

## **Affective togetherness in arts education: Linger on a performative approach to wool felting**

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### **Abstract**

This article explores moments relating to affect and togetherness as expressed by three groups of teacher training students who participated in different performative wool felting sessions during 2018 and 2019 at two Norwegian universities. A performative approach to the subject of visual arts in teacher education is characterised by fostering intra-actions among the participants engaging bodily with each other, space, time and materials, in an open-ended, creative way.

The students express feeling of togetherness stimulated by intra-actions in such relational processes during performative approaches to wool felting. The leading question throughout this enquiry is what kind of togetherness the participants express. This is seen in dialogue with the work of Brian Massumi about affect. I borrow concepts from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, along with theoretical insights from Karen Barad, to share those experiences with the reader.

### **Keywords**

Art education; felting wool; affect; togetherness; performance and performative forms of expression

## Introducing my liminal positions

This article is rooted in my arts-based research within educational settings. Besides being a visual artist, I have taught art to teacher training students in Norwegian universities since 2005. My artistic and didactical practices have also shaped my research practice and this creates a fruitful synergy. Those positions produce liminal spaces as described in *a/r/tography: an arts-based research methodology with a form of inquiry that is “an embodied query into interstitial spaces between art making, researching and teaching”* (La Jevic and Springgay, 2008, p.67). I shall come back to *a/r/tography* in another section.

Nourished by my artistic vigour, questioning my art teacher practice, and carried by my curiosity as a researcher, I propose and explore performative approaches to visual arts in teacher education. By forming / making / performing felting, I roam the territories of visual arts and of art education as spaces for reflections in actions to evolve within an intimate dialogue between my three parallel on-going practices, together with my students.

As a pedagogue in the subject of visual arts, I look for a pedagogy that resists individualism and predetermined outcomes as products to be considered “The right” learning outcomes. I look for a pedagogy of collaboration rather than competition. When we organise education as mass production, there is the danger that we “become the McDonald’s of the 21st century education” (Biesta, 2018), which presents two risks: the potential disappearance of art from art education and the potential disappearance of education from art education (Biesta, 2018). Art education in Norway tends to stay in a traditional groove, with “little understanding, or weight, on the personal, social, and relational factors as important in artistic activity” (Østern and Rønningen, 2019). In my view, we should value the artistic/creative process as much as we value the art product. For Østern and Rønningen (2019), this devaluing of relational factors “has, unfortunately, foothold in the classical Western arts education”. Ideal art education practices are not about sole focus on the process at the expense of the product. The idea is to foster a broadened understanding of the subject of art in teacher education in order to avoid disenchanting the very core of the subject; that is, to allow imagining of alternative approaches and the possibility to

experience the unexpected (Jamouchi, 2019). I do not claim that there is one best way to teach visual art; I value multiple approaches to the subject in order to enrich students' experiences.

This text is an entangled part of my artistic and pedagogical study. How do I engage in a writing process when the idea, the phenomenon, the moment, and the act of my doing is bodily in its essence and the moment of the act is defined by its fluidity? This text cannot be a written re-presentation of my practices. It reveals liminal spaces, in which my identities infiltrate and fertilize each other, as well as they evoke and provoke each other. Writing this text by being in motion is similar to motion and transformation I undergo as an artist and educator: becoming in relational positions in the world. It is an ongoing questioning and search about how to write and convey an act that is essentially artistic/creative in a pedagogical context, or, in other words, an aesthetical learning process. Whilst writing this text, some of the concepts and words do not settle in a constant state of being. Some of them bring me to other concepts that seem to express more precisely what I experience and what I think while felting wool. On the other hand, some of them, as soon as I wrote them down, fade away the fluidity of the felting process.

The questioning and search of words and concepts that can help to convey my research go beyond the use of relevant vocabularies and correct syntax. It demands clarity concerning ontological and epistemological positions. I do not follow grand narratives that order and explain, as in a positivist interpretive framework in which "A single reality exists beyond ourselves, 'out there'" (Creswell, 2013).

More than making some reverence, by using references, I need those references to work for me. It should work in a way that I gain from it, which I can relate to almost bodily or even approach it viscerally and instinctively. It has to concern me in a manner that is more than an indication of what or how I should do what I do. It should be more than a method with established procedures to follow. It has to resonate with my three practices (artist, teacher, and researcher).

I borrow concepts from the vocabulary of Karen Barad (2003, 2007 and 2014) and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1980). These include concepts like phenomenon, intra-action, re-turning, material-discursive, rhizome, and ritournelle. These are

concepts that transmit more faithfully moments of my teaching, creating, and researching. I find a fruitful synergy in connecting artistic research and art pedagogy with Barad's agential realism and the rhizomatic thinking of Deleuze and Guattari. Their work is indeed closer to a way of thinking and questioning, rather than explaining and establishing fixed models. It allows a research design in motion that resists following pre-given methods and protocols. This study benefits from a material-discursive approach that proposes the entanglement of matter and meaning, which suits my liminal positions. Drawing from Barad's agential realism, this assumes a particular position on scholarly practice. She draws our attention to how we frame, conduct, and communicate research. I shall come back to those concepts and some of Barad's work in another section.

