

The Wardrobe Hack and Uncatwalk digital platforms of action and services for positive engagement with clothing.

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Abstract

The choices we make about what we wear are influenced by life present, lives past and our ideas about our future selves. Expressions of values ... build a rationale for dress that transcend narrow commercial views about fashion. Instead they give us broader perspectives that honour our reality as well as our aspirations; and connect our psyche with our fibre and fashion choices. (Fletcher, 2014)

This research explores the emerging field of enriching the user experiences of people involved with fashion in the post-production sector and in the post-retail environment. This is an area in which historically the fashion industry has paid little attention. This research addresses the question, can designers create courses of actions or “services” using digital media that enable “users” of clothing to embrace the positive aspects of dress for a creative and satisfying experience of fashion? The research builds on Kate Fletcher’s work within the “Local Wisdom” international fashion research project, which provided a forum for critiquing the dominant logic of growth in a world of finite limits (Daly, 1992; Jackson, 2009) by applying design skills to offer user-initiated examples of resourceful practices (Manzini & Jegou, 2003).

The projects “Wardrobe Hack” (2014), developed by researchers Whitty and McQuillan, and “Uncatwalk” (2014), developed by Whitty, explore the emerging field of enriching the fashion user experience by utilizing digital platforms for disseminating and extending this engagement. The Uncatwalk website provides a digital media interface for a democratic virtual global exchange of interactions involving fashion. The Wardrobe Hack site provides a service for empowering

and sharing clothing user stories and systems. We currently have a situation in society where there is low participation with clothing, as clothes are disposed of rapidly. This research seeks to address this situation to create a better integration of clothing and meaning in our lives. It aims to get to the heart of the current issues in the fashion industry and propose positive alternative roles for designers and consumers. Ezio Manzini (1997) has long declared that sustainability is a societal journey, brought about by acquiring new awareness and perceptions. Guy Julier (2008) makes a case that design activism builds on what already exists. In keeping with this thinking these research projects have been developed with direct participation from members of the public.

Keywords: digital media, design activism, sustainability, design services, craft of use.

Introduction

The current fashion system has led to designers becoming increasingly disconnected and disengaged from the customer, as they are trapped on a treadmill of continuous product replenishment and accelerated changing fashion cycles. What was once a relatively simple two season fashion system is now a relentless data feed where between 30 and 50 trend driven fashion seasons are released by fast fashion businesses (Siegel, 2011). Fashion users, for the most part, participate with fashion through the narrow commercial lens of consumption, constantly coerced to “buy, buy, buy”, leaving little time or incentive to engage with, enjoy and express oneself through fashion.

Fashion is now fast and disposable, as unwanted items are quickly abandoned in favour of the next bright shiny new thing and the promises it holds without forming lasting attachments or placing value on the garments. The disposal of cheap and low quality goods is encouraged, resulting in a desire to consume more (Fletcher & Grose, 2012). Each year UK fashion consumers purchase 2,036 million tonnes of new textiles and clothing, while one million tonnes of clothing will be moving in the opposite direction towards landfill (The Sustainable Clothing Roadmap, 2009). According to Jonathon Chapman (2005),

this increasing waste stream could be interpreted from an emotional perspective as a failed person-product relationship, which is reinforced by the market. Consumer anxiety is fortified with negative signals about forging attachments to clothing (Chapman, 2010, p. 61). This anxiety continually reminds consumers that happiness, or “product-based wellbeing” (Manzini, 2006), is just another purchase away. However this pleasure seems to be short lived, as studies by Richins (2013) indicate the positive emotions evoked by a product for consumers with even the most materialistic values fade quickly after acquisition.

Tim Edwards asks, “Is ‘fashion’ per se, dead?” (2010, p. 160), as in his opinion, a glance at what people are wearing in any contemporary city, for the most part, displays an extraordinary degree of homogeneity and a lack of effort. This raises many questions about the success of the current fashion system, as people seem to have lost interest in the creative and satisfying use of fashion in their daily lives. This is a far cry from the positive potential of fashion, which can be a satisfying and creative outlet touching us both emotionally and physically. According to Quentin Bell, “our clothes are too much a part of us for most of us ever to be entirely indifferent to their condition: it is as though the fabric were indeed a natural extension of the body, or even the soul” (Bell, 1992, p. 19). What people wear is far from superficial; it is linked to a personal aesthetic, and is a negotiation of identity through materiality.

