

# 'We are Disruptive': New Practices for Textile/Fashion Designers in the Supply Chain

*Clara Vuletich*

*PhD Candidate, Textiles Environment Design (TED), Chelsea College of Art & Design, London*

[info@claravuletich.com](mailto:info@claravuletich.com)

## Abstract

Most fashion brands and textile/fashion designers have maintained a limited set of sustainability strategies that are focused at the product/processes level, while missing the opportunities for transformative actions that can 'disrupt' the existing fashion system. This paper will explore a recently completed project as part of the author's PhD research (funded by MISTRA Future Fashion research project 2011) that explored how a designer can use design skills throughout a supply chain to identify opportunities to improve both environmental and social impacts for a company.

Whilst some fashion brands limit their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policy to monitoring working conditions in their suppliers' factories, this project asks how a fashion brand could use an innovation process that brings both economic and social value, outside of the factory walls. While the business model concept being proposed is not new, the method being proposed to develop the concept, led by the textile/fashion designer, is where the novelty lies. This project proposes a new role for the textile/fashion designer within the business, bringing the designer closer to the CSR activities within the brand, and closer to the communities in which the business operates. This context requires new practices by textile/fashion designer and new skills, collaborating with a range of actors across private and third sector boundaries. Designers are increasingly engaged in working within communities and across the third sector to design for social good (Emilson et al 2011) and researchers are beginning to study and capture the methods being used (Tan 2009), however fashion and textile design activity is under represented within this discourse. This paper proposes to explore what these expanded design opportunities could mean for fashion/textile designers.

**Key Words** sustainable design strategies, fashion brand, innovation, fashion/textile designer, corporate social responsibility (CSR), Designathon, design thinking

## 1. Introduction

'Design for Change' was initiated via a consultancy commission for a large American apparel company (a parent company who owns and operates over 15 fashion brands) in late 2011, with a brief for the author to explore concepts of philanthropy and social enterprise for a fashion brand (Image 1). The commission was one of ten exhibits in a showcase dedicated to sustainability, part of an Innovation Summit for the client's employees. The section was curated using a set of ten sustainable design strategies for textile/fashion designers called TED's TEN (Earley & Politowicz 2010). The strategies work as a framework to assist designers and businesses in addressing the complexity of sustainable design and when offered as workshop experiences, the strategies can be a catalyst for using sustainability thinking to drive innovative product and sustainability initiatives. Focusing on two of the ten strategies – Design for Cyclability and Design for Ethical Production - this commission allowed for an investigation focused on a designer in the context of a large fashion brand. This project is the first in a series of 'design interventions' planned for the PhD research and as such, the findings are still in preliminary stages

*Fashion brand* will be used in this paper to refer to a clothing manufacturing company that either produces their own products in their own factories, contracts production out to domestic or offshore factories that they do not own, or a combination of both (Dickson, Loker and Eckman 2009: pg 16). The differences between textile and fashion designers are marked, however in this paper the two disciplines will be discussed together. *Textile/fashion designer* will refer to the designer within a fashion brand who designs either textiles or garments.

## 2. Research Methods

The aim of the project is to use a real design commission to investigate what new practices fashion/textile designers would need for systemic change in a supply chain. While the author was confident with designing and producing product outcomes, this would not have been sufficient to explore and communicate the new practices needed for 'systemic change'. So alongside the three fashion product prototypes, the author collaborated with a team of strategy and management consultants, Pipeline Projects (PP) experienced at embedding sustainability into business, to develop a business model concept. The business concept was illustrated for exhibition purposes through a film and animation, that was shown alongside the product prototypes (Image 2).

The methodology used for the business model concept was a workshop for generating creative concepts. For the product outcomes, the author ran a workshop with a fashion accessories and textile designer, responding to the limitations of the textile waste streams identified from the supply chain. Other methods used included desk research and open-ended interviews with the project collaborator and an industry expert.

The project was a combination of two approaches - a process that was initiated as a brief for a commercial client's innovation department, that was also carried out and reflected on as a practice-based design research process. Practice-based design research uses design practice and knowledge to develop and propose new perspectives and as such is an ideal process for investigating the notion of 'change'. As Walker (2011) argues, the conventions of design that we have become used to, that are linked to mass production, intensive resource use, and disrespectful human relations, need to change. Fuad-Luke in Walker confers and states that " design must decouple itself from the existing drivers of the discipline if it is to provide a new paradigm for design" (2011). In order to begin developing alternative approaches to our existing production systems and material culture, we need design work that is experimental, probing and iterative.

