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Not what we are: **The (co)re-creation of self**

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Abstract

Researching through design, this thesis explores the implementation of an online kit as a means through which the postmodern individual can participate in the creative processes of home sewing. Through the development of a knowledge network that is built on co-creation, a new approach to the traditional producer/consumer relationship is investigated. This network is used to encourage the fulfilment of self through the process of re-creation, while targeting the contemporary consumer by combining electronic resources and social networking with the hands-on nature of creative process.

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A note to the reader

This dissertation is accompanied by a CD containing the movie that was developed as a part of this thesis project; however it is also available to view on YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com/user/notwhatweare>). It is intended that the website (<http://www.notwhat.co.nz>) and Bebo pages (<http://www.bebo.com/not-what-we-are>) be viewed online after, or while, reading this document.

Due to the continually evolving nature of the Internet, it is possible that upon reading this you have found that the above pages have since been discontinued. If this is the case then I apologise that your experience of this project will not be complete, but why not adapt and improvise something new yourself?

Contents

Introduction	1
Context	17
Creativity	21
Kitness	24
Kit-history	26
Co-becoming	35
Co-creation	36
Issey Miyake	38
Julian & Sophie School of Pattern Cutting	41
StyleShake	57
Burda Style	60
Threadless & Ponoko	61
Conclusion	63
Design Development & the Knowledge Network	64
The Designer	65
The Designs	72
The Website	103
The Movie	107
Social Networking & Community	108
The Fulfilment of Self	109
Conclusion	113
Images	114
Bibliography	115

Jennifer Irene Deonarain

Introduction

“We are, not what we are, but what we make of ourselves”

Anthony Giddens¹

The act of making, the process of creating and re-creating, is thought to be necessary in ensuring the spiritual and emotional wellbeing of the postmodern self. Plagued with a desire for instant satisfaction and gratification, the postmodern individual is described as being torn between feelings of pointlessness, alienation and groundlessness² while confronted with a sea of meaningless products that promise quick-fix solutions that fail to deliver. The alternative solution, the subject of this thesis, is the combination of *re-creation process participation* with the instant gratification of a quick-fix – a kit for process.

The subject of this thesis developed from my undergraduate major project which involved the design and construction of a sewing kit. Two versions of the kit were designed and prototypes were created. Each kit contained fabric that could be sewn into a dress by following the cutting and sewing lines printed on the fabric (figure 1). That dress could then be altered to create a second dress and then a third dress, also by following the cutting and sewing lines printed on the fabric. A legend was designed in order to decode the dotted lines and notches.

¹ Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity* (UK: Polity Press, 1991), 75.

² Nick Mansfield, "The Subject and Postmodernism", in *Subjectivity: Theories of the Self from Freud to Haraway* (St. Leonards, N.S.W.: Allen & Unwin, 2000), 169.

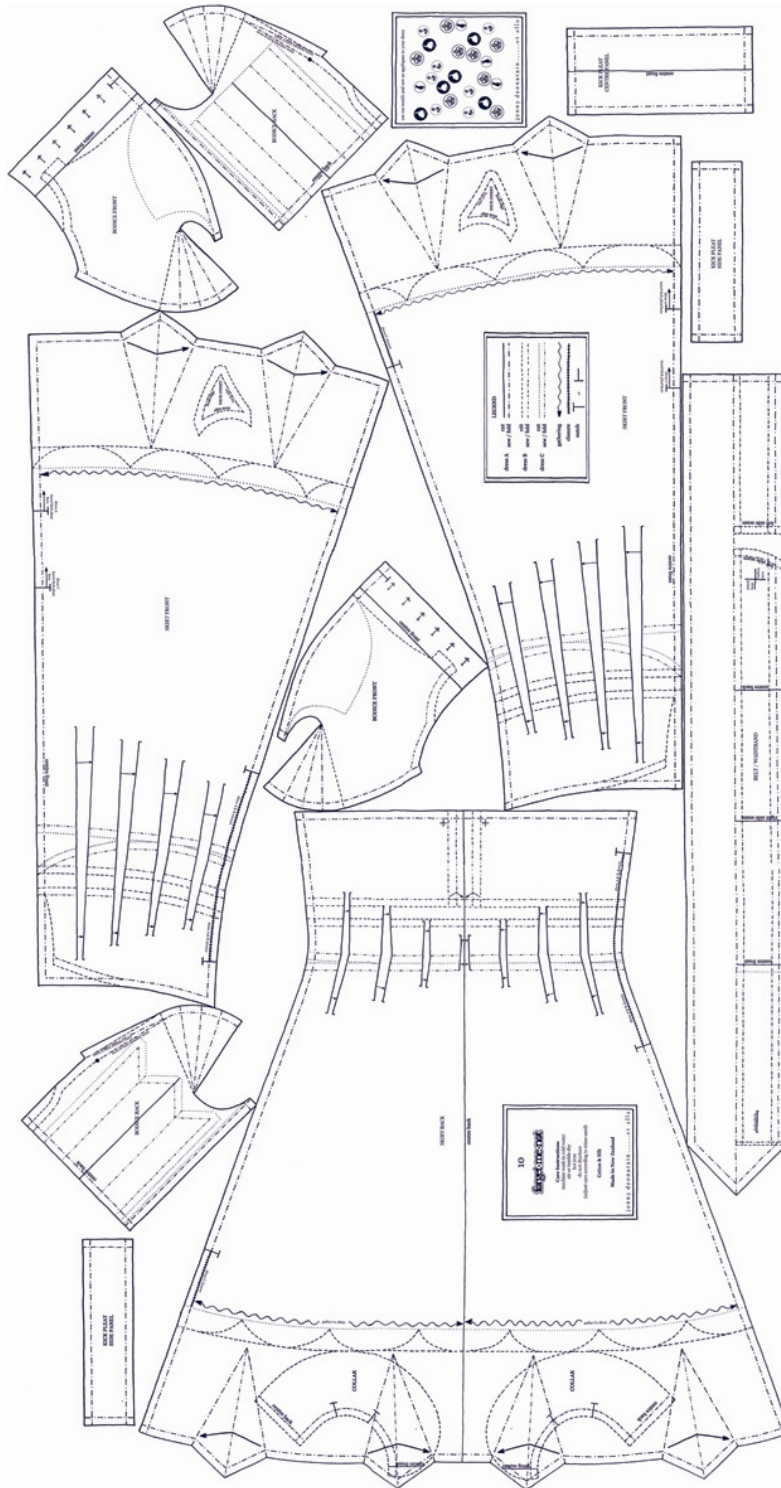


Fig.1 *et alia* forget-me-not layout

The sewing kit product is named *et alia*, Latin for 'and others'. This is a reference to the bibliographical abbreviation *et al*, used to indicate multiple authors. The *et alia* product has multiple authors made up of the designer and the consumers, communicating the label's emphasis on consumer customisation and creativity. The kits were unified by using the same theme of nostalgia, but individualised by assigning them different theme-related names: Forget-me-not and Cream & Sugar. I wanted to show that multiple kits could be designed under the same theme and ensured that fresh themes could be used seasonally while the main structure or formula for the product remained unchanged. Ultimately, the process needed to be repeatable.

The Cream & Sugar series was developed based on pleats; the idea here was to try to allow the product to cater for individuals of differing shapes and sizes. Unlike the Forget-Me-Not series which was developed by utilising a standard industrial process through repeated patternmaking and toile-ing, the Cream & Sugar series was developed in a more immediate and organic way reminiscent of the processes of a novice sewer. An initial pattern and toile was created and then each final was cut, sewn, altered and finished as was needed during the construction process. Neither series used any technique that couldn't be carried out at home using a domestic sewing machine or by hand sewing. This was crucial to the design development and the ultimate success of the product.

A basic prototype version of the kit was given to three research participants with differing levels of sewing skill and experience. The sewers were asked to use the kit to sew dress A. After photographing the dress it was returned to the sewers who were

instructed to sew dress B. This process was repeated with dress C. As can be seen in figures 2-10, each sewer produced a very different result due to the different decisions that the kit encouraged them to make, and this confirmed to me the potential of the kit.



Fig.2 *et alia* Sewer 1, Dress A



Fig.4 *et alia* Sewer 1, Dress C



Fig.5 *et alia* Sewer 2, Dress A



Fig.6 *et alia* Sewer 2, Dress B



Fig.7 *et alia* Sewer 2, Dress C



Fig.8 *et alia* Sewer 3, Dress A



Fig.9 et alia Sewer 3, Dress B



Fig.10 *et alia* Sewer 3, Dress C

This undergraduate study suggested many possible areas deserving of further investigation, including home sewing, kits, authorship, and creativity. There were particular aspects that promised great potential for not just the design of a product but also for the development of an entire system that could be used to generate products repeatedly, and thus avoid a close-ended project. As a designer it was important to me that at the completion of this thesis its outcomes could be extended beyond the margins of theory and academia into the commercial world.

