

Made by entangled words and wool

Rhizomatic relations in writing and making with(in) the phenomenon of wool felting

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As a preamble to this article,
I invite you to watch this video made of entangled words and wool fibres.



Video ²: 'Cutting through an assemblage of other-less'. Photo: Per Arne Ellefsen



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² Video link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ETZtZKTUIA>

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Untangling and openings

In this essay, I highlight a performative and rhizomatic approach to my art-based research using the phenomenon of wool felting to address entangling words and wool fibres as a material-discourse. I address drifting movements from the notion of a/r/tography as I perceive it, through echo, resonance and re-emergence in my art-based research design. This is done by querying, and caring for, the idea of identity, as I carry many of them, of various nature and various intensities. Furthermore, I decentralise the human in the art-based research methodology that I have been using in recent years in artistic, scholarly and pedagogical contexts. This text dialogues with the recent work of Stephanie Springgay (2020 and 2022), especially her work related to the concept of *feltness*, and more broadly research-creation (Manning, 2016).

The reading of the collaborative work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1980) and Karen Barad (2007) situates the theoretical framework in a landscape of post-structuralist and agential realism within new materialism. In those theoretical landscapes, the notion of identity is understood as dynamic and evolving as a rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari 1980). Moreover, the human position is decentralised as humans are in intra-action (not separated) of a phenomenon (Barad, 2007).


In my performative working process, I refrain to define identity as being an interacting socially recognised or assigned role of artist, teacher and researcher. Accordingly, my work decentralises the human and refrains to see the human as a subject placed in the world, but rather as being a matter of the world (Barad, 2007). Hence, identity is not understood as a finite individual entity separate from the world. In this case, I am an artist-teacher intra-acting (reciprocally creating and created) with the world. Matter (human or other) is not a thing but a doing (Barad, 2007, p. 183), a part of the world's ongoing and dynamic becoming.

The pedagogical background is related to what Dennis Atkinson (2015) names as the 'not yet known'. An approach to pedagogy that recalls how some artist-teachers work. This essay is also in dialogue with the works of contemporary textile artists and professors in art education. Female textile artists that influenced my generation of students at the art academy in Brussels in the nineties were, among others, Magdalena Abakanowicz (1930-2017) and Tapta (pseudonym of Maria Wierusz-Kowalska, 1926-1997). Their work, as well as the work of Cecilia Vicuña (b. 1948), is attentive to forms of expression using craft knowledge and performative processes, both in their artistic work and as professors in art education.

This essay is a narrative building largely on my professional artistic commitment and demonstrates how the above-mentioned theoretical and pedagogical landscape resonates with my research-creation, which I interpret as being broader than the segment of a/r/tography. My artistic research experience goes back to my first art academy training (1993-1997) and relates to my work localised in and outside my studio. It also relates to other and otherness in different manners when infiltrating different constellations, being local, national and global. In some of my works from the last 10 years, when exploring performativity, I connect traditional craft making and contemporary forms of expression. This kind of performative working process revealed affective togetherness (Jamouchi, 2020) encompassing the materiality of bodies in intra-action with other non-human materialities.

Keywords: research creation, sensory-making, visual art education, wool felting, performative, a/r/tography, textile

My quest while assembling some fabulations



This text does not give a solution to use as a better alternative way of practicing art, education or research. In my rhizomatic approach, fabulations are my argumentations, and creations are my answers in a dialogical dis-play. I am looking for robust sensory-making event, rather than giving solid(ified) meaning to what wool felting is.

The text is in the middle of some felt *ing*, word*ing* and world*ing* fabulations. It starts with a short introduction to my working framework that reveals the artistic, philosophical, theoretical and philosophical landscape it inhabits.

This is followed by some food for thought engaging with my reflection about evolving methodologies and my research creation.

Then come echo, resonance and re-emergence related to the becoming of my artistic work. This is followed by how I use a performative approach to materiality. In the next move, I come back to wool felting before a final touch sums up reminiscence of feltness.

Assembling some fabulations.

My quest while writing this essay is to articulate how a reemergence from the notion of a/r/tography creates a drifting path holding two main moments when 1) altering an inherited idea of identity as related to a given (or taken) role socially recognisable as an artist, teacher or researcher, and 2) decentralising the human as becoming intra-active matter of the world. This articulation does not follow the strictly regulated structured composition of a woven textile but embraces a more adventurous and multidirectional movement like wool fibres during a felting process.

My quest revolves around this proposition: textual and textile exploration (entangled word and wool) expands the materiality of the body in a performative approach to the phenomenon of wool felting. In this context, expanding means that identity exceeds a social or professional role, the body is more than its physical border, and words express more than their lexical definition.

Artistic, philosophical, theoretical and pedagogical framework

I do not usually regard my work as devoted to one particular artistic form of expression nor one specific theoretical framework. The categorisation of my work in artistic or theoretical segments like textile artist or a/r/tographer is too small. Not that there is anything wrong with identifying oneself as textile artist or a/r/tographer, but I find categorisation and classification too small to hold and reflect the diversity of what I do. I work with textile, but also with sculpture, video, and immersive installations, using both material-based and conceptual forms of expression. I work as an artist-teacher and researcher, but I refrain from defining myself as an a/r/tographer through an identity steadfast to the role of an artist, teacher and researcher. By situating my work in the realm of post-structuralism (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980) and agential realism (Barad, 2007), I trouble the idea of being only identified as a textile artist or a/r/tographer. I see rhizomatic structures in becoming and continually establishing connections reaching out, extended beyond human identity and the human realm. What I do emerges from the phenomenon of wool felting. In an agential realism sense, the smallest unit of analysis is the phenomenon. Hence, my doing and I are neither pre-defined nor separated from the phenomenon: "A phenomenon is a specific intra-action of an 'object'; and the 'measuring agencies'; the object and the measuring agencies emerge from, rather than precede, the intra-action that produces them" (Barad, 2007, p. 128).

Deleuze and Guattari (1980) expand the botanical term of rhizome to a philosophical concept, they create a different understanding of the notions of identity and being. They relate identity to the botanical referent, which is characterised by the becoming of an expanding and multidirectional rootlet system. Identity, as rhizomatic, is no longer understood as something being independent and constant. The philosophical

concept of the rhizome is an on-going becoming of dynamic encounters between elements of various nature and various intensities that connect them to each other. It is something that goes in different directions and is continually in motion. Identity is thus, in this framework, seen as fluid and multidirectional. This resists the assumption that identity is something immutable and constant.

In Barad's notion of agential realism (2007), the smallest unit of analysis is the phenomenon, not an object. A fundamental idea is that the researcher is a part of, and an imbricate apparatus in, the phenomenon that is investigated. Every phenomenon has the capacities of becoming and acting (agency) *in situ* and in relation to its various components. Thus, knowledge production is interdependent; the knower and knowing are not separated entities. This challenges the idea of an individual identity and a supposed detached position of a researcher. The human is decentralised and seen as being *of* the world, suggesting moving away from human exceptionalism. For Barad, neither phenomenon, objects nor persons precede their intra-action. We emerge through our encounters that materialise/produce what we become. Agency is not something one has or possesses, rather it is relational and emergent. Humans cannot be separated from the world of materiality "Practices of knowing and being are not isolable" (Barad, 2007, p. 185).

