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Creating an Authentic Aesthetic: A Study of Craft Consumption and Domestic Ideologies

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Creating an Authentic Aesthetic: A Study of Craft Consumption and Domestic Ideologies

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ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to interpret contemporary trends in craft aesthetics predominantly found in domestic interiors. Concentrating on philosophical ideology and its relation to aesthetic trends, this study gives prominence to the transformation of craft consumption in the twenty-first century, while also attempting to unravel the historical trajectory behind this transformation. It identifies, first and foremost, the specific details and tropes of a contemporary craft aesthetic, and how these tropes relate back to a constructed identity of the user. *Kinfolk* magazine, and specifically its publication *The Kinfolk Home*, functions as a case study for the implementation and approbation of a contemporary craft aesthetic. This thesis posits that the development of a broader picture of the landscape of contemporary markets and consumption highlights a subversive message that emerges amidst a traditional interpretation of Capitalist consumption, and demonstrates that crafted consumption can be harnessed for creative and convivial objectives.
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INTRODUCTION  
Historicity and the Development of Craft

The study of craft is a complex system of research that spans not only centuries, but also different media and philosophical ideologies. It is my objective to present a contemporary and progressive argument that gives prominence to the transformation of craft consumption in the twenty-first century, as it relates to both artisanal production and a more commercialized “craft aesthetic.” It is also of value to explore further what (if anything) distinguishes the fetishization of the handmade from an inclination towards an environment that meets these aesthetic but not qualitative standards. This endeavor is mindful of current trend research and analysis associated with this field, however, it is more concerned with constructing a grounded theoretical framework that clarifies the trajectory of craft consumption as it relates to both the contemporary market and user identity specifically. I hope ultimately to explore the ways in which this user identity is assembled through acts of creative consumption within the structure of a contemporary craft aesthetic. Consumption is a complex concept, often criticized as a means to Capitalist or even draconian ends. However, by developing a broader picture of the landscape of contemporary markets and consumption, a more subversive message emerges surrounding the ways in which these Capitalist methods can be harnessed for creative and convivial objectives.

When discussing the evolution of material culture and its relationship to craft consumption it is beneficial to examine the relationship of these ideas to both the history of craft and production, as well as the theoretical underpinnings that clarify contemporary consumers’ impulse to ascribe meanings to everyday objects. These factors ultimately conflate to form a cultural aesthetic that is singularly apropos to the Millennial generation that dominates the current market. Glenn Adamson, Director of Research at the Victoria and Albert Museum,
provides a historical approach to the idea of craft, and outlines the nebulous connections between art, craft, and industry of the 21st century in his formative text *The Invention of Craft*.¹

Adamson’s analysis formulates a contextual structure through which one is able to piece together the development of craft techniques as they became disjointed from more mechanized means of production. In his introduction, Adamson argues that the concept of craft as a discrete classification developed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries accompanying the proliferation of industrialized production systems. The Industrial Revolution occasioned the differentiation between artisanship and mass production, consequently associating craft with a specific set of positive moral values including “creativity, rootedness, and authenticity.”²

Authenticity in particular is a characteristic still associated with artisanship, and one that is worth examining as it relates to contemporary craft consumption and consumer identity.

The dichotomy occasioned by Adamson is foregrounded by the fundamental concepts of the Arts and Crafts movement, which grew out of a disaffection with not only the products but also the conditions of industrialized England. However, the motivations associated with the Arts and Crafts movement are manifold and imbricated in a way that complicate a distinct reading of concepts. One of the founding members of the “Arts and Crafts Society” defines the movement as follows:

It may be associated with the movement of ideas, characteristic of the close of the last century, and be defined to be an effort to bring it under the influence of art as the supreme mode in which human activity of all kind expresses itself as its highest and best…or it may be associated with revival, by a few artists, of handcraft as opposed to machine-craft, and be defined to be the insistence of the worth of mans hand…it may be defined to constitute a movement to bring all the activities of the human spirit under the influence of one idea, the idea that life is creation, and should be creative in modes of art, & that this creation should extend to all the ideas of science and of social organization, to all out of nothing and

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nowhere, into everything and everywhere, as well as to the merely instrumental occupations thereof at any particular moment.³

T.J. Cobden-Sanderson here describes the varied nature of the movement, or perhaps the function of the movement as relationship of associated ideas, which presents a complex and comprehensive approach to production, consumption, and aesthetics.

Scholarship surrounding the Arts and Crafts movement often centers around William Morris who, as main spokesman and trailblazer, also functions as a standard-bearer for idealist, medieval beliefs in the craftsmanship inherent in the guild structure, and the joy in skilled and artistic labor. Morris’s idealism centered outside of the classical Academy, instead it focused specifically within the home, seeing domestic space as inherently expressive of the craftsman’s artistic ability. Scholar and contemporary Oscar Lovell Triggs quotes him thusly: “‘Have nothing in your houses which you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful.’ He claimed that all art started from this simplicity…But this virtue appealed to him not merely because simple art was more beautiful than sumptuous art but because it was more social.”⁴ Here both Morris and Triggs bind craft together with domestic spaces, and the social and convivial atmospheres they provide. Within an Arts and Crafts philosophy, craft is a representation of the artistic simplicity and authenticity inherent in social, domestic spaces, and consequently serves as a foundation upon which a contemporary examination of craft aesthetics and consumption may be examined.

The Arts and Crafts movement also demonstrates the prevalent, if not instinctive, gravitation towards the aesthetics and practices of past societies, specifically ones historicized

through scholarship and literature. “In the early Middle Ages, in the midst of much confusion and barbarism, [Morris] detected the trend of popular art: ‘Art was no longer…kept rigidly within certain prescribed bounds that no fancy might play with, no imagination overpass, lest the majesty of the beautiful symbols might be clouded and the memory of the awful mysteries they symbolized become dim in the hearts of men…Art was free.’” 

The historicization of periods such as the Middle Ages, specifically in a glorifying or nostalgic manner, is characteristic of those ascribing to a craft aesthetic, whether in the nineteenth century or the twenty-first. Historicity proves to be a distinguishing factor in a sentimentality that provokes harkening back to materiality and craftsmanship.

A historicized view of Japanese aesthetics has transformed in similar ways to a modern craft aesthetic. Derived from Zen Buddhist philosophy, many Japanese aesthetic concepts present a spiritually salient argument for simplicity, rawness, a reverence for natural materials, and a specific focus on the consciousness of presentation. The principle of wabi-sabi is particularly significant in that it establishes strong convictions in the value of the unfinished, imperfect object within the structure of the whole.

One who perceives sabi quality in an object perceives it in a way associated with the quality of depth which comes from aging. Time may have taken its toll on the object yet in an important way it is nevertheless richer for this process…Wabi centers around the attraction to an unadorned, subdued and imperfect form…In addition to spareness, wabi involves clarity of image and technique. It suggests an uncluttered and precise attitude in which the individual gains a clear awareness of nature.

