Crafting ourselves

Amanda Zacarkim
Crafting Ourselves:
Producing Knowledge and Constructing Identities Through Contemporary Handmade Embroidery

Amanda Zacarkim
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Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Anneke Smelik
Student number: s4763521
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When I first moved from Brazil to the Netherlands to study, I had no idea of the impact that embroidery would have on my way of thinking. During this year of intense study, the idea of stitching knowledge together with more people is what has been motivating me to move forward. For this reason, I wish to acknowledge some of the people I am grateful for supporting me in one way or another throughout this adventure.

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ABSTRACT

Embroidery can be seen as a gateway to engage with the production of certain types of knowledge. This Master's thesis follows the lead to delineate what kind of knowledge can be contextualized in relation to material culture and the internal mechanisms that regulate contemporary craft practices. This research also explores how the formation of personal and collective identities are unfolded through the making of hand embroidery.

In this research I address needlework through the lens of anthropologist Tim Ingold and his notion that the process of making is able to shape one’s perception and produce knowledge, allowing new becomings. Philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychotherapist Félix Guattari’s concept of becoming will be used to relate the materiality of embroidery to the new identities that might emerge from this perception.

Finally, I tie the processes of formation of individual and collective identities to the practice of embroidery. In total, ten stories of Brazilian practitioners have been selected as examples. They present aspects of personal change through the engagement with hand embroidery and also deal with the initiatives regarding this craft technique in the social sphere.
INTRODUCTION

Embroidery, sewing, knitting, crocheting. Until not so long ago, these words were often related to minor skills in a culture that entraps women in their houses, as Virginia Woolf has written\(^1\). Being a woman of our postmodern times, I have denied any interest in handicraft for years in favor of technology and a busy lifestyle. But the more my routine was lead by virtual interaction, the more I felt the need to take my hands off keyboards and screens in search of something more tangible, perhaps more real. But, interestingly, it was through some 'likes' on social media that I got in touch with other women who were also experiencing the same sensation. Together, we decided to learn how to embroider. It has been now four years since our weekly embroidery meetings have unfolded in friendships and into *Clube do Bordado*\(^2\), our creative business.

Embroidery has shown to have a power on its own, what led me to discover new abilities and new connections with other people. This impression was being stitched into my personal life through readings, practical workshops, and by hearing stories of other embroiderers. They reminded me of the practices that I learned in childhood, in the conviviality with my grandmother and her talented seamstresses and artisan friends. I was then able to understand and to reconnect with my own story, and embroidery helped me put my forgotten ideas into practice, materializing them. From this previous understanding came the interest to study needlework and its power, perhaps to encourage the engagement of more practitioners and more scholars on this subject.

In this Master’s thesis, I celebrate hand embroidery beyond finished artifacts, addressing this technique from the viewpoint of its effects on the lives

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\(^1\) In the essay *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown*, Woolf analysed the representation of working-class women by Modernist authors and, by doing so, offered her critic to the ways in which the dominant social system entrapped all women in houses, including herself (Tratner 1997, p. 54).

\(^2\) *Clube do Bordado* is a Brazilian collective that seeks to foster the culture of embroidery and crafts since 2013. The group is formed by six partners who create contemporary embroidery artworks, promote meetings and workshops. In addition to the handmade products, the collective also creates videos and online content, using social networks in an attempt to exchange knowledge and open new paths for education and empowerment. (Clube do Bordado 2017, n.p.).
of people. I will explore the hypothesis that the knowledge produced through making can provide new discoveries for needlework practitioners, ultimately benefiting their processes of identity formation, both individually and collectively. The foundations of my research will be based on new materialist authors such as Ingold (2010; 2011; 2013), Barad (2003; 2007; 2015), and Bennett (2010); on Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophical concepts ([1987] 2004; 1994), and stitched along the sociological approaches offered by Sennett (2008) and Lawler (2008).

Embroidery has a long history as decorative work until being revisited as a craft in itself. By the beginning of the twentieth-century, Bauhaus and other European schools have presented the principles of craftsmanship as a form of understanding form, texture, line and color. But this approach of traditional techniques lasted little, and “by the end of the 1960s craftsmanship was barely taught in Europe, nor was it valued” (Dormer 1997, p. 3). Technological advances have replaced craft, and both the ready-made and the appeal of postmodern art have participated in this process (ibid). For Dormer, such devaluation happened as soon as the endeavors of technology and design followed their own ways, leaving craft to become a ‘salon the refuse of low status’ (1997, p. 4). A way of rethinking this status is offered by Adamson (2007), who defines craft as a process, “an attitude or a habit of action”, rather than a limited set of objects (2007, pp. 3-4). Adamson’s overarching idea of craft as a process attempts to extinguish the barriers between arts and craft that still exist both in theoretical discussions and in market practices. However, the thread of the skein takes us back to the stories sewn many centuries ago, and that are especially related to textiles and techniques like embroidery. Interestingly, Parker (2010) takes into consideration the production of embroidery throughout history to show that the ideal of femininity in the Renaissance coincides historically with the emergence of a clearly defined separation of art and craft (2010, pp. 4-5). This rupture began at the time when embroidery was increasingly being crafted by women, and later it was “reflected in the changes in art education from craft-based workshops to academics at precisely the time -- the eighteenth century -- when an ideology of femininity as natural to women was evolving” (Parker 2010, pp. 4-5). Therefore,
to consider embroidery is also to take into account the work of women and the marginalization of this craft that has been built up throughout history.

Nevertheless, needlework never ceased to attract interest for its aesthetic and sensorial qualities that denote mastery in its production. Some scholars even consider that textiles such as embroidery provide poetic inspiration for thinking about and making networks (Hemmings 2012, p. 121). Embroidery also proved to be a significant medium for several feminist artists in the 1970s (Parker 2010, p. xi), and since then the technique continues to challenge the established division between arts and crafts. Proof of this is that, in recent years, a number of exhibitions have shown work by artists employing stitchery (Parker 2010, pp. xii-xiii). In fashion, the use of embroidery is prolific and constant, ranging from the artisanal processes of haute couture to the mass production of fast fashion (Archer 2015, n.p.). It is thus by each stitch that this secular practice ends up reinventing history all the time.

Embroidery then shows itself as a versatile technique, far from being confined to tradition or to its historical legacy. More than the aesthetic appeal, needlework can be studied by its materiality, by the creative possibilities it offers, and by the many ways in which this technique can influence people. Just as in my personal account, engaging with embroidery can be able to produce a practical and sentient knowledge that ultimately acts in the process of forming new identities. In this regard, the present Master’s thesis strives to answer the following research question:

_How can engagement with handmade embroidery produce knowledge, and in what ways can such knowledge enable the construction of identity?_

**Method and approach**

Needlework is an accessible technique and its contribution to the formation of identity makes it of individual as well as cultural value. Therefore, in order to answer the proposed research question, I adopt two different methods. The first part features a literature review, endorsing examples of contemporary embroidery artists. The second and third parts use the analysis of interviews
with embroidery practitioners as a way to illustrate and discuss the theoretical framework of this study. Both web and academic sources are used to augment the studies on hand embroidery in relation to material culture and identity.

The first chapter will equip readers with theoretical background pertaining new materialist theories and their linkage with embroidery. By doing so, my objective is to explore how the knowledge performed through making is able to unfold new skills and new becomings. Anthropologist Tim Ingold (2010; 2011; 2013) revitalizes the argument about the practical knowledge acquired through material practices like needlework by what he calls as “thinking through making” (2013, p. 6). Propositions such as this guide the chapter along with the connections to the vitality of materials and the ability to tell by hand. To build this argument, I turn to examples from contemporary embroiderers such as the Peruvian artist Ana Teresa Barboza, for whom the impact of working with craft techniques has defined her artistic trajectory. In this sense, the knowledge of embroidery leads the way for connections with materials and with oneself, ultimately unleashing diverse processes of becoming. The concept of becoming derives from philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychotherapist Félix Guattari ([1987] 2004) and serves to designate new ways of being from encounters with other beings and things. As a second example, I will refer to the Brazilian group Matizes Dumont, from which one of the embroiderers comments about how the flow of experimenting with needlework influences her constant becomings.

The second chapter addresses the construction of personal identity through making. It advances the discussion about the potential of embroidery to be a tool for new becomings through self-awareness and experimentation, and of how, stitch by stitch, one's engagement with this technique is able to unleash new processes of identity formation. In order to examine this argument, I will first present the sociological approach to identity as offered by Lawler (2008), which will be used to analyse the subsequent narratives along with new materialist concepts. The personal accounts to be examined in this chapter present the diverse relationships that people established with and from the practice of needlework. Some of them have discovered their creative potential through stitchery, others have reconstructed their sense of self after engaging
with the materiality of the craft. In common, these stories present how embroidery is able to bridge the gap for a person to try out new abilities, possibilities, and encounters.

In the third and last chapter, I explore how the construction of identity through embroidery may have an impact in the collective realm once the individual initiatives expand to the social sphere. I will then continue the analysis of embroiderer’s narratives in order to comment about the construction of collective identities, thus encompassing social, cultural and political issues. By drawing from contemporary practitioner’s accounts, my aim is to present how the process of making embroidery has the potential to foster social bonds as well as collaborative actions. For instance, the narratives have shown the use of embroidery for professional and social initiatives related to mental health, the sharing of knowledge, or even as a way to position oneself in society. When addressed in this way, embroidery seems to have a connection with micropolitics for its small-scale initiative’s potential to impact the social sphere. In a further stage of this chapter, I will refer once again to Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of micropolitics ([1987] 2004) aiming to discuss the formation of collective processes through the engagement with needlework.

*Crafting Ourselves* offers the possibility to examine embroidery through an interdisciplinary approach inspired by new materialism, sociology, anthropology, and philosophy, producing in this way a more comprehensive understanding of needlework, its importance and applications. It also contributes to the studies related to identity by introducing ideas on why needlework can be recognized as a valuable technique for identity formation and how it could be used in individual and collective initiatives in which both materiality and craftsmanship work to flourish what is more creative in us.
CHAPTER I
ENTANGLEMENTS: THE MATERIALITY OF HANDMADE EMBROIDERY

Hand embroidery has aroused interest and new explorations in the fashion and design industries as well as in contemporary art. The traditional technique can be seen in fashion shows from high-fashion brands such as Gucci and Alexander McQueen, in stage costumes by music artist like Björk (Macalister-Smith 2016, n.p.), and also revisioned by contemporary artists such as Alice Kettle and Joana Vasconcelos, who have adopted embroidery as a creative medium (Cattin 2016, n.p.). Some scholars are even amazed by the fact that hand-stitched embroidery is still economically viable with the advances of technological machines in the production of mass-market goods (Miller 2011, p. 129). Not only is hand embroidery in full motion but it has also been generating a growing interest due to its material aspects beyond the aesthetic appeal.

Needles, threads, detailed stitches, cloths, and textures are elements that offer unlimited possibilities for creation and experimentation. As a matter of fact, a recent report from trendwatcher Lidewij Edelkoort (2016, n.p.) praises the return to the arts and crafts movement as a response to “the growing influence of an all-encompassing digital fantasy world”. From the perspective of virtual relations and mass-produced goods, the quest for ‘manually-powered’ products made with crafts materials such as textiles, ceramic and glass offer people more than tactile experiences. In this sense, Edelkoort states that the reappearance of arts and crafts to the fore of fashion and design is associated with the need for creations that are able to evoke sense, emotion, and soul (ibid). Thus, more than consuming products, we would be willing to engage with materials, expecting them to be somehow ‘alive’ and to connect with us.

This demand for connection allows us to look at material creations not as mere objects, but as complex things. According to anthropologist Tim Ingold (2010), only things, not objects, are able to evoke senses and emotion from us. Ingold makes his point proposing a connection to what philosopher Martin Heidegger has observed that an object presents itself in a static way, as a fait
accompli, while a thing exists in constant movement and in its relation with other elements that interfere and acts upon each other (2010, p. 4). For Ingold, in addressing objects that were once static and treating them like things, we are “invited into the gathering” or the underlying circumstances that rule them, revealing the material qualities of their identity (ibid). This ‘aliveness’ is a greater power than to have agency precisely because things “have not been reduced to the status of objects” (ibid, p. 7).

One of the assumptions of my Master’s thesis is that hand embroidered creations are living things in a sense that they are in the middle of a constant process of formation -- of its materiality, of its content, and its meaning. For Ingold a thing is only ‘alive’ in a meshwork of relations of movement or growth with other elements (2010, p. 8; 2013, p. 132). As an example, a piece of embroidery can be considered a thing because it is entwined with the tools and materials that were used in the process of making it, with the skilled human hands that have stitched it, and with the application of the technique itself. In this meshwork, a thing can only exist in its entanglements with other things, thus through material engagement. The assumption of embroidered objects as things permits further enquiries of other elements associated with the making process such as the work of the hands, the production of knowledge, and identity.

Ingold presents his influential approach to materials arguing that the process of making is able to produce knowledge (2013, back cover). He refers to the material practice of a craftsman or craftswoman who is capable of thinking through making, allowing “knowledge to grow from the crucible of our practical and observational engagements with the beings and things around us” (Adamson, cited in Ingold 2013, p. 6). In other words, this knowledge acquired through making is material-engaged, sensorial, and of a practical kind. In The Craftsman (2008), sociologist Richard Sennett also characterizes the production of knowledge through material engagement, considering that “thinking and feeling are contained within the process of making” (2008, p. 7). He does so referring to the craftsman’s way of working in an attempt to reconcile practice and theory, technique and expression, maker and user in the analysis of material reality (Sennett 2008, p. 11).
These theoretical concepts will be presented in this section through practical examples of contemporary embroiderers in an attempt to show that, while performing the hand making of the technique and engaging with its material aspects, one can acquire a knowledge that was once lost or estranged from everyday practices. First, I will discuss some artworks by Peruvian artist Ana Teresa Barboza in order to show how she experiments with materials from hand embroidery, knitting and crocheting. Second, I will present a narrative from Matizes Dumont, a traditional embroidery group from Brazil that builds a bridge between the engagement with materials with a practitioner's perceptions about her own being.

1.1 Following the materials of hand embroidery

The materials with which artefacts are made can offer ways to trace the work of human hands. As Tim Ingold (2013) explains in *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, there is an ‘art of inquiry’ with which one can explore materials and their properties such as textures and volumes in the generation of form, as well as their dynamics of activity and rest when in contact with other elements (2013, p. 10). Since materials are living things in their own right (Ingold 2010, p. 7), they are able to shape and even determine the relations with practitioners that choose to work with them in the production of artefacts.