Notes on philosophical concepts:

A concept is validated if it allows me to go further,
just like wool felting gestures
when it allows me to go further in a transformative process.
Going further means transporting myself to another territory,
that is not yet seen/experienced/known.

In this essay, knowledge becomes a relationship in which the researcher is entangled with/in the phenomenon of wool felting and words feeling. Wool *felting*, *wording* and *worlding* are act(ions) that materialise through intra-active responses, as "matter and meaning are mutually articulated" (Barad, 2007, p.152). An infiltrated reading of Deleuze and Guattari and Barad underlines the idea of non-fixed identity and the production of knowledge as something that is done through intra-action between human and non-human (as performative) as well as between matter (wool) and discourse (words).



Touch and intimacy between skin and wool fibres - Knowledge is not static.

A performative approach to the phenomenon of wool felting acknowledges and enables a pedagogy of the 'not yet known' (Atkinson, 2015). This acknowledgment is also inspired by, among other things, how a feeling of togetherness is expressed by the participants of wool felting events I organised in several Norwegian universities and in international artistic milieus since 2015. Note that togetherness is not the same as sameness or uniformity (Jamouchi, 2020, p. 62). By exploring my artistic practice in diverse contexts, I propose to move away from the given (or taken) identities of an artist, artist-teacher or researcher. This proposition, to inquire the making, or the practicing, and investigate wool felting as a phenomenon, decentralises the human subject. This is done by exploring the felting process, not only the felted product. This approach gives attention to intimate encounters - or *feltness* (Springgay, 2022) in creating a performative event. This approach can expand the notion of *a/r/tography*.

Theoretically, my methodological approach and the concepts I materialise and experiment with are inspired by various philosophical, theoretical, artistic and pedagogical strands. Such enquiry and creative practices inhabit a landscape of non-representational, material oriented, post-qualitative and performative research.

Food for thought (matière à reflexion)

Feltness

Stephanie Springgay is the co-director, together with Sarah E. Truman, of WalkingLab³. WalkingLab presents itself as an international group of walking scholars that approach the practice of walking that explores and challenges the normative or fixed understanding of place. The idea is to attune to place.

Springgay develops a theoretical and philosophical framework she calls feltness (2020 and 2022). I read her recent work, since 2020, as being particularly attentive to affect and touch (Springgay, 2020). Springgay proposes feltness as a practice of intimacy (2022) and brings the notion of relationality and intimacy in her research-creation, which combines artistic expression and scholarly investigation. It seems to me that her recent work is less attached to the notion of a/r/tography as she investigates the idea of feltness. Feltness, as a research-creation practicing intimacy, resonates with “the ethical and political pull of post-qualitative methodologies that aim to dismantle the neoliberal drives that have conditioned research methods that are dependent on prescribed procedures, knowable outputs, and measurable impacts” (Springgay, 2020, p. 210). She describes education as having a love affair with qualitative captures, assessment and metrics (2022, p. 135). Even if she does not explicitly mention an ontology of immanence and the concept of the rhizome related to Deleuze and Guattari (1980), Springgay advocates for the need of research “through speculative middles that insist on immanent and emergent modes of thinking-making-doing [...] Speculative middles can’t be known in advance and shape a way of inhabiting the world” (2022, p. 136). I interpret this approach as emphasising the doing or intra-action emanating from the phenomenon (i.e. in WalkingLab or wool felting). In other words, human beings and their identities (i.e. artist, teacher or researcher) defined prior an intra-action are less preeminent in the materialisation of a phenomenon. This approach follows Barad’s idea of agential realism, in which the distinction between the human subject and object of enquiry from an external world is obsolete.

³ Link to WalkingLab: <https://walkinglab.org/>

A/r/tography - an expanding notion

Research-creation has different names and evolves in different places in the world. A/r/tography and research-creation are prevalent notions discussed in academia in Canada (Social Science and Humanities Research Council, 2021). Even if both notions have a geographical affiliation with Canada, they expanded to other countries. “The name a/r/tography features art and graphy, and the identities of artist, researcher, and teacher” (Irwin et al., 2006, p. 71). Identity is thus related to three professional roles (artist, teacher and researcher) and the interstice between them. None of these identities prevail over the others.

Rita Irwin and Stephanie Springgay were front figures in the community of a/r/tographers in Canada, who have been mainly connected to the University of British Columbia. However, this method is used differently in different countries. As this special issue gives an extended introduction to a/r/tography, I briefly describe it related to my understanding of it, and particularly related to the idea of identity when a/r/tography is “envisioned as embodied understandings and exchanges between art and text, and between and among the broadly conceived identities of artist/researcher/teacher”.⁴ This implies that the human being has a central place as an a/r/tographer.

A/r/tography relates to a methodology that has no fixed criteria for how research should be carried out (Irwin et al., 2006). A/r/tographers are also mentioned as having multiple activities or roles, including the act of writing, by annexing “graphia,” which is the Greek word for writing” (Güneşş, Aksoy & Özsoy, 2020). Today, a/r/tography as a research methodology is still evolving. Already in 2006, the notion of rhizome inspired by Deleuze and Guattari was mentioned (Irwin et al., 2006, p. 71). I have earlier used the notion of a/r/tography when re-turning (Barad, 2007) wool felting. I now see how my artistic and arts-based research encompasses more elements than the identity of artist, teacher and researcher, plus the act of writing. I see how my work is deeply related to the performative, rhizomatic and intra-action in artistic and pedagogical contexts. Furthermore, craftsmanship and art making are strong commitments in the practices of my research creation. For me, art is a starting point for intra-acting with the world, rather than a method of enquiring about a topic of interest.

⁴ Irwin, n. d., <https://artography.edcp.educ.ubc.ca/>

fibres, lines, wool roving, become tangled up

intertwined wool, turned, returned, spread,
intermingled, entangled

words become lines, paragraphs, text on textiles

an (un)spoken meeting

a bodily conversation with colours, textures,
lines, surfaces

corporal and animal fibres vibrate jointly



Fractions, cuts and incisions from text and texture.

CRaFTography

The Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) had a research group called 'Rhizomatic learning and CRaFTography'. The Norwegian CRaFTography research group from NTNU described their task as a project that explores practical research, learning methods and examines how the practitioner—by virtue of being a crafts practitioner, researcher and teacher—exercises knowledge and relates to various tools in his or her exercise of knowledge (Norwegian University of Science and Technology, n. d.). This appears to underline the quality of craftsmanship knowledge/practice in their work, not as a methodological tool, but as a robust professional practice in their research. Thus, craft seems to be more than a method or a tool serving to conduct research. As I see it, it requires a long-lasting commitment and deep understanding of craft practice by virtue of being dedicated to exercising/practicing craft for its own sake. This makes, in my view, a distinction between a/r/tography and CRaFTography.