Wabi-sabi captures the some of the subtler, inexpressible aspects that characterize the appeal of a crafted domestic environment. Japanese aesthetic concepts prove the lasting influence of rustic or unpolished objects contributing to the atmosphere of an environment, as well as the the lasting

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5 Chapters in the History of the Arts and Crafts Movement, 104-105.
care and intentionality put into these environments throughout time. Japanese aesthetic influences reiterate themselves in a number of modern ways, as will be seen in the following chapters.

The historical structuring of the meaning of “craft” as a concept achieved by Adamson in his text, and exemplified by other craft-based historical movements, is the necessary foundation upon which the theoretical connections between craft, identity, and culture can unfold. Jean Baudrillard’s *System of Objects* addresses objects, with a specific focus on technology, functionality, and collection. This text creates a paradigm for the exploration of these themes as cultural constructs, and how they may be relevant to the cultural meaning making that surrounds objects in contemporary society. Baudrillard’s discussion of antiques is particularly compelling as they relate to the constructed identity through ownership and display in the home. He also connects a semiotic ideology to the signs and messages that are communicated by objects and their forms in relationship with their users. A Sasseurian application, as constructed by Baudrillard, works to frame this discussion not only in terms of cultural production but also as it applies to intellectual identity and aesthetics.

A theoretical analysis of cultural identity and value systems can also be coupled with an examination of authenticity, as previously referenced in Glenn Adamson’s text. Walter Benjamin also investigates notions of authenticity and “aura” in his seminal text, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.* This essay deals most clearly with the reproducibility of an artwork in light of developments in modes of production like photography. However, Benjamin also considers the effects of the development of technology on the

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authenticity of an object, which supports an argument for the creation of a unique craft-centered identity by consumers of a high-tech, digital age. Authenticity is integrally associated with a definition of craft and its interplay in the value systems of its consumers.

Benjamin’s argument delves further into these issues by broaching the aesthetic consequences of mechanical reproduction as they relate to a capitalist ideology. His estimation regards Fascism as an extreme form of Capitalism, which “has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order.” It is thus crucial to determine the significance of an aesthetic of authenticity in a society now dominated by modes of mechanical reproduction. We must interpret the ways in which craft and artisanship have developed as integral components of an authentic value system, and develop an understanding of the ways in which they conscribe to Benjamin’s polemic regarding consumer goods in a system of cultural domination. The most pressing question considers the ability of craft culture to subvert a structure of cultural domination and sustain a collective memory of authenticity that is latent in the craft aesthetic and artisan marketplace.

An investigation of this nature is complex in its theoretical origins and influences; however, it is useful to decipher the lineage and trajectory of material culture studies so that it may serve as a theoretical substructure to the arguments and theorists at hand. This provides a strong frame of reference that supports an argument for an authentic craft aesthetic, highlighting the relationship between people and things. The arguments made by both Henry Glassie and Michel de Certeau that offer a persuasive contextualization of material culture. Glassie’s folklorist approach in his text Material Culture reinforces the thread of craftsmanship and artisanship running throughout this study of contemporary craft consumption. With a focus on

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object history and tradition, of which pottery is given prominence, Glassie develops an approach that sanctifies human creative practices and their influence on history and culture.

De Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life* highlights the consumption present in our capitalist economy today and reframes this consumption as production, as a functional, individualized, and subversive act. His recontextualization of common perceptions regarding the overgeneralized “consumer” creates space for new interpretations of a commodified marketplace. In his text, De Certeau outlines “ways of operating,” which “constitute the innumerable practices through which users reappropriate the space organized by techniques of sociocultural production.” It is an updated understanding of these “ways of operating” that is the concern of my inquiry. It is my hope that by focusing solely on objects as cultural artifacts as opposed to art objects in a formal sense, as Glassie and De Certeau have done, we may be able to come to terms with the changing manifestations of creativity in and subversion of a capitalist consumer society.

I will rely on Georg Simmel and Guy Debord to support a historical examination of urban environments, and how urbanization and mechanization have given rise to the modern metropolis. As a home to many craft aesthetic apartments and houses, modern cities pose as a unique, and perhaps idiosyncratic, background for the exploration of craft, authenticity, and artisanship. Simmel’s “The Metropolis and Mental Life” is a formative exploration of the modernization of culture and psychology, which attempts to explain the alienation he perceived in early twentieth century Berlin. Debord serves as an extension to Simmel’s arguments, and his Society of the Spectacle emphasizes the trajectory of social relationships in modern urban environments. Debord and Simmel amplify the background noise of city, serving as a point of

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departure for those disillusioned by urbanization. This trajectory is arguably still developing, and the craft aesthetic argued here is one of its products.

In order to examine more completely the multifaceted nature of craft consumption in this context I have divided the chapters so that both may endeavor to understand a distinct intersection of these themes. The first chapter considers the ways in which objects play a role in creating an integrated craft aesthetic, and how these objects specifically function in the creation of a user’s ethos and identity. Here I will draw on Jean Baudrillard and Walter Benjamin specifically to understand how objects are able to amplify one’s identity, and how their “aura” complicates this notion. Objects themselves pose intricate questions with regards to their histories, production, and authenticity, and it is necessary to unpack the complex nuances associated with the circumstances of objecthood as it relates to craft and the individual.

Chapter two elaborates on the function of objects and atmosphere in the creation of a unified domestic aesthetic, and the role that lifestyle journalism plays in inspiring and shaping the aesthetic choices made by consumers. Drawing specifically on the journal *Kinfolk* and its most recent publication, *The Kinfolk Home: Interiors for Slow Living* (2015), I will endeavor to explore more fully the ways this publication operates within a specific moral sphere of influence (i.e. Slow Living). As a specialized journal that focuses on creating warm and inviting environments, *Kinfolk* exemplifies the identity and aesthetic explored in the following research and is an ideal case study. As a precedent for this publication, I argue that Victorian-era bound books of illustrated interiors serve similarly as aesthetic and moral indications of a specific subset of society. Georg Simmel and Guy Debord, by outlining the deterioration of social interaction in an urban environment, function as standards from which a Slow Living mindset may have developed.
CHAPTER ONE
A Topology of the Craft Aesthetic

We are beginning to see what the new model of home-dweller looks like: ‘man the interior designer’ is neither an owner nor a mere user—rather, he is an active engineer of atmosphere. Space is at his disposal like a kind of distributed system, and by controlling this space he holds sway over all possible reciprocal relations between objects therein, and hence over all the roles they are capable of assuming.11

Jean Baudrillard identifies a significant shift in the crafting of a domestic environment as early as 196812, and the reverberations of his principles are as significant, if not more so, today as a result of the changing technological and economic atmosphere of the twenty-first century. The craft aesthetic framed and described in this thesis is first and foremost an understanding of the reciprocal relations between objects and the engineers of their encompassing atmosphere. As Henry Glassie writes, “Beginning necessarily with things, but not ending with them, the study of material culture uses objects to approach human thought and action.”13 The materiality of the craft aesthetic creates a systemization of visual cues derived from objects that connote a moral belief that is anti-modern, or neo-primitive, even though it is conscious of contemporary trends. These objects, through their texture, color, form, and function embody the dogma of a new brand of utopianism that reinforces an ideology of crafted domesticity.