According to Mathilda Tham (Tham & Jones, 2008), designers can create courses of action or services that speak to the deeper layers of practices, attitudes or opinions of people to and about fashion. By doing this we can work towards a fashion system that has real plurality, heterogeneity and that encourages user autonomy. This can lead to a creative and satisfying experience of clothing.

Wardrobe Hack and Uncatwalk developed as a result of the emergence of Web 2.0 technologies, the open source movement and concepts such as peer to peer (p2p). These technologies have led to a new dimension of possibilities for human relations based on egalitarian social networking and mass collaboration on distributed networks. Manzini notes the “deep wave of social innovations”

(2013, p. i) that are emerging, which has enabled people to create new conditions of collaboration and interaction. This connectivity enables people to create meaningful activism and effective collaborations, while living more socially cohesive and sustainable lives (Manzini, 2013). This has led to the formation of the following research question, can designers create courses of actions or “services” using digital media that enable “users” of clothing to embrace the positive aspects of dress for a creative and satisfying experience of fashion?

Methodology and Process

This research was initiated as part of the Local Wisdom project led by Kate Fletcher, which “aims to challenge the dependency of the fashion industry on increasing material throughput and propose solutions through sustained attention to tending and using garments and not just creating them” (Fletcher, 2014). Local Wisdom combined ethnographic research methods with design processes to record the satisfying and resourceful practices associated with user practices of clothing called the “Craft of Use” (Fletcher, 2014). Through amplifying these practices and exploring their integration into other courses of action and/or services, this research strives to enrich the fashion user experience in the post-production and post-retail environment.

This research adopts the design principals of Carolyn Strauss and Alastair Fuad-Luke’s (2009) “design activism” as it aims to activate sustainable behavioural patterns in fashion users to address the current situation of low participation and shortened engagement with clothing. Design activism, which includes social design, participatory design, mass collaboration and slow design, can be defined as “design thinking, imagination and practice applied knowingly or unknowingly to create a counter-narrative aimed at generating and balancing positive social, institutional, environmental and/or economic change” (Strauss & Fuad-Luke, 2009, p. 27). Fashion activism is a political and participatory activity, which aims to empower the consumer to be independent from what is dictated by the industry. These principals offered the researchers the opportunity to shift their focus from the creation of “designed product” to the consumer/user–

garment relationship, using quantitative, qualitative and intuitive means of assessment.

The First Stage: Framing and Establishing

The researcher Whitty developed the two research projects Wardrobe Hack (Whitty & McQuillan, 2014) and Uncatwalk (Whitty, 2014) to amplify The Practices of Use (Fletcher, 2014) to foster the potential use of fashion in our everyday lives in conjunction with the principals of Slow Design (Fuad-Luke, 2008). Clothing use practices incorporate the following method of classification: “Body, Mind, Things, Stories, Knowledge and Skills, Structure, Individuals” (Fletcher, 2014), while “fostering the potential of use” (Fletcher, 2014) involves developing approaches such as “attentiveness and satisfaction, competencies, dynamic use, alternative social stories” (Fletcher, 2014). The researchers positioned their practice led fashion research within this framework, shifting the focus from designed product to the person-product relationship (Tham, 2009; Manzini, 1994).



Figure 1. Screen grab of the Wardrobe Hack homepage.

Wardrobe Hack: Whitty and McQuillan developed a research question which consolidated their respective areas of research. This enabled them to work in unison towards the aim of exploring new rich and diverse roles for designers as they take on multiple roles as a catalyst, facilitator, and co-creator to incite change. The researchers, inspired by the work of Fuad-Luke (2009), Tham (Tham & Jones, 2008), and Thackara (2005), asked, could fashion designers operate as social designers to formalize and scale systems to improve the human-product relationship and ensure ongoing contentment, fulfillment and wellbeing for the user? The researchers developed a manifesto (Appendix 1) for the project website to publicly establish their philosophical position, motivations and intentions. It was used as a “commitment of intent” to be signed by the participants in the second stage of the project.

The researchers designed a system for providing a service to their participants, which would be for the initial pilot conducted over a two to three month period from July to September, 2013. “The Wardrobe Hack is an individualized and modifiable set of self-determined actions, inactions, tasks, and exercises designed to deliver power into the hands, minds and bodies of all users of fashion. There are currently six stages to the Hack project” (Wardrobe Hack, 2014).

