

## **Design, Craft and Culture – Some Remarks on Production of Textile Craft in the Companies Vävkompaniet and Designbrenner**

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According to anthropological research it is fundamental that aspects of conceptuality and materiality are tied together in handicraft products. Objects have a social history and a cultural biography as well as a material form (Appadurai 1996). Thus analyzing crafting knowledge must involve both looking for bodily competences performed in the meeting with the materials (hand operations, touch, rhythm etc) and mapping cultural meanings on craft. In the ongoing project “Design, craft and culture” this is done through visual/sensory ethnography. Participant observations with video-filming and interviewing are done at Vävkompaniet, a cooperative running handicraft shop, and Design Brenner, private family company for tufting.

This paper brings up cultural meanings on craft, expressed by the craft practitioners themselves. What producers in both companies tell about work practices, inspiration, how they relate to the textile tradition etc. is discussed. Their definitions of the concepts craft, art craft, sloyd and design are especially highlighted. This is important since debate regarding craft as material expression versus craft as conceptual art implies different focuses when it comes to what counts as important knowledge - skill in using the proper raw material and technique to make useful products, or skill to materialize ideas in creative ways?

## “DESIGN, CRAFT AND CULTURE” A PROJECT ABOUT KNOWLEDGE IN ACTION

This paper presents ongoing research in the project "Design, craft and culture" where knowledge in action (Molander 1993) – which has often also been called tacit knowledge (Polanyi 1983) – is analyzed and discussed. The aim of the project is co-production of knowledge between academia and corporate world. Our ethnological research is conducted in, and together with, two small scale textile companies. Therefore our focus is on knowledge required while making or buying woven or tufted products, made in predominantly textile materials. Both companies are situated in Sjuhäradsbygden, a part of western Sweden which is often presented as an area with a rich textile cultural heritage and where textile production still prevails.

The two companies are:

*Vävkompaniet* A cooperative of artisans founded twenty years ago. The members produce textile craft and run a handicraft shop in Borås together. Recently the cooperative also started an on line shop. In September 2011 eight women are members. All of them weave, but some also do products in other textile techniques like knitting, felting or embroidery. In the shop both artefacts produced by the members and by other artisans are sold. The latter are not only made of textile materials but also ceramics, forging and wood and they are sold on commission. Yarn, made from different materials and some tools for producing textile products are also sold in the shop and exhibitions of craft and art are arranged regularly in a special room.

*Designbrenner* Since 1980 Designbrenner has designed and produced handtufted carpets. They offer customers a unique service involving both design and colour conformed to every single project. It's a family company situated in Holsljunga, a village in the country-side. Designbrenner do not have a shop. They create carpets on demand. Elisabeth Brenner often is the one that designs and Rolf Brenner is the "engineer". He has invented a tufting machine that makes the work less physical demanding.

From the companies point of view one aim of the project is to better understand the values customers ascribe to craft. Another aim is to "put the finger on" parts of the work (including marketing) that may have become matters of routine. Hopefully the research can contribute to reflections on practices that seem obvious and natural. If the craft practitioners become aware of competences previously hidden in the knowledge in action ideally this can be the base for development of for instance new products or different ways to reach customers. From academic point of view we aim at finding ways to transfer knowledge from practitioners actually working with small scale textile production today, to students who may have the same occupation (or profession?) in the future. In that way we hope education of designers (and if the education in hand weaving will be started again also of artisans) at The Swedish School of Textiles will be anchored in real life.

From this follows that the project has three main purposes: 1. To document craftwork and analyze: Which competences (verbal, bodily, technical and others) are used when performing these textile techniques and when buying craft products? 2. To investigate: What cultural meanings on craft in contemporary consumer society are actualized during the design- and production processes in the companies; from idea and possibly sketching, via the material craftwork, to the marketing and sale of crafted products? 3. To explore: What possibilities do visual methods like photography and video give as mediating tools for passing on knowledge in action to students?

## CONTENT AND METHOD OF THIS PAPER

This paper will bring up cultural meanings expressed by the craft-practitioners themselves - like how producers in both companies define the concept art craft and what they tell about

their inspiration, how they relate to the textile tradition etc. Thus mostly it deals with purpose number 2; to investigate cultural meanings on craft.

