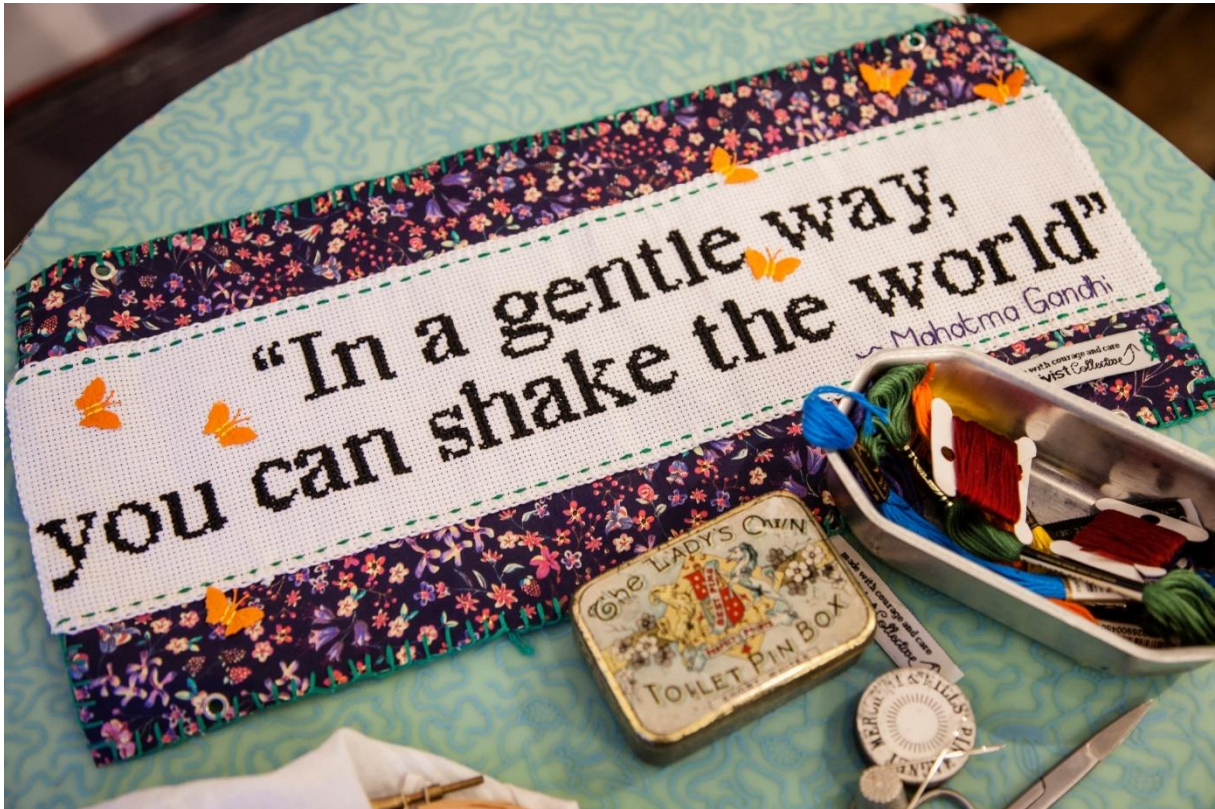


# Crafting Protest

Craftivism as Soft Feminist Activism



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April 18, 2019

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## Summary

The term Craftivism was coined by Betsy Greer in 2003. She defines craftivism as “[...] a way of looking at life where voicing opinions through creativity makes your voice stronger, your compassion deeper & your quest for justice more infinite.”<sup>1</sup> Craftivism is rising in popularity, because it connects to our highly visual online culture. Unlike online activism (click-tivism), however, it is not an effortless, often short-term and anonymous action. Craftivism takes time and creates personal messages that open up a conversation in contrast to the anonymous criticizing that takes place on the internet.

In this thesis, I suggest viewing craftivism as an activist tool which calls for the research of individual cases instead of looking at craftivism as a coherent practice. Not all craft projects are craftivist, they need to be motivated by a long-term goal of structural change. Moreover, since craftivism is a tool for activism it can be used for contradictory purposes, because activism spans a wide range of causes from women’s rights to the ban on abortion. Due to the historic connotations of craft as a demure female pastime, however, I propose that it can be very appropriate for feminist activism as a means to subvert the dominant outlook on femininity. The craftivist movement inverts the meaning of craft, like other social justice movements have done, by appropriating and re-signifying negative and oppressive language as happened, for example, with the word “queer” for the LGBTQI movement who made the term that was once hurtful their own.

Kingdom, namely the Pussyhat Project, the Evil Eyes Project and the “Don’t Blow It” campaign. These cases form different types of craftivist protest that cater to varying issues. Within this thesis the connection of craftivism to third wave feminism and postfeminism will be explored. The case-studies are critically examined and pitfalls of postfeminism and neoliberalism are laid bare, since craftivism is influenced by both. The practice of craftivism is still relatively young and in transition. This thesis

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<sup>1</sup> “Craftivism Definition,” Craftivism, accessed February 2, 2018, <http://craftivism.com/definition/>.

aims for a deeper understanding but also opens up a plethora of cases to be studied in the future and questions to be asked about craftivism.

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# 1. Introduction

During the last decade the Do-It-Yourself (DIY)-ethic has risen in prominence. People have started growing their own foods and making their own clothes again, which was self-evident in the period up until and during the first part of the industrial revolution. The DIY-ethic, however, can be traced back to the Situationist International, Hippies, Second Wave Feminists and the Punk scene.<sup>2</sup> The DIY-ethic developed with the rise of counter-cultural movements that valued personal agency and often rejected the commodification of society.<sup>3</sup> This ethic led to what has come to be termed “craftivism” in which it is used for a vaster array of political and social causes. One of the most prominent current instances of craftivism occurred during the Women’s March on the 19<sup>th</sup> of January 2017 in Washington in protest against Donald Trump’s presidency. Thousands of women wore pink, home-made knitted or crocheted hats that were subsequently dubbed “pussyhats”. The pattern for the pussyhat was created in reaction to Donald Trump’s comment on how he felt free to “grab [women] by the pussy”, in which pussy is a derogatory term for the female genitalia.<sup>4</sup> The motivation behind the pussyhat was to enhance the visibility of women’s rights and to create a safe space for discussion of sexual violence against women. Moreover, it represented a means for people to participate even if they could not be physically present by knitting hats and sending them to people at the protest.<sup>5</sup> The pussyhat project is just one example of craftivism and should be placed within the larger current political context of feminist activism. It is a predecessor to the global campaign against female sexual harassment, including the #metoo and #timesup campaigns, that are the vanguard of the contemporary feminist movement.

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<sup>2</sup> Julia Downes, “Riot Grrl: The legacy and contemporary landscape of DIY feminist cultural activism,” in *Riot Grrrl: Revolution Girl Style Now!* by Nadine Monem (London, Black Dog Publishing: 2017) 16-8.

<sup>3</sup> Matt Ratto and Megan Boler, “Introduction,” in *DIY Citizenship: Critical Making and Social Media*, ed. Matt Ratto and Megan Boler (Cambridge, The MIT press, 2014), 1-10.

<sup>4</sup> “Our Story,” *Pussyhat Project*, accessed March 27, 2018, <https://www.pussyhatproject.com/our-story/>.

<sup>5</sup> Jayna Zweiman, “The Project of Pussyhat,” *Pussyhat Project*, January 14, 2018, <https://www.pussyhatproject.com/pussyhatresponse>.

The #metoo started off on October the 15<sup>th</sup> in 2017 in response to the allegations against film director Harvey Weinstein ten days earlier, who was accused of sexual abuse. The hashtag received much media-attention and opened up the opportunity for women to speak up about sexual abuse situations especially when the man in question was in a position of power.<sup>6</sup> Comedian and black rights activist Bill Cosby was the first to be convicted after the rise of the #metoo. The multiple incidents ranged over a period of sixty years. It is argued that due to #metoo the court and jury were more open to hearing the victims.<sup>7</sup> Shortly after in the fall of 2017 during the Golden Globes Award Ceremony prominent actresses came up with the #timesup movement to put a halt to situations of abuse in power relations. What first started out with a focus on the movie business grew out to recognition to women in all walks of life and professions who had fallen prey to sexual misconduct.<sup>8</sup> The historical impact of the pussyhat movement is greater than previously imagined, since it foreshadowed these anti-sexual harassment campaigns that have now emerged as the hallmark of modern feminism.

The term 'craftivism' was coined by Betsy Greer in 2003. She defines craftivism as "[...] a way of looking at life where voicing opinions through creativity makes your voice stronger, your compassion deeper & your quest for justice more infinite."<sup>9</sup> Instead of just using one's voice to advocate one's viewpoint one can also use one's creativity. Through craftivism, new bonds are forged between people whose attention is grasped by the homemade products, over the subject these products are informed by and through the process of making them, in a time where (real) personal connections can seem distant.<sup>10</sup> Craftivism is rising in popularity, because it connects to the highly visual online culture. Unlike online activism (click-tivism), however, it is not an effortless, often short-

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<sup>6</sup> Sandra Gonzalez, Lisa Respers France and Chloe Melas, "The year since the Weinstein scandal first rocked Hollywood." *CNN*, October 4, 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/04/05/entertainment/weinstein-timeline/index.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Graham Bowley and Jon Hurdle, "Bill Cosby Is Found Guilty of Sexual Assault," *The New York Times*, April 26, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/26/arts/television/bill-cosby-guilty-retrial.html>.

<sup>8</sup> "History," *Time's Up*, accessed March 13, 2019, <https://www.timesupnow.com/history>.

<sup>9</sup> "Craftivism Definition," *Craftivism*, accessed February 2, 2018, <http://craftivism.com/definition/>.

<sup>10</sup> Betsy Greer, "Craftivism," in *Encyclopaedia of Activism and Social Justice*, ed. Gary L. Anderson and Kathryn G. Herr, (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2007) 401-2, doi: 10.4135/9781412956215.n218.

term and anonymous action. Craftivism takes time and creates personal messages that open up conversations instead of anonymously criticizing over the internet. Due to the visual nature of craftivism however, the discussions can be disseminated online by posting about the actions of craftivists.<sup>11</sup>

Craftivism is the combination of craft and activism. *Activism* is “The policy or action of using vigorous campaigning to bring about social or political change.”<sup>12</sup> Craftivist campaigning entails planned activities over time that cater towards achieving the goal of changing the political landscape but also altering the current cultural, behavioural and/or societal values.<sup>13</sup> Following Christina Neumayer and Jakob Svensson there are four types of activists that can be placed along two axes. The first axis is based on the subjects’ willingness to engage in civil disobedience. Civil disobedience can be violent and non-violent, ranging from property damage to leaking information, this type of disobedience inherently carries some risk, which makes it different from, for example, signing an online petition.<sup>14</sup> The second axes is about the way the subject identifies the other either as an enemy or as an adversary that should be listened to. Following Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau a part of conflict is identification, establishing us and them. Mouffe suggest viewing the other as an adversary, thus creating agonism instead of antagonism. These result in four different types of activists that are not necessarily mutually exclusive as can be seen in figure 1.

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<sup>11</sup> Sarah Corbett and Sarah Housley, “The Craftivist Collective Guide to Craftivism,” *Utopian Studies* 22, no 2 (2011): 348-9.

<sup>12</sup> Sarah Corbett, “Craftivism,” *How To Be A Craftivist: the art of gentle protest* (Londen; Unbound, 2017) 13.

<sup>13</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>14</sup> Christina Neumayer and Jakob Svensson, “Activism and Radical Politics in the Digital Age: Towards a Typology,” *Convergence* 22, no 2 (2016): 131-135, DOI: 10.1177/1354856514553395.





Figure 1: Typology of activism in the digital age, Neumayer, Christina and Jakob Svensson. "Activism and Radical Politics in the Digital Age: Towards a Typology." *Convergence* 22, no 2 (2016): 140. DOI: 10.1177/1354856514553395.

The 'salon activist' views the other as an enemy that should be fought rather than accepted and characteristically does not engage in civil disobedience. The second type is the 'contentious activist' who will take part in civil disobedience but, like the salon activist, views the other as the enemy.<sup>15</sup> "The law-abiding activist has a strong political opinion, has a clear political position and engages in political participation."<sup>16</sup> This type of activist does not engage in civil disobedience. "[T]his activist type engages in a participatory democratic discourse, which in itself signals a greater willingness to conceive of the *other* as an adversary to discuss with [emphasis in original]."<sup>17</sup> Lastly the "Ghandian activist" will engage in civil disobedience in order to achieve change, whilst viewing the other as an adversary and accept plural views.<sup>18</sup> This type of activist, that is inspired by the actions of Mahatma Ghandi, will like Ghandi be less likely to engage in violence, even though it can be part of civil

<sup>15</sup> Christina Neumayer and Jakob Svensson, "Activism and Radical Politics in the Digital Age," 139-140.

<sup>16</sup> Christina Neumayer and Jakob Svensson, "Activism and Radical Politics in the Digital Age," 140.

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>18</sup> Christina Neumayer and Jakob Svensson, "Activism and Radical Politics in the Digital Age," 141.

disobedience. The craftivist can best be understood as the 'law-abiding activist' although not all craftivist actions are strictly legal. The authors do remark that this type of activism risks hiding underlying power structures, a point that will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

*Crafting* takes skill to make something mostly by hand. Craftivism uses skills to create positive change. The act of using these skills results in a tactile product that is characterised by its discursive purpose rather than its practical functionality such as a sweater being capable of making its wearer warm. By making something visually attractive, the attention is grabbed by the onlooker, which is followed by interaction and reflection. Crafts have a meditative and repetitive character that opens up the space to contemplate and discuss where issues come from and what can be done. Craftivism is a long-term commitment to social and/or political change that involves critical thinking throughout the process. It is a part of the activism toolkit in the sense that it is a form of activism or tool that can be used, but does not necessarily oppose other types of activism.<sup>19</sup> Protest marches can for instance be combined with craftivism as was visible during the Women's march where both tactics strengthen the activism and its outcome.

Craftivism has not received much attention from the academia albeit being a growing movement with the potential of transgressing multiple cultures, since practically each culture has a connection to craft. From Delft's Blauw in the Netherlands and French lace, to the vast tradition of quilting by African-American women, each culture has their own crafts and traditions that overlap but are also specific to these cultures. It is important to understand craftivism's relationship to art practice and to know if it is able to travel to and across other cultures. We also need to understand the movement's politics more deeply to see how craftivism can be engaged with now and in the future to know if it is sustainable in the long term. Within this research craftivism in the United States of America and the United Kingdom will be researched, since that is where it originated, in order to come to a better understanding of craftivism as a tool for soft feminist activism.

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<sup>19</sup> Sarah Corbett, "Craftivism," 19.

## 1.1 Theoretical Framework

The research for this study has been conducted by way of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Mainly written texts on craftivism such as manifestos, blog posts, journalistic articles, theoretical texts and linked discourses such as third wave feminism, postfeminism and neoliberalism have been crucial to an understanding of craftivism as soft feminist activism. The positionality of the researcher as a heterosexual white Western woman results in a privileged position which can lead to a blind-eye towards people who are affected on multiple fronts in terms of their race, gender and/or sexuality. Hence being attentive to intersectionality is of great importance to this research. The texts used in this research, especially for the case-studies, are representations of subjects, which can help detect power relations, however, the researcher is aware of the fact that a representation is never exactly the same as the represented subject and hence is not a perfect representation.<sup>20</sup>

The second chapter will go into detail about craftivism, its historical background and founders. Although craftivism is researched as a feminist practice, this aspect of craftivism will be extended on in the third chapter. This divide has been made in order to lay a base of what craftivism entails in the second chapter, enabling more extensive analysis in the third chapter of the craftivist practices with the knowledge of the feminist theory. The researcher will conduct a first case study research into the Pussyhat Project, Evil Eyes for the March for our lives<sup>21</sup> and “Don’t Blow It”<sup>22</sup> project in the second chapter. These cases were all situated in the global west, more specifically the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (USA). The aforementioned examples are especially compelling examples since they are recent, initiated by prominent people in the craftivism

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<sup>20</sup> Chris Barker & Dariusz Galansinski, “Tools for Discourse Analysis,” *Cultural Studies and Discourse Analysis* (London: Sage Publications, 2001) 64-7.

