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# Affective entanglements with travelling mittens

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## ABSTRACT

Researchers have, most commonly, been studying souvenirs from two different streams: one that discusses the impact of souvenirs on the producers and another that focuses more on tourists as consumers of the souvenirs. Recently, the studies have also concentrated on the stories given with souvenirs, connectiveness to places and on the effectiveness of their memorability. However, research about the embodied experiences of and, most importantly, with souvenirs has been overlooked even in craft tourism, which can be seen fundamentally different way of experiencing tourism destinations as it invites people to involve the body in the actions, touch and move together. Therefore, in order to grasp the embodied encounters with souvenirs, we use an autoethnographic narrative of self-knitted green and white mittens to gain understanding about our experiences with the non-human actors, to research how emotions and affect are produced through craft tourism and the souvenirs, and how care as an affect is present in different situations and. By drawing inspiration from previous discussions on relational ethics, non-representational theory and affect in Tourism Studies, the narrative of the mittens explores the intensive entanglements in meanings and matter between handicrafts, places and humans. There, the ability to care is not limited to the social lives of humans. The self-made souvenirs emerge in unpredictable ways around everyday actions and create multiple affects, with movement, vitality and encounters on their own, becoming part of a life-long journey filled with memories of certain moments. Furthermore, our findings encourage future tourism research to go beyond representation when exploring the intensive entanglements between people, souvenirs and places.

## 摘要

最常见的是, 研究人员从两种不同的思路研究纪念品: 一种是讨论纪念品对生产者的影响, 另一种更为关注纪念品对作为消费者的游客的影响。最近, 研究还集中在人们赋予纪念品以故事, 纪念品与地方的连接以及纪念品纪念性的效果。然而, 即使在手工艺旅游中, 关于纪念品本身的亲身体验, 以及最重要的是, 购买纪念品的亲身体验研究也被忽视了, 这是一种完全不同的体验旅游目的地的方式, 它使得人们卷入到制造和购买纪念品的行动中, 一起触摸, 一起移动。因此, 为了把握旅游者对纪念品的亲身体验, 我们使用一个旅游者自织绿色和白色手套的自我民族志叙事, 获得对非人类行动者体验的理解, 研究情绪和情感是如何通过手工艺旅游

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## 关键词

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和纪念品生产出来的,以及关怀作为一种情感如何存在于不同情景中的。通过借鉴以往旅游研究中关系伦理、非表征理论和情感研究的讨论,手套叙事探索了手工艺品、地方和人之间在意义和物质上的紧密纠缠。在那里,关怀的能力并不局限于人类的社会生活。自制纪念品以不可预测的方式出现在日常活动中,通过纪念品的携带、纪念品本身所体现出来的活力以及人们与纪念品的相遇故事,创造了多重影响,成为终生旅程的一部分,充满了特定时刻的记忆。此外,我们的研究结果鼓励未来旅游研究探索人、纪念品和地方之间的紧密联系时要超越纪念品的表征。

## Introduction

*I hear the bus coming and realise that I must leave the church. My backpack bounces up and down as I run towards the bus stop in the snow. I feel like Rocky Balboa when I climb up the stairs of the bus. I try to catch my breath before telling the driver that I would like to buy a ticket to Kiruna. The feeling of success vanishes when I hit the front seat; my mittens are missing. This cannot be true. Oh my, I must have dropped Outi's precious mittens – which I have been hugging in my hands for more than two years now.*

This is the story of two green and white mittens that have touched us, taken care of us and made our hearts beat faster. The research journey began in 2016 with an urge to understand why this souvenir, a pair of hand-knitted mittens, had become so meaningful and important to us (see Thrift, 2008). This journey has allowed us – two tourism researchers and enthusiastic crafters – to shift our identities between those of tourists, friends, researchers and collaborators, who knit and purl and sometimes unravel stitches and, most importantly, to explore the potential of living with mittens like these (see Hokkanen, 2017; Mackenzie & Kerr, 2013b; Reed-Danahay, 1997). In our storyline, we approach handicrafts as souvenirs that entangle people and places and enrich both physical and mental travelling.

