

# Stitched Ripped, Ripped Stitched

Crafting A Queer Utopia In A Post-Truth Paradise

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Do you want the truth or something beautiful?  
Just close your eyes and make believe  
Do you want the truth or something beautiful?  
I am happy to deceive you

Sacred lies, and telling tales  
I can be who you want me to be  
Sacred lies, and telling tales  
I can be who you want me to be  
But do you want me?

Paloma Faith, *Do You Want The Truth or Something Beautiful?* (2009)

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I dedicate this thesis to Maria Cornelia ‘Miep’ Jaakke-Dekker.



# Abstract

Join us and die or die and join us: there seems to be no way out of the current populist right-wing political climate in Northern America and (Western) Europe. Post-truths are used to further polarise individuals and/or groups and death has become part of a ‘feel good’ fiction. While politicians like Thierry Baudet and Donald Trump envision a ‘revived’ Western Paradise, the other is left depressed; failing to live within the capitalist narrative of positive straight continuity. However, instead of framing this state of depression and failure as inevitable, this thesis, using the work of Ann Cvetkovich and Jack Halberstam, conceptualises negativity and immobility as a way to deconstruct and re/think this positive straight continuity in favour of crafting something else: utopia. Through crafts as a re/claimed practice, this thesis looks at the way negativity can craft, stitch and rip, the ordinary everyday.

Crafts | Political depression | Queer failure | Feminist, queer and affect theory



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# Introduction

The year is 2019. Thierry Baudet and his populist right-wing political party Forum for Democracy have taken centre stage in Dutch politics. His line of thought and conquests compliments the ongoing waves of conservatism, traditionalism and bigotry (to only name a few) that are soaking the current political climate in (Western) Europe and Northern America. It is clear Baudet likes to play with facts and ideas that others are ‘too scared to touch’, for instance casually quoting Carl Schmitt during a victory speech; Schmitt of course being a conservative German thinker and ‘only brief’ Nazi member (Valk & Rusman 2019). Although Baudet heavily leans on his established academic background as a way to profile himself as ‘trustworthy’, his inexhaustible lust for forbidden knowledge makes him, according to himself and his party, the most accomplished anti-establishment leader. Combined with the party’s mission to debunk the myths that are upholding the status quo, Baudet knows to say the things other politicians only hint at: pointing out the modern ‘quasi-religion’ of climate change, the Islamic ‘take-over’ of Europe and the problems of individuality that causes a misplacement of the family or, in other words, Western women, thanks to emancipation, cannot and do not breed enough Whites to sustain *our* society (Baudet 2019). He focuses on the ‘politically incorrect’ to provide space for expressing *emotions* and attach *feelings* to these topics to make a point through elaborate ‘untouchable’ academic blah blah. Following his line of thought in a recent essay on the work of French author Michel Houellebecq, *We* (meaning White, Western and especially Male) are dying. While the establishment is busy to dig *our* grave it is up to *us*, as he concludes the essay, to “express, and even revive, the Western will to live” (ibid.).

Baudet posits that this revived will to live helps to cure ‘our’ depression and existential dread from imposed-freedom, which are key components to the downfall of the West (climate hysteria that claims all of our money, Islamification that pollutes our society and the decline of Whites which *is* society). While he mourns the emancipated individual, in particular the ‘over-sexed’ White, straight, able-bodied Woman who prefers to share herself with men rather than to support ‘our men’, he expresses his yearning for a revival or return to the wonderful world of yonder years, to Paradise, where these Western women were walking baby-machines and *our* borders (and bodies) were nice and neatly closed, keeping intruders at bay (ibid.). While Baudet is gazing through his rose-tinted glasses, we are left with the implications of his words. This will to ‘revive Western life’ goes hand-in-hand with the will to kill others, the will to make claims based on twisted truths – from the careful use of double meanings that are either boldly racist or defused as ironic to outright (or alt-

right) lies – and, finally, the will to take up the role of ‘depressed’ victim as an upper-class, straight, able-bodied, educated, White Male in Western Europe and to speak for a group that also qualifies or likes to qualify itself within these identity markers (Witt Wijnen & Rutten 2019; Valk & Rusman 2019). Perhaps ironically, this is a real cause for depression.<sup>1</sup>

## Join us and die

Baudet’s views and *feelings* are not new and certainly not rare in the year 2019. And while he and his associates celebrate victory after victory, sincerely quoting Nazis and other ‘taboos’, we, the open borders, the mixed-raced non-gendered baby creators, the slaughtered bodies, are ushered to get up from the sofa, to open the door to the balcony and jump off the railing. Not to embody Christ and offer up our lives for a greater good, like Houellebecq’s protagonist in *Sérotonine* (2019) which Baudet quotes in his essay, but to violently hit the pavement next to Him so Paradise can be build on top of us, without us, burying our borderless bodies (Baudet 2019). In this logic of life or death, where the only option is to jump or to live in ‘Paradise’, we have reached an impasse. An impasse where populist right-wing politicians shine light on our failures and where every move is ‘defused ironically’ or defended by a felt legitimate urgency and earnest believe in victimhood that can deform any counter-argument to say what it needs to say. Is, then, death the only optimal mode of existence in this political climate?

“All you gotta do is join us and die”, to quote *The Guy Who Didn’t Like Musicals* (2018), a Starkid production, where the way to Baudet’s horror Paradise (or a successful alien invasion) is paved through wilfully singing in harmony, “your own body is your front row seat to die”, or refuse to sing and your death fuses into harmony as you are “genetically reconstructed from the inside out”.<sup>2</sup> As they sing in ‘America Is Great Again’:

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1 It goes without saying that these identity markers do not state the legitimacy of depression. My argument here is not about the question of depression, but about the claimed role of the depressed victim; using these identity markers as a point of departure and turning them upside down to be able to portray victimhood, a threatened state of existence, while, as can be read in the Theoretical Framework, these markers have been and are the epitome of being ‘us’, the group that makes the rules, the group that *threatens* and is not threatened.

2 *The Guy Who Didn’t Like Musicals* (2018) is a Starkid production, directed by Nick Land and music composed by Jeff Blim: <https://youtu.be/IrxKX44qBJ0>. See timestamp 0:58:53 – 1:00:43 for ‘Join Us And Die’ and 1:31:04 – 1:33:15 for ‘America Is Great Again’.

You can't run  
'Cause our borders are closed  
You're staring down the gun  
'Cause you're easily disposed  
The final solution  
It's a charted course at the whim of our own evolution  
Singularity had through a pre-destined self-destruction  
So that we may rebuild and experience a new construction  
Yeah, we're great again

While *The Guy Who Didn't Like Musicals* ends on the depressing note that, indeed, all we can do is join and die or die and join, in this thesis I want to do neither and explore ways to be 'other' otherwise. This is an attempt to be/come outside of *their* logic, to refuse to sing in harmony, where there is only one mode of existence: inexistence. Instead I want to craft, figuratively as well as literally, a new in/existence or utopia that can offer a different solution than life/death. This utopia pricks through the bubble of Paradise, of falsely claimed felt-legitimate victimhood and Nazi-nostalgia, and makes space for the sacrificed mixed-raced non-gendered baby creators. While Paradise relies on straight reproduction, on the 'sacrifice' – suicide, murder or suicide murder – of the other in order to thrive (or revive), utopia is built from this struggle or refusal to reproduce (to revive) this sacrifice and un/become the logic that underlines its difference.

In this thesis the work of Ann Cvetkovich and Jack Halberstam will be central. I outline their concepts in the Theoretical Framework, using depression, failure and negativity not as a jumping board but as sticky sh\*t that is valued as a story *an sich*. The Theoretical Framework is followed by a chapter on Methodologies, in which I describe the way I have conducted research. In the first chapter I explain the role of crafts and show its potential for crafting utopia through a historical overview using the work of Cvetkovich as guideline. In the second chapter I look at the way Halberstam uses crafts, in particular collage, as a way to cut through this re/presentation, relating it to the twenty-first-century collage: the Internet meme. In the last chapter I bring Cvetkovich and Halberstam together to create a hybrid and new understanding of utopia, one that rips and stitches the political climate Baudet and co sustain. In the conclusion I reflect on this thesis and give suggestions for further research.



# Theoretical Framework

“I couldn’t feel physical pain because I was so busy feeling other kinds of pain, which often took the form of feeling nothing at all. Everything blurred together in an amorphous sense of dread.”

Ann Cvetkovich, *Depression: A Public Feeling* (2012), 30.

Dread, disappointment, disillusionment, despair. Negative feelings are defined as an individual problem that is up to you to solve. Talk to a therapist, take your meds and be happy (again). *If only it was that simple*. I believe that popping pills and pushing forward, to ‘break up’ with negativity and to ‘make up’ with positivity, is not a choice everyone can or should make. So instead of pushing forward, I want to use ‘failure’ as a point of departure. Where, opposed to success, failure is made out to be a valuable political and/or utopian position. This re/framing of negative feelings is based on Ann Cvetkovich’s *Depression: A Public Feeling* (2012) and Jack Halberstam’s *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011). Both scholars are situated in feminist and queer theory and use negativity (or, in the case of Cvetkovich, ‘mixed feelings’) to re/think politics. Following feminist tradition, the political is seen as the personal and the personal as the political (Cvetkovich 2012, 156). In this Theoretical Framework I will define core concepts and theories that are central to my argumentation, focusing on negativity, failure and depression as dis/connections with/in the political (and thus personal) climate we live in.

*Depression: A Public Feeling* and *The Queer Art of Failure* were published almost ten years ago, and while they are still very relevant today, the environment in which they have been conceived has changed. As a way to show this change and to contextualise my interpretation and argumentation, I follow Ignas Kalpokas’ *A Political Theory of Post-Truth* (2018). Kalpokas is a media scholar who combines the work of seventeenth-century philosopher Baruch Spinoza with that of twentieth-century philosopher Gilles Deleuze to re/think post-truth. Post-truth indicates a new relationship towards information, where individuals and groups are placed in their own narrative universe based on truth claims that “constitute their own lived realities and explain the world” (Kalpokas 2018, 5). Post-truth will function as the fabric onto which I will stitch and rip my exploration of crafts as a non/practice: where Cvetkovich’s and Halberstam’s concepts fabricate an alternative understanding of utopia (Cvetkovich 2012, 159, 167; Halberstam 2011, 140). I use political depression as a rupture of the story; rejecting a politics of reparation, which insists on moving forward as a way to create

change (Cvetkovich 2012, 128, 133). Instead I want to acknowledge and un/become this immobile position (Halberstam 2011, 128, 129). Central to this exploration is crafts. Although I will define my interpretation of crafts in the first chapter, for now it can be identified as a slow living practice that Cvetkovich has archived as an ‘ordinary form of practice’ that labours through the (depressing) ordinary everyday (Cvetkovich 2012, 159).

Before I will explain the concepts of political depression, queer failure, anti-social feminism and post-truth, I will look at the role of feelings, emotions and affect in culture.

