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Craft in the 21st century is a nebulous and slippery topic. As the confluence of several different generational interpretations of a single term, "craft" presents us with a series of distinct yet connected sets of knowledge and values. Although each meaning refers to the production of objects by hand, a common definition for craft remains elusive.

Today studio craft is recognized as valuing skill, connoisseurship and tradition, and its social structure seems to generate the need for educational and professional hierarchies. In contrast, DIY craft emerges from a culture that does not seek professional validation within traditional art methodology but rather is motivated by joining with others socially in shared, creative activity [FIGURE 1]. Further, DIY often relies upon an ironic or satirical approach to forms of domestic creativity that the feminists of the 1970s (otherwise termed second-wave feminists) strictly sought to reject [FIGURE 2].

These differences, combined with the fact that DIY craft places little value upon hierarchical structure and tradition, often set the two forms of craft at odds with one another. In recognition of this tension, I aim here to place the DIY craft movement within the larger cultural context of generational movements, as these craft practitioners comprise groups whose values and aims need to be acknowledged and understood.

Let me first make clear that I am not making a simple series of generalizations about generations, social movements and the experience of groups of people. Rather, I am applying the concept of "political generations" to the concept of craft. According to feminist scholar Nancy Whittier,(FN1) a political generation is "a group of people (not necessarily of the same age) that experiences shared formative social conditions at approximately the same point in their lives, and holds a common interpretive framework shaped by historical circumstances." Thus, the tensions within craft have to do with allegiances and historical conditions established by different political generations that stand in contrast to one another.

However, the entire concept of political generations is surely more complicated than drawing a few lines in the sand, and several authors have suggested that rather than being cohesive, third-wave feminism, a movement that seeks to challenge what it considers to be the failures and shortcomings of second-wave feminism, is united by the themes of multiple voices(FN2) and contradiction.(FN3) We could likely say the same thing about Generation X,(FN4) and thus DIY craft, altogether.

If there is anything cohesive about the DIY movement, it's that its practitioners choose to reinvent tradition as a remix, engaging with it through parody, satire and nostalgic irony, quite in the same way that Sid Vicious mocks and riffs upon high culture in the opening minute of the Sex Pistols' 1977 remake of Paul Anka's "My Way." It is important to acknowledge that DIY craft as a movement emerged as part of community activism, with a lineage that can be traced back to the 1980s and the punk movement, 'zine activity

and into the early 1990s with the Riot Grrrl movement [FIGURE 3]. In its essence, this new type of craft represents a form of expression that often flies in the face of the 1970s second-wave feminist rejection of creativity in the domestic sphere.

Today within craft it seems that we are confronted with a shifting epoch, evidenced by the struggle of young people to be understood and to live out their own generational experiences and "truths" in a distinct manner. As conceptual artist and writer David Robbins suggests, "Every generation of artist configures culture to match its own experience. The conditions of our upbringing imprint us and when we come to maturity we return the favor, imprinting our sensibilities upon the culture and bending it to our wills."(FN5) Such a comment supports the assertion that today, as always, craft consists of multiple groups with their own goals, ambitions and internal methods of knowledge production and sharing; all are navigating their own way through previously unmapped territories [FIGURE 4].

During their youth, the baby boom generation, like the second-wave feminists, believed that revolutionary change was necessary to shift the existing social structure toward a more liberal moral ideal. During their formative stages as adolescents and young adults, they experienced much political turmoil -- the Vietnam War, the assassination of John F. Kennedy and the struggles of the civil rights and women's liberation movements. Young adults in the mid-1960s were portrayed by the French filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard in his *Masculin Féminin* (1966) as "the children of Marx and Coca-Cola." [FIGURE 5]

Young adults in the mid-1980s, however, are described by Robbins as the children of the French philosopher Roland Barthes and Coca-Cola, and he further describes his shared generational experience as having "no use for 60s naïveté or 70s embitterment"(FN6) because they led to cynicism. Nevertheless, the cynicism returned in full bloom along with new attitudes toward the media and political change. In contrast to the baby boomers, adolescents and young adults of the 90s experienced punk rock, grunge, hip-hop and mass consumerism. As a result of these experiences as well as the history that they inherited from their parents' generation, the Gen Xers and third-wave feminists confronted the inherent difficulty, perhaps the impossibility, of changing the world through direct political action; hence the cynicism. Today these groups' efforts to bring about political change often remain subversively masked within their culturally fluent use of mockery. Growing up with MTV and the Internet gives them media literacy, and, as a consequence, the methods they use to engage with the culture are very different from those of their parents.

