



by Franklin Habit

There's a box under my bed where I keep certain things I'm slightly ashamed of. No, not that box. Another one. A larger one. The one with all the swatches in it.

I like to swatch. I swatch all the time. Even when I'm not planning to make anything in particular, I put yarn on needles and play with it. I swatch for the sake of swatching.

"What are you making?" somebody will ask me. "A hat," I reply. Or, "A scarf." I never say it's a swatch, because the next question is always, "A swatch for what?" And admitting that you swatch for the sheer pleasure of it is like admitting that you feel slightly aroused whenever the office photocopier develops a paper jam.

One of my knitting companions, who has serious boundary issues, was visiting one day and while searching for a crochet hook she uncovered my box of secrets. Not that one, the one with the swatches in it.

"Squares for a blanket?" she asked. As well she might, because my swatches aren't just swatches, they're pretty swatches with nice garter stitch borders and all the ends woven in. I should have said yes, squares for a blanket, because everybody is always making squares for a blanket but nobody ever finishes the blanket, so nobody ever asks follow-up questions about your squares.

But there had been rum that afternoon. So I said, "Those are my swatches."

And she said, "Swatches for what?"

And I said, "Just for the fun of it."

She held up a swatch that I made to see what happens when you try to do complicated intarsia in pure cotton (the answer is you smack loved ones) and said, "Wow. You're definitely a Process Knitter."

I had no idea what she was talking about, but asking her for clarification seemed like a good way to get her out of my bedroom, so I asked what "Process Knitter" meant.

“Well,” she said, “there are Process Knitters and Product Knitters. Process Knitters are mostly in it for the making. Product Knitters are more in it for the wearing.”

She was still rooting around under the bed and had one hand on the other secret box, so I asked her to please elaborate in the living room.

“If you’re a Product Knitter,” she said, “you see a new pattern for a hat and decide to buy the pattern because you want the hat. If you’re a Process Knitter, you see a new pattern for a hat and decide to buy it because the way the hat is designed looks interesting.”

“Interesting how?”

“I don’t know,” she said. “It’s a hypothetical hat. Maybe it has stranded colorwork tropical fish on it.”

“Is it a winter hat?”

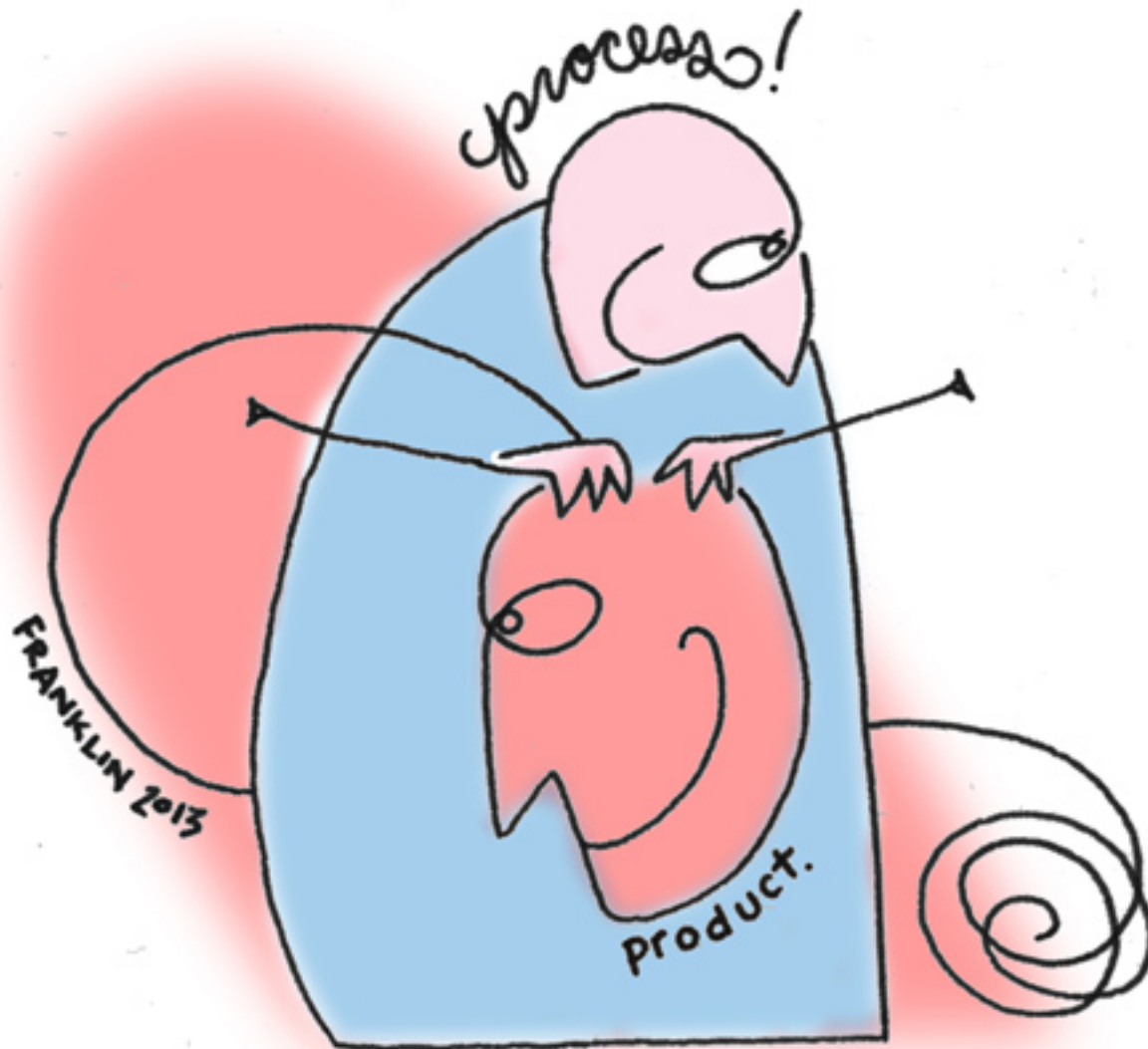
“What? I don’t know. Probably.”