Ingold argues that in order to know a material one needs to follow it through observation and by actively engaging with it (2013, p. 31). The notion of *following the materials* developed by Ingold (ibid) comes from Deleuze and Guattari’s idea that all things are in a *matter-flow* of constant movement and growth ([1987] 2004, p. 454). A person’s task then would be to ‘surrender’ to this flow and then “follow where it leads” (Deleuze and Guattari, cited in Ingold 2013, p. 45). From the construction of buildings to the art of drawing, a practitioner must keep track of the set of influences that bricks and pencils exert in order to develop his or her expertise in relation to their qualities and properties. Hence, Ingold is more interested in the engagement that a craftsman has with materials than in the knowledge that objectifies them:
“In the act of making the artisan couples his own movements and gestures - indeed his very life - with the becoming of his materials, joining with and following the forces and flows that bring his work to fruition. It is the artisan’s desire to see what the material can do, by contrast to the scientist’s desire to know what it is, that, as political theorist Jane Bennett explains (2010, p. 60), enables the former to discern a life in the material and thus, ultimately, to ‘collaborate more productively’ with it” (Ingold 2013, p. 31).

The concept of following materials is also valid for the streams of hand embroidery. Collaborating with various elements and building an intimacy with them is a determining factor in using this technique as a medium, letting creativity flow, and being surprised by what head and hands, threads and fabrics, altogether, are capable of making. At this point, I will conduct a close reading of embroidery in order to recognize and understand the specificities of this craft, including its agency on the practitioners while creating their works.

I will therefore analyse the work of Peruvian artist Ana Teresa Barboza to show how the raw materials of embroidery potentially delineate the trajectory of her manual production. In an interview (Pitcher 2015, n.p.), Barboza says that hand embroidery figures as a consistent choice in most of her creations over the past ten years. She comments,

“My work has addressed various styles… from photography to fabric transfers and embroidery on the image, fabrics and embroidery, drawing and embroidery, weaving and embroidery. The manual embroidery work went from being a technique to talk about something, to being the focus of my work. Talking about the process of manual labor in order to re-evaluate it.” (Pitcher 2015, n.p.).

One can note that in Ana Teresa Barboza’s artistry, powerful entanglements take form through embroidery. Although in the first artwork analysed here the artist focuses on a more figurative use of the technique, later she ends up using the fabric along with more complex patterns, speaking directly to the labour of her hands. This is characteristic of her embroidery creations on canvas from 2008, in which one particular piece strikes the eye (Figure 1). In this artwork she is using
embroidery both as a technique and as the main subject, symbolically portraying the act of embroidering her own skin. One way of reading this piece could be that Barboza is *intra-acting* with needle and threads in an attempt to internalize the stitching practice.

Karen Barad (2003) coined the term “intra-action” in her theory of posthumanist performativity. She uses *intra-action* to mark the inseparability of “components” -- human and non-human material bodies and their characteristics or “phenomena” -- in a constant process of affecting itself and its surroundings, going along the flow and (re)configuring of the world (2003, p. 817). As the world is in constant matter-flow, Barad argues that “relations of exteriority, connectivity, and exclusion are reconfigured” (ibid). She is not concerned with problems posed by the representation of the world, but rather in the “consequences, interventions, creative possibilities of intra-acting within and as part of our world” (2007, p. 37). In other words, Barad proposed the end of binary oppositions, marking that all things and meanings are inseparable instead of only interacting (Hird 2009, pp. 339-340). When thinking of intra-actions through Barboza’s artworks I would say that there are no boundaries between her process of hand making and the depicted embroidered technique, since they both deal with the connectivity that *matters* to unfold new enactments. I would thus say that both the theme and the suggested performance of this specific artwork from Ana Teresa Barboza could be related to Barad's explanation of a performativity that allows matter to be an active participant in the world's becoming, in its ongoing intra-activity (2003, p. 803).
Through Barboza's handworks, the materials express themselves creating intricate textures, patterns, unfolding diverse layers on a previously blank fabric. At the same time, the fabric acts by means of holding, sustaining, and intra-acting with the threads, needle, and the hands. “What interests me is that embroidery gave another layer of information to the image, and a new relationship between them and the technique I use”, as Barboza puts it (Pitcher 2015, n.p.). Her words thus suggest that she follows the life and affects of embroidery itself.

Moreover, in Barboza's process of making she is also corresponding with materials by experimenting with craft techniques. According to Ingold, a correspondence exists when one is able to follow the materials “in the anticipation of what might emerge” (2010, p. 9). For Ingold, making is then a process of correspondence between the materials with which one engages and the work of the hands, bringing forth multiple potentialities in a world in constant flow (2013, p. 31). In other words, to correspond is to engage with materials so they can also lead the way, unravelling new discoveries about material-engaged practices such as embroidery, drawing, cooking and so on. From this perspective, my point is that Barboza's artistic research towards hand embroidery has actually evolved to be all about the engagement with embroidery.
itself. As the technique and its materials unfold new experimentations, the artist corresponds to them, also letting those vibrant things to lead the process.

Ingold highlights two aspects that are central about correspondence (2013, p. 105). The first is that it implies moments of waiting and of action, alternately; and the second is that it is a sentient movement. The author explains it with the example of writing letters, as follows:

“the lines of correspondence are lines of feeling, of sentience, evinced not -- or not only -- in the choice of words but in the manual gestures of the writing and their traces on the page. To read a letter is not just to read about one's respondent, but to read with him or her. It is as though the writer was speaking from the page, and you -- the reader -- were there, listening.” (Ingold 2013, p. 105).

In that sense, when analysing an artwork one can read it with all its inseparable components, trying to follow not only Barboza’s primary intentions but also what the materials and the handmade technique have created along the way through many intra-actions. This active correspondence can lead to other connections with the strength and complexity of materials, with the act of making, and with what sentient hands are capable of producing.

A constant exploration and intra-action with embroidery made Barboza experience its force as a thing, what actively helped her in the formation of an artistic repertoire. By analysing this artwork, I have tried to put in use concepts from Tim Ingold and Karen Barad to present how materials can connect to the work of the hands in the process of making, finally resulting in new entanglements. In this sense, I would suggest that the causal relationship between the artist and the technique of hand embroidery has evolved into a sustained practice of self-discovery through engagement and correspondence with materials.

**Vibrant and interesting matters**

In more recent years, Barboza has continued her artistic experiments in ways that offer new insights about the engagement with materials through making, which is mainly the focus of my research. For instance, the artist has also
explored clothes “using the dress as a language to discuss relationships we establish with other people” (Pitcher 2015, n.p.). She has continued stitchery “with the topic of relationships but more instinctively, using representations of animals besides humans, creating tensions between them” (Pitcher 2015, n.p.). Nevertheless, hand embroidery has taken new approaches in its intra-actions with other techniques such as knitting and crocheting, as well as being applied to materials as diverse as paper, photographs, and wood (Ana Teresa Barboza 2013, n.p.). As a result, Barboza's artworks are going beyond 2D limitations in the sense that they explore flow and structure through their materiality.

Accordingly, the second artwork from Ana Teresa Barboza that I will discuss is Cieneguilla (Figure 2), which was part of the artist's individual exhibition Leer el Paisaje held in Peru in 2016. In this piece, Barboza uses graphite, embroidery on canvas, and a knitted yarn piece to extrapolate some boundaries of figurative art. By combining embroidery and knitting techniques, this artwork is inscribed in an attempt “to make a parallel between the process of handcraft and the process of nature, creating structures with threads similar to the tissues of a plant” (Pitcher 2015, n.p.). Barboza has thus taken part in the entanglements of diverse materials by mixing techniques in order to connect the artworks with a bigger spectrum. Indeed, she is being aware and paying attention to nature by exploring its textures, spatial landscapes, and ultimately life in a broad sense.
Another way of reading this artwork would be through Ingold's idea of “thinking through making” (2013, p. 6). Ingold argues that making allows practitioners and materials to correspond to one another in the process of creation. In that sense, the materiality of the threads and the embroidery itself do *matter* in the process of creating artworks -- both with visual effects and spatial textures -- within the work of the hands. In Ingold's words, the correspondence with materials in creating something enhances the sensory awareness of practitioners (2013, p. 7). I can thus argue that embroidery, knitting, and their materials are guiding Barboza’s ongoing artistic research, a research that extrapolates surfaces and physical boundaries in order to show how these materials affect their surroundings. In this particular artwork, the 3D effect can be understood as one of the consequences of this quest, both of the artist and of the materials themselves, to become more and more constituent
parts of an environment that is not physically confining, but rather that is able to show the leakages, the flow, and the life that cannot be contained.

An accurate perception of Barboza's artistic exploration lies in a text written by architect and illustrator Rafael Freyre, as follows:

“The visible landscape resembles a membrane containing infinite processes and multiple transformations at earth’s core (...) Thus the physical act of these techniques and its tactile materiality emerge from the image, to act as a mediator. A skin that approaches surrounds and returns us as viewers to the forgotten instant of the nature experience, to an unfinished and continuous flow between man and his [sic] environment.” (Freyre 2016, n.p.).

On the one hand, the text above offers clear references to flow and materiality in Barboza's creations as proposed by Ingold (2010; 2013). On the other, the artist's endeavors can be inscribed in what political theorist Jane Bennett (2010) calls as “vibrant matters”, which can be understood as all things that are able to affect material bodies. This affect happens in the sense that a vibrant matter has a capacity for activity and responsiveness, thus a force in itself (Barad, 2010, p. xii). In the artwork Cienneguilla, Barboza evokes affect and connection -- within nature, within handicrafts, and by extension within any material body that also takes part in this dynamic meshwork.

Although these propositions might seem abstract, they relate to Bennett's efforts to expose vibrant matters in practical ways, thus encouraging us to detect -- by seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling -- “a fuller range of the nonhuman powers circulating around and within human bodies” (2010, p. ix). Among many theoretical references, Bennett explores affect in accordance with philosopher Jacques Derrida's point of view. For instance, on the relation between being and following, Derrida writes,

“to be (anything, anyone) is always to be following (something, someone), always to be in response to call from something, however nonhuman it may be” (Derrida, cited in Bennett 2010, p. xiii).

This quote suggests that the work of an embroiderer practitioner or artist does not exist in isolation, as the expertise involved in the use of the technique can
only be fully acquired if there exists the constant following of materials and the needed correspondence with them. A vibrant matter is able to affect, and it acquires its right in influencing also our perception of an artwork by itself, as well as the affect generated in other bodies simply by being a living thing.

Moreover, in the entanglements with nature -- both as a theme and with handicraft materials -- Ana Teresa Barboza manages to leave behind the dichotomy of culture and nature. She combines the richness of the materials with the peculiarities of hand embroidery, transforming the technique itself into experimentation while also making an artistic statement about craftsmanship. Barboza’s creations offer a new perspective in terms of concepts and aesthetics to update a traditional technique like embroidery, ultimately transforming it into a political statement. As a matter of fact, Bennett thinks of affect as a central aspect of “micropolitics” associated with issues of power relations and the construction of identities (2010, p. xii), which I will explore further in the third chapter. Regarding Barboza’s artworks, such a political perspective is present in the relationship built both with natural and craft materials as well as their intra-actions in the process of ‘constructing’ herself, in the constant aim to extrapolate barriers.

In conclusion, from the entanglements in Ana Teresa Barboza artworks, I have gathered along in their materiality, getting to know some of the vivid lives that they are able to present and to enhance. Influenced by Ingold, I do believe in the power of making to create knowledge, and increasingly, I trust this knowledge to be participatory according to the intra-actions that it provides with other living things that surrounds us.

### 1.2 Making things, producing knowledge

In this section I will examine how the knowledge performed through making unfolds new skills and new becomings. In order to do so, I will first elaborate on the extensions and applications of making, which implies the engagement with materials, tactile experiences, and the work of the hands. Second, I will develop further Ingold’s concept of “telling by the hand” (2013, p. 112), according to which the conjunction of head and hands allows a practitioner to know a technique or
a process from the inside. Thus, this section deals with the production of a practical knowledge through making, and how the engagement with materials is able to disclose other initiatives and other becomings for an embroiderer, as I will try and articulate by the end of this section.

**Making and following materials**

Making, manufacturing and forging are all verbs that offer an analogy with the work of the hands, resembling a world in which the production would account for the practical expertise in knowing things by their materials and their main characteristics. All of these hark back to the tactility of making that, according to Ingold (2013), is especially alive in the domains of arts, architecture, and archeology; fields that he considers to be built upon the human encounters with materials (p. 11). As a matter of fact, Ingold uses diverse archaeological studies of an ancient hand axe to show that its form was not only conceived by human hands as it also counted on the intra-actions of different materials along with the action of wind, rain, and ongoing geological deposition (2013, pp. 44-45).

Since it is based on materials and their intra-actions with other aspects, making is then a process dependent on many factors rather than only determined by human intention. According to Deleuze and Guattari, making can be understood as a matter of surrendering to the materials and following them in order to discover the way they lead ([1987] 2004, pp. 450-451). It is thus a matter of corresponding with the materials and letting them guide the experimentation through making. Moreover, Ingold offers a comprehensive definition of making, as follows:

“the process of making is not so much an assembly as a procession, not a building up from discrete parts into a hierarchically organized totality but a carrying on - a passage along a path in which every step grows from the one before and into the one following, on an itinerary that always overshoots its destinations (...) is not an iteration of steps but an itineration: making is a journey; the maker a journeyman. And the essential characteristic of his [sic] activity is not that it is concatenated but that it flows” (Ingold 2013, p. 45).
Making is then a process of following the materials and letting their vibrant matters guide the way to go. For instance, in hand embroidery the process of corresponding with materials could be quite literal, with a practitioner actively sensing the threads while stitching them onto the fabric, thus intra-acting with them in order to decide how to proceed from their flow of textures, sensations and diverse effects. In this sense, the movements that seem repetitive -- as iterations -- actually create tactile traces by connecting a previous stitch with the next one, forming thus a complex itinerary to be followed with needle and threads.

What is more, as Sennett argues, “thinking and feeling are contained within the process of making” (2008, p. 7). That is to say that once a practitioner follows the materials, she or he can also enter an inner investigation through making. According to Sennett, making is then a committed dialogue both with materials and with oneself, as follows:

“Every good craftsman conducts a dialogue between concrete practices and thinking; this dialogue evolves into sustaining habits, and these habits establish a rhythm between problem-solving and problem finding. The relation between hand and head appears in domains seemingly as different as bricklaying, cooking, designing a playground, or playing the cello— but all these practices can misfire or fail to ripen. There is nothing inevitable about becoming skilled, just as there is nothing mindlessly mechanical about technique itself” (2008, p. 9).

As Sennett puts it, making goes hand in hand with thinking and establishing a rhythm through the correspondence with diverse materials. One is then able to think through making, as in Ingold’s terms (2013, p. 6), engaging head and hands to know materials and finally entering a creative flow within all these entanglements. In this sense, I would argue that the hand making, taken a priori as a simple and monotonous activity, presents itself in more complex ways because it also opens up possibilities for an embodied production of knowledge pertaining not only the materials but also one’s own ways of thinking and feeling. For instance in hand embroidery, when a person engages with the materials, creating textures and layers from plain cloth, she or he is acquiring knowledge.
from this tactile experience. While, at the same time, she or he is also producing knowledge through making, entering a sentient flow in an engagement with the technique and its materials.

