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Textiling World Politics: Towards an extended epistemology, methodology, and ontology

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This article argues that textiling—a particular kind of making that simultaneously constitutes a concept, a metaphor, and a practice—can facilitate a radical rethinking and redoing of the study of world politics. Specifically, we suggest three ways in which textiling, and the relationality it enables, facilitates this innovation: as a different way of theorizing in the discipline of international relations (IR), as a creative method and methodology for the empirical study of world politics, and as ontological world-making through cosmopraxis. These three ways open up possibilities of engaging the world and its politics differently by enabling an extended epistemology that accounts not only for propositional (abstract and textual) knowledge, but also for experiential, presentational, and practical ways of knowing. Thereby, textiling is not only an innovative practical instrument by means of which different research traditions within IR can cultivate non-propositional ways of knowing; it can also entangle these new insights with the propositional knowledge traditionally privileged by IR and interweave theory and practice in IR scholarship.

Cet article affirme que la textilisation—une technique de fabrication particulière, qui constitue à la fois un concept, une métaphore et une pratique—peut permettre de repenser radicalement la politique mondiale et d'en repenser l'étude. Plus précisément, nous proposons trois façons par lesquelles la textilisation, et la relationalité qu'elle permet, favoriserait cette innovation : comme théorisation différente dans le domaine des relations internationales (RI), comme méthode et méthodologie créatives pour l'étude empirique de la politique mondiale et comme fabrication du monde ontologique par le biais de la cosmopraxie. Ces trois façons ouvrent des possibilités d'interactions différentes avec le monde et sa politique en favorisant une épistémologie plus large, qui prend en compte les connaissances propositionnelles (abstraites et textuelles), mais aussi les modes de connaissance par l'expérience, la présentation et la pratique. Ainsi, la textilisation ne se limite pas à un instrument pratique innovant grâce auquel différentes traditions de recherche au sein des RI peuvent cultiver des modes de connaissance non propositionnelles. Elle peut également relier ces nouvelles informations aux connaissances propositionnelles traditionnellement privilégiées par les RI et unir la théorie et la pratique dans les travaux de recherche de RI.

Este artículo argumenta que la textilización, entendida como una forma particular de hacer las cosas que constituye de manera simultánea un concepto, una metáfora y una práctica, puede facilitar un replanteamiento radical y una remodelación del estudio de la política mundial. De manera más concreta, sugerimos tres formas en las que la textilización, y la relacionalidad que esta permite, facilitan esta innovación: como una forma diferente de teorizar en la disciplina de las relaciones internacionales (RRII), como método creativo y como metodología para el estudio empírico de la política mundial, y como una creación ontológica del mundo a través de la cosmopraxis. Estas tres formas abren nuevas posibilidades de involucrar al mundo y sus políticas de manera diferente ya que permite una epistemología extendida que tiene en cuenta no solo el conocimiento proposicional (abstracto y textual), sino también las formas experienciales, de presentación y las prácticas de conocimiento. De este modo, la textilización no es solo un instrumento práctico innovador por medio del cual diferentes tradiciones de investigación dentro de las RRII pueden cultivar formas no propositivas de conocimiento, sino que también puede unir estas nuevas ideas con el conocimiento proposicional que ha sido tradicionalmente privilegiado por las RRII y entrelazar la teoría y la práctica dentro del ámbito académico de las RRII.

Introduction

In this article, we make the case for textiling as one concrete possibility for scholars of international relations (IR)

to radically rethink and redo the study of world politics. Our argument for textiling takes as its point of departure [John Heron and Peter Reason's \(2008\)](#) proposal for an “extended

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epistemology” that brings together propositional—i.e., text-centric and abstraction-oriented—knowledge with experiential, practical, and presentational (creative/artistic) ways of knowing. Such an extended epistemology promises to enable IR to more effectively, responsibly, and “*practically* (not solely analytically) engage with materiality [. . .] and aesthetic-affective politics” to meet “the demands of contemporary world politics” (Austin and Leander 2021, 85). In light of this promise, however, we find much of current IR to be lacking not only in serious engagement with non-propositional ways of knowing, but also, where these “other” ways are already engaged, in ideas for how to integrate them with the propositional knowledge that IR has traditionally favored and which strives to formulate more generalized ideas about aspects of the social world.¹

In order to remedy this situation, and in line with this special issue’s rallying cry that “making is thinking,” we suggest that one possible way forward lies in one of the oldest and most universal forms of human making: textile-making (St Clair 2018; Hunter 2019; Postrel 2019). To develop textile-making’s potential for rethinking and redoing research in IR, we ask: How does textiling enable us to relationally bring together propositional and other ways of knowing world politics, and thereby to relate IR scholarship back to the experiences of people and communities across the world?

Understanding textiling as a particular kind of making, and as simultaneously constituting a concept, a metaphor, and a practice, we argue that, and show how, textiling offers multiple possibilities for realizing relational “both-and” logics in the practice of research. Rather than separating and hierarchically ordering difference in the binary “either/or” ways that dominate and limit propositional thinking in IR, both-and logics embrace difference through interconnectedness and multiplicity (Trowsell 2021; Trowsell et al. 2021). Specifically, we show that textiling can constitute a way of theorizing relationally by introducing practices and metaphors that are able to hold difference within them; that textiling can be a method and methodology for the relational empirical study of world politics in its emotional/affective, experiential, and creative registers; and that textiling can enable worlding—making ontological worlds by creating new or changing given realities—when experienced and lived as relational cosmopraxis. Thereby, textiling is both a practical instrument by means of which IR’s various critical and non-critical research traditions can cultivate non-propositional ways of knowing, and a means to entangle the insights offered by such “other” ways with the abstract-textual propositional knowledge traditionally privileged by IR.

The alienation of IR from the world and its politics, which this special issue seeks to address (cf. the Introduction section to this special issue; Austin and Leander 2021, 87–8), was already noted two decades ago by Steve Smith, who in his 2003 presidential address to the International Studies Association argued that IR scholarship “has concentrated almost exclusively on a particular world of international relations, and that has not been a world that most of the world’s population could relate to” (Smith 2004, 18). To deal with this disconnect, feminist, post- and decolonial, indigenous, and other critical scholarship has called for and pioneered engagements with dimensions that had traditionally been left out of IR analyses (Kušić Forthcoming), such as embodiment (Anzaldúa 1987; Wilcox 2015; Dyvik and Greenwood

2017; Pruitt and Jeffrey 2020), materiality (Barad 2003; Bennett 2010; Austin 2017), relationality (Shilliam 2015; Kurki 2021; Trowsell et al. 2022), and emotion and affect (Bleiker and Hutchison 2008; Sylvester 2011). Yet while theoretically, these pleas are no longer unheeded—insofar as diverse kinds of critical scholarship now also make it onto the pages of “mainstream” IR journals and find broader readerships as evidenced by download and citation counts—in the actual *practice* of research, both mainstream and critical IR scholarship still struggle to make good on the promise of overcoming the disconnect between IR as a discipline and world politics as lived and experienced by human—and multispecies (Cudworth et al. 2018)—communities.