<sup>21</sup> AJ Willingham, “Why you’ll see a lot of ‘evil eye’ gloves at the March For Our Lives,” *CNN*, March 24, 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/03/23/us/evil-eye-gloves-march-for-our-lives-trnd/index.html>.

<sup>22</sup> Helen Le Caplain, “Don’t blow it! Campaigners host Marks & Spencer hanky stitch-ins across UK to urge retail giant to pay living wage,” *SWLondoner*, June 25, 2015, <http://www.swlondoner.co.uk/dont-blow-it-campaigners-host-marks-spencer-hanky-stitch-ins-across-uk-to-urge-retail-giant-to-pay-living-wage/>.

movement and well covered in the media. Moreover, the craftivism movement was started in the USA and UK, which is why it seems logical to use examples from these countries. Within the scope of this research the number of cases needs to be limited to three. In this chapter the work of Sarah Corbett, who is the founder of the Craftivist Collective, a worldwide network of craftivists, and Betsy Greer, who coined the term craftivism, will be analysed as well as the three case-studies and the historical background of craftivism.

The third chapter is on craftivism as a feminist practice. In the first section the feminist waves will be historically positioned, thus creating a broader overview, after which the connection between craftivism, third wave feminism and postfeminism will be explored in the second section. Moreover, both postfeminism and third wave feminism will be critically assessed in relation to craftivism. The term 'intersectionality' will also be of importance. The work of Kimberlé Crenshaw on intersectionality is instructive. Furthermore, Laura Portwood-Stacer's critique in *Do-It-Yourself Feminism: Feminine Individualism and the Girlie Backlash in the DIY/Craftivism Movement* will be used to gain insights into the discussion of the feminist craftivism movement. The book *New Femininities: Postfeminism Neoliberalism and Subjectivity* by Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff will prove valuable in terms of positioning postfeminism and gaining insights in relation to neoliberalism which the researcher will argue influences the practice of craftivism. Rosalind Gills notion as postulated in the "Postfeminist Media Culture, elements of a sensibility" of postfeminism as a sensibility with its focus on the self, choice and empowerment will prove insightful. This in turn will be linked to Angela Mc Robbie's notion of 'double entanglement'. This is followed by a second more extensive analysis of the case-studies.

In the final chapter the researcher will conclude with an argument for understanding craftivism as a tool for soft feminist activism. This will be succeeded by recommendations for further research and future practice.

## 2. Craftivism

### 2.1 Historical Background: from knitting circles to punk

The historical background of craftivism can be divided into two main strands. On the one hand, there is the history of craft which has been a part of women's skillset for centuries. On the other hand, there is a younger strand that originates with the Situationist International that promotes the Do-It-Yourself (DIY)-ethic. This latter strand is less connected to the traditionally female skill of crafting, but does have strong discursive qualities that resonate within craftivism. Crafting in this sense is an art-discursive practice like a movement, whilst the former strand of craft is understood as a domestic practice.

Another important aspect of craftivism is feminism. The relationship of women to craft has evolved over time and is influenced by feminism. At first it belonged to a woman's identity to be able to craft. It was a quality that was praised in women and made them desirable for marriage. The suffragettes in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century used craft to set themselves apart in protest and convey their political standpoints. The feminists of the 1970's however freed women of their oppressive domestic role of which crafts such as knitting were a big part, hence crafting was discredited. Nowadays almost half a century later, women return to these domestic skills and reappropriate them by using crafts as a political tool. One modern examples of using craft as a political tool that predates craftivism, but with firm grounding in century old practices is the AIDS memorial quilt that was made in 1987. The technique and tradition of using quilting as a means of expression is an important aspect of African American women.<sup>23</sup> The AIDS quilt was made to ask attention for the AIDS pandemic and was made

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<sup>23</sup> Elsa Barkley Brown, "African-American women's quilting: A framework for conceptualizing and teaching African-American women's history," *Signs* 14, no. 4 (1989): 926.

out of more than 6000 panels with the names of people who died because of AIDS on them.<sup>24</sup> The feminist aspect will be elaborated on in the next chapter.

## Crafting

From the sixteenth century on, crafts were categorized as feminine domestic arts that would become almost a part of a women's identity. During the Renaissance in Europe the division between male and female conduct became stronger. The humanist view prevailed that men and women were each other's counterparts and that they therefore should be opposites (strength and robustness vs. softness and tenderness).<sup>25</sup> Crafting denoted female activities that were meant to be performed in the home in contrast to male activities in public. Whereas craft for lower-class women served a practical function, the elite classes used it mostly to promote their good qualities as a woman such as their 'delicate tenderness,' humility and obedience. Moreover, there was a distinction between the crafts, where stitching was practiced by all women and the skill of embroidery was perceived as a sign of status.<sup>26</sup> The knitting circles had the same function for white middle- and upper-class European women as the French salons or English coffee houses had for (European) men as a discursive space in which any common concerns could be discussed.

Besides being a suitable pastime for aristocratic women, craft was a necessary skill before the industrial revolution to produce goods such as clothing. The crafts, however, were used as well as a political statement and taken into the public sphere. An early example can be found in the United States during the colonial period. Britain had increased the taxes on British goods in 1765, which was called the Stamp Act, causing the prices of all paper goods to rise exponentially. The colonies were obliged to purchase British goods, which they began to boycott. This in turn led to 'spinning

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<sup>24</sup> "The History of the Quilt," *The Aids Memorial Quilt*, accessed April 5, 2019, <https://www.aidsquilt.org/about/the-aids-memorial-quilt>.

<sup>25</sup> Rozsika Parker, "The Domestication of Embroidery," in *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2010) 60-61

<sup>26</sup> Rozsika Parker, "The Domestication of Embroidery," 60-4.

meetings' which were political demonstrations against the raised taxes where cloth was spun by hand instead of imported from England. In contrast to the usually domestic and more secluded act of crafting that was confined to the private sphere of the household, women gathered in great numbers to these meetings in public. The women who managed to clothe their family entirely in home-made or recycled garments were called patriots. This title was formerly only reserved for men; however, many women did not want to be seen as part of a political act.<sup>27</sup>

Another significant moment in the history of craftivism is the rise of the Arts and Crafts movement in the United Kingdom that has been influential in the rethinking of the uses of craft. Where the spinning meetings were more so a means to an end, one of the main goals of the Arts and Crafts movement was to change perspectives and elevate the appreciation for crafts. Moreover, the movement was against industrialization. It was founded in the 1860s by William Morris who was an artist and designer who believed strongly in socialist ideals. His principles were unity in design, individualism, joy in labour and regionalism. Unity in design concerns the function of the object, Morris believed that the aesthetic value should not compromise the use-value of an object. Individualism as a principle moves against the mechanical mass produce of the factory in favour of unique hand-made pieces. Joy in labour refers to the credit that one should get for their work, because in his time male designers received all praise whilst women were often instrumental in creating the pieces. Lastly regionalism promotes the use of local and natural materials instead of importing them.<sup>28</sup> The Art and Crafts movement shows many signs of being anti-industrialization. Their aim was to revive the appreciation for crafts and change the general public's attitude towards consumption. The products that were made within the movement did not only serve a practical but

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<sup>27</sup> Tove Hermanson, "Knitting as Dissent: Female Resistance in America Since the *Revolutionary War*," *Textile Society of America*, 3th Biennial Symposium, September 2012, Washington DC, <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1695&context=tsaconf>.

<sup>28</sup> Micaela Hardy-Moffat, "Feminism and the Art of "Craftivism": Knitting for Social Change under the Principles of the Arts and Crafts Movement," in CUJAH no 5, December 16, 2012, <http://cujah.org/past-volumes/volume-v/essay3-volume5/>.

rather a discursive purpose. The Arts and Crafts movement gained popularity during the late 1800s in the rest of Europe, North America and Japan.<sup>29</sup>

A clear example of protesting using the appearance of the crafted products can be found in the handwork of the British suffragette movement in the early 1920's which was informed by the arts and crafts movement.<sup>30</sup> The Artists' Suffrage League was established in 1907 to campaign for women's rights to vote and involved many artists such as Emily Ford. Two years later the Suffrage Atelier was formed to attract women who were not professional artists. This was closely related to the Women's Freedom League and Women's Social and Political Union.<sup>31</sup> The atelier motivated the use of arts and crafts by all women as a means to communicate their standpoint on women's suffrage. Different from trade union banners, which were merely words stencilled on cloth, theirs were embroidered, appliquéd and stencilled showcasing their craftsmanship.<sup>32</sup> The suffragettes, as these women were called, worked to make their propaganda as striking as possible in favour of women's suffrage. The banners were carried in processions that were meant to attract attention and engage the public, which is why the visual aspect was very important.<sup>33</sup> Since craftwork was typically bound to the home, the opportunity to showcase the work was scarce. Hence these protests were an excellent opportunity to do so and displayed great skill as portrayed in figure 2, figure 3 and figure 4 on the following pages. The suffragette history is also part of feminist history, this is one of the first instances where the two meet. This link will be further explored in section 3.1.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>30</sup> Ann Rippin, Paula Hyde, "Sewing in Management and Organisation Research: The Subversive Stitch and the Politics of Cloth Revisited," in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Business and Management Research Methods*, eds. Catherine Cassell, Ann L. Cunliffe, Gina Grandy (London: Sage, 2018) 372.

<sup>31</sup> Artists Suffrage League, *arbiogs.co.uk*, accessed April 20, 2018, <https://www.artbiogs.co.uk/2/organizations/artists-suffrage-league>.

<sup>32</sup> Myna Trustman, "Banners of the British Labour Movement," BBC, February 17, 2011, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/empire\\_seapower/banners\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/empire_seapower/banners_01.shtml).

<sup>33</sup> Elizabeth Crawford, "Silk, Satin and Suffrage," YouTube Video, The Women's Library, LSE Library collections Museum of London, directed by Alison Ramsey, 10:18, February 6, 2018, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wqske-CilAY&feature=player\\_embedded](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wqske-CilAY&feature=player_embedded).





Figure 2: Suffrage Ephemera (Kate Parry Fye Collection), <https://womanandhersphere.com/tag/books-and-ephemera-by-and-about-women-womens-suffrage/>.



Figure 3: Suffragettes making banners: 1910, <http://www.museumoflondonprints.com/image/400816/worlds-graphic-press-ltd-suffragettes-making-banners-1910>.

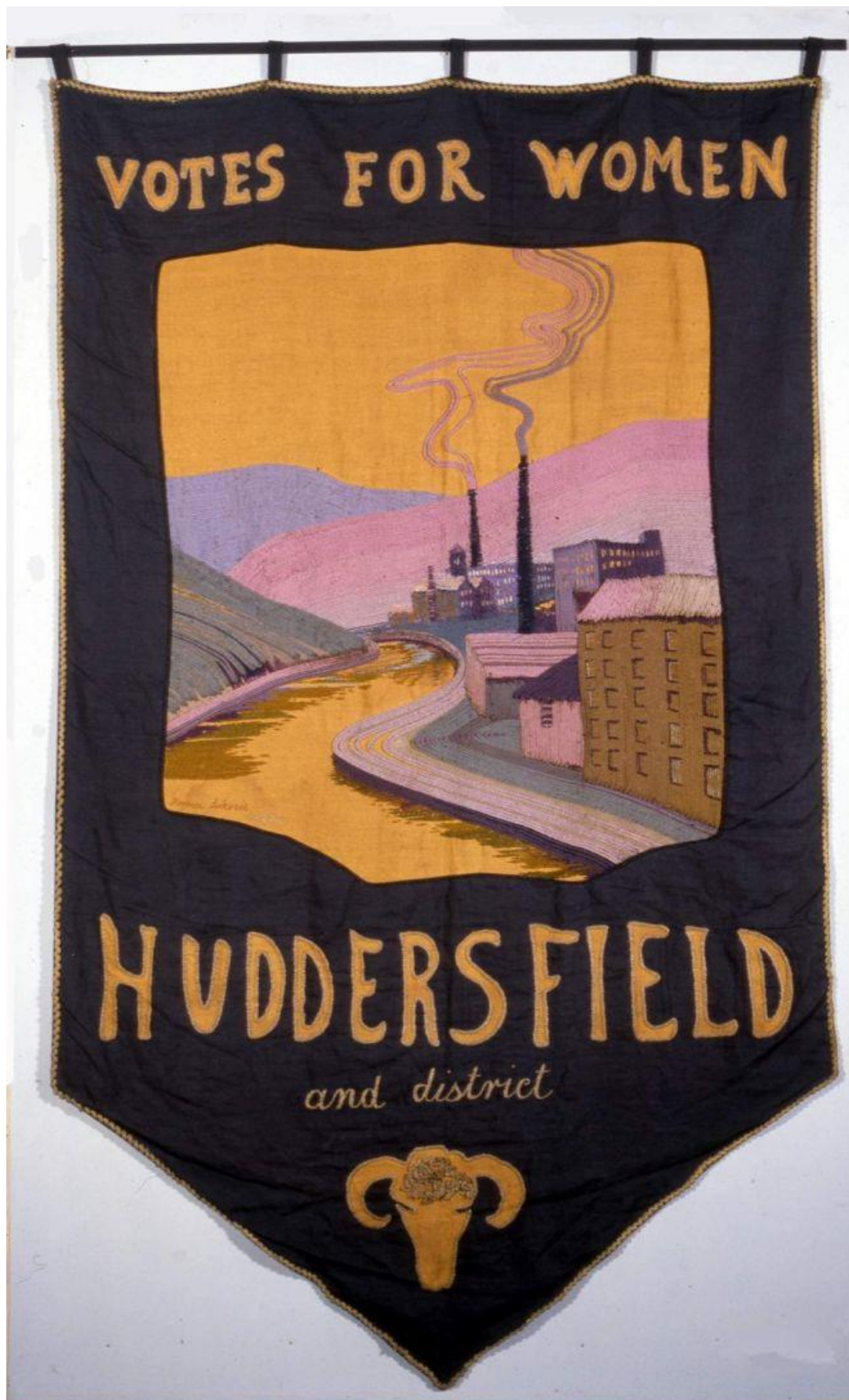


Figure 4: Huddersfield Banner, <https://womanandhersphere.files.wordpress.com/2014/11/huddersfield-banner.jpg>

Since the industrial revolution, buying goods had become cheaper than making them by hand. This in combination with the second feminist wave caused a fall in the popularity of craft. Women in the 1970s subsequently rejected crafts in order to gain more social and economic equality.<sup>34</sup> The skills required to craft were no longer handed down from mother to daughter. Nowadays the aesthetic value of the crafted product is valued more as well as the artisanal labour, because it is scarcer. Moreover, the reason to engage with crafting has changed as will become clear in section 2.2 on craftivism and its founders.<sup>35</sup>

## DIY-ethic

The DIY-ethic can be traced back to the Situationist International, Hippies, Second Wave Feminists and the Punk scene.<sup>36</sup> This ethic can be described as a form of counter-cultural production that places a strong emphasis on handmade production. It started with the avant-garde Situationist International (SI) that originated in 1957. The SI was a collective of European artists of whom Guy Debord was most well-known. The SI acted against the ideas of the capitalist consumer culture which they called the *Spectacle*. They exposed contradictions within society in hopes of creating a revolution. One of their tactics was the *detournement* which meant taking expressions from daily popular culture and subverting their meaning, which creates a space for resisting the dominant culture. It was crucial to the SI to not only have people listen to them but give the people the opportunity to speak themselves. They encouraged others to start expressing their problems with the dominant culture in their daily lives, not just on special occasions.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Betsy Greer, *Knitting for Good! A Guide to Creating Personal, Social, and Political Change, Stitch by Stitch*, (Boston & London: Trumpeter, 2008) 14.

