

Chapter 12

Crafting Public Cultures in Feminist Periodicals

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The early 1990s and 2000s saw the emergence of a cadre of independent periodicals, now associated with feminism's "third wave," a form of feminism viewed as distinct, but not completely divergent, from the "second wave" of feminism that developed during the 1960s and 1970s. The periodicals associated with third-wave feminism, such as *BUST* (1993–), *Bitch* (1996–), *HUES* (1992–1999), *ROCKRGL* (1995–2006), *Venus Zine* (1994–), and *Shameless* (2004–), differed from earlier feminist periodicals like *off our backs* (1970–2008) or *Ms.* magazine (1970–) in a number of ways. Namely, this new cluster of feminist publications emerged out of 1990s zine¹ culture, and the content of these publications focuses primarily on cultural production by women.

While there are continuities between second-wave and third-wave feminism, the two categories are frequently set up in opposition to each other and figured as sites of inter-generational tension. Third-wave magazines are often used as evidence of the alleged turn away from the recognizably "political" feminist work of the second wave in ways that elide the points of alliance between these two sets of feminist waves and that place rigid boundaries on what can and should count as appropriately "political" work. Thus, in the mid-1990s and intensifying in the early 2000s, when many of these feminist periodicals began discussing and—in many cases—promoting the reclamation and repoliticization of crafting activities, this turn to craft has sometimes been read as a sign of this wave's difference from the second wave, positioned as a selling out of feminist principles or cited as further evidence of the political apathy of young women through its return to domesticity.² These periodicals, *BUST*, *Bitch*, *Venus Zine*, and *Shameless*, frequently cast

¹ Zines are independently produced micro media in which the zine creator (or zinester) usually controls all aspects of the production process, which can include the writing, illustrations, layout, design, photocopying, and distribution of the zine. For further readings on zine culture, see Stephen Duncombe, *Notes From the Underground* (London: Verso, 1997) and Mark Todd and Esther Watson, *Whatcha Mean, What's a Zine? The art of making zines and mini-comics* (Boston: Graphia, 2006). For analyses of zines made by girls and women, see Mary Celeste Kearney, *Girls Make Media* (New York: Routledge, 2006) and Alison Piepmeier, *Girl Zines* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

² There are some ironies, here, in that within second-wave art history, crafting activities such as quilting were elevated to the status of high art.

knitting, sewing, and crocheting as new and fun ways of being hip and feminist. This paper thus considers the representation of crafting within feminist periodicals and, particularly, the ways that readers understand their relationships to both crafting and the magazines that promote craft. In what ways might crafting be feminist? How do these texts foster feminist craft cultures? Despite the frequent discursive appeals to the political potential of knitting, as evidenced by *BUST* editor Debbie Stoller's call to "join the knitting revolution,"³ it is worth asking these questions about the reclamation of craft as political and as feminist, linking them to broader concerns regarding the productiveness of so-called third-wave feminism. Focusing primarily on reader response to feminist craft discourse helps to move beyond simplistic and binary modes of conceptualizing cultural production as either radical or complicit, or as either political or apolitical.

Despite the ways in which feminist crafting is often described as "new," however, the discourses on craft within these periodicals are frequently in dialogue with what is to some extent an imagined feminist past. Moreover, rather than serving as a radical break from their precursors, feminist periodicals that promote crafting carry on an engagement with do-it-yourself (DIY) principles that runs through the long history of feminist periodical publications. This chapter historicizes the promotion of craft in feminist periodicals by situating these publications within this long history, as well as within their more immediate contexts of contemporary women's culture and DIY punk and zine culture. Examining and drawing out these different lineages demonstrates the ways in which feminisms do not follow easy, linear progress narratives, but are rather shaped by, and feed back into, multiple contexts.

Late Twentieth-Century Feminist Periodicals

With the exception of *Shameless* (2004–), the feminist periodicals under consideration here—*BUST* (1993–), *Bitch* (1996–), and *Venus Zine* (1994–)—began as zine publications in the early to mid-1990s, and gradually grew into more widely circulating magazines.⁴ The latter three are United States-based publications, while *Shameless* is published out of Toronto, Canada. *BUST*, *Shameless*, and *Venus Zine* are for-profit publications, while *Bitch* is a not-for-profit

³ Debbie Stoller, "The Shiz-Knit: Join the Knitting Revolution," *BUST* 19 (Spring 2002), p. 15.

