Transforming Quilts into Garments: Designers' Experiences with Upcycling

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Dedication

To DJ, for his unwavering belief and support in me.

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Abstract

The purpose of this hermeneutic qualitative phenomenological study was to describe designers' experiences when upcycling quilt materials into fashion garments. As calls for sustainable production methods have increased, there has been a greater emphasis on reusing and upcycling society's material culture. Designers play a critical role in the reinterpretation of material culture as they initiate the transformation of these objects. However, researchers have yet to examine designers' experiences when upcycling quilt materials. This study illuminated the designer's role in deconstructing and transforming quilt materials into new fashion garments.

A review of literature provided an overview of reuse and repurposing practices in textiles and apparel and historical examples of quilt materials repurposed into garments. It examined factors that led to the rise of the 21st century phenomenon of upcycling quilt materials and the controversy surrounding this phenomenon. In addition, previous research on upcycling and slow fashion and the meaning and value of upcycled objects was discussed. Lastly, research on apparel design models and experiences of designers when upcycling was explored.

This research entailed a three-pronged approach to phenomenology, including interviews with 17 designers representing 16 businesses actively involved in upcycling quilt materials into fashion garments, photo elicitation, and content analysis. Data analysis was emergent in nature, following the concept of the hermeneutic circle, aimed at conveying a common essence of the designers' experiences. This approach expanded on methods used to examine quiltmaking by investigating the social and cultural contexts where quiltmaking, fashion, and sustainability intersected.

This research found that the designers shared common foundational elements of experiences related to second-hand shopping and the fashion industry, which were the primary influences for their interests in sustainability and preserving material culture. These common elements motivated designers to give quilt materials new life by transforming them into garments. Their experiences revealed a distinct apparel design process based on their relationships with quilt materials. This design process aligned with material culture methodologies of examining objects rather than traditional iterative apparel design processes.

Designers' experienced strong emotional and aesthetic responses to the quilt materials during the design process. Their emotional responses were specifically due to the handmade nature and living history aspect of quilt materials. Due to their intersecting and conflicting aesthetic and emotional responses, designers experienced a series of tensions throughout their design processes. They became re-interpreters of material culture and actively contributed to and passed along the quilt material's story to customers. By integrating their emotions throughout the design process, designers hoped to encourage customers to value upcycled quilt material garments.

The findings of this study contributed to the knowledge of designers and design processes within sustainability spaces. The distinct design process based on material culture methodologies responded to slow fashion's calls for new approaches in apparel design to address sustainability issues. The research showed how integrating upcycled material culture into slow fashion paradigms was a way we can begin to address society's current overproduction and overconsumption problems. It enriched the knowledge of the design process and the relationship between designers and objects within slow fashion, upcycling, and sustainability.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Upcycling has been part of a circular economy in which materials were recirculated within the same system by being transformed into new products. In upcycling, an object often considered disposable has been modified into something new and useful by today's standards, thus creating "new products with *higher* value than the old" (Payne, 2021, p. 114, emphasis in original). As calls for sustainable production methods have increased, there has been a greater emphasis on reusing and upcycling our material culture. This call has been demonstrated within quiltmaking by designers upcycling quilt materials, cutting them apart, and transforming them into fashion garments, such as coats and jackets. Consequently, the question, "to cut or not to cut?" a quilt has been a hot-button issue debated within the quiltmaking community. The 21st century trend of designers upcycling quilt materials into garments, accessories, pet clothing, and toys for commercial purposes has divided quiltmakers, quilt scholars, and the general public over the value and meaning of quilts in American society (Fons, 2022a, 2022b; McCormick, 2013).

Historically, discarded quilts that no longer served a functional purpose as a bedcovering due to age or condition have been called "cutter quilts" or "dead quilts" (McCormick, 2013). Quilt scholars often have decried the cutting up of quilts, declaring the destruction of historical quilts as devaluing quiltmaking's cultural heritage, severing the link between quilter and quilt, and destroying potential valuable quiltmaking history (Bavor, 2014; Fons, 2022a, 2022b; McCormick, 2013). However, many designers have seen this practice as a sustainable way to reuse and give life to unwanted quilts that would otherwise end up in landfills (Hills, 2022). The designers have perceived this transformation of a quilt into a garment as elevating the heritage and value of quiltmaking in the public eye (Berlinger, 2022; Cotonou, 2020; Kux, 2019).

The phenomenon of upcycling quilt material was not new. Historical evidence shows quilts taking on other uses and values, such as tents for camping, garments, backgrounds for staged portraits, and bandages for medical supplies (Finley, 2012; McCormick, 2013). In the 20th century, several notable fashion designers repurposed quilts into fashion garments. For example, Adolfo Sardiña created several ensembles for Gloria Vanderbilt (then Gloria Cooper) out of antique patchwork and crazy quilts in the

1960s and 1970s (Adolfo, 1967a, 1967b; Vreeland, 1970). Vanderbilt was also known for literally plastering the interior of her home with antique quilts (Vreeland, 1970). Ralph Lauren's Fall/Winter (F/W) 1982 collection featured garments assembled from cut-up circa 1890s quilts in homage to "Americana" (McCormick, 2013). It caused an uproar in the quiltmaking community as many viewed the collection as destroying quiltmaking history and devaluing women's labor (Bavor, 2014; McCormick, 2013).

Fashion in the 21st century which mimics patchwork designs or repurposes quilt materials into garments has continued to pop up occasionally on runways. For example, Kelsy Parkhouse-Benson for Carleen in 2012 and Raf Simmons for Calvin Klein in 2017 and 2018 upcycled quilts for their collections (Bauck, 2018; Horyn, 2012). But it was Emily Adams Bode Aujla's menswear collection for her brand, Bode, at New York Fashion Week in 2016 that turned upcycling quilt materials into fashion garments into more than just a seasonal catwalk fad (Bauck, 2018; Fons, 2022a). The collection featured one-of-a-kind garments made from upcycled textiles and antique quilts. From this point on, fashion garments made from upcycled quilt materials grew in popularity, eventually moving out of the high-fashion market and into the mass-market (Fons, 2022a). As a result, this upcycling trend shifted from one-off high-fashion designer collections to designs by small entrepreneurial designers across the United States. As the trend grew, designers' purposes for using quilt materials shifted from themes of Americana and authenticity to upcycling and sustainability. This shift in themes followed the general zeitgeist push towards sustainability with designers touting the reuse of discarded and abandoned items such as quilts.

Sustainability and upcycling have become critical topics for researchers across disciplines, especially in apparel and textile research. Based on Payne's (2021) definition of upcycling, a quilt had less value as an original object than when repurposed into a "higher" valued fashion garment. Objects that were brought back from the "dead" through upcycling have been found to have a higher status and value than before (Emgin, 2012), and this appears to have been the case with upcycled quilts as well. However, discussions of upcycling tended to lack consideration for what happens when a designer transformed an object steeped with deep personal and cultural significance, like a quilt,

into a fashion garment. Former editor of *QuiltFolk* magazine and quilt scholar Mary Fons described why the remaking of quilts into fashion garments was fraught with controversy.

> The quilt-as clothes debate is emotional. Arguably more than any other domestic object, quilts hold emotional resonance in American material culture…People on both sides of the debate do seem to agree that a quilt has a soul; the battle is over who is better at saving it. (Fons, 2022a, p. 43)

Designers may play a critical role in "saving" the soul of a quilt as they initiate the transformation of quilt material into fashion garments. Previous research examined consumers' changing values towards quilts due to Ralph Lauren's F/W 1982 collection (McCormick, 2013). The diverse opinions of the 21st century quiltmaking community towards upcycling quilt materials were readily accessible through social media platforms (for example, the comments section of Fons' YouTube video (2022b)). However, research has not yet examined designers' experiences when upcycling quilt materials into fashion garments.

Rachael Cassar (2021) described the embodied process through which a designer connected with objects during upcycling as a phenomenological encounter. In this encounter, an object developed agency and there was a reciprocal relationship between the object and the designer. Payne (2021) expanded on this idea, describing the design process as three interlinked components: the design object (the material outcome), the design process (the activity of designing), and design agency (how the designer and designed object act on their world). Both authors described a relationship among designer, object, and society similar to the hermeneutic circle that grounds this phenomenological research. Through the act of designing, the designer and object constantly informed the other, imparting new layers of depth and meaning to one another. Design, therefore, was a conduit through which the value of objects was continuously redefined and mediated (Emgin, 2012). This research asked us to step back and consider the experience of designers recreating material culture through the upcycling process and what these experiences meant regarding the designers' relationship to pre- and post-upcycled objects.

Rationale & Significance

Prior research by McCormick (2013) on the upcycling of quilt materials post-1980 justified the need for 21st century research as the research was published in 2013, before the phenomenon was revived at a mass-market scale under the guise of sustainability. McCormick focused on how culture assigned new value to quilts through a case study of the Ralph Lauren Fall/Winter 1982 collection. The findings illuminated the controversy surrounding "cutter quilts," describing the consumer, quiltmaking community, and designer viewpoints. However, while she discussed the role designers played in the changing views of how consumers valued quilts, she did not examine the experience of designers within a sustainability paradigm. In addition, researchers have yet to explore the role of sustainability within quiltmaking or the intersection of quiltmaking and fashion. My research pushed McCormick's research further by honing in on the individuals transforming quilt materials into fashion garments - the designers.

My research presented an opportunity to study a phenomenon as it was occurring. It aimed to capture a specific movement in time through the lens of designers where quiltmaking, fashion, and upcycling intersect, just as they did historically when some quiltmakers repurposed garments as material for quilts. Some argued that 21st century designers upcycling quilt material for fashion garments was just the latest aesthetic fad, and interest would wane within a few years. However, as history shows, this was not the first time, nor will it be the last time, designers remake quilt materials into fashion garments.

In addition, my research added to the methods used to examine quiltmaking and the experiences of those involved in quiltmaking adjacent spaces. Barrus (2021) noted that the field of quilt studies tended to focus on historical and material culture methods, which "emphasize the aesthetic, material qualities of historical quilts, with the social and cultural contexts of production and use as secondary themes" (p. 24). This tendency for scholars to focus on historical quilts did not provide an opportunity to use phenomenological methods. Instead, my research focused on the social and cultural contexts of production. A hermeneutic phenomenological approach provided new understandings of the designers' experiences when actively shaping the contexts of quiltmaking and how their experiences imparted different meaning to upcycled objects.

In Cassar's (2021) phenomenological reflection on her embodied experience while upcycling the garments of a deceased female from 1920-1930, she challenged researchers to consider the experiences of designers as we move toward sustainable systems of thinking.

> I believe there is room within this dialogue to document the meaning and struggle the designer negotiates while deconstructing and reforming garments which are very rarely discussed…I believe shedding light on a practice such as upcycling will reframe the designer as a layered maker intertwined within the material world, thus contributing to knowledge in the area of reuse and reformation. (pp. 345–346)

Per Cassar (2021), upcycling was a process through which designers read and understand material culture. As a result, it could play a role in society reforming and reconnecting with historical pieces. When applied to designers upcycling quilt materials, history could be reinterpreted through the designers' experiences, adding additional layers of meaning to quilts.

The phenomenon of designers upcycling quilt material has extended beyond quiltmaking; it has been an example of society's response to sustainability issues predicated by climate change. As calls for sustainable production methods and design systems have increased, tension has existed between the apparel industry's desire to produce goods and society's desire to preserve culturally significant objects. Notable design systems, such as slow fashion, which focused on "small-scale production, traditional craft techniques, local materials and markets" (K. Fletcher, 2010, p. 264), were presented as ways to address these issues. And while studying consumer acceptance and preferences towards sustainable practices like upcycling and slow fashion have been critical, there has been a need to understand the design-thinking process of those working directly within sustainability design systems.

Designers have been the ones who created the change in material culture, not consumers. They have been the ones generating solutions to the waste produced by the fashion industry by changing how they have interacted with their materials and how consumers have valued their clothing (Holroyd et al., 2023). By capturing designers' experiences as they engaged in upcycling, we gained insight into their relationships with objects and what this meant for sustainability, design, and our material culture in the

future. This research also informed current and future apparel designers on how to rethink clothing design in light of calls for sustainable production. While this research was specific to designers engaging with quilt materials, it could also be applied to other material culture entering the upcycling lifecycle with inherent value and meaning, such as other handmade objects. The research provided new ways of thinking about preserving, reusing, repurposing, and revaluing our material culture.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this hermeneutic qualitative phenomenological study was to describe designers' experiences when upcycling quilt materials into fashion garments. "Upcycled quilt material(s)" included quilts, quilt tops, patchwork, and orphan blocks that designers sourced from second-hand markets, such as quilt dealers and vendors, and resale, antique, and thrift stores. These were not new objects created with the intent of being cut into a garment; they were created by another maker and discarded in some manner or deemed no longer functional for their original intent.

This study illuminated the designer's role in deconstructing and transforming quilt material into new fashion garments. The research added the voice of designers to the discussion of "to cut or not to cut" quilts and provided new layers of context to research and discussions in quiltmaking studies. It enriched the knowledge of the relationship between designers and objects within the upcycling phenomena. Finally, it provided different ways of thinking about what it means to upcycle and revalue material culture through design processes.

Research Question

This phenomenological research inquiry was about the experiences of designers as lived, not about their opinions on upcycling quilt materials for fashion garments (Peoples, 2021). The research question was informed by Cassar's (2021) description of a designer's experience of upcycling garments as a phenomenological encounter. The following question guided this research.

> What are designers' experiences when upcycling quilt materials into fashion garments?

Researcher Role

An essential aspect of hermeneutical phenomenology is discussing pre-understandings, assumptions, and biases (Peoples, 2021). My assumptions related to this research are discussed in-depth in Chapter III: Methods. The following section discusses my background as a quilter and designer and my prior experiences that led to my interest in this topic.

My history and connection to quiltmaking is long and immersive. My childhood bedroom was filled with quilts and blankets made by my great-grandmothers. These quilts were scrap quilts made with various prints and types of fabrics. They formed my early appreciation for quiltmaking and the meanings embedded into quilts. I made my first quilt, a Log Cabin, at age 11, and I continue to be an avid quilter enjoying both traditional and modern designs. During my master's research at the University of Minnesota, I joined the world of quilt scholarship, completing a thesis on the impact of pre-cut fabrics on quilters under the age of forty-five (Pokorny, 2020). As a result, I was immersed in contemporary quiltmakers' issues, especially those of newer and younger quilters. One issue I became aware of through my coursework, master's research, and involvement in quiltmaking groups, is the trend of designers upcycling quilts into fashion garments.

A material culture study as part of my coursework at the University of Minnesota was the impetus for this research. I examined two garments in-depth from the Ralph Lauren F/W 1982 collection from the Goldstein Museum of Design. This research included an interview with the donor of one of the garments, a sweater with antique quilt front panels and pockets (Figure 1). Through the research process, I became aware of the prevalence of designers upcycling quilts into garments, now couched under sustainability instead of Lauren's celebration of American heritage. I presented my findings at the American Quilt Study Group (AQSG) Seminar in 2021 (Pokorny, 2021). The presentation generated feedback and interest from attendees, including a quilt dealer, Claire McKarns, who had personally sold quilts to Tristan Detwiler, designer and founder

of STAN, a brand known for upcycling quilts into garments.[1] After conversations with Mrs. McKarns and other members of AQSG, I realized there were a variety of opinions about upcycling quilts and strong emotional reactions to the topic. These reactions and opinions indicated there was more to be explored than just "to cut or not to cut." I became interested in the designers who upcycled these quilts, as their experiences were often overlooked in popular media and discussions surrounding this phenomenon.

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020[2] also stimulated my interest in this research. During the pandemic, I, along with thousands of others, suddenly had more time to devote to quiltmaking (Glassenberg, 2020, 2021). Through social media, I noticed an influx of novice and returning quilters. Quilters, including myself, started new projects and finished backlogs of WIPs (works in progress) and UFOs (unfinished objects). It seemed like overnight, the production rate of quilts skyrocketed. I started and finished more quilts during the pandemic than in the previous five years. Due to innovations in quiltmaking, the speed at which a quilter could produce a quilt has increased dramatically from that of the 1800s and early 1900s (Cox, 2008; Kiracofe & Johnson, 1993). While there may be increased competition for our attention during leisure time due to technology and social media, quilters seemed to produce a higher volume of quilts faster than their forbearers.

My interest in this topic continues to be piqued due to the high visibility of the garments made from quilt materials on social media. I rarely produce a quilt with a specific intent, person, or gift in mind. I make quilts for myself, for the creative joy of working with fabric and color, and as a respite from graduate school studies. My office and sewing space share a room, and it is not uncommon for me to roll over to my sewing machine during a study break and sneak in a few minutes of sewing. My finished quilts sit in the closet, on a quilt rack, on the bed, and tucked into all corners of our house. I

[1] One of the garments Detwiler made from an antique quilt purchased through Claire McKarns was exhibited in *In America: A Lexicon of Fashion*, at The Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, September 18, 2021-September 5, 2022.

[2] The COVID-19 pandemic, also known as the coronavirus pandemic, was declared a global pandemic in March 2020. It was one of the deadliest pandemics in history, causing over 6 million deaths. It caused severe global social and economic disruptions, recessions, lockdowns, travel restrictions, and supply shortages.

wonder, what will happen in 50 to 100 years with all the quilts made during the pandemic? What will we do with all the quilts?

Figure 1

Ralph Lauren Sweater with Antique Quilt Front Panels

Note: This sweater from the Ralph Lauren Fall/Winter 1982 collection was the impetus for this research topic. From *Cardigan Sweater* by R. Lauren, 1982 (https://collection.goldstein.design.umn.edu/proficiowebmodule/JDetail.aspx?db=objects&dir=GOLDSTEIN&rID=2008.032.013). Copyright 2023 by the Goldstein Museum of Design.

My love of quilting and sewing also led me to an undergraduate degree in Apparel Design at Iowa State University and a career as a technical designer in the fashion industry. In my seven years as a technical designer, I honed my skills in construction, patternmaking, and the process of design from concept to production. My design thinking skills were informed by my experiences designing as an undergraduate, a technical designer executing the production of designs, a graduate instructor for design studios, and

a quilter. In many ways, this research was a culmination of my experiences as a quilter and as a professional in the fashion industry, merging my two skill sets and knowledge bases.

Definitions of Key Terminology

In the context of this research, these terms are defined as follows:

Cutter quilt: Quilts that no longer serve a functional purpose as a bedcovering due to age or condition (McCormick, 2013). These quilts are often remade or upcycled into items like jackets, stuffed animals, or pillows. Also known as "dead quilts" or "orphan quilts" (McCormick, 2013). Cutter quilts as a material are the focus of this study; however, within this context, they are referred to as "upcycled quilt material(s)" as the term "cutter quilt" rarely appears in 21st century references to this phenomenon.

Designer: A person who has a role in creating a designed garment (Payne, 2021). Specifically, for this research, a person with a business related to making garments from upcycled quilt material. The individuals either design and produce the garment themselves or design garments produced with the assistance of sewists or a manufacturing facility. For the purposes of this research, this term was used as a blanket term regardless of the participants' self-identification as a designer, artist, creator, etc.