As outcomes from an innovation process, the film and products acted as a 'rough sketch' of an idea, similar to a prototype from a design process. Prototypes are future-oriented and are useful tools to be shared, discussed and critiqued with the various actors involved, to act as a catalyst for new directions. In design research, prototypes play an important role in keeping people focused on design (Koskinen et al 2011). A focus on design was essential for this project as it was an investigation into a design thinking process and the practice of a textile/fashion designer.

The process of developing the business model concept, could have produced a report or other types of outcomes for strategic CSR approaches for a fashion brand. However, this process was led by a textile designer, with textile/fashion product outcomes being generated alongside the business concept. As Rowley (2012) from PP stated when asked to reflect on the role of the textile designer in the process:

*That is why I think it [the project] was good. It may not have been a fully fledged social business, as it was 'engineered', but what is good is that there is a tangible product [the bags]. In my role going into companies, it is often difficult to convince everyone involved about making changes. To have a 'prototype' that is produced is a really effective way to facilitate this change process, particularly when the company is a garment manufacturer.*

## 3. Sustainability, CSR & Systemic Innovation

While there is no agreed definition of sustainability, one of the most cited definitions is from the Brundtland Report (1987):

*Sustainable Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts: the concepts of “needs”, in particular the essential needs of the world’s poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organisation on the environment’s ability to meet present and future needs.*

This definition incorporates the three pillars of environmental, economic and social elements and can be applied at the organizational or societal level (Gardetti and Torres 2012). The Brundtland Report was a blueprint for how countries and organisations need to manage economic growth with the consequences of ecological damage, and to equalise out the growing imbalance between the world’s rich and poor.

The way organisations in the private sector have approached these challenges is through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policies. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is another very contested term. One of the most commonly used definitions is “the economic, legal, ethical and discretionary expectations that society has of organizations at a given point in time” (Carroll 1979). There is ongoing debate about the role of CSR and business activities in contributing towards sustainable development (SD). The argument often cited against CSR is that firms are merely engaging in these activities to maintain their corporate image and for business self-interest. However, some authors see the positive contributions. Moon (2007) cites the role CSR has played in the way society is governed, due to the increasing role of firms in providing labour rights, education and health services in countries where they operate. While others cite the emergence of new types of alliances and partnerships between business and the third sector.

Another trend to emerge within CSR activities, is the attempt to address the environmental and social impacts of business activities at a systemic level. Since the 1960’s when CSR became a firmly established practice, most businesses approached their CSR policy by abiding by existing regulations and making incremental changes at the product and process level. Businesses have now begun to take an anticipatory and forward-looking approach that sees sustainability as a driver for systemic innovation (EABIS 2012). A much quoted example of a leader in the UK is the food and clothing retailer Marks & Spencer and their Plan A strategy, that reframes their environmental and social responsibilities, from being expensive problems to strategic opportunities (Marks & Spencer 2013).

Brands in the fashion industry, who have begun to re-align their whole value proposition towards sustainability, include Nike and Puma, introducing best practice in monitoring labour conditions; creating environmental profit and loss statements; introducing product stewardship that includes using lifecycle thinking and leading the field in developing sourcing and design tools for measuring impacts.

If this project is to demonstrate ways to ‘disrupt’ the existing fashion industry for systemic change, inspiration can be found in innovation processes and business model development. ‘Disruptive innovation’, was defined by Christensen (1997) who identified the way small firms were able to innovate, by combining existing technologies in a novel way, for an under-served consumer market. Christensen found this activity to mainly occur in small firms who had the flexibility to respond quickly to emerging trends. A disruptive new business model would be unfeasible for a large apparel business, however the concept offers this project a useful framework. If to disrupt is ‘to break or interrupt’, this project hints at the potential for a novel way a fashion brand, aided by a designer, can use existing assets (textile waste and design knowledge/skills) to disrupt the existing system for two aims: for new profits and for positive social benefits.

#### 4. The Fashion industry

Within the Triple Bottom Line approach to sustainability (Elkington 1999) of ‘people, profit, planet’, most businesses find it easiest to engage with the financial and environmental elements, rather than the social elements, because they are easier to measure and involve less reputational risk. As Greene states, “The social element, which encompasses the ethical, moral, and philanthropic responsibilities of a business, pose great challenges for business. ... making it that much more difficult to integrate social initiatives as a core part of the sustainability strategy” (Greene 2012). Within the fashion industry however, it is actually the social elements of the Triple Bottom Line that

have dominated CSR policies, although environmental issues are now emerging as equally important (Dickson et al 2009).

