Craftivista: Craft blogging as a platform for activism

A thesis submitted to the Miami University Honors Program in partial fulfillment of the requirements for University Honors with Distinction

by

Bridget Dearie Clegg

May 2010
Oxford, Ohio
ABSTRACT

CRAFTIVISTA: CRAFT BLOGGING AS A PLATFORM FOR ACTIVISM
By Bridget D. Clegg

This project looks at the convergence of trends in craft and blogging to evaluate its potential as a platform for activism. As the craft movement has evolved away from the rigid boundaries of its past, a subculture of young women and men have embraced craft for its Do-It-Yourself (DIY) ethics. A vast network of makers in and outside the U.S. comprises the indie craft movement, which channels ideas about sustainable living, anti-consumerism and the feminist reclamation of domesticity into handmade objects. The indie craft movement springs from the riot grrrl movement of the 1990s and is enhanced by a succession of new Internet technologies. Blogging’s rise to ubiquity in the past decade provides indie crafters in disparate locations with disparate craft knowledge the ability to connect online. Craft blogs offer tutorials, inspiration and advice to their followers. The craft blogosphere’s power lies in its ability to connect people through mutual creativity, making it an ideal platform for craft-related activism, or craftivism. Craft blogging offers crafters a forum for collaborative or replicable projects that can raise awareness about a cause or invoke action to end unjust practices. Craftivism blogs lead to meaningful change in a community when engaged bloggers share information. Therefore, this project includes a reflection on creating the blog Craftivista, which features craftivism-related speakers, events and projects in the area around Oxford, Ohio.
Craftivista: Craft blogging as a platform for activism

By Bridget D. Clegg

Approved by:
Advisor
Dr. Sally Harrison-Pepper

Reader
Ms. M. Katie Egart

Reader
Dr. Lisa D. Weems

Accepted by:

University Honors Program
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank Miami University Housing and Dining for placing me in McKee Hall freshman year with a floor full of the Western crazies who turned into classmates, inspirations and inevitably, friends. I will be forever grateful for Kim Ernsting’s encouragement and the Western community’s faith in a curriculum of craft.

I could not have completed this project without the many discussions, Facebook chats, phone calls and emails to my advisor Sally Harrison-Pepper. Even if we aren’t talking about craft, your clarifications and reassurances are very much appreciated. Thank yous to Bill Newell for blindly supporting the potential of craftivism, and Lisa Weems and Katie Egart for their altruistic advising.

I would like to thank my parents for supporting my early craft habits with trips to JoAnn Fabrics and many Christmases replete with scrapbook and beading supplies. I’d like to acknowledge here the family of crafters—some more inconspicuous than others—that has taught me how to send handmade thank you notes, incorporate new technology into old platforms, appreciate images past and present, and make anything in orange and black. The Univac 1 has certainly come full circle, Grandpa Clegg!

To my Oxford housemates and lifelong Chagrin friends: thank you for supporting—if not quite understanding—all the crafty pursuits emanating from my fingers, and more specifically my thumbs. If we only knew what Bridget’s Beads would turn into…
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**INTRODUCTION** .......................................................................................................................... 1

**CHAPTER 1: CRAFT THEN AND NOW** ......................................................................................... 4
   I. **Defining Craft, Crafting and Crafter** ..................................................................................... 4
   II. **The Craft vs. Art Discussion** .................................................................................................. 6
   III. **The Influence of Riot Grrrl** .................................................................................................. 9
   IV. **The Craft Resurgence: What is it and Who is Participating?** .............................................. 11
   Timeline of Craft: 1700s-Today ..................................................................................................... 20
   Works Cited...................................................................................................................................... 22

**CHAPTER 2: BLOGGING** .............................................................................................................. 24
   I. **Defining Blog, Blogging, Blogger, Blogosphere and Web 2.0** .............................................. 24
   II. **A Brief History of Blogs** ........................................................................................................ 25
   III. **Constructing a Blog: Tools, Participants and Goals** ............................................................. 31
   IV. **Effects of Blogging** ............................................................................................................... 37
   Works Cited...................................................................................................................................... 40

**CHAPTER 3: CRAFT BLOGGING** .................................................................................................. 41
   I. **Defining Craft Blog, Craft Blogger and the Craft Blogosphere** ........................................... 41
   II. **The Motivations for Craft Blogging** ...................................................................................... 43
   III. **The Motivations for Following a Craft Blog** ....................................................................... 48
   IV. **The Underlying Themes of Craft Blogs** .............................................................................. 51
   V. **Social Change Communication Theory** ................................................................................. 54
   VI. **The Implications of Following and Creating Craft Blogs** .................................................. 57
   Works Cited...................................................................................................................................... 60

**CHAPTER 4: CRAFTIVISM** .......................................................................................................... 61
   I. **Defining Craftivism and Craftivist** ......................................................................................... 61
   II. **Craftivism in Recent History** .................................................................................................. 66
   III. **Why Craftivism?** .................................................................................................................. 70
   IV. **Craftivists’ Methods and Means** .......................................................................................... 75
   V. **The Characteristics of the Craftivist** ...................................................................................... 80
   VI. **The Impact on Community** .................................................................................................. 81
   VII. **The Influence of Internet on Global Connections in Craftivism** ...................................... 82
   Works Cited...................................................................................................................................... 86

**CHAPTER 5: REFLECTING ON CRAFTIVISTA** ............................................................................ 88
   Works Cited...................................................................................................................................... 95

**CONCLUSION** ............................................................................................................................... 96

**WEBSITES CITED** ......................................................................................................................... 99
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1: Screenshot, *Crafting a Green World’s* Post on the Environmental Effects of Crafting with Coral .............................................45

Figure 3.2: Screenshot, *The Curious’* Post on Flipbook ..........................46

Figure 3.3: Screenshot, *Failed Feminist’s* Tutorial for Recycled Cotton Hotpads .................................................................52

Figure 3.4: Pattern of Relational Development in the Blogosphere ............56

Figure 4.1: The Nike Blanket Project ..................................................62

Figure 4.2: Suffragette March Banner ...................................................67

Figure 4.3: Greer’s Anti-War Cross Stitch, “Follow” ...............................70

Figure 4.4: Reichardt’s Ceramic Spray Paint Can, “Bank Robber” ............71

Figure 4.5: Reichardt’s Mosaic, “The Luis Ramirez Wall” .........................72

Figure 4.6: Yarn Bombers At Work .....................................................78

Figure 4.7: Diagram and Knitted Womb .................................................80
INTRODUCTION

We live in a world in which people thousands of miles apart can go into a chain superstore and find the same products, smell the same smells and see the same layouts. In these increasingly globalized and mediated times, the Internet has enabled us to learn about cultures around the world and to share information on the cultures in which we live. Globalization in an economic and cultural context has the potential for mutually beneficial exchange, but the effects of that exchange are often negative. We initiate environmental damage shipping apples from China to the United States, yet we expect our local grocery stores to carry strawberries in December. Mass production has led to a homogenization of consumer goods and consequently, to some degree, of culture. The Industrial Revolution converted production methods from artisanal to mechanical, but a growing frustration with the distant and detached machine has made the handmade relevant once again.

The resurgence and reclamation of craft by some young women and men is a response to the consumerism rampant in Western society. As the effects of our unsustainable consumption surface, people are finding solutions in craft. Traditional craft practices of the past have evolved for a modern audience into the indie craft movement, where people use foundational skills such as knitting and sewing to make what others choose to buy. Indie craft is a fresh take on the undervalued skills that historically have been associated with the domestic sphere. The indie craft movement is born out of traditional craft, but focuses on the do-it-yourself (DIY) mindset of young people in the late 1990s and the early 21st
century. DIY encourages people to use their skills and resources to create things missing from typical consumption outlets, to find solutions for living sustainably by repurposing materials and to increase awareness of the processes used to make something (machine- and handmade alike). Crafters are learning the skills of their grandmothers and ancestors, and then fusing them with today’s technology and aesthetics with a sense of irony that underpins—but does not undermine—the serious feminist, environmentalist, and anti-consumerist goals.

The Internet has allowed a proliferation of Websites and blogs on craft skills, methods, theory and projects. Crafters are using the blogosphere as a network of inspiration and collaboration. Video and photo tutorials teach crafters new skills and techniques, while interaction between bloggers offers the support of a community unconstrained by geographic location. The blogosphere seeks interaction and participation between users, thus blurring the line between blog creator and blog reader. As is typical of DIY philosophy, the blog follower is encouraged to create—craft objects, new blogs, comments and emails.

The people participating in the indie craft movement and the craft blogosphere are advocates of craft’s relevance in contemporary times, and thus share various values. These crafters yearn for more than typical activism, where an individual marches in a protest or holds a sign in a crowd. They want to use their unique craft talents to affect change in their communities by making others aware of their living environments and forging connections between neighbors who were previously strangers. They draw people to their activist causes by engaging them on a personal level and finding ways to utilize the resources and
skills of an individual. People from disparate places have recognized their desire for increased personal connections to activism and banded around the term that unites craft and activism: “craftivism.”

The Internet joins the efforts of these singular craftivists, thereby connecting them in a movement that strives to improve the social, political or economic conditions in local communities through craft. These local efforts are recorded in an online platform that begs to be adapted and replicated in other communities, thus increasing the breadth and relevance of the craftivist’s actions. Craft bloggers are able to ask for contributions to craftivism projects from people around the world. Blogging gives participants the platform to discover new information about a craftivism cause and to offer suggestions for increasing the project’s impact.

This project outlines the rise of the indie craft movement in recent history and the concurrent blogging phenomenon. It documents the transition of craft communities from sewing circles to the craft blogosphere and explains how the Internet has fostered online community building. It explores the resurgence of the local in response to globalization, a return to the handmade despite mass production and a reassertion of the individual producer in response to the hegemony of multinational corporations. It looks at how craft blogging is the vehicle for spreading the craftivism philosophy to new bloggers and crafters, and offers examples of projects that have prospered through online communication. Finally, it reflects on my personal efforts in craftivism blogging.
CHAPTER 1: CRAFT THEN AND NOW

This chapter will first define the term “craft” as it is used in this project. I then outline a brief history of the craft movement that will provide context for the craft resurgence today. Next I survey the contemporary craft movement in terms of its participants, motivations and goals. Finally, I look at why this movement is occurring now.

I. Defining Craft, Crafting and Crafter

The term “craft” has a history of meanings in different contexts, and one of the underlying issues with researching craft is figuring out how the author interprets and uses the word. There is a range of dictionary definitions, but in a general sense craft can describe the accumulated skills and knowledge of a range of disparate practices. The craft of journalism, for example, includes learning how to find sources and interview subjects. In the creative sense, the term is used to describe the physical process of creating a craft object, such as the practice of metalsmithing or ceramics. The craft of craft, therefore, is the method, technique and production process of the craft object. Craft, trade and science can share similar practices. Ceramics, metalsmithing and glassblowing, for example, are pursued in all three veins. Whereas trade and science focus on the efficiency and replication of the product, craft emphasizes the artistic expression in the process. A cast or mold can replicate thousands of ceramics mugs with the same shape, or a ceramics crafter can choose to make multiple pieces in the same form, achieving uniqueness because of the handmade method.
Historically, material and technique dictated application of the term ‘craft’ to an object. Today, the boundaries of craft are blurring. Contemporary crafts “embrace a range of distinctive, medium-designated practices which, nevertheless, share a range of attitudes and values related to the process they utilize and the products they create” (Rowley xix). Contemporary crafters merge their skill sets and resources to pursue a desire to create what others would buy. They can sew, knit, embroider, bead, felt or collage items for personal use, gifts, or a small businesses. The Do-It-Yourself (DIY) attitude of contemporary crafting serves as an overarching defining characteristic for contemporary craft. For the purposes of this project, it is useful to characterize craft by the DIY ethos of the creator and by the melding of functionality and aesthetic quality of the object made by hand (or with machine- and computer-aided technology). This ethos further defines craft against the related, though separate, trade and science.

I choose to use the term “crafter” to describe the person making the craft object. While historically “craftsman” or “crafts practitioner” are terms used, the connotations of these labels are limiting and outdated. They evoke the idea that men are the primary participants and reinstate the formality of craft as work learned in an apprenticeship and carried out through adulthood as a primary means of income. A feminist philosophy underpins the contemporary craft movement and a gender-neutral term for its participants reflects the inclusiveness of a movement that values what was once considered merely feminine domesticity. The process of crafting involves learning and practicing new skills, and all genders and skill levels can participate.
Additionally, I use various descriptors with the term “crafter,” including “indie crafter” and “conscious crafter.” The adjectives denote the various values crafters apply to their work and the influences from which they draw. Conscious crafters, for example, will use only locally sourced materials, whereas other crafters opt for less expensive store-bought materials. The range of crafter types diversifies the craft community.

II. The Craft vs. Art Discussion

The definition of craft is central to the understanding of the relationship between craft and art. The evolving meaning of the term represents the changing role of the craft object in society. In the 18th century, humans’ desire to categorize brought together what is now seen as the traditional crafts— if for no other reason than those practices stood in opposition to fine art as it was understood at the time, namely, oil painting. M. Rouquet’s *Present State of the Arts* (1756) classifies the craft practices of silk manufacture, stone engraving, porcelain, chinaware, architecture and jewelry as art, but separates them from fine art (Dormer 27).

The theoretical departure of art from craft occurred in the 1900s, but the role of craft has been slowly evolving for centuries. Art historian and critic Edward Lucie-Smith summarizes the evolution of craft in three stages. The first stage is when all things were handmade, and therefore considered craft objects. The objects could be functional or decorative, but the processes available to make them consigned them to the category of craft. Craft moved into its second stage,
according to Lucie-Smith, during the European Renaissance when it separated from fine art and was subsequently relegated to an inferior status in the eyes of historians and art critics. The last stage of historical development occurred during the Industrial Revolution, when the craft object was separated from the process by which it was made. The use of machinery as the standard means of production created the “industrial object,” and stood in opposition of what was understood as handmade crafts (Lucie-Smith, *Story of Craft* 11).

John Ruskin, one of the founders of the Arts and Craft movement of the 19th century, critiqued this industrialized detachment of designer and maker. He advocated uniqueness when society was drawn to the sameness of commercial production (Cumming 12). The continued use of such commercial production methods over time has led to the misguided notion that creativity is a separate attribute “that precedes or can be divorced from a knowledge of how to make things” (Dormer 18). The misconception that the craft, or production of art, can impede an artist’s ideas, has further divided art from craft (Dormer 18).