This aesthetic favors the primitive and rustic, along with simplicity, high quality, and comfort, and is characterized by its integration into the modern home. The craft aesthetic is an attempt at a return to authenticity in a culture rife with technology, synthetics, and mass

12 Editions Gallimard published the original French version of this text, Le systeme des objets, in 1968.
production. However, anxiety regarding a loss of skilled craftsmanship and honesty of materials is not a new phenomenon. As Glenn Adamson argues in his seminal text *The Invention of Craft*, similar anxieties persisted throughout the escalation of the Industrial Revolution, and have reiterated in a modern moment. “…Indeed, in the early reaction to plastic materials, we begin to see the first stirrings of a new, dominant narrative about modern craft, one that casts it in the role not of silent partner for industry…but rather that of a remnant of earlier times, whose loss might well be disastrous.”\(^\text{14}\) Contemporary anxieties regarding manufacturing and artificiality fuel the embrace of an aesthetic of uniqueness, and the appreciation of authentic or crafted goods. As Grace Lees-Maffei and Linda Sandino have argued in their text, *Dangerous Liaisons: Relationships between Design, Craft, and Art*, the unique categories of “maker” and “made” are distinctly transforming the trajectory and future of material culture.\(^\text{15}\) In the domestic sphere a craft aesthetic is used as a means of self-definition. It therefore opens up a complex material landscape that is worth navigating in order to unravel the motivation behind such contemporary trends.

**A Classification of Aesthetic Motifs**

This return to authenticity is characterized by specific aesthetic qualities that are valuable to this argument when defined and classified.\(^\text{16}\) Rooms that manifest practices of socialization and sustenance, as in living rooms, kitchens, and dining rooms, present unique examples of ethos expressed through visual cues, and are the principal examples of this aesthetic. Dominant

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\(^{16}\) Authenticity functions thus far as a concept that suggests honesty and truth to materials, but this working definition will later be examined in further detail as it relates to contemporary morality and concepts of production and reproduction.
amongst all of these rooms is an unequivocal adoption of muted color palettes of chiefly white, ecru or beige, blush pink, dove grey, and navy blue (Figures 1 and 2). These colors create a distinct light and open atmosphere that serves as the foundation for the rest of the craft aesthetic ensemble. White walls, accompanied by natural light, are particularly evocative of a clean, pure, and uncluttered character in these spaces. The other colors present in this palette function as complimentary supplements to white as an overarching motif, deemphasizing the flawlessness of a white space, and introducing natural imperfection.

There are a number of visual and textural tropes manifest in this aesthetic that work with the color palette to develop a comprehensive environment, one which creates an atmosphere that is rooted in plainness, an appreciation for the honesty of specific materials, and the composition of such materials in a thoughtful way. Textiles are often used to demonstrate this ideology. Ecru, briefly touched on above, is derived from the French word for “unbleached,” and evokes the color and grainy texture of natural linen, a common material found in these spaces. Ticking, a distinct navy blue and white striped heavy-duty cotton or linen, is an unmistakable pattern that typifies the craft aesthetic (Figure 10). Its original durability, dating back to at least the 17th century, was necessitated by rough pieces of straw filling that would poke through mattresses and pillows.\(^{17}\) Now, the blue and white ticking pattern serves as a visual cue of a bygone era, conforming to the aesthetic palette and representing a simpler way of life.

Wood compliments the malleability of textiles, and serves as a rigid structural backbone of a craft aesthetic. Wood grain reveals the nature of its origins and evokes the natural forest from whence it came. Wood, in this case, is significant because it is not synthetic; it is a wholly organic material harvested and designed by the craftsman, forging a unity between man and

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material. As Baudrillard writes, “...With the form perfectly circumscribing the object, a portion of nature is included therein, just as in the case of the human body: the object on this view is essentially anthropomorphic. Man is thus bound to the objects around him by the same visceral intimacy, *mutatis mutandis*, that binds him to the organs of his own body…”18 Thus, furniture is the most recurrent example of the craftsmanship and artistry, acting as functional reminders of the human form and the comfort afforded it.

Flooring and floor coverings are perhaps the most ubiquitous demonstration of textural implications. Hardwood planks or whitewashed wood are standard precedents harking back to rural farmhouses or even ancient weather-bleached Scandinavian longhouses (Figure 3 and 4). Tatami mats or jute rugs act as a representation of historicized or primitive materials, and smooth soft rush straw or coarse rope-like jute fibers are tactile under bare feet (Figure 5 and 6). Their natural color and texture conform to the untouched and organic motif prevalent throughout this aesthetic. Thick sheepskins engender a material quality to the color white and elicit corporeal sensation that recalls the grislier origin of the skins. These furs are often used as floor coverings or draped over chairs providing warmth and comfort to the body in a primal way (Figures 7-9). A layering of these floor materials creates depth and complexity of visual and textural interests in a subtle and muted way within the domestic environment.

Raw wool or yarn weavings and macramé wall hangings mimic the effects of sheepskin rugs. Now decorative rather than functional, these crafts are often made on rudimentary handlooms. Roving, made up of bundles of raw wool fibers, is woven with yarn and other textiles to create biomorphic or geometric patterned mini-tapestries that are hung on wood or copper dowels, branches, or driftwood (Figures 11-13). Fiber wall hangings present a

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fascinating connection to the historical trajectory of craft culture, tying together the antiquated necessity for handmade goods with the value systems of counter-cultural movements of the nineteen sixties and seventies. Authentic materials may then be characterized by a conspicuousness of creation, marked by the hand that made the object. A rawness or peeling back of layers is thus an undeniable quality that serves as a placeholder for authenticity.

The integration of various styles of furniture in the home, including Shaker, Windsor, Danish Modern, International, and Contemporary pieces, forms an anachronistic and nostalgic union of stylistic approaches with a common goal of achieving straightforward honesty of material and form (Figure 14). “Only a traditional and fundamentally naïve view would find inconsistency in the encounter, on a teak-veneered chest, of a futuristic cube in raw metal and the rotten wood of a sixteenth-century carving…the consistency here is not the natural consistency of a unified taste but the consistency of a cultural system of signs.”¹⁹ The combinations of color, texture, form, and style are woven throughout different areas of the home, creating a network of signifiers where one characteristic alludes to another within the environment, and all come together to create a circuit of materiality and sincerity of medium.

