



IKEA's VIKTIGT Collection:
On Representations of
Craftsmanship and Handmaking

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Abstract

In 2016, home furnishing giant IKEA launched a craft collection in collaboration with Swedish designer Ingegerd Råman. The VIKTIGT collection is described by Råman as a project of collaboration between craftsmen and designer, which ultimately resulted in objects that contain energy and love. Handcrafted objects are a popular form of material culture these days. This research asks the question in which ways IKEA represents the notions ‘craftsmanship’ and ‘handmade’ with the VIKTIGT collection. These notions are each researched through the analysis of IKEA’s VIKTIGT commercials. There are several ways in which to see the role objects fulfil in society, which will all be discussed in this research. While the act of crafting is ancient, the way we see craftsmanship today originated during the Industrial Revolution. We see craftsmanship as a superior, alternative mode of production, compared to machinal mass production. Because of the human touch that goes into handmaking crafted objects, the idea exists that handmade objects also carry a piece of their maker, a fragment of the craftsman’s identity. Ultimately, handmade objects are thought to contain and transmit love.

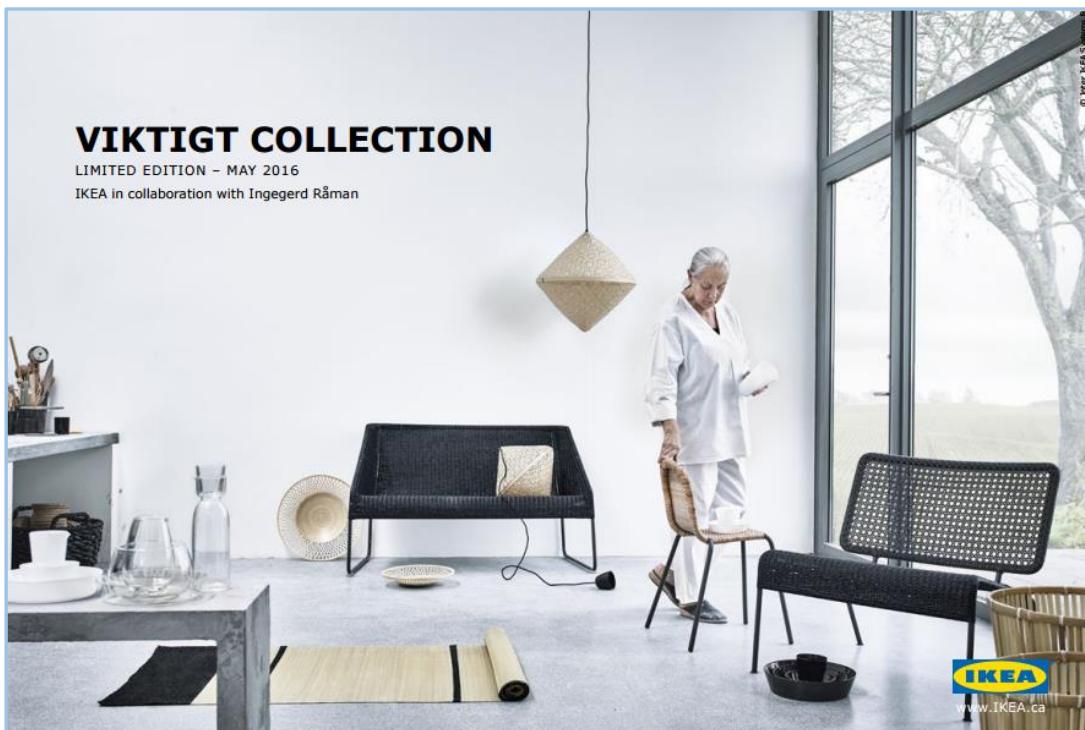
The research into IKEA’s representations of ‘craftsmanship’ and ‘handmade’, opens with the cultural biography of an object from the VIKTIGT collection. The design, raw materials, transportation, and crafting were all traced to illustrate what the life of a VIKTIGT object might look like. While some aspects of that life became clear, much about the craftsmen and the story behind their work remains unknown. The chapters that follow each contain an analysis of a commercial, after which each commercial is tied to one of the questioned notions. IKEA represents craftsmanship not through showing the craftsmen at work, but by portraying the designer as an enlightened figure of inspiration who instructs the hired hands on how to perform their skill. This representation does not conform to the idea that the craftsmen leave a piece of their identity in each object they make, as they seem to have no agency in the process represented by IKEA. The second analysis of a commercial shows that it is not necessary to advertise a specific object, but rather the experience that objects can encompass. In a time where consumers do not desire more of the same, mass produced things, objects that are imperfect, authentic, and handmade hold the attraction. The love and energy Råman finds in the collection does not resonate with the portrayal of craftsmanship and handmaking by IKEA. Material culture derives meaning from the human interactions with it, VIKTIGT’s story will never be known to its full extent by the consumer.

Introduction

THIS COLLECTION IS ABOUT CRAFT, IT'S A PROJECT BETWEEN THE CRAFTSMEN AND THE DESIGNER. IT HAS LOTS OF ENERGY. AND LOOKING AT THE OBJECTS NOW – THE THINGS WE DID – FOR ME, IT REPRESENTS LOVE.

- Ingegerd Råman

With this quote, designer Ingegerd Råman introduces the limited-edition collection VIKTIGT that she and IKEA brought into the world. Besides Råman, IKEA in-house designers Nike Karlsson and Wiebke Braasch also contributed to the collection, which was launched at IKEA in May of 2016. VIKTIGT, a Swedish word which translates to 'important', is all about handcrafted objects such as ceramics, woven baskets and rugs, and mouthblown glasses. The collection consists mostly of natural materials such as clay, glass, bamboo, water hyacinth, seagrass and paper. Råman, a Swedish designer specialized in glassblowing and ceramics, expresses how the objects that form the collection are an embodiment of love to her. Besides the aforementioned 'love', the quote above gives more incentive for research. Craft is the focus of the collection and it is achieved through a collaboration between the craftsmen and the designer. But what is the difference between a craftsman and a designer, and at what point exactly does 'energy' come into the collection? While the designer is responsible for creating the concept and perhaps the first physical expression of the design, the craftsmen are responsible for the



execution of the designer's ideas. Whose energy is then embedded in the object? Or are idea and execution both factors in the creation of the energy that the consumer can obtain?

Why handmade?

In a time where machines can produce cost-effective and structurally perfect objects on a large scale, there still seems to be a market for handcrafted objects. The popularity of these objects can be seen throughout our society. Craft beers and microbreweries are immensely popular, supermarkets sell handmade yoghurts from local farmers. When reviewing the popularity on a global scale, platform Etsy is the obvious example. 1.6 million creators sell their handmade products to 27.1 million consumers, accumulating a total revenue of 2.39 billion USD in 2015.¹ Often, the maker will be made visible in some way or other to the customer. Etsy shows the name of the maker next to the product they offer, and handmade cosmetics store Lush will identify the maker by placing a little cartoon version of their face as a sticker on each product. This enforces an idea in the consumer that purchasing the product is also purchasing a piece of the maker's touch and effort. Objects that are marketed as handmade are almost always more expensive when compared to similar objects that are machine-made. So, from a purely economic standpoint it is not logical for consumers to choose the handmade object. Explaining the rise in the popularity of handmade and crafted objects could be complicated, but the notions touched upon by Råman offer some first insights. Handmade objects in the VIKTIGT collection embody qualities such as love and energy, according to Råman. The objects thus not only comprise the uses they can be employed for, or the aesthetics that are visible, but also a quality beyond the tangible and visible. Marketing a product as handmade communicates to the consumer that they will purchase more than the product itself, they also obtain the love and energy that is embedded in the object by the caring and creating hands of another human being.

There is a certain tension between the company IKEA and the concept of selling handcrafted objects. This tension lies in the common knowledge that IKEA is an important and big player in the field of home furnishing. And exactly the scale on which it operates makes the idea of handcrafted products at IKEA a little strange, considering the number of handmade products that would have to be created. With 389 stores in close to 50 countries, IKEA is one of the largest furniture chains in the world.² To supply all these stores with handmade objects, many craftsmen would have to contribute their time and skills to produce enough stock for the collection to be sold on such a large scale. This makes it impossible for the consumer to know exactly which hands have created the object they purchase. The consumer might even assume Råman herself created the object they acquire, seeing as she is both the designer

¹ Figures are stated on Etsy's website, via: <https://www.etsy.com/about/?ref=ftr>

² These figures were retrieved from IKEA's website, via: <https://highlights.ikea.com/2016/ikea-facts-and-figures>

of the object and the face of the marketing campaign. The anonymity and scale of the craftsmen involved with creating VIKTIGT calls into question the way we might think of the notions ‘craftsmanship’ and ‘handmade’. Are craftsmen still craftsmen when working in factories? Does the ‘love’ associated with ‘handmade’ still apply when the object is part of a large-scale collection instead of a personally inspired project? And when viewing the VIKTIGT collection in opposition to the other objects sold at IKEA, why are not more products being sold as ‘handmade’? Surely, hands must have been involved in the creation of most products at some point or other in the production process. Imagine the numerous textiles such as pillows, curtains, rugs, and bedding sets sold at IKEA; hands are likely responsible for sowing the fabric into products. So, where lies the limit of human contact with an object necessary for it to be classified as handmade? Or is the label ‘handmade’ just something communicated to the consumer by a marketing department whenever it befits an object’s advertisement?

Structure of the research

This research will inquire into IKEA’s collaborative collection with Ingegerd Råman represents the notions ‘craftsmanship’ and ‘handmade’ by asking the following question:

In which ways does IKEA represent the notions ‘craftsmanship’ and ‘handmade’ with the limited-edition collection VIKTIGT?

I will explore this question in three chapters. Before trying to answer the question, I will give an overview of the field of material culture studies, to which the study of objects belongs. After this, I will describe the research concerning the notions ‘craftsmanship’ and ‘handmade’ published by different scholars. The first of the chapters that explores the VIKTIGT collection will contain the biography of a specific object from the collection. The concept of writing a biography for an object was introduced by Igor Kopytoff in 1986 and explores how describing every known and unknown aspect of an object’s life can reveal what otherwise may remain unknown. In the second and third chapter, the notions ‘craftsmanship’ and ‘handmade’ will be discussed, each in relation to one of the commercials IKEA used to promote the VIKTIGT collection. The first commercial is about Råman’s motivations as a designer and about the craftsmen that created the objects for the collection. This commercial will be linked to the notion ‘craftsmanship’. The second commercial could be called a declaration of love to the capabilities and disabilities of the creating human hand. This commercial values ‘handmade’ as imperfect and therefore unique and desirable. The commercial will be used to explore the notion ‘handmade’ in a broader sense. In these last two chapters, a method of visual and textual analysis will be employed to aid in the discussion of both notions.

The company IKEA

But first, let us dive into the company IKEA itself. Knowing its history and corporate identity could contribute to understanding the representations IKEA puts forward when marketing their products. IKEA is originally a Swedish company, and was registered in 1943 by the seventeen-year old Ingvar Kamprad. Kamprad did so after his business of selling matches by bike grew to be successful. The name IKEA comes from his initials (I.K.), and the first letters of the farm named Elmtaryd in the village Agunnaryd (E.A.) where he grew up.³ The Swedish company started as a mail order service, the first shop opened in the small Swedish town Älmhult in 1958. In 1973, IKEA opened its first stores outside of Scandinavia in Switzerland and spread throughout European countries. As mentioned, IKEA is now spread across the globe and has close to 400 stores both within own management and as franchises. In 2016, IKEA accumulated 36.4 billion euros in retail sales. IKEA's success has attracted the attention of scholars for some time. Sara Kristoffersson writes in *Design by IKEA: A Cultural History* how both the corporate culture at IKEA and Kamprad himself have played an important role in the company's success (Kristoffersson, 2014: 3). Besides the logistical structure and distinctive business model, the story of Kamprad himself lies at the core of what customers might experience at IKEA. The company links its own values and its 'Swedishness' to the origin story of Kamprad. On their website, IKEA states:

The IKEA concept began when Ingvar Kamprad, an entrepreneur from the Småland province in southern Sweden, had an innovative idea. In Småland, the soil is thin and poor, and the people have a reputation for working hard, living frugally and making the most of limited resources. So when Ingvar started his furniture business in the late 1940s, he applied the lessons he learned in Småland to the home furnishings market.⁴

Frugality and hard work are exactly the things IKEA's customers conform to when shopping at the chain. IKEA is known for its low prices, and has worked with the flatpack formula to keep production and logistical costs low, which translates to lower retail prices.⁵ In return for these relatively low prices, the consumer is responsible for both getting the flatpack out of the warehouse and assembling the furniture themselves. Cost efficiency is possible because the production process needs to be completed by the consumer. This strategy of making the consumer part of the production process causes a curious effect. The article 'The IKEA Effect' (Norton, Mochon & Ariely, 2012) shows the workings of the so-called 'IKEA effect'. Assembling furniture with their own hands results in consumers

³ As per IKEA's information, via: <http://supplierportal.ikea.com/aboutIKEA/Pages/default.aspx>

⁴ This story can be found on IKEA's website: <https://highlights.ikea.com/2016/ikea-facts-and-figures>

⁵ More information on flatpacks via: <https://highlights.ikea.com/2016/flat-packs>

attaching a higher value to the objects they surround themselves with compared to products of similar price and quality that have already been assembled.

IKEA seems to be a company with a clear moral, judging by the charming origin story about frugality and hard work with limited resources. The friendliness to the consumer's wallet and the flatpack concept that enables efficient transport contribute to that idea. However, the prices of the objects sold at IKEA do cause some doubts about whether the production process is ethical both in the way of acquisition of raw materials and in the way workers are treated throughout the production process.⁶ To answer such questions, IKEA publishes a yearly sustainability report. The document released to explain achieved goals and methods for the year 2016 is 97 pages long and addresses issues such as energy independence, more sustainable products, better lives for workers in the supply chain, and support of human rights. Promising paragraphs show that, for example, raw materials such as cotton and wood are coming mostly from sustainable sources. IKEA strives to produce all the energy they use within own operations themselves by choosing for renewable energy sources such as solar panels and windmills. The code of conduct, called IWAY (the IKEA Way), is applied in the supply chain and conforms to many global guidelines for better work environments.⁷ IKEA reports on the number of audits performed in the supply chain to ensure working conditions and to prevent child labour. Especially in home-based production, which is common in the production chain of handwoven objects such as in the VIKTIGT collection, there is a higher risk of unsafe and unfair conditions. These so-called cottage industries can, for example, be found in Southeast Asia. Raw materials such as rattan, seagrass and water hyacinth that are used for traditional weaving grow in this area. IKEA recognizes that unsafe conditions and child labour could go undetected more easily with this type of work. According to the sustainability report, in 2016 all 268 villages and all 98 weaving centres in Indonesia and Vietnam that work within the natural fibre supply chain were approved within IKEA's code of conduct.⁸ This would include the production of VIKTIGT woven items, although this is never stated explicitly.

IKEA as an experience

A visit to IKEA has become far more than just a necessity in the process of acquiring new furniture. The stores, with their homely showroom set ups, food markets and restaurants, are known to be a fun day

⁶ Past scandals around IKEA's production include child labour and the plucking of feathers from live geese. The company's methods to evading taxes is controversial as well. Via: <http://www.economist.com/node/18229400>

⁷ IKEA's sustainability report, via: http://www.ikea.com/gb/en/doc/general-document/ikea-read-ikea-group-sustainability-report-2016_1364331441708.pdf More information on IWAY can be found on page 61.

⁸ More information on weaving centres can be found on page 73 of the sustainability report:

http://www.ikea.com/gb/en/doc/general-document/ikea-read-ikea-group-sustainability-report-2016_1364331441708.pdf

out. In 1999, Pine and Gilmore wrote in *The Experience Economy* that goods and services are no longer enough to ensure growth and prosperity. IKEA's lively stores are proof of this. The company promotes an active attitude to their customers on their website by inviting them to touch and feel everything:

At the store, you'll find our range of well designed, functional home furniture – all waiting to be tried out. That way, you can plop down on the sofas, open up wardrobe doors and feel each and every rug to decide what you like best.⁹

Customers can feel very much at home in the stores: IKEA lately reached the news with slightly comical actions of customers that take photos in showrooms to upgrade their Tinder profiles; in China IKEA actively promotes sleeping on the beds and sofas as a way of trying out furniture.¹⁰ The IKEA restaurants offer Swedish and non-Swedish options for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, enabling the customer to stay at the store all day. Children might spend their day at IKEA in the Småland supervised play area, so parents can move freely and without worry through the store. Finally, IKEA adds to the 'make yourself feel at home' strategy by giving out customer cards that offer free coffee and discounts on both food and furniture, and even activities and workshops. These cards are not simply named customer cards, which would reinforce the economic relationship between store and customer, but are called 'family card'. Considering a customer as family is a clear invitation for a swift return to the IKEA stores and the experience that can only be offered at those stores. The marketing strategy for the VIKTIGT collection, which presents design and craft as a happy marriage, may very well fit right in with the welcoming experience that is IKEA today.