This division created separate entities of craft and art, and a hierarchy of creativity has developed with fine art at the top and craft beneath it (Dormer 28). One of the divisive points that contributes to this hierarchical structure is craft’s lack of a critical discourse system. Risatti’s *A Theory of Craft* quotes critic Glenn Brown, who argues that there is no body of theory that is "faithful to the craft tradition yet effectively asserts the contemporary relevance of craft practice" (2). Consequently, writers on craft must attempt to apply the critical framework of fine arts to craft. Typical craft writing focuses on materials and the visual details
of an exhibit. The subsequent lack of critical analysis of craft exhibitions and works creates a weaker market for craft objects. Crafts sell for less than so-called fine art and the hierarchy is thus enforced (Risatti 3).

The characteristics we use to evaluate a craft object help us figure out what separates craft from art. The aesthetic values, its handling (the feel, weight and balance), and its materials are generally agreed upon criteria (Rowley xix) to evaluate craft objects. Craft’s distinguishing characteristic from other art, however, is its functionality (Lucie-Smith, *Story of Craft*). A craft object can have a perceived use, defined as “an end or aim to be achieved” (Risatti 24). It also has a function, or “that which an object actually does, by virtue of the intention of its maker” (Risatti 24). “Craft objects can be understood as belonging to that larger class of objects that we have been referring to as applied objects because they also are instigated by purpose and formed by applied function” (Risatti 28). The rise in popularity of decorative arts at the beginning of the 1800s initiated the ongoing debate of functionality’s place in the arts (Dormer 29), and 20th century Bauhaus designers and the Deutscher Werkbun later enforced and promoted functionality as a desirable characteristic of created objects (Lucie-Smith, *Story of Craft* 251). Functionality is still a defining characteristic of craft.

Craft’s unjustly inferior status urges many inside the craft community to seek dissolution of the boundary between craft and art. Art and craft critic Janet Koplos has asked if the field benefits from espousing fine art’s theoretical framework (Risatti 3). In doing so, the form loses its focus on the materials and emphasis on the technique. Craft’s striving to meld into critics’ standards for art
wastes energy within the field that could be spent pursuing appreciation for its own strengths. “However desirable aesthetic parity may be, framing the issue around the elimination of craft and fine art as separate categories is a questionable strategy” (Risatti 4-5). It is important to recognize the differences between art and craft, and to value the distinctive ability of craft to merge form and function.

III. The Influence of Riot Grrrl

Craft’s marriage with political statements originated with the Arts and Crafts movement of the 19th century, which stood in opposition to the Industrial Revolution. In the 1960s and ‘70s, counterculture once again embraced craft as a way to reconnect to the earth at a time when pop art praised commercialization and consumerism (Lucie-Smith, “Craft, Criticism” 95). Compared to traditional crafts of times past, the quality of these craft objects, memorably made of Popsicle stick and pom-poms, was poor. At this point, critics turned away from craft and focused on fine art once again. “As the ‘80s turned to the ‘90s, galleries and museums began to dominate the high-end art world, and discussions with street-level craft movements had all but ceased” (Levine 2-3).

While art circles flocked to galleries and museums, an underground DIY scene was developing across the country that fed into the parallel resurgence of craft. In the early 1990s in Olympia, Washington, the roots of the riot grrrl movement spread and jumpstarted a DIY culture in music, writing, fashion and feminism. At this time the punk music scene of the ‘90s focused on male grunge and left women punk groups without corporate sponsorship to grow. “Women
already working in the indie underground began to work together to start their own bands and called on others to join their supportive network” (Spencer, Lo-Fi 255). From this collaboration, the musical and cultural genre of riot grrrl grew. Beth Ditto, member of the band The Gossip and participant in riot grrrl culture, describes the genre as “a movement formed by a handful of girls who felt empowered, who were angry, hilarious, and extreme through and for each other” (Modem 8). The focus on women in subversive culture propelled a generation into the DIY ethic.

While women and girls were creating their own music scene, riot grrrl fanzines, or zines, were reinventing notions of writing, publishing and distribution. These noncommercial, nonprofessional, small-circulation magazines (Duncombe 6) spread the DIY message of riot grrrl by virtue of the handmade nature of the product, usually cut-and-paste images and writing that were photocopied and distributed by hand. The production enabled girls to create their own discourse for the counter-culture, and to discuss the issues they, as participants in the movement, deemed significant. “Riot grrrls began to rewrite and figure out for themselves what it means to be a girl, a feminist, and activist, a musician or an artist. It opened up the possibility to share our experiences, tell our own stories and create our own language” (Modem 12-13).

Zines and the overarching DIY ethos enabled feminism to reach a younger audience. “Riot grrrl was by far one of the most undeniably effective feminist movements, turning academia into an accessible down-to-earth language, making feminism a trend for the first time in history” (Modem 8). Riot grrrls planned
social events, workshops and eventually entire conventions to bring about social and cultural change (Spencer 257). Instead of traditional activist measures, such as protests and rallies, riot grrrls subverted cultural norms through the cultural activities in which they were participating—in zines, music, art and film. Lyrics, for example, served as the literature of the movement. “Adapting theories of third wave feminism into everyday life, they attempted to work within an underground community to bring about change” (Spencer 257).

Riot grrrl was popular in the media and made lasting effects on punk music and feminism, but the Internet is seen as one of the factors to riot grrrl’s fading underground again. “Girls could now meet each other on message boards and link to each others’ blogs, where affecting prose equal to anything in the first riot grrrl zines was a mere mouse-click away” (Modem 166). The Internet changed the outward presence of the movement, but riot grrrl culture instilled values into a generation that would carry the DIY tradition into other venues.

IV. The Craft Resurgence: What is it and who is participating?

Craft in the last two decades has emerged from the DIY movement and transformed cultural ideas about what craft is and who crafters are. DIY philosophy sustains an independent community that wants to distance itself from commercialization, use resources efficiently and live consciously in its environments (Spencer 162-163). We have broadly defined craft as an act of making, and it is in that making that the political ideology arises. Carmine Branigan, executive director of the American Craft Council sees the historical
roots of craft at the heart of the current trend. “The twenty-first century resurgence of popularity in craft and handmade objects is in many ways an echo of the rebellion of a hundred years ago [to industry and manufacturing], when people were afraid that machines and big businesses would take away their job” (Radeschi 20). This conscious crafting dictates what crafters make, how they make, and largely, how they live their lives.

Knitting is arguably the first and most visible craft activity to reappear in this resurgence. Debbie Stoller, founder of third wave feminist magazine *Bust*, recognized knitting’s empowering effects on the individual and saw an opportunity to harness that power by recreating knitting circles. In 1998, Stoller started the group Stitch ‘n Bitch in New York with the idea that city dwellers could gather in public places, such as coffee shops or parks, to share stories and inspiration while knitting (Spencer 215). Stitch ‘n Bitch knitting groups now assemble in all 50 states and in over 25 countries (“Stitch ‘N Bitch Groups” 1). The once private act of knitting has morphed into a visible sign of how ideas of domesticity are changing. “Knitting is no longer seen just as a hobby to engage in behind closed doors, it is an activity that a whole group of people are turning into social resistance, a playful act of crafty rebellion. It is now being used as a guerilla protest, as a political act that challenges capitalism and consumerism on a global scale” (Spencer 213).

Acts against consumerism comprise the independent, or indie, craft scene today. In a time of mass-produced goods, where chain stores in states from California to New York carry the same products, people are once again craving
individuality and finding an answer in craft. “It is this insatiable quest for a distinct identity that will ensure that the trend for making stuff is only going to grow” (Making Stuff 12). The act of crafting disrupts the cycle of commercialism. The ability to make something by hand empowers the individual by taking away a reliance on buying goods that have been detached from the processes by which they were made. Crafting encourages people to be conscious consumers who are aware of the message their dollars send to corporations that use unethical labor practices and create unmanageable carbon footprints. Once again the craft ethos can be compared to and traced back to punk rock’s ideas against establishment and consumerism (Making Stuff 11).

It is no coincidence craft has returned at a time when people are questioning how their actions affect the environment and the communities in which they live. Crafting is part of many people’s effort to live sustainably. “Just as many people are returning to a self-sustainable lifestyle and growing their own food and harnessing solar and wind power, others are turning to craft” (Spencer 14). The crafts themselves promote environmental sustainability by incorporating found materials. Craft books and online tutorials instruct people on how to crochet plastic bags into a reusable tote bag, or cut and weave strips of an old t-shirt into a rug. The projects challenge how we consume resources and offer solutions to combat unnecessary consumption.

Crafting encourages us to question how we interact with our environment and our community. The design of suburban neighborhoods separates neighbors and the fast pace of urban living allows us to ignore those we pass on the street.
Crafting, however, serves as an outreach for those wanting to reconnect and rebuild community. “If you want to live a creative, crafty life, you need to build communities of resistance. If most Americans are passively living their lives, in order to craft yours consciously, you’ve got to get support, to surround yourself with others who are doing the same” (Railla 118). Using Stitch ‘n Bitch’s model of communal crafting, other groups have formed to support efforts aimed at rebuilding community. In 2003 women in Austin, Texas formed the first Craft Mafia group in order to pool their creative energies for the making and selling of crafts. Since its inception, Craft Mafia groups have organized around the world. Crafters enroll in their city’s chapter and organize events to sell and promote their chosen craft.

The power of crafting is seen both in the outward relationships it builds and the inner spiritual growth of the crafter. Craft projects can serve as an outlet for stress relief and provide people a time to meditate. Knitting has meditative and therapeutic benefits for the crafter and the recipient of the finished object (Greer 37). The shift to a conscious way of living through crafting sparks a religious experience for some. The Church of Craft was born out of the idea that making things enriches the makers’ lives and is central to many people’s senses of self. Founder Callie Janoff held the first meetings in Portland, Oregon in 2003 as a place for people to convene and converse on projects and life. She says one of the unintended effects of the meetings was that the process of making became more important that the actual craft object produced (Levine 56). People have now started branches of the Church of Craft in cities across the country. Janoff’s group
maintains the craft culture philosophy: “Consumption eats self-esteem; creation makes it grown” (Levine 57).

For some, the craft resurgence is about reclaiming domestic roles and finding value in activities that were formerly disregarded as women’s work. Crafter and writer Jean Railla coined the term New Domesticity to describe the trend in her book Get Crafty. She cites the inception of Stoller’s Bust magazine as a precursor to the movement, but also sees the history of women’s work as leading up to today’s reclamation. “[The movement is] committed to recognizing, exalting, and most of all enjoying the culture that women have built for millennia” (Railla 7). Women who once celebrated independence from the traditional domestic lifestyle are now finding fulfillment in decorating the home, cooking, cleaning, sewing and knitting. New Domesticity advocates trying new activities without the pressure for perfection, and sharing inspiration with other women. “It’s about thoughtfully and consciously living your life and respecting the rights of other women to do it differently from you” (Railla 136). Crafters are reconnecting to the work of their mothers and grandmothers (Making Stuff 11), discovering new venues for expressing their creativity and feeling a sense of accomplishment in the work they do in and out of the home.

The thread connecting all the reasons for the craft resurgence is undoubtedly the widespread use of the Internet as a platform for connecting people to the ideas that inspire them. Although much of the appeal of craft is a return to face-to-face (FTF) relationships and the tactile, the Internet has enabled people to form crafting communities regardless of physical location. American quilter Denyse
Schmidt likens the Web to a "cyber sewing circle" where people can share projects on a global scale (Spencer 173). Websites showcasing craft projects and providing tutorials have increased in traffic and popularity. One of the first of these sites, *Craftster*, launched in 2003 and now captures an audience of over one million users a month. On the site, *Craftster* describes itself as an online community with forums to promote the indie craft movement. Websites like *Craftster* celebrate the diversity of the movement, foster friendly competition, and provide a space for a heterogeneous mix of blogs, forums, projects, email groups, and social networking sites (Levine 31).

The Internet has enabled the sharing of ideas for both making and selling crafts. Crafters can organize shows and events to sell their work to interested and appreciative customers. “Crafters are natural organizers. Sites like Craftster, Etsy, Meetup.com and newcomer Ravelry.com let crafters find strength in numbers” (Levine 33). The low cost of publicizing events on the Internet makes craft shows a viable option for crafters with a slim profit margin (Levine 35).

The Website *Etsy* is the premiere online marketplace for all things handmade. Since its launch in 2005 the site has expanded into a destination site for sellers and buyers to connect. Users can search for products by type or artist, learn more about the community in the forums, or find inspiration to lead a handmade life in the site’s blog entries. The site is drawing increasingly larger audiences: sales increased from $16 million in September to $17.7 million in October 2009, an 11% growth ("Etsy Statistics: October 2009" 1). With conscious consumerism on the rise, Etsy has found a niche where, as in traditional craft, the quality of the
product dictates the demand. “There will always be a market for objects that express a high level of skill, planning and uniqueness, but sustaining American crafts is more than selling objects. It’s enabling the buyer to touch the creative energy of the artist” (Radeschi 24). Etsy’s dedicated following represent the global craft community, with members in 150 countries around the world. Etsy enables crafters to reach and engage customers, and provides unmatched access to handmade goods. The site embraces the dynamic between creative seller and eager buyer. “Etsy also knows its audience—compulsive shoppers who banish their guilt by purchasing handicraft!” (Handmade Nation 31) Etsy signifies the reclamation of craft as a viable means of income.

The craft fairs and events, organized and publicized online, are another sign of the thriving indie craft community. The fairs bring together sellers with a market that consciously chooses handmade and wants to learn about the processes involved in the making. A familiar statement from crafters who sell at markets describes the connection to the customer as more than a transaction. Crafter and blogger Jenny Ryan, who started the holiday craft fair Felt Club in Los Angeles, stresses the educational process of craft fairs. “For me Felt Club isn’t just about providing a great shopping experience, it’s about providing an education—showing people why and how they should be interested in the handmade movement and how they can get involved, too” (Levine 125). Handmade Bazaar in Portland, Bazaar Bizarre in Boston and Renegade Craft Fair in Chicago are some of the fairs that started with just a few venders and have expanded over the
years with dedicated customers and ambitious crafters. The fairs provide a tangible market for handmade objects that is matched only by Websites like Etsy.

The feat of bringing in crafters with a variety of talents reinforces the community values of the contemporary craft movement. Crafter Jamie Marie Chan talks about how the craft object sold embodies that spirit. “It’s a place where our hobbies, our ideas, and our worldviews are packaged up into a tangible object, to be admired, and to start new relationships between people” (Levine 125). Craft fairs break down borders between the virtual and the actual crafting community, introducing craft blog followers to the creators (Levine 124).

Craft groups and fairs have increased awareness of the craft movement and broadened the spectrum of participants to include a younger generation (Spencer 50). These politicized young crafters confound the perception of the traditional crafter as a passive elderly woman. “They [the public] really have a hard time acknowledging that there is this population that are kind of alternative chicks, who are sort of feminist and crafty and into the indie rock scene” (Making Stuff 9). While the discourse on crafting is intrinsically feminist (Making Stuff 10), men are participating in the movement as well. All-male knitting groups and online sites for male crafting strive to draw men into the crafting scene.