My expertise in craft and visual art making within textile, and especially my evolving wool felting expertise over the last 30 years, generates a strong and robust connection to the materiality and malleability in my repeated encounters in a performative approach to the phenomenon of wool felting. It is a series of repetitions with infinite, sometimes almost unnoticeable, shifts. An act of intimacy between materials and bodies that is perceptible for others too, in different ways. During a

duo-ethnographic project I conducted in 2018 (Jamouchi, 2019), I invited some colleagues to watch me felting wool in different studios/spaces. Here are two shortened versions from a couple of emails that they sent me 10 months after the felting session⁵. Their texts are closely related to material intimacy, the in-between movements, the act(tions) of touching and being touched in repetitive encounters. One of my colleagues wrote this:

I also remember the careful movements you made with your hands as you felt the felt flap between each time you rolled it into the mat. It became so clear to me that this was a form of knowledge that sits in the hands. It seemed so straightforward and went so fast. I remember being amazed that it was so engaging to watch. When you stopped, I wanted you to go on even longer. I think it was beautiful. (personal email correspondence, February 2019)

Another college wrote this:

I have experienced that in a way your body and soul became one - the way you have moved with great certainty, rhythm and 'she knows what she is doing', that you are in the process, with the process and are the process itself. The action had clear phases and transitions. I had the feeling that I would never manage this, because I haven't tried, trained, understood what to do, why, and in what order. It also felt like you could remove all the objects and your body still remembers every movement. Quite simply, you could felt without felting. (personal email correspondence, February 2019).

Other participants of a performative approach to wool felting are Norwegians and international students. Their written notes reveal, among other things, the intimacy that can occur, both between the students and between the working process and the material. The following quotes, that I used in a previous publication (Jamouchi, 2020, p.70), are from two different student teachers that worked barefoot to press, pack, entangle and felt a large amount of wool displayed on the floor:

Walking around with others gave rather a feeling of intimacy, since feet are actually a very private thing.

⁵ Those personal correspondences are from an earlier exploration in which I invited several colleges, from 3 different Norwegian universities and abroad, to watch me felting wool. I asked them to share their impression with me just after the felting session. I contacted them by email 10 months later to ask them to send me some words about what they remembered from the felting session. I wrote more about that project in the article "Exploring a Performative Approach to Felting Wool. An Autoethnography for Two?" (Jamouchi, 2019).

The material seems so fragile but during the working process, I've experienced again how strong and flexible the wool can be. What I also appreciate is the 'surprise effect' during the felting process! You never know exactly what the outcome might look like! Because the felting process is quite long, you somehow start building up a kind of 'relationship' (I can't find another word for it) with your artwork – that makes you even more proud when you've finished your project. (Jamouchi, 2020, pp. 70-71).

I bring wool felting as craft knowledge **and** artistic practice in university workshops or artistic arenas to enter the phenomenon of wool felting with other (other materialities and bodies as materialities). The phenomenon of wool felting becomes the creative and transformative event of those encounters. The ancestral craft is powerful, transformative and creates multidirectional connections. The phenomenon of wool felting is more than a research tool, or an instrument of measurement, or a final felted product. It is a sensory-making and embodied experience of intimacy that allows us to become aware of our relationship to inherited craft knowledge, to others and ourselves. Simultaneously, the craft of manual wool felting immerses us and 'plugs' us into our own time. When relating to CRafTography, I think of crafting in action and crafting actions.



Crafting in action and crafting actions.

Research-creation

While a/r/tography was an attempt to name a methodology, the phrase research-creation was an attempt to allow persons without a PhD degree to be able to apply for a governmental grant. The Canadian agency for government funding for the Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) defines research-creation as “An approach to research that combines creative and academic research practices, and supports the development of knowledge and innovation through artistic expression, scholarly investigation, and experimentation” (SSHRC, 2021).

Research-creation, also called art-based research (Manning, 2016, p. 26), started as a funding category. It was more instrumental than inventive, with the goal of enabling artists teaching in universities who did not have PhDs to apply for larger academic grants (Manning, 2016, p. 26). For Manning, being an artist-researcher was not something new: “For weren’t artists already involved in research? Wasn’t art practice always engaged in forms of inquiry? Wasn’t it a mode of knowledge in its own right?” (p. 26). Manning expresses it as “a practice of incipient thought”, and she refers to the medieval definition of art as “‘the way’ and ‘the manner’—locating art not at the level of the finished object, but in its trajectory” (p. 28). Research-creation creates new forms of knowledge embracing the non-linguistic, it generates forms of knowledge that are extra-linguistic (2016, p. 28).

“I never made a painting as a work of art, it is all research”

Pablo Picasso

As a visual artist, I can easily identify my work with this type of reasoning. But this was not articulated and stated in teacher education institutions as powerfully as Manning did. One can see the importance of naming a methodological approach like a/r/tography in research-creation, which established an academic platform in different countries that have embraced the qualitative research methodologies it offers. Research combining visual art and scientific works have recently been granted academic funding at the ‘Art in Context’ specialisation at the University of Agder (UiA) in Norway. That gave me the opportunity to accomplish the first combined doctoral thesis at UiA in 2023, combining my practices as visual artist and scientific publications.

It is during my doctoral study that I read and re-encountered the work of Deleuze and Guattari (Mille plateaux. Capitalisme et schizophrénie 2, 1980). I was captivated by their idea about things or thoughts that are yet to be named or yet to be thought. They reject the Oedipean explanation of one’s identity and Occidental semiotic in

favour of making new explorations or combinations, because knowing can limit creative thinking. They invite us to think, more than interpreting. “Stop! You tire me! experiment instead of signifying and interpreting. Find your own places, your territorialities, your deterritorializations, your regime, your lines of flight” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980, p.173).

Going back to some of the corpus of Deleuze and Guattari that inspired a/r/tographers was a moment and movement that brought me further than a/r/tography. This movement toward seminal ideas of research-creation was triggered by my informed intuition, as an artist-researcher, in my encounters with wool and words, rather than a planned action. It is during my enquiry with superposed layers of wool and words, as mutually reinforcing my embodied making and thinking, that the work of Deleuze and Guattari brought a fruitful and evocative provocation in their re-formulation of the term identity. An identity that goes beyond a specific profession. In their approach, the human is a part (among other parts) of a rhizomatic network, not the central element of it.

The possibility to conduct a combined doctoral study gave me/us/artist-researcher a framework in academic institutions that enables the blurring art and science boundaries. I could literally craft with words and wool. With a robust framework like this, I could be creative with entangled and entangling wool fibres and written lines unburdened by a rigid expectation of being an artist **or** a scholar (when those identities are understood as stable and mutually excluding). Within this mindset, a work of art can be a work of research. Reciprocally, I could be creative in my academic writing.

Wool felting entangled with words writing became a wayfaring (a voyage of discovery) free from pre-given formula. Of course, I knew about different wool felting methods and scientific writing forms (i.e. IMRaD). The goal of my research was not to arrive at a given and stable piece of knowledge. I was working with “research that changes the conversation” (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 52). Barone and Eisner suggest that the arts, like science, are concerned with the *process* of questioning and knowing (my italics, p. 52). For them, art making is “less a quest for certainty and much more a quest for plausibility” (Barone & Eisner, 2011, p. 53). The end view in research “is not to arrive at a singular and unchangeable slice of knowledge; it is to generate questions through which [...] will make our conversations more interesting” (Barone & Eisner, 2011, p. 53).

The outcome of my doctoral study generated questions about what a performative approach could bring to teacher education by asking other questions. Other

questions than for example those related to rendering or replicating something, or the ability to copy or imitate a given artistic style. The outcome of a research through rhizomatic connections with its diverse intensities between elements of different nature changed the conversation from what wool is, to what wool can do. It brought me to a state of formulating incipient thoughts, to use Manning's words, in the trajectory of research-creation.