Researchers have studied souvenirs for decades. As Kim and Littrell (2001) argue, the stream of research has been divided into two directions: one that discusses the impact of souvenirs on the producers and another that focuses more on tourists as consumers of the souvenirs. Generally, souvenirs can be seen as artefacts and memories of holidays and events (Edelheim, 2015; Graburn, 2005), as pieces of a place that travel back home with tourists (see Peters, 2011). In recent research on souvenirs in tourism, the focus has been more on the stories given with souvenirs (Edelheim, 2015), connectiveness to places and experiences (Cave & Buda, 2018) and on the effectiveness of their memorability (Sthapit & Björk, 2019). Moreover, Kimberley Peters' (2011) research on 'banal tourism items' and Susan Stewart's (2005) discussion of postcards as souvenirs open up the different meanings that tourists give to these things, and how they affect the people who receive them.

We accept here Stewart's (2005, p. 133) suggestion that experience of the object can be saturated with meanings that can never be fully revealed to us. Nevertheless, our wish has been to gain more understanding about our relationships with these kinds of travelling objects by researching them via craft tourism, which can be seen as a fundamentally different way of experiencing tourism destinations: it invites people to involve the body in the actions (see Thrift, 2008, p. 116), touch and move together. In craft tourism, tourists can be involved in making their own souvenirs and this pair

of green and white mittens is one good example of this. Hence, the purpose of this article is to explore the role of embodied encounters with souvenirs and this way to gain understanding about our experiences with the non-human actors.

Our research has been guided by Nigel Thrift's (2005, 2008) non-representational theory in particular. Thrift has encouraged us to look beyond the representation of hand-made souvenirs and their meanings and to dig deeper into the materiality and seek the multidimensional attachments of handicrafts. Non-representational theory or, perhaps more correctly, more-than-representational theory seeks to better cope with our multisensory worlds (see Barron, 2019; Lorimer, 2005, p. 83), stressing the importance of the affective capacities of our bodies. Drawing inspiration from discussions on affect, moods, passions and intensities (Anderson, 2006), we hope to gain further understanding of why and how souvenirs become much more than just objects and, in this case, clothing that keeps us warm. We wonder what emotions and affect produced through craft tourism and handicrafts – which are inherently embedded in the idea of embodied encounters and touching – might do, and how care as an affect is present in different situations. Therefore, we understand affect here both as concrete, embodied encounter and as abstract intensity of being and feeling (Barron, 2019; Thrift, 2008, pp. 175–176; Vannini, 2015a, p. 8; see also d'Hauterres, 2015).

In tourism research, a growing stream of studies has called for more holistic understandings of embodiment (Jokinen & Veijola, 1997; Veijola & Jokinen, 2008), feelings (Buda et al., 2014), emotions and affects (Buda, 2015; Cuthill, 2007; d'Hauterres, 2015; Tucker & Shelton, 2018) that enrich and surpass our visual senses and representations. Anne-Marie d'Hauterres's (2015) longitudinal research underlines the role of all the different agents producing the affect vibes generated in tourism spaces (Haraway, 2003). Likewise, researches by Gordon Waitt et al. (2014) and Buda (2015) offer examples and analysis of affective and emotional relationships that are triggered in the touch between both human and non-human bodies. However, while the affect theory has previously been applied to exploring encounters among human and non-human animals (Tucker & Shelton, 2018; Veijola et al., 2014), dark tourism routes (Buda, 2015) and affects that shape the ambiances of tourist places (Cuthill, 2007; d'Hauterres, 2015; Noy, 2008), there is less guidance available to understanding the affective life of objects, such as gifts and souvenirs (Cave & Buda, 2018; Haldrup & Larsen, 2006; Hokkanen, 2017; Lund et al., 2018; Ren, 2011).

The article proceeds by unfolding meaningful, affective events over the past four years. The narrative starts in 2016 when Outi travelled to Kiruna, Sweden, where she bought the yarn as a souvenir for herself. The story continues with reflections on knitting, gift giving and a discussion of how care as an affect is present in often surprising situations. Needless to say, there are plenty of non-human actors that entangle us with places and to other members of the Earth. Lastly, we conclude with how the mittens have emerged in unpredictable ways around our actions and different events and how they have created multiple affects, with movement, vitality and encounters of their own.