#### 4.1 Why the focus on the 'social'?

There are several reasons why firms in the fashion industry have focused on the 'social' aspects, and these can be traced back to the historical development of the global garment industry. Taking the US industry as an example, the apparel industry began to flourish after the Second World War and this continued into the 1970's. The boom was fuelled by an absence of trade unions to push for higher wages and an abundance of white female workers in the rural South who were willing to work for low wages. By the 1970's, many garment manufacturers were competing with retailers, and were at a disadvantage if they owned their own factories. The brands began to focus primarily on design and marketing of their brand names, and production shifted towards the Far East, first to Malaysia and Indonesia and then to China (Dickson et al 2009)

This search for lower wages and the dispersal of production across the globe, has resulted in global supply chains with multiple layers and geographical locations. In 2005, Gap Inc. worked with over 2,000 suppliers in 50 countries across the globe (Dickson et al 2009). Finally, there is the fact that the garment manufacturing industry has a low usage of technology and is highly labour intensive (Desai, Nassar and Chertow 2012). Unlike the textile manufacturing industry, the construction and production of two dimensional fabric, into three dimensional garments, is all done by humans and not machines, hence the need to look for the lowest possible wage option for it to make economic sense to the brand.

While garment production spread across the globe during the 1990's and 2000's, over two thirds of all jobs in garment manufacturing were lost in the US to overseas production within a 25 year period (American Apparel and Footwear Association 2002). Unusually, the brand on this project actually owned and operated their own factory in Los Angeles and this presented an interesting opportunity to test a CSR approach that looked beyond the working conditions of employees at this factory. This was based on an assumption that as the factory was local to brand and management headquarters, it was likely that workers conditions are already well monitored and maintained. It was also proposed that partnering with a local community organisation would have potential positive outcomes, as the brand already has a strong, local identity.

#### 4.2 Labour rights and beyond monitoring

CSR policies in the fashion industry that could be defined as 'social' rather than 'environmental' include philanthropic activities such as donating a percentage of sales profits to a charity; developing cause-related products such as H & M's 'Water Aid' collections; (H & M 2011) and the monitoring of workers rights in suppliers' factories.

The issue of workers rights has been a contentious one for the fashion industry worldwide for more than a decade, for many of the reasons described above. As a response to the work of several activist NGO's such as Clean Clothes Campaign and Oxfam, fashion brands have developed Codes of Conduct, in consultation with their suppliers, that ensure workers are treated fairly and humanely. However, there is evidence to suggest that working conditions and human rights in the workplace continue to be violated. As the Clean Clothes Campaign states "In spite of the tens of thousands of audits that are taking place each year, the patterns of exploitation and abuse of workers is continuing...the lack of progress is scandalous" (Clean Clothes Campaign 2005). While brands have been heavily focused on the monitoring of their suppliers' factories, there is now evidence to suggest that it is the purchasing practices of the brands having the most negative impact on factory conditions (Galland & Jurewicz 2010). An example of this is last minute changes to either design or quantity of an item by the designer or buyer, which puts increased pressure on suppliers and therefore workers (Parker 2012).

There is some work being done on how 'internal alignment' can create more effective communication channels between departments in fashion brands. There are also some attempts to create a shared vision for managing social impacts in the fashion industry that is 'beyond monitoring', such as brands becoming more involved in educating workers about their labour and human rights (BSR 2010). However this paper takes the position that new creative approaches to addressing these organisational and strategic CSR challenges are needed along with a re-framing of the responsibilities brands have to the communities in which they operate.

The next generation of CSR recognises that business and society are interdependent, and that opportunities to pioneer innovations that benefit society and a company's own competitiveness, can and should be found in the supply chain, or what Porter and Kramer call 'shared value'. (Porter and Kramer 2006). This project aimed to find out how a clothing manufacturer could begin to see their responsibilities as broader than merely following regulatory working guidelines for their factory workers and to prototype a business model concept that would directly address the social context of where the garment factory was located.

