

Embroidered Digital Commons

Facilitators Pack

Welcome to the exciting process of embroidering the digital commons!

1. Introduction
2. Choosing your term from the lexicon
3. Dividing up the text into a sign up sheet
4. Individual Embroiderers Pages
5. Design board
6. Choosing fabric and threads
7. Photographing the patches
8. Making an artwork
9. Credits
10. Keeping in touch
11. Theory
12. Tools and materials

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1. Introduction

Your role as a facilitator is crucial to make the project happen. You are one of 26 facilitators distributed across the globe each working with up to 40 participants to embroider a term from 'A Concise Lexicon of / for the Digital Commons' (Raqs Media Collective, 2003). We anticipate that approximately 1,000 people will contribute their stitches to the digital commons.

Before you start, you should read the whole lexicon and familiarize yourself with the project webpage at: www.open-source-embroidery.org.uk/EDC.htm

The Embroidered Digital Commons is part of the wider Open Source Embroidery project which aims to bring together crafters and coders to discuss the similarities and differences of their practice.

The aim of the Embroidered Digital Commons is to encourage people with computer coding skills (such as programming, html or wiki building), as well as people with craft skills, to take part or come together to stitch. Sometimes this happens in a very organised way, at other times it's much more informal. Partly the level of discussion depends on the interest and expertise of the facilitator, and their thoughts about the concept of the digital commons.

The process of facilitation and embroidery provides an opportunity for close-reading and close stitching the terms. By the time you have finished setting up the structure for stitching your term you will have read it several times and you will quickly spot mistakes as they occur.

2. Choosing your term from the lexicon

When you have read the whole Lexicon, you need to choose an available term. Check with the list on the project webpage, and with Ele Carpenter to make sure that no-one else is stitching that term.

The full A-Z of terms includes: Access, Bandwidth, Code, Data, Ensemble, Fractal, Gift, Heterogeneous, Iteration, Kernal, Liminal, Meme, Nodes, Orbit, Portability, Quotidian, Rescension, Site, Tools, Ubiquity, Vector, Web, Xenophilly, Yarn, and Zone.

Try to choose a term that relates to your network of stitchers. Are they visitors to an exhibition? Members of a craft group or media lab? Members of an email discussion list? Conference delegates? Party goers?

3. Dividing up the text into a sign-up sheet

Make a cup of tea.

Then divide up the text into manageable chunks of words which make sense in themselves, as much as possible. Then number each of these chunks of text in a table with space for people's names and emails as they sign up. This helps to prevent doubling up, keeps track of stitchers, and ensures that we have a record of everyone's name and email, so that we can credit them and keep them informed about future presentations of the work.

EXAMPLE

	Text	Name	Email
1.	Gift		
2.	Something freely given, and taken,		
3.	as in free code.		
4.	Etc.....		

This is easily done in Word by spacing the groups of words down the page, selecting the text, and converting the text to a table, then adding columns and numbering.

If you intend to provide the fabric and run a workshop then it's useful to keep a copy of the text before you convert it to a table. Then you can print this out, cut it up, and pin each phrase to a patch of fabric in sequence. Alternatively you can handwrite these.

4. Individual Embroiderers Pages

One of the problems is making sure that each embroiderer understands the meaning of the whole term. If they only have a few fragmented words they don't get a sense of the whole. A good solution is to give each person a copy of the full term with their words highlighted. You can do this quickly in a workshop with a pile of photocopies and a highlighter pen.

If you have time, and are working remotely, it's great to make an A4 sheet for each stitcher which shows the whole definition of the term, with their individual words **highlighted in an extra large font**. It's also useful to see where the punctuation sits within the text. This series of pages also makes a great exhibition display of the text.

5. Design Board

You can use a large notice board, corkboard, washing line or a curtain as a design board to help keep track of the patches.

The main aim is to keep the patches and texts in sequence. This is partly for your own organisation, and partly so other people can read the text in a coherent way.

