



# How to weave together

by Rosa Smits

---

I am soft  
As a blanket  
I am comfortable  
As circulating air  
I am hair

I am out  
But also still in  
In the light  
Could I be light?

I am a jacket  
I find structure  
In meeting hands,  
And body

I am us  
As us is me  
I am another

---

Gerrit Rietveld Academie, 16 october 2017

The first time I discussed my yet to be written thesis was during a session of Liveworks: a performance group guided by Pien Vrijhof. After talking about the subject of my thesis for a while, the group felt it was time for action and we tried to embody our words. It was a very important and powerful moment; ‚my‘ potential topic became a shared subject, and through performance, it became alive. These words rolled out of my pen, based on after our exercise. ‚I am another‘ is actually a borrowed sentence from the French poet Arthur Rimbaud, writer of the famous poem ‚Je est un autre‘.

Beatrixpark Amsterdam, Netherlands

Chapter 1 8 - 19

How to weave together Part I

A dialogue about Dutch textile industry from past to present

Redesign the social

Amekhlj Berber village, Morocco

Chapter 2 20 - 31

How to weave together

Reflection upon the

Tribes and roles

Part II

weaving of Berber carpets in Amekhlj

Textílfetur Blönduós, Iceland

### Chapter 3 32 - 43

How to weave together Part III

The importance of textile industry in Iceland

Towards collectivity in a slow pace

Closure 44 - 45

List of references 46

# Intro

When a friend checked the grammar of my thesis, she didn't understand the title. How to weave together - is it an instruction, a statement, a question? Her confusion over the multiple possibilities of this line assured me that it is the right title. This sentence arose at the very beginning of my study TxT at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy, faded to the background to come forward later again and again. It took a long time before I recognized its importance and all its possibilities, because I was more interested in sustainability. Gradually, by working out my own ideas during my studies, and reflecting on them, I discovered that with the simple line 'how to weave together' I could address all aspects of textiles that I wanted to expose and discuss in a much more personal way; through the initiated projects that are described in this thesis.

To me, the term sustainability seems nowadays overly used in marketing and communication. Although, I have not completely abandoned the term, I have begun to question if the sustainable market really stands a chance to make a difference in an economy that feeds on consumerism. If we are all responsible for creating the market by earning more money and buying products - then does it matter enough when they have been produced fairer? Does it also make us aware of the quantity that we buy and how we use the products? Can we convert everything we want back to what we only need? Or do we keep pointing the angry finger at multinationals and politics?

'How to weave together' has become a personal journey to find ways to link thoughts, relevant topics and theories to my own experiences from projects that took place in three different countries during my study. It has become my mantra, just as I imagine was 'How to live together' for the semiologist and philosopher Roland Barthes when he gave lectures dedicated to the theme of human relationships, their various forms and social models. If you are willing to contemplate for a moment on these titles, I hope you understand that I prefer their various meanings because it expresses that more possibilities do coexist alongside of each other. Words can be used systematically to communicate clearly, as well as to play with their order to question or to arouse the mind of its reader. Like any system, words can be dismantled and disassembled to find other ways of weaving them together.



## Chapter 1

How to weave together Part I

A dialogue about Dutch textile industry, from past to present

Redesign the social



# How to weave together Part I

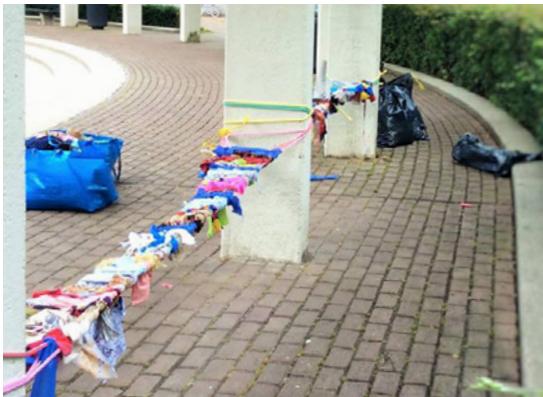
The act of creating a setting for collective weaving arose quite spontaneously from my first project at Rietveld. I had always worked with textile around the body and this time I was determined to relate textile to space. On my way to Rietveld I passed by a spot that interested me: a playground with a paddling pool in the Beatrixpark. I found it aesthetically pleasing, but at the same time questioned why a playground for children was solely built out of stone. How nice would it be to soften this place up?

While discussing my project in class, Ines, a classmate, encouraged me to email the council of Beatrixpark of whom she had their contact, about my ideas. So I did, to which Anne-Mariken Raukema responded with a warm invite to meet and discuss my project. She proposed me to do a workshop with children at the playground in the Beatrixpark about textiles. It was winter back then and the playground was cold and empty, so we planned it for next summer. I had a lot of time to prepare, during which I kept going back and forth between being enthusiastic to having multiple doubts with the workshop, which had never been my original idea. A turning point came when Eszti, a classmate, offered her help. One day in spring, we went to the playground together and tried to make a warp from rope between two pillars of stone. We brought old clothes that I gathered and used strips of them to weave a kind of hammock in between the pillars. The kids that were playing around immediately came and wanted to play with the unfinished hammock. Because they were so involved in the material and what we were making, it seemed a good idea to continue making hammocks with children together during the workshop.

