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Designers by any other name: exploring the sociomaterial practices of vernacular garment menders

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Studies around the cultures of design indicate a mutually constitutive relationship designers share with materials when in practice. However, professional designers are not the only ones experiencing proximate relations with materials. With the recent emergence of community-based repair workshops, non-professional designer practices of fixing things like garments reveal sites of active material tinkering possibly aiding transitions in current clothing disposal patterns. Using qualitative research methods and a sociomaterial theoretical lens, this paper takes the mending activities of non-professional menders in communal repair workshops in the city of Helsinki, Finland, as its point of departure. The study identifies these menders as vernacular menders and explores their dynamic practices to reveal the situated, embodied, routinized yet creative process of mending. The created outputs by the vernacular menders result in what is termed informal design and point towards extending mainstream conceptualizations of design and creativity. Taking such a view could help to sketch out new roles for fashion designers in pursuing endeavours to better support mending whilst bringing in positive environmental change.

Keywords: sociomaterial; vernacular menders; informal design; creativity

1. Introduction

The work of designers is often described as a practice involved in giving 'form' to materials (Alexander, 1971), solving problems in unique ways (Cross, 2006) or more recently creating new materials (Myers, 2012). Designers' ways of doing and knowing have been studied at length and theorized in various ways. One stream of current studies has been around the cultures of design that take into account the embodied, situated and material aspects of the work of designers (Geertz, 1973; Hendersen, 1999 in Kimbell, 2011). Work coming out of this field acknowledges that designers are not detached from the world they work in or on (Kimbell, 2011) and points to a close, mutually constitutive relationship designers share with materials when in practice (Shove, Watson & Ingram, 2007). However, professional designers are not alone in experiencing proximate relations with

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materials. In fact, designed artefacts are often not even used in ways anticipated by designers; they rather get constantly reconstituted when in use (Shove et al., 2007). One site where such re-configurations take shape, lies in the world of everyday repairing of numerous daily artefacts (Graham & Thrift, 2007; Maestri & Wakkary, 2011). Attending to these breakdowns not only results in an on-going recreation of relations between people and things, but the activities are also hotbeds for unleashing everyday “creativity, invention, imagination, and artfulness”, as well as design (Jackson, 2014:226, Maestri et al., 2011: 81). Moreover, with the recent emergence of community-based repair workshops, non-professional designer practices of fixing things, such as garments, are being recognized as possible platforms for aiding transitions in current clothing disposal patterns (Twigger, 2013; Chapman, 2013; McLaren & McLauchlan, 2015).

This study will take a closer look at what goes on when non-professional designers come together to mend their garments in these workshops. Furthermore, by way of a generative analysis, the embodied, situated and sociomaterial dependant aspects of mending will be explored. Creative and collective ways through which these dynamic menders extend garment life will reveal sites of informal design outcomes resultant from their mending practices. Thus, through an exploration of the doings (body), sayings (discourse) and materiality (artefacts) of mending practices, this article aims to do the following:

- emphasize the importance of understanding the inseparability of the social from the material, and vice versa, when exploring practices that may assist in driving positive socio-environmental change (Drazin & Küchler, 2015);
- point towards the blurring of designer-non-designer dualities that emerge in and from active material tinkering of non-professional mending practices; and
- articulate implications for endeavours aimed at encouraging garment longevity practices.

The paper will begin by identifying *who* these everyday menders are, illustrate *how* they mend and discuss what happens when they *do* mend.

