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“My past and present life
excites both wonder and anguish
and you expect me to be interested in another’s tale?
Isn’t the review of one’s personal history
the best undertaking in the world?
...The story of my life is so weighty
and replete with difficult situations that I couldn’t finish recounting it
even if I spent every hour of an entire year.
Besides, it alternates so rapidly between sorrow and laughter
that it’s bound to perplex the listener.”
(Amak Mahmoodian in Zanjir, 2019)



ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the use of multiple life stories in combination with textiles as a learning tool within the context of the 'Untitled' space at the Witte de With Center of Contemporary Art in order to challenge the notion of 'an expected singular story' in knowledge-based institutions. By examining the concept of shifting identity proposed by Stuart Hall, social/narrative encounters and learning by I.F. Goodson and embedded pedagogies/transformational learning by bell hooks, I clarify the process that learning, life stories and transformation go through when they are combined. As an educator confronted with these issues in a society where human relationships and identities are becoming more complex, I use textiles, poems and podcasts as a visual, transformative dialogue to bridge these complexities. This thesis employs four major research strategies: theoretical inquiry, the work of textile artists, my own educational, practice-led textile research and personal experiences. Through the use of textiles and poems to stimulate visual transformational dialogues, it becomes evident that safe spaces and sufficient periods of time are of major importance in order to communicate lived experiences.

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“I give you the end of a golden string;
Only wind it into a ball:
It will lead you in at Heaven’s gate
Built in Jerusalem’s wall.”

(William Blake, Jerusalem, 1815)

INTRODUCTION

“The threads that touch seem the same, but the extremes are distant, as often after a rainstorm, the expanse of the sky, struck by the sunlight, is stained by a rainbow in one vast arch, in which a thousand separate colours shine, but the eye itself still cannot see the transition. They are inserted, lasting threads of gold and an ancient tale is spun in the web.”

(Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book VI, *Arachne spins her winning cloth*, in Kassia St Claire, 2019)

Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* tells about the origin of the world through the eyes of the ancient Western people. Unlike most myths, it does not follow the narrative arc of one hero and one storyline, but is a succession of different stories. In this narrative poem, Ovid shows us the diverse lives of gods and goddesses who are continually undergoing metamorphosis.

The first time you read this poem, it is difficult, indeed almost impossible, to see or recognise the separate storylines in the narrative. After the second or third reading, however, you start to identify the different threads. The story of humanity, like that of the cosmos, is not definitely established, nor will it ever be. It is subject to continuous change and cannot be captured in one storyline seen through the eyes of Westerners. Instead, it should be considered as a woven blanket of personal stories, in which each individual can be seen as a thread that must be interwoven with other threads. *Metamorphoses* is an early Western example of how narratives can be intricately threaded with one another. However, it seems like this interweaving of multiple narratives within storytelling is often forgotten. That does not mean that we human beings have an innate blind spot that makes us close our eyes to these counter-narratives.

As Plato said: “Then we must, first of all, it seems, supervise the story-tellers, we’ll select their stories whenever they are fine and beautiful and reject them when they aren’t. And we’ll persuade nurses and mothers to tell their children the ones we have selected since they will shape their children’s souls with stories much more than they will shape their bodies by handling them.” (Plato, *Republic*, Book 2, 377c. in Goodson, 2011)

Just like with weaving or sewing, the maker decides which thread and which colour to use. Ovid uses a golden thread. He strings and sews different stories together, creating a tapestry that contributes to the metamorphoses of the characters he describes. The strung-together individuals tell a complete story that he sees as continuously capable of being changed. This precisely defines the relationship between textiles and human beings.

My relationship with textiles has always been close-knit. A couple of years ago my mother gave me a sewing box that belonged to my grandmother. The box evoked intimate memories. It reminded me of a time when my grandmother did not have dementia and she was still able to sew. Opening it showed me how I have looked at her differently over the past few years. For a moment, my recent mental picture of her receded and she transformed back into the woman who could elevate sewing to something divine. We always had a special way of communicating, in which she taught me how to sew, how to manipulate pieces of fabric and transform them into clothing. Since I was able to wear them, that transformation was immediately visible on my body. The clothes I made and wore represented the different stories of my life.

As an educator in arts and history in secondary education and within various cultural institutions in Rotterdam, people often ask me: “What inspires you in your work?” My answer has always been: “I aspire to tell stories.” I have been searching for ways to do so all my life. Working with a diverse range of people in different learning situations, I have never striven to provide them with facts but with learning tools that speak to the imagination, and therefore create a transformation in their personal awareness. In my work over the last five years, I came across the fact that in most spaces we unfortunately communicate and teach with the idea that a single narrative exists. According to the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a one-sided way of storytelling creates the expectation of a singular story. By embodying this singular story, people might have the idea that they have to disregard their personal experiences in order to grow as a human being, often rejecting the ones that do not fit into the expected narration. But aren't we as humans able to not only embody the expected, singular story but also a multiplicity of stories? Therefore, it is my intention to demonstrate that the use of personal stories within education can be transformative for someone's personal awareness.

The gift of the sewing box reminded me of how our lives had begun so differently and yet were 'sewn together', in the same way that Ovid uses a golden thread. It made us step away from the expected, singular story and create a dialogue. Because of this, a continuous transformation related to textiles took place. The act of sewing was a learning tool for me, through which I could express myself and tell a story. The same was true for my grandmother: this was her way of communicating.

By sharing memories, we embodied each other's stories. Reflecting upon this process made me ask myself: “What can I do with this in my profession?” That ultimately brought me to my research question: How can I use textiles as a way of telling life stories to create visual transformative dialogues within different learning spaces, which can lead to a personal rejection of the expected and singular story?

In order to answer my research question, I will tell this story through four strategies: theoretical inquiry, my educational practice-led research on textile, the work of textile artists, and personal experiences. In my first chapter, I will outline a theoretical framework for identity and possible transformative pedagogies. In order to understand how people might have fixed identities, I will dive into the notion of identity in relation to life stories and personal experiences. To clarify this, I will examine the concept of 'shifting identity' elucidated by Stuart Hall, David Held, & Tony McGrew in their book *Modernity and its Futures*, 1992. With a clear notion of their approach, I shall proceed by comparing it to the concept of 'narrative identity' explained by I.F. Goodson in the book *Narrative Pedagogy, Life History and Learning*, 2011.

Documenting and telling a personal life experience contributes to the process of remembering and the ways in which we speak about memories, reflect upon them and communicate them to others.

This theoretical framework creates the foundation for the rest of the chapter, in which I will highlight possible pedagogies in which personal experiences can be used as a learning tool. I do this with the help of bell hooks's¹ *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, in which she presents her vision of education, and I.F. Goodson's *Narrative Pedagogy, Life History and Learning*. Both scholars discuss creating certain spaces and conditions that allow personal experiences to become a source of learning.

In my second chapter, I will describe the act of sewing as done by individuals and collectives. Also important here is the relation between transformative learning in personal and collective awareness in both private and public spaces. It becomes interesting when this idea of transformative learning as a whole fuses with the possible social function of textiles. Finally, in my concluding chapter I will discuss and critically reflect upon my textile project hosted by the Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art.

By collecting, organizing and presenting all these theories, personal stories and objects, I hope I will be able to weave a new story in which I have processed my questions and let them flourish in their own light

¹ bell hooks does not use capital letters in her name to distance herself from her position as an authority.

“Your face is illuminated with this white linen. Your body is blooming with the green linen. You unite with the seshed-linen and overthrow your foe. You hold the red linen in its moment... These clothes woven by Isis and spun by Nephthys, they fit you, they cover your body, they remove your opponents from you.”

(Offer inscription at the temple of Horus, Edfu, first century BC., in Kasia St Claire, 2019)

I. LIFESTORIES AND THREADS

In this chapter, I will outline a theoretical framework: firstly around the notion of identity through life experiences and secondly around the concept of transformative learning. Therefore, the chapter is divided in two parts. In the first, I dive into the notions of identity and life-story research. By elaborating on the idea of life-story research, I hope to point out why this might play an important role in shaping an identity. For this reason, my theoretical framework in the first part will rely on *Narrative Pedagogy, Life History and Learning* by I.G. Goodson as well as 'Shifting Identity – The Question of Cultural Identity' from *Modernity and its Futures* by Stuart Hall, David Held, & Tony McGrew, and also personal experiences. In the second part of this chapter, I will outline a pedagogical framework around the notion of transformative and narrative learning. Here the theory is based on the ideas of learning presented in *Teaching to Transgress – Education as a Practice of Freedom* by bell Hooks, and the concept of 'narrative learning' by I.G. Goodson.

II. A STORY ON LIFE: STORYTELLING, IDENTITY AND SINGULAR STORYTELLING

When I was a young child, people told me that I spoke Dutch without an accent. They were generally surprised to find out I did not wholly conform to their idea of how people of colour express themselves in the Dutch language. The surprising part of this story was that I always kept wondering how they thought I should have spoken as a person of colour in the Netherlands. Did they perceive me as exotic as opposed to simply being Dutch? I have seen this experience echoed by others. In a conversation I had with an art student of Surinamese origin, he talked about his frustration at having notions about his identity imposed upon him at the art academy. During our conversation, we noticed many similarities in how we both were stereotyped within a social construct. Although this art student and I are both minorities in our immediate surroundings, it is essential to mention that not only minorities, but also every human being in the world experiences these imposed, fixed identities. The unique characteristics of one's life often are forgotten, since we have a tendency to consistently conform to what Adichie calls 'the expected and singular story'.

Even though there are different perspectives on identity, which often creates confusion about what the various notions of identity exactly comprise, I intend to first base this argument on British-Jamaican sociologist Stuart Hall's theory of identity. As described in the book *Modernity and its Futures*, this unified story is based on a post-modernistic approach to the *homo universalis*.

“Identity, in this sociological conception, bridges the gap between the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’ – between the personal and the public worlds. The fact that we project ‘ourselves’ into these cultural identities, at the same time internalizing their meanings and values, making them ‘part of us’, helps to align our subjective feelings with the objective places we occupy in the social and cultural world” (Stuart Hall, 1992, p 276). The effect of this is to cause people to appropriate cultural values and norms from dominant systems and ideas and to act accordingly. This makes human behaviour predictable and homogeneous. As soon as one does not conform to this perspective, it becomes difficult to cope. Therefore, it is essential to realise how we are expected to embody certain stereotypes and identities that are homogeneous and restricted.

“Identity thus stitches (or, to use a current medical metaphor, ‘sutures’) the subject into the structure. It stabilizes both subjects and the cultural worlds they inhabit, making both reciprocally more unified and predictable” (Hall, 1992, p. 276).

Acting and thinking according to the idea of an expected and singular story makes us forget the human aspect between people all over the world, and emphasises how we are different. “Therefore conforming ourselves to this narration actually shows how vulnerable we are as persons” (Adichie, 2019). In my opinion, the sensitivities of being vulnerable underlie people’s personal experiences. We embody these experiences, but when we regard them as socially unfavourable, we put them deeply away. Expressions of these suppressed experiences occur in different ways – namely in the clothing we wear, the people with whom we create relationships or the professions we practice.

“Identity [can be seen as] a sociological conception that bridges the gap between the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’ – between the personal and the public worlds” (Hall, 1992, p 276).

For example, when I look at my grandmother's life, she expressed herself through fabric and sewing instead of words. As a twelve-year-old girl, she had to work as a housekeeper in a local doctor's household because fourteen mouths had to be fed at home. Marriage to my grandfather was a step towards a new life in which she could take control over her actions as a homemaker. Although my grandfather was the wage earner and women were not meant to study or have a job, she managed to indirectly share her experiences with the outside world, namely through her sewing. My grandmother's example is one of many in which people embody the self according to social expectations or an 'expected, singular story'.