## 5. Creative approaches to local community engagement within a fashion brand

### 5. 1 The Local community as a stakeholder

The question of how much responsibility a firm has to their various stakeholders is an ongoing debate. 'Stakeholders' are individuals or groups that the firm is responsible to and that have a stake or interest in the firm's operations and decisions. There are five most commonly understood stakeholders - owners (shareholders), employees, customers, local communities, and the society at large (Carroll 2008). In regards to the local community as a stakeholder, the most common form of CSR engagement is normally philanthropic donations to a community group or sporting initiative, or employees volunteering their time at one of these organisations (Crane, Matten & Spence 2008). However, these types of engagements have begun to be seen as too paternal, or merely as a public relations device. Firms are now engaging in more strategic approaches that add value both to the cause and to the firm and that are based on the core competency of the firm, as in the 'shared value' approach described above. Crane, Matten & Spence explain that an example of this 'strategic philanthropy' is the way firms have developed partnerships with community organizations that build reputation and legitimacy with the public, as well as building competence around social issues.

This strategic approach to local community engagement is also evident in new business models that are emerging - strategic partnerships such as the social business Grameen and fashion brand Uniqlo - who have developed a clothing brand made and sold locally in Bangladesh (Grameen Uniqlo 2012) If firms are developing more strategic approaches to their engagement with local communities, what innovation methods are they using to do this? And what role does the fashion/textile designer play?

### 5. 2 Social Innovation

The role of business models and methods in solving social problems is currently being explored in an evolving innovation landscape within business, government and the third sector. One of the most recent forms of innovation practices to emerge is social innovation, where the innovation processes normally used for the market are being utilised to build social capital. Social innovation is defined as 'new ideas (products, services and models' that simultaneously meet social needs and create new social relationships or collaborations.....innovations that that are both good for society and enhance society's capacity to act' (Murray et al 2010 p 3) Examples of social innovation include The Open University or The Big Issue magazine, both in the UK. Murray et al (2010) explain that social innovation has emerged because the existing social structures and government policies lack solutions to some of today's most challenging issues such as climate change, social and economic inequality and an ageing population. A key characteristic of social innovation is that it occurs in all sectors - public, non-profit and private and often in the boundaries between sectors.

There has also been important contributions coming from designers getting involved in social innovation (Murray et al 2010, Emilson et al 2011), who are applying methods such as user-centered approaches and prototyping. The role of design is central to the innovation methods being used in this project, where the textile/fashion designer is encouraged to use design thinking and prototyping, to create novel ideas for the fashion brand's CSR policy.

One type of social innovation is a business model concept called 'social enterprise', a business that trades for a social or environmental mission, where all the profit is re-invested to further the mission (Social Enterprise UK 2013). Examples of social enterprises in a fashion context, include Social Studio (2009), that offers garment production training/employment to members of local refugee communities in Australia, and People Tree (2012), who works with small craft producers in India.

There are also examples of initiatives in high-end fashion, that support people through training and employment, such as Kate Spade's 'Hand in Hand' initiative, that works with women in Afghanistan and Bosnia producing hand knit accessories (Kate Spade 2013); and several initiatives by luxury brands in Italy who have developed similar models that work with disadvantaged members of society (Cakmak 2012). Initiatives like 'Hand in Hand' are design-led, where designers from the brand are designing product which is then being produced by the people who need employment. This project however, proposes that the designer is not merely designing the product to be produced, but is involved in the development and 'ideas generation' phase of such a project.

### 5.3 New CSR Methods :

Considering that firms are now developing more strategic approaches to engaging with local communities, and there are new ways to solve pressing social problems using innovation methods, how could these concepts work together and how could designers contribute? This project investigated a new method for achieving this, referred to in this paper as a Designathon. This methodology is still being developed, and will be one of the key methods used in the author's PhD project, so has not yet been tried out or tested in a real context. It is inspired by the methods being developed by Pipeline Project (PP) who are running workshops to develop creative branding and strategy solutions for charities and NGO organisations, (Good for Nothing 2012).

Through participation and observation of the methodology, the author has concluded that the PP method is a hybrid of three different methods: a traditional brainstorm used in creative brand/strategy contexts; a design thinking approach used by designers, where tangible outcomes are produced (Brown & Wyatt 2010); and the open-source, collaborative methods called Hackathons (Hackathons 2011). The PP method grew out of: 1) a desire to contribute to positive social change, 2) a frustration with the slow and ineffective innovation methods they were experiencing in large business contexts and to work in more collaborative and faster ways 3) to bring the designer upstream to the beginning of the innovation process and allow designers to create tangible outcomes such as web sites, products and brand identities (Rowley 2012). Each workshop normally involves one or several people representing the charitable organisation; five to ten designers/strategists/creatives and up to four people representing PP, who are the lead facilitators. They work in fluid groups over two days, with a self defined brief, based on the needs of the charitable organizations.