Orphan block: Patchwork quilt blocks made either as test blocks for a pattern or for a quilt but never assembled into a quilt top and left in an unfinished state (McConnell, 2017).

Patchwork: Also known as "pieced work." This is a form of needlework where pieces of fabric are sewn together to create a larger design. Patchwork is typically associated with quiltmaking, and large patchwork designs form a quilt top (von Gwinner, 1988).

Quilt: A three-layered fabric sandwich typically including a top, soft filling or batting, and backing fabric. The layers are stitched (quilted) or tied together at intervals.

Quilter: A person who makes quilts, whether or not they perform the actual quilting step of the process. Quilters may produce only the quilt top or patchwork and then pay another quilter to complete the quilting stage, or they may produce the entirety of the quilt themselves.

Quilting: In the verb form, it describes the process of stitching together the three-layered sandwich of a quilt to add additional design aesthetics to the quilt top (Dickie, 2003). In noun form, it describes the physical stitches of the process. This term is commonly used to indicate all the steps involved in making a quilt, but for this research only refers to the physical act or stitches that unite a quilt sandwich.

Quiltmaking: All of the steps of making and producing a quilt from start to finish, including designing, cutting, piecing, and quilting (Dickie, 2003). Commonly referred to as "quilting" by the general public.

Quilt top: The top layer of a quilt where the design is applied and displayed (Stalp, 2007). The quilt top can be patchwork, appliqué, whole cloth, or a combination of techniques.

Slow fashion: Kate Fletcher coined this term, which refers to a movement that pushes back against growth-obsessed fast fashion (2007). Slow fashion models of production advocate for consideration of the impact on people, the environment, and animals.

Upcycled quilt material(s): For this research, this phrase encompasses all quilt and quilt adjacent materials that designers use as "material" for upcycling. This may also include quilt tops, orphan blocks, and patchwork. These materials are sourced from second-hand markets, such as quilt dealers and vendors, and resale, antique, and thrift stores. These are not new "virgin" quilts or quilts created with the intent of being cut into a garment. The key distinction is that none of these materials are created with the explicit intent to be used in fashion garments; they are created by another maker and have been discarded in

some manner. Both the phrases “upcycled quilt material(s)” and “quilt material(s)” fall under this definition.

Upcycling: While there are numerous definitions of upcycling, each with its own nuance, the general definition for upcycling for this research is the act of “creating new products with *higher* value than the old” (Payne, 2021, p. 114, emphasis in original). These definitions are discussed further in Chapter II: Literature Review.

Zoom: Online video conferencing platform used to facilitate meetings, events, interviews, conferences, and webinars.

Chapter II: Literature Review

The following chapter covers a review of literature related to the history of upcycling textiles, apparel, and quilt materials, how society values quiltmaking, sustainability paradigms, and the experience of designers. This research was unique in that it combined quiltmaking, sustainability, and fashion studies. While this research dealt with quilts and their role in society, more importantly, it examined designers' roles in shaping the narrative of quiltmaking through upcycling. Thus, this review of literature did not focus on the history of quiltmaking, as typically found in other studies (Barrus, 2021; French, 2021). Instead, the literature concentrated on laying the groundwork for understanding the experience of designers by establishing: the role previous designers played in creating the 21st century phenomenon, how sustainability and upcycling shaped design, the meaning and value of objects transformed through the upcycling process, and experiences of designers upcycling other forms of material culture.

Explanation of Definitions Used in this Research

The following section provides some additional context around definitions used in this research beyond those presented in Chapter I: Introduction.

Defining Upcycled Quilt Materials

A major dilemma with this research was how to define the materials used by designers during upcycling. An initial content analysis of designers' websites and social media accounts uncovered a noticeable difference in descriptions. Some referred to their quilts as "antique" and provided specific provenance and date ranges. Others used the vague term "vintage" with no additional context. And some provided no additional context outside of general descriptors of the quilt. In addition, not all designers upcycled completed quilts. Some used quilt tops, which often contained minimal damage as they were unfinished and, therefore, never used. And others used orphan blocks or patchwork, which contained varying levels of damage because of their unfinished state. The one consistency was that designers sourced these quilts from various second-hand markets unless it was for a custom order where the customer provided the quilt material. Without consensus, how do we best define and refer to these not-new quilt materials upcycled by designers?

Scholars have used the term "dead quilt," tying the quilt to a larger life cycle metaphor (Forrest & Blincoe, 2011; McCormick, 2013). But this term had assumed the quilt no longer had a functional life or value as bedcovering. Content analysis of designers' websites showed that many designers used quilts that were damaged or no longer functional; however, some also appeared to use pristine quilts. McCormick (2013) used the phrase "cutter quilt" within her research, noting that this term was more common and was developed by antique dealers to describe quilts that were no longer functional as bedcoverings. When this term first appeared in the 1970s, the context was geared toward crafters, who purchased less-than-perfect quilts from dealers as craft materials (McCormick, 2013). However, McCormick's research was published shortly before the 21st century revival of the trend. The term "cutter quilt" or "dead quilt" rarely appeared in designers' descriptions of their quilts or in popular media's description of the trend. Instead, designers used terms such as "upcycled antique quilt," "upcycled vintage quilt," and "upcycled quilt." This change in terminology reflected the alignment of the trend with larger themes of sustainability.

When I began this research, my early drafts used the phrase "antique." As I dug deeper into the phenomenon, I switched to the term "vintage" as I saw it more frequently on designers' websites. However, after reviewing the literature, I realized neither of these terms was appropriate. While the generally accepted definition of antique was an item that was at least 100 years old ("What's The Difference Between 'Antique' & 'Vintage'?," n.d.), it was clear that not all designers were or could be using quilts that were at least 100 years old. There was also no concise definition of vintage in literature (Carey et al., 2018; DeLong et al., 2005; Fischer, 2015; McColl et al., 2013). The phrase was often conflated with similar terms such as "retro" and "heirloom." Based on how vintage was used in literature and by designers, the phrase seemed intended to evoke nostalgic feelings based on the intrinsic values of an object, corresponding with Cottagecore aesthetics.

In addition, the term "cutter quilt," as McCormick (2013) used, rarely appeared after McCormick published. Therefore, the blanket terms "upcycled quilt material(s)" or "quilt material(s)" were used within the context of this research. "Upcycled quilt material(s)" included quilts, quilt tops, orphan blocks, and patchwork that designers

sourced from second-hand markets, such as quilt dealers and vendors, and resale, antique, and thrift stores. These were not new objects created with the intent of being cut into a garment; they were created by another maker and have been discarded in some manner or deemed no longer functional for their original intent. These quilts were objects from the past but not associated with a specific time period or event; they were not newly created quilt material.

Defining Value

Throughout this research, the concept of value is continually discussed. As with defining the materials used by designers during upcycling, there is a range of definitions and types of value regarding objects. In general, *value* is the worth or significance of an object (Cultural Heritage Agency, 2014). But the term is subjective and dependent on the perceiver and their cultural background. In the context of this research, the following types of value are the most applicable.

- **aesthetic value:** based on an item's ability to elicit pleasure or displeasure in a viewer (Plato & Meskin, 2014).
- **artistic value**: based on an item's artistry or creative accomplishment or the degree an item exemplifies a specific style or design (Cultural Heritage Agency, 2014).
- **cultural historical value:** based on the combination of an item's artistic, historical, and information value (Cultural Heritage Agency, 2014).
- **historical value**: based on an item's association with historical people, places, events, or periods. Or how an object reflects a particular historical technique, process, or way of life (Cultural Heritage Agency, 2014).
- **informational value:** based on the information that can be "read" from an item, now or in the future (Cultural Heritage Agency, 2014). Regarding quilt materials, this refers to the ability to research a quilt to learn about patterns, techniques, fabrics, and the maker.
- **perception value:** based on how an item evokes emotions, feelings, or associations in a viewer, based on both tangible and intangible aspects (Cultural Heritage Agency, 2014).

- **sentimental value:** based on how an item evokes personal or emotional associations in a viewer, regardless of the item's worth (G. Fletcher, 2009). Sentimental differs from perception value as it is based on the personal relationships and memories of the viewer.
- **social value**: based on the attachment level that exists between an item and a group or community (Cultural Heritage Agency, 2014).
- **use value:** based on the current functional use of an item (Cultural Heritage Agency, 2014).

In subsequent sections, if no specific type of value is indicated, the general meaning of value is used. The specific type of value is indicated where appropriate.

A History of Upcycling Quilt Materials

The following section establishes the foundation of this study by providing an overview of reuse and repurposing practices in textiles and apparel and historical examples of quilt materials repurposed into garments. The 21st century revival of upcycling quilt materials and the controversy surrounding this practice is discussed also.

Before the terms "sustainability" and "upcycling" were coined in the late 20th century, terms such as "reuse," "repurpose," and "repair" were used to describe practices that extended the useful lifetimes of garments and textiles or transformed damaged textile goods into new items (Holroyd et al., 2023). Holroyd et al. (2023) traced the history of reuse and recycling practices in the fashion industry. They noted that clothing and textiles had been reused, repurposed, repaired, and mended for centuries. Historically, textiles were costly, prized commodities used and repurposed until they no longer held any use value. It was the textiles that held their value, not the garments themselves, before the industrialization of the textile industry in the 19th century and the rise of mass-produced apparel. The retained value of textiles often led to the refashioning of garments to fit changing trends, repairing and mending garments, or saving precious garment scraps to be repurposed. Throughout the 20th century, the reuse and repurposing of garments went through periods of being stigmatized as thriftiness and celebrated as fashionableness. More details about the history of reusing and repurposing garments in the 20th century is covered in subsequent sections.

Holroyd et al. (2023) also noted that in addition to reuse practices in apparel, large, expensive whole textiles, such as Kashmir (paisley) shawls, were repurposed into garments. Kashmir shawls were a prized fashionable luxury item for women in the late 1700s through the mid-1800s. When they fell out of fashion in the 1870s, the textiles were repurposed into garments and accessories well into the 20th century. Repurposing these shawls was an example of an expensive handmade object, not unlike a quilt, that was transformed to increase its aesthetic and use value.

Similarly, as long as quilts have been made, they have been reused for purposes beyond bedcoverings (Finley, 2012; McCormick, 2013). Quilts that no longer had a use value as a bedcovering due to age or condition would be remade into more functional items, such as jackets, stuffed animals, or pillows. Historical evidence has shown quilts taking on other uses, such as tents for camping, garments, backgrounds for staged portraits, and bandages for medical supplies (Finley, 2012; McCormick, 2013). These quilts were often known as "cutter quilts" or "dead quilts" (McCormick, 2013).[3] In the 21st century, using quilt materials in other settings was often seen as a form of sustainable upcycling, in which the quilt became the raw material for other more functional purposes within society, increasing its use value.

Unlike the act of repurposing garments or textiles such as Kashmir shawls, the act of repurposing or upcycling quilt materials has been controversial. Many layers of value have been tied to quilts beyond their functional purpose as a bedcovering, such as their cultural historical, sentimental, informational, and social values (McCormick, 2013). The 21st century revival of the upcycled quilt material trend, now under the umbrella of sustainability, has brought new attention to this controversy. While there were many forms a quilt could take in its "new" repurposed life, this research focused specifically on quilt materials upcycled into fashion garments.

Historical Examples

The following are historical examples of upcycling of quilt materials into garments. While it is impossible to confirm if all are examples of upcycling, especially

[3] For a more complete history of the uses of "dead" or "cutter quilts", see McCormick (2013).

examples that only exist in photograph form, they show the potential to reuse and an inclination for quilt materials appearing in apparel.

Figure 2 is an 1825 British patchwork dressing gown. The gown was made from a handsewn patchwork textile of small diamond shapes and lined in cotton. Based on conversations with the Associate Collections Manager of The Costume Institute at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, it was probable that the exterior patchwork textile was pre-existing and not originally intended to be used in this garment (M. Morimoto, personal communication, June 12, 2023). Typically, when a textile was woven or embroidered for a specific garment, there was evidence of intentionality in the construction of the garment. For example, the textile design would align across seamlines, particularly the center back seam, or be integrated into the garment's seaming. None of the seam lines in this dressing gown matched or enhanced the diamond patchwork shape cohesively. Due to the high cost of textiles in the 19th century, it was common for people to repurpose textiles or older fashion garments into new garments (Holroyd et al., 2023), which was likely the case with this garment. Whether this patchwork was produced intentionally for this garment or not, it was a striking example of patchwork moving into the realm of fashion.

Figure 3 shows a young woman dressed in a crazy quilt roller skating outfit from 1886-1890. Similarly, Figure 4 shows a young man in a crazy quilt uniform from 1898-1910. Based on photographic evidence alone, it was impossible to confirm if these are examples of pre-existing crazy quilts repurposed into garments. During the time of both photographs, crazy quilts were at their peak popularity (Finley, 2012). Thus, it was not surprising to see that popularity manifest in garment form. The photographs were further evidence of an interest in using quilt materials in garments. Crazy quilts would have been an ideal medium for apparel, as they were often made from scrap fabrics or discarded clothing and did not contain thick layers of batting between the top and backing (Holroyd et al., 2023). The scraps used to make crazy quilts were often remnants of costly textiles such as velvets and silks. Some scraps may have held sentimental value as remnants of significant family garments. But it was also possible for a quilter to buy kits of pre-bundled textile scraps, eliminating the need to save their own scrap fabric. These crazy

quilt examples were early examples of the circularity of upcycling, where quilters repurposed garment scraps into a quilt and then repurposed the quilt back into a garment.

Figure 2

British Patchwork Dressing Gown, 1825

Note. From *Dressing Gown* by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1825 (https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/159591). In the public domain.

Figure 3

Young Woman in a Crazy Quilt Dress, 1886-1890

Note: From *Quilts in Everyday Life, 1855-1955: A 100-Year Photographic History* (p. 44) by J. Finley, 2012. Copyright 2012 by Janet Finley. Reprinted with permission.

Figure 4

Young Man in a Crazy Quilt Uniform, 1898-1910

Note: From *Quilts in Everyday Life, 1855-1955: A 100-Year Photographic History* (p. 102) by J. Finley, 2012. Copyright 2012 by Janet Finley. Reprinted with permission.

In the 20th century, concrete evidence emerged of upcycling quilt materials into garments, mainly tied to the Great Depression and World War II. Figure 5 is a men's dressing gown from 1935, made from a 19th century crazy quilt. Reuse practices became the norm during the Great Depression, and all manner of textiles were repurposed into apparel (Holroyd et al., 2023). Unlike the previous garments, which were hypothetical examples of repurposing quilt materials, Holroyd et al. (2023) determined that this garment was made from a repurposed quilt, noting newer embroidery motifs added to the garment and evidence of substantial mending, including patching damaged original silk patches. As the garment's object description noted, the quilt's "conversion into a robe demonstrates a clever, perhaps necessary, reuse of materials during the Great Depression" (Man's robe, 1935). By the 1930s, a crazy quilt made in the late 1800s would likely show signs of deterioration and have diminished use value as a decorative household item. Repurposing the quilt into a garment was a way to maintain the quilt's sentimental value while increasing its use value as a garment.

Figure 5

Dressing Gown Made from an Upcycled Crazy Quilt, 1935

Note. From *Man's robe* by The Museum at FIT, 1935 (https://fashionmuseum.fitnyc.edu/objects/70552/901114?ctx=c113c2c9-efe3-4d0a-8953-df841614919e&idx=0). Copyright by The Museum at FIT.

Textile reuse and repurposing practices continued into World War II due to material rationing (Holroyd et al., 2023). A special exhibition held at Harrods in London aimed to show women how to repurpose home textiles while keeping up with the latest fashions as a way to support the war effort. A *How to "Make-Do-and-Mend"* propaganda video of the exhibition, released by the British Board of Trade, Ministry of Supply, highlighted the making of a dressing gown made from an old patchwork quilt (eransford, 2009), another example of reuse of a quilt to create a garment with higher use value.

After World War II, women quickly returned to regularly updating their wardrobes, and the reuse of textiles and garments became less prevalent and somewhat stigmatized (Holroyd et al., 2023). The repurposing of textile materials, such as quilts or Kashmir shawls, was less tied to the necessary resourcefulness of the previous decades and more related to the textiles' aesthetic value.

By the 1960s and 1970s, second-hand clothing markets abounded as a means of thrift and due to a rise in the aesthetic value of vintage fashion (Holroyd et al., 2023). The origins of the environmental and sustainability movement developed at this time, tied to movements of using handmade and second-hand clothing as an expression of anti-fashion, anti-capitalism, and to express support for environmentalism (Holroyd et al., 2023; Tortora & Marcketti, 2015). There was increased interest in one-of-a-kind wearable art by combining clothing and fiber arts to create unique apparel in an era of ever-increasing mass production (Holroyd et al., 2023; Sommer & Sommer, 1976; Tortora & Marcketti, 2015).

In 1976, Elyse and Mike Sommer published *Wearable Crafts: Creating Clothing, Body Adornments, and Jewelry from Fabrics and Fibers* (1976), with instructions and photographs for how to make apparel and accessories from various textiles and featuring the work of "craftspeople." In one section, they provided examples of patchworking old textiles into new garments, including the jacket in Figure 6 made by Yvonne Porcella[4]

[4] Yvonne Porcella is notable as the founder of Studio Art Quilt Associates (SAQA), an organization dedicated to documenting the art quilt movement and advocating for quilts as art (Stanfield, n.d.). She is known for her use of color, art quilts, quilted kimonos, and books. Her first art quilt, *Takoage,* is in the collection of the Smithsonian Institution. The jacket in Figure 6 is an early example of her patchwork collage garments.

from an old quilt. The authors tied Porcella's work to the larger sustainability movement and likened it to colonial and pioneer women making quilts from garment scraps, saying:

> When American pioneer women pieced and patched their marvelous quilts, their motive was strictly to make do with what they had. Fabrics in colonial America were in short supply, and every snippet and scrap was dear. Thus, though the term 'recycling' is of fairly recent vintage, the idea of using and reusing materials is a time-honored tradition which lost some of its impact during the affluent 1950s and '60s. The whole trend toward creating more personalized, less status-and fashion-oriented clothing and jewelry is as much motivated by the artist-craftsman-hobbyist's involvement with ecology as his love of one-of-a-kind personal adornments. (1976, p. 62)

Following these historical examples of upcycling or repurposing quilt materials into garments, specific apparel designers from the 20th and 21st centuries who pushed the use of quilts in fashion garments to the forefront are presented.

Figure 6

Upcycled Quilt Jacket by Yvonne Porcella, c. 1970

Note: Adapted from *Wearable Crafts: Creating Clothing, Body Adornments, and Jewelry from Fabrics and Fibers* (p. 63) by E. Sommer and M. Sommer, 1976. Copyright 1976 by Elyse Sommer and Mike Sommer.

Adolfo Sardiña & Gloria Vanderbilt

Designer Adolfo Sardiña (professionally known as Adolfo) was perhaps the earliest high-profile example of a fashion designer and brand repurposing quilt materials into garments. However, there were likely other designers who have yet to be researched or discovered that engaged in this activity before Adolfo. In the 1960s, Adolfo designed several gowns and skirts made from antique quilts, including several ensembles for Gloria Vanderbilt (at the time, Gloria Cooper) (Tashjian, 2021). The ensemble in Figure 7 was worn by Vanderbilt in 1967 and featured a skirt made from a 19th century patchwork charm quilt in a Triangle Tiles pattern (Adolfo, 1967b; Brackman, 2020). Her husband, Wyatt Cooper, also wore an Adolfo waistcoat made from an antique crazy quilt.