The 'multiple-authorship' aspect that I am investigating is a development in what could be seen as a global trend: consumer participation in product design, or co-creation. Later I examine five examples of co-creation and compare the approach and success of each. I also discuss the differences between customisation and co-creation and explain why the *et alia* project conforms to the former, and why the subject of this dissertation falls under the latter.

Another aspect that has great potential is the use of non-traditional sewing techniques. This thesis expands on this potential by investigating a new approach to construction techniques under the premise that having to learn and perfect traditional sewing techniques not only discourages individuals from participating in sewing for leisure, but also has the effect of restricting their perception of clothing to existing patterns and processes. Although it may be argued that learning these traditional techniques gives individuals the confidence to sew garments, I believe that this is true only to a certain extent, and that too much emphasis is put on making a garment *correctly*. Much greater importance should be placed on the experience and process of creating the garment.

The third aspect with immense promise is that of the organic process. Closely related to the use of non-traditional sewing techniques, the organic process opens up unforeseeable opportunities and promotes innovation and improvisation. Many sewers who teach themselves begin by approaching their projects with an organic process, not having yet been restricted in their experimentation by learning the 'right' way to sew. This free-flowing method emphasises enjoyment and experience of the process over correct, or even entire, completion of the garment. The organic process involves the making of decisions 'on the fly'. The process begins with fabric and a body, and evolves in a way that is neither planned nor methodical. There are no instructions to follow; one must simply participate in making.

The aims of this thesis are twofold. Firstly, as discussed above, it aims to develop a knowledge network that is built on co-creation. In this case, a knowledge network is a cyclical system of production that incorporates the designer, the consumer, and online media resources. Secondly it aims to encourage the fulfilment of self through re-creation. I believe this second aim to be of considerable importance in the development of fashion products. Fashion and clothing are closely associated with the communication and presentation of self, and when combined with the personal benefits of participating in creative processes these aspects become an opportunity to create products with immense benefit to the consumer. Turney states that participating in processes of making offers "a sense of well-being and calm, or stability in an unstable world".³ Similarly, Vienne explains that the brain is stimulated by

³ Jo Turney, "Here's One I Made Ealier. Making and Living with Home Craft in Contemporary Britain." *Journal of Design History* 17, no. 3 (2004): 272.

the physical process of making, and that “spectatorship” fails to provide a comparable advantage.⁴ As such, the adaptation of garments can offer fulfilment in a way that adoption of garments cannot.

⁴ Veronique Vienne, ed., *Something to Be Desired : Essays on Design*, (New York: Graphis Inc, 2001), 10.

Context

In the context of consumerist culture, simply choosing one product over another (such as an iMac over a PC) is generally considered a creative act and helps to define one's identity as creative. By purchasing the iMac the consumer is also purchasing an association with the iMac's brand values and image – it is the 'creative' person's computer. The consumer cannot claim authorship of the iMac, but can claim to have the same values as the iMac brand and thus the consumer has adopted a *creative* identity. This commonly accepted notion that creativity is a purchasable identity is revealing of our commodity obsessed contemporary culture, and a development on the method of categorising people into 'types' used by fashion magazines since the early 20th century. Individuals were expected to fit into one of the 'types' offered, and were thus expected to conform to the styles and characteristics described.⁵ The postmodern individual is presented with a range of possible identities from which they may adopt one, or many, thus reflecting the fragmentary and often contradictory nature of postmodern culture.⁶ As Wilson explains, individuals feel a need to categorise themselves, to legitimise their personalities for themselves and for others whose understanding and acceptance they seek.⁷ Although over time the rules of these

⁵ Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* (London: Virago Press, 1985), 123.

⁶ Diana Crane, *Fashion and Its Social Agendas: Class, Gender, and Identity in Clothing* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 207.

⁷ Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* (London: Virago Press, 1985), 12.

fashion personality types have become less rigid and presented more as suggestions than as expectations, magazines continue to present fashion in this way. Indeed much of the world of advertising and commodity aims to promote products in relation to particular *lifestyles*.

The need to be categorised and thus legitimised is a symptom of our consumption obsessed society. Barker explains that postmodern culture is characterised by an impulsivity encouraged by a “sense of the fragmentary, ambiguous and uncertain quality of the world”⁸, and where is this impulsiveness more apparent than in fashion? That which is *in fashion* is constantly changing, and this in turn encourages high levels of consumption as consumers strive to keep up with the most recent trends. Lillethun attributes this hastening of fashion to the increase in consumer awareness enabled by increased media coverage.⁹ The internet in particular has had an enormous impact on the way knowledge-hungry consumers approach the act of consumption. She also points out that the ability to manufacture and market product at any level of quality and price fuelled the pace of fashion.¹⁰

Barker, while discussing Marx, explains that we create our own identities by producing things for the environment in which we live. Hence a system where we produce but have no contact with the

⁸ Chris Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice* (London: Sage Publications, 2000), 22.

⁹ Abby Lillethun, "Introduction", in *The Fashion Reader*, ed. Linda Welters and Abby Lillethun (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 78.

¹⁰ Abby Lillethun, "Introduction", in *The Fashion Reader*, ed. Linda Welters and Abby Lillethun (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 78.

resulting product (capitalism) adds to the feelings of alienation.¹¹ “If we derive our identity from consumption, this means that it comes to us from the outside...our identity is in an only accidental relationship with the self; it is external to us”¹², Mansfield goes on to explain that individuals, driven by postmodern fear, turn to consumption in a relentlessly repeated effort to define an identity.¹³ The contemporary consumer uses shopping as a proxy for production, a phenomenon brought on by the removal of traditionally home-based activities into the commercial world.¹⁴ Clothing production was one of the first of those activities to exit the home environment for the factory, fuelling the migration of work in the home from an activity of production to one of consumption.¹⁵ Thus buying has replaced making.

Engaging in production, and in particular in creative process, is a way to reconnect with one’s surroundings and regain a feeling of control over one’s own life, to reground oneself. Strasser acknowledges the strength of creative process by stating that “Handwork challenges the dominance of the mass-produced”.¹⁶ These ideas have a history that dates back to the early modern with William Morris who believed that creativity is inherent in the

¹¹ Chris Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice* (London: Sage Publications, 2000), 12.

¹² Nick Mansfield, "The Subject and Postmodernism", in *Subjectivity: Theories of the Self from Freud to Haraway* (St. Leonards, N.S.W.: Allen & Unwin, 2000), 169.

¹³ Nick Mansfield, "The Subject and Postmodernism", in *Subjectivity: Theories of the Self from Freud to Haraway* (St. Leonards, N.S.W.: Allen & Unwin, 2000), 169.

¹⁴ Veronique Vienne, ed., *Something to Be Desired : Essays on Design*, (New York: Graphis Inc, 2001), 10.

¹⁵ Nancy Page Fernandez, "If a Woman Had Taste...': Home Sewing and the Making of Fashion, 1850-1910." (PhD diss., UMI, 1987), 2.

¹⁶ Susan Strasser, *Waste and Want: A Social History of Trash*, (New York: Metropolitan, 1999), 183.

process of making, and that engaging in processes of making aids emotional or spiritual fulfilment.¹⁷

¹⁷ Peter Dormer, ed., *The Culture of Craft: Status and Future* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1997), 34.

Creativity

Pope aims to rethink the widely held Western notions that creativity requires an element of newness or novelty.¹⁸ His argument is compelling, as it explains how the overuse of the term *creativity* has led it to grow into a broad and generalised label, encompassing everything from management to science to anything involving personal choice. Pope coins the term *re-creation* as a more accurate way to successfully communicate his definition of creativity.¹⁹ In doing so, he explains, any need for new and novel aspects are downplayed and instead emphasis rests on a *process* of creating in a context with history and influence.

Another aspect of Pope's definition for creativity explains how it should relate on the one hand to the collective and on the other to the individual. To elaborate, in modern society creativity was perceived as belonging to the individual, perhaps a tortured and lonesome soul, the creative genius. The myth is that creative nature comes from within and must result in ideas, objects, or experiences new to the world at large. Pope, however, suggests that creativity refers to ideas or objects new to the individual but having grown from a pool of collective knowledge. He also notes that Boden separated the definition of creativity to distinguish between personal discoveries and experiences (P-creativity), and

¹⁸ Rob Pope, *Creativity: Theory, History, Practice* (London: Routledge, 2005), 57.

¹⁹ Rob Pope, *Creativity: Theory, History, Practice* (London: Routledge, 2005), 84.

new inventions (H-creativity).²⁰ What Boden terms P-creativity need not be the creation of things or ideas new to the world at large, but simply new or enlightening to the creator on a personal level, and it is this level of creativity with which this study is concerned. This project therefore does not aim to make people more creative in its broad meaning, but rather to encourage the fulfilment of self through re-creative process. Pope's term *re-creation* fits more comfortably in this context than *creativity*.

