



Visible Mending, Street Stitching and Embroidered Handkerchiefs: How Craftivism is Being Used to Challenge the Fashion Industry

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Abstract

The contemporary practice of ‘craftivism’—which uses crafts such as knitting, sewing and embroidery to draw attention to ‘issues of social, political and environmental justice’ (Fitzpatrick 2018: 3)—has its origins in centuries of radical craft work where women and marginalised peoples, in particular, have employed crafts to protest, take a stand or comment on issues that concern them. Recently, craftivist actions have targeted the fashion and textile industry in an effort to highlight and address some of the social and environmental impacts of the global fashion industry, from the throwaway culture of fast fashion through to the unethical pay and working conditions of ready-made garment workers. Drawing on examples of both individual and collective forms of craftivism, this paper explores the ways that craftivism is being deployed not only as a means by which to mobilise the ethical use, consumption and production of fashion and textiles across the globe but also to hold the fashion industry to account against key concerns highlighted by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. In canvassing these examples, the paper considers the utility of craftivism as a model for challenging the fashion industry to effect change.

Keywords

Craftivism; gentle activism; anti-consumerism; craft washing; mending.

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Introduction

In recent years, the fashion and textile industry has come under intense scrutiny, in large part due to high-profile industrial disasters such as the Rana Plaza collapse of 2013, which ‘shone a spotlight on the underbelly of the global fashion business’ and its detrimental social and environmental impacts (Rahman and Yadlapalli 2021). While many of the concerns that were brought to light as a result of this event are yet to be fully addressed, *The State of Fashion Report 2021* (McKinsey & Company 2020) has noted that the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic—during which fashion industry profits plummeted by up to 90%—and growing consumer awareness of the treatment of garment workers and the importance of sustainability are putting further pressure on those within the industry to confront changing consumer expectations and values. For example, the #PayUp campaign (Clean Clothes Campaign n.d.) that emerged in 2020 in response to the failure of several high-profile fashion brands to pay for stock when the pandemic hit is but one of several citizen-led movements that aim to hold the industry to account on social justice and human rights fronts.

One particular category of activists who are increasingly engaging with the environmental, social and human rights concerns generated by the fashion industry are craftivists, who use crafts such as sewing, knitting and embroidery to start conversations, raise awareness and protest injustices. Craftivist acts are being used to advocate for change surrounding the ethical use, consumption and production of fashion and textiles, aligning with the broader imperatives of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5 (to ‘achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls’); SDG 8 (to ‘promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all’); SDG 12 (to ‘ensure responsible consumption and production patterns’); and SDG 13 (to ‘take urgent actions to combat climate change and its impacts’) (United Nations 2015: 14). But in what ways is craftivism being deployed, and to what ends?

This paper examines the different ways that craftivism is being used to protest the environmental and human rights concerns of the fashion industry. First, it provides a brief overview of some of the key criticisms that have been levelled against the fashion and textile industry, outlining the primary environmental and human harms that have been identified and the context in which such concerns have arisen. Second, it defines the concept of craftivism and elaborates on the social, political and environmental concerns that are of interest to craftivists before explaining how craftivism is understood in this paper as a practice that operates at three different, but interconnected, levels of action: personal, community and political. Described in this paper as the *logics* of craftivism, we use this framework to delineate the dimensions and tools of craftivism and unpack how these are employed. Third, through the logics of craftivism, we identify and categorise some of the ways that craftivists are engaging in actions targeting the fashion industry. By detailing how actions on the personal, community and political levels are being deployed by craftivists to approach and engage with their fashion-related concerns, we highlight the ways that fashion craftivism manifests in everyday forms of resistance (de Certeau 1984/1998), as well as larger-scale, organised political campaigns. Finally, the paper reflects on some of the critiques of craftivism to consider whether this particular brand of activism has the capacity to bring about real change in the industry.

Concerns Regarding the Fashion and Textile Industry

As noted in the introduction, the fashion industry has come under increasing scrutiny in recent years, leading many to reflect on their relationship with, and consumption of, fashion and textiles in their everyday lives. The human costs and harms, as well as the environmental damage attributed to the industry (Barber 2021), have forced ethical consumers to acknowledge that their love of fast fashion comes with serious consequences for people and the planet. Such concerns come off the back of greater public attention being drawn to the impacts of climate change and larger questions about capitalism and inequality which have been further illuminated in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

For decades, fashion manufacturers have been accused of exploiting their workers by paying unfair wages, exposing them to unsafe working conditions, overlooking occupation health and safety requirements and not fulfilling labour rights, including freedom of association, the right to organise and collective bargaining (Ross 1997). While these issues are endemic to fashion and textile manufacturing in the Global North and the Global South, according to writer and stylist Aja Barber, colonisation is core to the problems within the fashion industry. As writer, activist and founder of the Slow Factory Foundation, Céline Semaan (cited in Barber 2021: 58) notes, ‘colonialism is at its root a question of exploiting across geographies. Its roots are in setting up colonies to extract resources and labor’.