I regard identity and life narrative as intrinsically connected. British professor of learning theory and psychologist I.F. Goodson confirms this idea in his book, *Narrative Pedagogy, Life History and Learning*. We might look physically different, but a cosmopolitan view of human behaviour dominates how we approach certain things in life. Therefore, we keep shaping our identities to conform to a single story, a single set of morals and values. Not being aware of this, we might lose sight of the personal and unique characters in our everyday surroundings. When a singular and expected story is the norm, people narrate their lives in an attempt to achieve coherence with a dominant notion of narrative identity. This definition can be explained as a "statement about an individual or a group of people in terms of 'who did what'; who is the agent, the author?" (Goodson, 2011, p.7). Within this concept, we have to distinguish between the 'ipse-identity' and the 'idem-identity'. Together, these two create the narrative identity. The idem-identity can be described as 'the persisting self' and includes the physical aspects: specifically, the genes every person is born with; whereas the ipse-identity is selfhood and focuses on the question: Who am I?

Hall also claims that "a fully unified, completed, secure and coherent identity is a fantasy" (Hall, 1992, p. 276). Because of the events in our lives and the people we meet, our bodies keep shifting through different spaces and social encounters. If we do not acknowledge this process, people will constantly be shifting between conformation and rejection, which can create confusion in the shaping of one's identity. Therefore, both Goodson and Hall think that different life experiences, fragmentation, and sharing social encounters are the main aspects in shaping identities. Moreover, they think that approaching identity through this idea is essential for human beings in the growing complexity of the world we live in. Hall writes, "If we feel we have a unified identity from birth to death, it is only because we construct a comforting story or narrative of the self about ourselves" (Hall 1990, in *Modernity and its Futures*, 1992, p.277). This way of socially constructing identities does not stimulate dialogues, and consequently people will stop having them.

Building identities through the notion of a shifting narrative identity is not only based on the aspects we are born with, but also mostly around the experiences we have in life. Reflecting on this process is what Goodson defines as 'narrative telling', whereas Hall calls this a 'shifting identity'. Ultimately this process helps build up a narrative identity. The fragmentation in narrative telling can therefore be considered a narrative encounter. "In the building up of a life narrative, there are no clear steps to follow. They are fragmented and ambiguous" (Goodson, 2011, p.42). We don't have the same lives, but we share personal experiences in shared spaces.

Some personal experiences relate to others in our lives, and we need time to process and embody these experiences in order to shape our identities. With all these firm social constructs in society, I wonder if we might be losing tangible ways of expressing ourselves as individuals and therefore ceasing to pursue acts of listening. Thus weakening the meaning-making of lived experiences. I think we need these lived experiences in order to grow as human beings but also to bridge current complexities in the world we live in.

I.II THREADS OF LEARNING-A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ON TRANSFORMATIVE AND NARRATIVE LEARNING

In my family it is known that my grandmother had one dream: to become a teacher. She believed it was a noble profession. As a child, I was always intrigued by her intelligence and creativity. Without having had the opportunity to study, she was nevertheless able to learn in her own way. But what I think is more important here is that she was able to teach me about life – a crucial element that I did not learn in school or in places that we usually consider to be knowledge-based institutions. Looking back on my life so far, I see that I have learned through the changes that I have gone through. Shifting from one phase to another in various contexts and living environments has made me realise that I am not a person who conforms to one identity. When it comes to my profession, I have observed that it has constantly been subject to change: going from historian to educator, to an educator using art as a tool for learning. I approach this interdisciplinary profession as a way of learning not only about myself but also about the world around me. Every situation in which I have been has caused a transformation in my personal awareness. It has made me realise that learning does not only happen in the classroom but also through social encounters with others, lived experiences, and how these represent us.

So, what do we consider 'learning' to be? As the American pedagogue and cultural critic bell hooks mentions in her book, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, learning is also about life practice (hooks, 1994 p.15). While hooks is also an inspiration for many artists and philosophers as well as educators and artist educators like myself, I feel it is important to mention her ideas within the context of education. She strives to create a conscious transformation in personal awareness around the notion of becoming. I regard her as one of those pedagogues who use specific approaches that touch me both as a human being and as a teacher. She is a strong proponent of letting go of restrictive rules within educational institutions. In *Teaching to Transgress*, she explains how she steps away from boundaries and rules in the classroom in order to provide space for personal experiences and emotions, which we may not consider or regard as knowledge within classrooms. This transforming idea of education is highly inspirational for my own practice as an educator.

As a black woman, and later as a black teacher at prestigious universities in America, hooks experienced that the black student was always seen as an interloper. Because of this, she felt that she did not belong in the classroom, since she could not fully be herself.

“That shift from beloved, all-black schools to white schools where black students were always seen as interlopers, as not really belonging, taught me the difference between education as the practice of freedom and education that merely strives to reinforce domination” (*Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, bell hooks, 1994, p.4).

As hooks acknowledges, it is inevitable that we, as individuals, take our personal experiences and views into the classroom. Nonetheless, I have continued to see that personal histories and experiences are undervalued. Even though we approach specific intelligence through our own experiences, these histories are often not allowed as indicators for learning within the classroom, due to lack of time (or as some colleagues of mine would say, “a classroom is not the place to discuss personal visions”). It is my opinion that the dominating construct of knowledge in education emphasizes our differences. The problem is not diversity, but rather the lack of acknowledging it. Although hooks is primarily concerned with the differences between black and white students in America, this idea of a dominating knowledge in the classroom is certainly important when it comes to my thoughts about education. Taking your personal experiences with you is related to all of your personal characteristics, such as race, gender and physical appearance. When the dominant approach to learning is and remains the norm within education, students will have to adhere to one view of norms and values within the classroom. This also applies to the expected singular story to which we conform in society. When the circumstances for learning and developing as a human being in the classroom are extremely restrictive, it becomes a closed environment. Therefore, there will be no space for students or people to develop as independent thinkers who are also able to critically reflect on themselves, the world and their position within it. Every student, in a classroom in particular, will always have to adapt to the domination of an expected singular story. The consequence of this is that students are again continually shifting between conformation and rejection.

(By way of explanation, hooks' vision of education promotes a classroom where there is space for lived personal experiences and emotions. These are given an essential position as knowledge to be learned from and built upon.)

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Leaving behind the restricted ideas on education shows that people have personal expertise, both physically and emotionally, that is just as impressive as what can be found in academic books. While these ideas about education are probably familiar and perhaps inspiring to many teachers in theory, creating such learning environments in which a non-dominant form of knowledge can be shared is often a challenge in practice. According to hooks, this can among other things arise through our interest in the other, in hearing different voices and acknowledging someone else's presence. She writes:

"Since the vast majority of students learn through conservative, traditional educational practices and concern themselves only with the presence of the professor, any radical pedagogy must insist that everyone's presence is acknowledged. To begin, the professor must genuinely value everyone's presence. There must be an ongoing recognition that everyone influences the classroom dynamic, that everyone contributes. These contributions are resources." (hooks, 1994, p.15).

She elaborates further by saying: "The banking system of education (based on the assumption that memorizing information and regurgitating it represented gaining knowledge that could be deposited, stored and used at a later date) did not interest me" (hooks, 1994, p.15). By engaging with the whole student and the depth of who they are, learning is an embedded process rather than purely abstract. Inspired by the ideas of education held by Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh, hooks also claims that this holistic approach of human nature emphasises wholeness, a union of mind, body, and spirit.

This holistic approach can only be achieved if students and professors consider each other as whole human beings, who are not striving for knowledge out of books, but learning about how to live in the world.

"Urging all of us to open our minds and hearts so that we can know beyond the boundaries of what is acceptable, so that we can think and rethink, so that we can create new visions, I celebrate teaching that enables transgressions – a movement against and beyond boundaries. It is that movement which makes education the practice of freedom" (hooks, 1994, p.19).

I think bell hooks shows how education can be seen as a personal journey wherein meaning-making, transformation, reflection and human becoming are closely connected to each other. Through this model of engagement, students learn to understand normative pressures and potentially can transgress them. Her notion of learning thus brings me back to Goodson's 'life-story pedagogy' mentioned in the first chapter. His thoughts on learning show similarities with hooks's ideas. Besides being a professor at the University of Brighton he also works with different communities in and around the city. He regards the pedagogical aspects of his theory as a third voice, which is the collaboration between the people involved in the narrative encounter. This collaboration mostly occurs in the public sphere. Since we spend a large part of our time in this space as individuals, I believe his ideas about learning are significant if one wishes to step away from a singular vision of knowledge. Namely, he implies that learning is about human development or human becoming, which involves an understanding of oneself that is appropriately related to the life one lives. Whenever this personal process is acknowledged, a person is capable of understanding their relation to the world.

“To be a person is not only to be connected to the narrative, but more importantly, it is to be connected to how a person lives his life in relation to that narrative” (Goodson, 2011, p.114).

This enables a person to learn from within, a goal that most educators pursue in learning situations. In my grandmother’s case, she lived her life according to the social constructs of her time. Looking back on her life, there was no such thing as right or wrong, but rather a matter of understanding individual behaviour within a particular society. The reflective approach to this process, by examining the outcomes, might be vital to the telling of one’s life and an individual way of being (Goodson, 2011, p.114). He defines this process as ‘narrative learning’. In his opinion, life experiences are therefore resources from which to learn. According to him, the concept of narrative learning is related to human nature and disposition. Understanding your life narrative and acknowledging it as a learning tool does not come easily to everyone. Giving space to this process is highly related to the context people live or grow up in. A human being is not only embedded in a web of relationships with the self and others, but also shows a relationship between personal awareness that can undergo a transformation, and individual responsibility and engagement in the world (Goodson, 2011, p.115). Strictly speaking, he implies here that learning is about understanding yourself in relation to the narrative construct we live in. But it is also about personal engagement in this world. The changes in personal awareness that occur through this reflective approach are profoundly transformative in a way that makes sense to each individual. Therefore narrative learning and transformation need not be a disorienting dilemma. Becoming aware of specific events can be transformative in itself. He writes further that the telling of one’s life story is consequently related to interpretation. Seeing a person and their life as a text or a story can be problematic, because there is the danger of losing sight of human subjectivity and agency (Goodson, 2011, p.118).

Yet humans are capable of reconstructing their personal narrative and of having new insights through intense dialogues on this interpretation. He calls this process ‘reframing’. To strengthen this idea, he believes that it is crucial to create a place where dialogue and interpretation can be given space. Within this space, an internal conversation takes place between the different voices one has within oneself. A person acts upon these different voices, and each of these voices holds a different authority (Goodson, 2011, p.119). He notes:

“The process of reframing starts from an internal negotiation with these different voices. This results in decision-making in terms of what constituted his/her commanding voice at the time. This internal conversion can then lead to a shift of voice in the life story” (Goodson, 2011, p.119)..

Whenever this process exists, learning is naturally involved, which creates a transformation in how we look at our own lives and the world we live in. He writes:

“Narrative learning is a lifelong process. It is about consolidating. Narrative learning has an open agenda, and narrative learning draws heavily from one’s life and lived experience as well as depends on the individual’s narrative characters, nature of his/her life’s vision and life course stage and age” (Goodson, 2011 p.118).

Narrative learning is not problem-focused but instead raises the question: What can we or I do with it? Asking this question results in a patchwork of meaningful life experiences, with each piece helping to build up the whole picture of him or herself as a person (Goodson, 2011, p.2018).