Amsterdam, Netherlands, 30 Juli 2016



Amsterdam, Netherlands, 30 Juli 2016



On the morning of the workshop day, 6 girls showed up from 7 till 11 years old, encouraged by their parents to participate. Eszti and I already prepared a warp and cut strips of clothes on forehand. As we taught them how to weave in the strips, I noticed that the girls really loved textile by how focused they worked and how gently they handled the material. Together we made some hammocks in between pillars and also in between trees. After this, the girls putted some old fabrics we brought on the ground to cut holes in them. We wondered why, until they started to pull their arms and legs through the holes. They wanted to make clothes! I proposed to dress up the mermaid statue of the paddling pool. Eszter and I repeated the workshop about three times that day and it seemed, despite all of my hesitation, quite a success! Did it matter that a workshop was not my original idea, or that not everything was worked out on forehand? In the end, it went naturally and it seemed important that there was openness to allow something spontaneous to happen, like dressing up the statue. I observed the place well before and found a way to make use of it, but it wasn't until the day itself that I could observe the children and find out how to work with them. How much time do they need to learn something, and how long do they stay concentrated? When to take a break and at what distance to keep their parents? I had never actively involved children in making something before but I understood that it is crucial to observe and ask yourself questions like these, and respond to them immediately.

Anne-Mariken emailed me later about a possibility for artists to write a project proposal for all parks in Amsterdam, which, if chosen, would be funded by them. I thought about it deeply, and concluded that the progress of this project, which mostly is about how to work together, should evolve in its own speed. Rather not with force and expectations attached, so I chose to let it be for the moment. One day, when the time is ripe and a nice occasion would occur, I could simply pick it up again.

---

# A dialogue about Dutch textile industry

## from past to present

In February 2018, I sat around the table with Jantiene, librarian of the Textile museum in Tilburg. This museum is situated in a former textile factory since 1958. From the end of the 16th century Netherlands had a lively textile industry with Leiden as international wool producer. Later, the wool production moved to Tilburg, where the industry successfully produced until the 20th century. The production of linen started in Haarlem in 1600 and moved in 1700-1800 to Twente, the Achterhoek and Brabant, where they also produced cotton until 1960. The industry has been continuously on the move to seek ways of lowering down production costs, mostly meaning lowering down labor costs in order to compete with countries where labor is more cheap. In the areas of Netherlands that produced textile, there was more farming, meaning that the farmers had their own sources for food and thus needed less money to earn. Amsterdam and Rotterdam could not offer that to workers and focused instead on finishings in textile such as dry shaving, dyeing and trade in sheets. Jantiene referred me to an article in which I found much more facts in detail upon the history of the Dutch textile industry (see list of references), but mostly we talked about the disappearance of it, which took place between 1960-1980 and what effect this has on our society. According to Jantiene, the disappearance of 'makers jobs' causes unappreciation for things and how they are made. It seems that nowadays practical jobs are undervalued to office jobs, and it is unbalanced and unrealistic to think that everyone needs to be highly educated. She personally sees much value and power in craftsmanship and in the practical mindset and skills it brings along. Also she senses that people do want to make things themselves again, but a lot of knowledge, the 'how to' has been lost. The textile museum has a desire to bring back the connection in between textiles, craft and people in a low threshold way. Its workshop is open for everyone to visit - but only high skilled designers and companies that can afford it and are selected, have the ability to work there. How to bring back the close connection that the Netherlands once had with craft and producing textiles, that has drifted off to third world countries, is a question the museum in Tilburg actively started to think about and work with since only one year.

---

Jantiene also introduced me to the words of Political scientist Johan Holslag (see references list). He talks about Europe and the loss of the production industry in a much broader sense, but reflects more deeply upon the affect. Taking into account Europe's history as a leader in many topics such as humanism, Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution, he argues that it is Europe who can, and therefore needs to, make the decision to choose luxury over cheap produced products. To choose for sustainability, craftsmanship, quality over quantity and products that are made locally and not in China, or heavenly influenced by the market of the United States. These products might be more expensive, but worth it since they will bring back the many producing jobs that Europe has lost, that will give joy in work and life and beauty in our streets. Rather than taking away low paid jobs in inhumane conditions, Europe will raise the standard and open up possibility for current producing countries to improve their conditions. We can't stop globalization, but it is time for Europe to sharpen and improve it. To use it how it was meant in the 16th century: to enable us all to trade not in a competing way, but to exchange goods, products, services, art and knowledge with which we distinguish ourselves as a society.

# Redesign the social

The intention of my first project started as 'relating textile to space instead of body' but along the way it became many other things in addition. To research how to create a setting in which I could include others to work together, I needed to shift position from solo-artist (which unfortunately still seems the most common way of working in art academies) towards collectivity. Reading Bruno Latour's 'Reassembling the social' helped me a lot with my aspiration. In this book, the French philosopher questions today's main assumptions of sociologists and proposes a different way of observing and mapping a collective.

His theory taught me how important it is to have a precise understanding of words. Latour states that the word social, the protagonist of this spread, has substantially changed its meaning throughout decades, as a result of lack of accuracy. In order to regain its original meaning, the author argues that much work is needed.

## What social and textile have in common

---

Etymology of the social (Reassembling the Social, Bruno Latour)

Socius (latin): denotes a companion, an associate

Sec-sequin (root): to follow

Social: 1. following someone

2. enrolling & allying

3. having something in common

Social: to have a share in a commercial undertaking

---

As time passes, the meaning of the word social has shrunken, and perhaps is still shrinking. Despite of the absence of a clear definition, social is used extensively. Social order, society, social practice, social problems, social design - it seems to refer to things such as attitudes, orientations, behaviors, or intentions. The words imply that there is some social process involved or considered, but what exactly, is left open to the imagination. It raises the immediate question, what is social? It is

a problem when social begins to mean a type of adjective, like economical, mental, linguistic, but also wooden, steely.. It is not clear if there are relations that are specific enough to be called 'social'.

