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Textile Textuality in Inger Christensen: “Letter in April” and Amalie Smith: “Thread Ripper”

Departing from Roland Barthes’ association of text and textile, and feminist theory on weaving as text production, this article analyzes the textile qualities of Inger Christensen’s “Letter in April” (1979) and Amalie Smith’s “Thread Ripper” (2020). In “Letter in April”, Christensen establishes a connection between writing and spinning or weaving through their shared temporality of varied repetition. In “Thread Ripper” Smith alludes to Christensen and makes of the continuity between text and textile not only the main theme of the book, but also its structuring principle. Through a materialist conception of the text, regarding it as a woven fabric, the article focuses on the textual patterns of the two works (stylistic figures in Christensen, graphic composition in Smith). The connection from Christensen to Smith leads to a further connection to ecocritical conceptions of weaving as no less than a cosmological principle. On a concluding note, the article argues that weaving is not only connecting, but also disconnecting, cutting.

Keywords: textuality, weaving, textual materiality, permutation, anagram, Inger Christensen, Amalie Smith

The connection between text and textuality is a commonplace in literary theory, at least since Roland Barthes. Literary scholars have unfolded the feminist potential of this connection, comparing the production of texts to the production of textiles which has historically been women’s work. Recently, ecocritical artists and theorists have insisted on weaving as a metaphor not only for the text, but for the world, for the connectedness and entanglements between the different species

and matters on planet earth.¹ In Inger Christensen’s poetic work “Brev i april” [“Letter in April”] (1979) a connection is established between the work of writing and the work of spinning and weaving, sharing the temporality of varied repetition, a temporality which Christensen depicts as more revolutionary than the violent disruptive act. In Amalie Smith’s “Thread Ripper” (2020)—a recent Danish work that contains allusions to Christensen—the continuity between text and textile is an overt theme and structuring principle, as is the continuity between weaving and digital technology. This article analyzes the textile textuality of these two works against the background of weaving as a topic in literary, feminist, and ecocritical theories.

Text as Tapestry and Tissue

In “The Death of the Author”, Barthes speaks of the text as “a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture”.² In his entry on “(theory of the) text” in “L’Encyclopédie Universalis”, he reminds us that “texere” etymologically means “to weave” and defines “text” as “the surface of the literary work: it is woven by the words of the work.”³ Thus, the “textile” quality of the text, to Barthes, is both about its (constitutive) intertextuality, and about its being a tapestry of words and letters.

In “Weaving the Word”, Kathryn Kruger Sullivan connects this textile quality of the text specifically to women’s textile/textual production. Weaving has historically been a woman’s job. Thus, if textiles are texts, women were the first text producers.⁴ Sullivan points to the female figures in Greek mythology who told stories through weaving. In “Metamorphoses”, Ovid tells of Philomela who was raped and had her tongue cut out by her sister’s husband; unable to speak, she told her story by weaving it. Another famous woman weaver from “Metamorphoses” is Arachne who was transformed into a spider by Minerva, the goddess of (among other things) arts and crafts. Minerva was provoked by Arachne’s boasting and challenged her to compete in weaving. Both wove stories of the gods into their tapestries. Minerva depicted the gods as heroes, whereas Arachne wove scenes in which the gods act in disguise as cheaters, even rapists. To Sullivan, the myths of Philomela and Arachne propose “that if a woman were allowed to speak, she would say the unspeakable, or if a woman were to create texts, she would create dangerous ones”⁵.

¹ Haraway (2016: 91); Bertoli (2021: online).

² Barthes (1977: 146).

³ Barthes (2002: 443).

⁴ Sullivan (2001: 22).

⁵ *Ibid.*, 71.

