Ageing and materialities:
A study of the practice of weaving at Cercle de Fermières

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines the weaving practices of the Cercle de Fermières, a century-old community of older women, in light of Actor-Network Theory (ANT) (Akrich, 1987; Latour, 2006) and feminist theories of technologies (Haraway, 2004; Wajcman, 2007). Who and what is included in this "Cercle?" How do the affordances of technologies and materials contribute to the creation of necessities and forms of interaction within the organization? What happens when both humans (weavers) and non-humans (looms, thread, buildings) actors "age together?" I examine how the dynamic assemblage pertaining to the practice of weaving influences the organizational structure of the Cercle and contributes to the creation of associations and entanglements. Five vignettes describe life at the weaving Cercle and the roles of actors and ageing in this organization. A relational understanding of age and ageing, essential components of this analysis, allows to notice their uneven effects across the assemblage. While ageing has a profound impact on what it means to be a weaver, a centenarian organization or an ageing technology, ANT provides few theoretical tools to comprehend these entangled issues. This is addressed in the discussion section of this thesis. The empirical data comes from interviews and participant observation of two Cercles de Fermières : one in Montreal and one in Baie Saint-Paul. Interviews were conducted with five Fermières, aged 80 years old or more.

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Part 1: An Introduction

"What is Cercle de Fermières?," asks the monthly magazine La Terre et le foyer [1] to its readership in November 1952, encouraging members to discuss the identity and purpose of their organization. The answer documented in the minutes of the Baie Saint-Paul chapter provides us with a possible interpretation: "Here is an excellent definition of the word 'cercle'. A Cercle is a team of women that ought to forget 'I' and 'me', and use instead 'we' in words, thoughts and actions" (Cercle de Fermières de Baie Saint-Paul, 1952, pp. 75-76). This definition stresses solidarity, womanhood and oneness, features of the Cercle that remain important to this day for many of its members.

Another answer, further from subjective and personal involvement, could emphasize the historical background of the organization. Cercle de Fermières is a craftswomen's organization, founded in close collaboration with the clergy and the State in 1915, and which was placed under the authority of the Ministry of Agriculture for decades. At its inception, the Cercle was conceived as a mechanism to promote rural women's wellbeing and foster women's solidarity networks (Cohen, 1990). Yet another answer could focus on the present: Cercle de Fermières is an organization that counts 32,800 members (whom we will call "Fermières" from now on) as of 2016 (Les Cercles de Fermières, 2017). They are involved in various types of craft activities such as weaving, knitting, embroidery, and in altruistic causes (e.g. OLO and Mira Foundation). Their average age now revolves around 65 (Radio-Canada, 2015), a noteworthy contrast to earlier times.

There could be many more answers to what the Cercle is, given its importance for women and politics, the number of people involved in it, its geographical distribution and endurance over time. However, the question I ask over and over in this thesis is not "what" the Cercle de Fermières *is*, but rather "what is the role of weaving practices within the Cercle" and "what might we learn about the processes of age and ageing" if we examine these weaving practices. In this respect, my study is not about the

[1] Loosely translated as "Land and Home".

organization of Cercle de Fermières *per se*. Rather, it is an in-depth analysis of weaving as an evolving practice that is important to the construction of this organization's identity, as well as the identities of its members. And in this way, it is also a study that reflects upon age and ageing as a practice of transformation over time that is manifest materially: in bodies of the weavers that come to know how to make and draw upon their experiences, in the looms that wear down and must be maintained.

How age and ageing are enacted within the Cercles and among the Fermières has led me to explore the nuances and contextual influences of the many "actors" involved in this community of practice. The current ageing of Fermières troubles the organization: membership is dropping because Fermières either stopped weaving due to their ageing or passed away. Recruitment is becoming a key priority of the national organization and membership numbers in every Cercle are closely monitored (Les Cercles de Fermières, 2017). But is this membership drop the only effect of ageing in the context of Cercle de Fermières? Far from it. The concurrent ageings of both the Fermières and the various materialities that are necessary for the Cercle to undertake its various projects are an integral part of the on-going and changing identity of the Cercle.

In the following thesis, I set to understand how two Cercles de Fermières, one in Montreal and one in Baie-St Paul, are not closed circles, but in actuality, a dynamic socio-technical network that is ageing and being transformed through time: a weaving assemblage. I do not see these two Cercles as static groups that are decaying, an image of ageing as decline resoundingly critiqued in the age studies literature (Gullette 2004). Rather, I see them as being transformed as all of their network ages, developing in ways that take into consideration the past.

This thesis is divided into three distinct parts. In the first part, I begin with a brief overview of the history of Cercle de Fermières and provide background on the practices of craft and weaving, which intersect with the lives of many women in the 20th century. Ageing and its different meanings are also discussed. I then focus on Actor-Network Theory (ANT), a theory and a method associated with the writings of Bruno Latour. As a

theory, ANT draws attention to the multiple associations entailed in weaving practices and ageing processes, helping to shed light on the large and dynamic network that participates in the enactment of “Cercle de Fermières.” I spent time with the Fermières as part of this endeavour, chatting, weaving, learning. Sociology calls this method participant observation. The “Research Methods” chapter explains this choice in further detail, in relation to Actor-Network Theory. It also touches on some of the methodological issues I encountered, related to age difference, being a beginner at weaving and visiting a Cercle in a remote/rural location.

Part Two, which comprises the main body of the text, is composed of a series of vignettes that portray life at the Cercles at various moments. In this section I trace the complex entanglements found within this assemblage to emphasize how different actors – both human and non-human- constantly interact and adapt to one another. Fermières do not simply mobilize their network, or weaving assemblage, to fulfill their projects, “they are themselves specific local parts of the world’s ongoing reconfiguring” (Barad, 2003, p. 829). Their own ageing occurs in parallel to that of one of non-human actors, the loom, a central figure in the weaving assemblage. I choose to focus on weaving in part because of my fascination for looms, these powerful wooden machines that structure not only the order of thousands of threads at the time, but also life at the Cercle.

Understanding Cercle de Fermières using Actor-Network Theory points to some of the theory's shortcomings, and to questions that the theory either disregards or fails to answer. One of these is the question of age and ageing. The average age of Fermières' has steadily increased since the 1980, stabilizing today around 65 years old. As time goes by, the Fermières are not the only actors transformed over the years. While ageing has a profound impact on what it means to be a weaver, a centenarian organization or an ageing technology, ANT provides few theoretical tools to comprehend these entangled issues. This is addressed in the discussion section of this thesis.

Literature Review

Cercle de Fermières

Cercle de Fermières is one of the largest women's organizations ever to exist in Quebec. For its 75th anniversary, Yolande Cohen, who was already familiar with the organization (1987; 1988; 1989), was contracted by its executive committee to write its history. Her monograph, *Femmes de paroles* (1990), is rich with details regarding the ebb and flow of the organization's past, from its beginnings, its entanglements with the ministry and the clergy, to its numerous publications. Cohen is critical of earlier studies of Cercle de Fermières that focus on the controlling forces of the state and the clergy (Chénard, 1981; Desjardins, 1983; Letendre, 1983). She sees them as offering a biased view, skewed by the issues present in feminist studies of the time, which positioned the Fermières as embodying a past irreconcilable with feminism's purpose.

Indeed, the Cercle's ideology has been linked by some to a type of “maternal feminism” (Cuthbert Brandt & Black, 1990; Chénard, 1981; Dumont, 1989), where women occupy important – but distinct – roles as mothers and caregivers. This is the argument of Claire Chénard, who situates the specificities of the Cercle' history in:

> efforts pertaining to the materialization of ideologies aiming to rehabilitate and perpetrate the conservative and traditional features of the social labour division, assigning to women the sole responsibility of family production and rewarding them only in ideological celebrations (1981, p. 181).

These efforts include a focus on handicraft, supporting a number of elements the Cercle approved of: domestic skills, economic contribution to the family home, and symbolic value placed on national traditions as related to the role of women (Cuthbert Brandt & Black, 1990; Lamontagne & Harvey, 1997). Micheline Dumont (1997) is also quick to remind us that Fermières took positions against a number of staple issues for feminism, including the right for women to vote, access to abortion, and the contraceptive pill.

However, Cohen stresses that Fermières can be considered as precursors to contemporary feminism in Quebec. They allowed women to expand their sphere of

public and political action through a number of sociability mechanisms. Cercles, she argues, were solidarity spaces, where women could make their voices heard and take initiative (1997, p. 2). Guylaine Nadeau stresses the importance of the Fermières' contribution to the nascent cooperative movement in Quebec (1999). Despite the organization's apparent distance from the political sphere and a rather conservative agenda, we cannot neglect its role in encouraging the active participation of many women in society.

Much of the scholarship related to Cercle de Fermières concentrates on the organization, much less on individual Cercles,[2] and least of all, on individual Fermières.

Studies of age and ageing

This study does not take place in a retirement home or in a hospital. It does not engage with the demographic complexities of growing ageing populations, overmedication of elderly patients, the challenges of caregiving, nor with retirement policy, or at least, not in direct ways. Yet, it is guided by concerns that are at the heart of fields dealing with ageing and its different manifestations: it focuses on the changing experiences of older adults in a world full of objects.

Ageing is a concept central to this study. Looking through the photo archives of Fermières, the viewer notices a striking change, not only in clothing styles, but in age range. Old, black and white photos dating from the foundation of Cercle de Fermières show a group of relatively young women, with the oldest who seem to be in their 50's, showcasing their craft production. Contemporary color photos of the Cercle also depict a group of women, this time white-haired, giving the impression that the very same cohort was photographed, only sixty years later. Of course, the members are not the same. However these two sets of pictures, put into contrast, illustrate what I see as one of the most profound changes Cercle de Fermières has gone through during its existence – the generalized ageing of its membership. That said, Cercle de Fermières is

[2] One exception is Cohen's monograph (1990), in which she closely studies the history of 26 individual Cercles scattered across the province of Quebec.

not an organization aimed at older adults per se, such as FADOQ[3] or les Petits Frères.[4] Over time, it has had to evolve according to the needs of its members. On a personal level too, being old(er) profoundly affects what it means to be a Fermière in the ways one relates to a weaving practice, social relations, time, and more.

My study of Fermières and their organization is in line with the tenets of the cultural study of age, which challenge the "association between old age and the role of biology and chronology in defining it" (Twigg & Martin, 2015, p. 353). As Margaret Gullette suggests, "we are aged more by culture than by chromosomes" (2004, p. 101). Critics have objected that veering away from gerontology's politicized work related to intersections of old age with frailty, poverty, and social exclusion necessarily means more superficial engagement with the politics of ageing. However, Julia Twigg and Wendy Martin (2015) argue that a more cultural approach to later years can deepen our understanding of the politics of ageing as part of everyday life. Through their organization and their practices, Fermières define and contest their identities as older women and acquire cultural visibility.

Going to the Cercle is a part of everyday life for Fermières. While weaving, sewing, and knitting were not necessarily hobbies but necessities in the past, being active at the Cercle today may be understood as a manifestation of leisure. Critical leisure studies scholars suggest that leisure can be defined subjectively by people who engage in it. In her study of leisure perception, Susan Shaw (1985) found that "freedom of choice, intrinsic motivation, enjoyment, and relaxation" (in Parr & Lashua, 2004, p. 3) were the factors most often listed by participants to describe their personal and subjective experiences of leisure. During interviews, all Fermières expressed their enjoyment of weaving and some also referred to it as a relaxing activity. I argue that weaving is considered as a leisure activity by retired Fermières.

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[3] Fédération de l'âge d'or du Québec.

[4] Les Petits Frères is a non-profit organization committed to relieving isolation and loneliness among the elderly.

Weaving as a recreational activity (not necessarily perceived as leisure) can also be related to ideals of activity among elders. A performance of general "busy-ness" distances the individual from characteristics often associated to old age: "frailty, disability, slowing down, dependence" (Hagberg, 2004, p. 161) and has become "an antidote to pessimistic stereotypes of decline and dependency" (Katz, 2000, p 136). It has also positive virtues: activity is sometimes presented uncritically if not as a cure, at least as beneficial to seniors afflicted by disease, loneliness or disability (Katz 2000).

Fermières, in their weaving practices, interact with many different types of devices that form a part of this recreational activity. An exhaustive list of technologies found at the Cercle or used by its members might surprise gerontologists, used to conflating older adults with assistive technologies compensating for their lack of physical power, decreased mobility or failing memory. Often articulated from a biomedical perspective, this discourse on active ageing may strengthen age discriminations or become a tool for governance (Hagberg, 2004; Joyce & Mamo, 2006). Indeed, the gerontology literature about technology use among elders tends to be more evaluative than ethnographic, emphasizing how technologies can fulfill goals instead of the meanings seniors might attach to them (Loe 2010).

Despite social and technological barriers (Brotcorne et al., 2011; Gilleard & Higgs, 2008), older adults *do* engage with technologies, both old and new. In her study of nonagerians, Meika Loe found that old women negotiate technologies primarily to fulfill goals such as "self-efficacy, wellbeing, and connectedness" (2010, p. 320). Other scholars have studied grandmothers' uses of social media to keep in touch with family (Ivan & Hebblethwaite, 2016; Sawchuk & Crow, 2012). The boundary between use and non-use of technologies among elders is not as clear-cut as some suggest, with elders often following a "meandering trajectory of engagements with media technologies" (Fernández-Ardèvol et al., 2017, p. 50) along their life course. The key seems to remain attentive to older adults' agentive use of technologies (all technologies), which provides us with the "opportunity to theorize ageing people as technologically creative and literate" (Joyce & Mamo, 2006, p. 113). And indeed,

Fermières' use of technologies is varied and original. For instance, they invent personal designs that they then transpose to looms and they tie loom pedals to weave faster.

In this thesis, I consider the intersection of ageing with technologies and with other material items, objects, artifacts or "stuff" (Ekerdt, 2016) that we surround ourselves with as we age. As David Ekerdt so eloquently writes, all through the life course, humans carry a "material convoy" (Ekerdt, 2016) made of personal possessions that are not immune to ageing processes. Fermières are surrounded by objects and artifacts as they use looms and materials in their weaving practices. Yet, these material dimensions of existence are seldom visible in gerontological research (Hagberg, 2004; Katz, 2005) even when, as Line Grenier argues, their inclusion in a study of the ageing processes may reveal the ways that older adults "establish, modify, and maintain various forms of connections to the world, [their] family, [their] home, and their work, their community" (2012, p. 10). In this study, I pay attention to "aging processes as materially inscribed in the everyday world" (Sawchuk, 2018, p. 217) and to the everyday activities of life at the Cercle. As weaving is such a hands-on craft, the interactions of older women who must deal with the idiosyncrasies of material objects are many. From within the purview of Actor-Network Theory, this stuff is not inert matter, but exerts a kind of agency in the world, as it demands our interactions and perhaps our care. It is for this reason that ANT conceives of the objects and artifacts that partially comprise a network as "actors".

Another aspect of cultural gerontology is the consideration of other stages of life. Later years can be studied in relation to other life periods, to emphasize continuity rather than division (Öberg et al., 2004; Twigg & Martin, 2014). Accordingly, studying the engagement of older adults with objects or forms of activity carried out over a span of years can reveal shifts in materialities and meanings, both in the person and in the objects. As much as objects can tell us about their makers, they can also influence their existence in a more fundamental way. In a study of Chinese cabinetmakers and lacquered furniture, Julien and Rosselin (2003) question how the sequence of lacquering gestures comes to define furniture makers. The same applies to a Fermière.

With every row of the scarf that she weaves, she becomes ever more a weaver, a member of the Cercle and a vector for the transmission of the love of weaving.

Furthermore, personal bonds with objects are often generative of emotional attachments that may deepen with every year passing. Simone de Beauvoir noticed this phenomenon among older women whose possessions come to be seen as a form of guarantee, security, and purpose:

> Clinging to one's habits implies an attachment to one's possessions: the things that belong to us are as it were solidified habits — the mark of certain repetitive forms of appropriate behaviour. […] Ownership too is a guarantee of ontological security: the possessor is his possessions' reason for existence. (1996, p. 698)

In a different register, another function of possessions Belk identifies as we age is “the achievement of a sense of continuity and preparation for death“ (1988, p. 139). Even if a person dies, they can still “live on” through objects that will have been carefully distributed to heirs or museum collections. A type of longevity is achieved through objects that will remain long after one is gone. In the case of weaving, textiles can be seen as “an embodiment of self and identity” (Goggin & Tobin, 2009, p. 2) that lend themselves to be infused with the personality and memories of a deceased person, and that are passed on to following generations. Objects, as such, can come to materialize connections between generations (Larsson et al., 2014). The perception of their meaning can differ depending on the person and over time.

In short, I set to study ageing between human actors (Fermières) and non-human actors (looms, thread, organization, rooms, relationships, practices, etc.), paying special attention to situations in which they come to intersect, in a process that Stephen Katz calls “aging together” (2009). Although my study does seem to coincide with the premises of cultural gerontology, the word gerontology (from latin “old man”) may excludes essential actors that are inherently part of the Fermières' ageing.

Crafts & Weaving

For anthropologist Marius Barbeau, weaving in Quebec in the 20th century illustrated a type of resistance against technological and modernizing forces: “nowhere else in Canada have loom usage and traditional weaving better expressed an opposition against the numerous agents of decadence of small businesses than in Charlevoix” (2003, pp. 135-36). Séguin's work on *catalogne*, a type of traditional blanket weaved with thick fabric (1961), shows the same nostalgic bias. Both researchers take a position that is a manifestation of what Greenhalgh (1997) identifies as a growing discomfort with industrialization, which in turn provoked the valorization of the vernacular: village life, the work of country crafts(wo)men, and “authentic” tradition.

From a means of subsistence in earlier times, artisanal textile production was revived in the 20th century and became tainted by ideological and aesthetic considerations (Lamontagne & Harvey, 1997). L'École provinciale des arts domestiques was at the center of this enterprise in Quebec and encouraged the emergence of a weaving culture, enrolling other allies to fulfill this project. Oscar Bériau, its first director in 1929, was adamant that handloom weaving could solve the problems brought by the 1929 economic crisis: “the peasant household's consumption exceeding domestic production only leads to economical disaster […]. Weaving is the most marvellous solution to this problem” (in Little, 1978, p. 16). While historically, weaving has not always been a feminine activity, the government program specifically targeted women in this campaign. Correspondingly, Cercles de Fermières were constituted as a no-man zone.[5]

At the time, a new, modernized loom was designed to fit in the home rather than in the barn and plans to build it were distributed to interested farmers[6] (Holland, 1973, p. 20). The Quebec government increased its financial support to Cercle de Fermières, doubling its subsidy for their purchase of looms. Within 10 years, the number of looms

[5] This is inscribed in the guiding rules of the Cercle, although a certain flexibility prevails today. During my fieldwork, a man was allowed to attend the sock-knitting course in the Montreal Cercle (after formal discussion during the monthly meeting).

[6] This loom was a prototype of Leclerc loom, the most common loom used by the Fermières to this day.

in the organization increased five-fold: from 1807 looms in 1925 to 9420 in 1935 (Lamontagne & Harvey, 1997, p. 45). Considering that many Fermières weave on the same loom (a conservative estimate would be around 50), the number of weavers grew in similar proportions.