Figure 7

Gloria Vanderbilt and Wyatt Cooper, 1970

Note. Both are wearing garments partially made from quilts designed by Adolfo. From *Adolfo (designer)*, by Wikipedia, 2021. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adolfo_(designer)). In the public domain.

Another Vanderbilt-worn ensemble from 1967 used an antique crazy quilt for the skirt, neck ruff, and cuffs (Adolfo, 1967a). The Victoria & Albert Museum gallery label for the ensemble stated, “Here, he [Adolfo] has recycled an antique crazy-patchwork quilt to make the skirt, neck ruff and wrist ruffles. Despite this element of ‘cannibalisation,’ he has treated the historic textile with respect, gathering rather than cutting it to make the skirt” (Adolfo, 1967a). This label alluded to the dichotomy at the core of the upcycled quilt material trend. Was it a way for designers to respect and elevate quilts, or a form of murder, as Mary Fons (2022a) suggested? While little information existed as to why Adolfo chose to upcycle quilt materials, his choice might have reflected the larger wearable art movement in the 1960s and 70s and increasing pressure by quilt enthusiasts to consider quiltmaking an art form (Behuniak-Long, 1994; Holstein, 1991; Tortora & Marcketti, 2015).

Vanderbilt’s love of antique quilts extended beyond Adolfo’s designs, as she literally plastered the interior of her bedroom with quilts, as seen in Figure 8 (Vreeland, 1970). She covered the floor in lacquered patchwork fabrics, draped the walls and ceilings with over two dozen antique quilts, and covered almost every other surface in the room with quilts. The room was photographed for an article in *Vogue,* and Vanderbilt was pictured alongside it while wearing a caftan and ruffled collar made from crazy quilts, again designed by Adolfo (Vreeland, 1970). Vanderbilt did not state why she covered her room with quilts, only that the quilts were from a collection she and Wyatt Cooper amassed over the years and that her interest in quilts stemmed from her work as a painter and collage artist (Vreeland, 1970). There seemed to be little concern in the media about this unusual use of quilts, and the article lauded Vanderbilt for her unique design sensibility.

Figure 8

Gloria Vanderbilt in Vogue*, 1970*

Note: This *Vogue* spread shows Gloria Vanderbilt's quilt-plastered bedroom and features Vanderbilt wearing an antique crazy quilt caftan by Adolfo. From "Mrs. Wyatt Emory Cooper: Gloria the Great's Patchwork Bedroom," by Horst P. Horst, 1970, *Vogue, 155*(3), pp. 206-207. Copyright 2012 by The Condé Nast Publications Inc.

Ralph Lauren

American designer Ralph Lauren's collections often took inspiration from the American lifestyle and imagined versions of American history (McCormick, 2013). His Fall/Winter (F/W) 1982 collection was specifically inspired by American quiltmaking and featured antique quilts cut up and set into jackets, vests, sweaters, and skirts (Foulkes, 2018; McCormick, 2013). The garments cost several hundred dollars apiece and were sold in high-end department stores across the United States, such as Harold's in Minneapolis, Minnesota (D. DeFore, personal communication, November 16, 2019).

In the late 1970s, Lauren began collecting antique quilts, acquiring around 350 of them dating to approximately the 1890s from quilt dealers across the Northeastern United

States (Bavor, 2014; McCormick, 2013). The collection was never referred to as an act of upcycling, perhaps because this paradigm had not yet entered the fashion lexicon. Instead, Lauren justified using antique quilts as honoring American quiltmaking and creating an authentic customer experience. He claimed he saw beyond the functional utility of quilts and instead saw them "as an entire visual vocabulary and a form redolent with cultural meaning" (McCormick, 2013, p. 11). The garments were advertised as comprised of used, imperfect quilts, adding to the history and authenticity of the collection. Lauren seemed to view his action as rescuing tossed-off quilt remnants by giving them a new, more beautiful life, a sentiment often echoed by 21st century designers involved in this phenomenon. In a November 1982 article in the *New York Times*, Lauren stated:

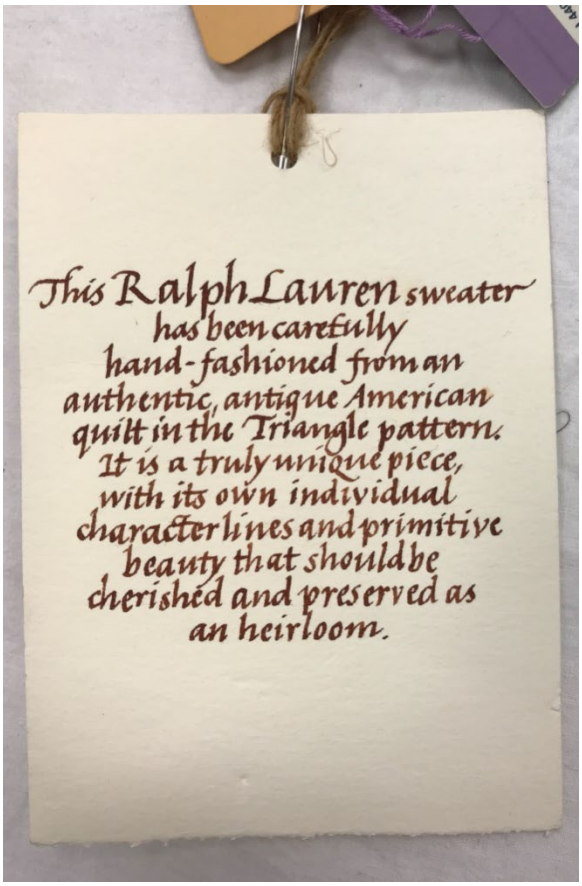
> 'Though they were by no means museum-quality quilts, I did pay several hundred dollars apiece for them…Had I made these clothes out of new material it would have bastardized the concept because the whole charm is in the fact that the materials are old and will continue to look beautiful with age.' (Vogel, 1982, para. 6)

The authentic "Americana" vibe of the collection made it extremely popular. McCormick (2013) stated, "…Ralph Lauren was selling authenticity. He was selling heritage. He was selling American-ness. And it was intoxicating. The items were mementos and family heirlooms for people who had none" (p. 29). The antique quilts allowed American customers to connect to and encounter a piece of their history, to wear history literally. Lauren further communicated this idea to customers through special hangtags and labels. For example, the sweater in Figure 1 came with a rustic twine attached hangtag stating that the garment was made from "an authentic, antique American quilt" and its "primitive beauty" should be cherished (Figure 9).

Adolfo and Ralph Lauren were not the only designers to upcycle quilt materials before the revival in the early 21st century. Bavor's (2014) interviews with quilt dealers revealed stories of dealers who unintentionally sold quilts to Ralph Lauren, Norma Kamali, and other designers in the late 1970s and 1980s. The Americana trend in home décor and fashion peaked during this time, and quilts were an ideal medium to express this trend (Bavor, 2014; McCormick, 2013; Vreeland, 1970).

Figure 9

Ralph Lauren Fall/Winter 1982 Sweater Hangtag



Note. This hangtag attached to the sweater in Figure 1 with rustic twine.

The 21st Century Revival

The 21st century revival of upcycling quilt materials came not from one designer but from a multitude of designers, all working with similar aesthetics and concepts simultaneously. While there were many examples of designers who had patchwork and quilt-inspired prints and textiles,[5] this research focused solely on designers who used actual quilt materials as part of their designs. The following section details some early 21st century designers and brands who upcycled quilts.

Kelsy Parkhouse-Benson for Carleen. While Emily Adams Bode Aujla was generally considered the originator of the 21st century upcycled quilt material trend, Kelsy Parkhouse-Benson's senior thesis collection for Pratt Institute in 2012 came first.

[5] For example, Valentino Fall 2015 ready-to-wear (RTW), Dior Fall 2018 RTW, Coach Spring 2018, and Isabel Marant Fall 2018.

Her brand, Carleen, was rooted in upcycling and sustainability, used primarily repurposed textiles and quilts, and took inspiration from American quilts (Parkhouse-Benson, n.d.).

Parkhouse-Benson gained recognition after a *New York Times* review touted her senior collection (Horyn, 2012). Interestingly, the reviewer skimmed over the fact that the garments were made from upcycled quilts and only commented that Parkhouse-Benson used "quilted and patchwork skirts and tops in faded colors" (Horyn, 2012, para. 5). This oversight was perhaps an indication that the upcycling paradigm was not yet mainstream. Parkhouse-Benson was also one of the participants interviewed for this research.

Raf Simmons for Calvin Klein. Raf Simmons used vintage quilts in his first collection for Calvin Klein, the Fall/Winter (F/W) 2017 Ready-to-Wear (RTW) collection and continued for three more seasons. Similar to Ralph Lauren, Simmons used quilts as part of his exploration of the symbolism and tropes of Americana (Göksenin, 2017; Phelps, 2017). The brand reportedly sourced vintage quilts from all over the country from antique shows, auctions, and private collections (Göksenin, 2017). The F/W 2017 RTW collection included women's coats made from vintage quilts and men's outerwear lined with vintage quilts (Figure 10, left panel). The show notes for the F/W 2017 RTW collection quoted Simmons as saying:

> All of these different people with different styles and dress codes. It's the future, the past, Art Deco, the city, the American West…all of these things and none of these things. Not one era, not one thing, not one look. It is the coming together of different characters and different individuals, just like America itself. It is the unique beauty and emotion of America. (Sebra, 2017, para. 2)

The quilt theme continued into the Spring/Summer 2018 RTW collection, where Simmons included vintage quilts in garments, accessories, and store art installations (Figure 10, center panel). Some quilts were repurposed and used as linings for jackets and coats. Other quilts were embroidered with "Conceived in New York City" and "Designed in America" and carried by models on the runway (Göksenin, 2017). Interestingly, the *Vogue* review of the runway show did not mention the quilts, which were arguably more visible this time than in the previous collection (Phelps, 2017). As a *GQ* reviewer noted, the fact that models carried these quilts down the runway mainly went unnoticed by the media (Göksenin, 2017).

The F/W 2018 RTW collection followed a similar Americana theme, although darker and more dystopian. Several models carried mylar jackets lined in vintage quilts while wearing sheer silk dresses printed to match the quilt's design (Figure 10, right panel). Yet, again, the use of quilts flew under the radar, with no mention of them in the *Vogue Runway* review of the collection (Phelps, 2018).

Figure 10

Raf Simmons for Calvin Klein 205W39NYC

Note: These are examples of Raf Simmons using vintage quilts in his collections for Calvin Klein. Left panel: From Fall 2017 RTW, look 43. Middle panel: From Spring 2018 RTW, look 9. Right panel: From Fall 2018 RTW, look 46. Left panel from *Vogue Runway*, by Y. Vlamos, 2017 (https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/fall-2017-ready-to-wear/calvin-klein/slideshow/collection#43). Copyright 2017 by Condé Nast Publications Inc. Middle panel from *Vogue Runway*, by Y. Vlamos, 2018 (https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/spring-2018-ready-to-wear/calvin-klein/slideshow/collection#9). Copyright 2018 by Condé Nast Publications Inc. Right panel from *Vogue Runway*, by M. Tondo, 2018 (https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/fall-2018-ready-to-wear/calvin-klein/slideshow/collection#46). Copyright 2018 by Condé Nast Publications Inc.

Emily Adams Bode Aujla for Bode. In the early 21st century, popular media often credited Emily Adams Bode Aujla with restarting interest in repurposing quilts into garments, despite the earlier use of quilts by Carleen and Raf Simmons for Calvin Klein,

among others (Bauck, 2018; Fons, 2022a; Tashjian, 2021). Initially founded as a menswear line in 2016, Bode Aujla's first collections quickly garnered reactions among the fashion crowd, winning her the Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA) 2019 Emerging Designer of the Year and the CFDA Menswear Designer of the Year in 2021 and 2022 (Meltzer, 2022). Bode Aujla used vintage fabrics sourced worldwide, including quilts from New England, and produced one-of-a-kind garments. In 2016, after the debut of her first line, she discussed the importance of using quilts in her garments.

> "Somebody spent hours and days and months making those from scraps and they were, at some point, so functional and cherished…I'm repurposing that labor of love into a new piece that will be utilized. It gains a new function" (Moss, 2016, para. 3).

Perhaps because of the high visibility of her brand, with celebrities like Harry Styles and Zayn Malik wearing her garments, popular media tended to consider her as leading the charge of upcycled clothing (Tashjian, 2021). As of 2022, Bode sold garments in multiples, made from textiles that were "inspired" by quilts or vintage fabrics and produced at textile mills in New Delhi, India (Bode, n.d.). In addition, Bode still occasionally released one-off custom garments featuring upcycled quilts and textiles, although this was not as prevalent as in the early collections.

Upcycling Quilt Materials Goes Mainstream

Since Parkhouse-Benson for Carleen and Bode Aujla for Bode, many new designers have entered the upcycled quilt garment market. The fashion media began to pick up on the trend as high-fashion in 2018 and related the rise of these garments to a resurgence of interest in American West and Americana trends (Bauck, 2018). Whitney Bauck for *Fashionista* expressed concern in 2018 about the longevity of the quilt fashion trend, noting that Carleen and Bode were creating small-batch one-of-a-kind garments, "but if the desire for that look reaches the mass market, will the industry actually be able to set up and meet demand?" (Bauck, 2018, para. 13).

As it turns out, the trend did reach the mass market. Former editor of *QuiltFolk* magazine, Mary Fons (2022a), claimed that advertisements for garments made from upcycled quilt materials began to appear in early 2020, coinciding with the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, social media and the internet have increased the extent and speed at which consumers interact with trends. Fons (2022a) noted, "Whereas the previous

quilt-fashion cycles were brief and produced a limited number of garments for elite customers, a search for 'upcycled quilt clothes' on Etsy steadily returns around 2,000 hits" (p. 42). By 2022, hundreds of designers had flooded Etsy, Instagram, Facebook,[6] and other social media sites with upcycled quilt material garments, bags, stuffed animals, and other accessories.

The trend also caught the attention of an influential fashion museum, The Costume Institute at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, New York. Their 2021-2022 exhibition *In America: A Lexicon of Fashion* was conceptualized around a patchwork quilt, opening with an 1856 signature quilt. A section dedicated to American quiltmaking featured upcycled quilt ensembles from Ralph Lauren, Bode, Mimi Prober, STAN, and Eli Russel Linnetz (*In America: A lexicon of fashion 2021-2022*).

COVID-19 Pandemic and Cottagecore

The increased popularity of upcycled quilt material garments was linked to larger themes of sustainability, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on consumers, and the Cottagecore trend. As previously discussed, Fons (2022a) noted a rise in advertisements for upcycled quilt material garments in concurrence with the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020. Research has shown how the pandemic changed consumer clothing consumption and preferences due to stress and chaos (C. Liu et al., 2021). To understand this shift in clothing consumption, C. Liu et al. (2021) mined Twitter tweets between January 1, 2020, and September 31, 2020. As consumer consumption was often driven by a desire to feel good physically and emotionally, it could reflect consumers' mental health and well-being. The researchers found that consumers reached for items that provided a level of comfort, safety, warmth, and nostalgic connection to mitigate the effects of pandemic stress.

The pandemic also created an opportunity for new brands and businesses to cater to this shift in consumer tastes and desires (C. Liu et al., 2021). Garments made from upcycled quilt materials were uniquely suited to fulfill this need, literally wrapping consumers in warmth and comfort while providing tactile and haptic connections to

[6] Etsy is an online marketplace focused on handmade or vintage items and craft supplies. Instagram is a photo and video sharing social networking platform. Facebook is a social networking platform.

simpler times. As a result, designers were able to capitalize on this consumption shift and the increased demand for online shopping, accelerating the spread of the trend. In addition, C. Liu et al. (2021) noted the effect of consumer weight gain combined with dressing for virtual connections through platforms like Zoom on consumer preferences. Oversized, boxy jackets and coats made from upcycled quilts were an ideal solution that allowed consumers to conceal body changes, be physically comfortable, and still present an attractive virtual aesthetic.

This shift in consumer consumption also coincided with the increased popularity of the Cottagecore trend. Waller (2022) defined Cottagecore as "an internet-based aesthetic that revolves around a romanticized rural lifestyle, which is shared through social media postings" (p. 2). Also known as "Grandmacore," "Fairycore," and "Farmcore," this subculture focused on pastel colors, connecting with nature, sustainability, and slow fashion (Brand, 2021; Waller, 2022). Cottagecore created a feeling of escapism from consumers' highly chaotic and increasingly technological lifestyles, sentimentalizing pre-industrial ways of life (Waller, 2022). In addition, it encouraged interest in traditional female skills, such as sewing handmade garments and baking, but for pleasure instead of as gender-bound chores (Brand, 2021; Waller, 2022). Researchers noted that this focus on crafts and sustainable practices like upcycling and do-it-yourself (DIY) was a direct response to capitalism and modernism (Brand, 2021; Waller, 2022). Garments made from upcycled quilt materials were an ideal visible expression of Cottagecore, as quilts were tangible aesthetic symbols of pre-industrial life, traditional female skills, DIY, and sustainability.

While versions of the Cottagecore aesthetic existed throughout history, the 21st century movement grew out of political and social unrest and the COVID-19 pandemic. Consumers sought a way to escape their turbulent, unpredictable lives (Waller, 2022). Brand (2021) found that the hashtag "#Cottagecore" began appearing on social media as far back as 2014 but increased dramatically in use during 2020. This increase in use coincided with the shifts in consumer consumption found by C. Liu et al. (2021). The intersection of Cottagecore and the COVID-19 pandemic provided fertile ground for designers to engage in the revival of upcycled quilt material garments. Ironically, larger corporations began co-opting the Cottagecore aesthetic, selling mass-produced goods that

tapped into this visual aesthetic, directly opposing Cottagecore's ethos of slow fashion. Brands such as Target, Urban Outfitters, Free People, and Ralph Lauren began selling quilt and patchwork-inspired garments around 2020.

Why Upcycling Quilts Matters

On January 28, 2022, Mary Fons released a YouTube video titled *Stop Cutting Up Quilts to Make Clothes* (2022b). The arguments she presented in the video and the reactions of the quiltmaking community were a perfect microcosm for exploring why upcycling quilt materials was so controversial and why in 2022, it received so much attention. Fons later followed up the video with an article in *QuiltCon Magazine*, where she summarized both sides of the "to cut or not-to-cut" argument.