⁹ Text via IKEA's British website: <http://www.ikea.com/gb/en/>

¹⁰ Lindenberg, S. (20-01-2017) "Mannen poetsen datingprofiel op met selfies uti IKEA" In *De Stentor*: <http://www.destentor.nl/regio/zwolle/video-mannen-poetsen-datingprofiel-op-met-selfies-uit-ikea-1.6841220>; Pictures of sleeping IKEA visitors:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/picturegalleries/worldnews/10950697/Ikea-shoppers-in-China-fall-asleep-in-furniture-room-displays-in-pictures.html?frame=2966417> (31-1-2017)

Theoretical framework

This research aims to examine IKEA's VIKTIGT collection and the notions 'craftsmanship' and 'handmade', and will discover how IKEA uses these notions and their meanings in advertising the collection. As the collection exists of objects, this research can be placed within the field of material culture studies. In this chapter I will discuss the theoretical framework that is relevant to this research. I will elaborate on the developments in the field of material culture studies. This chapter will also offer a literature review of scholarly debates on the notions 'craftsmanship' and 'handmade'.

Origins and purposes of material culture studies

While the title to the field of material culture studies is relatively new, the contributions towards the study of objects have come from various scholarly disciplines since the beginnings of modern social science. Dan Hicks's chapter on "The Material Cultural Turn: Event and Effect" in *The Oxford Handbook of Material Culture Studies* shows that the terms 'material culture' and 'material culture studies' were first used at the end of the 1970's in the disciplines of archaeology and socio-cultural anthropology, and especially in the discipline that combines these: anthropological archaeology (Hicks 2010: 25; 47). While Hicks focuses chiefly on the influences of archaeology and anthropology on material culture studies, Ian Woodward, in his book *Understanding Material Culture*, suggests a broader scope of disciplines that contributed to the state in which the field exists today. According to Woodward, the multidisciplinary vantage points into human-object relations that are key to the field of material culture studies consist of contributions from disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, psychology, and design and cultural studies (Woodward 2007:4).

A definition of material culture is given by Jules David Prown in his article "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method". He defines material culture as "the study through artifacts of the beliefs – values, ideas, attitudes and assumptions, of a particular community or society at a given time". The term material culture also tends to be used to refer to artifacts themselves, to the body of material available for such studies (Prown 1982: 1). When the word 'material' is used in that manner, it can point to 'objects', but also to 'things', 'artefacts', 'goods' and 'commodities' (Woodward 2007:15). Each of these terms comes with its own nuances which makes them slightly different from each other, though some of them tend to be used interchangeably within scholarly and non-scholarly discussions on the topic. Woodward mentions that the term 'objects' refers to "discrete components of material culture that are perceptible by touch or sight". With the

aim to avoid confusion, this term will generally be used to describe instances of material culture throughout this research.

With its origins in a number of different fields, the general purposes and ideas of material culture studies differ slightly within different bodies of text evaluating them. Woodward, for example, writes that one of the main propositions of material culture studies is that objects have the ability to signify things, to establish social meanings. Ian Hodder sees a more active role for objects within societies and poses that “material culture transforms, rather than reflects, social organization according to the strategies of groups, their beliefs, concepts and ideologies” (Hodder 1982 in Hicks and Beaudry 2010: 52). Prown considers material culture to have an ability to reflect social structures: “the underlying premise is that objects made or modified by man [sic] reflect, consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly, the beliefs of individuals who made, commissioned, purchased or used them, and by extension the beliefs of the larger society to which they belonged” (Prown 1982: 2). The study of objects, it can be argued, is simultaneously a study of humanity. Daniel Miller conducted such a research in *The Comfort of Things*, a 2008 anthropological study in which he let objects speak for the subjects he visited. By entering the homes of different Londoners who were living in the same street, he sought to unravel the identities of his hosts by having them explain to him the functions and meanings of the objects they surrounded themselves with. Objects can act as identifiers for their owners. Exactly these mutual relations between people and objects lie at the core of material culture studies, and the aim of its scholars is to analyze how these relations demonstrate ways in which culture is transmitted, received and produced (Woodward 2007:14). Material culture has the power to both shape and reflect on structures in society. This research aims to address the movements in culture that have led to IKEA’s representation of VIKTIGT as a collection of handmade craft, and seeks to define how the presence of VIKTIGT continues to shape the ever-growing understanding of ourselves as individuals and of society at large.

Developments in material culture studies

According to Woodward, the field of material culture studies has evolved through three stages thus far. First comes the critical approach, which evolved from Marxism. Then follow structural and symbolic approaches, and finally, the cultural approach (Woodward 2007: 35-109). In *Capital* (1867), Marx gives a critique of capitalist society. He does so by arguing that the commodity reveals the underlying processes of society. The commodity, according to Marx, can be seen as a symbol for estranged labour. With this thought, he forgoes the opportunity to see objects as able to carry meaning within themselves. Marx uses the term ‘commodity fetishism’ to describe the way labour is organized

through market exchange: the selling and buying of commodities. The social relations between humans who are the producers of commodities can be perceived as an economic relation that is dominated by objects and their market value rather than by the efforts of the labourers. The framework Marx laid down was later elaborated on by Frankfurter School scholars such as Lukács, Horkheimer, Adorno and Fromm. Fromm stated that the less shaped the subject's personality is, the stronger the desire becomes to shape life through consumption (Lijster 2016: 64). Fromm saw alienation from "work, consumption and one's fellow citizens" as the central feature of social existence within capitalist society. The patterns of consumption have estranged from human needs, and therefore are not right according to Fromm (Woodward 2007: 46). This very negative, Marxian approach towards capitalism and consumption that originated in the early days of mass production, created room for the appreciation of alternative production methods such as crafting. Craft's reputation as a superior alternative to mass production still lives today. IKEA does not need to fetishize the VIKTIGT commodity, but, quite opposite from Marx, fetishizes the labour that went into the creation of the commodity. This will be explored further on.

Critiquing production and consumption of material culture lies at the core of the critical approach. In the structural and semiotic approaches, the focus shifts from production and consumption to the meanings that can be encompassed within objects. In the semiotic approach, objects are signs referring to something outside of themselves. This 'something' could be information about a person such as their social status, occupation, religion, gender, et cetera. (Woodward 2007: 57). Prown explains the way semiotics function within the field material culture studies by comparing a language of words to a language of form. Just as language can give structure to our understanding of the world, so can form act similarly (Prown 1982: 6). De Saussure is known for conceptualizing the systemic structures of language. This structural approach is not just applicable to language, but also to the structures of culture in a broader sense. His system of signs, signifiers, and signified was later applied by the anthropologist Lévi-Strauss to explain cultural communication. An important conclusion of Lévi-Strauss's work is that objects do not exist just to serve straightforward, utilitarian purposes. The more important, symbolic role of objects is to allow humans to construct and assign meanings within their cultural universe. This can be seen as a bedrock assumption within cultural studies (Woodward 2007: 67). Roland Barthes uses the semiotic approach in his work *Mythologies* (1957) to demonstrate how capitalism works to deceive subjects through propagating myths, which are embodied within a multitude of everyday objects and experiences. A myth, according to Barthes, is a type of language which acts to mislead and obfuscate meanings (Woodward 2007: 69). In *Mythologies*, Barthes presented examples of popular culture and mass media in France, which he observed between 1954 and 1956. One of these examples explains how the Citroën D.S. through its name (D.S. stands for and

sounds as Déesse; goddess) and form (streamlined and otherworldly like a new Nautilus) was able to enthrall consumers. Buying such a car would also lead to acquiring something extraordinary that is not truly present in the material itself (Woodward 2007: 75). As will be elaborated upon later in this research, IKEA, too, constructs myths in order to sell their VIKTIGT collection. By presenting VIKTIGT as objects that contain love and energy because they were handcrafted, the consumer is pushed to assume the objects contain qualities that are not physically present within the material itself.

Finally, the cultural approach to understanding material culture poses that objects have important cultural meanings and that they frequently do some sort of ‘cultural work’ related to representing the contours of culture. This includes matters of social difference, establishing social identity or managing social status. Douglas and Isherwood state that consumption is about meaning-making. Consuming things offers continuous opportunity to perform, affirm, and manage the self. Douglas and Isherwood see shopping trips as opportunities to give meaning to, or, affirm one’s social relationships and the wider universe (Woodward 2007: 96). Daniel Miller also has a relatively positive attitude towards consumption, especially mass consumption, in his book *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* (1987). Miller does not give a tragic account of mass consumption, he does not see it as an oppressive force like his predecessors from the critical approach. Miller gives credit to the mass populace, which he sees as the middle class that is neither a culture of leisure nor of poverty, and the subtle power that class has over society (Miller 1987: 5; 11). This power manifests itself through the influence the mass populace has on contemporary industrial cultures with their consumerist desires and habits. Another way of viewing material culture, is seeing objects as things that are enlivened by human contact. Arjun Appadurai recognizes that meaning is created through the trajectories and transactions that an object makes during its life. Igor Kopytoff suggests that writing a biography of an object, as one would normally do of a person, offers unique insights into the processes and movements of an object. By accounting for all the known and unknown details of an object’s life, we can discover obscured information and the full cultural meanings attached to an object. An object’s meaning is, according to Appadurai and Kopytoff, accumulated throughout the life of an object and is therefore always evolving.

The developments in the field of material culture studies continue to offer different ways of understanding the roles, functions, and meanings of objects in human lives. The critical, structural and semiotic, and cultural approaches to material culture will all aid in understanding how the constructions surrounding the VIKTIGT collection came into existence. Thus, the collection, which is presented to the consumer through the lens of craftsmanship, will be studied with the help of all approaches. It takes from the critical approach a critiquing of production and consumption, from the semiotic approach the idea that the construction of myths surrounds advertisements of commodities, and, finally, from the cultural approach, that material culture plays an essential role in the construction

of the self. Material culture shapes and reflects society at large. The VIKTIGT collection could prove to be an example of just that.

'Craftsmanship' and 'handmade'

The notions 'craftsmanship' and 'handmade' are important to the narrative of the VIKTIGT collection. The consumer is shown and told repeatedly that the objects are made by the hands of skilled craftsmen. The marketing campaign surrounding VIKTIGT puts an emphasis on these concepts by showing snippets of the production process, the designer's motivations, and an abundance of images of hands. Literature on both notions will now be discussed.

Craft and Craftsmanship

Craftsmanship has been around for as long as humans have used their hands to create. The word 'craft' is derived from the old English word 'cræft' which means either strength or skill (Frayling 2011). Sociologist Howard Becker defines the word 'craft' as: "a body of knowledge and skill which can be used to produce useful objects" (Becker 2008: 273). Another, much older, definition of craft can be found in *De Architectura* by Vitruvius, where he states that the nature of craft lies in the perfect realization of a form imagined before the work begins (Betjemann 2008: 184). This 'perfect realization' Vitruvius spoke of would be renounced later in the history of craftsmanship, as machine-made perfect objects came to be the exact opposite of charming, imperfect objects produced by the hands of the craftsman. A definition of 'craftsmanship' is given by Richard Sennett in his book *The Craftsman* (2008). Sennett gives an overview of the history of craftsmanship and evaluates its state today. He defines craftsmanship as possessing the skill of making things well. A good craftsman, according to Sennett, desires to do a job well for its own sake. Sennett believes this desire resides in all of us. He argues that the notion of craftsmanship does not only incorporate the skilled manual labourer, but also the computer programmer, doctor, artist, parent, citizen, et cetera. (Sennet 2008: 9). Sennett's definition implies that craftsmanship does not only involve the creation of material objects, but also the skilled execution of immaterial things, such as parenting, in contrast to both Becker's and Vitruvius's definition of 'craft'.

Advocacy for craftsmanship took flight with the arrival of the Industrial Revolution. John Ruskin, a nineteenth-century British art critic and social thinker, saw mass production and the rise of machines as a negative development for the working class. It had an unhealthy effect on Great Britain's populace, as the quality of living declined with the rapid urbanisation and workers became estranged from their

labour and the objects they produced. He wrote that the only way to make men work precise and perfect like a tool, is to de-humanize them: “all the energy of their spirits must be given to make cogs and compasses of themselves. In every man, there is the capacity for something better than this machine-like labour, some power of feeling and imagination” (Ruskin 1907: 176 in Luckman 2012: 55). The artist and writer William Morris is, together with Ruskin, responsible for the rise of the Arts and Crafts movement in industrializing Great-Britain. This movement came into existence in the 1870’s and was widely spread across Europe and North America, where the movement experienced its peak between 1890 and 1910 (Krugh 2014: 283). Morris stated that art is a man’s expression of his joy in labour. According to Morris, no joyous product, and therefore no art, could come from working in a Fordist setting. Unlike Ruskin, Morris never saw machines as the enemy, as they could assist in the process of creating. Morris’s enemy was capitalism itself (Luckman 2012: 62). Even though the social ideals behind the Arts and Crafts movement are still known today, these ideals clashed with the forces of the market. An example of this is William Morris’s own company, Morris & Co. In spite of the social and artisanal mode of production that was assumed, it could only sell products to the elite, as the time and materials that went into the production process were costly (Betjemann 2008: 191). Susan Luckman gives an overview of both Ruskin’s and Morris’s ideas surrounding labour, craftsmanship and aesthetics in her book *Locating Cultural Work*. Michele Krugh elaborates on the Arts and Crafts movement in the article “Joy in Labour: The Politicization of Craft from the Arts and Crafts Movement to Etsy”. She also discusses the rise of DIY in the USA after World War II and the ways craftsmanship exist today in the era of web shops like Etsy.

Etsy is perhaps the most obvious example of how craftsmanship’s popularity is visible today. The online platform has 1.6 million active sellers and 27.1 million active buyers, which led to a sum of \$2.39 billion revenue of sold merchandise in 2015.¹¹ The rise of interest in products of craftsmanship can be compared to recent trends that promote alternative production systems, such as: slow food, buying organic, living minimalistically, shopping locally, et cetera (Krugh 2014: 293). These current trends in consuming all point to a reconsideration of mass production from both environmentalist and humanist point of views. Craftsmanship fits into these trends because its association with unalienated personal labour that originated with the Arts and Crafts movement. The concept of personal labour performed by one craftsman to realize a product, is a reason for the appeal of craft according to Krugh. The consumer does not only buy an object when purchasing a product made by a craftsman, but perhaps also acquires a piece of the creator in the process.

¹¹ Figures as stated on Etsy’s website, via: <https://www.etsy.com/nl/about/?ref=ftr>

Ingrid Bachmann writes about the extreme irony she experiences when a product of skilled labour from an individual in the so-called developed parts of the world is valued on a different scale than similar work of anonymous makers in the developing world (Bachmann 2002: 46). Christopher Frayling also questions the current popularity of all things crafted. In *On Craftsmanship* (2011), he mentions that the word ‘craft’ becomes more vague now that big manufacturers like to promote their wares with the language of craft. Terms like ‘handmade’, ‘hand-finished’, ‘made by our craftsmen’, ‘uniquely made for you’ are all used to reassure “anxious consumers”. Frayling compares this phenomenon to the use of the word ‘organic’ in the marketing of products today. He states that the word ‘craft’ is used as a marketing strategy so that the promoted product will be associated with “values of the past, rather than the present” in the public mind.

Definitions of craft and craftsmanship seem to accommodate the notion of ‘skill’ to some degree. “Craft and the Limits of Skill: Handicrafts Revivalism and the Problem of Technique” by Peter Betjemann explores the relation between ‘craft’ and ‘skill’. Betjemann uses ideas of Ruskin, Morris and Veblen to illustrate the paradox that exists between the craftsman as a skilled manual labourer on the one hand, and the crafted product that receives some of its value from a ‘crafted’, imperfect look on the other. Ruskin once commented that handmade objects are valuable precisely because of their slight imperfections (Betjemann 2008: 188). So, what happens when a skill is mastered to perfection? The product will look less identifiably crafted as imperfections will be nearly non-existent or invisible to the eye of the layman. Within this frame of mind, the product could become less valuable based on the perfect state of the product alone. Betjemann sees this paradox as the irony of craftsmanship.

Hands and handmade

Unlike ‘craft’ and ‘craftsmanship’, the notions of ‘hands’ and ‘handmade’ are in themselves less complicated to understand. Hands are the things we humans have at the end of both arms, which we use to touch, grasp, feel, operate, et cetera. According to the philosopher Kant, hands are the window onto the mind (Sennett 2008: 149). This suggests that hands and the creations they construct offer an insight into the mind of the creator. ‘Handmade’ can refer to the hands of a person (or several people) being responsible for the creation of a thing. It establishes the idea that the touch of another person went into producing an object, which could be considered opposite from machine-made objects. However, it seems unclear to what extent human hands have to be involved in the process of creation of a certain product to carry the label ‘handmade’.