It is not least for this reason that Smith’s reckoning with IR remains valid today. Ontologically, despite recent openings, IR scholars have so far failed to decolonize and deparochialize the discipline (Blaney and Tickner 2017). Epistemologically, abstract-textual knowledge prevails at the cost of a valuation of other ways of knowing (Callahan 2020; Austin and Leander 2021). Methodologically, quantitative- and qualitative-positivist approaches continue to dominate how data are being generated and what counts as valuable and valid data, to the detriment of qualitative-interpretive and creative engagements (Kurowska and Bliesemann de Guevara 2020). How, then, can IR scholarship be practiced otherwise, in a way that brings it back in touch with the communities at the heart of world politics and that lets their experiences, epistemologies, and knowledges speak back to IR?

In our own research as well as in our social and political engagements and creative practices, we all individually arrived at textiles as a way of unraveling what we experienced as the straitjacket of conventional IR knowledge production. And we are not the only ones: More and more, IR scholars have begun to explore the varied and contradictory roles played by textiles in world politics (Behnke 2017). On the one hand, textiles are far from naturally peaceful or inherently progressive (Andrá 2022a). Among other things, textiles are commodities within a capitalist global political economy characterized by deep colonial roots and highly unequal divisions of labor (Kütting 2008). Historically, textiles have also been a means to enforce women’s “submission to the norms of feminine obedience” (Parker 2010, xix). On the other hand, textiles have been a driving force of politics, technology, business, culture, and science throughout human history (Postrel 2019). They have also frequently and effectively been mobilized in political struggles against violence and oppression (Wedderburn 2019; Andrá et al. 2020; Cole and Mills 2022). Social movements around the world have leveraged textiles’ particular artefactual quality or “thinginess” (Hamilton 2021)—that is, the multimodal ways in which they can carry and convey meaning—and have creatively subverted the seeming harmlessness stemming from textiles’ association with femininity (Agosin 2008).

In this article, we go beyond these insightful analyses of textiles as artifacts, focusing instead on textile-making. In particular, we query how engagements with textile-making can help us grasp both world politics, including some of its above-mentioned dimensions, and different ways of knowing these dimensions. As noted by textile artists Mercy Rojas² and Eileen Harrisson³ in relation to their own artistic

¹There are, of course, many individual exceptions to this rather sweeping claim about IR and its many strands. We will engage with some of these works in the article while nonetheless holding that IR as a discipline is still a far cry from embracing these other ways of thinking and doing wholeheartedly.

²Interview with Maria Mercedes Rojas, conducted by the research team of the project “Des-tejiendo miradas” involving Bliesemann de Guevara and Andrá, Medellín, November 2018. See Rojas’s work at <https://historiasentela.blogspot.com/>. Her ideas are further discussed in the next section.

³Eileen Harrisson’s work, which Andrá and Bliesemann de Guevara first came across in the context of co-organizing and co-curating the exhibition

practice, engaging in textile-making leads our attention not only to the aesthetic but also, and importantly, to the embodied, the emotional/affective, and the material (cf. Tidy 2019). Following up on these insights, we develop an argument for how textiling can help IR scholars to practically know about, experience, relate to, theorize, and ultimately engage with and contribute to the world and its politics differently.

Critical to our argument is that we understand textiling not only as a *concept*, that is, an abstract frame by which we systematically organize, name, and assign meaning to world-political phenomena. Rather, we simultaneously also take textiling as a set of *metaphors* that allow for making sense of the world by reference to specific forms and experiences of textile-making and as a set of *practices* in which IR scholars can engage to know and intervene in the world and its coming-into-being. It is by entangling these three dimensions of textiling as concept, metaphor, and practice that textiling makes for a different way of theorizing world politics, of utilizing methods/methodology to study these politics empirically, and of worlding, that is, creating and changing the realities of these politics. In this expanded understanding of theory, methodology, and ontology enabled by textiling, neither propositional and non-propositional knowledge nor theory and practice are separate, contradictory, or each other's opposite. Rather, textiling as a concept, metaphor, and practice offers a concrete possibility for IR scholars to put "both-and" logics into practice, by enabling creative processes that interweave presumably irreconcilable ways of knowing as part of an extended epistemology and by entangling and entwining theory and practice.

The empirical field of world politics we use in this article to illustrate our argument is that of political violence, armed conflict, and war. We build on years of respective individual research projects contributing to this field of study, all of which have engaged questions of political violence and their aftermath through textiles and textile-making in some form. As critical scholarship has amply pointed out, IR's ways of analyzing these various violence are limited, with the actual problems that different kinds of violence pose often exceeding IR's analytical frames (Andrá 2022c, 707). To remedy this state of affairs, feminist, post-structuralist, post-and decolonial, and other critical approaches offer a plurality of alternative theoretical options (e.g., Enloe 2007; Sylvester 2013; Barkawi 2016). Nonetheless, IR scholars—and we would include ourselves in this—still often find it difficult to *practically* make good on these theoretical options. In this context, we also develop our argument for textiling by engaging with different empirical examples of attempts at finding alternative ways for addressing multifaceted problems of violence in world politics. Rather than adding yet another critical approach or "turn" to existing critical scholarship, textiling as developed in this article seeks to offer both practical ways of rethinking and redoing IR scholarship with regard to these topics (and in general), and a possible bridge between different forms of knowing.

In the remainder of this article, we spin and illustrate our argument in four steps. In the following section, we first provide a brief description of our own textile-making practices—comprising several projects developed in other contexts as well as four small projects that we undertook specifically for this article. We then develop our understanding of textiling as concept, metaphor, and practice as well as our argument that textile-making can contribute to an ex-

tended epistemology that holds within itself abstract-textual (propositional) and other ways of knowing. Thereafter, we unpack and illustrate what textiling can do in and for making as thinking *and doing* in IR in three further sections. We first look at textiling as theorizing and show how textile practices and metaphors, and their inherent both-and logics, can alter how we make theoretical sense of world politics. Examples in this section refer to the work of, respectively, feminist activists and truth commissions in Latin America to address different violence. Secondly, we turn to textiling as methodology and method in empirical IR research, showing how practices of textile-making contribute to an extended epistemology through their embodied and affective qualities and how they create relations between and among researchers, researched, and research audiences. Examples here refer to work with demobilizing armed actors in Colombia. Thirdly, we spin the different threads of our argument together into an understanding of textiling as cosmopraxis—that is, knowing while doing, while being, while feeling—in, with, and as part of the process of bringing into being or changing (the) world(s). The example we use here is a textile artist's engagement with her experiences of violence during the Troubles in Northern Ireland. In our conclusion, we summarize our proposal for how textiling can help IR scholars to (re-) connect with a politics that most of the world's population *can* relate to.

The Makings of an Extended Epistemology in/for IR: Textiling as Concept, Metaphor, and Practice

A central proposition of this article is that an argument for textiling as a form of "making as thinking" cannot be abstract but must be embedded in praxis. And indeed, the threads of this article's argument are spun not only from engagements with different literatures but, importantly, also from our own textile projects and practices. Victória mobilized textile metaphors as analytical categories to theorize the practices of Latin American truth commissions dealing with different kinds of violence. She grounded these metaphors not only in interviews with transitional justice practitioners in Brazil, Mexico, and Colombia but also in her own material engagement with spinning, weaving, and stitching (Santos 2021). Berit and Christine were among the co-curators of *Stitched Voices*, an exhibition of conflict textiles on display at Aberystwyth Arts Centre in 2017 (Andrá et al. 2020),⁴ and were part of a collaborative research project with Colombian colleagues that employed textile methods, especially embroidery and appliqué, to explore the changing subjectivities of former guerrilla fighters of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in the Colombian peace process and to conduct their own researcher reflexivity (Arias López et al. 2020, 2022, 2023; Andrá 2022b).⁵ In her work on cosmopraxis and relational cosmology, Amaya focused on textiles as other-than-human actors/beings and on textiling as ancestral language and decolonial practice. In particular, she used weaving as "a key metaphor of entanglement and interconnection, but also as a concrete practice that embodies the principles of *cosmopraxis*" (Tickner and Querejazu 2021, 391; cf. Querejazu 2022). For this article, we also each engaged in different

⁴For reflections, see the early entries of the *Stitched Voices Blog* at <https://stitchedvoices.wordpress.com>.