What can I ask from wool, and wool from me?

Where are those fibres bringing me?

How works the concept of 'vibration' on me, my hands and feet, my thinking, making, imagining...?

What means 'touch' when I actually touch and I am in return being touched by a network of fibres entangling time, movements, thoughts, and more?

How can I/you/me/fibres/words/thoughts re-act through sensory-making rather than following a given method or formula?

What can it mean to approach a felting process by giving attention, being attentive, to rhizomatic encounters, rather than risking distancing ourselves from the (felting) process if we 'interpose' given methods between ourselves and other non-human materialities?

What can the phenomenon of wool felting do?

What can happen to teacher education when we diversify teaching practices created elsewhere than from normative practices?

Echo, resonance and re-emergence

I loosely remember that I heard the word *a/r/tography* once, somewhere, in some context, a few years ago. It came back to my ears sometimes, again, as an echo. I imagined it was echoing something that I knew or already did in my practices. I partially paid attention. I do not think that my artist-teacher practice and my research automatically make me an *a/r/tographer*. The word seemed to have some resonance to what I did as an artist-teacher in teacher education. As Manning describes it, artists were always engaged in forms of inquiry, but artists needed an academic platform to be able to apply for academic grants (Manning, 2016, p. 26).

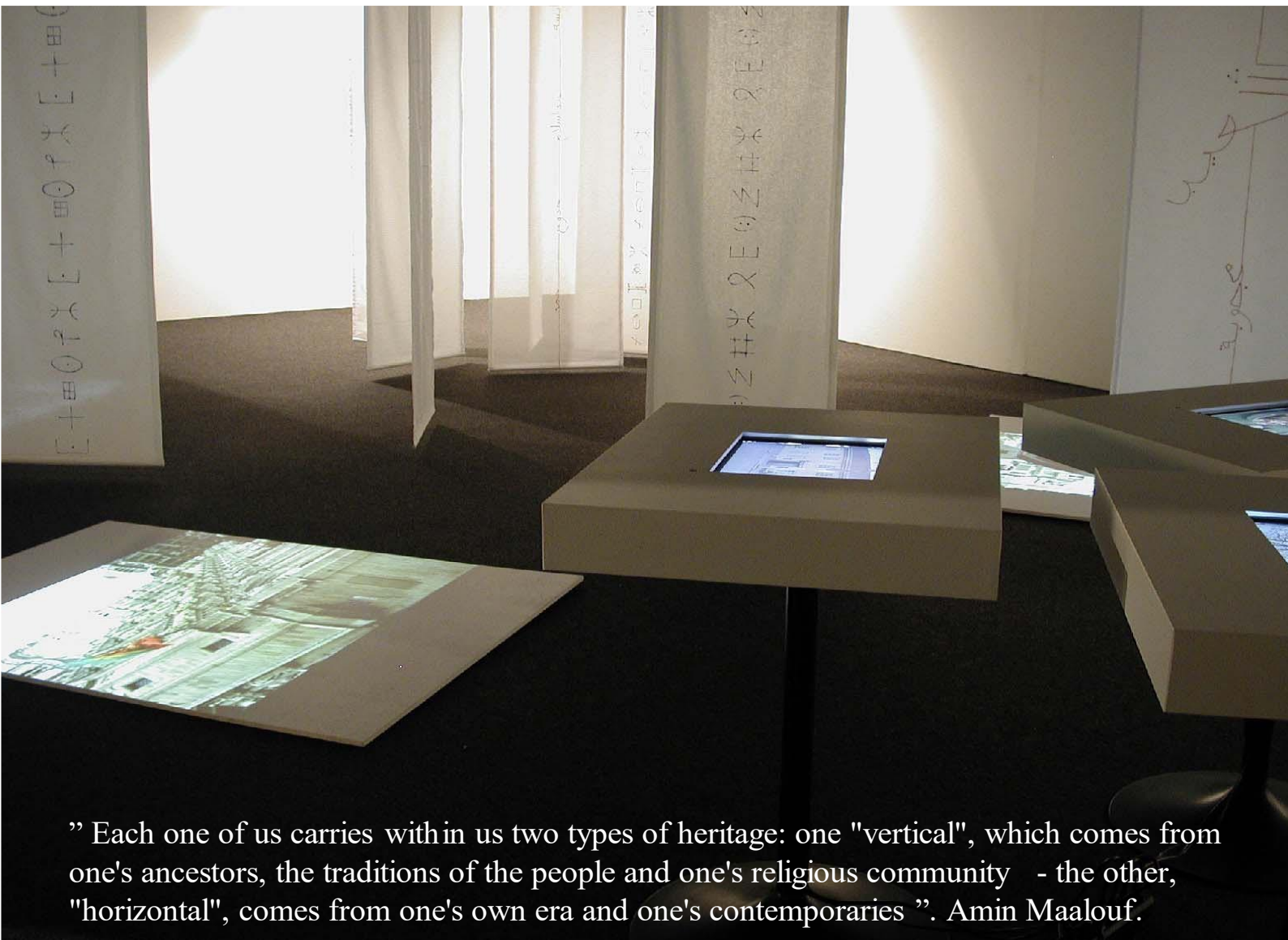
Eventually, *a/r/tography* did not manage to completely envelop me in its flow when reaching the European continent. Maybe *a/r/tography* was beside my own tempo. It created, simultaneously, a sense of resonance and re-emergence. My encounter with

a/r/tography was productive when embracing the tension between what I perceived as echoing other post structuralist territories, agential realism and a pedagogy of the 'not yet known' as mentioned above. My wayfaring between those diverse territories engendered a drifting path in a fruitful and creative chaos. They help me to articulate differently notions of rhizome (a sense of becoming rather than immutable identity) and phenomenon (as the smallest unit of enquiry decentralising the human). I am still enquiring as I am drifting with(in)/from/into the notions of rhizome and phenomenon. It is an intervention and intention to captivate something from chaos and its creative forces as Deleuze and Guattari (1980, p. 382-383) describe it in the *ritournelle*. A *ritournelle*, as I connect to it, reveals rhythm, repetition of non-identical but related moments and actions. It is a rhythm that takes me, more than a rhythm that I produce, when felting wool. It is like material displacements and flows that shape and un-shape more or less stable territories of certainty. It is about ongoing formulations and formations of (dis)connected layers of words and wool, rather than the formed (finalised) text or wool object.

The concept of identity is something I investigated in my earlier artistic work called "Identity" (2005). I bear Amazigh, Arabic, Brussels, Belgian, Walloon, Norwegian, African, European, Scandinavian, urban and rural cultures. I speak Arabic with my parents, Norwegian with my husband and French with my son in the very same conversation when we are together. Of course, like everybody else in academia, I also have many other identities than the three mentioned in a/r/tography. For me, the term identity connects to the various and variable intensities of/in/from/with diverse relations at different time-space and in several contexts that shape me — a constant becoming. The notion of identity, when I read the Lebanese-born French author Amin Maalouf (1998), is undeniably a plurality. As I understand Deleuze and Guattari, identity is a relentless becoming and multitude. With the work of Barad, identity has fluid boundaries that are temporarily constructed in the evolving intra-action of a phenomenon. As with the works of the Chilean poet, artist, activist and filmmaker Cecilia Vicuña (2023), identity is the traces of earlier relations and encounters.