⁴ These are not the only feminist periodicals that began publication at this time: the early and mid-1990s saw the rise of a vibrant feminist zine culture. Some of the most well-known feminist zines from this era include *Bamboo Girl*, *Bikini Kill*, *Doris*, and *Pagan's Head*. Other feminist periodicals that circulated more widely as magazines include *HUES* (1992–1999) and *Rockrgrl* (1995–2006); however, these publications did not include discussions of crafts. There is also a large number of small-scale zine publications devoted entirely to crafts: some are "one-offs" and others are serialized. Finally, there are also a handful of periodicals with higher circulation numbers (in the tens of thousands) devoted to crafting but without a feminist focus. These include *Make* (2005–) and *Craft* (2005–).

periodical; all four are published independently. Additionally, these periodicals share a focus on the activities of girls and young women (approximately ages 18–35), particularly in the realm of cultural production, including music, visual art, film, and, of course, craft.⁵ All but *Venus Zine*, which confines its focus to women in the independent arts, examine contemporary women’s culture from a feminist perspective. Frequently covered topics include motherhood, sex, style, and body politics.

BUST was created in New York City by Debbie Stoller and Marcelle Karp (playfully writing under the aliases Celina Hex and Betty Boob, respectively). The zine’s initial editorial set out a manifesto-style statement asserting the need for a magazine that addresses the “groovy girl-women” of Generation X who couldn’t quite get it together, a generation dubbed by Stoller and Karp “Generation XX.”⁶ The publication developed rapidly, from a black-and-white zine publication to a semi-glossy magazine with a circulation in the tens of thousands.⁷ *BUST* introduced a “how-to” department related to crafting in 1997 and continues to offer instructions on how to make one handcrafted item in every issue. Overall coverage of crafting has intensified in *BUST* since the early 2000s: there was a significant rise in the advertising of hand-crafted items (or items that *appear* handcrafted) during this period, as well as more discussion of independent crafters and their handmade products in the pages of the publication. Stoller also launched her own line of knitting and crocheting books—the *Stitch ‘n Bitch* series—which helped inspire a feminist knitting circle craze across the United States, Canada, Europe, and Australia.⁸

In contrast to *BUST*, *Bitch* is a journal-style publication devoted to feminist response to popular culture. Now published out of Portland, Oregon (and originally published in Oakland, California), each issue is organized around a central theme and includes feature-length articles, as well as short, pithy critical media commentary. One of *Bitch*’s long-time departments, Love It/Shove It, gives contributors the opportunity to either declare their love for, or disgust with, a recent pop culture text (such as a television commercial, music video, or

⁵ This focus is mirrored in the reading demographics for these periodicals. *Venus Zine*’s online press kit, for example, lists their readership as 92 percent female. *Venus Zine*’s readership has a median age of 26, and 76 percent are city dwellers (<<http://venuszine.com/advertise>>).

⁶ Debbie Stoller [Celina Hex] and Marcelle Karp [Betty Boob], Editorial, *BUST* 1 (1993); Stoller and Karp, eds., *The BUST Guide to the New Girl Order* (New York: Penguin Books [reprint], 1999), pp. x–xi.

⁷ The initial editorial mission, however, has stayed consistent: the publication serves as a feminist lifestyle publication for primarily urban, heterosexual, hipster women ranging in age from their early twenties to mid-thirties.

⁸ See Debbie Stoller, *Stitch ‘n Bitch: The knitter’s handbook* (New York: Workman Press, 2003); *Stitch ‘n Bitch Nation* (New York: Workman Press, 2004); *Stitch ‘n Bitch: The happy hooker* (New York: Workman Press, 2006); and *Stitch ‘n Bitch: Advanced* (New York: Workman Press, 2009).

consumer product). In this sense, *Bitch*'s feminist stance is not entirely a negative one when it comes to the realm of the popular. *Bitch* acknowledges that pleasures can be derived from pop culture texts, even if they do not always (or rarely) live up to socially progressive principles. *Bitch*, unlike the other three periodicals, does not feature "how-to" articles. However, the periodical has featured coverage of, and discussion about, feminist crafting and its interface with other topics frequently discussed in the magazine, such as motherhood and domesticity.

Initially self-published once per year as a fanzine, *Venus Zine* was the creation of Amy Schroeder, who began circulating *Venus Zine* while majoring in Women's Studies at Michigan State University. Beginning in 2000 Schroeder began publishing *Venus Zine* quarterly, with an eye towards becoming a more widely circulating magazine devoted to covering women in music. Over time, the magazine expanded its mandate to include women in the independent arts, which allowed the magazine to devote space to handmade items. The first "how to" articles appeared in *Venus Zine* in the early 2000s.

Shameless is a magazine for teenage girls, which has included "how-to" crafting articles since its inception. Although the publication did not begin as a zine, it references many of the DIY principles that emerged out of feminist zine culture. For example, the cover of *Shameless*'s inaugural issue draws on the cut-and-paste aesthetics of zines, through its appearance of having been constructed out of cut up and reassembled strips of paper, as well as in the way that the font of the magazine title appears photocopied (see Figure 12.1). But *Shameless*'s commitment to DIY culture goes beyond its cover page: the publication is notable in its encouragement of readers to become producers of culture, an approach that is, according to Mary Celeste Kearney, often sadly lacking within media targeted towards girls and young women.⁹ The magazine's original tagline, "for girls who get it,"¹⁰ further constructs its readers as savvy, smart, and capable.¹¹

BUST, *Bitch*, *Shameless*, and *Venus Zine* all currently remain in business; however, all have also struggled financially: *Bitch* launched a fundraising campaign in 2008 in order to help save it from going under and has massively restructured itself into more of a foundation model, of which the print magazine is simply one part. As co-founder and editor Andi Zeisler remarked in a 2007 interview,

⁹ See Kearney, *Girls Make Media*, pp. 1–16.

