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Working Patches

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Abstract: This paper addresses accountability in academic and artistic writing. We use the narrative position of the patchwork to tell stories of the travelling exhibition Threads - A Mobile Sewing Circle. This particular narrative position is chosen as it can handle fragments, as well as multiple voices and perspectives, while still being held together. In addition, we argue that Threads is similar to the practice and object of patchwork. It comes into existence through processes of exclusion and inclusion of connections, alliances, and separations – through putting things in relation to one another.

Key Words: Patchwork, accountability, sewing circle, academic writing

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Introduction

Through offering alternative modes of writing, scholars from various disciplines have addressed the issue of how, when and why we tell academic stories. (Bonnevier, 2007; Bränström Öhman & Livholts, 2007; Gislén 2010; de Laet & Mol, 2000; Lather & Smithies, 1997; Law, 2004; Mol, 2002)

This paper is an exploration of academic and artistic storytelling. It is also about storytelling as an academic and an artistic practice. More specifically, this paper is situated in *Trådar - en mobil syjunta* (*Threads* – A Mobile Sewing Circle, hereafter shortened to *Threads*), which is a travelling exhibition and workshop that invites participants to embroider SMSes by hand and by machine. The storytelling in *Threads* is fragmented when it comes to time, place, people, materials, and so forth. Consequently, there is not one strong narrative, not one narrator, and not one vantage point from which one can get a complete overview.

The patchwork is chosen as a narrative position in this paper because it can handle fragments of stories, as well as multiple voices, while still being held together. Our story-quilting looks for partial connections, alliances and separations and does not aim for a seamless whole. It is open for entrances and exits in more than one direction.

In particular, this paper is concerned with accountability, both in terms of the design of *Threads* and the practice of telling academic stories of travelling technologies. While some of the accounts brought into this text stem from others, we, the initiators of this project and authors of this paper, are the ones who have selected which accounts to include and how to stitch them together.

Patchwork and Clotheslines

The sewing circle *stitching together* was conceptualised by us for the 2007 exhibition *Digitally Yours* in Turku, Finland. It derived from an interest and desire to explore our relationships and interactions with others in physical, digital and in-between worlds. Over a six-week

Figure 1. Aligning patches of embroidered SMS and stitching them together into a patchwork.

period, visitors to the exhibition could join the sewing circle and embroider an SMS by hand or by machine. Most of the messages were hung on a wall to be later stitched together into a patchwork by us. As we continued to host *stitching together,* messages from other places were added to the patchwork.

Since then, we have developed the SMS embroidery sewing circle into a joint PhD project, under the name *Threads*. It is a collaboration with Malmö University, where we are based; Swedish Travelling Exhibitions; *Vi Unga,* a youth-led organisation for leadership, democracy and entrepreneurship; the National Federation of Rural Community Centres; and Studieför-bundet *Vuxenskolan*, a national organisation that arranges study circles. *Threads* toured Sweden during 2010-2011 and will continue to tour during 2012. When on tour, *Threads* travels mostly to rural community centres.

As an important part of making *Threads* travel we hand over the role of being host to local actors. To facilitate this process we host educational sewing circles where we suggest patterns of how to assemble, manage and disassemble the sewing circle, so the future hosts can learn from practice.

Figure 2. Educational sewing circle in Östersund, 2011.

The participants in *Threads* are invited to share stories in a variety of ways. Primarily, they are invited to select and embroider an SMS. Some bring their own textiles - such as towels, t-shirts, or aprons - while others use the materials we have provided. While embroidering, the participants usually expand parts of the story that the text message does not reveal and bring out concerns that may be connected to sending text messages, as well as memories, hopes and dreams in relation to everyday communication. Parts of these conversations can be embroidered on textile pages and categorised in five file folders with the following thematic oppositions: private and public; digital and physical; quick and slow; long lasting and ephemeral; and hand and machine. The purpose of this is to add nuances to the dichotomies. Additionally, there are tablecloths on which one can embroider almost anything.

Figure 3. A mobile phone with bespoke software for translating SMS to a specific file format and transferring it to the embroidery machine. Assembled in Gafsele, 2011.