'Identity' (Jamouchi, 2005) has different levels of movements and different tempos. It is a *ritournelle* with diverse rhythms, intensities and rhizomatic connections. Materiality, space, time as duration, still and moving images, embroidery, textile print, Amazigh and Arabic writing, light, agencement *in situ* and more create the installation 'Identity'. The public must move into the exhibition room to experience the installation as a whole. The work itself operates on several different timescales, locations and tempos. The white textiles hanging vertically from the roof and all the way down, which are almost immobile elements, contain Arabic embroidery and Amazigh (Berber) silk prints. The photographs of Brussels projected on large plates on the

ground beat with a rhythm of their own, like heartbeats. The films from Oslo running on the screens on the tables are in continuous motion.



” Each one of us carries within us two types of heritage: one "vertical", which comes from one's ancestors, the traditions of the people and one's religious community - the other, "horizontal", comes from one's own era and one's contemporaries ”. Amin Maalouf.

My installation 'Identity' (2005) exhibited at Stenersenmuseet in Oslo. The quotation is from Maalouf's book that I used as a starting point for this installation.

In this project, the notion of identity differs from identity of artist, teacher and researcher in the vein of a/r/tography. I explore the phenomenon of identity through a performative and rhizomatic approach. I use similar artistic research and arts-based research when I explore the phenomenon of wool felting.

Performative approach to materiality

I attempt to contribute to the discussion of arts-based research, as well as developing my own understanding of it, by articulating my understanding and how I drift from the

notion of a/r/tography. In doing so, I explore closely how I approach the phenomenon of wool felting in practices I undertake in specific intra-actions, where agential forces can emerge with/in encounters between elements of different nature and matter, including non-human matter.

Notes on touch:

Flesh-permeability and porosity of wool fibres meet
touching and touched
the intimacy of making-thinking with words and wool (un)folds
constituent and constituted
the art of work, the words, the wool kick back and demand attention
materialising and materialised
wool felting becomes a creative practice, away from applied techniques
mediating and mediated

I find it more intriguing and interesting to see what a performative approach to wool felting does to us (material, students, colleagues, artists and I) than describing what (a teaching session with) wool felting is. As artists, scholars and artists-teachers in an academic world, we can ask what research does and/or how it works in our work (Jamouchi, 2019). I continuously examine the potentials of a performative approach to materiality in a (mainly) written and verbally driven academic world. Barad claims that in recent years, scholars have “pursued performative alternative to social constructivist approaches” and that “The move toward performative alternatives to representationalism changes the focus from questions of correspondence between description and reality (e.g., do they mirror nature or culture?) to matter of practices or doing or actions” (Barad, 2002, p. 28). For Barad, “a performative understanding of discursive practices challenges the representationalist belief in the power of words to represent pre-existing things” (p. 133). Performativity, she says, contests the “unexamined habits of mind that rand language and other forms of representation more power in determining our ontologies than they deserve” (p. 133).

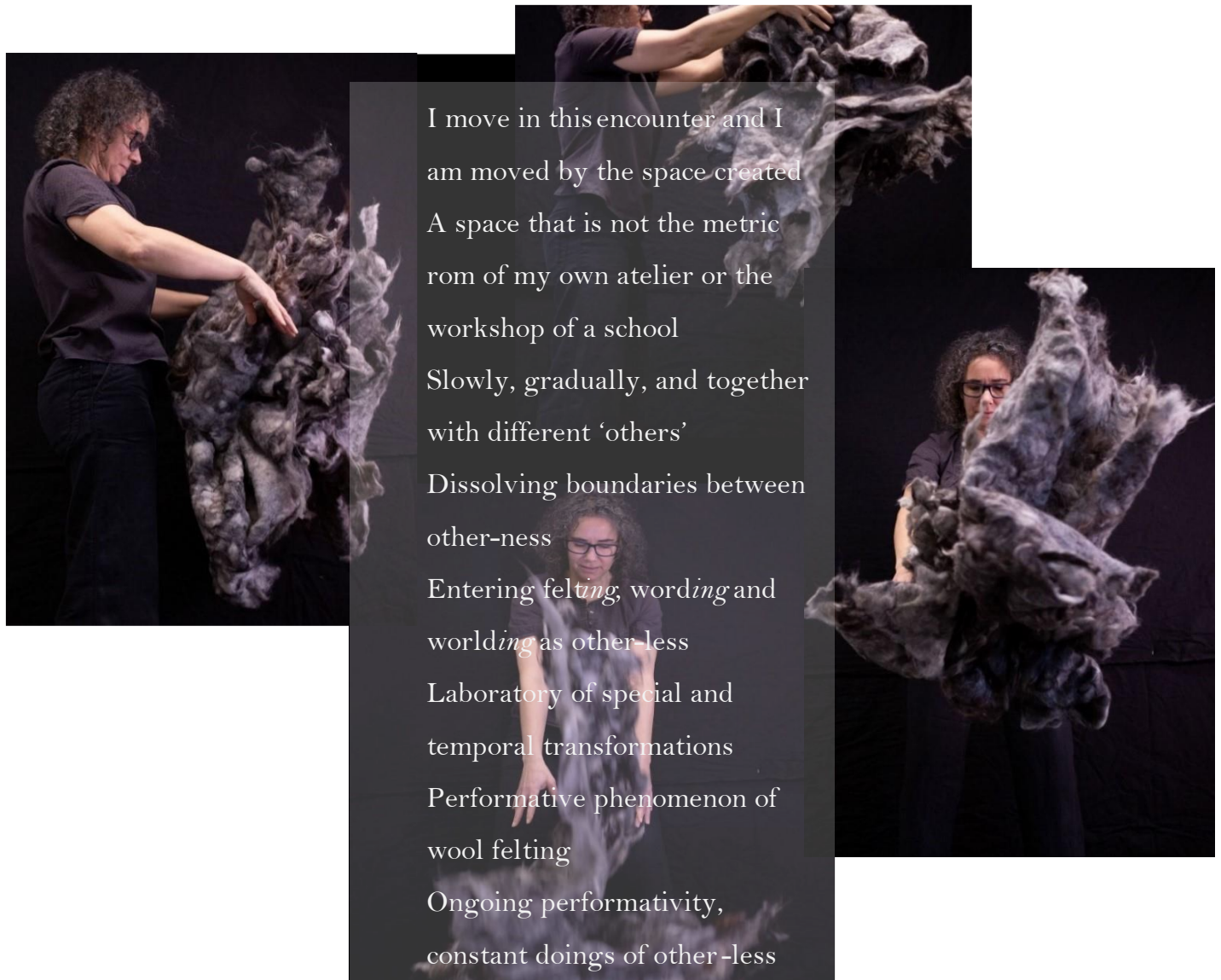
As I see it, a performative approach to wool felting offers a non-dualistic ontological understanding of the world, allowing the researcher and the researched to merge (resisting subject-object opposition) in a way in which they influence and transform each other. That relates to Barad’s notion of intra-action (2007), a key element in her agential realist framework: “The neologism ‘intra-action’ *signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies*” (p. 33, italics in original). Furthermore, this distinguishes the act of representing from intervening. Barad argues that “Bohr’s

proto-performative account suggest that scientific practices may more adequately, be understood as a matter of intervening rather than representing” (p. 54).