## **What do you feel?**

Or, perhaps more accurate, *how* do you feel? The question ‘what do emotions do?’ might seem simplistic, however, as Sara Ahmed shows in *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* (2004 [2014]), that what emotions do, and therewith feelings and affects, is not always self-evident. Ahmed is a feminist, queer and postcolonial theorist who, in *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*, analyses the way emotions “shape the ‘surface’ of individual and collective bodies” (Ahmed 2004 [2014], 1). Although they might seem interchangeable, affects, feelings and emotions are different but, in many ways, similar. Affect can be seen as a bodily impression, feeling as a registration of that impression and emotion as an expression of the impression (ibid., 7). However, as Ahmed demonstrates, these impressions are not exclusive internal bodily/cognitive effects. Ahmed defines emotions as intentional, relational, social and circular. They are ‘about’ something, they invite re/actions to something, they are socially and culturally shaped, and they “are not simply something ‘I’ or ‘we’ have. Rather it is through emotions, or how we respond to objects and others, that surfaces are made and impressed: the ‘I’ and the ‘we’ are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others” (ibid., 9).

So central to what emotions do (and affects and feelings) is attributing others as the source of our experience (ibid., 1). The other is defined through differentiating the ‘I’ or ‘us’ from ‘you’ or ‘them’. The other is therefore often constructed as a threat because by “not being us” they are perceived as “endanger[ing] what is ours” (ibid., 1). To understand this sense of (experienced) endangerment, you have to look at the position of the marker who defines the ‘us’ and ‘not us’. In this way “[i]t is not difficult to see how emotions are bound up with the securing social hierarchy: emotions become attributes of bodies as a way of transforming what is ‘lower’ or ‘higher’ into bodily traits” (ibid., 4). As Ahmed explains: “[E]motions work to differentiate between others ... by constituting some

others as the legitimate objects of emotion. This differentiation is crucial in politics as it works to secure a distinction between legitimate and illegitimate lives” (ibid., 191).

Ahmed shows how claims of il/legitimacy are marked through the so-called secure white subject (ibid., 2). Here, I want to use phallogocentrism as a way to explain how this position is constituted. Phallogocentrism was coined by philosopher Jacques Derrida and consists of two words, logocentrism and phallocentrism. Logocentrism refers to the idea that (White) Western (European) culture is superior and universal. Phallocentrism refers to the gendering of this culture, where masculinist (or phallic) supremacy is a core value in re/producing it. So the other in relation to the “secure white subject” is marked as not White, not masculine, not Western, not heterosexual, not middle-class, not able-bodied etc. (Braidotti 2000, 298-299). Because Western culture favours reason and rationality instead of emotions, which are perceived as feminine, they are ‘removed’ from public discourse; or, as Ahmed points out, they are ‘only’ utilised as controlled ‘tools’ to secure a ‘high(er)’ position in the social hierarchy (Ahmed 2004 [2014], 3-4). Feminist scholars like Ahmed, but also Cvetkovich and Halberstam, reject this separation of public/private, reason/emotion, and show how feelings are crucial in understanding and de/constructing the everyday.

## **I’ve got a feeling | Embracing negativity**

Ann Cvetkovich and Jack Halberstam actively place feelings at the heart of their theories to make sense of the everyday. They use the concepts of political depression, queer failure and anti-social feminism to re/work phallogocentrism while ‘embracing’ their othered position. Below I will explain their concepts.

### **Political depression**

Cvetkovich defines depression using a social and cultural framework. She sees it not as a disease contained in the (defect) body of an individual that can be solved through targeted treatment, but as an interdisciplinary phenomenon that is produced by a ‘sick culture’ (Cvetkovich 2012, 90-91, 102-103). Although ‘sick culture’ has individual impact, it is not contained within the body of a person but in the body of society. Cvetkovich traces depression through the histories of trauma found in colonialism and slavery which, using the terminology of sociologist Avery Gordon in *Ghostly Matters* (2008), “is haunting all of our lives” (ibid., 115). Quoting philosopher Cornel West, she distinguishes the effects of trauma histories in ‘black sadness’ and ‘white sadness’. These sadnesses

are different but interrelated through the myth of Whiteness, which upholds “a system of differential access” constructing higher and lower social positions for bodies to attain (ibid., 120). Cvetkovich underlines that ‘sick culture’ “manifests itself not in catastrophic events but in the fabric of daily life” (ibid., 157). Cvetkovich:

“[The] legacy [of histories of racism] continues to pervade everyday experience – we are all living in an environment steeped with racialized violence: the land we walk on is stolen, the labor that produced the things that we use is underpaid and exploited, the neighborhoods we live in are either segregated or gentrifying” (ibid., 125).

Not one trauma but multiple traumas, which connect and disperse on an individual understanding and experience of everyday life, shape and create political depression. Although the everyday can be appointed as an arena in which these dis/connections are made, they are part of a bigger picture that goes beyond the (claimed) borders but, at the same time, are significantly tied to the (global) position and (trauma) histories that are contained within these borders.<sup>3</sup> Political depression can be seen as hitting an impasse, failing to move forward.

## Queer failure

Halberstam defines failure as a byproduct of our heteronormative capitalist society, where success is equated with profit and failure with “the inability to accumulate wealth” (Halberstam 2011, 88). As Halberstam shows, wealth or profit is not just about obtaining more money than others, but about the mindset behind this obtainment; where “success happens to good people and failure is just a consequence of a bad attitude rather than structural conditions” (ibid., 3). Inequality, being the other or ‘loser’, in this system is, similar to political depression, seen as a problem contained in the body of the individual instead of the body of society. This means that anyone who does not obtain or try to obtain a higher social position is failing.

Halberstam identifies this ‘automatic’ failing in queers as they fail “to embody the connections between production and reproduction” needed to complete this narrative of positive straight continuity (ibid., 94). He uses this position, combined with the negative affects associated with

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3 Think for instance about the difference of slavery in Northern America and (Western) Europe; where in America there are clearly marked physical spaces of slavery, while in Europe these physical manifestations are more obscured through narratives of national glory and pride, where the ‘gains’ of slavery are actively used to build a sense of nation(hood).



failing, to create queer failure. Queer failure “poke[s] holes in the toxic positivity of contemporary life” and “confront[s] the gross inequalities of everyday life” by exploiting “the unpredictability of ideology and its indeterminate qualities” (ibid., 3, 4, 88). With queer failure Halberstam wants to show how “alternatives are embedded already in the dominant and that power is never total or consistent” (ibid., 88). Here failure can re/present “an opportunity rather than a dead end” and be/come subversive and productive (ibid., 96, 179).

### **Anti-social feminism**

Inspired by the work of, among others, feminist anthropologist Saba Mahmood and novelist Jamaica Kincaid, Halberstam re/creates a feminism “that does not speak the language of action and momentum but instead articulates itself in terms of evacuation, refusal, passivity, unbecoming, unbeing” (ibid., 129). This so-called anti-social feminism uses negativity as a departure for ‘doing politics’ that refuses to be ‘part of the story’ and/or to define the self, to live and perform, as the other (ibid., 131-132). This goes against general ideas of feminism where “a self-activating, self-knowing, liberal subject” is positioned at its core, trying to re/shape the narrative by becoming part of the story (ibid., 126). However, this form of feminism, as Halberstam points out, still works with the Western imaginary and therewith the phallogocentric logic of a social hierarchy. This creates situations where, in the name of feminism, the other is seen as needed to be ‘saved’ or their subjugation is made out to be contained within their individual body instead of the body of (Western) society (ibid., 124).

Important herein is also the refusal of feminism as a generational narrative that is passed on from mother to daughter. This matrilineal model, according to Halberstam, “ironically resembles patriarchal systems in that it casts the mother as the place of history, tradition, and memory and the daughter as the inheritor of a static system which she must either accept without changing or reject completely” (ibid., 125). So instead Halberstam chooses to do neither; or refuses to do either. Instead anti-social feminism rebukes to conform to the social hierarchy and “finds purpose in its own failure”: failing to save the other, failing to replicate itself, failing to be/come part of the story (ibid., 128).

## **(Non)sense | A new political landscape**

As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, political depression, queer failure and anti-social feminism were conceptualised almost ten years ago. Since then the political landscape that Ann Cvetkovich and Jack Halberstam address has changed. To explain this changed landscape I will first look at the Public Feelings Project, which was initiated in 2001 and forms the basis for Cvetkovich's political depression. I will use the project as a starting point to explain the current political climate through the idea of post-truth.

### **The Public Feelings Project**

The Public Feelings Project explores the way affects move in/between public and private spaces and argues for the acknowledgement of them in both spheres. The project actively defined its placement in relation to the presidency of George W. Bush. Bush was president of the United States of America from 2001 until 2009. His office was shaped by the terrorist attacks of radical Islamic group al-Qaeda on the World Trade Center complex in New York on the 11<sup>th</sup> of September 2001, also known as 9/11. This attack catalysed global military action and a declaration of 'War on Terrorism', actively supported by Western European countries. 9/11 is cited as an important shift in the way Northern America and (Western) European countries govern themselves, centralising a heightened public awareness and discussions surrounding and marking the other.<sup>4</sup> Bush's war-centred politics made the project question: "What makes it possible for people to vote for Bush or to assent to war, and how do these political decisions operate within the context of daily lives that are pervaded by a combination of anxiety and numbness?" (Cvetkovich 2012, 1).

In 2016 similar questions were asked after the unfolding of the United Kingdom referendum to leave the European Union (also known as the Brexit-vote) and the election of Donald Trump as the president of the United States of America. While early twenty-first-century politics were legitimised as a 'righteous' and 'rational' choice to fight against terrorism, even while their claims of 'saving the other' turned out to be acting on false assumptions instead of calculated reason, Brexit and the 2016 USA presidency election are framed through a clear emotional drive. This emotional drive is reflected in the slogans of both campaigns: *Take control* and *Make America great again*. These slogans are clearly targeted to create a sense of 'us' against 'them'. Although this 'us' and 'them' sentiment is not new to politics and similar to the legitimisation of early twenty-first-century

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4 See for a close reading of this othering in relation to terrorism Chapter 4, "The Performativity of Disgust" in *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* (Ahmed 2004 [2014], 82-100).

politics, but the way they were and are framed and argued for is different than before.<sup>5</sup> This difference has been dubbed as post-truth. Instead of before, when truth claims were backed-up by ‘research’, ‘statistics’ and ‘facts’, this new relationship towards information can be seen as an acknowledgement of affects in politics and the biases that shape ‘research’, ‘statistics’ and ‘facts’. However, post-truth claims have mainly functioned as a polarising mechanism where feelings about the other are neutralised and acted upon even when they are pointed out as false; so the affects that constitute the claim are seen as trivial and are not necessarily acknowledged as affects but rather as the (lived) ‘reality’ (Kalpokas 2018, 11, 22-24).

