

Wear Your Heart on Your Sleeve (2014)

Angharad McLaren, Research Fellow & Lecturer, Nottingham Trent University.

Mass-produced 'fast fashion' has changed our relationship with clothing – cheap and easy to acquire, we are unlikely to take time to undertake simple repairs or address issues of maintenance, often caused or exacerbated by poor construction and low quality materials (see for example Goworek et al, 2012; You Gov, 2012; Fletcher, 2008; Birtwhistle and Moore, 2007). Through complete lifecycle assessment, extending the useful life of clothes has been identified as the most significant intervention in reducing the impact of the clothing industry (Wrap, 2012). However, academic research has identified practical, social, socioeconomic, systemic and psychological barriers that prevent consumers from performing even the most basic of repairs, and as a result damaged or worn items are discarded or taken out of active use (see for example Armstrong *et al*, 2014; Middleton, 2014; Cooper *et al*, 2014; Fletcher, 2013; Goworek *et al*, 2012; Laitala & Boks, 2012).

As a textile designer and academic whose work is embedded in sustainable principles, my research has been exploring the barriers to mending and contemporary approaches to overcoming them. Darning is a technique for repairing damaged or worn fabrics by weaving stitched threads across the surface and creating a new layer of woven material that is embedded into the original fibres. Through a process of personal craft praxis, darned heart motifs were developed as a symbolic way of learning the technique of darning that encouraged people to love their clothes and literally wear their heart on their sleeve. Or in other words, a metaphor that offers an easily cognisable meaning to provide the foundation for emotional connection (Chapman, 2005:109). The pattern is adaptable, so it can be personalised to suit different individual styles.

These were showcased at a series of participatory workshops and events commissioned by Zero Waste Scotland / WRAP for the Love Your Clothes consumer engagement campaign, adopting the spirit of the 'Sharing Economy', that is a "collaborative form of fixing [that] encourages the replacement of shopping (as a stimulus seeking activity), with more creative and social experiences, centered on the shared act of making and mending" (Chapman, 2013). They aim to demonstrate new roles for designers as meta-designers (Twigger Holroyd, 2013) or community facilitators (Von Busch, 2011), using skills as strategic tools to both mend damaged clothes and weave new threads of life into the social fabric, benefitting the collective wellbeing of communities by bringing people together through shared experiences.

By taking time out to darn and repair we can begin to appreciate the value of slowing down, build better connections with our belongings and reflect on the changes we can make to move towards a future without waste.

<http://www.angharadmclaren.co.uk/#/weaving-darns/>