**Subjective Significance and the Aura of Authenticity**

So far the term *authentic* has been used generously, as a surrogate for honest craftsmanship, truth to materials, and historical origins, however the term is most certainly complicated by the contemporary marketplace of goods, as well as the subjective understanding of authenticity in general. Can one still have an authentic home if one’s macramé wall hanging is bought at a big box store rather than from an artist or made by one’s own hand? It is necessary

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¹⁹ Baudrillard, 41.
then to disentangle the various significations of authenticity in order to grasp its operation in a contemporary, authentic craft aesthetic.

Walter Benjamin may furnish the most compelling, and certainly the most historically significant, account of authenticity. His “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” is extraordinarily prescient of current cultural and material struggles with mass production and reproduction. He argues, “The presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity…The whole sphere of authenticity is outside technical—and, of course, not only technical—reproducibility.”20 For Benjamin, the original object is paramount to the preservation of authenticity, and authenticity degrades with each reproduction of the original. Written in the 1930s, Benjamin’s polemic primarily investigates the relationship between art objects and Capitalist economies.21 However, these arguments can be readily applied to the mechanical reproduction of handcrafted materials, the origins of which are so integral to the ideology at the root of a craft aesthetic. The aura of the original object bears the tradition of its historicity and because the aura is lost in reproduction this “lead[s] to a tremendous shattering of tradition which is the obverse of the contemporary crises and renewal of mankind.” Ultimately, Benjamin’s pertinence to the case of the craft aesthetic rests in his ability to correlate originality, authenticity, and tradition with an anti-capitalist rationale, equating the market of manufacturing and reproduction with the loss of culture, tradition, and ethos.

Jean Baudrillard addresses these notions of tradition and “historicalness” in his own right by arguing for the role of the antique exclusively as a signifier of time and character within a

21 Benjamin argues that Fascism is an extreme derivative of Capitalism and injects aesthetic expression into the world of politics, which culminates in war. The self-alienation inherent in Fascism can only lead to destruction as an aesthetic pleasure. “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” 306.
system of objects. “The functionality of modern objects becomes historicalness in the case of the antique object... without this implying that the object ceases to function as a sign within the system... The antique object no longer has any practical application, its role being merely to signify.” For both Baudrillard and Benjamin there is a certain truth that originates in the object having existed in a specific moment and throughout time and space, having been created and maintaining its significance through this act and not its reproduction. However, Baudrillard further complicates the narrative of the object by addressing its function, or lack thereof. For him, an antique Danish credenza or a carefully crafted Shaker ladder-back chair may function as a signifier for a cultural ethos surrounding craftsmanship and tradition. Though these pieces are functional in terms of storage or seating, their genuine role is to remain differentiated from a plastic folding chair or veneer cupboard: they represent a choice made by the consumer to uphold this ethos and aesthetic. Yet,

No matter how fine it is, an antique is always eccentric; no matter how authentic it is, there is always something false about it. And indeed, it is false in so far as it puts itself forward as authentic within a system whose basic principle is by no means authenticity but, rather, the calculation of relationships and the abstraction of signs.

Authenticity then, to Baudrillard, is a construction within the system of signifiers that users or consumers perceive in the objects and atmosphere of their homes. Consequently, if authenticity is a cultural construction, the authenticity of the craft aesthetic is called into question, or the essence or the nature of the aesthetic is based on something other than the authenticity of an object’s origin. Benjamin’s version of authenticity thus seems obsolete in a marketplace rife with “unauthentic” craft aesthetic options that may yet come together to form a consciously crafted and culturally relevant domestic atmosphere.

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22 Baudrillard, 77
23 Baudrillard, 78.
To illustrate this point, it is necessary to examine another trope of the craft aesthetic: copper. As both material and color copper is often featured as an accent in the craft aesthetic home, particularly in the kitchen. The prominent food blog Food52 sells such kitchen accessories on their website, along with antiques and “one of a kind” items. Listed in this section is a Vintage Copper French Saucepan with Lid, late 19th century, available for $575 (Figure 15).24 The glistening pot and lid are crisply photographed, with a special focus on the rustic and patinated handles that evoke true authenticity with evidence of wear and use (Figure 15, detail). Photographed on a stark marble surface and backed by a robin’s egg blue wall, the copper shines almost to the point of glowing, drawing the viewer’s attention to each small detail. The antique is made truly captivating by its stylized appearance, and as Glenn Adamson argues, “Objects, especially if they are handmade, are increasingly presented in a way that emphasizes their potential to enchant.”25 This saucepan most certainly effuses the aura of originality that Benjamin stresses. However, at such a high price point, it obviates its function as an authentic, aesthetic object dialectically at odds with the destruction and desecration of aesthetic pleasure that Benjamin argues is the consequence of Capitalism (ergo Fascism).26 In this case, an “inauthentic,” yet more affordable, and therefore accessible, copper pot would undermine the Capitalist destruction of aesthetic pleasure. In the twenty-first century marketplace, where historical authenticity has become a luxury, we must redefine what authenticity truly means.

Quoting anthropologist Alfred Gell, Glenn Adamson writes, “All objects that are ‘vehicles of complicated ideas,’ he wrote, including things like hunting nets that are ostensibly ‘pragmatic and technical’ in nature, could be equally regarded as suitable objects for aesthetic

25 The Invention of Craft, 99.
and conceptual interpretation…”

It is arguable, then, that when a brand like Target highlights copper accents in a warm, rustic kitchen in a “Fall Gathering” promotional video clip, these complicated and often functional objects achieve newfound gravity as representatives of authentic signifiers (Figure 16-18). Aesthetic choices that function as acts of self-definition in a domestic environment become more laden with meaning than the origins of the objects themselves because they inherently carry “complicated ideas” that call into question the meaning of authenticity. Skill, technique, and a truth to materials, may still be esteemed, or even favored, by the community of consumers, however the domestic craft aesthetic does not exclusively function on the foundation of an authenticity of origin.

The existence of these items within the brand purview of a company like Target speaks also to the influence of the craft aesthetic in the mainstream market. On its corporate website Target highlights its efforts in design and innovation: “Our belief is that great design is fun, energetic, surprising, and smart—and it should be accessible and affordable for everyone. When we talk about our dedication to good design, we don’t just mean how something looks, but also how it satisfies a need, how it simplifies your life, and how it makes you feel.”

Historically, Target has partnered with well-known designers like Michael Graves to intensify its connections with the design world.

Consumption as a Creative Act

Michel de Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life* provides an idiosyncratic interpretation of the act of consumption, particularly in relationship with mainstream consumer

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27 *The Invention of Craft*, 98.
practices. He outlines “ways of operating” that encompass everyday actions such as shopping, cooking, and watching television.