In her article on spinning and weaving in Homer, Maria C. Pantelia points to yet another ancient Greek woman weaver, Helen of Troy, whom Homer, in the third song of the *Iliad*, depicts as weaving the same scenes from the war that he himself is telling, thus implicitly making of her a kind of colleague bard, telling the same story, only in another medium: “Like an epic poet who preserves through his song the glorious deeds of his heroes, Helen weaves on her loom the story of the war.”⁶

While weaving tapestries as telling stories is one thing, we can also pay attention to the materiality of the text, the patterns of its letters and words, that the analogy between text and textile arouses. It makes us see the text as a patterned surface of words and letters. It even reminds us that the paper on which it is printed is in fact a textile material. This is a point that I first encountered as a feminist concern in Susan Gubar’s reading of Karen Blixen’s story “The Blank Page”. Blixen’s story is about a sisterhood of nuns producing precious sheets from linen that they grow themselves. In the story, the blank sheet is an overt allegory of the blank page, and Gubar points out how this makes of women’s textile work the material base for writing: “The sisterhood provides the blank sheets needed to accomplish writing”⁷.

It is the materialist conception of the text as a kind of woven fabric that will be my interest in this article, as I find it both in Inger Christensen’s “Brev i April” and in Amalie Smith’s “Thread Ripper”. Regarding the text as a tissue is suspending its production of images to concentrate on its materiality, its patterns of words and letters. “Letter in April” and “Thread Ripper” are both rich in images, though. Christensen takes the reader through a “vandfald / af billeder”⁸ [“waterfall / of images”],⁹ but as we shall see, the purpose is to move from metaphor to thingness. Smith circles around all the images in and around the subject—perceived images, metaphors, dream images, and not least the abundance of images on our phones and computers—but, just as Christensen, she also stresses the text itself as a tissue or fabric woven from letters.

Change through Varied Repetition

In April 1979, Inger Christensen went on a writing retreat in the Danish scholarship residence in Rue de la Perle, Paris. She brought her six-year-old son with her. A fantastic work came out of it: “Brev i April”, which in seven parts of five slender poems depicts the daily routines of the poet and the child: Setting the table,

⁶ Pantelia (1993: 495).

⁷ Gubar (1981: 259).

⁸ Christensen (1999: 355).

⁹ Christensen (2011: 137-138).

sleeping, talking together, going on excursions, the child playing, the child wondering, the change of light.

The all-pervading figure in “Brev i April”, both compositionally, thematically, stylistically, and genetically, is the movement whereby something imperceptibly or through small variations becomes something else. The work shows us how change can grow out of the inertia of routine and repetition. If you read the drafts of “Brev i April”, you get an insight into how the work itself has grown out of a certain sluggish repetition. Christensen was sitting with her pencil, writing the same sentences over and over, with only small variations (“Der ligger et granatæble på mit bord // Jeg gentager: der ligger et granatæble her / på mit bord” [“There is a pomegranate on my table / I repeat: There is a pomegranate here / on my table”])¹⁰, and out of this circling repetition a complex and rich work of poems has grown, which has retained the varied repetition as its principle of composition.

On the compositional level, the varied repetition must be captured with the mathematical concept that Christensen herself indicated as the work’s principle, taken from the composer Olivier Messiaen: the symmetrical permutation. On the semantic level, we encounter the figure of varied repetition as the routine of keeping house and taking care of a child, and in topological themes where movement and repetition coincide: the labyrinth and the spiral. On the stylistic level, we find different recurring figures of varied repetition, for example the so-called polyp-ton, where the same word is repeated in different inflections or forms, and the anagram, where the same letters are repeated, but in a varied order, so that “dug” [dew] becomes “Gud” [God].¹¹ On the text’s genetical level we find the movement in the pencil’s sluggish circle on the paper, the same sentences written over and over again with slight variations.

“Letter in April” insists that re-volution (in the sense of repetitive rotation) could lead to revolution (in the sense of change). It insists that the outbreak can develop from the inertia of routine and repetition. It promotes a narrative of revolution alternative to the one that, with the Parisian backdrop and the recurring motifs of freedom and broken chains, resounds in the background of the text. In her essay “Jeg tænker, altså er jeg del af labyrinten” [“I Think hence I am Part of the Labyrinth”] (named after some lines from “Letter in April”) Christensen reminds us that “ré-volution” in French originally means “en cirkelbevægelse, hvorved et bevægeligt legeme vender tilbage til sin oprindelige position” [“a circular movement by which a movable body returns to its original position”], but adds that if this body is a human being, it will always return transformed.¹²

A work of varied repetition to which “Letter in April” alludes, is the work of spinning and weaving. Spinning in the reoccurring image of the spider and its

¹⁰ Christensen (2018: 285). Translation: L.M.R.