⁵See www.des-tejiendomiradas.com. The project was supported by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation in Colombia, Minciencias (FP44842-282-2018) and the Newton Fund, UK (AH/R01373X/1) and hosted by Aberystwyth University, the University of Antioquia, and the Colombian association ASO-VISNA.

"Stitched Voices," and which we further engage later in this article, can be seen at <https://eileenharrison.com/>.

practices of textile-making, reflecting on the question “What is my IR?” Photos of these textile projects are woven into this article to help illustrate some of our points.

To get started on our proposal for textiling, let us briefly consider the broader notion of *making* that is at the heart of this special issue’s argument that “making is thinking.” In our understanding of this argument, making consists in “manual practices of crafting, constructing, or otherwise bringing into being material objects” (Andră 2022a, 1487). It is a skilled and often also a repetitive practice that partially lies beyond both linguistic expression and the reaches of human volition. The latter means that the idea of making as bringing into being is a qualified one. Following Tim Ingold (2013, 21), rather than subscribing to *hylomorphic* understandings of making as the imposition of “preconceived form” on infinitely pliable matter, we conceive of making as a *morphogenetic* or form-generating process in which the maker joins forces with materials “in anticipation of what might emerge” and thus “intervene[es] in worldly processes that are already going on.” Making, as Ingold (2010) puts it, consists “in a weaving of, and through, active materials.” As such, it “requires a kind of ‘futurist’ sensibility” that allows itself to follow the matter it encounters, “however much we might wish our pre-defined plans would provide some certainty” (Austin and Leander 2021, 137). This has a bearing not only for processes of making, which are always enmeshed in frictions, tensions, and improvisations, but also for how we study the processes through which things are made.

Textiling, in turn, constitutes a particular kind of making—which we here develop as a concept, a metaphor, and a practice. As a concept, the notion of textiling draws on art historian Julia Bryan-Wilson’s (2017) proposal for using “*textile* as a transitive verb.” To textile politics means “to give texture” to it; it connotes “a procedure of making politics material,” or an engagement with politics that renders it “textured as in uneven, but also [. . .] as in tangibly worked and retaining some of the grain of that labor” (Bryan-Wilson 2017, 7, emphasis in original). Importantly, Bryan-Wilson stresses how any politics is always already textured—it is riddled with complications and contradictions, which the act of textiling takes up and reworks. Put differently, to textile politics is not to untie its knots in an attempt to smooth out its surface, but rather to loosen some of these knots so as to weave otherwise some of its constitutive threads, reconfiguring the texture of the political fabric. It is not least through this ability to contain in itself this inherent and political contradictoriness, that the concept of textiling can facilitate both-and logics in the practice of research, as we will unpack further below.

Besides understanding textiling as a concept, we also and simultaneously take it to constitute a metaphor and a practice. While “a concept is an abstract frame that helps generating knowledge about the world by organising, naming, and giving meaning to its features” (Berenskoetter 2017, 154), through metaphors, we make sense of one thing in terms of another. Metaphors, such as those used above of “making as weaving” and “textiling politics as the re-weaving of the political fabric,” thus enable us to give “to airy nothing a local habitation and a name” (Shibles 1972, 28). Serving both heuristic and generative functions, metaphors are a means by which we encounter, understand, and give new meaning to reality, whether in everyday life or research (Marks 2004, 19). Yet on the still relatively rare occasion that textile metaphors are used in political research, they often seem to be brought in somewhat offhandedly, without much consideration of what particular kind of thing a

patchwork, weave, or tapestry actually is and which practices are involved in its making. In this article, we therefore advocate for employing textile metaphors more mindfully, paying attention to the specifics of what weaving, stitching, unraveling, etc. imply for the epistemological and ontological textures of our research and thus for theorizing in IR.⁶

This takes us from the metaphor of textiling to the practices on which this metaphor is based. Since metaphors operate to make sense of the unknown in terms of a sensible and specific known, a disconnect between metaphors and their experiential basis can beget “dangerously misleading” understandings, conjectures, and theoretical propositions (Marks 2004, 27). Therefore, our proposal for textiling world politics is grounded in textile practices in the plural: Knitting is different from crocheting, which is different from weaving, which is different from spinning, which is different from embroidering, which is different from sewing, and so forth. Even within one category, the differences in practice can be immense: In embroidery, for example, cross-stitch with its mathematical precision is quite different from ad-lib forms of embroidery based on a wealth of different stitches. Grasping these differences not merely intellectually but through the experience of our own bodies, with our own hands, makes a difference for how we incorporate notions such as textiling and textile politics into our conceptual and metaphorical thinking. In this way, the particularities of textile practices provide us with an embodied and affective appreciation of the improvisation and the essential openness that the material demands of us when we engage in textile-making (Andră 2022b, 519). Additionally, the particularities of different kinds of textile-making also imply that textiling offers a multitude of practices that may be useful to both critical and traditional ways of knowing—as textile-making sometimes follows strict rules (for instance in weaving) or relies on a specific shape from which to draw (for instance in cross-stitching), but also provides ample opportunities for creative improvisation (for instance in free form quilting).

Notwithstanding the emphasis we place on the particularities of different kinds of textiles and textile-making, our three-fold notion of textiling as concept, metaphor, and practice also embraces textiles’ universal dimensions. Firstly, as a kind of material, textiles share “specially tensile properties”; because of their composition from many different threads, which are themselves made from raw materials such as wool or cotton, textiles have a unique “capacity to be pulled, stressed, and withstand tension” (Bryan-Wilson 2017, 5). Moreover, there is also a tactile, affective, and embodied intimacy in textile-making that is shared by different textile practices across space and time and that distinguishes it from other kinds of making. As textile artist Mercy Rojas puts it, textile-making is “an embodied writing in threads, made with the materials that accompany us from birth to death: textiles. This is the intimate material that acts as a boundary between our skin and the world, that wraps our dreams and our despair, and that frees us with an intimate scream when it becomes our voice.”⁷

Finally, historically speaking, many kinds of textiles and textile-making have come to share a “dual face” (Parker 2010) insofar as the slow and repetitive nature of different practices of textile-making has been used to further both progressive and oppressive political causes (Bryan-Wilson

⁶We will unpack this point further in the next section, in which we discuss the relation between theorizing, metaphors, and practice in more detail and with reference to specific examples.

⁷Interview with Maria Mercedes Rojas, conducted by the research team of the project “Des-tejiendo miradas,” involving Bliesemann de Guevara and Andră, Medellin, November 2018.

2017; Andr a 2022a). The universal material, tactile-affective-embodied, and historico-political dimensions of textiles and textile-making stand in a sometimes uneasy relationship with the particularities of specific textile objects and practices. Yet we hold that this is just one of the inherent contradictions of textiles that makes textiling particularly suited to the task of making/thinking world politics differently: Textiling is not “either/or” but “both-and,” as we explain further in the different sections below.