## **Post-truth**

Following Ignas Kalpokas’ theorisation of post-truth, I will discuss how (post-)truth claims are made and the role of mediatisation and datafication in these claims. At the end I will critically engage with Kalpokas’ theory from a feminist, queer and de-/postcolonial standpoint.

## **Living your truth**

Truth with-a-capital-T, as theorised by Ancient Greek philosophers and taken up during the Enlightenment, states that claims of truth need to correspond with something in the ‘real’ (material) world to become True.<sup>6</sup> So a claim has to meet with outlined criteria that are seen as true to be accepted as the Truth until proven otherwise. Because everyone is obliged to follow these criteria when making a truth claim, a consensus is created on what counts as true or false, and therewith what counts as ‘real’. Through this process, truth claims that are accounted for as True turn into verifiable facts. These verifiable facts act as a barrier between new truth claims and verified Truths because they have been proven to be True and therefore actively fabricate and support ‘our’ assumptions of the workings of the world (Kalpokas 2018, 13-16; Davies 2016).

Post-truth also uses outlined criteria to create (a sense of) verifiability to fabricate a perception of the workings of the world. However, for a post-truth claim to become seen as the Truth, it relies on emotional investment. A post-truth claim becomes True because “people believe in it (i.e. it has been asserted affectively) or because people *would like* to believe in it” (Kalpokas 2018, 14). So a post-truth claim does not have to correspond with ‘reality’ to become True, instead it becomes True

5 See also the Introduction of this thesis in relation to the politics of Baudet and Forum for Democracy.

6 (Modern) Western thought has founded itself on the reading of, among others, Ancient Greek philosophy by Enlightened thinkers. So this idea of Truth is still important when looking at the way ‘reality’ is shaped and thought of as our current understanding of life (and beyond) is based on this principle.

because of its affective impact. As Kalpokas rightfully points out, believing, using and acting upon truth claims based on our lived experience and emotional reaction to it can be seen as the basis of politics. However, post-truth distinguishes itself from this more general dis/agreement on the way verifiable truths could be interpreted because it is completely independent from verifications and, therewith, from 'reality' (ibid., 13).

Post-truth creates its own 'reality' that does not have to correspond with the 'reality' of Truth. This enables post-truth to create a fiction that can confirm feelings (biases and prejudices) someone has about individuals and/or groups without verification. These post-truth claims based on 'lived reality' are achievable and often successful (accepted as the Truth, by some) because of pre-existing divisions found in our phallogocentric social hierarchy. Post-truth plays into these feelings by sustaining and entrenching groups further into their beliefs (ibid., 22-24).

### **Mediatisation & datafication**

According to Kalpokas, post-truth narratives have be/come this prevalent due to mediatisation and datafication. Mediatisation was developed as a way to theorise about the function, influence and consumption of broadcast media (television and radio) in society. Kalpokas uses mediatisation to flesh out the role of media as an information infrastructure that (co-)creates and frames public perception of the world, themselves and others. This information infrastructure is not only defined through broadcast media but encompasses all uses of media (ibid., 53-54). Datafication refers to the digital aspects of (social) media consumption where online actions are changed into (big) data which, in turn, are used as tradable commodities that helps to define the workings of algorithms: who is exposed to what, but also what is known and what is (made) forgotten. This idea corresponds with the concepts of biopower by philosopher Michel Foucault and societies of control by Gilles Deleuze (Kalpokas 2018, 29, 55; Foucault 1976; Deleuze 1992).

Kalpokus sees mediatisation and datafication as main practical instigators of post-truth fictions. Through (social) media, audiences are localised and exposed to (especially) crafted information that they (unconsciously) have provided through their consumption-behaviour. This creates a fictionalised sense of 'reality' or an (unverifiable) experience world that becomes True because it feels true and is affirmed to be true through their consumed media. This can be related to the idea of a 'filter bubble' where individuals and/or groups become isolated from information that does not confirm their world views. Instead they only consume information that re/affirms their own world

views. This makes it easier for post-truth fictions to be taken up as the (alternative) Truth because it fits into their (especially crafted, algorithmic based) ‘lived experience’. Filter bubbles make it difficult to expose yourself to counter-arguments or narratives and, thus, eliminates other perspectives. This not only effects how we process information, but also how we experience ‘reality’ (Pariser 2011, 76).

## **Critique on post-truth**

Although this constant exposure and creation of a fictionalised ‘reality’ works on a (power) system that is out of our control, we are not targeted audiences that consume innocently: algorithms reinvigorate ‘our’ feelings while post-truth narratives become True because they affirm these feelings (Kalpokas 2018, 67). It is therefore important to formulate post-truth as a collusion instead of a top-down imposed manipulated narrative.<sup>7</sup> Post-truth claims are made through a looped interaction between the messenger and the receiver, making post-truth narratives (radical) co-creations. This opens the door to not only identify post-truth as negatively disrupting the Truth, but also to enable counter-accounts to enter (mainstream) discourse independently from the approval of the status quo. Kalpokas: “[P]eople are empowered to choose themselves a reality which they would prefer to live” and therefore post-truth fictions carry a “(kind of) emancipatory potential ... instead of [the] dominance of ... exclusive ways of knowing ... the current truth market is a liberal one, guided by supply and demand” (ibid., 11, 127).

However, with this statement Kalpokas brushes over the imbalanced power relations that gives weight to voicing and acting out these choices. We cannot voice and choose from the same place, let alone actively act them out as an integrated part of (public) discourse. Kalpokas frames it as a step

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7 Post-truth is often formulated as a top-down imposed narrative crafted and expanded as a right-wing populist political tactic used to gain power through spreading scaremongering (unverifiable) facts. Left-orientated political commentators, such as British journalist Matthew d’Ancona, imply that post-truth audiences are passive consumers of information on (social) media, giving ground for post-truths to circulate and be accepted as the Truth because they do not (want to) know better, because to know better takes action (d’Ancona 2017, 141-142). However, this narrow formulation of post-truth obscures the participation of left political groups in post-truth narratives. It also denies pre-existing divisions and ‘truths’ individuals and/or groups experiences, which are verified through their (social) media consumption. I do agree with d’Ancona that post-truth is used as a polarising mechanism based on achieving a feel-good narrative, but by denying it as a felt-truth and therefore automatically framing it as a lie, you are prone to deny the (felt) legitimacy and workings of these truth claims in daily life (d’Ancona, 5, 15; Kalpokas 2018, 13, 36).

away from hegemonically imposed Truth and a step towards an equally distributed and contributed truth. However, as philosopher Roderick Howlett points out:

“The liberal ‘truth market’ [that Kalpokas] describes does indeed break down the present monopoly; but it is replaced with a different monopoly, this time actively encouraged to disorient and disguise, creating false hope in those who ‘collaborate’ in its dominance. The expectation that this new (dis)order built on confusion – even if this confusion is capable of temporarily pleasing – will not be used even more effectively by undesirable forces is dangerously naïve” (Howlett 2019).

Even though the (old) status quo does not have monopoly on the Truth any more, because post-truth narratives act (for some) as the Truth, it must be questioned which and whose claims are ‘made’ True. Not everyone is able to choose and live their own reality as there is still a hegemonic power that structures and incorporates (new) truth claims as part of the Truth; for instance creating new policies and laws which we need to abide to regardless of our own truth claims. Therewith, post-truth challenges our abilities to question its narratives because “facts that contradict a chosen reality can be simply opted out from” (Kalpokas 2018, 11). Or, as political economist William Davies concludes in an article for *The New York Times*:

“Once numbers are viewed more as indicators of current sentiment, rather than as statements about reality, how are we to achieve any consensus on the nature of social, economic and environmental problems, never mind agree on the solutions? Conspiracy theories prosper under such conditions. And while we will have far greater means of knowing how many people believe those theories, we will have far fewer means of persuading them to abandon them” (Davies 2016).

So post-truth does not create a ‘fairer’ truth claiming space that fits everyone’s needs. Instead “the key question [is] who will manage to assert their claim more effectively” (Kalpokas 2018, 11). Currently you can see in the election results and re/grouping of right-wing political parties throughout (Western) Europe and Northern America, that populist right-wing politicians have asserted their claims more effectively. This means that (more) right-wing politicians are designated to voice, choose and incorporate their claims as part of the legislated Truth; giving them (more) power to eliminate and/or ignore other perspectives when fabricating the Truth. Unfortunately this re/fabrication has concrete impact on the ability to live (‘choose’ and claim) as (self-)identified other. So the current political climate can be thought of as an impasse: it seems impossible to re/negotiate it because there is no ‘other side’ to be reached, only post-truth fictions that are either experienced as true or false without an underlying consent on which post-truth claim corresponds

with which conviction (ibid., 135).<sup>8</sup> This idea or ‘problem’ of the impasse relates to Ann Cvetkovich’s use of the impasse as valuable ground for exploration that does not require pushing straightforward. Reframing the signification of the impasse as not hindering the road to a sense of Truth or ‘reality’, but instead as something that sticks and/or becomes within its ‘stuckness’, another potential can be explored where remaining inside an impasse can be considered as a valuable non/position that does not engage in this tug of war on (post-)Truths.

As stated in the introduction of this chapter, I want to stitch and rip the fabric of post-truth by theorising and applying crafts. In the first chapter I will re/define crafts as a (potential) tool, using Cvetkovich, to stitch and thus alter the fabric of phallogocentrism and therewith post-truth. Using Cvetkovich and Halberstam I want to fabricate an alternative understanding of utopia. This utopia, as I will further explain in chapter three, is not reached by going forward to the ‘other side’, but instead uses rupture to un/become. Before doing so, I will first explain how this research has been conducted.

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8 And, as mentioned in the Introduction, the only option given within these fictions is to join and die, or die and join.





## Methodology

To answer my question whether there is a way out of death as the only mode of existence in a post-truth political climate through crafts (ripping and stitching its fabric), using the idea of utopia as a substitute to Baudet's Paradise, I have reviewed feminist and queer literature. Feminist and queer literature offer a way out of the logic of phallogocentrism and deconstructs its power structures. As stated in the Theoretical Framework, I have chosen to specifically build this thesis on my reading of the work of Ann Cvetkovich and Jack Halberstam, both renowned feminist and queer scholars, especially in the field of affect theory. I came into contact with Cvetkovich's *Political Depression: A Public Feeling* during a course on feminist art and affect. I connected with the words on paper through her multiple or layered vision of depression, from the personal to the political to the personal political and vice versa. While I found comfort in her ordinary 'slow living' practices, as an amateur crafter myself, it is actually the uncomfortable position Halberstam's *The Art of Queer Failure* presented that further stimulated my research and process; steering it away from my initial quite literal reading of Cvetkovich's 'slow living' crafting to a more radical sensibility of what it means to craft with/in the fabric of post-truth. Below I will further elaborate on the way I have conducted research.