> Quilts, inanimate as they are, strike many people as having a soul. As such, some see taking scissors to one of them akin to murder. Those who wield the scissors, however, view the practice as an act of kindness: reincarnating an aging quilt into a sweatshirt or a pair of bib overalls is, to them and the people who wear their garments, the ultimate act of quilt love and respect. (2022a, p. 40)

I could not find any evidence of concern over upcycling or repurposing of quilts before the 1980s. When crazy quilts were at their peak popularity in the late 1800s, creating a garment out of one was likely seen as an original way to participate in the trend (see Figure 3 and Figure 4). The dressing gown from 1935 in Figure 5 reflected a practical reuse of materials that was common and often necessary during the Great Depression. The same sentiment was apparent in a *How to "Make-Do-and-Mend"* propaganda video released by the British Board of Trade, Ministry of Supply during World War II. It highlighted a dressing gown made from an old quilt, along with other tips for repurposing home textiles and keeping up with the latest fashion, as a patriotic way to support the war effort (eransford, 2009). In the 1960s, when Adolfo upcycled quilts into garments, there was little concern raised by quilters. Only a few quilts were "harmed" in making the garments, and the larger quiltmaking community seemed unconcerned about this seemingly one-time high-fashion instance.

However, the Ralph Lauren Fall/Winter 1982 collection elicited a much stronger reaction from the quiltmaking community (Fons, 2022a, 2022b; McCormick, 2013). The collection coincided with increased interest in American handcraft in home décor. As a result, quilts, patchwork, and other Americana home décor and fashion became popular

(Bavor, 2014; McCormick, 2013; Peterson, 2003). Concern about the increased use of antique quilts in home goods and fashion bubbled over with Lauren's collection. One quilter took such offense to Lauren's collection that she purchased several Ralph Lauren shirts from a department store, cut them up, and made a quilt (Daniels, 1983). She embroidered messages around the edges of the quilt to reprimand Lauren, such as "'Quilters are sew-super, but Ralph Lauren, you are an old sew-and-sew'" (Daniels, 1983, para. 8). Taking it a step further, she included a pincushion on the quilt as a form of voodoo toward Lauren.

While this may be an extreme example of a reaction, quilters, in general, were upset with the large volume of antique quilts purchased for Lauren's collection (Harriss, 1987; McCormick, 2013; Vogel, 1982). Many were concerned that the collection further endorsed the cutting up of quilts for garments and home goods. Several articles in *Quilter's Newsletter Magazine* pleaded with readers to stop destroying antique quilts and instead make new ones for use in fashion and home décor (Edmonds, 1982; Leman, 1982a). Bavor (2014) also reported that some quilt dealers later regretted selling quilts to Lauren once they realized he cut them up for garments. The *New York Times* even ran an article in November 1982 discussing the controversy over Lauren's actions (Vogel, 1982).

Ralph Lauren's buying of antique quilts caused even greater concern in the quilt scholar community. They worried that antique quilts from the late 19th century would become scarce and that patterns and quiltmaking history would be lost (Bavor, 2014; McCormick, 2013). Once a designer cut up a quilt, it could no longer be appropriately studied. In Susan Behuniak-Long's (1994) research on the influence of technology on quiltmaking, she called out this problematic use of quilts for fashion.

> The buying and selling of quilts is always problematic, given that quilts reflect not only the time and material invested, but also the crafter herself. It is more than fabric, stitching and time that is being bought…For example, Ralph Lauren collected antique quilts in order to cut them up to make designer jackets, vests, and skirts. Someone's story, cut apart, rearranged, and worn, is flaunted for fashion's sake. (pp. 162-163)

This quote alluded to the issue of lost provenance when a designer upcycles quilt materials, severing the connection between quilter and quilt. As a result, researchers

could not study who made the quilt or why; the informational and historical values were potentially lost. The best researchers could do was to date the fabrics and patterns in hopes of placing them in the correct period. This issue begged the question; how much quiltmaking history was lost due to Lauren's collection? How much would continue to be lost with the trend's 21st century revival?

There was also an issue of male designers (like Ralph Lauren and Adolfo) profiting from women's historical labor. When a designer transformed quilt materials through upcycling, the often-hidden histories of women were erased as well (Fons, 2022a; McCormick, 2013). McCormick (2013) discussed how much of the outrage over Lauren's collection stemmed from a general feeling that he destroyed or co-opted women's work. At the same, the growing feminist art history movement in the 1970s and 80s was pushing for increased representation of female artists (Sandell, 1979), and the cutting up of quilts was seen as a direct affront to this movement (Mainardi, 1978).

The quiltmaking community similarly criticized the 21st century trend of upcycling quilt materials for garments. Once again, quilt scholars grew concerned about a loss of history due to the number of designers and quilt materials involved. Instead of limited runs of garments for elite clientele, designers purchased large quantities of quilt materials and made garments intended for the mass market. Designers frequently featured "quilt drops" on Instagram, showing piles of quilt material recently acquired, ready to be cut, and turned into garments (Figure 11).

The other side of the upcycled quilt material debate was just as strong. Ralph Lauren's collection grew out of his love for American quiltmaking, and he saw his collection as a way to elevate quiltmaking beyond a "craft." His use of real antique quilts added a layer of authenticity to garments, allowing customers to interact directly with history. For example, the donor of the Ralph Lauren sweater at the Goldstein Museum of Design thought the imperfections and wear-and-tear of the quilts made the garments more meaningful (D. DeFore, personal communication, November 16, 2019). Raf Simmons used a similar line of reasoning at Calvin Klein. Quilts were a way to celebrate an aesthetic style unique to America.

Figure 11

"Quilt Drop" Post on Instagram

Note: Designers often post "quilt drops" on social media sites, showing piles of quilt materials recently acquired, ready to be cut and turned into garments. From *[pancake emoji] quilt drop tomorrow [pancake emoji] tons of cutie recycled quilts will be listed on our "custom quilt jacket" web-page tomorrow!*, by Psychic Outlaw [@psychic.outlaw], 2021, Instagram (https://www.instagram.com/p/CK1SZ1mFTFW/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link). Copyright 2021 by Psychic Outlaw.

Designers upcycling quilt materials saw this as a way to honor quiltmaking heritage publicly. Quilts, which customarily inhabit the private home space, are refashioned into something worn for the public space (Eicher, 2021). Wearing a coat made from upcycled quilt material could have signaled one's love for quiltmaking and shared that love with others through a highly visible signaling device (Wobst, 1977). This signaling, in turn, could have made quiltmaking seem more valuable in non-quilters' eyes (Berlinger, 2022; Cotonou, 2020; Kux, 2019). It could have also encouraged others to be interested in quiltmaking as quilts became more visible through different mediums, like

fashion. But were all these designers upcycling out of love for quiltmaking, or were they capitalizing on the latest hot internet trend?

Designers argued that upcycling quilt materials was a way to use quilts that nobody seemed to want anymore, increasing their use value. Designers typically sourced quilt materials from second-hand shops, garage sales, flea markets, and thrift stores. They claimed these quilt materials often have "lived their best life" and were no longer functional as bedcoverings. If no one wanted the quilt material for its original purpose, then "transforming an unwanted quilt into someone's favorite garment is to give it a second chance at life" (Fons, 2022a, p. 42). One could also argue that not all quilt materials had ties to family history (historical value), were made for a specific intention or person (sentimental value), or were aesthetic works of art (artistic value). Therefore, upcycling these quilt materials did not create a loss of history or harm the maker's legacy. And since quilters constantly made new quilts, there was, in theory, an endless supply for designers to upcycle.

By upcycling these abandoned quilt materials, designers prevented them from ending up in a future landfill. Upcycling quilt materials was a sustainable practice, and instead of making garments from new materials, designers used existing deadstock, such as quilt materials, for garments. In addition, upcycling was a means for designers to push back against "fast fashion" that was so prevalent in contemporary fashion. Reuse, repurposing, and upcycling were core tenants of the slow fashion movement (K. Fletcher & Grose, 2012; Holroyd et al., 2023). Instead of hoarding quilt materials in the closet, why not use them, wear them, and appreciate them in a different form?

This trend was also seen as pushback against the "quilt police," or people who claimed that quiltmaking must follow specific rules and techniques to be done "correctly." Many commenters on Fons' YouTube video (2022b) found her demand that designers stop cutting up quilts as gatekeeping, dictating how society should engage with quiltmaking. If you bought the quilt, who was to say what you could and could not do with it?

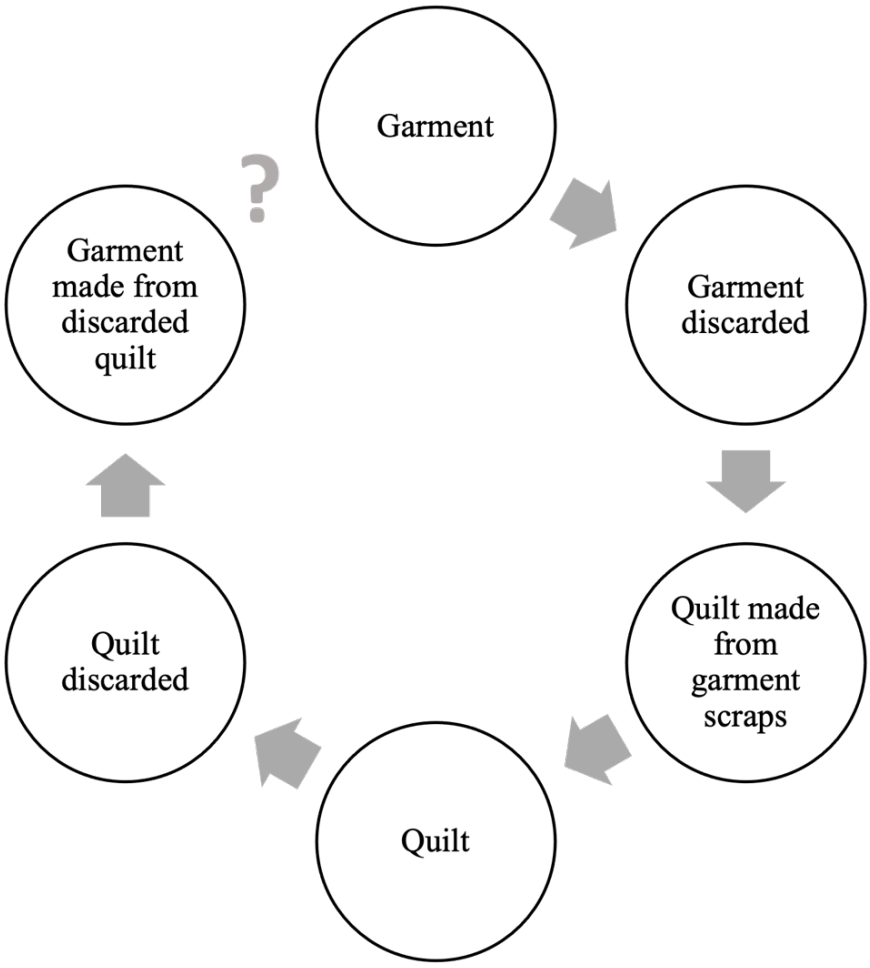
Finally, the upcycling of quilt materials by Ralph Lauren, Bode, and other designers mimicked the acts of some quilters. Designers saw quilt materials as scraps of raw materials ready to be repurposed into something usable, just as some historical

quilters saved garment scraps and repurposed them into quilts. Ironically, these same quilts made from garment scraps were cut and turned back into garments! Will these garments made from upcycled quilts eventually be discarded and turned back into quilts (Figure 12)?

Much research could be conducted regarding the controversy surrounding the upcycling of quilt materials, such as the change in attitudes of consumers and quilters over time. On social media, ample evidence existed of the divide between generations of quilters on this topic. However, this research focused on the designers' experiences when actively transforming quilt materials into fashion garments rather than the controversy of using quilts for garments.

Figure 12

Garment-to Quilt-to-Garment Lifecycle



The Value of Quilts in Society

Quiltmaking has long straddled the worlds of craft and art. However, it was not until later in the 20th century that the public began to see quilts as more than just a craft or "folk art" (Peterson, 2003). Traditionally, quilts were the product of domestic women's labor, intended for utilitarian purposes, as a sign of skill, or as gifting items (Brackman, 1989; Peterson, 2003). But quilts also served as remembrances of loved ones, fund-raisers, political and social expression, memorials, and creative expression (Brackman, 1989; Peterson, 2003). However, prior to the 20th century, quilts were rarely considered commodities or works of art (Peterson, 2003). Quiltmaking declined around World War II as mass-produced household goods became more affordable and accessible than home sewing. In addition, cultural changes, such as increased ease of travel and women entering the workforce, changed leisure priorities. In essence, society viewed quiltmaking as "old-fashioned."

Before the 1960s, the quilt dealer profession did not exist, and no established value was assigned to quilts (Bavor, 2014). Peterson (2003) traced the journey of quiltmaking from traditional craft to gaining cultural historical value, marking the 1970s as a turning point in how society viewed and valued quiltmaking. First, the 1976 United States Bicentennial sparked revived interest in quiltmaking, as women strove to evoke their foremothers by recreating traditional quilts (Kiracofe & Johnson, 1993; Stalp, 2007). However, a museum exhibition of quilts had the most impact on the cultural historical value of quiltmaking. In 1971, Johnathan Holstein and Gail van der Hoof curated an exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art called *Abstract Design in American Quilts* (Holstein & van der Hoof, 1971). Quilt scholars and dealers widely credited this exhibition as the turning point in elevating quiltmaking into the art world and creating a hierarchy of quilt value based on aesthetic and artistic merit (Bavor, 2014; Holstein, 1991; Peterson, 2003).

Holstein and van der Hoof offered the public a new way to see quilts by placing them in the context of artwork (Peterson, 2003). They selected quilts for the exhibition based on their aesthetic merit, not condition or workmanship. The quilts were framed and placed high on gallery walls, creating a level of detachment from the physical object and the maker (Holstein, 1991; Peterson, 2003). Peterson (2003) claimed that as a result of

the exhibition, “the symbolically powerful art field also gave quilts new legitimacy as ‘priceless’ aesthetic objects and helped to foster a stronger antique market for them” (p. 472). Quilts became commodified art objects worthy of collecting. They became celebrated more generally, and the public had a new way of viewing and understanding the visual significance of quilts.

However, to make quilts seem comparable to art, Holstein and van der Hoof removed the contexts of sentimentalism and utilitarianism from the quilts and focused on aesthetics to “elevate” them (Peterson, 2003). The upcycling of quilt materials into fashion garments mirrored this act. Through the transformation into a garment, the quilt material was divorced from its original context and maker as designers placed greater emphasis on its artistic value. As a result, designers altered the perception and cultural historical value of quilt material as they became commodified fashion objects.

Ironically, this exhibition may have been partially responsible for the upcycled/cutter quilt trend in the 1970s and 1980s. Quilts suddenly became collectibles, spurring the growth of the quilt dealer profession and the collecting of antique quilts (Bavor, 2014; Peterson, 2003). In reflecting on the exhibition, Holstein lamented that it contributed to the rise of interest in Americana for home décor and the misuse of antique quilts, specifically citing Ralph Lauren’s collection in 1982 (Holstein, 1991). While quilts had become valued as art objects, Holstein (1991) also noted that “by drawing so much attention to them, we had helped make them prey to the meanest market motives” (p. 112). As a result, quilts became simultaneously singularized as art objects and commodified as cutter quilts (Kopytoff, 1986).

Langellier (1994) further examined how the revival of quiltmaking after the 1970s changed quilts’ meaning and cultural historical value through a phenomenological and feminist analysis of quilters in Maine. She noted that after the 1970s, society no longer saw quiltmaking as old-fashioned or conservative. Instead, the meaning of quilts was refashioned as quiltmaking was brought out of the private home sphere and experienced through ever-expanding public networks. Langellier’s conclusions echoed the findings of Peterson (2003), who noted that quilts became seen as both art and a commodity. While quilts-as-art seemed to elevate the artistic value of quilts by separating them from their makers, it was the commodification of quilts that created the most reaction from the

quiltmaking community. Commodification manifested into the upcycling of quilt materials in the 1980s and continued to resonate into the 21st century revival. Are these commodified quilts valued for their history, sentimentality, or aesthetics?

Sustainability Paradigms in the Fashion Industry

Sustainability, upcycling, and slow fashion have become critical topics within apparel and textile research. Scholarship and research in sustainability and upcycling are quite prolific, examining the subject through various lenses (Cassar, 2021; Dissanayake & Sinha, 2015; K. Fletcher, 2014; Henderson, 2020; Janigo et al., 2017; Janigo & Wu, 2015; Payne, 2021; Young et al., 2004). However, researchers have yet to explore the role of sustainability within quiltmaking or the intersection of quiltmaking and fashion. In addition, there is little research on the experience of designers engaged with upcycling. Therefore, I sought literature from the apparel and textile fields to examine how upcycling and slow fashion practices could be applied to designers when upcycling quilt materials into fashion garments. I also explored literature on how the upcycling process could modify the meaning and value of objects.

Upcycling and Slow Fashion Practices

Researchers have noted the need for strategies that address the waste generated by fashion systems and how society values and uses clothing (DeLong et al., 2013; K. Fletcher & Grose, 2012; Holroyd et al., 2023). A few strategies used by the fashion industry and independent designers were the practices of upcycling and reuse. The term *upcycling* was popularized by William McDonough and Michael Braungart in their 2002 book *Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things* (2002). They promoted upcycling as a circular product lifecycle approach, where a product reaches the end of its useful life and either reenters the environment to promote future growth or reenters the industrial production cycle. In this way, materials and products were constantly recirculated within the same system by transforming into new products (McDonough & Braungart, 2002; Payne, 2021). Typically, in upcycling, an object often considered disposable by a portion of society was modified into something new and useful by someone else's standards. Designers played a critical role in upcycling by shaping a product's aesthetics, function, and impact throughout its lifecycle (Payne, 2021). As

discussed previously, the concept of upcycling existed for centuries as people reused and repurposed textiles and apparel (Holroyd et al., 2023). But the principle of upcycling as tied to the larger contexts of sustainability and climate change was a late-20th century postmodern concept.

Specifically, upcycling practices fell under the sustainability concept of *slow fashion* within the fashion industry. Activist Kate Fletcher (2007) coined the term, which referred to a movement that pushed back against growth-obsessed fast fashion. Slow fashion models of apparel production advocated for consideration of the impact production had on people, the environment, and animals. Fletcher (2010) stated that one way to address slow fashion was through "small-scale production, traditional craft techniques, local materials and markets" (p. 264), techniques often implemented by designers upcycling quilt materials. Holroyd et al. (2023) noted that this model was not focused on trends but instead promoted preserving and protecting craft techniques, quality, and individuality. It was an approach to production that looked at both materiality, such as quality and durability of fabrics and construction, and intangible factors, like how well a garment could continue to satisfy customers' needs for newness over time. Slow fashion also included approaches like zero-waste design, material and production innovations, DIY garments, and upcycling. Through upcycling, designers could combine quality craftsmanship, traditional craft techniques like quiltmaking, and uniqueness to create garments that have longer-lasting value for customers.

Many definitions of upcycling have existed, all of which had nuances that impacted the interpretation of what upcycling entailed and the role a designer played in altering the meaning and value of an object traveling through the system. Payne (2021) described upcycling as an act of "creating new products with *higher* value than the old" (p. 114, emphasis in original). Based on this definition, a quilt would have less value as the original object than the repurposed fashion object. But what kind of value could be increased through upcycling: use, perception, aesthetic, cultural historical? And what role have designers seen themselves playing in this change in value?