In this project however, the PP method would be adapted, as the aims are different. The fashion brand/garment manufacturer will partner with a local community organisation, to understand the social context of the surrounding population. A concept is developed for an initiative that aims to address persistent social issues, that could also become part of the brand's core value proposition. A range of stakeholders would participate in the Designathon including a business strategy team, fashion/textile designers from the brand, CSR and management representatives from the brand, and representatives from the community organisation. Therefore, the aims of the Designathon are to marry the corporate and commercial agenda of the brand with the needs of the community organisation and their clients (Image 3).

The outcomes from this type of Designathon could be varied, and may not be developed as far as product outcomes. However, in this theoretical scenario, a concept was developed for a Design Hub to be set up either on site at the factory, or nearby to the community organisation. From here, a design team would develop a new product range, using textile waste from the production process. The products would be produced by the members from the community organisation, who would be trained in garment and product production. A social enterprise model would be established, that could exist along side their existing for-profit business model, with a percentage of profits from the sales of the products used to cover operating costs.

This model offers a template for 'small steps' that a large clothing business can undertake, whose only current competitive advantage is their operational efficiency. The 'disruption' is the combining of existing components in a new way, for new markets and for social benefits to the community. The existing assets are both human and material - the members of the local community are human resources that are under utilised and the textile waste is also under utilised. While the social enterprise type of business model is not new, here the enterprise is being led by a fashion designer within a fashion brand, working collaboratively with a range of actors.

## 5. 4 Barriers & Opportunities

The author's experience suggests that the most challenging aspect of using this method, would be engaging the various actors within the brand itself. Within the organizational structure of a fashion brand, the fashion/textile designer sits within the buying team, which is separate from the CSR team. The designer's role is to design garments or textiles, and the designer is not included in developing the CSR objectives of the brand. So how to link the designers with the CSR objectives? This Designathon method is a useful method for achieving this but for the method to work successfully, the brand's management would need to see the value in allowing the CSR team to work collaboratively with the design team.

The method asks the fashion/textile designer in the organisation to also understand and engage with a new role for themselves. Irwin (2012) talks of there being a very limited view of the power and potential of design, within the design discipline itself. Introducing the designers to the PP team, or equivalent partners who have experience in these workshop methods, would reveal potential new ways for the designers to work.

This method also relies on the engagement of the community organisation. As the brand is offering potential benefits to the organisation's members – in this instance employment and training - it seems highly likely that the organisation would be willing to engage. For an initiative that offers training and employment to members of the community, the community organisation would work closely with the brand production team, to assess and implement the appropriate set up. Some community organisations already work in this way, such as the HomeBoy Industries Project in Los Angeles, that has set up several social enterprises that offer community members training and employment (Home Boy Industries 2013).

For the CSR team within the organisation, this method allows an opportunity to bring new, creative perspectives to their strategy. The Designathon could be an effective method for identifying what aspects of their responsibilities to their stakeholders they wish to prioritise. In this scenario, it was decided to develop a range of bags using waste from the supply chain and for the production to be done by newly trained community members. However, the CSR team may not prioritise the re-use of textile waste as important and may choose to focus on a different set of priorities.

## 6. The fashion/textile designer

### 6.1 New design practices

The challenges that businesses, society and individual designers face in our globalised, resource-constrained world are forcing a change to the current design, production and consumption systems. While there is growing awareness amongst textile/fashion designers as to these issues, most designers approaching sustainability have remained focused at the material and product level. Material knowledge is one of the characteristics and key skills of a textile/fashion designer, and is also the part of the production process that is most controllable for designers (Fletcher & Grose 2012). However, such a limited focus misses the opportunities for new types of design activity for systemic change.

This limited view can be seen in the context of how textile/fashion designers consider the social impacts of their decisions, strategy No. 7 in the TED's TEN framework 'Design for Ethical Production'. This strategy suggests actions that include:

- Design that utilises and invests in traditional craft skills in the UK and abroad
- Ethical production which supports and values workers rights
- Sourcing of fair trade materials
- Designers acting as facilitators of sustainable enterprise in traditional craft communities

This is also supported by Fletcher & Grose (Fletcher & Grose 2012) who identify that the most common actions for 'people friendly' fashion design include: at the garment level, choosing fibres and materials that are FairTrade certified or non-commodity fibres (non-cotton fibres including Tencel, Bamboo); and at the production level, include engaging suppliers who abide by codes of conduct and co-operate in monitoring labour conditions, choosing vertically integrated production or working with artisanal, producer groups.

