

# THREADS WITHOUT ENDS – A MOBILE SEWING CIRCLE

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper the exhibition *Threads – a Mobile Sewing Circle* is used as an example of a design that travels. To tell the story of how *Threads* travels we use the concepts of *immutable mobile* (Latour 1990) and *fluidity* (de Laet and Mol 2000) – concepts that invite us to think of standardisation and stability on one hand and changes and adaptability on the other. Since *Threads* is continuously assembled, disassembled and reassembled in different contexts and by different actors, we argue that *Threads* needs to be able to deal with changes and local conditions and cannot strive for stability in the sense of ‘no change’. On the contrary, *Threads* is dependent on local actors’ engagement, which partly is done through adding, replacing and altering parts and practices of *Threads* which also redraws its boundaries. We further argue that it is through what has been called *design-after-design* (Ehn 2008) that *Threads* can become entangled in the local setting and thereby matter. Through examples from *Threads* it is also shown that, what we call, a fluid designer role is helpful when making fluid designs travel.

## INTRODUCTION

*Threads – a Mobile Sewing Circle* is a travelling exhibition and workshop where participants are invited to gather for a day and to, among other things, embroider SMS, by hand and with an embroidery machine connected to a mobile phone. In this paper we will tell stories of *Threads* and how it travels. At each stop of this journey an assemblage of things, travelling in two boxes, offers the opportunity to become assembled into this *temporary assembly* (Lindström and Ståhl 2010) that we call *Threads*. In other words, this is a journey that includes not one piece of technology but various materials and technologies, as well as humans who engage in the process of assembling and thereby become part of the assembly.

The stories are situated within Science and Technology Studies (STS), which in various ways have dealt with the difficulties of moving or transferring technologies, as well as knowledge, from one site to another (see e.g. Law and Mol 2001). More specifically we will use the concept of *fluidity* proposed by de Laet and Mol (2000) in their article about the Zimbabwe Bush Pump. The Zimbabwe Bush Pump is a hand water pump, and might at first glance have little to do with *Threads*. We will however use the concept of *fluidity* since it offers a version of actorship, which allows us to move beyond a simple yes or no answer in relation to whether or not *Threads* succeeds or not on its journey. Compared with the *immutable mobile* (1990) proposed by Latour as a strong and stable configuration that is able to travel and at the same time keep its shape as a network (Law 2002), a fluid object or piece of technology is able to spread because of its adaptability – its ability to change and be adjusted to local circumstances. In other words, a fluid object is mobile and mutable.

*Fluidity* will here be seen in relation to the concept of *design-after-design* (Ehn 2008), which puts focus on the reconfiguration and reordering of things that goes on beyond and after *design-in-project* - when a design travels. This approach would then mean creating a “... larger space of possibilities for acts of defining use through use” (Redström 2008, p. 421) and thereby

blurring the division between designers and users.

Like any travelling technology, *Threads* faces several challenges on its journey. One is to make local actors engaged and caring in relation to *Threads* and to take part in the process of assembling. Compared with the Bush Pump that, among many other things, provides healthy water, *Threads* might not matter when it comes to survival. In this paper we will explore other ways of mattering.

*Threads* is a collaboration between Swedish Travelling Exhibitions, Malmö university, Vi Unga (a youth-led organization for leadership, democracy and entrepreneurship), the National Federation of Rural Community Centres, Studieförbundet Vuxenskolan (a national organisation arranging study circles).

#### THREADS – A MOBILE SEWING CIRCLE

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) is becoming increasingly integrated and entangled in everyday communications, which implies that these technologies also matters to and concern more and more people. In parallel with this development we can see a new interest in traditional handicrafts that are being appropriated and brought into new contexts (Minahan and Wolfram Cox 2007).

*Threads – a Mobile Sewing Circle* is an exhibition, a workshop or more specifically a sewing circle in which participants are invited to gather for a day and to embroider SMS, by hand and with an embroidery machine connected to a mobile phone. This invitation, to engage with various materials, technologies, stories and practices, can also be seen as an invitation to share concerns, desires, and memories in relation to old and new as well as physical and digital means of communication. Put in a slightly different way, *Threads* is not designed to communicate a pre-set package of information in relation to everyday communication, but to engage the participants in its becoming. Usually the sewing circles are hosted by local actors in rural community centres or other semi-public spaces, and last between 10 am and 4 pm.



