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Transcript

Hello. Hello, hello.

Welcome to the Oxford and the Property podcast.

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Hello and welcome to the Oxford Anthropology podcast. My name is Malin Schlotter and I am an Enfield student at the School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography. Today, we will be listening to a talk given by Tanya Perez Bustos entitled How to Stitch. Tanya is a feminist anthropologist at the University de Colombia, working on technologies and knowledge dialogues currently focusing on handmade textiles as technology of knowledge and care. This is reflected in our talk, which discusses how embroidery affects the body and enables collective reflection and listening when immersed in the act of textile making. Her research involves individuals linked to the comprehensive system of truth, justice, reparation and non repetition in Colombia, examining the bodily effects of listening to testimonies of violence. This talk was recorded online. Without further ado, please enjoy how to switch ethnography.

I'm going to start this conversation with two questions. How our bodies affected by listening and how can this be answered through embroidery? These questions frames teaching as an ethnographic device that is as an invitation to embroider collectively as a way of unfolding and exploring together. People and textual materials, different questions which have a profound, intimate, reflexive and personal dimension. In what follows, I display how this device works. I set the description initially by looking closely to a research with several professionals devoting their labour days listening to war stories in Colombia. With them, we search to inquire through a series of textile explorations, how their bodies were affected by this listening task. So before presenting the device, this, researching doing ethnography through embroidering, I must say, however, that the device. Does not exist in itself. There is. It cannot be understood or dimensioned outside the way in which it has been emerged. Stitching ethnography evolves as an empirical need to learn to embroider. And it is this pedagogical approach to this making practise the one that frames and allows to the the device to unfold. I will come back. To this in the second part of this century. The research from which I described teaching as an ethnographic device was called embroidering bodies that listen, and it started with an open call for workers in the transitional justice. System in Colombia. And this system, for those of you who don't know, was born after the signing of the peace agreement between the Colombian Government and the park. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia in 2016 and the system seeks to guarantee the rights and the of victims to truth, justice, reparation and non repetition. The institutions that compose the system have at the centre of its work the collection of victims, testimonies of their experiences of half a century of violence. For this, the Colombian transitional justice system has implemented a process for receiving these testimonies, which are then transmitted to professionals in charge of listening systematising and transcribing them. The work carried out by these people. Is crucial for. Arriving and the truth about what happened during the conflict in Colombia. While national reparation guides the mandate of the system, little attention has been paid to the experiences of officials whose days are taken up by listening to the testimonies presented by victims, which include descriptions of violence and traumatic acts. With this framework, the call that started the research invited professionals of this system to apply to be part of the. Research sharing an initial thought of how it was for them to work with testimonies about the internal conflict in the country and explaining why they thought a textile exploration could be a useful method of inquiry. For them, this call was an opportunity to meet others like them as a way to process how they felt, and they perceived embroidering as an entry into this with curiosity and interest. To think of embroidering as a mechanism to inquire something implied in this case to gauge what was needed to do a first stitch, how this was going to take place, and why. Although these questions could be answered more conceptually, something that in fact happened, what I want to highlight here is the way that they were answered through a series of material invitations. Some of these invitations anticipated the act of stitching, framing it in such a way that people felt. Part of the research. That is willing to reflect upon themselves while in the company of of others, or the people and other materials as well as open to materially explore their own questions, to discover them through stitching. Thus, before our first meeting, we sent to participants homes a tote bag with a sewing kit and a cloth batch with their name handwritten in pencil and a threaded needle attached to it. All these materials were handmade and put together by people from the team. Our hands, my hands had taken the time in the sewing of fabrics, the winding of yarns and the threading of needles. Thus these materials were as much as direct invitations for people to stitch. Their participation in the project and do it from their homes, embroidering their name in the place they belong, a gesture that implied an intimate recognition of who and where they were. And they were, by a way, to bond us together through our making. They were not just things to work with. They were companion