While some of these actions allude to new roles for designers beyond material/production choice, such as

'Designers acting as facilitators', there is a lack of research or investigation into how designers can and are acting in these new ways. So if textile/fashion designers are being asked to think outside of the boundaries of designing fabrics and garments, what new types of practice are needed? Fletcher & Grose (2012) have recently identified several new roles for fashion designers to bring about systems change, including Designer as Facilitator and Designer as Activist. "Fashion designers will move from working in the supply chain to working at the 'hub' of change – using their skills differently, envisioning change, organising it and enabling something different to happen" (2012: pg162) Design thinkers such as Fuad Luke (2010) and Thorpe (2012) have also been exploring new activist roles for designer in a 'post-growth' world of sustainable consumption and Tan (2009) identified new roles of designers in 'designing for social good' during the DOT07 project in the UK.

There are also examples of independent designers in the UK who demonstrate what these practices could be including Nin Castle from Goodone (Goodone 2013) and Lizzie Harrison from Remade in Leeds (Remade in Leeds 2011), who work with post-consumer textile waste to create upcycled garments, collaborating with business and with local communities. The author plans to include these designers as case studies within the wider research, so an understanding of their practice is not defined at this stage. While most of these examples are of designers working independently, this project allowed for an investigation of a designer within the context of a large fashion brand (Image 4).

## 6.2 New Design Skills

This project is proposing that fashion/textile designers have a central role to play in innovation methods within organisations, and within communities, and is inspired by the skills being implemented and tested by designers involved in social innovation (Emilson et al 2011) and social design (Tan 2009). In these contexts, designers are using design thinking methods, where solutions to complex problems, often outside of the realm of traditional design, are tried and tested. The process involves skills such as using your intuition, recognising patterns, starting with the 'user' and expressing ideas using visual language. There is growing research in design and management that is capturing and defining the design thinking methods being used in these new contexts, with most activity generated from product, service or graphic design disciplines. Within the fashion/textile design disciplines, there is a lack of research of new design practices and new design methods, except for some work being done on the contributions of the textile design process to design research in general (Igeo 2010). The intention of this project and subsequent paper, was to demonstrated through practice the potential new roles and behaviours a textile/fashion designer in a large organisation may adopt, working with a range of actors, across business and the third sector, taking inspiration from the emerging design practices mentioned above.

Brown & Wyatt (2010) explain the design thinking process as involving several key stages: it begins with 'Inspiration (the problem or opportunity that motivates the search for solutions); this leads on to 'Ideation' (generating and developing ideas and prototypes) and ends with 'Implementation' (takes the project into people's lives). It could be argued that a design thinking approach was used for the development of this model. A textile designer collaborates with a creative innovation team to identify the social needs of a particular community near to a factory site and the different waste streams (Inspiration); then to develop a prototype for a new business and new product range (Ideation); and then through feedback from the client to implement the 'model' (Implementation). The process of this commission can be used as a formula for what the designer and team within the 'Design Lab' are being asked to do - to use design thinking skills to create new CSR approaches.

Embedding the fashion/textile designer on site at the factory, or within the local community, is a radical shift within the fashion design and production system. Looking now just at the fashion design process, traditionally a fashion designer for a large company is part of a large vertical system, where the process of design and production often involve different people working in separate parts of the company/supply chain, and often in different geographical locations (Gwilt 2011). The fashion designer rarely has the opportunity to interact with the people who make the garments. However, in this process the designer is being asked to not only interact more closely with the people who make the garments (through identifying the waste streams and being 'on site' at the factory), but to begin to identify and discover what the needs are of the people in the community around the factory.

In effect, this project proposes the textile/fashion designer is a 'designer-in-residence' in a garment factory. Using design thinking skills, and the 'scent' of a fashion/textile designer, they are able to identify existing assets (both human and material) and propose viable solutions. This role is not being carried out by an environmental, human



resources or CSR manager but a designer who has a unique set of skills that allow for systems-wide thinking and implementation.

## Conclusion

The debate about the relationship between business and society is on going, but in recent years there has been a convergence in the boundaries between civil society, government and business. Business is beginning to play a more engaged role in society, and designers are also engaging in new ways.