¹¹ Christensen (1999: 359); Christensen (2011: 107).

¹² Christensen (2019: 164). Translation: L.M.R.

web. Weaving in the overall principle of composition, the symmetrical permutation, which imitates the way that Olivier Messiaen composed his “Livre d’orgue”, but may even allude to the way that Jacquard, the inventor of the earliest programmable looms, composed patterns for textiles on his weaving machine. Let us first take a look at the weaving composition, and then at the spinning spider.

A Tapestry of Sound and Images

In her radio essay “Moments musicaux” Christensen states that “Letter in April” is composed according to the principle of symmetrical permutation which she has taken from Olivier Messiaen’s musical work “Livre d’orgue”. She here describes the principle as starting out with “en tilfældig række af temaer” [“a random series of themes”] which “efter at have gennemløbet samtlige muligheder, ender som en ordnet række, men i samme moment også vender tilbage til den første tilfældige række, blot forvandlet” [“after running through all the possibilities, ends up as an ordered series, but at the same moment also returns to the random first series, only transformed”]¹³. Christensen’s notation of the composition from her drafts to “Letter in April” makes the symmetrical permutation clear:¹⁴

I	5 4 1 2 3
II	3 2 5 4 1
III	1 4 3 2 5
IV	5 2 1 4 3
V	3 4 5 2 1
VI	1 2 3 4 5
VII	5 4 1 2 3

The Roman numerals mark the sections of the work, in each section there are five poems, and each of these five poems has as its “title” a number (from one to five) of small circles (° °° °°° °°°° °°°°°). It is the number of these circles that is marked with Arabic numerals in Christensen’s scheme. We see how we “return to the random first series” at the end, after the order of the numbers have been systematically “permuted” by a principle of inversion plus repetition. (Inversion and repetition of the last two numbers of the preceding line and repetition of the first three numbers.)

The text genetic history of the circles is that they are abstractions of the pomegranate, which is a recurring motif. Together with Johanne Foss, the illuminator of the original edition of “Letter in April”, Christensen had the idea that the numbers should be small pomegranates, but they found that they looked too nitty-gritty and changed them into circles.¹⁵ Rikke Toft Nørgård suggests that the

¹³ Christensen (2018: 885). Translation: L.M.R.

¹⁴ Ibid., 340.

¹⁵ Silkeberg (2021: 14).

circles could also be alluding to holes in a pattern card for jacquard weaving. Nørgård shows that if you set up the seven series of circle numbers schematically and draw lines (or threads) between identical circle numbers, a symmetrical pattern of zigzag lines emerges, which resembles a weaving:¹⁶

