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TO RE:MAKE, TO RE:DO, TO RE:THINK

LOCAL DESIGN PRACTICES IN A GLOBALISED WORLD

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ABSTRACT

To live in a global world is to be constantly aware of our own lives and histories and how they may merge and blend with others. Taking a practitioner-led approach to design, and the production of cultural artifacts, this paper will draw on the author's response to a number of global and cross cultural references and show how these references have been translated into a range of clothing items. The first of these objects are a jacket and waistcoat developed as a response to the Global Denim project in which the discarded jeans, through a process of deconstruction were converted into something 'new'. This newness grew out of the previous owners no longer having a use for the garments and a contention that they no longer fitted into changing notions of their identity and lifestyles. The second object to be analysed is a garment developed as a response to Yinka Shonibare's work and within this aspects of global production and communication will be discussed. It will investigate symbolism within textile production processes, motifs and shape and form as well as providing a critique of Shonibare's work.

The relationship of the objects to global processes will be viewed through the lens of sustainability and in particular how production methods, especially those based in a studio environment, have the potential to impact on notions of social enterprise and design activism. To this aim reflection on the authors approach to design and the shaping of 'fashion' inspired objects will be provided together with an investigation into how models of social enterprise may be developed to have relevance to global processes. Theories relating to aspects of liquid modernity and global identities will also frame discussion into how objects become personalised and lead to a transformation of self.



PATTERN CUTTING WORKSHOP CONDUCTED BY THE AUTHOR UNDER THE AUSPICES OF OXFAM TRADING, SOUTH INDIA, 1998 (IMAGE COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR)



UPCYCLING WORKSHOPS CONDUCTED WITHIN SHOPPING CENTRES IN THE UK UNDER THE AUSPICES OF KETCHUPCLOTHES, 2004 (IMAGE COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR)

INTRODUCTION

In his book 'Stuff', Miller puts forward the proposition that *"the problem with viewing clothing as the surface that represents, or fails to represent, the inner core of true being is that we are then inclined to consider people who take clothes seriously as themselves superficial."* (Miller, 2010, p.13) These words reflect a view towards fashion and the study of clothing that were generally representative of the academic cannon for many years. Despite key studies by social analysts such as Barthes, Veblen and Simmel fashion writer Wilson (1985) bemoaned how fashion studies were often viewed as frivolous and due to their gender status much maligned in academic contexts in the past. To get a view of an academic study of clothing and in particular fashion often meant stepping out from the confines of the discipline into somewhat unknown territories of psychology, sociology, material culture and critical theory. This wasn't necessarily a problem as these studies gave depth and insight into what as a designer we may see from a very different viewpoint. It enabled us to assign abstract concepts and philosophical debate to physical artifacts and we have gradually seen a maturing of the subject that makes it a worthy counterpart in academic circles. This paper draws on perspectives from the author, a fashion/costume academic and designer, and by describing methods of design, manufacture and consumption of set pieces, hopes to path the way to a dialogue that can draw on many different viewpoints, led to an analysis of 'global' and 'local' practices and hopefully dismiss the claim of superficiality.

The aim of this paper is thus to demonstrate how clothing can be transformed and through this transformation reveal something about the world around us and point to news ways of doing. In the process it will draw on relevant social, political and environmental concerns and contexts and hopefully change the way in which clothing may be viewed especially in relation to its production and consumption. Critical perspectives drawn from notions such as design activism, liquid modernity and development theory form the backdrop to the study since it was felt that, when analyzing transitional forms such as 'fashionable'

clothing, an understanding of their wider societal adoption was needed (Julier, 2013; Fuad-Luke, 2009; Bauman, 2005; Chambers, 1997). Methodology employed in this approach has been influenced by approaches adopted by embedded practitioners and activist research where the strength of analysis comes from the absorption in a 'sticky problem' – in this case dilemmas surrounding waste, transportation production and consumption – and the proposing of new ways of working. Thus insight into the design and make process is influenced by sustainable approaches to design and a contention that the production of 'fashionable' clothes needs not necessarily be an exploitative process – accusations increasingly levied at it in the wake of vast ethical and environmental damage metered out across the globe over the past decades.