<sup>35</sup> Sarah Corbett, "Craftivism," *How To Be A Craftivist: the art of gentle protest* (Londen; Unbound, 2017) 10-17.

<sup>36</sup> Julia Downes, "Riot Grrl: The legacy and contemporary landscape of DIY feminist cultural activism," in *Riot Grrrl: Revolution Girl Style Now!* by Nadine Monem (London, Black Dog Publishing: 2017) 16-8.

<sup>37</sup> Ibidem.

The tactics of the SI of everyday DIY cultural subversions inspired multiple movements in the 1960's and 70's such as the Mods, Fluxus, Hippies, Punks, Yippies and The Diggers. The latter, for instance, was a San Francisco-based group that "combined spontaneous street theatre and anarchistic action with political art happenings, providing free music events, food, medical care, transport and temporary housing."<sup>38</sup> Furthermore the DIY cultural subversions were of inspiration for the feminist movements but also the women's liberation movement and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer movements. Chapter three discusses the feminist aspect of the diversion of representations in the dominant culture in more detail.

The DIY-ethic as well as the feminist influence can be clearly identified in the subcultural Punk group Riot Grrrl which is a direct precursor to craftivism.<sup>39</sup> Riot Grrrl was a group of (young) female punks that opposed the male dominance within the scene. They started making their own music and magazines, the "angry grrrl zines" to open up a place to discuss and resist the devaluation of women within their culture. The practice of DIY was not unique to Riot Grrrl but fitted within the punk scene. They expressed feminist thought in a manner that was accessible to all, which was in contrast to the feminism that was only available to the older, middle-class or educated women in the 1990's.<sup>40</sup> According to queer feminist Julia Downes in the book *Riot Grrrl: Revolution Girl Style Now!* "Riot Grrrl also proposed a different way of conceptualising feminist activism, to move away from traditional state-focused protests like marches, rallies and petitions, towards an idea of cultural activism which incorporated everyday cultural subversions like creating art, film, zines, music and communities as a part of feminist activism."<sup>41</sup> This culturally subversive practice has evolved into the softer form of craftivism in which the crafted products used for the protest are used as catalysts for an (open) discussion instead of opposition. Craftivism in comparison to the traditional state-focused

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<sup>38</sup> Julia Downes, "Riot Grrl," 14-5.

<sup>39</sup> Betsy Greer, *Knitting for Good!*, 12-3

<sup>40</sup> Julia Downes, "Riot Grrl," 15-6.

<sup>41</sup> Julia Downes, "Riot Grrrl," 29.



protest but also Riot Grrrl's activism is not anarchist but positive. Craftivism can be described as a type of peaceful protest.

### Craftivism Today

Theorist Nicole Burisch traces the emergence of craftivism back to “the renewed interest in social justice/activist issues that came in response to global trade issues/antiglobalization politics of the early 2000's.”<sup>42</sup> She states that the interest in alternative forms of protest which were characterized by play, accessibility and humour grew. Within the relatively new movement of craftivism, the DIY-ethic and craft come together. Both share the preference of creating something by hand. Craftivism borrows the subversive quality from the DIY-ethic in its protests. The skills used are those of crafting, which, considering its historical connotations give it a subversive potential as well. By taking crafting outside of the confined female sphere of the house and into the traditionally male public space this division can be questioned. Moreover, the intention of doing craft projects has changed since it is no longer a skill necessary to clothe the family nor a means to show your qualities as a wife. Since craft is no longer a necessity the focus has shifted to the aesthetic, artisanal and communicative qualities of the craft.

As described in the examples given in this chapter, the opposition towards commercialism and industrialization is a common theme in craftivism's precursors and craftivism as well. The current craftivist protests span a wide range from environmental, economic, feminist to political issues. Inherent to craft is slowing down (in comparison to machine production) and getting a feel for what it is like to make something by hand. This is in line with a larger trend of slowing down through for example slow food, slow design and slow cities.<sup>43</sup> In doing so you have more control over where the materials come from and under what circumstances of production the item is made. This quality is

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<sup>42</sup> Betsy Greer, *Knitting for Good!*, 127,

<sup>43</sup> Minna Haveri, “Yarn bombing- the softer side of street art,” in *Routledge Handbook of Graffiti and Street Art*, edited by Jeffrey Ian Ros (London: Routledge, 2016) 107.

used by many crafters as an act against mass-production and the consumer culture. “In many cases craftivism has been used as a way to a peaceful protest that could centre on a political statement, feminist ideas or anti-consumerist sentiments.”<sup>44</sup> Craftivism is hence a type of protesting that can be used for many causes but can also take many shapes, from yarn bombing to quilting.

Yarn bombing is associated with the practice of spray-painting graffiti, although it does not leave a permanent mark, almost all surfaces of public space can be targeted by covering them with hand-knitted or crocheted items. Moreover, like graffiti it is an activity that is perceived as a bit rebellious due to its subverting quality and can be seen as vandalism or littering. Quilting on the other hand is less edgy or risky and not associated with the street or public space. It is a practice that is associated with grandmothers who take hours to lovingly create quilted pillowcases and blankets. Nevertheless, both practices can be craftivist. By knitting around trees or dumpsters, which contrasts with the predominantly hard concrete and steel appearance of many urban spaces, the attention can be placed on our responsibility to take care of our environment.<sup>45</sup> An example of craftivist quilting is the project *To Boston with Love* that entailed making quilted flags to show support to Boston after the bombings at the Boston Marathon in April 2013.<sup>46</sup> Like the SI craftivism uses subversion to get their point across. Craftivism is not forceful but playful. It provides another perspective and makes what is taken for granted stand out, by for example hanging a hand embroidered message on it as can be seen in figure five.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>45</sup> Mina Haveri, “Yarn bombing – the softer side of street art,” 106.

<sup>46</sup> Susan Beal, “Charity Quilting,” in *Craftivism, The Art of Craft and Activism*, ed. Betsy Greer (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2014) 22-24.

<sup>47</sup> Sarah Corbett, *How to be a Craftivist*, 108.



*Figure 5: Robin Prime, A cross-stitched mask on a mannequin in a shop window to provoke thought and action in passers-by some of whom work for global companies. Shoreditch, London UK, Photograph, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/craftivist-collective/8622745632/in/album-72157680437612602/>.*

An important influence on craftivism is the growing online presence of people. In contrast to twenty years ago, the importance of the online domain in our day to day lives and our communication has grown exponentially. Only in 2005 did the web 2.0 originate with its focus on service and communication. But what does this mean in terms of the development of craftivism that only originated two years prior to the web 2.0? Through the internet people can get in touch with other people all over the world, this makes it easier to reach people with the same interests and beliefs as the rise of subcultures demonstrates. Craftivism is rising in popularity, because it connects to our highly visual online culture. The crafted products have appeal because of their aesthetic nature. Through websites like Facebook, Pinterest and Instagram people share their work and that of

others. As can be seen in figure 6, offline craftivism actions can be documented online and vice versa. However, unlike online activism (click-tivism) it takes more effort and creates tactile personal messages that open up a conversation instead of anonymously criticizing over the internet. The online craftivist community is able to support projects at a distance through for example online instruction videos and contact.<sup>48</sup>



Figure 6: Victoria Siddle, Shareability: hand-embroidered Twitter bird with a real tweet stitched on it. Offline craftivism actions can be documented online and vice versa. Photograph. September 10, 2015. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/craftivist-collective/21520>.

Without the internet, the spread of craftivism would not have been as rapid as it

has been. Although as the SI and punk movements have shown, through arts and crafts, visions can be shared and spread across national borders without the mediation of an online community. Kate Orton-Johnson who specializes in the intersections between technology, culture and everyday life argues “that the online spheres have made the often private and domestic knitting visible, and social networking and the related activities have enriched the experience of knitting and provided new ways of constructing the maker’s self.”<sup>49</sup> The craftivist gatherings that are organised over the internet can be seen as the digital counterparts of the historic knitting circles, sharing the potential of being a discursive space. Where women in the past came together to craft due to their shared locality, because of the internet a shared interest for crafting is the common denominator that brings crafters together.

<sup>48</sup> Sarah Corbett and Sarah Housley, “The Craftivist Collective Guide to Craftivism,” *Utopian Studies* 22, no 2 (2011): 348-51.

<sup>49</sup> Minna Haveri, “Yarn bombing- the softer side of street art,” 108.



## 2.2 Soft Activism and Gentle Protest

Craftivism is a type of soft activism or gentle protest that offers the opportunity to connect and deepen the understanding of the subject due to the time-investment that is inherent to craft. As Greer puts it “Yelling doesn’t change things, but dialogue does.”<sup>50</sup> Craftivism does not fix problems immediately, but neither does regular activism. It is a more personal way of protesting that derives from a personal search about what you can do to better your surroundings, deal with what is going on in the world and give meaning to it. Craftivism creates dialogue in the hopes of creating a positive change.<sup>51</sup> In the following paragraph the ideas of Sarah Corbett and Betsy Greer who are prominent women within the (Anglo American) craftivism scene will be discussed.

### Soft Activism

Betsy Greer who coined the term craftivism, defines it as “[...] a way of looking at life where voicing opinions through creativity makes your voice stronger, your compassion deeper & your quest for justice more infinite.”<sup>52</sup> Greer was involved in the Riot Grrrl movement and what attracted her to it was that it spoke freely about women’s experiences whilst fighting injustice through music and magazines. Moreover, the handmade character of these outlets attracted her. “[...]I was finally discovering that I didn’t have to be perfect in order to do something. It was acceptable to not be good, because after all, I was learning, right?” She got into the DIY-ethic and made things because she wanted to, not because others dictated her to do so. According to theorist and writer Amy Spencer, Greer was not the only one with a Riot Grrrl background who was attracted to craftivism. The same ideals are embedded in craftivism as in Riot Grrrl. As Greer would put it, “[...] I’m not alone in wanting to be able to literally “craft my life,” instead of letting it craft me.” She realized that by

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<sup>50</sup> Craftivism, “What is Craftivism Anyway?” accessed February 9, 2018, <http://craftivism.com/what-is-craftivism-anyway/>.

<sup>51</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>52</sup> “Craftivism Definition,” Craftivism, accessed February 2, 2018, <http://craftivism.com/definition/>.

stepping into the footsteps of the women before her by picking up crafting, she would be able to reconnect to them and celebrate their achievements instead of being “a traitor to feminism.” Due to the resurgence of crafting the connotations that come with the term can be changed to be more in line with the current views on domesticity and feminism.<sup>53</sup>

In her book *Knitting for Good!*, Greer shows how the crafting practice can evolve and create positive change on multiple levels. She suggests starting off with crafting for yourself and later on extend your focus. The repetitive motion of many crafts gives it a meditative quality which makes it useful to reflect on yourself, your community and on worldwide issues. These are also the levels in which crafting can make a difference. The latter two levels are most suitable for activist action, whilst the first has a more therapeutic quality. However, this quality is present all around since part of craftivism is being reflective and aware of your own and the others position.

Greer has co-written the *Craftivism Manifesto* (see appendix 1). The manifesto is very open-ended, and it reflects a positive attitude towards crafting and its potential it does not boast clear guidelines or principles. It stresses the importance of forming a community and retaining one’s own agency, staying reflective on one’s own actions as well as others. The manifesto promotes a type of soft activism that aims to start conversations instead of underscoring difference in order to seek solutions, not conflict. In the manifesto the image of crafting “as a benign, passive (predominantly female) domestic pastime” is challenged.<sup>54</sup> Crafting is seen as a tool to make positive changes or highlight the positive already present by for example making difficult issues tangible.

Within the discourse on craftivism a juxtaposition is made between the soft feminine art of crafting and the hard issues they protest. Although craftivism is a form of activism it distinguishes itself from ‘typical activism’ by highlighting its soft nature, which is why craftivism could be seen as soft protest. It is “*creativity plus activism [or] crafty activism*” that came about as a means to express

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<sup>53</sup> Betsy Greer, *Knitting for Good!*, 12-3

<sup>54</sup> “Craftivism Manifesto.” Accessed February 9, 2018. <http://craftivism.com/manifesto/>.

your feelings “without yelling or placard waving.” According to Greer “[craftivism] was about paying attention and not letting your anger consume you, it was about channelling that anger in a productive and even loving way” so creativity instead of anger is seen as the catalyst for change.<sup>55</sup>

## Gentle Protest

Craftivism is a form of gentle protest, according to Sarah Corbett, who is the founder of the Craftivist Collective which is a worldwide network of craftivists. Unlike the dominant portrayal of protesting as violent or aggressive, most protests are peaceful. Gentle protesting targets actions and policies instead of people. Gentle protest is about turning conflict into discussions and using debates and working together as a way to find solutions. This in turn can help create a community and a connection where there was previous none.<sup>56</sup> When pointing out someone as the oppressor, the dialogue is quickly shut off. According to Corbett the more gentle approach opens up the dialogue which could lead to resolution. However, craftivism is also critiqued as being too soft to make a difference, the protests would be “too safe and reductive to be an answer to the complex issues facing women today,” but more on that in the final section of chapter three.<sup>57</sup>

Corbett explains gentleness as a skill following Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Gentleness is a state of being somewhere in between excessive anger and excessive indifference. The gentle approach is about channelling these extremes in a constructive manner. In other words, he states that anger in a controlled amount is not necessarily problematic. According to Aristotle control and careful consideration are key to being gentle. Gentleness is not equal to passivity.<sup>58</sup> Corbett explains how we protest against the abuse of power or its unequal distribution. When we have the

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<sup>55</sup> Betsy Greer, “Craftivist History,” in *Extra/Ordinary, Craft and Contemporary Art*, ed. Maria Elena Buszek (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011) 183.

<sup>56</sup> Sarah Corbett, *How To Be A Craftivist: the art of gentle protest* (London; Unbound, 2017) 30-31.

<sup>57</sup> Shannon Black, “KNIT + RESIST: placing the Pussyhat Project in the context of craft activism.” *Gender, Place & Culture* 24, no 5 (2017): 697, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2017.1335292>.

<sup>58</sup> Sarah Corbett, *How To Be A Craftivist*, 27-9.

opportunity to act, we have an amount of power however small or big that may be. What is important is how you choose to act, so how you use your anger and achieve your goals in a gentle manner.<sup>59</sup>

What sets gentle protest apart from other types of protest according to Corbett is that it is also suited for introverted people. What she means by this is that by taking on a project such as embroidering handkerchiefs by hand for the head of Marks & Spencer (M&S) one slows down and think through the activist campaign in which one is participating. This type of activism is not bold, loud or in your face which is, according to Corbett, more suited to extroverts, but opens up a human discussion. According to her, the aim is not to seek conflict but to come to solutions, whilst the opposite can often be obtained by rash action. As Corbett sees it, this type of activism is not just for extrovert people, but also values and engages the skills of introvert people.<sup>60</sup> Which does not mean that extroverts do not fit within craftivist protest. An introvert might, for example, knit pussyhats and have nothing to do with the protest march but this can be the other way around for the extrovert.

For Sarah Corbett an important characteristic in craftivism is grace. In the sense that the projects done are sincere and genuine, open conversations and empower others to see your side and choose differently. This is not to say that it will necessarily help, but it does offer the opportunity for each party to reflect on each other's position and become more understanding. It derives from the idea to treat others the way you want to be treated, being kind when it is not necessarily expected or deserved. "We start with good faith in each other (we may not end up with that faith), are mindful of our judgements and preconceptions and we never give up on each other to show our humanity and do good work. We keep hope possible; we are not convinced by despair."<sup>61</sup> This can come across as

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<sup>59</sup> Sarah Corbett, *How To Be A Craftivist*, 29.

