

In the Making: The ‘Power to the People’ Workshop Track at Crafting the Future

Edited by Otto von Busch

***Konstfack University College of Arts, Crafts and
Design and Parsons the New School for Design***

ABSTRACT Over the last decade several projects and exhibitions have explored how crafts can play a central role for empowerment through social development, innovation and entrepreneurship. In order to facilitate this, there is a need to explore how craft practices can act as tools for empowerment, both in research and practice. The ‘Power to the People’ track at the European Academy of Design Conference in Gothenburg 2013 tried to answer on this challenge with a series craft-based seminars, each centred on a participant’s proposed craft or ‘Paper of Practice’. This formed a series of practice-based seminars that mixed hands-on activities and discussion, centred on and emerging from the very act of doing.

KEYWORDS: craft, research, practice-based seminars, empowerment

Introduction



The 'Power to the People' track at the Crafting the Future Conference came to existence at the intersection of two current interests of the conveners: on the one hand, to experiment with hands-on presentation formats for academic conferences, and on the other hand, questions of how craft practices may act as an empowering force in people's lives.

Practice-based design and craft research has over the last decades been established as an academic research field in its own right. Yet, at conferences research is still most often limited to paper presentations, as this convenient format is convenient to produce, schedule, present and later publish. However, some of the explorative aspects of research are often lost in paper presentations, not least the hands-on, collaborative and speculative parts of the actual process of making. For many researchers, it is exactly these latter parts of practice that their research is about, and there is a need to come closer to present, share, test and discuss those facets of enquiry at conferences.

Outside of the research community, there have over the last decade been several projects and exhibitions that have explored how crafts can play a central role for empowerment through social development, innovation and entrepreneurship. However, most often the process and results of these projects have been funnelled through systems that have a deeply disempowering effect on most people, such as the monetary economy, consumer/commodity culture and the global market. To challenge this condition, there is a need to explore how craft practices can act as tools for empowerment by actively resisting or bypassing these subjugating mechanisms. More specifically the track asked how research, rooted in hands-on, participatory activities such as craft, skill sharing and local systems of exchange, could be better understood and developed.

To give some justice to the topic, the conveners tried to break out of the traditional 'call for papers', to instead have a call for practices that could inspire active, participatory engagement with the conference audience, be prepared for 10–15 people and last for about one and a half hours. Through a series of craft-based seminars, each centred on a participant's proposed craft or 'Paper of Practice', the challenge was to escape PowerPoint presentations in front of passive listeners to instead form a series of academic craft circles with activities and discussion that centred on and emerged from the act of doing.

Before the conference, each workshop organizer wrote some initial notes for common discussion and brought material for a workshop for both beginners as well as experienced makers in order to facilitate a discussion to emerge as an act of making in its own right. The overall format of one and a half hours for workshops gave time for an in-depth example of practices yet still left room for three workshop sessions per day. Having several workshops per day

allowed some flow of participants, and also permitted some intersections between the different practices and formats to be drawn. In the last workshop of the conference the participants produced a collaborative zine to sum up the track and document the process and outcomes.

Here follows some short summaries from the workshop organizers.

UNRAVELLING THE POWER OF KNITTING

Amy Twigger Holroyd, University of Leeds, UK

About the Research

My research explores design activism in the context of my practice as a designer-maker of knitwear. Motivated by the prospect of a more sustainable and satisfying fashion system, I am investigating the idea of 'openness' within my practice.

At a macro level, I have constructed a metaphor of fashion as a commons, which has been subject to gradual enclosure through industrialization and professionalization. I see a lack of making knowledge as one element of this enclosure, and suggest that an open fashion system would see a greater role for individuals making and maintaining their own clothes.

On a more practical level, I have investigated ways of 'opening' existing knitted garments, using knitting skills to remake, alter and embellish them. Altering existing pieces enables renewal, and my research shows that it has the potential to change the wearer's relationship with fashion more broadly. However, the ability to open and reconfigure a garment depends on its physical properties and what is perceived to be possible. Although knitting has an inherently open and 'tinkerable' structure, we tend to perceive mass-produced garments as closed and inviolable. As Fletcher (2008: 187) argues, 'the products themselves are presented to us as complete or "closed", with an almost untouchable or sacrosanct status. This dissuades us from personalizing them in order to make them our own.'

About the Workshop

In my conference workshop, I aimed to discuss what we perceive we can do to existing knitted garments, whether we see them as open or closed, and what factors affect those perceptions.

The main reason for proposing a workshop on this topic, rather than a conventional conference presentation, was to integrate the process of making into the discussion. This was a continuation of my research methodology, which focused on the feelings of makers during the making process. I worked with a group of amateur knitters, exploring ways of opening existing knitwear and discussing the emotions involved. The project culminated in the participants using re-knitting techniques to alter items from their own wardrobes.



Figure 1

The knitting circle in progress. Photograph: Pascale Gatzert.