Further, the huge environmental impact of the fashion industry at all phases of the trade has also been recognised as problematic (Fletcher 2014; Muthu 2020). For example, during production, the wastewater and chemical processes associated with manufacturing have been shown to be both wasteful and damaging (Khan and Malik 2014). Throughout the life of the garment, several issues have also been identified, including microplastic pollution (Liu et al. 2021). At the end of the product’s life, there also occur several challenges. The use of non-recyclable fibres is commonplace in fast fashion, with most products made of mixed yarn, which prove difficult (and, in most cases, impossible) to recycle (Kumar et al. 2020). Second-hand clothing also often ends up in landfill, with the Ellen Macarthur Foundation (n.d.) reporting that a staggering one garbage truck per second goes to landfill, is incinerated or is shipped offshore to developing nations, which are subsequently faced with the burden of disposing of them (Besser 2021; Foreign Correspondent 2021). As de Castro (2021: xiv) noted, ‘fashion is one of the most socially exploitative and resource-polluting industries in the world, its economic and environmental impact is vast and its capacity for cultural influence is endless’. Craftivism is one movement attempting to invert some of the detrimental impacts of this industry.

Knowledge of the environmental, social and human rights costs of the fashion industry have now entered mainstream discourse, with influential publishers such as *The Guardian* and *Vogue* recently employing an Ethical Living journalist and Sustainability Editor, respectively, to promote sustainable fashion and educate the public on the incredible damage that fast fashion is causing. Perhaps unsurprisingly, crafters themselves have also started to reflect on their own complicity as both makers and consumers, arguably leading many to use the very tools, skills and materials of the trade against the fashion industry in an attempt to craft a better future.

Defining Craftivism

The term ‘craftivism’ was coined some 20 years ago and popularised by crafter, activist and writer Betsy Greer, who used the term to identify ‘a worldwide movement that operates at the intersection of craft and activism’ (Greer 2014, n.p.). Describing craftivism as ‘a way of looking at life where voicing opinions through creativity makes your voice stronger, your compassion deeper and your quest for justice more infinite’ (Greer 2007: 401), Greer has further explained that the term—a portmanteau of the words ‘craft’ and ‘activism’—is a useful way to characterise crafting that is ‘motivated by social or political activism’ (2014: 8).

For Greer, craftivism can be expressed in a range of different ways. It can allow ‘those who wish to voice their opinions and support their causes the chance to do just that ... but without chanting or banner waving and at their own pace’ (Greer 2007: 401). It can further function to ‘aid communities and foster both strength and empowerment’ (Greer 2014: 8). Greer also pointed out that craftivism may act as a ‘political mouthpiece’, providing crafters with a way to ‘speak overtly about political change’ (Greer 2014: 103).

Greer’s definition of craftivism has evolved over time and has been adopted by other practitioners and scholars of craft(ivism), who have expanded upon (and critiqued) what the term means. For example, artist, activist and researcher Tal Fitzpatrick’s craftivism manifesto (2018) extends upon Greer’s definition, accounting for the role that digital and social media and expressions of democracy now play in acts of craftivism. As she explains:

Craftivism is both a strategy for non-violent activism and a mode of DIY citizenship that looks to influence positive social and political change. This uniquely 21st century practice involves the combination of craft techniques with elements of social and/or digital engagement as part of a proactive effort to bring attention to, or pragmatically address, issues of social, political and environmental justice. Craftivism can take the form of acts of donation, beautification, notification or be deployed for its individual capacity building and therapeutic benefits, or for its ability to strengthen social connections and enhance community resilience. (Fitzpatrick 2018: 3)

Professional activist, speaker and author Sarah Corbett, who founded the Craftivist Collective —‘an inclusive group of people committed to using thoughtful, beautiful crafted works to help themselves and encourage others be the positive change they wish to see in the world’ (Craftivist Collective n.d. a)—has combined Greer’s definition with the concept of ‘quiet activism’, defined as ‘a set of “everyday”, small-scale practices that can bring about social change’ (Warner and Inthorn 2022: 89; see also Hackney 2013) to develop her own brand of ‘gentle activism’. In her book *How to be a Craftivist* (2017: 18), Corbett described craftivism as focusing on ‘handicrafts that use slow, repetitive hand actions so that we can also use the act of crafting to meditate and think critically about the social injustice we are tackling and the strategy we need to overcome it’. Corbett (2017: 30) argued that this ‘gentle activism’ allows individuals and groups to ‘effectively protest against harmful structures, attract people to protest, and reflect on what we want our world to be, challenging injustice and harm through values of love, kindness and humility’. Like Greer, for Corbett, craftivism is evident in the process of making, as well as in the object itself.