## Data collection

This thesis is built on the idea of situated knowledges, or 'strong feminist objectivity', by feminist professor Donna Haraway. Situated knowledges insists "on the embodied nature of all vision" as a way to counter the "gaze from nowhere" (Haraway 1988, 581). So instead of claiming to possess an all-seeing eye, during this research I claim a partial perspective. This partial perspective, according to Haraway, "allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see" and the power relations that comes with this vision (ibid., 583). This is opposed to the scientifically preferred disembodied vision that defines positioning yourself as 'tainting' the evidence with your presence. However, one's body, one's location, one's power, crafts what is known and unknown. So to claim the gaze from nowhere is to claim the gaze of phallogocentrism: where power is naturalised and neutralised in favour of 'invisible' boundaries that uses difference as a way to structure the world. Instead, through critically situating myself, I acknowledge "the agency of the world" and the continuous shift of boundaries in meaning-making (ibid., 593, 595).

Throughout this thesis I have tried to show my critical position by using intersectionality as an underlying method to think about ‘the other question’ outside of my bounded (self-)identity (as white and Western). Intersectionality was coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw to look at the relation between different identity-markers and power. She focused on the unrecognised position of black women in court, where their specific location and layered oppression were seen as separate claims; where racism could only be claimed in relation to black men and sexism in relation to white women. This obscured their specific location and oppression. So with intersectionality Crenshaw points to this specific intersection of identity, power and lived experience (Crenshaw 1989).

Since then intersectionality has been used to identify multiple layers of identity outside of the position of black women and to think about multiple de/privileges individuals and/or groups experience in society. As feminist scholar Katrine Smiet has pointed out, the question of intersectionality has complicated the “exclusive focus on sex/gender (in)equality” in feminism and allows for a deconstruction of inclusion, exclusion and erasure of individuals and/or groups in feminist and queer theories that previously did not fit within its (White, liberal) narrative (Smiet 2017, 122).<sup>9</sup> Within this thesis I follow this broader interpretation of intersectionality as a way to think not only about the implications that comes with race and gender, but also class, sexual preference etc. that are central in the way a phallogocentric social hierarchy positions its ‘citizens’.

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9 See for instance Halberstam’s anti-social feminism in the Theoretical Framework, where an intersectional framework helps to re/think the position of feminism.

## Chapter 1 | Re/defining Crafts

In *Depression: A Public Feeling* Ann Cvetkovich looks at ways people try “to live better in bad times” (Cvetkovich 2012, 167). She identifies ‘slow living’ practices as a way to cope with political depression that does not ignore negative feelings and/or confine its treatment to an individual body. Inspired by the repetitive daily habits of medieval monks dealing with acedia, Cvetkovich adopts their process based labour (opposed to goal based or with a material outcome) as a coping mechanism, one that does not rely on medicines or is waiting for a big overt momentum.<sup>10</sup> Instead she approaches depression from the everyday where “ordinary activities take on aesthetic significance through repetition and intentional framing” as a way to personally work with despair while acknowledging its interrelatedness with a ‘sick culture’ (ibid., 113). Cvetkovich has archived crafts as one of these ‘slow living’ practices that is found in the everyday.

Although Cvetkovich has written a whole chapter about crafts and how queer feminist artists like Sheila Pepe and Allyson Mitchell use it to show “creative ways of living in a depressive culture and as an ordinary form of spiritual practice”, she does not really go into why crafts is found or bound to the everyday (ibid., 159). This question especially lingers when she describes the work of Pepe and Mitchell, which are placed in a museum or gallery space and not in, say, someone’s living room. In this chapter I will therefore go into the history of crafts to give a better framework for its association with the everyday. After a historic overview I will look at the way crafts has been used subversively by queer and feminist artists. The goal of this chapter is to see how crafts can be/come a tool to stitch upon the fabric of post-truth fiction.

### Crafts | A short history

In *The Subversive Stitch* (1984 [2010]) feminist art historian Roszika Parker looks at the history of crafts, in particular embroidery, from a feminist perspective. She shows how crafts have been used to construct and sustain obtrusive ideologies. I will use Parker’s work as a point of departure. Although her analysis is specific to the development of embroidery in Western Europe and cannot simply be adopted to fit or explain other crafts practices, her analysis helps to re/think crafts

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10 Acedia is a form of depression described by medieval monks. Cvetkovich uses acedia instead of the usual Renaissance and Romantic melancholy to start her history of depression as a way to counter the familiar narrative in Western culture about depression “which privileges those periods as the sign of enlightenment and scientific progress” (Cvetkovich 2012, 87).

everyday-ness. Her analysis shows the previously obscured hierarchical and power structures which defines crafts existence as a second-class position in relation to Art, but also in relation to gender, sexuality, ethnicity etc.<sup>11</sup>

## **From labour to Art/crafts**

In the medieval guild system, embroiderers and painters were defined as the same kind of worker with no distinction made between the practices or those who practised it. However, this changed when an ideology of sexual difference took hold and theology and medicine were established as ‘sciences’. Sexual difference prescribes that masculinity and femininity “have meaning only in relation to each other”, where femininity is seen as the other of masculinity, leading “to an endless assertion of women’s femininity to provide an opposite against which men sustain their dominance” (Parker 1984 [2010], 61). One of the ways this dominance played out in the guild system was through appointing men as legal representatives. This changed female workers, by default, into anonymous workers.

Throughout the fifteenth-century more regulations were put in place based on sexual difference. Women’s paid participation in craft guild workshops became limited. Or, in the case of ‘wealthier’ women, their role became completely detached from paid production. Instead these women were ushered into unpaid domestic or amateur production (ibid., 64). In the mid-sixteenth-century the guilds became more hierarchically classified and distinctions were made between and among

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11 Although Parker only focuses on the creation and maintenance of the feminine in embroidery through the Victorian ideal of femininity, this ideal of femininity is intertwined with Whiteness and heteronormativity. Parker does not actively address these additional assumed categorisations as part of the feminine ideal, but they are very tangible in/between the lines. I would argue that the constructed second-class position of crafts (as feminine and feminine as crafts) corresponds with its usage and alignment with the other. This is also mentioned by art historian Maria Elena Buszek, who points out the relation between crafts with queer and non-Western cultures (Buszek 2011, 5); I use here Art with-a-capital-A instead of art with-a-lower-case-a to encapsulate the cultural significance of so-called fine art practices (painting and sculpture) in society. Art reflects the interests of an elite community that is protected and reinforced by institutions, such as museums and galleries, and art-buyers who, according to the Guerrilla Girls, reflect the industry of power instead of the industry of art. The Guerrilla Girls are a feminist activist group who, since 1985, dedicate their time to show and demonstrate against this elite conception of art/Art, where ‘other’ practitioners (those who are not White, Western and male) and ‘lower’ art practices (such as crafts) are mostly unacknowledged by the mainstream Art-industry (Guerrilla Girls 2018; Buszek 2011, 5). The split between crafts and art, and therewith the fabrication of Art, can be seen as one of the symptoms of Art as a (actively invigorated) ‘boys club’. I choose to use Art instead of art to underline these connotations and the constructed gap between art and crafts.

executors and designers. Although the guild system was already dependent on social and economic positioning, this gap was extended with the introduction of the artist, a new social and economic role that created a need for further differentiation. Parker:

“Artists wanted to be distinguished from those who were mere manual executors of other people’s ideas and designs. But as long as the medieval guild system persisted for painters and embroiderers, the modern notion of the artist as a special kind of person with a whole set of distinctive characteristics, rather than a kind of worker, did not gain general currency” (ibid., 79).

Because the artist became “evidence of a divine, inspired, individual” and a “measure of greatness”, embroidery and painting were separated in the guild system (ibid., 80). A new hierarchy of art forms was developed where, “[w]ithin the professional sphere, painting was valued as the expression of the individuality of the painter, while professional embroidery was placed lower in the artistic hierarchy because it was a collective effort associated with workers lower on the social scale than aspiring painters” (ibid., 81). But the higher status of the painter created a problem: because the artist aspired to assimilate with the (upper class) position to which the amateur female worker automatically belonged, there was a need to clarify and limit the work either of them could produce (to be read as ‘the work women could produce’) in order to perform their sexual difference successfully. So there was not only a division made between embroidery and painting, but also a subdivision between embroidery as a public craft and embroidery as a domestic art (instead of being part of Art practices). This subdivision allowed artists to portray and assimilate with/in the (upper class) domestic sphere, because the work women produced there was an expression of their ‘feminine presence’ and not a way to exert their “powerful artistic personality” (ibid., 61, 81).

Naturally a lot has changed since the sixteenth-century, but this image of crafts as second-class and crafts as feminine has prevailed over time. Not least because of nineteenth-century historians false readings of the (medieval) history of embroidery, and therewith crafts, which fabricated and affirmed the ideal of femininity and sexual difference as a ‘natural’ given instead of a carefully crafted changed position in society. Moreover, this reading was adopted by twentieth-century historians, further naturalising crafts as a specifically gendered and amateurish practice. Only at the end of the twentieth-century and the beginning of the twenty-first-century has the history of crafts been investigated more critically (ibid., 39).

## **The influence of the Industrial Revolution**

Roszika Parker puts the split between crafts and Art in the premodern era during the European Renaissance. This is, as art historian Maria Elena Buszek points out, in contrast to dominant re/tellings where this split is placed in the modern era as a result of the Industrial Revolution (Buszek 2011, 2-5). During the Industrial Revolution, production that would have taken place in guild workshops and/or at home were transferred to factories, creating a clear divide between work produced by ‘divine’ individuals, work produced enmasse and work produced (by women) at home. As academic Angela Davis explains, because factories could provide for the basic needs of multiple families while also profiting from their efforts, the ‘tangible’, ‘visible’ and ‘valuable’ work women used to do at home (such as weaving, lace-making, furniture building and other crafts practices) became unnecessary. Davis:

“This revaluation of economic production revealed – beyond the physical separation of home and factory – a fundamental structural separation between the domestic home economy and the profit-oriented economy of capitalism. Since housework does not generate profit, domestic labor was naturally defined as an inferior form of work as compared to capitalist wage labor” (Davis 1983, 131).

This devaluation of the at-home-production and the role of women in this production, created a shift in the way society was structured, where “[w]omen were the losers in a double sense: as their traditional jobs were usurped by the burgeoning factories, the entire economy moved away from the home, leaving many women largely bereft of significant economic roles” (ibid., 131). This detachment of women to ‘significant’ labour production and, more specifically, crafts practices, opened up the possibility for crafts to become an Art(istic) expression (Davis 1983, 131; Buszek 2011, 3; Parker 1984 [2010], 81). This changed image was taken up by the Arts and Crafts movement, which started in the mid-nineteenth-century in Great Britain and spread throughout Europe and Northern America.