The project is carried through as a multi-sited ethnography. Methodological inspiration comes to a great extent from the anthropologist Sarah Pink's books about visual and sensory ethnography (Pink 2007 and 2009). We are influenced by the view that embodiment (for instance embodiment of knowing) must be studied as a process integral to the relationships between humans and their environments, which Pink does using the concept emplacement (Pink 2009, p. 25). Our research is also guided by consumer researcher Russel Belk's emphasis on the visual, which according to him may help us achieve a different type of knowledge [from what we would gain from speak or written text] "...especially conducive to the goal of non-positivist research to capture the unique human texture of our informants, phenomena and sites" (Belk 1998, p. 311-312). For instance visual ethnography with videofilming helps invoke an understanding of how people actually perform their work, with different (material) tools and in various social settings (Pink 2007, Sperschnider 2007, p. 274).

Based on the conviction that visual ethnography can be used to study embodiment and emplacement, as they are performed or shaped in an ongoing process, one important research method in our project is participant observation. We are studying the practitioners when they prepare the loom or the tufting machine, and at the same time we ask questions about what they are doing and film their body movements. We have also been walking around for short periods in the craft shop together with customers, while video-filming how they touched, twisted and turned the crafted objects.

The analysis of the video-films lies ahead of us though. Instead this paper draws on transcriptions of recorded interviews with members in both companies which were made to get insight into their previous experiences of being artisans/designers as well as of how they usually perform the process from (design)idea to a complete product for sale. According to professor of philosophy Bengt Molander knowledge only exists in the form of knowing persons and it is always bound to the context in which it is put to use. Thus knowledge in action is situated (used in specific situations) and performed in a personal way. Actually knowledge in action can be considered as reflected experience, which can be used for new actions, in different contexts (Presentation by Bengt Molander at NIH in Oslo 2010-12-14). But if sensory perceptions, included in forming such practical knowledge, are to be mediated to other people, they are inseparable from the cultural sensory experience categories we use to give them meaning. Thus what has been called "tacit knowledge" is not just personal and wordless but also connected to broader discourses and situated practices (compare Pink 2009, p. 35). It can be reflected on, and tentatively be given words (to a greater extent the more the practitioner concentrate her or his attention on bodily sensations) (Schön 1983). Questions and words, uttered in a language which fits the events of the practice, can make the practitioners sharpen their attention and direct it at critical points in the practice that they accomplish (Presentation by Bengt Molander at NIH in Oslo 2010-12-14). By interviewing in a conversation-like way, we and the interviewees together created a space for such reflections, where cultural meaning categories regarding craft work and descriptions of crafting practices were put forward and discussed.

When it comes to Vävkompaniet tape-recorded interviews with five members have been transcribed and used as data here. One woman has been interviewed only during video-filming, which means that her opinions will become part of the knowledge produced by this project at a later stage when the video-films are analysed. Another woman is probably soon giving up her membership in the cooperative because of other work. The tape recorded interview with her has not yet been transcribed, and no decision has been made whether it will be used in the project or not. The last member has not been interviewed at all since she doesn't live near Borås anymore and is less active than the others. Thus it must be emphasized that this

paper will not give a full account of all members' possible standpoints. Designbrenner has been interviewed and video filmed. About five hours of interview/conversation with Brenners have been recorded and data about the company included in this paper descends from the first analysis of this material, made while listening through the material.

## DEBATES ABOUT CRAFT AND WHY IT MAY MATTER WHAT PRACTITIONERS CALL THEIR PRODUCTS

Craft has been a debated concept for a long time. It has moved about in the borderland between art and design, and from time to time it has been used as a counterpoint to both "design" and "fine arts" (Ihatsu 1996, p. 22). In the 1980s, when scientific discussions about representation reached craft, there was a debate about craft as handicraft or art. In the end of the 90s when the arts historian Sue Rowley (now professor at a department for Creative Arts) in the book "Craft and contemporary theory", emphasized the need for theoretical analysis of craft practices, there were still different positions concerning the character of craft. The discussion was about craft as a conceptual art form, versus craft as material expression. Some thought the most important feature of craft was the possibility of letting an individual idea (concept) be easily expressed in opposition to the rectification of mass-produced design. Others found materiality more important: that you can see the work of the hand in the object and meet the object with your tactile sense. They stressed skill to use the proper raw material and technique to make useful products, as more important than the idea expressed by the product (Rowley 1997). These different viewpoints seem to exist even today. However the point of departure in our project is that the dualism is not fruitful, since according to anthropological and folkloristic research it is fundamental that aspects of conceptuality and materiality are tied together in craft products. Objects have a social history and a cultural biography as well as a material form (Appadurai 1986). There's no point in dividing artefacts in things for use = craft and decorative things = art since for the user most artefacts can change meaning, from being things for use to being exposed as decorative art (Glassie 1989 referred in Nordström 1996).