The indie crafting population is younger, but crafters today share and embody the values of the traditional craftsman. At times in the past, society valued the traditional craftsman’s way of life more than the actual products. “The craftsman himself came to be regarded as an ideal, even a heroic figure, living out in practice the values which most people could only half-heartedly aspire towards.”
(Lucie-Smith, “Craft, criticism” 94). Today’s crafters reclaim that ideal by living sustainable and conscious lifestyles. The products they make, sell or share symbolize the DIY ethic of their shared history in craft. The materials and method continue to serve as evaluative qualities of craft objects, but the modern platform for sharing craft is most definitely the Internet.
Timeline of Craft: 1700s - Today

1. 18th century traditional crafts include ceramics like this porcelain pot from China, and handcrafted jewelry like this set from Delhi.

2. Bauhaus designers from 1913-1933 reinstated functional design.

3. The early 1900s Industrial Revolution created a division of labor that divorced objects from the process by which they were made.

4. 1970s craft resurgence as a reaction against pop art's glorification of materialism.

5. 1980s riot grrl movement breed a DIY mindset and encourages feminist activism through zines, lyrics, and fashion.


7. Things to do today:
   - get your hands dirty
   - find some recycled paper
   - look for your favourite paper
   - start an information site

8. "Stitch 'n' Bitch" makes knitting circles current with Stitch 'n' Bitch.

9. "Sew"
2003 is a big year for indie craft; Callie Janoff establishes the Church of Craft, Austin’s Craft Mafia forms, and Craftster.org is launched.

Etsy goes live in 2005, giving crafters a place to sell and conscious consumers a place to buy all things handmade.

Knitting groups bring a younger generation of men and women together to inspire, support and create.

The Renegade Craft Fair in Chicago unites the indie craft community and provides crafters a venue for selling to and educating older customers.

Green crafts, such as this recycled plastic bag tote and t-shirt rug, reuse found materials to encourage sustainability.

Craft shows embody the diversity of talents of young crafters today.
Works Cited


_____________________________________________________

**Timeline Art Sources**

1. Lucie-Smith 190
2. Lucie-Smith 70
3. Lucie-Smith 266-267
4. Lucie-Smith 251
6. Monen 72
7. Monen 137
8. Monen 15
10. Spencer 93
11. Spencer 194
15. Levine 29
16. Levine 75
17. Levine 9
CHAPTER 2: BLOGGING

In this chapter I define words related to blogging and outline a brief history of the platform. I then explain the requirements to enter the world of blogging, describe who is blogging, and offer reasons people blog. Finally, I explain the effects of blogging on human interaction, democratization and gender barriers.

I. Defining Blog, Blogging, Blogger, Blogosphere and Web 2.0

The term “blog” has evolved as the form itself has developed. In the late 1990s “WebLog” was the term to describe a personal Website with information, such as hyperlinks and commentary, in reverse chronological order (Rosenberg 79). In 1999, however, WebLogger Peter Merholz decided to cleverly rephrase the term to “wee-blog” (Blood “Weblogs”) and the catchphrase then spread. In a broad stroke, blogs are Web pages that individuals create and update (Ringmar 17). While originally blogs were a conglomeration of links to other Web pages, they have developed into forums for individual and personal expression. The idea of autonomy is attractive to people wanting to voice their opinions without direct moderation, as would happen in an email list or forum. “A weblog was a place where you got to say your piece your own way. Where nobody else’s voice could drown yours out. And where no one could make you shut up” (Rosenberg 63).

Blogging encompasses the acts of creating a blog layout, writing entries, linking other blogs or Web pages, and updating content (Rettberg 4). The individual synthesizing these elements is the “blogger”. A blogger is “the sole
The “arbiter of relevance” and composes a blog with the realization that the reader has many choices of other blogs to read (Rosenberg 64). The “blogosphere” encompasses the entire mass of blogs on the Internet—in other words, the blogging landscape.

Blogging is a concept included in the umbrella term “Web 2.0.” Tim O’Reilly, a technology and media professional, coined the phrase to describe the second wave of web publishing. “The first wave of Web developers focused largely on publishing content. Web 2.0, on the other hand, develops services that allow users to share their own content and to use the Web as a platform. Examples of Web 2.0 sites are the Wikipedia, YouTube, Flickr and Facebook…Blogs are also seen as part of Web 2.0” (Rettberg 9).

II. A Brief History of Blogs

The modern-day blog’s history is enmeshed with the rise of the Internet’s availability, usability and accessibility. While pinpointing a first blog is ultimately pointless because of the decentralized way the form arose, identifying the stepping-stones to blogging’s omnipresence provides the necessary foundational information to form insights about people’s use of blogs today.

One such stepping-stone is the public email list, which attempted to facilitate information sharing and direct contact between users. Software creator Dave Winer’s notable DaveNet email list gained prominence in fall 1994 after it enabled communication between Bill Gates and interested parties following its dispersal of a critical essay Winer wrote (Rosenberg 49). The email list
established the Internet’s power as a platform for access to information and the people in charge of information. Its implementation is a natural first step for a culture used to writing letters and essays as a primary form of communication (Lovink 4). A person had to maintain the first email lists by adding of subtracting email addresses, creating subject headings, and sending all emails. Email group software then developed, creating the LISTSERV, which eliminated the need for a person administering all group commands. Email remains a significant aspect of information sharing. The email list evolved into the blog as we know it today, but immediate commenting space is a relatively new feature. Readers, however, could always email the creator of the blog or personal Website their comment and the author could decide whether or not to publish it.

As LISTSERVs proliferated, people on the inside of Internet culture in the 1990s created personal homepages to display their interests. "The first publishers of Web pages outside of the academy were a motley, self-selected population of fringe types: software programmers, science-fiction fans, zine publishers, and misfit journalists. They created a profusion of what the industry now calls 'user-generated content'; observers of their efforts were often dismissive" (Rosenberg 12). These personal Websites stood as static representations of the creator’s interests—information may be added, but the purpose was not to continuously update (Rettberg 24). Consequently, these initial Websites often had “under construction” logos pasted on them and appeared unfinished and sometime cheesy (Rosenberg 12).
Some personal Websites displayed lists of links to other Web pages. Justin Hall, who later tested the limits of sharing personal information in blogs, created *links.net* in 1994. The site contained mostly hyperlinked text with little commentary. Hall hand-coded the Website until blogging software developed in 2003 (Rettberg 24). The rudimentary weblog began to take shape out of these links pages and the development of publishing software. The first links page devoted to news was *Scripting News*, a Website Dave Winer launched in spring of 1997 using the Frontier NewsPage software he developed. The site merely listed links, but the software behind it enabled the proliferation of weblogs (Rosenberg 79). Jorn Barger used the software to power his project *Robot Wisdom WebLog*, which aimed to collect and classify the range of human emotions. “Self-motivated and proudly unconventional, Barger wasn’t trying to target a particular audience or formulate a mix. He was collecting his own treasures and laying them out for you to admire” (Rosenberg 82). After other sites like Barger’s *Robot Wisdom* developed, weblogging became synonymous with filtering, or sifting through the Internet’s increasingly large pile of information (Rosenberg 79).

Near the end of the 1990s, the recognition of a community of webloggers emerged out of Jesse James Garrett’s Website *Infosift*. As editor of the site, Garrett compiled “other sites like his” in hopes of changing the act of consuming the Web to creating. In his words, he hoped to “turn reading the Internet into making the Internet” (Rosenberg 85). The term for organizing similar sites—weblogs, filter sites or link lists—into a posse or tribe is now called a “blogroll” (Rosenberg 86). The early weblogs were mostly hyperlinked text without much
commentary and most users knew how to code Websites, thereby excluding the
general public from participating. Up until this point, the forms of online
communication (email lists, forums, elementary weblogs) provided users equal
access to information, but intermediaries involved in the process often limited
completely open conversations.

Good moderators could inhibit dysfunctional behavior, but never eliminate
it entirely, and sometimes useful conversations were swamped by noise or
non sequiturs. ...It you wanted control over what you were saying and
also over the environment in which you were heard, none of these formats
would do. (Rosenberg 64-65)

Blogging software bridged this chasm to create a platform for singular voices.

In July 1999 the first free weblog-building software launched under the
name Pitas (Blood “Weblogs”). In August 1999 Evan Williams and Meg
Hourihan’s company Pyra launched Blogger as a side project to their goal of
producing software for online group collaboration. The successful software
launch popularized the term “blog” and enabled people without coding skills to
participate in blogging. While other blogging sites like Metfilter provided users
with a system for posting that included boxes for a title, URL, link text and a one-
paragraph description, Blogger set no such structure. Blogger was not the first
software available, but “it was the one that ultimately transformed blogging from
an arcane pastime for Web insiders into a mass-market, anyone-can-play
phenomenon” (Rosenberg 102).

The same year Blogger went live, the Websites LiveJournal and Xanga launched. LiveJournal was the brainchild of Brad Fitzpatrick, a college student
who developed and shared the program with his campus and later, a dispersed
community of diarists. LiveJournal included the feature of friend lists, which
reappears in newer Web 2.0 services like MySpace\textsuperscript{xiii} and Facebook\textsuperscript{xiv}\textsuperscript{a} (Rosenberg 112-113). The online diary format of LiveJournal and Xanga merged into the many applications of Blogger and consequently changed the concept of weblogs as merely filters or lists. As the Blogger trend grew in scope and number of participants, old-time users were left feeling alienated by a changing format.

“Instead of filtering the rest of the Web, the newcomers were often just posting random thoughts or notes about what was happening in their lives. In this view, Blogger was diluting the very identity of the weblog pursuit: it was blurring the line between weblogs and online diaries, a line that had never been visible to anyone except the most hardcore webloggers. (Rosenberg 115)

Blogging did not immediately catch on as a trend for the general public, but by April 2000 one thousand active bloggers were using the free software. “At the time, when weblogs were still understood as handcrafted, labor-intensive personal projects, that seemed astronomical” (Rosenberg 15). Blogger enabled users to create their sites, but the launch of Blogspot in 2000 provided a free hosting service for all of those separate blogs. Now blogs would inherit the “.blogspot.com” attachment. By 2001 Blogger hosted 100,000 accounts (Rosenberg 128). The usability of the software increased the number of journal-style bloggers and in turn, decreased the number of filter-style blogs (Blood “Weblogs”). The software component cannot be undervalued: “Blogging did not emerge out of a movement or an event. If anything, it is a special effect of software, as constitutional to it as the automation of links, a not-overly-complex technical interface design issue” (Lovink 5).

The Oxford English Dictionary recorded “blog” as an official word in 2002. Google acquired Blogger in February 2003 and a year later “blog” was
Merriam-Webster’s “word of the year” (Retterg 29). Google’s power lies in its access to the masses, not necessarily its monetary strength. Pyras, the original proprietors, relinquished control of Blogger to Google in the hopes of catapulting its creation to a scale of millions (Rosenberg 127). The hype of the Google-Blogger hybrid led to an inundation of media coverage with easy human-interest story ideas covering the “next big thing.” The public may have been latching onto the supposedly new trend, but the original users of Web 2.0 were disillusioned by the low quality and high quantity of the blogging scene post-2003. As media coverage died down around 2006, many proclaimed blogging dead. “But in reaching it [the conclusion] these bloggers made the same self-centered error that previous groups of blogging burnouts had fallen into: they thought that the fizzling out of their own scene’s energies meant the extinction of blogging itself” (Rosenberg 330).

The explosion of the social networking sites Myspace, Facebook and Twitter do not mark the end of blogging, as some have argued, but instead mark a new phase in blogging style. The way people blog has influenced how people use social networking sites and in turn, social networking sites are changing how people blog. Perhaps bloggers will write more deliberately, which is different from the short posting style of the social networking sites. New Web platforms will not oust the older, but will instead simply change how people use them—just as the television changed the way people use the radio, and online news changed the way newspapers function (Rosenberg 334-335).
III. Constructing a Blog: Tools, Participants and Goals

Blogging is a tool for sharing a diverse array of information on the Internet. In its beginning stages, slower Internet connections and simpler software made text and hyperlinked text the best way to convey a user’s knowledge. The increase in blogging participants and improvements in blogging software, however, expanded the types of message to include images, and then video. As fits the blog’s subject matter, images and videos are used to illustrate and expand textual information. Blogs about craft, for example, can use images to showcase craft creations and add interest, and videos to teach a certain skill or method.

As with all forms of expression, a certain number of tools are required to access the blogging world. A computer and Internet access are the foundational assets. Blogging software like Blogger or Wordpress (a free blogging software that requires knowledge of HTML coding) then allows users to publish information to a unique URL. The union of Blogger and Blogspot created the hosted blogging service, where anyone with access to the Internet could post. The costs to publish what were formerly zines or newsletters, for example, decreased to almost nothing. “The rise of the Internet opened new doors; suddenly, for the minimal price of some server space and a dialup connection (and later, even less), you could publish your words for an audience that was potentially in the millions” (Rosenberg 90). Crafters found blogging a viable and creative way to apply DIY principles to publishing.

Bloggers and blog readers encompass a broad wedge of demographics. Surveys of the blogging population reveal some generalizations. “As a subset of
internet users, bloggers are better educated than the population at large, they are also more likely to live in suburbia, to be students or have jobs with computers on their desks” (Ringmar 21). Data from 2007 reveal that the majority of posts (37 percent) were written in Japanese, and 36 percent were written in English. Men and women are equally likely to blog, but most bloggers are younger than the general Internet user; more than half of blogger are under 30 years old (Ringmar 21).

People are attracted to the blogging platform for a number of reasons; to archive Web finds, record daily life, discuss topics with like-minded individuals, browse images for inspiration or promote activist causes. Blogs developed out of the need to organize the Internet via weblogs or link lists and the links between blogs today is still significant. The links on a blog arguably define the personality of the author. A visitor to the site can infer the character of the person through the links and commentary, leading some to say, “in the world of weblogs, you were what you linked to” (Rosenberg 97). This notion can work for and against bloggers: founding blogger Jorn Barger in many ways shaped the current blogging scene, but his links to anti-Semitic Websites turned away many in his blog’s audience.

Bloggers choose a design aesthetic, which includes layout, font choice, banners (the identifying texts or images that run across the top of the blog), and background color, as fits the subject matter of their blog. Although Blogger offers templates for users, there are ways to customize the look of the page to clarify a theme or to ease navigation. The making and maintenance of a blog can be a
creative act that communicates information about the blogger and, depending on the design choices, may help or hinder blog followers in their initial impressions of the blog. The quality of an art or design blog, for example, may be judged by the quality of the images and the continuity of the design of the blog itself. Textually based bloggers should consider how their posts will look on a computer screen when choosing colors for the font and background.