<sup>60</sup> Sarah Corbett, "Activism needs introverts," filmed November 2016, TEDxYouth@Bath, 13:58, [https://www.ted.com/talks/sarah\\_corbett\\_activism\\_needs\\_introverts#t-825539](https://www.ted.com/talks/sarah_corbett_activism_needs_introverts#t-825539).

<sup>61</sup> Sarah Corbett, *How To Be A Craftivist*, 110

sentimental but that is also what is appealing, according to Corbett, since it contrasts with the prevailing cynicism and competition.<sup>62</sup>

The Craftivist Collective has also made a manifesto that is similar to the *Craftivism Manifesto* called *A Craftivist's Manifesto* with the subtitle 'connecting our hands, hearts and heads we can truly make a difference' (see appendix 2). In comparison to the *Craftivism Manifesto*, it does focus more on the approach towards the other. Points three and five especially, stress the importance of seeing different sides and how you can be constructive in your relationship with the other.

3. Solidarity not sympathy: Preserve the dignity of others by showing solidarity with them in your craft. Understand their struggles and you'll understand their solutions. Activism is not about charity. [...]

5. Empathy never points fingers: Try to see everyone's perspective. Everyone faces different challenges, so aim to make critical friends, not aggressive enemies.<sup>63</sup>

#### Views compared

Both the views of Corbett and Greer share the same goal of wanting to overcome conflicts by coming up with solutions together and doing something positive for society. The *Craftivism Manifesto* shows more connection to the history of craft and pride in its artisanal labour. The other manifesto however stresses that the size of the project is not of importance. Both are not specific on what type of craft

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<sup>62</sup> Sarah Corbett, *How To Be A Craftivist*, 107-24.

<sup>63</sup> "A Craftivist's Manifesto," *Craftivist Collective*, accessed February 21, 2018, <https://craftivist-collective.com/our-story/>.

should be used. “Craftivists are makers, hackers, menders and modifiers of material things. My craftivism can be different than your craftivism and that’s okay.”<sup>64</sup>

In an interview with Sarah Corbett, the differences in take on craftivism between her and Betsy Greer become apparent. Greer adopts a more open attitude towards craftivism where donating crafted products, fundraising and teaching how to knit can be considered as craftivist. Corbett on the other hand stresses how craft needs to be perceived as a tool that can be used for activism but is not necessarily activist or always appropriate. She explains how crafting gifts for vulnerable people can leave them feeling undignified, receiving a gift that does not help long term, no matter the good intentions. In these instances point 3 of the manifest “Solidarity not sympathy” rings true. In the interview she states; “I don’t see activism as donation, fundraising or awareness raising but looking at structural and cultural injustices and asking how we can change them long term through strategic campaigning.”<sup>65</sup> She positions her craftivism on another part of the activist spectrum and hence limits craftivist practices which leaves a more workable framework.

## 2.3 In Practice

In the next section case studies from the USA and the UK will be discussed. The first two projects by Krista Suh took place in the USA and are characterized by large groups of protesting people. The last case study is a project by Sarah Corbett that is smaller in scale and can be used for multiple causes. This project is called “Don’t Blow It” and is started in the UK.

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<sup>64</sup> “Craftivism Manifesto,” *Craftivism*, accessed February 9, 2018, <http://craftivism.com/manifesto/>.

<sup>65</sup> Honour Bayes, “Don’t Blow It! Craftivist Collective’s Founder Sarah Corbett on Crafty Activism,” *Run Riot*, November 17, 2015, <http://www.run-riot.com/articles/blogs/dont-blow-it-craftivist-collective%E2%80%99s-founder-sarah-corbett-crafty-activism-0>.

## The Pussyhat and Evil Eyes Projects

A prominent example of craftivism can be found in the Pussyhat Project by Krista Suh, best known for the Women's March on the 19<sup>th</sup> of January 2017 in Washington against Donald Trump's presidency. It was estimated that more than one million people attended the Women's March in the capital and over three million people participated worldwide.<sup>66</sup> The pattern for the pussyhat was created in reaction to Donald Trump's comment on how he felt free to "grab them (women) by the pussy," in which the word "pussy" is a derogatory term for the female genitalia. The protest was initiated because many people feared that the Republican administration would undo women's rights. Although Trump received multiple sex assault allegations, fat-shamed a former beauty queen and vented anti-abortion opinions, he still received 42 percent total of women's vote and 53 percent of white women's vote.<sup>67</sup> In response to the Women's March, Trump's lawyer and personal councillor Michael Cohen commented on Twitter that he was "Impressed by the number of supporters for the women's movement yesterday. Question: Were the pink hats made in the USA?" (@MichaelCohen212, January 22, 2017)<sup>68</sup> Apparently Cohen tried to diminish the symbolic value of the hats by questioning their origin and the authenticity of the protesters, whilst actually these hats were all handmade by the supporters whom live in and outside the USA. A salient detail is that the hats used in Trump's own campaign were actually made in China, Vietnam and Bangladesh.<sup>69</sup>

The pussyhat is a play on words (pussyhat-pussycat) but also a means to reclaim the term pussy and change its connotations.<sup>70</sup> The motivation behind the pussyhat was to enhance the

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<sup>66</sup> Sabrina Siddiqui, Molly Redden, Lauren Gambino and Joanna Walters, "'This is the upside of the downside'; Women's March finds hope in defiance," *The Guardian*, January 21, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jan/21/women-march-washington-protest-donald-trump>.

<sup>67</sup> "The pink 'pussyhat': symbol of challenge to Trump," *Daily Nation*, January 19, 2017, <https://www.nation.co.ke/lifestyle/women/The-pink-pussyhat-symbol-of-challenge-to-Trump/1950830-3619438-m2x0axz/index.html>.

<sup>68</sup> Michael Cohen (@MichaelCohen212), Twitter, January 22, 2017, <https://twitter.com/MichaelCohen212/status/823248828103061504>.

<sup>69</sup> Melissa Fares and Dustin Volz, "'It's made in Vietnam!' At inauguration, origin of red Trump hats shocks many," *Reuters*, January 21, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-inauguration-hats/its-made-in-vietnam-at-inauguration-origin-of-red-trump-hats-shocks-many-idUSKBN1542YL>.

<sup>70</sup> "Our Story," *Pussyhat Project*, accessed March 27, 2018, <https://www.pussyhatproject.com/our-story/>.

visibility of women's rights and being able to create a safe space for discussion whilst also being a means for people to participate even if they cannot be physically present by knitting hats and sending them to people at the protest.<sup>71</sup> The pussyhat project is a good example of craftivism, since it uses craft as a means of (visual) protest and it offers the opportunity to participate in multiple ways by either wearing it, knitting a pussyhat or by doing both. It moreover requires some time to make and reflect on the issue, in this instance Trump's presidency and women's rights, besides it is a non-aggressive form of protest. Images of the pussyhats such as figure 7 spread world-wide over the media.



Figure 7: "Women's March attendees in Washington, DC. Shannon Stapleton, Reuters, Pussyhat Project, January 21, 2017, <https://www.pussyhatproject.com/blog/2017/2/17/the-sea-of-pink>.

Another project by Krista Suh is the Evil Eyes Project. This project was started in reaction to a shooting in the Parkland, Florida high school in 2018. That year there had been eight mass shooting incidents in the USA, the project was also a means to ask attention for the larger gun control debate.

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<sup>71</sup> Jayna Zweiman, "The Project of Pussyhat," *Pussyhat Project*, January 14, 2018, <https://www.pussyhatproject.com/pussyhatresponse>.



During this shooting a former nineteen-year-old student killed seventeen students and faculty members. He was armed with an AR-15 rifle which he was able to legally obtain.<sup>72</sup> Suh was invited to participate in the March of Our Lives on the 24<sup>th</sup> of March 2018, that was organized by the students. The goal was to have at least 438 pairs of evil eyes gloves, one for each person that was killed or injured during a school shooting from 2014 until the present time. There is a great amount of symbolism behind the gloves. For one the idea is to have the marchers put up their hands, referring to the gesture of 'do not shoot me' that is known worldwide, which refers to the helpless predicament these students were in. Moreover, the evil eye cannot blink, it is a fixed eye demanding attention, but it also symbolizes protection. Because many of these gloves were donated, they became a sign of support to the students and families that were affected by the shootings.<sup>73</sup> An example of donating these gloves can be found in figure 8.



Figure 8: Kesley.365, Instagram, March 24, 2018, [https://www.instagram.com/p/BquNLFzBz99/?utm\\_source=ig\\_embed](https://www.instagram.com/p/BquNLFzBz99/?utm_source=ig_embed).

<sup>72</sup> Sarah Gray, "The March For Our Lives Protest I This Saturday. Here's Everything to Know," *Times*, March 23, 2018, <http://time.com/5167102/march-for-our-lives-parkland-school-shooting-protest/>.

<sup>73</sup> Krista Suh, "Don't Let Our Students Get Gunned Down – Sea Of Eyes March For Our Lives On March 24," *Krista Suh*, accessed May 16, 2018, <http://kristasuh.com/evil-eye-glove/>.

The March For Our Lives extended beyond students, teachers and their families. It was led by students from various backgrounds and its mission is “to assure that no special interest group or political agenda is more critical than timely passage of legislation to effectively address the gun violence issues that are rampant in our country [USA].” They want to stop the ‘epidemic of mass shootings’ to ensure that the public space is a safe space for everybody, not just children.<sup>74</sup> March for Our Lives demands a ban on assault weapons which are frequently used during mass shootings, a stop to the sale of high-capacity magazines, and background checks for everybody who buys a gun.<sup>75</sup> These suggested measurements find great resistance from the National Rifle Association (NRA), which is a pro-gun lobbying group in support of the second amendment which has up to five million members. The NRA is moreover supported by president Donald Trump. The second amendment states that “A well regulated militia, being necessary for the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed.” Since this sentence is grammatically incorrect, it is open for interpretation, who are for instance meant by ‘the people,’ and who is part of the militia at this time is not clear. The NRA places its focus on the last thirteen words of the amendment stating “[...] the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed.” The NRA does not support any ban on firearms, instead they point at the mental health care and the failing safety of the school system as the root of the problem.<sup>76</sup> In response to the shooting and the March for Our Lives the Florida State Legislature passed gun control measures including the ban of ‘bump stocks’ (which enable semi-automatic rifles to shoot more rounds per minute), raising the minimal age to purchase a firearm from eighteen to twenty-one and established a three-day waiting

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<sup>74</sup> “Mission Statement,” *March For Our Lives*, accessed May 16, 2018, <https://marchforourlives.com/mission-statement/>.

<sup>75</sup> Dakin Andone, “What you should know about the March for Our lives,” *CNN*, March 23, 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/03/21/us/march-for-our-lives-explainer/index.html>.

<sup>76</sup> Roland Hughes, “Four dates that explain the US gun debate,” *BBC News*, March 3, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-42055871>.

period on gun acquisitions. Besides more resources were made available for school safety, tip lines and mental health resources.<sup>77</sup>

These examples of craftivism are both used in large protests, they share the reliance on donations and hence create space for people around the world to participate. Although these projects take time they are construed in such a way that multiple pairs of evil eye gloves or pussyhats can be made prior to the march by one person. The strength of these protests lies in the numbers. This was especially successful with the pussyhats which made the crowd turn into ‘a sea of pink’ as can be seen in figure 9 .<sup>78</sup> These examples are very close to the traditional protest marches in the way they are organized. Crafting is used as another tool to bring the message across and show solidarity.



Figure 9: Voice of America, Brian Allen, *Pussyhat Project*, January 21, 2017, <https://www.pussyhatproject.com/blog/2017/2/17/the-sea-of-pink>.

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<sup>77</sup> Sarah Gray, “The March For Our Lives Protest | This Saturday. Here’s Everything to Know,” *Times*, March 23, 2018, <http://time.com/5167102/march-for-our-lives-parkland-school-shooting-protest/>.

<sup>78</sup> “The Sea of Pink,” *Pussyhat Project*, January 21, 2017, <https://www.pussyhatproject.com/blog/2017/2/17/the-sea-of-pink>.



## “Don’t Blow It”

The “Don’t Blow It” campaign was set up by Sarah Corbett in 2015 in collaboration with ShareAction who has posed questions about the living wage at over twenty annual general meetings of different companies with the support of shareholders. ShareAction is a charity that strives for responsible and sustainable investments in terms of the savers, society and environment. It deals with multiple issues from the lack of transparency in pensions to having companies pay the living wage.<sup>79</sup> The living wage is the minimal wage necessary ‘to live with dignity’ and without subsidies, this requires an amount above the legal minimum. ShareAction targets the largest publicly listed retailers in England, with the idea that once these companies pay the living wage, the smaller companies will follow.<sup>80</sup> Since no highstreet retailer had accredited with the Living Wage Foundation and agreed to pay living wage, M&S was targeted first. By offering hand embroidered handkerchiefs to influential celebrities that affiliate with the retailer in the 2014 ‘Leading Ladies’ advertisement campaign, the board and shareholders are encouraged “[...] not to ‘blow’ their chance to support life-changing decisions.”<sup>81</sup> At multiple branches of M&S’s several ‘stitch-ins’ are organised to sew messages on M&S handkerchiefs. An example of these handkerchiefs can be found in figure 10. They will serve as a positive reminder and conversation starter on living wage. What strengthens this initiative is the support of the major shareholders and their customer base. By having the stitch-ins outside of the retailer, customers of M&S could join the discussion but were also free to enjoy their shopping without hindrance.<sup>82</sup> The handkerchiefs were received very well by the board members and led to critical meetings, positive tweets and in the end the implementation of the living wage according to the Craftivist-Collective. Corbett was told by the board members that “they loved their hankies and how it really moved them, what we were doing, and they all told us that if we were standing outside

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<sup>79</sup> “About Us,” ShareAction, accessed March 18, 2019, <https://shareaction.org/about-us/>.

<sup>80</sup> “Why do our supporters care about Living Wage?” *ShareAction*, July 14, 2015, <https://shareaction.org/why-do-our-supporters-care-about-the-living-wage/>.

<sup>81</sup> “Why don’t Marks & Spencers pay staff a Living Wage?” *Craftivist-Collective*, June 19, 2015, <https://craftivist-collective.com/Why+don%27t+Marks+%26+Spencers+pay+staff+a+Living+Wage>.

<sup>82</sup> Ibidem.

screaming at them and not being gentle in our protest, they wouldn't have even listened to us, never mind had those discussions with us.”<sup>83</sup> The campaign to get M&S to accredit with the Living Wage Foundation has taken three years. The company did raise the wages earlier, but refused to accredit, meaning that employees could fall below the living wage once again in the future. The campaign did not stop with the handkerchiefs during these years, the conversation about living wage was kept alive. The board members received handmade holiday cards stating, “all we want for Christmas is for the company to pay the Living Wage.” After M&S raised the wages, handmade cards and key rings were given at the next meeting with jigsaw-puzzle imagery that symbolized the accreditation as the last missing piece of the puzzle. Currently the company has not yet accredited but does pay above Living Wage.<sup>84</sup>

This is an example of a campaign that is much more time consuming and personal in comparison to Krista Suh her projects. The craftivists spend over six hours on embroidering the handkerchiefs. Moreover, they researched the person they were making the handkerchief for in order to create a bespoke gift. Along with this task came some ‘crafterthoughts’ that encouraged the crafters to identify to an even greater extent with the person as a human being not an opponent or scapegoat. The handkerchiefs were placed in a giftbox along with a personal hand-written letter.<sup>85</sup> This project is a good example of ‘graceful activism’ in the sense that it is a humble approach that starts off with reflection on where the similarities and differences are. It moreover is a project in which time is invested, not only the six plus hours to embroider, but also the monthly meetings that took place over a period of ten months. The idea was that by handing over these handkerchiefs, which clearly took time and consideration to make, the receiver is more likely to open up.