A performative approach as I enact in this project is a re-turn, a ritournelle, a displacement of the dissimilar as the enactment brings other perspectives. They are many rhizomatic lines in this text, conveying my liminal positions in the realms I roam, concepts as philosophical doorways, and reminiscences as my poetical reverberations, students' reflections notes, material-discursive reflections of felting phenomenon, and spaces in-between those lines. Spaces that are open for the reader's imagination and interpretation. I hope that those rhizomatic lines and spaces in-between makes sensory sense or even creative non-sense for the reader. My wish to make common this study, by communicating this way, is that it might affect the reader.

## **Wet felting wool technique, contextualization and context**

### Wet wool felting technique

Felt is a non-woven fabric made primarily out of animal fibres. Wet felting is the oldest technique for turning animal hair, usually wool, into felt. The wool is washed, carded, and pulled to loosen the fibres, which are then arranged and overlaid. Water and soap are applied to open up the fibres. Then – by means of steps including manual compression, rubbing, squeezing, palming, and rolling – the loosened fibres are

densely entangled and bound together into a coherent and stable flat form. Wet felting involves a great deal of physical manipulation and lends itself to group participation.

In the classroom, I start with an approach to wool felting by demonstrating qualities of felting technique. I let the students become acquainted with the material and the technique before working, large-scale, co-making<sup>1</sup> project.

## Contextualisation of a performative approach

I contextualise the performative approach to wool felting by positioning what we do in some broader contexts. Those contexts can be a combination of two or more of the following approaches. I lecture on the 20th century development of installation and performance art. I bring the students outdoors and organize land art lesson, giving students an overview of an art form with large-scale workspace and wide horizons. In that outdoor setting, we also would abandon normal classroom relations and spatial grids and hierarchies. I introduce the theme of the relationship between the body and an artwork by telling about my own experiences when working with large-scale and/or immersive art projects. I show a video of women working on tweed textile making while singing a waulking (working) song, traditionally sung in the last phases of cloth making, to help to hold the rhythmic movement involved in passing on and rolling the fabric. Such contextualisations give students a more robust understanding and awareness of a performative approach to art.

## Context: participants and feedbacks

Both what the participants and I have done together, as well as the reflection notes they give me, inspire this text. Those reflection notes are feedback the students write just after a felting session. I use those written feedbacks as my empirical and referential material.

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<sup>1</sup> I use co-making instead of collaborating. To collaborate do not necessarily include the idea of doing physically something together. It is in the making that we become acquainted with others differently, when handling with the materials and each other's gestures and movements.

Participants were three groups of students. Group A had 15 students, group B had 10 students, and group C had 9 students. Groups A and B were students living in Norway, and group C were international students in the country for a study semester along. In total, 34 students from two Norwegian universities participated in these three sessions between 2018 and 2019, and 28 of them sent me their reflection notes (the written feedback was not mandatory).

The felting sessions last for about 2 to 3 hours. My request for feedback is always in relation to what we have done together, but the way I formulate my request varies according to the situation we are in. I give them my e-mail address and invite them to write promptly some words or sentences (reflection notes) about what we have just done together.

I asked the group A: What are your reflections on the sensory experiences and the relational perspectives? I asked the group B: What aesthetic experiences have you gone through? How would you convey this to pupils or a public? I asked the groups C: What is your experience of wool felting? What did you think, feel, or notice?

Some of the experiences that are often mentioned from those performative events with felting wool have caught my attention. Especially experiences that indicate moments of affect and togetherness. I did not necessarily use those exact words in my request to the participants. Many participants do not explicitly use those words either. However, a sense of affective togetherness is expressed in a more or less subtle manner in the written feedbacks. The feeling of togetherness as expressed by the students can be seen from three perspectives: 1) a sense of belonging connected to a group and to the process itself, 2) awareness of oneself among others, and 3) intra-action beyond interaction. Those perspectives reveal features that differentiate the notion of togetherness. However, those perspectives are not separated categories; they are fluid and occurred simultaneously in time and space in the context of our felting sessions.

By using Barad's agential realism and the rhizomatic thinking of Deleuze and Guattari, I aim to unveil notions of affect and togetherness. By using this theoretical framework, I position this study in the post-human analytical landscape. This implies that "a rational detached closure of what it means to be human, with the emphasis on human

consciousness, rationality, objectivity, and detachment from the material world inherited from the Enlightenment, is destabilised” (Maapalo and Østern, 2018, p.4). Some of the richest bodies of theory emerging from this rupture of Enlightenment stabilities have come from Barad (2003, 2007 and 2014), Deleuze, and Guattari (1980), whose principal concepts that I employ in my analysis I will turn to now.