Uncatwalk: In response to the same research question, this project was developed create a platform for all voices to explore fashion through new media. This was intended to operate outside of the confines of the existing media to uncover and document our real, everyday relationship with fashion. The concept was to build on the idea of exploring fashion through “cool” media, as posited by Marshall McLuhan (1964), for example, websites, online film platforms, open source software, and mobile devices which require the audience to participate, as opposed to “hot” media which requires little audience participation (for example, photography). Whitty collaborated with web developer Liam Talbot and film/web developer Tony Ellis to develop the backend of this platform, which uses open source software popcorn.js, an HTML5

media framework written in JavaScript for filmmakers and web developers to create time-based interactive media on the web.

The Second Stage: Engagement

Wardrobe Hack: The researchers created an online survey of nine questions (Appendix 2) in order to select a sample group of five participants for the pilot study, which was distributed to their extended networks using the online software Survey Monkey. They received 25 responses over a two week period, which were then analyzed to select our sample group of five participants to go through the Wardrobe Hack project. Their selection was representative of all the levels of engagement with fashion, incorporating both genders within a demographic range from ages 30 to 59.

Uncatwalk: Whitty explored the potential of her own mobile phone as a device for capturing ephemeral sights, sounds and experiences of the everyday use of clothing. She researched and developed topics that would appeal to a broad cross section of the public and set herself the task of filming her walk to work every day, then uploaded these user generated clips to the YouTube channel.

The Third Stage: Emerging scenarios

Wardrobe Hack: Whitty and McQuillan engaged in a series of tasks (six in total) that incorporated ethnographic research methods with design process. As part of stage four of the project they gathered stories and images from the selected participants of how people use their clothes at photo shoots of their wardrobes in the participants' homes. The objective was to reactivate Fletcher's (2008) "action tools" to facilitate cross-pollination of ideas amongst participants. This stage would develop strategies for collaborative consumption by making better uses of the resources available and developing systems for swopping or sharing. At stage six, The Hackers (Whitty and McQuillan) offer a workshop that builds competencies in the participants to engage with clothing in a way that promotes self-reliance and individual agency. The participants meet to share their ideas, approaches and new awareness to clothing.

Over the period of two to three months the researchers were in regular communication with the participants in the form of house visits and feedback via email. After each session the data (photographic, oral recording, written) was analyzed and discussed, and strategies developed for the individual participants were qualitatively assessed utilizing the Craft of Use methodologies and the researchers' own insights as a "social designer". This information was fed back to the participants in preparation for the next stage of the project.

Uncatwalk: Whitty collaborated with the ongoing building of the site from on open source code while testing the platform in relation to other platforms such as Youtube.

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THE MANIFESTO

1. Fashion has power; be it aesthetic, political, esoteric, frivolous, direct or ethical.
2. Each individual has the right to access that power. It is not held in the confines of institutions such as Vogue, through the lens of The Satorialist, in the offices or factories of industry or in the guise of size 0.
3. Accessing this power does not require money, over consumption, credit cards, or debt. It is in your everyday actions and choices. Chose wisely and act accordingly.
4. Wardrobe Hackers embrace the innovative use of what we already have, learning from others, and finding ways of disrupting existing power structures for our own use. We do not need a magazine to tell us how to dress or what to buy.
5. Wardrobe Hackers do not body-shame. Every Body is a vehicle for expression.
6. It is not reductionist, but not about excess either. It's for individuals, embracing our idiosyncrasies, hopes and aspirations. We are all very, very different (case in point: the wardrobe hackers) and a one size fits all /off the rack approach doesn't state our real needs/desires.
7. Awareness is power, don't accept what you are told by corporations, make a commitment to questioning how things are/and how they are perceived. Look beyond the brand, and be less passive.
8. We live in an age of an abundance of choices. But we need to remember that with these options comes responsibility, as every choice impacts on others, and the environment.
9. We believe strongly in people and our ability to make a positive change. We want to harness and share the collective intelligence you already employ in your use of clothing towards creating a mass collaboration of shared ideas, knowledge and resources available for all.
10. 'Fashion' sometimes referred to as 'the child of capitalism' (Wilson,2003:13). But that child has grown up! And as we enter into a post-capitalist age, we are witnessing a time of change, as fashion is embracing different ideologies, which include addressing continuity, stability and tradition.
11. Fashion has an enormous impact on the world- economically, culturally, and environmentally. It is simply too important to trivialise and ignore for much longer.