2. Theoretical framing

Let us begin the discussion first by gaining an understanding of sociomaterial practices. Rooted in relational onto-epistemology, a sociomaterial theoretical framing works towards overcoming dualisms between mind-matter/body, social-material, nature-culture, human-nonhuman in developing an understanding of the making of the world (see Haraway, 1991; Barad, 2003, 2007). Put simply, a sociomaterial practice theoretical lens takes an egalitarian view on the agency of humans and non-humans when considering enactments of practices. What this means is that ways of doing and knowing are not to be separated from the material or the social elements in the enactments of any practice (Gherardi, 2017). Rather, body, material and discourses are all “expressions of the same sociomaterial world” (Gherardi, 2017: 42). Knowing bodies and the things of knowledge do not exist as *a priori* entities merely coming into contact to mediate practice. Instead they are co-constituted through an enactment of practices entangled in the social and the material simultaneously. Therefore, when denoting this mutual constitution of the social with the material in the carrying out of practices, ‘intraction’ replaces interaction and becomes the preferred term of use (Barad, 2007: 37). Giving importance to this materiality aspect within practices also exists in the literature coming out of the “practice turn” or the return to practices (Schatzki, 2001; Reckwitz, 2002). A unified definition of practice does not exist, but for this paper I will take Reckwitz’s definition to further our understanding of sociomaterial practices.

According to Reckwitz (2002) a practice is a “routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one another: forms of bodily and/or mental activities, ‘things’ and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge” (p. 249). Conceptualizing any practice in such a way points to a number of key aspects. Firstly, neat distinctions between thinking and doing are avoided and ways of knowing are taken as a hybrid of the mental with physical/bodily activities (Shove, Pantzar & Watson, 2012),

being carried out in a world not separated but ‘entangled’ in the social and material (Scott & Orlikowski, 2008). Knowledge is seen, not as being sourced from the mind alone, but as embodied, experienced and distributed among humans and non-humans or nature and culture, social and material (Gherardi, 2017). As Schatzki argues, “knowledge is no longer even the property of individuals, but instead a feature of groups, together with their material setups” (2001: 12). In other words, knowledge is situated and taken as an on-going accomplishment manifested in the “performance” of a practice (see Reckwitz, 2002 for a detailed understanding of practice-as-performance and practice-as-entity). Secondly, through the situated intractions of things together with humans, understandings on ways of knowing, doing and saying are co-constituted, enacted in current performances and become enablers of future practice (Gherardi, 2017). This leads to the third key aspect whereby the unit of analysis moves from individuals and onto the enacted processes in a routinized, embodied and situated manner (Reckwitz, 2002).

We therefore understand everyday practices as not separate from the materiality of artefacts nor exclusive resultants of social structures (Kimbell, 2012). Rather agency between humans/non-humans is distributed and seen as entangled within a sociomaterial world when in the process of enacting everyday practices. The paper will now provide empirics to further anchor our understanding of mending as a reflective site.

3. Research design

This paper is based on empirical data collected over a seven-month period (November 2016-June 2017) of field work in 8 communal mending workshops in the city of Helsinki, Finland. The data consists of 16 semi-structured interviews with individual participants, one group discussion with 4 participants and 3 expert interviews with mending workshop organizers. The data forms part of the author’s larger on-going doctoral research on mending practices. A three-level approach was implemented for the purpose of gathering data (Table 1).

Table 1. Three-level data collection method

Levels	Objective	Data Collection Method	Data Recording Tools
One	Identify mending workshops Attend mending workshops	Web search, Snowball Field observation	Field notes
Two	Make contact and interview organizers	In-depth semi-structured interviews	Transcription of audio recording
Three	Interview participants Participate in mending workshops	Short surveys In-depth semi-structured interviews Group discussion Participant observation	Transcription of audio recording Field notes

Level one included identifying organizers of the mending workshops in Helsinki. Three organizers were selected, two (REMAKE and Korjaussarja) using online research and one (Repair-a-thon) through snowballing (Flick, 2014), whereby one of the organizers introduced me to the third organizer. I then decided to take part in the mending events with the aim of gaining access and permission to conduct my study at their respective workshops. By giving verbal consent, the organizers acted as the gatekeepers, giving access to not only partake in their own workshops but also to make contact with other organizers in the community of menders. The location of each workshop varied depending on who was organizing and where the organizers could gain access for conducting the workshop. All the mending workshops were free of charge and provided participants fee-free access to machines and other haberdashery needed to mend. The initial research, at this level, was limited to observing the activities in the workshops without making direct contact with the participants. These observations from an ‘outsider’s’ perspective documented the structure of

conducting the workshops (Nicolini, 2009). Initial observations formed part of the field notes used in later analysis.