Just like Rowley (1997) we believe that different aspects of a crafted product are possible to judge positively depending on if the work is seen as conceptual art or craftwork. The fact that different views of the concept craft exists, side by side, must not be seen as a problem; instead it can be enriching. It can lead craftwork in different directions at the same time and strengthen the position of craft in society. But since our project is about knowledge in action we consider that debate regarding craft as material expression versus craft as conceptual art may imply different focuses when it comes to what counts as important knowledge - skills in using the proper raw materials and techniques to make useful products, or skills to materialize ideas and values in creative ways? Thus, since one aim of the project is transfer of knowledge to students, it is important for us to research how "ordinary crafts people" (unlike craft critics and theorists) understand the concept craft, and what competences they have experienced that you need as a textile artisan today.<sup>1</sup> Therefore we have asked the practitioners in Vävkompaniet how they define the concepts craft (hantverk), art craft (konsthantverk) and to some extent sloyd (slöjd) (English wording from Ihatsu 1996).<sup>2</sup> In the interviews with Designbren-

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<sup>1</sup> Compare Ihatsu (1996, p.124) who gives some suggestions for future research of craft, of which one is to find out how those who work in the field define the concepts they have to relate to.

<sup>2</sup> Corse (2009) in one chapter focuses relations between the concepts art and craft. Ihatsu adds the concept design (1996). She puts art, craft and design in the corners of a triangular model and discusses concepts which can be seen as placed on a gliding scale between them, among others "art craft". In the research about Vävkompaniet the concepts craft, art craft and sloyd seemed to be the most relevant to discuss, while the concept design was hardly brought up at all.

ner the questions about concepts has not been as visible as in the case of Vävkompaniet (so far). Maybe because Designbrenner has moved around the world and the concept design works “everywhere”. At the homepage ([www.designbrenner.se](http://www.designbrenner.se)) they use words like: handtufted, custom-made design and unique but not words like craft, art-craft or sloyd.

## VIEWS ON THE CONCEPTS CRAFT AND ART CRAFT AMONG VÄVKOMPANIET’S MEMBERS

Most of the interviewees from Vävkompaniet basically define craft as different works done by hand. Two of them say that craft is that which you use – and it is implied that they mean in opposition to fancy goods just to look at. A wooden-shoe and what a shoemaker does are for instance considered craft (Interview nr 7). Other examples come from construction work; different works involved when building a house are seen as craft: “Craft can be for example if you think nice banisters in a house. (...) You can say that’s well done craft, but it’s not art craft!” (Interview nr 7). Another woman mentions that “tiling a bathroom” is craft, and she adds that a painter is also an artisan. So while craft for this woman is connected to work done in/on a building, she thinks that art craft is to “create artefacts”, “things... all around” (Interview nr 6).

Another person says: “Well maybe art craft is more something you stand and contemplate”. But in another moment of the interview she also insists that art craft doesn’t need to be fancy goods, instead it can just as well be utility goods; “some artefact you use” (Interview nr 7). Thus that things are made to be used in everyday life obviously doesn’t count as a dividing line between craft and art craft, according to these members in Vävkompaniet. Products that are useful in a practical sense can be labelled either craft or art craft. But there seem to be a common opinion among the interviewees, that it isn’t suitable to define things made only to be looked at and contemplated just craft, instead they must be labelled art craft. One woman would probably rather use the word react than contemplate though, since she emphasizes that art craft doesn’t necessarily need to be beautiful products, the point is to awaken the spectator’s feelings, and art craft can also be things apprehended as ugly or rather disgusting, which exactly because of that make people react in some way (Interview nr 4).