Contemporary expressions of craftivism have been used to highlight a variety of social, environmental and political issues via a range of crafting techniques. For example, some have used knitting to protest war, such as Marianne Jorgensen’s yarn covered ‘Pink Tank’, expressing her anti-Iraq war stance (see Black and Burisch 2011); others have used quilted banners to protest nuclear weaponry, such as the women of Greenham Common (Dew 2021), or in remembrance of victims of police brutality and violence, such as the Social Justice Sewing Academy (Trail and Wong 2021). While these examples are demonstrative of some of the larger-scale, collaborative projects that employ various crafts to engage in protest and activism, craftivism is also being practised by individuals looking to make a difference. As Hackney et al. (2020: 37) noted, ‘craft that takes place in the shed, at the kitchen table or village hall have renewed potential to shape new quietly revolutionary and ethically sustainable versions of how we might live and work: our values, relationships with others and the environment’.

Drawing together these various definitions and examples of craftivism, McGovern (2019: 45–46) has proposed that craftivism can be understood as comprising three interconnected *logics* or levels of engagement or action—the personal, the community and the political (see Figure 1)—embracing the different dimensions of craftivism. While each of these logics is inherently activist in nature, the manifestation of this activism operates at different levels or objectives. The use of the term logics here is informed by Dequech’s (2008) conceptualisation of ‘logics of action’. According to Dequech (2008: 531), logics of action are ‘a set of shared and regular ways of thinking and acting’, with each logic ‘associated with a specific objective’. As McPherson and Sauder (2013: 165) have further explained, logics ‘closely resemble tools that can be creatively employed by actors to achieve individual and organizational goals’. In the context of craftivism, the personal, community and political are examples of different logics of action that actors can employ creatively to achieve particular goals or outcomes.

As McGovern (2019: 46–47) explained, the personal logic is underpinned by acts of craftivism that function at the personal or individual level. For example, cross-stitching a feminist slogan to hang in your home can be a craftivist act because it subtly subverts domestic crafting to express a personal political viewpoint, which can be understood as an act of individual resistance and empowerment. The second logic, the community logic, describes acts of craftivism that engage at the community level—that is, craftivism that seeks to raise awareness and build and activate communities on a particular issue. An example of this might be the establishment of knitting circles that meet to knit and discuss local issues and share knowledge. The third and final logic, the political logic, encompasses acts of craftivism that express

political standpoints and are focused on affecting systemic or institutional change. Craftivist acts within this logic might craft protest banners to display at a public protest that highlights the dangers of climate change, demanding government action.



Figure 1. Logics of craftivism (adapted from McGovern 2019: 46)

While these logics are articulated here as distinct categories, in practice, they overlap and intersect with one another. As Dequech (2008: 531) noted, ‘each one of us belongs to different domains at the same time’. Individuals and groups who engage in craftivism can cut across these artificial dimensional boundaries, moving between the personal, community and political logics depending on the nature of and motives underlying their craftivism practice. The fluidity of these logics can be seen in Figure 1, which depicts the different forms of craftivism and the ways in which logics of the personal, community and political imbricate.

Using these logics of craftivism as a guide to understanding and defining what ‘counts’ as craftivism, and the motivations or objectives that underpin craftivist acts, the following section examines some specific examples of how craftivism is being used to resist, contest, protest and challenge the fashion and textile industry. As will become evident in the examples highlighted, there are often multiple logics that underpin craftivist acts—that is, their intentions may be ‘overlapping, interrelated, and fluid’ (McGovern 2019: 45). However, for the sake of clarity, these examples have been categorised within each of the three broad categories of logics described above.

Craftivism Against the Fashion Industry

Although the term ‘craftivism’ only entered our lexicon in the early 2000s, crafts have been used a vehicle for protest and resistance for centuries (McGovern 2019). These histories can be linked with feminist traditions (Newmeyer 2008) as well as civil and human rights concerns (Pace 2007) and are inclusive of acts that respond to concerns about the fashion and textile industries specifically, or advocate for anti-colonial, anti-slavery and anti-capitalist movements more generally (McGovern 2019). For example, in the 1920s and 30s, lawyer and social activist Mohandas Gandhi urged his followers to craft hand-spun, handwoven cloth (khadi) on a spinning wheel (charkha) as an act of defiance against ‘the exploitive and

controlling economic and political system' of textile manufacturing that came with British colonial rule (Brown and Fee 2008: 39). In raising awareness of the impact of cloth manufacturing being moved from India to England, Gandhi's nonviolent form of protest became not only a symbol of self-reliance and Indigenous products at a time when British textile laws threatened India's independence, workforce and economy (Carpenter 2010; Rall and Costello 2010; Singhal and Greiner 2008) but also a show of defiance against colonial rule (Gonzales 2012; Sharma and Bhaduri 2019). Similarly, in the 19th century, 'the conspicuous consumption of clothing and fashion accessories' became a way for enslaved people in the US to exercise a form of resistance against 'the commodification of their labor and their lives' (Knowles 2019: 64, 71). As historian and museum curator Katie Knowles (2019: 71) explained, by demonstrating their capacity to be part of the capitalist consumer market, enslaved people sought to disrupt the social order.