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<sup>83</sup> Sarah Corbett, “Activism needs introverts,” filmed November 2016, TEDxYouth@Bath, 13:58, [https://www.ted.com/talks/sarah\\_corbett\\_activism\\_needs\\_introverts#t-825539](https://www.ted.com/talks/sarah_corbett_activism_needs_introverts#t-825539).

<sup>84</sup> Sarah Corbett, “How a gentle protest with hand-embroidered hankies helped bring higher wages for retail employees,” *Ideas.Ted.com*, January 24, 2019, <https://ideas.ted.com/how-a-gentle-protest-with-hand-embroidered-hankies-helped-bring-higher-wages-for-retail-employees/>.

<sup>85</sup> “What we achieved at Marks and Spencer,” *Craftivist-Collective*, July 8, 2015, <https://craftivist-collective.com/What-we-achieved-at-Marks-and-Spencer-AGM>.



Figure 10: Sarah Corbett, *Graceful Activism: bespoke handkerchiefs for board members of a retail company to encourage them to shape their company to be as ethical as possible*, photograph, July 6, 2015, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/craftivist-collective/19336696379/in/album-72157680437612602/>.

This project has developed into one of multiple craftivist kits that are sold online. For an example see figure below. The ‘Don’t Blow It’ Hanky Kit is developed in order to create a connection with people in a power position whom you want to encourage to make the right decisions. The kit includes suggestions for MPs, teachers, religious leaders and bankers, but also “crafterthoughts” which are suggestions on what to contemplate about, in order to get the crafter to think critically and refine the message.<sup>86</sup> On the website of the Craftivist-Collective multiple kits can be found, some focus more on your own responsibility (as a global citizen), others aim at supporting people with mental health issues. But there are also kits that target solidarity, climate change or the fashion industry. Not all projects seek out such a personal bond as the handkerchiefs solicit. Other projects

<sup>86</sup> “‘Don’t Blow It’ Hanky,” *Craftivist-Collective*, April 14, 2015, <https://craftivist-collective.com/dont-blow-it-hanky>.

such as 'shop dropping' in which small scrolls are dropped in garments to have the potential buyer reflect on the origins of that piece, function more as reminders that may change ones (shopping) behaviour.



Figure 11: Craftivist Collective, photograph, July 2015, <https://craftivist-collective.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Craftivist-Collective-July-2015-9861-sharpened.jpg>.

## 2.4 In Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen that craftivism is strongly rooted in history, on the one hand craft has been traditionally a female pastime, on the other there have been multiple instances where crafts have been used to subvert common thoughts and beliefs. The nearest predecessor has been the Riot Grrrl movement that strongly promoted the DIY-ethic which is also present in craftivism.

However different from Riot Grrrl, craftivism is less confrontational and softer. Which has been made explicit by Sarah Corbett and Betsy Greer. Within the discourse on craftivism there are however some different views on what can be considered craftivism and what not. Greer is less specific in this instance and will allow many projects to be considered craftivist such as making blankets for aid organisations or friends. Corbett however stresses the more activist side of craftivism. So, the projects done need to bring the focus to an issue or open up the conversation. I find that this take on craftivism is more workable, since it gives some boundaries in an otherwise very broad concept. Moreover, it does more justice to the activist part of craftivism.

The examples given show that there are multiple forms of craftivism. The work by Krista Suh is more of a spin on traditional protest marches, whilst Corbett uses the crafted product as a catalyst for more personal contact and solution seeking. Whilst both projects require the devotion of time in contrast to for example signing petitions, this is much less the case in Suh's projects. Moreover, there is no real relation built between the protesters and the other. This is also the case because the other in Suh's cases is much more anonymous, since the protest is against a nationwide phenomenon such as high school shootings and gun violence or the global issue of women's rights. There is typically no spokesperson for these groups. Hence craftivism can target large phenomena but also issues close to home. The projects can be executed by large masses such as the Pussyhat Project, but can also be done by an individual with for example a kit by Corbett or anything in between.



### 3. Feminism and Craftivism

#### 3.1 History – Feminist Background

The history of feminism is often described in waves to signify the rise and fall in popularity of feminism. However, this metaphor does not always do justice to the movements, since the waves do not encompass all peaks and lows of feminism especially in terms of non-western feminism.<sup>87</sup>

However for the purpose of this historical overview it suffices to stay with the traditional distinction whilst keeping in mind that the waves are not necessarily opposites but predecessors aiming for equality.

#### The First Wave (Victorian Feminism)

The first feminist wave concerned legal issues such as female suffrage and took place in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. The term feminism only came into use at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Feminism evolved out of a series of campaigns that dealt with the specific difficulties individual women encountered such as custody rights, property rights and the right to vote, which previously solely belonged to men. The campaigns mainly targeted middle,- and upper-class women<sup>88</sup> The start of feminism is signalled with Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) which is concerned with the way society constructs femininity, she pleads for better education for girls to give them more dignity and freedom.<sup>89</sup> During the 19<sup>th</sup> century the ideal was that a man belonged in the public sphere and was safe to "expose[...] himself to the temptations of the market-place, while the woman stayed at home and preserved a place of peace and purity for her family."<sup>90</sup> However this ideal was

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<sup>87</sup> Iris van der Tuin, "Feminisme als strijd-toneel: Simone de Beauvoir en de geschiedenis van het feminisme," in *Gender in Media, Kunst en Cultuur* (Bussum: Uitgeverij Coutinho, 2007) 19.

<sup>88</sup> Valerie Sanders, "First Wave Feminism," in *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*, ed. Sarah Gamble (London and New York: Routledge, 2006) 15-20.

<sup>89</sup> Sanders, "First Wave Feminism," 15-6.

<sup>90</sup> Sanders, "First Wave Feminism," 16.

not realistic for all classes, since working-class women needed to work as well to provide for their family. Due to the Industrial Revolution, women moved outside of the home with their crafts and into the factories to weave and spin with the new machinery. The discussion arose whether women should be enfranchised, since they were already represented by men. William Thompson argued against this idea and importantly recognized that 'women' was not a cohesive group. He showed in his book *Appeal of One-Half of the Human Race, Women, against the Pretensions of the Other Half, Men*, that wives, adult daughters living with their parents and women without fathers and husbands all suffered in different ways from the repression by men.

In the 1850's feminist activism was most prominent during the first feminist wave. More and more single, middle-class women were looking for ways to gain economic independence but found that there were very limited employment options. A group of middle-class activist women founded the 'Langham place' circle in which they published their take on women in *The English Woman's Journal* and later *The Englishwoman's Review*. They worked towards providing alternatives for marriage and motherhood. What made the request for work difficult was the stigma of the 'lady' who was by definition not suited or supposed to work, marriage and the household were the only thing she was suited for. The employments that became more and more accessible to women "developed in areas that were seen as an extension of their 'natural' sphere as mothers and carers" such as teaching and nursing. As a result, the educational standards rose for girls who were no longer taught by governesses, but at school. This created better chances for the generations of women to come.<sup>91</sup> In 1867 John Stuart Mill was the first prime-minister of the UK to propose female suffrage, it would take many campaigns by the suffragettes to ensure a say in the political process for women. As mentioned in chapter 2, their *modus operandi* entailed a great amount of crafting to set them apart. Only in 1918 did women in the UK gain the right to vote and only in 1928 were women enfranchised on the same terms as men.<sup>92</sup> Feminist Activism in USA started a few years earlier in

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<sup>91</sup> Sanders, "First Wave Feminism," 20,22-3.

<sup>92</sup> Sanders, "First Wave Feminism," 23.

1848 with the Seneca Falls Convention, during this meeting an end to discrimination based on sex was demanded. The feminist activism in the USA developed alongside anti-slavery activism, although feminism was not always applauded by the abolitionists. Different from the UK, the reforms were passed at different moments in different states, separate from the central government. Hence women in Wyoming could vote in 1869, whilst it took 51 years longer for women in the northern states to vote in 1920.<sup>93</sup>

### The Second Wave

The second feminist wave from 1965-1980 focussed on the female body, sexuality and relationships.<sup>94</sup> During the second wave women turned away from typical female activities such as housekeeping and crafting since they were deemed oppressive. This type of activities became metaphorical for the inequality between man and women. This distancing was necessary in order to detach the negative connotations of crafting and reclaim the practice later on as a feminist stance during the third feminist wave.

In the USA there were two major strands of feminism in the 1970s. Betty Friedan's book *The Feminine Mystique* on the discontent of middle-class women in America about their role as wife, mother and housewife (1963) signalled the start of the second feminist wave. She also founded the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966. The NOW can be placed within a liberal Equal Rights tradition, it wanted to "bring women into full participation in the mainstream of American Society now, assuming all the privileges and responsibilities thereof in truly equal partnership with men."<sup>95</sup> The Women's Liberation Movement, on the other hand, originates from the left-wing civil rights movements, anti-Vietnam and student movements of the 1960s. During this period there was

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<sup>93</sup> Sanders, "First Wave Feminism," 21.

<sup>94</sup> Iris van der Tuin, "Feminisme als strijdtoneel," 19.

<sup>95</sup> Sue Thornham, "Second Wave Feminism," in *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*, ed. Sarah Gamble (London and New York: Routledge, 2006) 25-6.

a process of 'conscious raising' that meant that people started to recognize that 'the personal is political', hence explaining personal experiences in political terms.<sup>96</sup> The realization occurred that male power over women was reinforced within the personal realms of marriage, the bringing up of children and sex. In line with this the emphasis on housework and crafting was viewed differently.

In the UK second wave feminism was associated with the working-class women who went on strikes for equal pay. It was also motivated by radical left-wing politics which, like the feminism during this time in the rest of Europe, gave it a Marxist-socialist tone that sets it apart from its American counterparts. In 1970 both American and English feminists protested the Miss World competition in London. That same year the first national Women's Liberation conference was held, in which equal pay, education and opportunity as well as 24-hour nurseries and free abortion and contraception were demanded. "[This] signal[s] again the double focus which marked second wave feminism: on women as an oppressed *social* group and on the female *body* with its need for sexual autonomy as a primary site of that oppression [emphasis in original]."<sup>97</sup> In the US there was a division in terms of race, many Black women did not feel represented by the feminist movement, whilst in the UK the working-class women felt a lack of representation and hence did not participate. Moreover, lesbians also had a contested relationship with feminism, since it "[...] render[d] invisible the specific oppressions of lesbian women just as the 'double jeopardy' of black women was masked within a feminist 'sisterhood' articulated largely by white, middle-class, heterosexual women."<sup>98</sup>

Second wave feminism sought to unite women over a sense of shared oppression in both personal and social settings, but it is also characterised by the search for overarching theory.<sup>99</sup> Much of the second wave's theorising was based on Simone de Beauvoir's notion of women as Other in *The Second Sex* (1949). She states that you are not born a woman, but that this identity is a social construct and hence can be changed. Crafting in this sense was deemed as a feminine practice. The

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<sup>96</sup> Sue Thornham, "Second Wave Feminism," 26.

<sup>97</sup> Sue Thornham, "Second Wave Feminism," 27.

<sup>98</sup> Sue Thornham, "Second Wave Feminism," 28.

<sup>99</sup> Sue Thornham, "Second Wave Feminism," 28.

difference between men and women (the Other) is necessary in order to form your own subjectivity, you need something that is not self in order to get a grasp on what your self is. Man has dominated the category of self or subject, leaving the women as Other. By working towards complete social and economic equality women can exist for herself "[...] she will be a Subject, an *Other* for him only so far as he is for her."<sup>100</sup> Friedan is inspired by de Beauvoir, in her book *The Feminine Mystique* she also calls for a change in the way femininity is shaped in culture. She is one of the authors that laid emphasis on consciousness-raising during the second feminist wave and she pleaded for full participation within society for women. Friedan argued that women suffered from 'the problem with no name' that was caused by being confined to the domestic sphere, where the housework and crafting took place, and left them feeling purposeless. 'The feminine mystique' according to Friedan entailed that women were promoted in the media to be completely focussed on their husbands, children and home, causing them to lose their own identity. Hence, she promoted entering the public sphere and seeking fulfilment in education and a career.<sup>101</sup> These ideas in turn equalled housework and crafting to anti-feminist practices, which depopularised the tradition of handing over crafting skills from mother to daughter. What seems to be problematic about both De Beauvoir's and Friedan's work is that the blame for the position of women within society is placed with the women.<sup>102</sup>

Kate Millet is another key interlocuter within second wave feminism who had a strong focus on 'sexual politics'. She also extended the meaning of the term 'patriarchy' into meaning "the institutionalised oppression of all women by all men."<sup>103</sup> According to her patriarchy is the primary human oppression that is enwoven with our ideology, which makes it difficult to break. Different from De Beauvoir and Friedan, Millet sees the women as victims of this ideology that depicts them as a 'dependency class.' By this she means that by placing the focus on their reliance on man, their

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<sup>100</sup> Sue Thornham, "Second Wave Feminism," 29.

<sup>101</sup> Joanne Hollows, "Home-Work: Feminisms, Domesticity and Domestic Labour," in *Domestic Cultures* (Berkshire: Open University Press, 2008) 66-8.

<sup>102</sup> Sue Thornham, "Second Wave Feminism," 30.

<sup>103</sup> Sue Thornham, "Second Wave Feminism," 31.

primal focus will lay on their husbands and fathers instead of themselves, leaving them less reflective of their own situation. Juliet Mitchell (UK) agrees with Millet when it comes to the role of ideology in shaping women's identity. However, she states that women's oppression takes place in specific historical conditions. It is the combination of determining structures that deal with production and reproduction, sexuality and the socialisation of children.<sup>104</sup> According to Mitchell all four structures need to be changed in order to achieve women's liberation. When looking back at what has been accomplished during the second wave, we see that today still not all the demands (equal pay and opportunity, education, 24-hour nurseries, free abortion and contraception) are completely fulfilled.

### The Third Wave

The third feminist wave distinguishes itself from second wave feminism, because it takes into account the lived experience of femininity that has expanded during late modernity. The course of life has become hybridized in such a way that people can switch between different subjectivities and hence is more flexible and complex in comparison to the life of women in the 1970s. This is connected to the late modern female empowerment discourse that asserts that women have an increasing access to an autonomous subject position. This has been described as "a shift from 'living for others' to living a life of one's own."<sup>105</sup> The consequence of the increasing autonomous subject position is that there is no collective identity for 'a woman' or feminism; these identities are shaped by the specific cultural circumstances. According to Shelley Budgeon who is among others the author of *Third Wave Feminism and the Politics of Gender in Late Modernity*, third wave feminist "[...] identity projects have only the cultural resources within which they are embedded as tools for resistance."<sup>106</sup> Moreover, the aim is not so much to create a representation of femininity but to work

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<sup>104</sup> Sue Thornham, "Second Wave Feminism," 33.

<sup>105</sup> Shelley Budgeon, "Feminism, Postfeminism and 'New' Femininities," in *New Femininities, Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*, ed. Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) 284.

<sup>106</sup> Shelley Budgeon, "Feminism, Postfeminism and 'New' Femininities," 282-3.

on 'a politics based on self-definition'.<sup>107</sup> According to Budgeon this is evident in "[...] the D.I.Y. ethic of Riot Grrrl which promotes self-empowerment and independence as the motivating force behind its pursuit of a politics that will allow women to develop an understanding of the personal realm focusing more on the individual and the emotional than on marches, legislation, and public policy."<sup>108</sup>

The feminist origin of craftivism can be found within its roots of Riot Grrrl. These personal identity projects are a form of feminist activism that typically call attention to the lived contradictions of the instable gender categories in late modernity. Political activist and journalist Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner states that third wave philosophy is about creating social change indirectly through cultural action in daily life.<sup>109</sup> Third wave feminism is furthermore a response to global capitalism, environmental degradation and the expansion of information technologies.<sup>110</sup> These can also be traced back to craftivism since this type of activism caters to the same variety of current issues. Where, on the one hand, there is a discourse that states that gender equality has been achieved and feminism is something from the past (postfeminism), third wave feminism states that feminism is still relevant and takes the changing global arena as a chance to rethink gender and use feminist thought in areas that were not previously recognized by feminism.<sup>111</sup>

## Postfeminism

Postfeminism derives from the idea that gender equality has been achieved and places its focus on female achievement as is exemplified by the focus on lifestyle and consumption choices.<sup>112</sup> The term postfeminism has been used in multiple ways within the discourse, it can be used to denote a theoretical position, a type of feminism after the third feminist wave and as a political or

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<sup>107</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>108</sup> Shelley Budgeon, "Feminism, Postfeminism and 'New' Femininities," 283.