¹⁰ *Shameless* changed its tagline in the Spring of 2011 to "talking back since 2004" to reflect its mandate to be inclusive of transgender issues.

¹¹ For additional critical work on late twentieth-century feminist periodicals, see Courtney Bailey, "Bitching and Talking/Gazing Back," *Women and Language* 26/2 (2003), pp. 1–8; Suzy D'Enbeau, "Feminine and Feminist Transformation in Popular Culture," *Feminist Media Studies* 9/1 (2009), pp. 17–36; Elizabeth Groeneveld, "Be a Feminist or Just Dress Like One," *Journal of Gender Studies* 18/2 (June 2009), pp. 177–90; Elizabeth Groeneveld, "Join the Knitting Revolution," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 40/2 (2010), 259–78; Rebecca Munford "Wake Up and Smell the Lipgloss," in *Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration*, edited by Stacey Gillis, Gillian Howie, and Rebecca Munford (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 142–54; and Piepmeyer, *Girl Zines*.



Fig. 12.1 Norman Yeung, *Shameless* (cover), Summer 2004.

“it’s just getting more and more difficult to publish a print magazine, financially. Everything gets more expensive every year—paper, postage, shipping, fuel Not to sound too pessimistic, but we always feel relieved when we look at our cash flow and see that we can make it to another issue.”¹² *BUST* and *Venus Zine*, as for-profit periodicals that follow a commercial business model, have also had some difficulties. As of January 2011 *Venus Zine* has ceased publishing their print magazine.¹³ Similarly, *BUST* now offers an online version of the magazine at a discounted subscription rate, and, in a 2009 editorial, Stoller appealed for subscriptions.¹⁴ As the costs of producing a print magazine rise, these periodicals

¹² Andi Zeisler. Interview by author. 20 November 2007.

¹³ Courtney Gillette. “R.I.P. Venus Zine,” *AfterEllen*, <<http://www.afterellen.com/people/2010/12/rip-venus-zine>>. Published December 14, 2010. Accessed December 17, 2012.

¹⁴ See Debbie Stoller, “Future Shock,” Editorial, *BUST* (January/February 2009), p. 6.

have adapted, and will continue to adapt, to the changing environment with new, hybrid forms of publication. Indeed, the promotion of crafting and the industry it has spawned have allowed feminist periodicals to adapt to and negotiate the changing demands of the capitalist marketplace, which is an increasingly difficult sphere for print periodicals and has always been a difficult sphere for feminist periodicals to operate within.

Feminist Crafting

The growth of interest in craft, which was fostered through the circulation of these print magazines, did not go unnoticed by the mainstream press. Beginning in the mid-2000s, for example, a spate of articles was published on the “new knitting,” featuring titles such as: “Not Your Grandmother’s Hobby”; “A Pastime of Grandma and the ‘Golden Girls’ Evolves Into a Hip New Hobby”; “Knitting: The New Yoga”; and “Rock-and-Roll Knitters: They May Have Blue Hair, But They’re No Grannies.”¹⁵ As these titles demonstrate, the ways in which the resurgence of knitting was covered in the mainstream press emphasized the discourse of “newness” and trendiness, frequently at the expense of grannies (the “old knitters”) who, as I have argued elsewhere, are “constructed as the antithesis of cool,” a demographic figured here more in terms of hip replacements than as just plain “hip.”¹⁶ However, in examining the discursive construction of crafting in periodicals like *BUST*, *Bitch*, *Shameless*, and *Venus Zine*, what can be found in these feminist texts is a richer, more complex, and—at times—ambivalent relationship between crafters of different generations.