The study of crafts

According to Martine Roberge, the material study of culture emerged in Quebec in the middle of the 1960s (Roberge, 2004). Ethnographers from this period, mostly located in either sociology or anthropology, tended to consider objects from a "folk-antiquarian" point of view (Gauthier, 2006), cataloguing them only for the sake of holding onto a relic of a disappearing, preindustrial time. In this view, a *catalogne boutonnée* represented a bygone era, a memento of Nouvelle-France and "an extremely rare piece of a collection" (Séguin, 1961, p. 429). In opposition to this approach, Jean-Claude Dupont's seminal study, *L'artisan forgeron* (1979), detailed the universe of blacksmiths in Quebec in relationship with the technologies and objects used in the forge, spurring interest in material culture as embedded in people's daily lives (Dorion & Moussette, 1989; Ferland, 2005; Moussette, 1983; Turgeon, 1996). In a similar fashion, textiles could be considered in relationship with both their makers and their making.

Generally speaking and in contrast, the material turn in cultural studies, corresponding with post-structuralism, allowed objects to be considered as texts. The relationship between texts and textiles is more than etymological ("text" and "textile" come from the latin *texere*, "to weave" (Ingold, 2007, p. 65)). Textiles, as rhetorical objects, can be seen to afford women a discursive space that in turn reveal "women's participation in meaningful, epistemic constructions and material conditions that have so long been neglected, suppressed, erased, or otherwise silenced" (Goggin & Tobin, 2016, p. 3). Judy Attfield suggests a shift to study what she calls the "wild things" – "trifles, fancy goods, the kitsch, the fetish, the domestic, the decorative and the feminine, the bric-a-brac that exudes unashamed materiality" (2000, p. 76) – with the potential to highlight women's relationships to objects that have otherwise been overlooked in previous

studies. Her suggestion raises questions about what types of objects are deemed worthy of study, especially when it comes to feminine labor materialized in the form of crafts.

Do–it–yourself culture and feminist issues are deeply intertwined (Myzelev, 2009; Piano, 2003). Crafts, despite their innocent look and soft materials, can be powerful tools for questioning the place of women in society. The ubiquity and accessibility of crafting practices to many sets of hands — in Quebec and across the rest of the world — has played a role in political advocacy for a variety of causes, transcending crafts' reputation of non-threatening conformity, reaching far beyond the private sphere to which they were historically confined. In her study of third-wave feminists reclaiming domesticity, Groeneveld suggests that "knitting itself is not necessarily inherently political but rather can be mobilized for a variety of different ends and that the politics of knitting are context-specific" (2010, p. 266). On the other hand, "craftivism" is a contemporary trend harnessing crafts to challenge expectations and disrupt public order (Bryan-Wilson, 2017; Clarke, 2016). Feminist thought maintains an ambivalent relationship to crafts, which are too often linked to domesticity, conventional femininity, and oppression (Cowan, 2011; Parker, 2010).

Maura Kelly (2014), for one, explores if craft practices can be considered as a feminist project and a a social movements' tactical repertoire. Based on an ethnography of knitting communities, Kelly suggests that individual knitters' engagement with feminist politics in their practices is limited. In her research on fiber arts as a site of resistance, Marjorie Agosín (2014) argues that the creation of craft communities can counter social isolation. Others suggest that knitting clubs such as "Stitch n' Bitch" offer the opportunity for women to gather in public spaces to craft (Minahan & Cox, 2007; Penley, 2008). Jack Bratich and Heidi Brush (2011) argue that knitting circles can function as women-only zones, allowing for "a different kind of subject formation," with the production of physical objects becoming a reason to unite, share, and learn. These views correspond to Yolande Cohen's description of the Cercles as meaningful spaces of sociality and solidarity in rural regions (1990), where options for women's gatherings were limited.

In recent years, crafts have surged tremendously in popularity, with third wave feminists reclaiming domesticity and embracing crafting as a site of personal expression. Magazines such as BUST, and knitting circles like Stitch n' Bitch have contributed to redefining crafts and elevating their "cultural cachet and [their] appeal as a fun, urban, slightly ironic, but sexy, hobby" (Groeneveld, 2010, p. 261). Even the word "crafts" applied to hand-making and domestic practices is a recent development in feminist lexicon, strengthening crafts' coding as an activity requiring skill and thought (Groeneveld, 2010), suddenly valued and worthy of one's time, as well as critical consideration.

As it is constructed currently, it is arguable that this fad for crafts and crafting may come at the expense of older knitters, weavers, and embroiders who are used as a rhetorical tool to highlight the contrast between this "'new crafting" practice (Groenveld, 2010, p. 272), and the "old" way. Groeneveld (2010) identifies a trend, evident in the titles of news articles, that focuses on a generational divide in knitting. For example, articles with titles such as "A Pastime of Grandma and the 'Golden Girls' Evolves into a Hip New Hobby" (in Groeneveld, 2010, p. 272) position knitting as a cool activity, only because of its popularity among young people. During interviews, Kelly (2014) met knitters who explicitly rejected the stereotype of the "knitting granny," insisting instead on the creative and hip sides of crafts. Rather than being included for their knowledge and experience, older women may be excluded from the re-valuation of crafting, not only ideologically, but also in spaces of "new knitting culture" such as trendy cafes and pubs where Stich n' Bitch clubs meet, and internet discussion boards.

As this brief overview of the literature indicates, crafts may act as an entry point for a feminist study of conflicting and contentious notions of domesticity, women communities and activism. My own research on the Cercles de Fermières focuses on older women's experiences of weaving, whose voices are marginalized in contemporary discourses about crafts and feminism, and on the many artifacts (old and new, but all ageing) necessary to weave, which are seldom taken into consideration when commenting on the role of crafts in society. Practices of ageing and practices of weaving are examined

in this context as they shape the structure of the organization and the nature of the relationships between different actors.

Ageing and ANT: A Theoretical Framework

The rooms where Cercles de Fermières are located are unpretentious spaces adapted to the needs of crafters of all kinds. They host an array of *actors* who participate to the *life* at the Cercle. By *actor*, I refer both to the humans and the non-humans who *act* upon the ever-evolving grouping named Cercle de Fermières. And by *life*, I mean that the organization is an ecosystem in itself, which fosters an environment conducive to weaving and bonding.

These definitions of *actor* and *life* can encompass objects that an outsider would not immediately correlate with crafting, older women, or technologies. In this lies the power of Actor-Network Theory. As a method, it has forced me to be attentive to unexpected associations during fieldwork, to pay attention to random memories, repetitive actions or seemingly innocent comments. As a theory, it forced me to reconsider how networks are built and what makes an organization such as the Cercle de Fermières work – as it has, in shifting forms, for the past century.

Actor-Network Theory

The views of Bruno Latour, one of the key figures of Actor-Network Theory (ANT) and Yolande Cohen, historian of Cercle de Fermières are completely at odds concerning the role played by social relations in organizations. According to Cohen:

> Sociability is not so much the objective, as the *primary material cementing* the organization [of Cercle de Fermières] and making it work. In that sense, the sociability their members encounter sustains and gives meaning to their activities. (Cohen, 1990, p. 18, emphasis added)

For her, sociability between fellow Fermières is the reason behind such a long-running institution. Women want to meet among themselves, and, as a mechanism of belonging, the social bonds they create and maintain motivate them to take active part in the organization and keep it alive. Ultimately, the activities held by the group have little importance, for it is “sociability” that makes them meaningful.

On the other hand, Bruno Latour distinguishes two types of use of the word "social." One refers to Cohen's conception of sociability "cementing" the organization. "Social" is then likened to a type of material, "as if the adjective was roughly comparable to other terms like 'wooden', 'steely', 'biological', 'economical', 'mental', 'organizational', or 'linguistic'" (2005, p. 1). This view is adopted by many sociologists, who, like Cohen, resort to the term "the social" to explain social aggregates. In this respect, as Latour argues, "the social" becomes a glue (or a *cement*) keeping a group together, one that is self-explanatory.

The other use of the term "social" designates "a stabilized state of affairs, a bundle of ties that, later, may be mobilized to account for some other phenomenon" (Latour, 2005, p. 1). In this version, associations between different actors cause "social aggregates." Instead of considering the ties between different actors as social in themselves, Latour, as well as other ANT researchers, argues that it is only the *result* of these associations can be considered social. From this perspective, Cohen's reasoning can be reversed. In this understanding of the adjective "social," for example, the activities held at the Cercle (knitting, weaving, embroidering, planning, eating) and the connections (due to organizational, technological, economic, memory, family, age, gender and craft ties) they create in a material world are the very *cause* of sociability, rather than its effect. This understanding of the word "social" is the one I use in my analysis of how ageing and weaving intersect. While Cohen attributes the longevity of the organization to its sociability, I too explore the sociability of the Fermières. However I do not presuppose it. Only by focusing on the "bundle of ties" entangled at the Cercle, by following the threads and the weavers am I able to understand how and what makes this complex assemblage known as "Cercle de Fermières." According to Actor-Network Theory, an assemblage is a complex web of relationships involving actors (human and non-human) in which non-humans are given agency that recognizes their influence beyond traditional causality.

Three characteristics are essential to an analysis following Actor-Network Theory (Latour, 2005). First, an observer must be agnostic when they approach a situation. This

means that he or she has to be impartial to the type of explanation (scientific or social) provided by the actors, and that "no interpretation is privileged and no point of view is censored" (Callon, 1986, p. 200). Such a principle allows actors' views to be included, even if their views are opposed to that of the observer. Secondly, non-humans and human actors should be described using the same repertoire (principle of symmetry). Symmetry is meant to be methodological and not ontological, which would imply ascribing a soul or intentions to objects (Preda 1999). Latour specifies that symmetry does not impose a divide between intentional human action and the causal relationships that stem from the material world (Latour, 2005). By resorting to the same vocabulary — consistently, no matter the actor — distinctions between social and technical aspects of an issue tend to fade. In this way, according to Latour, all forms of agency can be acknowledged. For instance, a non-human actor such as a (non-human) household plant can "enrol"[7] a person into watering it, triggering an action in a human actor. Finally, ANT argues that associations between actors may expand freely, and may not be impeded under the guise of atypical ties (Callon, 1986, p. 200). For the observer, this means remaining attentive to the variety of associations between actors and not assuming or presuming that some of them are not possible because of their unconventionally. He or she ought to start with no a priori conception of why these things are related and *focus on the interaction* between actors. By studying the associations between the different actors, and these interactions, we can understand how assemblages achieve a certain stability. Yet, within ANT, stability is only a temporary state. Actor-Network Theory "is not about traced networks but about a network-tracing activity" (Latour, 1996, p. 378). The assemblage I write about in this thesis expands and dismantles as I write this and as you read it.

Historically, ANT questioned the divisions inherited from "modern" European thought and produced studies of assemblages involving (among the plurality of other actors), humans and scallops (Callon, 1986), fishers and Norwegian salmons (Law & Singleton, 2013), men and planes (Corrigan & Mills, 2017), Matsutake mushrooms and

[7] To "enrol" in Actor-Network Theory refers to an actor convincing another actor to become its ally. It is "the device by which a set of interrelated roles are defined and attributed to actors who accept them" (Callon 1986, p. 211).

communities (Tsing, 2015), patients with Atherosclerosis and hospitals (Mol, 2002), and Chinese cabinetmakers and lacquered furniture (Julien & Rosselin, 2003). My study of Fermières and looms is one of many trying to look for "social aggregates" emerging from this legacy of possible heterogeneous associations within our world.

Original and controversial, Actor-Network Theory was soon adopted by researchers outside of the sociology of scientific knowledge in the 1980s. However, feminist scholars applying ANT in their work noted some of its insufficiencies, namely a disregard for gender in its conception of power (Wajcman, 2000). Lawrence Corrigan and Albert Mills (2017) for instance, remark that one of ANT's first commandments is to "follow the actors" (Latour,2005, p. 22), while feminist research prefers to draw attention to mechanisms impeding the participation of everyone. In their words, "no one [should be] invited to leave their brain parked at the door to unquestioningly follow actors" (Corrigan & Mills, 2017, p. 169). As Star remarks,

> a stabilized network is only stable for some, and that is for those who are members of the community of practice who form/maintain it. And part of the public stability of a standardized network often involves the private suffering of those who are not standard — who must use the standard network, but who are also non-members of the community of practice. (1991, p. 43)

This concern speaks to the lack of reflexivity feminists see in ANT, where "the narrator is allowed the only innocent position" (Lohen in Corrigan & Mills, 2017, p. 170), a presumed neutrality which clashes with the tenets of participatory and engaged research. Critics have also identified the privileging of key male figures in various case innovation studies, such as Louis Pasteur in a study of pasteurization (Latour, 2001), even when ANT argues for "generalized symmetry" (Callon, 1986) in the treatment of actors. Finally, Keith Grint and Rosalind Gill worry that Actor-Network Theory does not have the theoretical sensitivity to see issues of gender at play in the networks (1995). The initial focus of ANT scholars on science and technologies was not accompanied by a critical examination of gendered relationships embedded in these technological networks, serving to erase the gender of the artifact (Berg & Lie, 1995). For instance, looms materialize and produce, simultaneously, gender relations that are ever-evolving

(Wajcman, 2007). For Donna Haraway, who adopts much of ANT into her feminist materialist reading of the science and technology studies, “gender is a verb not a noun;” it is “always about the production of subjects in relation to other subjects, and in relation to artifacts [and] is about material semiotic production of these assemblages, these human-artifact assemblages that are people” (2004, pp. 328-329). In other words, while many feminists have appropriated the insights of ANT to create a more ecologically ethical account of the place of humans in the world, they have also provided important amendments to its original tenets. In terms of a feminist materialism, ANT draws attention to the objects and artifacts around us, and also pays attention to the politics of how the human and non-human are divided within societies.

Another way in which gender becomes embedded in technologies is through design. At the design table, one must imagine a script which corresponds to the intended use of an artifact (Akrich, 1987). When designating the user as a “weaver,” “grandmother,” or “woman,” “this immediately calls up a picture of a whole set of actors, objects, and networks of relationships binding them together” (Akrich, 1995, p. 177). Where this method becomes problematic is when design precludes certain uses in the name of cultural constructions of gender. There is no doubt that gender can be included in the script (Berg & Lie, 1995). I would add, age as well, understood as Haraway might suggest not as a noun, but as a verb. In this respect, it is also important to consider how we understand “a script” as a set or processes. As a negotiated set of processes, scripts are not commands coming from above. Scripts can be subverted, bypassed, even coopted through use. We can think of Britain's Sufragettes, whose sewing machines (script: help women staying at home sew clothes more easily) were enrolled to create banners for public demonstrations, allowing them to voice their opinions with a needle in public when they were refused a ballot to do so (Tickner, 1988).

In addition to asking how the dividing line between the human and the non-human is drawn in societies, another thing Actor-Network Theory *can* do, aligned with gender studies' aims, is to highlight *how* women engage with technologies, rather than focusing solely on women's general lack of access to technologies (Berg & Lie, 1995). John Law

and Vicky Singleton (2013) emphasize the centrality of this *how*, as “ANT is interested in how [actors] get put together in practices” (p. 491). Acknowledging gender studies' concerns with ANT, Singleton suggests ANT should draw from at least two of its features: considering that knowledge is always situated, and that knowing is an intervention in the world (2013, p. 486). Harding (2008) also makes a plea for feminism to include questions raised by Science and Technology Studies (STS) about how science and technology are organized, practiced, and constructed. As Alex Preda has argued in his study considering the sociological role of artifacts, skills and abilities essential to scientific activity, practices (such as weaving) are produced and reproduced within the network (1999) and these can be understood in material terms. For instance, certain material configurations of knowledge are quite rigid and require human actors to adapt their skills and knowledge, acquired “through mundane interaction” (p. 50), to operate them. But human actors can realign the network and produce new material configurations.

While these are essential considerations, for the purposes of my study, it is important to acknowledge that Latour's “complete indifference in providing a model of human competence” (1996, p. 376) may mask the role of “the mediating cultural resources, from the basis of which the actors participate, formulate plans, and contribute to the network construction” (Miettinen, 1999, p. 182). These include the know-how, learning and development of expertise, the result of processes which stem out of familiarity between the actors over time, but also out of human cognition and intentionality, which an ANT perspective does not include. Even if all actors have the power to act in the network, I would assert that only humans can take initiative, a contradiction of the “symmetry” criteria of the theory. Furthermore, I also agree with critics of the theory who point out that the rational and functional description of actors in Actor-Network Theory (Lash, 2002, p. 55) may overlook both some of the temporal or affective aspects that come into play in our interactions with each other, and with the objects and artifacts that surround us, such as memory, tradition, and emotions.

With these caveats in mind, I still believe that ANT can be useful in identifying how "assemblages" such as Cercle de Fermières come into existence in ways that draw our attention to the processes of ageing together through a set of mutually influencing interactions.

Age or ageing?

Bruno Latour suggests that an "analyst should never pre-determine the weight of what counts and what does not" (1990, p. 116). If that is so, my time spent with the Fermières taught me that ageing processes – their own but also that of their material surroundings – matter in their activities. I have not come across any mention of age or ageing in studies using ANT. "Time," a concept allied with age studies, is more common, as in Knorr-Cetina's generations of experiments which involve a "temporal orientation toward the "life" (time) of an experiment and simultaneously toward future generations" (1999, p. 188) or laboratory schedules who exert "a strong coordinating force" in the network (p. 191). But no age.

Age could fit in ANT's framework as a characteristic of actors, defining it just like weight, color or position. As a characteristic, considering age would respect some of ANT's premises: it is "symmetrical" (Callon, 1986) and can be applied to any actor. Looms are of a certain age, so is the organization, the thread and the Fermières. And they all get older, inevitably.

Bruno Latour has hinted that:

> Just as we let actors create their respective relationships, transformations and sizes, we also let them mark their measure of time; we even let them decide what comes before what. (1990, p. 119)

That is to say that the actors in the network do not move at the same tempo; we should follow not only their trajectories but also their rhythms. It is interesting that Latour mentions time in this context, because the question of duration and of processes is precisely one that I have struggled with as I was thinking and writing about weaving and

age. One possibility is to conceive “age” as a characteristic, a noun to follow Haraway’s discussion of gender, just like I have suggested. To consider it a static attribute, like gender, implies a certain homogeneity: the person or the artifact’s past does not matter so much as the accumulation of years. It is a characteristic imposed on the actor, with no possible negotiation on its part.

The other option is to not focus so much on age as on ageing, as a process, a verb, to refer again to Haraway’s discussion gender. In terms of age, this means noticing the changes over the years, and acknowledging that life circumstances shape people and things. This relational conception of ageing is consistent with feminist philosopher Karen Barad’s insistance on the performativity of materiality. She urges us to take into consideration intra-actions, actions that do no occur between two distinct actors (such as inter-actions), but rather actions that define and mingle between both actors. The entanglement resulting from such intra-actions is rooted in “practices/doings/actions” (2003, p 802). Through them, assemblages are configured and reconfigured. Ageing then becomes “a temporal process of embodied transformations that engages with other ageings that surround us” (Sawchuk, 2018, p. 217).