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London College of Fashion
Loulou Wilson

Figure 2. The Hack

The Fourth Stage – Dissemination

Wardrobe Hack: Whitty and McQuillan developed the website with web designer Jia Fang and developer Stephen Holdaway to represent the project in an accessible and contemporary manner. They transferred edited “vignette” versions of all the data to represent the stages. The site was designed to allow users to navigate easily to access the information about either the stages or the participants, or to external links in the Local Wisdom site. The site has a linked social media Facebook group for further dialogue that allows for a collective intelligence to build and grow.

Uncatwalk: Whitty developed a working prototype as proof of concept of the site that provides the user with the ability to upload films showing their use practices of fashion in relation to their location (geo tag), to foster a global community of use. The objective is to renew the interest in engagement with fashion and participation in a universal and democratic sphere online. Each week the users can upload a short film in response to a topic that the researcher sets. The clips are assembled into a collated film, which is then archived at the end of each week to form a body of fashion use/experience knowledge, which cumulatively offers new stories and ideas creating a common cultural experience of fashion.

Results: Platforms of Action

In order to evaluate the results the researcher used the six Slow Design Principals (Fuad-Luke, 2006; 2008) as an evaluative tool to “interrogate, evaluate and reflect on their design ideas, process and outcomes using a quantitative and qualitative and intuitive means of assessment” (Strauss & Fuad-Luke, 2008, p. 1) in order to prompt a multitude of interpretations, uses and understandings of the research projects Wardrobe Hack (Whitty & McQuillan, 2014) and Uncatwalk (Whitty, 2014).

Principle 1: Reveal

“Slow design reveals experiences in everyday life that are often missed or forgotten, including the materials and processes that can be easily overlooked in an artefact’s existence or creation” (Fuad-Luke, 2008, p. 3).

Wardrobe Hack: The premise of the project was to stop the accelerated cycle of consumption and disposal by creating what Manzini (2003, p. 48) calls an “island of slowness”, which enables fashion users to pause for a moment of reflection and contemplation to consider their relationship with fashion away from the anxiety inducing gaze of consumer culture consumption.

Uncatwalk: We live in contradictory times of apparent freedom and excitement where, according to Jennifer Craik, “fashion is a choice not a mandate” (2009, p. 15), but what we see in the mass fashion marketing and communication media “tends to homogenize and standardise consumer tastes” (Kawamura, 2005, p. 103). Uncatwalk’s aim is to develop a platform for all voices to explore their everyday use of fashion through digital media and mobile devices, which is then uploaded on to the website.

Trying to make the ordinary extraordinary by simply giving some time to experience everyday motions and generic gestures ... By simply sharing the ordinary wonder of daily existence, spirituality becomes part of the fabric of life that is designed and woven to connect people and places. (Edelkoort, 2014)

As technology becomes more entwined and integral to our lives to communicate and capture our experiences of the everyday (Keep, 2013), new media could enable fashion to be explored as a more genuine and satisfying experience. Operating outside of the confines of the existing media and the commercial sphere, it could provide an alternative to a uniform cultural experience. It could uncover and document our real, everyday relationship with fashion to one that truly represents fringe cultures and minority opinions.

The screenshot shows the 'THE HACK' website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with social media icons (Facebook, Twitter, Google+) and a 'REGISTER INTEREST' button. Below this, the main navigation includes 'THE MANIFESTO', 'THE HACK', 'THE HACKERS', and 'CONFAB'. The 'THE HACK' section is highlighted, with sub-navigation for 'STAGES' and 'PARTICIPANTS'. A process flow diagram shows six steps: Interview/Survey, Design, Production, Inspiration, Distribution, and Sewing. The 'INTERVIEW/SURVEY' section explains that 'The Hackers will ask participants and potential participants questions to make you think about the role fashion has in your life.' Below this, 'Participant one' is featured with a survey form. The survey questions and answers are as follows:

2. How does 'fashion' or clothing fit into your life?
Fashion allows me to make visible statements about who I am. It can be a tool to make me feel better, or more confident, or calm and relaxed.

3. Do you deem yourself to look or feel 'fashionable'?
Other
I feel like I have my own fashion sense, but that doesn't necessarily fit in with fashion trends. I am also overweight, which is decidedly unfashionable.

5. What is your everyday relationship with clothes like? Please expand.
As the mother of a toddler, my everyday relationship with clothes comes down to - what is easy, what is clean, what is comfortable. Then there are the days spent away from my toddler. These are the days I put extra thought into what I'm going to wear, as these are the days I interact with other adults. I use clothes and make-up on these days as a reminder of a life that is separate from my daughter.

The survey form is accompanied by a photograph of a person's legs wearing dark trousers and white sneakers with black accents.