Our argument in the remainder of this article is that textiling—as a kind of making; as concept, metaphor, and practice; and as embracing both the particular and the universal—can help enable an extended epistemology in and for IR that embraces a both-and logic of holding and bearing difference within it. Following Heron and Reason,⁸ the extended epistemology we imagine interweaves the propositional knowledge of IR—that is, IR’s abstract “knowledge ‘about’ something in intellectual terms of ideas and theories” and expressed predominantly in written text (Heron and Reason 2008, 374)—with experiential, presentational, and practical ways of knowing. Experiential knowing arises in our encounters with “being and beings,” that is, in “the very process of perceiving [which] is a meeting, a transaction, with what there is”; it comes to pass “with greater immediacy and less mediation than propositional knowing” and often eludes attempts at being put into words (Heron and Reason 2008, 368–9). Presentational knowing perceives and articulates patterns in experiential knowing, “shaping what is inchoate into a communicable form” such as “visual arts, music, dance and movement, [. . .] poetry, drama,” and storytelling (Heron and Reason 2008, 370–1). Unlike propositional knowing, it does not seek to abstract from experience to arrive at a singular meaning but to open up multiple and contradictory significations. Finally, practical knowing means knowing how to do something. This kind of knowing rests in skills and competences, including those of engaging in “transformative actions in the world” (Heron and Reason 2008, 375).

Through textiling, these at first glance seemingly opposite ways of knowing and theorizing can come together in conversation and mutual co-constitution, complementing each other creatively and extending IR’s epistemology and ontology. To show what this might look like, in the next sections we develop the idea of textiling IR theory as one way of intertwining propositional with other ways of knowing world politics; ponder how a textile(d) methodology can better incorporate different ways of knowing into IR; and explore how the extended epistemology we imagine could go along with textiling as cosmopraxis.

Textiling as Theorizing: Making Textile Sense of World Politics

Theorizing is an inescapable part of all inquiry into our (social and natural) worlds. Beyond narrowly defined scientific engagements, it is also an “everyday human practice”—at least if we understand it as “the use of assumptions to make sense of complexity” (Reus-Smit 2020, 64). By intertwining these acts of sense-making on world politics with textile metaphors, practices, and concepts, we can grasp the texture of political processes and practices through assumptions that are materially and affectively grounded, allowing for an expansion of the practice of theorizing beyond the realm of propositional knowledge.

⁸While Heron and Reason developed their radical epistemology in the context of cooperative inquiry as a particular kind of action research, they hold—and we concur—that it is not limited to this context but can be applied in other kinds of research and, more broadly, in everyday life (Heron and Reason 2008, 367).

Metaphors have a central place in theorizing. In particular when it comes to theorizing the new or unfamiliar, “[m]etaphor is needed in order to conceive and recognize similarities, and for that reason may be the only way we can talk about new conceptions” (Hoffman 1985, 338). In theories of IR, attempts at grasping the complexity of world politics have similarly been permeated by successions of metaphors—as when relations between actors are framed as a *state of nature* (Jahn 1999), unequal *world-systems* (Wallerstein 2004), or *networks* (Best and Williams 2013). Less frequently, we also find efforts to make sense of world politics through textile metaphors, such as the “mending” of countries’ “threadbare democratic fabric” (Hendriks, Ercan, and Boswell 2020) or “patchworks” as a theorization of the subnational politics of postcolonial states (Naseemullah 2022). Each of these metaphors grounds different assumptions of what (or where) world politics is, how it works, and how one can make sense of it, making legible specific practices, processes, and problems to the detriment of others. Some of these examples, however, are marked by an unreflective use of metaphors, textile or otherwise—by the lack of a careful consideration of the assumptions through which one makes sense of world politics when theorizing it in terms of a frayed fabric, of a woven cloth, or of a patchwork. To avoid the development of misleading textile metaphors in IR theorizing, a material engagement with textile practices is crucial for grasping the theoretical implications not only of needlework in general but of different textile techniques.

This is illustrated by Tania P rez-Bustos, Eliana S nchez-Aldana, and Alexandra Chocont -Piraquive’s (2019) usage of the metaphor of yarn in an analysis of feminist (textile) activism in Colombia. Feminist IR in particular has highlighted the crucial role of feminist activists in international politics (Tickner and True 2018). Discussing community-building practices centered on knitting, P rez-Bustos, S nchez-Aldana, and Chocont -Piraquive (2019) add to our understanding of feminist activism by imagining various activist activities as differently colored threads spun into a continuous piece of yarn, which can then be knitted into a new textile surface (Figure 1). The metaphor explicates how, in Colombia, very different forms of feminist mobilization came together in a common political struggle and became intertwined parts of the same materiality. In this way, P rez-Bustos and colleagues’ understanding of knitting and the material composition of yarn enabled new theoretical categories to make sense of different community-building practices. In particular, it brought about a different theoretical grasp of the concept of a continuum. Common understandings of continua as lines (or traces drawn on a piece of paper) associate them with the presumed “sterility, as well as the single-track logic, of modern analytic thought” (Ingold 2007, 2). By contrast, the metaphor of the continuum as a piece of yarn foregrounds multiplicity and flexibility, and thus the agency involved when a continuum of feminist activist practices results in the making of a newly knitted social fabric.

Another illustrative example is that of weaving as a metaphor for truth commissions’ practices of producing final reports (Santos 2021). The politics of victimhood in truth commissions and beyond are an increasingly discussed subject in IR (Jacoby 2015; Krystalli 2021). Theorizing a truth commission’s final report as a woven fabric allows us to make new sense of how some storylines of victimization are woven into it while others are not. As a new piece of fabric emerges from the encounter between the weaver and the threads (Figure 2), so a truth commission’s report emerges



Figure 1. The continuum as a single yarn made up of different threads, by Victória M.S. Santos, 2022 (based on Pérez-Bustos, Sánchez-Aldana, and Chocontá-Piraquive 2019; photo: Victória M.S. Santos).



Figure 2. A surface woven with a hand loom, by Victória M.S. Santos, 2022 (photo: Victória M.S. Santos).

from the encounter between those who write it and those whose storylines are included. The production of these reports is usually an effort to enclose serious human rights violations into a finished past that is clearly distinguished from the present and thus allows for a hopeful future (Cuéllar 2017). Storylines of victims, however, challenge these clear-cut temporal ruptures. Their singular materiality resists efforts at neatly shaping and bounding the report, just like some of the threads in Figure 2 resist being neatly woven into the emergent piece of cloth.

Moreover, the metaphor/practice of weaving also enables us to theorize how victims' stories are woven so as to be visible both as a singular case and as part of an emerging pattern. In Figure 2, while the green, pink, blue, and brown threads can still be distinguished in their singularity, the weaving has altered them. In any textile, threads are bound in sympathy rather than "merely" joined up, and when a textile is unraveled, the threads from which it had been made

retain a memory of their former association (Ingold 2015, 23–5; see also Figure 7). Similarly, as victims' storylines are bound together in the making of truth reports, they are also affected by the very process of truth commissions in ways that cannot be simply "unmade"—as seen in the resignification by victims of their own stories through the act of giving testimony, and the effects this has for collective mobilization (Laplante 2007).