Although creativity is generally defined in Western societies as the development of something new or novel, in the East the re-creation of *existing* works is given much greater significance.²¹ Pope explains that creativity in the East is associated with fulfilment of spirit, a process of 'becoming' rather than simply 'making'.²² In this context he is not belittling the process of 'making' but rather pointing out that it can either be superficial or it can be a spiritually fulfilling reflective process. Western products have a tendency to promote the 'making' aspect without acknowledging the difference between 'making' and 'becoming'. This can be seen in amateur dressmaking kits such as the traditional paper patterns where decisions made by the sewer are both limited and carefully structured. Here products designed in the West echo mass fashion which adopted the styled appearances of modern subcultures while subverting the driving ideas that gave those looks meaning.²³ The

²⁰ Margaret Boden, "Computer Models of Creativity" in *Handbook of Creativity*, ed. Robert Sternberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 351-72, cited in Pope (2005), 57.

²¹ Rob Pope, *Creativity: Theory, History, Practice* (London: Routledge, 2005), 57.

²² Rob Pope, *Creativity: Theory, History, Practice* (London: Routledge, 2005), 60.

²³ Abby Lillethun, "Introduction", in *The Fashion Reader*, ed. Linda Welters and Abby Lillethun (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 78.

difference between 'making' and 'becoming' can be explained thus: 'making' is more akin to assembling something from existing parts and relates closely with the definition of a kitset (this is discussed further in the next chapter). 'Becoming', however, requires decision making on the part of the individual as well as reflection during the process. A greater degree of perceived ownership of the resulting product as well as enjoyment of the process is achieved by allowing the individual greater control over their creative process.

Kitness

A kit is often confused with a kitset. The former is a general term consisting of “a number of things...viewed as a whole; a set, lot, collection”²⁴, whereas the latter denotes “the components...for assembling an article”²⁵. The term *assembling* implies the bringing together of existing parts, the following of instructions, a manual process lacking in significant decision-making. In the home-craft industry a *kit* has adopted the definition of a *kitset* and designers of such kits appear to have done little to deter this. Such products are commonly promoted as easy or simple to complete and with emphasis placed on the end product the opportunity to highlight the potential benefits of participating in the process is neglected.

Returning to the definition of a kit, we can see how broad the term can actually be. A kit can consist of any number of elements that are united by a common trait or association. A book, for example, is a collection of chapters that relate to each other through the thread of a sequential story, or in the case of an anthology, through a shared theme. Additionally, each chapter is made up of a collection of words, ordered and grouped to produce meaning in a cumulative way. The traditional paper pattern is a kit that is almost entirely exclusive to amateur dressmaking. It consists of a set of garment patterns, illustrations, diagrams, and written instructions that are gathered together by the prospect of a singular unified outcome – the garment. To develop this idea a step further one could also

²⁴ OED, "Oxford English Dictionary," Oxford University Press, <http://www.oed.com/>

²⁵ OED, "Oxford English Dictionary," Oxford University Press, <http://www.oed.com/>

describe a collection of garments as a kit (being careful to avoid the meaning of *kit* when used to describe a uniform or other prescribed sets of garments) where the wearer must partake in some process of re-creation and decision-making.

Here the definition of a kit will be expanded. As in the above examples, a kit should convey information to the user. Ideally a kit will give *guidance* or offer *suggestion* as opposed to *instruction* or *direction*, which are more restricting and limiting to the scope of outcomes. Guidance or suggestion, like any element of the kit, may take any form such as visual, written, aural, physical, or virtual, and should convey information about the kit to its user. The content of that information depends on what the aim of the kit is; in this case the aim is to guide the user in the fulfilment of self through processes of re-creation.

Kit-history

Hackney explains the difference between home-craft and handicraft as being that home-craft is facilitated by consumerism and mass production through the use of kits and models, whereas handicrafts require skill and creativity, time and energy to complete.²⁶ Turney makes a different comparison, observing that the difference between home-craft and art is that home-crafts are involved in the processes of everyday life, whereas art is not.²⁷ Just as Hackney has separated home-craft from skill and creativity, Turney has separated home-craft from art, and few would disagree that art is an activity that requires both skill and creativity. Atkinson labels craft kits as *Reactive DIY*, thus including home-crafts under the *Do It Yourself* umbrella.²⁸ By labelling it so, Atkinson divorces home-craft from the category he terms *Pro-active DIY* (the category for which skill and creative thought is required). It is therefore home-craft with its mass appeal and lack of expertise that this study is concerned with, in particular with kits which offer more people the opportunity to participate in creative process.

The development of craft or sewing kits was spurred greatly by the advent of the Second World War. During this time the Make-Do-and-Mend campaign was launched by the British government's

²⁶ Fiona Hackney, "Use Your Hands for Happiness: Home Craft and Make-Do-and-Mend in British Women's Magazines in the 1920s and 1930s." *Journal of Design History* 19, no. 1 (2006): 25.

²⁷ Jo Turney, "Here's One I Made Ealier. Making and Living with Home Craft in Contemporary Britain." *Journal of Design History* 17, no. 3 (2004): 274.

²⁸ Paul Atkinson, "Do It Yourself: Democracy and Design." *Journal of Design History* 19, no. 1 (2006): 3.

Board of Trade. The Board published advertisements and flyers promoting frugality and smart wartime living to its audience – the female population. Through posters that promoted the home as a woman's battlefield, propaganda urged mothers and wives to take extra measures to ensure their family's clothing lasted its maximum lifetime and to limit waste by making new clothes out of old ones. Men's suits were deconstructed and women's suits cut from the pieces, and sweaters were unravelled and re-knitted into scarves. Magazines and radio programming were two mediums that greatly facilitated this widespread adoption of home-sewing. Radio programmes featuring mother-like characters gave women lessons and handy hints. *Let's Make a Dress* (broadcasted in 1944) aimed to teach sewing to women in America by broadcasting lessons with the help of diagrammatic booklets which were posted to interested listeners.²⁹ Although both clothing and fabric were rationed, requiring coupons in order to be purchased, second-hand clothing was exempt from the rationing and contributed somewhat to the reduction of the stigma surrounding recycled clothing. As a result, wearing recycled clothing, mending-patches, and home-made garments to some degree became a way to prove one's patriotism, one's commitment to the greater cause. It is therefore not surprising that following fashions actually became unfashionable,³⁰ also a common paradoxical situation today.

The values inherent in the Make-Do-and-Mend campaign were carried into the 1950s and beyond through the increasing

²⁹ Morleen Rouse, "Daytime radio programming for the homemaker 1926-1956." *Journal of Popular Culture* 12, no. 2 (1978): 322.

³⁰ Phil Goodman, "'Patriotic femininity': Women's morals and men's morale during the Second World War." *Gender & History* 10, no. 2, (1998): 281.

popularity of DIY and of craft kits in particular.³¹ Atkinson claims that since the 1960s DIY kits have been reduced to needing only “self assembly and finishing” rather than real craft skills, thus contributing to the loss of craft and sewing skills traditionally possessed by many women.³² Hackney disagrees, claiming that women have not become dependent on craft kits, and believes that recent criticism towards the commercialisation of craft is misdirected.³³ Her view is that by allowing more women to engage in craft activities, craft kits offer them empowerment. My own opinion lies somewhere between these two authors, as craft kits could be an achievable and accessible way for many more individuals (not just women) to participate in home-craft, provided that the kits gave options for customisation and some degree of creative thought and decision making.

The development of the paper home-sewing pattern was revolutionary in giving middle and lower class individuals the ability to be fashionable. In the 1860s, pattern companies such as Burda and Butterick developed their own magazines to showcase the latest fashions and sell their paper sewing patterns. The production of these magazines allowed consumers to create fashionable clothes at home for a greatly reduced price. These magazines did not just communicate the most current trends and popular styles to

³¹ Angela Partington, “The designer housewife in the 1950s”, in *A view from the Interior: Feminism, Women and Design*, ed. Judy Attfield & Pat Kirkham, (The Women’s Press, 1989), 211, in Paul Atkinson, “Do It Yourself: Democracy and Design.” *Journal of Design History* 19, no. 1 (2006): 8.

³² Paul Atkinson, “Do It Yourself: Democracy and Design.” *Journal of Design History* 19, no. 1 (2006): 5.