From the messages that are embroidered, some are left in the sewing circle to be shared with future participants. These messages are hung on clotheslines stretched along the walls and across rooms as well as outdoors to advertise *Threads*' presence. Participants can upload their own documentation of their embroideries to a website: www.mobilsyjunta.se. Instead of working with a patchwork, as we did in *stitching together, Threads* utilises clotheslines as a means of aligning and separating the embroidered text messages.

Figure 4. Embroideries hung on clotheslines when *Threads* visited Järnboås, 2010.

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Figure 5. Images from *Threads* displayed on digital clotheslines at www.mobilsyjunta.se.

However, in this paper we want to return to the patchwork as an object and a practice, and stitch together accounts of *Threads* into a patchwork of texts and images.

Patchwork

The patches, in this paper, are based on various records made by the participants of *Threads* as well as by us. A patch can be one of the images that the participants have uploaded on the website, embroidery on the tablecloth, a tune somebody sang in the sewing circle or a fragment of our field notes. Each patch has been named and becomes part of our meaning-making.

To stitch these patches together, we have written seams between them. If the patches are fragments, the seams are what we relate them to – it is our attempt to make them work together. Yet another difference is that all the patches have different origins, whereas all the seams are written by us only. Each seam is told from our own perspective, sometimes using our individual voices and sometimes a joint voice. The seams are our attempt to give accounts of how we make sense of the fragmented records with multiple origins. The seaming is a distributed activity. It took place when we first encountered what would become a patch, for example, situated in the sewing circle or at home with access to the website. The seaming also takes place now when physically stitching them together into a patchwork of texts. In both cases we make sense by putting them in relation to other things, be it experiences from the sewing circle or textual references.

The seams are reminders of how patches of knowledge are simultaneously aligned and separated. Seaming them together requires a lot of work. We refer to Sundén when she examines Shelley Jackson's hypertext *Patchwork Girl* from 1995. Sundén points out how the reading of the *Patchwork Girl*:

> ... becomes an art of sewing and stitching, which reproduces the story as well as the body of the she-monster. Pieces of text as well as pieces of bodies are sewn together, and the heterogeneous origins of these pieces are always visible through the scars and stitches. Scars, in their capacity of simultaneously marking a cut and showing a joining, become the quintessence of the monsters' fractured subjectivity. (Sundén, 2008)

This is said to emphasise how the reading of this patchwork is a way of working with the patches. The distributed seaming also takes place in the reading.

In *Patchwork Girl* the patches came from buried corpses. The materials in this patchwork have also had a previous life, which is characteristic for a patchwork. We have not used scraps in the sense that our material would have become obsolete and thrown away had we not taken care of it. For example, the first patch is based on the introduction to a manual, which is still in use.

Patch: Thoughtful Curiosity

In the 19th century, during the industrial revolution, textile workers rebelled against new technology since they feared that they would lose their jobs. These rebels were known as Luddites, which today is a term widely used for a sceptical attitude towards technology.

The sewing machine began to be mass-produced and became one of the first machines to be brought into the home. It was feminised, decorated, and served both as furniture and machine. With its ambiguous form and mixed messages, the sewing machine promised domesticity while it supported female emancipation by presenting an opportunity to make an income. (Waldén)

In Threads, we have connected a digital embroidery machine to a mobile phone, which is a technology that many of us have on our person these days. We are not Luddites, sceptical towards technological development; rather, we are driven by a thoughtful curiosity for new opportunities that may arise in encounters between different technologies — old and new. Remember, even machines need care and attention. To learn about any technology, one needs to familiarise one-self with it. Try, and make mistakes. (Excerpt from the introduction to the manual of how to use the embroidery machine connected to the mobile phone. Our trans-lation from Swedish. For Waldén, see reference list.)

Seam: A host who is preparing for an upcoming sewing circle phones us at work on a Friday afternoon. He says that he is having trouble configuring the technologies in *Threads*, particularly with uploading images. Kristina is on the phone with the host, unable to solve the problem. Åsa picks out a folder with manuals from a shelf and searches for guidelines because we realise that, when we are not on location with the technologies in our hands, we cannot communicate how to do it. Had we been in *Threads*, our fingers would have guided us and we would have appeared and felt more knowledgeable.