materials that started a continuity between our bodies making before we met and their bodies making to come those in potentiality. With these companion materials, there was also a letter addressed to them personally, in which we welcome participants to the explorations and suggested a question related to the work. This first letter was followed by other material correspondences that were sent every time before our encounters happened. Each one had a new open question and the request to bring to the meetings a surface to stitch. One time, for example, we asked participants to bring a personal clothes that needed to be mended. Another time it was a pillow cover. Or a blanket. We wanted surfaces that came from their domestic surroundings that were close to their bodies and therefore that could work as extensions of them as to materially elicit intimate reflections. Thinking with those clothes, going through them, piercing them with threads and needles as a way to inquire their own. For the affectations. Some of the questions that guided the textile encounters, as well as the epistolary reflections in between them, were the following. What parts have you had to walk again? In your listening of world stories. What marks has this exercise left on you? What has broken or is about to break in this task? What swallows and comforts you when performing it? Each one of these questions was as much as an invitation to think about their work as a bit to reflect upon the textile materials that accompany them while doing it. A job that even its nature was inhabiting their daily life. For each encounter and material exploration with received participants in a wide open and bright atelier, carefully organised for the meeting. We welcome them with some fruits and coffee. We gave them room to arrive, to drop their bags, to recognise the space. Only then we invited them to stitch something into their personal belongings and connect that textile making with their own reflections about their work and how their bodies felt about it. Only after they were welcomed in a space prepared for them did stitching began. Hospitality here was a way to continue caring for the bones that we had started to curate when sending materials and letters to their homes before the meeting, as we did. Those hospitality framed embroidering. Stitching as an autographic device was sustained by all these small textile gestures that were part of the preparation of the meeting. Winding handwriting, stitching, threading and that involved researchers, bodies and times, and participants felt recognised by them. Methodologically speaking, hospitality created an atmosphere of care and intimacy that trained encounters in the stitching and the way they could contribute to collectively explore certain questions. The first time we met, for example, participants were asked to draw with a threaded needle a line below their name using a simple stitch called back stitch. In embroidery, these stitches are used to outline shapes. To make them, one must go backward to the general direction of embroidery, bringing the needle through the fabric and then back down into the same hole at the end of the last stitch, passing over the path that the threaded needle has left behind the fabric. The participants got together in small groups and looked introspectively at the closed batch with their things, with an in pencil, and while trying to start the text, the label they talk about who they were and how their parts had brought them to this exploration. Sometimes participants did not know how to thread a needle, how long a thread should be cut to the stitch. How to not the end of the thread to start an embroidery or if doing so was necessary at all? So we help the participants do these simple things while talking about the common questions we had about the listening work. We got close to each other, really close something never imaginable in a normal ethnographic encounter. Our hands graced each other in that very first body exchange. Eyes on the textile materials, ears on the making instructions and as well on what others were. Starting at a more personal level. With each stitch, the collective is being embroidered, and this together ring speaks back to the maker. Doing a back stitch opens for participants personal, intimate and material reflections on the difficulties of listening to tales of a conflict that seems to repeat itself one and again in a country like colour. While engaging with testimonies of war, the stories take these professionals back to territories they have already visited. They think of this while bringing the threaded middle back from its own path. In this movement, they share their questions of what has happened to the people who live in those areas now affected, but also about how the stories affect them personally. These paths that I have walk and walk now through listening are my paths. These stories go through me, one of the professionals shares. Where her words come out of the stitching itself through the fabric while forming the reflection. The intimacy produced in the textile making affects listening. Transforming the explorative exercise into a collective puzzle. Participants felt welcomed and cared for through the space and explorations we have created for them. They were grateful for the time and room given to meet with others like them, and to pause in the textile making. To dwell through the stitching on what they were feeling and to see this reflecting in the other people with whom they did exploration, to feel that their embroidery brought them together in that mutual reflection. As an