³³ Fiona Hackney, “‘Use Your Hands for Happiness’: Home Craft and Make-Do-and-Mend in British Women’s Magazines in the 1920s and 1930s.” *Journal of Design History* 19, no. 1 (2006): 35.

their audience, but went a step further and supplied them with the means to create those fashions through using paper patterns and home sewing techniques.³⁴ Burda developed the paper pattern idea further by producing a post-war version of today's mass fashion in a home sewing format. Reminiscent of contemporary 'fast-fashion' companies such as Glassons which today are prolific in number, Burda took high fashion and filtered it into designs that could be quickly and easily developed for their audience.³⁵ Similarly, in the 1950s Butterick produced a pattern for a simple wrap-around dress that was hugely popular with home sewers. It became known as the 6015 (its pattern number) or the *walk-away dress* because it could be constructed in a single morning.³⁶ Paradoxically, this shows that the development of home-sewing patterns contributed to the development of mass consumerism, just as movement against mass consumerism has resulted in a recent increase in the popularity of home-craft.

People who engage in home-craft often do so in order to create an "enviable social display".³⁷ Home-crafters are often proud to present their achievements through framing and collective displays. This process of presenting can be creative in itself through the construction of frames or the taking and scrapbooking of photographs, further adding to the sense of achievement.

³⁴ Margarethe Szeless, "Burda Fashions - a Wish That Doesn't Have to Be Wishful Thinking: Home-Dressmaking in Austria 1950 - 1970." *Cultural Studies* 16, no. 6 (2002): 849.

³⁵ Margarethe Szeless, "Burda Fashions - a Wish That Doesn't Have to Be Wishful Thinking: Home-Dressmaking in Austria 1950 - 1970." *Cultural Studies* 16, no. 6 (2002): 850.

³⁶ S. Downing, "Cut out and keep." *Selvedge* 10, (2006): 25.

³⁷ Fiona Hackney, "'Use Your Hands for Happiness': Home Craft and Make-Do-and-Mend in British Women's Magazines in the 1920s and 1930s." *Journal of Design History* 19, no. 1 (2006): 33.

Interestingly, Atkinson labels this presentation of home-craft objects as *pro-active DIY*, implying that this process requires more skill and creative thought than the craft activity itself.³⁸ Turney believes that the framing of home-crafts is not for the object's value, but for the feelings of "completion and achievement" that it evokes for the home-crafter.³⁹ She also notes that completed projects are photographed and often scrapbooked sequentially to illustrate increasing skill. The equivalent for garments is the wearing of the garment once it is completed, often for a special event accompanied by professional or amateur photography. In this case there are two degrees of framing; the most vital is that of the styling of the garment and creation of the overall look but this is often followed by the cataloguing or display of associated photographs. The widespread adoption of digital photography combined with the development of web-based social networks such as Bebo⁴⁰ and Facebook⁴¹ means that not only can individuals display their images on the internet for their friends to see, but also that that list of friends can grow indefinitely and images can be copied from one friend's page to another. This offers a staggering breadth of possibility for display.

Turney, who defines the maker as their own consumer, concludes thus:

³⁸ Paul Atkinson, "Do It Yourself: Democracy and Design." *Journal of Design History* 19, no. 1 (2006): 3.

³⁹ Jo Turney, "Here's One I Made Earlier. Making and Living with Home Craft in Contemporary Britain." *Journal of Design History* 17, no. 3 (2004): 271.

⁴⁰ Bebo, <http://www.bebo.com/>

⁴¹ Facebook, <http://www.facebook.com/>

“The home craft object carries a secret and personal message, which is only fully understood by the maker and consumer. An outsider (one ‘other’ than the maker or consumer) sees only an object like many others, familiar and unremarkable; the maker, on the other hand, sees the hours –the passage of time– and captures it in physical form as a cultural marker, an expression of the linear in a fragmented world.”⁴²

Turney has pinpointed the importance of process in craft activities, and although this can be related to garments, a close association with identity and the self means that there is more to a garment than to other home-craft products. A garment works closely with the personality and character of the wearer and is highly versatile in the effect it can create on the body – the same garment can look very different on two different people. Likewise, a garment is complimented not simply on its own merit, but also on how successfully it relates to the wearer. Considering that the wearer is also the author of the garment, compliments take on an additional level of meaning and satisfaction for the wearer. This close affinity between author and garment is enabled through the narrative that was developed through the engagement in creative process. Clearly garments, which are indeterminately intertwined with communication of character and identity, have a close association with the self, and thus the re-creation of garments can be used in the fulfilment of self.

⁴² Jo Turney, "Here's One I Made Ealier. Making and Living with Home Craft in Contemporary Britain." *Journal of Design History* 17, no. 3 (2004): 279.

In order to develop a sewing kit consideration must be given to what kits exist already in a fashion context, and paper patterns are the most prevalent of these. Although contemporary paper patterns offer some options for stylistic decisions, they are very much restrictive and tightly instructive. Perceptions of paper patterns have changed considerably since the 19th century. As Gordon explains, originally patterns were used (and were generally seen) as starting points from which the amateur dressmaker would launch his or her individual interpretation.⁴³ Gordon states, “this power to make choices and adapt styles is often overlooked, but it is perhaps one of the most powerful elements of home sewing”.⁴⁴ Over time however, amateur dressmaking products in general (as this includes not only paper patterns but books and magazines also) have been simplified into templates, copied rather than developed by the amateur dressmaker. Patterns and ‘how to’ books appear to get increasingly simplified in order to cater to the relatively unskilled contemporary market. There are numerous books that have been recently published to encourage do-it-yourself apparel, including *Sew U* by Wendy Mullin.⁴⁵ These books aim to offer people with limited skills or experience the ability to create clothing that is individual as well as fashionable through the use of basic home-sewing techniques. However, although these books succeed in updating the shape and style of the garment patterns they offer in an effort to appear more contemporary, they are still very restrictive when it comes to allowing or encouraging creative process. Mullin

⁴³ Sarah A. Gordon, “Make It Yourself: Home Sewing, Gender and Culture 1890-1930,” (PhD diss., The State University of New Jersey, 2004), 55.

⁴⁴ Sarah A. Gordon, “Make It Yourself: Home Sewing, Gender and Culture 1890-1930,” (PhD diss., The State University of New Jersey, 2004), 63.

⁴⁵ Wendy Mullin, *Sew U*, (New York: Bulfinch Press, 2006).

in particular stresses the importance of following the instructions while at the same time claiming that one can be creative by choosing a different collar shape or shortening the sleeve length of a garment.⁴⁶ Mullin also supplies traditional paper tissue patterns with her book, plainly conforming to traditional processes and assumptions about how sewing and creativity are defined.

Sewing publications and patterns were aimed at catering to home dressmakers' high level of experience and well-developed skills before the rise of industrialisation and the subsequent removal of garment making from a home-based activity to an activity of consumption. Before the 1930s any developments that resulted in easier to use patterns and processes were rarely promoted as such,⁴⁷ instead emphasis was placed on their timesaving merits. It was some time before publishers tried to resurrect a declining audience by promoting it as "easy, fun, and modern"⁴⁸. This gradual removal of significant decision-making from amateur dressmaking has contributed to the decline in meaningful creative activity. Consequently instant gratification and quick-fixes have become favoured, with a focus on product instead of process.

Although, as discussed above, the simplification of kits has lowered the quality of the experience of process in the making of garments by amateur sewers, and despite the negative connotations that cling to the kit and amateur craft in general, the kit format is a way

⁴⁶ Wendy Mullin, *Sew U*, (New York: Bulfinch Press, 2006), 13.

⁴⁷ Sarah A. Gordon, "Make It Yourself: Home Sewing, Gender and Culture 1890-1930," (PhD diss., The State University of New Jersey, 2004), 153.

⁴⁸ Sarah A. Gordon, "Make It Yourself: Home Sewing, Gender and Culture 1890-1930," (PhD diss., The State University of New Jersey, 2004), 162.

to successfully reach a large audience. Kits cater to the postmodern need for instant information and gratification; they are an interesting way to mediate ideas about *(co)re-creation* and the fulfilment of self in the world of mass consumption. Like the trends forecasting website WGSN which claims that there is potential opportunity in fusing the traditional aspects of craft with contemporary processes,⁴⁹ and Haseman who speaks of the merging of “analog and digital, commercial and non-commercial” in the context of creative industries,⁵⁰ I believe that the key is to approach the kit format with a fresh and thoroughly forward-thinking perspective that utilises the technical and electronic resources available while retaining the hands-on nature of creative process. This places my system, or knowledge network, within the creative industries which Hartley defines as “...the conceptual and practical convergence of the CREATIVE ARTS (individual talent) with Cultural Industries (mass scale), in the context of the NEW MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES (ICTs) within a NEW KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY, for the use of newly INTERACTIVE CITIZEN-CONSUMERS”.⁵¹

⁴⁹ WGSN, “Nostalgia”, (2004)
http://www.wgsn-edu.com/members/think-tank/features/ti2004nov19_011197?from=search

⁵⁰ Brad Haseman, “Creative Practices,” in *Creative Industries*, ed. John Hartley, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 161.

⁵¹ John Hartley, ed., *Creative Industries*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 5.