Figure 1: *Threads* in Järnboås, 2010.

In 2009 we, and the collaborating partners, conducted a pilot tour with *Threads* that visited three rural community centres in Sweden. Based on those experiences we have further developed *Threads*. Partly to make it more mobile – meaning being able to travel.

#### BECOMING THREADS

The process of further developing *Threads* has been one of negotiations and conversations on e-mails, meetings, workshops, phone calls, sketching, writing concept papers and contracts. Throughout this process various narratives of what *Threads* could or should be have been told and performed. Some of the main objectives have been to create a meeting place between and over generations. To inspire the participants' own creativity and to try new and old technologies as well as craft. To create space for reflection on five themes in relation to communication: ephemeral/long lasting, quick/slow, public/private, digital/physical and hand/machine.

As we are several collaborating partners there have also been more specific goals for each organisation such as recruiting new members as well as developing knowledge on how to design exhibitions that are based on participation and reaches beyond the big institutions.

All of the collaborating partners signed a contract stating that we will not arrange parallel exhibitions or events under the name *Threads*. All of us are however allowed to host gatherings in which we embroider SMS.

These conversations and negotiations can be described as a process of trying to find one storyline and thereby making the project more robust and stable as it sets out on its journey. Throughout the process of designing as well as travelling with *Threads* there has been an expressed desire from several of the collaborating partners to agree on *one* story – what *Threads* is. It is however still hard to find one master narrative, one main objective and one main outcome.

When it comes to making *Threads* travel we would however like to mention three additions or new part of *Threads*.

First of all we have designed two blue boxes, containing all the materials and technologies that are part of *Threads*. The boxes fit into a car and can thereby more easily be transported between the rural community centres.

Secondly, we have developed an educational sewing circle in which we hand over the role of being hosts to local actors. On the pilot tour we, and a representative from Swedish Travelling Exhibitions were the hosts. During the workshop the future hosts learn by doing and are given a manual, or what we call pattern, suggesting how to introduce *Threads*, how to handle time during the day as well as suggesting topics for conversations. After the educational sewing circle the two blue boxes are sent between community centres as well as other semi-public spaces in the region allowing the hosts to set up *Threads* in their local environment.

Thirdly, a website has been designed, partly to invite the participants to make self-documentation by uploading pictures of their embroidered SMS. The website is also a site for announcing when and where *Threads* will be assembled. One page of the site has a pattern for how to *do it yourself* aimed for those who cannot attend one of the official sewing circles hosted as part of *Threads*.

Before we move on to the issue of travelling technologies we will take a closer look at the technologies and materials that are travelling with *Threads* – the things that are fitted into the two blue boxes.

## TWO BLUE BOXES

The boxes contain threads and needles for hand embroidery. A mobile phone that can be connected to an embroidery machine, allowing the participants to forward a message to the phone and to have it embroidered by the machine. There are also five thematic file folders with textile pages to embroider traces of topical conversations on. Each file folder has a title with a pair of oppositions: ephemeral/long-lasting, quick/slow, public/private, digital/physical and hand/machine.



Figure 2: The two blue boxes.

To set the room there are several tablecloths to embroider on. Clotheslines are used to hang the embroidered messages on as well as other accompanying artworks chosen because of their relation to the theme of text and textile and clashes between old and new technologies and practices. There are also books and articles on the same themes.

During the day a smart phone can be used by the participants to upload images of their SMS-embroideries to the project website. The website can be accessed through a computer with wireless connection.

Separately most of these things are nothing out of the ordinary, they are off the shelves items and recognisable. It is the arrangement, combination and assembling of them that make it possible to focus on, contrast and align things that we are surrounded with in our everyday lives in novel ways.



Figure 3: Table set in Åsgarn.

## TRAVELLING TECHNOLOGIES

In this section we will look at two ways of understanding travelling technologies; the *immutable mobile* and *fluidity*.

