

Exploring a Performative Approach to Felting Wool

An Autoethnography for Two?

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Abstract

This text treats the author's imagined research design based on her artistic research and pedagogical views. She tentatively call this arts based approach an autoethnography for two. The starting point of this approach is her critical view on a certain confine pedagogy in teacher education and a desire to walk away from being the object of a research project. She aspires for a teacher education in the arts subject that recognizes and values the working process as a significant part of creative processes, also within school contexts. Furthermore, she wants to join the multiple identities that compose the identity of many actors in school settings, which comprise the artist, the teacher and the researcher.

The ambition of this text is to articulate a plausible research design that can inspire others in their quest when embarking with arts based research in their artistic work and/or educational work. Her research in this text relates to her re-turning to the ancestral technique of hand felting wool. She questions and approaches this traditional technique by adopting a performative approach to the making. This approach suggests that making sense (as knowledge production) is intimately connected to the making (of felting wool in this case). By inviting peers in an autoethnography for two, to share impressions and reflections, this research design can elicit diffractively, a working process.

Keywords: Visual arts, teacher education, arts based research design, performative processes

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Samira Jamouchi¹

Preamble

I shall now return to the ancestral technique of hand felting a couple of decades after I first learned to felt wool. Fabric is often the result of woven threads. However, felted fabric is the result of non-woven, entangled materials, such as wool fibres.

The felting process involves physical vigour, gestures that are robust and gentle at the same time, as well as demanding closeness to the material. The metamorphosis of the wool fibres through the changing texture, their touch, the humid alternating with the dry and the variable temperature of warm and cold water are some of the tactile aspects sensed during wool felting. Beyond the purely technical aspect of felting, however, a unique sensory experience takes place. The becoming of the fibres under the manipulation of the material is, for me, a moment of promise—an unknown becoming of the material in my hands. This moment nourishes my imagination.

During the felting process, one can experience what Deleuze and Guattari (1980) define as a smooth space. They refer to felted fabric to express how a smooth space can be envisaged. They see felt as anti-fabric—there is no interweaving, only an

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entanglement of the fibres achieved by threading (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980, p. 594). They describe felted fabric as a set of entanglements that is by no means homogeneous: it is infinite, open and unlimited in all directions. The event, or *haecceity* as Deleuze and Guattari (1980) express it, characterises a smooth space. Exploring a performative approach to felting wool can lead to articulating moments of making during the felting process rather than focusing on the final product made of felted wool.

The process of felting wool as a performative approach to material is the event I aim to explore. I am interested in the qualities of ‘affect, more than properties’ and in ‘haptic perception, rather than an optic one’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980, p. 598) that the felting process can unfold. Working towards this aim, I imagine a research design that I tentatively name an *autoethnography for two* as a possible way to articulate my own felting process by inviting colleagues to see me felt and to give me their feedback on the event. In a longer time perspective, I wish to see how this performative approach, which is closer to an artist’s practice, can enrich teacher practice in school settings. My methodological approach is rooted in my previous artistic research and unfolds in the realm of artistic-based research in the academic world (Leavy, 2009). The two concepts, artistic research and arts-based research (ABR), are often considered similar. Even if their difference is blurred, however, artistic research is used more frequently in the context of fine art faculties when researching artistic topics, whereas ABR is used more frequently by education faculties when researching educational problems (Marin-Viadel, 2017). My theoretical approach is inspired by new materialism, especially in relation to Barad’s (2007; 2014) concepts of re-turning, intra-action and agency.

Introduction

As an artist, I have knitted and felted wool to create large-format sculptures and immersive installations. As an arts and crafts teacher since 2005, I have trained teacher students in different textile techniques, including hand-felted wool.

Today, I have become more aware of and interested in the profound significance of the making/felting process and the material awareness one can experience when working with this highly transformable material. I desire to articulate a performative approach to the process of felting wool, considering the intra-action, experimentation and haptic sensory aspects as significant for the creative process in the subject of arts and crafts.

Standard measurements and regulated outcomes in schools might reduce a creative approach to the subject of arts and crafts. The risk would be to disenchant the very core of the subject: imagining alternative approaches during a working process (the making). The risk to minimise an independent and imaginative approach would also diminish students' self-understanding and the understanding of the possibilities that a material can offer. My aspiration to change a certain art pedagogy that is close to a manufacturing way of making is stimulated by the desire to let students experience the unexpected. As a first step², during the writing of this text, I imagine a research design to articulate those experiences as an artist during the process of felting.

2 In a longer time perspective, I aim to include in the subject of arts and crafts the pleasure of making, experiencing and continuously gaining insight into oneself, others and the world as not only a rewarding experience but also an important source of knowledge. When it comes to the educational context, these aspects are crucial for teacher students to become acquainted with so that they can fully understand the subject of arts and crafts.

The first part of this text unfolds some of my seminal ideas about a performative approach to the subject of arts and crafts. Inspired by conversations with my fellow artists and scholars, I try to position my research, echoing my desire to see if a performative approach to the subject of arts and crafts can enable a shared creative experience.