## SLOYD AS THE “THE FIRST REAL CRAFT”?

When it comes to sloyd one of the women, when she hears the concept, thinks of textile techniques she learnt at school, like knitting and hooking. Another of the members in Vävkompaniet defines sloyd as “the old handicraft methods, certain ways to conduct work with your hands: ” She says: “I view sloyd as the first real craft, so to speak” The interviewer asks: “Like a basic form? Then it can develop in different directions?” and she answers: “Yes, I think that’s the way I look at sloyd” (Interview nr 6). According to this way of comprehending the concepts sloyd develops into art craft if the designs of the artefacts are made more individual. Ihatsu in her book about the concepts art, craft and design, brings up something similar when she describes craft as a foundation, that has developed in different directions (1996, p. 78). Referring to Walker (1989, p. 38) she states that historically seen craft preceded both art and design, since both emanated from craftsmen’s workshop skills. In the Swedish context it’s not strange that sloyd is called “the first real craft” since awareness of the historical importance of “domestic-sloyd” (hemslöjd) are spread by every museum with cultural history collections and since the tradition to do sloyd – to work with different fabrication techniques with your hands or simple tools to produce material objects – still is learnt to every youngster in school.

A woman who has been a member in Vävkompaniet for a long time tells that discussions about the concepts have occurred now and then in the history of the cooperative: “We have discussed it at some occasions, where we have had to define something somehow: What is

Vävkompaniet? What do we have [in the shop]? Are we a shop for sloyd? No, we don't think so. Or we? At least I don't think so." She also explains that the word "art craft" on the banderols outside, is not put there to distinguish the goods in the shop from sloyd. Instead it is used to pin-point that you can find much more than woven textiles in the shop even though it's called Vävkompaniet (in English: "The weaving company"), since art craft can be made of so many different raw materials. "Members may think differently regarding what they are doing. Some may have the opinion that Vävkompaniet is occupied with sloyd", she says, but based on what she is doing herself she doesn't think so: "I feel that probably I think of what I am doing as art craft, more than as sloyd because sloyd is more when you repeat something. (...) Like fabricating a fork. Yes, something like this you do on an on again", she says and points at a wooden tool for fork-hooking (gaffelvirkning in Swedish)."I do nothing of the kind! I mean I don't fabricate things that look the same all the time. Instead they are more art craft somehow" she tells about her own products (Interview nr 4).

To her the border between art craft and art seems more complicated (and maybe meaningless?) to define, but at least she seems to emphasize even more that art are unique products: "I think there's only one item. If you do an art object, then, in a way, there is only that one. Because you just produce it once, like a painting. Yes, then it's art". Thus in the concept art you include that it is more unique?" the interviewer asked to get this clearer and she answered: "Precisely. And art craft, I think, can be both. It can be one individual decorative thing, but it can also be an object for use". The design is also important when it comes to what shall be defined as art craft, she claims. It must not be the same design [model] all the time, but a unique form; so that if it is an object for use it has its own expression. Regarding textile work she says that art craft can for instance be about using a combinations of colours that you have never tested before when weaving; "...that you not sit there and repeat" (Interview nr 4).

Another member in Vävkompaniet says it's difficult to label what she is doing, but unlike the woman just mentioned above she hesitates to call what she is doing art craft: "I would like to say craft. There's so many different opinions, but I think art craft actually is an exceptional product, a unique product" (Interview nr 5). By pointing at a table cloth and saying that she can set up the weft in a loom and make ten of the same kind, ten that look all the same, she emphasizes that she is not doing art craft. She describes herself as someone occupied with textiles and a member in a group of crafts persons, not art crafts persons. Unlike what her colleague seemed to think she didn't label her work sloyd though. Actually none of the members in Vävkompaniet have called their own work or their products sloyd in the interviews.

During the interviews Brenners do not speak about their work as craft or art craft. Art and design are probably the more suitable concepts to use when discussing this company's work. Elisabeth Brenner has had exhibitions where she has shown art pieces. She has also worked as a designer at e.g. Volvo and as chief designer at Kasthall (in Kinna). Rolf Brenner is textile engineer. Both Elisabeth and Rolf have worked as teacher and they started a hand weaving company in Swaziland, Africa. They call Designbrenner: consult agency and tufting studio. This signal a more "commercial" orientation than Vävkompaniet but at the same time they do not put much effort into PR, and they have chosen to live and work in the countryside. And as Elisabeth puts it: it's a long way to Stockholm where most of costumers, magazines and showrooms are located. Some of their works has been exhibited in art museums. So they are both working with customers to whom they make "one of a kind" carpets and with more artistic objects. They are more "avant-garde" than Vävkompaniet but at the same time they offer a standard collection of carpets.