In *The Craftsman* (2008), Sennett devotes a chapter to ‘the hand’. He writes about the capabilities of the human hand. This discussion starts with the idea that the human capability to grip things, a result

of having a thumb, was an important reason for the cultural evolution of our species. Gripping things enabled humans to use tools and learn techniques that would eventually lead to the rise of civilization (Sennett 2008: 151). Sennett writes that there is a myth surrounding people who develop technique to a high level; they must have unusual bodies (and hands) to begin with. He argues this is not the case with techniques of the hands, they mostly need extensive practice to perfect movements. To support this statement, he cites the psychologist Gladwell's idea that to become an expert in a certain field – whether that is glassblowing or playing the violin – one needs 10.000 hours of practice. A more in-depth account of practising hand movements can be found in David Sudnow's *Ways of the Hand* (1978). It tells the story of how this social psychologist learned to improvise on the jazz piano, and offers a very detailed account of how Sudnow experienced his development of skill.

Qualifying something as 'handmade' is not always an indicator of how much the human hand was actually involved in the making a product. The label 'handmade' will appear clearly to describe certain type of products made by a certain type of producers, while on other occasions the 'handmade' aspect of a product will not be mentioned to the consumer. An example of this could be clothes sold on Etsy versus clothes sold by large chains such as Primark. The one will mention the handmade aspect as a unique selling point of the product, while the other will conceal the anonymous human hands that went into sewing fast fashion products. Calling a product handmade can have effects on the consumer. Abouab and Gomez performed an empirical study on how the production mode, handmade versus machine-made, influences the perceived naturalness of food. The study shows that a grape juice on which was clearly stated that it was handmade was perceived as being more natural than the exact same product that was presented as being machine-made. This effect occurs because of an increase in perceived human contact. Humanizing the production process can help the perceived naturalness of a product. This is paradoxical, as the ingredients in both processes remain the same and production with machinery is safe (Abouab & Gomez 2015: 273). Another article that performs an empirical research on handmade things is "The Handmade Effect: What's Love Got to Do with It?" by Fuchs, Schreier and Van Osselaer. They assessed the effect of the stated production mode on the attractiveness of the product by manipulating whether the same product is presented to the consumer as handmade or machine-made. After four studies, they conclude that the attractiveness handmade products have over machine-made product, is that handmade object is symbolically perceived to 'contain love'. Consumers consider handmade products as gifts for loved ones, and are prepared to pay more for these products. They found that handmade products embody effort, product quality, uniqueness, authenticity, and even pride (Fuchs, Schreier & Van Osselaer 2015: 98).

The idea that an object is created by hands seems to have a number of implications for the qualities that product can carry and convey. Sociologist Mike Featherstone proposes that the handmade

object's claim of being created by the touch of hands offers a sense of "authentic in an unauthentic world." People, according to Featherstone, "care for others mediated by caring for things" (Featherstone in Lewis & Potter 2011: xx). Nicole Dawkins's article "DIY: The Precarious Work and Postfeminist Politics of Handmaking in Detroit" approaches the handmade debate from the production side of the spectrum. She specifically focusses on what she calls "gendered domestic arts" such as knitting, sewing, needlepoint, and so on, with a specific interest in the Detroit-based collective of makers called Handmade Detroit. She argues that in this "indie crafting community", handcrafting offers pleasure and self-fulfilment, while similar activities in other parts of the world might be a form of unstable and exploitative work. Like Featherstone and Fuchs, Schreier & Van Osselaer, she finds that labelling something as 'handmade' signifies human emotion. Featherstone calls it authenticity or care; Fuchs Schreier and Van Osselaer call it love; Dawkins suggests that the emotions conveyed are "heartfelt consideration and concern." She elaborates on the production and consumption process of handmade products by calling the direct selling of those products (even on digital platforms) "an intersubjective performance where vendors and shoppers alike are able to enact and assert their unique individualism through the exchange of crafted objects" (Dawkins 2011: 273).

Methods

Just as material culture studies draws from numerous fields of research, this research will employ different methods to evaluate the concepts of ‘craftsmanship’ and ‘handmade’ as represented by IKEA’s VIKTIGT collection. The first part of the research uses the method of writing a cultural biography for an object to reveal what is known and unknown about a specific object from the collection. The concept of writing a biography for inanimate things was introduced by Igor Kopytoff in 1986. The aim is to write the life story of an object, and to reveal any obscured information through that process. An object has culturally specific meanings attached to it according to Kopytoff. These meanings are subject to change throughout the object’s life. Arjun Appadurai adds to this idea by stating that through study of the trajectories of objects, we are able to interpret the human influences that enliven things. Both scholars search for the meaning of an object by studying it throughout the stages of its life. This search for meaning through revealing the hidden trajectories of the object is what I will try to accomplish. The chapter concludes in an explanation of the movements the object of interest makes throughout its life. Bourdieu’s concepts of economic, cultural, symbolic, and social capital will aid in that discussion.

The second and third parts of this research will both employ the same method in researching the notion ‘craftsmanship’ and the notion ‘handmade’. These chapters will each open with an analysis of one of the VIKTIGT commercials, as each of the two commercials can be tied to one of the notions. Concepts from film analysis, such as camera movement and lighting, will be used to discuss the meanings and effects of the commercials. After that analysis, there will be a brief discussion of the scholarly debate surrounding each notion. Finally, the chapters will offer a comparison between IKEA’s representations of the notion and its scholarly understandings.

BIOGRAPHY OF ‘DISH’

Pieces made from natural fibres are as far from standardized design as you can get. It's handmade. Every chair and basket is different – that's what intrigues me the most.¹²

- Nike Karlsson, IKEA designer

Twenty-two out of thirty-eight objects listed in the VIKTIGT press guide are entirely or partly woven from natural fibres. The natural fibres used in this collection are paper, rattan, bamboo, water hyacinth, banana fibres, and seagrass. When scrolling through the press guide for the VIKTIGT collection, it is obvious that one woven object receives far more attention than others. The VIKTIGT dish appears on no less than seven different occasions within the guide. In this chapter, the dish will serve as an example in discussing IKEA’s process from the creation of the collection up to its arrival in stores. Because this research does not offer the space to analyse each object belonging to the collection individually, this chapter will focus on an in-depth biography of the object that IKEA puts on the frontline of the collection: the round, woven dish made from bamboo (see fig. 1.1).



Figure 1.1: VIKTIGT dish

Biographing an object

The idea of writing a biography for an object is introduced by Igor Kopytoff in 1986 in his article “The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process”. The article was published in Arjun Appadurai’s book *The Social Life of Things*. Appadurai himself opens the section called “Toward an

¹² Persgids p3 http://www.ikea.com/ms/en_CA/img/pdf/IKEA%20VIKTIGT%20Collection%20_May_ENG.pdf

Anthropology of Things” with an introduction on the topic of commodities and the politics of value. Both Kopytoff’s and Appadurai’s understanding of an object’s life will be used as a method in exploring the properties of the VIKTIGT dish. Once the biography is complete, Bourdieu’s theory on economic, cultural, symbolic and social capital will serve as a tool to explain the movements in the life of the dish.

Appadurai and Kopytoff both focus heavily on the object’s time spent as a commodity. This shows how not only the production side is of relevance, as was emphasised in Marxian approaches to material culture, but that the consumption is also considered to give meaning to an object. According to Kopytoff, the commonsensical definition of a commodity is “an item with use value that also has exchange value” (Kopytoff 1986: 64). Appadurai’s definition of the commodity situation is more detailed. He sees this situation as one of the stages in the social life of things. In the commodity situation, the thing’s exchangeability for some other thing is its socially relevant feature. Appadurai continues to separate the commodity situation into three parts: firstly, the commodity phase of the social life, things can move in and out of this phase. Secondly, the commodity candidacy of any thing, which refers to the standards and criteria that define the exchangeability of things in any context. Finally, the commodity context in which the thing may be placed. These are the various social arenas that help link the commodity candidacy of a thing to the commodity phase of its life (Appadurai 1986: 13-15). Appadurai recognizes the different types of knowledge that are tied up with the thing in its commodity state: knowledge of production, which is more technical, and knowledge that goes into appropriately consuming the commodity, which could be seen as social (Appadurai 1986: 41). He defines this as the distribution of knowledge. Appadurai adds to this that as the journeys of commodities grow more complex, and the alienation of the producers, traders and consumers from one another increases, culturally formed mythologies about commodity flow are likely to emerge (Appadurai 1986: 48). Upon considering the scale and multicultural character of the VIKTIGT collection, the distance between producer and consumer is likely to cause some form of alienation.

Appadurai states that value is created with economic exchange, an act in which, ultimately, the producer and consumer partake. The commodities that are at the centre of the exchange are an embodiment of value. By following the movements through time and space of the things themselves, we learn that the meanings of things are inscribed in their forms, their uses, and trajectories. Appadurai argues that “it is only through the analysis of these trajectories that we can interpret the human transactions and calculations that enliven things” (Appadurai 1986: 5). He states that it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context. Following the things-in-motion is almost synonymous to writing a biography for an object. Kopytoff’s approach to writing the biography of a thing is similar to writing a biography for a person. He proposes questions such as: “Where does the thing come from and who made it? What has been its career so far, and what do people consider

to be an ideal career for such things?” He also asks about the recognized “ages” or periods in the thing’s life, and about what cultural markers help to identify these ages. Furthermore, he asks how the thing’s use changes when it ages and when it reaches the end of its usefulness (Kopytoff 1986: 66-67). He later goes on to define what makes a biography of an object cultural. This type of biography looks at an object as a “culturally constructed entity”, that comes with culturally specific meanings and is classified and reclassified into culturally constituted categories (Kopytoff 1986: 68). The object’s commodity state would also be determined by such categories. The general goal of writing a biography is to expose what might otherwise remain obscure.

Before commencing the biography of the VIKTIGT dish, first some notes on some specifics of this process. Generally, a biography would be about the life of one specific thing, not a class of them. As I am not in the possession of the dish myself (the collection was sold out before this research started), I will write a biography on the general life such an object would have had up until being purchased at IKEA. This will result in a focus on the production of the dish, as little more than speculation is possible about its consumption. According to Kopytoff, every biographer will bring some prior conception of what is to be the focus of the biography to the table. Each biography thus selects some aspects of the life history and discards others (Kopytoff 1986: 68). So, a brief glimpse at what the focus will be in this biography: I will start by writing a preliminary biography based on every piece of information that IKEA offers about the dish in their own marketing campaign. After establishing this, the biography will dig deeper and focus on finding out the details about the life of the dish, ranging from the raw materials of which it was made to when the dish eventually was sold in stores.

VIKTIGT dish: the IKEA biography

The VIKTIGT collection launched in May 2016. Part of the collection is the handmade, woven bamboo dish. The dish is available in two sizes: the smaller version has a diameter of 37 cm and is 8 cm high; the larger version has a diameter of 50 cm and is 9 cm high. The inner part of the dish is a solid disk of bamboo which edges upward slightly. The edges of the dish are formed by woven strands of bamboo that move up and outward of the disk and give volume to the object. The strands finally come together in a ring of bamboo, into which they disappear.

Perhaps the easiest way for a consumer to find information about the dish is by consulting IKEA’s website. On this website, a general page for the VIKTIGT collection explains what the collection as a whole stands for. Craftsmanship and simplicity are the main themes, the collection is both “sober” and “essential”. This page is mostly intended as promotion and offers very little practical information. The

dish is present on this page, but other than the image of it no information is offered yet.¹³ To access such information, the consumer can visit the product page for the object.¹⁴ The product description shows that the dish is made from bamboo and clear nitrocellulose lacquer. As the “key feature” of the dish, IKEA states that it is “handmade by skilled craftsmen”. Ingegerd Råman is listed as the designer. Finally, the section “people and planet” informs the consumer that the bamboo used in the dish is “renewable material”.

Some more searching on the web could lead the consumer to the press guide for the VIKTIGT collection.¹⁵ The guide contains both simple and highly stylized images of the collection, and pieces of text which describe experiences the designers have had while creating the collection. IKEA introduces Råman by naming her “one of Scandinavia’s most well-known glass designers and ceramists”. In the interview section of the press guide, Råman is asked what the best part of collaborating with IKEA has been for her. She answers: “Trying to learn a new craft and working with foreign materials has been such fun. I’ve always loved baskets but never known how they were made. So, meeting the craftsmen on site in Asia and Europe was truly inspiring, I gained an insight into their professional skill.” It is interesting to think that, even though Råman has no prior experience with basket weaving, she still designed one of the key woven objects for the collection. This puts into question how much technical knowledge and experience of the production has to be present with the designer to enable them in creating the design, this thought will be discussed in the chapter on craftsmanship.



VIKTIGT dish Ø37, H8cm. Designer: Ingegerd Råman.

Figure 1.2: Quote Råman

I've always loved breadbaskets, and that's a feeling I share with many. At the same time they're kind of silly since the breadcrumbs always slip through on to your table,” Ingegerd says with a laugh. “Therefore, we designed VIKTIGT dish with a solid inner core of bamboo rolling - where you can place bread or fruits - combined with a braided outer edge.”

As mentioned before, the dish appears seven times in this guide. One of these images is accompanied by a quote from Råman (see: fig. 1.2), identifying the dish as a basket to store either bread or fruit. She

¹³ Homepage for the VIKTIGT collection via: <http://www.ikea.com/nl/nl/ikea-collections/viktigt/index.html> (16-1-17)

¹⁴ At the time of writing, both the Dutch and English pages for the dish had already disappeared from IKEA’s website. This Bulgarian page still showed the dish, the information has been translated online.

<http://www.ikea.bg/home-decoration/Vases-and-bowls/Vases/60728/87398/> (11-1-2017).

¹⁵ The press guide can be found through the following link:

http://www.ikea.com/ms/en_CA/img/pdf/IKEA%20VIKTIGT%20Collection%20_May_ENG.pdf (11-1-2017)

sees the dish as especially suitable for bread, since it has a solid inner core that prevents crumbs from falling through. The image shown with this quote has the dish containing neither fruit nor bread, but what seems like small wooden objects. Their colour is similar to the dish itself, so no attention is drawn away from the subtly brown coloured dish. Other images of the dish show it being held up by hands in several angles. The dish is both presented from the side and turned towards the viewer. In that position, the volume of the object disappears. It seems almost like a flat, round, decorative piece of handicraft. It is notable that even though IKEA states that the “Swedish origin and design sensibility” is present in each object of the collection, the hands that hold these objects are not typically Swedish. The hands have brown skin, perhaps in referral to the craftsmen whose hands were responsible for the physical creation of the objects. Further research into materials, logistics and production on IKEA’s website did not offer any insights specific to the VIKTIGT dish itself.

VIKTIGT dish: the (in)complete biography

To write the biography of the VIKTIGT dish, I follow its life and movements through time and cultures. The general goal is, as proposed by Kopytoff, to reveal what otherwise might remain obscure. Let us start at the very beginning, with the concept of the dish. Chronologically speaking, the bamboo used for the dish might have been growing before the designer created the design, but the bamboo’s life only became connected to the dish after the designer decided on it being part of the object.

The design

In an interview with *Poppytalk*, which is an online interior blog, Ingegerd Råman mentions the request to work with weaving and natural fibres came from IKEA.¹⁶ She went to Vietnam “with an open mind”, but without any knowledge about the production of woven objects. She knew it was craft, and as a craftsman herself she had knowledge of similar processes. To travel and to learn something new was the most beautiful part of the project, according to Råman. IKEA took her on a trip to Vietnam where they travelled from north to south, observing the traditional crafts of the people. After this, Råman returned to Sweden and started forming ideas and drawing designs. The dish’s design is very much inspired by traditional Vietnamese weaving. That inspiration was combined with Råman’s own views on what constitutes good design: simple, essential, and practical objects that are still pleasing to the eye. She sent her drawings to the producers in Vietnam, and went back to work in Vietnam for another week. Perhaps Råman made a prototype of the dish herself, but regarding her lack of experience in

¹⁶ The interview can be watched on YouTube, via: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jvA_GmoT27E

weaving it is also a reasonable assumption that craftsmen were the first to create a physical manifestation of the dish.