One could ask about the specificities or implications of this knowledge. For Ingold, it is a knowledge that celebrates the creativity of what makers are able to achieve by working with materials in anticipation of what might emerge (2013 pp. 21-22). Ingold also argues that this knowledge “grows from and unfolds in the field of sentience comprised by the correspondence of practitioners' awareness and the materials with which they work” (2013, p. 11). It is thus a knowledge that grows through the practice of crafts, so closely engaged to the figure of the practitioner that it becomes accessible through what the experience of making something is able to tell. Also, as Sennett puts it, “the craftsman way of working can give people an anchor in material reality” (2008, p. 11) by using tools and bodily movements in a viable way to conduct life with skills. In other words, the experience of making can offer ways to mend again practice and theory, technique and expression while producing a sentient knowledge inscribed in materiality.

**Telling by hand**

When analysing hand embroidery, the hands, their gestures and how they work are important elements that I will explore further due to their ability to tell about the knowledge produced through making. With the notion of “telling by hand”, Ingold considers ‘telling’ not as an explanation of the world, but rather as an effective way “to trace a path that others can follow” (2013, p. 110). To tell by hand is then to disclose a sentient being rather than merely manufacturing objects or things (ibid). Ingold also pinpoints two related senses of the verb ‘to tell’, as follows:

“On the one hand, a person who can tell is able to recount the stories of the world. On the other hand, to tell is to be able to recognise subtle cues in one’s environment and to respond to them with judgment and precision.” (2013, pp. 109-110).
In other words, to tell by hand is to correspond and to follow the materials with
sentience and precision, two important aspects that the human hands know
well. Ingold makes use of philosopher Martin Heidegger’s idea that the hand is
no mere instrument taking into account the differences between handwriting
and the use of typewriter (2013, p. 113). For Heidegger, the handwriting could
tell the actual realm of the hand by showing the way a person holds a pen, how
the force is impregnated in the paper, and whether it was written calmly or
abruptly. By contrast, the typewriter does not show the human traces in the
execution of its task. The traces left by handwriting can thus reveal the humanity
of the hand (ibid).

In the same manner with hand embroidery, the materials have tactile
characteristics with which the human hands can correspond with fineness of
structure or rather with intense force through the stitching process or in the
finishing touches. There are also material narratives to be perceived from the
chosen embroidery stitches, from the texture that is created, as well as from the
knots and threads that expose the artisan's finishing skills, and ultimately tell a
story about his or hers process of flow that existed during the correspondence
with materials. As Ingold puts it, “the hand can also tell the stories of the world in
its gestures and in the written or drawn traces they yield, or in the manipulation
of threads as in weaving, lacemaking and embroidery” (2013, p. 112). Indeed, as
the hand becomes more dexterous, the more it feels (ibid).

Sennett also highlights gesture and prehension as important skills to
maintain the rhythm and reveal the dexterity of the human hand, thus allowing
the craftsman or craftswoman to produce a good work. He explains that
“prehension signals alertness, engagement, and risk-taking in the act of looking
ahead” (2008, p. 154). The movements in which the body acts in advance of
sense data have prehension as a main characteristic. When a person does not
wait to grasp something in its totality, she or he starts anticipating it both as a
thought and an action through body gestures. Sennett also considers that the
fingertips are able to tell the truth about things and materials, and that such a
skill can be learned through sentience and repetition (ibid, p. 160).
Telling by hand thus demonstrates that dexterous hands are crucial for bringing sentience and engagement to the process of making. The human hand, in its gestures and capacity for prehension, works along with thinking in anticipating the next procedures in correspondence with materials. When it comes to embroidery, the hand offers guidance through tactile senses and practical manners. For instance, it happens in the execution of a knot, or in passing the string through a needle using quick movements at the fingertips. As Ingold claims, the hands are then able to tell a story that is not technical but rather natural to emerge from moving bodies and vital materials (2013, p. 110).

Hands are thus essential by what they are able to ‘give off’ into the rich itinerary of the process of making. Along with sentient thinking and the correspondence with materials, one is able to get to know things from the inside, engaging with these vibrant matters and potentially being also transformed by them. By entering a flow with materials that are constantly changing and evolving, an embroidery practitioner might also follow her or his own stream of consciousness, thus entering a process of becoming through making. From a practical activity that is able to produce knowledge, handmade embroidery could also be a powerful tool for new discoveries and thus the starting point for various becomings, as I will explore in the next section.

**Becoming: From Iteration to itineration**

Threads, needles and textile textures are rich materials with which an embroidery practitioner can engage with dexterous hands to disclose a sentient knowledge which offers possibilities for new creations and new becomings. But what are these becomings and what is the significance of this concept in relation to hand embroidery? In *A Thousand Plateaus* ([1987] 2004), Deleuze and Guattari have explained *becoming* as “a verb with a consistency all its own; it does not reduce to, or lead back to ‘appearing’, ‘being’, ‘equaling’ or ‘producing’” (p. 239). Becoming has a force in itself and is a generative process of new ways of being, capable of producing multiple effects. There is no particular start or ending point to a process of becoming, as any activity can potentially work as a borderline from taking one person from one context to another, from one being into
becoming-anything. What is more, for Deleuze and Guattari becoming is always a deterritorialisation ([1987] 2004, p. 299). Sutton and Martin-Jones (2008) explain deterritorialisation as “the breaking up of order, boundaries and form to produce movement and growth” (p. 142). To put it another way, a becoming takes place whenever a person engages with experiences that trigger personal, social or cultural boundaries, provoking transformations of any kind.

Approaching becoming in music, painting and the arts, Bogue (2003) argues that it entails an unfixing of commonsense coordinates of time and identity. As he writes,

“A becoming has the identity of an atmosphere, a time of day, or a season, a ‘thisness’, a specific configuration of relative movements and affective intensities that infuses and in a sense dissolves the heterogeneous commonsense entities that compose it.” (Bogue 2003, p. 34).

That is to say that a becoming might take only a moment, a song or a creative process just as much as a season or an era. A becoming is a continual process in which sensation also plays an important role. For instance, Deleuze considers that when one is moved by a work of art at the level of sensation, she or he encounters a moment of being-in-the-world: “I become in sensation and something arrives through sensation, one through the other, one in the other” (Deleuze, cited in Barnett 2012, p. 187). It is thus through the unbounded quality of sensation that one is able to discover processes of becoming, with experience close at hand. Moreover, as Smelik (2016) puts it, becoming is a practice of change and repetition leading to continuous transformations, thus it is never finished (p. 167). She also comments about the rich and quite literal metaphors proposed by Deleuze, in which knitting, crochet, embroidery, and patchwork are tangible examples of life in its process of becoming (2016, p. 166). As a becoming is always a transformation, a movement of “difference and repetition” (Deleuze [1968] 1994), it has the potential to start from the practice of hand embroidery, with which one can engage primarily from the stitches and materials to enter a flow that challenges fixed ways of being. As a result, both the material practice and the embroiderer could enter other becomings by following the flux of
handmaking, by merging into the figures that are being stitched, or becoming in other creative ways that arise from this engagement.

One can thus establish a connection between the ever-changing nature of becoming with the hand making of embroidery, which is about following materials with sentient hands in order to produce a meshwork of new textures, forms, images and beings that come into life within each stitch. From the outside, hand embroidery appears to be an iteration. Although by thinking through making (Ingold 2013, p. 6), hand embroidery presents ways of transformation just as well as “singing or composing, painting, writing have no other aim: to unleash those becomings” (Deleuze and Guattari [1987] 2004, p. 272). I therefore argue that through making embroidery by hand one can engage with experiences and activities that start other becomings.

The Brazilian short documentary Trans-bordando (Muller and Goifman 2007) presents a palpable example of becoming through hand embroidery. The production portrays the life and work of embroiderers from the group Matizes Dumont, a reference in traditional needlework in Brazil. The group depicts natural landscapes and local villages through embroidery with a style that can be compared to naïve art (Tate n.p.) by its simplicity and by being made by artists outside the traditional system. Matizes Dumont is also known for collectively illustrating children’s books and teaching the art of needlework to women in Brazilian underprivileged communities (Giannini 2012, n.p.). In the documentary Martha Dumont, one of the embroiderers of the group, comments,

“When I start an embroidery I cannot stop it anymore. I can continue stitching the same piece for more than 24 hours. I will stitch it in the living room, in the bedroom, while listening to music, or else I want the place to be very quiet…I just enter a process that I am not able to stop. I feel like I turn into a bird when I am embroidering a bird. The same happens while stitching a tree, and I turn into a tree. Then I stitch a person and I become human instead. I am becoming as I embroider” (Muller and Goifman 2007; my translation).

The artist speaks quite literally about the various becomings that she experiences by entering the flow of embroidery. All the figures that she stitches
-- a bird, a tree, a person -- creates opportunities for her new becomings. In other words, needlework provides the artist's deterritorialisation with these figures acting as _lines of flight_ -- that is, as the main actions of exploring new territories (Elliott 2012, p. 148) -- for diverse becomings through material experiences. Regarding the idea of becoming-bird, Deleuze and Guattari commonly name it as a broader becoming-animal referring to Jung to show that these relations function as "analogical representations" (Deleuze & Guattari [1987] 2004, p. 236). Interestingly enough is the attention paid by the philosophers to the notion of becoming-woman by reason of "becoming-woman, more than any other becoming, possesses a special introductory power" (ibid, p. 248) since it also implies "becoming-minoritarian" (ibid, p. 291). One can understand the minoritarian aspect from the perspective of hand embroidery being a craft technique mostly executed by women and that for years was disqualified exactly for this reason (Parker 2010, p. 5). But more than focusing on the historical implications, a becoming-woman brings an important connotation. As Bogue puts it:

"Why a becoming-woman, -child, -animal? Social coding operates by way of asymmetrical binary oppositions, in Western societies through an implicit privileging of male over female, adult over child, rational over animal, white over colored, etc. A becoming deterritorialises such codes and in its operations necessarily engages the underprivileged term of each of these binary oppositions." (Bogue 2003, pp. 34-35).

A becoming takes place between fixed identities, and a becoming-woman establishes the first change of perspective experienced in the process of making by hand. Moreover as Deleuze and Guattari put it, the becoming has a force because it is the "be-between, to pass between, the intermezzo" ([1987] 2004, p. 277). Becoming-woman is then the starting point for other deterritorialisations that one can encounter in the process of following the flow of craft. Deterritorialized from his or her fixed identity, one experiences and corresponds with crafts' materials and the sentient work of the hands. Moreover, Sennett (2008) highlights the idea of an iteration with a difference that is well-know in the artisan production. He writes,
“we might equate routine and boredom. For people who develop sophisticated hand skills, it’s nothing like this. Doing something over and over is stimulating when organized as looking ahead. The substance of the routine may change, metamorphose, im-prove, but the emotional payoff is one’s experience of doing it again.” (2008, p. 175).

More than a simple craft technique, hand embroidery has the potential to be a tool for self-awareness and experimentation. By engaging its practitioners in sensations and sentient encounters, needlework has the potential to assist diverse becomings. I thus argue that one’s engagement with the practical knowledge produced through making can have a further impact on the construction of identity. For instance, Deleuze and Guattari consider that one’s identity is always being developed, it is a “never-ending project of becoming” (Deleuze and Guattari, cited in Sutton and Martin-Jones 2008, p. 46). As something that can always be re-constructed, it also arises an ethical call for different ways of being through deterritorialisations. Becoming then turns out to be central in the discussion of identity for “its ability to help us understand how hierarchies of identity and essence are constructed and resisted” (ibid, p. 46). Moreover, as Sutton and Martin-Jones argue “to appreciate becoming as a fact of life, a stage of critical self-awareness, or even an ethical response is to appreciate how identity itself is formed through opposition, alterity and difference” (ibid).

Becoming is thus a starting operation to re-invent both personal and collective identities, once anyone or anything can create lines of flight as long as there is a shared affinity (ibid, p. 49). Taking hand embroidery into account, one can understand this affinity from the practice of the technique, from the knowledge acquired through making, as well as from sharing such knowledge with more people. The becoming happens with one’s encounter with the materiality of embroidery, but it can spread collectively once the knowledge of making generates lines of flight among more people.

Hand embroidery then becomes more than a craft technique considered its material aspects, its capability to impact on knowledge, and the potential effect that it has on individuals and their social relations. For instance, Jessica Hemmings (2012) recognizes textiles as influential tools for communication,
acknowledging their cultural value in contributing to the formation of identity (p. 203). She also highlights that textiles offer a response to various regimes of power, as a resistance within a difference: may it be in relation to hierarchies of perceived value within the arts, or by textile's accessibility in close connection with an undervalued place it occupies in the recent history of visual culture (ibid). The knowledge produced through hand making is then a meshwork of engaged thinking and practical actions that offer multiple possibilities for its practitioners to unfold and construct new identities, in the personal and collective spheres. The making of hand embroidery thus stitches along practices, becomings, and identities-in-formation. In doing so, the making of embroidery potentially creates new textures in the layers of social life.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have analysed the entanglements of embroidery with materials and the work of human hands in order to show how the process of making by hand is able to produce knowledge. I argue that the strength of making lies in the intra-actions between materials and their correspondence with dexterous hands, all encompassed in the process of mastering the technique of embroidery. By following the itinerary of threads and stitches, a practitioner engages in a *matter flux* and acquires a knowledge that is able to create new skills and sensations. Since this knowledge is a practical one, it can be learned, experienced and shared. The assumed repetition of making by hand is thus substituted by a sentient knowledge, in which the hands are able to tell about their encounters with materials. This aspect represents a “repetition with a difference” (Smelik 2016, p. 167, in a reference to Deleuze [1968] 1994), opening possibilities for new experiences to happen. In relation to my research question, my point is that the engagement with embroidery is capable of producing knowledge by the very act of making by hand. This is a process that generates skills, that asks for the correspondence with materials, and that offers a flow for creation. I believe and propose, infused by the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari, that these aspects are the basis for producing a practical and sentient
knowledge through hand embroidery, a knowledge that has the potential to ignite new becomings.

Accordingly, this Master’s thesis pertains to the entanglements of theories from material culture with crafts, anthropology, and philosophy in an attempt to propose a new approach to study hand embroidery. Such perspective sees needlework as a thing, with a force on its own. Bennett’s concept of vibrant matters helps in considering embroidery for its capacity to connect with other material bodies (2010, p. ix). In the same manner, Barad’s proposition of intra-actions (2003, p. 803) inspires the analysis of the ways in which embroidery corresponds with human hands and materials. Along with Ingold’s “art of inquiry” about materials and their properties, both Bennett’s and Barad’s concepts were used to examine the artworks from Peruvian artist Ana Teresa Barboza. As I discussed above, the materials with which she corresponds with to create embroidered pieces have intra-acted with the work of her hands to the point of delineating Barboza’s artistic trajectory ever since.