These ‘ways of operating’ constitute innumerable practices by means of which users reappropriate the space organized by techniques of sociocultural production…the goal is not to make clearer how the violence of order is transmuted into a disciplinary technology, but rather to bring to light the clandestine forms taken by the dispersed, tactical, and make-shift creativity of groups or individuals already caught in the nets of ‘discipline.’ Pushed to their ideal limits, these procedures and ruses of consumers compose the network of an antidiscipline which is the subject of this book.²⁹

De Certeau’s network of an antidiscipline destabilizes the entire perception of authenticity thus far and designates the consumption of goods as a subversive, creative, and tactical act much in the same way that the craft aesthetic and ethos disrupts traditional, or even Victorian, notions of domesticity that have survived into the twenty-first century. De Certeau argues that “The procedures allowing the re-use of products are linked together in a kind of obligatory language, and their functioning is related to social situations and power relationships.”³⁰ Through the act of consumption, the user is equipped with the power to resituate or even reappropriate the significance of an object regardless of its designation as physically authentic. These “ways of operating” thus allow the consumer to embody the ethos of neo-primitivism with an arguably proletarian degree of accessibility to the products, and in doing so create a new relationship of power within the domestic sphere.

The craft aesthetic comprehensively exists within an extremely broad commodity landscape, from high-end luxury goods to conventional super-stores, however its significance lies outside of the boundaries of this commodity landscape. The aesthetic manifests itself instead in the choices made by its adherents, or more specifically: the arrangements and syntheses of

specific colors, textures, and forms that espouse the spirit of a simpler, more satisfying lifestyle. To be authentic within the craft aesthetic represents multitude of approaches that go beyond the certitude of the aura of an antique. Equating art with object and the everyday with art, Henry Glassie writes: “Art embodies, and insistently exhibits, personal and collective identities, aesthetic and instrumental purposes, mundane and spiritual aspirations. Around art—the most human of things—material culture gathers, blending nature and will, and beyond material culture spreads the merely material, the unhuman.”31 In a market inundated with digital technology the preference for simplistic or primitive forms in the domestic environment marks an act of opposition. It reveals a spirit of material culture that is in fact most human, one which reaches back to man’s primitive origins while looking forward to a more heartening future.

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31 Glassie, Material Culture, 42.
Figure 2: *Interior view of Salt Lake City home*, My Domaine blog, http://www.mydomaine.com/studio-mcgee-lynwood-remodel/.
Figure 3: Interior view with wood floors, FindersKeepers model apartment, Copenhagen, Denmark, http://www.myunfinishedhome.com/2015/06/finderskeepers-apartment.html.

Figure 4: Fyrkat Viking Center, Hobro, Denmark, http://www.visitmariagerfjord.dk/ln-int/danmark/fyrkat-viking-center-gdk650293
Figure 6: MUJI “Tiny House” with tatami flooring, designer Jasper Morrison, http://www.elledecor.com/design-decorate/trends/news/a7955/muji-designs-tiny-homes/?mag=edc&list=nl_edn_news&src=nl&date=110915
Figure 7: Wooden chair with animal skin, home of blogger and interior designer Lisbeth Williams, Stockholm, Sweden, [http://wabisabi-style.blogspot.se/2012/12/winter-and-white-star.html?crlt.pid=camp.QBqP9l3VktEE](http://wabisabi-style.blogspot.se/2012/12/winter-and-white-star.html?crlt.pid=camp.QBqP9l3VktEE)
Figure 8: *Antique bench with sheepskin and patterned blanket*, home of textile artist Ashley Helvey, Seattle, Washington, [http://www.designsponge.com/2011/05/sneak-peek-ashley-helvey-miles-pederson.html](http://www.designsponge.com/2011/05/sneak-peek-ashley-helvey-miles-pederson.html)
Figure 9: Nursery with layered jute rug and sheepskin, interior design firm Homepolish, http://www.refinery29.com/homepolish/71?crlt.pid=camp.7BEbln2VJnui#slide
Figure 10: *Couch with ticking quilt*, Modern Country blog, Norway, http://moderncountry.blogspot.com/search?updated-max=2010-04-12T11:53:00%2B02:00&max-results=20
Figure 11: Macramé wall hangings with branches, artist Sally England, http://www.sallyengland.com
Figure 12: *Roving wool wall hanging with copper dowels*, Elkeland Visual Studio online boutique, Denmark, http://elkeland.bigcartel.com/product/elkeland-wallhanging-white
Figure 14: International, Windsor, and Danish Modern chairs at a dining room table, Lonny Magazine blog, http://www.lonny.com/photos/Gallery+Wall/NUNmxAdfLS
Figure 15: *Vintage Copper French Saucepan with Lid, Late 19th Century*, Food52 online store, [https://food52.com/shop/products/1918-vintage-copper-english-saucepan-mid-19th-century](https://food52.com/shop/products/1918-vintage-copper-english-saucepan-mid-19th-century)
Figure 16: Still of advertisement of rustic kitchen with copper accents, Target, http://www.target.com/c/fall-home-style-inspiration/-/N-4y509##?lnk=Grid_Fall_100615_X0Y0W4lX0Y0W4lT:Template_Grid1AlC:CMS&intc=2946052null
Figure 17: Still of advertisement of rustic kitchen with copper accents, Target, http://www.target.com/c/fall-home-style-inspiration/-/N-4y509##?lnk=Grid_Fall_100615_X0Y0W4lX0Y0W4lT:Template_Grid1A|C:CMS&intc=2946052|null
Figure 18: Screen image of copper kitchen products, Target, http://www.target.com/s?searchTerm=copper&view=medium&sort=relevance&iee=0&resultsPerPage=60&category=4094&s=y
CHAPTER TWO
Ideologies of the Domestic Interior

_The Kinfolk Home_ was published in September of 2015 as a supplement to the magazine’s quarterly publication, Simply titled _Kinfolk_. Kinfolk’s founder, Nathan Williams, is chief editor of the text, and it features photographs of and essays regarding thirty-five contemporary homes around the world. The interior imagery presented throughout the book is intended to communicate a “Slow Living” ideology, whose objective is to alleviate the pressures and anxieties of contemporary urban life through the strengthening of community, simplicity, and thoughtfulness. However, the book itself, as a cultural and artistic object specifically, is indicative of a number of concepts that are interwoven in contemporary art, design, and theory. As a mass produced, though beautifully crafted, coffee table book, _The Kinfolk Home_ presents a unique case-study for the exploration of the bridge between material commodities and crafted domesticity, and it is therefore valuable to examine it within the domestic craft aesthetic frame.