According to Latour, 'Social is no glue that can fix together, it is what is glued together by many other types of connections'. What he proposes is a sort of 'gaze inversion': what we tend to give for granted, what we consider as preconditions (e.g. the existence of a collective), is actually what we have to account for, what needs to be actively build. The social, according to this perspective, is the connection between things (that might originate elsewhere), not a collection of things that are in themselves 'social'. Sociology is according to Latour not a domain on its own: it is the domain of tracing the connections to all other domains, things of topics.

Something analogous, I believe, can be said about textiles - what does this word mean? Does it refer to fashion, architecture, interior (domains)? To which part of the process does it refer to? Harvesting plant fibers, weaving, sewing, wearing it or buying new curtains for your living room? The answer can always vary and consequently textiles can be seen as a network that metaphorically weaves other domains, topics and things together.

## How to build a collective

The Actor Network Theory (ANT) is a method that Latour suggests to sociologists to trace back steps to map social processes accurately. Contrary to other sociological approaches, 'Actors' refer to not just everyone, but in fact to everything that exists out of connections. During my workshop in the Beatrixpark for example, actors were not only Eszti, Anne-Mariken, the young girls and me - but also the pillars of stone, scissors, the rope, old clothes and the mermaid statue were acting. The term 'Network' refers to the assemblage of all connections between various points. For instance, the network in between one of the girls and a strip of old cloth she wove with. Theory is understood as the to-do guide to trace in a precise, complete and flat way the actors and network together. It maps the newly build collective.

## The difficulty of groups and collectives

What needs to be understood but not be feared about mapping social processes,

is the difficulty of it: actors are made to fit in several groups at the same time. Groups, collectives and networks are therefore not static but dynamic. Relating one group to another becomes an on-going process made up of uncertain, fragile, and ever-shifting ties. It neither stops for a moment nor will it ever reach an end conclusion. Latours' alternative perspective on sociology claims that because of this difficulty, the main sociologist has walked another path for decades. Groups and collectives are so dynamic and ever changing that sociologists decided it was up to them to define who belonged to a group and who and what did not (mostly considering humans). Stabilizing groups of course makes it easier to study them - but are the results reliable? Drawing borders around groups, in which naturally networks continuously change, will obviously exclude many actors.

## Division between fields

Because of these mistakes, not only the meaning of the social shrinks. The book 'The Shape of Things', by Vilem Flusser, a Czech philosopher and writer, explains how terms such as design, machine, technology and art were closely related to each other. Modern bourgeois culture and sociology made a sharp division in between them, which became irreversible towards the end of the 19th century.

---

Etymology of mechanics and machine, technology  
(The shape of Things, Vilem Flusser)

Mechos (Greek): denotes a device designed to deceive

Techne (Greek): art, related to a carpenter: wood is a shapeless material to which the technician gives form

Ars (the Latin equivalent of techne): a metaphor similar to English rogue's 'sight of hand

Articulum (the diminutive of ars): something is turned around the hand: ability to turn something to one's advantage. Being an artist means being a trickster above all. It links to the word artifice and

---

What once was united, splitted up in two branches: science: scientific, quantifiable and hard versus art: aesthetic, evaluative and soft. Design became the bridge in

between two: the site where art and technology come together as equals, making a new form of culture possible.

If textile can be used as a platform to connect things and design as a bridge to make a new form of culture possible, where do I, as textile designer, start? By redesigning the process of how something is made and reinventing ways of working together. This means to understand the size and dynamics of groups, while still taking into account all details: all actors (humans and non-humans, minorities, animals, materials, circumstances, things) and networks. This relativistic method of thinking will help me to create conditions that are based on including everyone and everything while remaining open to continuous change.

## Chapter 2

How to weave together Part II

Reflection upon the weaving of Berber carpets in Amekhlj

Tribes and roles



## How to weave together Part II

After having spend a couple of days in Amekhlij with the TxT department; weaving with Berber women on their carpets, cooking and doing dishes with them, playing with their children and reading on their soft carpets under the hot sun bits of Bruno Labours' Ding politik article - it was time to start up a project of my own. My own? That is perhaps not how I would describe it. I discussed with Giene Steenman (head of TxT department), who mentored me during my workshop in Amsterdam, that this seemed the right time and place to start collective weaving again. It already was happening but in the strict settings of Berber carpets. Could I do it outside, freed from the loom, and get not the women, but the children to weave with me? They were not involved in any activity with us, but were all the time hanging around, eager for interaction. Also, they didn't seem to have toys to play with.

The first sample I made, between two branches of an olive tree, turned out like something between a seat and a swing. Rachida, a woman specialized in weaving, helped me to make a warp, without me asking for her help. We didn't miss a common language to communicate in as she quickly understood my intentions. I started to weave alone, but soon two young girls joined. We wove together (they must have learned from their mothers how) and finished it in about two hours. The girls cared not only about the function of the seat but had clear preferences for colors and helped to make nicely finished ends as well. When it was done, these girls were the queens and caretakers of their new seat, and would allow the boys only to try it when they asked nicely and were very careful.