<sup>109</sup> Ricia Chansky, "A Stitch in Time: Third-Wave Feminist Reclamation of Needled Imagery," *Popular Culture* 43, no. 4 (August 2010): 681-3, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5931.2010.00765.x>.

<sup>110</sup> Shelley Budgeon, "Feminism, Postfeminism and 'New' Femininities," 279-80.

<sup>111</sup> Ibidem, 281.

<sup>112</sup> Ibidem, 281.

epistemological stance. This makes it difficult to determine the features of postfeminism.<sup>113</sup> Following Rosalind Gill, postfeminism can be understood as a sensibility that includes several related themes. According to Gill these include “femininity is a bodily property; the shift from objectification to subjectification; an emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring and self-discipline; a focus on individualism, choice and empowerment; the dominance of a makeover paradigm; and a resurgence of ideas about natural sexual difference.”<sup>114</sup> Perceiving postfeminism as a sensibility has the advantage of enabling the researcher to critically analyse cultural products and practices such as craftivism. However, since Gill has researched the (popular) media culture, the parallels will not be perfect.

With the idea that “femininity is a bodily property,” Gill refers to the sexualization of the media and heavy scrutiny of the female body. She positions this in contrast to the former (also problematic) view of the female as the nurturer-mother that was fought during the second feminist wave, now her sexiness is prime. This sexiness is not passive, but women are portrayed as sexual subjects who choose to come across this way. The emphasis on taking care of others has switched to self-empowerment and narcissism. Although the agency of women to choose what they want to do is strongly present in the postfeminist discourse, Gill states that it is striking how the patriarchal ideal is followed so closely. This results in a denunciation of (second wave) feminist values as prude or killjoy. It is also connected to “the shift from objectification to subjectification” in the sense that women are no longer portrayed as object but willing subjects (that have internalized the male gaze), again highlighting their ‘agency’.<sup>115</sup>

The “emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring and self-discipline” points at on the one hand the increased intensity and scope of self-surveillance that not only entails the physical appearance but also psychological wellbeing. On the other hand, this heightened scrutiny is renounced which can be linked to “a focus on individualism, choice and empowerment.”<sup>116</sup> According to Gill, the

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<sup>113</sup> Rosalind Gill, “Postfeminist Media Culture, Elements of a sensibility,” in *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10, no 2 (May, 2007): 148, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549407075898>.

<sup>114</sup> Rosalind Gill, “Postfeminist Media Culture, Elements of a sensibility,” 147.

<sup>115</sup> Rosalind Gill, “Postfeminist Media Culture, Elements of a sensibility,” 149-152.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibidem*, 155.



central idea of free choice within postfeminist discourses portrays women as not influenced by inequalities and power imbalances. This can explain why the makeover paradigm is so prominent since it appeals to one's agency whilst on the other hand enforces the dominant neoliberal view. "[W]hat is striking is the degree of fit between the autonomous postfeminist subject and the psychological subject demanded by neoliberalism."<sup>117</sup> Since the ideals that are incorporated out of free choice and because it makes people feel better are so in keeping with the dominant ideals they should be questioned. Moreover, in this DIY/self-improvement paradigm women are predominantly addressed, according to Gill "the ideal disciplinary subject of neoliberalism is feminine."<sup>118</sup> Since you can 'do it yourself,' failure is understood as a personal fault, rather than deemed as a consequence of for example the socio-economic environment. Lastly the ideas about natural sexual difference have revived which one could argue strengthens the male dominance and corners feminism since it "tries to impose its ideological prescription on a nature that did not fit."<sup>119</sup>

### Double Entanglement

In comparison to the second feminist wave the feminist debate is now much more incorporated in the daily life through the media, however on the other hand feminism is also revised, depoliticised and attacked in the media. Angela McRobbie refers to this as the 'double-entanglement'. "[P]re-feminist ideals are being (seductively) repackaged as postfeminist freedoms in ways that do nothing to question normative heterosexual femininity." Within postfeminism both feminist and anti-feminist ideas are proclaimed through a discourse of DIY and self-empowerment that is in keeping with neoliberalist ideals. According to David Harvey "Neoliberalism is a theory of political economic practices proposing that human well-being can best be advanced by the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights,

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<sup>117</sup> Ibidem, 154.

<sup>118</sup> Ibidem, 156.

<sup>119</sup> Ibidem 158-9.

individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade.”<sup>120</sup> However he states that neoliberalism causes a restoration of class power, rather than cause economic growth. It caters to peoples want for freedom in order to convince them that privatisation is beneficial to all whilst it actually enforces the higher classes.<sup>121</sup>

According to McRobbie, within postfeminism there is a co-existence with feminism that is both repudiated but also part of a Gramscian common sense.<sup>122</sup> This common sense is part of our subjectivity, but it is also perceived as an external reality. Gramsci stresses how the common sense can be contradictory and fluid carrying the potential for change.<sup>123</sup> Because feminism is very much taken into account within postfeminism, it can be dismantled further whilst calls for renewal are typically discredited within neoliberalism. Following Judith Butler, McRobbie explains how women are shaped as subjects within postfeminism in which ‘we’ is unproblematic whilst the single ‘she’ is problematic, hence placing agency and fault with the individual.<sup>124</sup> Moreover McRobbie states that postfeminism functions through a “constant stream of incitements and enticements to engage in a range of specified practices which are understood to be both progressive but also consummately and reassuringly feminine” rather than telling women what they should not do.<sup>125</sup> According to her this is underpinned by the idea that women have succeeded in gaining equality, which means that feminist critique has no place in society anymore, the battle has been won. Besides, neoliberalism has caused consumption to become equal to individualistic empowerment, changing the feminist stance into a commodity. “The consumer-based logic of postfeminism conflates feminism and femininity, individualism and liberation,

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<sup>120</sup> David Harvey, “Neoliberalism as Creative Destruction,” in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 610, (March, 2007) 22, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25097888>.

<sup>121</sup> Ibidem 22-44.

<sup>122</sup> Angela McRobbie, “Post-Feminism and Popular Culture,” *Feminist Media Studies* 4, no 3, (2004): 255-6, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1468077042000309937>.

<sup>123</sup> Kate Crehan, “Gramsci’s concept of common sense: a useful concept for anthropologists?” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 16, no 2, (2011): 273, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1354571X.2011.542987>.

<sup>124</sup> Angela McRobbie, “Post-Feminism and Popular Culture,” *Feminist Media Studies* 4, no 3, (2004): 256, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1468077042000309937>.

<sup>125</sup> Angela McRobbie, “Top Girls? Young women and the new sexual contract,” in *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change* (London: Sage Publications, 2009) 57.

and consumption and activism.”<sup>126</sup> The danger of this development is that the current distribution of power is enforced and the inequality is reproduced, without leaving room for other voices. According to McRobbie, central to postfeminism is a ‘politics of disarticulation’ in which inter-generational and cross-cultural bonds or solidarities are undermined by contrasting non-Western women with Western women and hence endorsing white Western dominance. This however does not mean to say that women of colour are not affected by postfeminism, nor that there are no representations of women of colour.<sup>127</sup> Similar to the way feminism is cornered to be passé and does not need to be discussed, racial politics are also cornered as an issue from the past which causes racial exclusion.<sup>128</sup> This is where intersectionality becomes important, since it can help understand on what axes the inequality operates.

## Intersectionality

Intersectionality can be used to research an array of different subjects in order to understand complex conditions where multiple factors are active, especially in social and political life in terms of the division of power. According to Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge the core insight of intersectionality is that “major axes of social divisions in a given society at a given time, for example, race, class, gender, sexuality, dis/ability, and age operate not as discrete and mutually exclusive entities, but build on each other and work together.”<sup>129</sup> Kimberle Crenshaw has introduced and developed the term intersectionality and shows that it is problematic that race and gender are treated as mutually exclusive categories. She explains that “[...] in race discrimination cases, discrimination tends to be viewed in terms of sex- or class-privileged Blacks; in sex discrimination cases, the focus is on race- and class-privileged women. This focus on the most privileged group members marginalizes those who are multiply-burdened and obscures claims that cannot be

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<sup>126</sup> Jess Butler, “For White Girls Only? Postfeminism and the Politics of Inclusion,” in *Feminist Formations* 25, no 1 (Spring 2013): 45-6, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ff.2013.0009>.

<sup>127</sup> Jess Butler, “For White Girls Only? 47-49.

<sup>128</sup> Jess, Butler, “For White Girls Only? 50.

<sup>129</sup> Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, *Intersectionality* (Cambridge, Polity Press: 2016) 13.

understood as resulting from discrete sources of discrimination.”<sup>130</sup> In other words the dominant within a group is represented, leaving a part of the group behind that fall into multiple categories, in this case Black women. Just adding the excluded group does not solve the exclusion, because what these women experience because they belong to multiple minorities is greater than the racism and sexism combined.<sup>131</sup> Crenshaw gives a clear example from a court case in which five Black women accuse General Motors of discrimination, because all Black women that were hired got fired. This was not accepted as discrimination because General Motors did employ Black man and also employed white women. Hence on both separate plains of discrimination, namely ethnicity and gender, the employer was perceived to have not discriminated against these women. However, as Crenshaw points out the intersectional experience is greater than the sum. These women are only protected to the extent that they fall within the categories of the more privileged dominant in the groups namely Black man and white women.<sup>132</sup>

In many groups people seem to be too blindsided by the representation of the dominant within the group to see the inequalities within. Crenshaw is, for instance, critical of feminism, since remains privileging the white racial contexts it has evolved from over the experience of women from different backgrounds.<sup>133</sup> That is why intersectionality has become an important aspect of feminist theory as a means to better understand the scope of gender inequality and come to an understanding of the multiple factors active. Intersectionality is also valuable for the critical analysis of craftivism, since it on the one hand claims that it is open to everybody, whilst it has originated from and caters most to white middle/upper class women.

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<sup>130</sup> Kimberle Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” in *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, no 1 (1989) 140.

<sup>131</sup> Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex,” 140.

<sup>132</sup> Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex,” 141-3.

<sup>133</sup> Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex,” 154.

### 3.2 Craft and feminism

In both the work of Sarah Corbett and Betsy Greer the importance of feminism for craftivism can be recognized. Greer, for instances, states that “By making the domestic a source of pride and strength, we have the opportunity to culturally redefine “woman’s work” as an act of progress and regression.”<sup>134</sup> This was not possible if the second wave feminists had not proven that women are just as capable as men. She stresses, moreover, the importance of ‘our’ *choice* to cook or knit “without feeling like we’re bending to cultural stereotypes.”<sup>135</sup> Corbett’s connection to feminism can be traced back to her personal history, always involved in protesting and being raised by strong women. Her feminist views come most to the fore in her projects. She is more careful with the labelling herself or her work as feminist. Craftivism as she views it is a tool in the activists toolkit and hence can be used for multiple conflicting agendas.<sup>136</sup> However due to the history of craft and the friction with that past that craftivism invokes makes it undoubtedly linked to feminism. Postfeminism as an analytical term can help us see how craftivism is feminist, but is also very much motivated by neoliberalism.<sup>137</sup> When pairing this with intersectionality, a better understanding can be reached about who is implied within feminism and who is not. Within this section these notions will be used in order to explore the connection between craftivism and feminism. Moreover, the critique of, and relation to girlie feminism will be explored.

#### Craftivism, Feminist Waves and Neoliberalism

As mentioned before, craftivism is tied to third wave feminism because of its shared background of Riot Grrrl. Both moreover create social change through cultural action in daily life and respond to the same array of social, cultural, environmental and political issues. When looking at the history of craft,

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<sup>134</sup> Betsy Greer, *Craftivism, Knitting for Good*, 19.

<sup>135</sup> Betsy Greer, *Craftivism, Knitting for Good*, 18.

<sup>136</sup> Sarah Corbett, *How To Be A Craftivist*, 19.

<sup>137</sup> Rosalind Gill, “Post-postfeminism?: new feminist visibilities in postfeminist times,” *Feminist Media Studies* 16, no. 4 (June 2016): 622, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2016.1193293>.

its potential as a feminist practice has not always been recognized. Debbie Stoller sees crafting as a feminist act in itself, because of its strong feminine connotations (see history of craft). Stoller is the author of *Stitch'n Bitch* and the co-founder of the feminist third wave magazine *Bust*. She has opened up what can be considered feminist practice. Doing a craft project can be a form of apolitical consumerism but also a "purposeful [project] in the spirit of feminist goals of empowerment, social justice, and women's community building."<sup>138</sup> Sarah Corbett makes the distinction between non-political craft projects and craftivism, which is motivated by the long-term goal of structural change.<sup>139</sup> Just like Stoller, Corbett recognizes the potential of craft to make a change, which is inherently tied to the motivation behind the craft project. Following deCerteau, craftivism can be understood as part of feminist activism which may differ in form from regular feminist activism. Seeing craftivism as such can "highlight the possibility of resistance through the re-appropriation of cultural material," and reveal the messy but "creative and resilient capacities of humans [...] to "make do"" and use craft in "a cunning elusive and resistant fashion."<sup>140</sup>

Within third wave feminism, there is not one collective identity for women due to the late modern female empowerment discourse which, as a result, causes women to construct their own identities based on the specific cultural circumstances which also shape their tools for resistance. This can be traced back to Sarah Corbett who writes that she, like Peter Korn in his book on craftsmanship, finds the word craft a 'moving target'. She cites him saying "Craft is a cultural construct that evolves in response to changing mindsets and conditions of society."<sup>141</sup> Hence the notion of craft, just like the notion of womanhood is linked to a specific moment and place in time. Corbett is moreover aware of the Western context on which she focusses within her book *How to be a Craftivist, The Art of Gentle Protest* where "residents can mostly speak freely, where people are not

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<sup>138</sup> Beth-Ann Pentney, "Feminism, Activism, and Knitting: Are the Fibre Arts a Viable Mode for Feminist Political Action?" *ThirdSpace* 8, no 1 (Summer 2008), <http://journals.sfu.ca/thirdspace/index.php/journal/article/view/pentney/210>.

<sup>139</sup> Sarah Corbett, *How To Be A Craftivist*, 14-20.

<sup>140</sup> Trent S. Newmeyer, "Knit One, Stitch Two, Protest Three! Examining the Historical and Contemporary politics of crafting," *Leisure/Loisir* 32, no 2 (2008), 445-6, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14927713.2008.9651417>.

<sup>141</sup> Sarah Corbett, *How To Be A Craftivist*, 10.

struggling in a war-torn country and democracy is, for the most part, in operation.”<sup>142</sup> However in terms of intersectionality she does not mention to whom craftivism is and is not accessible. The central idea of craftivism seems to be that craftivism can be practiced by all within this Western context. She does state that “[o]ur members are eclectic in style, age, creed, colour and sexuality, yet by wearing the craftivist objects they make, they show that [they are] part of a movement for change without having to cover up their own authenticity. Whether you dress in gothic clothing, skater gear, or a twinset and pearls, you are all welcome to do craftivism as you are and wherever you are. You can be yourself.”<sup>143</sup> However the economic capital needed in order to be able to participate is not mentioned, which limits the accessibility of craftivism. Moreover there is no mention of different ethnic craft practices, such as the African-American women’s quilting to be incorporated into craftivism, which could be an interesting sight for further investigation.