_The Kinfolk Home_ is divided into three chapters: “Homes for Community,” “Homes for Simplicity,” and “Homes for Slow Living.” There is a distinct focus on communication, relationships, aesthetics, and urbanization throughout the chapters, and the lush photographs of carefully curated homes on heavy, matte paper create a captivating fantasy space where this dogma can be reiterated. In his introduction Williams argues: “Our homes should explore life’s fundamentals and then seek to incorporate them into our surroundings. In this way, a home isn’t just a physical structure, but also a structure of our beliefs.” Williams frames _The Kinfolk Home_ in its entirety as an infrastructure for ideology, and an argument that advocates for the creation of an aesthetically simple and relational environment that is meant to counteract the

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33 Williams, _The Kinfolk Home_, 8.
ennui of a tech-infused, alienated society. This synthesis of aesthetics and morals is not a recent development, formerly exemplified in a number of design movements from the Arts and Crafts to the International Style, however the ideological vision presented by *Kinfolk* addresses technological changes in contemporary society that have, as of now, unforeseeable repercussions on social interaction and quotidian behavior.

**Influences of the Victorian Domestic Vision**

Williams’ illustration of the *Kinfolk* ideology evokes a brand of morality that prevailed under the reign of Queen Victoria in the nineteenth century. Imagery of the domestic interior was laden with ethical messages and symbolism. These are particularly evident in illustrations exhibited in *House Proud: Nineteenth Century Watercolor Interiors from the Thaw Collection* at the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum of the Smithsonian Institution from August 2008 to January 2009. Curated by Gail S. Davidson, this exhibition was an exploration of domestic interiors and how they typified the spirit of Victorian, upper and middle class society. This catalogue includes detailed reproductions of the watercolors included in the exhibition as well as two essays, one by curator Gail S. Davidson and the other by Floramae McCarron-Cates, former Associate Curator of Drawings, Prints, and Graphic Design at Cooper-Hewitt, and Charlotte Gere, writer, curator, and expert on nineteenth century decorative arts. This impressive cloth-bound, hardcover catalogue functions as a kind of glossary or key that unpacks intricate and minute detail of the imagery seen throughout the exhibition.

Davidson’s overview, and her exploration of early prints in particular, contextualizes the characteristics of Victorian art, architecture, and design. However, her categorization of domestic imagery is perhaps too overly simplistic in its Hegelian understanding of the evolution of interior design movements. She explains:
But the rebellious, anticlassical spirit of rococo could not last long in France. Even before 1750, the pendulum began to swing back to a decorative style rooted in classicism, inspired by scholarly interest in the discoveries of Herculaneum and Pompeii, by the prints and drawings of French followers of Giovanni Battista Piranesi, and by the taste of Marie-Antoinette, among other forces.34

This is therefore implied as an innate and logical process, each antipode spurring on the evolution of the other in the same way that Hegel’s thesis and antithesis typify the trajectory of history. Davidson creates a lineage in which Victorian design is the inevitable result of the back and forth pendulum of the history of taste. It is necessary, then, to explore various perspectives of nineteenth century culture and morality in order to understand its relationship with modern design ethos.

McCarron-Cates and Gere draw upon the arrangement of furniture, drapery, and textiles in particular to emphasize the transition from cold to comfort. For example: “In England, formal entrance halls in stately homes were devoid of furniture and often lacked warmth. In Tudor times, armorial suitings were kept there, and furnishings consisted of a few chairs pushed against the walls.”35 While this type of space is seen in a number of nineteenth century images in the Thaw collection, particularly in mansions passed down through family bequests, McCarron-Cates and Gere gravitate towards the proliferation smaller more crowded, casual, and intimate spaces in homes that are not necessarily so stately (Figures 19 and 20). The balance of discussion weighs heavily on these latter images, persuading the reader that this presents a kind of metamorphosis of lifestyle even if these styles were concurrent in different types of households.

35 *House Proud*, 33.
This essay creates a compelling explanation of interiors where the original architecture of a space is overwritten and inscribed by resident and his or her new use of the space at hand. The authors reference an English salon in particular, dated to the 1830s, which presents a pastiche of styles including renovations that are Neo-Classical, a Gothic organ, Jacobean window bay, and Regency window treatment (Figure 21). “Although this is architecturally a formal salon, it functions as a music room, library, and drawing room. In this interior view, the watercolor serves less as a document of style and more a record of lives lived.”

This is one of the few instances McCarron-Cates and Gere pause to acknowledge the taste and personality of the residents, often absent from these views, as opposed to the taste and ethos of an era. The integration of both morality and human influence exemplified here demonstrates a connection with The Kinfolk Home in its objective to associate beliefs with a positive domestic environment.

Understanding the Metropolis and the Effects of Urbanization

It is useful to create a historical trajectory leading from the nineteenth century into the contemporary. This arguably dates back to the writings of Georg Simmel, which are particularly relevant with regards to notions of an urban ethos and psyche. Simmel’s “The Metropolis and Mental Life” (1903) sheds light on the development of cultural identity in the wake of an unparalleled moment of urbanization and industrialization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

He argues that the conditions of the metropolis have altered man’s psyche so that “The individual has become a mere cog in an enormous organization of things and powers which tear from his hands all progress, spirituality, and value in order to transform them from their subjective form into the form of a purely objective life.”

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36 House Proud, 42.
38 Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” 58.
stimulates man so that he retreats into his mind, disconnecting from social relationships but
gaining freedom within himself. Simmel’s text has bearing on urbanism’s relationship to
modernity and alienation, which are crucial elements to contend with when composing a “Slow
Living” environment.

Guy Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle* strengthens the notion of deteriorating social
relationships in the modern world. The opening statement of *Society of the Spectacle* reinforces
this connection: “The entire life of societies in which modern conditions of production reign
announces itself as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*. Everything that was directly lived
has moved away into representation.”

The modern condition of production and
standardization, accompanied by growing social alienation is the current plight of theorists,
designers, and consumers alike, and is the chief motivation behind creating a “Slow Living”
home. Debord argues that the spectacle has become a way of seeing, in which cultural and
physical production reappropriate the reality inherent in everyday living, and become that reality.

When the real world changes into simple images, simple images become real
beings and effective motivations of hypnotic behavior. The spectacle as a
tendency to make one see the world by means of various specialized mediations
(it can no longer be grasped directly), naturally finds vision to be the privileged
human sense which the sense of touch was for epochs…

Through the materiality and concreteness of a home and its interior decor, and the relationships
built within this space, *Kinfolk* attempts to mediate the ways of seeing that a modern
consumption-based economy has commandeered, though still within the framework of
ownership and exhibition of identity and authenticity.