The links to outside Websites form the content of a blog, but the connections between blogs signifies the powerful flow of information in the blogosphere. Sociologist Mark Granovetter’s theory of weak ties applies to blog and blogger connections, and explains how blogrolls and friend lists increase the power of information sharing. “Granovetter was interested in how ideas spread through communities, and argued that weak ties between individuals are more important than strong ties for the broad dissemination of information” (Rettberg 59). His theory states that if A and B are close friends, and A and C are close friends, B and C probably know each other. If A needs new information, B and C will not be the best source. Rather, an acquaintance, D, will most likely bring new information. Weak ties form bridges between social groups and the people who are bridges learn new information quickly (Rettberg 59). In the blogosphere and on social networking sites, weak ties, or connections to “acquaintance” blogs increases the flow of new knowledge and, in turn, create a complex system.

The connections people make in the blogosphere are often based on the material about which they write. Blogs as diaries, in the style of LiveJournal and Xanga, are popular applications of blogging software. Blogs offer the opportunity
to record human narratives and foster human interaction (albeit interaction that is not FTF or in real time, or generally even supplemented by such interaction). The personal homepages that preceded blogs were often regarded as a hobby, a process of crafting the perfect finished product. “When you crossed the threshold to weblogs, that represents our realization that this is a dynamic medium. It’s not about pushing an object into the world, it’s about opening a channel between yourself and the world” (Rosenberg 87-88). The creative quality of blogs is both in the making of the blog itself and in the hobbies, interests and passions they document. Individual channels of those interests can cross and those bloggers can form virtual relationships by following one another’s blogs.

The candid recording of daily life raises the debate over what separates the public and private sphere on the Internet. Human narrative blogs reveal information about the bloggers that would have remained private in times past, such as the details of their sex lives, the amount of money they earn or the details of their relationships with their spouse, boss, parent, etc. “It is remarkable that many participants do not perceive blogs and social networking sites such as Orkut [Google’s social networking and forums site] or MySpace as a part of public life” (Lovink 7). In the early years of blogging, this confusion led to employers firing bloggers for their inappropriate discussion of job-related information on their blogs. Consequences aside, the diary format is still a popular application of blogs. "As long as there is a Web, it will offer youthful seekers a seductively grand public stage for playing out their quests for connection and identity and meaning” (Rosenberg 45).
The topical blog has risen out of the former discussion boards and forums. Blogs for cooking, motorcycle, gardening, and fishing enthusiasts (to name only a few) provide opportunities for connections and interactivity among bloggers and blog readers. Many blogs focusing on a specific subject matter use images to attract readers and supplement textual information. A blog on beading, for example, will provide followers with photographs of the materials and end product. Parallels can be drawn between topical blogs and fan Websites or ezines: both act as a virtual meeting place for like-minded people regardless of geographic location and foster community through their shared interest.

Sharing not only information and opinion about a passion, contributors construct and share their own identities with each other. They ‘authorise’ themselves to speak, validate their lives and make their voice public—at least the parts of those voices that otherwise would not get heard. (Coyer 63)

The blogger and the commenters on and followers of the blog are participating in a fundamental aspect of the Internet—the ability to be a reader and a writer of new media (Rosenberg 13).

The Internet has enabled people with access to computers the ability to publish content for themselves, instilling or reinforcing a DIY ethic. The reasons to blog are as vast as the decentralized Web, but the individual applications of blogging software and the act of blogging itself often reap rewards for the users. In 1998, early in blogging history, Web designer Rebecca Blood started a blog about her life called Rebecca’s Pocket, which revealed to her the therapeutic benefits of daily writing and sharing. “The daily exercise of posting to her weblog helped her discover what her true interests were…And she found that the act of writing for public consumption bolstered her confidence in the value of her
perspective” (Rosenberg 89). Blogging can unleash the potential of the author’s creative powers, which can then be applied to any field—activism, journalism, politics, baking, etc.

As blogging began spreading beyond the technology industry, its new acolytes carried the seeds of this ethos into other fields. Maybe you could start a new publication without rounding up big money. Maybe your political organization or your marketing consultancy didn’t have to invest in a lease of fancy signage. In this way, blogging became not only a mode of expression but a way of thinking about guerrilla-style organization-building. (Rosenberg 129)

The DIY mindset is an inherent part of blogging and the many applications of the blog reinforce the power behind that mindset.

One application of blogging that receives much attention is citizen journalism. Bloggers are producing news without the approval of the powerful media companies that produce today’s mainstream journalism. While supporters of mainstream media argue that non-journalist bloggers lack the credentials to publish accurate news reports, supporters of blogging value the transfer of power from big business to citizens (Huffington 7). News blog followers value the unconcealed subjective approach of the stories, but others see news bloggers merely as accessories to mainstream media. “Bloggers rarely add new facts to a news story. They find bugs in products and news reports, but rarely unmask spin, let alone come up with well-researched reports” (Lovink 8). Blog supporters, however, appreciate the platform’s power to criticize mainstream media and add relevant context for readers (Rosenberg 89). They relish blogging’s ability to make news consumers active participants in media, rather than passive readers (Rettberg 31).
IV. Effects of Blogging

The individual blogs making up the blogosphere create a sense of community through the interaction of commenting on each other’s sites, adding blogs to blogrolls, and linking outside pages to their own (Rettberg 69). Blogging communities can bring together people with similar interest from disparate geographic locations. Blogs and social networking sites thereby contribute to the proliferation and maintenance of subcultures. In one example from the days of LiveJournal, the UK Goth community strengthened out of the information shared and personal connections made on their online journals; the online community reinforced the offline community. “The operation of such friendships, alongside the direct exchange of subcultural information, enthusiasm, and commodities via the platform, served to act as practical means to enhance participation in the core activities associated with the subculture” (Bruns 195). While some still lament the loss of privacy from these platforms, the participants feel that relinquishing some privacy is worth the sense of belonging to a community they gain (Rettberg 83).

The communities created through blogs reinforce what some argue is the democratizing power of the Internet. The dotcom boom and bust brought people online for e-commerce, but blogging has empowered the masses to use the Internet for their own gains.

Blogs were the actual catalysts that realized democratization, worldwide, of the Internet. As much as democratization means engaged citizens, it also implies normalization (as in the setting of norms) and banalization...If you can’t cope with high degrees of irrelevance, blogs won’t be your cup of tea. (Lovink 4).
The “banalization” of blogs is what enables the average Internet user to participate—everyone has the opportunity to write about their lives, post links and information on their interests, or voice their commentary on current events.

At the advent of the Internet’s democratization, people preached utopian ideals about the Web’s equalizing power. The supposedly democratizing power of blogs totes a similar line. Blog users and researchers debate the role of gender in blogging, but generalizations confirm antiquated stereotypes of women’s place in the private sphere and men’s in the public sphere.

The content of women’s blogs is perceived by some to be less noteworthy than men’s by virtue of their often domestic and personal sphere of reference, whereas men’s blogs are often seen to be more engaged in political debate, especially when the notion of what counts as political remains undefined. (Bruns 151)

While there are ample examples of blogs written by women that debate politics (Arianna Huffington founded the news blog Website The Huffington Post, for example), there are also enclaves of women blogging communities that strive for appreciation of these generalized women’s blogging topics. BlogHer\textsuperscript{xv} is a women’s blogging portal that hosts 6500 blogs written by women (Ringmar 121). These communities reflect on experiences previously ignored: “In this way, blogs are helpful for breaking the isolation many women have felt when faced with ongoing societal expectations that they are the ‘natural’ partner to stay at home, raise children, and attend to housekeeping tasks” (Bruns 153). Although in theory blogging presents the opportunity for the appreciation of blogs written by women and men equally, there is little research on why the subjects about which women write are then considered feminine practices (Bruns 154).
Blogging represents the need for humans to record a fragmented society. Blog posts can be a reflection on a book, a description of someone on the subway or a rant about work. “These fragments, pieced together over months, can provide an unexpectedly intimate view of what it is to be a particular individual in a particular place at a particular time” (Blood “Weblogs”). Blogging engages a person as a reader and a writer and offers the opportunity to construct and reconstruct the society in which they live (Rosenberg 336). In this fashion, blogs serve as records of human life, offering amateurs a place for their voice to be heard.
Work Cited


CHAPTER 3: CRAFT BLOGGING

In this section I combine the ideas of the contemporary craft movement and blogging to paint a picture of the niche activity craft blogging. The contemporary craft movement’s incorporation of the blogging trend has enabled a proliferation of craft-specific blogs. This section explores the people creating craft blogs, the people reading craft blogs, and the blogs themselves. It explains the motivations for maintaining and following a craft blog, and describes the subsequent community that forms around this phenomenon. I then explore the underlying themes of craft blogs, which include ideas about sustainability, feminism and the reclamation of domestic roles, and anti-consumerism. Finally, I use communication theory to explain how the blogging platform delivers messages about those themes.

I. Defining Craft Blog, Craft Blogger, and the Craft Blogosphere

The concept of craft-specific blogs emerges from users’ adaptations to and applications of blogging software. Similar to the diaries on Websites like LiveJournal and the Web archiving blogs on Blogger, craft blogs record the narrative of an individual’s interaction with craft and point followers to other craft-related material. Craft blogs usually display highly visual content and are accompanied by informal writing about the images with links to the sources of information. Posts may contain, but are not limited to, information on the art and craft world; tutorials or “how-to” instructions on a specific craft; anecdotes from the blogger’s creative life; inspirational ideas, music or film; craft book reviews;
or profiles on crafters (*Making a Great Blog* 24).

The “craft blogger” is the creator of the blog, manager of content and moderator of comments. Given the historical context of feminine handcraft, generally craft bloggers are adult women who are participating in the contemporary craft movement. However, Websites like Garth Johnson's *Extreme Craft* and Paul Overton's *Dude Craft* speak specifically to male crafters. The female majority of craft bloggers arises from the same population that reclaimed domestic roles and found renewed value in craft skills that were relegated to the domestic sphere. Craft bloggers can reside wherever there is access to the Internet and blogging software, intrinsically incorporating location-specific material and crafting skills in their blogs.

Veteran craft blogger Diane Gilleland created *Craftypod* in 2002 and now teaches classes about art and craft blogs. Her ebooks on creating and marketing craft blogs reinforce the idea that craft bloggers must maintain a positive tone and nurture mutually beneficial relationships with other crafters (*Making a Great Blog* 43). Those relationships stem from the fact that craft blog creators are inherently craft blog readers. “The blogosphere is an ecosystem. It needs both writers and readers—producers and consumers—in order to be healthy. So, to keep the ecosystem in balance, you really need to be both” (*Creating a Blog* 15). Craft bloggers fulfill the role of reader and writer and strengthen the relevance of their content by reading other craft blogs. The craft blogosphere, however, is also made up of many craft blog followers who opt out of creating new content and only read blogs others have created.
The overlapping roles of creator and follower foster relationships between craft bloggers that cultivate the “craft blogosphere” or “craft blog community”. The past decade’s blogging boom saturated the craft blogosphere with personal, as well as corporate, craft blogs. CRAFT magazine’s CRAFT: blog, for example, expands on the print publication’s content with staff-generated and user-recommended content. Craft blogs can be a tool for crafters wanting to increase the market for their wares, or an expression of an individual’s crafting inclinations. Craft blogs constitute a niche in the art and design blogosphere, but overlapping political, environmental or feminist content propels craft blogs into the wider blogosphere. Gilleland concludes: “The toughest thing about the blogosphere…is that the only limit to it is human capacity. There will always be more new and interesting blogs, more fun social networking sites, more eye candy, more great ideas, and more tutorials” (*Creating a Blog* 52).

II. The Motivations for Craft Blogging

The motivations for creating a craft blog are as vast as the range of people participating in the medium. While some crafters want to altruistically share craft ideas in a blog format, others want to market a handmade item. Craft bloggers are most successful when they clarify a purpose (*Creating a Blog* 7). This section outlines some of the various purposes underlying craft blogs.

Similar to the primitive weblog, a craft blog can serve as an organizational tool for storing the links and sources of inspiration a crafter finds on the Internet in a visual format suited to a creative person. The archival characteristic of the
blogging platform also enables crafters to document the projects they have completed and the progress of current projects. The blog is an interactive record of a person’s craft habits, where followers can comment on technique, offer advice on material or support a crafter’s exploration of a new skill. In the blogging style of reciprocity, bloggers then strengthen their creative and writing skills, finding and posting new projects for their blogs.

The craft blogosphere functions as an online community and draws lone crafters to start blogs that they can use to connect to their peers. “…The person-to-person contact that blogs and other Internet media promote tends to encourage person-to-person relationships across professional, political, and geographic boundaries” (Reynolds 267). The indie craft movement, affirmed by its nomenclature, operates outside mainstream society’s ideals of increased consumerism, globalization and mass production. The craft blogosphere forms a virtual subculture that shares information and forms a community regardless of geographic location, though dependent on access to Internet.

Sociologist Richard Kahn theorizes that subcultures thrive on the flow of information and “can be seen to be using the Internet as an environment that supports their attempts to gain and provide access to information that exists beyond the means of control of the dominant media culture” (Muggleton 300). The increased flow of information, then, bonds members of the insider group. “Consciousness of kind is collective consciousness, the outward manifestation of a ‘we-versus-they’ mentality” (Adams 17). Posting tips for reusing craft materials or repurposing household items on a craft blog, for example, increases the shared
consciousness between craft bloggers and consequently strengthens the craft community on- and offline. *Crafting a Green World*\(^{xx}\) and *CraftGossip’s Recycled Crafts*\(^{xxi}\) are blogs that provide patterns, information and tutorials on crafts that use repurposed, reused or natural materials. A post on *Crafting a Green World* alerts readers to the devastating effects of harvesting coral for handmade jewelry, with information on how crafters can make their bead sourcing more eco-friendly (Figure 3.1). The craft blog community members viewing and sharing this information are united in their awareness of and attempts at sustainability.

**Figure 3.1: Screenshot, Crafting a Green World’s Post on the Environmental Effects of Crafting with Coral**

The ideas of community and subculture do not exclude commerce. The increase in overall blog users has opened up the blogosphere as an extensive...
potential customer source for small-scale crafters. “Back then [in 2002], the
majority of blogs were personal projects, designed to share inspirations and works
in progress. Today, a lot more people start blogs with the intention of marketing a
small craft business” (Creating a Blog 3). Designer, animator and crafter
Alphonse Swinehart uses his blog as a platform for showcasing his talents on his
blog *The Curious* xvii. After writing a post about one of his projects—handmade
flipbooks that bind together still images to animate personal photographs—people
following and sharing his blog wanted to know more about his process. Swinehart
then provided photographs, step-by-step instructions and material guides to enable
and inspire followers to make their own (Figure 3.2). Another post on *The
Curious* discusses the design of the business cards he created. Swinehart utilizes
his blog as a channel for marketing himself as a designer with creative solutions,
thereby creating a tool for networking and an online presence to support his
resume.