Both Goodson and hooks are searching for methodologies in which people can become whole human beings by focusing on life experiences. Both scholars think that dialogues and space are essential in order for this personal transformation to take place. Although hooks works within educational institutions, her approach to learning is different than Goodson's; she emphasises and acknowledges that personal experiences are resources to learn through. By doing this, we can move towards embodied knowledge within classrooms or other places that evoke a learning situation. Therefore, I think it is important to go one step further than propelling a transformation in the self through intense dialogues. I would like to suggest a way of learning that is transformative and yet tangible, embodied in a physical medium. Both my grandmother and I found this way of learning through the use of textile. Combining the abstract element of learning and the tangible element of textile not only encourages moments of reflection during the process of making but also creates a visual language for communication. Just like textiles, learning only gains meaning when it is shared with other people and creates a transformation in someone's awareness of ways of being. By doing this we might be better capable of embodying knowledge.

“You cut a length of thread, knot one end and pull the other end through the eye of the needle. You take a piece of fabric and push your needle into the side of the cloth, then pull it out on the other until it reaches the knot. You leave space. You push your needle back through the fabric and pull it out on the other side. You continue until you have made a line or a curve, or wave of stitches. That is all there is: thread, needle, fabric and the patterns the thread makes. This is sewing.”
(Claire Hunter, *Threads of Life- A History of the World Through the Eye of a Needle*, 2019, p.1.)

II. UNRAVELED TEXTILES

To underpin my ideas on identity, narrative telling and transformative and narrative learning, I aim to outline clear evidence of two textile projects where this medium held an important position in the process of transformation and narrating. Firstly, I shall detail two projects wherein textiles were collectively made and embodied personal histories, knowledge and emotions. Through these examples, I shall elaborate on Goodson's notion of reframing in the context of textile.

II.I PERSONALISED TEXTILES

Both of my grandmothers familiarized me with sewing not long after I took my first footsteps. Why clothing and textile have always fascinated me so much is something that I still do not fully understand. It is interesting to reflect on my life and to base my clothing choices on specific phases of it and events that occur. Wearing these clothes has always had a personal aspect, with chosen fabrics only coming alive when I step into the outside world and encounter others. I have observed that textiles constantly surround us. We wake up around textiles and we go to bed with them. They determine our identity, our representations, our life, our experiences, our origins and our social position, but most of all they protect our human body. Entire communities can be created around textiles; the medium is as varied as human beings and therefore has multiple voices. When we consider a human utterance to be beautiful, it is often one that evokes emotions. As human beings, we need emotions to understand lived experiences. I think that embodied textiles can help us in mediating personal emotions that often occur when we talk about lived experiences. Hence, I find it intriguing to notice that the craft of textiles often is connected with safe spaces, environments in which people can explore ideas and express themselves in a context with well-understood ground rules for conversation (Palfrey, 2017, p.20). As a child, I regularly searched for calmness and intimacy. Only through these two states of being was I able to heal, learn and deal with my past. My active search for such a place brought me to the world of textiles. Tinkering with fabrics and stitches were crucial to creating a safe space and processing lived experiences

The book *Strange Material: Storytelling through Textiles* by Leanne Prain discusses the relationship between textiles and safe spaces. She notes that textiles might be selected at random as a surface on which to tell a story, but the working process cannot be edited. One experiences a story word by word. The same thing happens when we design textiles. This is a time-consuming activity. Every stitch is thoughtfully placed on the fabric and there are rules one must follow in order to construct a fabric. The whole cloth ultimately tells a story. On that account, the fabric offers thus a familiar space within which to share stories that need unravelling. During the process of making and unravelling, there is no wrong way to tell a story on a cloth. The recent research of British-Lebanese curator and writer Rachel Dedman, *Labour of Love*, (Dedman, 2018)(p.22-23), is a perfect example of how textiles tell stories that cannot be edited. In her examination of the embroidery on garments of Palestinian women who were living in different refugee camps a tangible history of Palestine unfolds through the use of clothing. The crafters created a safe space to express their experiences by using not a pen but an embroidery needle. Dedman collected 100 historic dresses and accessories that visualize cultural elements from every region of Palestine.

These dresses range from militant, nationalistic Intifada dresses that rendered women's bodies active sites of political resistance during the first uprising to a dress donated by one woman to another after the Nakba (Palestinian War 1948), patched with cloth from a sack of flour donated by UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) (*Labour of Love*, 2018). The 'Intifada dresses' combine traditional motifs with rifles, maps and political slogans and were embroidered by women in protest and solidarity during the First Intifada (Dream-ideamachine, 2018).

Embroidery is an important element of the Palestinian culture of traditional clothing. This was further stimulated by Inaash al-Mukhayyam, a foundation that provided Palestinian women a source of income through the selling of their embroidery after the Nakba, the exodus of 1948 in the wake of the founding of the State of Israel (Dream-ideamachine, 2018). Layered with emotional meaning, their embroidery work became tactile cloths of resistance and symbols of reunion; eventually, they became acts of repossession.

This story shows a constant shift in the function of textiles. Not only are the textiles themselves transformative because of the different contexts in which they were made, but also the meanings that are sewn into them. Emotions are essential aspects of the process of creating these textiles.. Reflecting or talking about these emotions might accordingly be transformative. A study of these cloths nowadays reveals individual and collective memories that concerned every Palestinian. The embroidery patterns and decorations are a means of bringing together, at least symbolically, a diasporic culture.



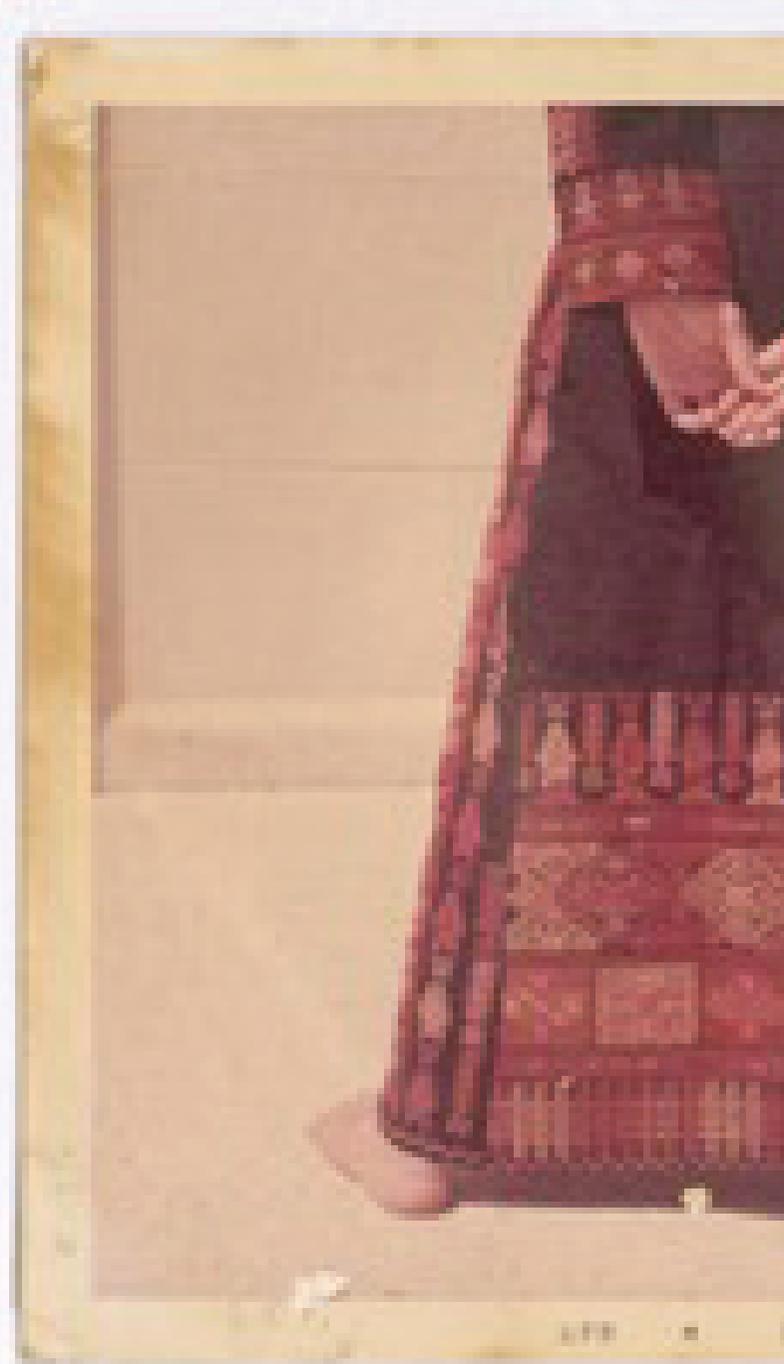
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3.





4.

The work of contemporary Belgian/Croatian artist Hana Miletic (Miletic, 2017)(p.28-31) is another beautiful example of storytelling and safe spaces in relation to textiles. Through her audio installation 'txt Is Not Written Plain', she created a safe space for a group of refugee women to share their stories while making felt carpets. During the workshops, the women were asked to recite poems that were related to their experiences as refugee women in Belgium. What I find interesting about the collective making process is both the outcome and the process itself. Analysing Miletic's work as an outsider, I cannot exactly know what happened during that process; the artist chose not to document this. Consequently, I can only speculate that a potential intimacy was revealed where the women jointly constructed a physical story. Looking at the act of collective making might ensure that narrative encounters between stories and people can take place. This is also the case in the work of the Gee's Bend women in Alabama, United States of America (*While I Yet Live*, 2018). By creating quilts together, the life experiences of these women become visible in their community. The songs that the women sing strengthen the process of making(Gee's Bend)(p. 33-34). I consider this as a strategy that evokes individual and collective memories. The quilts not only contain personal and authentic stories but also collective expressions of the love of life in a rural community.

In both stories, the makers connect verbal storytelling with visual storytelling through the use of text and textiles. Within Miletic's workshops, the text was constructed in the same way as how people work with textiles. Thus this is a medium that needs to be designed with tenderness and care. Notably, the meaning of the poems was unravelled because it was visualised by the physical medium, felting. By looking at the metaphors in the carpets for life experiences, emotions, traditional and personal views, one could see that the relation between the poems and the textiles showed a multiplicity of personal stories with a singular outcome. For this reason, the process might have retained an authenticity that may be difficult for an outsider to grasp. However, a potential transformation in the participants' personal awareness might have been evoked through a safe space and the use of poems and textiles.





5.



SUBSCRIBE

6.



7.





7.

I think there has always been a close relationship between text and textiles. It starts with their etymology. “Text and textile have a common ancestor, the Latin word *texere*, weaving” (Kassia St. Claire, 2019, p. 32). Also we certainly must not forget that fabrics are often decorated with symbols and words full of metaphorical meanings – an important tradition that is still applied in the Islamic faith and among the Palestinian people, for instance. ‘Text’ and ‘textile’ both tell a story. In my view, poems display the same metaphors that can be seen in textile form. A poet tells a story in a way that appeals to the imagination. For me, the article ‘*Poezie is de macht van het net niet begrijpen*’ (poetry is the power of not quite understanding) from the NOS, 13 June 2019, explains why poetry is so attractive to us. The elusiveness of poetry comes with a non-understanding of our human lives and the way in which we represent ourselves. As I pointed out in my first chapter, sharing life stories does not have to provide a solution, but is contingent upon the question: What can we do with it or what can I do with it? We can ask these questions when we read poetry and when we talk about lived experiences, but also when we work with textiles.