### **Autoethnographic narrative**

This narrative of the green and white mittens is written using the autoethnographic approach. We have sought guidance from previous autoethnographic studies on affect

and emotions, for instance, in the context of family voluntourism (Germann Molz, 2017) and family holidays (Noy, 2008), adventure guiding (Mackenzie & Kerr, 2013a, 2013b), site-specific dancing (Barbour & Hitchmough, 2014) and conducting fieldwork (Hokkanen, 2017). In addition, we follow Stewart's (2005, pp. 135–136) thought of how, by giving the souvenir a narrative, it offers deeper meanings, attaches the object to the origin and creates an experience for the possessor. Most significantly, we have followed Philip Vannini's (2015b) writings on non-representational research methodologies that encourage us to focus on relationships that are not quite graspable. Engaging with non-representational research means replacing the idea of representation with striving to give life to non-humans and being on the move. It encourages us to 'hear the world and make sure that it can speak back' (Thrift, 2008, pp. 18–20). Vannini's (2015b) ethnographic field journey to an off-grid cabin in the Arctic tundra in Canada has encouraged us to focus on the partiality, immediacy, proximity, fluidity and reflexivity in our writings.

Autoethnographic data were collected over two and a half years, between summer 2016 and winter 2019, and written in field notes, email exchanges, personal journals, knitting notes and photographs. We have chosen to re-tell the story by remaining loyal to chronological emergence, 'aha' moments and 'eureka' experiences (see Edelman, 2015; van Manen, 1990, p. 26) and the recognition and interpretation of different entanglements, emotions and affects (see Haldrup & Larsen, 2006). This is in line with the focus of non-representational research on events that shape our relationships and reveal old and new potentialities for collective 'being, doing and thinking' (Anderson & Harrison, 2010, p. 19 as cited in Vannini, 2015a, p. 7). So, instead of observing handicrafts and tourism from a distance, we use the autoethnographic approach and hold on to the knitting needles and become part of the phenomenon we wish to understand (see Maydell, 2010). We agree with Vannini (2015b), Manning and Adams (2015) and Spry (2001) that autoethnography and 'thick description' allow us to see our experiences both as the process and outcome of the research (Ellis et al., 2010; Ellis & Bochner, 2000) and the search for the unconscious thoughts that can affect our ability to see and experience things (Thrift, 2008). In other words, autoethnography allows us to research the embodiment and affective touch of the mittens – how our bodies understand the meanings of the mittens before the words even enter our minds (Törmä, 2015, p. 14). Our hope is that our style of writing will create all kinds of affect, ranging from joy to irritation, just as souvenirs may do.

## Origins of the yarns – Outi

I knit outside of a Sámi church in Jukkasjärvi in northern Sweden. I have already been in the Kiruna region for three days, participating in a Nordic Knitting Symposium – Nordiskt Sticksymposium – to collect data for my PhD project (the Danish organisation, Gavstrik, organises the Nordic Knitting Symposium yearly). Almost 150 enthusiastic handcrafters have gathered here to learn new methods in workshops, to buy materials for future crafts, to visit local shops and, not least, to enjoy the midnight sun. Today we took a bus to the village of Jukkasjärvi, where we are spread around the church yard, most of us knitting and enjoying the sunshine. A guide arrives to tell us more about the church and we take our belongings with us, walking slowly

indoors. A cold breeze welcomes us and invites us to hide on the benches; it is nice to sit down away from the warm sun for a while. After a moving speech about the history of the church and the stories of the paintings and bodies buried under the floor, a Sámi man walks in and starts singing us *yoiks* (a traditional Sámi way of singing) that he has written himself (Figure 1). Chills go through me. Memories of the events during the last three days come to mind: how welcoming the atmosphere has been even though I am new to this group of people, how a lecture hall full of knitters has affected me and how emotionally empowering this trip has been (see Brennan, 2014; d’Hauteserre, 2015; Törmä, 2015). I feel that I finally belong somewhere: in this place with other knitting enthusiasts.