*Figure 3.2: Screenshot, The Curious’ Post on Flipbooks*
The nonlinear decentralized structure of the blogosphere changes the methods of engaging potential customers. Craft bloggers aiming to advertise a handmade product do so through their blog networks: emailing personalized messages to bloggers they read, commenting on other blogs with their blog link in the electronic signature; and soliciting new blogger friendships. Although the motive of this type of network is a sale, Gilleland’s instructions for marketing a craft blog emphasize the importance of maintaining the craft blogosphere’s foundations in community: “Remember, the craft blogosphere is a community. If you treat people like potential friends, you’ll have a much better experience and make many more connections. If you treat people as merely potential customers, you’ll mostly turn them off (Creating a Blog 26).

While some crafters try to capitalize on the blogosphere’s potential customer base by using their blogs as promotional tools for selling their craft products, others use blogs as vehicles of exposure for their particular craft-related skill.

If you have dreams of being a published author, or a freelance writer, or a craft project designer, a blog is a fantastic tool. Magazine editors, book publishers, and web producers are actively trolling the blogosphere for new talent. Your blog is like an ongoing resume for your crafts and writing. If it’s well-made and well-read, it could lead you to a job teaching crafts. It could land you a book deal. It could lead you to hosting a TV show. It could lead you to design your own craft products. (Gilleland 2)

Craft blog networking unleashes the power of weak ties by forging connections to engaged craft bloggers and followers, thus gaining access to each blog’s connections outside the crafting niche.
III. The Motivations for Following a Craft Blog

The followers of craft blogs vary in intensity and interest level. While some read every updated post and add their comments, others only browse in their free time or search for posts about a specific craft topic. Besides the craft blog creators that read, organize and link craft blogs as a job, many craft blog followers are reading blogs in their free time to find more information about a craft-related interest. Tutorials and instructional posts on a craft skill, such as crocheting or beading, are popular posts for craft blog followers. “Craft bloggers post millions and millions of words and pictures every day, but it’s the how-to posts that really get around. In our amazing culture of sharing, we crafters are always hungry to learn new techniques and projects” (Creating a Blog 34). These “how-to” posts may include photos or videos with step-by-step instructions that enable blog readers to enact their DIY capabilities. The blogging platform’s accessibility and respect for sharing information enables craft blogging to thrive. Craft blog readers gain inspiration for their own creative pursuits and foundational knowledge to learn a new skill.

Craft blogs are not static; it is user interaction with the blogs that creates meaning. Craft bloggers and followers develop friendly relationships through their online interactions, which occur through commenting, emailing and sharing photos.

Friendship, in some ways, is the currency of the craft blogosphere. The more people you’re kind to, the more will be kind back to you. If you seek out bloggers who are kindred spirits, and invite friendship with them, over time you’ll end up building a valuable network of like-minded friends, whom you can exchange with in many ways. And these efforts, over time, bring you a large and loyal blog audience. (Creating
The bonds among blog followers and between bloggers and their readers build a craft blogging community. The community nurtures friendships that offer support of craft pursuits, and increase a craft blogger’s presence in the blogosphere and potentially in the face-to-face (FTF) crafting world.

Each individual relationship you form in the blogosphere may seem like only a tiny point of contact. But think of it this way: every time you form a friendship with one person, you’ve also gained a positive recommendation to everyone that person knows. So, person by person, relationship by relationship, you’re still reaching lots of people. It just happens more subtly. (*Creating a Blog* 32)

By reaching out to individual craft bloggers with comments, email, and perhaps eventually FTF connection, the community network expands and the mutual benefits of sharing information increase.

The sense of community is a significant draw for many craft blog readers. The nature of Internet communication enables people from diverse backgrounds and locations to connect to similar ideas and transport those ideas into their local contexts. Similar geographic locations once defined community, but the Internet enables a transcendence of time and space and the formation of communities organized around similar interests, i.e. the craft blogging community. In the past, subcultures or niche communities relied on FTF relationships. “…The new subcultures that are arising around the evolving Internet appear as wholly mediated and committed to the medium of network communication that they correctly recognize as their foundation” (Muggleton 299).

Paradoxically, the global network of members in an Internet community promotes organization on a local level. “The growing influence and social
activities of virtual communities create a way for individuals who have never met and may never meet in the near future to organize themselves and actively develop and empower their concern about areas of collective interest” (Adams 48). The local organizing does not necessarily mean FTF connection with online community members, but instead is a way of focusing the global community’s ideas into a geographically local context.

In the rhetoric of Tyrone L. Adams and Stephen A. Smith, the craft blogging community becomes an “electronic tribe” (e-tribe) when it organizes to pursue a common goal. An e-tribe is “an exclusive, narrowly focused, network-supported aggregate of human beings in cyberspace who are bound together by a common purpose and employ a common protocol and procedure for the consensual exchange of information and opinions” (Adams 17). The craft blogging e-tribe shares ideas by linking posts and commenting on each other’s blogs. For example, craft bloggers can discover ways of incorporating found materials in their individual craft talents through the contributions of the greater tribe. In this way, the collective thoughts of the craft blogging tribe synthesize in a broader context, enabling action on an individual level. The craft blogosphere gains power as a group to carry out craft ventures on a local scale.

Like knitting groups of the past, the craft blogging e-tribe comes together to share information and then disperses to carry out individual tasks. “Electronic tribes make obvious the truism that humans have ingrained desires for communication and the construction of a sense of community. These desires especially become apparent in times of disasters such as hurricanes, wildfires, and
so on, or when people find themselves marginalized by mainstream society” (Adams 18). Participants in the craft blogosphere can therefore be considered part of a community, subculture and electronic tribe.

IV. The Underlying Themes of Craft Blogs

As the name denotes, the outward focus of craft blogging is the skills, materials and people practicing craft. The underlying messages of these blogs, however, expand on issues such as feminism, globalization, consumerism and sustainability. The networking element of computer-mediated technology enables linkages across disciplines: “Such networking links labour, feminist, ecological, peace, and other anti-capitalist groups, providing the basis for a new politics of alliance and solidarity to overcome the limitations of post-modern identity politics” (Muggleton 307). Craft bloggers and followers are defined not only by the craft medium they pursue, but also by the meanings they choose to explore in those practices.

A generation of young crafters can channel their feminist ideologies into their crafting and writing about craft. Feminist craft blogs range in tone from serious to ironic: the blog 52 Acts \(^{xxiii}\) discusses projects that combine feminism and social media in an attempt to recreate online gender roles, and Failed Feminist \(^{xxiv}\) documents one woman’s experiments in cooking, craft, organization, gardening, thrifting, and living green (Figure 3.3). Craft blogs grant feminists a stage to perform their ideals and an audience to follow their journeys. Regardless of the collective feminist movement’s struggles to organize actions by “waves,”
or of a woman’s claim to a specific feminist wave, crafters are actively reclaiming what was once domestic, while asserting their talents as valuable contributions to the narratives of their lives.

It is a necessary part of third-wave feminist movement for women to talk with each other about the phenomenology of feminist living in this context, and personal narrative is often the device of choice for such talk… One of the important contributions of third-wave feminism is its emphasis on narrative for exploring how it feels to live a feminist life, how feminism informs and complicates one’s sense of identity, and how one stabilizes that identity while being knocked about by postfeminist and backlash forces. (Kinser 137)

Media-savvy feminists using DIY ethics in crafting and online publishing are learning how their interests and skills fit into their feminist lives, while at the same time (re)defining the culture in which they live (Kinser 138-139).

Figure 3.3: Screenshot, Failed Feminist’s Tutorial for Recycled Cotton Hotpads

(Source: http://www.failedfeminist.com/)
The craft blogosphere and other Internet subcultures address political and economic topics at both a global and local scale.

Much more than other subcultures like boarders, punks, mods, or followers of the New Age, Internet subcultures have taken up the questions of local and global politics and are attempting to construct answers both locally and globally as a response. Importantly, this can be done due to the very nature of the medium in which they exist. (Muggleton 304)

The Internet enables information to be shared within an online community across geographic locations—a quasi-globalization of culture. Indie craft businessmen and women, however, are inherently positioned against globalized production and consumer chains. A defining feature of indie craft is the small-scale production of unique craft objects, such as a tote bag sewn with repurposed men’s neckties or felted wool covers for handmade soap. Crafters’ individual production levels are unable to compete with globalized enterprises, and most craft business people are not striving for economic convergence across nations. But the blogging platform that supports the sharing of ideas and opens up markets for the selling of indie crafts also sets up corporate structures of globalization. The Internet enables networking across geographic boundaries, thus providing corporations the opportunity to invent their idea in one country, manufacture the parts and assemble it in others, and sell it online to consumers from around the globe for the cheapest price possible. “Therefore, while the Internet can and has been used to promote capitalist globalization, the current configuration of online subcultures are interested in the number of ways in which the global networks can be diverted and used in the struggle against it” (Muggleton 304).

Craft blogging is a means of producing and distributing political and
economic messages on a global scale. These messages are shared across vast geographic spaces, but are used to promote discourse and action on a local scale.

Using the very online means that these corporations helped to popularize against them, users are globally beginning to portray for each other a maturing political awareness that perceives corporate and governmental behaviour as intertwined in the name of ‘globalization’. As part of the backlash against globalization over the past years, a wide range of theorists have [sic] argued that the proliferation of difference and the shift to more local discourses and practices define significant alternatives to corporate globalization. (Muggleton 301)

For example, blogging about craft’s relevance in a time of climate change is relevant across borders, but it also encourages local sustainability efforts in the communities of those receiving the messages, i.e. the craft blog followers.

V. Social Change Communication Theory

The Internet contains some of the platforms from which media and information is shared to effect social change.

The Internet is not a technology that, by itself, can cause much of any social consequence. ICTs [Information and communication technologies] are socially contextualized and part of a social system where they play some role in social change, but probably do not act as independent agents. (Communication Technology 30)

In a utopian view of Internet's social impact, ICTs create advantages for people, such as increased access to educational material, greater freedom from governmental media censorship, and an improved flow of information between rich and poor countries. However, a dystopian view of ICTs reveals the increased opportunities for children to come into contact with pedophiles and the greater chance of user injury from an email phishing scheme (Communication Technology 30). While the idea of the Internet is
neutral, the applications of ICTs determine the potentiality for positive social change. Craft blogging is an application of communication technologies that connects people striving for this positive change.

The interconnectedness of the craft blogging community enables the distribution of craft blogs' underlying messages. The knowledge spreads beyond the craft blogosphere through horizontal knowledge chains, thereby supporting Granovetter’s theory of weak ties. “Horizontal knowledge is communication among individuals, who may or may not know each other, but who are loosely coordinated by their involvement with something, or someone, of mutual interest. And it’s extremely powerful, because it makes people much smarter” (Reynolds 121). Horizontal knowledge is collective knowledge, shared through posts, comments and emails between craft bloggers. Using the same methods of emailing and commenting, that information is then shared to the greater blogosphere. Members of a specific e-tribe, such as craft bloggers, usually have ties to and participate in other e-tribe activities. Craft bloggers, for example, may read and comment on the environmental blog site TreeHugger\textsuperscript{xxv}, a street fashion blog such as The Sartorialist\textsuperscript{xxvi}, and the blog news conglomerate The Huffington Post\textsuperscript{xxvii}. Craft bloggers peruse the latest information on their various interests and passions using the familiar blog platform, and thus expand their consciousness of issues outside craft and increase the breadth of their inspiration for craft. Communication between members of different tribes is more heterogeneous than members of the same. Those outside links, therefore, allow users to find and release information to new audiences (Adams 45).
The chart below (Figure 3.4) illustrates the gradual shift from individual user of online media to member of a community with shared goals and interests. Crafters approach the blogosphere with an interest in craft; engage with blogs and bloggers who share that interest; exchange information about themselves in emails and comments; learn about other bloggers and their backgrounds; and then join the craft blogging community through their connections.

*Figure 3.4: Pattern of Relational Development in the Blogosphere*

(Source: Adams 46)

This progression increases a crafter’s willingness to seek out fellow members of the blogosphere as sources of new information about craft and users’ cultures.

Engaged bloggers nurture ties to various information sources in the blogosphere, thereby increasing their awareness of cultural information and the sources of that knowledge (Adams 45). “…Members of an e-tribe community are transformed by electronic media, which in turn are responsible for what Marshall McLuhan calls ‘retribalizing’ human society into clusters of affiliation1. Therefore, e-tribes bring about significant social changes” (Adams 45). When craft bloggers find useful information on another blog (craft-related or not) their confidence in the tribal, community-centered manner of gaining information is bolstered (Adams 45).

---

The indirect implication is that the interactive influence of e-tribes will then filter through to members’ immediate cultural environment. As a result, one can argue that e-tribe participants, and to a greater extent electronic media, serve as social agents for cultural transformations in users’ various cultures. If virtual communities (to which e-tribes are similar) consist of people who share norms of behavior and actively enforce some moral standards, and who intentionally attempt to find like-minded people, then they could be likened to innovators and early adopters. (Adams 46)

The online blogging environment enables people to change norms, develop relationships and seek solidarity that may otherwise be prohibited or limited in their towns, cities or countries (Adams 51). The practice of online communication and unity, however, leads people to seek action in their offline communities.

VI. The Implications of Following and Creating Craft Blogs

Regardless of the reasons craft bloggers and followers participate in the community, their actions contribute to the effects of a changing relationship between humans and media. There is much speculation that blogging undermines traditional journalism, but more significantly the platform changes users' ability to connect to their sources of information. The sources of information for blogs are the bloggers themselves (or links to a Website where the information was gathered), enabling social interaction that deepens an understanding of the blogs' subject matter. “Although e-tribes have the tendency to focus initially on factual information exchange, over time the exchange can be expected to mix factual information with social or relationship information” (Adams 47). People are empowered by the information they seek and find, as well as by the connections they make in commenting on posts and emailing a fellow blogger. Craft bloggers
can satisfy their yearning for information on a skill, hobby or lifestyle that may not be present in their local environments. Furthermore, they can discover a vast supportive community that may not exist in their offline lives.

The cooperative efforts of the craft blogosphere support the claim that online interaction will effect positive change in offline interactions. The online activities of e-tribes and cyber communities will not eliminate the need for FTF interaction. They will instead push innovations in technology and offer opportunities for offline meetings (Adams 46). “...New technologies will extend the ability of people to cooperate beyond cyberspace, as well as increasing [sic] what people can do in the real world...New technologies will help people cooperate, which will lead to further improvements in technology, which will lead to more efficient cooperation (and individual effort), which will lead to further improvements, and so on” (Reynolds 257-258). Craft blogging leads to contacts in disparate locations and opportunities for professional advancement. It also creates opportunities for crafters to work together at offline venues such as craft fairs or craft workshops.