## VÄVKOMPANIET - MAYBE ART CRAFT, BUT NOT “AVANT -GARDE” ART CRAFT OR DESIGN

Previous Swedish/Nordic research on craft has been done partly within the frame of sloyd-research (slöjdforskning), predominantly occupied with knowledge qualities and learning in sloyd in schools (Johansson 2005, Johansson&Porko-Hudd 2007, Gulliksen&Johansson 2009), and partly within artistic research on (art) craft. The latter has recently become a more vital research area, since higher artistic textile education in Sweden according to governmental decisions now must rest on scientific foundations (compare Konstnärlig forskning Yearbook from Vetenskapsrådet 2006, Bondesson&Holmgren 2007). This literature describes art craft with emphasize on art (or at least artistic expression). The testing of materials, and artistic expressions described in these texts seem to draw on theories and/or experimental practices and a critical reflexive approach that the art craftspersons have learnt during university education. The artistic research (Astfalk&Jönsson 2005, Zetterlund 2006) brings up questions about the design- or creation-process which seem relevant to discuss when it comes to much of the work done in Designbrenner. But spontaneously it feels like the (more or less) conceptual or thoroughly ”material-testing” craft, which is brought up by the artistic research ”plays in another division” than the craft done by Vävkompaniet’s members. None of these two types of research totally captures the work conducted in Vävkompaniet.

When it comes to Vävkompaniet it is not uncritical/unreflexive, but less spectacular and less conceptual craft we study and discuss. One of the members thinks that Vävkompaniet is very important for the type of craftworkers she belongs to: ”Here is a forum for us who are no well-known craft persons... or art craftspersons, but want to get our stuff out and hope for someone to like it. That you can get it out like this makes Vävkompaniet really valuable, I think” (Interview nr 6). Even though the members sometimes show their products at exhibitions (for instance in their own exhibition-room) the main display of their products doesn’t take place in (art)galleries but in the little shop’s shelf or display window.

When asked: ”Art craft, craft and sloyd – what’s your opinion about those concepts and what they would stand for?” one of the women in Vävkompaniet, who had been a member about eight or nine months at that time, answered that actually she has never thought about it. Then thoughtfully she said (not unlike others in the cooperative by the way): “Art craftworkers... that stands for quality. (...) Well, but craft, that can be everything from painting a wall...” and she added that in her opinion art craft is better; more distinguished than craft. The interviewer reminded her that banderols outside Vävkompaniet state that art craft can be bought in the shop, just to implicate that by talking like that actually she stressed that the things sold in the shop are superior in some way. She answered by pointing at different things she had produced, as if she wanted the interviewer to judge by herself if the label art craft was appropriate, and rather humble she said that she is absolutely very happy that her things are allowed to be included in the concept art craft. Then she told a story about the turning point in her life when the seed to seeing her products as art craft was planted.

It happened when she visited the big city nearby (Gothenburg), with the purpose of shopping some clothes. When she tried on some garments one shop assistant said that she needed a shawl around her neck, to complete the outfit: “And then she was on her way out to fetch a shawl. And I said: But I have one myself! And then I spun my shawl around me and both the shop assistants said it was the most beautiful one they had seen in a long time.” She thought that it was “insane” that someone who didn’t know her said that something she had done was beautiful, and that the owner even wanted to discuss if such shawls could be sold in the clothing shop. “And then it struck me, oops, can something I fabricate interest others!?”. That experience altered her view of things she produced: “Then it was not just home fabricated handicraft, instead it was art craft!” Eventually this insight that her production could be labelled art craft led her to become a member in Vävkompaniet. She went there and showed

her shawls for those who already were members in the cooperative. They liked her products and suggested that this woman should be elected to be a new member. But even though she at this stage, as a member of the cooperative for some months, could see her products as art craft her identity had not yet fully transformed: “I don’t view myself as craftsperson! (...) It’s too big for me. It’s not me”, she said (Interview nr 1).

This story shows how textile products become art craft when seen as presumptive goods which can be labelled that way, based on how they are fabricated and how they look – and how the transformation of the products from handicraft to art craft is even more emphasized as their producer enters the manifold arena of art craft (or rather when the producer is allowed to enter this arena, since you are elected to be member in Vävkompaniet.) The story is also an example that it has not been evident for the members in Vävkompaniet, just after they have finished education in weaving, that they can view themselves as art crafts persons.