The conference workshop activity was essentially a knitting circle: we knitted and talked, as I shared stories from the group of amateur knitters (Figure 1). By participating in the craft activity being discussed, the workshop participants gained an insider perspective from which to consider the experiences of others and discover their own opinions.

Having set up the practical activity, I described the re-knitting project and read out quotes from the research participants relating to their initial feelings about unravelling, cutting and altering:

I'm always scared, I mean if you drop a stitch or something, I'm always scared it's going to run right down to the bottom. Cutting knitting? It's sacrilege!

I demonstrated methods of opening knitted fabric, and described how the amateur knitters' feelings changed as they experimented. They discovered qualities within the fabric that they had not previously considered, and this changed their attitude to alteration:

It's liberating because it's not all just disappeared. It's that expectation that it would all fray, and it just hasn't.

During the conference workshop, we were not knitting using new balls of yarn in a conventional way. Instead, generic knitted garment panels were gradually unravelled and re-knitted, with one piece disintegrating as another was created. This meant that the workshop participants were experiencing at first hand the emotions involved in deconstruction. While the quotes from the research project offered a starting point for discussion, the workshop participants readily shared their own thoughts and feelings, offering alternative perspectives which enriched my understanding of the issues in question.

Later in the workshop, I shared descriptions of a number of fictional knitted garments, which I had discussed with the research group as a way of interrogating the factors affecting their inclination to make alterations. The workshop participants contributed their own thoughts about each garment, which in many cases were different to those of the amateur knitters. Finally, I showed images of the amateur knitters' re-knitted garments, before and after their alterations, and shared some of their reflections on the experience as a whole:

We've done things I would never have dreamt of.
It's made me a bit braver.

Reflections

The conference workshop took place during the analysis phase of my research. I found it valuable to talk about my tentative findings, and respond to questions, at this formative stage. The atmosphere in the room was convivial and reflective, with all participants contributing to the discussion. Each act of unravelling involved at least two people – one holding the disappearing panel, and one knitting a new piece from the same yarn. The threads stretching between these collaborators created physical connections which visually reflected the shared experience. Although I had planned a way of including participants who were unable to knit, all those who attended could knit; it is a drawback that the activity may have put off those who did not already have this skill.

Having now completed my analysis, I am able to briefly share my conclusions on the issue of garments being perceived as open or closed. I discovered a general assumption that complete, finished items would not be altered, which applies to both shop-bought and homemade clothes. However, it seemed easier for the research participants to perceive items as open and suitable for modification if there was a recognizable problem to be solved. While all knitted garments have the capacity for alteration, it is when they become damaged and the structure starts to degrade that this property becomes more obvious. It was surprisingly straightforward to create a situation in which it was acceptable to modify items of knitwear; through playing with knitted fabrics, the research participants quickly extended their ideas about what could be done.

Overall, I have found that the process of deconstruction can be a valuable research tool, prompting reflection on the item itself – its construction, age and conditions of manufacture – and much broader issues, such as workers' rights and waste. I intend to develop this methodology in future research.

MAKING, GIFTING AND CONNECTING

Julia Keyte, Sheffield Hallam University, UK

Aims

The Making, Gifting and Connecting workshop developed a method for eliciting the narratives and emotions connected to personal possessions. It invited participants to reflect on an uncherished gift they had received and kept, and the experiences associated with it, through a drawing, making and sharing activity.

The workshop extended methods generated through the Campaign for Objects in Purgatory, an ongoing research project which collects and explores the personal narratives of uncherished gifts in order to examine how attachment to a possession evolves as it is integrated into the home, and the implications of this for research on emotionally sustainable design.

Method

Ten people participated in the workshop, which took place in three stages. In stage one I introduced the key themes of my research. In stage two, participants were invited to recall an uncherished gift they had received and kept. They were each invited to sketch their gift, from memory, on an A5 piece of paper (see Figure 2). In the third and final stage, the group was divided into five pairs. I asked each person to make a frame for their partner's drawing that would help communicate the story of the gift in the drawing. There were basic craft materials available for this: A5 card, papers, mirror card, sheet foam, acetate, pencils, clips and glue sticks.

The participants responded to the framing activity in a number of different ways. Several cut holes in A5 sized card, which they laid over the drawing to make selected areas visible. Others made frames that opened and closed to reveal and conceal specific parts of the drawing. Other frames were three-dimensional and used visual symbolism, such as an acetate box built over the object to represent a zone of perceived inaccessibility around it (see Figure 2), or layers that could be peered into to represent looking into the past or future.