In a teaching session where I talked with the students about new materialism and entangled materiality, we looked at different ways of approaching and writing about wool and other plastic materials. The materials we use in art education can be described in many ways. A common way to do it is perhaps to describe materials with words representing the world. In an attempt to engage with a matter of intervening, as Bohr puts it, we looked at a material-discourse that expresses ongoing moments that reveal exploration, play, discovery, collaboration, meeting resistance, or founding new/other/own solutions. We did that to see how one can avoid, so to speak, the risk of neglecting the ‘doing’ of entangled agencies as mentioned above. Describing matter intra-action, inspired by Barad, can be done by paying attention to the genesis of wool fibers during our encounters with them. What the students and I discussed can also apply to clay, wood or paper, as they can take many forms. Wool fibers have plasticity (moldable), porosity, they can change forms, mold, (re)shape and have sharp or organic forms. When connected together and connecting, they can adjust, squeeze or become shrinking, rolling, folding, warming, drying, malleable in direct contact with hands and body (without something ‘in between’ as tools), creating different soundscapes. Water evolves between different states as liquid, gaseous, or solid state, being soft on some conditions or hard in others. The materials can be large, larger than one’s own body, smell, drip, leave traces in the space but also on the body (create and leave experiences that the body remembers), give a new sensation or bring previous tactile experiences, make us wonder, surprise us by behaving in an unexpected way, sensory-making or contribute to nonsense, make us creative, provoke disgust, invite to reflection, bring calm to the room, chaos, or even other settings. Leaving sensory traces and memories inscribed in the skin. My experience when inviting people to a performative approach to wool felting in whatever continents we were in (Europe, Africa, Asia or North America) is that it brings numerous sensory experiences and reminiscences to people.

Epistemologically, a performative approach to wool felting shifts from studying wool fibres as isolated objects or studying a person’s identity as independent from the environment, to inquire the wool felting phenomenon as the primary ontological unit (Barad, 2007, p. 141). This is a radical repositioning of the human that is no longer the central investigator but as entangled in what is happening in the process of wool felting, as there is no inherent separation between the knower and the known. “And the primary semantic units are not ‘words’ but material-discourse practices through which (ontic and semantic) boundaries are constituted” (Barad, 2007, p. 141).

Material-discourse emphasises the entangled inseparability of discourse (being oral or written words) and materiality (including more than humans).



Encountering and intra-acting in space-time-mattering. Encounters that the students⁶ and I explore together in a performative approach to wool felting. Photo: Per Arne Ellefsen

Schematically, analysis in quantitative research produces (statistical) numbers and overviews, while traditional qualitative analysis produces codes, categories, themes or patterns, which often look for and produce sameness (Østern et al., 2021, p. 10). A diffractive analysis avoids reflection on representation, it will rather accounts for how practices matter (Barad, 2007, p. 90). In the context of this research on/with/in/through/from the phenomenon of wool felting, it means practicing art

⁶ I refrain using pictures showing students out of respect for their privacy.

through pedagogy and pedagogy through art. This, by being in intra-action with wool fibres, time, space and other human and non-human components, rather than only focusing on a finished wool product (pre)defined as an artistic or pedagogical object. In other words, I understand research practice with/in art making and teaching as a co-making event (or event creation) rather than an object.

Working as an artist-teacher has been a central practice for textile artists like Magdalena Abakanowicz (1930-2017) and Tapta (pseudonym for Maria Wierusz-Kowalski, 1926-1997). Both have changed the history of textile art, and as educators they brought new ideas about what it means to create something. They changed the understanding of what textile art can be, compared to previous conventions people had concerning weaving (for example like Gobelin textile tradition). Abakanowicz and Tapta had a great influence on how textiles, besides being crafts, are now also considered both as sculpture and installation.

Abakanowicz worked as a professor at the art academy of Poznan in Poland between 1965 and 1990. As an artist, she considers rules and instructions to be the enemies of imagination. She wanted to show the qualities found in textiles that we overlook due to blindness of habit (Coxon & Jacob, 2023, p. 23). This approach to art making has influenced her art teaching. This artistic and pedagogical approach impacted on us too, when we were students of the textile department at the Academy of Fine Arts in Brussels in the early 1990s. Tapta worked as a professor at La Cambre, the National Higher Institute for Architecture and Visual Arts in Brussels. In the catalogue of the exhibition 'Espaces souples' she is described as follows:

Tapta's appointment as teacher at the National School for Advanced Visual Arts La Cambre was just as important as her artistic practice. She headed the textile workshop there from 1976 to 1990, renaming it 'Flexible Sculpture'. Rather than instructing her students [...] in a particular technique, she prioritised the development of an open and critical mind (WIELS, 2023).

Another artist, Cecilia Vicuña (b. 1948, Chile), shows how she explores the material through its possibilities and its becoming. "My work dwells in the not yet, the future potential of the unformed, where sound, weaving, and language interact to create new meanings". For her, things are more than objects, the qualities of an object lie in the relationship that arises between materials and people who have a relationship with them. One of her poems describes this as follows: "An object is not an object; it is a witness to a relationship" (Vicuña, 2023).

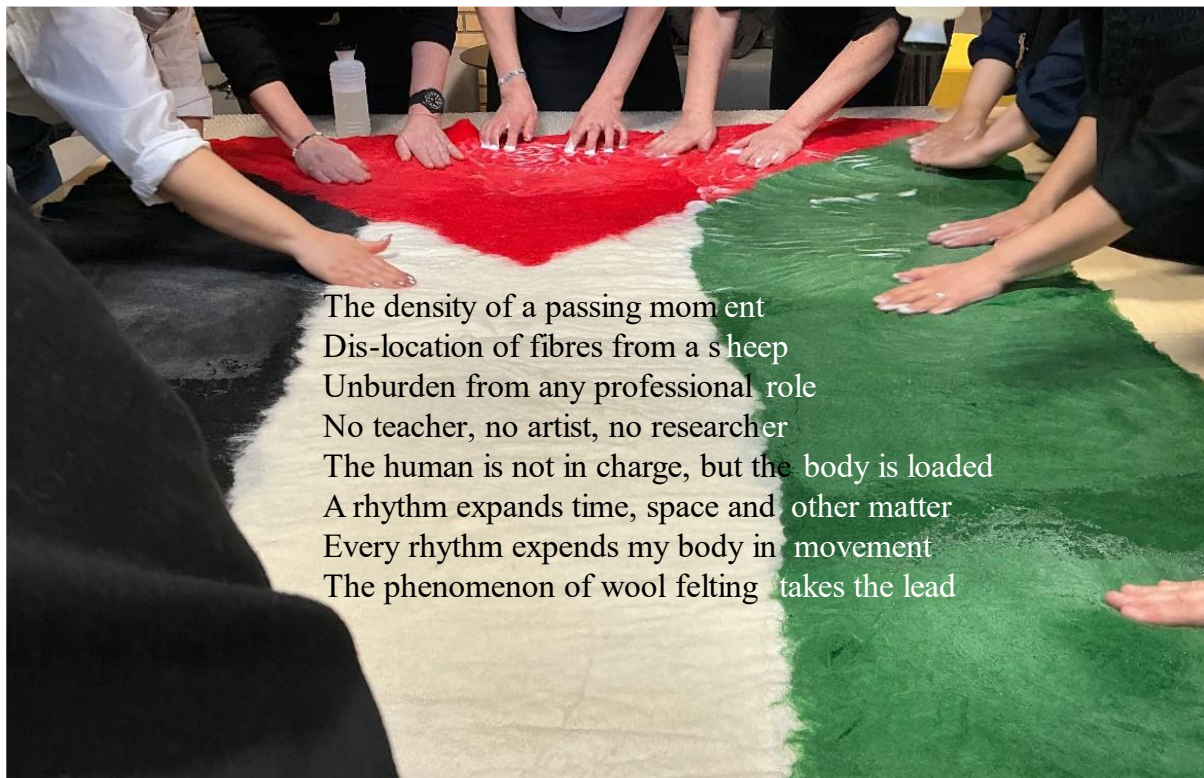
The work of those three textile artists recalls performativity and collective knowledge creation one can see in the not-yet-known of a non-prescribed pedagogy (Atkinson,