Craft blogs create social change by increasing a participant's sense of community and empowering people to take individual actions to create change both online and offline. “Also, organizing into e-tribes and virtual groups empowers members and seems to elicit members’ activist tendencies...Group members walk away with a renewed sense of assurance that they have more power than they originally envisioned. Members can also bounce ideas around within their groups to determine strategies for handling situations where they feel
powerless” (Adams 51). Blogging bonds crafters across geographic and cultural boundaries. Craft bloggers' recognition of this diverse community elicits change when a common consciousness arises from the material in the posts and comments. Crafting started as a utilitarian venture, was cast aside as a hobby, and is reclaimed today by bloggers willing to share information on strengthening their skills, making a living on their creativity and increasing a craft consciousness that involves living sustainably and engaging with their local environments.
Works Cited


CHAPTER 4: CRAFTIVISM

This chapter defines the term “craftivism” and describes the development of the idea throughout recent history. It explains the reasons for engaging in craftivism and the characteristics and methods of participant craftivists. Next, I show how craftivism can create change in local communities and support various activist causes for social change. I then look at the outcomes—personal, political and social—of craftivism projects. Finally, I analyze the influence of the Internet and the concomitant global connections craftivism is able to make.

My research started with Betsy Greer’s craftivism Website and branched out to include blogs on craft and craftivism projects. I analyzed blogs in search of major trends, examples of craftivism projects and the nature of the craftivism blogosphere. Most of the published works that reference craftivism are hobby books on craft, and in those sources craftivism is mentioned only in short excerpts. Greer’s book *Knitting for Good*, however, is a valuable collection of craftivists commenting on their work and its impact. The majority of my sources, however, are blogs that contain the most current information on craftivism efforts.

I. Defining Craftivism and Craftivist

“Craftivism” is the marriage of “craft” and “activism” in both words and sentiment. Betsy Greer, who coined the term in 2003, says:

Activism (or craftivism) is less about a call to arms and more about a call to act for change...Every time you make a conscious choice, you are being an activist. In choosing to buy one brand of yarn instead of another due to the way it was produced or by choosing to ride your bike instead of drive, you are being an activist. (Greer "Craftivism Vs. Craftism")
Craftivism stems from the belief that an individual’s increased consciousness about the power of consumer and lifestyle choices can lead to behavior changes. These changes can then subvert the existing systems of hegemony that have contributed to our society’s environmental damage, sexism, unfair labor laws, etc. Craft is the channel through which these people can act on their consciousness. To be a craftivist is to believe that crafters and activists have overlapping goals, values and power.

Craftivism arises out of some people’s frustration with anonymous and disconnected activism that relies on anonymous letter- and email-writing campaigns, quick petitions, or faceless marches. In 2003 craftivist Cat Mazza decided to challenge the petition method of raising awareness by engaging knitters around the world. The knitters, who learned about the project and accessed free patterns on Mazza’s Website *microRevolt*, knit squares to contribute to the Nike blanket (Figure 4.1), which is displayed in galleries and shows to raise awareness about the company’s unethical labor practices.

*Figure 4.1: The Nike Blanket Project*

(Source: http://www.microrevolt.org/)
Each square represents a person’s awareness and disapproval of Nike’s labor practices and is a visual representation of the efforts of that knitter to engage others in a discussion about labor laws. “Whereas signing a petition takes only a few seconds, projects like the Nike blanket…are effective precisely because of the very personal and time-consuming collaborative process through which the message of protest comes to be voiced” (Regine 1). Mazza says she engaged the crafting community to expose unfair labor practices because they understand the effort it takes to make something. Craftivism projects such as the Nike blanket call on individuals to apply their personal creative talents to causes that affect their communities, both local and global.

Craftivism aims to increase activism that improves what works in a community and draws attention to community problems through the individualized craft skills and craft projects of people living in that community. “Craftivists” are the socially conscious crafters who enact that positive change. Based on explorations in the craftivism blogosphere and craft literature, there are thousands of crafters who have taken on craftivism projects in their creative careers. They share the roles of crafter and activist, and have aligned their personal behaviors to reflect their activist values by making conscious consumer choices, spending time on crafts for a cause and discussing their work with friends and acquaintances to raise awareness. The 2007 Encyclopedia of Activism and Social Justice’s definition of craftivism demonstrates how it focuses on the person doing the activism as much as it does on the craft.

Craftivism is the practice of engaged creativity, especially regarding political or social causes. By using their creative energy to help make the world a better
place, craftivists help bring about positive change via personalized activism. Craftivism allows practitioners to customize their particular skills to address particular causes. ("Craftivism." Encyclopedia of Activism and Social Justice)

Craftivism encourages people to make things instead of buy them and donate handmade goods to support charities that matter to them. It celebrates the slow production process of craft as a way to increase the perceived value of objects that are routinely seen as disposable in today’s world.

There are two subtly different types of craftivism. There is the mindset of the crafter and craft enthusiast who believes that practicing and supporting craft is activism. By subverting systems of mass production, globalization and consumption, these craftivists believe craft is the final step toward change. There is also the person who focuses on the combination of craft with causes outside of craft promotion. Gabriel Craig, craftivist and creator of the blog Conceptual Metalsmithing, says the first school of thought appeals to many in indie craft circles who practice this form of passive resistance by buying handmade items and being socially responsible consumers. Craig sees craftivism in this form as a resurgence of the 19th century backlash to industrial production.

With this resurgent attitude finding a new buzz word label, I am still left feeling that the combined practice of craft and activism (craftivism) has the potential to describe a much more robust and diverse set of practices. This being the case I suggest a supplemental definition for craftivism: using craft skills and ethos to directly engage in creating culturally enriching experiences. (Craig "The New Craftivism")

Craig proposes craftivism as an approach to self-reliance, education, community engagement and philanthropic projects. His writing and creative work strives to contribute to humanity, rather than just to decorative arts history. A blog post on Conceptual Metalsmithing Discusses various efforts to train and educate...
underprivileged people in craft as an economically and environmentally sustainable way to make a living. The Bead Project, for example, trains poor urban women how to make glass beads and silver jewelry to supplement income from their homes. On completion of the program, the women are given the tools of the craft and an education on entrepreneurship. The project has helped 200 women find self-reliance through craft since its inception in 1997. Clearly, craft can be the foundation for projects that seek sustainable solutions to financially underdeveloped communities and strive to enrich both nonexistent and struggling creative communities.

Some views of craftivism arise out of the desire to support environmental sustainability by reusing resources and economic sustainability with sweatshop-free fair labor practices. Radical crafter Carrie Reichardt says craftivism is, “the awareness that we have a finite planet” (Mikhail 1). The idea of radical craft resonates with other craftivists working on defining the term. Editor of the blog Radical Cross Stitch and supporter of both anarcho-feminism and indigenous sovereignty, Rayna Fahey defines craftivism as:

The use of craft to communicate a radical idea or position…This can be through overt messages in a craft object, or through the use of craft materials in a public space as a form of activism. Some people would define craftivism to be the radical use of materials, i.e. only using recycled materials or using materials in purposes other than which they were originally intended. Some people would define craftivism as simply the very act of making something yourself as opposed to buying it from a chain store. (Fahey “Whose Craftivism?”)

The Etsy members who formed a Craftivism team of sellers and buyers incorporate tenets of various craftivism definitions. They focus on the crafts that define their activist work: “Some of our members make t-shirts, jewelry, pottery,
and art with creative, thought-provoking messages. Others spin yarn, sew, hammer, forge, glue, knit, knot, alter and sculpt with an eye towards creating new forms of commerce and the making of goods” ("Craftivism" Etsy). These “new” forms of commerce and craft making are rooted in the traditional lifestyles of the crafts person in times past, thus reinforcing the cyclical nature of craft in the context of industrial and technological advances.

The convergence of ideas about uniqueness, materialism, the Internet’s ability to erase geographic boundaries and the reclamation of craft stimulated the craftivism movement (Greer "Craftivism Vs. Craftism"). “The fact that several different people in geographically separate parts of the world had similar ideas around the same time spoke to the fact that this convergence, it properly harnessed, could be more powerful than we ever thought possible” (Greer, Knitting 127). The history of craftivism mimics the recent histories of crafting and blogging, bonding the trends in a symbiotic union.

II. A Recent History of Craftivism

Craft and activism have been linked throughout history, at times by women crafters seeking greater rights. In 1911, British suffragettes in the Women’s Tax Resistance League embroidered banners with their political messages to increase awareness of their struggle for voting rights. “The message was both obvious and ironic—the women used a traditional, feminine skill to make a powerful and controversial statement” (Spencer 228). In the late 19th century women in the National American Woman Suffrage Association used
similar tactics for increasing their presence in the United States and overturning strictures of domesticity ("Catch the Suffragists' Spirit!").

Women’s suffrage groups incorporated vivid colors and imagery in their banners to draw attention to their message and to distinguish themselves from the various groups fighting for women’s right to vote. Many of the banners are pieces of velvet and cotton cloth sewn together with the lettering of the groups’ slogans appliquéd on top, much like the image (Figure 4.2) of a 1908 banner celebrating Florence Nightingale’s suffrage efforts ("Extending the Suffrage” 1). Historical and modern craftivism projects often break down barriers between the public and private spheres to increase their impact. “Craftivist practitioners need an understanding of the complex history of public and private space, including of [sic] both incredibly intimate (sexualised and/or taboo ‘sites’) as well as a sense of the opposite and larger scale: urban planning” (Trouton “The Craftivist”).

Figure 4.2: Suffragette March Banner

(Source: http://www.vads.ac.uk/)
Craftivism’s history is inherently connected to women’s history, which includes a progression toward the appreciation of so-called domestic arts like sewing and knitting.

Craftivism cannot escape its direct, unrelenting and very specific links with the gendered history of craft, the lack of women’s equitable employment/financial independence (especially in craft in the first and fourth worlds for very different reasons), lack of creative or organizational leadership opportunities, (and the resultant consequences for their independence and safety). (Trouton “The Craftivist”)

The actions of feminists in the early 20th century provided the foundation for young feminists in the 1990s to reclaim their space via the riot grrrl movement. Riot grrrl’s DIY cultural aesthetic remained with the young women who were encouraged to try activities that were not usually acceptable for girls, such as skateboarding or playing in a rock band. Feminist artist, filmmaker and DJ Cathy de la Cruz attributes her confidence to try various creative venues to the movement: “Riot Grrrl provided so many women with the empowerment to make their own destinies” (Greer, Knitting 13). Riot grrrls typically focused on making music, zines and skateboarding as cultural subversion. The movement overall, however, promoted various offshoots of the DIY mentality that manifested in the recognition of craftivism’s relevance in today’s world.

Betsy Greer considered herself a riot grrrl participant in the 1990s, but struggled to find her niche in adulthood amid an array of interests and talents. Frustrated by failed attempts at the typical riot grrrl activities of music and zine production, Greer reflected on what she did well. “Greer began by asking herself how her love of music, social science, skateboarding, knitting, travel and culture reflected her life and her values” (Chavez 1). She discovered knitting and
connected to the skill her grandmother had once mastered. She then attended Goldsmith’s College in London and graduated with a Master of Arts in Sociology. Her thesis focused on knitting, DIY culture and community development, which led to the creation of her Website *Craftivism* in 2005 (Greer “About”). Greer’s Website, lectures and contributions to craft literature spread the craftivism philosophy and encouraged other to participate. She published *Knitting for Good: A Guide to Creating Personal, Social, and Political Change, Stitch by Stitch* in 2008 to further document and promote the therapeutic benefits of knitting, as well as the opportunities for intertwining craft and activism.

Greer advocates finding personal causes with which to connect. Her desire to process the United States’ involvement in the Middle East motivated her to cross stitch anti-war graffiti images (Figure 4.3). “I decided to cross-stitch them for two different reasons: 1) to put ‘dangerous’ graffiti in a ‘safe’ context, 2) to further elucidate that while their countries may fight, there are many citizens who remain opposed to war” (Greer “Anti-War”). Greer’s pieces illustrate the significance of the graffiti image as an expression of a person’s political views. She takes the time to complete the thousands of stitches that go into a pattern based on another activist-artist’s designs. Greer’s cross stitch art is displayed in New York, Wisconsin and online to further highlight and memorialize the original graffiti artist’s goals for increased awareness of anti-war activism.
III. Why Craftivism?

Craftivism projects originate from the theory that personal connections can be made through craft. In the process of making, craftivists form bonds to their craft that are forever connected to the object. The slowness of making enables crafters to focus on the values they associate with their work. The processes of creating the object are embedded in the end product, which then reminds users of the values attached to handmade production. For the crafter, the process of making can be meditative, allowing the craftivist to discover multiple layers of symbolism and meaning in the craft object. Kate Bingaman-Burt, assistant professor of graphic design at Portland State University and creator of ObsessiveConsumption discussed this therapeutic effect of making: “The
slowness of craft reveals a certain layer of truth. The maker is able to meditate and/or critically focus on the subject of what is being made” (Greer, *Knitting* 31). Like an abstract painting, the craftivist object contains the messages the creator intended to produce and is then open to new meanings created by the end user or viewer. The craft object’s utility repeatedly calls to question the ethics of consumption.

Craftivism projects often express difficult themes by drawing on visual and emotional cues between the crafter and viewer. Carrie Reichardt is a London-based multimedia craftivist who conveys the injustices of the American federal prison system with her hand-painted ceramic spray paint cans (Figure 4.4).

In collaboration with Louisiana State Prison inmate and ex-Black Panther Herman Wallace, Reichardt has created a set of spray paint cans with dead revolutionaries painted on them. Reichardt uses her ceramics craft skills to create a classic object of resistance—the spray paint can—that communicates the message of resistance.

*Figure 4.4: Reichardt’s Ceramic Spray Paint Can, “Bank Robber”*
Before her partnership with Wallace, Reichardt and American death row inmate Luis Ramirez exchanged letters for six years prior to his execution. Reichardt channeled her grief and frustration at his loss and an unjust penal system into a mosaic wall (Figure 4.5) that includes Ramirez’s last words. “Reichardt realized…how beautifully skilled craftwork can wrap itself round some hard-hitting images and messages, and get away with it” (Mikhail 1). Reichardt’s craftivism uses the form to communicate the message—not only in words, but in images and with symbolism.

*Figure 4.5: Reichardt’s Mosaic, “The Luis Ramirez Wall”*

The messages communicated through the craft object facilitate personal connections with the maker and viewer. The intimate relationship between crafter and craftivism object develops with the understanding that an end user will benefit from the production of the object, again highlighting the utility of craft objects. The time and energy spent on a craftivism project are forever attached to the object and manifest in the comfort it brings to the recipient, not only the
possible profits it brings to the crafter. Greer’s foray into charity knitting nurtured this understanding of how her actions positively affect others.