As we look through the various manuals we stumble upon the introduction to the manual for the embroidery machine and mobile phone that we wrote in 2010 to contextualise the technologies we introduce in *Threads*. In the manual, the Luddites are described mostly as being sceptical towards technology and progress. If we attend more carefully to the history of the Luddites a more nuanced picture emerges. Fox (2004) states that the rage and rebellion of the Luddites was not primarily against the new or against the machine as such, but against the order that these machines brought with them. The efforts of the Luddites, he continues, should partly be understood as resistance against forces that threatened their collective way of life. Fox refers to Thomson who states that attacks on the machine were not random. The Luddites carefully selected which machines to destroy and focused on "...those that produced inferior goods" (Fox, 2004, p. 34). One such example is the shearing frame, which could do the job that previously was done by the highly skilled artisans, a lot cheaper but not as well.

So far none of the machines or pieces of technology that are part of *Threads* have been vandalised, as the Luddites did. Still, the embroidery machine and smart phones do evoke strong emotions at times. The embroidery machines and mobile phones that are part of *Threads* might not be a threat to the participants' incomes, unlike some of the machines were for the textile workers of the 19th century. Although the devices in *Threads* might not be a threat, they can be provocative. That is, if they are perceived as disregarding the participants' knowledges and skills. The devices can also demand knowledges that the participants do not have.

In the manual we continue to suggest that we are driven by a thoughtful curiosity. As Otto von Busch points out, curiosity is also a skill: "For me, skill is not only a matter of ability but equally one of curiosity. Skill is in this sense something more than a linear path forward, it is

also about taking an inquisitive look at the adjacent fields" (2008, p. 45). As we understand his statement, to be curious means to attend to the unfamiliar, not only the expected and the known.

What we can bring with us from the Luddites' protests is that technology is not innocent. Technological development is part of reordering ways of living, which is not altogether a good thing. This was the case during the industrial revolution and continues to be so. What we hope to achieve in *Threads* is to allow for both criticality and curiosity: to engage with the known and the unknown in thoughtful and curious ways.

Perhaps this is also what Suchman is referring to when she writes about artful integration:

New ways of working and new technologies grow out of old ones. They do so neither through a process of simple incremental change, nor through wholesale displacement and transformation, but out of an ongoing interaction between understandings based in prior experience on the one hand, and leaps of faith inspired by imagination on the other. (Suchman, 2002, p.100)

Patch: (Dis)connected
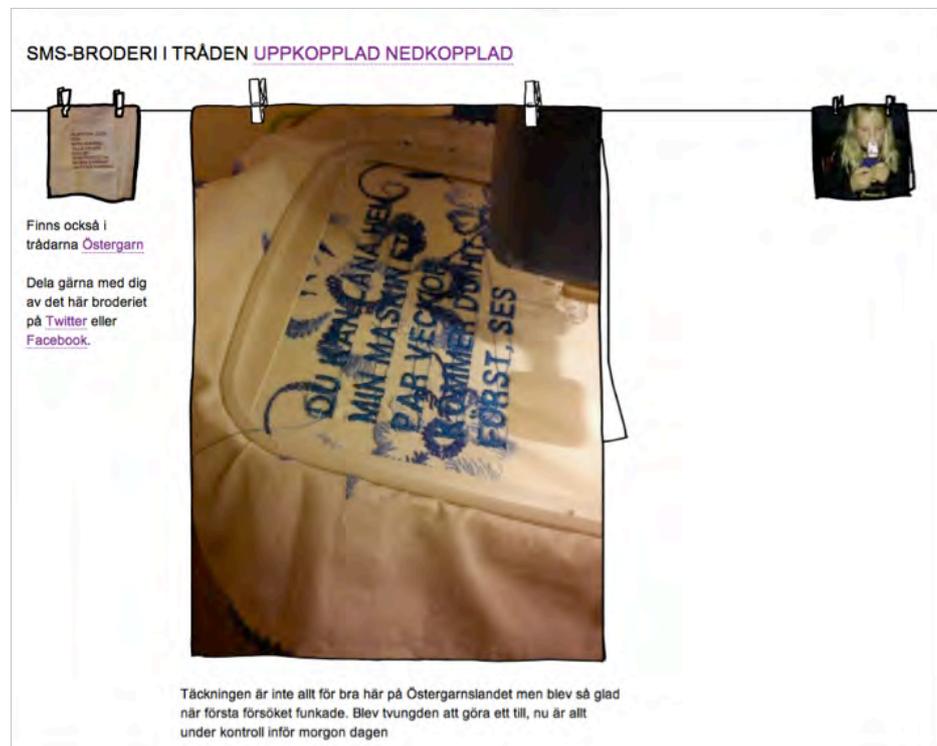
The reception is not too good here in Östergranslandet but was so happy when the first attempt worked out well. Had to do one more, now that everything is under control, awaiting tomorrow. (Our translation of the text accompanying the image.)