Fermières are aware of both their age and ageing, but they don’t confuse them. On the one hand, age is sometimes celebrated (members get a free yearly membership when they turn 90), sometimes kept secret, sometimes dissociated from lived experience, sometimes forgotten (nobody remembers the age of a loom). It is in this sense, unrelational, or outside of a concrete relation to other actors’ existence. On the other hand, ageing is lived. Weavers witness their own ageing in ways that are relative to the material world surrounding them. They are aware of their capacities and limitations and enrol other actors to compensate for them. Ageing also affects artifacts, in different ways. Needs, challenges, and abilities stem from their ageing, which leads actors to associate differently. Once I started paying attention to ageing processes, I began to see how these processes were embedded and enacted in the Cercle.

Ageing and Latour's technical gestures

Bruno Latour considers that technical action "folds" time, space, and actors together, in a gesture that assembles materials and eras in a common goal (2002, p. 249). Following his logic, one should not only consider that a loom was built 50 years ago, but that it is made of wood coming from a maple, a cherrywood, or a birch tree that grew for decades before being cut. Its metal parts involve different (antique) temporalities, as does the thread. Weaving activates and brings together different moments in time in an unlikely amalgamate.

But in a strange fashion, Latour does not address his own age nor ageing in his example of a multi-temporal assemblage. When he grabs the handle of a hammer, "[it] allows [him] to insert [him]self in a variety of temporalities or time differentials, which account for (or rather imply) the relative solidity which is often associated with technical action" (2002, p. 249). The fact that he – the initiator of the technical action – is 55 years old[8] when he proceeds to hammer on a nail does not seem to matter to him.

It matters to me.

We can imagine that, at 55 years old, Latour has nailed many nails before. I suggest that his gesture "folds" fragments of his own life, drawing on every time he has used a hammer, on every time he has hit his finger or missed his target. A 5-year-old Latour surely did not possess the calm and precise hit of 55-year-old Latour. And his 90-year-old self might not have his strength. Moreover, the associations necessary for the hammering to happen are not the same due to his ageing. I am sure it would be harder for him to hit the nail without glasses, an actor that might have been unnecessary in his youth.

Taking into consideration the ageing of human and non-human actors in the weaving network, I hope to shed light on their intra-relationships, an entangling that often spans

[8] Age is considered here as a point of reference in an ageing process, and not as a characteristic.

decades. I investigate how artifacts and Fermières have been enrolled in networks that have evolved during their respective life courses and contributed to define what Cercle de Fermières is today.

Weaving as a technical and performative gesture

Fermières are rarely quiet at the Cercle, for weaving is a process that requires multiple steps. With its relational approach, Actor-Network Theory "emphasizes processes and practices rather than substances and essences" (Matthewman, 2011, p. 113). It highlights what technical and performative practices relate to looms instead of unilaterally stating that looms "keep women in domestic spaces," or "guarantee the continuity of the organization because of their sturdiness and long-lasting existence."

Arguably, the process of *making*, of *weaving*, deserves to be closely studied. Knowledge of crafts exists only in their practice (Adamson, 2013; Greenhalgh, 1997). This knowledge is shared in the Cercle and needs to be constantly performed in order to be kept alive. It pertains to the category of embodied knowledge, "to those ways of knowing and doing that grow through the experience and practice of a craft, but which adhere so closely to the person of the practitioner as to remain out of reach of explication or analysis" (Ingold, 2013, p. 109). Fermières mobilize this knowledge in the present. Far from stable, their crafting practice is a renegotiation of the past. Fermières will alternately "select from, elaborate upon and transform" (Rowley, 1999, p. 11) a weaving tradition, influenced by their current network, as they create their fabric.

Performances can help us highlight how weaving knowledge is shared among members of the Cercle. The archive of collective memory, say Hirsch and Smith, are not piles of documents stored in dusty rooms, but rather "acts of transfer without which we would have no access to [it]" (2002, p. 9). In order to be shared, weaving knowledge needs to be articulated. For Confino, every society shapes an image of its past, but this image alone cannot make a difference in society; it needs to "be received to become a socio-cultural mode of action" (1997, p. 1390). This applies here to the organization of Cercle

de Fermières who is actively looking to perpetuate its existence in continuity while its past is re-enacted in the present day. What remains part of the “present” can be linked to persistence. The Cercle de Fermières' endurance and development over a century illustrates this principle of persistence through action. If certain activities of the organization are now considered part of its history (political activism or agricultural support, for instance), it is because they are no longer enacted in the present day.

ANT insists that continuity is performative, that “if a dancer stops dancing, the dance is finished. No inertia will carry the show forward” (2005, p. 38). If a weaver stops weaving, her work will remain incomplete. If no one learns how to set up a loom, weaving knowledge will eventually disappear and weaving will no longer be considered as strengthening the existence of the organization over time.

Looms as technological artifacts

Social worlds both construct and are constructed by the materiality of things. This is valid at a micro level as well: “as people and objects gather time, movement, and change, they are constantly transformed, and these transformations of person and object are tied up with each other” (Gosden & Marshall, 1999, p. 169). In this study, I consider looms as “material-semiotic artifacts” (Haraway, 1991) part of a complex “assemblage” (Latour, 2005) playing a role in shaping the Fermières' community and activities.

But are looms technologies at all? This is a question we must start with, because technologies often get associated with male spheres of influence, in part due to selective use of the term “technology”. Deborah Johnson reminds us that:

> human-made, material objects used by men are called technology; human-made, material objects used by women are referred to as tools and utensils or appliances. Domains of knowledge and skill mastered by men are called technical or technological while those mastered by women are considered crafts. (2010, p. 57)

Clearly, looms are technologies and weaving is a technological domain of knowledge, overlooked as such because of its association with women.

As users of this type of technology, experienced Fermières *understand* how looms and the different parts that constitute them work. The unit "loom" is understood as a variety of components that interact in the weaving process, each of them with their own purpose. The problem might not have to do with one specific part, but rather with this part in relationship with the other. This description of a mechanic working on tractors could very well apply to Fermières and looms, with only minor tweaks in vocabulary:

> Are there noises that don't sound right? Will it go into gear and move? Will the different tools engage with the drive? Do they do what they are supposed to? Does something have to be patched together to do a new job? The mechanic isn't confronted with a working (or a nonworking) tractor as a single entity. It's a multiplicity, a set of different and no doubt interacting performances. (Law & Singleton, 2013, p. 774)

Madeleine Akrich suggests that technical objects are inherently political because they organize relationships between humans and their environments (1987). They should not be conceived as mere material devices nor limited to the functions they perform, but rather as the articulation between those two things. As "the hardest of material artifacts" (Carey, 2009, p. 7), they define a space and actors (Akrich, 1987, p. 209). In his study of farming technology, François Sigaut observes that some tools are made for specific users, such as a pair of workers or a mother carrying a child (1984). As for looms, they suppose a certain type of room suited to their needs, a large area to prevent clutter.

Following Actor-Network Theory, technologies are considered as actively shaping networks, as opposed to being simple instruments in already existing social contexts (Latour, 2002). Here, the looms reinforce the reputation of Cercle de Fermières as a crafty women's association, while also creating a space for new practices to unfold. The Cercles contribute to a circular reaction: social and material practices taking place in them "recursively generate social and material practices, technoscientific knowledges and versions of the social and material worlds" (Law & Singleton, 2013, p. 766).

Technologies create new programmes of actions, new possibilities. In giving agency to Fermières and to looms, ANT allows for the recognition of some overlooked factors contributing to the fluidity of the gendering of technologies and insists on the performativity of artifacts.

Research Methods

My research methods are grounded in a feminist perspective, in the hopes of documenting the relationship of ageing women with their weaving practice, as embedded in a set of socio-material practices. In light of this approach, I relied on interviews, participant observation and archives,[9] as one of the many possible combinations of feminist ways to do research (Reinharz, 1992), drawing on ANT to guide me in my observations. As Latour has argued,

> technologies bombard human beings with a ceaseless offer of previously unheard-of positions—engagements, suggestions, allowances, interdictions, habits, positions, alienations, prescriptions, calculations, memories. (2002, p. 252)

I attend to the relationships between Fermières and the objects/artifacts that are part of their weaving practice. I followed the Fermières, based on their testimonies and actions, to their moments and places of engagement with their world. I focused on the parts of the assemblage that I identified as constituting this organization-in-the-making, many of which are influenced by processes of ageing. Indeed, following the Fermières called for descriptions "of a very particular and foundational activity: the assembling, disassembling, and reassembling of associations" (Baiocchi et al., 2013, p. 336), in order to better grasp the role of all actors in shaping continuity over time.

Becoming a Fermière

Cercle de Fermières is aptly named: it is very much a social circle. Studying the first 75 years of the organization's history, Cohen identified many types of socializing at play in different Cercles, some more traditional than others, all aiming to create a sense of community (1990, pp. 166-184). This proved to be the case in the two Cercles I came to know: Cercle du Coeur-de-l'Île-de-Montréal (Montreal) counts 58 members (as of 2017), and Cercle de Baie Saint-Paul (Baie Saint-Paul) has 76. The core of each Cercle is constituted by a limited number of Fermières – between five and ten – for whom crafting

[9] I consulted the archives of Cercle de Fermières de Baie Saint-Paul in the form of handwritten meeting minutes, from 1939 to 2009. The archives for the Montreal Cercle were not made accessible to me.

is the primary occupation. These members come almost on a daily basis as they have already retired from work. Most Fermières I met over the course of this research have been Fermières for years, decades, lifetimes. As for me, I had never been a Fermière before. I became one officially in January 2017, for the purpose of my research. My membership was formally materialized in the form of a paper card, stamped to the logo of Cercle de Fermière du Coeur-de-l'Île-de-Montréal.

I say that I became one of them. Or did I? Becoming a Fermière is more than paying for the annual membership. It means entering a community, making crafts. Keeping this in mind, I believed that participant observation would best inform my understanding of what it meant to be a Fermière, in Cercles inhabited by older women weaving, looms set up with kilometres of thread, tiny needles and seasoned accessories, countless numbers and infinite possibilities. A researcher can get involved to various degrees in a research setting, from complete detachment to higher involvement. For the majority of my fieldwork, I was a "participant-as-observer" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 206), actively taking part in the organization and gaining insider knowledge related to my research question, all the while my identity as a researcher was known. This method aligned with Actor-Network Theory's famous prompt to "follow the actors" (2005, p. 12), something much more easily done when immersed in the field.

The first step in becoming a Fermière was to learn to speak their language. Fermières are mostly francophone, and French is my mother tongue. But I did have to learn several words at the Cercle. Words defining the numerous parts of the loom e.g. "*ensouple*" (warp beam), "*lisse*" (heddle), "*navette*" (shuttle), and my favorite, "*ourdissoir*" (warping machine); words for actions I had never performed in my life e.g. "*chaîner*" (warping), "*donner un quart*" (move the loom's break); and words for different types of material e.g. "*orlec*" (a type of acrylic thread), "*tencel*" (a fibre made from wood). These are some of the words Fermières use to explain what they do, which name the ways they interact with their surroundings. Naroll lists language proficiency as one of the key measures of the quality of ethnographic reports (1970). To me, language

proficiency is not limited to speaking “a” language, but encompasses the subtleties of the vernacular expressions, those which cannot be learned from textbooks.[10]

Meanwhile, I also needed to learn how to weave. In doing so, I intended to “turn *towards* the world for what it has to teach [me], and to refute the division between data collection and theory building” (Ingold, 2013, p. 6). “Learning how to weave” can have different meanings according to whom you're speaking. When I finished my first “lavette” (rag), with its inconsistent edges, I thought I knew how to weave. How easy that was! Graziella, an older Fermière, had shown me: you simply had to sit quietly for a few hours and press a set of pedals following a pattern (to be fair, I learned the simplest pattern, “canevas”). But the process of weaving far exceeds the few hours of throwing the shuttle across the threads. To be able to weave, an extensive assemblage has to exist, and my understanding of the process of weaving now involves all of these steps prior and after the time where, from afar, it looks like you are actually “weaving.” So, I weaved and weaved. Six lavettes, four dish cloths, a cushion, four placemats, a table runner and a traditional *boutonné* piece. The goal was to be present and active, not merely observing but also *taking part* in the Cercle. Weaving became an occasion for personal growth, rich interaction, careful observation and ultimately allowed me to ask better questions during the interviews.

Latour suggests that

> the most routine, traditional, and silent implements stop being taken for granted when they are approached by users rendered ignorant and clumsy by distance —*distance* in time as in archaeology, distance in space as in ethnology, distance in skills as in learning (2005, p. 80).

My distance was certainly skill-related in general, and space-related in the case of Baie Saint-Paul, as I am living in Montreal. I had questions about parts, processes, people, in short, about the functioning of the looms and the organization. They faded over time,

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[10] The Linguistic atlas of East Canada, *Parler populaires du Québec et de ses régions voisines* actually mentions all of these expressions in its study of vernacular speech in Quebec regions (Dulong and Bergeron 1980, pp. 2702-2707). Although it was published in 1980, we can see how little the vocabulary around weaving has changed in the past 40 years.

erased by habit and newly gained knowledge. Still, these questions highlighted associations between actors that fed my understanding of what weaving entailed at a Cercle de Fermières.

I started weaving in March 2017 in Montreal, and kept weaving periodically over the course of my research. The situation was quite different during my fieldwork in Baie Saint-Paul (during my two stays of two weeks in October and December 2017), where I was not considered a full member of the Cercle de Baie Saint-Paul. [11] This meant that I was not on the loom waitlist and was unable to weave. I believe this made it more difficult for me to approach other Fermières. The occasions for one-on-one interaction, in a benevolent pupil-teacher relationship, were simply not as frequent when I could not weave on a loom. Unintentionally, my status had changed from "participant-as-observer" to "observer-as-participant" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 205), which entailed a more limited involvement in the Cercle. Instead, to be both busy and hopefully create other interactions informed by crafts and demonstrate my knowledge, I knitted a pair of socks[12] during my stay. Kathleen DeWalt and Billie DeWalt (2002) suggest that commitment to a community is key to having a "breakthrough," meaning, being accepted into a community. In this case, my commitment translated to being a knowledgeable crafter (either weaver or knitter), which really helped my case, as we will see later.

In addition, DeWalt and DeWalt note that coming back to fieldwork after a certain time usually improves acceptance from the participants. This is something I noticed during my second stay in Baie Saint-Paul (a month later), for which I had waited to conduct my interviews. Some Fermières were visibly happy to see me, asking about my second sock, and I was invited to social events. I was also more comfortable asking for interviews, no longer such a total stranger to them.

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[11] Although the Cercle de Fermières organization is provincial, membership is granted at the individual Cercle level. Consequently, I was considered as a Fermière from Cercle du Coeur-de-l'Île-de-Montréal and was welcomed as such.

[12] Knitting these purple socks probably took me longer than weaving my six lavettes, four dish cloths, a cushion, four placemats, table runner and traditional *boutonné* piece. They are also too large.

In general, engaging in the craft of weaving made for a convenient entry point into the conversation. It helped me to establish a connection with Fermières, and their physical presence allowed me to ask precise questions about Fermières' work, some of which led to deeper personal conversations. As Harry Wolcott notes, fieldwork entails some kind of exchange, “one that often involves gifting across cultural boundaries where exchange rates might be ambiguous or one wonders what to offer in exchange for intangibles such as hospitality or a shared life history” (2005, p. 84-85). Objects in the making became the occasion for an exchange between a Fermière and I, opening up a space for reciprocity, care, and skill exchange. I spun the thread around the beam of the loom; she showed me how to make straighter fabric edges.

As I became more familiar with weaving and everything it implied, in what we could call a very hands-on learning process, the questions I had started to evolve. “Being there” forced my ideas to confront my ideas about the Cercle and rearticulate my experience and the very actions and words of the Fermières (Becker, 1977). Didn't their back and legs hurt after so many hours spent bent over a loom? Mine certainly did. Why would some of them only weave canevas pattern, or with synthetic fibres? I also became privy to some of the feelings one can feel when weaving (from pride to deep frustration), and to characteristics of several different looms. Reflecting on these assumptions, very diverse in their focus, allowed me to produce a more authentic interview guide, informed by both Fermières' and my own experience. The entire process was iterative. Additionally, I had to opportunity so see the “making-of” a fabric, as it evolved over time, “providing a rare glimpse of what it is for a thing to emerge out of inexistence by adding to any entity its time dimension” (Latour, 2005, p. 89).

My participant observation mostly took place at the Cercle spaces. In Montreal, it is located in the basement of the Church Saint-Vincent-Ferrier, in Villeray. Fermières moved there in 2014. They now own 14 looms of different sizes and shaft numbers, which clutter the space and make it difficult to circulate in between them. Fermières in Baie Saint-Paul moved in May 2017 to the old Petites Franciscaines convent, which was acquired by the village and converted into the headquarters for various community

organizations and associations. They own eight looms. Their space is much more spacious, and a very nice light comes in.

Becoming a Fermière meant being invited to Fermière events. These generally fell into four categories: meetings (monthly meetings, weavers' meeting), fundraisers (in Montreal: spaghetti dinner, in Baie Saint-Paul: card game night), specific skill courses, and sales. I tried going to as many as I could to do peripheral observation, not only limiting myself to the physical space associated with Cercle. However, due to schedule constraints (especially in the case of Baie Saint-Paul, where I was only present for a total of one month) I could not attend all of them. My absence was not noted by the Fermières as only the core members of the Cercle try to always be present. I did feel like I was giving back a little to the community welcoming me when I helped with a sale or volunteered to take pictures at a Christmas event.

Old & Young

As mentioned earlier, all of my interviewees are over 80 years of age. Most members of the Cercles are retired women, with only a few exceptions (pregnant women on maternity leave, a few younger women who come on different schedules because of work). At the time of writing, I am 26 years old. Participant observation meant taking part in a community of women two or three times my own age, a difference hard to conceal. Understanding how this difference between me, the “young” researcher, and them, “old” Fermières, played out is important: the positions we occupy vis-a-vis one another influenced not only our relationship, but also the production of data (Lundgren, 2013; McCorkel & Myers, 2003).

French language has a way to verbally force the acknowledgement of age difference (or authority) by having two different possible pronouns: “tu” and “vous.” “Vous” was my preferred pronoun for talking with Fermières. It implied respect, age difference and a certain distance. Most of them employed “tu” with me. However, after some time getting to know another person and depending on the context, “vous” can turn into “tu”. It is sometimes directly addressed in a conversation and the shift represents a mark of

familiarity and acceptance. On certain occasions, I used “tu” without being asked to. I felt that “vous” implied too much distance, and that “tu” elicited a better connexion with my interviewees. None of the Fermières commented on it, and this is something I only did with Fermières I became much closer to.

Age difference was sometimes referred to in conversation, fulfilling different strategies. It was a way to identify me: Fermières recognized me coming down the stairs leading to the Cercle space quickly, while most of them had a slow pace. I also embodied “youth” in general, as in Graziella's appreciative comment “la jeunesse, ça apprend vite!” (“youth learns quickly!”). I felt sometimes like weavers were eager to share their knowledge with me and were more forgiving of my mistakes on the basis of my age. Fermières would also start sentences with “At your age…,” which opened up a symbolic line between them and me.