The second part of this paper relates to my earlier experiences with performative drawing sessions conducted with teacher students in Norwegian universities. These experiences and the students' feedback revealed the importance of the making process, as well as the students' unexpected aesthetic experience of the sensory aspects. As a continuum of these earlier experiences with performative drawing, I now wish to explore a performative approach to wool and felting. By doing so, I shall relegate the recipe-like approach in (re)producing a product/object in the background and rather focus on the pleasure of making during the felting process itself.

The third part is about the situated knowledge that can unfold in a studio and how it can be elicited by the practitioner himself/herself. By using ABR, we can both be closer to the phenomenon we are studying and the reflections made by the practitioner, how one is making the work and at the same time reflecting in and on the work. This poses the question on the researcher being an apparatus and the nature of the collected data.

In the fourth part, I share what I imagine to be a possible and plausible research design. Inspired by performance art, new materialism assumptions and ethnography, I propose a research design I call an autoethnography for two. In this part, I reveal to myself and to readers an imagined research design as an inspiration, rather than give a systematic methodology to follow.

In the fifth part, I question the limitations and possibilities of an autoethnography for two. Likewise, I connect it to pedagogical documentation and

its possibility to help us see how the felting process can be thought of and, later on, how it can be taught.

I conclude with a short summary inviting readers to approach this text as a motivation to imagine other research designs related to their own context.

1. Narration: My germinal ideas put in motion

In 2018, I came across different research groups and discussed with colleagues about their ABR within the art education and teacher training context in Norway. The ideas conveyed during our meetings highlighted the interest and question I had in mind for a long time: *Can a performative approach to the arts and crafts subject (in this case, using wool and felting) enable shared creative experiences?* By experiences, I mean those that enable the exploration of alternative possibilities rather than the repetitive production of foreseen felted products. Experience and experimentation are linked to open-ended processes and are inseparable from the idea of discovery. Allowing one to get to know the material and its agencies without necessarily knowing what the outcome would be is crucial to getting to know the material. Experience and experiment in artistic research approaches are not the same as the production of an object. Østern (2017) describes the field of research with art as something complex and diverse, as well as including both exploration and experimentation. Hence, allowing for experimentation might be a relevant way to take heed of unforeseen outcomes.

Inspired by conversations with fellow artists and other scholars, I recall the following ideas: inhabiting a theory, eliciting ideas, embodied/non-verbal, attentiveness, issue as a concern or care not necessarily as a problem, producing meaning, relational aesthetics, ethnography and autoethnography, and trust in emotions and imagination. Without discussing the meaning of these ideas, I can say

that these words and concepts considerably resonate with me. They reveal and disclose an attitude, or a state of mind, that indicates the epistemological and/or ontological perspective of the researcher. If one believes that reality is multifaceted and that the truth is, in a sense, individually constructed and constantly evolving, then these words and concepts become important—they resonate. Leaving aside the problematic aspects of these beliefs, such resonance is an essential precondition for getting to know something.

The important moments one can address are *truth as an event* and *data as kreated*, considering that data are fiction, that is, data are not something we find but something we make. ‘Data’, from the Latin word ‘datum’, meaning ‘something given’ or ‘the act of giving’, facilitates different understandings of this word. Ellis et al. (2011) examine reliability, generalisability and validity in the work of autoethnographers. ‘Autoethnographers also recognize how what we understand and refer to as “truth” changes as the genre of writing representing experience changes’ (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 7). They write further, ‘For autoethnographers, validity means that a work seeks verisimilitude; it evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible, a feeling that what has been represented could be true’ (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 7).

The question of making and experience in this research is clearly related to the researcher’s understanding of a phenomenon and his/her own way of expressing the experience of a phenomenon. One can also think about how the researcher tailors the research design to study the phenomenon or case and the need to be attentive to the phenomenon with one’s whole body in order to understand the situation better and more adequately.

I shall come back to the idea of how we create data (Barad, 2007) and how we make sense by using embodied research (Groth, 2015) in the fourth part of the text.

I have seen moments of entanglement which occurred in some of my teaching sessions when I invited teacher students to perform drawing together with me during my arts and crafts classes. These earlier performative drawing sessions constituted my first steps toward an aesthetic experience considering the working process as an essential part of the subject of arts and crafts (Jamouchi, 2017). In the following section, I relate to performative drawing as a decisive phase that initiated my wish to undertake the project I write about in this text: exploring a performative approach to felting wool.

2. Performative drawing as a first step towards aesthetic experiences

Basing on my earlier experience of performative drawing with teacher students, I now aim to explore the possibilities of performative approaches inherent in the process of felting wool fibres. By looking at the agency and intra-action that can occur in the felting process, I shall acknowledge the primordial role of experience and experimenting in teacher education. In my study with wool, I will take on a general perspective known under the labels post-humanism and new materialism, and I am particularly interested in the intra-action and agency (Barad, 2007) that can occur between the material and the practitioner. By examining closely the process of felting, I wish to see how being of the world (Lenz Taguchi, 2010) can connect human beings intimately with the materials they work with and the situations they experience. First, however, let us take a step back to earlier performative drawing, which was my first step towards an aesthetic experience together with my teacher students.