More than the compound of materials and dexterous hands, making by hand can prompt other processes beyond the learning of the technique. In the context of this research, making also implies the engagement with the tactile experiences provided by embroidery. Ingold (2013) assures that making has the power to produce knowledge: a practical and participatory knowledge that brings together head and hands, and that can spread around us. This knowledge “grows from and unfolds in the field of sentience” in the linkage between manual practice and materials (Ingold 2013, p. 11). As in the account of one artist from group Matizes Dumont, while embroidering a piece one can apply this knowledge to enter a flow of experimentation and new becomings.

Along with the work of stitching hands, threads and needles offer new lines of flight (Elliott 2012, p. 148) from one being into a potential becoming. Deleuze and Guattari have coined both concepts of becoming and lines of flight as inherently revolutionary processes of change, in an ongoing disclosure of new ways of being (ibid). In order to become one might first experiment new lines of flight, being deterritorialised by certain practices or encounters. For instance, as the embroiderer from Matizes Dumont explains, once she engages with the
needlework she becomes what she is stitching -- a bird, a tree, or another human. Stitch by stitch, the making of embroidery offers a practical way to touch and feel new sensations, finally disclosing new becomings through the working together of head and hands. Moreover, as Bogue puts it, a becoming detaches the notions of time and identity (2003, p. 34). The knowledge produced through making by hand is linked with unleashing one's fixed ways of thinking and being in pursuance of new becomings, with endless possibilities of arousing new identities.

It is thus through a never-ending process of becoming that both personal and collective identities are able to unfold and flourish. Nevertheless, the formation of new identities is not disconnected from social and cultural settings, and the disclosure of both personal and collective identities will be further explored in the next chapters. All in all, this chapter has provided an insight to think hand embroidery from the viewpoint of its materiality, but also as a powerful tool to disclose one's abilities. I have demonstrated that the hand making, taken a priori as a simple and even monotonous activity, presents itself in more complex ways as it opens up possibilities for an embodied production of knowledge. Moreover, the concepts presented by Ingold (2010; 2013), Sennett (2008), Barad (2003), Bennett (2010), and Deleuze and Guattari ([1987]2004) contribute with insights and help to answer the research question. Altogether, these practical and theoretical efforts contribute with valuing craftsmanship by its entanglements with materiality and knowledge.
CHAPTER 2
THE KNOWLEDGE OF EMBROIDERY IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF PERSONAL IDENTITY

This chapter focuses on the argument of the construction of personal identity through the process of making embroidery. This argument will be examined according to the analysis of stories submitted by contemporary practitioners of the technique. I will begin by explaining the methodology which will be used in the following chapters, and next to that I will explore the concept of identity from the sociological approach offered by Lawler (2008). This approach, along with the new materialist theories presented in the first chapter, will inform the subsequent analysis of the embroiderers' narratives. The reflection on these narratives aims to show the relationships these people have established with and from embroidery. My point is that, by making embroidery, one acquires a practical knowledge with which she or he can potentially experiment new encounters and transformations in the routine and, more deeply, in the personal identity. These changes can start with simple and small actions. For instance, it may be through identifying with an artwork, by bringing back a practice that was forgotten in childhood, or by the discovery of one's own manual skills. The following accounts thus demonstrate that it is always possible to promote transformations and to reinvent oneself from the embodied encounter between head, hands, and materials.

Before I can proceed with the analysis, I ought to make explicit the connection that I find between becoming and the process of identity formation. For Deleuze and Guattari ([1987] 2004), a becoming is a process that starts when one encounters something or somebody, what ignites new transformations in one's ways of being. As they write,

“[Becoming] constitutes a zone of proximity and indiscernibility, a no-man's-land, a non-localizable relation sweeping up the two distant or contiguous points, carrying one into the proximity of the other.” ([1987] 2004, p. 323).
A person can experience the process of becoming in multiple ways: through sensing a smell, hearing a new sound, or through material practices such as assembling an artefact. It is in this sense that hand embroidery can offer textures and layers of experimentation for a person to discover new abilities in the encounters with oneself and with a world of materials. Embroidery requires one's attention at every stitch, and this attention helps to connect head and hands while also freeing the person from his or her limitations in the ways of thinking and making.

Another way to approach the notion of becoming is by thinking it as a cartography where the process deterritorialises one from an established position (in a map of ideas and actions), promoting, as a result, transformations in one's identity. As Sutton and Martin-Jones (2008) explain, “it might be an accidental genesis that gave us our point on a cultural, societal map, but it’s up to us how we use our potential becoming, up to us how we move” (2008, p. 50). That is, this ability to ‘move on the map’ may start from an encounter with new people, an artwork, or a material practice -- which is the case of needlework. It is so not only because the making of embroidery provides food for thought and a practical work, but also because it produces a “difference with repetition” as in Deleuze's terms ([1968] 1994), in the sense that the very act of making produces novelty at each stitch. Moreover, by thinking through making (Ingold 2013, p. 6), one can potentially get into new processes of becoming with the stitchery acting as a line of flight towards what is being produced with needle and threads. And just like an embroidered piece, one's identity has the potential to be done, undone, and redone through processes of becoming initiated with one's engagement with hand embroidery. This is an important point that I will expand in the following chapters.

Needlework then has the potential to be a sustained practice of self-discovery through the engagement and correspondence with materials. This view is shared by Parker (2010) in her study on the historical link between embroidery and femininity. As she writes,

“The process of creativity -- the finding of form for thought -- have a transformative impact on the sense of self. The embroiderer holds in her
hands a coherent object which exists both outside in the world and inside in her head” (2010, p. xx).

In other words, embroidery can reflect an internal world at the same time that it is made through the connections with other materials, thus it penetrates the textures of what we can think, feel, and touch. By its close connection with the world that surround us, I feel the need to clarify that the stories of Brazilian embroiderers will be analysed in my Master's thesis in an attempt to exemplify the material engagement with the technique, as I will explain in the methodology below. However, this research method has no intention of limiting the findings only to these embroiderers or to state a determinacy of national identity at any level. There are many anthropological and ethnographic works that have already dealt with the technique and its importance in the construction of national or diasporic identities (see for this approach Femenías 2005; Giunta & Sciorra 2014; and Saca & Saca 2007). The present Master's thesis aims to unleash the vitality of this technique from borders of any type, as it relates to philosophical concepts derived from Deleuze and Guattari as well as from material culture theories and their links to anthropology, sociology, and feminist perspectives. That is, rather than determining specificities due to the nationality of the practitioners, I seek to demonstrate how their narratives present comprehensive aspects that have been debated by many scholars. Embroidery then offers multiple lines of flight to all of those who engage with its making, as this is substantiated by the literature that supports my Master's research.

Finally, this chapter is also relevant because there are no published researches devoted to the analysis of embroidery from the perspective offered by new materialist theories along with anthropology and sociology. On top of that, it proposes alternative ways for writers, artists, and practitioners to think and engage with embroidery in relation to the construction of identities.

2.1 Methodology
The aim of this section is to explain further the methodology used in the following two chapters of my Master’s thesis, which is online interviewing. According to James and Busher (2009), online interviewing is a qualitative
research method that can be used to understand the narratives through which participants express their perspectives of their experiences and identities (pp. 2-3). In other words, this method focuses on narratives that are constructed and told by the participants themselves. As Woodward (2007) puts it, these accounts or stories are relevant because, through them, people can express their ability to “make sense of -- and make through practical means -- their lives” (p. 153). Narratives thus present a way for articulating individual’s values and experiences. In my Master’s thesis, the choice of online interviewing focuses on people’s narratives about their engagement with embroidery in order to capture aspects related to their identity formation.

The internet is used as a research medium because it functions as a "virtual social arena", opening up innovative ways to examine human experiences, individuals and communities (James and Busher 2014, p. 3). Moreover, I have chosen to carry on the model of one-to-one semi-structured asynchronous interviews -- that is, non-real time consultations. In this mode of interview there are no time restrictions on the interactions between researcher and participants, making it easier to work with people living in different time zones and places. James and Busher (2014) also consider that this model allows participants to take as much time as they wish to consider the questions and responses, creating the potential to enrich the interview text once it may “empower the participants to present themselves in the ways they chose” (2014, pp. 6-7). In my account, I was particularly interested in including embroiderers from diverse educational and occupational backgrounds in order to get a broader perspective, and interestingly, only women practitioners engaged in answering the questions.

I will now describe the process of collecting, selecting, and using the interviews. Each participant has voluntarily chosen to take part in the research by first reading about it in a publication I made about the topic on social media networks such as Instagram in April 2017. As the second step, the prospective participants have contacted me by e-mail, and from that I have provided the guiding questions to start out the interviewing process. All the interviews were conducted in (Brazilian) Portuguese and have been translated into English. I have received more than 35 personal reports, 10 of which were chosen to be analysed
in my Master's thesis. In the selection process, I have prioritized the narratives that more openly exposed the person's relationship to the practice of embroidery as well as possible changes in one's routine, mental state or social initiatives that provided subsidies for the analyses of identity formation.

Furthermore, I have created an Instagram account called *Gente que Borda* (People who embroider, in Portuguese) with the goal to make all the stories received available to the general public. This entails that all participants have given their express permission to make their narratives public and that they have also sent photos to the posts on a voluntary basis. The choice of Instagram is based on the popularity of this platform and by the fact that it is a personalized social network. According to Bucher and Helmond (2017), Instagram is an environment in which user's needs and individual behaviors play a generative role in offering the content with which one is able to interact (2017, p. 27). Thus, the more those interested in needlework interact with the stories published on *Gente que Borda*, the more this profile will be promoted on Instagram to people with similar interests. The idea to transform part of the findings of my Master's research in a social media profile is an attempt to learn from others while also sharing these stories with a larger community which is not restricted to the academic field. The project *Gente que Borda* was first motivated by this current research but it will continue to receive and to promote embroiderer's stories. It is thus active on Instagram and it has no deadline set to end.

In the next sections, I will explain the approach to identity and advance to the analyses of embroiderer's experiences in my argument that relates the knowledge of making by hand to the construction of identity.

### 2.2 The approach to identity

Steph Lawler's book *Identity - Sociological Perspectives* (2008) will be the guiding thread for this chapter. It offers ways of portraying and understanding identity through the stories that people tell and engage with, thus proposing discussions that involve social and collective aspects of identity. Lawler gives a general

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3 *Gente que Borda* is available at: https://www.instagram.com/gentequeborda/
definition of identity in which sameness and difference play important roles, as follows:

“Not only are we identical with ourselves (that is, the same being from birth to death) but we are identical with others. That is, we share common identities -- as humans, say, but also, within this, as ‘women’, ‘men’, ‘British’, ‘American’, ‘white’, ‘black’, etc. At the same time, however, there is difference from others. Western notions of identity rely on these two modes of understanding, so that people are understood as being simultaneously the same and different.” (Lawler 2008, p. 2).

Identity then involves the identification with others in a process that is open to endless transformations both from oneself and from social and cultural settings. As Lawler puts it, different forms of identity should also be seen as interactive and mutually constitutive (2008, p. 3). That is, identity is dynamic and is constructed in relational ways. For instance, a South-American black woman constructs her identity from social and cultural perspectives that are different from an European or an African black woman. Although they might have in common both the becoming-woman and becoming-black-woman, their identities are constructed along their social relations and their cultural environment as well. The notion of individual identity is put into question as an assumption of a true ‘inner core’ that lays outside the social world. Norbert Elias (1994) has questioned this “sharp dividing line between what is ‘inside’ man and the ‘external world’” that was transformed in an assumption for much of the European intellectual and linguistic traditions without a critical examination (1994, p. 206). For Elias, the notion of individual identity is better perceived as an effect of social processes of control (ibid, p. 211). The individual approach here is then put aside to comprehend people in terms of their relations with others, and hence, to “understand identity as formed between, rather than within persons” (Lawler 2008, p. 7).

In this sense, the analysis of identities can be taken as being made through narratives, since they are ways of understanding one's story as also being engaged in a process of “producing an identity through assembling various memories, experiences, episodes” (Lawler 2008, p. 11). These materials such as
experiences and their interpretations are used in the creative formation of identities. As Lawler argues,

“When we endlessly tell stories about our lives, both to ourselves and to others; and it is through such stories that we make sense of the world, of our relationship to that world and of the relationship between ourselves and other selves” (2008, p. 12).

Far from being only raw descriptions of events or memories, these stories are complex procedures through which one makes sense of the world, of daily practices of his or her own life. Identity is thus produced through the stories that we engage with and that ultimately tell “how we come to be the way that we are” (Lawler 2008, p. 13). That is to say that out of a wide range of circumstances, only some will be selected as meaningful episodes with which to construct a narrative. As Hacking (1995) argues, the best analogy to remembering is storytelling: “We constitute our souls by making up our lives, that is, by weaving stories about our past, by what we call memories” (1995, pp. 250-251). They make identity as a configuration over time and through narratives, thus it is continually produced, interpreted and reinterpreted.

As I have explored in the previous chapter, the making of embroidery and the engagement with materials might also produce sentient practices and memories in connection to what the hands are able to tell. The narratives presented in this section are thus informed by the knowledge produced through making. In my Master’s thesis, I approach identity as constituted through the stories made with sentient hands and the practical knowledge of embroidery. It is an approach that highlights the ways in which identities are embedded in relationships. Identity is neither something we possess or something that defines us but, instead, it is an unending process of becoming (Kaplan 2014, n.p.). What is more, identity is understood from the diverse manners in which a person engages with needlework and its materials and, in doing so, she or he can enter diverse processes of becoming. The narratives explored here and the recurrent themes to which they are related are thus informed by embodied material practices, with embroidery being used as a facilitating tool for new becomings.
In the next section, I will conduct an analysis of short narratives with the aim to show how the engagement with needlework might affect the construction of identities. This exploration will take into account the knowledge produced through making and also the ways in which one addresses herself or himself as a certain kind of person and, through this process, she or he becomes that person (Lawler 2008, p. 59). It is important to recall that all the narratives presented here were sent by embroiderers on a voluntary basis. By telling their stories, these practitioners assert Lawler’s idea of identity as “something produced through the narratives people use to explain and understand their lives” (2008, p. 17). These personal identities are thus constructed both through the engagement with the technique itself and with the general decision of telling their own stories.

2.3 Stitching identities: Personal perspectives in the usage of hand embroidery

In this section, I will analyse five embroiderer's narratives that present recurrent subjects related to becomings and the construction of personal identity. The point of connection between these accounts is the individual engagement with the technique of hand embroidery.

(1) Needlework, representation, and creative expression

Let me start with one of the first stories that I have received and published in the project Gente que Borda. Through Janine’s account, I will explore a process of identification that started in her a new becoming, as well as the use of needlework to unleash her creative expression.

Janine: “I have studied Visual Arts and currently I work as an educator in a museum in Rio [Rio de Janeiro, Brazil]. I was studying a specific work by Rosana Paulino\(^4\) for one exhibition that involved hoops, photograpies of black women, and embroidery. As a black woman myself, that work greatly moved me. I usually draw, but I thought my creations fell into oblivion on

\(^4\) Rosana Paulino is a Brazilian visual artist and educator, who constantly works on the issue of visual representation of the blacks, especially of black women in Brazilian society. Her interests are to think of the shadows that slavery has cast on this population by creating a social symbolic place for Afro-descendants. (Paulino 2014, n.p.).
paper. That was one of the reasons why I have looked up for embroidery as an alternative. I have learned it by watching tutorial videos on YouTube and by checking the work of embroiderers from around the world.” (2017, my translation).