The Arts and Crafts movement was appalled by the low quality, ‘passionless’ and polluting products produced in factories. Instead they wanted to associate Art with labour (to be read as factory work as well as crafts practices), and to produce ‘moral’ living spaces that would enhance the quality of products and the quality of life, instead of the ‘immoral’ living spaces created through factory work and products which endangered this quality. The movement was inspired by the writings of art critic John Ruskin, who saw Art as a reflection of national character (instead of Art as an ‘aesthetic’ or

‘conceptual knowledge’) and advocated for its social usefulness and its ability to ‘raise the character’ of workmen (Triggs 2012, 8-13, 23, 27). This new image of crafts as a potential Art medium merged in the mid-twentieth-century with the modernist movement when it began to connote ‘honesty’ and ‘transparency’ (Buszek 2011, 3). Crafts has since been widely acknowledged as a ‘romantic’ act, and museums and academics often use this version to explain the significance of crafts, opposed to Art, but within an Art space (ibid., 6-8).

## **Crafts as a twenty-first-century slow living practice**

Ann Cvetkovich identifies crafts as a slow living practice. This corresponds with crafts’ current role as a slow and unique producer of products. Crafts has become an increasingly popular spare time activity in the twenty-first-century because of its potential performance as a ‘romanticised return to an honest and transparent pre-industrial mode of existence’; opposed to the current post-industrial existence with the “tyrannical pressure of technology” (Buszek 2011, 1). A similar stance is taken in the Art world, where artists use crafts to highlight and/or re/direct our digital ‘immaterial’ existence; to create a hybrid between “rage against the machine” that ‘rules’ our lives and a celebration of technological advancement. As Buszek underlines in the introduction of *Extra/ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art* (2011):

“[I]t is unsurprising that such old-fashioned, handmade images and objects should resonate with artists and audiences in our high-tech world. In today’s information age the sensuous, tactile ‘information’ of craft media speaks ... of a direct connection to humanity that is perhaps endangered, or at least being rapidly reconfigured in our technologically saturated, twenty-first-century lives – thus, demonstrating the extraordinary potential of these seemingly ordinary media and processes” (ibid., 1).<sup>12</sup>

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12 Crafts is profiled as that which, quite literally, ‘makes’ humanity opposed to technology that only downgrades humanity. However, contradictory, technology – and crafts role in its development – is at the same time celebrated as ‘making’ the future. The usage of crafts outside of an Art space are highlighted and praised, both for its pre-technological existence as well as its role in making (new) technology possible. See for instance the interview with Margaret Wertheim in *Extra/ordinary* (Buszek 2011). I think that arguing for ‘humanity’ through crafts, in opposition to technology, underlines a narrow understanding of technology and gives a very broad meaning to ‘being human’ (that is therefore conceptualised as being central to the world, instead of being part of the world). In this sense technology becomes to mean only something ‘digital’ instead of the tools (and materials) that are used by humans to create something outside of our (flesh) bodies. This erases the tactility and impact of technology; not least because the ‘digital’ becomes disembodied and its impact on (human) life is mythologised to a ‘tyrant without a source’; similar to Ignas Kalpokas’ argument of post-truth, I think ‘we’ should take responsibility for ‘our’ role and (co-)creation in technology and technological developments and not limit it to a top-down imposed



Roszika Parker relates the current interest in crafts to the late 2000s early 2010s financial recession. She observes that the recession, similar to the one during the 1980s when she was writing *The Subversive Stitch*, caused a “revival of enthusiasm for embroidery [and other crafts practices] as a ‘homecraft’ with the call for the homemade, the hand-made and the natural”, perhaps because of its connotations with ‘honesty’ and ‘transparency’ in harsh and unsteady times (Parker 1984 [2010], xi). Although Parker identifies a decline in feminism in 2010, a new feminist-bloom can be identified, especially in relation to crafts. Crafts can be seen as a rising feminist hobby while simultaneously supporting a (often social media based) collective. While feminists have taken up crafts to ‘positively’ showcase its pre-industrial, and therewith pre-capitalist position as a domestic production, there is also an awareness of its corporate and ‘craftwashing’ use that shapes its ambivalence in a more ‘negative’ way (Cvetkovich 2012, 159).<sup>13</sup>

## **Critical positioning | Beyond romanticism**

The historic overview above shows the social and economic confinement that shaped crafts as second-class. This imaginary has been addressed and subverted by feminist artists in the 1970s, but also current artists like Sheila Pepe, Allyson Mitchell and Lacey Jane Roberts have worked with/in this imaginary through their crafting. In the last part of this chapter I will look at the way queer and feminist artists have critically positioned themselves in relation to crafts history as a second-class practice.

### **1970s feminist crafts art**

Although Roszika Parker and Maria Elena Buszek state that the boundaries between different creative expressions and cross-pollination have become normalised in society, this does not mean that crafts has ‘recovered’ from its second-class position (Buszek 2011, 6-7; Parker 1984 [2010], xii). In the Art-industry, artists have relied on its placement to politically charge their work and as a way to point out their ‘second-class’ position. During the 1970s feminist artists such as Judy Chicago, Joyce Scott and Miriam Schapiro deliberately incorporated (domestic) crafts practices to signal its (made) forgotten character as a creative form due to its feminine (and non-Western,

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‘resourceless’ existence (Kalpokas 2018, 13, 36).

13 ‘Craftwashing’ is similar to greenwashing, where the image of crafts and its connotations (such as ‘honesty’ and ‘transparency’, and specifically in relation to feminism as ‘groundbreaking’ and ‘open-minded’) are used to mislead or make claims that make it appear (more) progressive, honest, natural or homemade than it actually is.



coloured, queer) associations. Through incorporating crafts in their work, they tried to communicate “beyond an elite community and letting the ‘real’ world back into the art world” (Buszek 2011, 5).

Although Parker states that the practice of crafts in an Art space has become less significant due to these feminist artists promoting cross-pollination, crafts and Art are still very gendered and hierarchical (Parker 1984 [2010], xiii).<sup>14</sup> However, its re/introduction in the Art industry has influenced the ability for other artists to show their work in museums and/or galleries. Or, as Cvetkovich puts it: “[C]rafting’s interventions in the art world are central to the reclamation of feminist cultural politics, as well as to crafting’s redefinition of what counts as politics to include sensory interactions with highly tactile spaces with other people – or, in other words, feelings” (Cvetkovich 2012, 177). Instead of seeing this second-class position as limiting, through the de/constructing elements in the work of these artists, crafts is used and can be redefined as open and perhaps even endless.

## Queering crafts

This redefinition for Cvetkovich mostly lies in the way artists like Sheila Pepe and Allyson Mitchell create work that ‘refuses to choose’ and re/make spaces “in which daily life can be literally felt and sensed differently” (ibid., 185). Cvetkovich relates this idea to queer theory. Queer crafts, Cvetkovich explains, allows for the empowerment of the other. It can be utilised to further ‘make’ and explore this other position tactically (to be read as tactical as well as tangibly or sensually). In a conversation between artist Lacey Jane Roberts and Pepe about their work as queer, Pepe states:

“We can only take a stance of difference in a large, heterogeneous platform that already lives in a broad public imagination. I maintain a public identity as lesbian, feminist, and textile user as a way to persistently point to the political otherness of people and taste. I do so in an effort to make these things move from a disempowered Other to valued differences in a broad field of shared differences – all as empowered in real terms of access, money, and influence. I’m working against purity and for equal access” (Pepe & Roberts 2015).

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14 Parker takes embroiderer Jamie Chalmers (also known as Mr X) as an example, who still (feels he) needs to differentiate himself from ‘normal’ embroiderers through calling himself a ‘manbroiderer’ and pointing out his ‘masculine’ posture to counteract and perhaps defend his ‘feminine’ practice. Parker: “Thanks to the Women’s Liberation Movement, there is a greater flexibility in what is considered natural or normal behaviour for men and women, yet the associations with femininity, triviality and domesticity still need to be warded off by the term ‘manbroiderer’ – and by the build of the stitcher” (Parker 1984 [2010], xiii).

Pepe shows how her conscious critical positioning is not anchored by its constructed limited otherness. Instead she shows how it actually helps to empower it and to move it beyond the (singular, confined) categorisations and/or labels placed upon her (and her work) by hierarchical power structures. Besides empowering, queer theory deconstructs this other position altogether. As Roberts describes in *Put Your Thing Down, Flip It, and Reverse It: Reimagining Craft Identities Using Tactics of Queer Theory* (2011), because queer theory uses “reclamation, reappropriation, and disidentification” non-normative identities (to which she also counts crafts) are given agency while simultaneously questioning “the seemingly stable systems that render them as other” (Roberts 2011, 245). By working fluidly and underlining the multiplicity of crafts, it can be used, performed and re/defined as a continuous process of re/making, as Roberts further elaborates:

“Stereotypes work to singularize, requiring less exertion for those seeking to control and repress marginalized populations. Disidentification works to make visible these infinite varieties of identity – or nonidentity – that present such a threat to dominant forces; the act plays on the stereotype and moves away from it. ... Through the dismantling and reconfiguration of its own stereotypes, craft is positioned as a potent agent to challenge the very systems that create and proliferate stereotypes to maintain hierarchies of visual and material culture. ... This radical, critical position would relocate craft as an aesthetic category that embraces an enormous range of multiple and seemingly contradictory practices, as well as an agent to challenge existing systems that define materiality and makers” (ibid., 247-248).

This can be related to crafting as a combination of knowledge and practice that embodies but also moves beyond the body to (co-)create and de/construct ways of being and ways of coping. Or, as Cvetkovich puts it: “Unlike forms of self-sovereignty that depend on a rational self, crafting is a form of body politics where agency takes a different form than application of the will. ... Crafting is about a way of being in the world that requires not just knowledge but practice” (Cvetkovich 2012, 168). A practice that goes on and on as it moves with/in and in/between different modes of existence.

Crafts, thus, can potentially be used to stitch onto the fabric of post-truth and re/work its claims through its critical other and/or alternative position; both as an artistic expression or, as Cvetkovich sees it, as an ongoing daily ‘slow living’ process. However, in relation to the work of Jack Halberstam, what happens with this practice when the crafter fails and/or refuses to live? How can crafts be used to unuse? To unbe? Within Halberstam’s framework Cvetkovich’s concepts fails, so

to speak, to craft a tool that rips the fabric of post-truth. In the next chapter I will therefore focus on the way Halberstam sees crafts, in particular collaging, as a practice and process that undoes and unbecomes, and therefore tries to not work with the fabricated (non)sense of post-truth claims.



## Chapter 2 | Un/doing crafts

While in the first chapter I established the way Ann Cvetkovich's crafts are used to work with despair, in this chapter I want to focus on Jack Halberstam's use of crafts to work from or as despair. In contrast to Cvetkovich's idea of 'slow living' in a 'sick culture', Halberstam advocates for *not* living in a 'sick culture'; that is to say, to refuse to perform or practice, even subversively, the role of other that is underlying and sustaining the narrative of this culture. Using Halberstam's queer failure and anti-social feminism to re/formulate his vision of necropolitics, the first part of this chapter will critically look at Cvetkovich's conceptualisation of crafts.<sup>15</sup> The second part of this chapter will look at Halberstam's interest in the craft of collage as a negative destruction. I will connect Halberstam's idea of collage to the so-called Internet meme, a twenty-first-century collage-technique, to explore an ordinary form of destruction of the everyday. Just like the goal of the first chapter, this chapter looks at crafts as a tool to stitch and/or rip the fabric of post-truth fiction. However, instead of looking at it as a mode of creation, this chapter is concerned with crafts as a mode of uncreation or destruction.