My role in stage three (framing) was to oversee the making activities, by listening and talking to the pairs as they worked. To support this stage I supplied a list of questions for participants to use as prompts, to help them gain a deeper understanding of their partner's story. I encouraged participants to support each other by framing the drawing in a way that might help their partner to see the gift

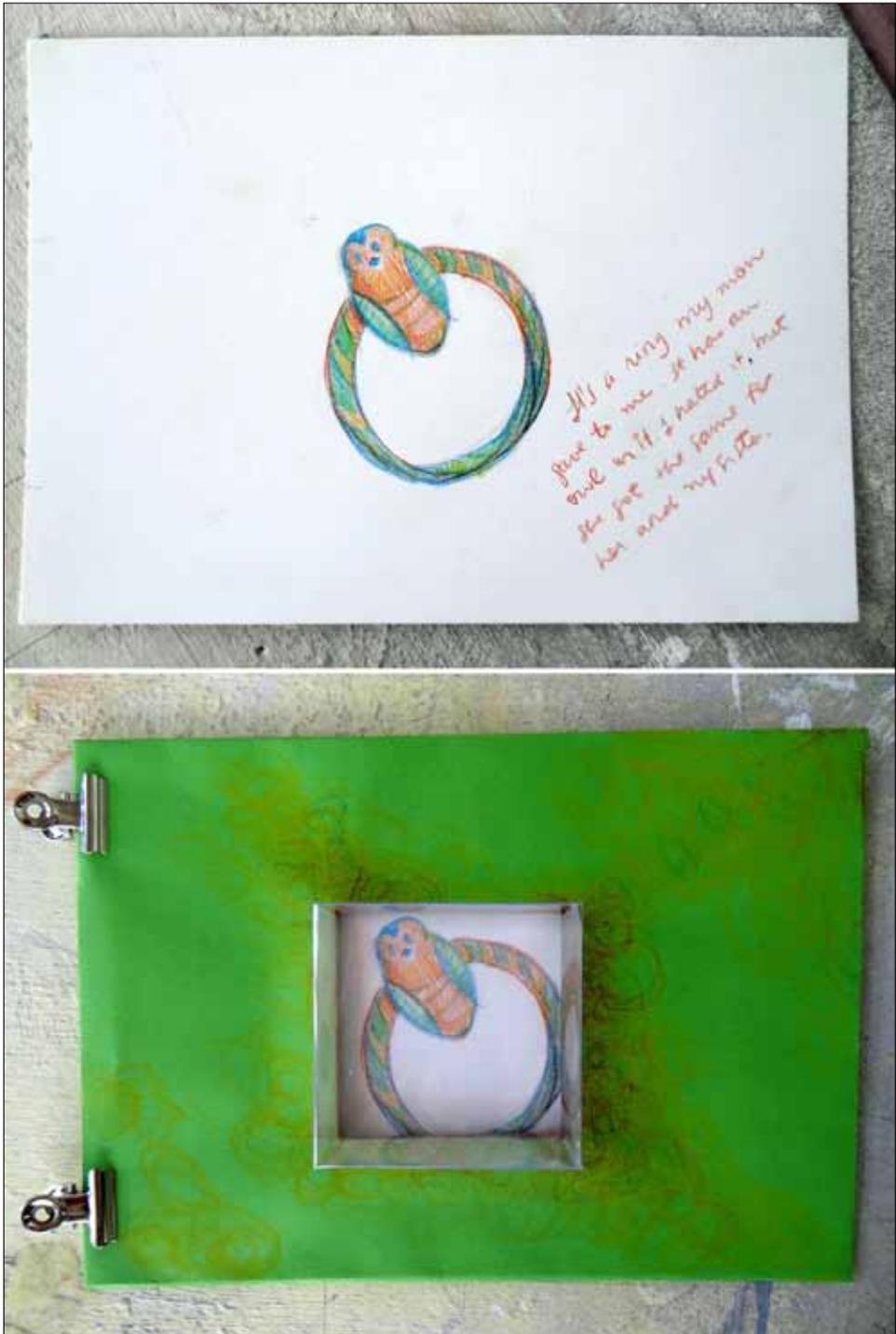


Figure 2

Drawing of participant's uncherished gift (above) and the drawing framed in paper and acetate by their partner (below). Photograph: Julia Keyte.

differently; to 'throw light' on the dilemma the person experienced in connection with the gift.

The workshop developed a method of eliciting the narrative and emotions connected to a possession, and was also an active, creative means of exploring the development of meaning in an gift, building on previous research (see Keyte, 2013) and established theory on gift giving (see below). While the workshop activities themselves cannot create meaning in the framed sketches in a measurable way, the active reflection on gifting helped us to 'reframe' individual dilemmas experienced in connection to uncherished gifts, and to expose rituals and practices of accumulation, acquisition and divestment.