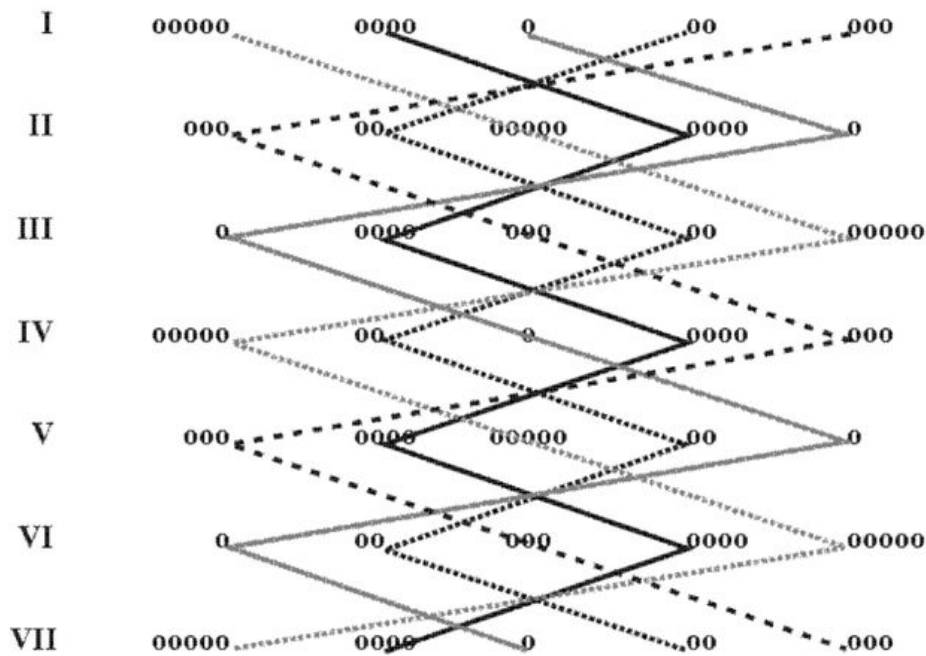


Image 1: Nørgård 2002: 146.

The principle of composition—the staggered return to the same point while several threads are crossed—can thus be visualized not only by the image of the labyrinth or the scheme of symmetric permutation, but also as a weaving. The text reflects the structure of a piece of music in which motifs return in varied sequence and form, but the structure is also analogous to a web of motifs in a shifting pattern. Musical and textile composition meet in Christensen’s description of Messiaen’s music as “klangtæpper” [“enormous tapestries of sound”]¹⁷. Likewise, “Letter in April” is a tapestry of sounds and images, woven in a complex but systematic pattern of varied and deferred repetitions.

The effect on the phenomenological level, that is on the level of the reader’s experience, is a labyrinthine feeling: reading the work is a labyrinthine experience. In an ingenious system of text spins, the same words and motifs appear again and

¹⁶ Nørgård (2002: 146).

¹⁷ Christensen (2018: 885). Translation: L.M.R.

again, but each time a little changed, a little shifted, seen from a new perspective, so that the reader wonders: Have I been here before, or haven't I? Somewhere along the way you can find a system in the return (poems with the same number of circles contain the same motifs), but sometimes it still does not fit—you think you've figured it out, but then you get lost again, like in a labyrinth. We arrive at the house again and again, we search again for the spider's web, we are led repeatedly to the table that is set and the bed where dreams are dreamt, again and again we go out into the white world (white as a bakery, white as a laundry) and pass by the stone head over the gate and the stone lion and the doves (yet are they the same?) and there is the rain and the pomegranate and the place of sudden light, all recurring but each time a little different. The text is a labyrinth, where we constantly return to the not-quite-same places.

Spinning Anagrams

The work of varied repetition—the work of housekeeping, the work of writing poetry—is something that the poet learns from the spider's web, more precisely from the dew on the spider's web. This is stated in II^{oooo} (section two, the poem with five circles) in which the varied repetition is also the principle of composition on the micro-level of weaving words out of letters, anagrammatically processing the literal material of language:

oooo

Går ud på terrassen,
 mens tasmørket åbner sine sluser
 og alt glider i ét
 med sig selv.
 Og det du spurgte om,
 om edderkoppens spind,
 og regnen der vaskede vandet,
 måske,
 men jeg ved ikke rigtig,
 om duggen kan huskes.
 Duggen der om sommeren
 dunede spindet så blødt
 som kun et under kan være;
 lærte hvad arbejde var,
 at det var sådan det var,
 som ordet dug,
 og hvis man læste det spejlvendt,
 som gud.¹⁸

oooo

Walking out onto the terrace

¹⁸ Christensen (1999: 359).

while twilight opens its floodgates
 and everything slips into oneness
 with itself.
 And what you asked
 about the spiderweb,
 and the rain washing the water,
 maybe,
 but I don't exactly know
 if dew can be remembered.
 The dew that in summer
 velveted the web as soft
 as only a wonder can be;
 and taught us what work was,
 that it was
 like the word dew [dug],
 and if you read its mirror image,
 like god [gud].¹⁹

Here, the anagram is literally spelled out for us: if we read the word “dug” [dew] reversed, we get the word “gud” [god]. On an elementary level, the thought that God is in the dew can be read as a pantheistic notion of God being everywhere in nature. There is an anthemic tone to these verses, a praise of creation, and probably an allusion to the (to a Danish public well-known) song “Jeg bærer med smil min byrde” by Jeppe Aakjær and Carl Nielsen (1915), in which the poet’s heart “skælver af glæde/ blot duggen dynker et strå” [“trembles with joy / just the dew drenches a straw”].