Amekhljij, Morocco. 26 March - 5 April 2017



Amekhljij, Morocco. 26 March 2017 - 5 April 2017



The last day, I planned on weaving a bigger hammock in between two olive trees. As I started to warp rope between them, again I received help. This time from the oldest woman of the village, 'grandma'. She coughed a lot and the weather was hot, so we took our time and worked patiently. The warp looked like a mess. I tried to make it more sturdy by hanging two branches with stones at the end over it. Even though it worked, it made only look worse. Grandma didn't seem very impressed by my attempt but she didn't question it either. While weaving, this time a young boy came to help me. He quickly understood how to do it and seemed totally into it, happy that he finally had learned how to weave, like his mother (this I understood by exchanging some English and French words). His brothers, nephews and friends came to help and he showed them 'how it was done'. The hammock became bigger but it took time, and it became impossible to finish it nicely because the boys were already all over it. They played so wild, jumping and hanging with fifteen at the same time on it! I thought the hammock would break but luckily it held up. The kids loved their new self-made toy and liked all the attention they received from people with camera's even more.

During a tour alongside of all TxT projects on the Berber land, Hamid El Kanbouhi (the artist who invited us there) shared a comment on my project about it having a sense of freedom in ownership, a collective made- and used object. He advised me to elaborate on this; to research on deeper levels what it means to me. He also warned me that the next day, the hammock would likely be gone because someone would take the rope to use it for something else, or sell it. I didn't mind because it already served my purpose more than I imagined.

---

## Reflection upon the weaving of Berber carpets in Amekhlj

Closely observing a production of the traditional Berber carpet - a product mainly bought by tourists - gave me a better understanding of what is going on in 'the other side' of the capitalistic world. We might not consider Morocco as part of our rich Western world but it seems to have a day task in producing for it. Do Moroccan producers know that, if we would make the same product (assuming we could live up to their craftsmanship which I doubt), we would charge at least 10 times as much for it? Do tourists, who have bought a Berber carpet, know that their traditional souvenir might not carry much traditional meaning anymore? Also here in Morocco, all is about making money. The focus is not (like ours) on investing and buying, but on producing and trading. The Moroccan patterns, colors and designs might expose beyond the stories they are supposedly telling, Morocco's position on the market.

The Berber women learned the craftsmanship and technique, as well as aesthetic patterns, colors and symbolism, from their mothers. Who learned it from their mothers, and so on. The women nowadays are not sure about the meaning of the symbols they use. Some have ideas about it, but no information from the past is saved in books and writings. Most don't know how to read or write. Most women are coming from another place in Morocco and moved to Amekhlj when they married their husband. This will never happen the other way around. While the women cook, take care of the children and weave carpets, their men work on the land. In Morocco, men weave only horizontally.

Back to carpets. Each pattern seems to have its own set of colors. The women do not recognize different emotions or feelings towards colors. They make as they were taught how. I guess they must discuss patterns and color before they start but it was unclear to us how that process normally goes. The setting when we were there - all women working collectively in one space - differs from their daily life in which they work in their own homes on vertical looms, often close to the kitchen.

---

There are no drawings. The women do not design what they make, instead they seem to work from a kind of 'Berber Aesthetic library' in their mind, which they simply translate into actual carpets. On the second day, a group of TxT students started to draw with them. They found out that the Berber women never have drawn in their life! The next day, Rachida showed us the many drawings she made the night before. She must have understood that drawing makes it possible to design what you want to create and to communicate it. The group of students started to work towards one carpet design that contained a drawing of each Berber woman. Their drawings still had a lot of Berber symbols. Not knowing what they mean must be irrelevant to them. It overpowers the expression of their culture: this is part of what binds them, what makes them Berber.

# Tribes and roles

Is language without the intention to speak still language? Are words such as 'cultural' or 'traditional' still valid when cultural expression is mainly used for commerce? Writing about this experience again brought up these questions in me. The funny thing is that this does not seem to happen to them. They are Berber women and making carpets is part of how they live.

Groups, actors, tribes, Berbers - they are in fact ambiguous words, because they set neither size nor content. The terms could be applied to a plant as well as to an individual, to all Arabs as well as my family. This is not a problem, as the vagueness of these terms makes it possible to have and to make use of various meanings.

Refreshing social ties is important to groups. Traditions are relived and re-invented, symbols re-used and redesigned. Without any kind of totem it would be difficult for a tribe to recognize members of its clan. Social expressions make all the difference because there exists no glue to keep a group together. Regardless of the lost meanings of their symbols, without them, the Berbers would have already lost their tribe. You can't compare them to a building that sometimes needs restoration because it is a movement in need of continuation.

## Why should a whole be superior to its parts?

To understand what role groups play in society and how they are handled, I found the conceptualization of the relation between parts and whole, provided by Latour in his article 'Does the body politic need a new body?' very helpful. He explains these concepts through an example of a story - the Fable of the Members and the Belly - Shakespeare's Coriolanus.

---

There was a time when all the body's members (parts), rebelled against the belly (whole), thus accused it: That only like a gulf it did remain l'th'midst

o'th'body, idle and unactive,

still cupboarding the viand, never bearing.

Like Labour with the rest. Where thóther instruments

did see and hear, devise, instruct, walk, feel.

And, mutually participate, did minister,  
Unto the appetite and affection common  
Of the whole body.

The members, who have revolted against the Senate, are reminded of the story that when members had revolted and championed their identity, the belly had brought them back to their senses by telling members thus:

‘True is it, my incorporate friends’, Quoth he; ‘That I receive  
the general food at first, which do you live upon, and fit it is,  
Because I am the storehouse and the shop, of the whole body.  
But, if you do remember, I send it through the rivers of your blood  
Even to the court, the heart, to th’ seat O’th’brain;  
Whereby they live. And though that all at once’.

---

What we can understand, even through the barrier of this Fable’s old language, is that when all body members finally co-operate (after the revolt has been squashed) there exists a whole of which they are only the obedient and functioning parts. The Belly, a super-organism (the whole that is superior to the parts) restores order again by underlining its original intention after which the parts agree to play nothing more than their limited roles without looking higher or further.