Gift Giving Theory

Gift giving has rich potential as an area of engagement for design, as it is often blamed for the creation of an overspill of unwanted possessions (*The Daily Telegraph*, 2012), but conversely also has the capacity to create strong human-object attachments. Seminal literature on gift giving (Mauss, 2004[1950]) emphasizes gift exchange as an instrumental transaction in constructing relationships. Carrier (1991) and Trivers (1971) develop expanded views of the role of giving and receiving (to include exchanges of acts of generosity, for example, and not just formal gifts) as the structure which underpins all human relationships. This points to the importance of gifting in connecting people, and to human relationships as instruments in the formation of meaning in objects (Miller, 2008). Can designers and makers take an instrumental role in connecting people through their designing and making activities?

Reflection on Aims

There are three key successes that will form the basis for further work.

First, the workshop added an interesting dimension to drawing and making as participant research activities, because it introduced a new element of exchange (of experiences, stories and making). The exchanges had an especially empathetic dimension as participants were supportive of one another in seeking out each other's stories and working out how to represent them in the frame. (Several participants mentioned that they found the interpretive process challenging but enjoyable.)

Second, the exchange can be understood as an intimate and creative interviewing process, but rather than the researcher conducting the interview, the participants informally interview each other. These 'interviews' present an interesting challenge for the researcher, as they are not easy to record without intervening.

The third key way in which the workshop was successful was in how it enabled participants to reflect on their gift. In some cases it seemed to effect a transition in how they thought about it. For example, three people decided it was time to get rid of the object, and

for others the workshop provided a space and opportunity to think about the complex social and practical aspects of owning a burdensome possession. Some participants remarked that it drew their attention to an object that was otherwise 'invisible' to them in daily life, and to see it differently. This suggests the workshop effectively employed making as a reflective process for expressing thoughts and ideas not usually consciously examined (see Gauntlett, 2007). It was an effective means of finding out about something as familiar and overlooked as a home possession.

Conclusions

I think the method has much potential for gaining further insights into processes of meaning making in home possessions. Connecting people through exchanging experiences is an empathetic way of valuing the personal stories of objects, and enabling participants to reflect on their own practices of keeping. In its capacity as an active and creative method of reflecting on the familiar, it has further potential for examining the ebb and flow of meaning in domestic objects. It is an involved activity that needs a longer time frame to fully realize its potential, and to include recording processes.

NYONYA BEADWORK: A MEDIUM OF AESTHETIC EXPLORATION IN CONTEMPORARY PERANAKAN CULTURE

Soh Choi Yin, Epoch Design Studio, Singapore

The Peranakan culture in Singapore has gone through a period of assimilation, extravagance, obsolescence and revival since the 18th century. The descendants of the Peranakans consist of the early Diaspora communities who were mostly wealthy merchants and traders from Southeast Asia. They married brides from local natives and adopted their customs, language (Baba Malay with a mixture of Chinese dialects) and lifestyle, and absorbed elements of European culture during the colonial times. This eclectic mix creates a unique hybrid culture that is manifested in the Peranakans' material artefacts, such as porcelain, furniture, silver, jewellery, beadwork, embroidery and other domestic objects in the Peranakan homes (Tahir, 2008). The Nyonya beadwork, one of the cultural signifiers of the Peranakan heritage and craft, was the main focus of this workshop. Every Nyonya learned various handicrafts, such as beading, knitting, embroidery and crocheting, from their mother at an early age. The level of intricacy in their beadwork would determine their suitability for marriage and their position in the household (Seet, 2009). Colours of the beadwork are high in contrast and vibrant. The design motifs usually demonstrate a fusion of various influences – Chinese, European and local cultures, ranging from adopting Chinese symbolism to European imageries. However, for the past 50 years in Singapore, the Peranakan culture gradually became obsolete in

the modern world after the implementation of various pragmatic state policies to moderate cultural distinctiveness of every Diaspora community in order to achieve racial harmony for rapid economic development. The threat of cultural loss of the Peranakans' distinctive identity prompts the state to preserve what is still remained in the Peranakan culture (Cheah, 2010).

The initial intent of the Peranakan beading workshop was to bring different beading knowledge and design insights together by different cultures. The cross-cultural collaboration of the workshop would encourage different interpretation in styles, colours, forms and techniques, contributing to diversity and intriguing discussion during the process of making. Ideally new visual exploration would emerge, leading to further initiatives of expanding material culture in the Peranakan heritage. It was aimed to contribute to the revival and re-connect the Nyonya beadwork to a larger public; not restricting itself within the Peranakan community. Being a 'hybrid' Peranakan culture, the collaboration with the participants from different countries would potentially display a greater 'hybridity' of aesthetic interpretation for beadwork.

Constructing a Practice-based Workshop for Beading

Two months before the conference, a website was set up to call for interested participants to take part in this beading workshop. The design motif (4 inches × 4 inches) was submitted by the participants. The designs were digitized and the beadwork frames were made before the workshop. The one and a half hour beading workshop began with a brief overview of the Peranakan culture and identity, from its glorious history, its vanishing past to its process of revival with an emphasis on the discussion of the aesthetics of Nyonya beadwork in relation to the changing social role of the Nyonyas within the Peranakan communities. Slides of vintage and contemporary beadworks, and my practices and inspirations in bead craft and illustration were presented. An introduction of the craft and steps for beading techniques were introduced. Beadwork frame, glass beads, needles, threads, wax and more digitized designs were provided during the workshop (Figure 3).