Following in the footsteps of such traditions, modern craftivist acts have traversed individual, community and political logics to comment on, respond to and challenge the status quo in the fashion and textile industry. The following sections of the paper highlight some key examples of how craftivism is being used individually and collectively as both a show of resistance and a mechanism for protest. Starting with examples of personal logics that are expressed through the growth of do-it-yourself (DIY) culture and anti-capitalist, anti-consumerism craftivism movements that mobilise individuals to push back against the system, the discussion then moves to explore craftivism initiatives that operate through a community logic, aiming to raise awareness, build community and give visibility to issues identified with the fashion industry within a broader social context. The final set of examples highlight the political logic, evidenced through more strategic and coordinated craftivism campaigns that directly target policymakers, stakeholders and corporations in an attempt to effect change and transformation within the industry.

Personal Logics of Fashion Craftivism

In recent years, there has been a focus on thinking differently about how individual consumers engage with fashion. As *The State of Fashion* report noted, customers of the fashion industry are more conscious of some of the darker sides of the industry, such as the exploitation of workers and the industry's impact on the environment (McKinsey & Company 2020: 47). One manifestation of these concerns has been the trend towards individuals adopting new practices and habits that reduce their reliance on fast fashion and consumer culture. These trends see individuals using craft as a way of expressing DIY, anti-consumerist and anti-capitalist sentiments. As maker and design lecturer Stella Lange (2019: 32) has noted:

Positioning craft as part of a wearer's fashion practice, as craftivism, a deliberate activism, be it 'loud' or 'quiet,' enables a consideration of alternative fashion practices [...] that [signal] a resistance to consumerism, in an authentic, and visible way – raising questions about how things are made and how we as people (not consumers) can create and maintain our fashion.

This approach to craftivism is informed by the global Slow Movement, which initially emerged as a way of protesting the impact of fast-food companies on local, sustainable produce; and, has subsequently been adopted to challenge other industries, champion a better quality of life, more sustainable practices and stronger connections to culture and community (Wellesley-Smith 2015: 12–13; Lipson 2012). The Slow Fashion Movement, in particular, has established goals that, among other things, seek to empower individuals to change their own fashion behaviours 'to reflect a more sustainable fashion environment' (Slow Fashion Movement 2021).

This slow fashion approach has been articulated further in several books and manifestos written over the last two decades, encouraging people to take a more mindful and deliberative approach to their use and consumption of fashion and textiles. The mend, repair, re-wear and upcycle movement is one such example which has gained popularity, urging consumers to enact more deliberate, personal actions and agency to reduce their consumption and reliance on fast fashion and engage in more sustainable choices around fashion (see e.g., Brown 2013; Fulop 2020; Montenegro and Montenegro 2020; Rodabaugh 2021). For example, upcyclist fashion designer and co-founder of *Fashion Revolution* Orsola de Castro described in her book *Loved Clothes Last* (2021: xvii) how learning to make your clothes last through repair can be a

form of creative action, or craftivism, against the modern fashion industry. For de Castro (2021: xviii, xi), her book is a 'call to action to use our clothes – and the tools that make them last – as our armour, taking up mending as a revolutionary act' against mass production, mass consumption, waste and the exploitation of workers.

Similarly, the Visible Mending Movement encourages consumers to make use of their own skills to visibly resist consumer culture and make a political statement. As writer, clothes historian and mending educator Kate Sekules (2020: ix) explained, Visible Mending is a 'protest movement and an art form and a fashion statement'. In her book *Mend! A Refashioning Manual and Manifesto*, Sekules (2020: 2) introduced the practice of visible mending, a style of 'decorative repair' that 'encompasses a rebellion against the fashion status quo, a refusal to dress correctly, and thus a refusal to line the pockets of a few over-rich, white male, conscience-free titans of industry'. For Sekules, visible mending is a way of 'repairing history, healing systemic injustice, making reparations, exposing scars' (2020: ix). The manifesto not only offers an account of the history of mending but also provides readers with insight into the mending process, including the types of materials and supplies suitable to the task, detailed instructions on stitching methods and determining the mendability of garments and fabrics and different visible mending designs that can be employed.