At the root of this enquiry was an analysis of key set pieces conceived, designed and manufactured by the author, under the guise of the social enterprise – Ketchup Clothes. As a fashion designer dedicated to a community and activist approach to sustainability these pieces included garments made from recycled materials and the dissemination of methods of remake initiated through development projects in a variety of settings including shopping centres, festivals and community centres. These spaces of make and interaction formed the platform for the communication of ideas and thus provided an important source of contextualization and analysis of design outputs. Key to these initiatives was a desire to investigate anti-consumption approaches to clothing design and ways in which people were able to make without buying, have without consuming. This approach to design and production was chosen over more conventional forms of make due to a concern with overconsumption and a desire to test out Braungart and McDonough's contention that the only way to tackle sustainability is to design as though waste can not exist (Braungart & McDonough, 2008). As such a conscious effort was made to source only found or discarded materials and to practice local production by the establishment of a design studio equipped with industrial machinery. This form of redirective practice was consistent with notions of design activism advocated by writers such as Julier (2013), Fry (2009), von Busch (2009) and Fuad-Luke (2008) who saw value in a reorientation of design practice and the embedding of design think-



COLLECTION OF CLOTHES MADE FROM RECYCLED MATERIAL, ALTERNATIVE FASHION WEEK, SPITALFIELDS, LONDON, 2008 (IMAGE COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR)



COLLECTION OF CLOTHES MADE FROM RECYCLED MATERIAL, ALTERNATIVE FASHION WEEK, SPITALFIELDS, LONDON, 2008 (IMAGE COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR)

-ing as a way of solving wicked problems in this case landfill, air miles and unethical practices in global clothing production. Approaches to development and the role of technology, in particular notions of 'appropriateness' advocated by development critics also framed the nature and way in which garments were designed, produced and consumed with an emphasis on community engagement, empowerment and poverty alleviation (Schumacher, 1978; Chambers, 1997; Fletcher, 2008).

To eliminate the concept of waste means to design things - products, packaging and systems from the beginning on the understanding that waste does not exist (Braungart & McDonough, 2008, p104)



WASTESAVER DEPOT, HUDDERSFIELD, 2008 (IMAGE TIM MITCHELL)



STUDIO SPACE IN LEEDS 6, 2009 (IMAGE COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR)



RUBBISH ON THE STREETS OF LEEDS 6, 2009 (IMAGE COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR)

“ In the second half of the 20th century, development became the code word for not wanting to be left behind in a world of rapid discoveries and changes. Practically every country in the world is compelled to seek development in order to become and stay modern. For modernity connotes the charmed circle of progress, sophistication, growth and completeness.” (Hogan, 2002, p34)



‘DEVELOPMENT’ BILLBOARD, WESTERN AUSTRALIA, 2010
(IMAGE COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR)

DEVELOPMENT AND MODERNITY

Notions of development and modernity have framed much of the critical enquiry into the role of clothing within both our public and private life and in particular the relationship of fashion to our notions of being modern. Much of this has been framed through involvement with development projects that have sought to harness and assist producers through the production textile and clothing related pieces and a realization that whilst textile and clothing related activities have much to offer in the way of social, economic and political development that there still exists vast areas of exploitation and disempowerment (Dennis, 1999). To fully understand how these practices can be improved within general development practices we need to more fully understand the process of development and its political connotations. As a whole series of measures implemented from the 1940s, development studies became the way in which manufacturing practices become rationalized and as stated by Sachs (1992) 'to talk about development meant nothing more than projecting the American model of society onto the rest of the world' (Sachs, 1992, p.159). Also much of the work of neo-classical economists stemmed from the notion of comparative advantage, which related to the availability and cost of labour, capital and resources within an economy thus 'Third world countries should specialize in and export land and labor-intensive goods while leaving the production of capital intensive goods to those countries with greater endowments of capital' (Brohmann, 1997, p.36). Development, thus, became concerned with the expansion of markets, effects of itinerant labour, redrawing class lines and the contradictions of consumption playing its part in this was global production.