Topics for Discussion

Due to the short time frame of the workshop, the initial intention to discuss with the participants about colour applications of their beadworks with preferences to their personal taste, as a cultural signifier or as an artistic interpretation was not examined in detail. Moreover, only a small portion of the beadwork patterns was beaded as the beading process is meticulous and tedious. Notwithstanding that, during the process of making, active discussions were facilitated and exchanged. Topics discussed varied from the preservation of traditional beadwork as a contemporary leisure activity, to different ways of reinventing bead craft to encourage the younger generation



Figure 3
Beading in progress.
Photograph: Soh Choi Yin.



Figure 4
Beadwork in progress
and completed artwork.
Photograph: Soh Choi Yin.

to learn Peranakan beadwork, and applying bead craft as a fashionable ornament for a personalized wearable (Figure 4).

Conclusion

Beadwork is a humble and domesticated craft through which the Peranakan culture and identity may be imagined and articulated. While older pieces of the Nyonya beadwork provide the material connection to the historical past, contemporary pieces encourage the new self-identification of the Peranakan identity. This workshop is a continuous development of articulating the material culture of the Peranakan beadwork through its production and process as contemporary community leisure. It reveals the ongoing cycle of its cultural transformation that is relentlessly fluid and hybrid in its aestheticism, expressions and personification. The beading workshop provides a broader framework of its evolving material culture to a wider audience in the contemporary society.

**THE OLDEST TEXTILE PROCESS, THE FIRST
MULTICELLULAR ANIMAL AND A THING ABOUT
COLLECTIVITY: WHAT WE LEARN BY MAKING**
*Hope Ginsburg, Virginia Commonwealth University,
Richmond, USA*

Taking the material processes of dry felting and the subject matter of the sea sponge, this workshop explored learning by doing, or specifically the pedagogic power of craft. The use of craft for both fostering collaboration and extending an understanding of ecology was explored.

The material felt, which is often said to be the oldest fabric production technique, is an apt metaphor for collectivity. Individual fibres interact randomly. There is no set structure, no knitted substrate. But the fibres, whose scales lock irreversibly with moisture, agitation and an acidic or alkaline agent (such as soap), or with entanglement by a barbed needle, form a material that is strong, malleable and flexible. The fabric breathes. Unlike a woven or a knit, one yarn break does not unravel the whole affair.

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987) count felt among their examples of the desired 'smooth space' where systems are infinite, open and unlimited in every direction. These characteristics ring utopian in our time of increased disciplinary specialization, economic scarcity and conservative body politic intent on limiting the variability of our choices. Felt, in all of its 'non-structure', is the stuff of possibility.

'The Oldest Textile Process, The First Multicellular Animal and a Thing About Collectivity: What We Learn by Making' used foam replicas of sea sponges, produced by casting, to make a symbolic preservation of 'our oldest living relative'. Approximately 20 people participated by needle felting onto individual models (Figure 5). The workshop began with a brief presentation about the pedagogical project *Sponge* (2006–present) and the goings-on at the *Sponge HQ*, a workshop and experimental laboratory situated at the Anderson Gallery of Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond. As participants began to needle into their sponges, an introduction to the species and its implications for modelling collectivity took place. A brief précis of this notion follows.

'The Sponge's Tale' in Richard Dawkins' *The Ancestor's Tale* (2004) relays an experiment by scientist H. V. Wilson, published in a 1907 volume of the *Journal of Experimental Zoology*. A living sponge was pushed through a cloth sieve, which caused the animal to separate into a mass of cells at the bottom of a container. The individual cells moved freely until they found like counterparts and formed agglomerations, which in turn grew into adult sponges. Sponges are understood to be the earliest example of the metazoans, or animals. And animals can be thought of as assemblages of protozoans, or single-celled organisms. Dawkins writes:



Figure 5

Sample needle-felted sponge is carefully inspected by participant at start of the workshop. Photograph: Pascale Katzen.

The 'sociable' behavior of sponge cells as exhibited by such experiments perhaps sheds light on the normal embryonic development of individual sponges. Does it also give us some sort of hint of how the first multicellular animals (metazoans) evolved from single-celled ancestors (protozoans)? The metazoan body is often called a colony of cells. [...] Could the behavior of the crawling and agglomerating cells in Wilson's experiment represent some sort of re-enactment of how the first sponge arose – as a colony of protozoans? (Dawkins, 2004: 486f)

This scenario of sponge cells crawling around in a saucer of sea water, looking for their cohort, on their way to 'building an animal' is striking to me as an analogue for social practice and collaborative methodology.