The written feedback I collected earlier from students with whom I undertook performative drawing underlines the evocative and emotional experience they had during the drawing session (Jamouchi, 2017). The method for data collection was empirical and qualitative (Creswell, 2013; Halvorsen, 1996; Repstad, 1993). The data

gathering of written feedback from the students just after the drawing session was meant to capture the phenomenological approach of the aesthetic process: ‘a study of [the] lived experiences of persons’ (Creswell, 2013, p. 77). I emphasised the perspective of the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945) related to the body subject and the subject’s awareness of experience.

Bodily engaged with the task, we performed drawing on a large space in the classroom, we evolved collaboratively by drawing on wide-ranging Kraft paper displayed on the floor and the wall, and we explored this two-dimensional form of expression through non-verbal communication. In the previous study (performative drawing), most of the written feedback focused on the aspects of flow, musicality, the bodily experience connected with the drawing process, the room and the material (Jamouchi, 2017). After this performative approach to drawing, the students expressed this experience like an unexpected use of the body and the room, as well as a practice that values the process of drawing. The drawing process indeed often competes with the seductive, aesthetic aspect of the final product, which is habitually seen as the main part of the drawing practice.

This awareness about the working process, the unexpected richness of the material and the explorative approach to paper were rather new for the teacher students. This is despite paper being one of the most common materials we can find in a classroom and one of the most traditional materials used in the subject of arts and crafts in schools.



Image 1: The performative drawing session with teacher students, 2017.

Drawing as an activity spans a social range from individuals acting alone to collaboration. Performative drawing draws from performance art, which is interdisciplinary, involving the combination of two or more forms of artistic expression. Performance art relates to conceptual art, which emphasises ideas over the formal or visual components. The action is the main component of a performance, and the relation between the public and the performer is the object of this artistic expression.

I organise a performative drawing session by transforming the classroom; I display a large-scale thick brown Kraft paper on the wall and floor. This metamorphosis of space is immediately noticed by the students, triggering their curiosity.

Performative drawing is a playful way to communicate with others through bodily movements, improvisation and cooperation whilst evolving in a shared space and creating two-dimensional forms (Jamouchi, 2017).

The students' written feedback mentioned moments of flow, mutual inspiration, an almost meditative experience, the autonomous transformability of shapes, entanglement with the material and a sense of musicality, as well as pleasant silence. Some students expressed this as follows in their written feedback: 'I became a part of the paper', and 'Silence and movements became art. Combining dance and colours' (Jamouchi, 2017, p. 9). The drawing process and not only the product became essential in the students' understanding of what an arts and crafts session could be.

However, after 14 years of working as a teacher trainer in the subject of arts and crafts, I can see that being creative or explorative for students who are not used to applying their creativity and imagination can sometimes be challenging. It seems like in the school system, what some of the students have gone through is inspired by behaviouristic educational settings. Some students are afraid to make an independent decision based on their own appraisal. Nevertheless, most of the students quickly expressed their desire to experiment further with what we are doing in the university's studio and to try similar performative approaches with the pupils in their respective schools.

Taylor (2016) uses 'edu-craft intervention as a matter of knowing-in-doing', which is inspired by the idea that 'environments and bodies are intra-actively constituted'; she adds that 'These edu-crafting activities sometimes produce profound discomfort and sometimes generate desires for greater risk' (p. 21). Taylor's way of teaching contests usual modes of knowing, learning and writing. When we challenge the usual mode of teaching by allowing students to take part in creative and imaginative processes, we also welcome transformative processes. This kind of

transformative process does not only change the material, the shape or the colour; it also transforms the person during the working process.

Hohr (2015) describes an experience as a transformative process in interaction between an organism and the outside world, leading to new insights and feelings. He also reminds us that the general task of education is not to teach children to become artists but to open their experiences for the aesthetic dimension so that they can develop, differentiate and criticise their experiences. At the same time, Hohr (2015) argues that children's aesthetic challenges concern the mastery of everyday life and not just artistic exploration.

Experiencing a piece of art, as Greene (2011) describes it, when releasing our imagination is similar to the creative process I wish to elicit. As an experience when undergoing different possibilities, a creative process demands us to dare to imagine non-preconceived possibilities involving the use of space, materials and our body not only to solve a problem but also to gain 'new resonance that aesthetic experiences do and ought to break with the banal, the routine, the mechanical' (Greene, 2011, p. 5).