In comparison to more mainstream media publications, the relationship between younger and older generations is generally constructed more positively in *BUST*. For example, the author of one “how-to” article on rag rugs encourages readers to put “their own twists on old-school skills and crafts,” with a pattern “inspired by one my grandmother made many years ago.”¹⁷ Within the letters to *BUST*, particularly, the potential for craft to link practitioners, particularly women, of different generations is emphasized. In letters to the editor about *BUST*’s craft content—and contrary to mainstream media accounts of “new” knitting—readers discuss the ways in which knitting has helped them connect

¹⁵ See Linda Greider, “Not Your Grandmother’s Hobby,” *Washingtonian* 36/5 (2001), pp. 136–40, <<http://www.washingtonian.com/print/articles/20/99/6294.html>> (accessed 29 January 2007); Carol E. Lee, “A Pastime of Grandma and the ‘Golden Girls’ Evolves Into a Hip New Hobby,” *New York Times*, 30 March 2005, <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/03/30/opinion/30wed3.html?_r=1&sq=&st=nyt&oref=slogin> (accessed 2 August 2008); Eva Marer, “Knitting: The New Yoga,” *Health* 16/2 (2002), pp. 76–80; and Julie Scelfo, “Rock-and-Roll Knitters: They May Have Blue Hair, But They’re No Grannies,” *Newsweek* (January 24, 2004), p. 54.

¹⁶ Groeneveld, “Join the Knitting Revolution,” p. 272.

¹⁷ Jennifer Worick, “From Rags to Riches,” *BUST* 47 (October/November 2007), p. 25.

to older family members. One letter writer claims to “love the warm, inclusive feminism of *BUST* and I think you have done brilliant work reclaiming knitting as a respected craft. My Grandma, who taught me to knit, is highly amused by the name Stitch ‘n Bitch—her group is called Knit and Natter!”¹⁸ These contributions to *BUST* emphasize the intergenerational aspects of craft and figure older women as sources of inspiration and knowledge, rather than as figures from whom distance needs to be kept.

The potential of craft to link different generations is also discussed in *Bitch*. An article on the reclamation of knitting, for example, takes to task those discursive constructions of craft that rely on “distance from the previous generations, and thus from knitters’ own histories,” citing, in addition to mainstream press coverage, indie website Craftster.org and craft bazaar Craftilicious, as evidence.¹⁹ Indeed, *BUST*’s approach to knitting and generation can be less positive, at times, than the examples above indicate. For example, in one article on knitting, Stoller (writing as Celina Hex) and Amy Ray encourage readers to knit by stating that “knitting’s not just for grannies anymore” and “don’t let the old-lady aesthetic frighten you away,” before adding parenthetically, “unless you find yourself drawn to things associated with old ladies.”²⁰ This ambivalent statement about the association of craft with old ladies and grannies acknowledges the more mainstream construction of “new” knitting and upholds its ageist rhetoric, while simultaneously claiming to enjoy this same pastime *because* of its association with old ladies. The parentheses around this latter statement, however, minimize the value of this aspect of crafting, in this instance, likening the claim to more of a guilty admission than an embrace. In addition to showing up the more ambivalent relations between craft’s association with older generations of women, both of these articles demonstrate not only that feminist periodicals are trend-setting, when it comes to the promotion of crafting, but that they also interact with and respond to the ways in which “new” craft practices are, in turn, discursively produced within mainstream, non-feminist publications. Rather than existing outside of mainstream culture, then, feminist periodicals overlap with this culture, shaping and responding to it.

According to Somerson, while many mainstream media accounts have framed knitting as a return to conservatism and the private sphere, “There’s another way to look at the resurgence of knitting, one that focuses on its potential for building community, rejecting consumerist sweatshop culture, and encouraging creativity,” an approach that Somerson finds preferable.²¹ This emphasis is also found in the ways that periodical readers describe their own crafting practices. For example,

¹⁸ Anna Wise, Letter to the Editor, *BUST* 36 (December/January 2006), p. 8.

¹⁹ Wendy Somerson, “Knot In Our Name: Activism Beyond the Knitting Circle,” *Bitch* 34 (Winter 2007), p. 39.

²⁰ Debbie Stoller [Celina Hex] and Amy Ray, “She’s Crafty: Knits are for Chicks,” *BUST* 14 (Spring 2000), p. 17.

²¹ Somerson, “Knot In Our Name,” p. 39.

one letter writer remarks that “Within the first week of being loaned a few of your back issues, I made no less than three snow globes, two rock T-shirt handbags, and two showy rings. I then proceeded to rave about you to all of my crafty homegirls who were not already informed.”²² Another letter writer, Sally Melville, herself the author of multiple knitting books, writes, “Congratulations on your discovery of knitting . . . I find it fascinating that while many of us ‘get it’—the intrinsic value of handmade things, the soothing nature of the activity, the community it engenders—there is still, so often, a note of apology surrounding the admission that one knits.”²³ The apologetic tone cited by this letter writer, appearing, as it does, in a feminist magazine, references the broader discussions around the politics of crafting being debated within feminist print communities. There is a perception that a feminist has “sold out” if she has dropped her burning bra and is knitting one instead. Of course, the two positions encapsulated by these two caricatured figures (the bra burner and the knitter) are not incommensurable with each other.²⁴ One does not need to forsake volunteering at a women’s shelter, marching in a protest, or advocating for equal pay for knitting. In fact, in some cases, the two may go together very well. In both of these letters, for example, the links between craft and community are emphasized; thus, although crafting is a pastime that can be practiced individually, within feminist periodicals it is the potential of crafting to foster friendships of many kinds that is valued.