Once these ideas were put forward in the workshop, an open discussion ensued. This 'Power to the People' project itself fit into the larger undertaking of producing an installation of handmade sea sponges, modelled on a spectacular and tragic image of a sponge store in Kalymnos, Greece. Formerly the sponge capital of the world, the waters are so overfished there that sponges must now

be shipped from the Caribbean to stock the 'shelves' (Hendrikse and Merks, 2009). As such, each completed felt sponge was tagged with the name of the project, the name of the maker and the sponge species that had been replicated. Participants had the option of keeping their object or contributing it to an extended collaborative work, entailing a collective unfolding, across international waters. At the end of the session, knowledge regarding sponge biology as well as felt production was transferred and new notions of the power of making emerged.

THE BLACK HACK CHAT

***Rebecca Earley, Textiles Environment Design (TED),
Chelsea College of Arts, University of the Arts London,
UK***

***Jen Ballie, Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and
Design, Dundee University, UK***

Introduction

This workshop was part of the design research by TED for MISTRA Future Fashion, a Swedish consortium concerned with creating sustainable, systemic and profitable change for the fashion industry. When organizations put design at the heart of product and service development, they are triggered to ask fundamental questions about what they make, how they make it and who for (Thackara, 2008). The approaches included within TED's TEN (Earley and Politowicz, 2010) promote design thinking and demonstrate how textile designers can play a more strategic role to instigate social and environmental change. The workshop combines three of the ten by applying design to replace the need to consume in order to 'upcycle' discarded garments (Earley, 2009). Design activism influenced the agency within this workshop and combined insights from two existing projects, 'Black Hack' (Earley, 2012) and 'Old Is the New Black' (Ballie and von Busch, 2011).

The 'Black Hack Chat' (BHC) explored new roles for the professional textile designer (the authors), which enabled them to exchange their skills and experience through facilitation of this design intervention. The aim was to push the boundaries of textile design practice through co-design to identify how it can be used as a tool for citizen engagement.

Pre-Workshop

The textile techniques within this workshop addressed the need for designers to aid consumers and retailers in recycling polyester, which is the most recyclable of fibres (Muthu *et al*, 2012), yet as the largest volume of fibre globally produced – representing 80 per cent of the global chemical fibre output – it is the most common type to be found in landfilled clothing (Aizenshtein, 2012; Dawson, 2012).

In the run up to the BHC workshop Earley filmed a how-to guide, demonstrating the transformation of a shirt within three minutes using a domestic iron, scissors and black transfer paper. *Shirt Film* (2013) was published online for people who wanted to take part in the BHC workshop session, wherever they might be located. Social media – mainly Pinterest and Twitter – was integrated to curate inspirational content, promote agency and support consumer participation.

Workshop

Through transformation methods the workshop focused on overprinting discarded clothing to offer new modes of collective agency. The participants operated as design activists – for themselves as individual consumers and as customers to a producer – and were provided with the necessary tools and methods to transform a garment in a short space of time.

The participants were first invited to select a polyester shirt from a selection the researchers had sourced from UK charity shops. Then they sat in pairs at tables – most sitting with participants that they had not met before. von Busch and Ballie – along with Earley on a Skype screen – briefly introduced the workshop. *Shirt Film* was shown to help the participants visualize and understand the process they were being asked to engage with. The pairs were asked to work collaboratively to transform each shirt (Figure 6).



Figure 6
Black Hack Chat
Workshop.

Post-Workshop and Outcomes

During the making process a series of provocations sparked debate from perspectives of both the retailer and consumer. This was captured, along with the redesigned items, in the workshop space: photographs; video interviews; screen capture via the Skype conversation; and Post-it note ideas all captured the experience and the discourse. The event was filmed and the team documented the discourse and the making with the participants. Participants published updates on the outcomes of the session on Twitter during the day (#blackhackchat).

Workshop insights for the researchers to take forward also stemmed from the Post-it note comments wall, which suggested that retailers could:

- Release patterns every year for consumers to over-print with
- Design shirt prints at the outset to gradually become blacker through 'updating'
- Run competitions for the best over-print design
- Sell 'Print Your Own' kits – for celebrations and events like hen parties
- Provide over-print toolkits for consumers, sold with garments and separately

Consumers could:

- Host BHC parties for their friends within their own home
- Use existing garments within their wardrobes as stencils to create new variations
- Contribute to an online gallery or social network
- Recreate on trend patterns and styles to update garments within their existing wardrobe

Working with ready-mades: the old shirts, the dry transfer process (where no further fixing is required) and domestic irons meant that the garments were quickly adapted and immediately wearable. This seemed to add a level of engagement from the participants that perhaps had not been found in previous workshops by the authors.