At the bottom of the page, there is a footer with the following information: © 2013 The Wardrobe Hack | CONTACT US, MASSEY UNIVERSITY, BRITISH COUNCIL, Centre for Sustainable Fashion London College of Fashion, and local wisdom.

Figure 3. The Wardrobe Hack: Stage 3, Participant 4.

Wardrobe Hack: As researchers, the research enabled us to shift our focus and reveal more about the person-product relationship to address the real problems of our times; the increase in over production and consumption (Niinimäki, 2013; Fletcher, 2008; Fletcher & Grose, 2012). The result has been a system that reveals the under-observed phenomena of fashion users' experience with their day-to-day clothing habits and rituals. For example, the high level of engagement participant two has with her clothes was evident from the outset through this system. The participant has in place some very simple yet effective strategies that allow her wardrobe to work for her with a unique combination of discipline and spontaneity working in tandem. This was very revealing for the researchers as it offered valuable information about post-purchase life of garments.

These discoveries have been subsequently disseminated through the online website to enable others to build on these ideas, to encourage reflective fashion activity amongst a larger population of users.

Principle 2: Expand

“Slow design considers the real and potential ‘expressions’ of artifacts and environments beyond their perceived functionalities, physical attributes and lifespans” (Fuad-Luke, 2008, p. 4).

Wardrobe Hack disrupts the pace of the fashion industry and the shortened lifespan of garments by assisting the fashion user to delve within their existing wardrobes, creating renewed value with the things they already own, gaining skills to evolve and change the things so they can expand and grow with them. During stage four the Hackers devised a set of tasks to widen the focus of the participants’ engagement with their clothing to transform and extend these existing practices through co –design strategies. The behavioural strategies that emerged included one that encouraged the reintroduction of under-utilised items back into wardrobe circulation. Garments which had happy associations for the users were put back in wardrobe circulation in an attempt to increase enjoyment of the use of their clothing and to reconcile all aspects of their lives that were somewhat compartmentalized (participants one and four). In exchange the Hackers offered to create replicas of favourite items that had become unwearable or offered to help develop the participants’ competencies by teaching them to repair favourite items or extend their creative skills.

According to the Craft of Use (Fletcher, 2009), we often overlook the “stories and language that is adopted as we invent, communicate and enact the using of clothing” (Fletcher, 2014). These stories are rich with emotion and conviction as they are “tales of love, provision, sharing, and taking a stand, among others” (Fletcher, 2014). Wardrobe Hack offered the participants the vehicle to examine and talk about their use practices associated with clothing to build value in human relations and confidence to articulate their fashion behaviour. For many

of the participants it was an entirely new experience as they had never thought or spoken about their relationship with fashion from a holistic perspective.

Participant five in particular relished the opportunity to share her wardrobe with the researchers in a very different capacity to the sphere of the commercialization/sales push dialogue she was more familiar with. The interview and wardrobe visit were insightful nonjudgmental exercises as the topic of clothing took the researchers on an interpersonal journey of exchange into the participants' lives. It expanded the role of the designer-user relationship to create an alternative form of fashion practice and a changed set of power relations (Fletcher, 2014, p. 204) outside of the existing consumer paradigm. At stage two the participants were asked to categorize their garments in their wardrobe according to suggested categories, but it was enlightening when participants elaborated on the existing categories with their own unique descriptors which transcended commercial tags. For example, participant four's subsections within his wardrobe were: the animal section, party shirts, different categories of warm clothing, man hats, comfort pile, and shared category, to indicate items shared with his partner (Whitty & McQuillan, 2014).