Seam: While travelling by train on our way to host an educational sewing circle, we try to order the uploaded images on the project website. We tag images, and they become aligned on different digital threads resembling clotheslines. As the Wi-Fi connection on the train comes and goes, the question of being connected or disconnected also becomes the category of one of the threads.

Haraway argues that to give better accounts of the world, we need to resist fixation and to be "...curious of the webs of differential positioning" (1991, p.590). In *Threads*, physical

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and digital clotheslines with easily movable patches, are used to align and at the same time avoid fixation of matter and meaning. On the website each image can belong to several threads such as *(Dis)connected, My most common or Mixed technology* - categories we have created. All of the images are also associated with the location they originate from. We have visited some of these locations. We have been able to connect to other locations through images and texts published by the participants on the website.

The accompanying text (above), written by one of the hosts, expresses the relief and excitement she felt when the mobile phone reception at the rural community centre proved to be strong enough to send text messages. Another image from the same location shows an embroidered SMS accompanied by the text: "What a summer. This is the only SMS in my inbox, which I don't check very often" (our translation). Although the images share the same topic, the participants who chose to embroider these particular messages did not share the same feelings towards the issue of being disconnected. In one of the posts connectedness is associated with relief and joyful surprise, and in the other it is expressed as something positive to be disconnected for a while.

While the two examples of being (Dis)connected refer to rather different situations and relationships between humans and technologies than the ones that the Luddites rebelled against, there are similarities. The images and short texts published on the *Threads* website are in line with what the Luddites suggested: technological assemblages and entanglements affect our way of life and how we are with others.

Patch: Removed

Keep Sweden Swedish

Seam: When glancing through the *Threads* website one evening, a message attracts Kristina's attention. Bevara Sverige Svenskt (Keep Sweden Swedish) is stitched in blue thread on yellow fabric. These colours correspond to the Swedish flag, which is a yellow cross on a

blue background. Consequently, she asks Åsa on Skype what to do with the message. After discussion, we decide to take a screenshot of it. Then we remove it from the website since Keep Sweden Swedish is an organisation reminiscent of nationalistic movements in the 80s and 90s, which today are again gaining ground in the political landscape. We do a quick Google search and it is confirmed that this movement aims to limit immigration to Sweden and to repatriate immigrants from Sweden.

In an email to the collaborating partners and to the host we let them know that we had removed the image and explain our decision: racist values do not fit in with the democratic basis of the project. The collaborating partners agreed.

Although we removed the message from the website, we decided to include it in this text. The reason for including it here is not because it is representative of the kind of message that is typically embroidered and shared in *Threads*. On the contrary, the message is an exception and the only message that we have removed from the website. We discuss the message here because it explicitly raises issues of what to include as well as how to include messages on the project website. Should we have kept the Keep Sweden Swedish post on the website as a means of appropriately addressing the questionable agendas of nationalistic movements?

We usually claim that the aim of *Threads* is to facilitate the sharing of multiple and contradictory stories and values, without the need of reaching consensus (Lindström and Ståhl, 2011). This ambition, which is part of our design and political choices, does however not mean that there are no boundaries of what to include or exclude in *Threads*. Since the boundaries of *Threads* are suggestive, in the sense that they are articulated as an open invitation, it is not uncommon that they are redrawn in the encounters between people, places, machines, stories and materials. Usually these encounters result in expanding or further blurring the boundaries of *Threads*. In this particular encounter, we decided to remove a racist message on the project website and thereby tighten the otherwise rather loose and inclusive boundaries of *Threads*. One of the reasons for doing so was that, along with the other collaborating partners, we did not feel that we could address it properly on the website since it is not designed to support discussions of such a sensitive matter. Amanda Dahllöf, from the collaborating partner Vi unga who had been with us at the educational sewing circle in that particular region, suggested that we use it to discuss similar dilemmas in future educational sewing circles, and so we have.