This project exists in the intersections between the corporate responsibilities of a fashion brand and the potential social innovation opportunities within a community where the fashion brand operates. Here the designer is centre stage, employing two design strategies: using pre-consumer textile waste and designing for positive social change. The project takes inspiration from designers working in social innovation contexts and new forms of innovation methods emerging that are utilising design skills and processes.

While the context for the design practice was within a large fashion business, which has its own limitations of departmental divisions and budgetary/time pressures, the author did not actually practice in this context. However the process of designing and developing the project with a live brief from a client, and collaborating with partners experienced in business contexts, is the first stage in investigating potential new design practices for textile/fashion designers for positive, systemic change in the fashion industry.

Images



Image 1: initial graphic generated by author to visualize concept



Image 2: product and film outcomes for exhibition



Image 3: initial research on social business model from Pipeline Project

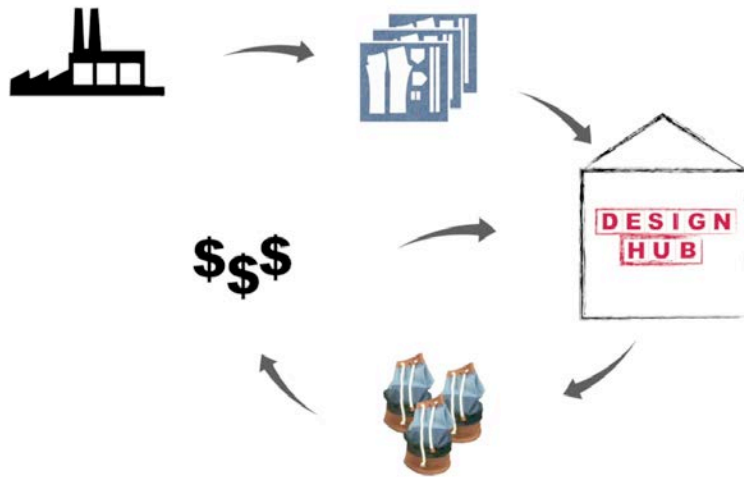


Image 4: Still from animation of the 'system' created by the designer



Image 5: fashion shoot contextualising the bag prototypes

## References:

- American Apparel and Footwear Association (2002) *Focus: an economic profile of the Apparel Industry* Arlington VA: AAFA
- Apolis (2013) [www.apolisglobal.com](http://www.apolisglobal.com) (accessed 2 January 2013)
- Brown, T. and Wyatt, J. (2010) 'Design Thinking for Social Innovation' in *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Winter 2010
- Brundtland Report (1987) *Our Common Future* UK: Oxford University Press
- BSR (2010) *Beyond Monitoring: A New Vision for Sustainable Supply Chains* [www.bsr.org](http://www.bsr.org) (accessed 4 August 2012)
- Cakmak, B. (2012) Interview with author
- Carroll, A. (1979) 'A Three Dimensional Conceptual Model of Corporate Social Performance', *Academy of Management Review*, 4(4)
- Carroll, A. (2008) 'The Pyramid of Corporate Social Responsibility: toward the moral management of organizational stakeholders', *Corporate Social Responsibility* Crane, A., Matten, D. and Spence, L. (eds.) London: Routledge
- Christensen, C. (1997) *The Innovator's Dilemma: When New Technologies Cause Great Firms to Fail* Boston: Harvard Business School Press
- Clean Clothes Campaign (2005) *Looking for a Quick Fix: how weak social audits are keeping workers in sweatshops* [www.cleanclothes.org](http://www.cleanclothes.org) (accessed 1 September 2012)
- Crane, A., Matten, D. & Spence, L. (2008) *Corporate Social Responsibility: Readings and Cases in a Global Context* UK: Routledge
- Desai, A., Nassar, N. and Chertow, M. (2012) 'American Seams: an exploration of hybrid fast fashion and domestic manufacturing in relocated apparel production', *Journal of Corporate Citizenship*, Special Issue on Sustainable Fashion & Textiles, Spring 2012
- Dickson, M., Loker, S. and Eckman, M. (2009) *Social Responsibility in the Global Apparel Industry* US: Fairchild Books
- EABIS [www.eabis.org](http://www.eabis.org) (accessed 12 May 2012)
- Earley, R. and Politowicz, K. (2010) *TED's TEN* [www.tedresearch.net](http://www.tedresearch.net) (accessed 16 June 2012)
- Elkington, J. (1999) *Cannibals with Forks: the Triple Bottom Line of 21st Century Business* UK: Wiley Business Publishing
- Emilsson, A., Hilgren, P. and Seravalli, A. (2011) *Dealing with Dilemmas: Participatory Approaches in Design for Social Innovation* Swedish Design Research Journal
- Fletcher, K. and Grose, L. (2012) *Fashion and Sustainability: Design for Change* UK: Earthscan
- Fuad-Luke, A. (2010) *Design Activism* UK: Earthscan
- Galland, A. & Jurewicz, P. (2010) *Best Current Practices in Purchasing: the Apparel Industry* US: As You Sow [www.asyousow.org](http://www.asyousow.org) (accessed 7 September 2012)