## CRAFT AS A HOBBY AND DESIGN AS A WORK

The women in Vävkompaniet tell similar stories about their education, namely that they as adults, during or after periods of work at home taking care of their children, or after changes at previous workplaces, have attended different part time courses in weaving<sup>3</sup> and also longer basic folkhögskole-courses (maybe equivalent to community college courses?). One of the four whose stories have been included in this paper, also has attended the (at that time) two year long university course in hand-weaving, which existed until a few years ago at The Swedish School of Textiles. All of them say that after their different courses they were not at all convinced that they would ever work with weaving as more than a hobby. When asked if she at that point thought her production would be something to sell one of the members exclaimed: “No! No. Just pleasure. Just for pleasure I thought. Just fun to know how to do it. Never thought I would sell. And I still don’t, because I am such an amateur. (...) But now since I have become part of this at least there’s the possibility to put something out here [on the shelves in the shop]. (...) And if you notice that it isn’t sold, well then you have to take it back” (Interview nr 7).

Another woman says in a similar way that she never thought she would be a professional weaver. That she has kept on weaving instead has to do with the positive feelings it gives: “I just fell that the whole weaving-process is so satisfying. All of it! If you like colour and form and creativity. (...) It involves everything, weaving, I think”. About the actual weaving she says: “It is somewhat meditative too” (Interview nr 6). To handle the whole process, from warping to the moment when the weave is cut down, gives lots of different sense-impressions and feelings, and this makes the creative process worthwhile doing on and on again. Reward in the form of money for sold goods is not the driving force for this woman’s creative work, just a possible, positive surplus.

The stories about how textile craftwork, as years have gone by, has been more and more important in these women’s life and how they are torn between supporting themselves (and take part in supporting their families) through ordinary work and finding time to work with their textile craft work are similar to stories told by the ethnologist Ingrid Nordström (1996) who, also based on interviews and observations, compare the creative processes performed by glass craftspersons and textile craftspersons. Not even the woman who attended the university course in hand-weaving knew for sure that she would work professionally with weaving after the education and she still has another work as her main occupation. Regarding thoughts about future work when her education was finished she says: “I wanted to have something which had to do with textiles then. But at the same time I didn’t really know...Actually you

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<sup>3</sup> Including for some distance-courses where most of the work in the loom has taken place at home.



didn't become anything [as a result of the education]. You got an exam in hand weaving, but it's not that now people think you are that and that, so to speak.(...) I mean if you take fashion design or textile design, well then you are designer or something. But what did we become?" Thus it was not at all self evident that she would run a textile enterprise. Not until two or three years as a member in Vävkompaniet she realised that it was about time to start apprehending her weaving as more than a hobby.

Elisabeth Brenner got her (master) education in design in Hamburg (1969). Rolf is from Germany and is educated as textile engineer. They have been traveling around the globe and worked with textile in various ways. In contrast to the members in Vävkompaniet Elisabeth and Rolf has been working with textile, professionally, for a long time and done it purposefully, both as "free lancer", employees and in their own company.

## THE PROCESS FROM IDEA TO TEXTILE PRODUCT IN VÄVKOMPA- NIET - A MATERIAL APPROACH

How the practitioners conduct the process from idea to product seems to a great extent connected to how they view craftwork and how they have learnt to work during their education(s). When it comes to Vävkompaniet it is noticeable that the members tell about a more material and sensitive than conceptual approach to craftwork.<sup>4</sup> This can be interpreted firstly from answers where the interviewees talk about their choices of different materials as a base for their production. When one woman is asked if she can tell a little about what she has produced during the years – like for instance if she has had different periods when she has made different things, or if some more long lasting directions in the fabrication have existed side by side all the time – she answers by mentioning the textile materials she has been working with, in periods: "I have been weaving wollen fabric, and then also paper-yarn and then with metal threads in it". She further explains that she means warp made of paper-yarn and weft from copper thread, which makes a woven material she later can shape in three dimensional structures (for instance fold). When the interviewer asks how she came up with that idea she tells about the pure lust to experiment: "It was precisely this with the materials. Just have to mix them and see what happens!" (Interview nr 6). Another woman, who works with nuno-felting (felts wool onto silk or cotton fabric) expresses the same lust to experiment without having any hypotheses about what will be the result. She says: "I just enjoy doing it. (...) I enjoy mixing colours and observing what happens and so on" (Interview nr 1).