## Looking for a fruitful language

Reading Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, and Karen Barad was incredible, fantastic, different from what I had read earlier and amazingly close to what I do. Sometimes, I approach their work instinctively more than cognitively. Which generates a powerful engagement, engaging more than my cognitive understanding, including my thinking under the complementary acts of doing felting, researching, and writing. I probably do not understand everything, or I do understand it my way and make it work for my work. In this section, I present key concepts of a/r/tography, phenomenon, intra-action, returning, material-discursive, rhizome, and ritournelle. I describe how I understand them, and how I use them in my work. I start with liminal positions of an a/r/tographer as an overall frame.

The concept of a/r/tography relates to the living inquiry I deal with in my intertwined positions as artist, teacher, and researcher. A/r/tography reminds me of the entanglement described in Barad's material-discursive ontology and recalls Deleuze and Guattari's concept of rhizome.

A/r/tography is a “living inquiry” in which “visual, written, and performative processes are enacted as a living practice of art making, researching and teaching” (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 902). The concept of a/r/tography expresses my intertwined positions when I try to be in the experience of felting wool rather than re-presenting it: “living inquiry is an embodied encounter constituted through visual and textual understanding and experience rather than mere visual and textual representation” (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 902).

Irwin et al. refer, in their article “The Rhizomatic Relations of A/r/tography” (Irwin et al., 2006), to the rhizomatic interstitial spaces in between thinking and materiality

(Irwin et al., 2006, p.71). Further, they encourage us to engage with our work “as a rhizome by moving in and out, and around the work, making connections in a personal way” (Irwin et al., 2006, p. 72). I have been moving around my work with felting wool and re-turn (Barad, 2014) it. By doing so I propose a performative approach that emphasises the process. This includes giving attention to what happens with all the components of the phenomenon of felting, not only the visual aesthetical elements of the finale physical product.

The non-fixity of parts in mutual relation is the central idea of Barad's concept of intra-action (Barad, 2014). She describes a phenomenon as a relationship that emerges among entities from within their relationships. An event takes place, Barad argues in laying out her ontological picture of agential realism, within relationship, not prior to or outside it:

“the primary ontological unit is not independent objects with inherent boundaries and properties but rather *phenomena*. [...] phenomena do not merely mark the epistemological inseparability of observer and observed, or the result of measurement; rather, *phenomena are ontological inseparability/entanglement of intra-acting “agencies”*. (Barad, 2007, p. 139; emphasis in original)

In my project, I approach the felting process as a phenomenon. I endeavour to unveil the intra-action between the components: human and non-human in a post-humanistic perspective. Barad's concept of intra-action describes the relationships occurring under a phenomenon that emerges from within the components. Further, intra-action relates also to the inseparability between the phenomenon investigated and the investigator. Barad describes the researcher as someone that interferes and disturbs the intra-action of a phenomenon. She refers to the researcher as an apparatus as s/he is entangled in the phenomenon (Barad, 2014).

I understand agency as the mutual constitution of entangled components. The components do not hold agency as individual entity with separately determined properties. In this study, I look at what happens from / within the components in intra-action. When I now adopt an ontological assumption that approaches and understands reality as multiple, and dependent, among other components, on the



approach of the researcher, I also re-turn and position my working with felting differently.

Karen Barad (2014) uses the term re-turn with a hyphen to distinguish it from the verb return. Re-turning is not about going back to the same or doing again what we have done before. For her, re-turning means to approach a known material or phenomenon from another angle as when: “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). In my work, it means to re-turn the well-known wool felting material and technique. I question traditional teaching practices in art education, I re-turn wool felting to look closer at the value of the process of felting when intra-acting with material, students, space and time.

In 2015, I invited teacher training students to play-felt large amount of wool with me on the floor, in the classroom. By doing so, we found ourselves elsewhere than in the position of focusing on the production (close to the idea manufacturing) of a given set of pre-defined products that can (more) easily meet what is expected to be learning outcomes as described by the Norwegian curriculum (cf. Østern and Rønningen, 2019). Detached from “formal aesthetic art didactics”, as analysed by Venke Aure (2013), a performative approach to the subject of arts led to various approaches (Aure, 2013, p. 14) which are not based on regulated and regulating thinking. We evolve in the flux of our making and within intra-active relations of the event/phenomenon.