Co-becoming

Concerning the re-creation of garments, at what stage does the authorship of the garment cease to belong to the creator of the original design in order to be claimed entirely by the re-creator? This question assumes a dichotomy; however, I believe that the answer lies in the co-existence of authorship, or more accurately, the existence of co-authorship. Rather than acting as alternatives, they each add a layer of meaning to the garment in a process of *co-becoming*. Pope uses the term *co-becoming* to describe how creativity is not carried out in complete isolation from the rest of the world, but in collaboration with it.⁵² Indeed, in amateur dressmaking both the creator (designer) and the re-creator (amateur dressmaker) relate to the garment in a creative way, each applying their own mark of style and values, their own layer of meaning. Vinken expands on this, “Fashion becomes a co-production between the creator and those who wear the clothes. Whether fashion is interesting is no longer dependent on the designer alone, but in equal part on people on the street: on what they ‘make’ out of what is on offer”.⁵³

⁵² Rob Pope, *Creativity: Theory, History, Practice* (London: Routledge, 2005), 52-89.

⁵³ Barbara Vinken, *Fashion Zeitgeist: Trends & Cycles in the Fashion System*, (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 35.

Co-creation

The location of the line between customisation and co-creation is continually argued by bloggers working and teaching in the design and marketing industries.⁵⁴ The general consensus is that customisation is where the consumer personalises their experience by choosing their own changes to the basic product. To borrow Rice's Starbucks example, customisation is where a consumer orders a "half-caf mocha latte", so the consumer is getting a product that is personalised for them.⁵⁵ In comparison, if the consumer were to vote on the types of "beans, flavours, store locations" that Starbucks supplied, then this would be co-creation. Further, the customisation of a product ends with the consumer who bought it, whereas when a consumer participates in co-creation with the company then the assumption is that that participation will result in changes to the products that that company releases. Therefore, the earlier *et alia* project was an example of customisation. It was designed to be supplied to consumers with the intention being that they would then customise the garments by making decisions and carrying out those decisions

⁵⁴ Susan Abbott, Abbott Research & Consulting, "Co-creation and Fashion Brands", *Customer Experience Crossroads*, (2007), http://www.customercrossroads.com/customercrossroads/2007/04/cocreation_and.html
Centre for Design Innovation, "Archive for 'Co-creation'", (2007), <http://www.designinnovation.ie/blog/?cat=42>
John Bell, "Co-Creation", *Digital Influence Mapping Project*, (2006-2008), <http://johnbell.typepad.com/weblog/cocreation/index.html>
John Winsor, *Cultural Radar*, (2005-2007), http://www.johnwinsor.com/my_weblog/cocreation/index.html
Jennifer Rice, "Co-Creation", *What's Your Brand Mantra?* <http://brand.blogs.com/mantra/2006/05/cocreation.html>

⁵⁵ Jennifer Rice, "Co-Creation", *What's Your Brand Mantra?* <http://brand.blogs.com/mantra/2006/05/cocreation.html>

through the process of sewing. This project, with its focus on co-creation, must therefore ensure that consumer participation is recycled back into the product development. The creation and participation of a community, enabled by the cyclical nature of the system, is very important.

The terms co-authorship and co-creation refer to, respectively, designers working with other designers and to designers working with an audience. Care must also be taken here to distinguish between mass-customisation and co-creation. The former is performed by large companies with a strong brand image, and as such the choices and options they offer their consumers have strict parameters so that the products do not lose their brand identity, and so that the brand image does not get mangled through the design of the product. Co-creation, however, is much closer to an equal partnership. The problem with this lies in the need for the designer to develop and maintain some degree of ownership or brand recognition in the ensuing product, and to thus enable continued business. As Hertz so elegantly explains, "let a thousand flowers bloom, as long as they sprout in our garden".⁵⁶ Co-creation is not simply a trend but rather a way of approaching the producer-consumer relationship that acknowledges postmodern consumers' desire to stress their intelligence and penchant for innovation. Each of the six following companies have used elements or varying degrees of co-creation. Ultimately they all offer their consumer the opportunity to participate in creative processes related in some significant way to their product.

⁵⁶ JC Herz, "Harnessing the Hive," in *Creative Industries*, ed. John Hartley, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 328.

Issey Miyake

Designer Issey Miyake understands the importance of process. “One of the problems with ‘making things’ is that the process is always on-going, in a state of ‘becoming’ and you can never say, ‘Good, let’s leave it like that!’ The work is never finished”.⁵⁷ Despite the negative slant that this statement takes, Miyake is clearly concerned more thoroughly with the processes of creation or re-creation than with perfection of the completed product. That is not to say that his garments are not beautifully constructed or presented, but rather that the importance does not lie in the completion of the construction or presentation but rather in the participation in the transformation.

Issey Miyake’s *A-POC* collections use a technique where a tube of machine-knitted fabric is designed to enable a garment, or even an entire wardrobe, to be created from it by the consumer. Without the need for traditional seams to hold it together, the marked lines simply need to be cut to create different garments. Although instructions are supplied, there is some leeway given to the consumer to make their own decisions about details such as sleeve length and neckline shape. The *A-POC* products allow the consumer to engage in both decision-making and the process of re-creation. Miyake is particularly aware of this aspect of his work, of encouraging the re-creation of his garments through their design, “I would...like those who wear my clothes to feel free to adapt them

⁵⁷ Miyake quoted in Herve Chandès, ed., *Issey Miyake. Making Things*, (Zurich: Scalo, 1999), 113.

and recreate them in their own way”.⁵⁸ Although referring to clothes in this instance, this is still valid when looking at the *A-POC* series. Admittedly the *A-POC* product is not clothing, but neither is it simply fabric and instructions. The outline of each garment piece has been knitted into the fabric so that although the consumer is buying a length of fabric, that fabric is already some way towards its transformation into a set of garments. There is a limit to the alterations that can be made to the garments by the consumer in the *A-POC* series, as the form-fitting nature of the knit fabric combined with the allowance of creating new holes (but not new seams) creates a kind of sameness shared by each outfit. The knit fabrics have been cut to fall over the body in a simple and classic shape. I suspect this can be attributed to the use of knit fabrics as Miyake has not been known to shy away from volume. This quality of knit fabric, to fall around and fit the body in a classic way almost by default, is an issue that I faced during my own design process and is discussed further in a later chapter.

By providing the fabric, pre-knitting the garment seams, and writing instructions with diagrams Miyake has created parameters for his consumer, and thus retains some control of the outcome. The high fashion status of the Issey Miyake brand offers the consumer the seemingly privileged opportunity to participate in the creation of ‘a Miyake’. This adds greater perceived value for the consumer as well as fostering a feeling of belonging or of brand familiarity, and this in turn nurtures brand loyalty. Miyake has kept creative control of his designs to the degree that, although allowing some measure

⁵⁸ Miyake quoted in Herve Chandès, ed., *Issey Miyake. Making Things*, (Zurich: Scalo, 1999), 108.

of alteration, they are still recognisable as his original designs. However, although Miyake has succeeded in keeping his status as designer firmly intact, I do not believe he has given the consumer sufficient room to re-create. The alterations that can be made are relatively superficial, and consequently the overall shape or style of the garment would be difficult to customise. Further, technically I would call *A-POC* a project in customisation rather than co-creation due to the fact that the re-creations are not cycled back into the *A-POC* system.

Julian & Sophie School of Pattern Cutting

Designers Julian Roberts and Sophie Cheung have established a system of pattern cutting that reduces clothing down to a basic condition - a tube through which the body passes. This system uses logical and non-traditional techniques to create garments. The logic of the system is made quite clear through the diagrammatic explanations of the processes. If the garment is simply a tube through which the body passes, then it must have entrances and exits. As long as this 'rule' is followed then a garment can be created. However, between the entrance and exit is a whole area of fabric and space that can be manipulated to create different shapes and passages for the body.

The tutorial, which can be found free on their website⁵⁹, explains 'the basics' as well as the three techniques – the 'tunnel technique', the 'displacement technique' and the 'plug technique'. 'The basics' describes how patterns can be created by combining front, back, and aerial views of traditional garment shapes. Such a step immediately negates traditional methods and promises unconventional garment shapes, and provided that the rule regarding entrances and exits is observed, assures a workable garment. The 'tunnel technique' involves the rolling or concertina-ing of the fabric tube followed by the cutting and sewing of entrances and exits throughout. When placed on the body the fabric, affected by gravity and the shape of the body, contorts and

⁵⁹ Julian Roberts and Sophie Cheung, "Julian & Sophie School of Pattern Cutting," <http://www.blowpr.co.uk/JULIANandSOPHIEsite/school/basics/index.htm>

distorts to create a unique garment. Figures 11-14 show my own exploration of this technique.

The 'displacement technique' requires the use of a traditional bodice shape. The front and back bodices are sewn to opposite ends and sides of a large piece of fabric with a hole in the middle that is large enough for the body. One bodice is then rotated through the hole any number of times and then sewn to its mate along the shoulder and side seams. This technique creates a greater distortion around the body than the previous technique, as the more the fabric is twisted the greater the deformation of the garment. My own attempt is shown in figures 15-18.