Secondly members' stories about their appreciations of the textile cultural heritage also convey a material approach to craftwork. One woman especially mentions the old habit to use outworn old textiles for new products, and in connection with this she discusses some different textile materials she has used; as if she views the positive value of tradition, which she wants to convey, as inherent in the materials. She mentions both bear-moss (björnmossa in Swedish) which she has used as weft in door-mats, handspun linen yarn "with splinter and straw in it" used for a table cloth and old linen sheets, which she buys at auctions, cuts and uses as shreds for carpets. Another member sees her own work as part of a textile tradition of working with natural fibres: "Actually I find it hard to cope with synthetic materials. Thus one thing I want is that natural materials not shall disappear. Instead they must be available" (Interview nr 5). The last years she has been working especially with hard fibres like piassava, which she has combined with for instance paper yarn.

And thirdly the material rather than conceptual way to work with craft can be interpreted from answers to the question where the members get their inspiration from. One woman,

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<sup>4</sup> Here we see that we ourselves as researchers mirror the separation between feelings and thoughts/intellect. But no other interpretations based in the interview material have been possible to do here.

when she describes the basement room she works in, gives the impression that she is in the middle of her material; it is like a combination of a storage-room and a workshop where she has her stock of textile materials, tools and yarn on the shelves around her. She says it's rather messy but it's "awesome" to be in that room: "There's needles and there's buttons and knitting pins and sewing-machines. And that I think – I believe – is inspiring! You feel: o, there's that. I have to use it for something. And that! It's like: what shall I produce from that? Think I want to see everything around me" (Interview nr 7).

Lately also another woman has been interested in making use of some old material: "I think, well, what materials do I have at home? (...) And then start looking at it, and from that try to find out what to make out of it" (Interview nr 4). And when inspiration to produce something suddenly comes it's important to go on in the material weaving process, thus this woman says: "I have quite a few looms. (...) Because if you have an idea about something, and there's some other thing in the loom, then you have to do that first. That's not good!" Also a third member when asked: "How does your process look when you produce something? Do you sketch?" says: "I both do it and not do it. Sometimes, but otherwise I just see the material – o, I want to do something from this! Now for instance I have lots of silk fabrics at home, in different green nuances. Thus I am thinking of using them for a bag" (Interview nr 6). So for these three women the textile material is often the starting point and not any idea about a message or value that shall be emitted.

Besides the material itself nature seems to be the most acknowledged source of inspiration for the members of Vävkompaniet. One member tells that it is not in an obvious way though, like "wow, now I saw that tree and that inspired me to do this" [this shape or pattern]. Nature as inspiration for her has more to do with putting herself in a certain creative mode or state of mind: "It is there much of it comes [meaning that ideas arise when she is in the nature] (...) You enter something different somehow; another kind of world". She especially mentions that inspiration for colours comes to a great extent from nature: "Like the combination of colours in a flower" (Interview nr 4). Also others have mentioned that nature gives inspiration especially regarding colours.<sup>5</sup> The combination of colours then can be tested in yarn by the material sketching techniques to wind yarn around a piece of cardboard, which probably was taught at the weaving courses they have attended, or to use strips of coloured paper which are woven together to test new bindings and how colours influence each other. Also weaving a sample is a material way to test the technique. One woman tells: "I am not very much in favour of having any grandiose picture of what it shall become. Instead it's more testing and trying, to get forward. And if it becomes rubbish you throw it away. And it has to further mature for a while. And in that way you have worked yourself through it, and then you can go on with some other thought. So I can feel that I make a sample in the actual weave I am working with" (Interview nr 4). "Learning by doing!" one member says and laughs (Interview nr 1).

Sketching is by the way an occupation these members in Vävkompaniet do not tell a lot about at first. But when asked they mention that they do sketch now and then, with a pen, coloured pens or with aquarelles. One approach to sketching is to do it without any particular purpose, not intended to clarify how a certain product shall look, but just because the lust to sketch appears. They keep their drawings and may find parts of them useful later. One woman tells that besides finding inspiration in textile materials, which she has told about already, also another type of process can take place: "I can walk about a rather long time, thinking of

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<sup>5</sup> There's also "an exception to the rule" consisting of a woman who says that she is not inspired by nature. Instead she has to view objects, for instance at exhibitions, to get inspired. Then she can imagine things she can make herself, in other materials, colours, shapes – but with that which has been made by others as the starting point for her alterations.

something. Find inspiration in books and have some kind of idea about something. (...) When you have reached that far, I am rather certain what I want to do. Then I can draw something”. (Interview nr 4). Sketching at that stage can be good because “then you can see that it works!” as another member puts it (Interview nr 6).