Another example is Mandeville’s Fable of the Bees from Bernard Mandeville. Long story in short: a selfish movement of a bees swarm produces ‘public benefits’ instead of producing for a superior authority. There is no super organism here, but the difference is minimal in the end, since there is still a distinction between the parts (the swarm of bees each following individually their selfish interests) and the whole (the public benefits).

## The individual versus society

The difference between these two fables is that the first runs ahead the distribution of roles, while in the second, the superior order follows automatically after the interplay of individuals. Basically, it is the difference between state and free market. The ever ongoing discussion between state and free market makes so much noise,

that it hides the fact that both rely on a parts/whole system. The problem of this system is that parts are ignorant, they have to stick to their limited role while being fully apart (individual) from one another. The whole already knows or will end up knowing what is best for the parts and how to assemble them. As it is superior, it overrules but doesn't really consider them on the individual level that each part acts upon. If we would project this theory on to the market of Berber carpets, we now understand that it doesn't matter if the Berbers make carpets for their own cultural expression or for the market - in both cases they act in limited roles. And so do tourists that buy them. As long as the tourists have their carpet and the Berbers earn money, what is there to complain about? In the interaction between trader and buyer, there is probably talk about the price, how to transport it and how to keep the carpet clean. But will they contemplate also the life of the sheep, the conditions of the workers or the cycle of the carpet once the buyer doesn't want it anymore? Looking at carpet production on a bigger scale - taking in to mind that the first carpet was made 6000 years ago - what about the amount of carpets? How many would there be right now - is anyone counting? Who dares to pose the question - what, besides creating work and earning money, is the real value of a carpet? What value does creating work and earning money have when we use it to buy more products that signals the free market that we should produce more - when existing products already are uncountable?

..In practise, we don't experience life on two levels: one for the individuals, the other for society'', as The French founder of alternative sociology Gabriel Tarde once said. The current well-known saying ..a better world starts with yourself'' can bring one only so far, as the example of state and free market illustrates that individual action is limited. We all are individuals and we constantly are part of - and shift in between- groups. As two levels form one reality, they need to be simultaneously worked on. The question remains; how to start and through which medium(s) can all the participating actors reunite?



Textísetur Blönduós, Iceland

## Chapter 3

How to weave together Part III

The importance of the textile industry in Iceland

Towards collectivity in a slow pace



## How to weave together Part III

Last summer, I spend 3 months in Iceland for my internship at a textile art residency in a remote town called Blonduos. Besides bridging between management and the artists, I had a lot of time to work on my own projects. The residency had a beautiful vertical tapestry loom which already had a warp on it, so I enthusiastically began to weave and knot in the only tapestry technique I knew: the Berber technique I learned in Morocco. Among materials I brought some Moroccan wool: a shade of light pink and a non-colored one. I first wove and knotted an outline of pink which I continued in the natural color, with the idea to weave in symbols with pink later. It didn't take long to figure out that I wouldn't get far with my small amount of wool. Also, something didn't feel right about it: I was not in Morocco anymore, but in Iceland. Should I mix Moroccan and Icelandic wool, since wool plays a very important role in this country too? How to combine the Berber technique with something that marks a stamp on it from here?

Besides working at the residency, there was not much to do. A highlight of the day could be a trip to the supermarket which had huge selection of wool. As I became afraid to use up my Moroccan wool, the tapestry was on hold. When my attempt to import wool from Morocco failed, the only thing I could do was finding out which Icelandic wool was most similar to the Moroccan, which was 'Lopi wool'. Lopi means spun yarn, and as its name reveals, it is more evenly spun and also monotone dyed than the Moroccan quality. To get comparable, uneven colors, I bought white Lopi to dye it myself. An obsession for natural dyeing completely took over my worry about the carpet. Everyday for two weeks, I gathered water from the Blanda (the river) and dyed with absolutely everything I could find: from fuchsia rose peddles (a shade of lilac) and lupine (green) to bird bones, lava stones (which unfortunately didn't work) and seaweed (amazing smell!). Shades of yellow, green, orange and purple came out. I started to play with intensity of water versus pigment to develop different tones, which I called 'families of colors'. Combining the unevenly dyed Lopi families with Moroccan wool didn't seem so odd anymore. Still, how to continue the carpet?

Blönduós, Iceland. July, August, September 2017



Blönduós, Iceland. July, August, September 2017



As I looked again at photo's and notes from Morocco, the artists around me wanted to know what I experienced there. I gave a small lecture on my experiences in Amekhlj, in which I explained that what struck me most there, were neither the Berber patterns nor their symbolism, but the way the women worked together, and how connected they were by it. Realizing again how important this was for me, I offered the artists to teach them the Berber technique by weaving with me. Each artist took their favourite shade of the green family and I demonstrated them how to knot, continuing myself in natural colored Moroccan wool. An irregular, uncontrollable pattern started to appear, which expressed not only the melting of two different cultures, but also the connection I made with both of them through all the people there. Every day I wove and sometimes it took more than a week until someone else would weave with me. This is visible by a longer absence of color. Many mistakes were being made by co-weavers, but I took what they did as a given and didn't correct anything. Also not when one didn't like green and took pink, orange or purple instead. When visitors came by to see the residency, I would show them around and invite them to take part in my project as well. And I brought the loom to the exhibitions we (artists) held at the end of every month, to open up the possibility for the people from Blonduos to (learn how to) weave together. Most of them had never worked with textile before. It resulted in a piece of carpet, full of connection, colors, knots and mistakes, made collectively by myself and the people I met there. Knots made by the changing artists every month, Johanna and Ragga (managers of the residency), children of tourists who passed by and by the mayor of the town, lifeguards of the local pool and fishermen. Besides a very personal souvenir, it became the cradle of my end project.