### Crafting destruction | How to not live in bad times

Ann Cvetkovich points to the ordinary existence of political depression to find a way to stay alive. She realises that living and/or surviving as other in a 'sick culture' is not found in big life-changing momenta, but by practicing and processing the ordinary (Cvetkovich 2012, 159). Jack Halberstam also uses negativity to transform 'sick culture', but instead of making it better, he focuses on unmaking it. Below I will further explain the way Halberstam can be read as a critique on Cvetkovich's conceptualisation.

### Refuse to choose

One of the critiques that Halberstam's work can provide on Cvetkovich's notion of crafts, is her unacknowledged 'liberal' actor. Although Cvetkovich is aware of the mandatory pursuit of happiness in (neo)liberalism and denounces this pursuit in favour of negative or mixed feelings, you can still identify an active and choosing subject as the practitioner and/or crafter. Cvetkovich praises crafts for its ability to fabricate alternative spaces that empower the crafter as well as those that come in contact with these crafted spaces. She uses the work of Sheila Pepe and Allyson Mitchell to

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<sup>15</sup> Below I will explain the concept of necropolitics or the necropolitical, created by Achille Mbembe, and the way Jack Halberstam interprets it within his work.

demonstrate and celebrate their craft as a ‘refusal to choose’ (Cvetkovich 2012, 185). However, as can be read in the excerpt in the first chapter, Pepe “take[s] a stance of difference” and actively uses her queerness “to make these things [lesbian, feminist, and textile user] move from a disempowered Other to valued differences in a broad field of shared differences” (Pepe & Roberts 2015). Even though Pepe’s stance is different than the desire of the ‘sick culture’ and she uses her otherness (and negativity) to pave a way to empowerment, it is this active positioning that still abides to the logic of the ‘sick culture’. This stance of difference can be seen as a byproduct of the ‘sick culture’ that demands this interaction of complying to or choosing to be the other as a negative difference. Her ‘embracement’ of other confirms its otherness and instead of ‘refusing to choose’, chooses in some way to participate in its conception. This can be seen as ‘working from the inside out’, but it relies on a participation that is performed through the action of choosing, subverting, showing, doing, being.

As can be read in the citation at the beginning of this chapter, Halberstam sees ‘refusal to choose’ not only as a refusal to fulfil the myth of happiness and implementing negativity (and difference) to broaden narrow notions of existence in ‘sick culture’. Instead, he is interested in a “kind of necropolitical relation” towards the ‘sick culture’ where a constructed subject refuses to be and therewith refuses “to perform the role of other within a system that demands [its] subjugation” (Halberstam 2011, 132). Political theorist Achille Mbembe created necropolitics as a continuation or new mode of Michel Foucault’s biopower that exercises “control over mortality and to define life as the deployment and manifestation of power” (Mbembe 2003, 12). According to Mbembe the practice of necropolitical power does not only rule over life and death, as biopower does, but creates a new in/existence or ‘death world’ through capital; where economical gain is used to mark certain bodies as other and disposable, while also marking some of these others as valuable disposable. Valuable disposable bodies are, similar to disposable bodies, not valued on the social hierarchy, but are instead valued because they sustain this hierarchy through their participation and/or serving role that enables the production that provides for economical gain (ibid., 40). Halberstam uses this idea of a ‘death world’ with marked bodies, but instead of seeing it as a continuation of their service to ‘sick culture’, he uses it to signal an in/existence that refuses ‘sick culture’ altogether.

## **Cut-and-paste | Collage as negative destruction**

Using ‘death world’ as a point of departure, Jack Halberstam looks at ways of unbeing and unbecoming. He identifies cutting, figuratively as well as literally, as an unpractice. Through cutting you can eradicate yourself, your body, and your performance from ‘sick culture’ and transform it, to unbe. He points to collage as a practice to destruct this other ‘you’. Halberstam: “I want to use the example of collage, a cut-and-paste genre, to find another realm of aesthetic production dominated by a model of radical passivity and unbeing” (Halberstam 2011, 136). First I will discuss this idea of collage as negative destruction, then I will look at the way this destruction can be found in the Internet meme.

### **Fragmentation & in between spaces**

Collage is a technique often used by queer and feminist artists. English and Women’s Studies professor Gwen Raaberg explains how collage uses a technique that assembles “fragmented elements or portions of prior work and juxtapose them in a discontinuous manner” (Raaberg 1998, 154). Raaberg thinks this technique is very suitable for feminism and sees the fragmentation it makes as positive. She states, quoting art critic Lucy R. Lippard, that collage is “born [out] of interruption and the healing instinct to use political consciousness as a glue with which to get the pieces into some sort of new order” (ibid., 157). This reading of collage where it is not seen as a failure or lack “but as rife with possibilities”, is similar yet different from Halberstam who sees collage as a negative production and/or unproduction through which new possibilities can be found (ibid., 168).

Halberstam sees collage as a craft that can help to conceive “another realm of aesthetic” (Halberstam 2011, 136). He thinks collage is especially suited for this as it “references the spaces in between and refuses to respect boundaries that usually delineate the self from other, art object from museum and the copy from the original” (ibid., 136). His interpretation of ‘death world’ can be seen in a similar manner, where its in between status is found by cutting through the boundaries of ‘sick culture’. However, opposed to Raaberg, he defines this fragmentation not as positive but as negative. I think this difference mainly lies in the emphasis either of them makes on the technique of collage: where Raaberg sees it as part of a “healing instinct” where the glue plays the most important role, Halberstam sees it as part of a refusal where the cutting plays the most important role. This is perhaps best illustrated through the examples they use. While Raaberg praises the work of Barbara Kruger, Halberstam is interested in the work of Kara Walker.

Kruger, Raaberg points out, uses photo-collage to create an opposition; gluing different pieces of images and language together to show the construction of identities. She uses the conflict between the picture and the words, and also between the collage and the viewer, as a strategy to disrupt power, evoke awareness and assert agency. As Raaberg concludes in relation to Kruger's collage *Untitled (You Are Not Yourself)*, 1982: "The work interrogates the social construction of gender by sources outside of the self, and at the same time, presents the pain of self-rejection and lack of agency" (Raaberg 1998, 160). Halberstam refers to the work of Kara Walker to illustrate his point. Walker places silhouettes of black figures on the white walls of museums. These silhouettes "convey the atrociously violent landscape of the American racial imagination" (Halberstam 2011, 136). Halberstam is not interested in the way this work can disrupt power, evoke awareness or assert agency. Instead he focuses on the cuts between the silhouettes and the white walls where Walker "manages to convey both the myriad ways that the human body can be opened up, ripped apart, penetrated, turned inside out, hung upside down, split, smashed, fractured, and pulverized and the nearly limitless archive of the human violent imaginary" (ibid., 136). Her work, thus, does not conclude in a question of agency, but in a question of (negative) tension; while Raaberg points to the 'speaking conflict' in Kruger's work, Halberstam points to the simultaneous 'speech and silence' in Walker's work. He sees this simultaneous speaking and silence as negating both acts into (radical) passivity instead of agency.

## **Forget about it | From memes to memory**

Using Ann Cvetkovich's idea of the ordinary as an important site of existence, I want to look at Internet memes to localise Jack Halberstam's idea of collage as cutting and/or destructing the everyday.<sup>16</sup> Memes can be seen as a popular twenty-first-century collage-technique, where different images and words are cut (and glued) together to create, often absurd and comical, messages. Limor Shifman, a professor in journalism specialised in popular culture, in particular the Internet meme, describes the meme as "units of popular culture that are circulated, imitated and transformed by individual Internet users [but also big corporations], creating a shared cultural experience in the process" (Shifman 2013). Important to add is that memes are set in a 'nonhierarchical' and user-based model, where content is created of users by users for users, which has introduced new social

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16 Memes also go hand-in-hand with Halberstam's 'low theory', using for instance animated movies as an entry point for his argumentation. Therewith, it is a testament of the interrelation of technology and crafts. One that does not rely on nostalgia or the denial of human accountability in its creation.



norms in media since the introduction of social media platforms in the early 2000s.<sup>17</sup> Shifman sees memes as a “highly valuable [pillar] of contemporary participatory culture” where imitation and remix are central to the process of (cultural) transmission (ibid.). The word meme, she explains, was coined by biologist Richard Dawkins in 1976 in an attempt to apply evolutionary theory to cultural change. He uses memes, like genes, to define “replicators that undergo variation, competition, selection and retention [where] memes suited to their sociocultural environment spread successfully, while others become extinct” (ibid.)

## **The circulation of Blackness**

This notion of extinction is interesting when looking at the role of Black culture in the creation of memes; where Black subjects and language are prominently transferred to ‘units of popular culture’ that, according to critic and artist Aria Dean, “circulates independently from actual black people” (Dean 2016). This depersonalisation of Blackness attached to memes, while still clearly projecting this Blackness, is significant to the movement of memes where ‘difference’ is meant to be forgotten in favour of signifying and centralising a collective (and therewith arguably a White and heteronormative) experience. Dean explains how memes have moved on from simple ‘units of popular culture’ to connote relatability. Dean:

“[M]eme has taken on a more difficult and speculative connotation: that of #relatability, an ability to provoke a feeling of identification in the viewer. It is conceptually linked to the French *même*, which can be used to mean ‘same’ ... Relatability helps memes sustain a kind of cohesion in ‘collective being’, a collective memory that can never be fully encompassed; one can never zoom out enough to see it in its entirety” (ibid.).

This relatability, according to Dean, is tunnelled through capitalism, where memes and the so-called online attention economy complicate “the familiar, semi-linear relationship between black production and nonblack appropriation” as the purpose of memes is virality “and, by extension, appropriation” (ibid.). This cycle of production, appropriation, consumption, and reappropriation makes it hard to identify “a pre-existing authentic collective being” and therefore makes it easier for a White subject to (ab)use and benefit from Blackness (Dean 2016; see also Jackson 2014 and Jackson 2016). Dean uses the essay *In Defense of The Poor Image* (2009) by visual artist Hito Steyerl to re/think and relate memes and Blackness through circulation (instead of content) to,

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<sup>17</sup> The idea of nonhierarchical re/production and communication of memes should be taken lightly; see Theoretical Framework on mediatisation and datafication.

quoting Steyerl, see it as “anonymous global networks” that “creates a shared history” where it is coalesced “into a collective archive surrounding an event or cultural touchstone” (Dean 2016). This is similar to the African diaspora and shows the “inability [of memes, of the poor image, of Blackness] to stand on their own. They are made what they are by the circumstances of their larger body” (ibid.). This focus on circulation can turn the meme (and the poor image and Blackness) into a lesson in queer body politics, where its quick movements, unpredictability and ‘lack of fixity’ can “confront our simultaneous desire for visibility and awareness of the violence it brings”; acknowledging that this violence is not inflicted onto an individual body but onto the body of Blackness or other as a circulating representation, a copy without an original, always rendering, instead of a being (ibid.). Dean:

“The 20th century taught us that one of our rights is a right to representation, not only politically but personally — that we have a right to be represented as we are, for our images to hold true. But what if one says to hell with that? Blackness, as poor image, as meme, is a copy without an original. There is no articulable ontology of blackness, no essential blackness, because blackness’s only home is in its circulating representations: a network that includes all the bodies that bear its markers, the words produced by such bodies, the words made to appear to have been produced by such bodies, the flat images that purport to document them, and so forth” (ibid.).