Janine’s narrative about her engagement with embroidery raises different topics. The first that I will examine further is the identification that she established with artworks from Brazilian artist Rosana Paulino, for which I argue that this encounter might have also promoted Janine’s becoming. The second aspect on which I will focus is the use of embroidery as a medium to break down barriers of creative (self-)expression.

Lawler argues that history can be seen as a way of understanding the world: by learning to identify with other people, other events and other times, we are learning specific ways to reflect on and to understand ourselves (2008, p. 21). History is thus a rich resource in constituting narrative identities. From this perspective, it is no mere coincidence that Janine is able to identify herself with another black woman that is also inserted in the restricted Brazilian art market. In spite of the generalized belief in the art world that an artist is recognized because of her or his talent, a recent study has demonstrated that “the access to notoriety seems, however, to be highly gendered” (Quemin 2013, pp. 355-356). What is more, Janine’s identification with Rosana Paulino adds up with the entangled discussions generated by the representation of black women in a country in which social determinism and racism still have a strong impact. As a matter of fact, Brazil is a multiracial country marked by strong social inequality among various racial groups (Shecaira 2002, p. 141). This historical condition has broader implications in terms of national identity. When it comes to racism, a study coordinated by anthropologist Lilia Moritz Schwarcz has shown that,

“97% of the respondents claimed that they were not prejudiced, while 98% of the same respondents declared that they knew other people who were [prejudiced]. When asked about their relationship to the people who they claimed were racist, the interviewees unashamedly said that these were relatives, close friends, girlfriends and boyfriends. The conclusion of the
study was: ‘Every Brazilian feels like an island of racial democracy, surrounded on all sides by a sea of racists.” (Schwarcz 2003, p. 5).

I believe that there is no way of analysing Janine's identification with Rosana Paulino's artwork without the perspective of Brazilian society as offered by the above-mentioned study. Although, for the purpose of this research, I will rather explore the importance of identification in the construction of Janine's identity. I argue that the fact of Janine identifying herself with the artwork of a black woman could be seen as the first becoming that she has entered in order to start an awareness of her own condition as a black woman and black artist. In this sense, Paulino's artwork has opened the possibilities for Janine to become along with important aspects of her identity in formation -- being a Brazilian black woman, being a black artist -- and this process of identification has facilitated the unfolding of those aspects of identity. As Lawler puts it, “people acquire identities through knowing what to make of their identities” (2008, p. 52), and for that becoming she could also unleash new aspects of her creative expression.

One could also relate this identification to Judith Butler's notion of performativity. For Butler (1993), performativity can be a subversive practice because it reveals that identities are formed and performed, thus it is more of a changeable process (Butler cited in Barad 2003, p. 808). Janine's empathy with Rosario's artworks could have affected her own becoming-woman and performativity of her own identity while also searching for alternative ways to express herself, finally experimenting with new topics and materials through the possibilities of hand embroidery. What is more, the wide range of materials present in Paulino's artworks, such as wooden hoops, photographies, and textiles, has offered Janine a starting point to assert her creative expression. In other words, the connection with the artworks and materials explored by Rosana Paulino had offered Janine a way forward by contrasting the effect of fabrics and threads with the forgotten illustrations on paper. Janine's enactment with her own becoming-woman flourishes through the practical engagement with embroidery as a new medium for her creative expression.
(2) Materiality, affection, and knowledge

The subsequent narrative brings another perspective into the analysis inspired by both affective memories from childhood and new becomings provided by making by hand. I will discuss these factors in detail after presenting Léia’s story.

Léia: “My grandmother Dona Tereza came from a small city known as the land of embroidery. From all her siblings, only my grandmother had no skills for handiwork. Even though she helped me a lot! She would tell me: ‘Do you want to learn something? Then go ahead and study. If you want, do not depend on anyone else’. When I was 9 years old, my grandmother saw that I wanted to learn to embroider and told my mother to get me enrolled in some classes. After that, I did many embroidered pieces as a gift for my grandmother.” (2017, my translation).

Léia’s narrative presents a range of persons and facts that are all entangled in her engagement with embroidery. Interestingly, she begins her story considering the key relationship with her grandmother -- not the traditional crafty grandmother but a self-sufficient-minded one -- who has encouraged her to pursue her goals. In addition to being inspirational, the relationship with her grandmother was important for Léia to be introduced to the materiality of embroidery during her childhood. The approach of taking initiative and learning things offered by the grandmother made Léia aware of the practical knowledge offered by hand making, which also allowed her to produce unique gifts for her grandmother. In a chapter dedicated to the qualities of touch and sensibility in textiles, June Hill (2012) considers that simple actions such as watering plants or knitting socks could be seen as acts “of love proven through making and sharing” (2012, p. 38). In Léia’s narrative, this aspect is present in the role of materiality as a means of expressing her feelings through needlework -- or, to put it in another way, in how Léia’s handmade gifts and the sentient knowledge attached to them could offer a tangible way of accessing gratitude through her making. One could notice how feelings are conveyed between people through the material experience of making by hand, the time spent in the task, and how the
engagement with it would be able to turn a feeling into something palpable, which can be felt and touched.

More recently, the knowledge acquired through making enabled Léia to re-signify her personal identity after she became a mother. As she puts it:

**Léia:*** “Years ahead, I was able to leave a bureaucratic job to start working as photographer and designer. Soon enough, I also became a mother. But I didn't know what motherhood can do to a woman. I felt as if I was losing my identity and this feeling was the worst I have ever experienced. (...) As a way out, I asked my husband for a different Christmas present, a subscription for online courses so I could at least study again. I started an embroidery course and it made me feel so good about myself! Until then everything that I did was dedicated to my son but now I could be myself again. I can even say that embroidery has helped to rebuild my identity as a woman. It made me happy again, wanting to be with everyone and to do whatever I wanted.” (2017, my translation).

The knowledge that in her childhood was used to express gratitude in the form of handmade presents has now offered Léia new entanglements in her adult life from the moment she reconnected herself with the making of embroidery. As she puts it in her narrative, embroidery was back and it “helped to raise a woman”. The technique is thus present in the new ways in which she crafts her personal identity. This new meaning refers to a sentient knowledge that Léia has acquired through needlework, and from a new perspective to it offered by a new becoming. As Deleuze and Guattari have it, a becoming is a practice of change and repetition ([1987] 2004, p. 239). As Smelik puts it, “with each repetition -- of a gesture, a thought, a desire, a way of dressing -- one can make little changes and hence differ from what one was before” (2016, p. 167). For Léia, this change came with her re-enactment with embroidery, through which she could reconstruct her personal identity after having a baby. Thus the knowledge of making crafts, full of affective memories, helped Léia to unleash new becomings. These transformations happened in quite literal ways once her identity as a mother was then multilayered with also being a designer, a photographer, an embroiderer: all along with a better perception of herself.
(3) Unfolding creativity: embroidery and self-perception

The next story offers a link between embroidery and new ways of exploring one's personal identity. The means by which Fernanda has discovered her creative skills will be examined below as related to “thinking through making” (Ingold 2013, p. 6).

Fernanda: “I work with information technology and my life is based on logic. Lately, my job began to consume a lot of me, which resulted in an anxiety crisis. When I first had contact with embroidery I saw the opportunity to develop my creative side, which I had never explored before. I have made eight embroidered pieces so far, and I can notice my evolution in the technique while I became confident in my ability to produce beautiful things rather than only consuming goods. Embroidery thus represents the breaking of a paradigm that led me to believe, for 22 years, that I had no skills, which used to diminish me in front of ‘highly creative' people. With needlework, I realized that this barrier had only been imposed by myself”.

(2017, my translation).

Fernanda chooses to portray her life by contrasting the logical aspects of her job with the discovery of a ‘creative side’ that was not explored before. She has unfolded creativity by her engagement with embroidery, which seems to have added up more ‘layers’ to her personal identity. What is more, by thinking through making (Ingold 2013, p. 128), embroidery had an effect on her perception of herself, in a sense that she has broken paradigms in her self-perception in order to experiment and produce creatively.

The first aspect that I will analyse here is the unfolding of Fernanda’s creative outcomes from her encounter with hand embroidery. Here I want to approach the transformative process of becoming through Deleuze's notion of “the fold” (Smelik 2016, p. 176). Deleuze refers literally to folds, unfolds and excesses from the Baroque clothing of the seventeenth century to metaphorically represent processes of infinite becomings that are 'multilayered and overflowing' (ibid). In Fernanda's narrative, one could consider the metaphor

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of how her identity overflowed by her engagement with the materiality of embroidery, which allowed her to unfold an 'interior' creative side that was not developed until then.

Fernanda was then able to unfold new aspects of her personal identity in relation to creativity by the power to produce with her own hands rather than only consuming goods. Such a material encounter has brought awareness to Fernanda about her own skills and abilities. As Smelik puts it, “the fold helps us to rethink of identity as a process of becoming, functioning as an interface between the inside and the outside, depth and surface, being and appearing” (2016, p. 178). To this idea, one could also add the importance of making as a way for Fernanda to become empowered about her creative outcomes. The unfolding of her new skills can be seen as a space of encounter, as an expansion of her personal identity, and “as the power to begin again” (Deleuze cited in Barnett 2012, p. 188), in a sense that she is experimenting by unravelling new material practices.

As a second aspect, Fernanda’s narrative offers a palpable way of considering embroidery’s affect in her self-perception. As I have argued in the previous chapter, embroidery is a material technique full of vibrant matter, with a capacity for activity and responsiveness. It thus affects its practitioners. One can relate affect to Barnett’s (2012) argument about the very materiality of such encounter: “To touch is always to be touched and one never emerges intact from any encounter, for to be touched involves a capacity to be moved, a power to be affected” (p. 185). When Fernanda got acquainted with embroidery, she could prehend the technique and work with its materials more fluidly rather than predicting ‘logically’ what the results would be. Fernanda has discovered herself as a sentient practitioner, and in this sense, she was able to let her creativity flow in the process of making. This engagement has thus affected her practice as well as her self-perception, giving new meaning to what she is now able to think and to produce.
(4) Telling by hand and the truth at the fingertips

The following story demonstrates how the literal engagement with making by hand can bring personal knowledge to the fore. Adriana’s narrative will bring into discussion Sennett’s (2008) concept of sentient hands with what the hands are able to tell (Ingold, 2013).

Adriana: “By the middle of 2015, I was enjoying to collect many images and references of crafts. In this immersion, embroidery started to stand out when I came across a basic embroidery workshop in São Paulo. I had no doubts and I immediately signed up to learn the technique! On the day of the workshop, I went home completely dominated by a feeling that I haven't experienced in a long time: the good sensation of creating with my own hands. By the way, I noticed recently that, since I was a child, I always liked to make things by hand. For instance, I loved to draw, paint, and assemble small jewelry. However, until that workshop, I had never actually embroidered. But what is needlework if not a wonderful way to draw with colors and textures? I glimpsed this possibility and then I wanted to dominate the world by embroidering on paper, fabrics, clothing...on everything! This rediscovery of myself also brought the realization that I was not happy dealing only with computer work as an architect, and I needed to experience the hand making more often”. (2017, my translation).

In this narrative, Adriana describes that returning to the process of making things manually was essential for her rediscovery about herself. I argue that such commitment with the time and effort to produce things was the starting point for Adriana to begin new processes through which she reconstructed her personal identity. Through her account, I will discuss the importance of sentient hands, as proposed by Sennett (2008), as well as Ingold’s notion of telling by hand. By doing so, I intend to demonstrate that making by hand has an effect into the construction of personal identity.

The process of making by hand and its close relation to a practical knowledge is evoked by Sennett (2008), who states that “what the hand knows is what the hand does” (2008, p. 155). Adriana was able to recall her interest in the
manual making once she was again absorbed by it during an embroidery workshop. Interestingly, the remembrance of drawing and painting only appeared after this practical engagement. But how could this happen? According to Sennett, one of the hand virtues is the truthfulness that lies at the fingertips: “instead of the fingertip acting as a mere servant, this kind of touching moves backward from sensation to procedure” (2008, p. 160). For instance, a practitioner touches threads with different textures and chooses the best ones to stitch fabric, paper or a piece of clothing. By doing so, she or he searches for the means to improve and repeat the material practice with sentient hands and accurate fingertips. It is thus with the exploration of sameness and difference, which is so characteristic of embroidery, that “practicing becomes a narrative rather than mere digital repetition” (ibid). This is true with Adriana’s literal engagement with making by hand, with which the probing touch of materials and the knowledge at the fingertips could offer her a reconnection with core aspects of her personal trajectory and, consequently, with her personal identity.

What is more, Adriana’s story literally links the work of the hands with her process of re-imagining her identity to the point of rethinking her professional choices and lifestyle in general. Here I found particularly interesting a connection between Adriana’s narrative with Ingold’s (2013) notion of telling by the hand. Ingold relates the personal knowledge to the capacity of the hands to correspond with materials and to tell through practice and experience “precisely because telling is itself a modality of performance” (2013, p. 109). For instance, an embroidery practitioner can tell about which type of stitches were used in an artefact, but she or he can also tell about the time taken to finish a complex embroidery before giving it as a present. As Ingold puts it, it is “an education of attention” (ibid, p. 110). In Adriana’s story, the engagement with the work of the hands unfolds ways of doing and knowing that grow through the practice of the craft, ultimately offering her clues about the changes she would need to make in the routine in order to be happy with herself.

The materiality of embroidery and the knowledge involved in its practice have enabled her to perform a new identity through making by hand -- thus “understanding identity as a bodily practice that is performed time and time
again" (Smelik 2016, p. 171). In other words, needlework offered Adriana alternative ways to rebuild her identity. What the hands were able to tell is what gave Adriana an attention to her internal processes, the resumption of knowledge, and the desire to pursue the path of manual making, since it brings her fullness.

(5) Embroidery and its affect on mental health

As many of the stories received for my Master's thesis commented on mental health issues such as anxiety and depression, I have chosen to analyse one narrative pertaining the close connection between hands and head. Elis could experience both the materiality and the affect of embroidery in relation to her mental health, as I will discuss further after presenting her story.

Elis: “I had never embroidered until 2015, a particularly difficult year in which I dealt with depression. My therapist suggested that I should learn to embroider as part of a treatment that involved body care and prescribed medication. Then I started embroidering during a one-hour class, and when I left the place I went straight to a haberdashery to buy the materials. I felt so free and creative! At times, when I didn't have the energy to get out of bed, I would embroider lying down. Needlework gave me tools to open a path to more mental health. I live in São Paulo, and for me, the city has become less aggressive because whenever everything is too gray I get an embroidery from my bag and just start stitching.” (2017, my translation).