Janigo et al. (2017) provided a more nuanced description of upcycling, indicating a change in an object's aesthetic and use values. They stated, "Upcycling transforms a garment at the end of its useful life into something novel and appealing, applying

noticeable aesthetic changes" (p. 256). For example, this transformation could happen through deconstructing a garment, cutting patterns from the material, and creating a new garment with different functionality and aesthetics. The focus of their definition of "aesthetic change" indicated the importance of aesthetics in assigning a new value to the upcycled object and the role of the designer in creating this aesthetic change.

A third definition of upcycling came from an interview with Sarah Scaturro, the Head Conservator of the Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art at the time of the interview (Odabasi, 2021). Scaturro reflected on the differences between upcycling and conservation, providing a particularly apt definition of upcycling when applied to designers upcycling quilt materials.

> Upcycling often entails taking an original garment apart to create something new which is somehow more relevant to the current fashion…I think upcycling is a process that gives you a product that already has an attached story in some way, even if you do not know the story…Upcycling really has the power to marry aesthetics with narrative. (Odabasi, 2021, p.14)

In Scaturro's definition, upcycling went beyond creating a new product with an increased aesthetic value. It involved a designer reinterpreting and sharing the stories of the transformed object. This definition highlighted the need to understand how designers perceived themselves as storytellers. Do designers consider the stories of quilts and American quiltmaking during upcycling? Based on Scaturro's definition, understanding the designers' role was critical, as they are the ones who translated and shared the story of objects when upcycled.

Based on these definitions, it became apparent why many quilters reacted negatively to designers upcycling quilt materials. These definitions automatically discounted the inherent cultural historical value and layers of meanings tied to objects prior to upcycling. For example, did society perceive the value of upcycling a mass-produced vehicle taillight into a home décor object the same as upcycling a handmade quilt into a garment? At a base level, all the definitions of upcycling discussed the transformation of an object beyond the physical. But the definitions solely focused on what happens to the object, not the designer creating this transformation. There may be something more happening to the object as mediated by a designer at a metaphysical level.

Meaning and Value of Upcycled Objects

Based on the definitions of upcycling, objects that undergo this process were transformed in more than just aesthetic and physical ways; they also seemed to be altered in meaning and value. Emgin (2012) examined the trend of "trashion," where objects were recreated from trash, countering the idea that an object was dead once it had been disposed of. Instead, Emgin argued that the value of objects was constantly evolving, so even when an object became "waste," it still could be brought back to life and redefined in terms of value through upcycling. Furthermore, objects brought back from the "dead" often had higher status and value than before, as "people are often eager to see objects that were once considered useless and tasteless when they have been invigorated with new life" (p. 71). These rebirthed objects gained new value types such as use, perception, and social value. Therefore, design was a conduit through which the value of objects could be constantly redefined and mediated. This concept, however, runs contrary to those critical of upcycling of quilt materials, like Fons (2022a, 2022b), who claimed cutting up quilts "kills them," effectively ending the use and value of the quilt.

Emgin (2012) also noted a dichotomy within upcycling. Society saw upcycling as ethically moral, as a way of managing waste and improving the environment. However, upcycling was also an economic enterprise, as designers and consumers interacted commercially through discarded objects. Both ideas changed the value of objects through upcycling. For example, discarded or "dead" quilts increased in perception and use value once transformed into a fashion garment because they went through the disposal and rebirth processes. But this practice has also become an entrepreneurial boom for designers, creating a separate layer of context for the value of quilts.

Young et al. (2004) evaluated the personal, environmental, and economic value of apparel produced from post-consumer recycled clothing and textiles. They found that participants highly regarded custom-designed upcycled garments, especially if made from family heirloom garments. Participants saw these garments as meaningful, symbolic, and cherished ways to use old clothing while strengthening family social connections. Young et al. showed that upcycling sentimentally valued objects made them more appealing and desirable to consumers and, therefore, could command a higher price point. In the case of quilt materials, designers often bought them for next-to-nothing at thrift stores, even

though they could still contain levels of historical, sentimental, or informational value. After upcycling, the transformed quilt could sell for $250 - $4,000 as a fashion garment due to increases in a customer's perceived use and aesthetic value. Just as family heirloom garments from Young et al. no longer served a functional purpose in their original state, a quilt remade could command a higher consumer price point once converted into a new garment.

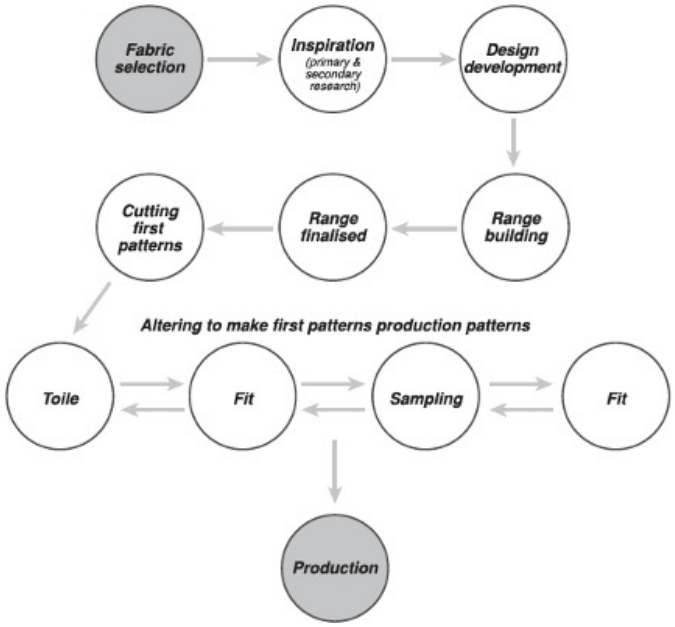
Lastly, Janigo et al. (2017) performed a longitudinal study that examined upcycling behavior of 30 women. One finding showed that upcycling allowed women to share and celebrate their culture with others. For example, wearing an upcycled quilt jacket could be a way to signal and celebrate quiltmaking with others. Participants who shared their garment making process through social media or blogs could create a higher perceived value for consumers. For designers upcycling quilt materials, this connection to consumers could be significant, as they frequently shared their progress and process on social media, showing images of the original quilts, their process, and the final garment.

Designers and the Design Process

Defining *design* was complex as design could refer to any act of making and encompass a spectrum of craft, art, and technology (Payne, 2021). What it means to be a *designer* also comes with a range of nuances. For example, Thomas (2017) noted that design could not exist without a consumer, as the ultimate goal of a designer is to resolve a market need or problem for a customer. Thomas presented a design-to-production model outlining the design process specific to the fashion industry, which went through an iterative sampling phase before production (Figure 13). Lamb and Kallal (1992) presented a more generic iterative model with the following design stages: problem identification, preliminary ideas, design refinement, prototype development, evaluation, and implementation (Figure 14). Their model centered designers' decisions on a target market and provided criteria to assess how well a design met the needs of consumers. In both Thomas's (2017) and Lamb and Kallal's (1992) models, the designer was responsible for determining a problem that needed solving for a target market.

Figure 13

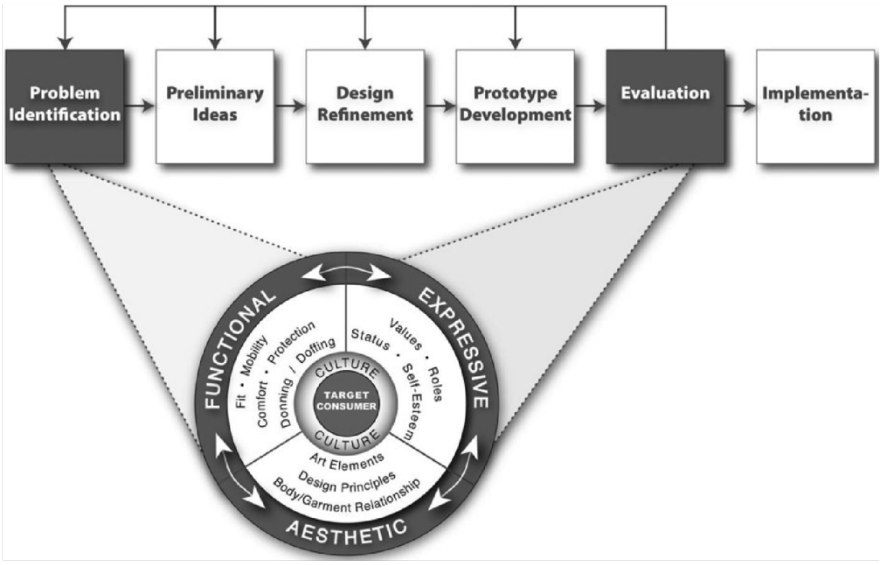
Design-to-Production Flowchart



Note. Adapted from *Fashion Ethics* (p. 20), by S. Thomas, 2017, Routledge. Copyright 2017 by Sue Thomas.

Figure 14

Apparel Design Framework (ADF)



Note. The ADF is an iterative process centered around the target consumer. Adapted from "FEA Consumer Needs Model: 25 Years Later," by B. Orzada and M. Kallal, 2021, *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, *39*(1), p. 25.

Payne (2021) presented a more philosophical approach to the design process. For fashion designers specifically, she stated that "their creative work is intangible and tangible, imbuing fashionable meanings and brand meanings into the garments they design" (p. 43). Unlike Thomas (2017) and Lamb and Kallal (1992), who described design through the interaction of designer and consumer, Payne concentrated on the interaction of the designer and the designed object. She described the design process as three interlinked components: the design object (the material outcome), the design process (the activity of designing), and design agency (how the designer and designed object act on their world).

These three interlinked components formed a hermeneutic circle among the designer, object, and society, like that which grounded this phenomenological dissertation. Through the act of designing, the designer and object constantly informed each other, imparting new layers of depth and meaning to one another. Payne (2021) stated, "In this sense, the designed 'designs' back upon the designer, in essence designing her or him, and laying down ways in which future designed objects and environments in turn 'design' consequences" (p. 3). Design, then, became a conduit through which the value of objects was continuously redefined and mediated (Emgin, 2012). Payne's ontological interpretation of design provided a different approach than traditional design models to examine designers' lived experiences when upcycling quilt materials and uncover how they shape future fashion, quiltmaking, and cultural systems.

The Importance of Fashion in Society

For this research, I focused specifically on the experiences of designers when upcycling quilt materials into *fashion garments*, as opposed to accessories or home décor items. Designers upcycled quilt materials into numerous objects like stuffed animals, fanny packs, tote bags, and pillows. However, transforming quilt materials into a fashion garment was particularly interesting because of how society values and ascribes meaning to what we wear and how this practice could address slow fashion approaches in apparel design (K. Fletcher, 2010; K. Fletcher & Grose, 2012). What we wear has been a means of personal communication and identity signaling (Eicher & Roach-Higgins, 1992). It has also reflected the larger cultural context in which an individual resides.

As Payne (2021) noted, scholars have long wrestled with defining and contextualizing *fashion* and fashion systems. Payne proposed a new conceptual framework with three dimensions—fashion-as-culture, fashion-as-change, and fashion-as-industry—demonstrating the interrelationship of designers, objects, and processes in the fashion industry according to a society's culture and time.

The first dimension, fashion-as-culture, was related to fashion's role in creating symbolic meaning and culture (Payne, 2021). As Payne stated, "Dress[7] is a powerful form of cultural expression, a visual medium, constructed and reinvented by both wearers and producers of clothing" (p. 16). This quote showed the importance of not just those wearing but also those producing and designing fashion in creating cultural meaning. Just as quilts reflected quilters' experiences, politics, art, and culture, so too has fashion. When quilts and fashion combined, there were layers upon layers of symbolism and meaning interacting.

The second dimension, fashion-as-industry, examined how human labor and technology produced fashion, thus creating the context for fashion-as-culture (Payne, 2021). Production methods were explicitly linked to the culture, tradition, and geography of the makers or designers of both fashion and quilts. Designers who upcycle quilt materials bridged multiple cultural phases of fashion-as-industry, tying pre-industrial methods of slow fashion and hand sewing to modern practices of factory production.

The third dimension, fashion-as-change, looked at how the movement of trends and preferences over time reflected more prominent cultural themes (Payne, 2021). The previous discussion on sustainability and the history of upcycling quilts illustrated how societal changes led to the 21st century mass-market phenomenon. However, the question remained if this phenomenon was just a fad with minimal cultural impact or if it would have staying power, changing societal views about the meaning and value of quilts and upcycled objects.

Through the act of upcycling, designers moved quilts out of the realm of quiltmaking into the realm of fashion, where these objects became part of Payne's (2021)

[7] In this context, *dress* does not refer to the apparel garment, but to dress as defined by Eicher and Roach-Higgins (1992) as "an assemblage of body modifications and/or supplements displayed by a person in communicating with other human beings" (p. 15).

framework. This framework showed how transforming quilt materials into fashion garments could recontextualize both objects and add new layers of meaning.

Designers' Experiences When Upcycling

Most upcycling research focused on the need for upcycling, how to upcycle, or consumer-related studies. Little research examined upcycling from the viewpoint of designers. This section highlights research that explored the experiences of designers involved in upcycling and what these experiences meant in terms of the designers' relationship to objects.

First, in their longitudinal study of upcycling behaviors of 30 women, Janigo et al. (2017) found that emotional connection was an essential aspect of the upcycling design process. One group of participants interviewed, "Upcycling Professionals," sold their upcycled products and typically focused on a specific product category. These designers were most similar to the designers targeted for this research. Their results showed that Upcycling Professionals utilized emotional connection to increase the salability of their work by creating objects that commemorated customers' life events or memorialized customers' loved ones. They preferred to work with clothing with inherent histories and invested time upcycling these types of garments into new products like rugs, t-shirt quilts, and teddy bears to create and share new narratives with customers. The researchers also examined the motivation, challenges, and tools needed for upcycling but did not examine the specific experience of Upcycling Professionals. While they discussed the importance of emotional connection when upcycling value ladened objects like garments of the deceased, further examination of this aspect was needed concerning upcycling quilt materials. My research was built upon Janigo et al. (2017) but focused solely on the experience of designers.

Book designer Jason Thompson (2010) discussed his experience with upcycling books into paper art. Thompson's reflections shed light on the inherent values of books, stating, "Books are more than pages, board, glue, and thread – they are artifacts of the human spirit and hand" (p. 7). This sentiment could equally be applied to a quilt. Quilts were handmade objects consisting of seemingly unimportant materials (fabric, thread, batting), which, when they came together, reflected something greater about their maker, culture, and time.

Thompson (2010) also reflected on the first time he took a book apart for art, describing the act as a violent process.

> It felt wrong to cannibalize the essence of a book for its elemental parts. But after playing with enough unwanted and forgotten books, this feeling eventually passed. There are a lot of books out there - don't be afraid to exorcise their bookish essence for other creative ends. (p. 7)

This violent metaphor was similar to that used by Fons, who compared cutting up a quilt to murder (Fons, 2022a, 2022b). However, even though Thompson viewed books as sacred objects, he also recognized that not all books were sacred. Turning unwanted books into art allowed designers and artists to make new meanings out of these objects, a sentiment that could also be applied to quilt materials.

Lastly, Rachael Cassar (2021) used phenomenological reflection to examine her embodied experience while upcycling the garments of a deceased female from 1920-1930. Objects, especially those made from fabric, were a "form of memory" that archived lived experiences and traces of the maker. Cassar stated that it was vital for a designer to gain a deep understanding of the object before extending its lifespan through upcycling because "I'm caring for the piece, processing the garment's physical, tangible narrative and history and ensuring that this knowledge is transferred through the process of reformation" (p. 340). As a designer, Cassar needed to connect with an object emotionally and physically to sustain the object's material heritage. Therefore, she was as much impacted by the upcycling process as the object. Her interaction with upcycled garments led her to wonder if upcycling could be a process through which we read and understand material culture and what role upcycling could play in reforming and reconnecting with historical pieces. This query is apt when applied to upcycling quilt materials, as history was reinterpreted through the designer's experiences, adding new layers of meaning to these objects while recontextualizing our connection to history. Was sustaining a quilt's heritage and story an essential part of the process for these designers as it was for Cassar? How did designers connect with quilt materials emotionally and physically, and what could this say about the role quilts play in our lives?

Chapter III: Methods

This hermeneutic phenomenological study utilized qualitative research methods to describe designers' experiences when upcycling quilt materials into fashion garments. A qualitative approach was appropriate because this research sought to give meaning to a common experience shared by a group of designers. The research used a three-pronged approach to phenomenology, including interviews with 17 designers representing 16 businesses, photo elicitation, and content analysis.

This chapter outlines my research approach, justifies the use of phenomenology, and describes my research methods. In addition, I present my research procedure, including sample selection, recruitment, and data collection methods. Finally, I explain my data analysis methods and methods to ensure validity and rigorous research.

Research Approach

For this study, I used a phenomenological methodology because it afforded the illumination of rich descriptions and personal meanings of designers' experiences when upcycling quilt materials. The primary goal of phenomenological research has been to describe what a set of participants had in common in order to convey a universal essence (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). Specifically, I used a hermeneutic phenomenological approach as described by Heidegger (1962). Heidegger focused on understanding "dasein," or the meaning of being human in the world (Laverty, 2003). He saw hermeneutic phenomenology as an interpretive process through which the meaning of human cultural activity could be understood. Hermeneutic phenomenology has been ontologically based, focused on "studying the concept of being in the world rather than knowing the world" (Reiners, 2012, p. 1). By highlighting details and minor aspects of an experience that are part of everyday life, researchers created a sense of meaning and understanding of lived experiences and how people interacted with one another and their material culture (Dibley et al., 2020).

In hermeneutic phenomenology, the researcher did not bracket out their prior experiences. Instead, the researcher embedded them into the research and interpretation process (Laverty, 2003). Individuals interpreted their encounters in the world through

lenses formed by their background or "pre-understandings" (Peoples, 2021). Pre-understandings have been individuals' preconceived knowledge of the world, shaped by their cultural, social, and historical contexts (Laverty, 2003). They have been constantly revised through experiences and interactions in the world, thus impacting interpretation and understanding (Peoples, 2021). Individuals and the world have been part of a continuous circle, each imparting meaning on the other (Laverty, 2003). Therefore, Heidegger believed that a person could not set aside their own pre-understandings as one could not separate oneself from their existence in the world (Reiners, 2012). Instead, a researcher integrated their pre-understandings directly into the data analysis process. My pre-understandings are outlined in the following "researcher assumption" section.

The core of Heidegger's (1962) phenomenology was a circle of understanding in which individuals integrated their pre-understandings into their understanding of the world. This constant revisionary process has been known as the hermeneutical circle (Peoples, 2021). In the hermeneutical circle, data analysis has been an iterative process of understanding the whole (the entire transcript), the parts (codes and themes), and then the whole again, constantly looking for new comprehensions of the experience. The process had not been linear but a spiral in which the researcher is "always moving from the object that is to be understood to the personal comprehension of the researcher and then back to the object" (Peoples, 2021, p. 33).

Researchers did not typically apply phenomenology to quiltmaking research. However, in one example, Langellier (1990, 1994) discussed the combination of phenomenology and feminism within quiltmaking research and how both could inform the interpretation of quiltmakers' experiences. In interviews, she used a single open-ended question, combined with quantitative data, to reveal how quiltmaking intersected with multiple aspects of women's lives.