Fashion and in particular clothing has always been a part of this appearance of being modern and systems of production and consumption have been changed over the years to accommodate for changes in design as well as technology. However, the recent plight of the garment workers in Bangladesh, for example, has highlighted key deficiencies in this system and how serious issues of working conditions and how profits

both socially and economically are metered out through forward and backward linkages in the chain. As stated by Lee (2005) *“the poor, who can be made to work, or at least form the industrial reserve army, are exploited in body and oppressed in mind to ensure the smooth functioning of a commodified labour market.”* (p.81). This has led to calls for companies to bring elements of fairness into production systems and interventions that will help producers break out of cycles of poverty and lead to greater empowerment and control over working conditions.

In the context of a research project set out to investigate the role of textile production within development projects, the image of a weaver in Nepal illustrated the problem we may have in attempting to improve lives by enabling producers to operate on a global level with their products. Here we have a woman operating a handloom and weaving cloth made from nettle fibre. It is a centuries old activity with the outputs traditionally being consumed in the home or for local sale. However, a reorientation of the size and design of the cloth means that through developmental efforts the outputs of the woman's endeavours are bound for a western market to be consumed as placemats through the department store Liberties, London. The extent to which we view this as a valid and logical approach to development will depend upon the extent to which we see this as an improvement on the previous state. Certainly there is potential to bring in 'global' currency into the woman's life but does this come at too high a price. The high risk nature and volatility of the global markets means that the outputs will be subjected to intense 'quality' measures and fluctuations in desirability based on understanding of product, consumer trends and marketing. It also brings into question the extent to which the woman feels empowered by this intervention. Discussions highlighted how she did not own a table and was uncertain as to the context in which the placemats she was making were consumed. This stymied innovation and left the producer at the mercy of western 'designers' (often under the guise of development workers) to push their product design forward. This should surely make us question the extent to which innovation is allowed to develop when vital information and connection is missing

WEAVING NETTLE YARN, NEPAL, 1998
(IMAGE COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR)



TAILOR, BANGWEULU, ZAMBIA, 1995
(IMAGE COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR)

This embedding of development aims within this context and terminology underpin an approach based on the rationalization and globalization of production methods very much in line with many western plans set up to make producers more efficient and cost effective. However, a critique of this would entail looking at just how viable this approach is and whether other approaches would be more beneficial and sympathetic to social and political aims. Eileen Fisher's stated goal for this form of production, seen from the view of competitive advantage, is to reach a target of '20% of its product line to have ecologically sustainable component' (Curwen et. al., 2013, p31). This appears as a drop in the ocean especially when we consider that this implies that the other 80% is unecological and unsustainable. Horror stories from most of our global clothing production methods would certainly point to a condition out of hand and the only way to really tackle sustainability is to seriously tackle overconsumption. With research highlighting how the average female American has enough clothes in her wardrobe to last 40 years it would appear that making use of what we have is a better approach to sustainability rather than trying to tackle sustainability through consumption.