On a few occasions, age difference also served as a rhetorical tool to create distance between us. During a workshop about Fiberworks, a weaving software, the instructor, a 77-year-old weaver who mastered to perfection the software, kept referring to me (the only person under 50) to emphasize her own experience. For example, she recounted that she had started using a computer in 1988, a number that illustrated her experience based on an extensive time period (and not, say, on the complexity of designs she creates) and that seemed even more impressive compared to my own age. In the beginning, she said, the software was sold on floppy disks, adding “Ms. over here surely does not know what a floppy disk, am I right?” She also implied that I certainly knew how to manage the software better than she did (not in any way!), as younger people know so much about computers. The weaver appeared to assign me a position of “digital expert,” based on my relative youth. I interpret it as a forestalling strategy preventing me to question her experience, on the basis of digital ageist prejudices. It is worth nothing that, during the entire workshop, I tried to keep as quiet as possible.

Kathleen Riach (2009) has suggested compiling “researcher/research conflation” comments and see what themes overlapped them to identify what reflexive

considerations shape the project. In my case, age difference is definitely a central theme, especially when it comes to learning and digital technologies, and the symbolic associations linking them to different stages of life.

Asking questions

As a research method, oral sources in the form of semi-structured interviews can be appraised as a solution to highlight women's points of view, and to document their pasts without relying on written sources that might be scarce or not available (Perrot, 1984). However, to give a voice to these women is not enough in itself: we ought to understand the participants' backgrounds to expand our focus beyond the private sphere, including objects as parts of their existence. Only then can we begin to account for their experiences in all their richness and complexity.

Being at once a newcomer to the Cercle, a weaving student, an participant-as-observer and an interviewer, as well as an ex-journalist, I asked a lot of questions to the Fermières during the observation period. This was done in informal settings most often, but I did conduct four more formal, semi-structured interviews with a total of five weaving Fermières (two from Montreal, three from Baie Saint-Paul) in November and December 2017. Candide Dufour, Claire-Ange Desmarais, Graziella Martin and Régina Bouchard[13] were over 80 years old at the time of the interview, and Rolande Dufour, the matriarch, will have turned 88 by the publication of this thesis. I aimed to interview the oldest active members of every Cercle, without having a specific age in mind. Having lived and aged with the practice of weaving, the oldest Fermières were able to talk about their involvement over their lifetime, and share their experiences as older women weaving. The interviews lasted between one and one and a half hours and were transcribed verbatim. All procedures were approved by Concordia University's Human Research Ethics Committee.

[13] Régina Bouchard is referred to as "'Madame Régina" for the rest of the thesis, as it is the name most Fermières call her at the Cercle in Baie Saint-Paul.

The Fermières interviewed for this work were all born in the 1930s and are thus too young to remember an ideological push for weaving. They nonetheless are inheritors of the effects of this history: all learned the basics of weaving at home or at school, with the nuns. Some, like Madame Régina, went to courses taught by Germaine Galarneau, one of the several weaving teachers appointed by the Ministry of Agriculture. Above all, they remember working from a very young age, weaving, knitting, sewing, cooking, washing, cleaning. Such was the existence of many girls growing up at the time, a flow of household tasks that left little to no tangible traces.

In Baie Saint-Paul, where the Fermières did not know me very well, a relative of them arranged an interview with Rolande and Candide Dufour (sisters) for me. I interviewed them together and they became a bit wary when I asked if I could record the interview for further notes, worrying about not sounding "educated" enough. Their preoccupation reminded me of the words of Oscar Bériau, the first director of l'École provinciale des arts domestiques. Weaving, he once said, was "cet art rustique propre aux gens vivant du sol, le langage de leurs mains"[14] (1933, p. 16).

I did my best to reassure them: it was *their* point of view that I wanted to hear, informed by everything they had lived. What followed was a lively and interesting conversation, recorded, with their approval, by a discrete iPhone. My third interviewee in Baie Saint-Paul was harder to convince. I believe that she eventually accepted to be interviewed because I "proved" myself as a competent weaver. The "breaktrough" happened when I finally identified the problem in the set-up of a newly purchased loom.

In Montreal, both interviews took place at the Cercle, which was ideal for a number of reasons. First, this was an accessible space for the Fermières, one that they were presumably comfortable in. Secondly, it was filled with looms and objects that I wanted to inquire about. For these interviews, I aimed to explore the actions that people performed with these objects (Wilton, 2008) and the stories of the objects in and of

[14] "Weaving is the rustic art of people living off the land, it is the language of their hands". My translation doesn't do justice to the words he chose, which imply the eloquence of the weaving gesture.

themselves, Lastly, the Cercle space was semi-private. I conceived it as a “third space,” “a generic designation for a great variety of public places that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home [first place] and work [second place]” (Oldenburg, 1999, p. 16). This simplified the politics of the interview for the interviewee (no intrusion in a private space), and for myself (possibility to end the interview and to exit the space).

In Baie Saint-Paul, none of the interviews were conducted at the Cercle. One took place in a café, over coffee. My two interviewees only visited Baie Saint-Paul once a week and they had their entire day planned. They weren't weaving at the time and saw no use to going to the Cercle, which meant more logistics for an already busy day spent outside the house. My last interview took place at the Fermière's house. She was the one harder to convince and it was a condition of hers. This setting proved interesting as she owned various looms and insisted on showing me some of her past weaving production. It also highlighted a complementary weaving space.

I used an inductive approach[15] to analyse my data. The primary purpose of this method is to let categories emerge from the raw data, which furthers orient the research findings (Thomas, 2006). The raw data being the content of the interviews and complementary observations, my categories were based on the lived experiences of women, giving primacy to their perspectives. Thematic categories such as the role of loom parts and weaving accessories, different ageing processes at play, communication and knowledge sharing, space and the multiple steps involved in weaving all informed my research and oriented the structure of this thesis (see the following vignettes). Although my findings were influenced by my initial research questions, it is worth nothing that they arose from the data itself, not from a model developed *a priori* (Thomas, 2006). Inductive analysis is especially fitting for exploratory studies about specific problematics, when one hopes to uncover unexplored aspects of a question (Blais & Martineau, 2006).

[15] An inductive approach is different from a deductive one, which postulates general theoretical concepts and a proposition. Inductive thinking, in its roots in ethnographic observation, is commensurate with ANT thinking.

On being "une étrange"

My fieldwork took place in two different Cercles in Quebec, one in Montreal and one in Baie Saint-Paul. I did not mean to do a comparative analysis between the two, but rather to stay true to the Cercle de Fermières' organization, which has always been rooted in the countryside (Cohen, 1991). As of 2016, the national organization counts 631 different chapters, or Cercles (Les Cercles de Fermières, 2017, p. 20). Each of them represents a vision of what Cercle de Fermières is, what its members consider it should be. Spending time in two different Cercles, I was able to see that some of their differences can be traced to their respective socio-technical networks. Nonetheless, both Cercles remain inherently "Cercle-like" assemblages, with significantly overlapping networks.

As for the reasons leading me to choose Baie Saint-Paul for fieldwork, I was interested in the region of Charlevoix in particular because it was a hot spot for handicraft in Quebec (Lamontagne & Harvey, 1997), which Marius Barbeau considered a "pays enchanté" (Gauthier, 2006), representative of the qualities of Quebec as a whole, in all of its quaintness and archaism. Charlevoix is also famous for its traditional *catalognes* and *boutonné* textiles, which I thought Fermières could possibly still be making.

Many researchers have pondered about "stranger" status while doing fieldwork (Agar, 1980; Breton, 2003; Powdermaker, 2000). For me, the feeling was particularly acute in rural Charlevoix, where my presence during low touristic season was noted by locals. In Baie Saint-Paul (pop.: 7000), foreigners even have a nickname that made it into regional vernacular language: "les étranges"[16] (loosely translated as "the stranges"). Suffice to say I was one of them.

At the Cercle in Baie Saint-Paul, I was first introduced as "a Fermière from Montreal," which at least recognized my Fermière membership. However, when I presented my research project more formally, I became "a Master's student," which unsettled some

[16] This expression was also indexed by Gaston Dulong and Gaston Bergeron (1980, p. 2584).

Fermières. The president at the time, for instance, assumed that I only wanted to conduct interviews with Fermières. I had to clarify my methods to her and explain what participant observation entailed.

At the Cercle in Baie Saint-Paul, my “étrange” status was made up of number of positions: a Master's student, from Montreal, and relatively young person. But not being from Baie Saint-Paul was a central node of my difference. I tried to alleviate this fact by systematically alluding to my maternal grandfather who was born in Les Éboulements, a few kilometres away from Baie Saint-Paul. One of the Fermière remembered him, as her cousin was our family's handyman. I took special care in mentioning that I was living with my aunt in downtown Baie Saint-Paul during fieldwork, proving that my family still had ties to the region, and did my best to display my familiarity with Charlevoix.[17]

I also had to prove myself as a Fermière, as I was not considered a “new” member that needed to learn everything. Cultural capital at the Cercle is linked to craft knowledge: the more you know, the more you can share with others. In Baie Saint-Paul, I was not allowed to weave, but I did assist during the set-up of a new loom and prove myself useful. I also helped one of my interviewees with the weaving of overshot, a more advanced technique involving weaving two threads at once. The socks that I was knitting for the most part of my participant observation were made with thin wool, and socks are not considered like a beginner's project. This is how I tried to establish my credibility as a Fermière and become a little less “étrange,” a little more normal at the Cercle in Baie Saint-Paul.

Despite my attempts to integrate the two Cercles as a participant as much as an observer, my position taints the results of my research. This study of Cercle de Fermières is far from being an “innocent description” (Law & Singleton, 2000, p. 768). In their discussion of methodology in the social sciences, particularly in science and

[17] This involved, for example, being able to situate myself in the village without any map, referring to going to the beach as “going to the wharf” (aller au quai), talking about summers spent at my grandparents' place, referring to key actors I met during my stay (museum director, librarian, archivists, city clerks) by their first name, etc.

technology studies, Law and Singleton suggest that writing is much a performance as any description of a technological project. They state: “as we tell a story about a ‘project,’ we tend to breathe life into a whole set of assumptions” (Law & Singleton 2000, p. 768). These assumptions can be explicitly political (role of older adults in society, functioning of community associations) or implicitly (such as the distinction and consideration of both humans and non-humans).

In this thesis, I focus on particular aspects of the organization and delve into very specific questions: what does ageing change? what do objects do? In order to provide a framework for my analysis, the chapters that follow is composed of five vignettes. The use of vignettes is in line with Actor-Network Theory (Law & Singleton, 2000; 2013). My intent is to expose everyday scenes that illustrate the nuanced relationships between actors — they do not inevitably play the same role across the vignettes. This storytelling approach also echoes feminist discussions of the anecdote (Crow & Sawchuk, 2018), a type of “stories-so-far” (Massey, 2005). Most of them take place in the Fermières’ loom room, a site in which many “stories-so-far” intersect. Wherever I turned, there were traces of stories unfolding, texturing the space. We follow some of them, frozen in time, in the subsequent analysis of the vignette. However, vignette and analysis are not designed to be read side by side. Rather, vignettes are conceived as evocative starting points, allowing the reader to delve into the context without being overwhelmed by details or numbers, but rather led through the Cercle following a story.

While “to describe is also to simplify” (Law & Singleton, 2013, p. 496), vignettes allow for a (possible) delineation of an issue occurring within the dynamics of an assemblage that can be later looked at more closely. Because networks are ever-shifting, vignettes are necessarily incomplete, and dated because they are associated with a particular place and time.

Part 2: Life at the Cercle - A Few Vignettes

I have selected five different scenes, or vignettes, to provide a variety in the situations that emerged at the Cercle de Fermières, drawing attention to the composition of this network.

The first vignette portrays Fermières setting up a loom, that is to say, stringing the many inches of thread onto it. We realize that the loom is a demanding technology in terms of both knowledge and ressources. Fermières are described as different from other weavers in that cooperation is at the center of their practice. In the second vignette, I focus on the spatial characteristics of the Cercles. Questions of access, spatial organization of the space and history of the buildings hosting the Cercle (oftentimes historically related to catholic religion) are discussed. The third vignette informs the reader on the many and diverse artifacts that participate to the Fermières' practice of weaving. Shuttles, measuring ribbons, and loom beaters all serve a specific role. They also contribute to foster cooperation and friendship among Fermières, an instance of socio-material relationships sustaining social bonds. The fourth vignette suggests that weaving could be considered as an activity part of an "active ageing" agenda. Older Fermières' reasons to be active members of the Cercle on their own terms are contrasted with this idea, nuancing the effectiveness of such discourses. Finally, the fifth vignette presents some aspects of the management of weaving. The role of the loom coordinator — essential to the smooth allocation of looms — is detailed. I also mention the importance of phone calls as tools for bringing the community together and as technologies of ageing.

In the following analysis, I focus on different ideas alluded to in the vignette, often starting with a specific actor and its effects on the network.

Vignette 1. Setting up the Loom

Mme Régina and Fermières in Baie Saint-Paul carefully stringing the cotton thread on their newly purchased Leclerc loom.

A Leclerc loom, strangely out of place, occupies the center of the weaving room. No sooner is a loom emptied from all its threads than the Fermières look to set it up in a different way. This is no easy task. Tonight, six of them are busy preparing materials for it.

A homemade engine, dirty with oil, is already secured to the beam. The metallic hardware contrasts with the softer materials of the wood and the threads. Other odd devices are out: two warping machines and a tension stabilizer. These extensions of the loom will allow them to string 40 yards of warp threads, enough for Fermières to weave a number of placemats. At 48 threads per inch, they are going to be very thick.

Madame Régina is heading up the enterprise, prescriptive in her tone. The matriarch is referring to a Fermières' guide book for the pattern of the loom set-up. Where I see rows of coloured squares, she reads precise instructions in color, needle numbers and thread length. She instructs the other women on the spool order for them to correspond to the “Fall wind” design they decided on.

Fermières proceed inch by inch, starting from the middle of the loom. Once the 48 threads are installed on the warping machines and lodged into the tension stabilizer, Aline turns on the engine. The beam starts to spin, and every yard is signalled by a "tick" on the meter. Halfway through, Aline stops the machine, panicked: "We forgot to tense the fibres!"

Indeed, the threads in the tension stabilizer are going *over* a wooden stick, instead of under. This makes all of the difference. We need to unravel the threads and start over… I ask why we do not simply cut the threads and start anew. Aline is horrified: "That would be such a waste! Time costs nothing." What the engine did in less than two minutes takes us over an hour to undo.

When we finally leave the weaving room, around 10 PM, four inches of threads are neatly entwined around the beam. We will come back tomorrow evening, to hopefully finish the set-up.

Considered in the analysis of this vignette: tisserandes *and shuttle throwers, unnecessary actors,* Les secrets du tissage*, inscriptions, minimum wage, and time ahead.*

The importance of knowing how to set up a loom

> So if you wanted… let's say a piece with 20 threads per inch and that you set a 100 inch loom up and you used 80 or 90 inches, then it's 20 times 80, 1600, 2 times 8, 16, yes, 1600 threads, then you made a big rope according to the length you wanted, but you'd never set up 50 or 60 yards, you would set up, I don't know, when we used the 100 inch to make blankets, we'd set up 225, 250 inches, so in yards, divided by 36… Our rope had to be around 12-yard-long and have the 1600 threads.
> *Graziella, explaining how to set up a loom without a warping machine.*

The actions we usually associate with weaving (i.e. throwing the shuttle, pressing pedals, beating the beater) are the ones visibly related to the making of a fabric. Before they become possible, weavers need to set up the loom, an overlooked – intricate and essential – part of the weaving process. Claire-Ange Desmarais, 84, suggests that setting up a loom is the most complicated step, because "if a loom is wrongly set up, nothing goes right" (2017).

The set-up determines the parameters of possibilities. As Régina Dufour, 80, said, "A loom is only a loom. All depends on the set-up" (2017). For without threads, a loom is simply a cumbersome piece of equipment.

Knowledge pertaining to the loom set-up differentiates advanced weavers from beginners (such as myself). Fermières are always encouraging new weavers to understand the logic behind it. At the level of the Cercle, this helps to alleviate the task of loom set-up by creating a larger pool of advanced weavers ready to lend a hand. But on a larger scale, disseminating this knowledge is imperative for the survival of the Fermières and their weaving craft.

> If you simply follow the pedal order, you don't need to understand how the loom works. It's easy. But you need to learn how to read weaving patterns. You know, us who set up the looms, we are not eternal… (Graziella, 2017).

The national organization is very aware of this fact. It organizes a yearly weaving contest, and a rule specifies that Fermières must have participated to the loom set-up and be able to read the weaving draft in order to submit a piece. Cécile, during a monthly meeting, made it clear "the organization wants weavers (*tisserandes*), not shuttle throwers!"

The difference between the two highlights some tensions on how Fermières can perceive weaving. *Tisserandes* might consider it as a craft, a practice requiring them to think, ponder, imagine, try new things. It involves an awareness of a complex process, involving several different steps. Whereas shuttle throwers, or we should say, regular weavers, see weaving as an activity during which they simply need to repeat the same movements to obtain a fabric. As Madame Régina puts it: "A lot of girls arrive and everything is ready for them. They just have to throw their fibre."

In a sense, *tisserandes* make it easy for regular weavers: they exempt them from a tedious process in the hopes to convince them to become *tisserandes*. This could be considered as a pedagogical twist: setting up a loom can be such a daunting task that *tisserandes* introduce regular weavers to the joys of weaving, luring them with immediate gratification, before actually explaining what the set-up entails. Little by little, they can take part in the full process and better understand how different actors allow them to weave.

Weaving video tutorials

New ways to pass on craft knowledge have arisen with the democratization of digital technologies. Internet, for one, hosts a variety of video tutorials available for free to crafters of all kinds. Nonetheless, I was surprised to find so few weaving video tutorials on YouTube, which has otherwise proved to be a fitting dissemination tool for craft instruction. Knitting has known such a revival among younger generations (Groeneveld, 2010), why would weaving be any different?[18]

When I typed “how to weave” loom in the search bar, the results obtained (185,000) were overwhelmingly related to simple frame looms, a type of loom that you can build to make simple tapestries as found on Pinterest. Simple frame looms are DIY-friendly, easily assembled from scraps of wood and a few nails. On the other hand, “how to weave floor loom” only yielded 14,700 results. In light of this research, I suggest that this gap is directly linked to the particularities of the floor loom's weaving network.

Let us remember what a craft-inclined but absolute beginner would need in order to weave. A floor loom. One of these costs between $3,000 and $10,000 new and over $500 on the second-hand market. Additionally, setting up a loom requires, literally, the use of kilometres of thread (unless you want to set it up for only one piece, which leads to a lot of excess and wasted time). And space! The arrival of power looms in the beginning of the 19th century affected the architecture of English textile mills: industrials had to house the power looms in settings that accommodated both their size and the weavers who would use them (Giles, 1993). Looms need space, and amateur weavers and industrials alike need to give it to them. Madame Régina, for one, kept her loom in a dedicated room. However, contemporary dwellings are seldom equipped with enough room (and rooms) to install a floor loom, which complicates their use. I have only enumerated here the basic material requirements to own a personal loom, without tackling the necessary knowledge to set it up (see previous section).