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي
خَلَقَ الْمَوْتَادَ مِنْ طِينٍ
وَالْبَشَرُ مِنْ عَلَقٍ
وَالْحَيَاةَ مِنْ مَاءٍ
وَالْجِبَالَ مِنْ حَمَلٍ
وَالْأَنْجَارَ مِنْ عَيْنٍ
وَالْأَنْجَارَ مِنْ عَيْنٍ

وَالْأَنْجَارَ مِنْ عَيْنٍ
وَالْأَنْجَارَ مِنْ عَيْنٍ
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وَالْأَنْجَارَ مِنْ عَيْنٍ
وَالْأَنْجَارَ مِنْ عَيْنٍ



9.



In my view, these examples show that textile is not only a tool for communication that mediates personal emotions but can be seen as a shield that we can transform into anything we want, and therefore not only transform the human body's exterior but also its meaning. Since textile is created by the human touch, we can transform it into a story, thus making the object the subject matter. If we use this method in terms of life experiences, we see that we can change the subject matter of the experience in different phases of life. I would state here that lived experiences are the object and how we tend to construct a story around it is the subject matter. Not because we necessarily have to change it, but because of the narrative construct in which we live. Recognizing personal aspects in this construct is thus highly transformative. hooks calls this process 'thinking and rethinking' and Goodson defines this as 'reframing'. These personally created textiles are fascinating to research in order to understand how people think and act, both today and throughout history. Working with specific chosen stitches or fabrics can result in aesthetic objects in which the created piece is just as important as the emotions behind it. An analysis of the process of sewing and the final creation shows that, personal and emotional aspects play a dominant role in constructing the picture of the self.

“He draweth out the thread of his verbosity finer than the staple of his argument”
(William Shakespeare, *Love's labour's Lost*- 1595)

III. CLOTHED BODIES. WHAT NEW STORY CAN WE WEAVE TOGETHER?

In this chapter, I will give a clear overview of my personal textile project. I substantiate the choices my project through the textile projects and literature described in chapters one and two. In addition, details of the workshop material can be found in this chapter. The remaining workshop material can be found in the footnotes, appendix and bibliography. The evaluation of the workshops is divided in three sections: the making process, space and visual outcomes.

III.I EVALUATIONS

From language to fairy tales, technology and social relationships, our lives throughout history have been riddled with threads of fabric production. It is my hope that throughout the first two chapters, you will have discovered how our lives are interwoven with textiles. My explanation of this transformative and emotional medium motivated me to design a tangible textile project. By means of textiles and various strategies, my goal was to create visual transformative dialogues within different learning spaces that might lead to a personal rejection of the expected and singular story. Therefore, I started the project by conducting an in-depth research on what the relation is between the individual participants and textiles. In setting up three workshops for the project, it was important for me to introduce a common thread in which participants reached into their own past. Consequently, the participants created an option to reach into their personal history by themselves but also to investigate this in a collective context. I have used several strategies such as poems, podcasts, movement and strings of fabric, in which podcasts and poems specifically were most influential as guidelines within the workshops. The other strategies were carefully interwoven in the whole project.

To evaluate the goals of my project, I focused on three essential elements. First of all, the making process during the workshops. In this process, I used poems and podcasts as strategies to exchange our lived experiences. The artworks of Hana Miletic and the Gee's Bend women, described in chapter two, showed how individuals with a personal story can give meaning to those experiences through text and textiles. By creating a relationship between poems and textiles, I hoped to reveal a tangible exchange of text and textiles. These poetic writings were used as an orientating voice for the human emotions reflected in the textiles.

Secondly, the use of the 'Untitled' space in Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art. I chose to work within this space due to its transformative character. Also, the curatorial and educational strategies at Untitled are intertwined in the hope of acknowledging counter-narratives through collective learning and making. During the three workshops, it was also important to work in a space where the body could move around freely, where small spaces could subsequently be created within the larger space, and more importantly, where the aim of transformation could potentially be realised. I think that the spaces in which our bodies move around are so decisive for how we approach and communicate our memories to others. In all of the textile projects that I mentioned in my second chapter, the space in which the maker is located plays an essential role. The relationships between people and the objects in that space are loosely connected to each other. Therefore, to make the participants aware of this connection in relation to their own story but also that of someone else, the workshops were held in the Untitled space. And thirdly, examinations of what has been made. Looking at the choice of materials is just as relevant as the process of making. Since I aimed to create visual transformative dialogues, the textiles that have been made need unravelling too.

III.II WORKSHOPS

Individual Writing

The Individual Writing workshop was the first workshop in the Clothed Bodies: What New Story Can We Weave Together? project. During the workshop, the participants brought one of their precious garments along. Over the course of different writing sessions they conceptualised and reframed their vision of their precious garments. By giving meaning to these objects, they turned them into a subject matter. Subsequently, podcasts were used to archive the stories of the garments and the participants eventually had the option of sharing these with the others.

Collective Weaving

During the second workshop, the participants were asked to create new threads of history. While making these, they had to concentrate on different parts of the body. The body can be considered the first element of our identity. Covering up parts of our body with clothes says a lot about the relationship we have with our body. By doing this, we turn ourselves into a project. We are our own handiwork; through projected identities, we imagine, impose, embrace or fight against these immovable identities. How we move in our clothed bodies is also related to the spaces in which we live. During the workshop, I aimed to make this multiple storytelling visible through the use of textiles and bodies

Collective Reading

The Loom of Dreams

I broider the world upon a loom,
I broider with dreams my tapestry;
Here in a little lonely room
I am master of earth and sea, And the planets come to me.

I broider my life into the frame,
I broider my love, thread upon thread;
The world goes by with its glory and shame, Crowns are bartered, and blood is shed;
I sit and broider my dreams instead.

And the only world is the world of my dreams, And my weaving the only happiness;
For what is the world but what it seems?
And who knows but that God, beyond our guess, Sits weaving worlds out of loneliness?

(Arthur Symons, in *Poems*, second volume, 1901.)

The above poem was the starting point of the third workshop of the project. For this, participants shared personal experiences in which we collectively looked for connections based on common themes and poems. By thinking about emotions and memories related to a diverse range of themes in life, I aimed to create a tapestry of multiple life stories and experiences.

III.III TRACES OF MAKING

One thing I was much aware of was the fact that sharing a personal life story is not clear-cut for everyone. To create a clear bridge between textile and these stories, I therefore decided to apply two important strategies, namely podcasts and poems. As I briefly explained in chapter two, there is an age-old relationship between text and textile. The use of poems is not only symbolic. A poem is also a voice of orientation that enables one to divide human life into themes. The reason for using podcasts as a second strategy was to create an intimate setting, but also to offer an indirect way of communicating. By doing this, I hoped that sharing a personal story would be less confrontational.

The transformations that the participants shifted through were always linked to a specific subject that consistently confronts us in life. In the first workshop, the poems acted as the connection between human emotions and textiles. Because we were talking about memories and archiving, I created a close reading session on not only the garments but also on the emotions that were related to them. A vital element here was how they stored their garments in their closets. This brought me back to the question: How do we archive and why do we archive? But more importantly: What kind of emotional connection do the participants have with their garment?

To go deeper into this matter, I asked them to recreate their garment in a miniature form. This allowed them to think carefully about the choice of fabrics, shapes and colours – important elements to which emotions can be linked. For instance, one of the participants indicated that her garment was made out of light fabrics, since she grew up in a tropical country (p.47 text and link podcast). The linen fabric gave her a feeling of belonging. Another participant struggled with an eating disorder and she described a shapeless black tunic as her most precious garment. This was the only garment in which she was able to appreciate and express her physicality in a way that made her feel comfortable (p.49 text and link podcast). Through the use of poems, I tried to show this internal conversation between different voices, which Goodson refers to in his concept of reframing. The conversation between the textiles (garments) and the poems (podcast) was held by two different voices in which reflection upon and interpretation of memories was of huge importance. Eventually, the participants showed an influential part of their lives in a dialogue with others through the use of podcasts. Hence, they chose their own way of looking at their garments.

Writing a short podcast about this was undoubtedly a challenge. However, it was remarkable that the participants indicated that they would like to tell their stories during the workshops. I think this was because of the podcasts. It created an intimate session of listening, in which they listen to each other's poems in an indirect way. What made the whole thing interesting for me as an educator was that the participants indicated that they did not want to have a follow-up discussion. The podcast spoke a language that did not need to be elaborated upon.

In my opinion, this entire process relates to the notion of reframing and rethinking, as implied by the work of Goodson and hooks mentioned in chapter one and two. A potential transformation in personal awareness was visible in subtle steps. These steps also persisted in the formulation of the assignment, which was designed around a process of reflection, responding and interpreting. This way of working created moments of different reframings. By analysing the garments in steps, I referred to the building up of life stories. As previously mentioned, life experiences do not tell the story of lives in a linear fashion but through fragmentation. By doing this, the participants' garments became a tangible memory in which an object turned into the subject matter – and therefore this 'body of knowledge' was accepted as a learning tool.

Natural
Cool
Fluid
Womanly
Breezy

The linen jumpsuit



9.

The linen jumpsuit
is like a second skin
The cool textures of the fabric feels natural against her skin
It brings memories of jasmin
it brings memories of her mother
tiny hands clasping onto large pants
It brings memories of the salty tang of ocean spray
A warm breeze dancing through her fingertips
There is a comfort and peace in its embrace
inside the jumpsuit her movement is fluent
gracefull
The fabric caresses her skin
this is womenhood
this home

(Individual Writing, *The Linen Jumpsuit*,
<https://soundcloud.com/user-811449589/sets/clothed-bodies-individual/s-Hqxlt>, 2019.)

A black tunique

floating / flowing

morphing

straight

mind presence

absence



My head is a bubble
And my body is wrapped in a soft black tunic
The garment reducing parts of me
I escape a bit of my identity
The absence of a silhouette on me frees me
I am not longer my representable body I become my spirit
My movements leading me
The air around me travels through the textile
and dances around all the shapes and curves of my body
It is the only thing I let close to me on days like these
The connection between my mind and body is straight
Vertical
A strong line
The same way my legs appeared today
Sticking out of this garment
My legs well visible With a tighter silhouette
They lead me
They ground me
The move me through the spaces through the streets
through the day
until I am back home
Ready to go to bed
and escape space again

(Individual Writing, *A BlackTunique*,

<https://soundcloud.com/user-811449589/sets/clothed-bodies-individual/s-Hqxlt>, 2019)





In the second workshop, I examined the human body in relation to textiles as a source of learning. My aim therefore was to have the participants, and not the institute, decide about the 'body of knowledge'. Using self-made fabrics to clothe the body was a strong way of raising a voice. Again, the relation between poems and textile was decidedly present. By using a compilation of poems that indicated the human relation with their bodies, I tried to make the participants think about this matter. Using this element could have created the risk of much hesitation and feelings of vulnerability. To embark upon this, I asked them to move their bodies through the space by collectively hanging up my installation, 'Threads of History'. Again, by taking smaller steps and different exercises, I aimed to design moments of reframing. (Photos 56,57)

For every step they took, I tried to make them think perspectives about the given subject matter, namely the body, from different perspectives.¹ Also, having them work in pairs and exchange experiences ensured that there were constantly moments of interpretation and reflection. By playing with the question of what we make visible, I referred to the telling of a multiple story in our society. The exchange of experiences could have played an important role in deciding about a new body of knowledge. But apparently not all of the participants in this workshop felt comfortable enough to share their stories, unlike those in the first and third workshops. One of the participants was even offended by the poems.