Following from this, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with the organizers to identify motivations behind their activities. Each of the three interviews lasted from 1 hour to 1 hour 40 minutes. The full interview transcripts were analyzed, highlighting the perceptions of the organizers of their own practice and that of the participants as a group. This served as the grounds for level three of the data collection, where the motive was to zoom in and get an 'insider' view by tapping into the participants' views on mending practices, motivations for joining the workshops, experiences while mending and observing the doings of the participants (Nicolini, 2009). This was done through short pre-workshop surveys, in-depth semi-structured interviews and one group discussion during the workshop with the participants. The interviews and discussion each lasted from 30 minutes to 1 hour. All interviews were done only after attaining consent from the participants to be audio-recorded and used as data for the purposes of the current study. Additionally, observing the participants as they mended and self-reflexive activities by mending my own garments at the workshops also formed part of the field notes. A triangulation method was then used to analyse the data which included transcriptions of interviews, group discussion, short surveys and field notes (Flick, 2014).

Figure 1 Vernacular menders seen mending at a mending workshop held at an atelier (left) and at a café (right) in Helsinki. Source: author.

The consolidated data was coded using open coding. Open coding was directed towards forming descriptive categories and sub-categories when addressing the questions “who are the menders?”, “how do they mend?” and “what happens when they mend?”. The data revealed two major groups of menders: the organizers and the participants. As all three organizers held professional degrees in the field of fashion and/or textile design, they were grouped together as the “Professional Menders”. Within this category, sub-categories were created based on the varying motivations of each organizer as summarized in Table 2. The second group was categorized “Vernacular Menders” and consisted of the non-professional menders participating in the workshops. The focus of this paper is on the knowing, doings and saying of the mending practices of vernacular menders.

Table 2 Types of Professional Menders and their motivations.

Professional Menders (Organizers)	Motivation (Professional Menders)
The Activist	Waste minimization
The Entrepreneur	Social enterprise
The Craft Teacher	Skill sharing

The term ‘vernacular’ is used to refer to the everyday, mundane, ordinary mending as sites of creativity and to reveal its importance for research within design (Hawkins, 2017). Using a sociomaterial theoretical lens to study mending practices of vernacular menders revealed the different types of menders. These sub-categories emerged because of the variations observed in the ways of knowing, saying and doing mending. The vernacular menders were then categorized as the restorer, the re-doer, the recruit and the reluctant.

Figure 2 Community of menders: Professional and Vernacular menders' positions in participation. Source: author, adapted from Lave and Wenger's (1998) "Relations of participation and non-participation" diagram (p.167).

These categories are dynamic and not taken to be static, as vernacular menders did move in between them. What is important, however, is to highlight the distributive nature of mending as seen being performed by different bodies all engaged in routinized yet dynamic ways of doing mending (Reckwitz, 2002). This is a point to which I return in later sections ('Results', 'Emergent informal design' and 'Everyday creativities'). Additionally, the social nature of practices is revealed and points to what Lave and Wenger (1998) term as 'community of practices', whereby different bodies with varying knowledge all form part of the community by engaging in the same practice spread across space and time. Moreover, working consistently, whilst entangled with the materials, practitioners learn their way into a practice and move from 'peripheral' corners into becoming fully participating practitioners (Lave & Wenger, 1998). Therefore, as the following section will reveal, these sub-categories hold great relevance for the present study.

4. Results

4.1. Distributive mending

The varying profiles of menders described here illustrate the distributive nature of mending. This section describes the variations within the performances of mending as acted out by different bodies in the context of communal mending workshops. The four accounts illustrate the situated, yet at times overlapping, ways in which mending is carried out and knowledge is distributed (see Figure 2). The discussion will then turn to the embodied nature of the practice and explore ways of knowing as embodied entanglements within the sociomaterial setting when enacting practices of mending.

4.1.1. The restorer

I don't want to mend things if they don't look professional, {...} I think I would like it (the garment) to look like it was meant to look originally.