In writing this text, I borrow another central concept from Barad, which is material-discursive. She emphasizes the entangled inseparability of discourse and materiality:

“The relationship between the material and the discursive is one of mutual entailment. Neither is articulated/articulable in the absence of the other; matter and meaning are mutually articulated. Neither discursive practices nor material phenomena are ontologically or epistemologically prior. Neither can be explained in terms of the other. Neither has privileged status in determining the other”. (Barad, 2003, p. 822)

The entanglement of matter and meaning focuses and gives attention to the ongoing, dynamic, and relational enactment of a phenomenon. This is how I communicate the analytical reading of my materials/components towards the end of the article.

Deleuze and Guattari (1980) introduce the concept of rhizome with a nod to its botanical referent: a multidirectional rootlet system. They elevated the term to ontological status and use it to denote a system composed by non-hierarchical and non-representational points. One characteristic of the rhizome is connected to the principles of multiplicity and agencement, in terms of its being “a growth of dimensions in a multiplicity which necessarily changes in nature as it increases its connections” (Deleuze et Guattari, 1980, p. 15). This is something I understand as putting me/we, when felting wool, in a constantly phase of becoming. A multiplicity of points of different nature composing the rhizome “are not composed by units, but by dimensions, or rather moving directions” (Deleuze et Guattari, 1980, p.31). This multiplicity of dimensions are, in a performative approach to felting wool, intensities of acts, movements, changes, displacements, encounters, etc., whilst transforming animals’ fibres, human bodies, and other non-human components involved in a rhizomatic structure.

Deleuze and Guattari underscore that “In contrast to a structure which is defined by a set of points and positions, (...) the rhizome is made of lines” (Deleuze et Guattari, 1980, p. 31). Those lines are “segmentary lineage, stratification as its dimensions, as well as lines of flight or deterritorialisation as the maximum dimension after which the multiplicity undergoes metamorphosis as changing in nature” (Deleuze et Guattari, 1980, p. 31-32).

When the rhizome “operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, side shoot” (Deleuze et Guattari, 1980, p. 31), it reveals a language that recalls the work in motion of a felting process and its multiple offshoots and ramifications.

I have been felting wool for years; still I need, each time, to re-enter a new the phenomenon of felting. As “A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*” (Deleuze et Guattari, 1980, p. 31), I do not find myself in the beginning of a procedure or at its end. I rather position my work as an ongoing process of an artistic intention over time. This idea of *intermezzo*

reveals that I do not wish to come back or mirror previous felting acts. I am evolving/becoming in the middle of a practice of research into material and immaterial components.

Deleuze and Guattari introduce the *ritournelle* by starting with three aspects: as a point that we attempt to fix in a space/territory, as a circle that organises a limited space that holds the forces of chaos outside, and as an opening in the circle allowing us to reach out to the chaos and allowing the chaos in (Deleuze et Guattari, 1980, p. 382).

When felting wool I re-create a previously known territory each time I start a felting process. Deleuze and Guattari write also about territorialisation and deterritorialisation. More than being a territory limited by static boundaries, deterritorialisation is a movement operated by lines of flights (Deleuze et Guattari, 1980, p. 634). As I understand it, lines of flights are movements by which we leave a space/territory to enter another one that changes us fundamentally, as we reach the point of non-retour.

I interpret the *ritournelle* as an act of coming back to something known, but with a shift or rupture from a previous act. When I felt wool, I compose with known and unknown components. I compose with material components and the ideas of fluidity and exchangeability.

### **Re-turning wool felting toward a performative approach to art education**

In 2010, I started to invite teacher training students to play-draw with me in the classroom. Using our whole bodies on large-scale craft paper displayed on the floor and the walls, allowing cooperation through non-verbal communication, we focused in the making rather than the result of a foreseen product. A few years later, I started to document and reflect on this approach to drawing, inspired by contemporary performances within visual arts. The transformative power of performance (Fisher-Lichte, 2008) was also transforming our teaching session (Jamouchi, 2017). I wanted to see if the deterritorialization (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980) of traditional teaching sessions could disclose a creative detour. Together with my students, I wanted to extend the borders of traditional arts teaching practices.

Fischer-Lichte (2008) claims that the transformative power of performance lies on different parts of the work. The present, live moment transforming the spectator into an actor is one of them. Another one is that a performance eludes the scope of traditional aesthetic theories. Moreover, performance challenges the classical interpretation of art object focusing on its visual components (Fischer-Lichte, 2008).

In the subject of visual arts, one can study and describe materials as amorphous or inert entities, as if materials are passive until we do something to them. However, we can also approach materials from a more dialogical perspective, being in intra-action (Barad, 2007) with them. Some materials are extremely malleable and offer unforeseen moments that can lead the students to creative de-(con)struction, shifting, and non-identical repetitions, as an echo to the concepts of the *ritournelle* given by Deleuze and Guattari (1980).