The materials

Bamboo is the most significant material used in the production of the dish. The use of bamboo is in line with goals IKEA sets regarding their own effect on the planet. In their 2016 sustainability report, IKEA claims to be the biggest user of wood in the retail section globally.¹⁷ While wood can be harvested sustainably, the fact remains that it takes many years before a tree grows ready for harvest. Therefore, one of the goals mentioned in the sustainability report is using more renewable sources for raw materials. Using bamboo, which is a grass, instead of traditional types of wood in the production of furniture testifies to this, as bamboo holds the world record for fastest growing plant.¹⁸ Within three to four months, bamboo reaches a mature height, after which it takes around five years for the plant to achieve its peak hardness.¹⁹ Bamboo grows chiefly in warm climates, such as China. In 2016, 90% of the bamboo used by IKEA was grown in China, and 90% of that bamboo was FSC certified.²⁰

IKEA's sustainability report shows many instances of raw materials that are mostly grown in a certain area and are mostly sustainable. The few percent that is unaccounted for in these statements remain undiscussed. It is difficult to find information on what companies exactly are the suppliers for IKEA's raw materials. IKEA mentions Dasso as one of their bamboo suppliers, and an article posted on the FSC website reveals the Longtai Company as another supplier of bamboo.²¹ Both companies produce bamboo in China and probably fall under the 90% of FSC certified suppliers mentioned by IKEA. Statistically speaking, it is likely that the bamboo for the VIKTIGT dish is grown in China, possibly by either Dasso or the Longtai Company. Practically speaking, it is perhaps more likely that the bamboo for the dish was grown and harvested in Vietnam, as it would reduce transportation costs and would thus generally lower production costs. Because there is no evidence that places the growing site of the bamboo in either China or Vietnam, the biography will use the statistics provided by IKEA and assume the bamboo was grown in China.

¹⁷ As stated on page 25 of the sustainability report, via: http://www.ikea.com/gb/en/doc/general-document/ikea-read-ikea-group-sustainability-report-2016_1364331441708.pdf

¹⁸ Stated by Guinness World Records, via: <http://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/fastest-growing-plant/>

¹⁹ More information on bamboo via: <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/bamboo-boom/>

²⁰ Information provided on page 26 of the 2016 sustainability report: http://www.ikea.com/gb/en/doc/general-document/ikea-read-ikea-group-sustainability-report-2016_1364331441708.pdf; FSC stands for Forest Stewardship Council. Its label assures consumers that the wood they encounter was obtained through sustainable forestry.

²¹ FSC refers to the Longtai Company in relation to IKEA, via: <https://ic.fsc.org/en/news/id/1611>

The bamboo dish is finished with a clear nitrocellulose lacquer. Nitrocellulose is a granular chip or fibrous material, that is usually kept wet in water or an alcohol solution. It is highly flammable and working with this lacquer requires protection of the skin, eyes, and airways. This type of lacquer can be used for numerous purposes: in nail polishes, in inks, as a finish on guitars and saxophones, and it is the substance that holds staples together.²²

The production

In traditional weaving, the tubular bamboo stalk is first dried and then cut with large knives, until it reaches the desired length and thickness.²³ The scale on which bamboo is needed by IKEA, might result in using more industrial methods to split the bamboo tubes. This could happen either while the tubes are with the supplier, or could be done after the bamboo has been transported to the Vietnamese craftsmen.²⁴ After the bamboo is cleaned, dried, and cut, the strips can be used for weaving. Even though the disk at the centre of the dish looks like a solid piece of bamboo, it is also comprised of bamboo strips that are pressed together tightly to form the desired shape.²⁵ The craftsmen require tools to pierce through the disk, after which they attach bamboo strips through the holes and weave up and outwards of the disk. The strips are either created to have the exact needed length, or are trimmed after weaving. They then disappear into a bamboo ring that forms the outer edge of the dish.

Other than statements such as “handwoven by skilled craftspeople, and therefore unique” or “each basket is woven by hand and is therefore unique”, IKEA communicates very little about the making of the dish.²⁶ The only evidence of the production process is offered in the form two photographs of the designers in a factory hall²⁷, and around 20 seconds of footage, in which Råman and craftsmen are visible together in a commercial.²⁸ The consumer is told nothing about the craftsman who made their dish, the place where that happened or the conditions the craftsman was working in. A search on the locations of production of IKEA’s handmade objects in Vietnam had meagre results. Only the villages

²² More information on nitrocellulose lacquer via: <http://nj.gov/health/eoh/rtkweb/documents/fs/1366.pdf> (21-01-2017)

²³ A demonstration of traditional techniques is given by bamboo artist Jiro Yonezawa in this documentary: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z0IcPxCvIcA>. (16-01-2017)

²⁴ One of the methods Dasso uses to split bamboo tubes is shown in this video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xq_ghrv6x_s. (16-01-2017)

²⁵ The traditional way of making bowls out of bamboo strips is demonstrated here. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oqtW9hcCDrU> (19-01-2017)

²⁶ These and other quotes about the production of VIKTIGT can be found in the press guide: http://www.ikea.com/ms/en_CA/img/pdf/IKEA%20VIKTIGT%20Collection%20_May_ENG.pdf

²⁷ Picture on page 3 of the press guide: http://www.ikea.com/ms/en_CA/img/pdf/IKEA%20VIKTIGT%20Collection%20_May_ENG.pdf

²⁸ VIKTIGT commercial that shows Råman and craftsmen together. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y9AVSok4fko>

Phu Ngia²⁹ and Thanh Binh³⁰ are known as production sites for IKEA. The sustainability report makes an effort to reassure any doubts that might arise about the working conditions the craftsmen that create for IKEA experience. IKEA admits that especially with the handicrafts, which can be produced from home, it is hard to ensure the worker's safety. Proper conditions, hours, and the prevention of child labour are difficult to oversee in these so-called cottage industries. An initiative to prevent unsafe conditions is the creation of weaving centres.³¹ A video on IKEA's website shares the story of a Vietnamese woman who stopped producing from out of her own home, and now frequents a weaving centre. At this centre women sit on plastic lawn chairs in a large hall, they crochet at an impressive pace. The woman in the video experiences the weaving centre as an improvement.³²

Even though these examples offer an insight into possibly similar conditions of production, they are by no means specific enough to make any declarations about the production of the VIKTIGT dish. The origins of the material, and the location, circumstances, identity, and skillset of the craftsman remain unclear.

The movements through time and space

Following things-in-motion illuminates their human and social context, according to Appadurai. In the life of the dish, its movements could look as follows: Råman visited Vietnam and gained insights into traditional bamboo weaving, as well as inspiration to create her own design. She then went to Sweden to create the design. The design was sent to Vietnam, and Råman later followed it to attend the start of production. The bamboo was transported to the craftsmen, who added the value of their skills, time and touch to create an object. The dish was then coated with clear nitrocellulose lacquer, this could have either been done at the location where the dish was woven, or could have happened after transport to a different facility. The dish was then packaged and shipped, arriving at any one IKEA store that carried the VIKTIGT collection. The shipping route, the companies employed to undertake the shipping, and any possible distribution centres which the dish might have travelled to are not disclosed by IKEA.

The consumers were made aware of the existence of the collection and the dish through a marketing campaign. The campaign existed digitally in the form of videos, blogs, IKEA's own website, and

²⁹ As stated here: <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB106391679466691200>

³⁰ IKEA has a weaving centre in Thanh Binh, via: http://www.ikea.com/ms/nl_NL/pdf/yearly_summary/ikea-group-yearly-summary-fy14.pdf

³¹ More information on weaving centres on page 62 of the sustainability report:
http://www.ikea.com/gb/en/doc/general-document/ikea-read-ikea-group-sustainability-report-2016_1364331441708.pdf

³² IKEA on managing worker conditions: http://www.ikea.com/ms/en_KR/this-is-ikea/on-the-factory-floor/better-conditions-on-the-factory-floor-and-beyond/index.html 19-01-2017

advertisements. The dish had a prominent position in the marketing campaign, as it received far more attention (or: screen time) than most of the VIKTIGT objects. The consumer could arrive at an IKEA store either with the goal to purchase the dish, or could make that decision upon encountering the object. The consumer would either pay €12,95 for the smaller dish or €14,95 for the larger dish. The dish would then travel with its new owner to a new location and either perform one of the intended functions, such as being a bread or fruit basket, or a decoration. It could also serve another purpose depending on the owner's usage of it. The life of the dish could end at the hands of the same owner, when it is either broken or becomes unwanted and is discarded as waste. Perhaps the dish was not used by the buyer, but served the buyer as a gift to one of their relations. Another possibility is for the owner to resell the dish, as it is a piece of design that was only sold for only a short period of time and might be desired beyond its availability at IKEA.

The commodity

Describing everything that is known and unknown about the VIKTIGT dish enables a discussion about its existence in the world. Elements that go into gaining a deeper understanding of what the existence of the dish entails are its motions in and out of a commodity state and its cultural meanings; both will be discussed below. As a method for discussing movements and meanings, I will use sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's "The Forms of Capital" (1986). He explains that society is not a game of chance, a roulette with an equal opportunity of winning and therefore changing one's social status immediately. Rather, the social world is accumulated history. There is no equal distribution of chances, they are determined by the movements of capital. Besides the well-known economic capital (the command of resources such as money), Bourdieu introduces cultural and social capital as factors in the functioning of the social world. Social capital are resources based on group memberships, and networks of contacts. Cultural capital refers to knowledge, skill and education (Bourdieu 1986: 16). When a certain instance of cultural capital is an embodiment of prestige or honour, it can be seen as symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1986: 18). It is useful to follow the dish while explaining the different capitals that are involved in its movements, because these capitals can explain motivations for the involvement and influence of all parties tied to the existence of the dish.

In the biography of the dish presented above, the dish's existence starts with its design. The design was commissioned from a renowned designer by IKEA, as part of a limited-edition collection. By commoditizing Råman's cultural and symbolic capital as a designer in the form of a contract for designing the VIKTIGT collection, IKEA uses its economic capital to achieve a growth of that economic

capital in the future. Why IKEA would choose to work with a designer can be explained with the following quote by Bourdieu:

(...) any given cultural competence (e.g. being able to read in a world of illiterates) derives a scarcity value from its position in the distribution of cultural capital and yields profits of distinction for its owner. (Bourdieu, 1986: 18)

Råman brings her knowledge of practical, minimalistic design and her prestige as a renowned designer into the mix. Her prestige can be considered as symbolic capital and a scarcity, seen as there is no designer with exactly her fame and style. The fact that the collection is a limited edition contributes to the scarcity described by Bourdieu as well.

The choice to work with bamboo probably resulted in a contract for a farmer, who invested time, knowledge and money to grow plants and commoditize the raw material. It is difficult to determine whether choosing bamboo had a positive effect on the economic capital tied up with the dish, as it is unclear what IKEA was paying for their raw materials. Working with weavers grew Råman's cultural capital, as she was taught a traditional craft by people who possessed the skill and knowledge needed for weaving. As with Råman's cultural and symbolic capital, the weavers received a contract for making the dish that commoditized their time and handwork. In exchange for money, they performed their cultural capital, resulting in the physical existence of the dish. The transportation of the dish to IKEA stores resulted in an object that is both a piece of Swedish design and an embodiment of Vietnamese traditional craft being available to consumers as a commodity. The consumer who purchases the VIKTIGT dish exchanges their own economic capital to obtain anything the dish might represent to them, such as cultural and symbolic capital. IKEA's goal is then achieved; the investment of economic capital results in a profit, increasing the overall economic capital of the company.

The culturally constructed dish

All this talk of exchange, contracts and commodities may quickly deromanticize any pre-existing ideas about the handmade object. When looking at the dish as a culturally constructed entity, which, as Kopytoff explains, is an element that goes into making a biography cultural, we are able to understand some of the charm a consumer might find in the dish. To start, the dish's shape is not unorthodox. Its advertised function as a bread basket conforms with the



Figure 1.3: hump in boarder

traditional concept of such a basket anyone might have in mind. The choices made by IKEA to employ Råman and work with craftsmen both contributed to the dish being loaded with more culturally constructed meanings than the average bread basket at IKEA might be. Having Råman design the dish, even though her career as a craftsman has no connection with weaving, brings prestige to the dish that is normally not present in objects sold at IKEA. Her designs would normally be even more exclusive, and perhaps not within reach of the average IKEA customer. Having Vietnamese craftsmen perform their traditional craft adds a layer of otherness to the dish. Besides it being a piece of Swedish design, it also becomes a piece connected with oriental craft and it might even possess an aura of authenticity, of uniqueness, that would not be achieved through machinal production. This topic will be further discussed in the chapter on the notion ‘handmade’. An instance of uniqueness can be seen in figure 1.3, where the combination of a natural material and the handwork of a craftsman have left a visible hump in the outer boarder of the dish in the photo, an imperfection to the roundness of the boarder. Another layer of positive connotation comes with the choice for bamboo. Not only is it a relatively new and exciting material that is gaining popularity, it is also known for being very eco-friendly. Lastly, the dish being sold by IKEA makes that it is linked with the company’s values of democratic design, that stands for the availability of quality furniture for everyone, no matter their financial position. The dish as a culturally constructed entity holds far more meanings than just its function as a dish or basket.

Conclusion

Through the marketing campaign, IKEA presents an object that is the result of harmonious collaboration between design and craft, between timeless ideas and old tradition. It is a culturally formed myth that combines a consumerist desire for innovation with the desire to own something unique, something no one else possesses. IKEA chose the combination of design and craft because it fits in with the consumer’s desires, a desire for authenticity that is prevalent in society today (Pine and Gilmore 2007). Now, Appadurai’s observation about the distribution of knowledge comes into play. While the consumer carries the social knowledge to appreciate the myths about design and craft presented to them by IKEA, the technical knowledge that went into production is obscured by the complex journey of the dish. The scale of production and distribution alienate the craftsman from the consumer. This enables IKEA’s marketing department to create a successful myth about the commodity flow of the dish. Even biographing the dish’s life does not reveal whether all the positive ideas suggested by IKEA, such as a harmonious collaboration between craftsman and designer and the use of sustainable raw materials, was indeed the reality of the production process that resulted in the dish.

Craft and craftsmanship

This collection is about craft. It's a project between the craftsman and the designer. It's a lot of energy. When I come back and look at the object, the things I did, I think it represents love for me.

Everything I do, I do for myself. I am the first customer I used to say. And I can't speculate what other people really want. The only thing I know is that I am not so ununique [sic] and I am sharing a lot with other people. You don't need to know that it is an Ingegerd Råman design but you need to know that it's someone who has take [sic] care. That's the feeling I want people to know. I am not so interested if they know it's me.

We have something in common and it is easy to communicate. You can look on each other, you point. I don't speak Vietnamese, but when I work with the craftsmen you forget that. Because you know you always find a way of the communication and that's the beautiful part. I felt like a child. Everything you have the possibility to learn and learn from the beginning, it's so beautiful. The thing that I get afraid of is that I shouldn't learn enough so I could do what I want to do. But it also has to be beautiful. I mean you should see it and you shouldn't see it. I used to say when I'm ready: oh it was nothing, but it is something anyway.³³

The (somewhat incoherent) monologue above is given by Ingegerd Råman in one of the two videos IKEA released to promote the VIKTIGT collection. As the video is made to advertise the availability of the collection, it can be considered as a commercial. This commercial shows Råman explaining some of the processes and ideas behind her participation in the VIKTIGT collection. She does so while being seated at a table in a room with white walls and tall windows. Footage of Råman is alternated with shots of the VIKTIGT objects and with shots of working life in Vietnam. The commercial communicates a set of expectations to the consumer. It illustrates the situation of the designer and of the craftsmen involved in the collection, and offers detailed shots of the products that were the result of their collaboration. In this chapter, I attempt to find out what IKEA communicates to the consumer about craft and craftsmanship with the video described above and with the VIKTIGT collection as a whole. I do so by analysing the video with concepts that belong to film analysis, such as narrative and style, which manifest through the cinematography, editing, mise-en-scene and sound. I will then use scholarly debates on the notions of craft and craftsmanship to situate IKEA's representation of craftsmanship in the broader understanding of that notion.

³³ VIKTIGT commercial via: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y9AVSok4fko>

Analysis of the commercial

Expressions of craft and craftsmanship are present through both words and images. While Råman's voice tells the viewer about the experiences she had when working on the collection, we see footage of Råman herself, of people with Asian appearances, and we see various shots of objects that are part of the VIKTIGT collection. Besides Råman's voice, the video incorporates a music track which spans over the entire duration of it. This nondiegetic melody is cheerful and fast-paced, and sounds like it was played on a marimba. This wooden percussion instrument is uncommon in Western music, and produces a hollow and round sound. That sound is reminiscent of the natural, wood-like materials used in the handcrafted products of the collection.

Below, the 125 seconds long video is schematically divided into six different types of shots that make up the sequence of the commercial. In the scheme below (see fig. 2.1), any part of the sequence in which one object or person was consecutively shot from different angles counts as one appearance in the sequence. As it shows, by far the most screen time goes to shots of objects from the VIKTIGT collection. Råman herself gets a decent amount of screen time, both on her own in the studio and with craftsmen in Vietnam. And while a large share of the monologue given by Råman refers to the craftsmen, they get relatively little screen time in the commercial. I will now discuss how footage of Råman, the craftsmen, and the objects functions within the commercial.