ethnographer, prototyping participants experiences and caring for their well-being, I I was attentive to how the stitching was generating this intimate listening atmosphere. But I was also part of the whole performance that sustained this happening and the hospitality that characterised it. However, in this I was not alone for this project in particular. The company of artists was very important in the crafting of the device. The sensitivity to the role of material beauty in the shaping of the atmosphere we were trying to create in the textile explorations was brought and curated by them. They saw the poetics embedded in how the small textile gestures that we all made before the meeting. Were then repeated during the encounters by the participants. They were touched by those repetitions and by now by how they wrapped them collectively. Stitching as a thermographic device was then nurtured as much as prototyped by the sensitivity which was shared during the planning of the textile exploration. It also contributed to highlight the intimate continuity between bodies makings and materialities in the making and how it affected. Knowledge production. This in the sense that there is a body that is stitch in embroidery, one that listens and relates differently because of stitching. Something that in turn necessarily affects the research she performs. Although the crafting of stitching as a device was highlighted and enhanced by this artistic sensitivity. I did not learn about the methodological possibilities of embroidery only through them. This device was engendered and unfolded initially out of my personal learnings with traditional embroiderers and in particular their connect their continuous goal to grab a threaded needle to understand what they were doing with it. I delved into this in the next part of this talk, a part that I have called learning to embroider. My approach to embroidery goes back to 2013, when I reached traditional embroideries of Cartago Colombia with an interest. To understand how what they carefully made with their hands could teach me something about care as a knowledge making practise. In this region, women of advanced age craft, a technique called Calado, which is a Spanish tradition and is also made in other parts of Latin America like Mexico and Brazil. This technique is performed in the underlying constructional fabric. Before any speech takes place, women, mostly most partially destroy the clothes. Carefully removing fibres from it to widen its grid, which is later embroidered with new threads, usually of the same colour and thickness as the original fabric. This process leaves in the embroidered cloth a series of complex tessellated figures. I can give this very general description about this way of stitching because I spent long hours living with women embroiderers at their homes for almost a year. I saw how they crafted this technique in between performing other domestic chores and labours of care, and I also saw the care that the craft itself implied. The time and attention it involved and the intimacies and silences it created for them. In my ethnographic work with these women artisans, I learned to embroider doing research, but I also learned to research embroidering. This in mesh making practises occurred at the domestic level where embroiderers where embroidery takes place, which means that my learnings both about research and about embroidery were affected by the daily life pedagogies that emerge in this scenario. These everyday learnings contributed to understanding the dynamics of advice and solidarity that emerged in the art of embroidering collectively, which were characterised by shared intimacy and mutual support. This contributed to giving account for the ways in which one learns to be part of a group. To become part of others on a daily basis. The four learning to stitch was a way of learning to care and relate to others, both people and companion materials, a process that took place while learning to stitch itself. I would sit close to them and watch what they did and I ask questions, but they were unable to respond them not because they did not know the answer, but because they knew it with the hands. Acknowledging that their knowledge was embodied in the sense of touch was a way of recognising that in order, in order to access it, I had to touch as well. This turned my ethnographic exercise into an ethnography of contact. And this transformed my relationship with needlework and embroiderers. I was able to discover that there are bodily affective and cognitive dimensions of this making that do not only pass through words, and that the perception of the knowing body when embroidering is affected by the embroidery itself. My body needed to make the stitches to understand them and in that making I drew closer to those who taught me how to make them. Learning to embroider was a political epistemic requirement to think differently about. And with embroidery to think by embroidering, to think with embroidering. Hence this learning is then constitutive of the possibility of embroidery to become an ethnographic device. As ambergris taught me how to stitch, I was discovering how embroidery made me dwell on the movement of the needle in the fabric. Focus on that slowness. I perceive differently. What was being shared between us? The materials passed from their hands to mine, touching each other. Our bodies came closer when I required some explanation of what I was doing. Between this, the time came to prepare the food and they got up from the labour and went to cook. It was impossible to continue embroidering while they spent time taking care