As these two examples show, when grounded in a practical engagement with the material practices to which metaphors refer, richer and more nuanced theoretical categories can emerge. Such practically grounded textile metaphors enable theorizations of the processes and practices that make up world politics in ways that account for their flexibility and texture; for enmeshments between parts and whole; for the moves that go into their making and unmaking; and for a kind of agency that sees human actors engage with active materials. Textile metaphors such as those referred to in

this section—spinning a yarn from different threads, knitting a surface from this yarn, and weaving a cloth from different yarns—invite critical reflection on the assumptions associated with the mobilization of each particular textile artifact or practice. Theorizing world politics through various needlework techniques makes sense of it in different ways.

When theorizations are constructed—or woven—from such practically-metaphorically grounded concepts, what emerges is a textiled kind of theory. An example of this is John Law and Annemarie Mol's (1995, 290) proposal of patchwork as a "theory-metaphor" for how research can identify "[p]artial and varied connections between sites, situations, and stories." Imagining theorizing as patchworking, theorists attend to the "many ways of sewing" and "many kinds of thread," and especially to the fact that "a heap of pieces of cloth can be turned into a whole variety of patchworks. By dint of local sewing. It's just a matter of making them" (Law and Mol 1995, 290; for an IR application, see Möller 2019). Patchwork as a theory-metaphor draws attention to the analytical choices and strategies that go into the making of theoretical connections. More generally, due to the specific properties of textile artifacts (e.g., their capacity to be pulled and stressed, their texture and feel, their "thinginess") and practices (e.g., the slow manipulation of materials), the mobilization of textile metaphors and practices favors a theorization of world politics that conceptually textiles it—that captures its snagged, uneven character, and the complications, contradictions, and tensions it entails. The resultant textiled theory is a far cry from the abstract and parsimonious generalizations that (IR) theory is usually understood to consist in.

Ultimately, entangling textile concepts, metaphors, and practices enables a theorization of world politics that goes beyond the realm of propositional knowledge. It allows us to recognize how our conceptualizations of the world are already enmeshed with our experiential, direct knowledge of it; with how we imagine and present this knowledge through image and words; and with the practical skills—in writing, spinning, knitting, and weaving—that enable us to make sense of, and convey, the very textility of politics.

Textiling as Method(ology): Studying World Politics through Textile Sensitivity and Practice

Thinking about world politics through the concept of textiling highlights, as we have argued above, the frictions, tensions, and improvisations this politics entails. Empirical analyses of such politics ought to attempt to account for its textility—and textile-making, along with other creative or co-productive methods, is particularly suited to do so. In the following, we first theorize textiling as a particular methodological sensitivity through the metaphor and practice of weaving, before turning to textile-making as method and discussing the ways of knowing it enables.

To theorize the work that methods do within social-scientific research, we draw on Beatriz Arias López's (2014) metaphor of weaving. A researcher in community mental health, and also a seamstress and embroiderer whose husband practices weaving on a self-made loom, Arias López suggests that methods' capacity for bringing different elements together and enabling something new to emerge makes them the warp, or the lengthwise threads, on the loom of qualitative-interpretive research. Just like the warp supports the weft, the narrative and creative methods Arias López used supported the interweaving of the other elements that made up her research: the questions, ideas, and concepts; the data, literatures, and contexts; and the sub-

jectivities, materialities, bodies, affects, and emotions. The metaphor of weaving highlights how creative and narrative methods aided the emergent and artisanal character of her research, its being pursued as an open process with "a unique result that [. . .] carries the particular stamp of its creators" (Arias López 2014, 113; cf. also Figure 2).

Understood as warp yarns, methods enable researchers to pick up many different weft threads and weave them into a newly textured and patterned piece that, while still showing the traces of its making, comes to form part of the social fabric of reality. This understanding of the role of methods in research is different from standard social-scientific accounts, according to which methods have an auxiliary function for propositional knowledge. As King, Keohane, and Verba (1994, 12–3) observed resorting to architectural metaphors, "investigators often take down the scaffolding after putting up their intellectual buildings, leaving little trace of the agony and uncertainty of construction." Unlike scaffolding, however, which can be taken down without the building collapsing, the warp cannot be pulled out without the woven fabric unraveling—it is an integral part of the resulting piece of fabric.

The understanding of methods as warp yarns also goes beyond critical engagements with methods and methodologies in IR. Pointing out that methods are always political, critical scholars have reconceptualized methods accordingly, moving away from the notion of neutral instruments for the study of the world and toward an understanding of how methods can enact and disrupt worlds (Aradau and Huysmans 2014; see also Tidy 2019). The idea of *textiling methodology* takes such critiques one step further: to textile methods means to reconfigure the texture of the politics of methods. What Arias López's work hints at is how methods, understood as the warp to support the interweaving of all the other research elements as weft threads, can open our research to an extended epistemology that includes and validates not only propositional but also representational, experiential, and practical knowledge.

In this sense, textiling as methodology and method is more than a mere critique of standard methods or a metaphor for thinking methods differently: It is an invitation to practice textile methods in IR, to allow for embodied and affective ways of knowing to be brought into our knowledge practices, and to convey them through textiles. From the literature and from our own experiences of using textile-making as a research method (e.g., Andrá 2022b; Arias López et al. 2022), we can distil at least three ways in which textile methods as particular practices of making allow us to expand IR's understanding of and engagement with world politics.

Firstly, textiling is intimately linked with the experiential, the embodied, and the affective. As a slow craft, any form of textile-making creates time for individual becoming aware, feeling, remembering, and reflecting—not just in intellectual, but also in embodied and affective ways. As Ingold (2013, 111) observes in his discussion of know-how (or practical knowing, in Heron and Reason's terms), the craftsperson's work requires "intense concentration" and constitutes "thinking with his eyes and his fingers" [*sic*]. What is more, as textiling revolves around notions of unraveling, mending, and recomposing, in both a material and an emotional sense, it can enable resignifications, as Bello Tocancipá and Aranguren Romero (2020) have shown with regard to Colombian victims of armed violence. An example of this can be drawn from a research project with Colombian ex-guerrillas/peace signatories that two of the authors of this article were involved in and which invited research

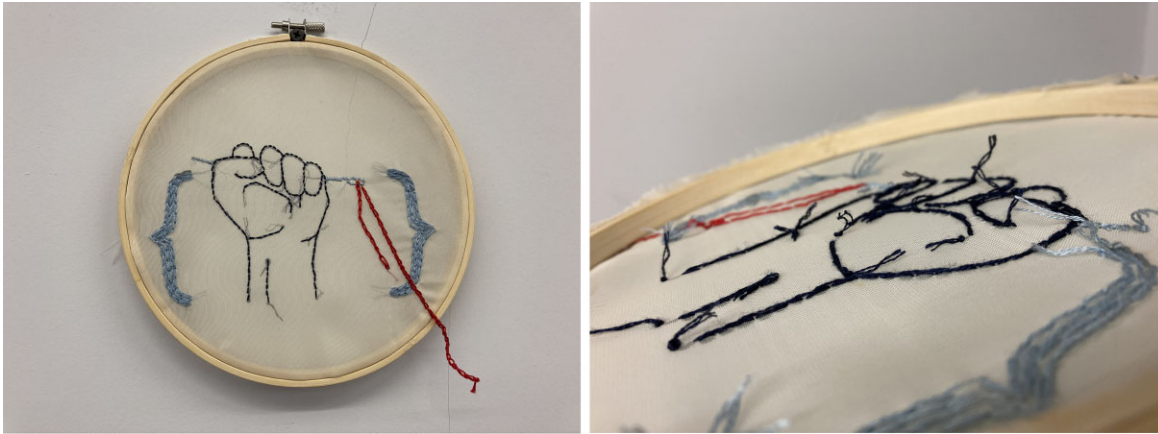


Figure 3. “Embroidery as method, as collective struggle, as care,” front and back view, by Berit Blieseemann de Guevara, 2022 (photos: Berit Blieseemann de Guevara).