Moreover, craftivism is not free from postfeminism and neoliberalism either. The practice of creating these objects and more specifically posting about them online as a part of your identity construction and selling them is part of the larger DIY-trend which is informed by neoliberal motives. On the one hand you could argue that craftivism encourages crafters to consume less by creating themselves and buying sustainable resources. On the other hand, the provenance of the resources is difficult to check and the crafted product for protest actions are often not made for practical use-value but more so for their quality to make a point come across. Within postfeminism the common notion is that gender equality has been achieved whilst at the same time focussing on female accomplishment through lifestyle and consumption choices. Craftivism can be considered as such a lifestyle choice, although opponents will refute this notion, because wearing your own handmade pieces is actually defying the dominant ideals of appearance. This would of course all depend on the design, making something by hand does not simply imply that it is not conforming to the norm. Since

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<sup>142</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>143</sup> Sarah Corbet, *How To Be A Craftivist*, 215.

women are targeted to develop the way they look, act and think, the idea of constructing your own identity through your craft is a response to the neoliberal society we live in.

What makes it difficult to pinpoint whether craftivism is inherently neoliberalist or not, is the fact that each outing can be deemed differently. The specific characteristics of a project in relation to the dominant ideals in terms of lifestyle, consumption and appearance that prevail in that space and time for that specific group or person all influence how a craftivist project should be understood. Moreover, a person who for instance creates something with the best intentions can still for an outsider be problematic in terms of consumption. The knowledge and perspective are key in one's understanding. Seeing the flaws and discrepancies within a system are more easily detected from outside than within. The researcher would like to propose to view craftivism as a tool, instead of researching it as one homogenous practice, since it can be used for many causes and in many ways. Moreover, for craftivism to be activist, as pointed out by Stoller, not all practices are in fact craftivist, albeit being crafted.

The problematic notion of choice which is highly present within neoliberalism (and postfeminism) can also be traced back to craftivism. The idea that by choosing to follow heteronormative, paternalistic norms one is still empowered or feminist is a contested issue as can be seen in the next section on girly feminism.

### Girly Feminism

Writer, scholar and feminist Laura Portwood-Stacer is critical of girly feminism which is a type of feminism that focusses on femininity and feminine practices such as craftivism as a form of feminist activism. Following Linda Alcoff, she states that the focus on 'the feminine' presupposes an "essential



gender identity for women.”<sup>144</sup> This identity is shaped by the patriarchal view of women and moreover caters only to one privileged type of womanhood. Intersectionality is called for in this instance, more so because girlie feminists appear to be unaware of the inequalities still present for many women, when taking into account sexuality, race and class. According to Portwood-Stacer they portray second wave feminist as ‘gloomy Gertrudes’ who have been fighting against girlie things and hence do not tolerate girlie feminists pleasure in doing girlie activities. Girlie feminists hence fight against this ‘repressive’ feminism instead of fighting against sexism or the patriarchy. This is problematic because, many women do not have access to the issues second wave feminists have fought for, which seem to be a common misconception among girlie feminists. Moreover, not every woman feels comfortable with the gender identity that girlie feminism caters to not in the least because it “constrains one to disempowering norms”.<sup>145</sup> Portwood-Stacer furthermore shows how we should be mindful of the factors that make girlie culture appealing, taking power-relations into account. She is critical of women-identification as a stand-in for feminist activism, since these movements “are particularly unhelpful when they fail to confront the oppressive ideologies that exist between women along vectors of race, class and sexuality.”<sup>146</sup> Girlie feminists have a positive investment in heteronormative feminine roles, because of the social rewards. This downplays feminism and fits neoliberalism in which McRobbie’s notion of “feminism taken into account” is strongly present which takes out the critical evaluation of femininity and hence the incentive to start social action.<sup>147</sup>

One could argue that girlie feminism is a parody of normative femininity, making the girlie performance possibly subversive. However how the other will interpret your actions is unknown. The performance can just be for mere self-development instead of making a difference on a larger scale,

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<sup>144</sup> Laura Portwood-Stacer, “Do-It-Yourself Feminism: Feminine Individualism and the Girlie Backlash in the DIY/Craftivism Movement,” presented at *The International Communication Association Convention*: San Francisco, California, 2007, 5.

<sup>145</sup> Laura Portwood-Stacer, “Do-It-Yourself Feminism,” 7-9.

<sup>146</sup> Laura Portwood-Stacer, “Do-It-Yourself Feminism,” 6.

<sup>147</sup> Laura Portwood-Stacer, “Do-It-Yourself Feminism,” 10-11.

hence individual cases need to be assessed. The claim to be subversive is not enough. According to Portwood-Stacer, girlie feminism and craftivism merely reappropriate gender roles instead of changing them or moving away from them.<sup>148</sup> However what Portwood-Stacer seems to overlook is that craftivism uses crafting as a tool for protest, not as the protest itself. Craftivism moreover functions as a means to concentrate on the issue at hand and come to a better understanding of that issue in order to come to a more effective discussion. The activism typically does not stop when the knitting needles are put to the side. Portwood-Stacer is moreover critical of the notion that because you choose to do something, for instance knit, it makes your activity feminist. As mentioned before the researcher is also critical of this notion and would not view it as craftivism. However, the focus on personal choice fits in well with the neoliberal ideology and is present in the discourse on craft(ivism). Besides she points out how craftivism is not sensitive to the fact that it takes economic capital and a privileged class position to be able to buy the resources necessary and invest the time to participate. "Only if crafting is undertaken with the political aim of social change can it reasonably be thought to enter the realm of activism."<sup>149</sup> This comes close to Corbet's critique of Greer's too open-ended definition of craftivism, that allows for non-activist activities to be considered activist. Hence it is useful to keep these concerns in mind and assess cases individually.

### 3.3 On A Critical Note

The craftivists write with full conviction about their activism and promote its effectiveness. Craftivism allegedly speaks to introverts, which comprise half of the world's population according to Sarah Corbett, it is thought through, gentle and humble, it opens up conversations in order to get to solutions and it treats people with respect. Moreover, by being so time-consuming and repetitive it is a type of meditation for the crafter, hence one has the time to reflect on one's own responsibilities

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<sup>148</sup> Laura Portwood-Stacer, "Do-It-Yourself Feminism," 14.

<sup>149</sup> Laura Portwood-Stacer, "Do-It-Yourself Feminism," 16.

and understand other people's choices. There are however some points of critique. For one, the softness of the activism is a point of critique. Since it is so non-confrontational and time consuming the ability to respond to current issues adequately instead of being overpowered is questioned. In other words, would the more fierce types of protest not stifle these introverts. Sarah Corbett states that "[...] introverts are really good at intimate activism because we like to listen, we like one-to-ones, we don't like small talks, we like those big, juicy issues to discuss with people, we don't like conflict, so we avoid it at all costs [...]. And most of us won't say that we're introvert, or we get embarrassed by saying what overwhelms us."<sup>150</sup> However if introverts avoid conflict "at all costs" and are embarrassed to say what overwhelms them the question arises: how they can be the ones who lead conversations and come to solutions without being pushed over. Another line of critique on Craftivism is that since it promotes passive action, it will enforce the dominant aggressive rule, since it is not forceful enough to break dominant views.<sup>151</sup> This is linked to the argument that violence of the oppressed is not equal to violence of the oppressor, since it is a form of self-defence.<sup>152</sup>

It can moreover be argued that craftivism is informed by neoliberalism and shares the same pitfalls. Within neoliberalism for instance autonomy and self-improvement is championed. This in turn leads to the notion that making yourself happy and successful is your own responsibility. As David Harvey states "individual success or failure is interpreted in terms of entrepreneurial virtues or personal failings ... rather than being attributed to any systemic property."<sup>153</sup> Similarly, craftivists feel empowered by being able to choose to start crafting and donate or sell their produce, but fail to realize that the pressure to be successful is created by the championing of autonomy. The minimal government involvement linked to this autonomy is an important characteristic of neoliberalism, which affects minorities the most who are ironically an important target group for craftivist actions.

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<sup>150</sup> Sarah Corbett, "Activism needs introverts," filmed November 2016. TEDxYouth@Bath. 13:58. [https://www.ted.com/talks/sarah\\_corbett\\_activism\\_needs\\_introverts#t-825539](https://www.ted.com/talks/sarah_corbett_activism_needs_introverts#t-825539).

<sup>151</sup> Shannon Black, "KNIT + RESIST," 697.

<sup>152</sup> Ana Hurwitz, "20 ways the violence of the oppressed isn't the same as the violence of the oppressors," *Collectively Free*, February 2, 2017, <http://www.collectivelyfree.org/violence-of-the-oppressed/>.

<sup>153</sup> Nicole Dawkins, "The Precarious Work and Postfeminist Politics of Handmaking (in) Detroit," *Utopian Studies*, 22, no 2 (2011) 277.

It can be argued that there are craftivist actions that work for, not with marginalized people and hence do not come up with fitting actions. The craftsmanship used in craftivist actions is mostly appreciated by crafters, since they can understand the time and skill needed to create a piece. Hence the impact may be misplaced, it can be like preaching to the choir.

### Case-studies

The Pussyhat and Evil Eyes Projects by Krista Suh are examples of taking the traditionally domestic practice of crafting into the public space, by in some occasions knitting in public settings, but also by using the handmade products as a means to get attention for the cause. By doing so the marginalisation and devaluation of crafting is countered and the feminist subversive quality of crafting is explored by reappropriating craft.<sup>154</sup> According to Shannon Black “craft activists have a history of placing craft ‘in view’ as a tactic for transgressing space, raising political awareness, and valuing women’s craft work. The Pussyhat Project extends these efforts and does so on an unprecedented scale.”<sup>155</sup> However in terms of gender, race and class there are limitations to these projects.

For one the pink colour and name of the Pussyhat reinforces essentialist ideas on what female biology looks like. Hence women of colour and transgender women are marginalized or excluded since a ‘pink pussy’ does not represent them. It is argued by Shannon Black and others that the “cutesy” and “unthreatening” demeanour of the Pussyhat Project is directed towards a privileged part of society, which is in this case white, middle-class, women. This tactic opens a pathway to this type of feminist activism but fails to connect to other feminist activism that does not cater to the dominant white, middle-class, heterosexual, cisgender women and might use different tactics of getting their point across. There have for example been multiple protests prior to Donald Trump’s

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<sup>154</sup> Shannon Black, “KNIT + RESIST: placing the Pussyhat Project in the context of craft activism.” *Gender, Place & Culture* 24, no 5 (2017): 697-700, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2017.1335292>.

<sup>155</sup> Shannon Black, “KNIT + RESIST,” 702.

election, however the women's rights protest by far got the most attention. It is striking how, according to Shannon Black, women of colour participated in the protest for women's rights, but that white women rarely show their support through activism vice versa.<sup>156</sup> However, this was based on an article in the New York Times. No (current) scientific research on this topic has been found, but is called for.<sup>157</sup> Due to the influence of neoliberalism "[t]hird wave anti-racist and anti-colonial, transnational feminisms, which have fought to break down universalizing concepts of 'woman' and 'women's rights' – concepts which often assume a white, middle-class, heterosexual, cisgender, able-bodied subject – are negated."<sup>158</sup> Moreover, Angela McRobbie states that within the discourse on creativity, choice and autonomy, inequality persists because discussing disparities in class, race and gender are deemed irrelevant since the notion that female equality is obtained is enforced within postfeminism and neoliberalism. She calls this phenomenon the politics of disarticulation.<sup>159</sup>

Similar to the critique of the colour of the Pussyhat, one could argue that using the traditionally blue evil-eyes enforces white dominance and excludes other ethnicities. This is a misconception informed by western ideas about the most common eye-colour. Historically the evil eye was blue, because it was not the norm for people to have blue eyes which made them more striking. Moreover, the fact that the traditional image is blue-eyed does not mean that that colour is prescribed by the project; all colours can be used. This project is made more accessible not only by encouraging people to knit more gloves but also by distributing stickers for free by Suh and other volunteers with all different colour irises on it (see figure 12).<sup>160</sup> Yet by encouraging people to knit or crochet their evil-eye gloves the craftivist quality is (partly) ensured. According to Suh the project is meant to be inclusive and intersectional, she states that "[e]yes are used as symbols all over the

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<sup>156</sup> Shannon Black, "KNIT + RESIST," 703-4.

<sup>157</sup> Jenna Wortham, "Who Didn't Go to the Women's March Matters More Than Who Did," *New York Times*, January 24, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/24/magazine/who-didnt-go-to-the-womens-march-matters-more-than-who-did.html>.

<sup>158</sup> Shannon Black, "KNIT + RESIST," 705.

<sup>159</sup> Shannon Black, "KNIT + RESIST," 706.

<sup>160</sup> Marilyn Icsman, "Here's why you'll see evil eye gloves at the March for Our Lives," *USA Today*, March 24, 2018, <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/onpolitics/2018/03/23/heres-why-youll-see-evil-eye-gloves-march-our-lives/453056002/>.

world.”<sup>161</sup> The project can be supported by all and due to its harmless nature would attract the same



Figure 12: Marilyn Icsman, *USA Today*, March 24, 2018, <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/onpolitics/2018/03/23/heres-why-youll-see-evil-eye-gloves-march-our-lives/453056002/>.

women who would support the Pussyhat Project also because of its universal quality. Children from all kinds of different

backgrounds go to school and also gun violence affects all.

However not everybody is affected equally. Research shows that inequality is an important factor in gun violence. Moreover mostly males are affected by and turn towards gun violence.<sup>162</sup>

Tied to the issue of gun violence and gun control are larger social problems that strike the people affected by poverty and

inequality the most.<sup>163</sup> Based on data of the Gun Violence

Archive and Everytown for Gun Safety, mass shootings make up

a relatively small percentage of all gun violence incidents,

namely 100 deaths of the 12,500 to 15,500 per year in the USA. The communities of colour and specifically black people are disproportionately affected by gun violence. They represent around fourteen percent of the population in the USA but make up half of the homicide victims.<sup>164</sup>

Hence the success of getting people to support the March Of Our Lives and Evil Eye Project could be an example against the statement of Shannon Black. She stated that craftivism fails to connect to feminist activism that does not cater to the dominant group, since gun violence has an impact on all, but mostly minorities. This potential is not met, since there very little attention is paid to the different groups most affected by the Evil Eyes Project which as a result can be deemed rather

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<sup>161</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>162</sup> Maia Szalavitz, “The Surprising Factors Driving Murder Rates: Income Inequality and Respect,” *The Guardian*, December 7, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/dec/08/income-inequality-murder-homicide-rates>.

<sup>163</sup> Jeremy Slevin, “A Gun Violence Expert Explains the Link Between Inequality and Gun Deaths,” *Talkpoverty*, March 29, 2018, <https://talkpoverty.org/2018/03/29/gun-violence-america-isnt-one-epidemic-several/>.