At the same time, though, the word “dug” is introduced as a comparison, an image of “work”. According to Rikke Toft Nørgård, the analogy between the dew and the poetic (/divine) work is about visibility.²⁰ The dew makes the web visible, just as the poem does. The poem makes visible not only the spider’s web as one of nature’s small wonders, but also the pervasive web that weaves the world into the human mind and the mind into the world. Strictly speaking, though, the poem does not say that the work is “like dew”, but that it is “like the word dew”. The work, let us go so far as to say the divine work, is a work with the word (the “work with images words” mentioned in the epigraph), with the material of the word.

The work with the literal material of the word “dug” finally produces the word “god”, but on its way it also produces other words: “dunede” [“downed”, Nied translates “velveted”] and “under” [“wonder”] (which is an anagram of “duner”, the present tense of the verb “dunede”). God is thus not so much the Creator as the creative principle, which through varied repetition produces something new; God is the very principle by which “dew” becomes “god”; the wonder is the very wonder that “down” [“dune”] becomes “wonder” [“under”]. Per Lindegård writes: “the poetic wonder is that simply by moving the letters around a little you

¹⁹ Christensen (2011: 107).

²⁰ Nørgård (2002: 148).

can create completely new concepts and contexts, perhaps completely new worlds.”²¹

Sections I, III, VI and VII also feature the motifs of the spider’s web and the rain in the poems with five circles. Both motifs are introduced as something from a conversation with the child: “Vi taler om edderkoppens spind / hvordan går det til, / og om regnen der vaskede vandet”²² [“We talk about spiderwebs, /—how do they work)— / about the rain that washed the water”]²³ (section I)—“Og det du spurgte om, / om edderkoppens spind, / og regnen der vaskede vandet”²⁴ [“And what you asked / about the spiderweb, / and the rain washing the water”]²⁵ (section II). The motif of the spider’s web is rooted in the wonder of the child, in the wonder that is apostrophized in section III and thus is one suggestion as to whom this “letter” in April is addressed: “Kære forsvundne undren”²⁶ [“Dear vanished wonder”]²⁷. If we continue to pursue the motif of the spider’s web in the ooooo poems, it is spun into a metaphor in section III, stating that while “we” [“vi”] before sunrise set off to find “the nearest spider” [den nærmeste edderkop], “our minds are / spun / like a world / around us.” [bliver sindene / spundet / som en verden / omkring os”].²⁸ Again, the poetic work here is as much a work of processing the material of language as a work of creating images; if the mind (“sind”) can be seen in the image of the web (“spind”), it is not least because the two words are spun from almost the same letter material. (Besides the anagram “dug/gud”, the most remarkable instance of decisive letter materiality is the passage in VI^o “mimoserne / ser mig, / som min mor / da jeg fødtes”²⁹—“acacias / see me / as my mother did / when I was born”.³⁰ We have earlier, in IV^o, heard that “the anemones” do *not* “see me”, so why do the acacias? Because the Danish word for “acacias”, “mimoser”, contains all the letters you need to compose the sentence: “min mor ser” / “my mother sees”.)

In the last section, section VII, the web is not mentioned in the poem ^{oooo}, but metonymically present by virtue of the spider, which is swept down: “Vi gør det så fint / som vi kan. / Vi bader, / gør rent, / fejer edderkoppen / ned”³¹ [“We make

²¹ Lindegård (2016: 123).

²² Christensen (1999: 355).

²³ Christensen (2011: 103).

²⁴ Christensen (1999: 359).

²⁵ Christensen (2011: 107).

²⁶ Christensen (1999: 363).

²⁷ Christensen (2011: 111).

²⁸ Christensen (1999: 366); Christensen (2011: 115).

²⁹ Christensen (1999: 368).

³⁰ Christensen (2011: 134).