## FROM ORDER TO OBJECT AT DESIGNBRENNER - SKETCHING, TECHNOLOGY AND SMALL SCALE PRODUCTION

Elisabeth and Rolf do, so to speak, have parallel carriers. They both produce objects that are considered art. Sometimes they exhibit their art objects at galleries or museums. Elisabeth is very inspired by the plaited hair styles of Swazi women. In her art she also works with other materials than textile. She often uses mundane things to create her art, like rubbergloves, plastic packaging material, old books and iron gratings. Rolf uses the tufting machine in his art. He likes to play with optical illusions. On the other hand they make carpets to customers on demand. A process that sometimes includes doing things they themselves don't find beautiful or interesting. Some architect offices use Rolf skills to tuft. They send him a Photoshop “picture” that he makes into a carpet.

In interviews with Elisabeth sketching has been discussed. A “typical” assignment starts with a meeting with the customer. Elisabeth wants to see what context the carpet will be in. She considers the form of the place, other objects in the place and function. After the meeting Elisabeth starts to sketch (in aquarelle) and gives the customer some different proposals. They discuss yarn and colours in detail. When the customer has decided what design he or she wants Rolf's work starts. He counts on how much yarn they have to order, he takes Elisabeth's sketch and via Photoshop he turns it into a jpeg file and loads it into the specially built machine. He prepares the background and starts to tuft (which isn't quite as simple as it seems here!). Neither he nor Elisabeth uses the tufting machine to create “out of head”, but Rolf talked about students that find it interesting to experiment. One started the machine and changed yarn randomly. Elisabeth and Rolf seem to see the carpets as a way to get “daily bread”, even if the process contains many creative aspects they seems to be, maybe, a little too skilled at what they are doing! There are no surprises any longer.

## BRIEF CONCLUSIONS

Both Vävkompaniet and Designbrenner are seen as representatives for small scale textile enterprises in Sjuhäradsbygden, but by interviewing members the large differences between the two companies have become obvious to us. Under the label of being textile enterprises of Sjuhäradsbygden some kind of regional identity is created and maintained for those still working with textile production in the area, but various companies conditions of existence differ strikingly much. To further develop possibilities for selling textile products, in forms which these two small scale textile enterprises have shown are negotiable to do in the region, education of new practitioners should include both hand-weaving (and maybe also other textile techniques made by hand or with simple tools), and knowledge about high tech digital textile production tools, like the tufting machine of Designbrenner. Both experientially based competences in handling textile raw materials in craft processes and competences in problem solving and expressing ideas through sketching in design processes are needed, but off course more or less depending on which professions related to textile production the students want to work within.

Another insight we have had is that we have to be very open minded when asking questions about the creative processes involved in design- and craftwork. Many various ways exist when it comes to forming raw material into a product and there are no clear-cut dividing lines between different paths that craft work can follow. It is not right to talk simply about a process from idea to product though, because it is not always mental representations [ideas] that

lead the process in different directions. Instead another kind of reflexivity is often involved in shaping the craft process in a material, experimental way; a bodily reflexivity which occurs in the meeting between the (textile) raw materials and the body movements (the latter either arm/hand movements made to sense and maybe alter different qualities in the material or movements involving larger parts of the body, performed to master various textile tools).

Cultural meanings on what they are doing [what they are occupied with] influence the practitioner's attitudes to their work. Especially the choice to do sketches with paper and pen (or other materials which produce a visual image) or not seems to depend on the practitioners' views of whether they are doing art craft or design. The members in Vävkompaniet, who say they are doing craft or art craft, tell much about material ways of testing what the result will be (winding yarn or weaving a sample). Designbrenner also use such ways to test what the final product will look like. But in the design process made at Designbrenner sketching to define forms, clarify details, solve problems and also to communicate ideas to a customer seems much more important than in the process of craft work as it is described by Vävkompaniets' members. Even though definitions of the concepts art, craft, art craft and design are floating, and they are seen as complicated to define scientifically (Ihatsu 1996, Corse 2009), still in the every day life of craft practitioners perceived differences between the concepts can be important. They concepts thus contribute to shape practices of craftwork in different ways.

The End

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