I'm very precise, so I know when something is homemade and I prefer the type of mending that looks factory-made and quite exact.

I want to have it (pair of pants) fixed in a way that doesn't show the damage. Mostly, I like to use the sewing machine to fix garments, I will put patches of the same colour and fabric of that particular garment {...}. Once I repaired clothes and it became very dramatic and then I didn't use it anymore. So the thing is to make it invisible.

Professional, original, precise, factory-made, invisible, all point to the restorative qualities of mending. Turning back the clock on garments to erase any or all signs of breakdown is perhaps the most obvious light in which mending is perceived and expected to be performed (Spelman, 2002). Restoring garments to be neat, not grungy, and as they should be, is woven well into this practice.

Figure 3 Restorer digging through scrap denim (left) to find the exact colour so as to add patches inside (middle) the fraying crotch area to strengthen the jeans without showing the mend (right). Source: author.

However, restorers working within these peripheries are well versed in the language of materials and are anything but ordinary. They may not possess professional degrees in the field of garment mending or design, but their knowledge is on par with that of professionals and forms a vital part in the community of menders. Their reason for coming to the workshops is mainly to get a little advice on their mends while sharing their expertise with others. Restorers seek comfort in the company of other menders and avoid isolated moments of mending. In the process of pristinely mending garments, restorers often end up invisibly adding features into the garment. In this manner, restorers might overlap with the works of re-doers. The next section will this explain further.

4.1.2. The re-doer

There is a little hole (on the jacket). I will cover it up, and there is a saying, if you want to cover it, [you] should make it to be bigger and show so it looks part of it. I will use embroidery mending. It's very easy, you don't have to be the best embroiderer. I like the idea of doing something new, I have done this kind of work on t-shirts and if it doesn't succeed I do more embroidery over it{...}. I am more interested in experiments, and I do this a little bit {...}. I think for me I am always looking forward to the result, I think it's fun.

Figure 4 Re-doer using a visible embroidery mend to cover holes on the sleeve of the jacket. Source: author.

The re-doer is an experimenter and a risk taker. Re-doers bring new features onto the garments and re-configure the original design of the garment. However, such mends do not always have to be visible for, as seen, restorers too can re-do invisibly. This reveals an overlap and the fluid nature of the said categories. Additionally, the re-doer well recognizes the variety and differences in the demands of each mending job (Spelman, 2002) and is motivated by a strong desire to learn and improve their technique. Therefore, the range of knowledge oscillates from basic to advanced in this group. Moreover, re-doers normally do not have all the needed equipment at home and participate in the workshop to gain access to materials. Many times they will be seen making-do with what is available and improvise with those limited materials as they go along with their mends. This can be seen in the following excerpt:

I repaired it (pullover) using a very visible repair and many of the repairs were even on it when I bought it{...}. I find that it gives something special and something more to the garment, I like to do visible mending{...}. I have made some very funny things with visible mending. I also have these woollen trousers and then there were a lot of holes {...} and I didn't have the right colour for these trousers because they were deep blue and I used pink to repair it.

Where a restorer might spend hours searching for the perfect coloured thread, a re-doer is more spontaneous and not afraid to work with the odds. Similarly while a restorer might hide the additions made to the garment the re-doer makes it a point to show and highlight them. Both, however, when in the process of mending the garments, learn from the original design of the garment and enhance it. This is an aspect to which I will return (see 'Everyday creativities' and 'Emergent informal design').

4.1.3. The recruit

I brought my trousers that I stopped wearing because they were ripped here (pointing to the crotch area) so I want to fix them and I don't know how to operate the sewing machine, and I thought the machine will be the best for this because it is what you call a double stitch. And I learned how to operate with a needle in primary school but I wasn't very good so I thought I will come here and learn how to use a machine.

The recruit is a first-timer and has little to no experience with repairing, possessing very basic knowledge. The recruits want to learn how to put their clothing back into use. They are open to trying out various techniques of (invisible and visible) mending and are keen to learn. Some might be shy to use the sewing machine at first and are normally found around the hand stitching tables.