- Gardetti, M. and Torres, A. (2012) 'Introduction', *Journal of Corporate Citizenship*, Special Issue on Sustainable Fashion & Textiles, Spring 2012
- Goodone <http://www.goodone.co.uk/> (accessed 3 January 2013)
- Good for Nothing (2012) [www.goodfornothing.org](http://www.goodfornothing.org) (accessed 11 June 2012)
- Grameen Uniqlo <http://www.grameenuniqlo.com> (accessed 3 September 2012)
- Green, J. (2012) *Making Environmental Achievements Count for Consumers* Young Women Social Entrepreneurs [www.ywse.org](http://www.ywse.org) (accessed 8 September 2012)
- Gwilt, A. (2011) 'Producing Sustainable Fashion: the points for positive intervention by the Fashion Designer' in *Shaping Sustainable Fashion* Gwilt, A. and Risannen, T. (eds.) UK: Earthscan
- H & M (2011) *Conscious Actions Sustainability Report* [www.hm.com](http://www.hm.com) (accessed 8 September 2012)
- Hackathons (2012) Wikipedia <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hackathon> (accessed 29 May 2012)
- HomeBoy Industries (2013) <http://homeboyindustries.org/> (accessed 7 January 2013)
- Igeo, E (2010) 'The Tacit Turn: Textile Design in Design Research' in *DUCK: Journal for Research in Textiles and Textile Design*, Vol. 1
- Irwin, T (2012) *Research as a Process of Transformation*, SKIP lecture, RCA London, 22 November 2012
- Kate Spade (2013) <http://www.womenforwomen.org/help-women/kate-spade-hand-in-hand.php> (accessed 5 January 2013)
- Koskinen, I., Zimmerman, J., Binder, T., Redstrom, J. and Wensveen, S. (2011) *Design Research Through Practice: From the Lab, Field and Showroom* US: Morgan Kaufman
- Marks & Spencer (2013) *How We Do Business Report*, [www.marksandspencer.com](http://www.marksandspencer.com) (accessed 2 January 2013)
- MISTRA (2011) *Future Fashion Research Project* [www.mistrafuturefashion.com](http://www.mistrafuturefashion.com) (accessed 6 August 2012)
- Moon, J. (2007) 'The Contribution of Corporate Social Responsibility to Sustainable Development', *Sustainable Development Journal* no. 15
- Mulgan, G. (2011) 'Introduction' to *Recipes for Systemic Change*, Helsinki Design Lab
- Murray, R., Mulgan, G. and Caulier-Grice, J. (2010) *The Open Book of Social Innovation*, NESTA/Young Foundation
- People Tree (2012) [www.peopletree.co.uk](http://www.peopletree.co.uk) (accessed 15 January 2013)
- Parker, L (2012) Interview with author
- Porter, M and Kramer, M. (2006) 'Strategy and Society: the Link Between Competitive Advantage and Corporate Social Responsibility' in *Harvard Business Review*, December 2006
- Remade in Leeds (2011) <http://www.remadeinleeds.org/> (accessed 4 January 2013)
- Rowley, T (2012) Interview with author
- Social Enterprise UK (2013) [www.socialenterprise.org.uk](http://www.socialenterprise.org.uk) (accessed 4 January 2013)

Social Studio (2009) [www.thesocialstudio.org](http://www.thesocialstudio.org) (accessed 9 January 2013)

Tan, L (2009) 'Perspectives on the Changing Role of the Designer: Now and to the Future' The International Council of Societies of Industrial Design, *World Design Congress Education Conference*, Singapore

Thorpe, A (2012) *Architecture and Design Versus Consumerism* UK: Earthscan

UNGA (2005) United Nations General Assembly, World Summit Resolution A/60/1, adopted by the General Assembly on 15 September

Walker, S (2011) *The Spirit of Design : Objects, Environment and Meaning* UK: Earthscan