Instead, research methods for quiltmaking generally have focused on historical or material culture methods to shed light on a specific quilt (Baumgarten et al., 2020; Dimock-Quaglia, 1999) or described a locale-specific quilting style (Bond, 2020), or traced the history of a phenomenon, such as research on the cutter quilts by McCormick (2013). Researchers who focused on the quilters themselves often traced the history and genealogy of a specific quiltmaker, as told through a particular quilt (Bongiorno Stephens

& Stephens, 2020; Bywater Cross, 2020). Other researchers produced ethnographies based on quilting guilds (Cerny et al., 1993; Dickie, 2003; Stalp, 2007) or specific types of quilters, such as those attending QuiltCon (Barrus, 2021). Another methodology used oral history to capture the voices of often-overlooked male quilters (French, 2021).

There has been precedence for using phenomenological approaches to examine apparel designers. First, Janigo et al. (2017) used interpretive phenomenological analysis in a longitudinal study of upcycling behaviors of 30 women. Their data included interviews, questionnaires, and photographs of participants' upcycled items. This methodology allowed the researchers to develop detailed descriptions and comparisons of behaviors across participants with a range of upcycling experiences. Second, Carufel (2019) used phenomenology to highlight the experiences of apparel designers related to customer sizing in small womenswear businesses. This research gave voice to issues faced by design entrepreneurs regarding sizing, a topic typically researched from a consumer standpoint. Lastly, Cassar (2021) used phenomenological reflection to describe her embodied experience while upcycling the garments of a deceased female from 1920-1930. The line of inquiry presented by Cassar became the impetus for the research question of my study.

I chose a methodological approach that more closely aligns with those used to examine apparel designers because all the participants were designing apparel items, and I wanted to elevate their voices and experiences. In addition, I aimed to expand on methods used to examine quiltmaking by looking beyond physical and historical aspects and into the more significant social and cultural contexts where quiltmaking, fashion, and sustainability intersect.

My research used a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to focus on designers transforming quilt material into new fashion objects. These designers imparted additional meaning and new types of value on these materials, moving them from one exchange sphere – discarded or second-hand quilt market – into a new sphere – apparel market – through the act of upcycling (Kopytoff, 1986). Cassar (2021) described the process through which a designer connected with objects during upcycling as a phenomenological encounter. Through the upcycling design process, the object developed agency forming a reciprocal relationship between the object and the designer.

This reciprocal relationship between designer and object was similar to the hermeneutic circle between researcher and interpretation. Each one constantly informed the other, imparting new layers of depth and meaning. Therefore, by using a hermeneutical approach, I could deeply explore the experiences of designers when upcycling quilt material and how the relationships they formed with these objects were reflected in themselves and their work.

Researcher Assumptions

For rigorous qualitative research, the researcher must have stated their philosophical assumptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My methodology was grounded in a social constructivism paradigm for this phenomenological study. I centered my research on understanding the world and experiences of participants through broad, open-ended questions and aimed to interpret their reality and the contexts which shape that reality.

An essential aspect of hermeneutic phenomenology has been discussing pre-understandings, assumptions, and biases (Peoples, 2021). Moustakas (1994) noted that the personal history of the researcher should have been a driving force in the interest and curiosity about the research question. The researcher should be situated within their research world on some level, with an "undeniable connection with the population they intend to study" (Dibley et al., 2020, p. 53). As a quilter for over 20 years, my involvement in quiltmaking as a hobby and a scholar has influenced my research interests and interpretations. While I have been a quiltmaker, I did not identify as a quilt collector or dealer. I also had professional experience as a technical designer in the fashion industry and working in museums with historical dress and textiles. This intersection of quiltmaking, apparel design, and historical dress and textiles formed the framework for my interpretation of this research and situated me within the world and population of this study. As a result, I approached the research from an emic or insider perspective. Stalp (2007) noted the importance of insider status when researching and interviewing quilters, who could be reluctant to discuss their work with outsiders. While not all participants in this study identified as both quilters and designers, my background knowledge in both quiltmaking and apparel design allowed me to build rapport with participants and understand discipline-specific jargon.

I did not have personal experience with upcycling quilt materials into fashion garments, but my sentiments about the process evolved throughout the early phases of my research process. I initially became aware of the phenomenon through a material culture analysis of a sweater with antique quilt front panels from the Ralph Lauren Fall/Winter 1982 collection (Pokorny, 2021; Pokorny & DeLong, 2022). Through the lens of this research, I agreed with the quiltmaking community's criticism of the collection. I too saw Lauren's actions as an inauthentic use of quiltmaking history, profiting from the historical labor of females.

However, as I became aware of the 21st century version of the phenomenon, my opinions began to shift. The reactions online to Fons' (2022b) YouTube video opened my eyes to new viewpoints. Reading through hundreds of comments on Facebook (Young & Millennial Quilters [Janelle Carew Vogler], 2022) and Reddit (fnulda, 2022) revealed that many younger quilters felt differently than the scholars who had previously expressed concern over the cutting up of antique quilts (Daniels, 1983; Edmonds, 1982; Fons, 2022a, 2022b; Harriss, 1987; Leman, 1982a; McCormick, 2013; Vogel, 1982). Some commented that quilts were meant to be used and visible instead of hidden away or inaccessible to the public in museums. Others discussed the sustainable aspect of using quilts for fashion garments. They felt that the sustainable use of quilts took precedence over the perceived "improper use" of quilts. And still others expressed outrage over Fons (2022b) dictating how society should interact with quiltmaking heritage and her comparisons of upcycling quilt material to "appropriation," accusing her of gatekeeping the quiltmaking world.

The strong polar reactions to the act of cutting up quilt material fueled my interest to dig deeper into the phenomenon and understand it from the experience of designers, a voice I felt was missing from the conversation. I began following designers on Instagram engaged in upcycling quilts to immerse myself in the phenomenon fully. I saw merit in both sides of the issue and found that this topic represented an overall shift in the mindset of the quiltmaking community as beginning, younger quilters started to engage in the craft (Barrus, 2021; Pokorny, 2020). Therefore, I approached this research with pre-understandings about both sides of the argument, aiming not to validate either side but to shed light on the often-overlooked designers as opposed to consumers, quilt scholars, or

quiltmakers. Ultimately, the decision "to cut or not to cut" was a highly personal one and should be respected.

Research Methods

Research methods for this study used a three-pronged approach to phenomenology, including interviews, photo elicitation, and content analysis. This combination of data sources provided a more nuanced view of the experience of designers, allowing for a deeper level of synthesis and integration (Hall-Patton, 2005; Peoples, 2021). In addition, I gained a comprehensive view of designers' experiences through these multiple perspectives. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Minnesota as an exempt study on July 20, 2022.

Sample Selection

For this study, I interviewed 17 designers representing 16 businesses actively involved in upcycling quilt material into fashion garments.[8] Purposive sampling was used to select a homogenous group of participants who had experienced the phenomenon of upcycling quilt materials into a fashion garment (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The inclusion criteria for the study were as follows:

The designer had to:

1. Be based in the United States with an established business related to making garments from upcycled quilt material for at least one year.
2. Upcycle the quilt material into fashion garments, such as jackets, tops, and dresses. The designer could also upcycle quilt material into other items, such as accessories or bags.
3. Source the quilt material from second-hand markets, such as thrift stores, estate sales, quilt dealers, eBay, or Facebook Marketplace.[9] Or the designer could source directly from customers as part of their custom work business. The garments could not be made from new "virgin" quilts or quilts created with the intent of being cut into a garment.

[8] Two designers co-owned a business and were interviewed simultaneously.
[9] Facebook Marketplace is a peer-to-peer e-commerce platform hosted through Facebook, a social networking site.

4. Design and produce upcycled garments themselves or design garments produced with the assistance of sewists or a manufacturing facility.
5. Be 18 years or older.

As defined in Chapter 1, the term designer was used as a blanket term indicating a person who has a role in creating a designed garment (Payne, 2021). No preference was given for the size of the designer's business. Business size ranged variably from designers teaching classes on making upcycled quilt jackets, to producing a few works a year, to producing a few garments monthly, and to producing wholesale collections following the traditional fashion calendar of approximately 100 garments every few months. Participation was not limited to those who were also quilters, as the research aim was not focused on quilters but on designers who upcycle quilt material.

Recruitment

Potential participants who fit the inclusion criteria were identified based on designers mentioned by Fons (2022a), searches on Instagram, panelists from *Second Lives: Reusing Vintage and Antique Quilts* from the Quilt Alliance's "Quilters Take a Moment" event in 2022, and recommendations from American Quilt Study Group members. Identified designers were either direct messaged on Instagram, e-mailed, or messaged through their website's contact section. Due to the informal nature of direct messaging on Instagram, my initial contact consisted of a short message introducing myself, explaining the purpose of the study, and asking if they would be interested in participating. If the designer responded, I sent a second message providing a brief overview of participant requirements, compensation, and a link to an information sheet that provided full details of the study with links for booking an interview time and photo consent (Appendix A). For designers contacted via e-mail through their websites, a more robust initial e-mail was sent outlining the study, time requirements, and compensation. After confirming interest, participants were sent an e-mail with the same information as that provided in the information sheet link to those on Instagram. See Appendix B for the recruitment text.

I recruited additional participants by posting a flyer on my personal Instagram, which was shared in the Instagram Stories of several friends in the quiltmaking community (Appendix C). At least one participant saw my recruitment flyer shared on

another account's Instagram and contacted me directly about participation. Additionally, I posted the recruitment flyer in 16 Facebook quilt and upcycling-focused groups. I received several e-mails and Facebook messages from interested designers and confirmed two participants through this method. When contacted directly regarding participation, I asked potential participants to provide links to their social media accounts or business websites, and I screened them to confirm that they met the inclusion criteria. In total, over 40 designers were contacted, and I had a list of an additional 15 designers identified as meeting the criteria who were not contacted. The number of potential participants showed the scale and scope in which designers engaged in this phenomenon.

Sample size. This study aimed to interview approximately 15 designers who upcycle quilt material into fashion garments. According to Dibley et al. (2020), the goal of qualitative research has been to reach *data saturation*, a point at which no new data was being found. However, in hermeneutic phenomenological research, reaching data saturation has been seen as impossible as participants may not represent all the experiences relevant to the topic. The researcher was not trying to definitively answer a question but shed light on a shared experience. Instead, a researcher balanced the purpose of the research, the relationship between population and sample size, the depth of data collected, and data analysis methods. The sample size for this study (n=17) was found to be sufficient as it represented almost a third of the population size identified (n=55). Combined with a narrow study focus, the sample size was appropriate for this study.

Pilot Study

Prior to recruitment, I conducted a pilot study with a member of my graduate program cohort. While she did not upcycle quilt material into garments, she had personal experience with upcycling other textile arts and researched the upcycling of historical objects. I reviewed the pilot study with my advisor, Dr. Elizabeth Bye. Based on the pilot study, I confirmed the interview length of time, reordered the interview questions, tweaked the questions' wording for clarity and flow, and developed additional follow-up questions to elicit more detailed responses. The data from the pilot study was not included in the final data analysis.

Interviews

For this research, I interviewed 17 designers representing 16 businesses actively involved in upcycling quilt materials into fashion garments. Before the interviews, participants received an information sheet that explained the research process, the purpose of the study, confidentiality, and compensation details (Appendix D). Signed consent was not required, per the Institutional Review Board, but before the start of the interview, I verbally asked participants to consent to audio and video recording for data analysis.

In addition, I asked participants to verbally consent to the use of their names and their business names in data analysis, scholarly presentations, and publications. I outlined the risks of sharing their identity at the start of the interview, and I gave participants the option to have a pseudonym assigned. All participants consented to the use of their name and business name. The decision to identify participants was determined under careful consideration regarding research ethics. This research presented minimal personal risk for participants, as the topic was deemed neither sensitive nor involved marginalized groups (Dibley et al., 2020). The nature of their business working with upcycled quilt material already opened them up to scrutiny and criticism from the public, and this research presented them an opportunity to address these criticisms directly. As the research questions dealt with specific topics about their business and included images of their work, which was already publicly visible online, the chance of identifying a participant was high.

All interviews took place over Zoom and occurred between September and December 2022. The interviews were long-form, semi-structured interviews lasting between 75 and 195 minutes, with an average of 110 minutes. Interviews were ideal for capturing participants' perspectives, emotions, and attitudes about their experiences (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). Participants were offered a $75.00 honorarium in the form of a pre-paid Visa gift card or Amazon gift card. I recorded audio and visuals of the interviews through Zoom and captured backup audio using a high-fidelity hand-held recording device in case of an issue with Zoom. I took field notes of keywords and phrases, participant emotions and body language, and potential themes during interviews. After each interview, I used reflexive memos to examine my own understanding as part

of the hermeneutic circle, where the researcher constantly analyzed, recorded, and revised their understanding of the phenomenon.

Interview Questions

Interview questions centered around the "why" and the "how" designers upcycled quilt material into garments to understand their experiences and develop rich, thick descriptions of the "essence" of this experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Open-ended questions encouraged participants to describe their experiences as opposed to what they thought about their experiences. The questions moved through five major themes, detailed in Appendix E.

1. Overview of their business and the story of how they started upcycling quilt material into garments.
2. How their background related to design, quilting, and sustainability impacts their work.
3. Their design process when working with quilt materials in conjunction with photo elicitation.
4. The types of quilt material they upcycle and how this relates to their design process.
5. Their experience with the controversy surrounding cutting up of quilts.

Probing and follow-up questions encouraged participants to elaborate on their stories and experiences and share deeper insights into their work.

Photo Elicitation

To complement the interviews, I used photo elicitation to further explore designers' experiences of transforming quilt materials into a garment. Creswell & Poth (2018) advocated for diverse forms of data that could provide additional layers of rich context to qualitative research. Photo elicitation has been a method of "inserting a photograph into a research interview" (Harper, 2002, p. 13). The photographs aided participants in accessing other experiences or memories and helped raise unexpected topics or reinforced points discussed verbally in the interview (Dibley et al., 2020; Harper, 2002). The photographs also served as a record and link to the original quilt material, which some quilt scholars argued was lost during the upcycling process (Behuniak-Long, 1994; Fons, 2022a; McCormick, 2013). In this way, the "photographs

appear to capture the impossible: a person gone; an event past. That extraordinary sense of seeming to retrieve something that has disappeared belongs alone to the photograph, and it leads to deep and interesting talk" (Harper, 2002, p. 23). The quilt material no longer existed in its original form but still lived on in photography form.

Forms of photo elicitation have been used in other quiltmaking research, such as in my Master's thesis, in which participants provided photographs of quilts made from pre-cut fabrics (Pokorny, 2020). These photographs were used as a jumping-off point to discuss the impact of pre-cut fabrics on the designs and processes of quiltmaking. French (2021) also used photo elicitation combined with oral history methods in her dissertation on male quilters. The photographs allowed her to dive deeper into the identities and stories of male quilters.

Prior to the interview, participants were required to upload photographs of up to three of their upcycled quilt material garments to an online survey (Appendix F). They optionally provided photographs of the original quilt material before the upcycling process and photographs demonstrating the design process. An option was also offered to upload videos or provide links to Instagram Reels[10] or TikTok videos[11] of the design process. The survey also asked for photographer attribution, if necessary, and consent for the photographs to be used in analysis and reproduced in any written findings or presentations. All but one participant consented to using photographs in written results and presentations.

I downloaded the provided photographs before each interview and ensured Zoom recording settings captured screen sharing and a thumbnail of the speaker video. During the middle portion of the interview, I screen shared the photographs over Zoom. Participants discussed their design process with each garment and their experience working with the quilt material. Through the photo elicitation process, I could capture a greater depth of meaning about their design processes and hear stories of their experiences working with specific quilt materials.

An additional benefit of using Zoom was an expansion on photo elicitation. Some participants directed me to their websites so we could examine a specific garment with a

[10] Instagram Reels are short videos produced by users and shared through the social media platform.
[11] TikTok is a short-form video sharing social media platform.

story they wanted to share beyond the photographs provided. One participant showed me work in process in her studio and images of her work from a book. And when another participant struggled to articulate her decision-making process on using quilts, I used the Zoom whiteboard function, and together we mapped out her process. The flexibility of Zoom allowed me to quickly pivot during interviews and capture additional vital data and stories.

Content Analysis

Prior to each interview, I conducted a content analysis of the participant's customer-facing website(s). Customer-facing websites included e-commerce, such as an online store or Etsy, and social media accounts like Facebook and Instagram. The content analysis collected data on how the participants described their upcycling process to consumers, product information provided about garments, types of garments produced, and price points. Collecting this data before the interview provided background information on the participant, their work, and their upcycling philosophy, which helped facilitate and enrich conversation during the interview. The content analysis provided additional depth and breadth regarding how the participants translated their upcycling experience to customers. An example content analysis matrix is found in Appendix G.

Data Analysis

As this phenomenological research aimed to explain the experiences of designers, data analysis was emergent in nature. Phenomenology has used "significant statements" and "meaning units" to develop an "essence" of the "what" and "how" of participants' experiences (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). Specifically for hermeneutic phenomenology, the focus has been on the interaction between the researcher's interpretation and data interpretation (Peoples, 2021). Therefore, I immersed myself in the participants' descriptions of upcycling to turn their everyday experiences into a core essence. Data analysis followed the concept of the hermeneutic circle, where "the parts inform the whole, and the whole informs the parts" (Peoples, 2021, p. 57). Interviews, photo elicitation, and content analysis came together to describe the experiences of designers upcycling quilt material into fashion garments. As part of the hermeneutic circle, I continuously journaled during every step of the process, noting changes in my

understanding, assumptions, and interpretations of the phenomenon (Peoples, 2021). This process illuminated revisions to my personal biases and new meanings and interpretations that developed as a result.

A challenge of hermeneutic phenomenology has been the lack of defined linear procedure. Instead, it has been an iterative process, similar to how we move through the world and our lives, constantly revising our thoughts and understandings based on our experiences (Dibley et al., 2020). Thus, the following data analysis procedure adapted from several sources was only a guide, as the process was continually changing and evolving (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Dibley et al., 2020; Moustakas, 1994; Peoples, 2021).

Analysis began with describing my personal experiences and pre-understandings of upcycling quilt material. This process has been a key part of the hermeneutic circle and was ongoing through the data analysis process (Peoples, 2021). As stated previously, reflexive memoing occurred continuously throughout data analysis. I used trint.com, an artificial intelligence (AI) powered transcription service focused on visual files, to transcribe the Zoom video recordings. Next, I viewed and listened to each interview in trint.com in its entirety to gain a complete picture of the participant's story. During this process, transcriptions were cleaned for accuracy, and any unnecessary information or filler words such as "um," "uh," and "like" were removed. Preliminary meaning units related to each participant's experience were generated after each interview was reviewed. The result was a high-level summary of each participant's experience. Additionally, I created an initial list of emerging themes and patterns noticed across all interviews based on the preliminary meaning units.