³¹ Christensen (1999: 385).

it as fine / as we can. / We bathe, / clean house, / sweep the spider / down”].³² As also noted by other readers, section VII is the most concrete, narrative one, where the images and motifs of the previous sections become “recognizable” as objects or activities from “a limited stay in a foreign house.”³³ The spider is swept down, the child’s mapping of continents between table and bed is explained as a game with thread; breadcrumbs are scattered for the pigeons (and not, as in section II, for the words); milk is fetched and eggs are boiled in the morning sun (where milk, eggs and sun were previously thrown together in a metaphorical salad of “æggene”³⁴ [“eggs”]³⁵ and “mælket sol”³⁶ [“milky sun”]³⁷); the mythical stone lion settles as a sculpture in the yard, where we also find a concrete waterfall instead of the “waterfall of images”, which in the first section is a metaphor for the facade of the house. The reader may have been able to visualize these objects and activities throughout the poem, yet they have been woven into a web of metaphorical and anagrammatic associations that are now, so to speak, “swept away”, so that the “things” can “speak their own clear language”, a language that would not have been clear if all the preceding layers of flickering images had not polished and sharpened it.

³² Christensen (2011: 139).

³³ Lindegård (2016: 138).

³⁴ Christensen (1999: 365).

³⁵ Christensen (2011: 114).

³⁶ Christensen (1999: 365).

³⁷ Christensen (2011: 115).



Image 2: Amalie Smith, “Machine Learning I, II, III.” Ørestads Gymnasium. Photograph by David Stjernholm.

The Binariness of the Loom

In Amalie Smith’s “Thread Ripper”, the continuity between text and textile is an overt theme. Like Roland Barthes, Smith draws on their common etymological root: “the word text comes from the Latin *textus*, which means textile. Like ‘tissue’, it stems from *texere*, to weave.”³⁸

Weaving is also the principle of the book’s composition. It consists of two tracks of text, one track with diary-like notes (entitled “NOTES”), dated from September 2017 to June 2018, and one with essayistic texts (entitled “.TXT”) exploring the connection between the world’s oldest technology: the loom, and the newest: the computer. The NOTES track runs on the left pages of the book, the .TXT track on the right pages, and they are set in two different fonts (Baemuk Batang and Gulim). In the drafts of the book, Smith wrote the NOTES track by hand, and the .TXT track on the computer.³⁹ The tracks are parallelly paginated; the two pages on a double side therefore have the same number. This composition makes of the reader a kind of weaver, weaving together the two tracks with her

³⁸ Smith (2022: 99).

³⁹ See www.amaliesmith.dk/thread-ripper.

eyes. Introducing each of the seven sections, black-white images of an encyclopedic kind are inserted, referring to themes in the section to come.

The writing self is the same in both tracks: an artist/weaver in her early thirties, working on a digitally composed tapestry the pattern of which she produces by training the computer vision program DeepDream with images of plants. This was what Amalie Smith herself, who is both a writer and an artist, did when asked to make a visual work for the Ørestad Gymnasium (grammar school) in Copenhagen, which specializes in IT. So, Smith decided to compose the work on her computer. She gathered endangered plants on the salt meadows close to the grammar school and trained a program with their images which generated new fantasy plants from them. These computer-generated plants became the motif for the large tapestries “Machine Learning” which were woven on a digital loom and now hang on a wall in the grammar school. A process of digitalizing and rematerializing in several loops.

The .TXT track is on the technique of the weaver’s work, and the technique and research it includes. In the NOTES track, her work is just one theme among others: Getting older, having children or not, wanting to live close to nature, loving and doubting. But like in life, there is no absolute division between the two tracks in the book: The “personal” track contains thoughts about work, the “work track” is interwoven with threads of personal history, and in both tracks the writer calls herself “the wavering Penelope”, whether she has doubts about her personal life choices or her artistic creation. The research of the .TXT track leads to the British countess and mathematician Ada Lovelace, who contributed importantly to the development of the “analytical machine”, which was the predecessor of the computer. Lovelace was inspired by the punch cards invented by Jacquard for his weaving machines and thus provides a link between the loom and the computer. The weaver feeds Ada’s letters into her computer, combined with a translation module and a few biographies. It generates (in the tracks of the right-hand pages) a text, Ada’s story, which in some passages completely takes over, so that the left-hand pages fall silent: “Jeg er Ada / En frugt af Annabella Milbanke / & Lord Byrons hurtige ægteskab” [“I am Ada / Fruit of the short marriage between / Annabella Milbanke & Lord Byron / An odd coupling of / mathematics and poetry”].⁴⁰ In the Danish original, Ada’s text is written in a weird Danish, which reads like Google translated English, probably the result of the process described. (For instance: “Deres meget sandt” as a word-by-word translation of “Yours very truly”).⁴¹

Thus, the binary principle of weaving is not only a theme in the book, but also the principle of its two-track composition. Binariness, the crossing of two, is a principle shared by the loom (warp and weft) and the computer (zeros and ones), as well as by other central themes in the book: Jacquard’s punch card (hole and non-

⁴⁰ Smith (2020: 37); Smith (2022: 37).