With my upcoming study with wool, I would like to see how the making process (in my artistic practice) can be brought to the surface when trying to take a glimpse of the felting process. The focus here is on the process of felting rather than the finished product. In other words, I wish to bring forth my artist–teacher role in order to help me in my arts and crafts pedagogue role. Hopefully, this will inspire others to broaden the narrow definition of an arts and crafts teacher when it is understood as one who leads learners through some techniques and evaluates the outcome, which is a foreseen product.

As mentioned earlier, I learned to felt wool about 20 years ago during my short stay as an art student in Norway. Later, as a visual artist, I used wool fibres and felting to create monumental installations and sculptures. As a teacher in the subject of arts

and crafts, I have been teaching this method to Norwegian teacher students since 2005.

Now, as a researcher, I wish to see if and how my artist–teacher role can bring a more creative approach to felting wool in the classroom beyond being a technical procedure to achieve a given goal or a foreseen product. The purpose of this arts-based exploration (in a longer time perspective after this study) is to contribute to an extended understanding of what an arts and crafts teaching session can be, inviting students to intra-act with the materials in a playful and explorative way. By doing so, we shall undergo a shared creative process that is close to artistry and that one can recognise in contemporary visual art, especially within performance art, a form of expression that creates situated meaning in action. It is indeed the action itself that is the piece of art in a performance and not necessarily a physical object (Ferrier, 1990; Fischer-Lichte, 2008).

Fischer-Lichte (2008) mentions the performance ‘Lips of Thomas’ (1975) by Abramović as one of the works within visual art that marks a fundamental shift in our experience and understanding of a piece of artwork independent from the artist. This transformation from a traditional work of art into an event is called the performative turn (Fischer-Lichte, 2008). In her book *The Transformative Power of Performance*, Fischer-Lichte (2008) describes performance art as an alternative approach to the traditions and standards of the visual or performing arts that stresses the present, lived moment and that challenges the classical interpretation focusing on the artefact and its visual components. In a context such as this, the spectator is not a passive watcher anymore; the spectator becomes an active participant of an aesthetic experience.

The notion of an aesthetic experience, as defined above, draws attention to different moments. In the educational context, Lenz Taguchi (2010) sees students as being of the world, not detached from it, and consequently as entangled and in intra-

action (Barad, 2007) with it. Hohr (2015) and Greene (2011) stress the broad aspect of an aesthetic experience—an inner activity that is both creative and critical, as well as contributing to the mastery of everyday life. From the context of the visual art world (Fischer-Lichte, 2008), an aesthetic experience demands active involvement; it is the transformation we undergo when experiencing a piece of art (also understood as an event), which is the core element of such an experience.

In this first part of my study³ with wool, I will focus on my own practice and praxis (in action) when working with wool and felting. Drawing on an autoethnographic approach, I will investigate the intra-action and agency (Barad, 2007) emerging from a deeper awareness of an embodied approach to the material. In addition to reflections on my artistic work, I plan to invite two arts and crafts teachers in the studio and ask them to write their impressions when watching me working. These impressions may include sensitive cognition, affect and effect, as well as the visual, auditory and olfactory senses⁴.

These impressions may or may not mirror my own reflections. In any case, the gas and impressions of others on my making process would inevitably engender a dialogue between our different, nuanced or similar impressions. By inviting peers to watch my working process, I am not giving up my positions when I am involved in both the making and the reflecting. I regard my peers as individuals who can help elicit moments of *savoir-faire* from another perspective, in addition to mine, in the very moment of the work in process and in progress.

3 This first part of the study is mainly related to how I work with wool and felting. This part is the first phase of a large project connected with the subject of arts and crafts in school.

4 The feedback of other arts and crafts teachers has not yet been collected. That part of the study (data collection) is therefore not presented here. What I introduce here is an imagined research design.

3. Situated knowledge: A *savoir-faire in situ* to be unfolded

The attempt to acknowledge moments of a *savoir-faire in situ* needs to emerge from those moments of making, always in a state of becoming. This approach should be associated with my lived experience of felting. As an echo to the making process, it cannot be built on theoretical discourses disconnected from what happened in my studio.

It has not been common for craft practitioners to undertake research on their own work, especially when involving subjective experiences and emotions (Groth, 2015). Gray (1996) claims that ‘... traditional ‘research’ (largely theoretical/critical) has been carried out *into* Art & Design, *on* artists & designers, *for* Art & Design primarily by non-artists & designers! We have usually been content to practice and allow others to critique that practice’ (p. 8). Barone and Eisner (2006) express dislocation of theory when ‘theory tends to be fashioned from within a preselected framework, one that is identified with a particular research subcommunity’ (p. 97) Barthes (1977) makes a distinction between two ways of understanding a method: on the one hand, a method can be understood as a routine following some protocols of operation that fetishes the goal of the research. On the other hand, a method can be understood as a violent force, breaking routines or conventions to allow the researcher to take a different or unknown path and leading him/her into a place of discovery and creativity.