participants to embroider their most important life stories. In the resulting textile narratives, the embodied practical and experiential knowledge of their makers was not separate from the storied content of the embroideries. Jhonatan, a peace signatory who meticulously stitched an anatomical heart, “chose stitches that give you more work” to express that “what I am longing for will not be easy to achieve”: “I wanted [my embroidery] to reflect that our process [of reincorporation] is hard, that it takes time, and there is a lot of fear. I wanted to not just embroider for embroidery’s sake, but to show that [...] embroidery is a way of telling a story, too” (Jhonatan, cited in [Andră 2022b](#), 515).

Secondly, the experiential, affective, and embodied effects of textile-making are not limited to the individual maker but are intersubjective and therefore collective experiences. When carried out in groups, textile-making creates relations of trust, affect, and mutual care, which allows individuals to express their experiences and enables collectives to establish and/or resignify relations ([Pérez-Bustos and Chocontá Piraquive 2018](#), 5–7; [Bello Tocancipá and Aranguren Romero 2020](#), 189). In the aforementioned project with Colombian peace signatories, participants were invited to a workshop based on the notion of life being composed of scraps of fabric.⁹ As they sewed scraps of fabric onto sheets of paper, they got talking about their life experiences in an entirely new way, as their former commander and now peace-time political leader later told the research team: “I don’t know how you have done this, but people have never shared so much about themselves with each other before”¹⁰—putting into words the experience of trust, affect, and mutual care the textile method had created in this instance.

In their collective dimension, textile methods can thus also enable the textiling of relationships, undoing some of the social fabric of a group or community, and recomposing it in new ways, even if only in the specific moment. David Gauntlett, a scholar of creativity and design who has explored the “social meaning of creativity” in more detail, argues that “through making things, people engage

with the world and create connections with each other” ([Gauntlett 2018](#)). As we have observed in our own research using textile-making as method, such connections tend to cut across genders and generations, across past experiences and present ideologies of the makers and their audiences, thereby often enabling new resonances and conversational threads. However, this collective recomposing of the social fabric also often produces new knots, tensions, and entanglements that may well be visible in, and become an integral part of, the emergent fabric, both literally and metaphorically/socially. Also, textile-making as method obviously misses the threads of those who choose not to engage with or have been left out of the making process.

Moreover, textile-making as a collective method can also connect researchers and research participants differently. The embroidery shown in [Figure 3](#), for example, is a reflection of one of the authors on how, in her collaborative research with colleagues in Colombia over the course of several joint projects, textile-making evolved from a method (embroidering as a way to capture participants’ preferred narratives) to a deeper understanding of the social struggles her colleagues and their research participants are involved in (the raised fist of struggle, enriched by a needle and thread) and to a rethinking of her own role as Global Northern researcher in mobilizing resources and helping create space for those struggles (symbolized by the embracing but non-restrictive curly brackets). But again, this is not a smooth process, and its knots, frays, and imperfections are not hidden from view but visible through the semi-transparent voile and on the back of the embroidered piece.

Thirdly, textiles and textile practices also have effects on their audiences that go beyond propositional knowing or intellectual reflection and that make them particularly suited for experiential and affective encounters and exchanges ([Thanem and Knights 2019](#); [Andră et al. 2020](#)). As textile artist Mercy Rojas observes: “The textile narrative is a language that can only be transmitted from and received with the body.”¹¹ This is because of the materiality and tactility of textiles, the sometimes deep symbolic meanings of the (often second-hand or used) materials they are made from, and the traces of their slow and tedious making process, which touch audiences in particular ways that relate back to the intimate and ubiquitous role textiles play in human lives (cf.

⁹This notion is inspired by a poem by Brazilian poet Cris Pizzimenti, “Sou feita de retalhos,” https://www.pensador.com/autor/cris_pizzimenti/, accessed August 9, 2022.

¹⁰Fieldwork conversation between “Un-Stitching Gazes” project team members and the leader of the village of San José de León, Mutatá (Department of Antioquia, Colombia), fieldnotes, April 2019.

¹¹Interview with Maria Mercedes Rojas, conducted by the research team of the project “Un-Stitching Gazes,” Medellín, November 2018.

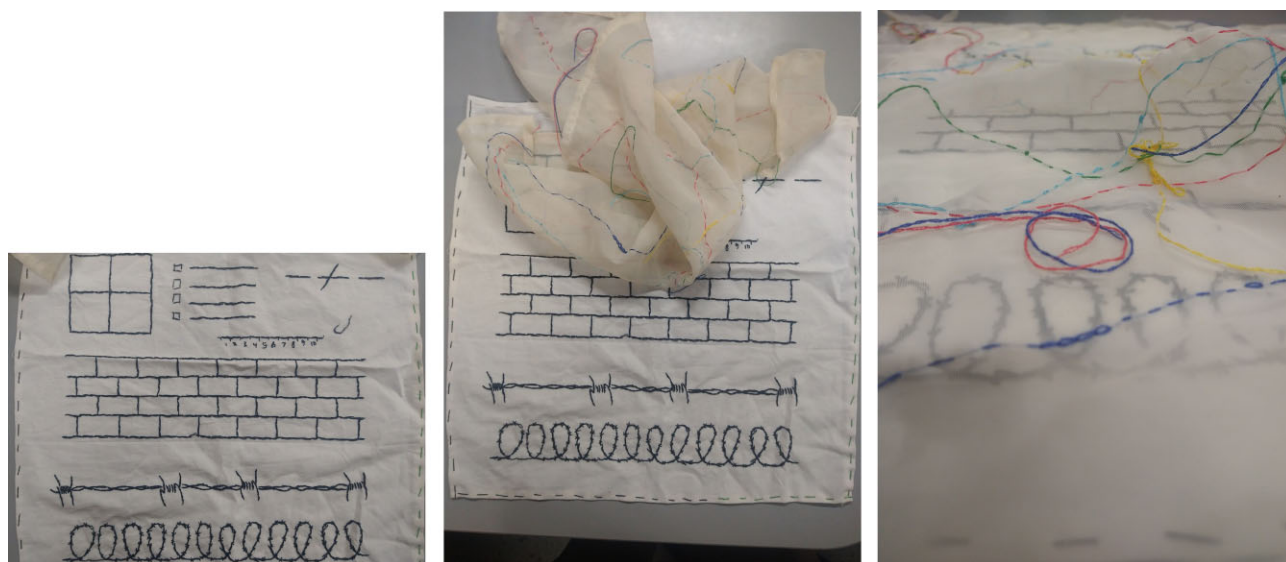


Figure 4. “Cosmopraxis entangles propositional knowing and being,” by Amaya Querejazu, 2022 (photos: Amaya Querejazu).