Given broader public interest in practices that foster self-sustainability and self-sufficiency, it is little surprise that movements such as visible mending have gained currency among those concerned about their complicity in the proliferation of fast fashion. Psychologist Sarah Kuhn (2019: 241) described the activity of mending, especially when undertaken in the company of others, as 'a vehicle for activism, dissent and social critique'. After hosting mending workshops in her local community, Kuhn identified several themes that characterised this assessment, including that mending:

- gives people agency, 'providing a sense of self-efficacy seasoned with a dash of subversion'
- is sustainable, encouraging people to 'purchase well-made, high-quality clothing' because it is 'worth buying, worth mending, and worth keeping'
- is a form of anti-consumption, a way of 'protesting overconsumption and the corporations that promote it'
- is community building
- is soothing, reducing stress and promoting mindfulness
- challenges gender by being inclusive and breaking down gendered barriers through DIY culture (Kuhn 2019: 242–244).

While these approaches encourage consumers to repair, mend and upcycle their clothes to engage more sustainably with fashion and challenge models of consumerism, as environmental and social justice activist Ngozi Okaro notes, mending is something 'that communities of color have been doing [for a long time]. If you are from a community that has been shut out or deprived, then you make the most of with everything you have' (Okaro cited in Odabasi 2020: 977; see also Middleton 2015; Sekules 2020). Thus, while for some individuals, the choice to embrace the contemporary mending movement might be a deliberate craftivist act, for others, the practice has been an act of necessity and self-reliance.

Community Logics of Fashion Craftivism

Beyond movements and manifestos that empower individuals to change their own consumer behaviour and engage with more sustainable fashion choices and behaviours, other craftivist campaigns have turned their attention to raising awareness and activating the community to campaign against the fashion industry. For example, in the early 2000s, craftivist group microRevolt, founded by artist and craftivist Cat Mazza, embarked on a range of projects aimed at helping knitters create their own garments and spread an anti-consumerist message in an effort to undermine corporate branding (Rall and Costello 2010; microRevolt n.d.; McGovern 2019). While sharing some features with the aforementioned mending and upcycling movements, the participatory and performative nature of such projects—whereby attempts are

made to raise the visibility of these efforts through collaborative public events and projects—set these examples apart from the individual-level actions or personal logics discussed in the previous section.

One project initiated by microRevolt was the ‘NIKE Blanket Petition’, whereby knitters and crocheters from around the world contributed 4 x 4-inch squares that were sewn into a 15-foot-wide blanket. The blanket depicted the NIKE swoosh symbol, which microRevolt explained acted ‘as a signature for fair labor policies for NIKE garment workers’ (microRevolt n.d.). The completed project went on a global tour and ‘was also accompanied by a virtual component, which allowed visitors to the Blanket’s website to click on each square of the blanket and see the name and location of its creator’ (McGovern 2019: 23), further ‘reminding viewers to think about the workplace conditions that produce luxury and sports goods’ (Rall and Costello 2010: 94).

More recently, craftivist Suzi Warren founded the Street Stitching Movement, which is described as ‘an act of gentle disruption that demonstrates the pleasure and necessity of garment repair in areas of fast fashion chains where consumers are already thinking about replacing or adding to their wardrobe’ (Street Stitching 2021). The Movement’s main campaign is the ‘Stitch It Don’t Ditch It’ initiative. The strategy of the campaign, as explained on the Street Stitching (2021) website, is that:

People form lines of chairs along the centre of their high streets to sit and mend. Each Street Stitcher has a handmade chair-banner with the hashtag #StitchItDontDitchIt and a QR code linking to free online repair demos for anyone interested ... The action is a co-ordinated, visually-cohesive happening that takes place on the same day at the same time in dozens of towns and cities.

This campaign takes the mend/repair/upcycle trend to another level by raising awareness and encouraging others in the community to become more conscious of fast fashion trends. However, Street Stitching explicitly states that it is not a protest. Rather, the campaign labels itself as ‘an encouragement’, a demonstration of ‘what we want more of’ and ‘what we want less of’ (Street Stitching 2021). The movement has already established more than 40 ‘Stitch It Don’t Ditch It’ groups in the UK, with additional groups running across Australia, Germany, France, Sweden, Japan, the US, Canada, Mexico and Portugal.

Another recent awareness-raising campaign was the 2021 Manchester Fashion Movement #craftivismcr exhibition. Partnering with Kala Clothing, the Manchester Fashion Movement hosted an exhibition at Old Trafford Creative Space to raise awareness of the #PayUp movement during Fashion Revolution Week¹ (Bradbury 2021). Those in the Greater Manchester area were invited to craft miniature garments using scrap fabrics from patterns provided by the Movement (Manchester Fashion Movement n.d.). Creations were exhibited alongside a QR code directing people to sign up to the #PayUp campaign, initiated in March 2020 in response to the ‘the fashion industry’s decision to refuse payment for completed clothing orders heading into the COVID-19 pandemic’ (Manchester Fashion Movement n.d.).