---

## The importance of textile industry in Iceland

Geographically, Iceland is the furthest country of Europe and is thus a very isolated island. Therefore developments have always arrived much later, for example while the first spinning wheel arrived in Europe in late 13th century, it was only introduced at the end of the 18th century in Iceland. The population has always been very small, but is growing since the sixties. Nowadays, it counts 300,000 people, which is for example, is still less than the city of Utrecht. Before 1960, there were less than 180,000 people in the whole country, which is three times the size of Netherlands. Because of the lack of manpower, sources (an isolated island covered in volcano ash doesn't provide good soil to grow - they barely have trees!) and slow transportation, Icelanders remained much longer in survival mode than other North European countries. They could only work with what they had, and mostly that were sheep. Icelandic farmers have always cared (and still do) very much for their sheep, which roam freely on the land, only to be gathered together in Autumn when their wool is shaven off. In the past, the shaving was done with self-made knives and the quality of the wool was carded and separated by hand in three categories. 'Tog' are strong outer hairs, which protect the sheep from rain and cold. This wool doesn't felt and it was originally used for over clothes, sewing threads and blankets. 'Ter' is softer hair, more closer to the skin of the sheep. It felts easily but also damages easily when it gets wet. It was used for under clothes. 'Gratt har' (grey hair) is bottom hair, which sticks out. This wasn't used because it doesn't take up color well. After separating the different kinds of hairs, they were spun into different yarns used for various purposes. Nowadays, all the wool is thrown on one pile and spun in to one yarn. The demand became too high to separate the qualities, claim the factories. Most farmers are not happy with this so-called 'development'.

Iceland's textile industry profiles itself nowadays with knitted sweaters, gloves and socks in Icelandic patterns, but knitting actually came up much later (around 1500) than weaving. In 874, the first people (Vikings from Norway) arrived in Iceland by ship and brought along a breed of Norwegian sheep and

---

knowledge on spinning and weaving on warp-weighted looms. Weaving was something fundamental in Europe. From 874 until the late 18th century woven fabric was the main currency in Iceland, in contrast with the present in which knitting is more appreciated because weaving is associated with the past of poverty and labour and has therefore drifted to the background. But in the past, Icelandic wovens had a unique quality on the European market because of the sturdy wool, the way farmers cared for their sheep and separated the hairs. This doesn't sound poor at all, but because the population was so small and they didn't have fast tools, it took an incredible long time and amount of effort before a cloth was woven and ready to be shipped and traded for something else. When Iceland finally industrialized, the resentment for weaving grew so deep that they rather focused on knitting.

#### Footnote: knowledge through experience

This information I personally gathered from lectures of Johanna, the initiator and manager of the residency but also she is a specialist in spinning and knitting and a sheep farmer; and Ragga, a specialist in weaving. These two hard working women gather all historical Icelandic cloths to preserve the techniques and knowledge of them, which are shown in the Textile museum in Blónduós. Also, I helped farmers at sheep gatherings. Once, we spend 12 hours in rainy mountains, mainly to lose half of the group we were with, due to upcoming fog. It became rather a re-gathering of people instead of gathering sheep. This is what farmers do every fall, through wind and rain to find back their sheep.

# Towards collectivity in a slow pace

By now, you have read stories about my experiences of weaving with others and observations in three countries related to textile production. Also, I have used theoretical perspectives to question why things are being produced the way they are and what roles individuals and groups play in that. What barely is addressed, are the actual wovens: the hammocks and the carpet. When making them, I focused so much on their process that I neglected the outcome. Therefore, I neglected the point of making them.

## Dingpolitik

Realizing this, I could compare the role I took as a designer to the role of a politician: trying to solve problems with a variety of solutions. Politicians are, different than me, democratically the chosen ones to do so, and too busy discussing and compromising to spend real time with their outcome too. When any created thing - may it be a hammock, a newly drawn border or a new law - is ignored, someone should speak up and ask a critical question, to prevent the thing from being neglected. Am I fit to design another carpet? Are those who cannot place themselves in the shoe of their own created thing, fit to create? Perhaps, our current system requires too much from our political Parliament. Could some things, - issues, - some objects of concern, be divided not within, but outside of democracy? What role can the thing, that binds us in the case but is often left out, play in that?

---

Etymology (from Realpolitik to Dingpolitik - Latour & Weibel)

Thing/Ding - a certain type of archaic assembly. For many centuries it has changed to the issue that brings people together because it divides them

---

If we go back to the production of carpets, what is the actual value of the carpet itself? What quality does it have in this world, what voice? To only see it as a way of making or spending money doesn't make sense to me, because so many issues of concern are involved in the process; labour, sheep, tools, transport, tradition, knowledge, to name a few. All those elements act and have an effect on our lives

and our environment. Some even lead lives too, and perhaps not only the sheep. As carpets go from one place to another, from person to person, we could regard them, and therefore any other object, as having a lifecycle of their own too. Doesn't this mean that we need to start taking them in to account, as much as the benefit someone makes by producing or selling it? Is the carpet - or any other designed thing we grow or produce to make money with - capital? In Iceland, wovens were used as currency for centuries. Let's replace those wovens for the word thing, which etymology claims that it has changed to the issue that brings people together because it divides them. If capital - in endless amount of forms- divides, it surely has a very active role. How do we act towards it? Do we acknowledge our responsibility for seeing its true value and hearing its voice? Instead of overruling things, as a whole superior to its parts (referring to Chapter 2), how do we live with them in coexistence and interact?