Effects of global production don't stop at the consumption end either though as we become more concerned with landfill and the fall out of production. The export of waste has been highlighted as a dangerous practice and one that brings with it many dilemmas and contradictions (BAN,2002). This is very much the case with the second-hand clothing industry, which on the one hand provides clothes for those in need but also has a detrimental effect on indigenous modes of dress, design, production and the perceptions of traditional clothing. When we see a child running around a rural village in a T-shirt emblazoned with Coca Cola or Adidas where does that take us and what critical questions relating to globalization does it raise? Of course this fallout from production and consumption has been exacerbated by the whole phenomenon of 'fast' fashion and the pursuit of liquid identity in a post-modern world (Bauman, 2005). Designers deliberately factor in inbuilt obsolescence into designs and this has seen the transition of design from catwalk to shop reduce dramatically creating a need for newer and faster turn around of clothes. Whereas in the past collections would have been turned around in 6 months we

This link between knowledge about global markets, company (often capitalist) ideals and local production for global consumption was highlighted by Curwen et.al. (2013) In their study into the American fashion company 'Eileen Fisher' and in particular their involvement with 'The Peru Project'. This project centred around employment for Peruvian knitters and was chosen by the company as a way of addressing what we perceived as sustainable goals and the fact that the project was "a local supply chain totally from fiber all the way to the finished garments and (the product) is organic and its dyed in a responsible way." (Curwen et.al., 2013) the challenge to bring products from the project into a global consumer cycle were identified as quality and perceived value stating how when they began the initiative the knitted jumpers were of "basic make and mediocre quality" (p39) . Equipment was also seen as underdeveloped, described as "somewhat rustic and not refined enough compared to the capabilities of sophisticated knitting machines used in Chinese factories." (p39)

These two terms become emotive in development parlance and was something that Chambers sought to challenge in his work on how to put the last first in development plans and the negative connotations of backward and 'primitive' societies. So just how can we put producers first in our quest to assist (as in the nature of development projects) or empower or just to help them become 'modern'? In relation to 'things' and their production this is often viewed around ways to enable producers to become capable of competing and in turn engaging with global markets. In the case of the Eileen Fisher case study this was achieved by 'substituting, limiting and streamlining materials and processes' and by a series of visits by western designers to the locus of production by offering training in style, materials and production methods. They also 'worked to optimize timing and resources' (Curwen et. Al., 2013, p41).



TRADITIONAL SILK REELING CHARAKA, BANGALORE, INDIA, 1997
(IMAGE COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR)



INTERMEDIATE TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPED BY ITDG, 1997
(IMAGE COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR)

are now seeing lead times decreasing to 6 weeks, 6 days even 6 hours. This all helps to create a state in which consumers are constantly searching for something new but with a focus on cheapness and availability.

This development along capitalist lines has done much to degrade and dishonor an activity that has so much more potential to offer in the way of creativity and identity formation. Tracing back the roots of garment manufacture we see a history littered with glorious creations and an innovations that have helped shape our global world. As an industry its vast forward and backward linkages have the potential to be a liberating force if only power relations and unethical and unsustainable practices could be addressed. It is within this context that the designer comes into their own as a way of positioning possibilities. As stated by Simons (1996) “the natural sciences are concerned with how things are... design on the other hand is concerned with how things ought to be”.

Writers such as Braungart (2009) and his contention that waste needs to be eliminated from the design process and that it cannot be allowed to exist in our manufacturing process have contributed much to an understanding of what needs to be done to tackle issues to do with waste, particularly as they apply to clothing and its production and disposal. Many interested in sustainability within the clothing industry advocate a ‘closed loop approach’ as the only way to address the vast environmental problems associated with inbuilt obsolescence (Reiley, K., & De-Long, M., 2011). It also follows the contention that the power to make is very strong and the ways in which we form the materials we have at hand have the potential to link us into traditional modes of making and deeper social and political aims. Fieldwork as part of a PhD demonstrated the potential for clothing and textile production to address key developmental aims but also highlighted key deficiencies in the orientation and application of aims particularly as they related to notions of poverty alleviation and empowerment (Dennis, 1999). In many cases the aims were orientated around a need to work towards global products – ones produced in one setting (often a rural, ‘ethnic’, traditional location) but consumed in a very different context (often a western,



TRADERS SELLING SECOND -HAND CLOTHES, SAMFIA, ZAMBIA , 1995
(IMAGE COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR)

‘fashion’ oriented capitalist context). This helps to reinforce difference in the two contexts where on action if undertaken in order to ‘help’ the poor. As Lee (2005) stated this has often been done on the assumption that the poor are ‘flawed’ consumers and that they need a cash injection. Tied in to this are also very emotive connotations associated with the process of development and in particular desires to become ‘modern’.