By using the Keep Sweden Swedish embroidery example, we can present one of our previous dilemmas to our new hosts in order to provoke discussion and hopefully they will find ways of translating it into future, similar situations.

In one educational sewing circle a woman found it a relief that, in the library where she would be hosting *Threads*, there was already an existing library user agreement on what the visitors were allowed to write on the computers. She would be using the same boundaries in *Threads*.

While the Keep Sweden Swedish message was explicitly excluded and removed from the website, there are other stories, thoughts, questions and people that are implicitly excluded in *Threads*, as well as in this text.

Patch: Leave It At That

She won't be part of our sewing association any more. I'll just leave it at that. (From the song "Syföreningsboogie", performed by Charlie Norman. Our translation.)

Seam: A woman starts singing lyrics (above). No one knows who sang the song originally, so Åsa looks it up on YouTube. It turns out to be Charlie Norman's song "Syföreningsboogie". Kristina asks why the girls in the text, one by one, are excluded from the sewing association. One participant says that the answer can be found in the verse. It is not expressed explicitly. However, when listening carefully to the lyrics, it becomes obvious that the girls are excluded because their behaviour deviates from what is socially accepted. Ahmed writes of circulation of social goods: "Through narrative, the promise of happiness is located as well as distributed" (Ahmed, 2010b, p. 45). Through aligning with those stories and practices, participation in an affective community is expressed. Those who deviate from the social good challenge the community, suggest other directions and become killjoys, according to Ahmed (2010a,

2010b). The women who were excluded from the sewing associations did most likely deviate from the social good of that particular community.

Sewing circles, including sewing associations, as social gatherings have been debated several times during *Threads.* On the one hand, sewing circles have been described as places for gossiping; on the other hand, they have been described as a context of practising democracy. One woman told us how the sewing circle she was involved in had to stop meeting in the participants' homes because it became too much of a competition of who was the best and most generous host. This threatened their existence as a group, so they decided to meet in a nearby rural community centre instead.

One of the few male hosts expressed that he envied all the women who were part of sewing circles. He did not feel he could take part in them but very much appreciated being part of *Threads*, in which he felt included. At the same time, he was reluctant to be part of an article about *Threads* in the local newspaper. He laughed and said that some of his friends might not approve of him participating in *Threads*. His remark, however, did not prevent him from actually participating in *Threads*. Rather, it points towards the various networks, groups and collectives that we are all part of and which we move between. Since the various networks, groups and collectives might have different criteria for what to include and exclude, movements in-between can become troublesome.

While we attempt to make *Threads* a space that can host multiple and contradictory stories, values and social goods, we can neither control how information is transmitted nor how it is received in the extended set of relationships that we are all part of.

Patch: Stories From Somewhere

The colonial powers teach the history from the south.
(Fragment from field note. Our translation.)

Seam: On several occasions, in the inner parts of northern Sweden, colonialism has arisen as a topic in the sewing circle. It was the beginning of July. We hosted an educational sewing circle where the potato tops in the fields could almost be seen above the ground. We had just flown and then driven there from the south of Sweden where the potato harvesting was well into its season.

The participants point out that we are gathered in a part of Sweden with rich natural resources. They express that the dominant discourse in Sweden does not acknowledge the assets in their region, but rather belittles them as dependent on subsidises. One woman said that it depends on how we tell the story of Swedish economy, whether for example the energy production that stems from the northern rivers or the ironstone, is the starting point or not. She talked about the power of telling a story from somewhere.

Åsa asks how often they mention colonialism. Another woman responds that she gets palpitations by telling us about her insights on colonialism. She then manages to tell us how an energy provider, owned by the Swedish state, wanted to divert the water from a river near to where she lives. The energy company was offering small amounts of money as compensation, which it expected the inhabitants to readily appreciate, despite rich fishing ground being lost. It was described as a democratic process. However, after the referendum, which ended with a 'no' to changes in the river, there were wounds in the municipality. The process, as she experienced it, made her think that colonialism was exercised. She contrasted the instrumental view on the resources and energy production with how relatives of hers had been living off the fishing in nearby waters without having any other income. They were not wage earners.