⁴¹ Smith (2020: 38).

hole) and procreation (the mating of male and female). Finally, the book defines its own genre as a crossing of two in its self-designating subtitle: “Hybrid” (which you find on the cover of the Danish original, but not of the English translation).

Butterflies and Bugs

In one of the “NOTES”, a question appears which resonates heavily with allusions to Inger Christensen:

What does the butterfly know of the images on its wings?

It knows what it means to be an image from
the inside out, with no regard for the outside in.

What can we know of the butterfly’s images
when we are only able to *see* them?⁴²

Hvad ved sommerfuglen om billederne på dens vinger?

Den ved hvad det vil sige at være et billede
indefra og ud, uden tanke på udefra og ind.

Hvad ved mennesker om dens billeder, når vi
kun kan se dem?⁴³

Since 1991 (the year of the publication of Christensen’s “Sommerfugledalen” [“Butterfly Valley”]) a Danish poet can hardly write the word “sommerfugl” [butterfly] without alluding to Christensen’s work. But Smith’s note also resonates with these lines from “Letter in April”, II^o:

Hvem ved
om granatæblet
ved med sig selv,
at det hedder
noget andet.⁴⁴

Who knows,
maybe the pomegranate
itself is aware
that it’s called
something else.⁴⁵

⁴² Smith (2022: 10).

⁴³ Smith (2022: 10).

⁴⁴ Christensen (1999: 361).

⁴⁵ Christensen (2011: 109).

In Smith's text the question of knowing one's image from within is connected to the development of programs that enable the computer to recognize what pictures represent: "How do you get a search engine to search through images consisting of hundreds of thousands of tiny colored dots? How do you build a loom capable of seeing the image it weaves?"⁴⁶ It is not that the butterfly becomes a metaphor for the digital image; rather, butterfly and digital image are juxtaposed in a continuity between the material and the digital. "Thread Ripper" insists on this continuity, not least through the leitmotif of another insect related to the butterfly: the moth. The image that introduces the section entitled "DIGITAL PESTS" is a photograph of the very first "bug" found in a computer, which was an actual moth that got stuck in the relay for the computer developed for the U.S. army by Grace Hopper in 1947.⁴⁷ In a way, the moth becomes the hero of the book, both in the figure of a material and a digital bug. The moth is the artist whose creation also involves unraveling; a theme which is stressed through the artist's comparing her work with Penelope's. The moths are the rebels, the "luddites" who smashed the industrial looms in England in the beginning of the 19th century; a theme which is part of the history of weaving told in the .TXT track. The .TXT track ends in a partly dystopian, partly utopian vision of a future in which the electronic networks all over the world are invaded by masses of moths.

Animation

In Christensen, the question of the pomegranate's self-consciousness is an instance of the trope that pervades all her writing: animation. Due to the textile perspective of this article, I have focused on the stylistic figures (that is patterns) of Christensen's text and bypassed the tropes, but the trope of animation has to be mentioned, not least because it is woven into the theme of connectedness between species which is so central to Christensen. The quote above continues like this:

Hvem ved
om granatæblet
ved med sig selv,
at det hedder
noget andet.
Hvem ved
om jeg selv
måske hedder
noget andet
end mig selv.
Jeg tænker,

⁴⁶ Smith (2022: 98).