The digital element accompanying both the Street Stitching and Manchester Fashion Movement projects is demonstrative of Fitzpatrick’s (2018: 3) point that contemporary craftivism projects typically include elements of social or digital engagement. Social and digital engagement entails several benefits. As sociologist and communications scholar Manuela Farinosi (2021: 14–16) noted in her study of the evolution of urban knitting movements, digital media helps facilitate the establishment of local and global networks; provides a mechanism to mobilise and coordinate with participants; serves as a platform to educate and disseminate the outputs of projects; and helps to articulate and reinforce collective identities, thus ‘acquiring a greater potential for collective political pressure than they could possess alone’. The ability to develop, coordinate and make visible craftivist projects in online spaces has been particularly important during the COVID-19 pandemic, while many of the usual in-person manifestations of craftivism were impossible due to various lockdowns and restrictions around the globe (see e.g., Fitzpatrick and McGovern 2021).

Political Logics of Fashion Craftivism

In addition to the collaborative projects described in the previous section, craftivists have also developed larger, more politically engaged campaigns, strategically targeting policymakers, stakeholders and corporations in their campaigning for action and change in the fashion industry. One group that has been prolific in profiling concerns relating to the industry is the aforementioned Craftivist Collective, who have led three campaigns specifically targeting the fashion industry's treatment of retail and garment workers and the unethical manufacturing of clothing. While two of the three campaigns are arguably more aligned with the community logics featured in the previous section, it is worth considering the corpus of the group's work as part of the ongoing political campaigning being undertaken by Craftivist Collective.

The first campaign conducted by the group targeting the fashion industry was the 'Love Fashion Hate Sweatshops' mini protest banner campaign, undertaken during London Fashion Week in 2012. As McGovern (2019: 25) noted, the initiative 'served to highlight the unethical conditions facing many fashion industry workers around the globe'. The campaign encouraged people to hand stitch a mini protest banner using the skills of cross-stitch and embroidery with a statement highlighting issues within the fashion industry, such as the pay disparity between garment workers who produce clothes and the fashion models who wear them. Banners were then displayed in public spaces around Fashion Week venues, which McBride (2012) described as 'a non-threatening method of drawing attention to the issue and provoking people to think about how they can make a difference'.

Following from the mini banner campaign, Craftivist Collective established the 'Marks & Spencer Living Wage' campaign in 2015. The campaign featured a series of 'stitch ins', as well as more targeted activities aimed at addressing the wages and treatment of garment workers for the British retailer and seeking a commitment from Marks & Spencer to pay employees a living wage.² One aspect of the campaign involved the distribution of 250 'Don't Blow It' kits to Marks & Spencer shareholders, encouraging them to support the living wage (Corbett 2017, 2019). Each of the kits contained a handkerchief, featuring the printed text 'it's not just a job, it's an M&S job. So please don't blow your chance to pay the Living Wage', a needle and thread, sewing instructions and a briefing note on investment risk (Craftivist Collective n.d. b). Fourteen handkerchiefs embroidered with personal messages promoting the living wage were also gifted by craftivists to Marks & Spencer's board members ahead of the company's Annual General Meeting in 2015 (Corbett 2019). Members of the community could also purchase 'Don't Blow It' handkerchief craftivism kits from the Craftivist Collective website to use in their own political campaigning for fair wages (Craftivist Collective n.d. c). In May 2016, Marks & Spencer announced plans to pay their employees above the living wage (Corbett 2019).

Craftivist Collective's third and most recent campaign targeting the fashion industry was their 'Mini Fashion Statement Shop Drop campaign', which commenced in 2019. This campaign aimed to encourage consumers to reflect on who makes their clothes and the true cost of fashion, both monetarily and ethically. Through a kit that could be purchased from the Craftivist Collective, individuals were provided with 10 scrolls upon which they could write a short message about achieving a more sustainable fashion industry. These scrolls would then be secreted into the pockets of clothes in retail stores so anyone trying on or purchasing the items would discover and read the scroll, hopefully reflecting on the message it contained (Craftivist Collective 2019). The Shop Drop campaign was launched to coincide with the global Fashion Revolution 'Who Made My Clothes?' campaign, which invited shoppers to 'take to social media and turn their clothes inside out, posting photos of garment labels to demand an answer to the question, "Who made my clothes?"' (Goldsworthy 2019). At the launch of this joint campaign, Fashion Revolution (n.d.) stated:

How we interact with craft in the age of the Anthropocene – from the effects of globalisation, to the plight of the homeworker; the crafts that are on the brink of extinction, and the ones that are alive, kicking, and actively embracing new technologies to ensure the hand-made and the artisanal remain relevant for the future. Like Craftivist Collective, Fashion Revolution is concerned with both the social and environmental impacts of the global fashion industry.