<sup>164</sup> Sarah Ruiz-Grossman, “We Need To Talk About Black Lives And Gun Violence After The Florida Shooting,” *Huffpost*, February 22, 2018, [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/black-lives-gun-violence-florida-shooting\\_us\\_5a8f1a11e4b00804dfe6a466?guccounter=1&guce\\_referrer\\_us=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuY2l0eWxhYi5jb20vZXF1aXR5LzlwMTgvMDMvd2hlbi10ZWVucy1wcm90ZXN0LXJhY2UtbWF0dGVycy81NTQ0ODAv&guce\\_referrer\\_cs=J3JyznNrLJ8WII0MXGnt\\_A](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/black-lives-gun-violence-florida-shooting_us_5a8f1a11e4b00804dfe6a466?guccounter=1&guce_referrer_us=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuY2l0eWxhYi5jb20vZXF1aXR5LzlwMTgvMDMvd2hlbi10ZWVucy1wcm90ZXN0LXJhY2UtbWF0dGVycy81NTQ0ODAv&guce_referrer_cs=J3JyznNrLJ8WII0MXGnt_A).

universalizing. However due to the success of the March of Our Lives, the debate on gun violence has been rekindled and offers opportunities to use this momentum to increase the discrepancies in the communities most affected. Whilst the majority of the responses to the March of Our Lives was positive, there has been some hostility. Several students have been threatened online on basis of the theory that they would be fake ‘crisis actors’ that worked for the FBI or left-wing politicians in support of the campaign against guns. These theories are popular among members of the NRA.<sup>165</sup> However it is striking that whilst the predominantly white students associated with the March for our Lives were received positively, youths associated with the Black Lives Matter movement were received much less so, although they share similar sentiments. The Black Lives Matter movement was created in 2013 and wants “[...] to build local power and to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes.”<sup>166</sup> The issue of gun violence has been confronted for many years by youths of colour, yet they had to deal with police repression or being scorned or ignored by the public.<sup>167</sup> This however does not mean that black activists and scholars do not applaud the efforts of the Parkland students, but they do point out the contrast between their own experience and that of the students. It can be a possibility to join forces since “The black teens haven’t been able to talk because there hasn’t been anyone to listen. [...] And the students from Parkland haven’t been able to grieve because the public wants them to be spokespeople.”<sup>168</sup> Black Lives Matters co-founder Patrisse Cullors states that “What happens is white people get to be everything — they get to be victims, they get to be heroes [...] Black people unfortunately continue to be criminalized for our moments of courage, mourning or grieving. When we go out to the streets to protest for our lives that matter, we’re given heavy police repression. This is a race question.”<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Daniel Arkin and Ben Popken, “How the internet’s conspiracy theorists turned Parkland students into ‘crisis actors,’” *NBC News*, February 21, 2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/how-internet-s-conspiracy-theorists-turned-parkland-students-crisis-actors-n849921>.

<sup>166</sup> “About,” *Black Lives Matter*, accessed April 5, 2019, <https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/herstory/>.

<sup>167</sup> Mimi Kirk, “When Teens Protest, Race Matters,” *Citylab*, March 1, 2018, <https://www.citylab.com/equity/2018/03/when-teens-protest-race-matters/554480/>.

<sup>168</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>169</sup> Sarah Ruiz-Grossman, “We Need To Talk About Black Lives And Gun Violence After The Florida Shooting,” *Huffpost*, February 22, 2018, [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/black-lives-gun-violence-florida-shooting\\_us\\_5a8f1a11e4b00804dfe6a466?guccounter=1&guce\\_referrer\\_us=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuY2l0eWxhYi5](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/black-lives-gun-violence-florida-shooting_us_5a8f1a11e4b00804dfe6a466?guccounter=1&guce_referrer_us=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuY2l0eWxhYi5)

The “Don’t Blow It” project by Sarah Corbett provides an example in which the development of the activism and the aftermath is clearly visible. The project was successful and led to many discussions and a change in policy in the end without resentment towards either party. As discussed before the nature of this campaign was rather different to Krista Suh’s projects in terms of duration, scale and personal commitment. As with the evil eye protest not all people affected by the project fell within the target group of the typical white female craftivist. Moreover, since this campaign is more local it fits in with the third feminist wave in the sense of creating your own identity and stance in relation to your more immediate environment. One of the dangers of postfeminism and neoliberalism is the reinforcement of class power for the higher classes.<sup>170</sup> However the “Don’t Blow It” project is a clear example that fights toward more equality since it strives towards having UK retailers pay living wage. Due to the time-consuming nature of this project it is not accessible to all since it requires a large time investment. The whole process however was supported and shared online which is an accessible way of supporting that strengthened the campaign as well. “Throughout the AGM we had lots of people on Twitter sharing our activities which only helps the cause. One of our tweets had 70 retweets and 54 favourites on the day.”<sup>171</sup> Lastly, the spin-off craftivist kits can be seen as a clear sign of commodifying protest and turning consumption into a lifestyle choice that can be bought into that is very much related to neoliberalism.

For all these examples you can argue that supporting these craftivist projects online is accessible to practically all, however there is a distinction between doing the actual crafting and sharing or liking something you see online. The act of crafting and the investment of time that comes with it distinguishes craftivism from other types of activism, but because of these qualities it means that not everybody can participate in the actual craftivism. To what extent do other types of activism

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<sup>170</sup> David Harvey, “Neoliberalism as Creative Destruction,” 22-44.

<sup>171</sup> “What did we achieve at the Marks and Spencer AGM for shareholders?” *Craftivist-Collective*, July 8, 2015, <https://craftivist-collective.com/What-we-achieved-at-Marks-and-Spencer-AGM>.



cater to all remains to be seen, but since craftivism claims to be so accessible these questions need to be asked. Moreover, the extent to which all men and women feel free to join, is unclear. The typical craftivist group is predominantly female and white. The idea that craftivism is accessible to all can be linked to the central notion of postfeminism that “all our practices are freely chosen [...] which presents women as autonomous agents no longer constrained by any inequalities or power imbalances whatsoever.”<sup>172</sup> This notion also glosses over any inequalities among women and can explain why this idea that craftivism is accessible to all is so strong, since following the postfeminist logic all constraints seem to fall away. The discourse is centred on choice and individuality, whilst turning a blind eye to intersectionality. Using craft as a form of self-empowerment is fitting with the focus on individualism.

Although it is an honourable thing to strive for, one cannot expect to create a form of activism that is appealing to everybody. It is however important that despite the former statement people are not excluded. Being mindful of the reasons why people are not participating is hence crucial. Not everybody will want to join a protest march nor participate in knitting a meters wide blanket to get attention for the effect of drilling for natural gas. But it becomes problematic if people are excluded due to their race, gender, sexuality or class. Following Corbett craftivism should be a tool from the activists toolbox that widens the appeal of activism to include introverts and extroverts alike from all kinds of different backgrounds.

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<sup>172</sup> Ibidem, 153.

## 4. Conclusion

This research started off with tracing back the historical background of craftivism in order to come to an understanding of what craftivism is. To do so, three case studies have been researched namely “The Pussyhat Project,” the “Evil Eyes Project,” and the “Don’t Blow it Campaign.” In addition to the history of craft and the DIY-ethic another chapter has been devoted to craftivism’s relation to feminism and postfeminism. Within this context the case studies have been critically analysed.

Craftivism leads to activism that is ‘soft’ in the sense that it does not so much seek conflict or opposition but uses crafting as a catalyst for discussion and finally resolution. It is a type of peaceful protest. The means of craftivism is also soft, it does not necessarily involve yelling or placard waving. Due to the nature of crafting the people involved in craftivism take the time to reflect on the issue at hand instead of going into rash action. Craftivism is feminist due to its subversion of the connotations connected to crafting in the past. However not every craft project is feminist nor craftivist. In order for it to be deemed craftivist the motivation needs to be activist and cater to long term change. A craftivist protest is indeed feminist if it caters to a feminist cause and it is especially adept to be used for these causes due to the connotations of crafting. This does not mean to say that once a craftivist project is used for a feminist cause it should not be reviewed critically, since intentions and outcomes do not always line up.

A pitfall of craftivism is the influence of neoliberalism that can gloss over inequalities in terms of gender, race and class. Through the focus on personal development and choice, larger structures within society can be disguised whilst promoting the false idea that by choosing to do something makes this action subversive although following the norm is actually not. Within the discourse on craftivism the idea that the practice is open to everybody is strong, however this notion is indicative of neoliberalism in which the idea of choice is key. Anyone can choose to do anything and if it fails the blame can be sought with yourself and not with larger structures within society. The openness of craftivism can be questioned, for one because it takes a quite extensive investment of time and

resources such as yarn and needles that is not accessible to all. Moreover, craftivism is predominantly practiced by white women which can lead to the exclusion of others such as can be seen with the design of the pink pussyhat that is offensive to queer, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans (lgbt) and women of colour, since it reinforces the dominant ideal and does not incorporate others.

Due to the connotation of craftivism as a demure female pastime, it has the potential in line with third wave feminism to be used as a subversive tool. However, it remains important to be critical and mindful of the larger structures at play as can be seen in the case-studies. Where the “Evil Eye Project” had the potential to lay bare the groups most affected by gun violence and hence create more awareness, the issue was universalized. The “Don’t Blow It” campaign on the other hand did make a difference in terms of equality, but by later on selling kits for your own future projects does raise issues in terms of commodification and access.

Craftivism can best be understood as a tool for activism, which hence means it can be used for contradictory purposes. In order to achieve long term change one could argue that a more fine-tuned definition of craftivism does steer towards defying neoliberalism since it is so omnipresent in our culture. Besides neoliberalism tends to distort the notion of activism and free choice, making working towards long term change within neoliberalism challenging. For future research the individual cases within and outside the Western context need to be analysed in further detail, by looking into the motivation from participants and reactions from outsiders or of opposing parties. It would be interesting to see if there is a dialogue between craftivist and traditional indigenous craft practitioners. The specific tactics and types of craftivist protest needs to be explored further to come to an even better understanding of its uses as soft feminist protest and to know if it is sustainable in the long term. It is moreover interesting to research the development of craftivism in relation to the development of community art, since they share a similar history and common goals, yet community art theorists have not claimed it.

Craftivism has the potential of being an important strategy or tool within feminist activism due to its history and inherent time for reflection. If the time is taken to create protests that cater to social change, are inclusive and informed by feminist history they can escape the pitfalls of neoliberalism and appeal to introverts and extroverts alike due to its soft nature.

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## 5.1 Figures

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Figure 1: Typology of activism in the digital age, Neumayer, Christina and Jakob Svensson. "Activism and Radical Politics in the Digital Age: Towards a Typology." *Convergence* 22, no 2 (2016): 140. DOI: 10.1177/1354856514553395.

Figure 2: Suffrage Ephemera (Kate Parry Fye Collection), <https://womanandhersphere.com/tag/books-and-ephemera-by-and-about-women-womens-suffrage/>.

Figure 3: Suffragettes making banners: 1910, <http://www.museumoflondonprints.com/image/400816/worlds-graphic-press-ltd-suffragettes-making-banners-1910>.

Figure 4: Huddersfield Banner, <https://womanandhersphere.files.wordpress.com/2014/11/huddersfield-banner.jpg>

Figure 5: Robin Prime, A cross-stitched mask on a mannequin in a shop window to provoke thought and action in passers-by some of whom work for global companies. Shoreditch, London UK,

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Figure 6: Victoria Siddle, Shareability: hand-embroidered Twitter bird with a real tweet stitched on it. Offline craftivism actions can be documented online and vice versa. Photograph. September 10, 2015. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/craftivist-collective/21520>.

Figure 7: “Women’s March attendees in Washington, DC. Shannon Stapleton, Reuters, Pussyhat Project, January 21, 2017, <https://www.pussyhatproject.com/blog/2017/2/17/the-sea-of-pink>.

Figure 8: Kesley.365, Instagram, March 24, 2018, [https://www.instagram.com/p/BguNLFzBz99/?utm\\_source=ig\\_embed](https://www.instagram.com/p/BguNLFzBz99/?utm_source=ig_embed).

Figure 9: Voice of America, Brian Allen, *Pussyhat Project*, January 21, 2017, <https://www.pussyhatproject.com/blog/2017/2/17/the-sea-of-pink>.

Figure 10: Sarah Corbett, Graceful Activism: bespoke handkerchiefs for board members of a retail company to encourage them to shape their company to be as ethical as possible, photograph, July 6, 2015, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/craftivist-collective/19336696379/in/album-72157680437612602/>.

Figure 11: Craftivist Collective, photograph, July 2015, [https://craftivist-collective.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Craftivist\\_Collective\\_July\\_2015\\_-9861\\_sharpened\\_.jpg](https://craftivist-collective.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Craftivist_Collective_July_2015_-9861_sharpened_.jpg).

Figure 12: Marilyn Icsman, USA Today, March 24, 2018, <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/onpolitics/2018/03/23/heres-why-youll-see-evil-eye-gloves-march-our-lives/453056002/>.

## 5.2 Appendix

### 1. Craftivism Manifesto

# CRAFTIVISM *MANIFESTO*

***A craftivist is anyone who uses their craft to help the greater good.***

***Your craft is your voice.*** Craftivism is about **raising consciousness**, **creating a better world stitch by stitch**, and things made by hand, by a person. It's also about sharing ideas with others in a way that is welcoming, not dividing, and **celebrating traditional skills in new ways**. **As well as remembering and respecting the makers that came before us, adding to the dialogue and leaving something for the next generations of craftivists.** Craftivism is about creating wider conversations about **uncomfortable social issues**. A craftivist is anyone who uses their craft to help the greater good **or in resistance to a greater societal ill**. **A single individual crafting can make a difference. Or they can craft together and benefit from the fellowship of other crafters.** Craftivists open minds and hearts. It's about connecting through **by and with craft and creating a more compassionate community**. **Craftivists are makers, hackers, menders and modifiers of material things.** My craftivism can be different than your craftivism and that's okay. Craftivism encourages people to **challenge injustice and find creative solutions to conflict**. **Craftivism does not expect you to come with skills but with willingness.** Craft is often seen as a benign, passive and (predominantly female) domestic past time. By taking these stereotypes and subverting them, craftivists are making craft a useful tool of peaceful, proactive and political protest. Craftivism is a way to make big issues tangible, **so that we can build a better world together**. **Craftivism is about reclaiming the slow process of creating by hand, with thought, with purpose and with love. Because activism, whether through craft or any other means, is done by individuals, not machines.** **Craftivism is a tool to instantly create a small part of the warmer, friendlier and more colorful world we hope to see in the future.**

This manifesto was written by Mary Callahan Baumstark, Ele Carpenter, Joanna Davies, Tamara Gooderham, Betsy Greer, Bridget Harvey, Rebecca Marsh, Manna Marvel, Ari Miller, Iris Nectar, Abi Nielsen, Elin Poppelin and Cat Varvis.

Craftivism. "Craftivism Manifesto." Accessed February 9, 2018. <http://craftivism.com/manifesto/>.

## 2. A Craftivist's Manifesto

# A Craftivist's Manifesto

Connecting our hands, hearts and heads  
we can truly make a difference.

### 1 Be the tortoise

Breathe; take it slow. Craftivism is about taking a thoughtful approach to mindful activism.

### 2 Craft is our tool

It can bring about effective long-term change, but it should always fit seamlessly with what we're saying, never used for the sake of it.

### 3 Solidarity not sympathy

Preserve the dignity of others by showing solidarity with them in your craft. Understand their struggles and you'll understand their solutions. Activism is not about charity.

### 4 Find comfort in contemplation

Use the slow, stitch-by-stitch, nature of craft to help you consider the complexities of injustices. It will lead to a deeper understanding of them and their solutions.

### 5 Empathy never points fingers

Try to see everyone's perspective. Everyone faces different challenges, so aim to make critical friends, not aggressive enemies.

### 6 Small & beautiful

However small, pieces inspired by beauty and love can be powerful reminders of just how gorgeous the world can be. Don't worry about imperfections either; they're endearing.

### 7 Humility holds the key

The world often needs us to change before it can. Consider your role within the bigger picture. Work with people, never against them and always keep an open mind.

### 8 Provoke don't preach

Never shout, always encourage. Inform through your craft and it will provoke thought and action. Intriguing activism inspires never intimidates.

### 9 Embrace positivity

It's the most encouraging tone we can take. Being cynical's easy, but a positive, compassionate world vision has the power to fuel dreams and build movements.

### 10 Make the change you wish to see

If we want our world to be more beautiful, kind & just, then let's make our activism beautiful, kind & just. So pick up your needle and thread and join us in crafting! Together we'll change our world one stitch at time...

Made with courage and care by Craftivist Collective

Craftivist-Collective. "A Craftivist's Manifesto." Accessed February 21, 2018. <https://craftivist-collective.com/our-story/>.