⁴⁷ Ibid., 78.

altså er jeg del
af labyrinten⁴⁸

Who knows,
maybe the pomegranate
itself is aware
that it's called
something else.
Who knows,
maybe I myself
am called
something else
than myself.
I think,
therefore I am part
of the labyrinth.⁴⁹

Animation is a debated trope in ecocritical theory because it risks projecting human subjectivity into non-human things (here the pomegranate), thereby staying inside an anthropocentric regime.⁵⁰ But Christensen avoids an imperialist gesture of anthropomorphism by quietly and hypothetically posing the pomegranate's self-consciousness as a question without question mark—a thought that can neither be affirmed, nor rejected. Furthermore, the question of (not) knowing the name given to you by another species is extended to also concern the human “I” in a labyrinthine reflection whose reflexivity is potentially unending. The conclusion transforms the Cartesian self-reliant Ego to an I that does not rely on itself but is part of that maze leading in and out and back and forth through mind and matter, connecting different species. The maze in this context even calls forth the overlapping images of the inner of a human brain, and the inner of a pomegranate.

In Christensen's work, the figure of animation is part of her Romanticism inspired conception of poetry as the self-reflection of the created world through the poet's consciousness. “Verden ønsker at se sig selv” / “The World Wants to See Itself”—this is the title of one of Christensen's essays⁵¹—and in her poetics, poetry is a means to fulfill the world's wish, by letting the material of language mutate like the material of nature. Poetry is not only the self-reflection of the created world, but also a way of caring for the created world. In “Letter in April”, this poetic care is interwoven with the taking care of a house and a child.

⁴⁸ Christensen (1999: 361).

⁴⁹ Christensen (2011: 109-110).

⁵⁰ See for instance Bennett (2010: 100).

⁵¹ Christensen (2018: 821).

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In different ways, the textile textuality of “Letter in April” and “Thread Ripper” is relevant to feminist ecocriticism. Both shape a continuity between spinning/weaving and writing. By aligning the work of writing with the work of the spider and with domestic work, “Letter in April” crosses borders between species and promotes the work of care and its temporality of varied repetition, which are today ecocritical alternatives to exploitive work and the temporality of growth, optimization, and acceleration.

Through its focus on the loom and the textile genealogy of not only text, but also hypertext, “Thread Ripper” approaches the ecocritical trend to regard weaving as no less than a cosmological principle. In “Staying with the Trouble”, Donna Haraway writes: “Weaving is cosmological performance, knotting proper relationality and connectedness into the warp and weft of the fabric.”⁵² In connection with her exhibition “Woven Cosmos” in Berlin 2021, the weaver/artist Hella Jongerius stated: “We are all yarns in the bigger cloth, all interwoven”.⁵³

What distinguishes “Thread Ripper” from these ideas, though, is its insistence on unraveling just as much as on producing, on cutting just as much as on connecting, on the moth just as much as on the weaver. Just as much as we can say that the book connects two tracks, we could say that it is divided into two tracks. A recurring theme is language as something that cuts connections: “Hører i radioen, at hjernen, når vi bliver født, er en grød af forbindelser. At sproget hjælper os med at afskære forbindelser.”⁵⁴ [“Hear on the radio that the brain, when we are born, is a mush of connections. That language helps us cut off connections.”]⁵⁵ The potential of the “bug” or the error for producing poetry is clear from the Ada text composed by the computer and gaining in poetic quality from the errors made by Google translate. The very title of the book not only refers to ripping the thread, but is also the result of a ripping in its verbal materiality: “Den computer, jeg arbejder på, har jeg bygget selv. Jeg valgte en processor med 8 kerner, 16 tråde, en ‘AMD Ryzen Threadripper’. Jeg rev produktnavnet over og døbte computeren ‘Thread Ripper’”⁵⁶ [“I built the computer I work on myself. I chose a processor with 8 cores, 16 threads, an ‘AMD Ryzen Threadripper’. I tore up the product name and named the computer ‘Thread Ripper’”].⁵⁷ The ecocritical cosmologies of weaving emphasize connectedness and entanglement; Smith shows how weaving—both when it comes to weaving cloth, weaving text,

⁵² Haraway (2016: 91).

⁵³ See Bertoli (2021: online).

⁵⁴ Smith (2020: 20).

⁵⁵ Smith (2022: 20).

⁵⁶ Smith (2020: 5).

⁵⁷ Smith (2022: 5).

and weaving visual works—also implies ripping the thread, cutting connections, unraveling.

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