1. <https://soundcloud.com/user-811449589/sets/podcast-collective-weaving/s-8CHPJ>

Therefore it was not possible to start the process of reframing during this workshop. While listening to the poems, that participant said: "white people also have stories", and she had no interest in stories about slavery. Which was an interesting reaction to the poems, since I had picked a variety of poems written by known and unknown writers based on different genders, ages and multiple backgrounds. Also, all the poems were related to the body instead of personalities. She did not want to elaborate her thoughts on this topic with us. Reflecting on this reaction through Hall's concepts of dialogues and identities, I assume that the participant was used to constructing a comforting story for herself in which she might never have had a moment of reflection on her narrative identity.

As hooks says with regard to her ideas on transgression, a space where all voices are acknowledged is essential for reflecting on personal narrative identities. During this workshop such a space did not exist, seeing as not all bodies were acknowledged because not all of the participants were white. Therefore it was hard to have the reframing of the internal voices within every participant take place. The reactions of the offended participant made it impossible to have a dialogue. For this reason, it was hard to build up a relationship of trust between the participants because the expectations of this workshop was not comparable to that of the others, inasmuch as it felt that not every participant underwent the transformation during the process of making that I was hoping for. The participants again constructed their story partly in a singular narrative. This became clear when we evaluated the process after the workshop.



"Hate gives identity. The nigger, the fag, the bitch illuminate the border, illuminate what we ostensibly are not. We name the Dream of being white, of being a Man. We name the hated strangers and are thus confirmed in the tribe."
— Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*

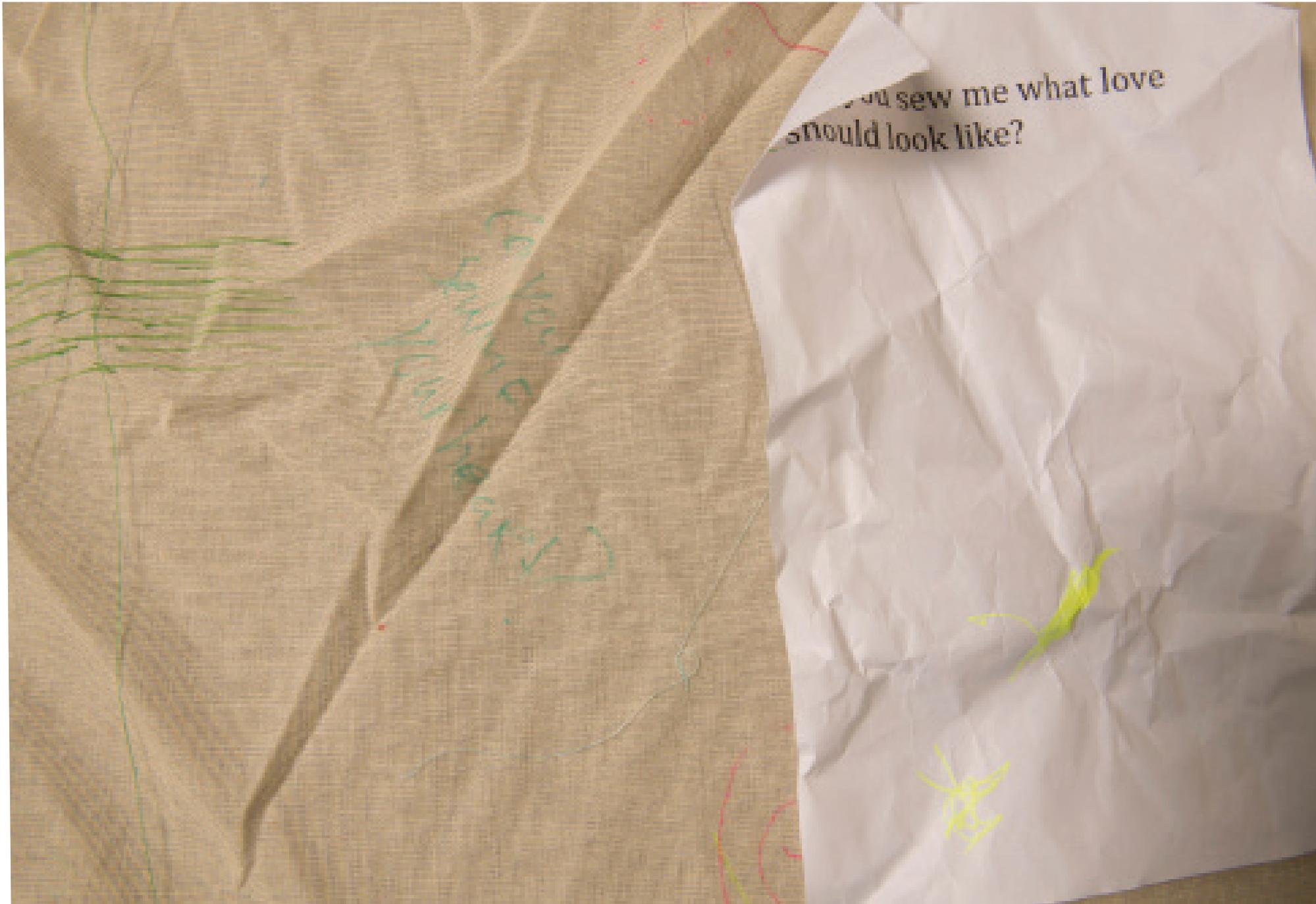


That not all of the poems had themes that were suitable for the workshops was also the case in the third workshop. Using Hana Miletic's work as an example, the group focused on themes such as love, family, loss, change, hope. I hoped that using these topics would stimulate them to sew a more idealistic world instead of the reality. The participants talked about being confused, sad, longing for acceptance, change and love. At a certain point, I wanted to bring in the theme of family but most of the participants were not keen on working on this subject matter with others. Therefore, I gave them the possibility of choosing the themes they wanted to work on in the tapestry. Not talking about certain topics showed me that certain events in our lives take more time to reflect upon. Therefore, the relation between family and narrative identity might be an interesting topic to investigate in a follow-up project.

In conclusion, looking back on the making process in the three workshops, there were different outcomes. In the first and the third workshops, the strategies evoked potential transformative learning situations. What was important was that narrative encounters were taking place. Especially in the first workshop, the lives of all four participants were not dominated by a singular story, which not only encouraged them to search for stories that were similar to their own but, more importantly, to pursue a space where multiple storytelling was allowed. As a result, they showed mutual recognition in being young adults struggling with similar issues in contemporary society. Eventually the participants in the first and third workshops were able to reframe their personal experiences through the process of making.

Unfortunately, this was less the case in the second workshop. Although in this session the textile outcomes were beautiful, it was harder to recognize a moment of transformation in the participants' personal awareness, not only because of the lack of reframing but also because of the lack of acknowledging different voices during the process. This became clear in the group discussion after the workshop. It was due to the different expectations in this workshop, the age differences, and also the lack of time as concerns the process of making. In all three of the workshops, we ran out of time.





III.IV EMBODYING SPACE

While pursuing the right circumstances for carrying out my project, I got into a conversation with Jessy Koeiman, the current curator of collective learning at Witte de With Contemporary Center of Art. She manages a recently created space at that institute, the Untitled space, where she allows people to learn from each other through an extensive educational programme. This space within the Witte de With was created to tell 'counter-narratives'. As the result of intensive conversations with Jessy about her goals for the space and my vision of art education, I was able to carry out my textile project there. My project would be an interesting ending for a year in which the institute has thought intensively about the transformation of this space. It is not entirely part of public space, but it does relate to the notion of seeing and being seen due to its windows. To evaluate the importance of space in the project, I aimed to examine space and intimacy through staging and the interaction with the outside world. I knew this was going to be a challenge, since the hollow acoustics in the building were not conducive for intimate settings. The only way to solve this was by shutting the doors to the room. But by doing this, the space became less accessible for other bodies of knowledge in the building.

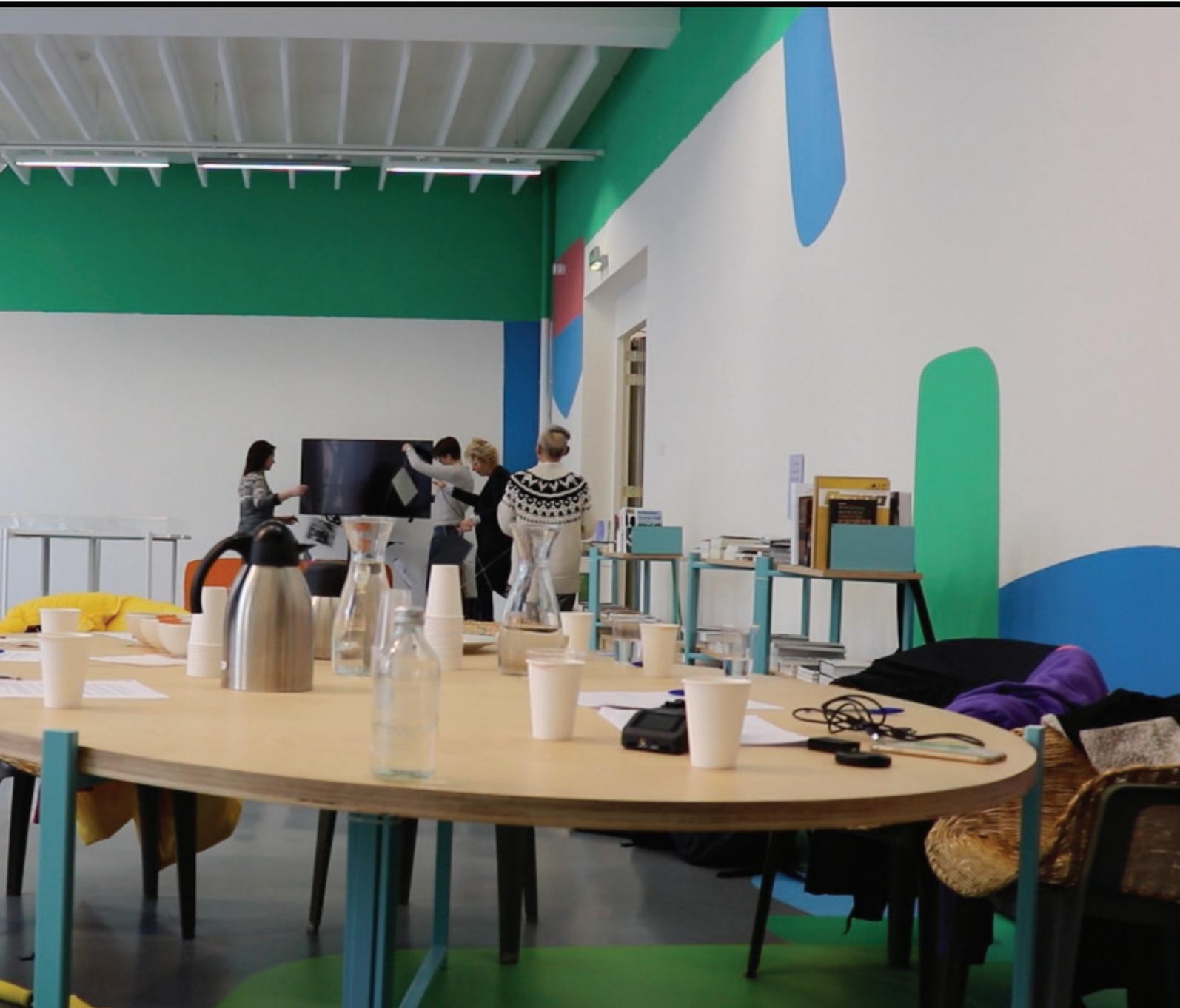
For each workshop, I handled the space differently. In the first workshop there was an intensive listening session. Therefore I created two separate spaces in the room. As you can see on the next page, the first was the workspace in which the participants could create. I would like to regard this as a social space for exchange and interaction. The other one was for listening and to evoke a dreamy headspace through the use of podcasts.(p.60)

Both spaces were arranged in an intimate circle. In this way, the closed loop ensured a feeling of safety. The listening space was by the window. Because of this, I questioned whether the emotions occurring while listening to the poems were shared with the people on the other side of the windows. This partly happened. Some people stood still in front of the windows to observe what was going on. Others took a quick look, but immediately turned their heads away. My take on this was that some people outside felt the intimacy among the participants and therefore did not dare to observe. Some others found it fascinating and watched.