6. Choosing fabric and threads

The only rules are size and colour contrast. Patches can be 25cm square, or widescreen proportions approx 25 x 35cm, or a combination of these sizes. Keep the widescreen landscape (not portrait) because the final images will be shown on a flatscreen.

Plain cotton fabric is best because it's easier to get a good contrast between the embroidered text and the fabric. If the colour contrast isn't very clear, the text is illegible once it has been digitally photographed and turned into a slideshow film.

Recycled fabric is best – have a look in your fabric box. Encourage participants to use their own fabric if possible. Good sources of free fabric swatches are: costume departments in art schools or theatres; local fabric shops; charity shops often have a bag of rags out the back if you ask, they might give you some old sheeting to cut up if you explain it's for an educational project.

7. Photographing the patches

When all the patches are complete you need to take a photograph of each one against a background of black fabric. It's easiest to lie the fabrics flat on the floor and photograph directly from above in good even light. Don't worry about loose threads or creases in the fabric. But do try to avoid any odd shadows. Use the highest resolution that you can.

Sophie McDonald has made two films which you can view on the project webpage. The plan is to make all the films in a similar style.

Save each image with the title of the term, and the number of the patch, eg: Zone1, Zone2, Zone3. This will help everyone keep track of the sequence.

You will need to upload these images to a file sharing site to share with Ele, and anyone working on the exhibition.

8. Making an Artwork

There are many different aspects of exactly what the work is in this project. Firstly the process of making is a tool for discussion. For Ele the discussion is the work, and the artwork is a tool. For others it will be different. But for the work to continue to inspire discussion it needs to be taken care of and clearly disseminated. You can help this by documenting the workshops and noting the range and depth of conversation around the project by blogging, or feeding back to Ele by email.

The final presentation of the whole lexicon will be an exhibition of digital films and fabric embroideries. Once the film has been made, the patches can be sewn together into a complete work. Think about your term, does it make sense to be: a quilt, a curtain, a tent, a cloth book, a washing line, bunting, flags, streamers? You choose. You might want to do this yourself, organize a sewing circle, or even a round-robin.

9. Credits

The credits for the end of the film, and all other references online and published should be:

<p>Embroidered Digital Commons: (add your term here)</p> <p>Curator, Ele Carpenter Text, Raqs Media Collective Film, (add filmmaker and year)</p> <p>Supported by (add any project partners and funders here) and HUMLab, Umeå University, Sweden.</p> <p>www.open-source-embroidery.org.uk</p>
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<p>Embroiderers</p> <p>List embroiderers full names, alphabetically by surname.</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>
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10. Keeping in touch

Keep in touch with Ele by email.

Post photos on the Open Source Embroidery groups on Facebook and Flickr.

Email updates to the OSE google group <http://groups.google.co.uk/group/os-embroidery?lnk=srg&hl=en>

Link to the blog <http://www.eleweekend.blogspot.com/>

11. Theory

The notion of the Digital Commons, where the digital is common, or rather what is digital is common to all. Not common as in popular, but commonly owned, commonly accessed or available. Like the common grazing lands, or the common good, the commons has become synonymous with digital media through the discourse surrounding free and open source software and creative commons licensing. The Digital Commons is a response to the inherent 'copy n paste' reproducibility of digital codes, scripts and files, and the cultural forms that they support. Instead of trying to claim ground or restrict access, the Digital Commons invite open participation in the production of ideas and culture. Where culture is not something you buy, but something you do.

The project is based on a decentralized network model using the distributed network of the Internet, and the facilitators personal or event-based networks. These network topologies were illustrated by Paul Baran in 1964, when he was planning the early stages of the Internet.

Ele is planning to write an academic paper for the Text-ile Journal about the Embroidered Digital Commons in 2010-2012.

12. Tools and materials

Internet access

Pins (round headed coloured pins are best because they don't get lost so easily)

Pin cushion

Plain fabric (re-used fabric is best)

Embroidery thread (Ele can send you some if you're stuck).

Embroidery needles (you need a large eye)

Digital Camera for documentation and final patches.

Time.

GOOD LUCK!