Fuad-Luke defined activism as “...*taking actions to catalyse, encourage or bring about change, in order to elicit social, cultural and/or political transformations.*” (Fuad-Luke, 2009, p6). As a designer this has always been part of the game. As we adapt to innovations in textiles and modes of manufacture we change the shape and form of things. We mix up references to give a ‘new’ take on things and present these to an ever-hungry public. This, of course, in itself is not strictly activism since whilst the catalyst may be to encourage people to wear shorter skirts, for example, in many cases it is not going to be significant to bring about deeper social, cultural and political change. This is because we are changing the outputs of our endeavours but not altering the underlying implicit system of production and consumption. To do this means to radically change our opinions and structures of design to turn them from things of horror into things of beauty.

Design as an activity for intervention and positive change links into theories and practices proposed by von Busch (2008) and in particular an approach of ‘hactivism’ in which the focus was on changing the system rather than destroying and tearing it apart. According to von Busch (2008) this hacking into a system (in this case the fashion system) is done out of love rather than any malicious intent.

“Hacking is a matter of dedicated and systematic curiosity, of understanding a system, reverse engineering it, finding a suitable place of intervention, plugging in and keeping the power on. Hacking is to modify and advance a system because you love it, not because you hate it.” (von Busch, 20)

Ways in which this ‘hacking’ was undertaken within the context of my own work was through the careful selection and appropriation of material and resources, the establishment of a local studio and the engagement with activities that aligned themselves with attempts to redress imbalances. This included the demonstration of recycling techniques within traditional consumer spaces i.e. shopping centres and the establishment of free workshops where participants were shown how to customize garments and take them away. Within this context there was an overwhelming sense that participants felt it was “better than shopping”, reflecting the view that studies into anti-consumption are relevant and timely in an age of overconsumption, inbuilt obsolescence and a gradually disheartening of what consumption can actually bring to our everyday lives. Within this context it was found that the ways in which participants, particularly under the guise of development and financial inclusions projects engaged with clothing and its remake led the way to a transformation of self. This was also borne out by the ways in which the objects themselves were transformed and inspiration for this process came from the writings of Bauman and practitioners such as Sherman and Bowery (Greer, 2005; Bauman, 2005; Sherman et. al, 2012).



DEMONSTRATION OF RECYCLING TECHNIQUES, ST. JOHNS CENTRE, LEEDS, 2008
(IMAGE COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR)



TESTING OUT IDEAS FOR THE GLOBAL DENIM PROJECT, IZE - DRUMMER FROM DIRTY VELVET, 2011 (IMAGE COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR)



THE GLOBAL DENIM PROJECT

Involvement with the Global Denim Project was centered upon the creation of new denim garments that would allow for a further exploration of how the material of denim could be transformed and the life cycle of the material extended (Miller & Woodward, 2011). Jeans discarded by participants of the research project were cut in half with one leg being used to test the physical materiality of the items (i.e. in terms of strength and length of time before the material would naturally degrade) and the other being used to test the psychological materiality in terms of participant's attachment to the objects. Since all of the participants were discarding the objects a key aim was to convert all of the legs into something 'new' but drawing upon narratives from interviewees as inspiration for the design process. To begin the design process research and development was carried out to establish inspiration for form and shape and the type of garment to produce. An interview were conducted with a customer who was looking for someone to convert jeans that no longer fitted him, into a garment he could wear on stage and would fit into his lifestyle as a drummer in a band. A waistcoat with a large sheepskin collar was developed and reactions gained. When questioned the client expressed his joy at the use of details that to him had been very important on the original pair of jeans. He recounted stories of when he first bought the jeans and details such as pockets and frayed edges become interesting revelations as he tried on the garment and noticed them in unexpected places. He also expressed pleasure at the fact that the jeans were back on his body having been discarded in his wardrobe due to the fact that the fit was now wrong and they were a little tight.