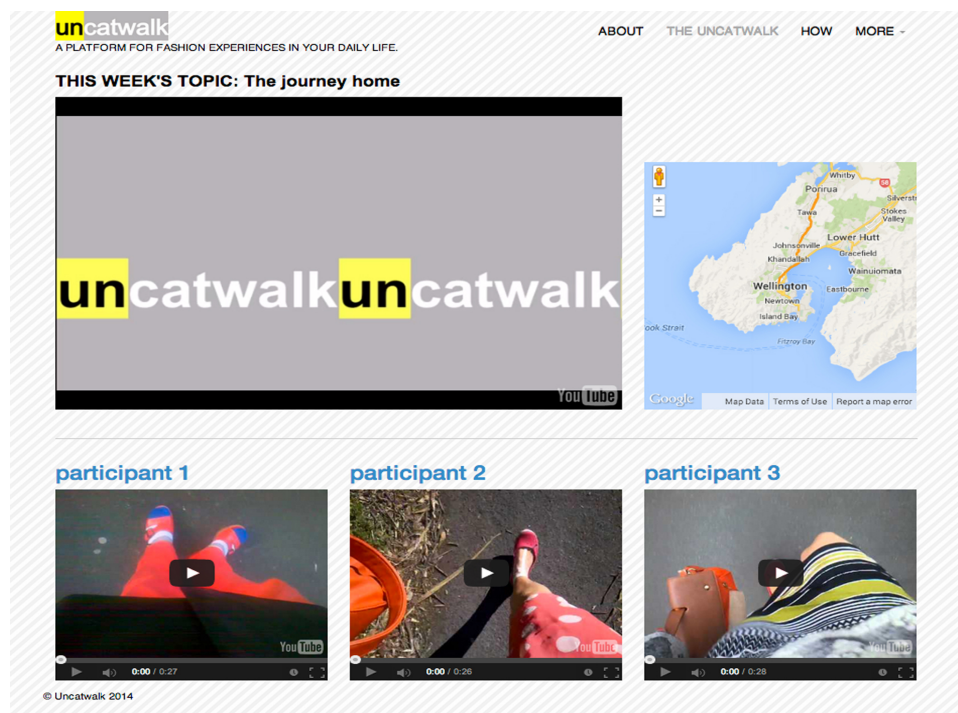


Figure 4. Wardrobe Hack: Stage 3 Participant 4

Uncatwalk: The purpose of this platform is for fashion users to reveal and document their creative rituals connected with clothing. It provides a new service for examining the place clothes have in users' lives. It aims to discover new ways of thinking about clothing and new possibilities for engagement will be revealed. It is still at the user testing stage; this has yet to be fully utilized. The researcher Whitty has submitted her own films to test the site; she has found that it has brought a different degree of awareness and satisfaction to her daily connection with her clothing. It has served to blur the boundary between interior/private performance and public – creating a new facet of fashion consciousness beyond the limitations of language and outside of the constraints of market.

The site will enable fashion users to become fashion narrators of their own sartorial lives, exploring fashion as a narrative construction and embodied experience through new media, as it will generate collated films of multiple consciousnesses woven together. This approach could offer links to approaches in other forms of cultural activity, such as literature and poetry, where poets and writers elevate the every day, finding poetry in the banal (for example, Woolf, Joyce).

Principle 3: Reflect

“Slow Design artifacts/environments/experiences induce contemplation and what slowLab has coined ‘reflective consumption’.” (Fuad-Luke, 2008, p. 5)

Both projects encourage deliberate contemplation through a renewed state of awareness of the attributes, functionality and presence of existing garments in one's life through practices of use and online technology. The practices of use are a complex interplay of the mind, body and soul as we interface with the world.

The routinized set of mental processes that go into the way we use garments reflect the way we understand the world ... They are part of mental patterns and knowledge that helps us as in the world – and carry out life's demands and rhythms. (Fletcher, 2014)

The projects question the perceived low value of used garments that are seen as outmoded by the industry, ready for the stockpile. This project serves to halt that linear race of disposal to allow for longer term relationships by creating islands of slowness, as described by Manzini and Jegou (2003, p. 48), to savour in the pleasure of wearing existing garments, revelling in their material pleasure and sharing this with communities, to recognize and share the wisdom of use experience.

During stage two of the Hack, the participants are encouraged to take a complete view of all aspects of their wardrobe in order to see each garment as part of a system. The participants' diversity of approaches testified to the importance of clothing in their lives (consciously and unconsciously), their innate creativity and resourceful practices. Participant one: It was clear from the wardrobe visit how much emphasis the participant has placed on clothing and how it has played an important part of significant stages in her life. She has reinforced the physical and symbolic connections between her clothing and events in her life, such as her 21st birthday and her wedding. She did this in a very considered way, as she selected a small section of the printed fabric of her 21st birthday dress to cover the buttons on her wedding dress. This link reinforces the bond she has with her clothing. The garment is embedded with memory and meaning beyond mere function as it becomes increasingly precious to the user over time (Heijdens, 2004).

Principle 4: Engage

“Slow Design processes are open-source and collaborative, relying on sharing, co-operation and transparency of information so that designs may continue to evolve into the future” (Fuad-Luke, 2008, p. 6).