During this trip I have had the chance to visit an exhibition of the work of Erika Nordvall Falck, called *Samiska Marknadsvantar - Fancy Mittens*, in the Kiruna Town hall, where I took a picture of a pair of beautiful green and white ‘kaffebönor’ (coffee bean) mittens, that reminded me of my friend, Emily, and her research on tourism in coffee-growing communities (Höckert, 2018a). The picture will become a part of my narrative from the holiday (Edelheim, 2015; Noy, 2008; Stewart, 2005). In the town hall, I have also had the chance to watch other artisans showing off their skills. Most importantly, I have been able to take part in workshops where I have learned new ways of knitting and making jewellery from different materials. These workshops have particularly affected me due to the nature of embodied actions that has happened in them; the touch of the material, learning new techniques for cutting fabric and concentrating on the lectures, to name just a few. The affect needs embodiment, as both Thrift (2008, p. 116) and Buda (2015) argue. I have also bought yarn that is produced by a Sámi company named Stoorstálka, which advertises itself as doing designs ‘by Sámis, for Sámi people and equally cool souls’ as a physical souvenir. The yarn has attracted me with its colours and origins, and it will certainly give me a connection to this place (see Peters, 2011; Timothy, 2005). All the souvenirs from this trip, both mental and physical ones, are allowing me to be in this world, to experience and to feel objects through my body (see Thrift, 2008, p. 239). The feeling of belonging somewhere and the embodied, emotional experiences will surely make the memories of this journey last a long time (see Sirgy et al., 2011).

By reflecting on the experiences of the day more carefully and writing notes in my travel journal (see Noy, 2008), I can see that I have been participating in many different forms of craft tourism. In craft tourism, places and experiences are understood via embodiment and physical emotions (see Haldrup & Larsen, 2006). Accordingly, actions are interpreted through the bodies, which respond well to Risatti’s (2007, p. 179) explanation of craft’s relationship to the body: ‘... craft objects are by their very nature intended to be physiologically functional, they are objects made for the body and bodily actions ...’. On occasions like these, tourism is usually defined as creative tourism, which has been discussed in tourism studies (see Richards, 2011) Richards & Wilson, 2006). Creative tourism can refer to something special, like bungee jumping (Richards, 2011), but on this occasion I would rather refer to this trip as craft tourism, as there are embodied actions, emotions and affects which offer a fruitful basis to discuss what the essential elements in tourism are (see, e.g., Aho, 2001; Ritchie & Zins, 1978). Nevertheless, in both definitions tourists actively involve themselves in tourist services – and interacting with places and others – instead of merely watching and





**Figure 1.** Knitting in the Jukkasjärvi church. Source: Outi's personal file.

interpreting the culture via a guide, something for which cultural tourism has been criticised (Richards & Wilson, 2006). In other words, in craft tourism, tourists can do souvenir shopping, visit museums and galleries, see artisans working and touch material elements in workshops (see Pitkänen, 2005; Richards & Wilson, 2006) and feel the crafts through their bodies.

### **Knitting the mittens – Outi**

Autumn has turned to October and it is raining outside. I go through my yarn box and discover the multi-coloured skeins of Stoorstålka yarn: they have been hiding

from me for some months already. Only by looking at the yarn, do I remember the days I spent in Kiruna and Jukkasjärvi, the kaffebönor-pattern, my emotions and embodied feelings and the beautiful scenery in Swedish Lapland (see Peters, 2011). I also remember how being together with all the knitting enthusiasts filled the journey with joy (see Brennan, 2014). The narrative of the souvenir starts taking shape in my head (Stewart, 2005). I take the green and white skeins of yarn out of the box and visualise the mittens made in the kaffebönor pattern for Emily. Our friendship had begun six months earlier, when we started to prepare a grant application for a project on indigenous tourism in the Arctic. If I use the yarn that I bought from Kiruna, I could knit together human and non-human actors (see Thrift, 2005, p. 233) and the pattern, the colours and the origin of the thread would hold a story behind them – the mittens would be a hand-made souvenir from this time of working with the project and becoming close friends. Moreover, they would add one more level to our friendship and possibly new connections and ways of thinking for both of us (Thrift, 2008).

I make a cosy place on my sofa, wrap a warm woollen blanket around myself and cast on the first rows of the mittens. There are many unfinished objects in my project bag (knitters call them 'UFOs'), but I just want to knit these for Emily. The pattern looks so cute and is haunting me so that I cannot do anything else. I can thank my grandma for the ability to knit, she had a real talent with knitting needles. Knitted objects used to be taken for granted, but the image is (luckily) changing and knitting is nowadays seen something of a chance to emancipate both men and women, and a part of popular culture (Turney, 2009, pp. 2, 9; del Vecchio, 2006; see also STT Info, 2019). There are many workshops, seminars, knitting festivals and craft fairs that people can attend, where they can mobilise themselves and be together with others. In recent research by the Finnish craft organisation, Taitoliitto (2018), knitting is gradually gaining more interest. Making crafts and knitting are nowadays seen as ways to bring positive effects to our lives. This can be seen as moving towards a more relaxing mental and physical space where we can relieve stress, ease the chaos in our minds and regain focus – not only for knitting, but also for life itself (Rauhala, 2019, pp. 205–206; see also Pöllänen, 2015). Knitting also gives multiple meanings to life. Although these are personal and changing all the time, the meaningfulness is the most important reason to do crafts (Kouhia, 2016). It is easy to agree with these studies, as knitting not only makes me calm and brings balance to my otherwise quite hectic lifestyle, but also gives meaning to my life itself (see Pöllänen, 2015; Rauhala, 2019, p. 206).