The design of this initial waistcoat led to the design of garments for the Global Denim Project in that importance was placed on the utilization of details and also consideration for the narratives that had been gleaned from the interviews carried out by Woodward. Within these narratives were tales of 'outdated' fits, a scruffy aesthetic no longer appropriate to their current lifestyle and in many cases a movement from a casual state into one that focused on their roles within a professional workplace. Within this context their own tired and outdated jeans became part of an old.

Padding and peek-abo: shoulder pads as earmuffs.



INSPIRATION, JACKET BY LEIGH BOWERY, ID STYLE MAGAZINE, 1986
(IMAGE XAVIER GUARDANS)



WHAT TO DO WITH OLD JEANS JACKET , GLOBAL DENIM PROJECT, 2011 (IMAGE COURTESY
OF THE AUTHOR)

identity and thus destined for the skip or charity shop. Inspiration for the pattern also came from an old 1980s Leigh Bowery jacket whose work was firmly embedded in the notion of transformation and helped to inform shape and style. To reinvigorate the material, and in the process the jean legs, a pattern based on a smart fitted jacket was developed to represent this transition from casual to professional. In an attempt to highlight the femininity of the cloth and to move away from the 'unisex' nature of some of the garments that the interviewees had expressed a desire get away from, bust cups were inserted and a nipped in waist accentuated by pocket details and pin tucks running across the back of the garment. Working from a flat pattern the jeans legs were cut to lay flat and the process of actually working with the fabric began. It presented several challenges not least because the jean legs were all from different weights and types of denim and also had many design features that needed to be cut around or incorporated into the final piece. However, generally the piece came together well and had merit in its construction and aesthetic appeal.

The waistcoat was developed in a more organic way and really did represent the waste from the research project. The production of the jacket had utilized larger pieces of denim taken from the lower legs and had left more fixed, functional and secured design details such as zip and fly and waistbands behind. These were presented to the dress stand and manipulated in such a way as to construct a sleeveless jacket. In this state pockets got twisted and a jean waistband became a cowl neck. Working with material and old garments in this way can present challenges for the pattern cutter and maker since there is so much that is unknown about how the pattern will fit onto the fabric available and how details may be incorporated onto the body in places where they wouldn't have originally been - the waist as a cuff feature and pockets on the back of the garment, being examples of this. Of course this is also the beauty of this style of making since there is always an element of the unexpected, of the garment evolving before your eyes. There are times when a strict pattern is just what is needed and at other times a necessity to get onto a dress stand and mould the material around the body.

Making it fit and altering finishing details so that the garment looks authentic, as something that has not just been patched together but has its own identity and style. We are never able to really leave the original garment behind but in its transformation we are able to learn something about its trajectory and how it may have been conceived and constructed in the first place. The meditative act of sewing also provides us with time to spend with the garment and the material from which it is made, as it was and as it will be. It allows for reflection into just how the items have come our way and what our role as designers may be for the present and future.



WHAT TO DO WITH OLD JEANS- WAISTCOAT, GLOBAL DENIM PROJECT, 2011 (IMAGE COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR)

CROSS CULTURAL DESIGNING

Responses to the work of Yinka Shonibare took a similar approach to the Global Denim Project in that found and reclaimed materials were used but in this case no garments were used and the process of dissecting a garment came from the adaption of a tradition garment, in this case the sari and joining it to a fitted bodice block. This was done for the purposes of a wedding dress in which the intention was to marry two different styles – one originating from an Indian context and the other from a UK context. This was to represent a mixed marriage of two cultures and became an important consideration in the development of design features and selection of seam lines and fabric. When a call for papers to respond to the work of Yinka Shonibare came this garment became the focus for attention since the material for sampling the wedding dress fitted into the African fabric used by Shonibare and provided a focus for the contextualization of themes such as hybridity, globalization and aspects of post-colonialism and identity