“Tropical fish on winter hat seems weird to me. Not interesting. Weird.”

“Well, some other kind of fish, then. Cold fish.”

“Lox?”

Then she remembered that what she had been looking for was a crochet hook, and changed the subject.



I kept thinking about it, though. Was I a Process Knitter? The word “process” sounded so orderly. Orderly I am not. I generally feel that my knitting is just fumbling plus yarn. Occasionally I fumble my way to a whole sock. More often, I do not.

“Are you really sure I’m a Process Knitter?” I asked.

“What does that have to do with Kim Kardashian?” she said.

“Nothing,” I said. “Unless she’s a Process Knitter too. Why do you ask?”

“We were talking about Kim Kardashian. But obviously you were thinking about something else.”

“I always do,” I said, “when the subject is Kim Kardashian.”

“Of course you’re Process,” she said. “What are you making right now?”

“A lace shawl.”

“*Why* are you making a lace shawl? Are you going to wear it?”

“Well—”

“Do your shoulders get chilly at the gym and you feel a lace shawl would be just the very thing?”

“No.”

“Do the other guys at Murphy’s Bleachers make fun of you because you’re the only one without a lace shawl?”

“No.”

“You’re making it because you thought lace would be an interesting thing to play with for a while, am I right?”

“You’re right.”

“You’re a Process Knitter, then. You have no need of the shawl, yet you make the shawl. Whereas I am a Product Knitter: I knit the hat because I want to wear the hat.”

“I thought you were making a cowl.”

“No, not *this*. A hypothetical hat.”

“Oh. The tropical fish hat?”

“Any hat. If I want it badly enough, I’ll knit it. Even if I think working through the pattern might be a little boring, I’ll still knit it because I want *that particular hat*.”

“You don’t even like stranded color work,” I said.

“But I’ll do it,” she said, “*if* I want the hat.”

“You know who would wear a tropical fish hat in winter?” I said. “Kim Kardashian.”

She decided it was time to go home.

That night, after I had sorted and packed away the contents of my secret box (not that box, the one with the swatches in it), I pulled out another box (not that box) that's full of odds and ends of yarn. Then I got out some graph paper and pencils. Then, suddenly, it was four o'clock in the morning, and I had about five square inches of knitting.

"Maybe you *are* a Process Knitter," I thought.

I saw my friend the Product Knitter the next afternoon at the coffee shop.

"What's that?" she said.

"New swatch," I said. "Stranded colorwork."

"And are those..."

"Tropical fish."

"I thought you said that was silly."

"Silly, but interesting."

"I'm not wearing it, even if you finish it."

"It's not for you," I said. "It's for Kim Kardashian."

We haven't spoken much since.

Designer and illustrator Franklin Habit is the proprietor of the popular knitting blog The Panopticon (the-panopticon.blogspot.com) and the founder of Yarn Shaming (yarnshaming.tumblr.com). He loves yarn, but yarn does not always love him back.