The emphasis on creativity and productivity within feminist periodicals is also evidenced in the pages of *Shameless*. *Shameless*’s discursive framing of crafting frequently appeals to the creative and productive aspects of this pastime. The publication also constructs its readers as smart and thrifty for making handmade goods, a discourse that also circulates in *BUST* through, for instance, its repeated salutation of readers as “crafty.” Indeed, the longtime title of *BUST*’s craft column, “She’s Crafty,” constructs readers as smart and subversive; further, as a reference to a Beastie Boys song with the same title,²⁵ the periodical figures female readers who craft as savvy about independent (“indie”) culture and as attractive and sexually available to heterosexual men (perhaps particularly hipster “bad boys”). While much contemporary craft is explicitly queer in its focus and while much encourages the participation of all genders,²⁶ in *BUST*, the ways in which crafting

²² Christen McClellan Derr, Letter to the Editor, *BUST* 37 (December/January 2006), p. 8.

²³ Sally Melville, Letter to the Editor, *BUST* 18 (Summer 2001), p. 6.

²⁴ The stereotype of the feminist as bra burner stems from an inaccurate media report on a protest against the 1969 Miss America pageant: no bras were burned during this protest; yet, the figure endures within popular culture representations of feminists.

²⁵ The chorus is as follows: “she’s crafty / she gets around / she’s crafty / she’s always down / she’s crafty / she’s got a gripe / she’s crafty / and she’s just my type.” Beastie Boys and Rick Rubin, “She’s Crafty,” *Licensed to Ill* (1986).

²⁶ See, for example, the craftwork of Allyson Mitchell and Allison Smith, as well as craft groups such as the Washington, DC-based Queer Crafting Collective and the Calgary-based Revolutionary Knitting Circle.

is framed tends towards heteronormativity, which is in keeping with the overall flavor of the magazine—a tendency that has also been flagged by readers. In this sense, acts of reading should not be viewed as simply consuming information, but rather as processes yoked, as Pamela Butler and Jigna Desai put it, to subject formation and “(dis)identification.”²⁷ Making the crafts described in feminist magazines, reading these magazines, discussing them, or even just having them lying around the house, therefore, become performances of feminism and of a particular kind of hipster feminist identity.

Like the DIY zine culture from which they emerged, crafting practices foster small-scale acts of friendship, care, and love not only among individuals, but—moreover—between individuals and feminist periodicals; these relationships between readers and texts can often be as intense, as caring, or as fraught as interpersonal ones. *Venus Zine*, for instance, regularly prints photographs of mail art and crafted items sent in by readers inspired by the magazine (see Figure 12.2), and *BUST* will publish photographs that readers have submitted of their completed craft projects. This practice of sharing cultivates a particular kind of relationship to texts, to crafts, and to community, creating a sense of discursive solidarity that has long been a hallmark of what Lauren Berlant calls “women’s culture.”²⁸ According to Berlant, “one of the main jobs of minoritized arts that circulate through mass culture is to tell identifying consumers that ‘you are not alone (in your struggles, desires, pleasures)’: this is something we know but never tire of hearing confirmed, because aloneness is one of the affective experiences of being collectively, structurally unprivileged.”²⁹ Indeed, contemporary feminist periodicals often print letters that demonstrate the affective relationships between readers and texts that Berlant signals. Writes one reader, “You give me hope that the world isn’t all right-wingers, and that there is a community for us ‘indies.’ I look to you for so many resources, and I can’t thank you enough.”³⁰ Moreover, this affection for texts is often figured through their personification, as readers frequently liken magazines to a friend or sister.³¹

As the above examples make clear, these periodicals help to produce particular kinds of affects through the act of reading, such as care, love, creativity, and thrift. These affects are tied to the production of crafts, but are, at the same time, thoroughly embedded in the realm of consumption. As Ann Cvetkovich argues, rather than providing “an alternative to market culture,” crafting is more “an

²⁷ Pamela Butler and Jigna Desai, “Marriage, Manolos, and Mantras: Chick-Lit Criticism and Transnational Feminism,” *Meridians: Feminism, race, transnationalism* 8/2 (2008), p. 27.

²⁸ Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The unfinished business of sentimentality in American culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), p. 5.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. ix.

³⁰ Jessica Clark, Letter to the Editor, *BUST* (Summer 2004), p. 7.

³¹ See, for example, Stefanie Lenn, Letter to the Editor, *BUST* 42 (December/January 2007), p. 7.