In Elis' account, one can notice how embroidery first appears as a part of a suggested treatment, stating again the strong connection between mind and hands, between making and becoming. The process of becoming means that one forms alliances with different affects, forces, and intensities of life (Smelik 2016, p. 170). From this perspective, by trying to improve her mental health, Elis has also entered a process of becoming-craftswoman, engaging effectively with making needlework by hand. One can notice that the encounter with embroidery was so intense for her that she immediately went in search of materials to continue the process right after the first lesson. Embroidery thus opened a way
for Elis to feel ‘free and creative’. As Hill (2012) suggests, the technique has an affect in one's becoming, “in that corporeal place in which our interiorities find expression in, and through, material realities” (2012, p. 40). In Elis' narrative, therefore, the materials and the making of embroidery were used to give access to subjective aspects of her mental and emotional health.

Moreover, the affect of embroidery can be understood in the junction of psychoanalytic theory and material culture. As Woodward (2007) explains, “it is this expressive capacity of objects that affords individuals the opportunity to articulate aspects of self through material engagement, in an attempt to communicate something about -- and indeed to -- themselves” (2007, p. 135). Elis places needlework as an active participant in the process of restoring her self-esteem and rebuilding her personal identity. Once the technique affects her mental health, it also has an effect in how she experiences the exterior world. In this sense, Chodorow (2004) offers a psychodynamic perspective paying attention to affect in order to explain individual experience: “people create and experience social processes and cultural meanings in affect-laden as well as discursively, and such experience will be as much affective as non-linguistic as cognitive” (Chodorow, cited in Woodward 2007, p. 138). This could explain how embroidery became part of Elis current material practices with an emergent affect in itself, not overcoming the medical treatment but literally offering her a tool set to face her own emotions and thoughts as well as the exterior world -- represented by the city of São Paulo and its possibility of being ‘too gray’.

In that regard, Elis benefits from her encounter with needlework. Here I argue that such practical and mental enhancement is due to the vitality of the technique as a material practice. As Coole and Frost (2010) write,

“For materiality is always something more than ‘mere’ matter: an excess, force, vitality, relationality, or difference that renders matter active, self-creative, productive, unpredictable” (Coole and Frost, cited in Smelik, 2017, forthcoming).

That is to say, by following embroidery as a practice with a force in itself, Elis has managed to invest interest, time and effort in the hand making just as much as she has sought to establish a connection with herself. This initiative has opened
spaces for hands and mind to work in congruence in providing Elis new becomings. The notion of affect, therefore, shows how the materiality of needlework intra-acted with Elis. By doing so, the technique has helped her to take part in an open-ended process of recovery of her mental health.

**Conclusion**

I have demonstrated in this chapter the ways in which embroidery and the practice of making by hand appear to tie firmly to the construction of personal identities. As identity is always relational and always in the process of being forged, I argue that needlework affects its practitioners in different manners although the final output is related to positive experiences and feelings about one’s self. For one thing, it always takes work -- both the work of head and dexterous hands as well as the following of materials -- in order to produce such transformations in the self. For another, new becomings and the formation of identity are configured in the understanding of the sentient knowledge that is acquired through making things.

The five narratives presented in this chapter have helped me to illustrate the importance of needlework in processes of (re)building one’s personal identity. For instance, by identifying with the artworks from a black woman Janine experienced a becoming that unleashed her creative expression. In a different manner, Léia resignified her identity only after re-engaging with the materiality of needles and threads. By “thinking through making” (Ingold 2013, p. 6), Fernanda’s creative production could flourish, and Elis could experience the benefits of needlework in enhancing her mental health. These embroiderers’ accounts thus assist me in demonstrating the interesting topics raised by my research question. They provide specific examples and insights to the ways in which the knowledge produced through making embroidery unfolds new identities.

From this point, I will move to the next chapter by carrying on the discussion of identity and expanding it from the personal to the collective sphere. It will draw from some concepts that I have explored here, such as becoming, affect, and the knowledge produced through making things. Likewise,
I will introduce some complementary concepts that are relevant to the connection between material culture and identity with the aim of considering initiatives related with embroidery in the social sphere.
CHAPTER 3
MAKING CRAFTS AND SHARING KNOWLEDGE

This chapter benefits from the previous analyses of personal identity in order to expand its applications pertaining to collective identity construction, thus encompassing social, cultural, and political issues. It provides a reasoning of the never ending processes of identity formation in relation to small social settings and collective initiatives which have needlework as their main connection point.

The need of shift from the individual to the collective realm is due to the fact that no identity is formed without social interference. From the start, this process includes a person’s location in society, with the multiple types of social roles that one has to perform at different times and places (Woodward 2007, pp. 134-135). The question is then under what constraints and in what contexts one is able to construct his or her own identity, keeping in mind that the individual actions are part of a wider social order. Goffman (1990) states that there is no self which is untouched by the outside social world. As he puts it, “the self then, as a performed character, is not an organic thing that has a specific location, whose fundamental fate is to be born, mature, and to die; it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented” (Goffman 1990, p. 245). That is to say, one’s identity occurs as a result of social situations. Furthermore, Butler goes beyond Goffman in her inquiry about social identity arguing that identities are performative and are repeatedly ‘done’ within a matrix of social relations that authorizes their being done (Butler, cited in Lawler 2008, p. 118). In other words, identity is done rather than owned.

In the context of the embodied knowledge of embroidery, one can repeatedly perform his or her own identity through the themes and materials of needlework. This approach of embroidery within the context of social repetitions and transformations is inspired by art historian Rozsika Parker (2010) who has explored the secular link between the history of embroidery and the history of women in The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the making of the feminine ([1984] 2010). In the book, Parker understands the feminine as a “lived identity” that may
be “either embraced or resisted” according to the complex social, political, and economic factors that have connected women and needlework since the middle ages (2010, p. 4). She recurs to historical relevance to show how, over the centuries, embroidery has passed from a symbol of subservience -- "exemplified by the bowed head of the embroiderer" -- to a technique whereby women have the potential to express themselves while also interfering in their social setting (Parker 2010, p. xvi). In the context of the present Master's thesis, my argument is that needlework has a force to generate transformations that begin in the personal scope but spread to multiple small-scale actions that ultimately culminate in intervening in a broader sphere.

This chapter thus presents narratives portraying the influence of embroidery in a wide social spectrum. The aim is to answer the central research question: to discover in what ways the knowledge acquired through needlework enables the development of collective identities. For instance, the narratives analysed here demonstrate that one can engage with embroidery as a tool to share knowledge, promoting social and professional change such as more fruitful work practices. I will present how such changes that arose from the making of embroidery end up, in practice, fostering social bonds towards collaboration and collectivity. After discussing each case, I will tackle the embroidery in relation to micropolitics, the term referred by Deleuze and Guattari to discuss the political shaping of preferences, attitudes, and perceptions that occur at individual and local levels (Scherer 2015, n.p.).

The goal of the five narratives provided in this chapter is to highlight the role of hand embroidery in the discovery and construction of collective identities. The analyses rely on the method and theories presented in the previous chapters, namely, intra-activity (Barad 2003), the ability to tell by hand (Ingold, 2011; 2013), and the process of becoming (Deleuze and Guattari [1987] 2010). These concepts will be further connected with the narratives voluntarily sent by embroidery practitioners for this research, as explained in the previous chapter. Focusing on contemporary relation established by and with the technique, I will demonstrate that embroidery has a significant impact on women's lives from different cultural and social settings since they have experienced
transformations that went beyond the boundaries of the self. Embroidery is mainly seen as a means to enhance the transmission of knowledge between practitioners.

3.1 The making of collective identities through needlework

In this section, I will elaborate on the analysis of narratives pertaining to personal relations with embroidery in which the practice of the technique has extended its force to the construction of collective identities. In each of the five accounts, I will analyse different elements pertaining the embroiderers’ engagement in processes of teaching, learning, and sharing the technique through collective or collaborative initiatives. In order to do so, I will relate each story to a particular theory or concept presented in the previous chapters while also briefly introducing some other approaches proposed by authors such as Ingold, Sennett, and Parker. These complementary ideas, such as Sennett’s definition of the ‘sociable expert’, derive from the theoretical framework already explored in the current work, and they will help to shed light to new connections of material culture and identity in social contexts.

Interestingly, these stories have in common the making of embroidery. For this reason, the idea of collective identity in my Master’s thesis is related to collaboration in the context of each interviewee. For instance, these actions take place in the social sphere, either through the creation of professional collaborations as well as in the response-ability of using the knowledge of embroidery as a social tool to benefit more people. The following accounts will, therefore, depict different ways in which embroidery and the knowledge of this technique offers a deeper insight into the construction of collective identities.

(1) Embroidery and the knowledge shared through sociable expertise

The first story features two interesting aspects that I’ll try to analyse below. The first is the practitioner’s discovery of embroidery as a political medium due to its close relationship with the feminine ideal. It leads to the second aspect, in which Nathália understands the knowledge of embroidery as a privilege that must be shared collectively.
**Nathália**: “I started embroidering in 2016 when I moved to Mexico. It was the time when I got to know *Clube do Bordado*, and I saw that something as feminine as embroidery could be revolutionary in the fight against patriarchy. Currently, embroidery is like a therapy for me as I use threads and needles to reflect about life. I feel the need to pass on what I know because knowledge is a privilege, and I want to help those who don't have access to or don't feel skilled enough to do handiwork” (2017, my translation).

Nathália’s narrative starts with an assumption of embroidery as something “feminine”, followed by her surprise about the possibility for the technique to be a political medium against patriarchy. Interestingly, Parker identifies the historical hierarchical division of the arts into fine arts and crafts as a major force in the marginalisation of women's work (2010, p. xii). Moreover, Parker describes embroidery as both a site of the construction of the feminine, which also allows for creativity and pleasure and as a resistance against such constructions. As she writes,

> “Historically, through the centuries, it [embroidery] has provided both a weapon of resistance for women and functioned as a source of constraint. It has promoted submission to the norms of feminine obedience and offered both psychological and practical means to independence” (Parker 2010, p. xix).

From the perspective offered by Parker, embroidery is a feminine practice which is able to resist the prejudice against women. It is interesting to notice that the linkage of embroidery with femininity is what has brought Nathália's attention to embroidery. By what Nathália writes, such interest is particularly linked with the ways in which embroidery is being used as a medium to challenge patriarchy. To this, I would add that the contemporary motifs of embroidery recollect some of the works of the nineteen-seventies' artists. As Parker states,

> “Seventies artists employed embroidery as a medium with a heritage in women's hands, and thus as more appropriate than male-associated paint for making feminist statements” (2010, p. xii).
That is, embroidery was one technique among many which could be combined in new ways to create forms of art truer to women's skills and experience. One could say then that the feminist theorist and artists from the second wave of feminism left an important cultural legacy that is currently being revisited and expanded by new practitioners, as is the case of Nathália. Over the years, the knowledge produced by making has been able to create a cultural "repetition with a difference" (Deleuze [1968] 1994). So new becomings and transformations have happened to women like Nathália once they get to know their skills as well as the political and historical load of embroidery as women's work. It was then by seeing other women engaged with embroidery that Nathália got interested in also learning the technique to subvert its stereotypical usages.

Moreover, Nathália had experienced the technique both as a tool for expression and as a way of subverting cultural norms. She recounts the need to share the acquired knowledge with more people since she was first inspired by other women. As she puts it,

“When knowledge is shared it can get in the history of a people, a family, or a place. Spreading embroidery is important so that it is not only a technique pertaining to upper class women. In this way, more people can tell their own stories through needles and threads” (2017, my translation).

In this sense, one can see that Nathália is approaching the knowledge acquired through making as a tool with impact on a social level. Once she engaged with the making of embroidery, her new skills were then “incorporated through practice and training” (Ingold 2011, p. 17). In other words, Nathália has acquired the knowledge through making, as proposed by Ingold’s (2013). This knowledge opened up wider possibilities for her to act in the social sphere. Nathália seems to feel the response-ability to share this practical knowledge. What is more, I argue that this sense of collectivity can be connected to Sennett’s commentaries about the sociable expert.

As Sennett writes, “sociable expertise addresses other people in their unfolding prospects just as the artisan explores material change” (2008, p. 251). The sociable expert then uses his or hers tacit knowledge as a mentor and has transparent guiding standards that are comprehensible to non-experts (ibid).
Although Nathália is an amateur embroiderer, she could be considered a sociable expert by her ability to share knowledge in order to reduce inequality in terms of skills and privilege, thus empowering other people through the good practices of craftsmanship. Sennett also considers that the necessary abilities on which craftsmanship is based are easily acquired and transmitted (2008, p. 277). As in Nathália’s account, she could discover her skills and was able to put them to use in order to democratize the knowledge of embroidery with as many people as possible. Therefore, her narrative can be seen as a good example of how an amateur becomes a sociable expert. As she engaged with the process of making embroidery, she also embraced the potential to socialize this knowledge with more people. Nathália’s personal commitment with needlework then turns to have a greater impact in the social sphere.

(2) Empowerment through making

The next account offers another perspective which involves the collective sphere. In Lais’ narrative, the stimulus offered by friends and the reception of her work had a significant impact in terms of empowerment. The discussion will then draw upon the importance of the collective as a source of inspiration and the development of identity through making by hand.

Lais: “For a long time I was unable to do any kind of work -- and if it involved creativity, my insecurity was even worse. This internal charge resulted in a depression that left me stagnant. I did not even know what embroidery was, but in 2013 my roommate wanted to learn to embroider with another friend of us, and I decided to join them. Three more friends also wanted to learn the technique, and suddenly we were six women weekly embroidering in my living room. Soon enough, what was just a meeting of friends began to change its course. The girls suggested selling our creations and transforming the embroidery into our own business, and I had no doubt that I wanted to be part of it. So I started embroidering the designs from my friends, then I created my first pieces and people wanted to buy them. Thus, the movement to believe in myself came from the outside in: first with my friends from our collective who always encouraged me. Then with people I
did not even know. Currently, my main activity is working within the collective Clube do Bordado, and I could find myself by being part of this group. I have also learned to speak in public, to teach the technique to more people, and mainly I learned to believe in myself” (2017, my translation).

In recounting her experience with embroidery, Laís explores a wide range of transformations and becomings, which I will examine below. She first acquired embroidery skills by learning the technique with friends. Then the same group of friends became her partners in a collective in which Laís could see embroidery as a professional opportunity. Embroidery had a direct impact on Laís confidence, allowing her to overcome the extreme insecurity about her skills in order to produce creatively and professionally. These transformations in the life of Laís are due to the qualities linked to craftsmanship. According to Sennett (2008), the craftsman ability to shift between domains of activity stimulates fresh thinking about problems, opening them up and seeing them as possibilities instead. As Sennett writes,

“Open up’ is intimately linked with ‘open to’, in the sense of being open to doing things differently, to shifting from one sphere of habit to another. So elemental is this ability that its importance is often slighted” (2008, p. 279).