The researcher, designer and philosopher mentioned in the paragraph above (Barone & Eisner, 2006; Gray, 1996) unveil the distance that a research practice can generate when observing a dichotomy between the object and the subject of the study. They also sustain the idea that a more intimated and creative approach to research can reveal unique insights through a practice-led self-study research

approach (Groth, 2015) and can lead us to unexpected discoveries (Barthes, 1997). Situated knowledge and integrated reflection are therefore necessary to my study.

The French expression *savoir-faire* expresses the complex kind of knowledge that artists process in their praxis. This noun phrase means the ability to successfully make what we undertake and to solve practical problems; it means competency and experience in the exercise of an artistic or intellectual activity (Le Petit Robert, 1990). Harrap's dictionary (1982) translates *savoir-faire* as follows: 'ability, know-how'. This denotes the knowledge and reflection that are intrinsic in the making of our profession.

Embodied knowledge in action is what I experience in praxis, and it is also the way I learn about and through my artistic praxis, rather than reading texts about arts. Knowing in action or informal knowledge is also called tacit knowledge, a concept introduced by the Hungarian philosopher–chemist Michael Polani (1966) in his book *The Tacit Dimension*. This kind of knowledge can also be related to the form of knowledge that Aristotle called *phronesis*—a kind of knowledge connected with the wisdom we acquire during years of practical experiences. Schön (1991) provides us with an understanding of knowledge connected with reflection *in* action—reflecting on the action in the very moment it is taking place. He describes reflection *on* action as a reflection made after the action or event. This is a part of the reflexive practice, a fluctuating and fruitful pattern of reflection that looks 'not at [the] thing but [at] the doing' (Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p. 63).

As pointed out above, the performative drawing sessions I undertook with teacher students generated reflective notes written by the students. Using a qualitative reading of the feedback gave attention to what the students motioned as important, not on what I deemed to be important aspects of this drawing session. By doing so, I did not use my own voice in that previous study (Jamouchi, 2017). I just sought to understand how a performative approach could make sense for students

and to enrich what an arts and crafts session could mean for them. That previous study with drawing shows, amongst other things, that the students were not used to a performative approach to the subject of arts and crafts, that they enjoyed working collectively on a large scale by freely using their body in the space and that they experienced a flow close to the meditative state (Jamouchi, 2017).

Now, I wish to look at my own understanding of the performative approach to felted wool fibres. ABR is a suitable approach, as it may ‘also take the form of non-linguistic arts, including the plastic and performing arts’ (Barone & Eisner, 2006, p.95). With a research design drawing from ABR, I want to actively think of and discuss the metamorphosis of wool fibres and the capacity for personal and collective transformation. From a new materialistic perspective, this transformation can be understood as the intra-action between entities emerging during their entanglement. Barads’ idea (2014) of intra-action echoes that of the current project. Her post-humanist performative framework that proposes an ontology in which entities are not taken as given but as constituted through material entanglement contests the classical dualist view in scientific research (object/subject, material/discourse, nature/culture). Her concept of intra-action, describing a phenomenon as a relationship that emerges between two entities from within a relationship (not prior or outside it), is relevant for my study. This view can help unfold and articulate what happens when my hands and wool entangle during the felting process.

4. The imagined research design: Autoethnography with two observers?

This part of the text is a reflection on an imagined research design in the search for a possible and plausible way to articulate and bring my work forward. This part of the text is not an account of a method as a recipe to follow on who to study with regard to the experience of a performative approach to wool fibres and felting.

Making research is not a neutral affair. Questioning data as something we make, not as a neutral entity to be found *out there*, is close to Barad's view (2007) when she underlines the awareness we should have about the researcher as an apparatus that shapes and determines a phenomenon. For Barad (2007), nothing is inherently separated. All elements of the world are entangled, and all elements are entities (human, as well as non-human) that intra-act in a way that make them dependent on one another. Following this reasoning, a researcher would *per se* use himself/herself as an apparatus, and he/she would be entangled within/with/in the phenomenon he/she studies. Using myself to explore my own work, I am aware of the role I play as a non-neutral apparatus, as well as my entanglement within the phenomenon of felting wool.

From a new materialism perspective, 'Materials have agency, they change ideas in certain ways, and they "diffract" human agency in unexpected ways' (Hickey-Moody, 2018, p. 2). Intra-action is related to the inseparability not only between the practitioner and the material but also between the phenomenon investigated and the researcher.

Autoethnography is comparable to Barad's ontology, as it seeks to correct the erroneous position that art and science are at odds with each other. 'Autoethnography, as a method, attempts to disrupt the binary of science and art. Auto-ethnographers believe that research can be rigorous, theoretical, and analytical *and* emotional, therapeutic, and inclusive of personal and social phenomena' (Ellis et al., 2010, p. 8). For auto-ethnographers, the most important question is 'Who reads our work, how are they affected by it, and how does it keep a conversation going?' (Ellis et al., 2010, p. 8).