Fig. 12.2 Page from *Venus*, issue 25 (Fall 2005), p. 6.

alternative market culture.³² In *Venus Zine*, for example, it is this alternative economy that is primarily emphasized within the discursive construction of craft. Many of *Venus Zine*'s articles on crafting are written with an eye towards how handmade craft projects might be converted into small businesses. While certainly not radically challenging to capitalist consumer culture, this discourse represents an important intervention into the realm of commercial culture via the encouragement of women's entry into small businesses in a cultural context where corporate multinationals have the greatest stake in the marketplace; in which knowledge about how to start and maintain a business is less accessible to women; and in which women are frequently not actively encouraged to develop critical skills and knowledge around finance. While feminist crafting emerged out of the DIY ethos of punk music, particularly Riot Grrrl,³³ which has an implicit—and frequently explicit—anti-capitalist stance within feminist DIY periodical culture, the distinction between production and consumption becomes blurred, and the two practices come to exist in a reciprocal relationship. DIY, as Clive Edwards puts it, is “both a producing and a consuming culture,” and this relationality is made more visible within, and capitalized upon, in feminist periodicals.³⁴ *BUST*'s introduction of a regular column, “Buy or DIY,” through which readers can learn how to make a handcrafted item or where to purchase a similar one made by someone else, is emblematic in this regard.

Continuities

As the previous section demonstrates, there are differences between how crafting is presented in mainstream media texts and how it is depicted in feminist periodicals. Feminist periodicals typically present a broader discourse on craft that discusses it in terms of business, community, friendship, thrift, love, and care. But one of the most consistent aspects of craft discourse that appears across these media texts is the figuring of crafting hobbies as “new.” Many of the letters cited above invoke this discourse through words such as “discovery” and “starting,” and the articles in the periodicals reinforce this perspective. While there has been an intensification of crafting in recent years,³⁵ what is at stake in

³² Ann Cvetkovich, “Depression: A public feelings project” (public lecture, Guelph, Ontario, University of Guelph, 20 March 2008).

³³ Riot Grrrl was (and continues to be) a feminist punk subculture that encouraged women and girls to pick up instruments and start bands, create zines, organize workshops, and make art.

³⁴ Clive Edwards, “‘Home is Where the Art Is’: Women, Handicrafts and Home Improvements 1750–1900,” *Journal of Design History* 19/1 (2006), p. 11.

³⁵ According to the Craft Yarn Council of America, “the number of knitters and crocheters between the ages of 25 and 34 jumped 150 percent from 2002 to 2004, attracting 5.7 million people.” See: Elizabeth Waickman, “Knitting Hobby Attracting More Men and Younger Devotees,” *Point Park News Service* (24 September 2008), <<http://pointparknewsservice.com/?p=247>>.

continually figuring crafting practices as “new”? Certainly, such discourse allows media texts to self-construct as cutting edge and trendsetting, a journalistic craft tradition that Patricia Bradley dubs “the lure of the new.”³⁶ But one effect of this persistent discourse of newness is that it also results in a distancing from the history of craft practices, eliding the important alliances—not just familial, but also political, aesthetic, and cultural—that might be forged in making these historical continuities more visible. This emphasis on newness is consistent with the ways in which “third-wave feminism” is often cast as a completely new form of feminism, rather than emerging out of and in response to other forms of feminist movements. Thus, within this context, the figuring of crafting as “new” distances contemporary feminist practices from the grassroots activities of previous feminist generations, activities that are not the same as current feminist practice associated with “third-wave feminism,” but which share similarities and which might be put into dialogue with each other in fruitful ways. In this section, contemporary feminist crafting is situated within a set of contexts—the longer history of feminism, DIY and zine culture, and contemporary women’s culture—that are germane to understanding the emergence of feminist craft cultures and their development.

The ways in which feminist crafting is promoted and discussed in feminist periodicals, particularly in the emphasis on the collective, community basis of craft, clearly resonate with the consciousness-raising (CR) groups established by radical feminists beginning in the 1960s and those which were established later within some Riot Grrrl chapters beginning in the 1990s. Stitch ‘n Bitch groups, or other groups of crafters, offer sites for crafters to get together and discuss their lives, potentially linking their personal experiences with more structural and systemic problems. Indeed, the name “Stitch ‘n Bitch” suggests that talking and griping (bitching) is as important as the stitching that takes place. While not all knitting circles are going to engage in radical politics, the simple act of making connections and creating community is, as Alison Piepmeier puts it, “meaningful for girls and women in a culture in which they are often figured as each others’ competition rather than as allies.”³⁷ In this sense, contemporary craft practices have the potential to unsettle conventionally held beliefs around what constitutes “the political” and how one engages in political practices.

There are also, of course, crafting groups that do engage in practices that are more recognizable as traditionally “political”: these include “knit in” occupations and the use of collectively made knitted, sewed, or crocheted banners in protest marches. Beth Pentney’s analysis of feminist crafting, for example, cites the Revolutionary Knitting Circle, the Cast Off Knitting Club, and Knit4Choice as groups that have engaged in political actions concerning the G8, militarism, and abortion

³⁶ Patricia Bradley, *Mass Media and the Shaping of American Feminism, 1963–1975* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003), p. 91.