Later that day we had dinner with Lisa Lundström from the Swedish Travelling Exhibitions. Lisa, who grew up in the same region reminded us of a song about hepatica - a small blue flower - in springtime, which we used to sing as children. For her the lyrics were confusing as a child since she had never seen any. As hepatica does not grow in the climate where Lisa grew up, this was a story from somewhere far away from her.

Being from the south of Sweden, we had not realised the power of the lyrics in that song, because it affirms our experiences of seasons. We are, with the words of Ahmed, experiencing "...pleasure from proximity to objects that are attributed as being good" (2010b, p. 41). To

state that certain stories told from somewhere are a way of exercising colonialism would in many situations be a killjoy, disturbing happiness. It would most of the time be considered a destructive practice. Ahmed expresses killing joy as something generative:

> I would argue that it is the very assumption that good feelings are open and bad feelings are closed that allows historical forms of injustice to disappear. [...] I think it is the very exposure of these unhappy effects that is affirmative, that gives us an alternative set of imaginings of what count as good or better life. (2010a, p.50)

Stories are always told from somewhere and, in order to live better lives together, it might be crucial that somebody points out the possibility of living otherwise; that we are exposed to sociomaterial effects of how stories are told.

Patch: Being Invited or Not

Crowded in the sewing circle this evening! Bloody cool atmosphere. Sara will put pictures on the FB page with time. Regards Katarina, say hi to Kristina! (Text message sent to Åsa on March 16, 2011 at 7:15 p.m. Our translation.)

Seam: Åsa cannot recognise the mobile phone number and has to re-read the message several times to understand where it has come from and by whom it is written. Finally, it makes sense: while preparing for the educational sewing circle in a former court house in Östersund, in north-western Sweden, a woman called Katarina Franck had knocked on the door. She invited *Threads* to be part of a youth club, *Art for Gals*, where women aged 12-25 can practise art and craft every Wednesday. She also invited us to her home for a Friday dinner saying that, when travelling a lot, staying in hotels and so on, it can be nice to also sit down at a table in somebody's home.

Katarina Franck's reason for establishing an exclusive organisation as a strategy was that she thought power and space were unequally distributed, particularly in the youth club in the former courthouse in Östersund, where she has an office. She wanted young women to have somewhere to gather where they could develop their creativity, just like a lot of young men already did, and loudly so: in the rehearsal rooms with their bands. During the educational sewing circle, it was debated whether *Threads* should follow the rules of *Art for Gals* or have an open invitation as usual. Katarina Franck was determined that, if *Threads* was to be invited into *Art for Gals*, it needed to follow its own rules and only allow female participants between the ages of 12 and 25. In that sense, the aim of creating a meeting place between and over generations, which the collaborating partners of *Threads* had agreed on, was replaced with the ambition to create a space for young women to meet and learn more about art and craft.

Again the boundaries of *Threads* were redrawn, not permanently but temporarily. In this particular case, we recognise the need for exclusive organisations as a strategy for participation. Through *Art for Gals*, the current exclusion of girls from the youth club was brought to light. Within this exclusive room, one possibility could be to empower the girls to be better equipped for spaces such as the youth club, where they do not feel invited. *Art for Gals*, as an exclusive organisation, is not a means to an end, as in the case of Keep Sweden Swedish.

Patch: Wasted Efforts

Seam: We have gathered around a table in Rävemåla with a new host and another participant. There are a few new embroidered patches to put on the clotheslines. What is more, there are embroideries that were not on the tablecloth the last time we saw it. Or, maybe they were there, but we cannot remember them. We notice an embroidered cake on one of the tablecloths, and take a photograph of it (above). Perhaps we notice this particular embroidery because of a conversation we had the previous week with curator/researcher Ele Carpenter, throughout which she had expressed her anger towards knitted cakes. In her text "Activist Tendencies in Craft" (2010), she argues that the surplus of knitted cakes has confused the political intention of craftivism, which has its focus on social reform rather than nostalgia towards the feminine ideals of the 1950s. Her point is that the aim of DIY (do it yourself) is to

develop knowledge, practical skills and resources, for example through "...taking apart your jumper or video player to learn how to fix or reuse it". This is in turn "...very different from buying a knitted cupcake complete with strawberry frosting, even if it is locally made" (2010, para. 16).