*The Kinfolk Home* is not simply about building relationships in the home, but also
creating a specific aesthetic environment that is meant to cultivate these familial and convivial

40 Debord, Society of the Spectacle, 6.
relationships. This notion resonates with the argument made by Nicolas Bourriaud in his seminal text *Relational Aesthetics*. Bourriaud writes: “The relationship between people, as symbolized by goods or replaced by them, and signposted by logos, has to take on clandestine forms, if it is to dodge the empire of predictability. The social bond has turned into standardized artifact.” Bourriaud could be seen as taking this position. He cites Guy Debord’s “Society of the Spectacle,” which perhaps functions as an intermediary between Simmel and Bourriaud, and emphasizes the deteriorating social relationships in the modern world. However, Bourriaud’s answer was through his text, the *Relational Aesthetics*, which promoted “learning to inhabit the world in a better way, instead of trying to construct it based on a preconceived idea of historical evolution. Otherwise put, the role of artworks is no longer to form imaginary and utopian realities, but to actually be ways of living…” In a domestic sphere rather than an artistic one, *The Kinfolk Home* proposes just such action. This is arguably more effective and accessible to the public in that it functions as a manifesto for the home distributed amongst consumers rather than residing in the often exclusively perceived world of galleries and museums.

*Kinfolk Case Studies in Crafted Domesticity*

The creative living space of Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset is a particularly striking illustration of these notions. Their immense converted water-pumping warehouse turned home/studio is located in the Neukölln neighborhood of Berlin, and is featured in *The Kinfolk Home* along with an interview with the two artists. The converted warehouse appears in the text as a clean, white, soaring space that embodies a minimal, contemporary aesthetic (Figure 22). Black subway tile lines the lower level where immense crates and works in progress are stored.

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The upper levels spread across white metal catwalks and overlooks plain desks with sleek Mac computers and architecture drafting lamps. The studio is used for domestic purposes as well as work and socialization, and each function intertwines in constantly shifting ways. “On a typical day here, there can be up to a dozen people working on different projects and eating lunch together in the kitchen,” Ingar says. ‘We also have a number of guest rooms and some more domestic-looking areas where we have meetings. Flexibility is key.’ The unique and multifaceted usage of the Elmgreen & Dragset studio creates an uncommon space for non-familial relationships to develop in a pseudo-domestic space, strengthening these relationships in ways that a traditional office could not (Figure 23). The transformed urban yet inclusive atmosphere of the space presents a counterargument to the alienated and image-saturated urban environment outlined by Simmel and Debord, and stresses the significance of Kinfolk’s ideology.

The studio is also fascinating because it interfaces with Elmgreen & Dragset’s work in such profound ways. The work of Elmgreen & Dragset explores the transformation of gallery spaces into domestic interiors whose inhabitants seem to have just stepped out. Their exhibition Past, commissioned by the Victoria and Albert Museum in late 2013, explored the boundaries of public and private space as the viewer interacted with unoccupied, but personalized, environments (Figure 24). These ideas were reiterated in Past Tomorrow at Gallerie Perrotin in May 2015 (Figure 25). Elmgreen & Dragset create environments that both foster intimate interaction and question the boundaries between the domestic and outside worlds through the design of their work and studio. Thus their work and living space become fused in a significant

43 Williams, The Kinfolk Home, 100.
way and bridge the gap between the home and museum. Their praxis is also arguably connected to the theoretical alienation of man in a modern urban environment, outlined by Simmel and Debord, and presents a commentary on and reaction against such alienations.

Another interior featured in *The Kinfolk Home* is a traditional Japanese house surrounded by trees, counterintuitively located in the heart of metropolitan Tokyo. Artist Yukiko Kuroda’s home functions as a paradigm of simplicity and tranquility amidst a bustling urban environment. She uses a minimal amount of electricity to run the house free of appliances, which is built of *shoji*-paper walls and tatami floors. According to *Kinfolk* writers, “Instead, she pulls up cool water from the well on her property, uses ventilated bamboo baskets to keep produce fresh and pickles or ferments perishable items, storing them in tall jars in her pantry.” Kuroda’s home is presented as an oasis amid the otherwise fatalist characteristics of a traditional urban environment, qualities already introduced by Georg Simmel, and is perhaps the epitome of the urban antithesis while remaining within city limits.

The neutral colors and natural materials present in her home emphasize the naturalist or primitivist ideology that accompanies the interior. Images of Kuroda’s kitchen reveal white and wood walls, a simple flowing white window curtain, zinc countertop, and bamboo and wood utensils (Figure 25). The kitchen is conspicuously without brand names or product labels. The Japanese novelist Jun’ichirō Tanizaki writes of Japanese interiors:

> The quality that we call beauty, however, must always grow from the realities of life, and our ancestors, forced to live in dark rooms, presently came to discover beauty in shadows, ultimately to guide shadows towards beauty’s ends. And so it has come to be that beauty of a Japanese room depends on a variation of shadows, heavy shadows against light shadows— it has nothing else. Westerners are amazed at the simplicity of Japanese rooms, perceiving in them no

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more than ashen walls bereft of ornament. Their reaction is understandable, but it
betrays a failure to comprehend they mystery of shadows.47

In Kuroda’s home the play of light, dark, and neutral, accompanied by the interaction of lines,
organic forms, and shadows present a stunning visual demonstration of the subtleties of a
Japanese aesthetic and the mystery of the shadows therein. Yet, it seems that interiors like
Kuroda’s, and others present in *The Kinfolk Home*, manifest an awareness of aesthetics and
harness a transformed understanding of a holistic, craft-based domestic aesthetic in the twenty-
first century. Yukiko Kuroda’s home is an anachronism in that it relies upon antiquated methods
to counteract Dubord’s spectacle of modern urban life, and represents a growing interest in the
primitive or historicized aesthetic domestic life.

Like Elmgreen & Dragset, Kuroda’s work functions as an extension of the ideology of
her home.

Her desire to repair rather than replace extends to her work in *kintsugi*, which is
the traditional Japanese craft of fixing broken pottery using sap called *urushi*
that’s made with ingredients such as dirt, rice, and powdered gold. Instead of
trying to hide the cracks in these ancient pieces, the gold highlights the pottery’s
flaws and acts as a nod of recognition to the past.48

By bringing pieces of the past into her domestic practices, Yukiko Kuroda consciously acts
against the contemporary pull of technology and consumerism. She exemplifies the inverse of
planned obsolescence, accruing and restoring what she calls “simple, honest and reliable”49
objects that pay homage to the past, present, and future by maintaining the capability of outliving
many products on the market today. The passage continues:

Through applying the concept of *wabi-sabi* (an appreciation for the imperfect and
temporal nature of things) to both her work and domestic life, she sticks to her
ethos down to the smallest elements of her daily rituals. Because of this her bond

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49 Ibid., 262.
with her home is particularly strong. ‘I respect my home a lot and regard it as my mentor,’ she says. ‘I am a pupil of my house.’\textsuperscript{50}

\textit{Wabi-sabi} is arguably one of the major elements of a Slow Living philosophy, and it is worth noting how this worldview or aesthetic acts as a substantiating element of \textit{Kinfolk}’s own ideology. This passage also underscores the relationship the dweller has with his or her house, highlighted not only in \textit{The Kinfolk Home}, but also in \textit{House Proud}’s representation of the changing notions of comfort in Victorian society. Consequently, Yukiko Kuroda’s home not only represents ways in which an ancient Japanese aesthetic has re-established itself in modern Japan, but also the ways in which ancient and modern Japanese aesthetic beliefs and tropes have eclipsed the bounds of a singular cultural experience, creating a pluralistic, global craft aesthetic.