After a few hours on the sofa, the first rounds of fair isle pattern with a beautiful 3D-effect are ready: the mitten starts to take the shape of a material object. I stroke the pattern with my hands, feeling the warmth of the wool and admiring the pattern at the same time. It seems unclear when and, more exactly how, a pair of mittens actually materialises. How can I make sure that I will pass these embodied experiences on to Emily so that this pair of mittens does not hold only a symbolic value for her, as Hitchcock and Teague (2000) argue? I want to reveal the experiences behind the object (Stewart, 2005, p. 133), transform 'the mental into the material within the context of tourism' (Noy, 2008) as the whole process of knitting these mittens has brought more possibilities for thinking and understanding – both of myself and of souvenirs (2008, p. 175; Stewart, 2005; Thrift, 2005). By giving Emily something that



she can use when she travels here to Lapland, by telling the story behind the mittens and by sharing the embodied experiences I had with them, I can only hope that the mittens can create similar affects in her as they have done for me (see Barbour & Hitchmough, 2014; Barron, 2019; Stewart, 2005; Thrift, 2008).

### Mittens as happy objects – Emily

I wake up to a blinking phone, which delivers birthday wishes from my family back home. Inhaling the divine smell of the coffee, I climb down the steep wooden stairs. We have gathered at Keropirtti, a log-house on the outskirts of the Pyhä fell in Finnish Lapland, for a research seminar and to write our project application on culturally sensitive tourism. This is a sacred place that allows us researchers to slow down our thinking and let our ideas become entangled (see, e.g., Rantala et al., 2018; Veijola et al., 2014). Indeed, I am so excited about being here that I could have easily forgotten my birthday. However, by the kitchen door I realise that my colleagues would not have allowed me to forget. They have lit candles on the breakfast table; a big strawberry cake is waiting for me; there is a greeting card and even a present wrapped in colourful paper. I lift the card, which is a quite typical tourist postcard in Finnish Lapland. Under the text 'Life is Good' there are two smiling men with missing teeth, wearing Sámi clothing. I appreciate the ironic banality of the card, which insists that there are multiple layers that must be acknowledged (see Morton, 2010, p. 17). I wave the card and state that it looks like our forthcoming project on cultural sensitivity is timely.

I remove the ribbons, thinking how fortunate I am to have a job and friends like these. I am carefully taking off the tapes, peeking inside the wrappings and seeing something green. Indeed, this the first encounter between the green and white mittens and me (Figure 2). I hug the mittens to my chest with tears of joy. I look at Outi to confirm that she has made these by herself, and she nods with a smile. I had often seen Outi knitting during seminars and meetings and admired the beautiful things she made. While she knits, the yarns travel through safe and caring hands and she follows the discussions with a peaceful and focused aura around her. Indeed, over the past few years I have seen more and more people knitting in conferences and lecture halls, which creates a cosy and calming ambience and, in Tucker and Shelton (2018, p. 67) words, 'a hopeful mood, or affect'. I have also heard Outi describing knitting as her 'yoga' (see also Turney, 2009, p. 216), which has encouraged me to relax and meditate with knitting).

I pour myself a big cup of coffee and cut a piece of my breakfast birthday cake. The mittens circulate around the heavy log table and it seems like everybody wishes to try them on and feel their smooth surface (see Waitt et al., 2014). We pose questions for Outi and she shares with us memories from her trip to Kiruna, the story of the patterns and details about the bright green and snow-white yarn bought on the same journey. While the story of 'my mittens' – my souvenir from this trip – begins here, Outi's memories reveal how the mittens have already been living a long, adventurous life without me. It is all these stories that make the mittens more meaningful and precious: that the pattern, the colours and the origin of the thread hold a story behind them. It is the narrative and our relationship with Outi that enables me to



**Figure 2.** The green and white mittens. Source: Outi's personal file.

have my personal relationship with the mittens, because without it these mittens would be only a piece of wool (Stewart, 2005, p.137). It is valuable to become attuned and sensitised towards the multiple ways that these kinds of non-human-actors mobilise, spread and entangle stories and create new affects beyond tourist destinations (van der Duim et al., 2017; see also Cave & Buda, 2018; Tsing, 2015).