Figure 5 Recruit seen consulting the professional mender as the two work through the mend with the materials. Source: author.

Taking inspiration from their garments, professional menders and other vernacular menders, recruits collaboratively work on their mends as seen in the following narrative:

I was nervous about using the machine because I'm not that used to sewing, but we had good tutors and were helping and being positive. And I was hoping I could replace this section of the jeans and Piia (Professional mender, REMAKE) suggested I could take this part straight from the other jeans, and I haven't even thought about that before and then I was like, aha, let's do this, so I am really pleased with the outcome{...}. Now I will use my skills afterwards and also show some other people the same technique, it has been a very useful and productive evening!

4.1.4. The reluctant

My son's jeans got ripped in the crotch and it was a big hole and he brought it to me, but I did not know what to do with them, and they are in a bag in the summer cottage of broken clothes.

If it's just socks then I will throw it away but if I like it I ask someone to fix it for me. I have used a machine at school and haven't done it for it ages. I probably should but I ask my friend {...}. I think to start is the hardest part. I would probably throw [it] away if my dress breaks and I don't have any help.

The above excerpts are two women speaking, one who had brought in a Burberry jacket with a broken button in need of fixing while the other brought trousers owned by her mother with holes in them. The two women, although reluctant to use the sewing machine or their hands to mend, did not hesitate from explaining how they wanted the garment to be fixed. Both wanted the garments to be restored without the work being visible and in this way sharing some of the qualities with the restorers. Reluctants, out of fear of ruining the garment, do not give a go at fixing it. However, they want to consult and tell the professional mender what to do in a very particular manner. They select the materials themselves and know what and how they want it to be. In this way, they find themselves half-way between being outsiders and peripheral members of the community of menders as seen in Figure 2.

Figure 6 Professional mender seen mending the jacket of a reluctant vernacular mender as per his requirement. Source: author.

Additionally, some even show willingness to try mending themselves after seeing how it is done in the workshop. They learn in terms of seeing but do not “do” at this point, yet are inspired to try. This is seen in the following conversation:

Reluctant: came with my friend randomly. That’s it. And I found out that I could fix something that was broken. Both the zipper and the bottom button of my jacket were broken {...}, today we fixed the zipper, it’s a little bit wonky but it works.

MD: What do you normally do when garments rip or buttons break?

Reluctant: Well, if it would be a button like this I would find someone to do it for me. But now I know how to fix this (button) one and she (professional mender) showed me and if the same problem happens again I will try to fix it myself.

5. Discussion of findings

This section will now explore three key themes that emerged from the analysis of the vernacular menders’ various practices in the communal workshops.

5.1. Embodied knowledge

*I prefer using my hands to repair. I feel I have some kind of **connection with the garment** and it’s somehow more under my control when it is in my hand. (Restorer)*

*It (mending)[is] relaxing and takes **my mind off things** and lets me unwind and **I wasn’t thinking about anything**. (Re-doer)*

Every time someone began mending a garment in the workshops, be it a professional mender or a vernacular, it would always begin with touching the fabric and feeling it between the thumb and fingers. The broken area would then be felt and slightly scratched with a fingernail whilst the fabric

was turned inside out and back in again. The direction of the fibres would be felt and the fingers were seen grazing in the direction of each yarn looking intently at the garment construction. The hands were in constant use and in motion, feeling, touching and assessing the material properties of the garments prior to repair. Once the issue was diagnosed the use of hands would not stop, for as the menders began mending, a conversation in motion was witnessed between the mender and the matter – without being able to determine who was telling whom what to do next. From using the mouth to soften the thread just enough to accurately thread the needle to keeping the body in particular postures while working through the mend, the body's reliance on and inseparability from the tactile materiality of the work became effortlessly prominent. Not only was the sense of touch visible, but the sense of sight and feel were ever present too.

Figure 7 Using hands whilst encircled in a group of varying vernacular menders collaboratively working with the materials on their mends. Source: author.