[18] The search “how to knit” yields 1 850 000 results on YouTube.

In short, to be able to weave is synonymous with being able to afford a significant investment of money, resources, and space, given the material characteristics of the loom. Comparatively, knitting or embroidering have a very low entry point: all you really need are needles and a bit of thread. I suggest that the scarcity of loom-related YouTube videos is a direct consequence of the limited number of people who can weave (and make YouTube videos), given the requirements of looms. Furthermore, the pool of weavers can hardly grow because of these videos: although weaving can look like an interesting craft to take up on a whim, the feasibility of it is compromised by the expenses to acquire the necessary equipment to even try it out.

Fermières bypass this problem altogether by using a cooperative model, contributing to upsurge its use in Quebec starting from the 1940s (Nadeau, 1999). Looms are collectively owned and used, which also means a greater rotation of models over time. Costs are down (acquisition, materials), and space is leased through the organization (or granted by the community). Looms favour cooperation within the Cercle in many ways. In this case, it is through the pooling of resources that ultimately allow any woman interested to weave to do so at a very reasonable cost. Yes, Fermières can encounter challenges that are different from those of the weavers weaving at home, but they are a small price to pay for the democratization of weaving.

Fermières and the engine

The beam-spinning engine is not a necessary actor. For instance, Fermières in Montreal use a type of crank instead and spin the beam by hand. When I expressed admiration for the engine in Baie Saint-Paul, comparing it to the crank, Martine laughed at me: “That's so outdated! I meant to say, here, we have state-of-the-art technologies!” The fact is that this greasy, clunky hand-made machine could not be further from “state-of-the-art technology.” Indeed, during the set-up, sparks occurred because the wire was exposed, which caused the machine to break down. Fermières, undeterred, fixed it and continued their work.

I learned later that the beam-spinning machine was assembled by someone's husband, specifically for this beam-spinning task. A custom job. Interestingly, Leclerc Looms, which holds a quasi-monopoly over the weaving market in Quebec, has no such tool in its catalogue. The closest thing to it they sell is a crank such as the Montreal Fermieres', priced at $93 (Métiers Leclerc, 2016, p. 57). But the crank is not handy. It requires weavers to bend awkwardly to have a good hold and spin it for a long time, in quite a tiring way. So Fermières in Baie Saint-Paul decided that another tool could perform a better job and tasked a relative with the project. This is a telling example of human actors realigning a material configuration to suit their needs. Fermières excuse the clunkiness of their beam-spinning engine by its usefulness.

Inscriptions and design

When Fermières decide on a loom set-up, they have an approximate goal in mind. They might have consulted outside sources, such as the Fermières magazine *L'Actuelle*, reference books or, in this case, *Les secrets du tissage* (Cercles des Fermières du Québec, 2015), a Fermières' staple, to find an inspiring weaving pattern.

The weaving pattern (or any other publication) on which they base their work could be considered an “inscription,” a kind of document that allows for “action at distance“ (Latour 2003). Sometimes taking the form of writings, inscriptions translate one's interests in material form. Cercle de Fermières, the publisher of *Les secrets du tissage*, want their members to weave and encourage this activity by suggesting patterns that fit their vision of what weaving should be like. However, inscriptions are not always fully effective given the agency of the actor making use of them. Here, Fermières will tailor their project according to personal taste, needs, and imagination. The pattern of use suggested by the pattern is only one part of their project.

So far, the weaving project has been influenced by the inscription (pattern) and a Fermière's needs and creativity. To complete the picture, we need to add the material actors such as the loom and threads. They come only later, but their influence cannot

be ignored since the inscription and the Fermière's will cannot materialize without their support. When Fermières actually start preparing the materials for their project, they might realize that they need to buy one more spool of red thread, that the reed is too small for this project, or that they don't have the time to complete such a long scarf. They must comply with the affordances and demands of the different actors involved.

When Fermières finally finished setting up the loom in Baie Saint-Paul, they discovered that they were unable to press the pedals smoothly. First, they doubted themselves. Could it be that they had attached the pedals the wrong way? They carefully studied their set-up, unable to find any human mistake. Then, they doubted the inscription. A weaving pattern is a complex grid where a misplaced square can modify the entire result. They even traced the author of the pattern, a Fermière based in Lac Saint-Jean, and phoned her. She could not explain either why her design was not working on their loom. Only then did they look at the materials. The threads were too thick. They chafed against one another, impeding the shafts to go up and down as they should. This episode serves as a reminder that materials hold more power than one might usually think.

Fermières and time

Weaving takes time. In fact, any manual activity requires an engagement over time. This explains partly why weaving can be such a popular activity among retired seniors: it takes time, which they have, and they have time, which they choose to fill with activities. Away from the fast-paced world of the job market, the clock ticks at another speed (Wajcman & Dodd, 2017). Fermières conception of time clashed with mine, at times. In the vignette above, they agreed to use six persons' time, for one hour, to spare the waste of a spool of thread. At the time of the event, I started calculating in my head how much money our collective endeavour represented at minimum wage, before correcting myself. Weavers do not think in terms of money and time (Little, 1978). Otherwise, weaving as a craft would have disappeared long ago. No, it is rather a question of materials defining a schedule, to which Fermières dedicate their time.

Vignette 2. Welcome to the Cercle

Fermières in Baie Saint-Paul have recently moved to a new place. They used to be on the third floor of a primary school which was later closed due to seismic regulation. Their new headquarters are actually located in one of Baie Saint-Paul's most imposing (and not especially new) buildings: la Maison Mère des Petites Franciscaines de Marie, built in 1896. Even though they are now on the third floor, an elevator can take them up and down at any time of the day.

In 2016, the city of Baie Saint-Paul bought la Maison Mère for $800,000 with the hopes to make it a community hub. A year later, it clusters organizations as varied as the Festif! music festival, a youth hostel, a coworking space, a cafe cooperative, and our Cercle de Fermières.

Fabienne, weaving on a double loom, still marvels at the new room, spacious and bright. She was president of the Cercle for six years (the maximum allowed) and has coordinated much of the logistics behind the big move. Kneeling to fix a thread on the beam of the loom, she says jokingly “God, I have to do penance.” Not all Fermières are as quick to laugh about matters of religion. Until 2005, monthly Fermières meetings were still opened with a prayer and Fermières’ annual textile exhibition still receives the parish priest’s blessing every year. As if Petites Franciscaines meant to remind Fermières of their presence, a statue of the Virgin Mary remains, in a corner of the room.

Fabienne knows this building very well. She used to be a night watchwoman for the religious congregation, before the nuns moved to a new wing of Baie Saint-Paul's main hospital. Her weaving partner, Ghislaine, also has ties to the Maison Mère. Her parents sent her (one of their 10 children) to complete her juniorate with the nuns when she turned 11. She remembers that her locker was located just in front of the room Fermières now use.

Considered in the analysis of this vignette: building conversion, rent, ground floors, and predictable needs

Location of the Cercles

Both Cercles de Fermières are tied to religious buildings, although their statuses differ. This is not surprising: churches are numerous in Quebec. As buildings, they are linked to a set of actions related to religion and stabilize their practice therein (Guggenheim, 2013). Churches have occupied a central place in community life, especially in villages. Be they “typical or exceptional, sole monument in a village or in rural settings, focal

points in dense neighbourhoods, small and stark or oversized, [churches were] always at the *center* of something" (Noppen et al., 2006, p. 13) (emphasis added). However, a drop in church attendance in the past decades, coupled with steady costs of maintenance, have threatened the ideological and infrastructural survival of these buildings. Both the buildings and the catholic religious practice are part of temporal processes. While some buildings have been torn down, Luc Noppen suggests that "we must truly 'convert' them, i.e., ascribe some meaning to such 'retaking' by civil society, in the name of 'heritage,' of buildings partially or totally abandoned by religious practice" (2006, p. 287).

In Baie Saint-Paul, Fermières have moved into a "converted" motherhouse, la Maison Mère des Petites Franciscaines de Marie. The congregation gave it to the city of Baie Saint-Paul, which agreed to host the Cercle de Fermières at no charge, given its non-profit status. Unlike private firms who bought disused places of worship and transformed them into condominiums, Baie Saint-Paul was not driven by profit, putting the interests of its community first. Traces of the presence of the nuns can be seen everywhere in the motherhouse. There is the statue of Mary in the corner of the weaving room, the bell tower that continues to shine in the sun, and a large wooden statue of Jesus Christ on the cross in the main corridor.

Michael Guggenheim understands buildings as "mutable immobiles, objects that are immovable and thus likely to be changed on the level of their social classification" (2013, p. 445). In other words, a church's appearance or location cannot be modified – the church bell is there to stay – but its building uses and occupancy can change. Mutable objects are in counterpoint to Bruno Latour's "immutable objects" or "blackboxes" (1999), whose inbuilt features guarantee reproducible outcomes. However, as illustrated by the faithful's attendance drop, a church does not inherently ensure believers' presence within its walls. Thus, we can conceive of a different type of use for the building, a transformation distinct from the intended religious use at the time of its construction.

Baie Saint-Paul's motherhouse did not undergo such a drastic conversion. It rather became a hub for the community, reuniting disparate organizations in the same physical location. Community-bonding, an important aspect of religion, might have remained embedded in the building, encouraging contact between laic organizations. For the Fermières, the move came with new opportunities for getting closer to other associations, such as Rêves d'automne, a painting festival which sponsored them, or Café Mousse, a café where they sometimes go. The motherhouse is not directly linked to religion anymore, but its architecture, implying physical proximity between numerous people, continues to inspire community-minded behaviours. As such, I suggest that the building's conversion is a success: Baie Saint-Paul found a new meaning for the building, rooted in values that do not go against religious ethos. Fermières directly contribute to this success, by effectively being a close-knit community and bonding with other organizations in the building. While Fermières' historical association with religious authorities might not be as influential as in the beginning of the organization, their presence in a motherhouse certainly isn't against the beliefs of most Fermières.

Fermières in Montreal have their room in the basement of Saint-Vincent-Ferrier church. The church is still consecrated and holds offices a few times a week. From the basement, we can sometimes hear the deep bass of an organ being played.

Some of a church's functions are secular, such as a representing a social, community-based space. The front of the church (*parvis de l'église*), where villagers exchange news, is one of those spaces, as is the church basement hosting organizations endorsed by the church. Church basements as community spaces are a distinctive feature of Quebec churches (Noppen et al., 2006). Such spaces inadvertently contributed to stopping the wave of church closures in the 1960s and 1970s, as it was costlier to provide new spaces for community organizations than maintaining the church for their use (Beaudet, 2006, p. 391).

Maybe as a sign of the times, the Cercle pays rent to the diocese, which represents a financial burden for the organization. This obligation generates an increased awareness

of the value of the Fermières' work and a concern for productivity. As a direct result, every third dish cloth woven must be given to the Cercle (or bought at full price). Rules like this one are not born out of a concern for profit-making, but organizational survival. In 2017, when their rent increased, Fermières also organized a spaghetti dinner night (*souper spaghetti*), a traditional fundraising event in Quebec. This was a first. Finally, a clause in the New Horizons for Seniors Program (NHSP) prohibits the use of any of the grant's funds to pay rent. Fermières responded to this impediment by charging Fermières for thread use, but actually using the money collected to pay rent. The NHSP money is then used to "pay" for the thread instead.

Once again, a seemingly simple aspect of the network (rent for room use) has domino effect all over the network, from personal Fermières production, to fundraising necessities to subterfuge in grant money administration, all of this in order to stabilize the network of weaving production.

(Apparent) clutter

Both Cercles are home to Fermières, but also to a multitude of objects, looms being the largest. You will find spools of thread, sewing machines, knitted pieces, shoes, magazines, thread spinners, spinning wheel, warping machines, heddles, blinds, measuring ribbons, brooms, microwaves, cutlery, needles, patterns, books, scissors, tapestries, bills, phones, lists, scales, tension stabilizers, shuttles, benches, cushions, catalogues, boxes, loom parts, and chairs and tables.…

Behind the apparent clutter lies a logic I came to understand only with time. Every object at the Cercle belongs to a specific place according to its role and how it relates to others. Open any loom's bench and you will invariably find the same objects: a spool of the thread used for the warp in case a thread breaks, a measuring ribbon, a ball of recycled fabric to finish your piece, and the pattern of the model used (a sheet inside the bench specifies its contents and courtesy norms to respect). In the cupboards, it is of the utmost importance that same colour and same material types of thread remain

together as to prevent the mistaken use of slightly different colours of material. The looms are positioned in a way that allows Fermières to move (relatively) freely around them. A very necessary pair of scissors and a set of needles are attached to every loom. The space of the Cercle, as that of a laboratory, “is constituted as a configuration of cognitive interaction between human actors *and* things” (Preda, 1999, p. 351). My fieldwork only included two Cercles, but I wouldn't be surprised to find the same logic, the same disposition of objects in others. The national organization of Cercle de Fermières doesn’t publish any guidelines regarding object layout, no weaver is responsible for the enforcement of space use. The arrangement is rather due to the practice of weaving, better executed when objects are located in a logical manner (for weavers).

Moving

Cercles in Montreal and Baie Saint-Paul have had to move in the past three years. If moving is a complicated undertaking in and of itself, moving a Cercle de Fermières whose main (and cherished) possession are a dozen looms or so falls into another category. That most of Fermières are women over 65 years old only complicates the venture. However, they have more than one trick up their sleeves, and work doesn't frighten them. Their effort was a truly common one and everybody participated according to their abilities. Graziella, 85, remarks: “I participated. I certainly don't have the physical strength to do everything, but I emptied the looms and prepared them as much as I could. And you know, us Fermières are very resourceful” (2017). As for Madame Régina, she insists on the members outside of the Fermières community who came in to help, including men:

> There was Gaétan, from the Seniors' club (*club de l'âge d'or*), his brother and his wife. Micheline's husband. And Lucette's husband, who came with a lift. They used it to get the looms out of the primary school. And what they could not bring up with the elevator in the motherhouse, they went up the stairs with.

Looms are very demanding. This time, it is their weight and size that bring people together in a moving project. Because senior women do not necessary have the

physical force to move them themselves, other actors seldom included become part of the network: men, family members, and a mechanical lift.

Finally, a word on the floor level of the Cercles. While the ground floor would be ideal, none of the Cercles have their room on that level. For some women with mobility issues, this can become an impediment from going to the Fermières, a few extra steps to take (literally) can discourage their participation. In Montreal, the flight of stairs is a challenge for some members who use canes, whereas Baie Saint-Paul's weaving room is located on the third floor, with an elevator allowing the room to be much more accessible. This elevator was installed during the nuns' time in the motherhouse, a predictable equipment need for another community with an average age of around 70. Its presence contributes to making the Cercle more age-friendly.

Vignette 3. It Takes Two (or More?)

Martine is starting a new project today: a catalogne for the dowry of her grandson (she has no granddaughter). The threads of the warp on the loom, purple, green and blue, await her movements in tension. However, before she starts, she needs to prepare a few more things. First, the fabric. A catalogne is a blanket made of torn textiles, a fabric made of fabrics.

For the past few nights, she has been cutting old sheets she retrieved from her job at Société des établissements de plein air du Québec (SÉPAQ). Her colleagues were going to throw them straight to the garbage, but she saw other possibilities in them. They could be transformed, with a little bit of effort, into the blanket accompanying her grandson to university, to distant Quebec City. So, carefully, she cut, with scissors, the old sheets in strips about an inch wide and rolled them into balls. Then, she took out her own skis, rather large shuttles made especially to accommodate bigger threads such as yarn and fabric. She could only prepare two skis, as she did not own any more of them.

But here, sitting on the padded wooden bench of the loom, she still cannot use them. Martine first needs to weave two inches of tabby, or basic weaving, so as to prevent the fabric from unraveling. Raymonde is helping her. On a double loom of a width of 100 inches, having a partner is a requisite. Raymonde is a friend of Martine and they often help one another with their weaving. Once they are done with the tabby, they can use the ski, throwing it across the threads. The tension of the warp threads seems a bit loose to Raymonde, who suggests giving the beam a quarter of a turn in order to strengthen them up. Then, they press the beater against the fabric, appreciating the combination of the colours. They switch pedals at the same time, synchronizing their gestures without a word. And so is the first official row of the catalogne made. Martine exclaims matter-of-factly, “It's the first 5 inches that take the longest!”

And they go on. They are by themselves in the weaving room, so it is not very noisy. When the other looms are occupied, the ambient sound bears similarities to earlier times of collective labour, either at the Cercle de Fermières, or, some of them say, at a weaving factory. The mechanisms of the aged loom squeak, the pedals pull the shafts and hit one another. After approximately one hour, the weavers measure their work with a handmade measuring ribbon. On Raymonde's side, the blanket is 12 inch long. But on Martine's side, it is 11 1/2 inches. This happens when Fermières pull the beater with different strengths. It plays on the tightness of the fabric, but also its length. When two people work on the same loom, a slight mismatch might occur. Martine and Raymonde expected it and are not too worried. They simply switch sides on the bench to balance everything out.

Considered in the analysis of this vignette: the betrayal of technological life, hylomorphism, craftspeoples' relationship with materials, half-blankets, synchronization between weavers and loom, mistakes, sheep, centennial oak shuttles, homemade measuring ribbons, and a weaving symphony.

Flexibility

Whatever Fermières initially set to make, Latour suggests that contact with technologies will undoubtedly distort it, for,

> if you want to keep your intentions straight, your plans inflexible, your programmes of action rigid, then do not pass through any form of technological life. The detour will translate, will betray, your most imperious desires (2002, p. 252).

Perhaps Martine wanted a blanket for a single bed. Or envisioned a colourful catalogne, fitted to the walls of her grandson's room. But a loom's features somehow become part of the project, embedded in the very characteristics of the final product. This double loom measured 100 inches and was set up to make 90 inch blankets. The length might have been negotiable, but the width was not. [19] The warp thread also had to be purple, green and blue, this was definite because of the initial set-up.

Nonetheless, many Fermières are aware of the limitations of the looms and plan their projects accordingly. I doubt Martine really wanted to make a single bed blanket: if she did, she would have used another loom. In Montreal and in Baie Saint-Paul, Fermières own a wide variety of looms made to accommodate many projects. Specimens of this type of "technological life" are many: Clément looms, Leclerc looms, 4-shaft looms, 8-shaft looms, wider, smaller, table looms, counter-balance (or sinking shed) looms, and Jack looms… Their users have come to know them and their affordances, over years. The Fermières' community owning several looms (between 9 and 14) means that they enjoy options that individual weavers do not.

[19] For Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guatarri, this characteristic of fabrics qualifies them as "striated spaces," sedentary spaces (1987, p. 475)

It is worth wondering in what context can one have such a definite project in mind, bound to be marred by the action of technological devices, as Latour says. His position implies a type of hylomorphism: “whenever we read that in the making of artifacts, practitioners impose forms internal to the mind upon a material world ‘out there,’ hylomorphism is at work” (Ingold, 2013, p. 21). Here, it is technological life that “betrays” the plans of the maker, so clear and definite in her mind.