In the second workshop, the entire space got used. As Hall indicated in his theory of Shifting Identity, our identity is formed by the spaces we move through and the experiences we have in life. As they moved around, some of the participants worked together and others alone. As a way of connecting, we used strings of fabric with which the participants could decide for themselves whether they held onto the strings or distanced their bodies from it. I hoped that the social encounters resulting from these constant movements caused a subtle reframing, which ultimately contributes to a potential transformation in personal awareness. As I had allowed them to move freely through the space, I found it compelling to observe whether they had an interaction with the public space. When the making process started, people outside were curious as to what we were doing and dared to enter our space.(p. 65) Because the feeling of intimacy was less present, people who were visiting the institute walked in to observe what we were doing. Others joined them, and some read the books on the shelves, since these were still present during the workshop. An interesting encounter was with a little girl of about six years old who started making her own cloth.(p.66) She is an example of someone who is not bound to a social construct that obligates specific behaviour in certain spaces. The freedom with which she entered the workshop was unrestrained by expected roles that become more prominent as we grow older. hooks' and Goodson's ideas on the notion of framing and reframing or thinking and rethinking was not an issue, since the girl was not yet trapped in a social construct. Her framework was still open, and because she had not yet been forced to close it, her emotions were much better visualised in her process of making.









During the third workshop, I asked the participants to take a seat around a four-meter long cloth of unbleached cotton. The participants read poems aloud while sitting in a circle. In this way, I hoped for a more intimate setting.

For centuries, the making of fabrics always happened in the presence of all kinds of people. The makers will have told stories, gossiped and talked during the weaving and sewing. The resulting words soon inspired the imagination and became lively and tangible elements (Kassia St. Claire, 2019, p.31).

Precisely for this reason, working in a circle around the cloth was essential for the outcome in the third workshop. By working in this way, a safe situation can arise in which life experiences can be shared, embodied in a tangible element, namely the tapestry. The tapestry was also put on the floor and I asked everyone to sit around it.

The cushions were placed on the floor at an equal distance apart. It was interesting that some participants in fact started moving their cushions around. They also walked across the tapestry to do their sewing together with others, while others remained at their places and worked alone. These people told me afterwards that they preferred their personal space. In conclusion, I felt that the participants did not have complete freedom to work and open up to each other during every workshop because of the space. The participants felt the same way, and some of them struggled to share their stories. And the ones that did get shared did not remain in the space, since we had to remove everything after the workshops were finished. For instance, the tapestry that was made in the third workshop had to be removed.

Which was a shame, since it had become a conversation piece involving text and symbols. It even invited people to adjust something on the tapestry because one of the participants had sewn textile pencils onto it. If the cloth could have stayed in the space and new bodies had walked in, carrying new knowledge with them, it would have become a source of learning. Also, the cloth itself would have undergone a constant transformation. The same thing happened with the first workshop; the Mp3 players with the poems also had to be removed. Both the tapestry and the Mp3 players were not part of the interior furnishing of the space. I wonder if carrying out the project on the streets or in a playground would have transgressed the boundaries of a dominant construct of knowledge more.



III.V VISUAL OUTCOMES WORKSHOPS

In my last research element, I aimed to visualise the stories in both the poems and the textile objects as moments of reflection. To give a clear overview of this, in two out of the three workshops I differentiated between the written poems and the textile objects that were made. By looking at the fabrics, colours, stitches and words that were chosen, I hoped to capture the relation between personal storytelling and textile. Throughout the workshops, I asked the participants to create two expressions: namely, poems and textile objects that contributed more to the understanding of the self. Emotions, intimacy and imagination played a significant role in all the cloths and garments that were made. This was shown in the outcomes in several ways.

Throughout the first workshop, the participants had to work alone and could only communicate through their poems and garments. This created a dialogue between the two mediums. As a listener, I felt like I was briefly being invited into someone else's life. A clear relationship was noticeable between the two, which played a significant role in the imagining of the stories. For instance, one the participants visualised her black dress in an orange flower print.(p.68) She searched for the fabric that was most similar to her memory of the dress, which was flowery and feminine.

Another participant had a different approach; instead of making the entire garment, she enlarged part of it, which made you wonder what the rest of the garment would look like. It almost felt like she was zooming into a life experience shaped by her shifting identity. Listening to the podcast, which allows you to think along with her, made the garment a whole, just like reflecting on encounters we have in our lives. Also, the poems turned objects into a subject. This was very well experienced with the poem '*A Black Tunique*'. The writer's use of words like 'float' and 'body' made the dress almost become alive as one listened to this poem that told parts of her story.

comforting

freeing

relaxing

confident

lady

~~Flowy Black Dress~~

Flowy

Black

Dress



Whereas the first workshop focused on individual work, pairs were formed in the second. This meant that some pairs choose to make one cloth in which the lived experiences of both participants were visualised. Other pairs chose to each make their own cloth, but they still had a dialogue. This is shown in the fabrics in photos 23 and 25. Both were made by participants with a non-Dutch background. The first photo shows a cloth in Delft Blue.(p.72,73,74). The material refers to the Golden Age in which the Netherlands experienced enormous prosperity as a colonial power. The participant was an Indonesian immigrant from a former Dutch colony, and this material reflects parts of his history. By creating new patterns on the fabric with blue ballpoint pen, he aimed to visualise the fragmented personal history within him, which he is now able to tell. What this work corresponds to is the work 'New Hair'.(p.75,76) This participant used elements that are significant for Latin American society. The use of lace refers to Marianism, in which women fulfil a pious position that is at odds with the red and fiery character with which Latin American people are often associated. As the result of making this head covering, she wondered whether people would stereotype her more or less than is the usual case.











In order to understand these beautiful cloths, I somehow felt that I had to ask the participants to write poems describing them. Afterwards, I felt it would have been better not to apply this strategy and let the textiles speak for themselves. As for the construction of the fabrics, a variety of techniques were used: hand stitches, large stitches and small ones. Other participants did not stitch but only cut, and some embroidered. Still, every movement made in order to transform the fabric was done thoughtfully. All the cloths made sense in relation to the poems. They represented a multiplicity of voices inspired by the body. How the participants approached the body was certainly coloured by personal experiences and explained through metaphors. The garment called 'the circle of life' referred to the aging of bodies, which is an inevitable process that we have to go through. For this reason, a tunic representing nature was made with images of plants and animals.(79,80,81,82)

oog in oog in oog

een zee blauw, groen
met een roestbruine vlek

verberg je niet,

maar STRAAL!

Chin up!

* het is gezand

* het ziet er beter uit

* je voelt je er actiever,
optimistischer, sterker door

De verantwoordelijkheid om recht
vooruit te kijken, niet naar beneden,
en soms ... omhoog.

Rug recht.

DE ZEE IS VAN NIEMAND
MAAR HET LAND IS VAN IEMAND
DUS DE MIGRANT ZWERPT VERDER









30.

It is hard to say if the participants accepted the use of material as a learning instrument. Although, what I can say is that the clothes enfolded the participants' bodies. Therefore, a tangible transformation and narrative encounters were visible on their bodies.

Eventually, only hand stitching was required in the last workshop. Having initially had the idea of creating a large tapestry together, understanding the outcome was much more complex than I had thought it would be. First of all it was hard to read the personal experiences on the cloth. Also, there was not a cohesive story. As the cloth was too big for the number of people in the workshop, not that many social encounters took place. This does not mean that they did not try to connect. People stitched threads into each other's work.(p.84) They made holes in the cloth, which were repaired by others through stitching. By doing this an interaction was visible between the stories. A bit of Ovid's golden thread was therefore used to sew the different stories together. But this was only made clear through a close reading session at the end of the workshop. It seems that the size of the cloth made it unsuitable for telling intimate stories, since a refined way of working was not applied. This was reflected in the stitches. They caused the tapestry to look rough and not taken care of. An interesting note that raises the question: How do we treat our lived experiences?



31.

IV CONCLUSION

I think I have been lucky in having had the space and time to reflect on my life story during my process of becoming. As for my grandmother's life, I cannot say with all certainty that she never had the opportunity to reflect on specific experiences. However, during our time of sewing together it occurred to me that she lived her life according to social expectations. Moments of reflection on and interpretation of her lived experiences were not an issue for her, so that most likely her ways of thinking were not always understandable for those in her immediate surroundings. Manifestations of this must certainly have led to uncomfortable situations. I am convinced that sewing therefore played an important role in her life. Textile became the medium in which she could not only embody her emotions but also her experiences in life. As a result of today's changing society, in which we are daily confronted with 'the other' in social constructs, we must ask ourselves: How do we give space to all these stories? In my opinion, education plays a major role here. Because of my experiences in uncomfortable situations within learning environments where little attention is paid to a more multiple notion of knowledge and where counter-narratives are not recognized, it felt like a necessity to challenge these issues. Also my own background as a person of non-Western heritage living in the Netherlands played an important role in forming these views. This led me to start my Master's degree, in which I have begun an in-depth investigation into sharing multifaceted knowledge through personal experiences. Consequently, this research has aimed to analyse how the use of textiles as a manner of telling life stories, can create visual transformative dialogues within learning spaces, which might lead to one's personal rejection of the expected and singular story

Based on a research of the literature in response to a practice-led research on narrative stories, identity and textiles, it can be concluded that a clear answer cannot be given to this matter. Both Goodson and Hall argue for rejecting fixed identities. Not being influenced by social structures but by life experiences might create comprehensible identities for the self. These identities are far too undifferentiated. The consequence of this concept is that people are constantly subject to conformation and rejection. As a result, we focus too much on 'the other'. The stereotyping of people and their corresponding identities by means of a one-sided story ensures that differences become more emphasized. And when we let this happen within a classroom, we do not educate critical and whole human beings but individuals that do not feel engaged with the world in which they live.

I can conclude by saying that life stories are much too underestimated in the shaping of identity and becoming. In my opinion, this needs to be an important aspect, particularly in education. Personal elements and emotions are precisely what can be the basis for learning, says hooks. Goodson also agrees with this. In his view, narrative learning, reflection and reframing are important elements for using life stories as learning tools. Further, my research of the literature on textile showed me that it is a tangible medium that can be used as a learning tool that needs safe spaces in order to express lived experiences and to mediate emotions. Setting up the same circumstances within my own textile project required great effort. During the research it became clear to me that personal experiences should be embedded in education, but only when the right circumstances are present for creating these visual transformation dialogues.