I know that what I create with my own hands will directly help someone in need by providing warmth. I can watch the garments grow on the needles in my hands, then send them off to an organization in the knowledge that they’ll be distributed to people who can use them immediately. (Greer, Knitting 3)

Greer’s outlook on craftivism recognizes and accepts the smaller scope of most projects. It also acknowledges the potential of an individual’s small actions for great change.

While I wasn’t volunteering to go live in a sub-Saharan refugee camp, I was doing something. Small? Yes. But desperately needed and treasured by the people receiving the scarves or hats of blankets. It was for those people, the ones who truly needed something that my hands could create in a few spare hours, that I started donating handmade items on an international level as well as a local one (Greer, Knitting 3).

While the world’s problems are vast, craftivism enables people to create change with the talents and means they have. The small scale of some forms of craftivism does not diminish the significance of the positive impact it has on a personal level.

Craftivism promotes social responsibility by raising awareness of the needs of others. Many craftivists decide to use materials produced ethically and with fair labor practices. That same consumer consciousness is applied to their other purchasing habits, consequently increasing the impact beyond the project itself. This philosophy can be applied to all consumption practices, from purchasing food to clothing.

The overall lesson to be learned in looking at what it takes to make something (and what it takes to buy something) is that we have a choice about what we wear and how it’s made. This ripple effect seeps into our
...subconscious and allows for more informed choices and an appreciation of
what’s really important to us. (Greer, Knitting 33)

By creating something handmade, the crafter begins to conceptualize the labor
that goes into the making of everything we consume. A relationship forms
between the crafter and the people laboring in distant places, thereby humanizing
and personalizing unjust labor practices. Greer’s consciousness evolved as she
learned to knit:

By whipping out my credit card and supporting companies with questionable
ethical practices, I was helping support businesses that believe that individuals
in poorer countries deserve less money for their time than we do...As knitters,
we have the tools to help in a small way by making items for ourselves and
our loved ones instead of buying them. By deciding to make and restructure as
much of my wardrobe as I can, I am consciously choosing to not support the
actions of corrupt companies... (Greer, Knitting 32)

When crafters recognize the negative impact of uninformed consumer choices,
craftivism arises as the next logical step to raising consciousness.

Craftivism is part of the solution to the problem of misguided consumerism.
Making something by hand instead of buying something off the shelf creates a
personal connection to the object, and therefore increases the sentimental value of
the object and potentially decreases its casual disposal. Donna Druchunas’
Website SubversiveKnittingxxxv promotes knitting for charity as a way to challenge
consumerism’s ubiquity.

All knitting, especially making projects with handspun or organic yarns,
makes a statement against the consumerism that is rampant in Western
society. Even when I am knitting something for myself, by creating something
from scratch, something uniquely mine, I defy the standards of mass
production and conformity that we are bombarded with in the media. (Greer,
Knitting 9)
The recognition of consumer responsibility inherent in craftivism is a result of the choice to make something by hand with responsibly sourced materials, the slower personal methods of making that object, and the resultant unique object. “The tiny choices that may seem inconsequential can, when aggregated, add up to a host of handmade goods and money spent on what’s necessary instead of solely on what’s wanted” (Greer, Knitting 33). Craftivists consider the consequences of their consumption beyond the immediate monetary cost, incorporating the human toll of labor and the sustainability of their purchases and purchasing habits.

IV. Craftivists’ Methods and Means

Craftivism starts with crafters recognizing what skills and talents they possess that have the potential for creating change. Craftivism overturns the notion that large-scale action is the only path to doing good. Craftivists do not need to donate large sums of money or mobilize a worldwide campaign (although some projects might). Instead, the power in craftivism lies in utilizing an individual’s particular strengths and knowledge in the amount of time available in the individual’s life (Greer, Knitting 2).

The first step to participate in craftivism is to reclaim craft on a personal level. Finding a medium, researching materials and furthering craft skills through experimentation, craft classes or blog tutorials are parts of the process of releasing the crafter’s power to affect change. The next step is to find causes that align with both the skills and beliefs of the crafter. Craftivists can design and carry out projects on their own, align with an established charity or philanthropic
organization, join a network of craftivists in their online or local community or start their own craftivism group. Crafting groups that meet regularly encourage the circulation of ideas through dialogue and exchange between members (Greer, *Knitting* 107).

Concomitant with the attitude that craft is inferior to art is a perception that it is merely a domestic hobby for women. Greer urges people to use the assumption that craft is a safe activity to engage people and communicate the messages of their activist causes.

You can use a cultural stereotype (that craft isn’t dangerous) to help further a message of your choice. Use it to wake people up, to lead them into action. By shifting the paradigm, you get them to think, which is a large part of moving toward change…The joy of finding causes you really believe in is discovering how others feel about the same things. (Greer, *Knitting* 129-130)

As a result of communicating with people in- and outside the craft or activist community, craftivists subvert stereotypes of craft and infect others with their passion for change.

The craft object can create a greater impact than conversation about craftivism or specific projects. When words fail to deliver messages because of “language barriers, lack of resources, or censorship” (Greer, *Knitting* 115), the images, symbolism and spectacle of craft intercedes. “Craft takes more processing as our minds translate what we’re seeing. We can ignore what we hear more easily than we can ignore a visual piece of art” (Greer 136). Engaged viewers of Reichardt’s meticulously placed mosaic, for example, comprehend her strong feelings toward the injustices of the American prison system in ways words express cursorily. The combination of learning about crafters’ activism and seeing their passions
expressed in time-consuming activity articulates a call to action more heartfelt than one or the other on its own.

The functional aspect of craft shapes the message in as much a way as the medium does. Reichardt’s mosaic (Figure 4.5), for instance, is on a wall of her house, thus demonstrating her personal connection to Ramirez and voicing her feelings of injustice to all who visit. The wall serves its original purpose, but the mosaic adds meaning.

By choosing to craft specific items, such as political banners, memorial blankets, or pictorial tapestries, we are adding yet another layer to our crafting. Instead of just something to use for warmth or utility, craft can also take on a symbolic meaning. The triple use of intention, agenda, and end product creates a multitiered work that expresses our views, wants, and aesthetics all at once. (Greer, *Knitting* 115)

Multitiered craftivism projects fulfill the aesthetic and utilitarian goals of craft, and succeed in creating, applying and implementing activism’s messages of change.

Dialogue on the various reactions to a craftivism project is part of how the project creates change. The craftivist’s intended messages are open to discussion when the craft object is put on display. Viewers see the images and symbols through a filter composed of their personal viewpoints and assumptions, so even if the craft object contains explicit textual messages, the images and symbols remain contentious. “Craftivism is ‘encoded’ communication, and as such, is ‘fraught territory’ which is split right down the middle between ‘social conformity’ and ‘social protest’”(Trouton “The Craftivist”). Craftivism mixes the safety of crafting with the subversive qualities of activism.
To achieve the greatest impact, craftivists must acquire an awareness of the history of the images they use and the space their craftivism projects occupy. Yarn bombing is the craftivism practice of creating knitted material that is sewn onto public fixtures, such as light poles, statues or fences (Figure 4.6). It aims to make people aware of their surroundings by visually engaging them with brightly colored bands of handmade swatches. Yarn bombs are public art installations that push people to take responsibility for their environment (Greer, *Knitting* 63). When knitting is woven into a chain link fence or between a paint-chipped bench, people are compelled to evaluate their interactions with their town or city and, concurrently, with the people residing in those habitats.

*Figure 4.6: Yarn Bombers At Work*
Yarn bombing can be seen as a form of silent protest, which is a category of dissent with debatable effectiveness. “As a result of its ambiguous stance, Yarn Bombing is safe-to-practice [sic], but contentious in its reception” (Trouton “The Craftivist”). The effectiveness of yarn bombing is measured in this concept: to uninformed viewers, the yarn bomb will draw their attention to their surroundings and to those familiar with the intentions of the yarn bombers, it will reveal the local goals of the group. Conversations arising from the yarn bomb’s reception turn the silent protest into a vibrant venue for craftivism.

Whether a professional or amateur pursuit, Craftivist/Yarn Bombers should acknowledge that they, indirectly, become carers of 1) the sustainable environment and 2) the sustainable (non-violent) community and, as such, their art-making becomes a service. In these methods, public artists also critically protest the lack of time for conversation in an highly mediatised world increasingly reliant on e-communication and e-relationships. (Trouton “The Craftivist”)

Craftivists must work to find spaces for conversation to occur, either in the physical places where their projects exist or in the online communities from which many of their projects originate.

Craftivists from all points on the political spectrum can process political messages with their projects. “When considering this question of the political potential of craft, it isn’t craft alone that is powerful, but the scope of the people who engage in it” (Greer, Knitting 107). Crafters on both sides of the polarizing issue of abortion have found craftivist solutions to raise awareness of their beliefs. Pro-choice crafters organized themselves on LiveJournal in 2005 to distribute a free pattern for a knitted womb (Figure 4.7), which would then be sent to the steps of the Supreme Court in 2005 to protest anti-abortion legislation. On the opposite
side of the issue, pro-life crafters have been knitting baby items since 1995 for mothers in crisis pregnancies with the organization Gifts for the Unborn (Greer, *Knitting* 107).

*Figure 4.7: Diagram and Knitted Womb*

V. The Characteristics of the Craftivist

Craftivists emerge out of both the crafting and activist fields. Craftivists are women and men who are frustrated with feeling disconnected or insignificant in typical activism. Craftivists want to see their talents directly applied to creating change. The Craftivist Collective in London invites people from all skill and understanding levels to its meetings: "We want to show people that making people aware of the injustices and poverty in the world can be fun, fulfilling and can build friendships all over the world. It doesn’t have to be stressful or elitist" ("Craftivist Collective: About Us").

Craftivists blend worlds of high art and craft, and encourage undermining assumptions about the two worlds through personal action; artists can be crafters, crafters can be activists, and on and on. In the past, the gendered history of craft
might have prevented people who aligned themselves in high art from participating in craftivism.

Creating, and ‘going public,’ in two widely-differentiated genres would have entailed considerable deliberation in ‘serious’ women painter and sculptor predecessors who would have been aware that their ‘gendered’ idealistic or political pursuits and ‘crafted’ concerns could be critiqued and ‘read’ as superficially decorative (lacking a depth of integrity), fluffy, sentimental or, even, simply dismissed as ‘mad.’ (Trouton “Tasmanian Renegade Craftivism”)

Today’s climate of indie craft, with its blurred boundary between art and craft, enables the interdisciplinary pursuits of craftivism. As a result people who have not previously labeled themselves artists are connecting to craftivism as an accessible and tangible way to act on their values.

Today's DIY movement—with movable boundary lines that can be extended to include anti-globalization activists and self-described feminist knitters—has morphed the philosophy to fit a 21st century world where corporate monopolies, globalization and intensive advertising have alienated the average consumer from production more dramatically than ever. (Martin 1)

Craft provides a platform for interested parties of all skill levels to enact change in ways they think will impact their communities.

VI. The Impact on Community

Craftivism seeks to improve community relations through projects that raise awareness of physical environments and the people living in them. Although online communities play a vital role in connecting crafters with similar interests and values, craftivism strives to reestablish relationships between people in the local physical community as a first step to creating positive change for that area and its people (Greer, Knitting 53). Craft groups, such as London’s Craftivist
Collective or the many branches of the Church of Craft, enable crafters to meet each other and work on community-building projects together. Within the craft group, relationships are formed between people from different races, generations and backgrounds. “The ease of conversation prompted by craft helps us connect with others beyond our own racial, economic, or social backgrounds, allowing everyone involved to learn about someone new and foster a sense of belonging” (Greer, Knitting 55). The discussions initiated in and through craft are encouraging practice for engaging with neighbors near and far in conversation and small acts of kindness.

VII. The Influence of Internet on Global Connections in Craftivism

Craftivism is rooted in local communities, but prospers through Internet communication. Information on cultures around the world is available online, which can isolate individuals who feel overwhelmed by the expanse of knowledge and connect people through the similarities of human existence. Craftivism draws on those basic tenets of Internet information; online communication unites people otherwise isolated in their craft practice and ideology, and opens up a vast network of diverse interests, issues and struggles to which craftivism solutions can be applied. The Internet provides people with the resources to create a framework for increasing the breadth of small-scale action. Craft Websites, forums, blogs and marketplaces propagate craftivism project ideas by providing people with free patterns, tutorial instructions and advice on supplies, as well as links to information on the cause behind the project. The philosophy of craftivism
spreads from the online communication portals that encourage interaction and information sharing.

Craft blogging is particularly well suited for increasing the breadth and impact of craftivism. The craft blogging audience demonstrates an awareness of craft’s relevance in its active participation in posting comments and sharing information and inspiration. Many craft bloggers express their values in discussions on sustainability, globalization and the reclamation of domestic roles. Their choice to craft addresses a concern for consumerism and a belief in the personally transformative power of doing craft. Crafters intuitively practice craftivism at some level, but craft blogging enables them to increase their impact by connecting their practices with projects and groups that share their values.

Craftivism thrives on harnessing the individual talents of crafters desiring change in their communities. Craft blogging thrives when it connects those disparate crafters and communities. Blogs focused on craftivism philosophy and projects are platforms for sharing the information to initiate, duplicate or improve attempts at social action through craft with the people willing to participate. Geographic barriers that once inhibited the spread of such knowledge are dismantled by the increased accessibility of the Internet and blogging software. Increased communication about craftivism pursuits is a motivating factor uniting this community. The blogosphere has brought together individuals working on similar craftivism efforts in geographically separate places. Knit graffiti artists, for example, were executing yarn bombs in their communities without knowing people in other communities had the same idea until information was shared.
online under the buzzword “craftivism.” (Greer, *Knitting* 138). Local and online communication encourages craftivism pursuits and exposes potential converts to the philosophy.

Blogs foster collaboration on craftivism projects and thus increase the relevance and social impact by diversifying the source of the craft object. Felicity Ford’s Missability Radio Show is an online project that discusses the intersection of craft and “the design of disability related assistive technology” (Ford 1), such as Guide Dog harnesses, crutches and walking sticks. In 2007 the show called for knitted entries to the Walking Stick Cosy Project, which emerged out of Ford’s dissatisfaction with the aesthetics of the equipment she needed. By incorporating the extensive skills and inspiration in the online craft community, the Walking Stick Cosy Project found solutions to the lack of choice for individuals with disabilities. Ford attributes the success of the project to the similar approaches to resolving issues in craft and living with a disability:

> So many conversations about living with a disability or knitting a garment revolve around problem solving and ingenuity, and I wanted to bring those worlds together to shift questions about living with a disability away from medicine and hospitals and into knitting circles everywhere. (Greer, *Knitting* 45)

By sharing patterns, posting photo galleries of entries, and creating an online dialogue about craft in the context of disability on a blog and Website, the Walking Stick Cosy Project realizes the potential of craftivist blogging.