The metaphor of the *immutable mobile* (Latour, 1990) describes networks that are able to travel and move without losing its shape. *Immutable mobile* is in that sense a metaphor that invites us to think about long distance control, which is possible as long as codes, information, soldiers, bankers, ships, scientific instruments, newspapers and money are able to keep their shape as stable network configurations as they travel around the world (Law and Singleton 2005). One example is how the new vessels and the new navigational technology developed in the 1400's were vital in for example how the Portuguese built up its colonial empire. Movement in this case is possible as long as the vessel keeps its shape as a network – as long as “the relations between it and its neighbouring entities” (Law 2002 p. 4) such as “Arab competitors, winds and currents, crew, stores, guns” (ibid) are kept in shape. In other words an *immutable mobile* refers to two different kinds of spatialities – network space and three-dimensional space – and it is the immutability in network space that makes movement in three-dimensional space possible (Law and Mol, 2001, p.4).

In an attempt to update the traditional notion of the actor in a network as well-bounded and with a stable identity, like in the case of the *immutable mobile*, de Laet and Mol tell a story of the Zimbabwe Bush Pump that has a “striking adaptability” (de Laet and Mol 2000, p. 226). The authors describe the Bush Pump as a hand water pump designed in Zimbabwe for villagers to maintain themselves. The reason for their attraction to the pump lays in its quality described as its *fluidity*.

At each village, in which the pump is assembled, it looks and works a little bit different from the next as some of its parts have been changed or altered and since the local conditions are different. “Good technologies, or so we submit after our encounter with the Bush Pump, may well be those which incorporate the

possibility of their own break-down, which have the flexibility to deploy alternative components, and which continue to work to some extent even if some bolt falls out or the user community changes” (2000, p.251). In comparison with the *immutable mobile* a fluid object like the Bush Pump is not able to spread and travel because it keeps its shape but because of its flexibility – its ability to change its shape and still work.

This does not mean that the Bush Pump is without boundaries or that it can be anything. As de Laet and Mol point out: it is not a bucket pump (p.237). What characterises “the mechanics of this fluid technology” is that its boundaries are vague and moving, rather than solid and sharp (de Laet and Mol 2000).

Throughout the text they show that the pump has several identities - a mechanical object, a hydraulic system, a device installed by the community, a health promoter and a nation-building apparatus - which all come with its own different boundaries. Whether or not the Bush Pump succeeds in its activities is not a binary matter since it is different for each of these identities. The Bush Pump “does all sorts of things”; it acts, despite the fact that it does not have clear-cut boundaries or a stable identity. In other words the Bush Pump, like other fluid entities, can be “fluid without losing their agency” (2000, p. 227).

As mentioned previously the *immutable mobile* is stable through keeping its shape and relations, which means that it cannot cope with missing parts or new actors to be included in the network. This idea of stability can however not handle or explain changes of the network, whereas the metaphor of *fluidity*, invites us to think of objects, technologies and perhaps also thoughts and knowledge that is able to move because of its ability to change.

We will now continue this exploration of fluidity and shift focus from designs into designers, from objects to subjects.

### ... AND THEIR (NON)INVENTORS

Like the Bush Pump in itself Morgan, who is the actor behind the pump, is also described by de Laet and Mol as fluid, as he refuses the position of the control-driven modern subject. He does not claim authorship and do not patent it, as he considers the Bush Pump to be a result of not one author or creator but “... a perfected version of a long-established and locally-developed technology that has always been part of, and belongs in, the public domain” (2000, p. 248). de Laet and Mol further suggest that perhaps it is precisely this kind of fluid non-modern subject that is needed to shape, reshape and implement a fluid object or piece of technology: “... non-modern subjects, willing to serve and observe, able to listen, not seeking control, but rather daring to give themselves over to circumstances” (2000, p. 253).