Examples like the spaces of Elmgreen & Dragset and Yukiko Kuroda call attention to the ways in which notions of the family and morality have changed in relation to the domestic sphere since the Victorian era. Though \textit{The Kinfolk Home} highlights many traditional and non-traditional families, the text presents partnerships and individuals as equally important elements of a Slow Living lifestyle. This is a substantial change from the Victorian mindset, which privileged the stability of the nuclear family as a unit of social currency. The contemporary value, however, is tied to human relationships and interactions, whether they are familial or otherwise, rather than those ascribed by society to the quintessential family arrangement. In this way, \textit{The Kinfolk Home} presents a striking expression of a quickly developing contemporary value system that eclipses moral value systems and becomes post-ideological through its emphasis on atmosphere and interaction rather than judgment.

\textbf{Defining the Contemporary in Terms of Slow Living}

\textsuperscript{50} Williams, \textit{The Kinfolk Home}, 260.
It is arguable that by featuring examples like Elmgreen & Dragset, along with other designers, stylists, architects, and makers *The Kinfolk Home* hopes also to keep its finger on the pulse of new tastes, trends, and ethos. The book strives to prove that the spirit of a Slow Living lifestyle is truly relevant to contemporary society. As Giorgio Agamben writes, “Contemporariness is, then, a singular relationship with one’s own time, which adheres to it and, at the same time, keeps a distance from it. More precisely, it is *that relationship with time that adheres to it through a disjunction and an anachronism.*” In an effort to outpace the overpowering digital age, *The Kinfolk Home* draws on historicized views of humanity and culture to exalt an at once anachronistic and futuristic attitude. The text itself also functions as both a container for theory as well as an anachronistic object, printed matter meant for one’s coffee table rather than one’s blog.

*Kinfolk’s* craft-based *wabi-sabi* aesthetic perhaps falls under the “post-digital” as examined by Florian Cramer. Cramer argues: “The term ‘post-digital’ can be used to describe either a contemporary disenchantment with digital information systems and media gadgets, or a period in which our fascination with these systems and gadgets has become historical…” Cramer presents a reinterpretation of notions addressed by Simmel, Debord, and Bourriaud, assimilating the technological customs and burdens of the twenty-first century. His attempts at defining and characterizing the “post-digital” does service to the efforts of subcultural movements, like Slow Living, which confront and react to the overwhelming digitization of daily life. *The Kinfolk Home* channels this disenchantment in an effort to redefine what contemporary culture can mean,

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and in doing so contributes to the broader conversation surrounding contemporary culture and design in significant ways.
Figure 19: Drawing, An Elizabethan Room at Lyme Hall, Cheshire, 1872, Joseph Nash the Elder, Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum, 
https://collection.cooperhewitt.org/objects/18708227/
Figure 20: Watercolor, Interior of a Library, 1830s-40s, Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum, https://collection.cooperhewitt.org/objects/18708143/
Figure 21: *Drawing, Large Salon with Organ, 1830*, Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum, [https://collection.cooperhewitt.org/objects/18708111/](https://collection.cooperhewitt.org/objects/18708111/).
Figure 24: *Past,* Elmgreen & Dragset, Victoria and Albert Museum, October 1, 2013-January 2, 2014. [http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/exhibitions/tomorrow-elmgreen-dragset/about-the-exhibition/](http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/exhibitions/tomorrow-elmgreen-dragset/about-the-exhibition/)
CONCLUSION

Much of the consumption that individuals undertake in contemporary western societies should be conceived of as craft activity; that is, as activity in which individuals not merely exercise control over the consumption process, but also bring skill, knowledge, judgment, love and passion to their consuming in much the same way that it as always been assumed that traditional craftsmen and craftswomen approach their work.  

This passage, from Colin Campbell’s “The Craft Consumer,” demonstrates the crux of this discussion concerning a craft aesthetic of the twenty-first century. Reiterating Michel de Certeau’s polemic of the nineteen eighties, Campbell argues that a craft consumer demonstrates his or her creativity through choice, and is someone who “transforms ‘commodities’ into personalized (or one might say ‘humanized’) objects.” An authentic craft aesthetic is established through this humanization of objects. In the inundated commodity landscape that circumscribes contemporary consumers, what remains significant is the ordering, arranging, and constructing space in which to interact, in which to slow down and savor the moments engendered by such spaces. A new domestic ethic has digested and transformed the qualitative morals of the Arts and Crafts era, and through this aesthetic the consumer rather than the maker assumes authority.

Rooted in nostalgia and enchanted by primitivism rather than placing faith in authenticity or pursuing craftsmanship, this aesthetic calls attention to a contemporary zeal for the antiquated or anachronistic. However, as Florian Cramer writes, “While a Thoreauvian-Luddite digital withdrawal may seem a tempting option for many, it is fundamentally a naïve position, particularly in an age when even the availability of natural resources depends on global computational logistics…” In our contemporary, post-digital society, the hybridization of old

55 Cramer, “What is ‘Post-digital’?”
and new and the reinterpretation of old into new dominates the ways we interpret the world, and therefore the ways we craft our environments. With technology now integrated into the very fabric of human interaction, embodying a craft aesthetic signifies a distinct ethical decision. It attempts to re-embrace domestic environments arranged to inspire convivial moments, without endeavoring to eradicate the digitization imbricated in a post-digital world.

The duality of a yearn for the primitive and the control furnished by the commercially consumed characterizes the contemporary, yet intuitive, relationship of people and things. Michel de Certeau writes, “But our research has concentrated above all on the uses of space…and on the many ways of establishing a kind of reliability within the situations imposed on the individual, that is, of making it possible to live in them by reintroducing into them the plural mobility of goals and desires—an art of manipulating and enjoying!”\textsuperscript{56} It is my goal as well to manifest here the creative manipulation of space that embodies a contemporary craft aesthetic. The enjoyment of these spaces, and the convivial interaction practiced therein, reintroduces to us the creativity of the post-digital world where object and atmosphere contend with the technological landscape.

\textsuperscript{56} Certeau, \textit{The Practice of Everyday Life}, 22.