But it would seem that weavers are quite open to the possibilities offered by the loom and the materials. Their plans change according to which device they are assigned, to which fibres they have access to. In Baie Saint-Paul, Fermières set up a loom for a table cloth with “thread leftovers,” meaning with extra reels not completely used in earlier projects. In Montreal, older weavers are experimenting with 8-shaft looms, trying new patterns that were not possible before. Their impulse is far from being purely intellectual; Fermières seek to make fabrics taking into account the materiality surrounding them. There is a curiosity embedded in their practice, a desire to play with the variables. Graziella Martin, 85, speaks of this aspect of weaving: “For sure, a machine is quicker than me. But when you're not weaving for money, you can have fun. You can play with your threads, try to create color nuances…”.

Then, maybe Latour's position is tainted by his research in laboratories, peopled by scientists whose aims differ from those of a weaver. Jane Bennett, in her study of materiality, reflects on metalwork, suggesting that “the desire of the craftsperson to see what a metal can *do*, rather than the desire of the scientist to know what a metal *is*, enable[s] the former to discern *a* life in the metal and thus, eventually, to collaborate more productively with it” (2010, p. 60). Fermières are most certainly more interested in the potential for fabric-making of threads and looms than in their scientific definition.

Fermières and the double loom

Having a partner on a double loom is a prerequisite. But making blankets was not always a cooperative endeavour in this fashion. Rolande Dufour, 88, remembers using

smaller looms to make “half-blankets,” that were then seamed together at the end, for a lack of larger loom (2017). Nowadays, Candide Dufour, 81, would rather make “one-piece” blankets on a double loom, but her personal relationship network makes it harder for her to find a willing co-weaver, especially at an age at which many have stopped weaving. “You have to beg, you have to ask… At least, Fermières are obliging”. She also admits a certain shame to ask other Fermières, a difficulty for her to “receive without giving back,” she says, at least not straight-away.

In the previous vignette, Martine and Raymonde are weaving on a double loom, which is equipped with two sets of pedals. In order to move the shafts, which lift the threads, and produce a pattern, pedals have to be pressed. On a mechanized, Jacquard loom, this process is all automated with a series of punched cards controlling the movements of the shafts. However, this specific double loom is human powered: Fermières have to press the pedals with their feet – and at the same time – otherwise the shuttle won't be able to make its way across the length of the loom. The weavers' synchronization is mostly non-verbal: the rhythm of the activity governs the switching of the pedals. Only sometimes do they confirm what their feet already sense: “we're at 1-3, aren't we?”

Looms demand cooperation and harmony from the Fermières, for if only one of them makes a mistake, the entire fabric will bear witness of her error. In this sense, the Fermière is attentive to her movements as much as her co-weaver's. Fortunately, the loom is a benevolent actor: it is forgiving. As long as it is spotted in good time, a mistake can easily be erased, or rather, undone, by unraveling the fabric until the problematic row can be redone properly. If it is only noticed after many rows, weavers have two options: to go back and undo a large section of their work, or to go on and embrace the error. In any case, a mistake in pedal order can always be undone.

The synchronization induced by the loom has consequences for the Fermières' lives, even when they are not weaving. During the weaving period, they have to adjust their schedules to fit with one another, making time and compromises for their joint crafting enterprise. This is one instance of an artifact generating a temporal structure for other

actors (Knorr-Cetina, 1999; Preda, 1999). In order to complete their weaving, Fermières need to work *together* on the loom for a number of hours. Additionally, more weavers are waiting for their turn on the loom, which only allows for the creation of one fabric at a time. The relationship between Fermières (weaving and waiting to weave) and looms is thus dictated by a temporal structure that ensures the stabilization and coherence of social order at the Cercle: two Fermières can weave at a time, and they should do so in a prompt and coordinated manner to let other women weave as well.

Fermières and the beater of the double loom

As much as they want their gestures to be identical, Martine and Raymonde cannot help being humans (and not living Jacquard looms). When they beat the beater, after every shuttle throw, they exercise different pressures on the weft threads of the fabric. Raymonde is stronger than Martine, which means that her side gets a little more compressed every time. Ultimately, Raymonde's side is tighter and shorter than Martine's. In the vignette, they exchange sides on the bench, which compensates for their strength difference.

Their relationship with the beater is tainted by the regular interruptions to check on the length and the sporadic side switching. Inexperienced weavers making their first catalogne, unaware of the perils of the beater, might not only end up with a shorter catalogne, but with slanted stripes. However, these weavers are experienced. They have not only woven on this loom before, but also together. Martine and Raymonde smooth differences in their practices enough to become one macro-actor operating the loom. Hereafter, Martine's enrolment of Raymonde in her weaving project allows them "to act like a single will which is, however, extremely powerful because of the forces on which it relies" (Callon & Latour, 1981, p. 277).

Getting ready to weave

The actors enrolled in the goal of making a catalogne assemble before and after the actual “weaving” part. The loom needs to be set up (see the fifth vignette), phone calls need to be made (see the third vignette), and materials need to be prepared.

Nonetheless, older Fermières remark that the amount of work required today before being able to weave is not comparable in any way to the efforts they had to put in the past.

> We had sheep [for the wool]. It was something… when you stop to think about it for a second. […] Now, [Fermières] arrive, they have their balls of yarn. […] It doesn't require any effort. Before, there was horrendous efforts put in just to set up the loom. Spinning wool, can you imagine it! (Rolande, 2017)

Rolande's comment highlights shifts in the network over time. It is not that the network used to be more extensive – involving sheep, spinning wheel, and more family members – but rather that the actors have changed. Nowadays, Fermières buy their yarn and thread from an intermediary (Rossy for yarn and Madame Régina's daughter for thread in the case of Baie Saint-Paul weavers, and bulk purchases from Maurice Brassard in Plessisville for Montreal weavers). The intermediaries, in turn, are in relationship with other providers, who interact with more actors. So, on the contrary, today's network can cross international borders and include more actors than ever.

What happened is that Rolande has lost personal touch with part of the network. She doesn't have to wake up at 5 AM to feed the herd of sheep, she doesn't have to spin every thread that will eventually become part of the catalogne. Graziella doesn't need to sow flax and eventually transform it into thread. Living in quasi-autarch in the 1940s, on the margins of capitalist financial exchange networks meant relying on actors accessible to the vicinity of one's village, no longer necessary. This loss of contact with the network does not interfere with Fermières' activities, as people “can’t articulate most of the webby practices, or the power that they are doing. They ramify off in every direction and go on forever” (Law and Singleton 2013, p. 494). Networks of power distribution are not

always explicit or visible, or in this case, necessary to be aware of in order for weavers to weave.

Although Fermières are mostly unaware of the complex ramifications of human and non-humans that have to be mobilized on a global scale to provide for their weaving, they are deeply entangled in this assemblage. Ian Hodder defines the human "entanglement" with things as "the dialectic of dependence and dependency between humans and things" (2014, p. 20). If Fermières are dependent on cotton thread (enabling them to weave), they also contribute to maintain large-scale cotton plantations, fertilizer and pesticide industries, as well as corresponding labour relationships, transport routes, etc., which are all somehow necessary to obtain said cotton thread. For the supply of thread to be stable, "humans rely on things that have to be maintained so that they can be relied on, [they] are caught in the lives and temporalities of things, their uncertain vicissitudes and their insatiable needs" (Hodder, 2014). This is dependency, and not so much relationality, as Latour has implied. On a larger scale, the phenomenon of humans getting increasingly involved in the care of human-made things is a long-term trend that is particularly hard to reverse because it is very much an entanglement: "unraveling one part of an entanglement often involves disentangling too many other parts" (Hodder, 2014, p. 32). Rolande's experience illustrates an expanding entanglement, and personally, she does not wish to return to an earlier epoch, where she was personally in touch with the entire imbroglio.

The Fermière and the shuttle

Earlier in the story, Martine prepares two "skis," or large shuttles, with fabric she has previously cut in tight strips. To make her catalogne, she will most probably need a dozen of them. However, she personally owns only two skis, which limits the lead she can take before starting. Here, it is not the characteristics of the actors that can dramatically speed up the process, but rather their number. Interestingly, Fermières in Montreal have bought several skis for the double loom weavers to use, instead of every Fermière having to buy her own set like in Baie Saint-Paul. They can be borrowed from

the Cercle and diligently returned once the project is finished. These artifacts, the shuttles or skis, represent an instance of differences in the management of weaving at the Cercles. In Montreal, weaving is made more democratic and accessible to beginner weavers who do not have to purchase shuttles or skis before trying out weaving.

Madame Régina prefers to have her own shuttles anyways. She inherited them from her mother, which means that they must be well over 100 years old. They are made of oak, her mother made them herself. Madame Régina takes excellent care of them, “look at them, they are not damaged in any way,” she says proudly. A rough shuttle is highly unpractical for weaving: coarse sides will often chafe against the warp threads and weaken them, until one of them breaks (a Fermière's most recurring nightmare). In Montreal, a rough shuttle was sanded until it became smooth again, restoring its shuttle capacities. In other words, Fermières care for their shuttles and take action (preventive and restorative) in order to maintain a functional relationship with them. They depend on them. As others, Fermières have had “to get involved in the lives of things, to look after them, repair them, replace them, manage them” (Hodder, 2014, p. 32).

Madame Régina's shuttles' lightness and thinness contrast with the commercially-made ones used by most Fermières at the Cercles, which is why Madame Régina keeps them in her car, always on-hand. If one day, she happens to forget them, she could always use someone else's shuttle, but her experience is likely to differ. She will most probably swear, saying “I hate them as much as the plague!” as she cannot reach her usual speed. In the case of regular shuttles, quality is better than quantity (as opposed to skis). That is because the shuttle itself does not act as a spool, but as a spool-holder. A spool takes about two minutes to make, so not very long, and many of them are available at the Cercle. Once a spool is empty, you can simply insert a new one in the shuttle, and continue weaving. Unlike skis, which you need to wind with fabric or wool, shuttles are always ready to be used.

The Fermière and the measuring ribbon

In Montreal's Cercle, every loom's bench is equipped with a measuring ribbon. Numbers have been written in Sharpie on a commercially-made fabric, in inches. A dish cloth should measure around 40 inches, a lavette, about 13 inches, etc. What do these ribbons tell us about weaving at the Cercle?

First, that precision is not the goal. Fermières do not subscribe to scientific principles privileging exact measurement above everything else. Measuring ribbons are not considered the "irreplaceable witnesses and arbiters [of] scientific disputes" (Knorr-Cetina, 1999, p. 53). Here, they are used to *estimate* length. Sometimes, it is a length in and of itself: a dish cloth is a dish cloth, one can have personal reasons (or weaving fatigue) for making it longer or shorter. Other times, it is used to compare lengths. If a table measures 60 inches, then a table cloth should at least be 85 inches. If the first table mat of series is 20 inch long, then it is advisable to make them all the same.

Second, that the imperial system is only one way to measure fabrics. When actually making a pattern, a weaver needs to accurately count rows. This is key for the adequate repetition of the pedal order. Sometimes, Fermières will keep track of their work on a sheet, moving an object (a magnet, a hair pin, etc.), as they advance in the pattern. Forgetting a row count or getting lost in the numbers will inevitably lead to a mistake. One way to identify where we are in the pattern in terms of rows is to associate pedal positions to row count.

Weavers can also assess their needs with their bodies, simulating the fabric with something else and then only measuring it. This is like Raymonde, who wanted to weave a blanket covering her arms' length, to "go to the wharf". The wharf is located in front of the Saint Lawrence river, in a naturally windy part of the bay. Her future blanket needed to keep her warm and ensure proper coverage of her entire upper body during her evening strolls. It was not a matter of inches, it was a matter of body size.

The Fermière and the many different types of noise

My father once told me that he associated the sound of sewing machines with falling asleep: his mother worked long evenings as a seamstress during his childhood and the machine buzz was the last sound he was conscious of. I am sure the loom's rhythmical beating equally characterized many childhoods, lulling families to sleep, punctuating days.

The loom's parts make different noises as one weaves. There's the beater making a muffled sound against the weft threads. The pedals squeak slightly when you press them. The shafts, being pulled up and down (especially on Jack looms), produce deeper wooden overtones. A quick, unraveling sound is created by the spool in the shuttle as it travels across the warp threads, accompanied by the more infrequent sound of the beam turning. And, of course, there is the sporadical conversation likely to take place between weavers on a double loom. All of these come together in a weaving symphony, conducted by the pattern Fermières are making. Except the symphony might suddenly be interrupted by a problem, for example, the sudden “clack” of a thread snapping. Then, the loom stops making noise for a little while, until activities can resume. Noise is tied to normality; when everything is working properly, the room is filled with the steady throb of loom beaters.

James Gibson developed an ecological approach to perception (2011), in which he identified visual signals that informed us on the possibilities of interaction with specific objects. For instance, a bench in front of a loom might suggest that weaving is an activity more easily executed sitting. Objects can encourage actions by their sheer design. Bruno Latour follows Gibson in this: objects influence actions, but do not determine them. There exists “many metaphysical shades between full causality and sheer inexistence” (2005, p. 72). Things, he says, can “authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render possible, forbid, and so on” (Latour, 2005, p. 72). While Gibson focused on visual cues, William Gaver (1991) pointed out that sounds could be equally precious markers of technological affordances.

For instance, Fermières have come to relate certain sounds to specific actions. Interestingly, the sounds produced by a loom are not imputable to a clever designer, but rather to the materials themselves. If a spool stops making noise, then the thread might be tangled. The beating sound was even used to dictate the rhythm of work in certain factories, eventually becoming the baseline of “weaving songs” in Quebec, England and in India.[20] What some might describe as “noise” is a steady point of reference in the weaving process, one that reminds us that weaving is far from being an oculocentrist art. Hearing and touching are crucial to any weaving practice.

[20] For more about the form and function of songs sung during textile labour, see Emma Robertson and al. (2008), Antony Tuck (2006) and Marius Barbeau's ethnographic songs collection (1946).

Vignette 4. A Public Demonstration

On a sunny Saturday morning of September, Cécile is on a street corner, almost ready for the exhibition organized by the leisure department of the city. An hour earlier, a fellow Fermière dropped her off with everything she needed to present the Fermières community to bystanders on a weekend stroll: two large bags of fabrics and a portable loom, called *Dorothée*, a nickname given to her by the manufacturer. A few other cultural organizations also have stands, scattered across the sidewalk in front of the church. In the meantime, Cécile chats with the organizer, whom she knows from a previous fair.

On a table, Cécile carefully lays out the past months' production: knitted socks (winter is coming), dish clothes, woven scarves, a quilt, phentex slippers, placemats… The most precious piece is a large *catalogne*, spread on a special metal structure. A tiny, handwritten price tag puts a number on its value: $300.

Soon after, people flock to her display table. An older woman expresses interest in joining the Cercle and Cécile hastens to invite her for a visit. A couple with their young daughter approaches and Cécile asks her if she would like to try to weave on the loom. Indeed, this type of loom is suitable for a child. The girl enthusiastically accepts. Cécile then proceeds to explain how the loom works. The principle is the same, no matter the size of the loom, but she needs to adapt her explanation for a 5-year-old.

This loom's shafts are activated by handles, so the weaver has to alternate between the handles, the shuttle and the beater. Cécile, demonstrating the process, cannot replicate her usual rhythm on the loom. She is slower. She comments: “With bigger looms, you don't have to think about so many things! You move your feet on the pedals and you only care about the shuttle.” The little girl tries to weave, under the watchful eye of Cécile and her parents. She understood how and she is very pleased with herself.

Considered in the analysis of this vignette: active ageing, a $25,000 grant, changing meanings of the home, faire du social*, the authenticity of hand-made items, Dorothée the table loom and miniaturization.*

Leisure, Fermières and the city

Fermières take part in various activities outside of their Cercle: fairs, outings, exhibitions… For this specific fair, entitled “Lumière sur le loisir culturel de Villeray,” they were invited to attend by the borough. Different actors might assemble for distinctive reasons, benefiting from their union but fulfilling different goals. For the Fermières in

Montreal, this fair was seen as an occasion for recruitment and exhibition of their best works (they did not initially intend to sell anything, despite the price on the catalogne). As for the borough, we can only speculate. Inviting Fermières might have meant supporting leisure (as in “loisir culturel”) among all ages, including older adults. Other organizations targeted younger audiences with puppets and breakdance demonstrations, for instance.

Public policy often insists on the importance of encouraging older adults to remain active in their later years in one way or another, a manifestation of the paradigm of “active ageing” (World Health Organization, 2002) (sometimes referred to “productive ageing” “ageing well” or “successful ageing,” with some semantic nuances). It encourages older adults to use their later years, during retirement, to keep contributing to society and remain busy, by volunteering, exercising or learning. This incentive to remain (or become) active has trickled down to “all dependent non labouring populations — unemployed, disabled, and retired — [who] become targets of state policies to “empower” and “activate” them” (Katz, 2000, p. 147). Politicians confronted with an increasing number of seniors are quick to call active ageing a “win-win” scenario (van Dyk et al., 2013): older adults' time can be filled with activities benefiting society (financial worth of their volunteering time and decrease in medical care needs) and they can improve their social status doing so.

Despite this seemingly beneficial solution, critics have identified serious pitfalls that exclude several elders from “succeeding” at ageing. Namely, this paradigm offers a single standard of ageing, suggesting that activity levels is a benchmark that can objectively measure if someone is doing it “right” or “wrong” — or that such a right or wrong way even exists. The responsibility to remain a functioning and contributing member of society falls on the individual. The problem with this view is that all people are not born the same, and that life circumstances only multiply the possible trajectories leading to old age. Likewise, it suggests that older adults *ought* to remain active for the sake of busyness. Stephen Katz suggests that gerontology's widespread call for seniors to remain active – to become “busy bodies” – can refer to three different forms of

activity: “activity as physical movement, activity as the pursuit of everyday interests, and activity as social participation” (2000, p. 136). Being an active member of Cercle de Fermières means engaging with all three forms.

A government agent could see in Cercle de Fermières an ideal opportunity for older women to remain socially involved in their community. Weaving keeps a woman busy! In fact, via its New Horizons for Seniors Program (NHSP), the federal government has directly encouraged the Cercle's activities in Montreal by providing a punctual funding of $25,000 (the maximum allowed per organization) for the past two years. To be clear, NHSP is not a program aimed at funding Fermières' or craft activities, but senior-led initiatives benefiting communities. With hints of active ageing, the website does suggest that “as baby boomers age, communities have an opportunity to benefit from a highly-skilled cohort of seniors looking for new and meaningful ways to contribute to their communities” (Government of Canada, 2016). Again, the emphasis is put on seniors' skills and a desire on their part “to give back” to their communities.

However, Fermières have enrolled NHSP in the network order to achieve a different goal: being able to weave, at an accessible cost. While the government insists on the instrumentalization of their organization to fulfill an agenda of “active ageing” for its members, turning our gaze to the “tactics” (de Certeau, 2013) seniors' organizations employ can reveal how they push-back and negotiate governmental incentives on their own terms (Sawchuk 2013). As older women self-managing their organization, they have the power to exert their agency and attain goals that matter to them.