Postrel 2019; Hamilton 2022). In the different textile exhibitions two of this article’s authors were involved in, visitors were invited to contribute to or resonate with the exhibited textiles by engaging in needlework themselves. Feedback from visitors suggests that this practice of textiling brought about more than just a different intellectual engagement or “thinking space” (Bleiker 2017): It enabled affective and embodied, or experiential, knowing and thereby contributed to a transformative experience (Andrá et al. 2020; for an example of a textile resonance, see Andrá 2022b, 517–9).

All three aspects of textile-making as research method—the experiential, embodied, and affective aspects of textiling; its potential for collective recomposing; and the embodied and affective connections textiles create with their audiences—work against epistemic closure. Textiling as method involves processes of stitching, un-stitching, and/or re-stitching knowledge, and its products therefore contain the complications, contradictions, and tensions of the textured social and political worlds they emerge within. At the same time, textiling shapes and re-shapes these worlds through practice. As methodological sensitivity, textiling thus brings the uneven fabric emerging from such practices and encounters into IR analyses and theorizing, and creates opportunities to connect scholarly practices more closely with the life-worlds of those they engage with in their research.

Textiling as Cosmopraxis: Knowing While Being, While Doing, While Feeling

The emergent, uneven relationships between and among textiles, their makers, and their audiences are an example of our final argument about textiling as an expansion of the ways in which we experience life. In the making of textiles, we argue, we can understand the making of reality. Understood as cosmopraxis, textiling allows for other ways of thinking, in which textiles have an influence on the realities they create and are created by. The term “cosmopraxis” denotes the inseparability and simultaneity of being, feeling, knowing, and doing as part of the same relational experience—as represented by the curling, multi-colored lines in the semi-transparent top layer of the embroidery

shown in Figure 4. Cosmopraxis draws our attention to relations of interconnection and co-becoming between human and other-than-human, animate and inanimate actors, and the spaces created in between them (Tickner and Querejazu 2021, 399). In the context of textiling, cosmopraxis highlights, both literally and metaphorically, the relation of interconnection and co-becoming between the maker and their textile, the embroiderer and their embroidery, and the researcher and their research. Textiling as cosmopraxis thereby shows “different” paths to theorizing and practicing world politics, comprising at least three aspects: cosmopraxis as worlding, textiling as the enactment of worlding, and textiles as other-than-human beings.

Firstly, textiling as cosmopraxis is a way of “worlding,” or worlds in the making through practices (Blaser 2010). Worlding refers to the experience of moving about multiple worlds as practiced by actors including other-than-humans and entails relational practices of co-participation in the cosmos. While the term cosmopraxis has been used mainly to refer to worldings of the Aymara communities in the Andes (Arnold and Espejo 1995; De Munter and Note 2009; Querejazu 2022; see Figure 5), the idea of a relational cosmology—derived from indigenous cosmologies but also from discoveries in the natural sciences—has increasingly also been used to call “for reassessments of the many distinctions and dichotomies embedded in academia, seeking to ‘loosen,’ ‘undo,’ and ‘reframe’ our conceptual understandings” (Kurki 2021, 2). In this sense, textiling as understood in this article constitutes one possible (cosmo-) practical way in which IR scholars can engage in the undoing and retexturing of dichotomies that relational-cosmological scholarship calls for. Understood as a form of worlding, textiling can help reveal the workings of cosmopraxis; develop our awareness of our cosmological interconnections; and theorize textiles as other-than-human beings with political relevance.

This entails, secondly, that from a cosmopraxis perspective practices of textiling are performative in that they enact and shape worlds. They are narrative practices through which people give meaning to their lives (Bliesemann de Guevara and Krystalli 2022), but they also serve to symbolize that those lives sometimes involve other natural and spir-



Figure 5. Crocheting a Wayuú “mochila,” which symbolically holds and keeps the cosmos, according to the laws of origin of the Wayuú people (photo: Amaya Querejazu).

itual worlds. Textile patterns not only contain knowledges and histories; they also reflect a cultivated habit of noticing surrounding details and therefore contain and constitute important material and symbolical information about our interactions. Rather than only serving as repositories of memories, textiles themselves become relevant as subjects.

The importance that textiles acquire as subjects, thirdly, is key to understanding textiling as cosmopraxis: Their materialization reveals processes of worlding in which human and non-human, animate and inanimate matter is fundamental for the ongoing social formation of relations (Thrift 2008). Acts of weaving, for instance, can enact and perform cosmopraxis (Querejazu 2022). As a process of worlding, weaving involves a simultaneous experience of being/knowing/feeling/doing, which becomes a way of creating and transforming reality (Blaser 2010; Blaney and Tickner 2017). As a relational process, weaving reveals relations of co-becoming between maker and textile in which both the textile “product” and its maker are (trans-)formed. While textile-makers may tell varied stories in their crafting, once finished a textile is not just the container of those stories, but itself becomes a storyteller. One key aspect of this is that the textile becomes an agent who connects time/space, reveals and reflects images, tells stories, and transmits knowledge, emotions, and experiences. As storytellers, textiles thus have an impact not only on their creators, but also transform those who observe and interact with them (cf. previous section on textiles’ audiences). A second key aspect is a textile’s multiplicity in *being*. In addition to constituting storytelling agents, textiles can also contain communities’ cosmos and memory and become the embodiment of community members such as ancestors (Tickner and Querejazu

2021). This way of being many things at once is crucial to textiling as cosmopraxis and the understanding of the other-than-human world it presupposes.

Importantly, textiling as cosmopraxis matters all over the planet. Since the idea of “cosmopraxis” comes from indigenous cosmologies, it is often exoticized as being far removed from the “Western modern world” or from “Western reality.” Yet elements of cosmopraxis are present in everyday (textile) practices throughout the world. Textile artist Eileen Harrisson’s exhibition “Sorrowful Healing” illustrates this point.¹² The exhibition was part of Harrisson’s PhD in Fine Arts, in which she explored “the symbiotic relationship between stitch, sound and word through the prism of [her] experiences of the Troubles in Northern Ireland.”¹³ Harrisson’s pieces have previously been classed as “conflict textiles” (see Andrá et al. 2020) and as an example of the “textile language of conflicts.”¹⁴ Yet, they constitute much more than textile testimonies of conflict—and the process of their making is itself an example of being, while doing, while knowing, while feeling.

As Harrisson explained in her speech at the exhibition’s opening, it was the stitching itself that triggered her memories of those sorrowful times she experienced as a nurse living through the Troubles in Belfast. Specifically, when Harrisson explored the different sensual dimensions of the act of a needle and thread reaping fabric, the amplified sound of it reminded her of a bomb explosion that she had experienced. This bodily experience of the interaction between the textile and Harrisson unfolded in her research on embroidering as a process of memory and healing. The sound brought her to her past, and textiling was the connection. Embroidering revealed something not even she as the embroiderer knew was there. In its multiplicity, embroidering both opened the wound and became a means to heal it, transforming Harrisson’s reality, her past and present. Figure 6 shows a detail of Harrisson’s work called “After,” which is “based on an incidence of violence in Belfast during the Troubles in the 1970s,” as she explains, and visualizes “how people would disappear into smoke when a bomb exploded and only afterwards would you find out if they were alive or dead”¹⁵—an experience Harrisson has also reflected on in a poem.¹⁶

The praxis of textiling aroused painful memories who as agents became other textiles, other stories that transformed, transported, and emotionally affected the exhibition visitors—as viewers, listeners, feelers, and experiencers interpellated by the space—who had not been present during the bombings. To them, the amplified sound of needle and thread reaping the fabric, played at the exhibition, indeed sounded and felt like a bomb. A connection was formed between visitors, sounds, and textiles, allowing for this transformation. Harrisson’s work reflects not only metaphorically but also ontologically French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s affirmation that “we are always caught-up in the fabric of the world,” with and within which

¹²The exhibition was on display at Aberystwyth University’s School of Art in February 2022. See more at Eileen Harrisson, “PhD Work and Exhibition,” <https://eileenharrisson.com/1395-2>, accessed August 8, 2022.