Type of shot	Times occurred in sequence	Total screen time
VIKTIGT objects	10	56 seconds
Råman in her studio	7	33 seconds
Råman and craftsmen	3	12 seconds
Craftsmen	2	8 seconds
Street life in Vietnam	1	3 seconds
Text 'VIKTIGT collection' and IKEA logo	1	13 seconds

Figure 2.1

Råman

When one is watching the commercial, a different impression of what receives the most attention might arise. Even though shots of Råman's interview only make up one fourth of the commercial, the audio track of her monologue spans over almost the entire video. This creates the impression that she is the main focus of the video. Her words are constantly accompanied by the fast-paced marimba melody, giving them an upbeat and positive undertone. The monologue in its textual form has been given above. The reader might have noticed that the style and vocabulary of the written text comes

across as somewhat haphazard. This has everything to do with the narrator who performs the monologue in the commercial. Her command of the English language is not at the level that is prevalent these days. She speaks with a heavy accent and uses a limited vocabulary. At one point, she uses the word ‘ununique’ when the rest of the sentence indicates that she meant to say the word ‘unique’. While Råman as a narrator might not communicate as clearly as possible, her role as narrator does add something to the commercial that a perfectly styled voice-over could not have achieved. It creates a more sincere performance, as it is coming directly from the designer responsible for the creation of the collection. She also represents *Swedishness*, which is foreign to most viewers who watch this English commercial. This affirms not only her identity as a designer from Sweden, but also establishes a connection between herself and the Swedish company IKEA.

Besides her role as narrator, Råman is present in the commercial as the designer of the collection. The viewer is told so in the first shot of Råman sitting in her studio, when a section of text introduces her as ‘Ingegerd Råman, Designer’. Her looks match the description. In this mise-en-scene, she is wearing loose fitting black clothing that covers everything but her hands and head. Her grey hair is tied back in a tight ponytail. Nothing distracts from the movements her face and hands make as she speaks about VIKTIGT. She speaks with lively facial expressions and her hand gestures convey a certain passion for the topics she discusses. Her surroundings put an emphasis on her presence: she is seated at a rectangular wooden table and as background we see a white wall and part of a window. In this environment of light colours and straight lines, Råman herself stands out in her black, shapeless outfit. While the ways of her portrayal vary because of the camera assuming different angles, she is always central in these shots. Råman herself never looks directly into the camera, the fourth wall is retained continually. It seems as if she speaks to someone seated across from her, who is positioned just outside of the frame. This makes that the viewer is never addressed by Råman, which creates a distance between the narrator and the viewer. This distance does not only function to give the monologue a more authentic and less scripted vibe, but also ensures her somewhat mythical status as designer. Her status as a designer is relevant in the realm ideas, not in that of direct contact. Even direct looks could alter that status, as it would demystify Råman’s personhood. She is not the face of the VIKTIGT campaign in just the visual sense, but also receives this position by voicing her motivations and personal experiences. She is both the knowledgeable designer who provides ideas and inspiration, and the approachable enthusiast who learns and collaborates.

The latter is demonstrated in the few shots Råman shares with Vietnamese craftsmen. In these shots, the eyes of the craftsmen are always directed at Råman, while she is not necessarily looking back at them. Because the conversation that is going on in these shots is only incorporated in the soundscape as vague background noise, it is unclear what the people in the shots discuss. From their positioning

towards one another, Råman seems to be the centre of attention. She speaks, perhaps gives instructions, and the craftsmen listen attentively. This communicates a hierarchical relation between the designer and the craftsmen, in which Råman is positioned to have the upper hand. These images call to mind ideas of colonial times, in which Europeans were often depicted as bringers of civilization in exotic and undeveloped lands. Råman's position among the craftsmen enforces ideas of the unique Westerner and the anonymous and submissive natives. In this case, Råman is the bringer of civilization in the sense that she designs what the craftsmen will create. She thus brings her own cultural values about material culture and relies upon the needed but inferior handwork of the locals to complete her work.

Craftsmen

While thus far assumptions have been made that the four different people with Asian appearances the viewer encounters in the factory halls are craftsmen, none of them are explicitly specified to be so. Råman is introduced to the viewer as a designer by the addition of text to the video, this is not the case for the presumed craftsmen. But because the commercial implies their status as craftsmen through the monologue given by the designer, I will assume that they are craftsmen for the sake of this analysis. The craftsmen appear mostly in shots with Råman. Just one out of the four craftsmen appears solo, he is working on a piece of handicraft. Appearing with Råman takes autonomy away from craftsmen: they are always looking at her, while Råman does not necessarily look directly to them. In not recognizing the craftsmen either by introducing them, or having Råman acknowledge them directly, they are not represented as full persons. They have no name or function to affirm their identity, but serve as a sort of general personification of craftsmen to the viewer.

The cinematography in these few shots with the craftsmen is vastly different from shots in Råman's studio and from shots of the objects. Unlike the smooth and conscious movements the camera makes in those shots, the footage is shaky and seems to have been recorded with a handheld camera. Working with a handheld camera is a technique that originated in documentary films. Because of this history and its accompanying associations, it lends a certain feeling of authenticity to these shots (Bordwell & Thompson 2004: 270). The shots do not come across as scripted or planned in any way. The interactions between people, materials and the camera seem natural and give the impression that the camera just dropped in at a random moment. The viewer sees how the real production of VIKTIGT objects takes place. Never mind that the viewer actually sees just one craftsman working to create an object. The shots illustrate more about the collaboration and relation between craftsmen and designer than about the work the craftsmen perform.

The background in the shots at the production site also contribute to the feeling of stumbling into an authentic workplace. There is a lot of clutter: we see packaging material, shelves are stacked with documents and trinkets, and raw materials for weaving are scattered on the floor. There is chaos in these shots, especially when compared to the very minimalistic environment of Råman's studio. To display these two environments so dramatically different creates a difference between 'us' and 'them'; 'us' being westerners and 'them' eastern non-whites that stand in relation to westerners. The framing is less stylized as well. Body parts of people who are present in the factory halls but are not consciously incorporated in the shots appear within the frame on multiple occasions. This contrast in portrayal illustrates the difference between designer and craftsmen to the consumer. The former is operating out of a consciously organised space, with very little to distract from the goal of creating simple, essential and beautiful designs. The latter work from a less inspirational space, filled with clutter that is not necessarily connected to the creation of handwoven objects. The designer works with her mind to seemingly create designs out of thin air, the craftsman needs no inspiration to produce objects of which the function, form and techniques have been determined by others. The distinction between mind and body in the functions that both the designer and craftsman fulfil, gives the role each performs a different value. Inspiration and the ability to design can be attributed to an extraordinary mind, while the ability to craft is something that can be learned by anyone who has hands.

Another aspect of the representation of the VIKTIGT craftsmen stands out because of its absence. The crafted objects included in the VIKTIGT collection are not just woven objects from Vietnam, but also handmade ceramics and mouthblown glass made in Poland. While these objects themselves are present in the commercial, their creators and sites of production are not. A possible explanation for this lies in the difference of working with natural fibres, and working with ceramics or glass. While one can look very much like traditional craft, the other can look to have more in common with industrial production. The process of weaving requires very little tools after the fibres have been cut into the desired shape and size. Because the craftsmen work with their hands to shape the material, their craft is more relatable for the consumer. The consumer might observe weaving as a craft they could perform themselves, as they already possess hands and only need to practice with certain skills to achieve what the craftsmen in the video demonstrate. The process of blowing glass entails more commanding elements and tools such as a blowpipe, fire, and hot, liquid glass. The more dangerous looks of this could result in a lesser relatability and a lesser connection to the concept of handicraft that might exist within the consumer.

Objects

Shots of the VIKTIGT objects comprise close to half of the video. Seeing as objects do not move on their own, the camera is used to create an illusion of movement. Different from the shots with Råman and the craftsmen, the camera does not aim at one designated point. The VIKTIGT objects are being shown to the consumer through the movements of the camera. Various techniques such as moving from left to right, up and down, and zooming in and out provide the consumer with an almost tangible idea of what the texture and feeling of these objects might be. Laura Marks discusses the effect this method has on the viewer. In *The Skin of the Film*, she explains how a visual experience can encompass a tactile quality. She calls this 'haptic visuality', and describes this as a moment in which the eyes function like organs of touch (Marks 2000: 162). Marks cites Benjamin, who stated; "a story bears the marks of the storyteller much as the earthen vessel bears the marks of the potter's hand". She sees cinema as bearing the marks of sense memories that do not find their way into the audiovisual expression otherwise (Marks 2000: 129). Haptic cinema, according to Marks, does not invite identification with a figure so much as it encourages a bodily relationship between the viewer and image (Marks 2000: 164).



Figure 2.2: lamp shade



Figure 2.3: lamp shade

the intricately woven bamboo pattern. The next shot is an extreme close-up, in which the lamp shade is out of focus at first. Light comes through the holes in the pattern, the

One of the objects shown through such a method is the pendant lamp shade made from bamboo. The flower patterned woven design was inspired by traditional Vietnamese hats.³⁴ The camera directs the viewer's eyes both to the lamp shade's function and its structure. In the first shot of the lamp shade, the viewer sees a close-up in which the lamp seems to be hanging from the ceiling. The frame is cut so that the upper corner and right side corner of it are not visible. The lamp shade revolves around its own axis in this shot, offering the viewer a sight of

³⁴ As stated in the press guide on page 6:

http://www.ikea.com/ms/en_CA/img/pdf/IKEA%20VIKTIGT%20Collection%20_May_ENG.pdf

pattern on the inside of the lamp is vaguely visible (see fig. 2.2). When the camera focusses, the pattern on the outside of the lamp shade manifests itself. Opting for an extreme close-up for this shot causes the viewer to have a brief experience of being at nose length from the material. The detail offered by this shot is reminiscent of touching the bamboo itself and feeling the structure of the material (see fig. 2.3). This sequence and its editing creates a moment of haptic visuality with the viewer.

As mentioned before, the video only offers one shot of a craftsman in the act of creating an object. The craftsman is weaving with thin strips of bamboo and creates a tubular shape. Strangely enough, the method in combination with the material he is using has no finished equivalent within the VIKTIGT collection. The craftsman seen by the viewer is not actually making an object for the collection that is advertised through the commercial. The viewer is, in truth, offered no insights into the manual creation of the objects by the commercial, even though that impression might have arisen. The only true representation of handcrafted objects is given to the viewer by the camera, in the shots described above. The camera moves in order to enliven the objects, creating an almost tangible experience of the filmed VIKTIGT objects.

Representing craftsmanship through language and image

The commercial offers representations of craftsmanship through both language and image. As mentioned above, the images fail to show the physical creation of VIKTIGT objects. Nonetheless, the shots of a man weaving a tubular shape out of bamboos strips still qualifies as an example of a Vietnamese craftsman performing his skill in a general sense. The footage of this man does establish an idea of what the process of weaving VIKTIGT objects could have looked like. The consumer might very well not recognize the discrepancy between what this craftsman is creating and the objects that comprise the collection. When this is the case, his work could be perceived as a true representation of creating a woven VIKTIGT object. Besides the act of creating as a representation of craftsmanship, one could argue that craftsmanship is also represented in the VIKTIGT objects that are shown in the commercial. While such a thought may be true, the objects only receive such a status because Råman's words about craftsmanship coincide with footage of the objects. When considered as autonomous images, there is no evidence to suggest that the objects encountered by the viewer are the products of craft.

A third dimension of the representation of craftsmanship through images lies in the interactions between the designer and the presumed craftsmen. They perform a relationship in which the craftsmen depend on the designer to instruct and inspire. Footage of their gaze upon Råman confirms her special status in the midst of the craftsmen and their work environment. We can thus conclude

that the images of craftsmen and crafted objects alone do not form the representation of craftsmanship in this video. Both the craftsmen and the objects gain their status through the words and actions of Råman.

The commercial focusses heavily on Råman, as she is the narrator who contextualizes the images for the viewer. Her monologue can be divided into three parts. In the first part, she introduces the collection as a being about craft, as a project between the craftsman and the designer. In the second part, some of her philosophy as a designer is shared. She states to think herself not so different from the average person, and therefore designs with her own needs in mind. Her goal is not for people to know the designs to be hers, she wants evoke the feeling that the maker of the object has put care into it. In the final part of the monologue, Råman mostly reflects on the very organic collaboration between herself and the craftsmen. The one seemingly cannot perform its role without the other. This is especially true upon considering Råman's statement that she had the possibility to learn everything from the beginning by partaking in the VIKTIGT collection. Råman is known as a potter and glass designer, she had no previous experience with weaving and had to learn about techniques and applications in Vietnam before designing objects, such as the VIKTIGT dish discussed in the previous chapter. Råman speaks of working with craftsmen as an experience that transcends language. As they were unable to communicate in the most common way, Råman states they communicated through their shared understanding of craft.

Craft and craftsmanship as represented by IKEA through this commercial, exist as part of a collaboration. Craftsmen are the hands that complement the brains of the designer. And while they are both part of the process of creation, the designer is shown to have authority in that process.

Craftsmanship's history

To gain an understanding of craftsmanship in scholarly debates, it is helpful to get an insight into its history. Richard Sennett elaborates on that history in *The Craftsman*. He cites a Homeric hymn to the Greek crafting god, Hephaestus, as one of the earliest celebrations of the craftsman. As a god, Hephaestus was recognized as a bringer of peace and a maker of civilization. In the hymn, civilization starts when mankind begins using tools (Sennett 2008: 21). The word 'demioergos' is used to name the craftsman in the hymn, it is a combination of public (*demios*) and productive (*ergon*). Later, Aristotle abandoned the word for craftsman, and used 'cheirotechnon', which means handworker. His motivation for this is that the architects of each profession are more knowledgeable than the artisans, because they know the reasons why things are done (Sennett 2008: 23). Aristotle's reflections on

craftsmanship show a divide between head and hand, as was previously encountered with the division between the designer and the craftsmen of the VIKTIGT collection as portrayed in the commercial.

From Aristotle, Sennett jumps to the Middle Ages. The craftsman's workshop doubles as a home: a place for sleeping, eating, and raising children. Sennett defines the workshop as "a productive space in which people deal face-to-face with issues of authority". The authority in any workshop lies with the master because of his proven skills (Sennett 2008: 53-54). Within the system of guilds that was prevalent in the Middle Ages, there was a hierarchy of masters, journeymen, and apprentices. The masters and his students were bound by a religious oath to, on the one hand, improve the skills of the apprentices, and, on the other hand, keep the secrets of the master. Besides the master's blood relations, his students were also considered as a part of the family (Sennett 2008: 63). Curiously, the authority Råman has over the craftsmen in the commercial is not based on her proven skills. She is perhaps the least skilled weaver among the people that are portrayed. This shows how in modern craft production, mastering the entire process of creating an object is no longer a requirement for exercising leadership.

In the Renaissance, the concept of the artist as we know it today started to form. The growing emphasis on subjectivity in society allowed for the artist to emerge from the Medieval tradition of craftsmanship. A new phenomenon that separated the artist from the craftsman was the claim of originality for their work. Originality is seen as the trait of the individual, inspired mind. Nevertheless, Renaissance artists did not work in isolation. The workshop turned into the artist's studio, where the assistants and apprentices aided the artist. The artist turned inward upon himself and claimed artistic value in work that is unique or has distinctive qualities, while the craftsman remained part of his community and kept the relative anonymity that came with the collective practice. Sennett argues that we should remain suspicious of the contrast we still see between artists and craftsmen. He sees originality as a social label, and it is unclear whether the maker or the consumer has the authority to assign it (Sennett 2008: 65-67). The distinction between artist and craftsman is present in the VIKTIGT collection as well. While Råman is very visible to the consumer in the promotion of her own designs, the craftsmen who executed those designs remain largely anonymous. The consumer is drawn into this hierarchy of values and is not offered a position to admire the skill of the maker of VIKTIGT object. The consumer is left with only the option to appreciate the artist Råman and her originality.

The next significant shift in the history of the craftsman happened during the Industrial Revolution. The introduction of machines, factories, and, later, the Fordist mode of production changed the way labour was organized. The development of machinery for large-scale production meant that highly skilled labourers saw their opportunities reduce, while semi- or unskilled workers found work

operating alongside the machines (Sennett 2008: 106). A passionate protest towards this development came from the English writer John Ruskin, who is recognized as a Romantic analyst of craft. He argued that the division of labour that came with the industrialization was dehumanising. Karl Marx would subsequently expand on Ruskin's ideas of alienating industrial labour. Men could either be tools, or men, but not both, according to Ruskin. He stated: "Men are not intended to work with the accuracy of tools, to be precise and perfect in all their actions. If you will have that precision out of them, you must dehumanize them" (Ruskin 1907: 176). Previous to the era of machines, any craftsman able to produce a perfect object would have received praise for his accomplishment. But with the machine's ability to produce perfection on a large scale, imperfections became valued in objects because they demonstrated uniqueness (Betjemann 2008: 184). Sennett writes about how the introduction of the machine altered the relation of quantity and quality of material culture for the Victorians. For the first time in history, the quantity of uniform objects dulled the senses, because their uniform perfection elicited no personal response in the consumer (Sennett 2008: 109). The critique of working conditions together with the dislike towards mass produced objects resulted in the creation of the Arts and Crafts movement in Great Britain. John Ruskin and the artist William Morris are seen as the founders of the movement. Its ideals can be seen as romantic and take inspiration from the Medieval craftsman's workshop, where the production was wholesome compared to the inhuman and repetitive experiences workers had with the industrial mode of production. Morris believed that no joy, and thus no art, could come from working in an industrial setting. In his own workshop, Morris's designs were produced by skilled craftsmen, following the social ideals he held in high regard. The VIKTIGT commercial conforms to Morris's beliefs in the sense that the craftsmen appear to enjoy freedom in their labour. They do not wear uniforms, communicate freely, and work with their own hands. Their work is based on skill and is therefore valued over the dehumanizing labour that we are still confronted with today, such as the production in sweatshops and at assembly lines. Råman is like a modern Morris, in the sense that she is the figure whose exemplary lead and designs create opportunities for skilled workers who would otherwise squander their talents at inferior production sites. She is also like Morris in the sense that the VIKTIGT craftsmen might be producing objects they would never be able to acquire themselves at IKEA, which ultimately alienates the craftsmen.