2015), extralinguistic research-creation which develops along the way (Manning, 2016), affective togetherness that acknowledges diversity (Jamouchi, 2020), feltness as a practice of intimacy (Springgay, 2022), and the ongoing dynamic of the concepts of becoming (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980) and intra-action (Barad, 2007).

My initial practice in textile art in the 1990s was characterised by experimental approaches to materials. It was seldom that I sought to turn threads and textiles into beautiful functional objects. I used hard materials together with the softness of linen or wool. I included stones, metal or wood in the plasticity of textile. My works were mainly abstract and conceptual. Later, they evolved from 2-dimensional to 3-dimensional works, acquiring sculptural forms, developing into immersive room installations, sometimes with video, and became more and more performative during the last decade. Still following an open-ended path in my artistic research, this inquisitiveness leads me to yet other materialities and encounters through time-space-mattering. The concept of time-space-mattering refers to an activity, rather than stability, of dynamic world-making in which time and space mutually articulate and materialise each other (Barad, 2007). Time-space-mattering thus arises in world-creating actions and events that are framed as inseparable. In an interview in which Barad talks about intra-active entanglements, she explains that future and past are interconnected in the sense that the past and present are not closed and that they are haunting us: “diffraction is a matter of inheritance and indebtedness to the past as well as the future” and that “we’re always already haunted by the past and the future – that neither the past nor the future is closed” (Barad in Juelskjaer, 2012, p. 13). In the following, I map the rhizomatic connections of an extended territory between the past and uncertain future of people in different territories.

Artistic research reaching a larger territory

My artistic research, as presented in the next paragraph, proposes a way of living that Haraway (2016) describes as a myriad of unfinished configurations of places, times, matters and meanings. The practice of becoming unfolds throughout Haraway’s writing and interpretation of sym-poietic systems or making-with rather than auto-poietic systems or self-making. When Haraway refers to Strathern’s thinking practices “it matters what ideas we use to think other ideas (with)” (Strathern in Haraway, 2016, p. 12), I think about how I can re-claim the measure of what matters and count what counts. “*Trouble* is an interesting word. It derives from a thirteenth-century French verb meaning ‘to stir up’, ‘to make cloudy’, ‘to disturb’” (Haraway, 2016, p.1). For Haraway, staying with the trouble requires attentiveness, presence and awareness of being “entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings” (Haraway, 2016, p.1).



Our freedom is incomplete (2025) Public textile action at Oslo Metropolitan University.
Material and technique: hand felting wool. Duration: one hour. In collaboration with the artist collective Stitch Sisters.

The textile action “Our freedom is incomplete” (February 5th, 2025) reveals my interplay, or what Barad calls intra-action, with the world. Wednesday February 5th, 2025 was, accidentally, the very same day the president of the US declared that America should “own” Gaza and turn it from a “demolition site” into the “Riviera of the Middle East” (Goujard, Hülsemann, Caulcutt, Giordano & Keate, 2025)⁷. “Our freedom is incomplete” is not realised from a position of individuality. It is a collaborative project with the artist collective “Stitch Sisters” (Samira Jamouchi, Helen Eriksen, Mali Hauen and Tona Gulpinar). Conceptually, it is an act of worlding with people, spaces, materiality, living conditions or experiences that people shared with me during our encounters and conversations. To undertake this textile action is a reaction against military actions. With this textile action, I articulate/produce meaning beyond my individual sphere. I work in a territory that is larger than mine/me/self-understanding. “Our freedom is incomplete” offers an example of artistic research establishing connections between tangible and intangible matter with people in different geographical contexts. It is not only about giving voice to people, but also about listening to other voices. This textile action invited colleagues and students in the Oslo Metropolitan University campus to materialise the Palestinian flag.

The title of our textile action is taken from a speech Nelson Mandela gave on the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people in 1997, three years after the fall of apartheid. He said: “*We know too well that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians*”.

Never has this sentiment been so strong than at the present time when world opinion could not stop the immense human suffering, pain, and material destruction of Palestine. Nobody can be truly free while the Palestinians are still fighting for their right to live.

We believe that solidarity with the Palestinian people can manifest through collective artistic action. We invited the public to join us in the spirit of hope, solidarity, and as a resistance to Palestinian erasure that we have witnessed over many years. People were invited to take part with us in our textile action. Engage with their own possibility to resist political apathy by coming together for a task that needs many hands: materialising the Palestinian flag.

Crafting with wool is a different way of establishing connections. It relates to a smooth space, as nomadic science rather than state science (Deleuze and Guattari,

⁷ Clothilde Goujard reported from Amman, Jordan. Laura Hülsemann reported from Berlin. Clea Caulcutt reported from Paris. Elena Giordano reported from Brussels. Noah Keate reported from London.

1980, p. 594). A smooth space in which people's stories and voices are audible and heard despite the widespan and intensity of state stories. In teacher education, a smooth space can challenge governance documents and the metric understanding of a room. I recall how I evoked a smooth space in a workshop with student teachers:

"Away from a mindset promoting stabilisation (of time) and standardisation (of objects), my students and I find ourselves elsewhere. Space becomes more qualitative than metric. Working away from a table, leaving small scale projects for larger formats, and not sitting on a chair but standing in the room enable us to freely use our whole body, enable us to use large movements. This enables also improvisation and co-making not only based on pre-determined product, but generated by the actual making, *in situ*, during a creative and active process (Jamouchi, 2019, p. 75).

I am especially interested in artistic works related to performativity and togetherness, slow or time-demanding experiences and experimentation (Jamouchi, 2020, 2023 and 2024), using the entire body, beside hands and feet, to work on large-scale projects when inviting others into a wool felting process. My artistic research is an integral part of my university courses in Norway or when I am invited abroad. My encounter with the students is present in my mind and in my artistic research. The encounters with people from different parts of the world were and still are entangled in my approach to material and my conceptual approach to art making. What I learned from female textile artists like Abakanowicz, Tapta and Vicuña is not only how to produce a textile. What still remains deep in my memory 30 years after I saw their works is that exploration and experimentation do not reside in the artist or the material as separated entities. It is not about skills, It is about traces of a relationship, touching and being touched. It is about fibre art when we are feeling while felting. An act of connecting. It is about creating and being taken away into an intimate sensory landscape.