## What would a so-called 'object-oriented democracy' look like?

Looking for possible answers, I have read the article 'From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik', written by Bruno Latour in collaboration with Peter Weibel, an Austrian artist, curator and theoretician (2005). In the article, the two discuss projects of an art show called 'Atmospheres of Democracy' (see list of references) in which artists are thinking about redefining the role of politics, how to give importance to objects and questions of representation. Latour and Weibel propose, that '...each object or issue generates a different pattern of emotions and disruptions, of disagreements and agreements. Objects bind all of us in ways that map out a public space different from what is usually recognized as 'political'. What is at issue - the object of concern that brings together - is hardly mentioned. In a strange way, political science is mute just at the moment when objects of concern should be brought in to speak up loudly.'

The current political system tries to bring together two different meanings of the word representation. One, well known in schools of law and political science, points out the way to gather the legitimate people around some issue. A representation is faithful if the right procedures have been followed. The other, well known in technology and science, describes what the object of concern is to the eyes and ears around it. A representation is good if all observations have been accurately described. So, first a circle is drawn around the group that address the issue, for

example a council or a parliament. Secondly, it addresses the topic. But why are the two not taken together: who is to be concerned and what is to be considered? The third meaning of representation is left out. One with which artists and designers are familiar: how to represent and through which medium. On what spot do people gather to discuss their matter of concern? How should non-human actors that are involved be represented (referring back to Chapter 1)? An 'object-oriented democracy' cares for the procedure; how to bring in all relevant parties, - and for the method; how to bring the proof that needs to be discussed into the center of the debate, at the same time. In simplified words, applied on to my questions about the production of carpets: how can all producers, makers, traders and buyers be represented and assembled in one chosen place, together with a representation of the data (amount of carpets, prices, work hours, amount of sheep necessary for wool, perhaps other materials, tools, transportation costs and kilometers, impact on environment, used liters of waters, and so forth), to discuss the real value of a carpet and the future of its production?

### A global dilemma forms a global connection

The last mentioned proposal seems imaginary and beyond possibility. Yet, do we have another plan of action? Not only the parliament of politics has started to fail us, but also nature, a huge and silent parliament, crumbles down in rapid speed. It seems that nature is no longer unified enough to be a steady ground and source for the traumatic experience of humans creating their society. As humans have 'milked out' their own designed forms of sociology and politics, we do the same to nature. Yet, through our own shaped economy, we are connected on a global scale by many assemblies; such as markets, technologies, science and even the ecological crisis. We can easily accuse globalization as a cause of world problems, but we can also look at it as an already existing connection and therefore, as a starting point. To, slowly and with creativity, find ways to reassemble all actors scattered throughout the world that are involved in simultaneous products or services together, through the three forms of representation. In Iceland, I became aware that weaving together became my medium to (beyond connecting to their culture, the Icelanders to mine and the Berbers) slowly assemble and sharpen a method of working together, while we discussed and connected over the thing that we were making collectively.

No matter the differences between people, their roles on the Market and the profit they make, no matter even the difference between people and other actors: what binds us all at the moment is the ecological crisis. As ice is melting and temperatures are rising, nature is running out of time, therefore, we are running out of time. The course of time has become crucial, and neither the left nor the right side of politics is prepared to encounter it. Now that everything has become contemporary, the left and right, the rich and the poor, all need to start to think and act collectively. Imagine that we were to design an operating system all together, that deals with this huge dilemma. To overcome our differences, we need to first free ourselves from political ideas like progression, succession and revolution. We cannot continue to act upon these ideals as they do not let everyone and everything benefit and long-term affects cannot be estimated. If our existing systems, like capitalism and democracy, are not suitable to solve this huge global problem, we might as well stop pointing our fingers towards them. Instead, let's put our differences aside to collectively (sociologists and animals, carpets and Berbers!) start on building new ways based on things, problems and actions that bind us.

### Weaving together slowly

How can we go forward? I would like to propose designers, artists and politicians to start warming everyone up for very simple forms of working together. For example, weaving a carpet together. Slowly, cohabitations can grow into much fuller ones, where more things are taken into account. What and how many contemporary things can we weave together, side by side? Through which mediums? How can we keep on tracing its steps while leaving space open for change? That is progress!

# Closure

It has become a difficult task to find words that can form a suitable closure to this thesis, which every reader will understand in his or her personal way. Which is encouraged by this story, because it intends to show us that different points of view can coexist, that they are all connected and worthy to be heard or read.

In the end, I am not entirely sure until what extent I am the writer of this essay. At some point, and it is hard to trace back exactly when it happened, it seems as though it started to have a voice of its own. It dawned on me that even written material can start to lead its own life. Or did I consciously choose to let that happen? I find there is a lot of beauty and possibility in the process of letting go the control we humans seem to want to have in every step of something we create. For example, the moment that you stop following precisely a recipe of a cookbook and you start cooking with your heart open to your desire and your senses open to the flavour, the smell, the texture and the colors of the food. If then, something special happens, it is because you allowed it to: you connected directly to the food and gave it space to react upon you and your surroundings in return. Though, an open and unified way of working is no guarantee for success. Luckily everyone will survive a slightly less tasty meal. However, in the case of a melting iceberg that causes floods, the issue itself will make the inhabitants of the affected area cooperate naturally to find their possible way out. Desperate times call for collective action.