The services are available online so that they can be shared with all to create a new type of fashion experience where novelty is gained not from consumption but through practicing the craft of use. This is a process of learning, education and the development of new skills reflecting the social nature of fashion (Fletcher, 2014). By sharing “Alternative Stories” (Fletcher, 2014) around the “ideas and

practices associated with the craft of use” of clothing, the platforms of Wardrobe Hack and Uncatwalk will open up “alternative pathways” (Fletcher, 2014) for fashion expression and provision, as a social process of collaboration (Craik, 2009) will emerge.

Both projects exist online for a similar rationale to the Openwear project (2010, p. 47) that also operates in the online space as it provides tools for representation, acknowledgement, sharing and networking for the fashion user. The participants for the pilot Wardrobe Hack case study were representative of the Wellington, New Zealand region but the ultimate goal of the project is to be representative of other cultures and global contexts, as by sharing this information it provides a pathway for social innovation and global understanding and sharing.

Whitty and McQuillan felt very strongly that fashion has been misrepresented in society. They wanted to create a platform for enabling others to appreciate and enjoy it as much as they do as a “product of a complex, dynamic relationship” (Fletcher, 2014) which evolves over time. They decided to try to create an action platform for positive engagement with clothing, where they could impart their knowledge and experience to others, so others can engage with clothing in a way that promotes self-reliance and individual agency.

Uncatwalk: Our relationship with fashion is for the most part mediated through a lens of commercial activity. While the online space and blog sphere has opened this up somewhat, bloggers, for the most part, promote conventional forms of beauty and the practice of consumption and display not use practices. The creation of a counter system of use will enable fashion to exist as a social practice – a parallel activity for users to have a voice.

Principle 5: Participate

“Slow Design encourages users to become active participants in the design process, embracing ideas of conviviality and exchange to foster social accountability and enhance communities” (Fuad-Luke, 2008, p. 6).

Both projects capture local knowledge about fashion, which are annotated with thoughts and ideas related to fashion. Uncatwalk provides a feature for users to put in their location so their videos are linked to a map location, connecting fashion behaviour with a place, giving a virtual sense of community. Wardrobe Hack has a link to a Facebook group to encourage dialogue and a growing community amongst the participants. Both sites bring human relationships to the fore and encourage others to participate in their own ongoing creative investigation.



Image 5. Screen shot of the Uncatwalk homepage.

Wardrobe Hack: The very concept of hacking something existing by freeing it of or modifying it from its original form by giving it new meaning (Fletcher & Grose, 2012) empowers the user to be more active in their use of clothing. Activist design projects like these motivate and enable the user to seek better product understanding to look afresh at one's own wardrobe.

The intention was also to explore Mauss's (1954) notion of the gift as a guide to how giving can promote a better way of living in relation to a garment. The participants could utilize the Wardrobe Hack system as a method of swapping items they no longer needed to build up relationships between humans, building "social solidarity". Unfortunately, due to time constraints, we were unable to properly to test this aspect of the project. We intend to revisit it.

Uncatwalk: The research builds on the idea of exploring fashion through "cool" media (McLuhan, 1964), for example, websites and online film platforms, which requires the audience to participate, as opposed to "hot" media, which requires little audience participation (for example, photography). It develops a space that adheres to emergent participatory design approaches such as mass collaboration, which facilitates communication, discussion and collective working on distributed networks. It is defined as a "form of collective action that occurs when large numbers of people work independently on a single project, often modular in its nature" (Fuad-Luke, 2009, p. 156).

Principle 6: Evolve

"Slow Design recognizes that richer experiences can emerge from the dynamic maturation of artifacts, environments and systems over time. Looking beyond the needs and circumstances of the present day, slow designs are (behavioural) change agents" (Fuad-Luke, 2008, p. 7).

Both the projects share the ambition to gradually change our understanding of the dynamic role for fashion engagement in our daily lives. By turning our attention to the use of garments it opens up possibilities for alternative approaches to the conventional approach to sustainability in fashion which tends to focus on production and technical issues (Fletcher, 2013).

By looking at society as a whole we can see how fashion relates to the other aspects of human activity and by attempting to understand the interconnectedness of fashion to the bigger picture we are more informed designers. The Fashion Praxis Collective (2014) discusses ideas for giving a

place for different expressions of fashion. It can be seen as a political statement in that it proves fashion happens outside of existing power structures and the capitalist drive of industry. The modest gesture of looking at what we already have can have major implications as it takes on issues of continual production and our relationship with other fashion users. The short term holds positive results for the individual user, but the longer term positives occur when it operates as a system for instigating new communities, changing consumption habits, and amplifying the value of fashion in society.