Back to wool and feltness

This essay narrates a process-oriented and durational relationship including wool fibres, human and non-human components not only as a medium but also as an intimate experience of touch and togetherness. Artistic and pedagogical work as an action, which I like to call a co-making event rather than collaboration (Jamouchi, 2020), recall inclusion of the body and other non-human beings in sympoiesis (Haraway, 2016). *Working* as action, rather than a physical result/object (artwork), is central in both artistic and pedagogical settings that promote dialogue in material touch (Stitch Sister, 2023). Felt demands friction, inviting us to touch and being touched in return.

Springgay introduces 'feltness' as a practice of intimacy imbedded in touch, affect and relationship (2020). She does not mention a/r/tography explicitly in her recent publications and states that feltness shifts research to become a practice of intimacy in research creation. Referring to Alaimo (2010) and Christin Shaw (2018), Springgay further explains that feltness, as an act of intimacy, "does not place human mastery on the centre" and "decentres the isolated individual as the privileged recipient or the primary site of care" (Springgay, 2020, p. 213). I also find an echo in her thoughts about curiosity (2022, p. 138) that resonate with my way of questioning a regime of pedagogical practice and how response-ability plays a role in research (Jamouchi, 2023, p. 39, 49 & 52). Inspired by Tatiana Kinnunen and Marjo Kolehmainen (2019), Springgay also refers to touch biographies and how curiosity is bodily: "Touch is about being open to curious encounters, to coming to something transcorporeal as feltness" (2022, p. 138).

Fibres and soapy warm water explore and invest spaces in between tangling fibres. Whilst animal and liquid components merge, human bodies explore and invest spaces in between, being between physical bodies or objects, as well as intra-action with space, time and this essay. Fibres, soapy water and bodies create serpentine roads shaped by emerging affinities and haptic engagement from no pre-given structures nor functions. The haptic is a property of a physical form or object "that allows it to resonate more in the sense of touch than in the optical experience" (Mørstad, 2024). In such textual and textile assemblages, exchange, hybridity, intra-action, infiltration, co-habitation and co-making can emerge.

I do not act as an artist; I am an artist. I do not act as an artist-teacher; I am an artist-teacher. I do not act as a researcher; I am a researcher. Felting wool is not a different or differentiating action. Performative felting events, as feltness, are touches like rhizomatic movements with tentacular manoeuvres that bring different expression or impression in relation to the produced space where it is enacted and emerging.

wildness and woolness

feral wool

woolly worlding

feltingness

stay open and attuned to materials, bodily intuition, inviting and invented gestures, carnal
experience through the senses that have not yet given verbalised sens(at)ions

a performative approach allows and enriches to attentiveness to what is hidden for the eye

embodied the flesh/epidermis, and unspoken worlds or silent sounds

a material-discourse engaging us with the intensities of infiltrate/infiltrating sensory-making

We travel in time by activating the inherited knowledge of wool felting received through generations of cohabitation between people and sheep in different parts of the world. Just as in felting wool, we are not in a static or frozen position, nor have a fixed identity. We rather become entangled with the past and become a part of future generations. Entanglement of fibres and their expansion go hand in hand with adventurous physical/bodily actions. This brings me to adventurous questioning that engender exploration and eventually exceed conventional prescribed pedagogy (Atkinson, 2015), static teaching practices and thinking (cf. image of thought by Deleuze and Guattari, 1980). Wool felting activated a feral approach to what art making and teaching art could be, not only what it should be (Jamouchi, 2023), and ultimately resists what have been described as control, standardisation and conformity (Atkinson 2015, St. Pierre 2019, and Østern 2021).



Wool felting is an extra-ordinary source for creative work and has been a resource for humanity since ancestral times, centuries before our era. Still today, we use fibres from animals —wool, silk, fur, leather, feathers, fleece, or skin—as garments or ornaments. The experience of textile is one of the most common experiences for humans, from the moment we are born to the moment we leave this life. Civilisations in diverse time–spaces have and still continue to process materials from nature as social and cultural forms of expression within and outside groups of people. Wool fibres are particularly interesting, because —just like our hair—they come from the exterior surface of the skin. Cellular layers that envelop our human -animal bodies: At the same time they form a protective membrane and a channel between internal and external spaces. This skin of us, of the sheep, is a part of all our senses. It forms and contains our ears, our eyes, nose, tongue, and it is the very sensitive foundation of our sense of touch.

Co-existence, response-ability, continuous ruptures, diffraction and dis-continued relations
in/to inherited craft knowledge.

Final (?) touch and reminisce of feltness

This essay articulates how the notion of identity and the decentralisation of the human puts my work in an artistic and art-based research landscape larger than what I discern in a/r/tography. The narrative in *Made by entangled words and wool* shows how I use performative strategies to engage with the materiality of words and wool, when words are felt and wool felted. Words and wool re-enact layering of thoughts, memories and gestures. Creating roots and routes to past and further wondering and wandering involved with/in the reciprocity of physical touching care-fully explored with (an)other less/ness. Collectively and event(u)ally orchestrated by touches, at different times and spaces, remains and remembers.

Tactile exploration challenging and changing through touching and being touched. The echo of touch transforms the skin and the wool fibre. Audible, tactic, olfactible, visual and nearly taste experience/sense/sensation of touch(ing/ed). Becoming thoughts provoking and memory provoking. Re-negotiating with the materiality of experiences, concepts and memories. Re-negotiating with known and un-known gestures and words. Engaging with wool felting evokes attentiveness to fibres and skin, and reciprocity of one's re-action. A feeling of togetherness and awareness of the world we are of. Fingers and feet located between a mass of wool. Wool fibres located between fingers and feet.

Touch. We are touching and touched at the same time. A reciprocal action and sensation to which skin and fibres re-act as soapy warm water and frictions meander between porous surfaces constituted of human and animal proteins. A feeling of touch and self-touching. More than 'just' seeing, we experience sensory-making. Rubbing, smelling, holding, folding, touching, hefting, twisting, lifting, grabbing, touched, bending, pressing, squeezing, palpating, touching, moving, shaking, rolling, stroking, touched back, wool fibres become an intimate experience of some of its many properties and possibilities.

Creating connections and extensions. The body is extending. Where does the skin end and the fibres begin? How do skin, words and wool imprint each other? Wool touching back the skin. Wool is re-positioning the body, when raising the awareness of reciprocity of touch and re-action. Blurring the boundaries of my body/skin's movements/transformations and wool fibres' movements/transformations. Resisting the (expected or traditional?) boundaries between objects/materials and body/skin. Becoming with the malleable structure of wool, words and skin. Ephemeral and still tangible when wool felting gives life to the body and the body gives life to wool fibres. When textile becomes textual, and text becomes texture. Rhizomatic relations unfold in multiple encounters between materialities engaged into the becoming of wool felting. Felting, feeling, inscribing fibres and sentences in practicing feltness? A performative approach to wool felting is more a feeling-thinking-doing event than a circumscribed definition of what wool is. Looking for abilities and possibilities.

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