Beside a traditional approach to arts in Nordic teacher education, we see more voices that embrace approaches that go under the umbrella definition of post-human and new materialism. Some Norwegian doctoral theses written by Ninni Sandvik (2013), Bente Ulla (2015), Ann Sofi Larsen (2015), Camilla E. Andersen (2015), and Ann Merete Otterstad (2018), relate to pedagogical work in Early Childhood Education. Contributions with such approaches specifically within visual arts subject in teacher education are still modest.

I re-turn wool felting; I approach it from the angle of a performative act, a creative event. It means to enact the phenomenon of felting wool through co-making and meeting each participants' differences, similitudes, and singularities. The pedagogical aspect resides in the relational and other potential experiences among the artist-teacher and the students. The performative approach to wool felting neutralizes technical and recipe-like (teacher) formation to accomplish other forms of transformation. A performative approach to wool in the classroom is explorative, non-representational, participative, dialogic, and relational, as well as a space for opposition and resistance. When using concepts of Karen Barad, one could add intra-action and material-discursive. This kind of approach with teacher training students unveils some aspects of affective togetherness.

## Affective togetherness

Achieving a common experience is not synonymous with experiencing the same. This is common for both a learning context and an artistic experience. Students or a public sharing the same experience do not necessarily go through the same transition. The threshold, as “The magnitude or intensity that must be exceeded for a certain reaction, phenomenon, result, or condition to occur or be manifested”<sup>2</sup>, during an aesthetic learning process can give different ways of experiencing a shared experience. The collectiveness of a situation affects us differently. A transformation puts us, and people watching around us, in a different position of togetherness, without necessarily merging us in the same way of being/doing/thinking. For Massumi,

“When you affect something, you are opening yourself up to being affected in turn, and in a slightly different way than you might have been the moment before. You have made a transition, however slight. You have stepped over a threshold. Affect is this passing of a threshold, seen from the point of view of the change in capacity”. (Massumi, 2015, p. 110-111)

In this respect, togetherness does not bring uniformity. “There is no sameness of affect. There is affective difference in the same event— a collective individuation” (Massumi, 2015, p.103). Affect is related to the idea of togetherness because it cannot emerge in a vacuum. We cannot be affected when cut apart from others or our surroundings. In a learning context in art education for example, students, teachers, materials, space and time are present components. Each component plays a role. Affects “are basically ways of connecting, to others and other situations, of affecting and being affected” (Massumi, 2015, p.110). The idea of affect and togetherness is thus symbiotic. For Massumi, affects put us in processes of participation larger than ourselves: “With intensified affect comes a stronger sense of embeddedness in a larger field of life – a heightened sense of belonging, with other people and other places” (Massumi, 2015, p. 110).

The classroom during a performative approach to the subject of visual arts puts us in a larger field in which moments of affective togetherness unfold. An aesthetic learning

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<sup>2</sup> Source of that definition: <https://www.lexico.com/definition/threshold> Retrieved on January 2020

process is a process that broadens our understanding of the self and the other. To do so we are giving and receiving and we are in the state of being in tune.

The idea of a transformative path, or threshold as mentioned above, is present in the classroom when we relate to ourselves, others, things, objects, and surroundings under a transformative path. This attentive presence to human, non-human, and the surrounding seems to bring a sense of togetherness.

In my project, the idea of togetherness is inspired by contemporary performance art. However, the performative turn we have seen in the art world since the 60's is not equally noticeable in art teacher education (Aure, 2013). A performative approach to art education might resist generating predetermined outcomes, traditional knowledge production, and individual working process (that are different from mutually and collectively engaged artistic processes). Simultaneously, a performative approach to art education can engender unforeseen results, experimental research, and collective working processes. For Aure (2013) a relational and performative oriented art didactic has its potential in allowing a more flexible and dynamic approach to the working process (p.15).

Illeris (2012) analyses the Scandinavian concept of aesthetic learning processes for the 21st century by bringing our attention to how they "remain bound to a limited number of symbolic forms, i.e. those related to the arts, while experiences with a range of other cultural products are excluded" (p. 12). She proposes a relational aesthetic-inspired approach to actively create relation, not a passive empathy (Illeris, 2012, p. 16). Her concern and hope for a broader aesthetic learning process includes a performative approach in the future.

The reading of Massumi, Illeris, and Aure shape and sharpen a plural approach to the notion of affect and togetherness. When we do not only look for manufacturing a product as the outcome of aesthetic learning, we might be more aware of ourselves and possibly find a way to intra-act / mediate ourselves in/within the world, as we are a part of the world.

As the reader has now noticed, this text is not dealing with potential learning outcomes related to students' craft skills or ability to realize formalistic aesthetic products. I approach the aesthetic learning process by looking at the potential experience of

affect and togetherness, as expressed by teacher training students over the two past years.

Before bringing the voice of the students through their reflection notes, I shall introduce our felting sessions by rendering them through my narrations.