Craftivist Collective continues to engage in craftivism projects that seek to both raise awareness among the general community and directly target and petition political leaders and businesses to take action on issues in the fashion industry and beyond. As such, their work exemplifies multiple logics in action, from the personal to the community and political.

Can Craftivism Bring About Change?

As the examples of craftivist practice above demonstrate, there are several logics that underpin the use of craft as a tool for fashion activism. The personal logic sees individuals embracing craftivist manifestos that reject fast fashion and embrace DIY, anti-capitalist approaches that focus on personal behaviours and choices that reduce the consumption of (fast) fashion. Arguably, these acts of craftivism are small and incremental; yet they can help build individual capacity and skills that facilitate ‘defiance of consumerism’ (Middleton 2015: 270). The community logic sees the activation of members of the public through participatory projects that increase the visibility of concerns with the fashion industry and raise broader public awareness. Through this logic, craftivists are focused on effecting change in others by educating the broader community on the issues and arming individuals with knowledge and skills that will enable them to act. When practised in public, these acts of craftivism start conversations about important topics in spaces where they might not ordinarily occur, such as the main street of a shopping precinct. Finally, the political logic sees collectives and advocates demanding change by targeting their craftivism at policymakers, stakeholders and companies who are in the position to enact the changes necessary to see the fashion industry become more sustainable and addressing social and environmental harms of the sector. Through the political logic, this dimension of craftivism focuses on the larger systems and structures that require revolutionising. Advocates of this ‘gentle’ approach to political activism have argued that it can be used as:

A tool calmly and carefully to reflect on and understand the injustice issue more, empathise with all those involved, and work out how to engage with those with the power to change it in an emotionally intelligent way. (Corbett 2017: 32)

While each of these examples demonstrate ‘the ongoing potential for craft to address and creatively respond to pressing social and political issues’ (Black and Burisch 2021: 2), questions remain regarding the capacity for craftivist acts to bring about change within the fashion industry. While Greer drew inspiration in her framing of craftivism from the feminist catchcry ‘the personal is political’ (McGovern 2019) and has argued that ‘each time you participate in crafting you are making a difference; whether it’s fighting against useless materialism or making items for charity, you are fighting for causes you believe in’ (Jefferies 2011: fn 13, 239), some have debated the efficacy of some acts purporting to be craftivism. For example, in a recent webinar on the craftivism movement titled ‘Disrupting Craftivism’, motivational speaker, podcaster and activism coach Omkari Williams stated:

What I think craftivism is *not* is something like knitting pink hats for the Women’s March.³ Which I was part of, and I wore my pink hat. But knitting a hat isn’t craftivism. Getting your butt to the march, making calls in support of something, that’s activism. And when you’re using your craft for that, to me that’s craftivism. It’s not just making crafts, which is a perfectly legit thing to do and lovely, but they’re different’. (Williams cited in Fuller Craft Museum 2021)

What Williams argues is that the making and displaying of crafted objects in and of themselves does not equate to activism. While a crafted object may visually signify dissent or dissatisfaction on a particular issue, for activists like Williams, crafting does not become activism until it is accompanied by actions that attempt to effect or bring about political change. As crafter and activist Shannon Downey (2021), otherwise known as Badass Cross Stitch, expressed in a recent tweet:

Political art is not craftivism. It is political art. If there is no ACTIVISM in your making, then it is not craftivism.

Activism – vigorous campaigning to bring about political or social change.

This raises the following question: Will a small, individual act of resistance, such as crafting a visible mend in a moth-eaten sweater, revolutionise the fashion industry? And should it be expected to?

Similar criticisms have been made by artist and cultural worker Anthea Black and critic and curator Nicole Burisch (2021) who question what they see as the assumption that the contemporary resurgence of crafting is politically progressive and inherently subversive (see also Robertson 2011). As they have argued, acts defining themselves as craftivist must be careful not to focus solely on individual consumption, lest they contribute to the phenomenon of ‘craftwashing’ (Black and Burisch 2021: 27). Craftwashing, Black and Burisch (2021: 19) have explained, ‘capitalizes on the individual consumer desire to do good – or be perceived as morally good – amid overwhelming, irreconcilable political anxiety and impending ecological collapse’. The tension here is that acts of craftivism, such as the mending movement, can be both an expression of anti-consumerist resistance while also easily ‘co-opted by market forces and reduced to fad or representation’ (Middleton 2015: 267). In this way, individual resistance may have the opposite effect to what it intends.