The appeal of craftsmanship today

The romantic view of craftsmanship that originated with the Arts and Crafts movement is still prevalent today. While the abundance of mass produced goods makes it impossible to keep up with acquiring the latest trends and gadgets, an awareness of the harmful and destructive properties of the current

mode of production and consumption awakens within consumers. The result of this is a market for ethically produced goods. Labels that attest to ethical production range from ‘biological’ and ‘organic’ to ‘made by craftsmen’ and ‘handmade’. The former two deal with issues of the environment, while the latter two focus on the circumstances of labour. While each of these labels comes with its own set of problems, their presence in today’s society demonstrates how production, consumption, and their effects are being taken into consideration. Michele Krugh writes that since the Arts and Crafts movement, craft has been linked with unalienated personal label on both a social and political scale. This stands in contrast to impersonal, industrial mass production. She argues that because the appeal of craft comes from the focus on individual labour, craft is about the personality of the maker (Krugh 2014: 293). With the VIKTIGT collection, the consumer is not likely to discover which craftsman was responsible for the creation of any product they might purchase. It is Ingegerd Råman’s personality that is linked to the collection by IKEA. Her opening words in the commercial do point towards notions similar to Krugh’s description of craft’s appeal. Råman describes VIKTIGT as a project between the designer and the craftsman, it represents love and contains energy. These human emotions and experiences would not arise from industrial mass production as, in line with William Morris’s thinking, we do not associate such production with joy.

Råman’s mentioning of love and energy, and Krugh’s association of craft and the personality of the maker all imply that handcrafted objects carry more meaning than similar objects that are fabricated industrially. This is reminiscent of Walter Benjamin’s critique on the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction. In his 1936 essay, Benjamin analysed how the mechanical reproduction of things such as newspapers, photographs, and (as his main focus) film made such expressions of art available to the masses. While he applauded the possibilities for communication brought along by such mechanical reproductions, Benjamin feared for the loss of uniqueness and authenticity that came with reproduction. The artwork, according to Benjamin, was losing its aura. He specifically wrote about how film devaluated the performance and interaction of actor and audience. The concept of the aura as explained by Benjamin is interesting when considering the position of crafted VIKTIGT objects. The aura of any object is accumulated through its unique presence in the world. The history and tradition of the object are authentic and give it authority. These two qualities are part of the aura of the object. Any reproduction of the object would not only result in the absence of an aura in the reproduction itself, but would also diminish the aura of the original (Benjamin 2008: 31). The handmade VIKTIGT objects are imbued with qualities that Benjamin would consider as the aura: each object is unique, according to IKEA, because they are handmade. Benjamin poses the work of art against its mechanical reproduction. In the case of VIKTIGT objects, there is no original artwork and the production of the collection does not happen mechanically. It might even be difficult to argue that the objects can be

considered as art at all. Following Krugh, the maker of the object would have left traces of their touch. This might be what Råman refers to when she associates the handmade objects with love and energy. When taking Benjamin's arguments into account, VIKTIGT objects could be considered to have an aura. They are unique in the sense that they were handmade by craftsmen, none of the objects are exact machinal reproductions of one glorified original. However, the aura of the objects would have a stronger presence, had they been made by a figure whose identity is known to the consumer. If, for example, Råman would have made the objects with her own hands, the history and tradition of both her name and her experience would lend a stronger presence of authenticity and authority, and thus of an aura, to the objects.

Both Krugh and Benjamin ascribe the attraction of unique, handmade objects to the objects themselves and the traces of touch left by their maker. Another way to look at the attraction of handmade objects is offered by Thijs Lijster. In *De Grote Vlucht Inwaarts* he argues that because of the growing complexity of the outside world, individuals are losing sight of how they can personally influence that world. As a result they tend to close themselves off from the world, both ideologically and physically, and turn inward upon themselves. This movement of turning inwards leads to ascribing a greater value to the spaces an individual does control, such as their homes (Lijster 2016: 10). From these observations, Lijster concludes that we more consciously surround ourselves with objects that emphasize design over function, and that carry symbolic value (Lijster 2016:47). Objects such as cell phones and jeans derive their value and desirability largely from immaterial factors such as status, symbolism, and culture. Objects have the ability to carry out their owner's identity, or perhaps the identity they desire to assume. It is because of this that Lijster calls 'the self' the most successful commodity on the market today (Lijster 2016: 34). Daniel Miller's *The Comfort of Things* attests to Lijster's argument. In his anthropological study of material culture, unravelling the identity of his hosts was possible by having those hosts explain the functions and meanings of the objects they surrounded themselves with. Unlike Krugh and Benjamin, Lijster and Miller would ascribe the attraction of handmade objects not to the object or the maker, but to the human interaction with the object. The reaction the consumer experiences upon encountering such an object, and the decision to incorporate the object into their own space and identity. Choosing to acquire an object that is clearly being marketed as made by craftsmen, can confirm the consumer's identity as someone who is considerate of production modes and desires to support a more ethical system³⁵ of production, all the while getting an imperfect but unique object to aid in the construction of their own identity.

³⁵ Further reading on the state of ethical consumerism: Littler, J. "What's Wrong with Ethical Consumption" in: Lewis, T, and Potter, E. (2011). *Ethical Consumption: A Critical Introduction*. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Problems with craftsmanship today

When a movement gains momentum in society and leaves the niche of the first followers to become part of mainstream culture, problematic situations might arise. With craftsmanship, problematic situations commenced as early as William Morris's workshop. While he advocated for craftsmanship as the ideal form of labour for all people, the production costs made Morris's designs too expensive for the average consumer of his time. Thus, his crafted objects were perhaps created by the working class, but were also out of reach for that class (Betjemann 2008: 184-185). In "Craft and the Limits of Skill: Handicrafts Revivalism and the Problem of Technique" Peter Betjemann touches upon the problematics of perfection, which exist ever since Ruskin spoke out about the value of imperfections in crafted objects. In Ruskin's *The Nature of the Gothic*, irregularities are identified as the grounds of handicrafts authenticity. Following this logic, a craftsman would diminish their own chance at success by perfecting their skill and execution (Betjemann 2008: 188). IKEA's marketing campaign resonates with Ruskin's views, as they put an emphasis on imperfection as a desirable feature of their collection.

An aspect about the VIKTIGT collection that could be called into question is the scale on which it was produced. Industrial mass production can be considered as the opposite of craft production. The question is whether the line between those two forms of production is that distinct. Many products are entirely or partly handmade, but would not benefit from the association with human touch. Examples include the iPhone, which is presented as pure technology that has never been among humans before, and items of clothing that could not have been created by machines, such as ripped jeans and beaded blouses, that could be associated with unpleasant labour. A product is labelled as 'handmade' only when the idea of craftsmen creating it adds value in the eyes of the consumer. A handwoven basket might be thought of as charming, while a handmade laptop might be suspected of human errors. As a result of this, the representation of crafted objects in stores is hardly representative of the reality of production, both when it is fully manual or when hands are needed to operate machines.

Even though the consumer might have general associations with the notion of craftsmanship, there are no guidelines that ensure the boundaries of when the term is applicable to an object. In "New Craft Paradigms" (2002), Ingrid Bachmann mentions experiencing irony with the crafted commodity. When the maker of an object is from the developed³⁶ world, the object will be sold by introducing the maker to the consumer. The craftsman might even sell the object themselves, which adds to the experience of consuming. Etsy, for example, specifically encourages sellers to disclose details about the design,

³⁶ It is important to recognize that terms such as "developed" and "developing" are problematic, as they suggest that the latter needs to conform to the former's state of being. The terms will be used throughout this research, as they are used commonly in the literature that is used in this research.

production, and people involved in the creation of any object. Consumers are not only confronted with objects, but could also decide to purchase pieces of craft because they experience a connection with the creator. Contrary to craftsmen in the developed world, the identities of craftsmen from the developing world will not be disclosed as often. According to Krugh, the problem with craftsmanship remains as it was during the high days of the Arts and Crafts movement: the labour of some craftspeople gets valued more highly than others (Krugh 2014: 295). Bachmann urges against the fetishization of labour for its own sake. She highlights the discrepancy between the economic and cultural value of an object made in the West and functioning in an arts marketplace, and a similar object from an anonymous craftsman who performed similar labour and has their product being sold at a dollar store or local market (Bachmann 2002: 46). An example of fetishization of Western labour can be found in a currently popular type of shoe. Dr. Martens is generally known as a brand that produces high quality boots that offer support and will last a long time. When shopping online for their most common type of shoe, a black lace-up boot, they offer two seemingly similar, but apparently also vastly different options. A pair of so-called '1460' boots will either cost €165, or €220, depending on whether the consumer would like their boots to have been made in England, in the original factory in Northamptonshire. The cheaper boots have been produced in Asia, but this fact is not advertised at all. Apparently, location and labourers only matter when the association with it creates a positive association, which in this case could be considered the history of the original production place and the traditional knowledge of the craftsmen working there.

In the case of IKEA's collection, labour is fetishized. Each product is described to be unique because it was made by human hands. Bachmann would perhaps applaud this in part, as the labour of craftsmen from the developing world is not completely obscured. The cultural value of the objects as works of craftsmanship is preserved. While the identity of the craftsman remains unknown, their work is celebrated and admired to some extent. The economic value of VIKTIGT objects might not be up to par with what creators from the developed world ask for similar creations. When singular pieces of craft are being sold by Western makers in the Western world, their creations are commonly priced higher compared to similar products available at stores. While Western craftsmen would carry the costs for production and have both pricing and profit in their own hands, craftsmen from the developing worlds and their labour are merely one aspect of the different costs and processes that accumulate to the existence of a crafted object. For the craftsmen involved with VIKTIGT, the economic value put upon their labour might not differ from when producing for companies that do not advertise the mode of production like IKEA does. It is unclear if, like the ideals of the Arts and Crafts movement suggest, the lives of the VIKTIGT craftsmen are indeed better than if they had been employed through modes of industrial mass production.

Conclusion

In ancient Greece, craftsmanship was seen as the beginning of civilization. It was a standard mode of production for most of human history up until the Industrial Revolution. Craftsmanship then became the alternative mode of production, and was valued over dehumanizing industrial labour. Craftsmanship appeals to us today because it still presents itself as an alternative to harmful modes of production and consumption. Objects of craft have an aura, something that is missing from industrially mass-produced objects. Consumers find attraction in the idea that their possessions are imperfect and unique, and could use such possessions as building blocks in constructing their own identities.

The idea of craftsmanship is celebrated with the VIKTIGT collection. The commercial discussed in this chapter attests to this, as both the text and images are proof of a successful collaboration between a large company, a designer, and craftsmen. Certain film techniques in the commercial offer the experience of learning about the process behind creating the collection to the viewer. Craftsmanship is represented as a harmonious mode of production which results in objects that contain energy and love. The viewer discovers all this through Råman's point of view, making her presence more prominent than that of the craftsmen. With this, IKEA proves that craft from the developed and developing world is not treated equally. Råman is to be admired as both a crafter and designer, while the Vietnamese craftsmen who created the collection with their own hands remain largely anonymous. While celebrating craftsmanship raises awareness for alternative modes of production within the consumer, IKEA could still improve the representation of the actual craftsman within their marketing campaign.

Hands and handmade

Hands.

The finest tools ever made.

Strong. Sensitive. Flexible. Infinitely useful. Unchallenged in their versatility.

But they have a weakness.

They're not exact.

No matter how hard they try or how many times they practice, the result is never the same.

But maybe it's that weakness that is their biggest strength.

Maybe it's the way that every handmade object is different, that makes them *feel* the way they do.

Easy on the hands. Naked. Essential.³⁷

IKEA released not one, but two videos to promote the VIKTIGT collection. The topic of the second video is revealed both by the first word in the monologue and the image the viewer encounters in the first shot: hands. The hand as a tool for creation is central in this video. A smooth, female voice recites an almost poetic monologue in which the capacities of the human hand are presented and glorified. As explained in the previous chapter, the idea of a craftsman being involved in the creation of an object adds value to that object. This chapter continues the subject, and elaborates on why an object created by human hands encompasses a different experience compared to similar objects that are machine-made. I try to achieve this by evaluating IKEA's representation of hands and the notion 'handmade'. Like in the previous chapter, I will first analyse the commercial itself, using concepts belonging to film analysis. After that, I will elaborate on the current scholarly debate on the creating hand and the handmade object. The chapter concludes with a comparison between IKEA'S portrayal of the human hand and the broader understanding of what it means to present objects as being handmade.

³⁷ VIKTIGT commercial via: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kYn-xUjv_qs

The commercial

The video, which, like the other video, qualifies as a commercial since it presents objects with the aim to sell them, is mainly focussed on the human hand. Both the text and the shots that comprise the commercial revolve around hands. The viewer encounters hands against a black background, which makes the movements of the hands stand out. A female voice delivers the words that guide the viewer's understanding of the footage. Like the commercial discussed in the previous chapter, the words and images are accompanied by an uplifting melody played on the marimba. Whereas in the first commercial this melody could be linked to the representation of craftsmen as non-western and joyous labourers, and to the natural fibres with which they worked, the tune does not have a clear relation to this commercial. The up-beat and cheerful melody simply adds the suggestion that the topic discussed in this commercial is equally happy. Since the melody is used in both of the VIKTIGT commercials, it might even be considered as the VIKTIGT theme song.

The commercial can be divided into three parts, which can be observed only from the visual aspect of the video. With its length of exactly one minute, the three parts do not share an equal twenty seconds of screen time in the commercial. What can be considered as the first part of the sequence are shots of a pair of hands that make movements while being shot from different angles. The second part of the video commences after 21 seconds. The single pair of hands is animated to become numerous pairs of hands, which all perform the same movements. The effect this animation has is reminiscent of synchronized swimming. The third part of the video encompasses the last eleven seconds of the video, hands are at last not the only thing visible on the screen as the viewer is introduced to some objects from the VIKTIGT collection. Unlike the first commercial, this commercial seems to have no emphasis on the collection or objects. The further analysis of both the text, narration and footage of the video will show that is indeed the case.

Text and narration

Ingegerd Råman's charming narration in broken English was characteristic to the previous commercial. IKEA opted for a different narrator in this video, the monologue is delivered by a female with a smooth voice and British accent. Another difference lies in the text itself. Whereas the first commercial showed some spontaneity in delivering the lines, the text in this commercial seems to be comprised of not only carefully chosen words, but also of carefully chosen intonation and rhythm. The pauses and emphases in this woman's narration highlight certain words or sentences, which adds meaning to the narrative.

The narrator starts by addressing the topic, hands, and calling them the finest tools ever made. Viewing hands as something that was made is a bit odd, as presumably nobody put a conscious effort into the creation of hands. Rather, they are a result of evolution. The narrator continues by naming several properties of the hand: "Strong. Sensitive. Flexible. Infinitely useful. Unchallenged in their versatility." While strong, sensitive and flexible might refer to sensory or muscular functions, "infinitely useful" and "unchallenged in their versatility" are less specific. But this hardly seems to matter, as the narrator's next statement contradicts all positive praise: "Hands have a weakness, they are not exact". The consequence of this is that no two objects created by the hand will ever be identical, as one might imagine would be the result of machinal production. As IKEA puts it: "No matter how hard they try or how many times they practice, the result is never the same". To create, hands need to employ both effort and practised skill. Trying and practising to reach identical results thus seems the ultimate goal for the creating hand, up until the following sentence: "But maybe it's that weakness that is their biggest strength". The use of the word "maybe" to indicate a new way of viewing the limitations of the hand leaves more room for the viewer to comply than if this "biggest strength" had been presented as a fact. The next sentence lies at the core of what this commercial tries to communicate: "Maybe it's the way that every handmade object is different, that makes them *feel* the way they do". The word "feel" is heavily emphasised by the narrator. Because each handmade object is different, they are said to evoke a certain feeling. It is unclear what this feeling might be, and how it is different from objects that originated through a different mode of production. The sentence also implies that while handmade objects all differ from one another, they evoke the same feeling, which seems contradictory. It is also unclear whether the feeling is an emotional or sensory experience, or both. Nevertheless, the experience is used as a unique selling point for handmade objects, which would not function were it applied to machinal, mass-produced objects. The final words of the commercial coincide with footage of VIKTIGT objects. "Easy on the hands. Naked. Essential" seem to refer to the objects that the viewer encounters. In this last sentence, the hands of the maker are exchanged for the hands of the consumer. "Easy on the hands" refers to the hands of the consumer and the user-friendly design of the objects. "Naked" possibly refers to Råman's minimalistic designs. "Essential" could be another expression that refers to minimalism, but might also address the necessity of the VIKTIGT objects to the consumer's life.