In responding to the fabric, reference was made to previous garments conceived and made by the author. This included a jacket that on occasion had caused a reaction in the form of certain looks and had always been a source of interest. When wearing it there was often the worry that it would be construed as out of my 'culture' and concern over the interpretation others may have of it. Like many of the clothes made under Ketchup Clothes it was made from found and reclaimed cloth, in this case having come from a friend with a shop selling 'ethnic' products in Chapeltown Leeds who had a bag of African fabric that she couldn't sell. The jacket provided a link of the time spent in Africa working alongside Zambian tailors as they fought to maintain their livelihoods against the tide of imported secondhand clothes and a reminder that cloth and pattern are inextricably linked to our both our past and our future. The jacket as an object has been a form of contact on many occasions with viewers often having commented on the look of the fabric and words that run down the side of the sleeve. Incorporated into the design are the words YA MTU HUPANGWA NA MUNGU (Your path is determined by God alone) running down the sleeve, a direct communicator to the outside world for those who can read Swahili.

Thus is responding to the work of Yinka Shonibare and the communicative power of cloth it was felt text from the cloth should be incorporated into the piece and that motifs, silhouette and fit should also be used to communicate non-verbally issues that seemed pertinent to those explored by Shonibare. Within this context hybridity was taken as a central theme and a mismatch of pattern and motif together with converging cultural designs were taken as design inspiration. Drawing on the contention by Shonibare that, “hybridity, a term that itself has come in and out of fashion within the contemporary art discourse is a contamination of different cultural elements. The term stands for anti-purity, anti-essentialism”. Focus was given to elements that would have resonance to cultural elements of design but when placed together or out of context would have potential to carry meaning.

This was achieved by contrasting the energy of the ‘I Love Africa’ Chitenge with the racist overtones of the ‘plantation workers’ print fabric which shows two figures – one white with red trousers and a pipe, the other black with a bundle balanced on his head and what almost seem like shackles on his feet standing between palm trees. The origin and indeed date of this material is unknown having been unearthed at a boot sale although it would appear to be from the 1950’s in terms of design, fibre content and weave. What it would have been used for is also unknown so it is hard to comment on original intention and message behind the design. A contemporary analysis of the design, however, points to notions of colonialism, power and global trade and production – all themes important in the author’s theory and practice of design.

The 1950s fabric being used to represent notions of colonialism/globalization / westernisation was formed into a tight fitted bodice and inspiration was taken from 1950s pinups and sexualisation. The worker and owner (if we can indeed call them that) straddle the bust and draw attention to notions of femininity acted out through clothes and the author’s own identity as a woman (and an Essex woman at that!). Cultural notions of femininity were further explored within the photo shoot, which saw the piece transform in terms of the covering



CONVERSATIONS IN CLOTH. RESPONSE TO YINKA SHONIBARE'S WORK, 2013
(IMAGE CARINA ZHOU)



the body through the drape and positioning of the zari. The cut lines, pleating and drape of the piece was heavily influenced by eastern, in particular Indian approaches to pattern cutting in the form of a sari-derived design. These design features were further contextualized within a photo shoot that took place in the quintessential 'English' village 'Holmfirth', famous for the TV series *Last of the Summer Wine*, in which a variety of poses based around 'Nora Batties' doorsteps were photographed.