The previous two techniques greatly affected the distortion and overall shape of the garment. The 'plug technique', in comparison, keeps its traditional garment shape relatively intact. Extra fabric is added to the garment to move it into the unconventional. The 'rule' for this technique is that a fabric hole (the negative) and fabric piece (the positive) will always be able to be sewn together regardless of their shape and size, provided that their perimeter's are the same (taking into account the seam allowance). This results in garments that appear to have growth-like bunching and draping of fabric erupting from various sites on the garment. I used the 'plug technique' to develop the garments in figures 19-22.



Fig.11 *Julian & Sophie Test* Tunnel Technique, View A



Fig.12 *Julian & Sophie Test* Tunnel Technique, View B



Fig.13 *Julian & Sophie Test* Tunnel Technique, View C



Fig.14 *Julian & Sophie Test* Tunnel Technique, View D



Fig.15 *Julian & Sophie Test* Displacement Technique, View A



Fig.16 *Julian & Sophie Test* Displacement Technique, View B



Fig.17 *Julian & Sophie* Displacement Technique, View C



Fig.18 *Julian & Sophie* Displacement Technique, View D



Fig.19 *Julian & Sophie Test* Plug Technique, View A



Fig.20 *Julian & Sophie Test* Plug Technique, View B



Fig.21 *Julian & Sophie Test* Plug Technique, View C



Fig.22 *Julian & Sophie Test* Plug Technique, View D

Roberts and Cheung do not see the inexperience of amateur sewers as a weakness. They go as far as to state in 'the basics', "Being amateur is always an advantage"⁶⁰, and it is this I believe that is the greatest strength of their project. Not only do they acknowledge the value of improvisation but they have gone as far as to have designed a system that is thoroughly non-elitist. The use of casual handwritten explanations and doodle-like diagrams are a far cry from the traditional instructive nature of most sewing tutorials. They are clearly focussed on the process of creating the garment rather than in the resulting appearance. As Roberts states, "It's more like a story which unfolds in stages, ending up in a garment".⁶¹ The process by its very nature requires creative input from the individual, and this is further encouraged by the designers through the explanation of the basic principals of the three techniques rather than the description of instructions for a specific outcome. The audience is also encouraged to use their own bodies directly for measurements and for deriving pattern shapes, which emphasises the experience of the process.

Surprisingly, although a considerable amount of choice is available to their audience, the designers have still managed to ensure that the garments that are created all retain a similar look. Through publicity they have succeeded in publicly associating that look with their brand and therefore do not relinquish perceived authorship of the garments entirely to the audience. This appears to be the most difficult aspect of designing a co-created product, to offer the

⁶⁰ Julian Roberts and Sophie Cheung, "Julian & Sophie School of Pattern Cutting," <http://www.blowpr.co.uk/JULIANandSOPHIEsite/school/basics/pages/intro7.htm>

⁶¹ Julian Roberts and Sophie Cheung, "Julian & Sophie School of Pattern Cutting," <http://www.blowpr.co.uk/JULIANandSOPHIEsite/school/basics/pages/intro7.htm>

consumer considerably free reign while retaining your own status as designer. Roberts and Cheung have succeeded by ensuring that their processes were designed to create garments that embodied the Julian & Sophie aesthetic.

The Julian & Sophie project exists somewhere between customisation and co-creation. Although the designers call for the submission of images of their audience's garments, it is not clear whether these have been influential in amending the current processes or in designing new ones. Further, considering that the product recognition and designer status is dependent on the aesthetic of the garments, they would find it difficult to refresh the aesthetic seasonally without significantly changing it.

StyleShake

The StyleShake⁶² e-store and community is run by CEO and founder Iris Ben David and Creative Director Romina Karamanea. Together they have created a website that offers its members the opportunity to design their own dresses as well as the venue to display them. On entering the 'design studio' the consumer is prompted to choose a fabric from a range of colours and fibres, they are then directed to a tool that allows them to select their preference for each part of the garment. As parts such as the 'upper bodice', 'sleeves', 'lower bodice' and 'skirt' are selected they are built onto a virtual mannequin. Unfortunately, like an electronic paper doll the 'clothes' sit stiffly on the body. This would be less of an issue if one could distinguish between the cotton and silk fabrics which would undoubtedly drape in different ways but which, on screen, are identical (see figure 23). This sameness is present throughout the dress designs. Although the website claims to offer more than one thousand dress variations,⁶³ one cannot find two designs that feel unrelated. It is possible that this is a deliberate move by StyleShake to retain a fraction of their own aesthetic in the designs, or it may be that each season new styles will replace or be added to these current ones. No doubt there are limitations to the styles that can be offered as each dress must be made separately – this is a bespoke service – and especially elaborate or detailed designs may not be realistic at this stage.

⁶² StyleShake, <http://www.stylesshake.com/user/>

⁶³ StyleShake, <http://www.stylesshake.com/user/>



Fig.23 *StyleShake* Virtual Mannequin, Cotton Dress (left) & Silk Dress (right)

The most impressive aspect of StyleShake is their focus on the StyleShake community. There is no limit to the number of dresses that a member can design and each can be named and saved under their username with no obligation to buy. All dresses are added immediately to the gallery where everyone is free to browse for ideas or to buy. Although there is no 'cut' paid to the designing-consumer if someone else buys their dress, a voting and comment system ensures that the most popular dresses are displayed on the main StyleShake page. In the future they plan to add a feature that allows individuals to open their own shops within the StyleShake community where dresses designed on StyleShake can be sold by producing-consumers who will get a cut of the profit from each sale.⁶⁴ StyleShake encourage suggestions not just for the website, but also for the improvement of the designs, and this is what makes this company an excellent example of garment co-creation utilising technology and community.

⁶⁴ Mike Butcher, "Styleshake Turns Women into Fashion Designers," *Tech Crunch*, (2007), <http://uk.techcrunch.com/2007/10/12/styleshake-turns-women-into-fashion-designers/>

Burda Style

Burda Style⁶⁵ is another website that is focussed on fostering an online community. Burda have released their patterns online free of copyright which offers their audience the opportunity to develop their own designs using the patterns and to then use the website to sell those designs as patterns or garments. One can download the patterns free from the website and then either print them at home or at a copy centre. The community functions around the sharing of sewing knowledge and discussion of sewing problems as well as the display of members' creations. The 'Sewpedia' offers definitions for terms related to sewing and fashion and can be added to by any member, while chat forums host various discussions about sewing issues, ideas and problems. Like StyleShake, Burda Style has developed a successful online community to surround their product. However, where StyleShake has a fashion design focus, Burda Style has a focus on hands-on sewing and making. My own project attempts to combine both aspects.

⁶⁵ Burda Style, <http://www.burdastyle.com/>

Threadless & Ponoko

Threadless⁶⁶ is a T-shirt e-store run by Jake Nickell and Jacob DeHart. DeHart describes the company as “an on-going T-shirt design competition”,⁶⁷ which makes its community aspect paramount to its success. The site works by allowing members to design their own T-shirts using a template supplied by Threadless. The designs are posted on the site for one week and during that time members can rank their liking of each T-shirt from 1 to 5. At the end of each week the results are analysed and a small number of shirts are chosen for printing with the designers of the chosen designs receiving a monetary reward. Although this system seems to work very well for Nickell and DeHart as the owners of Threadless, and the constant competitive nature of the process fosters innovation, most of the consumers are still buying products that were designed by someone else. This system lacks the hands-on physicality of ‘making’ that produces a unique item that can be treasured and presented with pride, and thoroughly involves one in creative process. The satisfaction to be gained from using one’s hands should not be underestimated. This system does however give Nickell and DeHart creative control over their product and brand image, despite not actually designing the products themselves. They achieve this by screening the designs as they are submitted. Unlike StyleShake where all submitted designs are posted in the gallery, not all T-shirt submissions make it to the gallery on Threadless. This ensures that a high quality of designs is

⁶⁶ Threadless, <http://www.threadless.com/>

⁶⁷ Dehart, cited in Michael Zhang, “Interview with Threadless”, *Folksonomy*, (2006), http://www.folksonomy.org/2006/09/interview_with_threadless.html

maintained and that the gallery does not become too full to browse comfortably. There is no online design tool on the Threadless website, instead Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator templates are supplied for download. Unfortunately this greatly restricts the number of people that can participate as they require both the software and the skills to use it. The Ponoko⁶⁸ website uses a similar system. It offers templates for design software which designers can download and then use to develop their own designs ranging from jewellery to furniture. Ponoko uses a network of manufacturers to enable the production of the designers' work which the designers can then sell through the Ponoko website.