Groth's work (2015) on making sense through making by using the embodied research method clearly reveals the uniqueness of subjectivity and how this strengthens research when having a practice-led approach. Even if Groth's work

emphasises the embodied approach during making, I see the bodily aspect in relation to material when the body and the material enter the dynamic of intra-action. Both have agency and are inseparable from each other during making. ‘This theoretical approach rests on the assumption that nothing is inherently separate from anything else, but rather, separations are temporarily enacted so one can examine something long enough to gain knowledge about it’ (Hickey-Moody, 2018, p. 2).

Stake’s (2018) statement that an *issue* is not necessarily connected with a problem⁵ resonates with me and relates to my work. In my study, the making relates to the artist–researcher, and the issue relates to my concern and care for the students I meet every day and with whom I endeavour to explore what the world of art can be about in the school setting. This concern is connected with the attention I give to an alternative way of teaching the subject of arts and crafts and my choice of an explorative performative approach to wool felting, in contrast to the traditional felting procedure I learned two decades ago in which I was guided safely towards obtaining a felted product.

Groth’s (2015) subjective approach to making and my interpretation of Stake’s (2018) idea of issue as a concern are statements that shape the idea of a journey of exploring felting as an intertwined experience that can benefit students.

There is a difference between the *how* of teaching and its *what* (Andrews, 2018). As teachers, we constantly work, using written or other visual forms of notes, about and on the content (the what) of our teaching. The way we enact a curriculum (the how of our teaching) seems to be less the subject of our written or visual notes about our teaching practice. In a comparable way, within early childhood education, Lavina and Lawson (2018) invite us to examine ‘the self and teaching that influence practice’ (p. 3). ‘In this way, teachers are provided means to critique potentially romanticised images of working in early childhood contexts’ (Lavina & Lawson, 2018, p. 5).

5 Personal virtual conversation, April 10, 2018.

Examining ourselves might reveal (even the non-conscious) meanings we put in our teaching practice.

Andrews' (2018) work on artistry in teaching focuses on how the teacher enacts the curriculum in the classroom and less on what the teacher conveys to the students. However, as the content and the enactment of the subject matter are interconnected, the teacher needs to have a certain level of understanding of the subject matter in order to see how he/she uses his/her body as a tool for communicating ideas and concepts (Andrews, 2018). The researcher will then need to understand both the how and the what of the working process. In my study, the understanding of the subject matter (wool as the material and felting as the technique) is intimately connected with the making and its enactment (the felting process).

I regard an autoethnographic research design as a *conditio sine qua non* (indispensable) to be able to undertake my research. The constantly shifting impressions and associations I have during the process resemble, in Skjerdingsstad's (2018) words, what 'might first seem ungraspable, fluid and volatile' (p. 512). It relates to a desire or urge to share an experience with others. To be able to investigate our own artistic processes and their sensorial/aesthetic meaning, we need to inhabit that process ourselves and reflect on what it does to us.

Groth (2015) concludes in her article that sensory experiences and emotions influence a practitioner's decision making and problem solving during the craft of making something. She also points out that many academic research practices exclude important factors in craft practices. The reason for this negligence is as follows: 'An objective view from a non-practitioner would not have been able to access this information, as the objective researcher would not possess the tacit and embodied knowledge of the situation' (Groth, 2015, p. 150). Furthermore, she argues that a practice-led self-study research approach allows practitioners to couple their own

subjective experiences with a serious attempt to describe and explicate the experiential knowledge they process (Groth, 2015, pp. 150–151).

These general points made by Groth are substantial. In my study, however, I am thinking of inviting other arts and crafts teachers to participate in the reflection on the action. I am planning to hold a session in a studio when I felt wool. I will film myself and have a colleague watch the process and write down his/her impressions. My goal is to obtain my peers' feedback on the ongoing process. This two-pronged observer approach could perhaps serve as a kind of method triangulation. Method triangulation refers to the use of multiple and different data sources in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). Other observers might capture moments that I am not completely aware of because of the intense involvement of my mind and body in the process of felting wool. The impressions of my colleagues would enrich and deepen my own understanding of the process.

The *added* observer in autoethnographic practice-led research can be related to the concept of empathy in qualitative research. According to Bresler (2006), this allows for empathic connections and an empathic understanding. Empathic connections 'provide a space for others to articulate experiences, to create "arcs of narratives" in the process of reflecting on meaning' (Bresler, 2006, p. 25). Empathic understanding 'involve[s] resonance, an embodied state of mind that is cognitive and at the same time, affective and corporeal' (Bresler, 2006, p. 25). It is those articulated connections between the observer and the ongoing felting process that I wish to collect. This connection to my work (experienced and expressed textually by the invited observer) will hopefully expand my own understanding of the felting process by making me aware of others' perceived meanings. The responses, which are based on the experience of my hands transforming wool fibres, demand involvement and attention. Armstrong (as cited in Bresler, 2006) identifies five aspects of the process of perceptual contemplation of an art work. Although he refers to a finished art

work, such aspects can be connected with the artistic creative process, especially the aspects of lingering caress and mutual absorption:

When we linger, ‘Nothing gets achieved, nothing gets finished – on the contrary, satisfaction is taken in spinning out our engagement with the object. [...] mutual absorption refers to the transformative character of deep engagement’.