One revealing example was when a man brought a woollen coat in need of a button stitch-up to one of the workshop events. As he was not happy with the way the jacket closed when it was first fixed, he returned to the workshop a second time. The troublesome button was placed together in consultation with the professional mender in various spots several times. Fitting and checking in the mirror, the two bodies worked in tandem with the sewing pins pinned in the coat to find the most aesthetically pleasing spot for it. They used their hands to fix and feel the fit of the coat before finalizing on the best spot for it to be sewn on. These observations point to a reliance on a kind of knowledge that can be seen as not purely coming from an intellectually charged cognitive process, rather an embodied one (Strati, 2007). Additionally, it seems to be entangled in the social (consultations with the professional) along with the material qualities of the coat and the senses and sensibility of the body. Strati (2007) terms this type of knowing as 'sensible knowledge', where the intractions of the hands with matter being worked with provide the basis for the enactments of on-going and future practices. The two are entangled and the knowledge derived is both in the action and in the sensing. According to Gherardi (2012) material engagements such as these enable the tactile and visual senses of the body and inform the performance of practices.

In other words, when using a sociomaterial lens to study practices, knowledge and ways of knowing are not constricted to purely the mind. In fact, an egalitarian approach is taken to the study of practices whereby dualities between mind/body, human/non-human, matter/ideas, are blurred. Knowledge is then taken to be embodied and a reliance on sensible knowledge is seen in the enactment of practices, as exemplified in the above examples. With this comes also the distributive nature of knowledge amongst various bodies (Henke, 2000). Ways of knowing are not confined to just one but various bodies and things. Ergo practices are seen as distributive and ways of knowing

are performed and enacted in varying degrees. When they are performed, different bodies enact them in different ways.

Figure 8 Vernacular menders uses hands to scratch, sense, feel and converse with the materials when trying to understand the cause of the garment's breakdown. Source: author.

This distributive nature of practices is then seen in the bodies of the restorer, re-doer, recruit and reluctant vernacular menders, along with the professional menders, all of whom form part of the community of menders. Using a sociomaterial lens to understand the process of mending reveals that knowledge of and knowing how to mend is an embodied and distributive phenomenon (Gherardi, 2016). It brings to surface the importance of and reliance on materiality and bodily movements guided through what is called the “intelligence of the hands” in the enactment of these practices (Strati, 2007: 68). This implies that the process of thinking is not sourced purely in isolated cognitive exercises. Rather it comes from the co-constitution of various minds/bodies entangled in sociomaterial surroundings. Taking such a view on everyday practices also helps in recognizing subtle ingenuities that abound in the on-going shaping of artefacts. The next section will reveal how, through the sociomaterially immersed practices of vernacular menders, informal design outcomes are birthed.

5.2. Emergent informal design

I've been meaning to fix these jeans since I fell down two weeks ago and tore the knee {...} so it was T-shaped the way it had torn {...}, this is the burros stitching {...}, I drew it (the pattern) on a paper. And then I made the pattern on the jeans. And decided to sort of cut a small piece out and make a square and twist the sides inside. First I stitched the square so it is stuck to the patch behind, then I made the crosses. Then I made them (the crosses) by hand {...}, then I thought I don't want to make it like a square so I made it a bit uneven from the grid (Re-doer).

The process of mending as it unfolded whilst the vernacular menders mended, be it a re-doer or a reluctant, always began with the identification of a problem. In this instance, the problem took form in the breakdown of a garment due to for example a broken button or a ripped trouser. Once the problem was defined the next step entailed analysis of the broken material and the self (embodied knowledge), followed by an examination of the available material and if needed the surrounding knowledge (consulting other menders). Analysis of material would occur almost simultaneously in action and conversation among and between all menders and materials. The menders would not always state what the next course of action would be but through the enactments of their practices the next steps emerged and became visible. This normally came in the shape of menders drawing ideas out on pieces of paper, chalking on patterns they wished to embroider on their mend or placing patches of scrap fabric to mask holes in the garments. This was followed by an experimental phase whereby different threads, buttons, patches and other haberdasheries were temporarily used to get a visual before selecting the final ones leading into the visibly or invisibly mended end results.

Figure 9 Process of mending. Source: author.