As a result of this opening up, Laís has experienced a becoming-craftswoman in which she feels capable of working creatively thanks to her new trained skills. Among other things, such becoming made her self-reliant to speak in public and to teach the technique to other people. That is, the knowledge of making by hand also invested Laís with the knowledge of being as she re-discovered herself creatively through needlework.

Furthermore, Laís becoming was both inspired by and had an impact on other people. She affirms that these transformations “came from the outside in” with the encouragement and acceptance of others. This perception reverberates in her sense of belonging to the collective and the work she now executes -- namely in designing her own embroidery pieces, teaching the technique, and speaking in public. She is thus promoting embroidery beyond her personal
expression. Here, again, I turn to Sennett's insight about the connection between making things and in so ‘assembling' interpersonal relationships:

“The craft of making physical things provides insight into the techniques of experience that can shape our dealings with others. Both the difficulties and the possibilities of making things well apply to making human relationships” (Sennett 2008, p. 290).

The influence of her collective partners and new customers was important for Laís to acknowledge her own value as a craftswoman. I argue that Laís' finds in the collective making of embroidery an empowering tool for her becoming. The collective Clube do Bordado offers a safe space for Laís to produce creatively and to feel confident about herself. I also consider that her empowerment happened thanks to the support of her friends and their connection as a group.

In the context of my Master's thesis, I approach empowerment from social practices rather than only depending on individual efforts. For instance, philosopher and educator Paulo Freire (1993) considers empowerment both as a process and an outcome that does not occur at an individual level. In an article focusing on empowerment in the professional field of art therapy, Lynn Kapitan (2014) explains Freire's idea of empowerment. She writes,

“Empowerment is a multidimensional process having to do with shared experience and connectedness with others. As a process, people move from relative powerlessness to self-determination; as an outcome, empowerment results in increased self-efficacy” (Kapitan 2014, p. 3).

In other words, by connecting with other people, one can become aware of his or her own skills and can put them in practice. In Laís’ narrative, this empowerment has the effect of broadening her perspective from personal to collective actions, since she now engages in educating more people in the art of needlework. The support of her friends and the appeal of collaborative making have also helped Laís to find her place as a craftswoman. It is thus interesting to note how the work that Laís executes in Clube do Bordado has an important effect on her identity. By working with embroidery and being part of the collective Laís was able to develop skills and could overcome her diffidence. Laís benefits from working in the collective in counting with the help and feedback of friends, as
well as in sharing with them a creative workflow. The consequence is that collaborative making empowers Laís, who is now capable of investing her creative efforts to reach and inspire more people.

(3) Embroidery as a generator of social initiatives

The following account presents some of the multiple possibilities offered by craftsmanship. I will analyse its aspects after presenting Letícia’s use of embroidery below:

Letícia: “Four years ago I met a talented embroiderer here in Araxá [a municipality in Minas Gerais state, Brazil]. I saw her happiness in being able to share her art when I asked if she could teach me to embroider. One year later, I brought to the city a workshop of the group Matizes Dumont in which each participant embroidered his or her own life story in a mandala. We formed a group from that meeting onwards and now we met weekly to practice some stitches. (...) Moreover, as a psychologist, I have become aware of the positive changes provided by embroidery, which gave me the idea to use it in a therapeutic way. As a result, I started a project called Bordando no Divã [“Embroidering on the Divan”] which uses needlework as a tool in motivational workshops or therapeutic groups” (2017, my translation).

By learning the technique from another embroiderer, Letícia has discovered the material appeal of needlework -- and the stitches have a valuable place in her life ever since. As Deleuze and Guattari put it, in becoming one is deterritorialized from his or her practices when encountering minoritarian forces that challenge the standards ([1987] 2004, p. 291). In Letícia’s account, such vitality was discovered with embroidery and the power of the technique to aggregate people. It was only because of this encounter that Letícia’s personal, professional and collective practices were transformed -- thus deterritorialized -- in order to impact on her community. From the engagement with the technique, Letícia has started organizing workshops, an embroidery group that meets weekly, as well as a professional project that links psychology with needlework.
Letícia has thus engaged with people and projects, opening ways for this material practice to have an impact on its own rights. I want to argue that Letícia's first engagement with the art of needlework had an affect on her personal life that encompasses collective initiatives. In What Is Philosophy?, Deleuze and Guattari define the work of art as “a block of sensations, that is, a compound [un composé] of percepts and affects” (1994, p. 154). In Letícia’s narrative, crafts had affected her creative expression. It also influenced the spheres in which she acts collectively since she became a disseminator of the knowledge acquired by making embroidery. Moreover, as Deleuze and Guattari put it, through percepts and affects “one is not in the world, one becomes with the world, one becomes in contemplating it” (ibid, p. 160). That is, one is provoked by the affect of material practices on social operations and is thus invited to react according to it. By ‘becoming with the world’, Letícia could find her path working towards the construction of a local community of embroiderers, highly aware of the affect that the knowledge of making has on people. As for Ingold, to follow the materials is the only way to know things from the inside (2013, p. 31). In this sense, the creation of the group of embroiderers and Letícia's professional project can be understood as ways in which she has followed the materiality of embroidery. In doing so, she has put herself in the world, conveying reception and belonging in a collective way.

With the enterprise Bordando no Divã, Letícia's experience as a craftswoman now adds to her professional background as a psychologist. As she comments, the initiative came about because she noticed the positive effect of embroidery on people's lives. So she has appropriated the technique as a therapeutic tool, proving once again the potential of embroidery to affect many people's lives. I argue that Letícia’s insight and initiative are linked to what Sennett calls as "craft of experience", by which “we would try to make the particular knowledge we possess transparent in order that others can understand and respond to it. The idea of experience as a craft contests the sort of subjectivity that dwells in the sheer process of feeling” (Sennett 2008, p. 289). By way of explanation, Sennett is referring to the knowledge ingrained in the processes of making, and how such knowledge becomes effective when more people put it into use. Letícia has thus
reinvented herself with embroidery, and by sharing her experiences of making by hand she ultimately makes an impact in her community. Letícia aims to promote well-being by combining the practical knowledge of craftsmanship to the field of psychology. The good practices that Letícia acquired from needlework have thus evolved to the point of using the technique as a tool for other people's becomings in the meshwork of psychology and craftsmanship. This approach can be related to a similar use of art therapy for empowerment. In an article focusing on art therapy initiatives, Kapitan argues that “empowerment meant participation in society, social networks, and supportive group processes” (2014, p. 3). This participative role is exactly what Letícia has managed to accomplish: once she could disseminate embroidery, she also affect her community and prospective clients as well.

Letícia’s story then shows how embroidery can have an effect beyond one’s personal identity to impact the collective. As Ingold puts it, by ‘thinking through making’ the tacit knowledge can grow from practical and observational engagement with the beings and things around us (2013, p. 6). Explained differently, the practical knowledge acquired through making embroidery can be used to benefit more people by means of social initiatives. In Letícia's account, this knowledge served to the promotion of workshops, in the creation of an embroidery group in her town, and as a tool for her work as a psychologist. Because of Letícia's small actions, more people in her community can find a new hobby, a new source of income, and ultimately a path to mental health in making embroidery.

(4) From intra-actions to human connectedness
By analysing the following narrative, I will return to Karen Barad's (2003; 2015) notion of intra-action alongside with the force of shared knowledge. I will investigate it further after presenting Amanda's narrative:

Amanda: “I began to embroider in 2016 as a way to relieve constant bouts of anxiety. Soon enough, my friends became interested in my embroidered pieces and I started to receive purchase orders. The biggest change happened when I was invited to join a collaborative store with other
independent creators. Being part of a collective initiative enriches our work due to the constant exchange of knowledge. Add to this the fact that I am a teacher and I had no idea what it was like to have a small business. For me, it is thus essential to count on the knowledge of more experienced people. It inspires me and makes me want to produce even more” (2017, my translation).

Like other accounts already addressed in Crafting Ourselves, there were significant changes in Amanda’s life that started out from her experience within embroidery, which I will analyse through Karen Barad’s (2003; 2015) concept of *intra-activity*. From this engagement, Amanda experienced a change by connecting with other independent creators, and the exchange of knowledge is now a crucial factor in her routine as a craftswoman. This factor will be analysed in relation to the human connectedness (Lawler 2008) in the construction of identity.

Stitch by stitch, Amanda has discovered both the force of materials and the strength of making by hand. Here I refer once again to the importance of *intra-actions* in promoting further becomings. In an article exploring the materiality and the intersections between nature’s practices and political imageries, Karen Barad offers new insights on intra-activity. She writes that there is “an infinite set of possibilities involving every possible kind of intra-action with every possible kind of virtual particle it can intra-act with. That is, there is a virtual exploration of every possibility” (2015, p. 399). Intra-actions thus open the gates for new becomings - of anything, at any given moment. In Amanda’s account, the intra-action with herself and with the materials of embroidery had the power to change her daily practices to the point of inferring new discoveries related to her skills in the creation of artefacts. As a result, Amanda is now constructing new layers to her identity as she becomes more and more an embroidery creator. As a becoming is a process always relational to one’s practices, it is entangled to other forces and (human and non-human) beings. Since in every particle there is the exploration of numerous possibilities, a
material practice such as embroidery calls for connections and intra-actions of bigger impacts. As Barad (2015) writes,

“To be a part is not to be absolutely apart but to be constituted and threaded through with the entanglements of part-ing (...) So a patchwork would not be a sewing together of individual bits and pieces but a phenomenon that always already holds together, whose pattern of differentiating-entangling may not be recognized but is indeed re-membered” (2015, pp. 406-407).

This reference provides an understanding that the individual process of intra-acting with materials and making by hand is inserted in the social sphere and has the potential to reconfigure the collective within the individual. Once Amanda intra-acted with the materials of embroidery and started her process of becoming, she forged transformations in her personal identity that could find support and inspiration in other creators within a collaborative setting. One could relate this process to Lawler's take on human interconnectedness and the relationality of identity (2008, pp. 147-148). Lawler argues that the self is made up of “bits and pieces of others”, exposing the constitutive sociality of human life (ibid, p. 147). Lawler also links this relationality to Butler's (2004) acknowledgment of the human connection as a result of human vulnerability (Butler 2004, p. 22), producing forms of being that are far from autonomous. These ideas shed light to how we can see identity as forged not within the individual, but in networks of relations with others, with connectivity at various levels. In Amanda's account, the exchange of knowledge provided by the collaborative environment of the store helps in managing her business while also inspiring her to produce more creatively. Once again, the practical quality of such knowledge is a determinant factor through which people can benefit from the connectivity of collaborative work practices. I believe that both the acquisition and sharing of knowledge represent a significant anchor among craftsmen to sustain their creative practices and ultimately to forge identities within the collective.
(5) The knowledge of embroidery perpetuated by teaching

The last narrative presents how a practitioner perceives other women in her process of learning and teaching embroidery. I will analyse Renata's understanding of identity due to the transmission of knowledge, and how other women play a key role in her account.

Renata: “Needlework helps to tighten my relations with numerous women. I carry a load of history and memory of the women who transmitted their knowledge of embroidery to me. For instance, the force of the threads favored me in reconnecting with my grandmother, with whom I haven’t spoken for over ten years. In the same manner, by teaching embroidery I am able to learn about new enthusiasts, discovering their own reasons to learn needlework. Although ephemeral, these relationships help me to better understand my role as a woman inserted in society and its historical context.” (2017, my translation).

Renata considers embroidery as a practice closely related to other women, as it was from their “history and memory” that she first engaged with the technique. Likewise, it is through the relationships quickly crafted while teaching needlework that she becomes aware of her role as a woman in society. In other words, it is through the bonds of women, in a collective sense, that Renata perceives the knowledge of embroidery.

In Being Alive: Essays on movement, knowledge and description, Ingold (2011) demonstrates that experimentation is the way to go regarding the practical knowledge transmitted from experienced practitioners to novice ones: “Inhabitants the world over grow into the knowledge of how to carry on their lives by trying things out for themselves, often guided by more experienced companions, in the anticipation of what the outcomes might be” (Ingold 2011, p. 15). Such knowledge is then not restricted to craftsmanship but is inherent to social relations. In Renata’s account, she was able to learn embroidery thanks to what other women were able to tell by their hands (Ingold 2013, p. 111). As a result, Renata now recognizes the importance of the technique not only in relation to its textures and effects but due to its history and to the knowledge
transmitted by different generations of women. Such cognizance is identified “by the very pathways (on trajectories, on stories) along which they have previously come and are presently going” (Ingold 2011, p. 141). In other words, it is a relation of time, memory and continuity of embroidery in people's lives. These stories are interwoven in the way that Renata relates needlework with history and memory -- thus rooted in the past --, as well as with the teaching process that promises the endurance of the technique into the future.

The knowledge of embroidery is the point of connection between different people and their diverse historical and social settings, but its relevance comes from it being ingrained in one's practices. As Ingold puts it, one can grow into knowledge by engaging with material practices, and this possibility only exists due to “the human ability to weave stories from the past into the texture of the present lives” (2011, p. 164). In a sense, then, “embodied knowledge is the ever-emergent outcome” (ibid) of such engagement with making things. For instance, Renata embodies the knowledge of embroidery and becomes one of those women that she has encountered before, who are able to teach the technique to novice practitioners. Interestingly, in instructing more people in the needlework and sharing with them both the time and the experience of the technique, she is able to (re)build her role in society.

After elucidating the role of women for Renata’s account, I proceed by exploring embroidery in its constant association with women and the ideal of femininity. This is exactly the point argued by Parker (2010) who shows that as soon as embroidery became “women's work”, it stopped counting as art, and from then on, its content has been neglected (2010, p. 5). Nevertheless, women have continued to learn, share, and to stitch the technique into the public realm. Renata seems to have an understanding of the issues involving needlework as a medium by recalling the linkage of the history of women with embroidery and by teaching the technique. She also approaches needlecraft both as a way to know women's history and as an important representative of the collective identity embedded in embroidery. In this regard, there is a connection from Renata's current practices to what Parker comments about the creation of groups of embroiderers following the education in needlework, especially after the 1970s
feminist artists usage of needles and threads. According to Parker, the 1970s approach to the technique was encouraged by “embroidery’s connection with the tradition of craft co-operative work, rather than the fine arts which foster and expect competitive individualism” (2010, p. 212). That is, the collective practice of embroidery might offer a way of reading the importance of other people in the process of learning and teaching the technique. By recognizing other women mirrored in her experience as an embroiderer, Renata also builds new relationships based on the exchange of knowledge. With the power of such knowledge in her hands, in a quite literal way, Renata puts herself in an active role in which teaching needlework serves as a tool for more women to express themselves and build their own stories. In this way, Renata’s identity is built collectively, from the direct relationship she establishes with so many other women by teaching embroidery, thus believing that the technique can offer ways of representation for women in society. It is thus through the exchange of knowledge, which is collectively connected to other women and their stories, that Renata is able to perform a new role in society.