Whether or not any of them ever studied Barthes, Gen Xers and third-wave feminists alike have a strong sense of semiotics (the theory of signs and symbols in language) [FIGURE 6], and they like to use the tools of the remix -- the aforementioned satire, parody and irony-along with an occasional tinge of cynicism or nihilism drawn, respectively, from grunge and punk influences, to make cultural statements [FIGURE 7]. In fact, quite often their experience with culture is such that their creative work calls our attention to the chasm between a diverse range of experiences and "truths" that are at the root of the postmodern condition, and quite often the remix calls attention to the postmodern and postpositive divides regarding the status of knowledge in the 21st century: namely, Jean-Francois Lyotard's idea that the Western meta-narrative is dead and Karl Popper's assertion that knowledge is conjectural.

In light of these cultural experiences, Gen Xers seem to be quite fond of using cultural

twists, quagmires and reinventions. We are witnessing similarly positioned work within the DIY craft community. The effect is that regardless of their political ambitions, anytime someone needle-points a pleasant-looking phrase gleefully embedded with curse words, knits a skull and crossbones or makes a cozy for a tank [FIGURE 8], these cultural statements demonstrate 1) the semiotic literacy of the generation, 2) the nostalgic irony through which this generation prefers to operate and 3) how cynicism sometimes finds its way to the surface of this creative work. Quite simply, this work makes its cultural statements indirectly and quietly. Rather than bringing revolution to the front door and kicking it open, as their parents may have hoped to do, these independent makers are using the disarming and unassuming aesthetic of DIY craft's remixed domestic creativity to make subversive statements about the world in which they live [FIGURE 9].

Despite these differences, it does seem that if we dig below the surface, we can still find a shared *raison d'être* for craft. An analysis of craft's ethos leads us back through a long history of resistance to both the industrial revolution and the general tendency of technology and capitalism to replace the more genuine and authentic forms of human production -- namely, making things by hand. As studio craft and DIY craft continue to resist the world and each other, it should remain clear to all of us why we came to the party in the first place: to celebrate the handmade. And that's what we need to keep doing, making stuff and then sorting out, after the fact, whether it is good or not. Or does that matter anymore?

ADDED MATERIAL

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FIGURE 1 Knitta, a Houston-based crew of knitters, wrapped a bus in Mexico City in November 2008 with knitted and crocheted blankets. The interior is hollowed out and used for community art workshops.

FIGURE 2 Lisa Anne Auerbach's banner (shawl) Qungmire, 2005, is typical of her machine-knitted garments that carry political commentary.

FIGURE 3 Cover of Riot Grrrl: Revolution Style Now!, a documentary history of the punk feminist movement.

FIGURE 4 Liz Collins's Knitting Nation Phase 4: Pride, part of an ongoing collaborative performance and installation project.

FIGURE 5 Poster for Jean-Luc Godard's Masculin Féminin (1966).

FIGURE 6 The Nike Blanket Petition, an anti-sweatshop protest initiated by Cat Mazza in 2003.

FIGURE 7 Julie Jackson's cross-stitched "sampler," a tongue-in-cheek take on traditional needlecraft.

FIGURE 8 Marianne Joergensen wrapped a tank in a knitted cozy in 2006 to protest the Iraq War.

FIGURE 9 Hummer Cozy, 2004, one of Adam Ellyson's works enclosing an industrial object with quilted fabric.

Knitra bus photo/Cesar Ortega.

Mazza photo/Jim Finn, Joergensen photo/Barbara Katzin.

FOOTNOTES

1. Nancy Whittier, "Turning it Over: Personal Change in the Columbus, Ohio Women's Movement," 1984, in *Feminist Organizations: Harvest of the New Women's Movement*, ed. Myra Marx and Patricia Yancey Martin, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995, p. 180.
2. L. S. Chancer, *Reconcilable Differences: Confronting Beauty, Pornography and the Future of Feminism*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.
3. C. Bailey, "Making Waves and Drawing Lines: The Politics of Defining the Vicissitudes of Feminism," *Hypatia* 12, 1997, pp. 17-28.
4. Generation X includes those born early-to-mid 1960s to late 70s.
5. David Robbins, *The Velvet Grind: Selected Essays, Interviews and Satires (1983-2005)*, ed. L. Bovier and F. Stroun, JRP/Ringier and Les Presses du Réel, 2006, p. 108.
6. *Ibid.*