Weaving is not an activity exclusive to seniors. Several Fermières I spoke to have been involved in the organization for decades, in a way or another. What seems to prompt women to join and stay at the Cercle is a desire to meet and socialize with other craft-minded women, often their friends. Interestingly, this “social” network would not exist without the direct contribution of socio-material weaving practices. They create what the Cercle is and become the scaffolding for further socializing, which attracts new Fermières.

Others want to leave their domestic space, motivated by very different reasons than in their past. Rolande and Candide (sisters) remember how farm and family life kept them at home and complicated any outing. Their isolation was also physical: home-bound, they lived in the countryside, a few kilometres away from the village of Baie Saint-Paul. Joining the Cercle, meeting other women, and going out of the house for meetings represented one of the few possibilities to take a break from all of their responsibilities, to *faire du social*. “With 11 people at home, being farmers, we didn't have much time to go anywhere,” says Candide.

This discourse contrasts with the one some Fermières hold today. For Claire-Ange, weaving at the Cercle constitutes a rare occasion to go out of the house and see people. She knits a lot, at home, but not owning a loom means she has to go to the Cercle if she wants to weave. It is not that she is necessarily busy at home like the Dufour sisters were. Rather, seeing people in the Cercle's settings is the main activity in her day, not a break of the rest. Weaving becomes an excuse to go out of the home. The same goes for Rolande, nowadays: “I still like going to the Cercle, it is an outing. I'll see people. Talk. Sometimes, one of them breaks a thread. I fix it.” In this instance, Rolande is going out of the home, but she also hints at other purposes for her outing, namely a need to feel useful and included in the community.

Across the lifespan, getting out of a domestic space is important to women. As younger weavers entangled in the demands of farm life, family and production, Fermières saw going to the Cercle as a well-deserved rest, a moment to spend with friends. As older weavers, Fermières might go to the Cercle to socialize, to meet people during a day which would have otherwise be spent at home, by themselves. Interestingly, none of the interviewees related their involvement in the Cercle to “active ageing”. The concept of ”remaining active” (loosely defined) was not mentioned once by the participants.

For these Fermières, weaving in not a synonym for “remaining busy,” but rather for “meeting people” and “going out of the house.” This finding is consistent with an earlier study (van Dyk et al., 2013), which confronted public discourses around active ageing

with older adults' experiences, stressing that social sciences have a tendency to overlook “the possibility that older people actually appreciate being active (on their own terms), but at the same time reject political claims that they should be active (on terms set externally)” (p. 111). We should not be too quick to relate Fermières' active participation in the Cercle as a direct consequences of “active ageing” discourses. Their perspective needs to be taken into account to nuance the presence and importance of such discourses (van Dyk et al., 2013). In this case study, Fermières did not openly oppose governmental incentives for seniors to remain active. Actually, they did not seem to relate it to their personal weaving practice or to their daily activities as older women. Nonetheless, they clearly expressed enjoyment in leaving the house, socializing, and weaving, which could all fall under the umbrella of “activities” encouraged by the public discourse around “active ageing.”

Vignette 5. Who is Calling?

Blanche is 78 years old and lives by herself in a small apartment in a building designed for autonomous and semi-autonomous elders. She goes to the Cercle on an almost daily basis, even when she is not weaving. As one of the regular members, she is part of the weavers' committee and is responsible for allotting three looms, depending on everyone's availabilities.

After dinner, Blanche dials a number on her house phone. Someone picks up.

B: Hi? Marcelle?
M: Yes, speaking?
B: It's Blanche from les Fermières. Would you be interested in weaving on #8?
M: What's on it?
B: It's a tablecloth, in linen. The sides are lilac and the middle is white. 60 inches, 4 shafts. Yvonne just finished hers, so you're next on the list.
M: I'm interested, but I cannot really go until next Monday… My grandchildren are with me for spring break.
B: Oh, then maybe I'll give it to the next person and call you back in two weeks?
M: Yes, I think that would work.
B: Perfect. Have a great evening then, and take care.
M: Thank you, you too.

Blanche calls other Fermières on her list until one of them agrees to weave on the loom #8. The list's order was determined by drawing lots, to be fair. Depending on the person, she has conversation of variable lengths.

Considered in the analysis of this vignette: phone chains, brief conversations, the gendering of technologies, companionship programs, random lists and their flaws, a happy coordinator, pattern cycles, the risks of using a white tablecloth, demanding fabrics, synthetic stuff, threads breaking, two powerful keys, and recent retirees.

Fermières and phone conversations

To communicate outside of the Cercle space, Fermières will use a phone chain, keeping everyone in the loop. The calls are made by the loom's coordinator and most of the time concern loom availabilities and reminders of monthly meetings. As in the vignette, the conversations can be very short, straight to the point. But their importance cannot be measured solely by word count.

Research indicates that older adults' social networks tend to shrink as they get older, although older age can create occasions for stronger ties in the network (Cornwell et al., 2008). The Cercle counteracts this trend by gathering women of different generations (recently retired women could very well be the daughters of the oldest members of the Cercle) and fostering interactions among them. While the weaving room might be the main location for physical encounters, I suggest that phone calls play a crucial role in the maintenance of relationships.

In this case, the actor-phone's presence is not enough. It needs to be used by one Fermière (at least) to actually foster relationships. A friendly “rrrrrrring!” needs to be heard. A silent phone can possibly be more depressing than no phone at all. When someone makes a phone call, bothering to dial a 9-digit number they might have learned by heart, it is a gesture of care, on a small scale. The content of the conversation, in fact, matters very little.

Judy Wajcman argues that the gendering of technologies are constructs that can shift over time (1991). Since their mass adoption, phones have moved on the gender spectrum of technologies. Early on, they were associated to sphere of male activities (Fischer, 1992). However, phones' gradual move from busy office spaces and important business conversations to private spaces induced a change in the tone of the conversations held on it. Phones have become ever more intimate a medium in an age of cellphone ubiquity, and seniors have adopted this technology, negotiating their own uses (Fernández-Ardèvol, 2011; Loe, 2010; Sawchuk & Crow 2012). The telephone is an example of technology that holds different meanings to different age groups, despite its ability to include and mix generations (Hagberg, 2004). Seniors tend to attach “symbolic meanings associated with mortality, overcoming loneliness, co-ordinating care, and staying in touch with family and friends” to phones (Loe, 2010, p. 326). For Fermières, a landline represents first and foremost a mean of organizing activities at the Cercle, a tool to transmit information over a distance. But it is also used to reinstate what is important for the Fermières' community: communication as an act of sharing (Carey, 2009).

For older women, receiving a phone call every now and then proves an effective safety net and can even be considered a tool for “aging in place” (Loe, 2010). Provinces and cities have implemented companionship programs (see Bell, 2017; Giguère, 2017) similar to Fermières' phone chains. Some of them only require seniors to pick up the phone when an automated system calls, whereas others have volunteers call in every week for a receptive conversation. Fermières do not need this service as they have organically put in place a phone call chain that fulfills their organizational needs, as well as their members' emotional and socializing needs.

The Fermière and a cellphone

Age shapes the way people use technologies: “In a very literal sense, older adults may perceive technology differently than younger adults do” (Charness & Boot, 2009, p. 255). For many seniors, cellphones are often perceived as a substitute for the former home landline (Fernández-Ardèvol, 2011) What is a cellphone to an older Fermière? For three out of the five Fermières I interviewed, apparently not a device they feel the need to own.

A Fermière who did possess one, Rolande (from Baie Saint-Paul) did not want, at first, to admit that she carried it with her while driving, sometimes in little-used country lanes. She took pride in never using it, not even to communicate with fellow Fermières: “it's in case of emergency, only for safety. Never, never, never do I call with it. My children give me [prepaid card with] minutes for Christmas. But I never use it.” Her experience echoes findings of an earlier study by Sawchuk and Crow, which suggests that the decision for seniors to get a cellphone for emergency purposes is often due to pressure from close relatives (2012). Personal support networks also play a direct role not only in the effective adoption of cellphones but also in the type of use (Fernández-Ardèvol, 2011). This all speaks to seniors' agentive negotiation of use, or non-use of technologies (Fernández-Ardèvol, 2011; Fernández-Ardèvol et al., 2017; Loe, 2010), and to their appropriation of cellphones as a type of technology of ageing.

As for Graziella, she owns a cellphone which she seldom uses. Other Fermières tease her because she does not answer it often, to which she replies that she “never seems to hear it ring.” While I have not discussed this precise question with Graziella during the interview, it seems that her neglect of entering phone calls is purely accidental (and not necessarily related to age-related hearing impairment). She tends to use her cellphone in cases where she needs to call someone, and not the opposite.

In the Fall of 2017, Fermières in Montreal decided to acquire a cellphone for the Cercle. This was not necessary in Baie Saint-Paul because crafters have access to a landline in their room. Safety and communication benefits were insisted upon during the monthly meeting, a type of “controversy” (Latour, 2005) useful to reveal actors' motivation. Nowadays, the cellphone is practically a landline: it remains plugged to its charger at all times for practical reasons – this way, it stays charged and people know where to find it. I got used to calling the Cercle number twice whenever I want to make sure someone is at the Cercle. This way, I can be sure that weavers have the time it takes at their pace to reach the cellphone.

The loom coordinator

Certain Fermières are part of a weavers' committee and act as a kind of loom coordinator (“responsable de métier”), such as Blanche in the previous vignette. Duties include: making sure the loom is set up, assigning looms to weavers (or the opposite?), collecting fees for weaving and resolving whatever problem comes up. Looms are associated to their respective coordinators in common conversations. For instance, in their meeting minutes, Fermières from Baie Saint-Paul refer to specific looms by their coordinators: “Jeanne-d'Arc's loom is ready for the set-up of tablecloths” (Cercle de Fermières de Baie Saint-Paul 2008, p. 673) or “Louise's tablecloth loom needs to be repaired” (Cercle de Fermières de Baie Saint-Paul, 2004, p. 650).

The most contentious role of the loom coordinator is certainly to determine who can weave on which loom, and most importantly, in which order. The system put in place, if

not the most convenient, is at least fair. The loom responsible simply draw names at random and lists them. From then on, every Fermière has the right to weave for two weeks, barring any unforeseen circumstances. This creates a short-lived community between weavers, where women are together at the Cercle for a few days in a row. Limits can also depend on the type of fabric made. You must not make more than one catalogne or three dishcloths at the time (and one goes to the Cercle, in Montreal). In short, several rules - written and unwritten - regulate weaving at the Cercle and loom coordinators are the ones enforcing them.

Not everyone is happy with this system. Some have complained that “regular” Fermières always weave before everyone else or that the system is too rigid for women who might be busy when their turn comes, and who then go back at the end of the list. It is also problematic for new Fermières (like myself) who are eager to learn how to weave but have to wait several weeks or months before their name (automatically put at the end of the list when they join) comes up. Older weavers, slow or very deliberate in the weaving, are known to be encumbrances to the loom coordinator’s ideal fast pace. While I have heard some complain, others such as Germaine have expressed understanding: “With the state of [Joséphine's] back, it's impressive that she's weaving at all.”

Indirectly, the role of the loom coordinator is to ensure that her looms remain active. A happy coordinator is a coordinator whose weavers weave a lot, and within the allotted time. Any calm period is frowned upon and considered a waste of time because another Fermière could be using the loom to advance her own projects. In this sense, loom occupation has priority over the Fermières' schedule whims. Only in this way can the loom coordinator, ultimately, satisfy more weavers.

Fermières have a space issue, in both Cercles. As much as they would like to own more looms (9 in Baie Saint-Paul and 14 in Montreal), the rooms they are in can only accommodate so many of them. Especially in Montreal, space is so scarce that Fermières have to literally weave in and out of the looms every time they need

something. On the other hand, Cercles are always looking to recruit new members and entice them with the possibility of weaving. The national organization encourages Cercles to grow their membership base and financially rewards chapters who do so. As an unintended consequence of this measure, individual weavers have fewer opportunities to weave. For example, out of 58 members in Montreal, 40 of them weave. Fermières have to wait over a year to weave on specific looms if their name happens to be drawn last, that is if the pattern has not changed altogether by then.

Looking at the big picture, we can understand the relationships at play between the different actors, ever-unfolding. The network is far from stable, and the minute an actor shifts, the web has to accommodate itself to remain steady (Law and Singleton 2013). Fermières want to weave. Loom coordinators want to make sure the most Fermières can weave. They measure their efficiency by loom occupation: the quicker a Fermière is done, the faster the next one can start. This leads them to be at times rigid with the list system. The national organization wants more Fermières in order to keep a steady number of members. Cercles recruit more Fermières, who want to weave. Since limited physical space offers no possibility to add looms to the network as a way to compensate the increased number of weavers, the frequency of weaving possibilities drops. Some discontent ensues.

Different types of thread

When describing to Marcelle which loom is available, Blanche talks about its characteristics (4 shafts, 60 inches), but also about the type of thread part of the set-up. Older Fermières are usually familiar with the looms available at the Cercle, but their set-up is ever-changing. A loom might go through two or three different designs during any given year, for a total yardage well over 100.

Thread color and material are two characteristics defining the type of thread used. Beyond personal preferences, the color of the thread can be decided depending on the type of object made. A white tablecloth might be a risky – if elegant – piece to use,

especially around grandchildren. In the vignette, the loom is set up in white, which means that the *warp* threads are white. Fermières are free to use whatever (available) color they want for the *weft* threads, which will ultimately decide on the pattern and general look of their piece. In other words, warp threads are the canvas, an already-decided part of their future project, while the color of the weft threads can be adapted to fit Fermières' inclination.

Now, the material of the threads does not offer so much flexibility. If the loom is set up in linen, weft threads imperatively have to be in linen too. Failure to use the same type of material might result in a beautiful, original piece, until said piece is washed and its fibres shrink at different rates. Then, a misshapen fabric is all that will be left to behold.

Again, Fermières must take into consideration the contingencies its future use and the preferences of its owner to choose a material for, say, the making of a tablecloth. Linen wrinkles. There is nothing to be done about this, except maybe iron any linen to make it look better. For some Fermières, this will be a loom deal-breaker: they will refuse to produce a piece so *demanding*, for which extra care will be needed. They will prefer the simpler entanglement of cotton. Cotton does not wrinkle as much, and thus they choose to wait until their turn comes for a loom set to make cotton tablecloths. Others will accept this high-maintenance contractual relationship between the tablecloth and themselves, for the sake of beauty or perceived value.

Some Fermières are critical of synthetical fibres (i.e. orlec, orlon, tricolet or cotolin). Using such material deviates from conceptions of weaving as an authentic, natural practice embedded in the past. What Graziella likes is “to transmit beauty, what is beautiful is what is natural. Synthetic fibres have some good sides to them, but they should not replace cotton and linen.” As a child, Graziella's family planted flax and used it to weave.[21]

[21] Flax culture seems to have been a marginal practice even at the time: linen was never used for more than a fifth of domestic production in Quebec’s 1940s (Lamontagne & Harvey, 1997).

For other weavers, thread choice is a matter of practicality and quality. “A blanket made of synthetic fibres simply doesn't let you breath,” suggests Claire-Ange and “synthetic fibres become real ugly after you wash them,” according to Rolande. “We're not from a generation who likes synthetic stuff,” she adds.

However, it would seem that it is not only a question of generation, but also of price and availabilities of the material. Costs are simply not comparable. A ball of 100 g of synthetic yarn fibre costs around $2-3 at Rossy (one of the very few places where one can buy yarn in Baie Saint-Paul), while the same weight in natural fibre will revolve around $30. Considering that several skeins are necessary to make a large blanket, weaving is no longer an affordable, cost-saving activity and becomes its very opposite.

The price tag attached to every inch of weaving is subject to conflict in Baie Saint-Paul. A great many factors are considered when calculating how much Fermières should pay: price of the spool (depending on the fibre), length and width of the piece, if the weaver brought their own thread or not. Loom coordinators are responsible to determine a fair price, but there remains a part of subjectivity in this complex calculus. Madame Régina suggests that high prices impede older women living on meagre pensions to weave as much as they would like at the Cercle: “For a while, we had more seniors, but now that the prices have gone up, they are not interested.” She has fought, successfully, with an earlier president to bring the prices down and ensure financial accessibility to most.

A last note about thread. It can break. This unfortunate event happens quite frequently, and more so with certain types of fibres, such as linen, or thinner thread (Fermières tend to use 1/8 of an inch, but they sometimes use 1/16). Then, the weaver needs to go through a series of operations to replace it at an exact position. For Candide, it is a source of stress. “I become nervous when I am by myself and a thread breaks and I need to fix it… I don’t feel confortable”. For others, the entire process is so tedious and tiresome that they would rather weave with more resistant, bigger, synthetic fibres.

In short, thread is an important actor in the weaving network. Its material characteristics relate to flexibility in pattern choices, varying degrees of future care, quality of finished piece, links with the past, changing prices, and difficulty levels in the weaving process.

The Fermière and her production

For Fermières who regularly weave, the question of production surplus — or even of purpose — must be asked. What does a woman do with all of these fabrics that she accumulates? One of the most common answers is to dispose of them in the form of gifts to family members. Graziella says that "all of [her] gifts, be it for Easter, Christmas or birthday parties, are always woven fabrics. And that if [her] children come home to visit, they can take absolutely anything in [her] weaving drawer."

Some Fermières have also developed an organic network to sell some of their production (Lamontagne & Harvey, 1997), such as Graziella and Madame Régina. While Graziella takes small orders, it seems that Madame Régina is involved in a greater enterprise, which she operates mostly from home. A few years ago, she took a 5-month contract for the local Centre d'art for 2000 *boutonné* placemats, to which she agreed only to "lend them a hand." Her net profit was 25 cents by placemat. Nowadays, she makes dishcloths "for whoever asks [her] for them," which I suspect is quite a number of people. Her business is known to other Fermières as Rolande who comments that "her, her [personal] loom is always set up."

As a child, Régina was hired with her mother and siblings to make *catalognes*. They would make four[22] of them on a daily basis, for a dollar each. While this fact cannot be verified, similar experiences of weavers in Baie Saint-Paul have been detailed and suggest that interest for handicraft in Charlevoix region might have been spurred by the tourism industry more than by the Cercle de Fermières. For instance, Alcide Bergeron, a local entrepreneur, ordered 5000 to 6000 blankets every year, putting women to work in

[22] This number is very impressive.

what was called “a genuine exploitation of feminine labour” (Lamontagne & Harvey, 1997, p. 65).

Not everyone agrees with this commercial side of weaving. Indeed, some Fermières consider that anything woven at the Cercle must be for personal use and not for sale, or worse, for *profit*.

> **Rolande**: Back then, it was forbidden to sell anything you made at the Cercle. Nowadays, it's almost a business! People weave multiple tablecloths, one asked to weave four baby blankets. She has two pairs of twins, I suppose? Me, I would never make anything in order to sell it.
> **Candide**: It needs to remain familial. It is for us, and to give to our families.
> **Rolande**: Yes, otherwise, you infringe on someone else's right to work on the loom.