Armstrong writes further,

When we keep our attention fixed upon an object which attracts us, two things tend to happen: we get absorbed in the object and the object gets absorbed into us (Armstrong as cited in Bresler, 2006, 26).

Drawing from Armstrong’s aspects of the process of perceptual contemplation of an art work, Bresler (2006) proposes a new one based on performance. Although she relates performance to a musical performance, there is a clear connection between how she describes how ‘performances unify performers and listeners in a shared experience’ (Bresler, 2006, p. 27) and performance as practiced in contemporary visual art when the action itself is the piece of work. Bresler’s understanding of a performance is close to Vist’s appraisal of relational aesthetics. Inspired by Bourriaud, Vist (2018) views art works as a social interstice that is also relevant in the relationship within educational research, in which each participating body means something in the constitution of the artwork.

5. What am I actually imagining?

The title of this section sounds somehow paradoxical in the sense that I bring together the actual (fact) and the imagined (nonfactual) as the focus of the project. What I imagine is perhaps what I envisioned but without programming it out of my previous knowledge and experiences and not being dictated by them. Imagining non-

facts is what has allowed people to develop ideas and be creative. In my case, it goes for artistic, pedagogical and research work. Improvisation is what puts us in motion. It has to do with what we have done before, but it is dealt with in a different way. Improvising can be seen as a way to embrace differences, to immerse oneself in positive differences (Melaas, 2012). It is an attempt to experience displacement, re-commencement, trans-position, dis-location and re-turning. When Barad (2014) uses the word 're-turning', it does not mean reflecting on or going back to a past that was. She means 'turning it over and over again – iteratively intra-acting, re-diffracting, diffracting anew, in the making of new temporalities (spacetime mattering), new diffraction patterns' (Barad, 2014, p. 168).

When I now go back to felting, a method I learned 20 years ago, it is not to do again what I did in the 1990s. My intention or my imagined fact is to intra-act differently with the material and the experience of felting. Would that be to produce *kreata*? As I mentioned, the truth is an event in which we invent data rather than find it as something neutral to be discovered. Would I be able to intra-act with the material by acknowledging its agency and at the same time being able to respond to its ability to metamorphosise when meeting my hands in movements? Would this idea of an autoethnography for two slow me down in my will to inhabit the felting process and see what it does to me? How can I inhabit an experience and let go when somebody is watching me? I even think about being filmed on a video camera so that I can see what I did during the felting process. Would a camera intimidate me?

When Armstrong (as cited in Bresler, 2006) mentions involvement and attention, as well as the mutual absorption between a material and a person, I then question the core of my imagined research design, which is to involve another person in witnessing this process, as well as having a video camera film the felting process. The idea is to use somebody else as a device (in a post-humanistic sense) in order to study a phenomenon. Would this device disturb and interfere with the intra-action? What

would I gain from an autoethnography for two? I expect to gain feedback from peers that can challenge or expand my own understanding of the felting experience. However, do I risk truncating my own experience of a performative approach to wool fibres? This is a risk that I look forward to taking.

Imagining an autoethnography for two can be related to collaborative autoethnography and pedagogical documentation. In both cases, we observe, study, reflect and present a fraction of a phenomenon. This can relate to the term agential cut used by Barad (2014, p. 1). What could/should be selected as foci in an autoethnographic observation or a pedagogical documentation is a question that both the auto-ethnologist and the teacher need to ask. The moments we observe and what we observe matter. Where we place a camera and when we record matter. These would have an impact on the foci, such as the space, actors, activities, objects, events, time, goals, emotions, rhythm, movements, actions and sounds.

Barad (2014) views the agential cut as a man-made cut (as the researcher is, in Barad's view, an apparatus of observation entangled in the world). As an apparatus that is unable to grasp the whole phenomenon, the researcher will proceed to some inclusion and exclusion. The cuts might be a result of our culture and habits of thought that can make some moments visible and others not visible. Then, the agential cut also accounts for the moments we do not include in our observation; therefore, the moments we do not study and are held away from knowledge production and a fortiori are not included in the presentation of our research.

Chang (2013) states that autoethnography is a highly personal and social process, as auto-ethnographers use their personal experiences as the primary material to contribute to the understanding of human experience. She also states that auto-ethnographers find their material where the fieldwork happens and that they enter their field with a unique familiarity with how and where they may locate relevant data; however, the first step of the research is to identify a research topic and method.