Sitting at the end of the table with my new mittens and the peculiar greeting card, I feel I am holding some very happy objects. I have previously been reading the world-famous Japanese tidying expert Marie Kondo's (2014) book, where she encourages and motivates people to stick with things that 'spark joy' in our homes and lives. While Kondo's advice is based on feeling, the phenomenology of happiness can help us to explore and evaluate more specifically how our bodies turn and relate to those things that we find joyful and delightful; that is, how those objects affect us (Ahmed, 2010a, p. 23). Sara Ahmed's *The Promise of Happiness* (2010b, p. 21) suggests that happiness puts us in intimate contact and proximity with objects. Then – and this seems central to hand-made handicrafts – when happiness creates its objects and such objects are passed around, they accumulate positive affective value as a social good (Ahmed, 2010b; Rauhala, 2019). In Ahmed's critical analysis on how objects become happy, affect is treated as something 'sticky'; that is, in here 'affect is what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values and objects' (Ahmed, 2010a, p. 230). In this case, we can ask whether handicrafts like these become affective, joyful, happy and sticky due to the multiple meanings we give to them and stories that they carry with them (see also Edelman, 2015)?

When I put the mittens on, I get an intense sensation of receiving a hug. Not a passionate one, but a hug that calms me and makes me feel safe. I think of non-representational theorists who encourage us to open research and theorising to more joy, action and imagination (Thrift, 2008, pp. 18–20). Hence, instead of treating the green and white mittens merely as happy objects with symbolic qualities, non-representational theory encourages us to give life, to boost aliveness, to the

supposedly inanimate, to non-human actors. From the perspective of non-representational writers, these mittens are active, and it is through their doings, qualities, movements and force that they exert their life (Vannini, 2018, pp. 5–7). What become interesting here are the relations and entanglements between this pair of active mittens and our bodies with their affective capacities (see Vannini, 2018, p. 5). It sounds like what Donna Haraway (2016) describes as nurturing (unlikely) kinships between bodies, materialities, things and ideas.

### Mittens that care – Outi

The same evening, at the log-house, we continue to discuss the mittens' journey to this point. Just to make the journey more concrete and visible, I turn one of the mittens inside out. The fair isle pattern, looked at from the wrong side with its overlapping yarns, can be understood as a place which holds knowledge about the destination, culture, pattern, memories and relationality and, at the same time, it allows us to dig deeper into the affects, embodied actions and the stories they whisper into our ears (Buda, 2015; Cave & Buda, 2018; Thrift, 2005, 2008). Haldrup and Larsen (2006) discuss the fact that, understanding the collaboration between embodied actions and material objects is a crucial element of tourism activities; tourists do not only see things, we always act at the same time, we have our bodies with us. Moreover, our bodies interact with those of others – the guide, other tourists, locals – and there is a need to adapt to the movements of others (Risatti, 2007, p. 198; see also Veijola & Jokinen, 1994). Thrift (2008, p. 176) explains that emotions and affect usually come from the outside, like settings for different events. However, in craft tourism, and especially in those cases when crafts are done as a touristic activity, the affects emerge in relation to the handicrafts. It is as if the handicrafts can trigger affects of care, while we care for them (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017).

In this way, craft tourism could be seen as travelling to experience how humans and non-humans take care of each other in tourist destinations (Höckert, 2018b) and bringing home ideas, inspiration, skills and things (like mittens and other hand-made souvenirs) that enhance caring relations, even at home (cf. Peters, 2011). Maybe craft tourism could also be understood as a phenomenon in which care is always present; not only tourists caring for each other, but also the host caring for guests, and – most importantly – locals caring for the human and non-human members of their community (see d'Hauteserre, 2015; Kenning, 2015). Many art-related projects have been criticised for lacking continuity, but if the knowledge and enthusiasm come directly from the community, the engagement in the activities is higher (Kenning, 2015). Maybe tourists participating in craft activities can help locals to understand the value of the cultural heritage of their own community, as discussed in Markwick (2001) and Miettinen (2007). This leads back to Sara Ahmed's (2010b) ideas about accumulating positive thinking via happy objects.