Rejecting the essentialist and capitalist narrative of positive straight continuity and confined ‘being’ through flat imagery goes hand-in-hand with Halberstam’s idea of queer failure and anti-feminism, in particular forgetting. As Dean already pointed out, this idea of ‘forgetting’ (and remembering and re/remembering) can be seen as central to queer body politics. While Dean uses the French *même* as a way to signify the collective memory that forms a meme, shifting away from Richard Dawkins’ replicating gene-meme, there is also mneme from sociologist Ewald Hering. Unbeknownst to Dawkins, in 1870 Hering also worked on the idea of cultural evolution. While Dawkins used the Greek *mimema*, ‘something which is imitated’, Hering used the Greek *mneme*, ‘memory’, to signify this evolution (Shifman 2013). I want to further work with this idea of meme as memory, following Dean’s meme as continuous floating replicating re/presentations of otherness bound to a collective body but without an original, but using mneme to point out “the ludic space between remembering and forgetting” that is able to break this constant replication (Halberstam 2011, 65-66).

## Queer forgetfulness

What is known and what is (made) forgotten? Halberstam, quoting historian Norman Klein, reflects on the uncertainty of memory using the literary tool ‘selective forgetting’ to describe “a social imaginary: how fictions are turned into facts, while in turn erasing facts into fiction” (Halberstam 2011, 83). Memory can be seen as a ‘gate-keeping mechanism’ which is (unconsciously) utilised in shock or trauma “to allow the self to grow separate from the knowledge that might destroy it” (ibid., 84). Halberstam wants to use forgetting, the failure of remembering, as a way to enter a queer temporal mode that lingers on this separateness to allow a new form of knowing. This queer temporal mode, like memes, lies at the ‘edge of memory’ because it does not follow a straightforward narrative and circulates through its constant changing (and unbecoming) existence.

Queer forgetfulness disorders social bonds (forgetting family as the ‘corner stone’ of society), disrupts the logic of the normal and uses queer time to go “against the logics of succession, progress, development and tradition proper to hetero-familial development” (ibid., 74-75). This refusal to follow the logic of a straight narrative provides for a possible tool to ‘jam’ the presumed inevitable and natural(ised) “smooth operations of the normal and the ordinary” that carries hetero-familial development and mainstream memory at its core of progressing from the present (ibid., 70). To queerly forget is to rupture (fail) “the eternally self-generating present” and to un/create through cutting boundaries (ibid., 70).

It is important to note that this forgetting, especially in relation to Blackness and White appropriation found in (mainstream) memes, differs from the damaging ‘leaving behind’ the baggage of the structural conditions of Blackness in relation to the social hierarchy. Halberstam implies that simply forgetting is not (good) enough and that forgetting does not mean to erase (wilfully forget) that which is ‘haunting’ us. Although he underlines the (queer potential) power in forgetting as “a release from the weight of the past and the menace of the future”, this should entail more than ‘moving on’ or burying our ghosts (ibid., 83). So instead of being or becoming a re/circulating meme, where boundaries are cut and glued and cut again, queer forgetting should be found through the (temporal) cuts in between each new configuration; the ‘death world’ where the other ‘you’ is not and unbecomes, creating an opening for knowledge from elsewhere. Instead of returning to the ‘inevitable’ surface of consuming and re/appropriation mneme, memory, can ditch the glue and, like Halberstam’s reading of Kara Walker’s silhouettes, negate through (radical) passivity; speaking while silent, silent while speaking.

So collage, and in extension memes, in everyday 'sick culture' can potentially negate wilful forgetting through destroying or queering its memory; not only cutting and gluing new pieces together to point out conflict, but to further cut and rip at the boundaries of each 'unit' that re/remembers the copy of a copy of a copy that 'sick culture' relegates. In the next chapter I will combine Ann Cvetkovich's crafts practices with that of Halberstam to create a hybrid and new understanding of utopia.

## Chapter 3 | Utopia

“An imagined place or state of things in which everything is perfect”

*English Oxford Dictionary* (2019).

“A perfect society in which everyone is happy”

*Cambridge Dictionary* (2019).

“An unattainable ideal”

*Van Dale* (2019, translation mine).

In this chapter I want to bring the previous chapters together and focus on the way Ann Cvetkovich's and Jack Halberstam's theories can craft a utopia in a post-truth political climate. Post-truth came to the foreground in 2016 after the Brexit-vote and the presidential election in the United States of America. It signals the change of accepting Truth claims based on a 'universally' agreed upon underlying logic to an acceptance of truth claims based on personal experience taken from daily life.<sup>18</sup> As Kalpokas puts it: in post-truth individuals and groups follow a truth-narrative based on claims that explain the world according to their 'lived realities' (Kalpokas 2018, 5). This seems like a much needed step away from phallogocentrism that validates subjugated knowledges and existences as 'real'. But unfortunately, – as perhaps can be deduced from the results of the Brexit-vote, the USA presidential election and the many other populist right-wing political developments that have since happened throughout (Western) Europe and Northern America – this has not been the case. Instead post-truth signals a strong polarisation where an 'us' versus 'them' logic is central to everything one does or does not do and therewith that what one is or is not. The goal of this chapter is to find a way out of post-truth existence or, as discussed in the introduction of this thesis, Paradise, by un/creating a utopia that is aware of the dangers of closed circles and 'feel good' bubbles.

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18 Naturally this idea of universality of Truth claims is based on a very biased power position from Western countries, who count their claims and knowledges as universal and universally logical, and identifies knowledge produced outside of the Western-thought traditions as inaccurate and/or non-knowledge.

## Feeling good | A battle for reality

As pointed out in the Theoretical Framework, the current swing to the right can be seen as a continuation of 9/11, where the other ('them') is under constant scrutinising as a potential threat, as a potential victim and as a potential battleground used to re/negotiate that which is true and that which is untrue about the 'reality' of Western civilisation (and therewith naturally the 'reality' of the civilisations it marks as other).<sup>19</sup> Ann Cvetkovich and Jack Halberstam closely work with/in this post-9/11 world and, as I have described in the previous chapters, search for other ways to be other in it. While post-truth does not seem to be a big leap away from the so-called 'War on Terror' Truth that characterised the early 2000s (and all of the other phallogocentric Truth-reasonings before that), the main difference can be found in the way it creates a constant battle for 'reality' that is sustained through sensation.

## The problem of information in the twenty-first-century

Instead of following the dominant idea of positivist empirical science, where 'we' search for an objective Truth in the world by re/valuing claims, with post-truth it does not matter whether it is valued as true or false or a mixture between the two. It only matters if a group believes or would like to believe it (Kalpokas 2018, 14). The dominant presence of positivist empirical science has been important and central to the development of (the idea of) Western countries; where a naturalised progression is traced from an industrial based society to a post-industrial society to a so-called Information Age, where technology and science are used to 'explain' the economy and therewith the world and ourselves.

Ignas Kalpokas identifies, besides personalisation and individualisation of consumption (see Theoretical Framework), the fast pace of information through digitalisation as enabling a heightened spread of mis/information and therewith post-truth fictions. Because there is so much information available 'in the palm of our hands', it is impossible to process and value it according to the Western 'scientific' standards. So instead people choose and/or are forced to only process that which makes them 'feel good', "to maximise their pleasure derived from the consumption process" (ibid., 34). Of course this search for maximised pleasure is, again, not something new, but it is

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19 In relation to the other as potential victim and/or battleground, see for instance queer theorists Jasbir K. Puar's *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (2007) which explores the way queer identities (White, Western, male gays) are used as a trope to legitimise actions against 'potential terrorists', in particular Muslims and people of colour. Homonationalism can be seen as an extension of the social hierarchy where certain markers score 'higher' or 'lower' which, during the War on Terrorism, can turn you into victim or perpetrator.

important to situate it in the increased mediatisation and datafication of living experiences, where algorithms serve its consumers only things they understand or want to understand; creating bubbles that, unlike bubbles, are not easily popped (Kalpokas 2018, 29, 55; Praiser 2011, 76).

## **Maximising pleasure**

This shift from positivist empiricism (Information Age) to belief or likeability (Experience Age) signals a new way of sense-making where the 'I' is constantly searching for positive affects that 'feel good' and, most importantly, feel good fast. As Kalpokas explains:

"In this sense, the Experience Age is about the (self-)management of experience, maximise some stimuli and minimising others that are seen as less pleasurable. Speed in choosing what to consume and what is most conducive to maximisation becomes paramount and here emphasis should indeed be on emotions as drives of quick response and rapid decision-making" (Kalpokas 2018, 35).

This persuasion of belief within post-truth, where positive experiences are the product as well as the currency, benefits from (neo)liberalism and its social hierarchy (ibid., 37). In relation to post-truth as a continuation of 'us' versus 'them' through a lens of terrorism, this search for a constant 'feel good' boost has provided Western countries with a felt-legitimised or positively-experienced victim/hero role: the infiltration and hurt caused by 'them' can only be overcome through either eradicating or saving 'them', whether perpetrator or not, from their non-Western-ness. And, to also relate this to the current debates on abortion most significantly in Northern America but also in Europe, this idea of 'controlling' the other through advocating whose life is worth what at which time (or whose life does or does not, at a certain point in time, provide a 'feel good' boost) is central to the legislated (post-)Truth fictions that shape lived realities.

## **Imagining alternatives | So why utopia?**

"Consumerism is the arena of agency and desire held out by a culture that forecloses other options – you're in the store and you can ask yourself *What do I want? What is my pleasure?* If the answer that comes back resoundingly is *I don't know*, or worse yet, *nothing*, and you thus seem to have stepped beyond even capitalism's seductions, what is to become of you?" (Cvetkovich 2012, 46).