Future Direction

The professional textile designer embodies a varied skill set through their tacit knowledge and understanding of materials, techniques and processes. Within every textile designer there is a specialized skill set. This workshop preparation, design and delivery demonstrate the value of exchanging skills from the designers' personal toolbox to develop an alternative way of working. 'Black Hack Chat' explored how a selection of skills traditionally embodied within the textile designer might be exchanged to demonstrate a new mode of material engagement for the fashion consumer and industry.

To support outside intervention through textile design, we need to develop a deeper understanding of the consumer 'sweet spot' being the optimum point or combinations of factors and qualities for promoting engagement. It is possible that we are not fully satisfied with fashion because we have not set the right social structure to engage with our clothing (Jackson, 2009). This could be especially valuable within the use-phase of a garment life cycle to support longer-term engagement. The consumer is supported only to the point of purchase with no infrastructure to support garment care, repair, alteration or even adaptation and transformation.

Finally, for retailers, the volume of polyester in their ranges demands that they invest in how this resource can be reused time and time again. New technically driven recycling processes are being trialled (Worn Again, 2013), but it could also be that their customers can contribute to this extended lifespan in a way that brings multiple, 'lo-fi' benefits: 'It actually makes polyester more attractive again ... This makes it much more interesting' (Diaz and Vuletich, 2013).

CRAFTING PLAY:CE – CRAFT AS A DESIGN TOOL FOR CO-CREATION

Helena Hansson, School of Design and Crafts, University of Gothenburg, Sweden

Workshop Concept

The workshop 'Crafting Play:ce' took place in Vasaparken, a public park in central Gothenburg during the conference and the aim was to investigate co-creation through a craft-based design process and through play. The idea was to scale up craft and Do-It-Yourself (DIY) activities and bring them out in public space by making a collaborative 'Do-It Together' (DIT) activity for public use.

Task

Twelve students from the Master's programme Child Culture Design at the School of Design and Crafts in Gothenburg were engaged as 'experts on play' from a child's perspective and as chief designers. Craftsmen, rope-makers and basketry-makers supported the students. The students' task was to make use of unused spaces in the urban environment and activate and engage people in different ages in 'crafty play activities' through a co-creative process. The main material, branches of willow, was used to build structures that both should fit in to the 'natural' environment but also be durable for active play. Of great importance was that the structures should be designed for 'open-play' where participants of different ages could be able to 'play' by building on to the structures and be engaged in the actual design process.

Process

After a short introductory workshop where craftsmen introduced the students to simple craft techniques and to the material, the students were divided in three groups, responsible for one play activity each. The groups were to choose a site in the park as theirs and develop a concept that should be related to the environment and to each other's concepts so it became a natural 'play flow' for the visitors in the park. After a short sketching phase, the students decided to start building immediately because they realized that it was hard to be too precise in their drawings because they neither knew the material nor the techniques until they engaged with the building process. It then became a very open and improvised process, where the students needed to collaborate and take decisions during the process despite not really knowing about the final end result. The concepts developed were big spider sculptures, a big balancing basket and a balancing/climbing net. Since the playground was built on-site in full-scale, the bypassing visitors could easily follow the process and see the playground take place during the week either from a distance, or if they wanted, more actively involved as co-creators (Figure 7). Many



Figure 7
The 'playground' was built on-site in full-scale, the bypassing visitors could easily follow the process and watch the playground take place either from a distance, or if they wanted, more actively involved as co-creators.
Photograph: Simon Farsi.

visitors came by asking about the process, and even if they were not actively involved they became engaged. People also started to use the space in a new way, they started crossing between the sculptures and sometimes people just sat down to have a rest in the park watching the ongoing building process.

Tests and Interactions with the Users

At the weekend, children and their families were more actively invited to be part of the further development of the play structures. Material was provided and we also introduced another craft technique, rope-making. The craftsmen taught first the students and later the visitors how to make ropes by simple hand-driven machines. The students used the ropes to build further on their play structures; for example, a group that made the low willow-net structure as a balancing activity tied the ropes between the trees so it could be used as a support for the balancing play, especially for the youngest ones.

Outcome and Reflection

The observations and student evaluations showed the craft-based playground building process to be an excellent tool for participation and activation of the place. Craft became a hands-on communication and co-creation tool. Unlike the more abstract sketch-based design process, the craft-based design process was more open as participants could enter and exit as they wanted, which really suited a workshop being held in a public place. It struck me how well the simple craft tools worked for engaging people in the design process, and how easily the design students and children started to interact. Instead of asking the children a lot of questions, the children could communicate their ideas by building it together as other participants could observe how it was used. The natural material became a natural part of the environment and did not make the place look messy, even during the actual building process. The full-scale prototyping in the actual material used for the final design made the prototype become a real test bed: it could easily and quick be put up, and then be deconstructed, and the material could be reused again. By combining craft skills, design skills and the children's skills in being experts on play, the structures became a very popular social meeting place during the week it lasted and a good learning platform for the students. One interesting reflection from the students was that they realized they had put too much work into making the final object, instead of thinking of how to facilitate the process and interact with the children as part of the design itself.