The next day, I feel joy when I see Emily wearing the mittens, just as I did when I saw tears of happiness in her eyes when she opened the present. At this point I can confess to Emily that I had been a little bit scared to give the mittens to her. I was worried about whether she would appreciate my mittens as much as I do (Turney,

2009, pp. 27–28) and feel the care that the mittens share (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, p. 70). Now, when I am watching her wearing the mittens, I understand that the caring agency toward the mittens has moved from me to her. I can no longer touch and feel the warmth of the mittens, but I can only hope that the narrative of the mittens, that consists of warmth, love and friendship, filling the mental and physical needs of both the receiver and giver, will travel with them (see Stewart, 2005, pp. 136–137) and show and practise care without using words (Pöllänen, 2015).

### On careful touch – Emily

‘Have any of you seen my mitten?’ I shout. ‘You know, the green and white mittens that Outi made ...’ I add, with anxiety in my voice.

It feels as if I have already looked for it everywhere. I dive into the box where we keep the woollen things, while squeezing the right-hand mitten towards my chest. I comfort my bare left hand with the lonely mitten. I slip my feet into a pair of too-big shoes without tying the shoelaces. I rush with clumsy steps through the snow, hoping that I will find the mitten from the car (see Tucker & Shelton, 2018). I gaze along the path, trying to see if I have dropped it somewhere in the snow. However, in that case a thick layer of new snow would already have covered it.

The mitten has overnighted under the passenger seat. Walking back to the house with lighter steps, I think of the latest occasion when one of our neighbours acknowledged their spreading positive mood. I had proudly told them about where the yarn had come from, about the pattern and about who was a real knitting-wizard. Moreover, I implicitly tried to slip in some information about the richness and vitality of Sámi handicrafts, which are constantly being revitalised and modernised (see Stewart, 2005). There have also been many times when the mittens have accompanied me to the neighbouring forest. On these occasions, I have thought about whether the mittens may feel more at home among all the different shades of green. I have also remembered my visit to the wonderful Museum of Anthropology in Vancouver, where a woman discussed the difference between First Nations’ handicrafts that are in use and those that are in the museums – how those hanging in the museums seem so lifeless, as if they had lost their vitality (see Rantala et al., 2020). This made me realise that, by trying to protect the mittens by not using them, by not allowing them to travel, I would reduce their vitality. As if not touching them would deny or reduce their ability to care.

I have often experienced feeling as if it were impossible to describe how special these mittens are. As if others saw them as just another pair of replaceable gloves, or as ‘ornamentation’, as Thrift (2008, p. 239) says. After being frustrated a few times about the non-stickiness (Ahmed, 2010a) of their happy story, I had come to realise and embrace the difficulty of representing or sharing an affect in a concise, pre-determined form (see Hokkanen, 2017; Thrift, 2008). Because isn’t it so with affect – just as with care, beauty, love and kindness – that it keeps escaping words? It is an experience, a feeling, like a thought without having a thought (Morton, 2010; see also Hokkanen, 2017; Höckert, 2018b; Zylinska, 2014), the unsaid or the barely sayable (see McCormack, 2002 as cited in Vannini, 2015a, p. 9), something that we are

destined to fail to capture (Vannini, 2018, p. 7). Or as Felicity Coleman (2005; see also Grit, 2014, p. 124) puts it so well, while affect is a knowable product of an encounter, 'it is also as indefinite as the experience of a sunset, transformation or a ghost'.

Coleman (2005) describes affect as 'the change or variation that occurs when bodies collide or come to contact'. Non-representational scholars, as Vannini (2015a, p. 9) describes, can examine affect as the body's capacity to be moved and affected – and the body's capacity to move and affect. Puig de la Bellacasa (2017, p. 95) seems to agree about how the affective engagements of caring invoke involved, embodied, embedded relations (see also Waitt et al., 2014). Hence, could it be that transmitting the meaningful story of the mittens, enabling others to think and know through these mittens, falls short without having experienced a personal 'touch'? This is what Stewart (2005) suggests; we need physical encounters. It seems like touching and being touched is the best example of ontological and epistemic relationality where the boundaries between the self and the other have been blurred (Waitt et al., 2014, pp. 95–96). Drawing on Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey's (2001) ideas in *Thinking through the Skin*, Puig de la Bellacasa (2017, p. 96) argues that asking what it means to touch and to be touched, or to move and to be moved, deepens our 'awareness of the embodied character of perception, affect and thinking'. She suggests that by thinking with touch, we can inspire our sense of connectedness and problematise dualistic divisions between subjects and objects, self and other, affects and facts and those who care and those who are being cared for (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, p. 97).