³⁷ Piepmeier, *Girl Zines*, p. 79.

rights, respectively.³⁸ Known as “craftivism,” these political interventions are frequently feminist, genderqueer, anti-capitalist, and/or environmentalist in their orientations. In this sense, the political practices associated with traditional forms of feminist organizing find their way into, and are “recast” within, contemporary crafting. However, these kinds of actions also respond to the more immediate context of highly confrontational police violence that has come to mark mass protests in recent decades, with interventions that are marked by the softness of wool and the soothing clickety-clack sounds of knitting needles. The juxtaposition of craft and violence is also notable in the term “yarn bombing,” a knitted version of graffiti.

The DIY spirit of contemporary crafting also shares continuities with grassroots feminist organizing that gained strength beginning in the 1960s. The emphasis on independently produced culture found within contemporary feminist craft has an ethos similar to the impetus that drove, for example, the establishment of feminist presses and a plethora of feminist periodicals in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.³⁹ Another feminist continuity may be found in the links between crafting and Riot Grrrl and zine cultures. Being or becoming a professional musician, writer, or artist was not the point; rather, putting one’s voice out into the world, whether through music, text, or art, in a culture that devalues or ignores such voices, was (and is) considered a profoundly political and radical act. The vibrant feminist zine culture spurred by Riot Grrrl continues to thrive and its energy has also inspired and found its way into feminist craft. Indeed, at zine fairs such as Toronto’s Canzine, many of the zine makers are also crafters who sell both text and textile at their tables.

While feminist craft culture shares a lineage with feminist punk and zine subcultures, it can also not be divorced from the rise of “domestic goddess” figures like Martha Stewart and Nigella Lawson within popular culture, as well as an intensification of mainstream media coverage on women who “choose” to stay home.⁴⁰ Indeed, this continuity is observed by Justine Sharrock who writes in

³⁸ See also the work of Cat Mazza: <<http://post-craft.net/catmazza.htm>> and <<http://www.microrevolt.org>>.

³⁹ On feminist publishing, see Simone Murray, *Mixed Media: Feminist presses and publishing politics* (London: Pluto Press, 2004). On the growth of the feminist periodical press, see Kathleen Flannery, *Feminist Literacies, 1968–75* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005). Sourcebooks on feminist periodicals include Cynthia Ellen Harrison, *Women’s Movement Media: A sourcebook* (New York: Bowker and Company, 1975) and Albert Krichmar, *The Woman’s Rights Movement in the United States, 1848–1970: A bibliography and sourcebook* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1972). Also see Tirza Latimer’s contribution to this volume for an example: “*Amazon Quarterly*: Pre-Zine Print Culture and the Politics of Separatism.”

⁴⁰ For analyses of the renewed interest in domesticity within the context of “postfeminism,” see: Stéfanie Genz, “‘I am Not a Housewife, but ...’ Postfeminism and the Revival of Domesticity,” in *Feminism, Domesticity, and Popular Culture*, edited by Stacey Gillis and Joanne Hollows (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 49–62; Joanne Hollows, “Feeling Like a Domestic Goddess: Postfeminism and Cooking,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 6/2 (2003), pp. 179–202.

Bitch that the advertising for household products appearing in “*Bust*, *Venus*, and, yes, *Bitch*, sometimes [makes] these magazines look more like *Martha Stewart Living* than *Ms*.”⁴¹ Certainly, there is a link between the rise of crafting within feminist indie culture and the rise of neo-domestic celebrity figures. Arguably, however, in feminist periodicals the reclamation of domestic arts is frequently figured, at least aesthetically, as a more critical appropriation. For example, in the pages of *BUST* and *Venus Zine*, there is a reworking of images of women from the 1950s and 1960s, ironically recontextualized so that while the aesthetic elements of the 1950s housewife, for example, may be retained, her reframing within indie subculture creates an “as if-ness” to the image, as in, “as if it were ever really like this.” The myth of the happy housewife is implicitly acknowledged as a myth, and yet, while the hard work and primarily invisible and always unpaid work performed by the housewife is not being reclaimed, the aesthetic stylings of this figure as retro kitsch are adopted.

Thus, in contrast to what the 1950s housewife represents—a selfless, tirelessly working figure dedicated to home, husband, and children—the ways in which crafts, linked as they are to the realm of domesticity, are being reclaimed pose key differences from this figure. First, broadly speaking, contemporary feminist crafting is much more closely tied to the public sphere, in terms of the kinds of political interventions performed by crafters, such as “yarn bombing” through which urban objects are “warmed” with handmade cozies. Second, in feminist periodicals, crafting is often figured as a leisure activity and as a way to unwind from the busy world of paid work. Crafting is thus a taste culture⁴² coded in a way that has middle- or aspiring middle-class dynamics, given that crafting is usually a time-intensive activity, and resembles the more mainstream domestic goddess texts in this regard. What these continuities between feminist craft cultures and celebrity domestic goddess figures indicate is that—despite the ways in which feminism is often figured as at odds with, or outside of, mainstream culture—feminism and popular culture exist in a relationship of exchange and negotiation, albeit an unequal one.