⁶⁸ Ponoko, <http://www.ponoko.com/about/thebigidea>

Conclusion

Each of the six preceding companies has successfully challenged the traditional producer-consumer relationship. Issey Miyake offers a product that can be customised through restricted processes of making to produce a garment that has a shared narrative with the consumer. The strength of this system is that Miyake keeps control of the process and his status as designer remains unchallenged. In comparison, Julian & Sophie's method ensures that their aesthetic is re-created by the maker but in a more subtle manner. Their process is designed so that although every time it is performed it will create a different garment, each of those garments will have a similar aesthetic, and it is the aesthetic that Julian & Sophie ensure is publicised as their own. The last four examples have built an online community around their product to the degree that the community is an integral part of the system. StyleShake offers an online tool for designing bespoke dresses which can then be critiqued and bought by others. Burda Style's online community uses Burda's patterns to develop new creations with a strong emphasis on discussion and hands-on making. Threadless is more elitist in that designs are submitted by people who are already skilled designers and are put through a screening process before they are presented to the community for voting. What this does achieve is a very competitive and innovative environment resulting in high quality product. The most challenging aspect of combining the best characteristics of each of these systems is to acknowledge the importance and contribution of the consumer and encourage them to participate in creative process with the product without relinquishing the status of the designer.

Design Development & **The Knowledge Network**

The co-creation system that I have developed for this thesis is a cyclical knowledge network that begins initially with the designer but becomes a recurring process. The designer creates a kit which takes the form of a website. The kit is used to inspire a short movie. The movie is posted on YouTube⁶⁹ which collects viewers directing them to the website, and generates feedback and publicity. The YouTube video is linked to the Bebo profile which works to gather and grow an audience and to direct them to the website. The website is designed to be the base of the kit's community and the way the community responds to it inspires and informs the development of the next kit by the designer.

⁶⁹ YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/>

The Designer

As the designer, my own system begins with the selection of a seasonal theme. The theme is chosen on the basis that it allows ample opportunity for development by both the designer and the consumer. This project began by using knots as a theme, by which I mean the manipulation of fabric to create knots, braids, and weaving. This choice was carefully considered and was selected for a number of reasons. Firstly, knotting is an easily learnt and widely held skill on which there have been published many books and websites, thus offering an even larger source of inspiration than I as the designer could provide to my consumer. This allows greater scope for the consumer to grow beyond the confines of the kit. Although, as I have explained previously, the kit would be designed to suggest rather than to instruct, the reality of a kit is that it cannot be completely free of borders. Thus this is overcome by ensuring that the kit is not a completely closed entity.

Secondly, the nature of knots to join and manipulate fabric in interesting ways offers many possibilities for the maker to forgo the use of traditional and often difficult garment closures such as zips and buttons. The use of traditional techniques requires practised skill and attention to detail which takes much time to perfect. Also, reducing the emphasis on traditional techniques encourages the consumer to pay more attention to how the fabric relates to the body as well as to how the fabric behaves when affected by gravity and movement. Thirdly, through aesthetic experimentation with knotting of fabric I was able to develop my own techniques for

creating and controlling fullness, joining fabric pieces, and contouring the garment to the body.⁷⁰ These work with the logic of fabric and the body. I found that different types of knots tended to be more successful when dealing with different parts of the garment. Singular knots gathered fabric into a singular point creating an area of suppression and thus allowing the fabric to be contoured around the body (figure 24). Plaits were especially useful in their ability to gather fabric along an edge or to act as straps, belts or ties (figure 25). Braids (flat plaits) or weaving enabled the creation of a new fabric out of strips (figure 26). I focussed on the differences between these three main knot 'types', but the range of knots possible within each of these groups was not thoroughly explored. Considering the enormous number of knots that exist, such a task was beyond the limits of this project. However, due to the unrestrictive nature of this kit it is an aspect that can be investigated by the sewer.

Another theme that could work successfully is beading – both conventional and unconventional uses of beads in creating garments. These could include simple embellishments, beads being enclosed in parts of the fabric to create distortion, or even entire fabrics being created out of beads. This would use limited traditional sewing techniques but at the same time would offer a plethora of possibilities for garment design.

⁷⁰ Images and detailed descriptions of these can be found on the website, <http://www.notwhat.co.nz>, under 'processes'.



Fig.24 *Singular Knot*



Fig.25 *Plaiting*



Fig.26 Weaving

The design processes engaged in by amateurs are quite different from those of the professional, with improvisation and appropriation being paramount to the process.⁷¹ Herein lies the strength of the amateur who will often make alterations or major decisions about their design on the spur of, or indeed in the middle of, the moment. Such organic or impulsive design produces unforeseen opportunities and should be seen as a strength. Pressing professional standards of knowledge, technique, and discipline onto amateur sewers inflates the importance of the end product while stifling experimentation and improvisation.

This project focussed on one garment type to allow a thorough exploration into design and improvisational techniques. Dresses offered a large area of fabric which allowed for greater scope in fabric manipulations. The dresses were developed by draping various fabrics onto a dress form and using the researched knotting techniques to inform the style and silhouette of the garments. The draping process began with one or two large rectangles of fabric and with the selection of various points on the body for possible emphasis; the fabric was then manipulated using the knotting techniques to create the form of the dress. I found that even as I draped, more opportunities for knotting presented themselves.

Experimenting with different types and weights of fabric produced different results and difficulties. Knit fabric, due to its flexibility, allowed the garment to fit the body without the use of traditional suppression techniques such as darts or tucks, as well as

⁷¹ Roni Brown, "The Producing-Consumer: The Self-Designed and Made Domestic Space," in *Passion, Play and the Everyday: Oral History and the Consumer Society Oral History Society Conference* (Sheffield, UK, 2006), 7.

successfully preventing the knots from slipping. Knit fabrics were also more forgiving to imperfect sewing, quick to seam with an overlocker, and rendered hemming unnecessary – characteristics beneficial to the amateur sewer. Woven fabric, however, was beautifully sculptural offering many more variations on form and silhouette when manipulated with knots. As such, using woven fabrics avoided the default Grecian or classical styles of the knit dresses. Although these were perfectly legitimate as designs and beautiful on the body, it was necessary to explore the use of woven fabrics to observe the effect of the process on fabrics with a firmer handle.

The Designs



Fig.27 *Designs* Black Knit Dress, View A



Fig.28 *Designs* Black Knit Dress, View B



Fig.29 *Designs* Black Knit Dress, View C



Fig.30 *Designs* Black Knit Dress, View D



Fig.31 *Designs* Blanket Dress, View A



Fig.32 *Designs* Blanket Dress, View B



Fig.33 *Designs* Blanket Dress, View C



Fig.34 *Designs* Blanket Dress, View D



Fig.35 *Designs* Cream Wool Dress, View A



Fig.36 *Designs* White Wool Dress, View B



Fig.37 *Designs* White Wool Dress, View C



Fig.38 *Designs* Black Cotton Dress, View A



Fig.39 *Designs* Black Cotton Dress, View B



Fig.40 *Designs* Black Cotton Dress, View C



Fig.41 *Designs* Pink Knit Dress, View A



Fig.42 *Designs* Pink Knit Dress, View B



Fig.43 *Designs* Pink Knit Dress, View C



Fig.44 *Designs* Pink Knit Dress, View D



Fig.45 *Designs* White Knit Dress, View A



Fig.46 *Designs* White Knit Dress, View B



Fig.47 *Designs* White Knit Dress, View C



Fig.48 *Designs* White Knit Dress, View D



Fig.49 *Designs* Black Plait Dress, View A



Fig.50 *Designs* Black Plait Dress, View B



Fig.51 *Designs* Black Plait Dress, View C



Fig.52 *Designs* Black Plait Dress, View D



Fig.53 *Designs* Pink Faux Suede Dress, View A



Fig.54 *Designs* Pink Faux Suede Dress, View B



Fig.55 *Designs* Pink Faux Suede Dress, View C



Fig.56 *Designs* Pink Faux Suede Dress, View D

The Website

Following the development of the dresses is the design of the website. This step was originally conceived as a physical flipbook that was intended to inspire consumers to create their own garments by suggesting ideas through photographic images. Aiming to inspire rather than direct, the initial flipbook offered no instructions; instead images of details were accompanied by short descriptions of the techniques. To investigate how the flipbook might be utilised by a consumer a casual trial was organised and filmed. A room was set up with a domestic sewing machine, a three and four thread overlocker, a couch, a full-length mirror, and a wooden chest filled with sewing paraphernalia such as fabrics, tools, and notions. The environment was designed to create a feeling of being at home or in a student flat where the test subject could feel relaxed and uninhibited. The subject, a photography student with minimal sewing knowledge, was invited into the sewing room which had been assembled in her own flat, and given the flipbook as inspiration. The flipbook featured six different dress designs that had been developed during 'The Designer' phase. Each design required one whole page which was split into sections showing various details of the dress (figure 57). The pages were cut into sections so that each could be turned separately with the intention being that this would encourage the subject to mix and match details to create her own design. As each of the six dresses was quite significantly different in structure, details could not be swapped exactly between dresses and this served to further encourage the sewer to improvise and make stylistic and creative decisions.