### **Reverberations from performative felting sessions**

In the following section, I retrospectively narrate some felting sessions carried out together with teacher training students. Those narrations differ from accurate description or re-presentation. I invite the reader to see those narrations as a rhizomatic reverberation of what we did, as I engage with my senses and memory. Those narratives are closer to a poetical language involving myself bodily and sensorily by using my memory to engage with a written language. Language is yet another material, or a component from a Baradian perspective. This entanglement, including wool felting and written words, is a living enquiry that encompasses my identities connected to my three practices as artist, teacher, and researcher.

#### Creating and finding our space

We are students and an artist-teacher in the workshop of a Norwegian university. We display a large amount of wool on the floor. The floor is ours. Our whole body integrates the space. We start with gentle frictions between our hands and the numerous layers of wool on the floor. We use pine tree soap and warm water to let the wool fibres open up. The colour, the texture, and thickness of the material change. The odours of the pine soap and the wool in the air become intense. The atmosphere in the room changes. We all experience and share material and immaterial components around us and in us. We start to step on the wool as we find a space to navigate between each participant, between the wool and the surroundings. We are creating and finding a smooth space, a territory.

#### Discovering ourselves and other in other ways

The sounds of our steps resonate. The rhythms of our movements takes us from place to place. There is no visible path or given method to follow. The ongoing rhizomatic structure regulates the next steps, undulations, and gestures. The bodies of the others make us aware our own body. As the fibres of the wool entangle, we intertwine our gestures. The space is smooth. We navigate as nomads. We undergo a wayfaring that sets the landscape in motion, inviting and inventing our next move. A ritournelle that does not repeat itself identically. Re-discovering all the components of the event, included ourselves. We roll, throw, and pass on the massive, felted piece of wool. We do, in other ways, what may have been done before, for centuries, elsewhere.

### Intra-action between wool and other components

Wool, soapy warm water, bubble plastic, air, spaces between bodies, bodies in motion, iterative movements during a duration.

Repetitive approaches, displacements, shifting places and qualities. Movements that bring the moments. Movements that transfer the moments. The intra-action does something. To be / make / become present. Agency of entangled components. A phenomenon. Moving whilst being moved. Affect? Improvising and understanding wool, water, spaces, and bodies. Process.

Touch and skin permeate natural materials, duration and tempo.

Be(coming) aware our own body, others' bodies, everybody. Heaviness and weightless, presence of diverse components. Intensity, augmentation, attenuation: moments do something to the event and its components. Ability to affect?

Composing with space, spaces in between, with movements, slow, rapid, repetitive, and unexpected. It makes me vibrate. Affective affinities. Exceeds threshold.

### Establishing another dialectical mode with written words

The transformations of the fibres are remarkable. We notice the changes of the wool and the changes of our relations during the event. Intra-acting with each other. We barely use words as we, sensory, make sense of the moment. Meaning making in /



through / within / during the making. A ritual we did not know before being (with/in) it.

The musicality is present, coming from the sounds made by all the present components. In some case, we amplify the musicality when we, intentionally, make sounds with our bodies. Sometimes we hum. Once, we had some music on.

The piece of wool is left to rest. We now enter another mode of expression. We transmit the experience of the event with the materiality of written words.

### **Material-discursive with/in components of felting phenomenon**

Teacher training students connect often what we do to their future profession as teacher. Even if the didactical aspect is clearly included in their feedback, their personal experiences of the event is substantial. The feedbacks are sometimes few words, sometimes shorter or longer sentences, and sometimes a longer text.

After reading Barad's concept material-discursive, one can see how I entangle the doing and the thinking. I am of this experience / phenomenon; I not only look back to what we did and describe it in words here. It is through the materiality of the components during the felting entangled with the materiality of the written students' feedback that the material-discursive practice become the analytical reading of the materials. What matters in this material-discourse is a sense of togetherness, which enact slightly differently in each felting session. Group A reveal a sense of belonging to the felting process itself, students in group B became aware of themselves among others, and group C experiences intra-action beyond interaction.

I asked group A to send me an e-mail reflecting on sensory experiences and relational perspectives. Those are my regular students<sup>3</sup>. This question came as a continuum to one of our lessons and discussions concerning conceptual art and installation.

Malin<sup>4</sup> wrote this: "Vestibular: the body gets moving, balancing on the wool with others. Kinaesthetic: muscle and joint sense: the interaction with the body's

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<sup>3</sup> This means that I am their art teacher through the semester.