For my study, I chose not to do autoethnography on myself. I decided to have a participatory study with peers that can ‘create [a] reciprocal relationship as equal and gain something meaningful from each other in the process’ (Chang, 2013, p. 110). This would diminish the concern with the privileged perspective of the auto-researcher-participant. By having a collaborative autoethnography, one engages with multiple perspectives and needs to consider one more layer of intersubjectivity (Chang, 2013). Chang distinguishes between full collaboration and partial collaboration. In my case, it will be a partial collaboration. I will work together with other teachers during the data collection phase, but the analysis will be my task. The outcome and dissemination of the study will also be my responsibility. However, this does not exclude other forms of communication and meaning exchange after our meeting during the felting process in the studio. As I will be in the phase of meaning-making of the collected data, inviting peers to express their view on the material might be relevant. This material will be a part of the outcome of this project. Moreover, the outcome can have several forms. ‘The end product of autoethnography takes different forms: research reports, poetry, performative scripts, songs, films, performing art (Chang, 2013, p. 118). Addressing the outcome of this project now is premature, but it would probably be a visual product, combining still and moving images, as well as spoken and written words.

Another aspect of autoethnography as a pedagogy of freedom is provided by Denzin (2003). He believes that autoethnography will ‘contribute to a conception of education and democracy as [a] pedagogy of freedom’ (Denzin, 2003, p. 262). When the subject of arts and crafts undergoes disenchantment caused by the absence of imagining working processes that allow experimentation, we should look closer at our practice; we should look for approaches that would help dissociate from a manufacturing way of making and allow the practitioner/research to experience the unexpected. Following Denzin’s ideas, it is from the school site that we can make changes to empower the quality of teacher education.

Lenz Taguchi's (2010) work on intra-active pedagogy and pedagogical documentation, as the title of her book suggests, goes beyond the theory/practice-divide in education. For her, the quality of pedagogical documentation 'puts in motion [the] process of learning and new becoming' (Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p. 67). She recognises what Barad calls the agential cut as a temporary constructed distinction. Lenz Taguchi (2010) also states that a piece of documentation, the result of a constructed cut, makes it possible for us to identify a material of the practice that we can talk about and study. Åberg and Lenz Taguchi (2010) likewise see pedagogical work from a democratic perspective. For them, the voice of the other, students or children, needs to be heard in order to respect different points of views and ideas. Through a pedagogical documentation, this approach is not static; it is continually in motion. It makes our practice as teachers more visible and enables the idea of working concretely with it and adapting to the different realities we encounter in schools.

Other teacher-researchers in Norway work with pedagogical documentation from a postmodern thinking. Kolle, Larsen and Ulla (2010) introduce pedagogical documentation as an inspiration to transformative practices in the field of education. Based on a Deleuzian approach to knowledge, their assumption is to look at not only what things are but also how they work and their potential becoming (Kolle, Larsen, & Ulla, 2010, p. 71). This means that pedagogical documentation should help us be creative in our teaching practices and not just deal with replicating activities. Because if teachers, they state, follow specific ready-made programs for educationally organised activities, this will mean that teachers become functionaries who follow recipes (Kolle, Larsen, & Ulla, 2010). In the school context, one should ask how teaching could work and not only how it works. Still inspired by Deleuze, Kolle, Larsen and Ulla (2010) praise experimentation to broaden the idea of didactic and nomadic thinking (Kolle, Larsen, & Ulla, 2010).

My understanding of autoethnographic and pedagogic documentation makes me think that my own understanding of making—coupled with the comments and feedback of some of my colleagues—and the documentation of the working process that praises meaning making, experimentation and critical thinking would help me examine how the felting process can be thought of and, later on, how it can be taught and still be understood differently. As I encounter different situations, schools, colleagues and, above all, different students, who may give non-expected itineraries to my work.

6. Summary

The pleasure of making has always been a part of my creative process. My awareness about it grew stronger when I took on the role of an artist–teacher in the subject of arts and crafts. When I gave more room to my artistic practice in the classroom by inviting my students to perform drawing together with me, we could co-create another understanding of what the subject of arts and crafts could generate in the school setting as, for instance, moments of entanglement with the material, when movements and even silence become art/aesthetic experiences. This means that the object of art has become the event (making) itself.

Drawing on my earlier experience with performative drawing within the subject of arts and crafts, I intend to unfold a performative approach to other materials and techniques. My general assumption is that a performative approach to felting wool can involve more than cognitive knowledge. It allows an approach that is comparable to performance art. It can emphasise the process rather than the final object, focusing on the sensory aspects of an experience.

By considering the subject of arts and crafts as an artistic–creative event, I approach this creative event from a Baradian use of re-turning, intra-action and agency. Inspired by autoethnography and pedagogical documentation, I imagine a

research design that could elicit my own working process by inviting peers to add their impressions to my reflection in and on the making.

This text presents a short account of the methodological and theoretical background that forms the framework of my project and my intention to reflect on a creative approach to the process of felting wool. Working towards this aim, I propose an imagined research design inspired by ABR, including agency and intra-action seen from a new materialist perspective. I think that the imagined research design presented here, called an autoethnography for two, can be an interesting one to try out.

This imagined research design still needs to be enacted. Nevertheless, I hope that this text manages to relay some suggestions to readers as an inspiration to undertake research on their own creative working process.

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