Law compares the modest role taken by Morgan with the position of Louis Pasteur and his laboratory. In late

19<sup>th</sup> Century France, products and procedures for saving cows from anthrax were accumulated in the laboratory of Louis Pasteur. “As a result the laboratory accumulated resources which further strengthened its pre-eminence” (Law 2002, p.100). Since its relations with other locations were fixed the institute became a ‘centre for accumulation’ (ibid). Morgan on the other hand is not seeking this control and there is no clear centre for accumulation. Law further argues that this does not mean that the Bush Pump is not a success. “But it is not a success that brings special rewards to one particular location. There is no strategic location where there is accumulation: there is no centre or periphery (Law 2002, p.101).”

de Laet and Mol describe Morgan as a fluid subject. A shift towards a more fluid designer role, although not expressed with these particular words, has been argued for and practiced by several designers and researchers. Within the tradition of participatory design there is a long history of engaging users in the design process and consequently the changes that the design might bring. These projects have usually been set in contexts such as work places (Ehn 1988) and organisations, in which the users and contexts of use have been more or less known. In other words, in contexts in which technologies or designs are not intended to travel far. It is however not uncommon that design has implications for others than the intended users and reaches beyond the intended design contexts (Ehn 2008).

When the user is not known and cannot be included in the design process Ehn argues for *design-after-design* which implies a shift from *design-in-project* to *design-in-use* (2008). In a similar manner Storni (2008) argues for an *increasingly delegated user*. He refers to design practices, such as *crowd sourcing*, *open sourcing* and *technological bricolage* in which the division between the designer and user to some extent are becoming obsolete. In a search for a new designer role that is adjusted to this new landscape he is arguing that designers need to make more profound delegations to the user. This would mean that designers should delegate design choices and design actions, instead of designing artefacts for use.

We argue that a shift towards *design-after-design* and an *increasingly delegated user* implies that there is no clear centre or periphery in the sense that there is no particular position from which all decisions can be made and there is not one particular actor that is in absolute control. This does not mean that there are no power relations or hierarchies. There will be centres, but they are most likely fluid in the sense that they are vague, moving, temporal and more than one.

### ASSEMBLING THREADS

When the things that are travelling with *Threads* are packed up in the two blue boxes they do little work. To paraphrase de Laet and Mol (2000): “If it is to work, it has to be assembled.” So, what does it mean to assemble *Threads*? What is required for *Threads* to work?

Before *Threads* travels to a region, the collaborating partners have meetings with the local community to introduce the project. This is one way of creating an emergent network of possible caretakers; fluid, unstable and yet vital in assuring that somebody has the competence to receive and be part of assembling *Threads*.

In addition to the things that are travelling in the two boxes the actors involved in assembling *Threads* are asked to contribute with several things. Prior to picking up the boxes, representatives from the rural community centres have received a document stating that they need to provide a place to host *Threads* in, tables, chairs, mobile phone reception and food for the participants. In the invitation, that can be found in the project website and on flyers, the participants of *Threads* are asked to bring fabrics as well as their mobile phone.

In this section we will give examples of how the local actors take part in assembling *Threads*. The examples are selected in order to show situations in which *Threads* could be said to stop working, or more specifically when some of the things that are part of *Threads* are missing or failing, as well as when new parts, partners and practices, beyond the invitation, are brought in and made part of *Threads*.

Our material is based on notes taken during participatory observations at sewing circles, the actions on the project's website, phone interviews as well as email conversations with participants and negotiations with the collaborating partners.

#### MISSING PARTS, PARTNERS AND PRACTICES

One of the things that the participants in *Threads* are asked to contribute with is to share and embroider an SMS. It is however not unusual that the participants do not have any text messages or even a mobile phone. In Järnboås Birgitta told us that she hardly had sent nor received SMS prior to hearing about *Threads*. To prepare, she sent a message to her son, daughter and husband saying: "Jag vill ha ett SMS före lördag" (I want an SMS before Saturday).

Her husband, who happened to be in the same room as her, was confused and asked her to explain her intentions. And so she did. He sent a message that said that she was the one, the best woman. She chose to embroider a shorter version. She suggested, that by only choosing a few of his words the message became stronger. She also stitched a heart and said that she would give it to him on their anniversary. This line of thought was also related to previous conversations where handwritten letters were compared to email and SMS. Handwritten letters and embroidery were suggested to share the slowness of production and distinct visibility of a hand as in style of handwriting.