<sup>4</sup> All the students' names have been changed.

movements". The awareness of her own body involves immediate experience of and meeting with the world. It is sensory perception and emotion as one. Malin writes further: "Collaboration, communication, flexibility in solving the task together, laughter and joy, togetherness, we participate in a process together where no one is a leader and everyone can contribute". The awareness of her own body and herself is also connected to the awareness of herself among others. The non-verbal communication going on leads the group; it seems like nobody takes the role of a leader. Nevertheless, the bodies in action lead and create the event. The intra-action among the wool, one's own body, and the others' bodies create the event. The event affects the participants as the event is leading the movements and actions, leading to a feeling of togetherness. A material-discursive event going on in the classroom emphasises the entangled inseparability of materiality and discourse. The performative approach to wool felting brings us into a territory where language is not opposed to material and oral discourse is not synonymous to language.

Christian writes his feedback this way: "Concerning the relational you come close to each other, as we did today: when you exchange the same piece of material it really become a common project". The sense of belonging is not only related to the different participants, but also to the material going from hands to hands among the members of the group. Marika wrote this about the relational perspective: "We got even more together when we worked with it. The relationship was strengthened and it brought unity".

Those feedbacks reveal that the students were in tune with the different entities of the event, composed by the transformability of the material, the bodies working with it, the flux of the exchanges among the participants as well as the process leading the event. The students are open to what affects them and in turn affect the process of felting and feeling of togetherness.

For Ingvild, it was "Nice to just DO<sup>5</sup> and see what happens – you can sing, dance and relate a lot (if you go for it) with each other in the process itself". Intra-action in this group was visible in the making and audible when the students started spontaneously to clap in cadence on the wool, producing rhymes and different sounds. Musicality

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<sup>5</sup> The student wrote the verb «DO» in majuscule in her feedback.

and drum-inspired approach to felting with feet and hands accompanied a rhythmic bodily approach, combining gestures and self-made sounds with different beats. The process comes at its highest level of intra-action: differences of the components are not separated or opposed to each other but entangled in a space-time made out of making, as Ingvild wrote: "Just DO and see what happens".

For Tilde, this session was "Something we made together. The expression is something we shared and the process was in focus". It seems as if the process had its own autonomy and brought the students further. Othilie wrote: "Of sensory experiences I forgot about time. There was also a lot of imitation in the room and we inspired each other. Across the room".

Bodies in motion and in intra-action with rhythms created by movements and sounds produced during the process generated an event where different components of the phenomenon intra-acted. Tempo, duration, flux, repetition and imitation overlap, occur, fade, become active again, speed themselves and ran across the room. The material and immaterial entities of the event are palpable in the room. This assemblage of diverse intensities is in motion, the materials are diverse in their forms and substance, and perform in a non-hierarchical intra-action.

I asked the group B those questions: What aesthetic experiences have you gone through? How would you like to convey this to pupils or a broader public? This question is related to the fact that this group of students have a slightly different profile from those following ordinary master degree education to become teachers. Those students follow one year of study in the visual arts as their only subject. After that year of visual arts study, they can choose to become teachers or artists or to work in an art institution with a broader public. I contextualised the felting session by starting with an introduction to performance art followed by Waulking song on a video showing women working on tweed textile making.

Andreas, a student in this group, wrote a long text about his experience. Some parts of his feedback were: "In such group work one works differently than when working alone. One has to discuss, people have slightly different perceptions of what is the right procedure. Learning to work in teams and accepting differences, and getting to know one another are important aspects in this way of learning". The feeling of

togetherness is not the same as a feeling of sameness. Even if everybody participates in the same performative event, their individual experiences all differ.

Andreas wrote further: "This creates a unique and new situation. We stepped on the wool and we supported each other. Inspired by a video from the hand craft tradition in Wales, we played rhythmic music<sup>6</sup> and followed its rhythm. We sensed in a completely new way. Walking on bubble wrap and walking on our soapy wool while hearing music was something completely new for everyone. There had been some uncertainty at first, but we quickly went on with the task, became familiar with the task, the others and ourselves. We support each other and use our sense of balance. We are physical." The sensory and bodily aspect is decisive here in the meeting with and becoming more familiar with both the others, a rhythmic dynamic, the wool, the task, and oneself.

Andreas wrote this too: "The process created something more than just a simple felting product. I think that the intention here has to be that in addition to learn felting and make a product, something more will happen. Experiences for the individual and for the group. Maybe in a greater extent than with a regular group exercise. Perhaps this approach may give a different result. Maybe it can be used with students who have difficulties, or with adults from different cultures. You become a little 'naked' and harmless when you do this task, not only yourself, but also the others. Perhaps the participants are left with experiences that go a little further and deeper than just solving a given traditional task".