Further Work

The students and local residents were not so happy about deconstructing the play-objects after such short time (a week). To really get the residents engaged with the objects and the place, it should perhaps be there for a longer time, or several workshops might be held

over a period of time, during which it should be highlighted that the process is the actual end result. The site can then become an active place as it keeps on changing and developing over time. As I see it, the biggest challenge here is the maintenance and facilitation of the process. I have continued to develop the idea further in my research, and we have already tried several workshops both in Sweden and Kenya. The concept seems to work very well, with similar results in the two different contexts; people get engaged easily and take ownership of the space.

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Biographies

Otto von Busch is professor in design at Konstfack University College of Arts, Crafts and Design (Stockholm) and assistant professor and researcher at Parsons the New School for Design (New York). In his research and practice he explores how design and craft can be reverse engineered, hacked and shared among many participants as a form of civic engagement, building community capabilities through collaborative craft and social activism.

Amy Twigger Holroyd is a designer, maker and researcher. Through her knitwear label, Keep and Share, she has explored the emerging field of fashion and sustainability since 2004. Amy recently completed her PhD at Birmingham Institute of Art and Design and is now Research Fellow at the University of Leeds.

Julia Keyte is a jeweller, product designer and senior lecturer at Sheffield Hallam University, UK. Her article-based PhD contributes to research on design and sustainable consumption, by examining how and why we keep domestic possessions. Her creative methods for collecting the stories of everyday objects help identify the potential for design to challenge consumption practices.

Soh Choi Yin is currently a part-time lecturer in Nanyang Polytechnic and an art director of Epoch Design Studio. Her design research is often viewed in relation to the perception of cultural identity in Web and design typologies. She has also crafted handicrafts relating to social discourses, globalization and disparities.

Hope Ginsburg is a Virginia-based artist whose work mixes sculpture, performance and craft. Ginsburg holds a BFA from Tyler School of Art (1996) and a Master of Science in Visual Studies from MIT (2007). Since 2007 she has been Assistant Professor at the Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts.

Jen Ballie is a post-doctoral researcher within Design in Action, AHRC Knowledge Exchange hub. Her research explores social, interaction and sustainable design for fashion furthering the design process through service design. She has delivered workshops for the V&A, London, Marks & Spencer's Shwop Lab and online retailer ASOS.

Rebecca Earley is Professor of Sustainable Textile and Fashion Design. Earley is Director of UAL's Textile Futures Research Centre (TFRC) and currently divides her London working life between the TED research project at Chelsea and TFRC at Central Saint Martins colleges. She is a designer, researcher and consultant, who collaborates with science and industry partners in UK, Sweden and Denmark.

Helena Hansson is a doctoral student in design at the School of Design and Crafts at University of Gothenburg. Her research 'Design as a co-driver for change' is based in Kisumu, Kenya, where she works in close collaboration with various stakeholders to establish a market platform for craft development.

Addresses for Correspondence

Otto von Busch, Konstfack, Box 3601, 126 27 Stockholm, Sweden.
Tel: +46 8 450 41 00
Email: otto.vonbusch@konstfack.se

Amy Twigger Holroyd, School of Design, University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT, UK.
Tel: 44 (0)113 343 3799
Email: a.t.holroyd@leeds.ac.uk

Julia Keyte, Senior Lecturer – Jewellery and Metalwork, Sheffield Hallam University, Faculty of Arts, Engineering, Computing and Sciences, City Campus, Howard Street, Sheffield S1 1WB, UK.
Tel: 0114 225 2649
Email: j.keyte@shu.ac.uk

Soh Choi Yin, Epoch Design Studio, 195 Pearl's Hill Terrace, 03-25,
Singapore 168976.

Tel: +65 9026 3698

Email: choiyin@epochdesignstudio.com

Hope Ginsburg, Assistant Professor, Virginia Commonwealth
University, VCUarts Art Foundation Program, 609 Bowe St. 5th floor,
Richmond, VA 23284-3047, USA.

Tel: (804) 827-7303

Email: hdginsburg@vcu.edu

Professor Rebecca Earley, EG21, Textiles Environment Design (TED),
Chelsea College of Arts, CCW, University of the Arts London (UAL),
16 John Islip Street, London SW1P 4RU, UK.

Tel: +44 (0)7952 752966

Email: r.l.earley@chelsea.arts.ac.uk

Jennifer Ballie, Post-doctoral Research Associate, Knowledge
Exchange Hub Design in Action, DJCAD | University of Dundee,
13 Perth Road, Dundee DD1 4HT, UK.

Tel: +44 (0)1382 385361

Email: j.ballie@dundee.ac.uk

Helena Hansson, PhD student, School of Design and Crafts, Box
131, 405 30 Göteborg, Sweden.

Tel: +31 786 00 00 (vxl)

Email: helena.hansson@hdk.gu.se