This opinion can be linked to the large number of women wishing to weave for their domestic needs and the limited availability of looms (Little, 1978) and to roots of the organization in not-for-profit and cooperation models.

The retired Fermière

As mentioned earlier, almost all Fermières are retired, with the youngest ones being the most recently retired ones. The nature of weaving at the Cercle makes it very hard for employed women to fully take part in the organization. In Montreal, the Cercle is generally open on weekdays, from 9 to 4. Outside of these hours, weavers need a key to enter in the church basement where the weaving room is, and only two keys are made available (that is, when they are returned), making it very hard to weave outside business hours. In Baie Saint-Paul, the situation is more accommodating. The weaving room is in a now-public building, open every day until 5 PM. Fermières can stay later and a key to their room is hidden so that it remains accessible at all time.

I also touched on the realities of loom occupation: Fermières are expected to start weaving right away, with little or no prior notice, and finish as quickly as possible. It makes it hardly compatible with a 9 to 5 schedule. Finally, weaving takes time. It

requires a least 6 to 8 hours to finish a piece properly, more in the case of larger pieces such as blankets and catalognes. Working women simply do not have the time it takes, unless they take time off. Of course, it is not necessary to be retired to have time to weave at the Cercle: during fieldwork, I met two women on maternity leave and a self-employed psychologist who were able to come on a regular basis. However, retiree is by far the most common employment status of the regular members of the Cercle.

Historically, Cercle de Fermières is not an organization aimed at seniors or retired women. But with the massive entry of women in the workforce, Fermières' average age kept increasing until it reached a threshold around 65 (Radio-Canada, 2015), which is a balance between the flow of women retired around 60 years old and joining the Cercle, and older members. In Baie Saint-Paul, the average is 58 years old, below their federation's average of 63,7 (Cercle de Fermières de Baie Saint-Paul, 2009, p. 682). My observations suggest that more younger women have access to the Cercle outside of the usual 9 to 5 work schedule, which allows them to participate on their own terms to the activities, and lowers the average age. There are also more members in Baie Saint-Paul than in Montreal, which Lisa, the ex-president of the Baie Saint-Paul Cercle, explains by the smaller number of activities available to recent retirees in the village.

Retirement represents a time of renewed possibilities: “late freedom” and the chance of self-determination are valued (van Dyk et al., 2013, p. 104). Graziella, for one, did not have the time to weave while she raised her three children and worked full-time as a teacher. She stopped weaving entirely for decades, until she was able to start again on a loom she bought just before retiring. Candide only took up weaving 30 years after she married. “Before, I didn't weave. I knitted, at home, I knew how to. I used to knit socks for the kids… Counting all of them, I had 7!”. Retirement brought other types of activities and responsibilities, among which punctual health-related appointments or the occasional grand-childcare. But these are of another kind, more flexible and less time-consuming. In addition, the Cercle encourages mothers and grandmothers to bring children. In Montreal, they have a special crib that is always available, and I have seen no less than three different children at the Baie Saint-Paul Cercle.

Part 3: Ageing at the Cercle

Perhaps some of my curiosity about Cercle de Fermières has to do with its longevity. Few organizations in Quebec can boast so many anniversaries and I had a sense that there was something to be written about ageing in a community that defines itself by its interactions with looms and objects over such a long period. Yet, as I discovered in my interactions and my observations over time, this curiosity transformed into a desire to understand the multifarious ways that ageing, as a process, was continually taking place at the Cercle. It is not ageing as a process of decline and decay that I witnessed, and was prodded into thinking about. I began to understand ageing as an active part of the present activities. Although it seemed to me that the passage of time was imperceptible, being with the Fermières opened my eyes to the discrete ways in which ageing becomes part of people and artifacts and can hardly be set apart from who or what they are. It also lead me to query the absence of any consideration of age or ageing within the theory, Actor-Network Theory, that seemed to open up a new pathway to talk about what the various and potent materialities at play within Cercle de Fermières.

One of my goals with this thesis was to capture the multiple and varied effects of ageing at play in Cercle de Fermières by using Actor-Network Theory. While the theory has proved fruitful to account for the materiality of weaving practices and the non-human agency of different tools and materials in the formation of Cercle de Fermières, it missed the theoretical insight needed to do justice to the complexities of ageing processes that I witnessed in my encounters with various actors within the network. While I noticed an absence of age in Bruno Latour's discussion of ANT, if I had strictly followed his precepts, I would have had to exclude questions of age and ageing that are so inherently part of life at Cercle de Fermières. This would have entailed ignoring the embodied knowledges of the weaving movements that the Fermières acquired over time spent at the loom. It would have excluded and disregarded the ways in which artifacts are assembled according circumstances arising because of the ageing of these artifacts.

Generally speaking, ANT could use some of the nuances of temporality distinguished by age and ageing studies in its conception of the networks deployed in the present. It needs to include what Segal calls the “paradoxes of continuities and discontinuities over time” (2014, p. 216), which would trouble its rather essentialist conception of actors. Although ANT could consider “age” as an attribute, applying to both human and non-human actors, I argue that this would limit ageing *processes* to a *characteristic* applied to actors, disregarding the life circumstances standing behind a number.

Ageing Fermières

Fermières are the sum of their ageing, the result of a life spent in a specific time and place, be it in the vicinity of Villeray neighbourhood or along the shore of the Saint-Lawrence river. It is impossible to dissociate them from their life and experience if we want to account for their present relationships. When I state that all the weavers I interviewed were over 80 years old, I do not stress their sameness, but rather the richness of different paths they have followed over time.

Weavers I interviewed recall periods of their life in relationship to their changing loom use. Graziella's life has been punctuated with interactions with looms. As detailed in vignette #5, she learned how to weave as a child, and then stopped for many years to pursue her career in teaching and to raise her children. After this, weaving became a retirement project, an activity she was able to take up again given her different schedule. Her production also evolved with time, from necessary items towards more fanciful fabrics that she often gives as gifts. She might not have always woven on the same loom, but she recalls different periods of her life in relation to her loom use. This type of relational ageing opens possibilities for thinking about the changing meanings of everyday objects and reconsider their role as companions along the human life course.

Arguably, the biological ageing of a Fermière’s body may bring other challenges to this practice. Being an older weaver, in an older body, implies a relationship to the socio-technical network of weaving that differs from the one of younger weavers. This

biological ageing is mostly noticed by the Fermières when they perform the actions involved in weaving: pressing the loom pedals for an extended period of time, having to fit a thread into the eye of a needle, needing physical force to do something, etc.

However, I noticed that Fermières will seldom complain about difficulties related to their ageing, focusing instead on asking others to help them. Claire-Ange speaks to this: “Not everyone can lay under the loom to change the ties! I wouldn't do it anymore, for sure. In my youth, yes. But now, I let the young do it.” As the average age of the weavers is quite high, being aged is not perceived as an anomaly, as a barrier. Older Fermières enrol other actors in order to fulfill their goals. Younger Fermières, canes, glasses, and cushions all participate to balance the weaving network, compensating for the issues raised by an ageing body. Fermières make use of a variety of cultural technologies to assist them, and to prolong their active participation in the network.

Furthermore, old is not a synonym of experienced, although in many occasions the two can be conflated. Graziella is 84 years old and has 72 years of experience weaving. But this is far from the case for all Fermières. Several members joined the Cercle after their retirement and decided to take up weaving, something they might never have done before. Despite their age, which we could interpret as experience and skills from afar, they were beginners to the craft, just like me. The solution to becoming a better weaver is not more years in the sense of *age*, but rather years in the sense of *time*, of *experience*, of ageing *with a practice*. We should not confuse these two variables when considering Fermières and their skills.

Ageing still mattered in their weaving practice for reasons we have seen earlier (see vignettes #4 and 5). They had plenty of time as retirees, a resource that is not always accessible to other beginners who might work full time. Like Claire-Ange and Rolande, they might have considered going to the Cercle a social activity *per se*, an excuse to get out of the house, remain involved in their community and meet people.

Ageing non-human actors

The relationship of objects to time is not as straightforward as we would assume. Their ageing process, too, has consequences affecting associations in the network. Objects surrounding us age at different paces, not quite mirroring those of human nor biological life. By expanding our focus beyond this association of ageing with desuetude or incapacity, new ways of ageing emerge, rooted in relation to other actors. Reflecting upon older looms and threads, we can address some of the nuanced effects of ageing on the material world and within a material world.

Ageing thread

Nowadays, Fermières usually buy commercially-produced thread. Because it is cheaper to buy in bulk, and their preferred store is at a distance, they might store dozens of spools at the Cercle until that one specific colour is needed for a project. Some colours are less popular than others and remain in dark cupboards for months, or even years. Thread, like fabric, is adversely affected by light and humidity, which can cause the fibres to weaken and the colours to fade. As the actor gets older, it tends to break more easily and become less attractive. Most Fermières actively avoid such thread, as seen in vignette #5, testing its resistance before using it.

But for Rolande, old thread can still be useful, and should be used. “I have a bag full of yarn… I’ll make a wool blanket to use it. No way I’m throwing it”. Her daughters make fun of her insistance on recycling, but she is adamant. She refuses to throw away thread, when it can still be useful.

The very same thread transformed into fabric ages as a whole, which confers it its charm, according to George Simmel:

> however heterogeneous [its] colors may have been when new, the long common destinies, dryness and moisture, heat and cold, outer wear and inner disintegration, which [it has] encountered through the centuries produce a unity of tint, a reduction to the same common denominator of color which no new fabric can imitate. (1958, p. 383)

Aged fabrics can *gain* in either aesthetic, financial, or emotional value (Stallybrass, 1993). At the two extremes, one can think of a Renaissance tapestry worth millions of dollars or of a cherished piece of clothing. Both of their value increased over time, despite ageing processes that might have affected their appearance or their solidity.

Ageing looms

At the Cercle, old and new looms cohabit. In Montreal, Leclerc, Clément, and Inka brands mingle together, although some Fermières have their personal preferences. My interviewees remember using "old" looms in their youth. Rolande talks of "a big loom made of rough wood, not even varnished, whose heddle divisions were made of thread, not of metal," and Madame Régina has "an old loom made with an axe." They agree that modern looms are easier to work with. Sharon Little, in her study of weavers on l'Île d'Orléans, reaches a similar conclusion. She suggests that:

> less time [is] wasted when one utiliz[es] the modern loom, as one [is] not obliged to return to the back of the loom to release the brake for the advancement of the warp threads, as was the case with the old loom. (1978, p. 33)

The characteristics of the "old" loom all relate to its design: the heddle was different, it was made with an axe, the break was located in a different part. However, there could be a different interpretation of the adjective "old" which was not acknowledged in the interviews. "Old" can be related to the lapse of time one has "known" the loom for, in a relative way. For instance, Candide has been a member of the Cercle for many decades now. She is familiar with the looms at the Cercle, having used them several times each to make her own fabrics. In 2017, the Cercle in Baie Saint-Paul bought a loom with the financial support of Desjardins[23] (see vignette #1). While it is quite similar to other looms (loom design has changed very little in the past 50 years), Candide calls it the "new loom." "Old" or "new" is then linked to the length of her personal interaction with this one machine.

[23] Desjardins is a bank cooperative based in Quebec.

Old is a very subjective characteristic for looms, as illustrated by Claire-Ange's description: “This is a Clément loom. It is rather old… But Clément are long-lasting, sturdy looms.” As long as they properly work, Fermières do not really mind the age of the looms. It is only when they start failing them that years are blamed. Just like in the case of the human body, a time-worn loom can be supplemented with other parts that will allow for its continuous use, despite minor encumbrance.

However, there are times when the inconvenience of dealing with an old loom becomes too important. There are only so many loom parts you can fix. For instance, the Cercle in Montreal sold one of their older looms because the break was too worn and beyond repair. It is worth noting that this only happened because the loom was intensively used by the Fermières over a long period of time. In a sense, Fermières generate “premature” ageing in looms.

I have tried to account for the diverse effects of ageing in Cercle de Fermières. But in the end, I am left contemplating somewhat of a contradiction: to “follow the actors” as they move through the world, as suggested by Actor-Network Theory, sometimes involves considering them in isolation from their own past, even when it can have repercussion on their present. Fermières weaving do not live in their past, they remain active, making, doing. However, their past experiences, their ageing, changes the meaning and the ways in which they weave in the present day. Inspired by the Fermières and their looms, I hope this research demonstrates the many and important ways in which our ageings may modify the alignment of their socio-material network, strengthening certain ties and loosening others in a given assemblage.

Conclusion: A Tightly-Knit Group?

Now that we've learned to know better the Fermières in Montreal and in Baie Saint-Paul and their material entourage, we can suggest another definition of "what the Cercles de Fermières are," taking into account the socio-material relationships created by their weaving practice and the multiple ageing processes intersecting.

Cercles de Fermières are assemblages created in part through weaving. I focused on weaving, but other practices such as knitting, sewing or sale-organizing create other types of overlapping networks within the Cercles. Instead of saying that Cercles are tightly-knit groups, I would rather suggest that they are tightly-*woven* groups, tightened (as opposed to kept together) by the contingencies of the very artifacts they use in their weaving practice. I have learned that while the presence of looms doesn't guarantee friendship or even cooperation between women, weaving becomes strangely much easier and more accessible when done in a community.

Over the course of this thesis and in line with Actor-Network Theory, I have argued that the weaving network favours sociability at the Cercle — and not the opposite. Through an entanglement created by the performativity and materiality of weaving practices, Fermières and other objects come together as a Cercle, which then becomes a social space.

Multiple actors participate to the creation of this sense of community within the organization. Their associations can be for economic, spatial, organizational, material or other reasons. Loom prices make it more economical to share the devices between a pool of weavers. Looms require large spaces in order to be operable, spaces seldom available in domestic dwellings. Phone calls are routinely made to ensure loom occupation. Shuttles have to be cared for in order to remain smooth. Loom set-ups are so complex it becomes logical to increase the length of the threads to maximize the effort, allowing a greater production and more Fermières to weave. Double looms require collaboration between two people, a synchronization of schedules and gestures.

These few examples derived from the vignettes show the variety of links created by weaving.

Understandably, Cercles are wary to be equated to their artisanal practices:

> Although Fermières recognize that artisanal practices have historically played an important role for the existence and the survival of their organization, they refuse to reduce its current dynamism and popularity to this sheer aspect (Chénard, 1981, pp. 1-2)

However, my analysis demonstrates that weaving practices are not an isolated aspect of the organization but rather an essential activity that fuels its existence. Fermières are more than the sum of their diverse artisanal practices, but their success is made possible by associations created during their making of crafts. We ought to conceive of the organization as an entanglement of "linkages that ma[k]e things relate beyond their supposed existence as stable regional entities." (Hodder, 2014, p. 24). Then, we can account for a variety of socio-material networks that both foster and impede the longevity of Cercle de Fermières.

In their activities, weavers makes use of different technologies. We have seen how looms and their different parts, warping machines, tension stabilizers and beam spinning engine all play a part. [24] Weavers need to know their function and the ways to operate them. During the process, they often face unpredictable issues that need technical and hands-on problem-solving. Years of experience make it easier to operate a loom. Madame Régina has so internalized the logics of weaving on a four-shaft loom that she doesn't need patterns anymore. At the Cercle, older women are often the savviest technology users.

Digital technologies are also slowly being integrated into the Cercles. But as Shannon Hebblethwaite suggests, Fermières' "decisions to engage (or not) with digital media are

[24] Fermières are hesitant to classify these artifacts as technologies. They rather consider them tools or machines. Definitions are key to social constructionist understandings of technologies, so I was careful to never define technologies myself during the semi-directed interviews, which could have limited, influenced or modified Fermières' own definition.

carefully considered in light of their long history with 'new' media across the life course" (2017, p. 99). Will looking for weaving patterns on Pinterest really lead to more interesting designs? Graziella is willing to try and see, but has yet to be convinced. Fermières in Montreal have also experimented with Fiberworks, a software made to design patterns from scratch. Claire-Ange participated to the workshop and even tried it at home. The complexity of designing patterns shifted for her: where on paper, she worried about the correctness of her calculations, the software asked her to master a new interface, different than that from the loom in many ways. Sometimes, new technologies seem too demanding in comparison to their analog counterparts. Sometimes, material life is easier to understand than digital life. Sometimes, older weavers are comfortable with the way they have woven in their past and do not wish to change.

A final word on ageing. The effects of time are felt by all actors, human and non-human. What especially caught my attention in this study of the Fermières is how relational — and uneven — it can be. There are multiple temporal trajectories in motion that muddy notions of linear life course in stages, or in clear divisions between old and young, or in our ideas of "the new" as incommensurable with the old. My study draws attention to the effects of age and ageing that Actor-Network Theory is unable to account for. A Fermière can be over 70 and still "new" at weaving, having never set a foot on a loom pedal of her life before. With every year passing, thread can lose in strength but gain in emotional value for the owner of a woven piece. Fermières sometimes prefer to use older looms because of a certain familiarity that developed over time, even if it means a longer wait time for their turn. Ageing is felt not as a number but as a cumulation of experiences that define the quality of the relationships linking actors involved in a weaving practice. It is this that I have learned from reflecting on age and ageing not only with the Fermières, but by paying attention to the integral role played by the artifacts that help to constitute their network and their interactions.

To conclude, Cercle de Fermières, as a weaving assemblage, is made of associations between humans and non-humans — some of them fragile, some more resistant. I do

not think that I chronicled the last years of a once-thriving organization or the decline of a community. Rather, I have tried to highlight the elements that contribute to its continuous existence and the omnipresence of ageing processes in the organization. I believe Cercle de Fermières is poised to change; its network will shift, as do all networks. But one thing that might not change so much is the need for community to exist for weavers to be able to weave. And here, only time will tell.

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Annex 1 - A Timeline

Writing a thesis in an iterative endeavour.
Here are some of the (many) steps that shaped the final version of this work.

September 2016
Beginning of the Master's. I am interested in researching organizations of older adults that might use digital technologies in their activities

January 2017
First visit to Cercle de Fermières in Montreal. Fermières tell me they don't really use technologies. However, I contacted them through Facebook and I see a desktop computer in the corner of the weaving room. First version of the research question : "How do Fermières integrate digital technologies in their weaving practices?"

Spring 2017
I take a directed studies about Memory studies. A lot of what I read about continuity and cultural persistence resonates with what I see at the Cercle.

March 2017
I do a pilot project with Danielle, a weaver, during Methods class. I decide to focus on weaving and the many devices involved in its practice. My definition of technologies is expanded to include non-digital technologies, including looms.

September 2017
I defend my proposal. I say that I want to "gain a nuanced understanding of how technologies, age and memory can combine."

November-December 2017
Fieldwork and interviews in Montreal and Baie Saint-Paul.

Spring 2018
Writing. I become interested in Actor-Network Theory. I write all of the vignettes and the age chapter. I realize that memory studies might not belong directly to this thesis, after all. My final research question is "what is the role of weaving practices within the Cercle and what might we learn about the processes of age and ageing if we examine these weaving practices?"

Summer 2018
Edits. I clarify the distinction between age and ageing, and how they hardly fit into an ANT framework. I also veer away from continuity, a concept I might have inherited from my memory studies period.

August 28, 2018
I successfully defended this thesis.