Regarding age, young adults felt more of a need to share their lived experiences, to understand how these related to the world, whereas older participants did not feel this urge. Not every participant was trying to embody a counter-narrative with regard to his or her own life. Yes, lived experiences and identity are intrinsically connected with one another. What is important here is: "What can I or we do with this?" Therefore, researching and using embedded pedagogies on life stories is not about fixing identities but about understanding oneself in the social construct in which people live. In as far as using lived experiences as a learning tool for any project or research in the future goes, all of the participants need to have comparable expectations. If not, creating an intimate and safe setting – which are crucial elements for talking about these experiences – is much harder to achieve. Also, smaller groups are required to investigate intimacy and safeness as key points in further research on this matter. In addition, when talking about lived experiences, it is vital to let these topics be discussed among the participants. As I stated in my evaluations, more time is needed to work on these visual transformative dialogues but also to reflect on the topics for discussion. The outcomes of an approach spread over more days or even weeks would probably contain more symbols, metaphors and emotions as compared to the visual outcomes of my project. I hope I am able to include these observations for my programme at *Framer Framed* in the upcoming year. They have approached me to carry out the project with them again. As Goodson implied, I think that narrative learning is a lifelong process in which reflection plays an important role. This is exactly what my project has evoked within my own life and thoughts on learning. Providing space for this in relation to dialogues should therefore have an important role in education. Additionally, the use of textile is highly undervalued in my view. This medium is so essential for describing and reflecting on representations and identities. Using this as a learning tool means that we think more consciously about the steps we take during the process of making. I think the same can be applied to the use of life stories in education.

V PERSONAL REFLECTION

Looking back on my own position as an educator working on this project for two and a half years, I realise that at a certain point I became my own most interesting guinea pig. I started this thesis and research with an explanation of how I observed continuous shifts in my own life and profession. These changes have certainly kept on going over the last two and a half years. I started working with textiles again, creating a process in which I challenged my views and identity and therefore my goals in life. The relation between space, textiles and bodies has started to fascinate me so deeply that as an historian and educator I am transforming into someone who aims to work on this relation in a more visual and artistic way. Searching for ways wherein spaces and bodies are able to merge into each other and fill up a possible physical absence, I started capturing these elements through video, photographs and performances. An important question in this regard is: What traces do I leave behind? (P. 86 until 100)

By doing this, I came across lived experiences that have always played an important role in my life. During my time as a ballet dancer, transforming myself through movement and clothes highly affected my consequent gaze on the world. This was actually my tangible, shifting identity, which contributed to eliminating the feeling of a certain absence in some spaces. This knowledge and experience is an inevitable part of constructing my identity around my body. What might be even more crucial, however, is asking myself the question 'What can I do with it?' For this reason, in order to continue my vision of education and transformation in the future, I feel it is necessary to keep giving myself space and time to keep reframing. Only in this way can I, as an educator, work with people who, just like me, are trying to make lived experiences more comprehensible to themselves in the complex society in which we live.































V APPENDIX

V.I POEMS

Dreams

I loom the dreams

I broider the world upon a loom.
I broider with dreams my tapestry;
Here in a little lonely room
I am master of earth and sea,
And the planets come to me.

I broider my life into the frame,
I broider my love, thread upon thread;
The world goes by with its glory and shame,
Crowns are bartered and blood is shed;
I sit and broider my dreams instead.

And the only world is the world of my dreams,
And my weaving the only happiness;
For what is he world but what it seems?
And who knows but hat god, beyond our guess,
Sits weaving worlds out of loneliness?

Arthur Symons in *The Loom of Dreams in the Second Volume* (1901)

Dreams, Penetrate into my soul

Dreams, u are my soul
I live in the hope of u
Penetrate in to my mind
Create an imaginary world

Anu Issac, <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/dreams-penetrate-into-my-soul/> (2006)

Sweet dreams and happy memories

Sweet dreams and happy memories,
A love that's good and true:
A home to care for tenderly:
A song to sing that's new
Sweet dreams and happy memories
And friends to join in mirth
Some tears to give to those who die,
And smiles to greet each birth
Sweet dreams and happy memories,
To win a game or two.
The faith to know that spring will come,
The strength to wait it through

Sweet dreams and happy memories,
To do what there's to do
For joy is living day to day,
To make sweet dreams come true.

Doris Reed Tietz, <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/sweet-dreams-and-happy-memories/> (2003)

It's Alright, Ma, I am Only Bleeding

And if my thought-dreams could been seen
They'd probably put my head in a guillotine
But it's all right, Ma it is life and life only.

Bob Dylan from *Bringing it all back home*, (1965.)

Dreams

Hold fast to dreams
For if dreams die
Life is a broken-winged bird
That cannot fly.
Hold fast to dreams
For when dreams go
Life is a barren field
Frozen with snow.

Langston Hughes, *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes published by Alfred A. Knopf/Vintage* (1994)

Tree of dreams

My mind is a tree of growing dreams
It seems like it produces more each day
But with every day that passes
There is also a forgotten one
When you add all the forgotten ones
You get a tree that is dry
A tree with many rings
But with one leaf
One green leaf that appears Every day but also dries up When next
day comes
When a tree only has one leaf
No one really looks at it
It is a tree with no ambition
A tree with only one dream
No one wants a tree with one dream
Especially if it is never fulfilled

Theorum the truth serum, <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/tree-of-dreams/> (2005)

My issue with what they consider beautiful
Is their concept of beauty
Centers around excluding people
I find hair beautiful
When a woman wears it
Like a garden on her skin
That is the definition of beauty
Big hooked noses
Pointing upward to the sky
Like they're rising to the occasion
Skin the color of earth
My ancestors planted crops on
To feed a lineage of women with
Thighs thick as tree trunks
Eyes like almonds
Deeply hooded with conviction The rivers of Punjab
Flow through my bloodstream so Don't tell me my women
Aren't as beautiful as the ones in your country

Rupi Kaur in *Milk and Honey* (2015)

Titled unknown

Everyone has dreams
Of becoming someone else.
It's time to wake up.

Change

Verandering

Wij houden ze op afstand door het meest gebruikte
Trouw te blijven, door altijd de kleur van de gordijnen,
Altijd de rand van het bed aan te wijzen,

De afstand tussen hand en glas, door tijd die vooraf
dient te worden klemgezet en groeien in onze
Jaren lang gehuurde kamers vast
Aan de punt van de pen, seeds op hetzelfde moment
Met dezelfde beweging opengemaakt.

Wij drinken vastgestelde wijn strikt afgemeten, zoeken
Niet meer- bescherm ons, gewoonte, wees alles
omvattend, raak ons ingesleten,

ten slotte zal er niets zijn, blijft er niets in zicht
dat langer dan de nacht duur
in ons wakker ligt.

Esther Naomi Perquin, *Namens de ander* (2009)

De afspraak

De afspraken spoelden over de wereld
En plantten zich onophoudelijk voort
Sponnen ins in een wereld van afspraken in

Dat je mooi was kon ik je zeggen
Dat je schoonheid toenam als ik dat zei

Dat pas als je het zegt ik besta, dat ik me
Zonder jouw woorden geen raad zou weten

Dat alles at voor je voel dankzij jou
En dankzij de afspraken bestaat, dat

Kon ik je zeggen maar niet tot wanneer.

Thomas Möhlmann, *Waar we wonen* (2013)

Milk and honey

You were so afraid
Of my voice
I decided to be afraid of it too

Rupi Kaur in *Milk and Honey* (2015)

De afspraken

We maakten een afspraak
En elke afspraak die daaruit
Groeide was een houtblok op het vuur, elk
Uur dat we in warmte konden delen
Was een uur waarin nieuwe afspraken
Mogelijk warden, waarin ik jouw gezicht
Door de vlammen kon verliht van nieuwe namen
Kon voorzien, waarin jouw vingers over de naden van mijn handen
speelden, ik zei
Vacht en jij dacht aan mijn huid, jij dacht
Nacht en de sterren prikten door het kleed
En ik wees elk sterrenbeeld van betekenis
Voor je aan, jij zei dorst en ik wees water
Jij wees naar de taken en ik bouwde
Een huis, Ik zei welkom en je kwam.

Thomas Möhlmann, *Waar we wonen* (2013)

Sommigen mensen doe hun ogen dicht

Sommige mensen zijn nog nooit wakker geworden
Van een wekker die afging in een droom. Er zijn twee
Mogelijkheden: we slapen altijd allemaal en dromen
tussendoor dat we ontwaken of we zijn altijd wakker
behalve als we slapen of dood zijn gegaan. Waar de uren
intussen precies naartoe gaan, waarom we soms schrikken
van wat ons allemaal niet bedreigt en soms zonder knippen
Oog in oog met het grootste gevaar kunnen staan,
hoe lang het duurt voor we een specifiek gezicht uit duizenden
herkennen en hoe lang vervolgens voor we het niet meer
zorgvuldigheid kussen, naast wie je wel en niet
gerust in slap kunt vallen, maar we gaan niet dood, wie we uit
vertrouwen de rug oekeren en wie uit verveling, we gaan
nog niet, schrik niet maar hoe komt een zacht dier hier binnen
zonder verdwaald te zijn, hoe verdwaalt een zacht dier hier
binnen? Sommige mensen laten zich van alles op de mouw
spelden. Sommige mensen maakt niemand wat wijs.

Thomas Möhlmann, *Waar we wonen* (2013)

Risico's

Onze gebruikelijke kamer. Geheel volgens afspraak richten de
muren zich op. het raam ontvouwt, compleet

Met gesloten gordijnen. Dit zou het begin van de nacht kunnen
zijn
Of het eind van de dag. Vormvast schemerdonker,

Wat grappen over daglicht dat minder en minder verdraagt. De
geur
Van hout en overrijpe mandarijnen.

Kijk, daar komen de kastjes tevoorschijn, het twee persoonsbed
Tekent zich af van met de lakens en dekens.

De spreij met de vlek ligt precies waar hij lag. Eenmaal beneden
hernemen we onze gezichten, schuiven we aan

en het uitzicht vult de kozijnen: Landerijen, drie wankele bomen.
We weten al lang wat we nu zullen nemen:

Het voorgerecht dat steevast tegenvalt, de biefstuk en de appel-
taart.

We zijn ouder geworden, kunnen inmiddels

iets beter betalen. Het regent hier de meeste dagen van het jaar.
Het grootste gevaar denkt ons toe

Met dezelfde plek, dezelfde kamer. We wagen ons gewoontes in,
Hebben ons lief. We herhalen.

Esther Naomi Perquin, *Namens de ander* (2009)

De laatste onbekende

Dus u heeft in het geheim geleefd, werd ondergrond
Geboren, u bent nooit in beeld geweest.

Dus u woonde op plaatsen waar geen kijkers kwamen,
Geen hond verlaten rondliep, neus dicht bij de grond,
U kwam nooit in de verleiding iemand
Duidelijk zichtbaar te aaien

U nam geen goed geschreven woorden in de mond,
Had geen zorgvuldig gezicht-hoe,
Als wij u niet zagen heeft u geleefd?

Hield u zich ergens voor iemand verstoep?
Leek het voor u andersom-raakten wij weg
Zolang u geen deel had aan ons?

U kunt niet meer weggaan zoals u hie rkwam,
In het donker, als een geheim. Blijft u
Zo zitten dan zoomen wij in.

Dit is uw kans om aanwezig te zijn.

Esther Naomi Perquin, *Namens de ander* (2009)

Your art
Is not about how
Many people
Like your work
Your art
Is about
If your heart likes your work
If your soul likes your work
It's about how honest
You are with yourself
And you
Must never
Trade honesty
For relatability

- to all you young poets

Rupi Kaur in *Milk and Honey* (2015)

Family

I struggle so deeply
To understand
How someone can
Pour their entire soul
Blood and energy
Into someone
Without wanting
Anything in
Return

Rupi Kaur in *Milk and Honey* (2015)

Family stories

I had a boyfriend who told me stories about his family, how an argument once ended when his father seized a lit birthday cake in both hands and hurled it out a second-story window. That, I thought, was what a normal family was like: anger sent out across the sill, landing like a gift to decorate the sidewalk below. In mine it was fists and direct hits to the solar plexus, and nobody ever forgave anyone. But I believed the people in his stories really loved one another, even when they yelled and shoved their feet through cabinet doors, or held a chair like a bottle of cheap champagne, christening the wall, rungs exploding from their holes.