The daughter's reply said: "Här kommer SMS:et före lördag" (Here's the SMS before Saturday). But while we were gathered in *Threads* the daughter sent yet another SMS saying: "SMS tycker jag är så opersonliga.

Kan vi inte ringa istället." (SMS are so impersonal. Can't we call each other and talk instead). Birgitta embroidered the second message with the machine. Later during the day the message was compared with another woman's message saying: "Vi kan ju börja med sms istället tycker jag." (I think we should start using SMS instead).

The messages that Birgitta embroidered were not selected out a long list of messages in her inbox, but sent to her because of the modest intervention done to prepare for participating in *Threads*. The messages became part of conversations in the sewing circle as well as between Birgitta and her family members.

In addition to the things that the participants bring and those that we have fitted into the blue boxes, *Threads* is dependent on local infrastructures such as access to electricity and mobile phone reception. During one sewing circle in Väskinde there was a power cut that altered *Threads* in the sense that there was no light, the embroidery machine no longer worked and stopped in the middle of the word *kärlek* (love). By using the mobile phones as a source of light the participants still managed to continue the sewing circle as they were able to embroider by hand. As a result of the power failure there were also a discussion on how dependent we are on electricity. A few days later several images, lit up by mobile phones, were posted on one of the websites connected to *Threads*.



Figure 4: A power-failure in Väskinde 2010. Picture by Görel Robsarve from [www.facebook.com/mobilisyjunta](http://www.facebook.com/mobilisyjunta).

In another region, there were difficulties finding places that were willing to host *Threads*. To not have a fully booked schedule, missing places to host *Threads* in, surprised us as a positive aspect as we, by listening in on the opportunities at hand, found new avenues for *Threads*. A participating teacher of textiles, Maria, was talking about how there had been a debate in her school on whether mobile phones should be allowed or not. Together with a teacher in mathematics she had been talking about how they could make use of the mobile phones: regard it as an aid rather than a disturbing element. Since there was a gap in the tour schedule she

could bring the two boxes with her and incorporate it in her teaching for two weeks. At the end of the day, when we were lifting up the heavy blue boxes into the trunk of her car she said: I could never have dreamt that this would happen when I woke up this morning.

All of these examples show situations in which parts, partners and practices of *Threads* are missing. In the case of Birgitta she did not have any text messages in her inbox to share and embroider, which encouraged her to start sending messages to her close ones. When *Threads* did not have any locations for assembling, Maria made place for *Threads* at her work. In the case of the power failure some parts of *Threads* stopped working. Without electric power the machine simply does not work, and one could thereby argue that the machine in itself is not particularly fluid. On the other hand *Threads* did not completely stop working. With some help from the light in the mobile phones and hand embroidery *Threads* could continue.

#### ADDED PARTS, PARTNERS AND PRACTICES

As we have mentioned the hosts and participants of *Threads* are asked to contribute with things such as fabrics, SMS, tables and food each time *Threads* is assembled. In this section we will give examples of when parts, partners and practices beyond the invitation are added.

One such example is a woman in Väskeby who did not embroider SMS, but greetings to her friends and family on previously unused terry towels, and thereby created a queue to the embroidery machine. She was not actively taking part in discussions with the other participants but rather focused on the embroidery machine as if it was a production unit. At one point the host decided to let some of the newly arrived participants jump the queue. The woman with the terry towels did however have all of her greetings embroidered by the end of the day.



Figure 5: Collector's cards added by the host Susanne.

At Väskeby rural community centre Susanne was the host for the one week that *Threads* visited. As part of assembling she brought new non-human actors such as textile collector's cards and embroidered everyday use objects that she hung on the clotheslines. In the

beginning of the day she introduced *Threads* through the thing that she had brought herself. She was still addressing the themes that we had been stressing during the educational sewing circle and which could be found in the patterns. One such overt theme was communication. Susanne also picked up on a more implicit theme that is that in *Threads* nothing can be bought, just like the trading cards that she brought can never be bought, only exchanged.