However, this process is not to be taken as a linear one. Quite often, menders would break away from one phase and go back to an earlier stage of the mend if their envisioned experiments failed to reflect through till the making of the mends (see Figure 9). Thus, there is a continuously re-mouldable, dynamic and looped nature of mending, as illustrated in the following quote:

At first I used pink yarn because I thought it will look cool, but as I did it then it was just a ridiculous idea {...} so it was a mixture of making a pattern but also not to make it show too much or make it special in a way. Because these are outdoor pants and I thought it will be a nice detail but also not show from far away, that's why I changed the idea of using the bright coloured yarn. Because I wanted to go wild but then I'm very minimalistic, it's better to go for the classic style even in this (cargo pants). (Re-doer)

Within these on-going enactments, the vernacular menders collectively used mind/body, social/material, human/non-human elements whilst orchestrating paths towards sound solutions. In their performances moments of improvisational ingenuity were often found. This could take the shape of uniquely visible embroidery mending or invisible mock safety stitches added onto or into the garments, improving garment performativity or aestheticism. To the naked eye perhaps something like an invisible mend might seem to have added nothing new to a garment and instead can be taken as just a mundane part of fixing. However, it was within these routine moments of even invisibly mended hidden solutions one finds reconfigurations to the original design assisting in the garments' transformative continuity. In this way, the reconfigurations are confirming and adding to Wakkaray and Maestri's (2011) concept of 'everyday design', as defined in terms of the ordinary yet unique extensions and modifications to already designed products that result from people's daily usage.

Figure 10 Process of mending: define (upper left)-analyse (upper middle)-ideate(upper right)-experiment (lower left)-mend: visible (lower right). Source: author.

Solutions such as these often lurk at the outskirts of professionally recognized design and are easily overlooked (Finizola et al., 2012). However, when using a sociomaterial practice lens to study mending, one becomes sensitive to these hidden features; design is no longer exclusively found in the creations of those holding academic degrees. Rather an appreciation of the ‘spontaneous manifestations’ of daily artefacts extending both the life and original design of things when in everyday use is granted (Wakkary and Maestri, 2011; Finizola et al., 2012; Kimbell, 2012). Informal design can then be understood in terms of solutions resulting from a reliance on non-industrialized modes of production carried out by non-professional designers for the purposes of extending the planned life of artefacts (Finizola et al, 2012). Therefore, all the various sketches of patterns, prototype patches pinned on mends to get a visual, placing buttons in various places, experimenting with different threads before the actual mend is stitched (visibly or invisibly) too are given equal importance. They are seen aiding in the renewing of garments, and also form part of this process (Kimbell, 2012). ‘Things’ or artefacts, like design, are seen as open and constantly in a state of what Ingold and Hallam (2007) call ‘becoming’ and being re-shaped or re-constituted whilst in use (Shove, 2007).

Figure 11 Dynamic process of mending where the vernacular mender began with a pink yarn (middle) but ended up revising and starting again from the ideation phase and finished with black visible mended (right). Source: author.

It is within these collective embodied enactments of mending, distributed across various bodies (not just professional designers), entangled within the sociomaterial that everyday informal design solutions emerge. The solutions reveal how design does not stop with the purchase of new garments. If anything, like designers and/or professional menders, vernacular menders are all carriers or stakeholders involved in the on-going co-constitution of design and designed things (Kimbell, 2012). The next section will take the discussion further by exploring the creative aspects found embedded in the dynamic practices of vernacular mending before concluding.