Another notion worth mentioning is one about the theories that I used to substantiate my arguments. Latours' perspective has helped me to understand the intention of my work, and therefore my place as a textile designer and artist, better. However, I found a huge contradiction in his text being full of care about the world with everyone and everything in it, but written so academically that it's access is limited. Not everyone will be able to imagine their role in the world he proposes through his writings. What helps, in my point of view, is when texts are not only read but rewritten again, may it be in a paper or a song, through a theatre script or an art exhibition. Perhaps, art and design can offer the missing bridge here. I regard it as important for fields such as art, design and science, to grow closer again; as they truly can supplement each other.

The essence of Latours' words have become entangled with my own, and together they provide a possibility to practice our level of empathy. Which can be linked back to my interest in sustainability. Can you put yourself in the shoes of the maker of your carpet, who weaves and knots 9 hours a day? Can you be the shepherd who shaves 300 sheep with a knife under the Mediterranean hot sun? Are you the carpet which is standing, rolled up and forgotten, on the floor of a dusty attic? If you can not imagine, I would like to warmly invite you to take a seat and weave with me. If you do not wish to imagine, well then, perhaps you should never buy a carpet.

---

## List of references

Latour, Bruno. (2005). Reassembling the social: An introduction to actor-network-theory. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Flusser, Vilem. Co-auteur: Anthony Mathews (1999). The Shape of Things - A philosophy of design. Reaktion Books Ltd

Latour, Bruno & Weibel, Peter. (2005 From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik - An introduction to making things public -Atmospheres of Democracy catalogue of the show at ZKM, MIT Press, 2005. Published on [bruno-latour.fr](http://bruno-latour.fr)

Latour, Bruno. (2016). Does the Body Politic Need a New Body? Yusko Ward-Phillips lecture, University of Notre Dame, 3rd of November 2016. Published on [bruno-latour.fr](http://bruno-latour.fr)

Sjoukje Colenbrander. (2010). Zolang de weefkunst bloeit : zijdeveverijen in Amsterdam en Haarlem, 1585-1750. Academic Thesis published on [historischcentrumoverijssel.nl](http://historischcentrumoverijssel.nl)

Jantiene van Elk. Interview in library of Textile museum Tilburg. 02-02-2018.

Johan Holslag. Europese smaak als wapen, VPRO tegenlicht, 19-10-2014  
Published on [vpro.nl/programmas/tegenlicht](http://vpro.nl/programmas/tegenlicht)

Morocco. (27-03 - 05-04 2017). Travel of TxT department. Invitation to Amekhlj by Hamid El Kanbouhi. Lectures of Bert Flint and Eric van Hove.

Textilsetur Blonduos Iceland (06-07 - 30-09 2017) Lectures of Ragnheidur Porsdottir and Johanna Palmadottir, in collaboration with Textile Museum Blonduos.



Shokran

Takk Fyrir

Thank you

Dank je

To all places and people that have welcomed me with open arms during the writing of my thesis and the journey of my graduation project. I am forever grateful to my family, friends and teachers that have helped and supported me through many years of study.

In regards to this paper, some names should be mentioned. First of all, Joke Robaard and Mariette Wijne, thank you for guiding and inspiring me to write this thesis. Grazie to my friend and professor of Social Sciences, Davide, for giving me feedback as if I was a student of his own. A shout out to Marlies for being a proof reader, my care taker and my second sister at home. Thank you to Giene Steenman and Anne-Mariken Raukema, who guided me through my first weaving workshop in the Beatrixpark, Amsterdam. Jantiene van Elk, librarian of the Textile Museum in Tilburg, your wise words and references helped this paper. Hamid El Kanbouhi, you invited and arranged to get me to the Berber village Amekhlij in Morocco twice. Shokran to Rachida, Mohamed and Hafida, and all the others of the Berber Tribe in Amekhlij, for making me feel at home, giving me food, for working with me and teaching me how to sing Berber and how to bake bread. Ibrahim, your translations from Berber to English and our interesting conversations helped me a lot. Aziz, there won't be a carpet (or a kimono) without our epic hunts for yarn through the Medina. Also you have shown me what Moroccan life is about and taught me about rituals, ramadam and religion. Your friendship means a lot. Takk to Johanna and Ragga, two strong and kind women whose work of collecting and maintaining knowledge upon their beloved Icelandic textiles really enriched this essay. I hope your country will recognize the importance of what you two are doing more.

Lastly, I am very, very thankful to all people who wove with me. It has been an absolute blast to work closely besides a lot of people and to listen to the many intimate stories that were shared. To hear what a particular color or working with their hands meant for someone, or to just weave together in silence and see someone getting carried away, not concerned anymore about time. If you are not sure what I am talking about, let's hope that you will find out soon and the future will grant us a moment to weave and chat together.

How to weave together  
by Rosa Smits

Gerrit Rietveld Academie  
TxT graduation 2018

Head of Department:  
Giene Steenman

Thesis guiders:  
Joke Robaard  
Mariette Wijne  
Davide Beraldo

Proof reader:  
Marlies van Stolk

Graphic Design:  
Rosa Smits

A photograph of a notebook page. On the left side, there is a hand-drawn diagram of a weaving loom with threads crossing to form a star-like pattern. To the right of the diagram, a piece of woven fabric is attached to the page. The fabric is made of wool and is divided into two main sections: a larger, reddish-brown section on top and a smaller, yellow-green section on the bottom. The threads are held in place by white vertical strips. The notebook has a red cover visible on the right edge.

29 of June 2017.

To kill time during a hot bustrip, I taught my Moroccan friend Aziz how to weave on a piece of cardboard. Although he works with yarn, he has never done this before. We weave alongside of each other, creating our own language out of the same material, while we continuously talk and explore all the differences between our lives and cultures among things.