The next step was to code the preliminary meaning units across all interviews. The original intent was to use trint.com for all data analysis to maintain the link between video and transcript, but the system was not robust enough for multi-layered coding. Instead, transcripts, field notes, and participant photographs were imported into NVivo for Mac for further data analysis. I coded each interview for five overarching themes that aligned with the interview questions and themes previously identified: background, value of quiltmaking, sustainability, design process, and relationship with the quilt. Each interview was reviewed again, theme by theme, and broken down into smaller descriptive codes. This step provided a deep understanding of each participant's description of the

phenomenon. Situated narratives of each participant's experience were generated and organized thematically, highlighting the meaning of their individual experience through direct quotes.

Next, general narratives were created per theme from the situated narratives of all participants, unifying their accounts into a general description. Each major theme was analyzed for commonalities and deviances across all participants. At this stage, two larger overarching themes, "emotional response" and "aesthetic response," emerged and were integrated into the coding process. For example, the general narrative for the design process was broken down into steps (e.g., sourcing, cutting, sewing) to look for shared experiences among all participants. Then the common experiences within each step were coded for themes of "aesthetic response," "emotional response," or "combination" and organized into groupings. This process of constantly organizing data and engaging with the participants' descriptions helped to clarify emerging codes and themes. A visual map was created that centered around how participants experienced the design process, integrating the identified themes.

Lastly, composite written narratives were created based on final codes and themes, using phrases like "most," "many," and "some" to quantify the range of experiences by participants. The written narratives moved away from a participant's individual experience to themes that were implicit in most of the participants while comparing and contrasting any specific outliers. This composite description reflected the "essence" of the participants' experiences.

Data Validation

Data validation was assessed using strategies outlined by Creswell & Poth (2018). First, a three-pronged approach to phenomenology, including interviews, photo elicitation, and content analysis, ensured the validity of findings through *triangulation*. In triangulation, multiple data sources could corroborate the evidence of a particular theme or perspective (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The additional layer of photos and content analysis confirmed interview findings and added depth to the description of the designers' experiences with upcycling (Peoples, 2021).

Secondly, I addressed validity by revealing my personal biases about the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Peoples, 2021). In the "researcher assumptions" section, I disclosed my initial biases about upcycling quilt materials into fashion garments. I continued to reflect and journal on these biases throughout the data collection and analysis process as part of the hermeneutic circle.

Lastly, I used the strategy of prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field. This strategy involved spending time in the field of study to gain a deep awareness of the culture and context of the phenomenon. As previously outlined in the research role and assumptions sections, I have been engaged in the quiltmaking community most of my life and apparel design for most of my adult life. I have continued to practice both quiltmaking and apparel design and engage in conversations with hobbyists and academics within both settings regarding this phenomenon. I was aware of the phenomenon of upcycling quilt material through academic work and social media well before it became my research topic, continuously observing it and my reactions to it. In addition, my insider perspective helped me gain the participants' trust and bolstered my credibility.

Limitations

There were some limitations to consider regarding this study. First, the subjective nature of phenomenology meant that the findings could not always be generalized to a larger group (Dibley et al., 2020). In addition, not all participants provided photos of the original quilt material before upcycling. While this was not a requirement of participating, having a record of the original to compare to the final garment for all participants would have strengthened the study and provided more cases to examine how designers interacted with the physical properties of quilt materials during upcycling.

Second, there was a lack of racial diversity in this study; all but two participants identified as Caucasian. The results did show some differences in the experience of a participant who identified as African American. But as there was not enough data to support any specific findings, this study was limited in exploring how racial identity might impact the experiences of designers in sustainability spaces.

Lastly, my personal interest in the topic was a limitation. It was challenging to keep my responses neutral to avoid influencing the interview, as I often agreed with the participants' observations (Rubin, 2012). Due to my interest in quiltmaking and apparel design, sometimes interviews strayed off-topic, and some follow-up questions were less related to the research questions and more to my personal curiosities. I occasionally had to bring myself back to the research question and not stray down a rabbit hole related to the "to cut or not to cut" controversy. Since it was easier for me to establish a rapport with participants, the interviews often lasted longer than intended, leading to an overwhelming amount of data to sift through.

Conclusion

This chapter explained the background of hermeneutic phenomenology and how this approach was applied to this study. It outlined the methodology used to design this study, recruit participants, collect data, and analyze data. All processes were grounded in a social constructivism paradigm guided by hermeneutic phenomenological methods.

Chapter IV: Results

This chapter presents the results from interviews with 17 designers who upcycled quilt materials into garments, their photo elicitation, and content analysis of their websites. An overview of each designer and their business is presented first, followed by common foundational elements that shape their experience. Next, significant themes that describe designers' experiences are organized thematically, starting with their "why" and then an overview of their design process. Seven specific tensions present in their design process are outlined. Lastly, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on designers' experiences is presented.

The Designers

Interviews were conducted with 17 designers actively involved in upcycling quilt materials into fashion garments and who met the inclusion criteria outlined in Chapter III. These participants represented 16 businesses. All the designers were interviewed over Zoom between September and December 2022. The designers ranged in age from 25 to 70 years, with an average age of 41. The designers were representative from across the United States, with most located on the West Coast or in the Western United States (10). Four were in the Southern United States, two in the Midwest, and one in the Northeast. One participant identified as male, and one participant with she/they pronouns; the rest identified as female.

A majority of the designers began upcycling quilt materials into fashion garments between 2019 and 2022, with 10 citing the COVID-19 pandemic as influential to the start of their business or their choice to begin working with quilt materials. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic will be further elaborated on in Chapter V. Four designers, Kelsy, MartyO, Sandra, and Lorelei, began working with quilt material prior to Emily Adams Bode Aujla's first collection of quilt clothing in 2016, which was widely credited as creating the 21st century interest in upcycled quilt garments (Bauck, 2018; Fons, 2022a, 2022b; Tashjian, 2021). MartyO had upcycled quilt material for the longest, starting around 2007 when she began making wearable art jackets. Sandra began working with upcycled textiles, specifically denim, as well as quilts in 2011. Kelsy, the owner of the brand Carleen, began upcycling quilts in 2012 for her senior thesis line at Pratt Institute.

And around 2012, Lorelei transitioned her jewelry and wearable art business to upcycled quilt and chenille garments.

All the participants were independent designers, meaning they were not part of a larger industrialized business. Thirteen of the businesses consisted of a single designer who assumed sole proprietorship and was responsible for most of the design process and production. However, three of these designers (Olivia, Allie, and Ashley) had an assistant or occasionally hired an assistant for cutting, sewing, or shipping. One business was co-owned and operated by Lisa and Rachel. Kelsy and Rebecca were also independent designers but operated on a much larger scale. Both utilized multiple contract sewists and cutters and produced a larger volume than the other designers. In addition, Kelsy sold garments wholesale following the seasonal fashion calendar.

In general, most designers produced women's clothing made from upcycled quilt materials, specifically jackets and coats. Some also made other garments such as pants, shorts, and shirts. Several designers produced dresses and blouses from upcycled quilt tops and patchwork. Lisa and Rachel applied patches cut from quilts, quilt tops, or patchwork to second-hand garments. Tristan exclusively produced menswear. Kelsy produced garments for men, women, and children, and Michele made garments for toddler girls. Most designers also sold small accessories (hats, bags, bandanas, etc.) from leftover scraps.

In addition to quilt materials, the designers also worked with other vintage and thrifted textiles. These included denim, chenille, tea towels, towels, linens, tablecloths, and lace, sometimes using the materials for separate garments or by combining them with quilts. Sandra did not produce garments for sale but taught classes and offered lectures on making coats from quilts. At the time of the interview, MartyO did not sell garments but had sold them in the past and produced them as custom orders. She taught classes and offered lectures on making coats from quilts. Her primary work was upcycling quilts into wearable art for exhibitions.

Due to the varied nature of garments and techniques used when upcycling quilt materials, comparing designers' price points was difficult. Generally, an adult coat made entirely from a quilt ranged from $135 to $1,600, with pricing varying based on the designer, the coat's length, and the original quilt's price. Most designers also offered

custom services, where customers provided quilts and selected the final details. Prices for custom services ranged widely as well. This research focused primarily on designers' experience making garments for direct sale, not custom orders. The custom component added an additional layer of complexity to designers' experiences. Further details on the demographics of the designers and businesses are in Appendices H and I.

Designer Vignettes

In hermeneutic phenomenology, the researcher constantly engages in a dialogue between the whole and parts of the participants' experiences. The following designer vignettes provide a glimpse into the whole of each participants' experiences. These vignettes give voice to each participant and a chance for the reader to connect with them personally. The research results that follow the vignettes contain elements of each designer, reflecting a common essence.

Taylor Randal – Softpaw Vintage

Taylor Randal (she/her), age 31, was the sole proprietor of Softpaw Vintage located in Rhododendron, Oregon.[12] Her business's Instagram bio stated, "small batch reworked magic" (Randal, n.d.). Taylor learned to sew from her grandmother who was a quilter. While Taylor did not consider herself a quilter, she had made a few quilt tops and one whole quilt. Growing up on a farm instilled in her the ideals of resourcefulness and sustainability. Taylor was a longtime thrifter and sold vintage clothing on Depop[13] in addition to running Softpaw Vintage. She particularly loved the way clothing could elevate how you felt about yourself.

Taylor started Softpaw Vintage in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. She previously made an upcycled quilt coat for herself, her mother, and her grandmother and collected a large stash of quilts while thrifting. Finding herself unemployed during the pandemic, Taylor turned to the resources she had on hand, quilts, to make garments and support herself financially.

Taylor recalled that the inspiration for making an upcycled quilt coat originated from a woman she saw selling Carhartt vests with upcycled quilt sleeves at a market. The

[12] Since her interview in 2022, Taylor has relocated to California.
[13] Depop is a peer-to-peer e-commerce platform.

idea made Taylor's "brain explode," leading her to purchase a Double Wedding Ring quilt from Goodwill to make into a coat. She described her first time cutting into a quilt as "nerve-racking," a feeling she still experienced every time she cut into a quilt.

Softpaw Vintage was sold primarily through its website. It could be found at www.softpawvintage.com and on Instagram @softpawvintage.

Sandra Lee Chandler – Sandra Lee Design

Sandra Lee Chandler (she/her), age 62, was the sole proprietor of Sandra Lee Design located in San Diego, California.[14] A guiding theme in her life and design work was "use your resources." Sandra first learned to hand sew from her grandmother and did not come from a family history of quiltmaking. It was when she sat at a sewing machine for the first time in her 7th grade home economics class where "the minute I touched fabric, I was in love." From this point onward, sewing and quilting became her life's passion, and she received a Bachelor of Science in Liberal Arts with an emphasis in home economics and textiles from Arizona State University. For the past 26 years, Sandra has taught home economics, sewing, and quilting in a variety of settings, from community centers to junior colleges to city jails.

Sandra first upcycled quilts in 2011, citing a desire to find a new, more aesthetically pleasing way to adapt fashions like women's holiday garments appliqued with pumpkins or pinafore dresses with quilt blocks. To Sandra, the idea of repurposing quilts to make garments was nothing new, as repurposing and maximizing resources was part of her experience as an African American.

She described her first experience cutting into a quilt as stressful because she tried to balance her aesthetic vision with using as much of the quilt as possible. The resulting bright yellow pants (Figure 17) have grown in notoriety, and Sandra has been frequently stopped at quilt conferences and shows for pictures. While she had not made upcycled quilt material garments for sale, she taught classes across the United States on making jackets from quilts and frequently lectured on the topic. Sandra has also been known for her upcycled denim quilts, wearable art, and sashiko work.

Sandra Lee Design could be found at www.sandraleedesign.com and on Instagram @Sandraleedesign.

[14] Since her interview in 2022, Sandra has relocated to Nashville, Tennessee.

Kamber Elyse – Kamber Elyse

Kamber Elyse (she/her), age 26, was the sole proprietor of Kamber Elyse located in Chicago, Illinois. Her business's website stated, "Taking your grandma's quilt and up-cycling it into a wearable memorabilia" (Elyse, n.d.). As the youngest of four siblings, Kamber tried to teach herself to sew to remake hand-me-down clothing. Her desire to learn to sew resulted in an Apparel Design degree from Iowa State University, leading to her working in the fashion industry as a trend forecaster. Kamber cited her experiences in the fashion industry as influential in her desire to design more sustainably. Kamber was not a quilter but had a strong family history of quilting, noting her grandmother's extensive collection of quilts.

When Kamber lost her job during the COVID-19 pandemic, she used sewing skills to support herself, making and selling over 5,000 facemasks. Due to a lack of access to resources and fabric stores, Kamber turned to her grandmother's stash of quilts for further design inspiration. She made her first batch of upcycled quilt jackets in December 2020 as sustainable "memorial" pieces to her grandmother. The jackets sold out in three days, and Kamber has been making them ever since.

Kamber was unsure of where her inspiration for upcycling quilts came from but noted she was aware of the trend on social media and that quilts were one of the few material resources she had access to during the pandemic. She described being nervous the first time she cut into a quilt because she knew how much time and labor went into its creation.

Kamber Elyse was sold primarily through its website, Instagram account, and in person at local markets. It could be found at www.kamberelyse.com and on Instagram @kamberelyse_studio.

Michele Alford – Josie & Jane

Michele Alford (she/her), age 50, was the sole proprietor of Josie & Jane located in Fort Worth, Texas. Her Instagram bio described her business as "Modern heirlooms, slow fashion. One of a kind children's wear using vintage fabrics, patterns and trims" (Josie and Jane, n.d.). Her fascination with sewing started early when, as a toddler, she sat on her mother's lap and watched her sew. This love of sewing and clothing design led Michele to an undergraduate degree in fashion design. However, after working in the

fashion industry for several years, she became disillusioned with the amount of waste produced, noting that the thought of it "physically made me sick." Michele left the industry and became the costume shop manager in the Department of Theater at Texas Christian University. While Michele was not a quilter, she remembered her mother making yo-yo quilts and how much time and effort went into them.

Michele started Josie & Jane in June 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic as a side business. She was always interested in starting a children's wear line, and the pandemic gave her the time she needed to explore the idea. Her line initially utilized materials she had access to in the house, such as tablecloths but soon expanded to second-hand materials she found at estate sales, including quilts. To her, using quilts was a natural extension of the materials and aesthetics of her line. Sustainability was essential to her business, and every component, material, and packaging (except for thread) was thrifted or upcycled.

Michele's first experience cutting a quilt was fraught with emotion. She recalled spending a lot of time looking at the quilt, trying to give herself permission to cut it. Every time she cut a quilt, she took a moment to give thanks to its maker.

Josie & Jane sold primarily through Etsy. It could be found at https://www.etsy.com/shop/JosieandJaneDesign and on Instagram @josie_and_jane_.

Tristan Detwiler – STAN

Tristan Detwiler (he/him), age 25, was the sole proprietor of STAN located in San Diego, California. On his business website, Tristan stated, "The goal of Stan is to recontextualize stories into clothing, and allow long lost memories to live on" (Detwiler, n.d.). Tristan grew up in a creative, artsy household, and his love of surfing and nature influenced his interests in sustainability. He was a self-taught sewer and patternmaker but was not a quilter and did not have a family history of quiltmaking.

STAN started in 2019, inspired by a project during Tristan's junior year at the University of Southern California. Tristan disassembled an old Levi's jacket, embroidered and painted the fabric, and reassembled it, which sparked his interest in upcycling and fashion. He looked for other textiles to use and decided to cut up the quilt on his bed to make a jacket to keep himself warm during pre- and post-surfing. A chance encounter with Claire McKarns, quilt collector and scholar while sourcing additional

quilts led to his continued interest in the history of quiltmaking and the stories held by antique textiles. Tristan did not recall any apprehension or nerves the first time he cut into a quilt, but that "there is a feeling like you're cutting into a soul, though."

In addition to quilts, Tristan also sourced antique textiles worldwide. STAN was sold online and was shown at New York Men's Day at New York Fashion Week (2020), photographed on Hugh Jackman in Vogue (Green, 2022), and exhibited at *In America: A Lexicon of Fashion* at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City in 2021.

STAN was sold primarily through its website. It could be found at https://www.stanlosangeles.com/ and on Instagram @stanclothing.

Lisa Cross and Rachel Pulliam – Thread and Butter

Lisa Cross (she/her), age 30, and sister-in-law Rachel Pulliam (she/her), age 31, were co-owners of Thread and Butter located in Portland, Oregon. Their business's Instagram bio stated, "Reworked vintage textiles | Slow fashion" (Lisa and Rachel, n.d.). Lisa's mother taught her to sew when she was 12 or 13, and together they made some simple quilts. She did not actively pursue sewing until the COVID-19 pandemic when she bought a sewing machine and could dedicate more time to sewing.

Rachel received a sewing machine from her grandmother for her college graduation, who then taught her the basics of sewing. Rachel made a few things over the years but did not sew regularly. She was not a quilter, but her mother was an avid quilt and vintage textile collector, and together they amassed a large collection of "cutter quilts." Lisa discovered a love for vintage and collecting through Rachel's mother (Lisa is married to Rachel's brother) and began collecting quilts as well.

Lisa started Thread and Butter in January 2021 after seeing upcycled quilt clothing on social media. Initially, Lisa wanted to buy an upcycled quilt coat but could not afford one. When she saw other businesses selling garments with applied upcycled quilt patches, she decided to try it for herself and began selling her garments through Instagram. When Rachel asked Lisa to make her some items, Lisa encouraged Rachel to try making something herself, and Rachel eventually began selling garments alongside Lisa on Instagram.

Lisa recalled practicing first on a commercial-made quilt from Arch Quilts[15] as she had just started sewing and was still unsure of her skills. She did not want to make a mistake and regret using a handmade quilt. Rachel's first experience upcycling a quilt was making a sleep sack for her daughter. She bought a cutter quilt from Facebook Marketplace and recalled being proud of the finished product but that it felt "weird" to cut it despite its damaged state.

Unlike the other businesses in this study, Thread and Butter did not sell garments made entirely from upcycled quilt material. Instead, they focused on applying patches in a variety of shapes made from quilts, patchwork, and quilt tops onto second-hand garments like sweatshirts and overalls.

Thread and Butter was sold on Instagram and in person at local markets. It could be found on Instagram @threadandbutter.vintage.

Lorelei Wood – Upcycled Gypsy

Lorelei Wood (she/her), age 63, was a retired chemistry teacher and the sole proprietor of the Upcycled Gypsy located in Mesa, Arizona. Her business's Instagram bio stated, "As an artist, I use vintage/antique textiles to create one-of-a-kind art to wear" (Wood, n.d.). Lorelei's mother taught her to sew when she was ten. In junior high school, she learned clothing design by altering her clothing to fit better. Lorelei was not a quilter and did not indicate a family history of quiltmaking. She was always interested in antiques and vintage shopping and described herself as a "hippie" and "bohemian."

Lorelei started making and selling jewelry at art shows over 25 years ago (approximately the mid-1990s). She began making garments from upcycled fabrics because "…as an artist at these art shows that I would go to, the more eclectic and unusual you seem, the better your art is." One of these garments was a jacket, the body made from an upcycled quilt and the sleeves and collar from a chenille blanket. It garnered many customer reactions, and she made a few jackets to sell alongside her jewelry. The upcycled quilt and chenille garments continued to be popular, and in approximately 2012, Lorelei shifted her business to focus solely on these garments.