5.3. Everyday creativities

I have two needles, one is bigger than the other and I use it for everything and it works. (Restorer)

I don't have any sewing machine and I don't have skills {...}. I'm hand sewing this kind of dress (button down) {...}. I really like to use this dress in the summertime, and it's usually nice to use it without a t-shirt or top under it so now I can be relaxed after putting this clasp button I found here that I won't show anything from here (pointing to the chest area). (Re-doer)

Using a sociomaterial practice lens to study practices allows for a sharper recognition of the subtleties of creativity found within everyday mending. In contrast to waiting for radically ingenious moments, one finds creativity in the continual “making of the world” (Tanggaard, 2012). Here humans share a close relationship with non-humans and things, which are always in the becoming (Ingold and Haram, 2007), whether showing through visible boros stitching or invisibly adding a feature (clasp button) to a dress to make it fit better. These manifestations imply creativity as not an individual trait achievable by only professional menders. Nor is it understood to be an outcome of individual divergent thinking but comes from contact through materials surrounding us. Making do with what is available (re-doer) or sniffing out materials to make garments look exactly (restorers) as they were, creativity is taken as “fundamentally relational” (Tanggaard, 2012: 25). Therefore, restorers like the non-restorers, vernaculars like professionals, all are entangled in a world of materials with histories that communicate “pre-existing ways of doing” and “emerge as part of specific activity and become part of performative action in the future” (Tanggaard, 2012: 25). This can be seen in the following example of a vernacular mender who initially was following the direction of the threads of the other buttons but upon engaging further with the materials realized the following and altered his way:

I think you put the thread here and here rather than making a cross but I think the rope (shaped on the button) is a guide for the thread to go, the button has holes so the thread goes in and when you are moving the thread it is more safer in the ropes, so when you are doing something the thread doesn't get ruined. And it was supposed to be sewn by following the shape of the rope rather than make a crisscross. It's meant for the thread. And maybe somebody else had repaired it in a crisscross before I found the coat. (Restorer)

While Lapolla and Sanders (2015) might explain everyday creativity sourced in an individual's skill alone, this paper brings the material basis of creativity to the forefront. Like informal design, creativity is seen to be emergent and not taken as a generalized formula to be applied from above onto a practice nor reserved for the 'exceptional' few (Taangaard, 2012). Rather, it is embedded within these small adaptations and improvisations made when enacting practices which on the surface seem standardized. These improvisations are not always exceptional or loud but can also be found in the mundane, the subtle, the hidden and the ordinary. Therefore, unlike Lapolla and Sanders (2015) who place mending on the lower ends of creativity and describe it as lacking in the creation of 'original ideas' (p.185), this study argues that creativity resides in the intractions of the material with social, of the human with the non-human, and in the exceptional as well as the everyday. It becomes a means through which what is known already is recreated (Tanggaard, 2012). Hence, as seen through the aforementioned examples, mending takes current ways of knowing and doing as starting points for building onto. In this on-going, embodied process, vernacular menders constantly rely on the use of their hands and bodies whilst collectively entangled in materials, resulting in dynamic and originally visible or invisible mended design solutions.

6. Concluding thoughts

This paper used a sociomaterial practice theoretical lens to study the dynamic mending practices of non-professional menders as situated in communal repair workshops in the city of Helsinki. In doing so, the study identified them as vernacular menders and revealed the situated, embodied, routinized yet creative process of mending. The created outputs of the vernacular menders resulted in what was termed as informal design and pointed to the need to recognize the fluidity of design and designed objects when in use. The contributions of this study, therefore, reside in the following aims:

- to overcome dichotomies between human/non-human, social/material, designer/user, when studying practices of garment use, and instead highlight the inextricable relations shared between vernacular menders, like that of professional menders/designers, with sociomaterial elements when in the process of mending;
- to acknowledge non-professional designers/vernacular menders/'users' as active tinkerers, extenders of and co-practitioners in design and not passive recipients of designed garments lacking agency;
- to extend current understanding on design authorship to include creatively rich, one-off solutions resulting from non-professional designers' material tinkering.

The relevance of taking such a view assists in bringing forward real-life garment use practices resulting in unique solutions already aiding product longevity. A re-consideration of current mending practices, not as common place drudgeries, but as unique opportunities can also assist in sketching out new roles for professional designers as facilitators in the on-going re-designing of garments. As Twigger (2013) too has claimed, seeing designers in the light of facilitating collaborators (instead of lead/sole practitioners of design and creativity) engaged in sharing expertise with vernacular menders (of varying degrees) could benefit efforts aimed at amplifying garment mending practices whilst bringing in positive environmental change.

7. References

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