For critics of these personal dimensions, craftivism that focuses on fostering individual action and behaviour change will not only serve to absolve the industry from dismantling the systemic and structural inequities that are necessary to bring about meaningful change but may also validate their attempts to perform ‘political and social engagement while obscuring ethical, environmental and labour issues in the chain of production’ (Black and Burisch 2021: 2). Akin to this are practices of ‘carewashing’, whereby neoliberal corporations market themselves as being ‘caring’ and ‘socially responsible ... while really contributing inequality and ecological destruction’ (Chatzidakis, Hakim, Littler, Rottenberg and Segal 2020: 26). Such criticisms are further evidenced by the trend towards commodifying acts of craftivism, whereby companies affiliate themselves with the practice and its associated ‘alternative lifestyles’ while eschewing the political or activist aims that predicate politically engaged craft practices (Black and Burisch 2011: 212). In this way, the co-opting of craftivism mirrors the appropriation and commodification of other forms of alternative cultures, such as street art and graffiti (Young 2014) and self-care and wellness products (Chatzidakis et al. 2020: 25–26). Furthermore, it gives the impression that something is being done to address the ethical and environmental concerns by association while these corporations continue to be driven by profit-making imperatives.

In considering the capacity for craftivism to bring about change to the fashion industry, it has been argued that personal logics alone may not be sufficient to compel the fashion industry to make the significant changes to its business model required to address the social and environmental harms that it is causing.

However, Professor of Design Studies and Fashion Studies Helen Clark (2019: 318–319) has argued that everyday tactics of resistance employed ‘by individuals and groups to challenge institutional and organisational “strategies”, such as ‘making, mending, sharing, swapping and other systems which are not predicated on (over) consumption’ are significant in not only changing individual mindsets but also re-envisioning the fashion industry. For Clark (2019: 310), these feminine strategies, theories and practices, which she terms ‘women’s wisdom’, can bring about systemic change by reconfiguring ‘economic logic, business models, values and processes’. Similarly, Hackney et al. (2021: 111) have suggested there is something important in ‘everyday agencies challenging the fashion status quo’, particularly as ‘alternative and countercultural values and practices move into the mainstream’ in the wake of the pandemic. In this way, the logics of craftivism framework is a helpful way for us to understand the interconnected nature of personal, community and political dimensions of craftivist practice, as well as the contribution that each level of craftivism can make in meaningfully shifting fashion systems and practices.

Conclusion

As this paper has discussed, craftivist practices are being used to advocate for change surrounding ethical use, consumption and production of fashion and textiles. These craftivist acts are occurring on several different levels, or overlapping logics, encompassing the personal, community and political dimensions of action. As some of the critiques of craftivism have highlighted, while there is great potential for these logics of action to engage with and address issues identified within the fashion industry, there is also a risk that these acts could facilitate craftwashing or carewashing within the fashion industry and, consequently fail to result in real, meaningful change. Despite this, several scholars have argued that the everyday tactics of resistance (de Certeau 1984/1998) operationalised through craftivism have the capacity to embed more long-term, transformative changes in the mindset of individuals and their engagement with fashion. The theories and practices that underpin the Slow Fashion Movement signal a potential shift in the way that individuals approach their relationship with fashion and provide us with a model to reconsider, reconceptualise and revolutionise fashion systems (Clark 2019). Similarly, the growth of non-capitalist 'community-oriented craft initiatives ... including makerspaces, online networks and campaigns to repair, rather than replace, consumer goods' have the potential to 'disrupt industrial production and resist the individualisation inherent in consumer culture' (Tigger Holroyd n.d.). While perhaps only a small part of this revolution, the various logics of craftivism discussed in this paper—which traverse individual, community and political dimensions of craft activism—provide us with one avenue through which to examine the ways that individuals and groups are engaging in these small and large practices of resistance in the pursuit of fashion justice.

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¹ Fashion Revolution Week is an initiative of activist group *Fashion Revolution* that runs in the week corresponding with the anniversary of the Rana Plaza disaster (Fashion Revolution 2021). During Fashion Revolution Week, the group leads various campaigns to promote positive change within the fashion industry, especially for those working in the supply chain.

² According to Mair, Druckman and Jackson (2019: 12), 'a living wage is the amount a worker needs to earn in order to be able to afford a decent, but not luxurious standard of living (Pollin et al. 2008). Estimates of living wages represent a quantified measure of fairness based on normative judgements around what constitutes a 'decent' life (Mair, Druckman and Jackson 2018). As a result, estimates of living wages vary over time and space.'

³ In November 2016, artist Jayna Zweiman and screenwriter Krista Suh co-created the Pussyhat Project. Working with a designer, Zweiman and Suh developed a pattern for a knit/crochet hat, pink in colour and featuring two cat-like ears. The design of the hat was in response to Donald Trump's 'grab them by the pussy' remark revealed during the 2016 Presidential Election campaign. Zweiman and Suh envisaged that the hats would be made to wear at the January 2017 Women's March in Washington DC as a show of solidarity for women's rights (Pussyhat Project n.d.).

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