I said it sounded harmless, the pomp and fury of the passionate. He said it was a curse being born Italian and Catholic and when he looked from that window what he saw was the moment rudely crushed. But all I could see was a gorgeous three-layer cake gliding like a battered ship down the sidewalk, the smoking candles broken, sunk deep in the icing, a few still burning.

Dorianne Laux in *Smoke* (2002)

The negro mother

Children, I come back today
To tell you a story of the long dark way
That I had to climb, that I had to know
In order that the race might live and grow.
Look at my face - dark as the night -
Yet shining like the sun with love's true light.
I am the dark girl who crossed the red sea
Carrying in my body the seed of the free.
I am the woman who worked in the field
Bringing the cotton and the corn to yield.
I am the one who labored as a slave,
Beaten and mistreated for the work that I gave -
Children sold away from me, I'm husband sold, too.
No safety, no love, no respect was I due.

Three hundred years in the deepest South:
But God put a song and a prayer in my mouth.
God put a dream like steel in my soul.
Now, through my children, I'm reaching the goal.
Now, through my children, young and free,
I realized the blessing deed to me.
I couldn't read then. I couldn't write.
I had nothing, back there in the night.
Sometimes, the valley was filled with tears,
But I kept trudging on through the lonely years.
Sometimes, the road was hot with the sun,
But I had to keep on till my work was done:
I had to keep on! No stopping for me -
I was the seed of the coming Free.

I nourished the dream that nothing could smother
Deep in my breast - the Negro mother.
I had only hope then, but now through you,
Dark ones of today, my dreams must come true:
All you dark children in the world out there,
Remember my sweat, my pain, my despair.
Remember my years, heavy with sorrow -
And make of those years a torch for tomorrow.
Make of my pass a road to the light
Out of the darkness, the ignorance, the night.
Lift high my banner out of the dust.
Stand like free men supporting my trust.
Believe in the right, let none push you back.
Remember the whip and the slaver's track.

Remember how the strong in struggle and strife
Still bar you the way, and deny you life -
But march ever forward, breaking down bars.
Look ever upward at the sun and the stars.
Oh, my dark children, may my dreams and my prayers
Impel you forever up the great stairs -
For I will be with you till no white brother
Dares keep down the children of the negro mother.

Langston Hughes in *The Negro Mother and Other Dramatic Recitations* (1931)

Title unknown

The wounded child inside many females is a girl who was taught from early childhood that she must become something other than herself, deny her true feelings, in order to attract and please others.

bell hooks in *All About Love: New Visions* (2000)

My father teaches me to dream

You want to know what work is?
I'll tell you what work is:
Work is work.
You get up. You get on the bus.
You don't look from side to side.
You keep your eyes straight ahead.
That way nobody bothers you—see?
You get off the bus. You work all day.
You get back on the bus at night. Same thing.
You go to sleep. You get up.
You do the same thing again.
Nothing more. Nothing less.
There's no handouts in this life.
All this other stuff you're looking for—
it ain't there.
Work is work.

Jan Beatty in *Witness, Volume 10, Number 2* (1996)

A practical mum

can go to Bible study every Sunday
and swear she's still not convinced,
but she likes to be around people who are.
We have the same conversation
every few years—I'll ask her if she stops
to admire the perfect leaves
of the Japanese maple
she waters in her backyard,
or tell her how I can gaze for hours
at a desert sky and know this
as divine. Nature, she says,
doesn't hold her interest. Not nearly
as much as the greens, pinks, and grays
of a Diebenkorn abstract, or the antique
Tiffany lamp she finds in San Francisco.

She spends hours with her vegetables,
tasting the tomatoes she's picked that morning
or checking to see which radishes are big enough to pull.
Lately everything she touches bears fruit,
from new-green string beans to winning
golf strokes, glamorous hats she designs and sews,
soaring stocks with their multiplying shares.

These are the things she can count in her hands,
the tangibles to feed and pass on to daughters
and grandchildren who can't keep up with all
the risky numbers she depends on, the blood-sugar counts
and daily insulin injections, the monthly tests
of precancerous cells in her liver and lungs.
She's a mathematical wonder with so many calculations
kept alive in her head, adding and subtracting
when everyone else is asleep.

Amy Uyematsu in *Stone Bow Prayer* (2005)

Assignment:

Can you sew me what your role model should look like?

Lost

If you forget me

I want you to know
one thing.

You know how this is:

if I look
at the crystal moon, at the red branch
of the slow autumn at my window,
if I touch
near the fire
the impalpable ash
or the wrinkled body of the log,
everything carries me to you,
as if everything that exists,
aromas, light, metals,
were little boats
that sail
toward those isles of yours that wait for me.

Well, now,
if little by little you stop loving me
I shall stop loving you little by little.

If suddenly
you forget me
do not look for me,
for I shall already have forgotten you.

If you think it long and mad,
the wind of banners
that passes through my life,
and you decide
to leave me at the shore
of the heart where I have roots,
remember
that on that day,
at that hour,
I shall lift my arms
and my roots will set off
to seek another land.

But

if each day,
each hour,
you feel that you are destined for me
with implacable sweetness,
if each day a flower

climbs up to your lips to seek me,
ah my love, ah my own,
in me all that fire is repeated,
in me nothing is extinguished or forgotten,
my love feeds on your love, beloved,
and as long as you live it will be in your arms
without leaving me.

Pablo Neruda (1948/1949)

Ocean of memory

I dived inside the ocean of memory
And went deeper and deeper
Everything around me went still
My life began to rewind

Flashing images from my past
The sorrows and the pains
The joy and the gains
I wanted some moments to stay for ever
And some to disappear fast

My whole life came before my eyes
Then everything became blank
I was still, everything around me became dynamic
I slowly returned back to the present

The ocean of memory is so vast
As life goes on, it grows bigger
I do make many voyages
Some so enthralling
Some full of pain

But my heart doesn't agree
It always wants to swim in this ocean

Kavitha Krishnamurthy from <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/ocean-of-memory/> (2006) edited 2010 by author.

Milk and honey

The world
Gives you
So much pain
And here you are
Making gold of it

- there is nothing purer than that

Rupi Kaur in *Milk and Honey* (2015)

Memory loss

Indeed we live in troubled times
Our days filled with angst n' worry
Good folk committing petty crimes
Blindly going nowhere in a hurry

Some complain of "Memory loss"
Whilst caught up in hurtful foment
Their days lived in utter chaos
Forsaken; "Living in the moment"

When events speed up slow down!
Deliberate; then proceed
'Lest you quickly sink n' drown
For it's your loss when lifetime tallied

Life is best when you're the boss,
And there's no need for memory loss

Ray Lucero from <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/memory-loss-2/> (2007)

Assignment:
Can you sew me what your happiest memory should look like?

Al wat sterft, zal bloeien

De bomen kom uit de grond
En uit hun stam
De twijgen
En iedereen vindt het heel gewoon
Dat zij weer bladeren krijgen
We zien ze vallen op de grond
En dan opnieuw weer groeien
Zo heeft de aarde ons geleerd
Dat ál wat sterft zal bloeien

Toon Hermans in *Liggen in het Gras* (2000)

Assignment:
Can you sew me what loss should look like?

Love

I do not love you except because I love you

I do not love you except because I love you;
I go from loving to not loving you,
From waiting to not waiting for you
My heart moves from cold to fire.

I love you only because it's you the one I love;
I hate you deeply, and hating you
Bend to you, and the measure of my changing love for you
Is that I do not see you but love you blindly.

Maybe January light will consume
My heart with its cruel
Ray, stealing my key to true calm.

In this part of the story I am the one who
Dies, the only one, and I will die of love because I love you,
Because I love you, Love, in fire and blood

Pablo Neruda in *One Hundred Love Sonnets: XVII* from *The Essential Neruda: Selected Poems*, edited by Mark Eisner (2004)

Helder en zonder vrees

Voor Samuel

Leg je hart bloot en er wordt op getrapt.

Spreek je gedachten uit en
je zult worden tegengesproken.

Kijk onze buigzame wereld recht
in het gezicht en je ziet de helft
Nog niet, laat staan het einde.

Je hebt een hart dat klopt en pompt
Een hoofd om mee te denken en
Longen om adem te halen, laat
niemand je iets anders vertellen.

Heb lief, heb eindeloos lief
Heb groots en meeslepend lief
Je zult alle lagen leren kennen
Van pijn, maar je zult leven
En volledig zijn.

Thomas Möhlmann, *Waar we wonen* (2013)

When we choose to love, we
choose to move against fear,
Against alienation and separation.

The choice to love is a choice to connect, to find ourselves in the
other.

bell hooks in *All About Love: New Visions* (2000)

L.O.V.E

ON THIS DAY
THERE WILL BE NO TALK OF WAR
OR POLITIC
OR DISASTER
OR DEATH
LOVE IS ALIVE TODAY
SO WE WILL SPEAK ONLY OF LOVE
THERE WILL BE ONLY LOVE
ON TONGUE
AND LIP
AND IN HEART
AND THOUGHT
AND IT WON'T BE THAT HOLLYWOOD TYPE OF LOVE
NOT T.V. LOVE
NOT DIMESTORE NOVEL LOVE
AND CERTAINLY, NOT MAINSTREAM MUSIC LOVE
LOVE
LOVE

YOU KNOW, LOVE
LOVE THAT HAS BEEN WORKED ON
LIKE GARDENS AND TERM PAPERS
LOVE THAT HAS BEEN NURTURED, LIKE CHILDREN
AND WELL, LIKE CHILDREN

LOVE THAT FALLS, CRASHES EVEN, BURNS
BUT DUSTS OFF, FIXES UP...AND RISES
RISES
MORE BRILLIANT THAN BEFORE
PHOENIX LOVE
YEAH, PHOENIX LOVE
SO, LET US SPEAK ONLY OF LOVE
HEALING LOVE
NO HERBAL OR OVER-THE-COUNTER LOVE
REAL HEALING LOVE
LIKE GOD LOVE
LIKE MOTHER'S LOVE
LOVER'S LOVE
CHILD'S LOVE
LIKE, BEST FRIEND LOVE
AND CHANGE THE WORLD LOVE
HUMAN LOVE
HUMANS LOVE
LOVE SOFT
LOVE HARD
BUT JUST LOVE
ENJOY THIS NEW GARDEN
LOVE
WORK ON IT TOGETHER
AND IT WILL BE PERENNIAL

IT WILL GROW...YEAR TO YEAR
IT WILL BE BEAUTIFUL
IT WILL WIN BLUE RIBBONS AND EVERYTHING
FOLKS WILL COME FROM FAR AND WIDE JUST TO SEE IT
AND WISH THEY HAD IT
HAD THIS KIND OF GARDEN
THIS KIND OF...
LOVE LOVE

Ursula Rucker from MA At Mama (2006)

Assignment:
Can you sew me your heart?

Final poem

You have made it to the end, with my heart in your hands. Thank you, for arriving here safely. For being tender with the most delicate part of me. Sit down, breath you must be tired, let me kiss your hands. Your eyes. They must be wanting of something sweet. I am sending you all my sugar. I would be nowhere and nothing if it were not for you, you've helped me become the woman I wanted to be, but was too afraid to be, do you have any idea how much of a miracle you are, how lovely it's been. And how lovely it will always be. I am kneeling before you. Saying thank you. I am sending you my love to your eyes, may they always see goodness in people, and may you always practice kindness, may we see each other as one. May we be nothing short of in love with everything the universe has to offer and may we always stay grounded, rooted, our planted firmly onto the earth.

- a love letter from me to you

Rupi Kaur in *Milk and Honey* (2015)

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