This discussion also bears on the perceived tension between second- and third-wave feminisms. That is, while indeed many second-wave feminists were critical of domesticity, the kinds of domesticity being reclaimed are quite different from the domesticity critiqued by second-wave feminists, who were also not homogenous in their positions on this matter. In this sense, it is reductive and inaccurate to place these two waves in opposition to each other, when it comes to the matter of craft. One would be hard-pressed to find an article in a third-wave periodical advocating for the reclamation of toilet cleaning, vacuuming, window washing, dish drying, or floor mopping. Activities that are being promoted include knitting, sewing, and

⁴¹ Justine Sharrock, “The Revolution will not be Sanitized,” *Bitch* 19 (Winter 2003), p. 60.

⁴² See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique on the Judgment of Taste* (New York: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1984), pp. 1–7.

soap, lamp, and jewelry making. Thus, it is domesticity as *leisure* and *pleasure* that is being advocated; the activities that allow most easily for creativity and the creation of a tangible product, rather than quotidian household tasks.

The multiple contexts out of which feminist craft cultures emerge challenge more straightforwardly linear histories of feminism, as well as the overdetermined wave categories. In principle, the watery-ness of the wave metaphor works well because it has the potential to invoke a language of feminist history that emphasizes fluidity, confluences, surges, tributaries, and slipperiness. Water is powerful: it can suddenly flood or it can gradually erode over time. And waves always have an undertow: water from previous waves running underneath the current ones, returning to a given body of water, a phenomenon that nicely emphasizes the ways in which waves connect with, and are supported by, each other. As Cecilia Chen, Janine MacLeod, and Astrida Neimanis argue, “water’s importance to *language and metaphor* reveals how the continuity of watery materiality with meaning opens up thinking practices to great creative potential [T]he movements and transformations of water emphasize shared cultures and unexpected communities.”⁴³ In practice, however, the wave metaphor has become a highly problematic way of representing feminist histories: it tends to elide important “inter-wave” activities; it tends to overly emphasize the contributions of predominantly white middle-class US feminists as the catalyst events for each wave; and it often does not account for the important feminist work that is done in coalitional and in transnational contexts.⁴⁴

Conclusion

Feminist periodicals and their readers offer complex and nuanced articulations of a particular set of activities that highlight the potential of craft to foster community. The development of feminist crafting emerges out of a nexus that includes DIY zine culture, popular women’s culture, and feminism. These multiple contexts demonstrate the need for more complex ways of accounting for feminist histories, ones that acknowledge, for example, the ways in which feminism is not a pure space untouched by capital. These multiple contexts also highlight the ways

⁴³ Cecilia Chen, Janine MacLeod, and Astrida Neimanis, “Introduction: Towards a Hydrological Turn?” in *Thinking With Water* (Montreal: McGill University Press [forthcoming]).

⁴⁴ For critical writing on the limitations of the wave metaphor, particularly the ways in which it is generationally divisive, see Elizabeth Groeneveld, “Not a Postfeminism Feminist,” in *Not Drowning But Waving: Women, Feminism, and the Liberal Arts*, edited by Susan Brown et al. (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2011), pp. 271–84; Astrid Henry, *Not My Mother’s Sister* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); and Amber Kinser, “Negotiating Spaces For/Through Third-Wave Feminism,” *NWSA Journal* 16/3 (Fall 2004), pp. 124–53.

in which the political efficacy of these print publications, in fostering feminist communities, relies on their circulation within a capitalist marketplace.

Third-wave feminist periodicals offer readers a space to enunciate and negotiate their relationships to crafting, in dialogue with each other, with older generations of crafters, with the periodical texts, and with their broader cultural milieu. In this sense, these periodicals serve as important media for the fostering of feminist craft communities and the many activisms generated within and through them. These magazines place more emphasis on the pleasurable, thrifty, creative, and do-it-yourself aspects of crafting, rather than the political activisms that might be fostered through craft. However, these discourses of pleasure, thrift, creativity, and DIY implicitly relate to and emerge out of anti-capitalist feminist politics, through their eschewing of products produced by multinational corporations and encouragement of readers to become producers rather than only consumers, even as these texts are thoroughly embedded within capitalism. In this way, the representation of feminist crafting in third-wave periodicals troubles easy binary distinctions between what is political and what is not, and between what is radical and what is complicit. Rather than taking an “either/or” position when it comes to these categories, third-wave periodicals demonstrate the inherently “both/and”-ness of political activism within the sphere of modern print culture.