3.2 The micropolitics of embroidery
The accounts presented in this chapter are grounded in the contemporary usage and values attributed to embroidery, although needlework has already witnessed the unwritten rules of its time in the past. As Parker writes, “the central tenet of the late-twentieth century Women’s Liberation Movement is that the personal is the political, that personal life is determined by the wider political structure” (2010, p. 209). That is, the personal is shaped by social and cultural norms, although in the same manner small and individual initiatives can affect wider social structures. Parker continues her argument stating that, by that time, embroidering the personal as political was, above all, intended to challenge the subordination and oppression of women (2010, p. xv). Whereas Parker focuses on a specific time frame for such usage of embroidery, it is my hope that the case studies presented above have shown that embroidery continues to present lines of flight for new becomings and new transformations within society. I thus
argue that such view of the personal as political resonates in the present through what Deleuze and Guattari call “micropolitics”.

The term micropolitics infers everyday concerns, it is related to individual and small nuclear foundations of society, namely one’s (un)doing of identity, gender, family, kinship, education and so on (Elliott 2012; Sutton and Martin-Jones 2008). The way in which Deleuze and Guattari have employed the term is further explained by Elliott (2012), who writes,

“It is the politics of minutiae, the myriad of concerns and political issues that directly affect the individual: local politics, sexual politics and identity politics.” (Elliott 2012, p. 149).

That is, micropolitics encompasses activities and institutions pertaining one’s life, and by this reason, it is relevant both to the local and the global, both to personal and collective identities. For Guattari, micropolitics represented the injection of personal desire into the political field (Elliott 2012, p. 46). This is so because there is no transformation that can happen on the macropolitical independently of the small events of daily life allocated in the micro sphere. As I have demonstrated in the case studies above, by engaging with embroidery those women have made valuable discoveries such as the strength of collaboration, the power of sharing knowledge, and their role in society through the knowledge of the technique.

In my view embroidery is able to produce both knowledge and new becomings. By being a practical and accessible technique it has the potential to generate considerable transformations in the micropolitical level, and consequently in the collective sphere. To support this argument, I will briefly return to the narratives discussed above. By understanding the knowledge of embroidery as a privilege, Nathália has felt the need to share it so more people can experience the technique. For this reason, I consider that she promotes an intervention based on her own practice as an embroiderer, which therefore depends only on her ability to tell by hand to impact more people. Likewise, Letícia appealed to needlework as a generator of social initiatives by its application as a therapeutic tool. One way or another, embroidery was a way of to promote what and Guattari entitles as “existential mutations”, which enables
the possibility of experimentations and the generation of projects (Guattari, 2000, p. 141). Needlework then offers the possibility of transforming and shaping one's micro reality, reinventing the ways in which one can perform in society, as in the example of Renata, or even in one's being encouraged by others to work collectively and creatively, as is the case of Laís. In this sense, I refer once again to Parker (2010), who, on one hand, recognizes that embroidery is still identified with femininity, but the framework for the making of the technique has changed from “wifely or domestic duty” to live on as a bond between women (2010, p. 215). On the other hand, Parker acknowledges that needlework is still largely ignored by men, which reflects embroidery's position in relation to the social structuring of sex difference and art practice (ibid). This means that the micropolitical changes related to embroidery are relevant to diminish binary oppositions between male and female practices and between fine arts and crafts. Moreover, I believe that the more women get engaged in needlework in the contemporary, the more they will be able to re-signify embroidery with their personal and local issues, thus using the technique to bring about changes in the present.

Embroidery and the knowledge produced through making it offer the person the possibility of intervening in her or his reality at every stitch and at every encounter with one's social and cultural settings. Though these actions are not limited to overtly political manifestations, but rather concern the grass roots of re-imagining themes such as gender, (in)equality, women's roles, and craftsmanship through minoritarian points of view and material practices. In this sense, the culturally marginal, yet accessible nature of crafts becomes a source of strength and potential as we explore its paradoxical aspects (Hackney et al 2016, n.p.).

Micropolitics is an important concept for considering embroidery not only as a force capable of producing knowledge and new lines of flight, but as a powerful technique to stitch transformations in everyday life, thus acting in the continuous making of social settings. In other words, the apparent repetition of embroidery in the fabric of social life turns out as “going along and affecting itself and its surroundings, and (re)configuring of the world (Barad 2003, p. 817). It is
thus through promoting a change in the micro-scale of personal identity and one's surroundings that embroidery reveals its grass roots usage in promoting both individual and collective transformations.

Conclusion

The five case studies of embroiderers provide a wide range of different approaches on how collective identities are forged through the engagement with embroidery. All five practitioners employ references to learning and directly sharing the knowledge of the technique with more people, may it be through sociable expertise, through working in a collective, using the practice as a therapeutic tool, by participating in a collaborative store, or even by engaging in the shared history of women through embroidery. Each one of these embroiderers thus creates new ‘lines of flight’ from the practice that end up intervening in their respective social contexts.

There is the constant process of construction of identity through the daily choices and initiatives of these practitioners in the interplay of repetitive acts and new becomings. Personal and collective identities are then always being build and rebuild through initiatives that are metamorphic even if encompassed with tradition. This is the case of embroidery, a technique with a history of millennia that has been reinvented at every new encounter with dexterous hands, thus expanding the ways a practitioner can grow into its knowledge also in the contemporary. In this sense, it is important to observe through the case studies how needlework -- stereotypically a symbol of subservience -- has been used by many women as an empowerment tool with an impact on other people's lives. However, it is also worth considering that changes of this kind produce other confrontations -- such as the real effect of small actions promoted by individuals in the social realm. My response to this approach is that embroidery cannot be dissociated from its inherited linkage with women, which therefore gives this practice an important political burden even if needlework is carried out on a small scale. By exploring needlework in relation to micropolitics, one can approach it as a performative act with the potential to intervene in the social fabric. At every stitch, there are new and multiple effects, such as the
recognition of women's creative potential inserted in collaborative rather than competitive work practices, as well as women's commitment to educating more people in the art of needles and threads.

The relation between embroidery, women and feminism continues to be relevant. Through to contemporary grassroots initiatives that start from the connection with making by hand, a practitioner can experience collaboration, the exchange of knowledge, and the creation of new opportunities. I have therefore broadened the perspective of the construction of identity from the personal to the collective sphere by means of embroidery as a tool for social engagement and empowerment.
CONCLUSION

This research has tried to investigate how the engagement with handmade embroidery is able to produce knowledge in addition to a further analysis of the ways in which this knowledge enables the construction of personal and collective identities. These inquiries were stated in my research question, and the findings of the previous chapters shed light to the technique of hand embroidery by its multiple uses and effects. I will thus proceed by providing an overarching answer to my research question before approach the theories and the analyses in more detail.

So to begin with the answer, I argue that the engagement with handmade embroidery is able to produce knowledge by the very act of making the technique with one’s sentient hands, that is, a dedicated attention to the process and to the materials. Together, these aspects lead an embroiderer into a creative flow, forging artifacts while also producing knowledge that is potentially transformative and easily shareable. Regarding the ways in which this knowledge enables the construction of identity, my point is that this expertise produced through making can provide a practitioner with new entanglements with the technique, with its materials, and with oneself. Stitch by stitch, new artifacts and new encounters are being created with the potential to ignite a process of becoming -- as a becoming-animal or becoming-human achieved while embroidering, as it was explained by one of the embroiderers from Brazilian group Matizes Dumont. The new experiences provided by making embroidery move a person by offering transformations that have an impact on his or her identity.

What is more, one’s identity is continuously forged according to sustained practices as well as it is connected to other identities. So, individual changes also call for further transformations in the social sphere, resulting in the construction of collective identities. The stories from embroiderers presented in my research helped to exemplify the ways in which it happens, or how the knowledge of hand embroidery can enable the construction of distinctiveness.
In a personal level, some stories have shown that embroidery is a starting point to unleash creative expression, to combat anxiety and depression, and to promote transformations in one’s career and lifestyle. On the other hand, the account of other embroiderers complemented the answer to my research question by showing that collective identities are also developed through needlework, may it be in initiatives that benefit mental health, in attempts to endorse equality by sharing knowledge, by valuing the technique as ‘women’s work’, or just by producing creatively and collectively with more people.

Crafting Ourselves has therefore looked into the process of making embroidery with the aim to challenge its cultural limitations. By doing so, I expected to examine how it would be possible to produce knowledge through the practice of this technique. The second purpose, in turn, was to investigate how this knowledge could enable new becomings, ultimately leading to the construction of individual and collective identities. In order to do so, I have applied material culture theories, letting myself and my work to be involved in the entanglements that they propose, to extend current understandings of embroidery in relation to its vitality. In other words, before critically analysing the formation of identities, it was necessary to establish how to approach needlework from a new materialist perspective and subsequently relate it to practices that could ignite new becomings.

Vibrant threads, needles, cloths and different stitches used in embroidery play an active role in presenting its practitioners a double way to go -- one of experimentation in the material world and another of immersion in themselves. I have approached this in the first chapter with the example of Peruvian artist Ana Teresa Barboza, who has followed the vibrant matters of embroidery and has unfolded a close relationship with nature and art through needlework. This kind of embodied knowledge was also exemplified by Martha Dumont, one of the embroiderers from the Brazilian group Matizes Dumont: by stitching a tree, she becomes a tree; by stitching a person, she becomes human instead. These transformations flourish through sentience of the self and the engagement with the materiality of the technique across the time spent on it. It is therefore by following the time of making by hand that one can recover a tactile knowledge
that was estranged from our everyday practices, opening space to creative skills that never had time to be nurtured to finally flourish by experimenting with practices like stitchery.

The research has also shown that this experimentation is conducive to new becomings, which have the potential to act in the construction of new identities. Once one has the knowledge of making by hand, it becomes more challenging to only repeat the stereotypical linkage of embroidery to the ideal of femininity, or to continue to marginalize it as a craft. Instead, as a “repetition with a difference”, these multiple becomings help to unlock a creative potential that defies these assumptions, and can build new connections at every stitch. I have argued this point from embroiderers' narratives and the sociology-based approach to identity as offered by Lawler (2008). The five stories analysed in the second chapter show that there are several ways of building new layers in the personal identity through making embroidery. They start in simple ways like the identification provided from the artwork of a black woman that has helped one of the embroiderers to become-black-woman herself. Or in the case of another woman who overcame the effects of depression by simple carrying some threads, fabric and hoops along in her routine, also stitching another relation to the city. By possessing the knowledge of the technique and its materials, one ends up discovering herself or himself through the creative expression that happens in the junction of head, heart, and sentient hands.

My Master’s thesis also shed light on the processes of building collective identities through stitchery. In the third chapter, other five interviews were accomplished and examined to gain insights into the effect of embroidery in social bonds or collaborative practices. In relation to the formation of collective identities, I can conclude that changes at the individual level are the starting point from small-scale initiatives that ultimately have an impact on a group or a community. They are as simple as engaging with needlework after being inspired by some friends, with the perspective of sharing the knowledge of making by hand with more people, or by using embroidery to build a creative business or a therapeutic group. As Sutton and Martin-Jones (2008) put it, a becoming is made up of mutable elements and characteristics, and for this reason the notion of
cross-contamination becomes essential to create a sense of awareness and empowerment (2008, p. 48). That is, a becoming is always relational and can have consequences beyond the boundaries of the self. With that in mind, Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of micropolitics helped to broaden the perspective of such small-scale actions by valuing their impact on individuals, their communities and so on.

I have observed multiple ways by which making embroidery have generated transformations in social groups, models of collaborative work, a come back to valuing artisanal production as well as new meanings that were attached to “women's work” in the contemporary. The 1970s feminists knew it well that the personal is the political (Parker 2010, p. 209), and in the engagement with embroidery this would be no different. As Parker (2010) and Dormer (1997) have demonstrated, the long history of embroidery is intertwined with cultural assumptions that have created barriers between craft and fine art as well as between valued techniques and the ‘mere' women’s work. These binary opposition serves to demonstrate some of the reasons why there is still the need to create other lines of flight, other way of perceiving textiles such as embroidery, knitting or crocheting. In the same manner, it also exposes that even with many technological advances and the boom of information in the contemporary, a simple technique like embroidery can offer an infinite potential for connectivity and correspondence within oneself and with others so as to effect change in society, however small it may seem.

The framing of my research was able to provoke very interesting discoveries on the subject, as well as relevant arguments and conclusions. I thus advocate a micropolitics of embroidery as a way of presenting practical and viable changes in which needlework is used as a material practice and a tool for social change. This can be achieved by promoting spaces and initiatives in which people of all ages and social classes are able to engage with stitchery as well as with interdisciplinary research to enhance the role of craftsmanship and its benefits. For instance, as the women's narratives have confirmed in this research, embroidery has the potential to be an empowering tool as it generates identification, promotes creative expression and even develops new ventures
both in the individual and collective spheres. Another example is that, by following the meshworks of the internet, the knowledge of making can be shared through texts, video tutorials and images, presenting new possibilities for other people elsewhere in the globe to transform their everyday practices through stitchery, ultimately affecting the reality in which they live. As Elliott states, each of us has the power to change the world not through political dogma but through directing energy and desire towards positive ends (2012, p. 49). This approach seeks to recover craftsmanship from marginalization and to use the accessibility of techniques such as embroidery as one of its main strengths.

Although the research has positively surprised me with the amount of subjects that led to further questionings and insights, there are limitations related to the number of narratives analysed and to the personal choice of focusing on Latin American embroiderers. In this critical reflection, it is important to point out that the interest on extending the academic understanding of embroidery led to a broad view of the subject despite the few narratives that were taken into account. Thus, it would be necessary to conduct further research that encompasses more geographical locations and a greater diversity of practitioners in terms of their ages, gender, and professions in order to generalise the findings of this work. However, the influence of micropolitics proved important in my choice to focus on Brazilian and Latin American embroiderers in an attempt to value and propagate their knowledge -- given also the myriad of North American and European perspectives available to scholarly appreciation.

I also hope to instigate further academic investigation on the subject and I encourage researchers to come up with new inputs and analyses that could complement, contest, or enrich the arguments presented in this work. It would be interesting to compare individual's experiences with embroidery in different countries, as well as the effects of needlework within the same research group to assess whether the technique continues to generate transformations in the long run. Another interesting approach would be to compare the use of artisanal techniques in slow fashion initiatives and in the conventional fashion production
system; or also to map creative businesses around the world that are bringing hand embroidery into play.

Continued efforts are needed to make embroidery accessible to more people both through practical activities and through academic research. That is why I believe, in conclusion, that Ingold’s (2013) idea of making to produce knowledge presents a very interesting and rich approach with which it is possible to revitalize the discussion on embroidery and other craft techniques. Needlework has an engaging, meditative, therapeutic, and constructive potential that enables active reflection on the act of making something with one’s own hands. With the work of the hands along with vibrant materials, this technique stands out as an active tool for empowerment through which people can access new becomings and form new identities. At the pace of each stitch lies the possibility to be carried away by experimenting with time, needles, and threads by crafting oneself. Handmade embroidery thus becomes a tool to unravel internal paths and to weave collaborative networks that ultimately highlight the creative expression of both the technique and its practitioners.
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