of the house, which at that time included me as well. If they shared their time to teach me, I will share my time to help them as well. So I will. Go with them and contribute to the preparation of food, the setting of the table to eat, the cleaning up of the mess left by cooking and eating. We will share the food and then go back to Andrew. And in that constant back and forth from embroidering to other labels of care, we would talk about them, about their personal history with embroidery about the materials they use, and about their life in general. They also asked me questions about me, about what I was doing there and about why I was interested in the Labour. We got to know each other in that intimacy while learning what they were doing with my own hands. Learning to investigate amid those daily gestures was a research that was deeply rooted in what they did and what they taught me about what I did and could do in terms of hospitality, care and intimacy, for example. There a material, corporal cognitive responsible and careful relationship was unfolding, and I was learning to investigate with embroidery. This passage from. Embroidery as a theme to embroidery as a methodological device. Without abandoning its status as a subject to be studied. Changes the daily gaze. Of the researcher with respect to textiles. Allowing her to realise the epistemic content of this making and its way of inquiring, and of relating to that which is being inquiry. It is there with the device with which this text open. Is configured. An initial search to understand the knowledge hosted by the craft of those who embroider gradually allows itself to become part of spaces for collective embroidery to experience their intimacy and then invite others to embroider collectively to answer questions intimately together. In the making of embroidery. Thus, embroidery as an ethnographic device is presented as a set of material explorations where questions are answered through embroidery. And here stitching itself is amplified. Even when talking about something not directly related with textile making, such as about bodies affected by the listening of all stories to the point that what is shared in relation with this becomes stitch. Thus, in these textile explorations, the body, textile materials continuities are central to the methodological design in itself, in the sense that they are thought of as a permanent invitation to dwell in the making with others, people and companion material. To take care of the listening that is generated there to take responsibility for it and for the intimacy which emerges and is shared in this continuity and which is understood in the making itself. It is in this continuity between the bodies that make and the the materiality that emerge from that, making that a subject that inquires is in a different way, one that investigates from that continuity is embroidered. Here, to stitch becomes rather than just embodied knowledge, a form of embroidered knowledge. I would like to close this stock with five specific hints and a warning about what embroidering ethnographic research entails. This closing list aims to invite you to imagine the device. As a toolbox with which you can revise and reinvent your own embodied material research practises. So first speech in ethnography starts with a material invitation to think with textile surfaces as companion materials to reflect upon what this gesture invites us to think back. Second, as an innography device. Stitching is not just about stitching. But it cannot be without stitching either. This implies the emergence and creation of a disposition to speech, to understand, to dimension that stitching is always in relation with materialities and context. Stitching and demographic is a collaborative mission. Scene of stitching. 3rd stitching, ethnography is a performative device that creates intimacy. And so it demands researchers to be responsible with this. To think about how to be hospitable and caring, not as moral demands, but as body and reflective practises that imply labour. In the bonding of bodies and materials. The objective of this device is to invite to listen differently. Creating a material atmosphere that generates a common space for understanding, crafting and participation. Stitching as well as ethnography is a practise that generates collective knowledge. It is an analytical tool. Teaching an innography make relations. For example, between stitching and listening. They make relations as threaded needles do. In these devices that that which is shared becomes textile. There is a thing in the hands of those making. A thing that can be remade, repeated and mended. Is in this sense that this device produces embroidered knowledge. Those are the five pints and now a final warning. Stitching as well as ethnography. Might become an easy formula to create intimacy. When it does, it is in danger of commodification. Hence, it is necessary to be careful in assuming textile making as an easy metaphor to interpret what emerges from its actions. So for example, not by stitching something, something to mend it. The one who stitches is healed or repaired. There stitching is imposed as an interpretive framework for healing. While both practises are trivialised. As a device embroidering and ethnography invite us to think carefully about what is embroidered and how to think of the surfaces, the materials, and the questions that the mission action of these surfaces and materials ask us back. Stitching a needle in a fabric is not a new graphic device per se. Thank you very much.

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