In the same community centre one of the collaborating partners brought roll-ups, flyers for their organisation and a machine to make pins. All of these things were placed at one side of the room clearly separated from *Threads*, as a one-off thing. Compared to the things that Susanne brought these were not related to the themes of *Threads*. On a later occasion the messages on the flyers and roll-ups, aiming to recruit new members, were embroidered on clothes and were put onto the clotheslines physically in the space and digitally on the website. Later they were placed in one of the travelling boxes.

The two blue boxes are fitted very well to the amount and shape of material that *Threads* consisted of at the time of starting its travel. They are, however, not dimensioned to contain large chunks of added material. Therefore one host, for example, found a couple of plastic bags, standing next to the two blue boxes when she came to pick up *Threads*. She decided to treat the content of the plastic bags as less prioritised when assembling *Threads* in the community centre.

Some of the added parts stay only for a short while, whereas some stay to travel to the next place. There are embroideries on the tablecloth and in the file folders with textile pages that can be described as some kind of accumulation of stories. In addition to the accumulation of stories that travels with the boxes, there is also accumulation on the website where the participants upload images of their embroideries.

Kajsa, another participant in Järnboås, waved goodbye at the end of the day and said that she appreciated being part of something bigger. Her participation was enhanced by knowing that *Threads* already had been somewhere, and will continue touring. The connection was made by the traces left by other participants and the notion of knowing that what you yourself leave will meet others.

Of the added parts, partners and practices some have been done with an effort to adjust themselves to what they understood as *Threads*, whereas others such as the roll-up, the terry towels and the embroidered member-recruitment have challenged *Threads* and its boundaries.

#### DISCUSSION: THREADS WITHOUT ENDS?

In this paper we have shown how the collaborating partners were striving for stability through finding one strong narrative, which resembles the concept of *immutable mobiles*, although not expressed in those words. However, in writing what you have just read and

in living with *Threads* on tour, we suggest that *Threads* is better understood through multiple stories – as a fluid assembly with vague and moving boundaries.

Most of the things that are part of *Threads* are nothing out of the ordinary. They are off the shelf items and are also used by several of the participants outside of their engagement in *Threads*. One way of framing the many parts of *Threads* is that they are designs, materials and technologies that have travelled far from their intended context of use to become assembled into *Threads*.

The design of *Threads* can in that sense be described as a *design-after-design* – a reordering of things beyond and after *design-in-project*. This process of reordering, or so we argue, continues as *Threads* embarks on its journey and becomes assembled in different context and by different actors.

This continuous relational reordering of things is partly designed into *Threads* since the actors involved in its becoming are asked to add parts and practices - to contribute with a space to host *Threads* in, tables to gather around and text messages to share and embroider. This reordering of things is also done through adding, replacing and altering parts and practices beyond the invitation of *Threads* and thereby challenging the boundaries of *Threads*.

The challenge for the designer in the context of making a fluid design travel, allowing for *design-after-design*, is how to perform a more fluid designer role and not seek absolute control. In *Threads* this means to create an emerging network, which has the readiness to take on, assemble and perhaps also adjust *Threads* to local circumstances and desires. For us and the other collaborating partners this means to listen and to be attentive. It also means to tell and allow for multiple stories of what *Threads* can be and mean. Some of these stories are told by representatives from the collaborating partners prior to assembling, by us during the educational sewing circle, through the things that we have put into the boxes and by other participants for example on the project website.

The fluid process can at times be frustrating and stressful since it involves uncertainty. *Threads* is dependent on various parts and practices to be added by the participants, and it is not uncommon that parts are missing, such as a place to host *Threads* in, mobile phone reception as well as text messages to embroider.

As the designers of *Threads* we still argue that the fluid character is most of all a good thing, in our case. We argue that *Threads* is able to travel not despite of its vague and moving boundaries but because of its ability to be assembled in different ways and thereby become entangled and part of the local context. This is also how *Threads* becomes to matter in the everyday life of the local actors. To elaborate on this argument we would like to pose the questions: Where does *Threads* end? And, where can the boundaries of *Threads* be drawn?