Blogs on craftivism are archived sources of information on changing the world through craft. The DIY movement’s ethics of self-publishing and empowerment unite the interests of the blogging community and crafters, thus
allowing craft blogs to flourish. Craftivism therefore encompasses both the
making of craft and the sharing of craft’s message. The desire to find unique
solutions to persistent social problems using the talents and resources available in
a local community makes craftivism a viable, attractive and efficient method for
creating change.
Works Cited


CHAPTER 5: REFLECTING ON CRAFTIVISTA

To fully realize the personal potential of the theories this project discusses, I created a blog to document the craftivism I find and initiate. Using Blogger and consulting with Betsy Greer, I developed the blog Craftivista to explore the connections I can make in the community through craftivism. I document the projects I pursue, write summaries and explanations of other craftivism efforts, and review lectures and events I attend that have a craftivist slant. I profile craftivists I know and craftivists I admire in the blogosphere.

My first post on Craftivista is a personal statement that explains the motivations and intentions for the project:

I’ve always been a tinkerer. Fixing necklaces, hemming old clothes, adding buttons to an otherwise bland tote bag. As the saying goes, a jack-of-all-trades, a master of none. I have tried my hand at jewelry-making, scrapbooking, sewing, knitting, collaging, photography, baking, blogging...although never completely proficient, I can do the basics and “make it work”.

As an interdisciplinary studies and journalism major at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, I have the opportunity to create a unique course of study designed around a topic of my choice. I have taken classes in costume and knit design, social resistance, fashion promotion, human nature, environmental journalism and interactive media. After studying abroad in Preston, England at the University of Central Lancashire and seeing the lively craft and ethical fashion scene in Manchester and London, I discovered the unfolding craftivism movement.

The founder and conscious crafter Betsy Greer coined the term (activism+craft=craftivism). Her site is flourishing with inspiration, links and information on the scene. I hope you will check it out for yourself!

This blog will follow my pursuit of bringing craftivism into my life and the lives of those around me. I appreciate and respect activism that aims to unite populations and affect large-scale change. While I’ve tried to connect to certain movements, I often feel detached, without a voice and overwhelmed. I want to raise consciousness and create connections on a person-to-person scale. What better way to do so than through the handmade? The power of DIY is just waiting to be released!

Craft is a platform for activism. Activism can be local and personal. I am a craftivist! Watch me work...
I lay out the guiding principles of my foray into craftivism and stress Greer’s influence on my realization of craftivism as a vehicle for merging my ideologies and creative talents.

One of the goals of *Craftivista* is to facilitate reciprocity among readers, fellow bloggers and me. I utilize hyperlinks, include comment forms and encourage subscribing to the blog to accomplish mutual exchange. My posts include hyperlinked text and images that direct people to the original sources of information. By creating these branches from my blog to other blogs and Websites I increase the relevance of my writing, encourage followers to continue exploring a topic and promote interactivity between bloggers. When I profiled the yarn bombing group Jafagirls[^1] of Yellow Springs, Ohio, for instance, I received a comment from one of the members that encouraged me to explore the crafters’ blog further. I have internalized Gilleland’s ideas about the vital connectedness of the craft blogosphere and therefore strive to comment on craft blog posts that strike me as inspiring. I include my blog’s URL as a signature in the comment to increase traffic to my site and increase the relevant sources of craftivism information available to that blog’s followers.

*Craftivista* blog posts conclude with comment forms for readers to express their opinions, insights and reactions. Over the course of the first three months I averaged two posts per week. There is, however, a dearth of comments from readers and followers, which speaks to the newness of the blog and the need for increased marketing efforts. Diane Gilleland’s *Creating a Blog Audience* suggests
building a repository of posts to develop personal style, blog focus and material that will attract new readers before attempting direct marketing efforts (10). The second phase of *Craftivista*, therefore, is to continue producing articulate posts on craftivism that affects me, and to focus my efforts on engagement marketing: commenting on other blogs, emailing fellow bloggers and soliciting or promoting comments from my readers to create a loyal blog audience.

The process of developing posts for *Craftivista* entails finding people in the community that are craftivists and discovering what motivates their work. I have interviewed a friend who reuses burlap coffee sacks to make purses, and connected with a community member who used the hair she lost in chemotherapy in a weaving that won first place at a juried show. This approach to writing blog posts pushes me to develop relationships in the community beyond the university, to sharpen my interviewing skills and to analyze the ways in which people find and hone their crafting skills. My efforts drive me to converse with people from different generations and backgrounds, and thus allow me to practice craftivism’s foundational principle of connecting with the community.

The maintenance of *Craftivista* inspired me to host a gathering to make blankets to send to Haiti for the country’s earthquake survivors. Utilizing my network of local friends, I was able to donate over $50 to the organization Partners in Health for its Haiti relief fund and send a dozen fleece blankets to Haitians with a friend who was traveling to the country for volunteer work. My blog writing also motivated me to join two student organizations’ efforts to bring jewelry-making craftivist Gabriel Craig to campus and to attend Cleve
Jones’ lecture on his work with the NAMES Project, which raises awareness about the AIDS epidemic and memorializes its victims.

By engaging in dialogue with classmates and professors about my blog and my senior project topic, I connected with Oxford, Ohio’s McGuffey Foundation School. With a dedicated mother and the school’s art teacher, I visited the school once a week to encourage the sixty students to finger knit, weave or crochet pieces for a yarn bomb of Oxford’s Uptown Park. During the week of Earth Day, the students displayed their collaborative efforts on statues, light poles and benches, and put up signs to publicize their school’s name in the hopes of improving future fundraising efforts in the community. I was able to share my knitting skills with students in Kindergarten through eighth grade, assist in the execution of a local community art project and create friendships with both younger and older community members I would not have met otherwise. The mutual goals of finding material for my blog and reaching out to the community through craft came together in the McGuffey Yarn Bomb, which was then profiled on Craftivista to encourage replication at other locations and in the future at McGuffey.

The active pursuit of weekly writing on craft has strengthened my skills as a communicator. My blog posts condense information from disparate sources in a conversational tone. I write in an engaging style to attract and maintain readership, and include a visual representation of the information with photographs and video clips. As I wrote about the Crochet Coral Reef Project, for example, I included photographs to demonstrate the intricacy of replicating coral
reef ecosystems and a video clip of project co-founder Margaret Wertheim’s lecture on the importance of coral reef preservation at a TED conference. The routine of writing about and pursuing craftivism helps me to make craft a priority in my life. Life’s myriad distractions have prevented me from completing projects in the past, but *Craftivista* motivates me to start and complete projects. In choosing craftivism projects, I have the added motivation of crafting with a purpose.

Writing for my blog has been practice in a different level of discourse. Most of my writing until this point has been the scholarly writing of my senior project or the journalistic writing of my curricular pursuits. The conversational tone of blog posts contrasts the formality of other writing styles. Blogging’s lighter tone and online accessibility engages a broader audience than narrowly focused scholarly articles. For blog writing, I adapt my diction, organizational choices and depth to suit the casual reader. A blog’s readability is dependent on short condensed summaries of information that lead curious readers to additional sources of information available online. The vastness of the blogosphere coupled with an increasing population of blog readers has the potential to influence the writing tone we expect in other forms of media, from online journalism to textbooks and magazines.

To find updated material I have to keep abreast of occurrences in the craft blogosphere, which motivates me to follow other craft, design and fashion blogs. I manage the blogs I follow with the social bookmarking Website *Delicious*[^iii], which provides me the platform to remember and share my bookmarks with its
community. On a weekly basis I check the blogs *swissmiss*, *The Sartorialist*, *Facehunter*, *Garance Doré*, *noquedanblogs*, *CRAFT: blog*, *Craftivism*, *How About Orange* and *design*sponge*. I check online news from *The Huffington Post* and BBC World News, and find the latest technology and design information on *Cool Hunting*. Blogs on street fashion, architecture, interior design, product design and craft shape an interdisciplinary perspective for approaching craftivism. I am able to see what people are making at all types of production levels—high art and fashion, corporate mass production, and small-scale niches—and analyze the different approaches to discover how we can make things by hand. I am inspired by posts about people discovering their passions and finding ways to pursue them sustainably, such as the *Etsy* blog series “Quit Your Day Job,” which profiles men and women who decided to pursue craft as a career.

As an active member of the overarching design blogosphere, I comment on posts that inspire me and share the information with friends and family through emails and on *Facebook*.

My craftivism blog promotes craft as a method for engaging with the community. I share Greer’s understanding of the small scale of my actions compared with charity organizations, social entrepreneurs or Peace Corps volunteers, for example. My aim is to inspire followers with cases of craftivists who have found solutions to problems they encounter in craft. I communicate the merits of craft blogging as a tool for personal growth and discovery in talking about *Craftivista* with the people in my life. I expose friends to the relevance of craft in today’s world of consumerism, globalization and environmental
destruction. With craftivism actively in my thoughts I am able to find connections between craft and other disciplines, and continue discovering ways I can apply my unique talents to the causes I value.
Works Cited

Creating a Blog Audience: An Unconventional Marketing Guide. CraftyPod.
CONCLUSION

At the end of the first decade of the 21st century, the Internet’s ubiquitous stance in the Western world is nowhere near waning. As our ideas for applications of technology grow bigger, the technology itself is getting smaller and more accessible. Some early adopters of the Internet mistakenly and idealistically foreshadowed equality among races, sexes and socioeconomic classes through online communication. Although those social barriers still exist, applications of Internet communication technologies, such as blogging, are increasing the opportunities for collaboration among people working toward positive social change. Those same technologies provide niche populations the platforms for communicating the information of their subcultures.

The DIY and indie craft movement grew out of social, cultural and economic influences at the end of the 20th century. The riot grrrls who experimented in producing music, making zines and skateboarding in the 1990s grew into adulthood with a feminist mentality that freed them from the constraints of traditional gender roles. At the same time, ideas of domesticity and feminine handcraft were restructured in third wave feminist theory. Former riot grrrls and other young women and men then reclaimed craft as a relevant and viable alternative to mass production, consumerism and environmental irresponsibility.

Indie crafters have claimed space on the Internet through free blogging software that developed at the same time as the DIY movement. As more information went online, the need for remembering and sharing Websites grew. Primitive WebLogs became user-friendly with the free software LiveJournal and
later, *Blogger*. *Blogger* created a platform for Internet users to share information about their personal lives, work, hobbies and online discoveries. The network of bloggers increased and then split into communities of interest. The blogosphere is both congruous and discordant; users share a belief in the personally transformative powers of communicating via their blogs, but yield content and opinion from all angles. Blogging provides Internet users the platform to practice DIY principles by enabling self-publishing.

Crafters are able to utilize the blogosphere as a device for networking and finding inspiration. Crafters isolated by geographic boundaries can find and share tutorials, videos and podcasts with ideas to improve a certain skill or to gain confidence in their pursuits. Blogging unites individual crafters in a vibrant community that is rooted in mutual respect and admiration for craft. The craft blogosphere encourages interactivity through commenting on posts and emailing bloggers. The community’s active participants can find the inspiration they need about reclaiming craft, and the blogs become channels of communication for explaining the importance of craft. The increased communication on craft leads to greater visibility for the entire craft community.

Craft bloggers come from different backgrounds and have different viewpoints. The craft applications they choose speak to those personal ideas and have become platforms for sharing their beliefs with people in the craft community and beyond. The intersection of craft and activism has communicated the ideas of different causes throughout history, but today’s craftivism is uniquely situated in the emergence of indie craft and its underlying principles. Craftivism
pioneer Betsy Greer opened a dialogue on the power of the philosophy with her Website and blog. People with the same thoughts about craft’s significance have emerged from disparate locations around the globe and joined the online blogging community to share their ideas. Craftivism projects are bolstered by the Internet’s capacity to connect people and share information on both the skills of making the craft object and the causes behind the project.

Blogging is the platform for craftivism in the 21st century. It has organized communities of resistance that share the values of the DIY and indie craft movements. It has facilitated discussions on defining craftivism and increasing participation. It reaches people with similar ideas who are separated by geography or unaware of the passions they share with their neighbors. It allows people to apply their individual talents to activism that matters to them, and it increases the breadth and impact of projects by encouraging collaboration and replication.

My craftivism blog is a space for me. It is born out of personal discoveries in craft, blogging, and activism. By actively pursuing craftivism and synthesizing the interdisciplinary ideas behind craftivism projects into blog posts, I am shaping the values that guide my life outside of crafting and writing. I am discovering how I can impact my community by finding out how others are impacting theirs. I am writing about the ideas of others and reflecting on how their beliefs mesh with mine. Craftivism is a form of activism ripe for personal adaptation and permutation. Craftivista will evolve as my value systems shift and my geographic location changes, but I have claimed the label “Craftivist” because I know that change is inherent in the term.
i http://stitchnbitch.org/
ii http://craftmafia.com/
iii http://churchofcraft.org/
iv http://www.getcrafty.com/
v http://www.craftster.org/
vi http://www.feltclub.com/
vii http://www.handmadebazaar.org/
viii http://www.bazaarbizarre.org/
ix http://www.renegadecraft.com/
x http://www.blogger.com/
xi http://www.livejournal.com/
xii http://www.xanga.com/
xiii http://www.myspace.com/
xiv http://www.facebook.com
xv http://www.blogher.com/
xvi http://extremecraft.typepad.com/
xvii http://www.dudecraft.com/
xviii http://craftypod.com/
xix http://blog.craftzine.com/
x http://craftingagreenworld.com/
x http://recycledcrafts.craftgossip.com/
x http://thecurious.craftgossip.com/?p=14
x http://fiftytwoacts.wordpress.com/
x http://www.failedfeminist.com/
x http://www.treehugger.com/
x http://thesartorialist.blogspot.com/
x http://www.huffingtonpost.com/
x http://microrevolt.org/
x http://www.conceptualmetalsmithing.com/
x http://www.carriereichardt.com/
x http://radicalcrossstitch.com/
x http://www.etsy.com/
x http://www.craftivism.com/
x http://www.obsessiveconsumption.typepad.com/
x http://www.sheptoshawl.com/
x http://gamiori.com/blog
x http://www.giftsfortheunborn.com/
x http://www.craftivist-collective.com/
x http://www.missability.com/
x http://www.craftivista.com/
x http://jafagirls.wordpress.com/
x http://delicious.com/
xlili http://www.swiss-miss.com/
xliv http://thesartorialist.blogspot.com/
xlv http://facehunter.blogspot.com/
xlvi http://www.garancedore.fr/en/
xlvii http://noquedanblogs.com/
xlviii http://blog.craftzine.com/
xlix http://craftivism.com/blog.html/
 l http://howaboutorange.blogspot.com/
li http://www.designspongeonline.com/
lii http://www.huffingtonpost.com/
liii http://news.bbc.co.uk/
liv http://www.coolhunting.com/
lv http://www.etsy.com/storque/