Where the first commercial was relatively direct about its message concerning the collaboration between designer and craftsman and the goals of the VIKTIGT collection, the second commercial does not speak directly about the collection at all. Should the viewer not watch the video, but only listen to it, no information about the VIKTIGT collection would be transmitted. While such an approach might seem illogical for a commercial, it does fit with the sentiment of the collection. To focus on hands and

handmade is to focus on the experience that the VIKTIGT objects evoke rather than the forms and functions that the objects have. This commercial contributes to that effect as the poetic monologue about hands invites the viewer to think about hands and handmade objects as “different” and capable of conveying a certain feeling. The commercial makes VIKTIGT objects desirable because it forgoes selling goods, and instead sells an experience.

Footage

Part one

In the first 21 seconds of the commercial, a pair of hands makes movements while the camera assumes different angles. The wrists are cut off by the framing. The hands are in a dark space, the background seems to be black. Soft blue light comes from shapes that look like windows, but the background never comes into focus (see fig. 3.1). Blue light in film is associated with night and moonlight. It also provides a contrast with the warmer colour of the skin on the hands. The limited lighting makes it difficult to determine the skin colour of the hands. This is relevant, as craftsmen in the first commercial were solely depicted as being from Vietnam. The skin does seem to have a pink undertone, which can be associated with European skin colour. Perhaps this single pair of hands on screen refers to designer Ingegerd Råman. The fingers first flex in a close-up, then the camera moves to an extreme close-up while the thumb rubs the other fingers. The shots of the hands show details such as fingerprints, little hairs, and fingernails. The muscles flex and the knuckles bend. These movements coincide with the narrator describing hands as strong, sensitive and flexible. The hands in the shots demonstrate those properties through movement.

Figure 3.1: single pair of hands



Part two

The middle part of the commercial lasts 28 seconds. The first part was relatable to the viewers as a pair of hands made movements the viewers could perform themselves. This second part moves into something more artistic and less realistic, as the hands multiply through animation. Another aspect that causes the loss of realism in this segment is the absence of the light source that was present in

the first 21 seconds. The background is completely black. While there are no windows or blue lighting, the hands are illuminated by an off-screen source of pale light. The colour temperature remains the same as in the beginning of the commercial. Also similar

to the previous part is the skin colour of the hands.



Figure 3.2: hands form an arc

At first, the viewer encounters a sea of hands in which the fingers all move like a school of fish: they share a rhythm but do not necessarily share direction. These shots seem chaotic, and coincide with the part of narrative that considers the hands inability to perform identical work at all times as a weakness. As soon as the narrator declares the weakness to actually be strength, the animation of the hands reflects this by shifting from chaos to uniform movements. First, the hands form two rows, each at an edge of the frame, they clasp and unclasp. The next shot shows multiplied pairs of hands that form an arc that moves towards and over the camera (see fig. 3.2). When the narrator states that the way each handmade object is different causes them to “feel the way they do”, the viewer once more encounters a sea of hands. The hands do not move chaotic, but twist around each other in a uniform manner. This uniformity of movement contradicts the glorification of being different that is implied by the narrative.



The final footage shows animated hands forming a spiralling tunnel through which the camera moves to reach the third part of the commercial in which several objects are shown (see fig. 3.3).

Figure 3.3: a tunnel of hands

Part three

The last 11 seconds of the commercial introduce the viewer to objects from the VIKTIGT collection. Three objects: a black, glass jug; the bamboo dish discussed in a previous chapter; and another, clear,

glass jug, are shown both with the dark background of the previous segment and with an exposition of other VIKTIGT objects in daylight. The objects are shown by hands that appear alternately on the left or right side of the frame. The hands are already in place when the shot begins, and make slight movements to create a dynamic in which the object both remains in place and moves slightly. The first shot of the black, glass jug has the hand holding the jug at an angle, the shape of a circle appears. The hand turns the jug so the viewer sees it from its side. The dish is shown frontally, so the viewer can clearly see the woven pattern. To illustrate the dish's depth, the hand makes a slight downward movement. The second glass jug is held by two hands and is only visible to the viewer once the first hand moves off-screen. The narration "easy on the hands", "naked", and "essential" each coincide

with one of the objects. The words do not necessarily seem to refer to the objects they are paired with. The glass jug in figure 3.4 is paired with the word 'essential'.



Figure 3.4: 'essential' glass jug

The last six seconds of the commercial enlighten the viewer as to what the commercial tries to sell. The words "VIKTIGT collection" and "handmade limited edition" appear on the screen. As a background to these words, the two jugs and the bamboo dish are once again held up by hands. The hands move into a space filled with other VIKTIGT objects. The mysterious atmosphere of the black background is exchanged for daylight (see fig. 3.5). As soon as the second jug is brought into the frame, IKEA's logo appears. There is no narration in this final part of the commercial, the viewer's eyes are now tasked with observing the context of the commercial's message: the feelings and ideas that were presented throughout the video are all encompassed in IKEA's new collection.



Figure 3.5: objects in daylight

Because the commercial takes its time to reveal the underlying goal of advertising the VIKTIGT collection, the effect of it is different from the commercial discussed in the previous chapter. Rather than just presenting the collection, the commercial seeks to instil an experience with the viewer. It takes the viewer on a journey that consecutively presents the hand as the finest tool ever made; a tool with a weakness of not being exact; and, finally, as the one and only tool that can make its creations feel a certain way because of their uniqueness. The viewer, who has hands, has plenty of time to experience the glorification of the hand and grow positive feelings towards the commercial. Because it is not specified exactly whose hands are described in the commercial, it in part flatters the viewer and the potential they have to create. This effect is strengthened by the haptic visuality in the shots of the hands. Unlike the lampshade in the previous chapter, the viewer does not encounter an object up close and experiences the texture of the visual manifestation through sense memories. Here, the movements of the hands on screen call upon the viewer's own muscle memory. Seeing the hands flex and bend causes the bodily reaction of reconsidering one's own hands and any movements they are able to make. Thus, Laura Marks's haptic visuality is not only applicable on memories of sensing, but also on the sensory organ of the hand itself. When it is finally revealed that the commercial's aim is to sell the VIKTIGT collection, the viewer's positive feelings are likely to influence their reception of the collection. The commercial advertises the collection by first creating a positive experience, through music, through hypnotizing footage and through a smooth and poetic narration, all of this together forms a transmission of affect. The viewer's emotions and memories are called upon, after which ideal conditions exist to introduce the viewer to the objects.

Handmade as preferred production mode

The commercial puts a strong emphasis on hands and objects that are handmade. At a certain point, the narrator refers to hands as being "unchallenged in their versatility". Because of the versatile nature of the hand's capabilities, the functions, symbolisms, and meanings that are ascribed to the hands are versatile as well. These may vary from culture to culture, but some general functions are shared across the world. Hands can sense textures and temperatures, can display a person's married status, and can identify a person through the uniqueness of their fingerprints. Hands can be adorned with ritualistic henna, with nail art, and jewellery. The hand can inflict injuries, both in a controlled environment as a sport, or in a fight. Hands can communicate through signs; those signs can form entire languages. In some cultures, hands are ascribed the ability to heal through touch. Some study the hand's lines and find information about the personality, fortune and future of an individual. And, as becomes clear throughout the commercial, hands are able to create objects that are unique because the hand is

unable to perform identical work. Opposite to creations of the hand, are objects created through machinal production. These objects will generally all be identical, the lack of uniqueness is presented as undesirable through the advertising of objects that are handmade. To present an object as handmade has several effects on consumers. These effects are discussed below.

One of the more curious areas in which notions such as ‘handmade’ influence consumers is in the food industry. Abouab and Gomez’s empirical study on food production modes illustrates the situation. In their article “Human contact imagined during the production process increases food naturalness perceptions” (2015), they prove how advertising a product through a discourse that implies human contact within the production process is beneficial to sales. The more food is processed, the less it is perceived as natural. To increase the consumer’s perception of naturalness, it helps to create the impression that the product was processed by hand instead of mechanically. An example used in the article is Starbucks’s soda drink *Fizzio*. Starbucks promotes this product with the slogan “Handcrafted drinks with sparkling personalities!”.³⁸ Abouab and Gomez argue that the naturalness of the product is not only established by the properties of the product itself (no preservatives, artificial flavours et cetera.); the product is also presented to the consumer as more natural because it is made by hand. Ascribing naturalness to human contact presents a paradox. Production processes that involve machinery are safe, and, when containing the same ingredients as a handmade product, does not alter the natural composition of food products (Abouab & Gomez 2015: 273). Teun van de Keuken, a journalist who is known for his scepticism towards the food industry, recently wrote a column in which he addressed the “hollow phrases” used to advertise food in supermarkets. Increasingly, products are being marketed as “according to grandmother’s recipe” or “handmade”. He argues that the ingenious mechanical production processes of today should be celebrated. Instead, they are hidden by putting labels on products that call to mind ideas of messy kitchens and old traditions. He also urges consumers to consider that “handmade”, especially when the product was made in low-wage countries, might very well indicate a life of sorrow and exploitation for the hands that created it.³⁹

What both Van de Keuken and Aoubab & Gomez do not elaborate upon is the connotations that come with discourses of ‘handmade’. IKEA addresses this briefly in their commercial when the narrator emphasises that handmade objects feel different. Fuchs, Schreier & Van Osselaer approach the handmade vs. machine-made debate by analysing what the perceived added value of a handmade object is compared to the same object that was presented as machine-made. Like Van de Keuken, they

³⁸This slogan can be found on Starbucks’s page for *Fizzio*: <http://www.starbucks.com.my/promo/fizzio>

³⁹Van de Keuken’s full opinion piece on handmade food in supermarkets can be found here: <http://www.volkskrant.nl/opinie/altijd-maar-handgemaakt-geef-mij-maar-machinaal~a4384019/>

address the curiousness of a market for handmade objects when machines are able to produce technically perfect and high quality products. In “The Handmade Effect: What’s Love Got to Do with It” (2015), the term ‘handmade effect’ is used to describe the attractiveness of handmade products. These objects are perceived to contain love. A pilot study shows that participants associate handmade objects with love, effort, quality, expensiveness and uniqueness. The four empirical studies that followed each tested the ‘handmade effect’ from a different perspective. The first study showed how the same product grew more attractive to participants when presented as being handmade, compared to when it was presented as machine-made or presented without mentioning the production mode. According to Fuchs, Schreier & Van Osselaer, this proves the existence of the handmade effect. The second study revealed that the inclination to purchase a handmade object is stronger when the object is intended as a gift for a loved one, as the handmade object is thought to contain love. The third study tied in with the previous results, this study showed that participants would rather gift an object that conveyed love than the best performing product available to them. This proves that quality is not the main driver in purchasing handmade objects, because value lies in the recipient’s understanding that the gift has come from love. Study four found that experiences of pride, happiness, contentment and authenticity are also connected to handmade objects. One of the conclusions of the research is that the handmade effect is driven to a significant extent by perceptions of artisanal love (Fuchs, Schreier & Van Osselaer 2015: 99-100).

While the ‘love’ argument was not brought forward directly in the commercial, the suggestion that handmade objects ‘feel’ different from any other object does imply the presence of touch and emotion. Ingegerd Råman did speak of love in the other VIKTIGT commercial. To her, the collection has “a lot of energy” and represents love. Those words by Råman are quoted often and it is one of the most prominent texts IKEA uses in presenting their collection. It is visible on websites, in the press guide, and in the book they published for anyone interested in Råman’s career and her work for IKEA. In line with Fuchs, Schreier & Van Osselaer’s argument that a handmade effect exists and depends largely on the perception of love in handmade objects, IKEA calls upon the ideas that might exist with consumers about handmade objects. By emphasising that handmade objects feel different and represent love, they instantly become more desirable than similar objects with different and unadvertised production processes.

Handmade as an experience

While the act of handmaking objects is older than nearly every man-made thing in the world, the status of handmade objects as the alternative to mass produced goods is relatively new. Another way to

explain why handmade objects are popular today, is by considering them part of a new economic system. In *The Experience Economy* (2011, 2nd ed.), Pine and Gilmore argue that both the industrial economy and the service economy have passed their peaks. Pine and Gilmore urge their readers to understand that goods and services are no longer enough. By this they mean that goods and services do not longer foster enough economic growth, create new jobs, and maintain economic prosperity. They state:

To realize revenue growth and increased employment, the staging of experiences must be pursued as a distinct form of economic output. Indeed, in a world saturated with largely undifferentiated goods and services the greatest opportunity for value creation resides in staging experiences (Pine and Gilmore 2011: 5-6).

Examples addressed by Pine and Gilmore of businesses that are successful with the experience approach include the Build-A-Bear workshops, Apple, and Starbucks. At Build-A-Bear, the consumer is offered a stronger bond with the object they purchase because they are involved in making decisions and in assembling the final product, which constitutes a personalized experience. Apple stores are designed to create the feeling of being in a luxurious hotel lobby, which makes shopping at their stores a different experience altogether. Starbucks offers a wide variety of options for the creation and customization of beverages. The making of the beverages by a barista and then receiving it in a cup with the consumer's name spelled (incorrectly) on it constitutes an experience. Businesses need to stage experiences for their consumers in order to remain successful. Every business is a stage, according to Pine and Gilmore, and therefore work is a theatre (Pine and Gilmore 2011: 29). Thus, not only the companies themselves need to embed a staged experience for their consumers, the employees need to perform according to the designed experience as if they are actors and actresses.

Experiences are co-created. IKEA is known for involving their consumers in the production process of objects by letting them assemble the final product at home. This not only results in lower production and transportation costs, but also causes the so-called IKEA effect. Norton, Mochon and Ariely describe the IKEA effect as "the increased valuation that people have for self-assembled products compared to objectively similar products which they did not assemble" (Norton, Mochon and Ariely 2011: 454). In one of the studies they conducted to prove the effect, participants made origami frogs and cranes that were auctioned with origamis created by other participants. The participants valued their own creations at 500 per cent higher than the general public. While the effect could happen with any object that oneself assembles, such as origami and a Build-A-Bear teddy, the effect is named after IKEA because of their worldwide presence and their well-known business structure involving self-assemble flatpacks.

With an emphasis on experience-oriented consumerism, the role of the consumer is altered in order to keep them engaged and interested. Alvin Toffler anticipated the rise of the ‘prosumer’ in his 1980 book *The Third Wave*. Toffler predicted that the roles of producer and consumer would merge as the highly-saturated marketplace with mass produced, standardized products would satisfy basic consumer demands. Both Toffler and Pine and Gilmore agree that to continue the growth of profit, businesses would have to make their goods customizable to the consumer. The experience of not being a consumer, but a prosumer, offers an added layer of motivation to choose a certain company and a certain product (Pine and Gilmore 2011: 20-21). IKEA adds to the experience of the consumer not only by having them assemble their own bed or wardrobe, the IKEA stores themselves are designed as an experience as well. The maze-like structure leads the visitor through scenes of living rooms and bedrooms, which call to mind various different ideas of what could be. At the epicentre of each store lies an IKEA restaurant. These restaurants are known for their breakfasts, Swedish meatballs, and above all, low prices. A trip to IKEA has become known as a nice outing for the whole family, the restaurant is a meeting place for people of all ages. The trip to IKEA ends with the consumer-gone-prosumer retrieving their chosen piece of furniture from the warehouse themselves, which is the start of their co-creation of that piece of furniture. Encountering the handcrafted VIKTIGT collection at IKEA constitutes an experience in itself. IKEA often makes a point of having their temporary collections on prominent displays so the consumer can hardly not notice them. Such a display could both communicate the limited availability of the collection, as well as the story of design and craftsmanship on which the advertising for VIKTIGT is based. Calling upon ‘handmade’ as the narrative through which the collection is presented, both in stores and in the commercial, offers an experience. As per the commercial, handmade objects feel different. This could be because of slight imperfections on the objects themselves, or because of the ideas that consumers have about what it means for an object to be handmade. However consumers might encounter the collection at an IKEA store, they will approach it with their own understanding of what meanings are inherently present in handmade objects.