Conclusion

It can be seen by examining the research projects Wardrobe Hack and Uncatwalk that both offer platforms of action for positive engagement with clothing in our everyday lives as they enable users of clothing to share their everyday practices to embrace the positive aspects of dress for a creative and satisfying experience of fashion. The projects foster the potential of use by nurturing and revealing practices of use which engage the mind and body, attentiveness and satisfaction, developing competencies, and encourage alternative social stories and dynamic use to flourish (Fletcher, 2009). The six Slow Design principles of reveal, expand, reflect, engage, participate and evolve as evaluation tools gave fresh insights into the research.

It is clear that in order to move forward with the sustainability imperative we need to see the interconnectedness of everything to understand the natural systems, cycles, flows, and web interconnectedness (Fletcher & Grose, 2012) of human behaviour, to harness our collective intelligence and empower people to have a place in fashion. This research offers a new dimension to the role of a designer who expands the interconnectedness of the consumer-garment relationship.

While the projects are both still at the early test stage of development, it is hoped that in time they will generate further interest and will develop an active collaborative community of users globally. The projects have the potential to be expanded across the globe to open up a dialogue for the recognition of all

fashion systems across the globe, as Craik (2009, p. 47) calls for an ethnocentric approach rather than the tendency to only focus on western systems, which compete and subvert one another (Craik, 2009, p. 34).

This research forms part of the wave of new ways to understand and engage with fashion that is somewhat outside of the margins of industry in order to extend the conversation and understanding in an emergent field. These projects serve to re-imagine systems for exchange and engagement that will assist with reconnecting with our creative potential as they demonstrate and enable our shared participatory realities.

Fashion is not just a matter of pretty dresses on a catwalk, disconnected and disassociated from our lives. Fashion is a live eco-system, a living force that resonates with the poetical expression of our everyday practices of life. This research serves to share and support diversity and plurality of use practices, to mobilize new collective forms of community and a participatory democracy for fashion based on concepts of inclusion and engagement.

Appendix 1

The Wardrobe Hack Manifesto:

- Fashion has power; be it aesthetic, political, esoteric, frivolous, direct or ethical.
- Each individual has the right to access that power. It is not held in the confines of institutions such as Vogue, through the lens of The Sartorialist, in the offices or factories of industry or in the guise of size 0.
- Accessing this power does not require money, over consumption, credit cards, or debt. It is in your everyday actions and choices. Choose wisely and act accordingly.
- Wardrobe Hackers embrace the innovative use of what we already have, learning from others, and finding ways of disrupting existing power structures for our own use. We do not need a magazine to tell us how to dress or what to buy.

- Wardrobe Hackers do not body shame. Every body is a vehicle for expression.
- It is not reductionist, but not about excess either. It's for individuals, embracing our idiosyncrasies, hopes and aspirations. We are all very, very different (case in point: the wardrobe hackers) and a one size fits all /off the rack approach doesn't state our real needs/desires.
- Awareness is power; don't accept what you are told by corporations, make a commitment to questioning how things are and how they are perceived. Look beyond the brand and be less passive.
- We live in an age of an abundance of choices, but we need to remember that with these options comes responsibility, as every choice has an impact on others and the environment.
- We believe strongly in people and our ability to make a positive change. We want to harness and share the collective intelligence you already employ in your use of clothing towards creating a mass collaboration of shared ideas, knowledge and resources available for all.
- "Fashion" is sometimes referred to as "the child of capitalism" (Wilson, 2003, p. 13), but that child has grown up! Also, as we enter into a post-capitalist age, we are witnessing a time of change, as fashion is embracing different ideologies, which include addressing continuity, stability and tradition.
- Fashion has an enormous impact on the world, economically, culturally, and environmentally. It is simply too important to trivialize and ignore for much longer.

Appendix 2

Wardrobe Hack Online Survey

1. What does the term "fashion" mean to you?
2. How does "fashion" or clothing fit into your life?
3. Do you deem yourself to look or feel "fashionable"?
4. Are you puzzled or pleased by the emphasis that is placed on clothing?
5. What is your everyday relationship with clothes like? Please expand.

6. Are you disappointed by the choices available to you for dressing?
If yes, please elaborate.

7. On a scale of passive to highly involved, what is your relationship with fashion like?

- Passive
 Marginally involved
 Moderately involved
 Involved
 Highly involved
Other (please specify).

8. Do you find dressing an easy/enjoyable/other experience? If "other", please expand.

9. Does clothing allow you to be imaginative and express yourself?
Explain please.

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