Our host has arranged buns and pots of coffee and tea on another table and plenty of food in the fridge for both omnivores and vegetarians. The amount of food is more than the four of us can eat. By the end of the day we felt a sense of failure, of wasted efforts. A lot of work had been put into making the day possible. We had travelled a couple of hours to get there, and the local host had spent a Friday afternoon collecting and carrying the material, an evening preparing food, and the entire weekend hosting very few guests.

A couple of months earlier, *Threads* is assembled in Järnboås. We are the hosts for the educational sewing circle. A woman who had not been able to bring *Threads* to her rural community centre approaches us. She tells us that she had tried to argue for *Threads* by suggesting that they would only have to invest their own time. On the other hand, a theatre play costing €2600, for example, required the organisers to put much energy into seeking sponsorship. She adds that she sympathises with the fact that in *Threads* there is no exchange of money, but that everybody invests their own time. Still, she could not convince others to help her to accommodate *Threads*. She expressed that others had responded that *Threads* does not result in a house, not even a bird box. As we understood her, the lack of a clear goal or outcome made the others reluctant to engage in *Threads*.

We try to understand the difference between *Threads* and the theatre play that she talked about as appreciated by that community centre. Just like *Threads*, the theatre play does not result in a building. Kristina suggests that the difference has to do with whether it is a recognisable format or not. The theatre play has well-established roles: performer and audience.

In *Threads* we aim to establish relationships based on exchanges of knowledge, experiences and resources, partly in line with the DIY movement as described by Carpenter. Since the proposed relationships in *Threads* are less well-known and defined than that between a seller and buyer of a knitted cake or a performer and audience of a theatre play, *Threads*

does, at times, encounter resistance, rejection and exclusion. In the first seam we suggested that a little bit of thoughtful curiosity is needed to make *Threads* work - to dare to engage not only with the known but also the uncertain. In this seam we can see that the uncertainties in *Threads* do at times become troublesome and result in what is experienced as a failure or wasted efforts.

Stitching Together Accounts

Writing this text is an attempt to work accountably with *Threads*; it is not to give a complete overview, but to temporarily stitch patches or accounts of *Threads* together into a patchwork of text and a few images. Following the suggestion of Mol (2002) in her experimental book *The Body Multiple*, where she works with generous referencing in one stream of text and equally generous ethnography in another, we take methods of writing just as seriously as methods of gathering and analysing material as they are closely entangled.

As part of our writing process and patch working, we spread and move around fragments on the floor from manuals, contracts, field notes, images - either taken by us or uploaded on the website by other participants, and email conversations and text messages sent to us by collaborators. This was an attempt to acknowledge that the writing process is a highly mate-rial and spatial practice. At that time, we did not know exactly how to make the patches work, and which patches to include or exclude. We came to learn that much work had to be put into the seams that separate, as well as hold together, the patches.

Figure 6. Working with patches.

Inspired by the mode of collaborative writing that Bränström Öhman and Livholts (2006) call story-quilting, we swapped pieces of text for the other to rewrite and alter. The writing process became an opportunity for dialogue and negotiation, not only in written text but also in oral conversations, opening up new perspectives and thoughts. Writing, combined with oral conversations, has continued as we have been sharing the document online and been able to follow each other's edits live while sitting in the same room.

In this process we have also made several cuts, in the patches as well as the seams. These cuts are not only to the words, but also cuts in the object or networks of analysis.

Suchman argues that the cutting of networks is not a given but always enacted: "The relatively arbitrary or principled character of the cut is a matter not of its alignment with some independently existing ontology but of our ability to articulate its basis and its implication" (Suchman, 2007, p. 284).

van der Velden also writes about ethics and accountability in telling technology stories (2008). She stresses that we make our relationship explicit with the technology that we study, whether it is as lovers (de Laet and Mol, 2000) or some other non-neutral position. This is how we make our accountability visible. She further argues that how and when these stories are told matters because this is how we decide what and who are significant:

> In the encounter with the other, in the 'situated partial connection', decisions of justice, of whom and what is included or excluded, are made. Epistemological and ontological issues, such as the question about what kind of technology story to tell, as a 'large critical story', a 'strong story, or a 'fluidity' of small stories, are therefore preceded by the ethical issue of who and what matters. (van der Velden, 2008, p. 6)

There are multiple ways and reasons for telling technology stories. Our ambition has been "…to let the text do what it is about" (Bonnevier, 2007, p.51). As Mol & Law point out, "Academic texts may talk about strange things, but their tone is almost always calm" (2002, p.3). While the phenomena of study may be multi-layered, complex and surprising, the academic text tends to organise these phenomena into clean overviews with a clear beginning and end, Mol and Law continue.