The word utopia first appeared in a sixteenth-century fictional story written by Sir Thomas More. He placed the religious idea of paradise in a humanist framework using Plato's classical model of the perfect state. In his story, More creates and describes an imaginary state of 'ideal perfection' compared to the not-so-ideal state he lived in at the time (Levitas 1990, 3). Although More sees his utopia as defined by the English Oxford Dictionary ("an imagined place or state of things in which everything is perfect"), the word itself, tracing it to its origin, can mean more than this (imagined) 'ideal perfection'. When using the Greek eu-topos, utopia means 'good place', but when using ou-topos it can mean 'nowhere' or 'no place'. As said, More relies on eu-topos in his novel, but both interpretations are used interchangeably and often go together and, in some way, complete each other. At the beginning of this chapter you can read the definition of utopia according to an English, American and Dutch dictionary. Based on these three definitions, you can say utopia is and simultaneously is not a mode of existence that is and simultaneously is not perfect (because of its imagined and unattainable character).

Although utopia can be seen as the epitome of post-truth through its re/presentation of the ultimate maximised pleasurable experience regardless of its place in 'reality', utopia can and is used beyond its constant implied consumption of positivity. Ann Cvetkovich as well as Jack Halberstam refer multiple times to utopia or utopian living. Although Cvetkovich uses the idea of utopia more explicit through her concept of 'the utopia of ordinary habit', Halberstam also points to an ambiguous non/existing state that can be seen as utopian; where the inability to consume what is in store serves as main drive. Below I will look at Cvetkovich's and Halberstam's vision of utopia using the work of queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz. Like the citation at the beginning of this sub-chapter, I want to explore what there is to become of us if we do not, cannot and/or undo continuous pleasure by refusing to choose something from the shelves in the store.

### **The utopia of everyday habit**

As discussed in the first chapter, Cvetkovich conceptualises 'the utopia of everyday habit' as an alternative for working with depression that is inspired by the practices of medieval monks with acedia. She focuses on the idea of 'useless' never-ending processes found in the repetitive or habitual actions of for instance crafts to live slow in 'sick culture' (Cvetkovich 2012, 189). She uses, among others, Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009) as a point of departure for her own utopian concept. Muñoz's work is used to underline the queerness of Cvetkovich's habit-based utopia, where the performance in the present is seen as a "force of and for



futurity” that glimpses through “everyday transaction[s]” but is always not-yet-here or, as Cvetkovich would say, an everyday ritual that refuses pragmatism and opens-up potentiality that never ends (Muñoz 2009, 22, 32). While Muñoz looks at the way these potentialities (or glimpses of potentialities) can be found in art and literature, Cvetkovich places her ‘utopia of ordinary habit’ in Avery Gordon’s ‘usable utopia’ that puts these glimpses in the active hands of the other to craft ‘new life’ or, using Muñoz, to craft queer ecstasy in straight time (ibid., 25). Cvetkovich:

“My contribution to this discussion is to insist that daily life in all its ordinariness can be a basis for the utopian project of building new worlds in response to both spiritual despair and political depression ... The utopia of ordinary habit is forged out of loss and connection – to the body, to a meaningful sense of work, to relations with others – that characterises depression” (Cvetkovich 2012, 191-192).

This idea of (loss of) connection is also prevalent in Muñoz’s ‘concrete’ utopia, where it is found in “the hopes of a collective, an emergent group, or even the solitary oddball who is the one who dreams for many” (Muñoz 2009, 3). This is opposed to an idea of ‘pragmatic’ utopia as a heightened version of the current society, as for instance found in Sir Thomas More’s novel, where, in terms of queer-belonging, the individual (or a very narrow homonormative group) assimilates with the “corrupt and bankrupt social order” and is therefore seen as ‘treated’ and ‘cured’ from its ‘depressing’ position (Muñoz 2009, 20; Cvetkovich 2012, 113). Both Muñoz and Cvetkovich, while acknowledging that the present is ‘not enough’, work with the present as a site or mode of potentiality because they see futurity, utopia, ‘made’ in relation to the present; which in turn has been made “by a perception [or performance] of past and future affective worlds” that are concentrated in the present moment (Muñoz 2009, 27). Muñoz even goes as far as saying that to turn away from the present is exchanging it “in favor of folly” as “utopia offers us a critique of the present, of what is, by casting a picture of what *can and perhaps will be*” (ibid., 27, 35). So to deny the present is, following Muñoz, to deny futurity and the not-yet-imagined.

## Thinking with others

Halberstam, with his queer failure and anti-social feminism that *does* deny the present and actively ‘fails’ the future, is therefore perhaps an odd addition to this line of thought. However, Halberstam recognises the importance of the not-yet-imagined and sees Muñoz’s work as “the most elaborate account of queer failure to date” as he “explains the connection between queers and failure in terms of a utopian ‘rejection of pragmatism’, on the one hand, and an equally utopian refusal of social

norms on the other” (Halberstam 2011, 89). So with ‘failing the future’ I recognise that Halberstam stages this failure within what Muñoz calls straight time and therefore is not a denial of queer future altogether, as for instance done by critic and academic Lee Edelman in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004). Both Halberstam and Muñoz critique Edelman’s narrow definition of future, who makes it synonymous to (White) hetero-reproduction, and instead, like Cvetkovich, point “to think with others” as a way “to work for a more collective futurity” or, in other words, an imagined utopian alternative (ibid., 42). Halberstam:

“The dream of an alternative way of being is often confused with utopian thinking and then dismissed as naïve, simplistic, or blatant misunderstanding of the nature of power in modernity. And yet the possibility of other forms of being, other forms of knowing, a world with different sites for justice and injustice, a mode of being where the emphasis falls less on money and work and competition and more on cooperation, trade, and sharing animates all kinds of knowledge projects and should not be dismissed as irrelevant or naïve” (ibid., 52).

Even though Halberstam would not necessarily use the word utopia, and instead re/conceptualises for instance ‘death world’, he is very interested in its transformative character and actually uses this in his analyses of pop culture in *Queer Failure*. In this way we can relate Halberstam’s call for unbeing to Muñoz’s definition of potentiality as “a certain mode of nonbeing that is eminent, a thing that is present but not actually existing in the present tense” (Muñoz 2009, 9). Therewith, following Halberstam’s idea and denial of being in the present, which in itself is an assemblage that consists out of “many other realities, fields of knowledge, and ways of being that have been discarded”, a utopian hybrid can be thought of where forgetting (cutting, see chapter 2) and potentialising (crafting, see chapter 1) can stitch and rip post-truth fictions through the constant becoming and unbecoming of the not-yet-here in the not-quite-there present (Halberstam 2011, 147).

Post-truth provides a constant sensationalised battle for ‘reality’ that uses the logic of closure for sense-making. Something makes sense because it fits neatly within the borders of understanding, it does not challenge or tries to look further than that what is already ‘known’ or believed. In this sense Paradise, like the one Thierry Baudet calls for (see the introduction of this thesis), happily plays with the idea of return as a way to ‘re/make the future’. The Paradise of post-truth, thus, relies on a closed circle to celebrate progression, because progression, the betterment of ‘being’, is something that can only ‘feel good’ by being already known. In contrast, the utopia of Cvetkovich, Halberstam and Muñoz does not play into this myth of a (self-evident) false ‘secure’ progression,

and instead sees escalation, breaking out of the circle, as futurity. By following this out-of-reach future (utopia) opposed to the closed circle (Paradise), progression becomes not the betterment of an already known 'being', but a present undetermined nonbeing or potential that is yet to come.



## Conclusion

Before I had no ambition  
But now my life is a song  
Don't you want to see me happy?  
Is it so tragically wrong?  
What if the only choice is  
You have to sing to survive?  
We must go on with the show  
It is inevitable

Inevitable, *The Guy Who Didn't Like Musicals* (2018).<sup>20</sup>

Happiness is guaranteed if you put your words to lyrics and harmonise into Paradise. However, as I have tried to explore in this thesis, happiness will only bring you so far. Especially if you are not the appointed subject that is supposed to be happy. In the phallogocentric fiction of Paradise, written by Baudet, Trump and the likes, happiness is used to signal a forever straight continuity where even death provides a feel good boost; another brick in the wall, building on top of the pavement filled with borderless bodies that have jumped or have been thrown off the balcony. So instead of concluding “how the world became peaceful and just”, like the aliens in *The Guy Who Didn't Like Musicals*, who gleefully invade the world with their killer songs, the key is to look at injustice, at the depressing failures, and to consciously excavate and craft these depressing failures as an un/being in Paradise; a reminder that the famous Shakespearean question ‘to be or not to be’ is only the life/death offered in the populist right-wing store.

Post-truth, Paradise, is inherently capitalistic. Through crafts this capitalistic drive can be stitched, ripped, stitched ripped, and ripped stitched. I have tried to show how crafts can un/create a way out of the singular linear narrative and the ‘other’ body, using the work of Ann Cvetkovich and Jack Halberstam to craft a utopia from daily ‘useless’ routines that transform the depressing everyday, to memes that cut through the ordinary and undoes this everyday altogether. This is an unendless process that cuts through the tight threads of fiction and opens-up potential knowledges and

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20 See footnote 2 for the link to the musical and timestamp 1:45:30 – 1:48:12 for ‘Inevitable’.

existences that are in the present. Not to be other in Paradise, but to un/become with/in this present and reach out to the not-yet-here not-yet-imagined future.

## **Suggestions for further research**

Cvetkovich and Halberstam offer a good opening into the world of negativity as a way to counter positivity that is prevalent to the fiction of phallogocentrism and the post-truth narratives used by populist right-wing politicians, but naturally there are a lot of other scholars who have worked on this theme whose thought could provide a different insight in the relationship between positivity and negativity. Think, for instance, of Sarah Ahmed's *Unhappy Archives* that "take shape through the circulation of cultural objects that articulate unhappiness with the history of happiness" (Ahmed 2010, 18). Or think of Lauren Berlant's *Cruel Optimism* (2011), in which she, like Cvetkovich and Halberstam, focuses on the everyday, but then looking at "the ways people seek to flourish turn out to be bad for them" (Cvetkovich 2012, 166). For further research these scholars could be used to re/think and further explore my interpretation of crafts and re/crafted utopia, where it is not just fuelled by negativity but also makes space for falsely assumed positivity. While there was no space in this thesis to explore this concept, in regards to post-truth, Cvetkovich's 'mixed feelings' and crafting a 'new world', this falsely assumed positivity actually plays quite a big role in the dis/connections experienced in the current political climate.

While this thesis has used written sources as a way to explore crafts potentiality, it goes without saying that, for further research, a more practical element can also provide new insights in the way crafts can, literally, craft that what is not yet here, not yet imagined, and, of course, the mixed feelings that come with this. Here I am not thinking only about literal crafts practices, but also, as Pepe states in the interview with Roberts in regards to crafts as queer or queer crafts:

"[T]here must be an inherent disinterest in becoming part of the larger whole. As a personal quest, this sounds good, but as a political one, it doesn't: few people have the luxury of – or interest in – living and/or working in a static state of marginality" (Pepe & Roberts 2015).

Although Halberstam answers this with the idea of unbeing and undoing, this can still be seen as a luxury position that, on a political level but also on a personal, has implications on how this refusal of marginality, to unlive in life, will take shape in the ordinary everyday. This is not something I

have addressed in this thesis, but this question of luxury and practical implications are potential new entry points for further research.





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