## Towards new patterns – Outi

- 'Hi there. Sorry for calling this late, but I have bad news. You'd better sit down.'
- 'Ok... What is it?'
- 'I lost the mittens. Both of them. I must have left them in a church in Jukkasjärvi. I had to run to the bus and could not turn back to go looking for them. I am so sorry! I was visiting that beautiful church there, at the end of the road. The one with colourful paintings of Sámi culture. Next to the Museum and Café Sámi. I think you have also been there, haven't you?'

I hear Emily's voice on the phone and my face breaks into a big smile. My mind travels to a beautiful summer day two and a half years ago when I spent a day in that same church. In a few seconds, I am no longer seated at the kitchen table but sitting and knitting on the church bench. Could it be that the mittens had returned home? I hear Emily asking whether she should try to contact the church to see whether someone could send the mittens to her. Then she apologises once more. Despite her challenge of coping without mittens in minus 30-degree Celsius temperatures in the Arctic (see also Vannini, 2015a, p. 113), I note that we could see this as a sign. Perhaps the mittens have inspired us enough, made us think beyond the representation. Now it is time for them to move on, to take care of someone else and whisper their stories to others. That particular church in Jukkasjärvi is a great place to leave them, because around that area most of the people recognise the coffee-bean pattern and will





**Figure 3.** The book about fancy mittens. Source: Outi's personal file.

respect them. I want to believe that if the mittens wanted to leave now, this was the perfect place to get separated from the owner<sup>1</sup>.

This narrative of the mittens has allowed us to explore the intensive entanglements in meanings and matter between handicrafts, places and humans, and we have wished to join the ongoing discussions about relational ethics in tourism research where agency, relationality and ability to care are not limited to the social lives of humans (Grimwood, 2015; Rantala et al., 2020; Ren et al., 2017; Veijola et al., 2014). Although the yarns of these green and white mittens are knitted and knotted in tidy ways, they have kept entangling as we have allowed their response-ability. They have travelled to places and been present at different events, like the Nordic Tourism Symposium in Alta, Norway, where we stood proudly in front of a crowd of tourism researchers telling about the caring, travelling mittens while wearing Icelandic sweaters (known as 'lopapeysias' – another good example of craft tourism), as a token of thankfulness for all the inspiration we have received from our Icelandic colleagues' research on more-than-human-actors in tourism (see Jóhannesson & Lund, 2017a, 2017b; Lund, 2005; Lund et al., 2018).

As the mittens share their stories with others, they keep creating new affects in our daily lives (see Barron, 2019). The mittens have opened up a discussion about the role of embodied experiences in craft tourism, the stories behind the hand-made souvenirs and the care embedded in material objects. Moreover, this journey we have taken together has shaped our personal lives – we no longer take pieces of material for granted, and we have become more curious about the stories of the knitted objects. Every mitten, sock or jumper that we knit holds a story behind it. Sometimes the journey is taken together, sometimes the paths will be parted. But eventually, the material



objects do become part of a life-long journey filled with memories of certain moments.

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Just before writing the last lines of this article, Erika Nordvall Falck (2018) book *Fancy Mittens - Markkinavanhuita* arrives by mail (Figure 3). I quickly scan the pages, admiring the beautiful photos of the mittens and reading some of the stories of fancy mittens. When I turn to the last pages of the book, I see the pattern of those coffee-beans I made for Emily. I laugh with disbelief; this cannot really be true: the pattern is here given the same name as Emily's daughter! As if it were Emily's daughter's pattern. It seems that the pattern is really haunting us, and this story of the mittens has truly been full of surprises (see Mackenzie & Kerr, 2013b). I send a text message to Emily about the mittens' name and she instantly replies: 'This is a sign: you shall knit new mittens for my entire family'.

## Note

1. While it may sound like the disappearance of the mittens is only a staged happening, we can assure readers that it happened for real. The mittens were way too precious to be sacrificed for science.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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