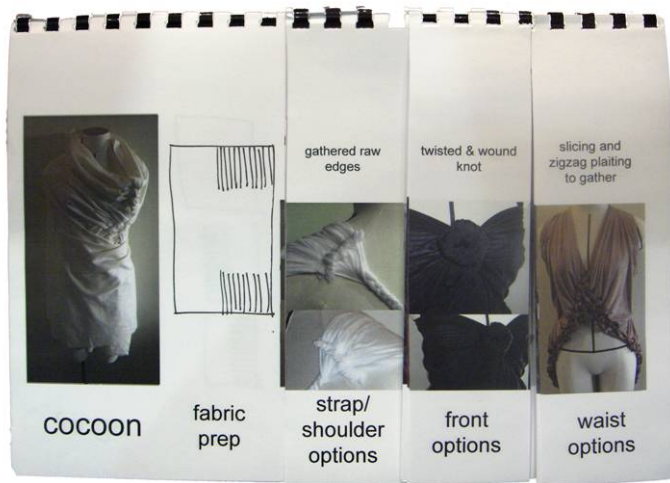


Fig.57 Flipbook Multiple Options

Although the flipbook referred to few traditional techniques beyond seaming and gathering, the subject nonetheless adopted the use of traditional darts as well as pins and a measuring tape. It is clear that the subject entered the trial with pre-conceived perceptions of home sewing. As the flipbook did not offer any substantial replacement for those default techniques and processes, the whole trial was not as free and open to experience and process as it could have been. The setup of the room may have encouraged this by providing those traditional tools. If those tools had not been supplied then the subject would have been forced to improvise. Likewise, by focussing on the promise of the finished garment the subject felt pressured to use the traditional dart technique in order to create the dress she had imagined. The result was ill-fitting, being too tight around the bust and too loose around the waist. Although she expressed a thorough enjoyment at the experience of creating the dress, she was unwilling to actually wear it. I believe that this is not due to the lack of direction, but rather due to the failure to fully embrace an alternative, non-traditional garment re-creation process.

It became clear at this stage that the flipbook needed to offer the consumer more than briefly annotated images. The kit could still offer a larger amount of information without *instructing* the consumer, but that information had to be explanations and descriptions of new techniques and processes that consumers could use to replace the traditional 'default' processes. The physically bound paper flipbook was inadequate for this job. The most logical and desirable option for advancing the flipbook was to develop it into an interactive website. Once Bebo was utilised to

begin to assemble a community around the kit, the website would provide that community with a home.

The Movie

The footage that was collected from the test filming was used to develop a movie. A teaser for the upcoming season, the movie was developed to promote a new season's kit release. It aims to communicate the theme of the kit as well as to show first time viewers what the kit involves without giving out too much information. The regular release of short movies based on the use of the kits has the potential to become highly anticipated by the product's community, and could be expanded into short instalments of ongoing storylines or themes. As the movie can be re-approached at the release of each new kit, this method could successfully generate and retain consumers' interest.

Social Networking & Community

As I have discussed earlier, the creation of a community that is integral to the product is paramount in co-creation. Therefore the next step in my system was to develop and maintain identities on the social networking websites YouTube and Bebo. Posting the movie on YouTube makes it available to an enormous number of potential consumers while recording the numbers of times the movie is viewed. YouTube members can add comments and ratings to share their thoughts on the movie. The Bebo identity is more in-depth in that it allows you to create an entire profile using skins, photos, and applications. The value in using these networks, despite the traditional advertising, is in the number of members you can compel to accept you as a 'friend', or ideally, request that you add *them* as a 'friend'. Once a 'friend', they are notified of any changes you make to your page which gives you the opportunity to frequently but subtly remind them that you exist. Setting up a Bebo profile for this project offers the opportunity for an immediate audience with which to interact with. By directing that audience to the kit website via the Bebo page a community can begin to form.

The Fulfilment of Self

Although mostly concerned with the postmodern self, I have found late modern theories of the reflexive re-creation of self to also be relevant. My research has therefore attempted to negotiate a co-existence of the two, an aim that is ongoing.

Sontag and Schlater stated that “Clothing projects organised image of self and is used to establish and validate one’s self.”⁷² However, if the self that is being communicated during the seeking of validation and acceptance has been adopted rather than adapted, then how can validation offer real security of self? The self becomes a concealed phenomenon, unable to grow and develop reflexively as it shrinks from social life.⁷³ Giddens refers to such an individual as suffering from the fragmentation of self, explaining that by taking clues from their cultural surroundings they become whatever those around them appear to be. As such, the “false self overrides and blankets out the original acts of thinking, feeling, and willing which represent the true motivations of the individual”.⁷⁴ Labelling these falsities “pseudo-selves” he explains that they cannot truly replace the ‘authentic’ self due to their heavy reliance

⁷² M. Suzanne Sontag and Jean Davis Schlater, "Proximity of Clothing to Self: Evolution of a Concept," *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 1, no. 1 (1982), 1-8, cited by Usha Chowdhary, "Self, appearance, and clothing," in *The concept of self in psychology*, ed. Anne P. Prescott (New York: Nova Publishers, 2006), 157.

⁷³ Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity* (UK: Polity Press, 1991), 191.

⁷⁴ Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity* (UK: Polity Press, 1991), 91.

on substantiation by others.⁷⁵ These pseudo-selves are like characters, which the individual pretends to be in their quest to belong. In general such role-playing, as Crane describes it, is enabled through the act of consumption, and thus the individual's desire to be accepted is utilised by companies who constantly produce goods that satisfy them only for a short time.⁷⁶ They then seek out new products, which the companies are only too happy to provide.

"The project of the self becomes translated into one of the possession of desired goods and the pursuit of artificially framed styles of life...The consumption of ever-novel goods becomes in some part a substitute for the genuine development of self."⁷⁷

The consumption of fashionable clothing is unsurprisingly used by individuals in an attempt to express self. However, I believe that this expression of self is not as beneficial as it might sound. Instead, I wanted to incorporate fashion and its ability to validate into a system that encourages the adaptation of fashion through creative process thus creating a narrative involving both the individual and their garment. The idea of the self as a narrative identity pertains to the idea of the individual as author of his or her own self and on a larger scale, his or her own life.⁷⁸ I am drawn to this theory, as I am

⁷⁵ Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity* (UK: Polity Press, 1991), 191.

⁷⁶ Diana Crane, *Fashion and Its Social Agendas: Class, Gender, and Identity in Clothing* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 11.

⁷⁷ Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity* (UK: Polity Press, 1991), 198.

⁷⁸ Diana Crane, *Fashion and Its Social Agendas. Class, Gender, and Identity in Clothing*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 10, and Roni Brown, "The Producing-Consumer: The Self-Designed and Made Domestic Space," in *Passion, Play and the Everyday: Oral History and the Consumer Society Oral History Society Conference* (Sheffield, UK, 2006), 3.

sure many others are, because of the sense of control that it offers. Accepting that the self is reflexive, constantly changing over time in a process of becoming but never having actually become, rather than existing in a fixed state, offers the opportunity and power of control over one's own self and life. Authorship through creative process and construction of narrative ensures that the garment is an expression of the individual's self. "Choice is a form of self-expression, as people can make their preferences and values overt and observable through choice".⁷⁹ Thus it is through choice that we can change fashion from a system of adoption to one of adaptation.

⁷⁹ Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity* (UK: Polity Press, 1991), 328.

Conclusion

By developing a knowledge network that is built on co-creation, this project has aimed to explore the notion of fulfilling the self through the process of re-creation. Taking into account late modern theories of reflexive self formation and postmodern theories of a fragmented self it has attempted to show that the fulfilment of self is possible through the process of re-creation. Combining the accessible, instantaneous medium of the internet with the hands-on aspect of creative process allows this network to offer the postmodern individual the beneficial experience of developing a shared narrative with their garments. Due to the cyclical structure of the network both the designer and the individuals who make up the kit's online community benefit from the symbiotic relationship. Its repeatability will allow it to grow and evolve as it gathers in an increasing and ever-changing audience of individuals who will create an online community whose garments and lives are rich with experience.

Images

- Figure 1 Drawn by Jenny Deonarain, 2006.
- Figures 2-10 Photographed by Jenny Deonarain, 2006.
- Figures 11-22 Photographed by Jenny Deonarain, 2007.
- Figure 23 Image created by Jenny Deonarain using the online design tool in the StyleShake Design Studio, 2008, <http://www.stylesshake.com/user/Studio.aspx?id=58>
- Figures 24-57 Photographed by Jenny Deonarain, 2007.

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