Andreas does not use the personal pronoun "I" when he writes about his experience, but he uses "we" to answer my request about his aesthetic experience. As a colleague of mine pointed out, I also use the pronoun "we" when I write about the felting processes I undergo with the students. Affect and togetherness, for Andreas and probably for most of the participants, is in the making, the sharing, the vulnerability, in the differences, and being physical and sensory. By sharing the same space in becoming coordinate (not necessarily pre-organised) in our movements, we created a territory that became ours. We find ourselves in a field larger than oneself. Intra-acting with space, time, other components and ourselves, we experienced a shared world. We expose our bodies differently during the event. The process had an agency that

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<sup>6</sup> They played this music on one of the students' mobile phone.

brought us in a deeper understanding of the task (more than an object production) allowing for a more intimate relationality to the participating components.

Linea comments on the fact of working barefoot as follows: "Walking around with others gave rather a feeling of intimacy, since feet are actually a very private thing". Kamilla goes on by writing: "I can imagine that using such a working technique is fun when working with children. That is because you use your body in a different way than usually in art subject. Using your feet to shape something is a different and fun physical experience".

Students used their feet to press, pack, entangle, and felt a large wool piece displayed on the floor. Rhythm, repetitions, different cadences create moments of entangled bodies and materials. Engaging in other ways with material and other participants, the students re-positioned themselves. They take positions that they did not experience previously. Other kinds of subject formation (the self among others) are allowed and the dynamic of becoming together among others redefines their relationship to material and immaterial components. The relationship to the process is also noticeable in the room. Each of us become the co-creator, the students together with the artist-teacher. The creative process is completed through every single body and everybody's participation. A ritournelle that comprises a plurality of approaches, new ways of working, discoveries, and inventions.

Martinas' feedback was "This was a social and creative process where the work had to be carried out by a group of collaborators. This is a task I would give to students from all grades. Because, no matter how old one is, this would fit in well with using the body in a creative process rather than using only the hands and working collaboratively in a group where several brains are in one and same creative process". The students were not only collaborating, they were also co-making. They become acquainted to each other not only by talking and planning, but also by actively doing in the making process.

Elisa wrote: "Different processes are repeated. Social, dance, seaman's shanty . Barefoot, a lot of energy going on". As for Marit: "You learn a lot from this task and we got to work in a completely different way than we thought. One learns to cooperate". For Roald: "To felt wool together was actually a weird process; it was something I did

not know would work until we started with it". The novelty or strangeness of this performative approach re-positioned the participants. We did not have a description of the task of how to use our bodies nor how the process should be accomplished. The material invited us to meet its qualities and the process brought us together as we felt the wool.

Group C is an international group of students following an art subject course during their international exchange program in fall semester 2019. I asked the group C to send me an e-mail about those questions: What is your experience of wool felting? What did you think, feel, or notice?

Denis wrote: "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 don't find another word for it) with your artwork – that makes you even more proud when you've finished your project". Here again we see intra-action and how the process seems to have an autonomous course with its own agency. This is why the process can surprise us. Affect is strong here: the student gets affected and actually opens herself for what the material can bring as non-expected moments. Denis does not mention building a relationship with other students. She rather points out how time is a component that contributes to building a relationship with the material.

Veronique has a similar feedback about the autonomous course of the process: "I didn't have to think too much about what I was doing, I just could use my hands and it developed kind of by itself". Caroline concludes: "As a teacher I will keep in mind that for wool felting pupils do not need an introduction because they have to pay attention to how the wool behaves and it shapes". The felting process reveals agency when intra-acting with/in us. An introduction to wool felting is not enough to understand all the qualities and possibilities wool felting has. It is the process, through performing wool felting, that one gets a broader understanding of it. Exactly that kind of understanding of wool felting and all the moments emerging during the process are difficult to enact in a traditional approach based in a formal aesthetic art didactic.

## Summing up and departing again

In a pedagogical context, performative art sessions rich in intra-active processes, unburdened by formalistic imperatives and preconceptions, offer unexpectedly rich insights to students in immediately accessible forms. These can inspire both artistic practice and enrich tomorrow's art pedagogy in schools.

I endeavour, with a post-humanistic perspective, to unveil the intra-action among the components – human and non-human. Philosophical concepts from Deleuze and Guattari, Barad, and Massumi – such as rhizome, ritournelle, phenomenon, intra-action, material-discursive, affect – have been explored here as extraordinarily apt in limning the mutually implicated and dependence among us, materials, space, and time in these sessions.

As mentioned in the introduction, they are many rhizomatic lines in this text, with spaces in-between the lines. Those rhizomatic lines invite the reader to imagine and interpret a performative approach the visual arts in teacher education in her/his own way.

Each felting project/session is a repetitive act with infinite variations. Lingering on a performative approach to wool felting in arts teacher training education give the opportunity to unveil some aspects of affective togetherness. Bringing visual arts in teacher education to the surface as rhizomatic lines and material-discourse can transform our understanding of what it can be. It is now up to us – me, the reader, and teacher training students – to think about how we want to understand and practice this knowledge in the future.

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