In reflecting upon the piece developed as a response to Shonibare's work four key elements, important to his work were identified. These included climate change, development/globalisation, manufacture and hybridity. Climate change was embedded within the overall production process and the contention that the only way to tackle sustainability is to tackle overconsumption, thus the focus on found and reclaimed materials. Whilst the original garment was developed as a 'sample' and a way of testing out the pattern before cutting in more expensive cloth it became reused in the sense that it provided for reflection and discussion within an art context. In relation to development and globalization imagery was seen as a way of provoking discussion into traditional and modern states, visualized in the clothing of the figures on the fabric and the style of the piece. The images of the 'plantation' owner juxtaposed with the 'African' worker highlighted the basis on which trade and economic power were developed and the 'Made In Kenya' pointing to an industry and sector subjected to governmental and non-governmental assistance (or hindrance). The use of the sewing machine acted as a link to the Industrial Revolution and the conflicts that still exist between how and where things are made and their ultimate consumption. Quite often this is a gender issue since much of work carried out in the clothing industry is still done by women with 'nimble' fingers and was cited as a major criticism of Shonibare's work. Much of the manufacture of his work is hidden since although we are looking at work he has designed and conceived it is not actually done by his hand. We were able to marvel at the exquisite way in which the items were made but not actually know who had made them and under what conditions.

Hybridity was borne out of the marriage of two different styles of dress and two different types of fabric/print. The western 'pin up dress' was grown out of the sari at the point where the cloth fell to cover the body and options were explored for covering, revealing and exposing the body based on the placement of the zari. Reflections on Linking into notions of fluid identity and the option for transforming the visual appearance of self through the use of cloth, clothes and context.



Conclusion and Discussion

In a consumer society we are paying for states of being. There are many interesting practitioners that use clothing to transform self and through association hint at an inner transformation (Sherman et.al., 2012). The idea that what is on our outer can be a reflection/distortion of our inner ties into notions of clothing being a language but is itself open to debate (Miller, 2010). Postmodernists are fluent in this language and use to highlight social and political issues and a move from a fixed to a fluid state. From this state there exudes an air of fickleness, of something so fluid that nothing can contain or harness. This is said to have derived as a reaction to linear and fixed aspects of development that have failed in their attempts to make the world a fair and just place and have had the affect of standardizing rather than celebrating hybridity and difference. As argued by Lee (2002)

“..development is not simply a process of improving the lot of the nation. First, it is yoked to a linear time frame and second it cannot be disengaged from the capitalist complex of production and consumption. The linear timeframe has been a universal measure of progress and world mastery. It has an evolutionary perspective that makes becoming a periodic inevitability, apparently moving from a lower stage to a higher one. Linear movement of time if like a blind man's buff, time unfolding.” (Lee, 2005, p54)

It is within this context that design thinking and the framing of development dilemmas within ‘wicked problems’ can be explored. One attempt to tackle these has been through the framing of design activism as a way of looking at issues to do with social injustice, environmental degradation and overconsumption. Research into the adoption and diffusion of, what were seen as more appropriate or intermediate, technologies highlighted the importance of indigenous development, manufacture and dissemination to the fulfillment of more social and political concerns. Economic gain also tended to follow but where it related to notions of quality, ‘tradition’, sustainability and empowerment it had the most success. Thus we need a rethinking of how we make, consume, dispose of and engage with ‘things’. Recognition that in a

fluid ever changing state of how 'things' can become embedded in a narrative and used as a benefit to society, there are many different modes of making, an investigation into which can point the way to new perspectives on their roles.

Borders can be mobile to the same extent as those who seek to cross them (Rumford, 2013, p.268)

As such this paper has outlined the salient features of the author's approach to design and the analysis of garments developed for local production with an emphasis on recycling and reuse. In the process it has highlighted the relationship of clothes to local and global manufacturing processes and the impact of design, manufacturing and consumption on us as both individuals and as a wider globalized society. It has investigated links between the spread of globalized practices to environment degradation and the erosion of social equality and, links between inbuilt obsolescence (a key component in the framing of a 'fashionable thing') and liquid modernity. To speak of globalization within the context of art and design practices is also to recognize the role of structured development on our cultural, economic and manufacturing capacity and thus the paper has discussed some of the mismatched logic behind previous development paths and the problem with viewing development as a linear path with fixed points of reference.

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