In another text, Law & Mol suggest the application of the patchwork-logic to talk about materialities as local arrangements that are difficult to gather as a whole. The patchwork is described as a 'multiple logic' that allows us to: "... move from one place to another, looking for local connections, without the expectation of pattern 'as a whole' " (1995, p. 288). This means looking at different stories of practices, interactions, designs, and how their materialities are partially related:

> This, then, is the patchwork option. It's to imagine that materials and social - and stories too - are like bits of cloth that have been sewn together. [...] It's to attend to the local links. And it's to remember that a heap of pieces of cloth can be turned into a whole variety of patchworks. (1995, p. 290)

Mol & Law urge us as readers to "Go and look. Trace connections. Partial connections. Here. There. Somewhere else again. Relational materialism doesn't just reside in objects. It's also a way of telling stories" (1995, p. 291). In our quest to give an account of *Threads*, we have chosen the practice and object of patchwork partly because it is a way for us to organise the rather fragmented material we have gathered through our travels with *Threads* without creating a seamless whole.

Partial Connections, Alliances And Separations

Looking back at the patches and how we have sewn them together, we see partial connections, alliances and separations. We have made choices in the design of *Threads* based on democratic values, to create a meeting place for different groups of people, and to exchange different kinds of knowledges. These values are, however, not a given; they can be changed and questioned.

Law & Mol use the example of Robert Moses' bridges in Long Island to argue that "...artefacts may be strategically designed to have politics" (1995, p. 280-281). Since the bridges were designed so that public transport could not pass underneath them, those who could not afford to drive a car were kept away from the beaches of Long Island. Furthermore, they argue that, while the bridges are still there, they have lost some of their strategic significance since more people in the U.S.A. have access to a car. In other words, the durability and politics of the bridges are relational.

Similarly, one could say that the values or politics of *Threads* are set in relation to other

rules and practices that are made part of it, both on a short- and long-term basis. When *Threads* was hosted as part of *Art for Gals*, it became an exclusive group, barring some participants that were usually welcome in *Threads*. Other examples show how *Threads* has been excluded or rejected. For example, in one region *Threads* encountered resistance because of the lack of a clear outcome, or as it was expressed: we are not building a house.

We argue that *Threads* is similar to the practice and object of patchwork. It comes into existence through processes of exclusion and inclusion of connections, alliances, and separations – through putting things in relation to one another. What to exclude and include has, however, not always been well-defined in advance, but has become more or less explicitly articulated through encounters between people, places and things. We would argue that these ongoing and collaborative articulations most of all are good, even though they at times are experienced as troublesome, since they become reasons for making sense together as well as (re)considering what and who matters and why. Who is considered knowledgeable? Which stories do we align with? Why?

To be accountable for what we design, and for the continuous realignments in which *Threads* comes into being, we argue, in line with Suchman (2002) that we constantly need to locate ourselves within extended networks of sociomaterial relations. We cannot seek absolute control, but need to constantly ask ourselves how we proceed in a responsible way within every set of working relations.

Through including ourselves in the seams, where we are, what we say and what we do, we put focus on our own involvement in continuous intra-active (Barad, 2007 and Suchman, 2007), meaning-making processes. We have tried to give accounts of how we have pondered on dilemmas and why we have made certain decisions in *Threads*. We argue that to proceed in a responsible way might necessitate the removal of a racist message from the website, recognising that stories are told from somewhere, and exercising thoughtful curiosity when reconfiguring the known with the unknown.

This text is a way of tracing our own connections and recognising them as partial. By making explicit what we include and exclude we also, as van der Velden points out, articulate who and what matters to us.

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