There are many possible ways to answer these questions. One way to do so would be to refer to the schedule posted on the project website which says that *Threads* begins at 10 am and finishes by 4 pm on specific dates, which means that *Threads* only exists when there is an announced gathering and only for that limited time. Another way of answering would be to suggest that it has to do with the physical space that we are in: the room in which *Threads* is assembled. Yet another possible answer would be to argue that *Threads* is made up of the things that are fitted into the two blue boxes and the participants who have signed the attendance list. If we, for example, turn to the contract with the Swedish Travelling Exhibitions which all the collaborating partners signed, the answer from a legal perspective might be that it has to do with the name: *Threads - a mobile sewing circle*.

But if we take a look at the stories of how *Threads* travel, how it is assembled and disassembled, we can tell a richer story than the just proposed boundaries.

When Birgitta received the invitation she did not have any text messages in her phone. To prepare herself she decided to send text messages to her family asking for a message before Saturday. This modest intervention did in turn generate not only new messages to embroider during the sewing circle but also conversations in relation to everyday communication with her family members, who did not take part in *Threads* when it was assembled in the local rural community centre between 10 am and 4 pm. Time, space of *Threads* is more fluid than the formalities of schedule tells us. And the human actors of *Threads* are more fluid than the attendance list says.

In other cases new things, that are not travelling in the two boxes, are brought in and made part of *Threads*. One such example is the textile collector's cards brought by Susanne that she used in her introduction. Yet another is the roll-ups and flyers brought by one of the collaborating partners as well as the plastic bags next to the blue boxes that one of the new hosts had to deal with. In other words, *Threads* does not end with the things in the blue boxes, even though some of these added parts are only temporary and will not travel with *Threads* to the next place.

de Laet and Mol quotes Morgan who notes; “the designer knows when he has reached perfection, not when there is no longer anything to add, but when there is no longer anything to take away” (2000, p.236). In contrast, we would not claim that *Threads* would ever reach perfection or that there are no more things to be added or to be taken away. *Threads* consist of many parts. As seen in the above-mentioned examples new parts are added by the participants. In other cases some are missing. In Väske *Threads* was missing electricity and the embroidery machine stopped working. Such a break down does not necessarily mean that *Threads* stops working or ends. The participants were still embroidering text messages. In other cases the

missing parts are replaced or altered by the participants. When *Threads* did not have a place to be assembled in, Maria brought the two blue boxes to her school – adding the part that was missing.

It is hard to say if there are one or several parts that are more important than others. If there is such a thing as one essential part of *Threads* that cannot be missing, changed or altered. That is however not the point of this paper.

What we suggest is that through the process of adding, altering and changing parts and practices *Threads* become more closely entangled in the participants' everyday lives. The boundaries of *Threads* that could be described in terms of time, place, the content of the blue boxes, and the participants who have signed the attendance list seems to be more vague and moving than that. We argue that it is precisely through the entanglement in the local setting *Threads* becomes mattering. Sometimes this mattering is in line with the articulated goals of the collaborating partner and at other times it is not. But since there is no self-evident centre, no full control, neither a position in which all decisions can be made it becomes difficult for any storyline to completely overwrite the other storylines.

The concept of fluidity does not in particular help us talk about or deal with the contradictory storylines of *Threads*. It allows us to tell multiple storylines but not stories of tensions and contradictions. In the future we will consider other metaphors or ways of telling stories that might be better suited for that, such as flickering fire.

In the end of 2010 we received an email from the person in charge of textile courses at a branch of study circles, saying that they will offer a course on SMS-embroidery as a study circle during the spring semester. She had among other things read the Do-it-yourself-invitation on the project website on how to host your own sewing circle. She was asking us if they could use a picture from the website to promote their course *SMS-embroidery*. She was not asking for the things in the blue boxes. As pointed out earlier, most of the things that we have fitted into the boxes, are nothing out of the ordinary and most of them can be bought or even found in your home. One could thereby argue that *Threads* is able to spread and travel, not only in the two blue boxes that we have designed, but also through stories told of *Threads*. Most likely there are few people who will develop an embroidery machine that you can connect to a mobile phone or design a website the way we have

done. But what the example with the SMS-embroidery-study-circle shows is that at least parts of *Threads* can travel and spread beyond the two blue boxes and under alternative names.

*Threads* is without ends, it seems.

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