¹³Harrisson, Eileen, n.d. “Biography,” <https://eileenharrisson.com/biography/>, accessed August 8, 2022.

¹⁴Roberta Bacic, “Textile Language of Conflicts” workshop and exhibitions, see <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/conflicttextiles/search-quilts2/fullevent1/?id=171>, accessed October 6, 2022.

¹⁵Eileen Harrisson, “Conflict,” <https://eileenharrisson.com/conflict/>, accessed August 9, 2022.

¹⁶Eileen Harrisson, “After,” <https://soundcloud.com/eileengrace19/after>, accessed August 9, 2022.



Figure 6. Detail of “After,” by Eileen Harrison, 2015 (photo: Eileen Harrison, <https://eileenharrison.com/conflict/>).

emerges that which we call subjects and objects (Merleau-Ponty cited in [Anderson and Harrison 2016](#), 8).

Like every human creation, a textile is never only individual nor only human, but always also relational. Its “quality” derives from an attentive relational enmeshment and is the work of a relationally composed self ([Reddekop and Trowsell 2021](#), 81). For one, textiling is a learned skill. Not only do we learn it from those who teach us; it also connects us to our ancestors, to their and our own observation of nature, to weaving animals such as spiders,¹⁷ and to their intentions and feelings. Moreover, practices of textiling are universal, or present in every part of the world, and yet they are also situated—a kind of relationality that cosmopraxis understands as both-and. As an enactment that attunes us to the cosmos, textiling transcends the situated experience, and yet, it is also a specific and contextual practice every time it is enacted. Textiling as cosmopraxis allows us to integrate all the dimensions explored throughout this article. What is more, it takes our analysis beyond mere alternatives to dominant ways of theorizing, researching, and knowing: It enables readings that give space to other-than-human agency and to surprising, unexpected ways of making (with/in) IR.

Conclusion

In this article, we have argued that the discipline of IR can gain in multiple ways from expanding its praxis into textile-making. We have proposed that textiling—as

¹⁷Textile artist Louise Bourgeois, for example, “understood the spider as both protector and predator, and associated it with her mother, a weaver and tapestry restorer. The spider’s ability to weave a web from its own body was a metaphor Bourgeois also used to describe her artistic process” ([Hayward Gallery 2021](#)).

a particular kind of making; as concept, metaphor, and practice; and as simultaneously embracing the particular and the universal—enables an extension of the epistemology, methodology, and ontology of standard, propositional knowledge in IR. Textiling does so through disrupting and interpellating propositional knowledge by, as well as complementing and combining it with, experiential, presentational, and practical ways of knowing. We have shown how through textiling, different and sometimes new kinds of ontological, epistemological, and methodological conversations can take place. As concept, metaphor, and practice, textiling can hold differences within itself and allow for both-and logics and narratives to emerge, which provide alternatives to the binary logics still dominating IR theorizing and research. In the last section, we have argued that, when embraced consequently, textiling results in cosmopraxis understood as a relational form of worlding in which these different ways of knowing are thought of as inseparable, as knowing while doing, while being, while feeling. In other words, the conceptual, metaphorical, and practical textiling of world politics does not only enable different and expanded theorizations, epistemologies, and methodologies; it can also render possible and visible multiple ontologies that depart from the “one-world world” vision of IR ([Law 2015](#)).

By unpacking these different dimensions of textiling, we have argued that an engagement with textile-making makes room for often neglected material, embodied, and affective dimensions of world politics, as called for by IR’s critical traditions. Moreover, textiling also allows for re-entangling propositional and non-propositional forms of knowledge that normally tend to be kept apart by disciplinary standards in both mainstream and critical IR scholarship. This



Figure 7. “Unraveling IR,” by Christine Andrä, 2022 (photos: Christine Andrä).

has perhaps become most visible in the section on textiling as theorizing, where we have shown how textile-making metaphors deeply rooted in practice allow for a different kind of abstraction—one that can at one and the same time account for patterns, for the elements these patterns are made of, and for the fact that these elements do not always integrate neatly into the patterns.

It should have become clear at this point that we do not conceive of textile-making as a new critical “tradition” or “turn”; rather, we offer textiling as an alternative practice that different kinds of (not only critical) IR scholarship might pursue, and which is by far not solely useful in research that takes textiles and/or textile-making as its objects of inquiry. As we hope to have shown through our examples, textiling is a tool that enables interconnections between theory and practice to be drawn in varied ways and with varied means, opening and widening possibilities to do critical work through creative practices of making and crafting but also to tie them back to theorizing about the world. This must be done sensitively, though (Twigger Holroyd and Shercliff 2020). Textile methods of making are not everyone’s preferred form of engagement, nor do they magically “offset ‘asymmetries of wealth, health, knowledge and agency’ between researchers—from the Global North and the Global South—and research participants” (Andrä 2022b, 521). Depending on how they are used in a wider research design, they can be just as extractive as other social-scientific methods.

Nonetheless, textiling should also not be dismissed or underestimated as a way of engaging with world politics.

Outside of academia, textile-making has a long tradition as a form of expression and worlding that scholarly engagements with textile-making can build on, with intimate links to political questions, struggles, and (cosmo-) visions (e.g., Parker 2010; Agosin 2014; Andrä et al. 2020; Dormor 2020; Andrä 2022b; Querejazu 2022). Our own practice has not only evidenced how much there is for scholars to learn from such collaborative engagements. It has also highlighted the ways in which textiling can interlace the propositional knowledge academics produce with the life-worlds of those they engage with. The possibilities of building on the emergent body of work on textiling (in) IR are manifold. As we have argued throughout this article, in the practice of textiling, the maker and the material are inseparable. They jointly bring about new futures and possibilities in a morphogenetic and ever-emergent process of interconnecting and co-becoming. This also applies to “textiling IR”—its theorizing, methodologies/methods, and ontology—as discussed in the different sections of our article. By bringing together textiling and IR, not in a transactional but in a morphogenetic sense, something new can and will emerge.

For too long, as Austin and Leander (2021) have noted, the international social sciences such as IR have privileged abstract approaches to knowledge production and written text. Yet the propositional knowledge emanating from these practices of thinking and writing is riddled with (patriarchal, colonial, class, etc.) power and privilege and experienced by many as irrelevant to their lives. Textiling, we suggest, is one form of making that can contribute to efforts to pluralize IR politically, analytically, and socially. It

constitutes a practical way of unraveling, fraying, and re-composing the key assumptions, dichotomies, and ways of knowing that much of the discipline's knowledge production still rests on but which we have experienced as limiting our engagements with the world. As the partly unraveled woolen sweater in Figure 7 suggests, whatever emerges from the frayed thread we produce when we unravel IR will retain some of its former form. But nonetheless, this thread can also be used to compose something new, however imperfect, that opens new possibilities for understanding and relating with the world.

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