Handmade as authentic

Another work by Pine and Gilmore, *Authenticity: What Consumers Really Want* (2007), offers a perspective on why handmade objects are desirable today. As the narrator in the commercial declared, handmade objects are never the same because hands are not exact. IKEA presents this as a positive quality of the VIKTIGT objects. Why would we see imperfections as a positive feature? Pine and Gilmore would argue it is because each unique imperfection makes the object more real, more authentic. The goal of their book on authenticity is to help business owners understand and manage

the perceptions consumers hold about what is real and what is fake, because people increasingly decide what to purchase based on how real or fake they perceive products to be. What is not addressed, is exactly what ‘real’ or ‘fake’ means. This is because the writers believe that, ultimately, the consumer will decide for themselves what is real or fake. According to Pine and Gilmore, these perceptions flow directly from how well any product conforms to the individual consumer’s self-image (Pine and Gilmore 2007: XI). This ties in with the field of material culture studies and its view that objects act as identifiers for their owners, but also for the larger movements of society to which they both belong. Daniel Miller’s research into the lives of Londoners through the discussion of their possessions attests to this. Woodward describes material culture as having the ability to signify things, to establish social meanings. Consumers are aware of that, perhaps subconsciously, and seek to buy the things that reflect who they are and who they aspire to be. An object that is immediately perceived as fake would not generally contribute to the construction of a person’s identity. An explanation for this growing longing for the real, for authenticity, can be found in the ways technology shapes human lives today. As our lives are becoming more and more intertwined with technology and the internet, direct human contact grows to be less common. To counter this movement, a longing for markers of a simpler and more personal life appear: we search for vintage, handmade and home-grown. Objects that carry such meanings function as a substitute for the loss of direct human contact. They offer an authentic experience in a world where our surroundings are becoming less real. The stories represented by handmade objects are, in part, a substitute for the person-to-person contact that seems to decrease constantly. Handmade objects encompass the knowledge that someone, somewhere in the world, has put their touch and effort into the creation of that object. While the exact origins of the object and the circumstances under which it was made might remain unclear, as with the VIKTIGT objects, the general idea of an authentic and personal encounter makes the objects desirable.

Conclusion

IKEA paints a portrait of the human hand as a versatile but inexact tool for creation. Versatility is demonstrated with the bending, flexing hands on the screen. This footage evokes recognition in the viewer, as they presumably have hands that can perform the same functions. Since it is not made clear whose hands are shown in the video, the viewer does not learn the objective behind the commercial until the very end, when it is revealed that those magnificent hands that perform a variety of movements are related to the VIKTIGT collection. The commercial’s aim is not just advertising the collection, but, more importantly, to evoke a positive feeling towards the creating hand.

Why does IKEA put an emphasis on the creating hand, rather than on the objects they try to sell? The commercial ties in with the demands of the market, which does not necessarily crave more products, but desires a new range of differently produced products. The growing demand for handmade objects can be explained from several perspectives. The aforementioned study by Fuchs, Schreier and Van Osselaer proved that a handmade effect exists, and depends largely on perceptions of artisanal love. Because consumers attach values of love to handmade objects, they are favoured above objects of higher quality when intended as a gift for loved ones. Following this logic, the idea that the VIKTIGT objects are handmade might be more of a marketable quality than the objects in themselves.

The changes in the market that create room for alternatively produced goods are explained by Pine and Gilmore. The duo explains the current craze for everything vintage, handmade and home-grown by presenting objects that fit within those categories as real. In a world that favours technology and internet over direct contact, the fake gains terrain on the real in people's minds. The recent explosion of 'fake news' attests to this.⁴⁰ A longing for authenticity is on the rise. As IKEA mentions in their commercial, no handmade object is exactly the same as the next one. Unique imperfections are proof that the object has been made by human hands and is imbued with their touch, effort, and perhaps even love. Imperfections show that an object is real, comes with a unique origin story, and is authentic. The growing market for handmade objects conforms to Pine and Gilmore's theory that goods and services are no longer enough. Consumers desire experiences. Handmade objects offer an experience in the sense that they are perceived to be more than just an object. They are also transmitters of love. And what is more authentic, more real, than an object that comes from love? If we are to believe Ingegerd Råman, the VIKTIGT collection is full of it.

⁴⁰ More information and statistics on fake news can be found via:
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/0/fake-news-origins-grew-2016/>

Conclusion

The research

This research has tried to answer the question in which ways IKEA represents the notions ‘craftsmanship’ and ‘handmade’ with the limited-edition collection VIKTIGT. This was done by analysing IKEA’s own representations of VIKTIGT, primarily through their advertising of the collection. IKEA’s representations were then explained by placing them in the context of scholarly debates with similar subjects. This all was done against the backdrop of the field of material culture studies, which is the study of artefacts and their meanings within cultures and societies.

Kopytoff’s method of writing a cultural biography for an object was employed to gain an understanding about the life and movements of a VIKTIGT object; a woven bamboo dish. It became clear that IKEA reveals more about the production of the dish than usual, as the designer and method of production are key to the marketing campaign. The vast majority of IKEA products are not presented as such, both the designer and production method are not considered relevant information for the consumer. However, much of the production of the dish still remains unknown. The origins of the raw material, the identity of the craftsmen, the site of production and labour circumstances, and the transportation of the dish are all not disclosed by IKEA. Especially the identity of the craftsmen and the experiences they had while creating the object are relevant in this case, as later chapters revealed that our understanding of the notions ‘craftsmanship’ and ‘handmade’ are heavily tied with the individual that creates objects which carry such labels. As Appadurai noted, the more complex an object’s journey grows, the more alienated producers and consumers get from one another. This is especially undesirable in the realm of craft objects, as the story of the craftsman that made the object is an integral part of the experience of buying handcrafted material culture. IKEA solves this by having a human face to represent the crafted collection in their marketing campaign; that of Ingegerd Råman, the designer. While this establishes for the consumer that the creation of the dish was a result of another person’s work, it also enforces the alienation between the craftsman and the consumer. The consumer might see Råman as the true creator, which obscures the fact that there were Vietnamese craftsmen involved in creating woven VIKTIGT objects. And so, IKEA honours the notion of craft without giving all the credit where it is due. Writing a cultural biography of the dish exposes the processes behind its creation that were later glossed over by the advertising of the dish.

In the chapter on craftsmanship, IKEA’s representation of craftsmanship was evaluated through the analysis of the VIKTIGT commercial in which Råman appears as both the narrator and protagonist. The narrative presents the collection as a harmonious collaboration between the designer and the

craftsmen, which results in the creation of objects that contain energy and love. Through various camera movements and mise-en-scenes, a different understanding of the VIKTIGT collection arises. The Western designer and Eastern craftsmen were juxtaposed through the differences in their portrayal. Råman was presented as the individual genius, a person of vision and noble goals. The craftsmen in the commercial never received agency and existed purely by the grace of the designer, who is always their centre of attention. Råman was portrayed as the bringer of Western culture, Western design, reducing the craftsmen to mere hands that do not need their own ideas or inspiration to create. IKEA thus values craft from the developed and the developing world on different scales. The craftsman-designer Råman receives admiration for her skills and designs, while the craftsmen who in truth created the physical manifestations of Råman's designs remain largely anonymous.

In the commercial, IKEA called upon the general understanding of craftsmanship as an alternative and favourable mode of production, as has been its status since the Industrial Revolution. The ideas that are attached to imperfect and unique objects of craft still attract consumers in a time of plentiful, perfect, machine-made objects. This attraction can be explained from different angles. Benjamin's concept of a thing's aura and Krugh's argument that the appeal of craft lies with the personality of the maker focus on both the object and the maker. The appeal can also be explained by focussing on the consumer's interaction with the crafted object. Both Lijster and Miller see objects as vessels for self-expression, as building blocks in the construction of identities. Choosing a crafted object identifies the consumer as a person who desires a more ethical mode of production, and owning a unique object contributes to the construction of one's own unique identity. The fact that VIKTIGT's craftsmen remain anonymous causes that consumers who purchase something from the collection will never know the full life story of the object. The craftsmen are denied recognition for their skilled labour, while the consumer is not offered the knowledge to value the object to its full potential, reducing the object's ability of aiding the construction of the consumer's identity.

The chapter on the making hand starts with an analysis of the second VIKTIGT commercial. This commercial is an ode to hands, and appears not to sell anything. Instead, it seeks to form a positive experience for the viewer. This is done through uplifting music, hypnotizing footage, and through a poetically delivered monologue that all praise the creating hand. Just as the commercial aims to offer an experience, so do handmade objects. Consumers value the idea that another human has put time and effort into the creation of an object that they buy or give. Handmade objects are thought to contain love, to encompass a feeling of authenticity that lacks in machine-made objects, and to tell stories through their imperfections, their uniqueness. The handmade object conforms to a new market in which, according to Pine and Gilmore, consumers do not want more, but different goods. Merely

buying a product no longer holds all attraction, the consumer desires objects to encompass experiences. Whether that is through the performance of acquiring that object, or through learning of its unique and interesting backstory. And the more details about an object are known to the consumer, the more its authentic status might grow. IKEA appears to recognize this shift in the market, as they hardly show any of the VIKTIGT objects in their second commercial. Rather, they focus on communicating that the objects were handmade by skilled creators and thus feel different from machine-made objects.

What both VIKTIGT commercials fail to show, however, is whose hands exactly are responsible for the creation of the objects. It is easy to assume that a craftsman has passion for his craft and creates objects from a place of love, as craft is considered a leisure activity in the Western world. When one considers the size of IKEA as a company, and the scale on which objects would have to be produced in order to supply all of their 389 stores, romantic ideas about handmade objects in these stores might change. The scale implies an industrial sized production process, which transforms imaginations of happy and fulfilled crafters into scenes of tedious manual labour. It would not be fair to assume that the large-scale production inherently means bad circumstances for the craftsmen that are hired to produce the VIKTIGT collection. Perhaps a fairer assumption is that the intentions and care that went into the creation of those products were different from what one might expect upon hearing that an object was made by hand. The VIKTIGT collection might be a result of Råman's love for craft and simplistic design, but it is most definitely a result of craftsmen that simply performed skilled work in order to earn an income.

Here the question comes into play what meanings are intrinsically present in a crafted object. Are the meanings attached to it though the creation by its maker still present when the consumer has no clue about the production process? Is meaning something that is created by marketing departments? Or is meaning added by the consumer's own conception of what it means for an object to be handmade, and does that meaning thus vary depending on the consumer that purchases the object? It can be argued that an object contains different meanings for different people during the course of its life. Those meanings might remain within the object as visible and tangible traces that the object once was in the hands of another human. We look at crafted objects and imagine their unique life stories, enlivened by the touch of humans that held the object before we encounter it. The life story of VIKTIGT objects is not completely unknown to us, but we can only imagine the true role, touch, and feelings of the craftsmen that made those objects, as IKEA does not share their story.

Findings

This finally brings me to answering the question of how IKEA represents ‘craftsmanship’ and ‘handmade’ with their VIKTIGT collection. IKEA utilises general understandings of both notions to advertise their collection. Without showing the detailed truths behind the production process, snippets of video and carefully chosen words demonstrate that the collection was indeed a result of harmonious collaboration between modern design and traditional crafts, resulting in unique objects that contain an essence of love. These general understandings of craftsmanship and handmaking were formed during the Industrial Revolution, where crafting became known as a superior alternative to dehumanizing and alienating factory labour. Because of the personal involvement with handmade objects, especially compared to mass-produced commodities from factories, the crafted commodity gained a special status amongst other instances of material culture. The human involvement is thought to show through slight imperfections in each handmade object, distinguishing them from perfectly identical and soulless machine-made objects. Through these unique imperfections, the craftsman’s passion and skill show, which allow the objects to become embodiments of love.

IKEA uses the general understandings described above in their representations of ‘craftsmanship’ and ‘handmade’. They have little regard for the problematics that come with those understandings, as addressed through several scholarly texts within this research. Betjemann’s observation of the paradox of craftsmanship comes into play here. As Ruskin once decided that the crafted object’s attraction comes from minuscule imperfections, the craftsman would harm their object’s desirability by mastering their craft and reaching a point of perfection in their creations. IKEA glorifies imperfections and shows disregard for what Sennett sees as the essence of craftsmanship: the desire to do a job well for its own sake. Imperfections are implicitly encouraged, as they are the proof that human hands have created the objects. IKEA could have opted for a different narrative in advertising their collection, they could have put an emphasis on the craftsmen behind the collection. As handmade objects are considered to gain attractiveness from the piece of the crafter’s identity that goes into creating them, telling the stories of how the craftsmen learned their skills and created the collection would have been a viable option to present VIKTIGT as a collection of craft. Rather, IKEA put all emphasis on the crafter-designer Ingegerd Råman. In presenting this Swedish woman as the centre of the collection, IKEA failed to represent craftsmanship to its full extent. While the designer’s part in the process of creating VIKTIGT is emphasised, the craftsmen are not allowed to fully represent their role in the process. Their presence is dependent on Råman’s actions, their work is not shown at all. The commercial that speaks about craftsmanship does not show craftsmen creating VIKTIGT objects. The commercial that brings an ode to the creating hand does so by showing hands that do anything but creating. IKEA calls upon

the notions of craftsmanship and handmade and implements only the aspects that fit with the narrative they attach to the VIKTIGT collection.

The portrayal of craft by IKEA is in part problematic because it denies agency to Eastern crafters, while a Western designer, whose expertise was not related to the traditional craft of weaving, is presented as the centre of attention. Footage of this fell nothing short of a colonialist, Eurocentric display. The denial of agency and the lack of representation of those craftsmen demonstrate a larger phenomenon: Western crafters are able to create and sell not only their product, but also their identity, and gain success through the combination of both. A similar crafted object from the East (or any other developing region) will more likely be commissioned by a company and sold at stores for a fraction of the price at which Western crafters sell their goods, as the Eastern crafter's identity is taken out of the equation.

Through the study of material culture, much can be learned of the time and cultures in which certain objects were popular. These days, the prevalence of products that have come into the market in a non-industrial manner show a desire for different and generally less harmful production processes. The re-using of objects in the vintage movement and the popularity of Etsy are examples of this. The rise of the craftsman's popularity and the demand for handmade objects can also serve as an example for that desire. IKEA's VIKTIGT collection fits into a market where consumers do not necessarily want more things, but desire their possessions to be more than just an object, to encompass an experience. Through Råman's point of view, the objects are advertised to embody energy and love. As the consumer never learns about the craftsmen responsible for handmaking the objects, any experience of energy or love has to happen on the level of the consumer's interaction with the objects. The consumer will, with influence of the marketing campaign, attach meaning and value to the objects through their own understanding of what handcrafted material culture entails.

Process and further research

The results of this research as described above are also the result of a series of choices. A question was asked, certain theories and methods were chosen to answer it. This research focussed on discovering and understanding IKEA's representation of the notions 'craftsmanship' and 'handmade' in their VIKTIGT collection. By choosing to study the representation of handmade objects and the meanings that came with their representation, the research was placed within the field of material culture studies. Research into the developments within that field unveiled that not only man's attitude towards objects is flexible, the theorizing about that subject is ever-changing as well. Understanding

the history of thinking about material culture helped to place the more specific evolution of the notions of craftsmanship and handmaking into perspective.

This research worked with representations, not with physical objects. That choice was made because the representations of the VIKTIGT collection as provided by IKEA are available to all, the objects that belong to the collection had a limited availability and were long sold out by the time this research commenced. Another choice made in this research was to focus on the production and representation of the objects in general, rather than the specific life of one or more objects from the collection. If this research had focussed on a physical object, more precise observations about traces of craft and handmaking could have been made, which could then later have functioned as an example in discussing the collection and its representations as a whole. By writing the cultural biography of the representations of the VIKTIGT dish, I learned much about the raw materials, skills needed for the production, and the journey of the dish up until its arrival at stores, which was perhaps its final phase of being a commodity. It would also have been a possibility to search for someone who had purchased the dish. Learning about their motivations and the meanings they saw in that object would have constituted another angle of researching material culture, as meaning is also created by the consumer.

The two chapters that each contain the analysis of a commercial and a review of scholarly texts concerning the notions ‘craftsmanship’ and ‘handmade’ dealt mostly with representations. IKEA’s choices in representing both notions strongly romanticised the idea of what it means for craftsmen to create by hand. Though these representations were discussed broadly, an angle received less attention. The difficult relationship between the designer and the craftsman was an example of how craft from the developed and developing world remains unequal. While this is an interesting topic of research, it would not have suited this research to elaborate on it extensively. It is therefore a topic which could be an interesting subject for further research. That inequality between crafters from different parts of the world we still see today, mainly manifests itself in the presence or absence of information about the person who crafted the object. The identity of the crafter might only be considered of interest when the consumer experiences learning about it as something positive, something they can personally relate to. Ingrid Bachmann sees the inequality as an extreme irony within the realm of craft, I very much agree with that sentiment. While craft’s history predates perhaps any written account of it, the act of importing crafted objects that originate through different cultures and traditions across the world is relatively new. Ever since the formal end of colonialism rendered more autonomy for developing countries, there remains a hierarchy between the developed and developing world, a form of neo-colonialism. It would be interesting to further explore topics of craftsmanship and identity against the background of the current inequality between the developed and developing world.

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