[15] Arch Quilts were mass-produced commercial quilts made in China and sold in American department stores in the 1990s (Fellner, n.d.). They were produced by Arch Quilts Elmsford, NY or Arch Quilts, Hawthorne, NY. Most quilts were machine pieced and hand quilted and frequently passed as hand-made quilts.

Lorelei did not remember where she got the idea to upcycle a quilt into a garment. She suspected it originated from something she saw while antique or vintage shopping, as she often saw quilts upcycled into other objects. Lorelei described making the first cut in a quilt as always being the most difficult emotionally, but the process became easier after that.

Upcycled Gypsy was sold primarily through Etsy. It could be found at https://www.etsy.com/shop/upcycledgypsy/ and on Instagram @upcycledgypsy.

Jillian Hertzman – Jillie P

Jillian Hertzman (she/her), age 45, was the sole proprietor of Jillie P located in Los Angeles, California. Her business's Instagram bio stated, "Reimagining vintage quilts into one-of-a-kind, sustainable pieces of wearable art" (Hertzman, n.d.). Jillian graduated with a degree in fashion design from the College of Design, Architecture, Art, and Planning (DAAP) at the University of Cincinnati, where she learned to sew, design, and make patterns. She was not a quilter, nor did she have a family history of quiltmaking, but grew up going to antique stores and flea markets where her mother occasionally bought quilts.

The concept of Jillie P started in late 2016 and fully developed into a business in the summer of 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. Jillian found that she had more free time and attended Factory 45, a sustainable business incubator. The specific idea for upcycling quilts into garments came from her mom, who had previously purchased a upcycled quilt coat at a flea market. At the time, Jillian was already working on the idea of Jillie P, and her mom's coat sparked her interest in making garments out of quilts.

Jillian remembered cutting out her first quilt to make a coat on the floor of her apartment. At the time, it was mostly a design experiment inspired by her mom's coat, not a business concept. Her reaction to cutting the quilt was less related to concern over "injuring" it and more connected to realizing that there was something special to working and designing with them. "This was a whole new world I'm opening up; I'm opening the door to something," she recalled.

Jillie P was sold through Etsy and in person at markets around Los Angeles. It could be found at https://www.etsy.com/shop/jilliepwearables/ and on Instagram @jilliep_wearables.

Olivia Jondle – The Rusty Bolt

Olivia Jondle (she/they), age 30, was the sole proprietor of The Rusty Bolt located in St. Louis, Missouri. Her business's Instagram bio stated, "Textile Alchemist • Fabric Hoarder [lightning bolt emoji] Buy Less • Buy Better" (TheRustyBolt, n.d.). The business also occasionally included hired assistants for simple tasks. Olivia learned to sew as a child and made one quilt when she was 13. She stopped sewing for many years but returned to it in 2016 when she recreated fashions worn by women in her family when they were her age for her senior thesis in art school. Olivia did not consider herself a quilter and noted that quilting does not feed her creativity in the same manner as making garments. She greatly respected quiltmaking due to her family's history with it, including a family quilt made from repurposed men's ties.

Olivia started The Rusty Bolt in February 2018, designing and making garments from vintage and second-hand textiles. By Spring 2019, she had improved her sewing skills to the point that she felt comfortable using quilts in her garments. Olivia recalled being inspired by her mother's antiques made from quilts and by the upcycling work of the brands Bode and Psychic Outlaw.

Olivia found her first upcycled quilt at a garage sale, where it had been discarded as a drop cloth. She described cutting into that quilt as scary, fulfilling, exciting, and magical. She still felt apprehension every time she cut a quilt, saying, "It's still scary; I don't want to disrespect this beautiful piece of history."

The Rusty Bolt was sold primarily through its website and in person at local markets. It could be found at https://therustybolt.com/ and on Instagram @therustybolt.

Paula Campbell – Sew Sassy by Paula

Paula Campbell (she/her), age 57, was the sole proprietor of Sew Sassy by Paula located in Vilonia, Arkansas. Her business's Etsy site stated, "Selling unique handmade items" (Campbell, n.d.). Paula's mother taught her to sew at a young age, and she grew up watching her mother quilt and sew. As a result, she developed a deep love for quiltmaking and respect for the time and labor that goes into making a quilt. Paula was a quilter and a quilt collector and started a local quilting group when she retired from teaching.

Paula recalled seeing vendors at vintage sales and flea markets selling items made from quilts and thought, "I can do that." Initially, she started selling accessories and home décor made from upcycled quilts in 2019 through her Etsy shop. In 2021, she progressed to making jackets from upcycled quilts after discovering the trend on social media. She decided to try making one for herself instead of purchasing one. Paula made a jacket pattern and selected a quilt from her collection that she was no longer attached to. The jacket sold quickly on Etsy, so she continued to make more.

Paula did not recall any significant emotional reaction to the first time she cut a quilt, stating, "I felt fine about it. I just knew that it's better to use the quilt than just let it lay off in a closet somewhere." She found a sense of accomplishment from turning a quilt that would otherwise be discarded into something new. In addition to garments, accessories, and home décor, Paula offered custom longarm quilting services to finish quilt tops and orphan blocks into quilts.

Sew Sassy by Paula was sold primarily through Etsy. It could be found at https://www.etsy.com/shop/SewSassybyPaula, on Instagram @sewsassybypaula, and on Facebook.

Allie Chamberlain – Reclaim Creative

Allie Chamberlain (she/her), age 25, was the sole proprietor of Reclaim Creative located in Knoxville, Tennessee. Her business's Instagram bio stated, "Reclaiming forgotten textiles!!" (Allie – Reclaim Creative, n.d.). The business also included one employee who assisted with cutting and sewing and Allie's mother who made quilted ornaments.

Allie came from a long line of Appalachian and Western Kentucky quilters, and her mother's family was from Paducah, Kentucky, home of the National Quilt Museum.[16] Her grandmother taught her to sew and quilt at a young age. Allie considered herself a quilter and made mini quilts and textile collages. She was inspired by an experience teaching sewing at a kid's camp where she saw how learning to sew and create empowered girls.

[16] The National Quilt Museum is dedicated to contemporary quilts and quiltmakers and is considered one of the world's top quilt museums.

Allie made her first quilt coat for her senior project in architecture school, exploring how "we project identity at the scale of the body." The coat was made from a family quilt that was no longer being used. Afterward, her grandmother gave her several more family quilts, which Allie made into her first collection of quilt coats in 2019. After college, Allie worked as an architect but eventually quit to follow her creative passion and become an entrepreneur and an artist, founding Reclaim Creative in 2020.

Allie felt empowered after making her first collection of coats, as they were the first garments she had made from start to finish. In retrospect, she described her decision to first cut a quilt as "pretty ignorant," noting, "I didn't really value it as much because I didn't really think critically about how it was made or what went into it or anything like that." This feeling led Allie to source most of her quilt materials from rag houses[17] and emphasize quality construction.

Reclaim Creative was sold through its website and in person at local markets. It could be found at https://www.reclaimcreative.space/ and on Instagram @reclaim.creative.

Marty Ornish (MartyO) – MartyO

Marty Ornish (MartyO) (she/her), age 70, was the sole proprietor of MartyO located in San Diego, California. Her website stated, "My work is the embodiment of my touchstone values: sustainable slow-fashion through a pallet of up-cycled materials… The impermanence of fashion and the handwork of forgotten quilters are honored anew" (Ornish, n.d.). Sewing and quilting ran in MartyO's family. She came from a Pennsylvania Dutch family. Her grandmother quilted, and MartyO possessed many family quilts passed down through generations. When MartyO retired, she began sewing again and explored different types of quilting like trapunto, free motion quilting, and art quilts.

In 2007, MartyO started making wearable art garments for fun from upcycled materials like denim, linen, and quilts and sold them to friends. But she was tired of making the same thing repeatedly with little profit. She then tried art quilting but

[17] Rag houses are facilities that process, sort, and bale bulk quantities of unwanted textiles from thrift stores and textile mills. These bales are often sold to buyers and second-hand resellers in overseas markets in African and Asia.

struggled to establish her own artistic voice. Looking for inspiration on what to do next, she realized no one else was using "ruined quilts" to make dresses. She began experimenting with wearable art dresses made from upcycled quilt material. She started exhibiting her work in 2013, and her first three garments won awards at exhibitions (for example, the garment in Figure 18). MartyO continued to produce wearable art dresses from upcycled quilts and has exhibited across the United States and the world, including being featured in a special exhibition at the 2017 International Quilt Festival in Houston, Texas.

MartyO stated that she focused on exhibiting her wearable art as opposed to selling it as she can more widely broadcast her messages about upcycling, zero waste, social justice, and women's rights. She described herself as very sentimental and used her work with quilts to honor and channel her mother and grandmother, who have both passed away. One of the goals of her work was to "…have people stop throwing out vintage fabrics. Thinking about if they're damaged, reuse them or restore them."

In addition to exhibiting her wearable art, MartyO produced custom upcycled quilt material jackets and accessories and taught and lectured worldwide on upcycling quilt materials. MartyO could be found at http://marty-o.com/, on Instagram @martyo_fiberartist, and on Facebook.

Rebecca Gholdston Wright – Bravo Charlie

Rebecca Gholdston Wright (she/her), age 43, was the sole proprietor of Bravo Charlie located in San Francisco, California. Her business's website stated, "A brand born out of a love of vintage textiles and an appreciation of all the handiwork that has come before us…Each piece represents a bit of history and a lot of love" (R. G. Wright, n.d.). The business included a team of contract sewists, and Rebecca worked with the lead sewist on pattern layout and cutting.

Rebecca learned to sew and make garments from her mother when she was young but noted that she often did not have the patience to finish a garment. Even from a young age, she preferred to upcycle and modify clothing and considered herself more of a "re-imaginer" of clothing than a sewer. Rebecca had made quilts with her mother, who was a quilter but preferred to collect and sell vintage quilts instead.

The inspiration for upcycling quilt material came from garments made from quilts that Rebecca would find while selling vintage clothing, and her favorite vintage quilted (not made from a quilt) jacket. She hired a patternmaker in 2019 and made a few prototype jackets. But the project was sidelined during the COVID-19 pandemic, as she had to assist her children with distance learning. Bravo Charlie finally started in 2022, and Rebecca switched her focus from upcycling quilts into jackets to upcycling quilt tops into dresses and other garments, to differentiate herself in the crowded quilt jacket market. Rebecca noted that she felt less guilty upcycling quilt tops than quilts, as they were already unfinished projects just waiting to be completed.

Bravo Charlie was sold through its website and in person at local markets. It could be found at https://shopbravocharlie.com/ and on Instagram @shopbravocharlie.

Elise Wright – FRANe

Elise Wright (she/her), age 33, was the sole proprietor of FRANe located in Lexington, Kentucky. Her business's Etsy site stated, "Vintage Textiles Reimagined" (E. Wright, n.d.). Elise's mother and grandmother were quilters, and her mother made most of Elise's clothing growing up. However, Elise did not start sewing until 2020, when it became a creative outlet to manage her anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the pandemic, Elise began researching slow fashion through social media and became aware of the fashion industry's negative impacts on people and the environment. She saw upcycled quilt coats on social media and decided to make one herself. Elise taught herself to sew, with the goal of becoming confident enough with her skills to make her own coat.

Elise recalled being very nervous the first time she cut into a quilt because "you're cutting into something; if you mess it up, you can't get it back." She experienced imposter syndrome, concerned her skills were not good enough to do the quilt justice and that she was wasting the money she had invested in the quilt as a material. When the coat was completed, Elise was proud and excited about her work, and gained a great sense of joy from the creative process. She began selling her upcycled quilt jackets online in 2021.

FRANe was sold primarily through Etsy. It could be found at https://www.etsy.com/shop/FRANeHandcrafted on Instagram @franehandcrafted.[18]

Ashley Saville – Anemone

Ashley Saville (she/her), age 36, was the sole proprietor of Anemone located in Winooski, Vermont. Her business's Instagram bio stated, "Transforming old textiles into wearable art" (Saville, n.d.). The business included a part-time cutting assistant. Ashley was a self-taught sewist and has sewn most of her life. Growing up in an 1890s Vermont house, she was exposed to antiques and antique quilts and gained an appreciation for reusing and repurposing. Ashley was also a quilter and quilt collector who preferred the slow process and connection created during the hand quilting process.

Anemone started in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. Ashley was home with her son and started sewing more as a creative outlet for herself outside of being a mother. She was aware of the upcycled quilt coat trend and, in September 2020, decided to make one for herself instead of buying one. Ashley documented her design process on Instagram for fun, never intending to start a business. By February or March 2021, she produced upcycled quilt garments full-time.

Ashley recalled the first time cutting a quilt as "Very nerve-wracking. Very stressful. Because it's the measure twice, cut once…but with the quilt, you really do only have that one opportunity to make that cut." Ashley also teaches classes on making upcycled quilt material coats. She believed that people should have the tools to learn how to make and reuse their things.

Anemone was sold primarily through its website. It could be found at www.anemonevt.com and on Instagram @anemone.vt.

Kelsy Parkhouse-Benson – Carleen

Kelsy Parkhouse-Benson (she/her), age 36, was the sole proprietor of Carleen located in Long Beach, California. Carleen's website stated, "Denim, quilts, Americana and nostalgia" (Parkhouse-Benson, n.d.). The business included one full-time employee and a part-time employee and contracted with a team of cutters, sewists, and production assistants. Kelsy learned to sew at a young age from a neighbor who offered sewing

[18] At the time of Elise's interview in November 2022, the FRANe Instagram account was active. However, the account has since be deactivated.

classes. Quiltmaking was not part of her family history, but her mother and aunt made simple patchwork and tie quilts for family members when they went to college. Kelsy studied fashion design at Pratt Institute, where she explored print, pattern, and textile design.

Carleen evolved out of Kelsy's senior thesis collection at Pratt Institute in 2012. The Grand Canyon, American West, and quilting traditions inspired the collection. She was drawn to the aesthetics and nostalgia of vintage quilts, and many garments in her collection were made from vintage quilts and textiles. As part of her thesis research, she deep dived into the history of quiltmaking, learned how to hand quilt, and hosted a quilting bee at school to teach people hand sewing and quilting.

Kelsy recalled selecting her first quilt for its faded and worn appearance and texture. Cutting the quilt was an anxious experience because she wanted "to do it justice and wanting it to be made into something good. And also, it's just like a limited amount of fabric." Her senior thesis won the inaugural Liz Claiborne Concept to Product Award. After graduation, Kelsy founded Carleen and continued upcycling quilts to distinguish herself from other independent designers. She noted that her business started before Bode, the brand widely credited with restarting the upcycled quilt jacket trend in 2016 (Bauck, 2018; Fons, 2022a, 2022b; Tashjian, 2021).

Carleen was sold wholesale to boutiques across the United States and through its website. Kelsy seasonally presented look books to wholesale buyers and followed the traditional fashion production calendar. It could be found at http://www.carleen.us/ and on Instagram @carleen_us.

Overview of Results

This overview of the results is presented to orient the reader before presenting the specifics of designers' experiences.

Two common foundational elements among the designers' backgrounds were second-hand shopping and their relationship to the fashion industry. These elements influenced designers' interests in combining sustainability and fashion and were the driving force of their design process to give quilts a new life. Designers formed emotional and aesthetic relationships with the quilts, and this relationship was the central

focus of their design process. During this design process, designers experienced conflicting tensions related to their aesthetic and emotional responses to the quilts. This series of tensions impacted their decision-making process and their upcycling experience.

Foundational Elements of Designers' Experiences

To fully understand the experience of designers upcycling quilt materials into fashion garments, this study explored the commonalities of the designers' backgrounds and their desire to combine sustainability and fashion. The research identified two foundational elements influencing the designers' interests and design processes: second-hand shopping and their relationship to the fashion industry. Of note was the significant connection between these two elements; they were not independent from one another.

Second-hand Shopping

The designers shared how their history with second-hand shopping led to an appreciation of "old things," which, in turn, led to an awareness of the need for sustainability. Most of the designers had experiences related to second-hand shopping including thrifting, antiquing, and vintage shopping; attending flea markets, estate sales, and auctions; selling vintage items; and growing up with hand-me-down items. The designers told stories of raising the paddle at auctions with their parents, growing up in houses full of antiques, hoarding vintage textiles from a young age, and collecting quilts. Many specifically mentioned a fondness for purchasing and selling vintage clothing and textiles. Through these experiences, the designers gained an appreciation for their material culture, aka "old things," and saw how these things could still have a functional purpose in life. Designers found historical and sentimental value in the history and stories inherent in second-hand items, especially those of garments, quilts, and textiles.

The designers' experiences with second-hand shopping influenced their views towards sustainability. Over time, second-hand shopping opened their eyes to how many objects already existed in the world and increased their deep desire to be sustainable through reuse practices. Many pointed to growing up with second-hand shopping as a key reason for their interest in upcycling and slow fashion. The designers preferred to buy second-hand or repurpose items as much as possible instead of purchasing new ones and contributing to more waste in the world, especially when it came to apparel. Kamber

noted how her experiences with vintage shopping provided her with a different viewpoint on sustainability than her peers in the fashion industry. To her, sustainability was not just about different ways of making materials through science but was about finding ways to upcycle existing resources.

> I don't think it [sustainability] always means that you're making leather out of fruit or finding all these different ways to make different textiles. I think it can also mean that you can take what already exists and upcycle it. I think our industry's kind of moved away from that a little bit, and they're getting more to the tech-science part when there's already these great resources around that you could upcycle.

Rebecca described how estate sale shopping highlighted the excess of objects in the world and how much use value survives in what already exists.

> It's hard to explain to people sometimes too, that aren't going to these the flea markets and estate sales. You are faced just daily with the amount of stuff that already exists in the world [laughs]. And that people just don't even know what to do with...I think that I'm pretty front and center to a lot of this "what do you do with the stuff of the world" because of the vintage that I do. And realizing that there's so much value in this stuff that already exists.

Designers' experiences with second-hand shopping fostered their appreciation for existing material culture while creating an awareness about sustainability issues. It also intersected with the second foundational element - the designers' relationship with the fashion industry.

Fashion Industry

Most designers expressed a love for fashion and clothing but were keenly aware of the sustainability issues related to the industry. They enjoyed shopping for vintage clothing, especially valuing unique statement pieces that could become staples in their wardrobe, similar to how they viewed the garments they created from upcycled quilt materials. Many discussed how clothing can create a special feeling and elevate how you feel about yourself. Taylor reflected on her love of clothing, noting how her favorite sweater and hat were an extension of her personality.

> I've always loved clothes. I love the way a certain piece of clothing can make you feel about yourself. It elevates who I am. For me personally, it elevates who I am and it's part of my personality. I feel like it's a good way to translate who I am. It's part of your personality, what you choose to wear. I've always been fond of core staple pieces. Like this red hat is a staple piece of mine [references the hat

> she's wearing]. This baba sweater [references the sweater she is wearing]. This is my staple winter, if I don't know what to wear. It's like part of me. If people were to see that know me, like a series of outfits laying out, which one would Taylor wear? "Oh, that's a Taylor outfit." It's part of your identity, and I feel like it's a good way to express who you are.

Taylor's comments also indicated an appreciation for the core staple items in her wardrobe that she could wear again and again. Many designers emphasized that while they loved clothing and fashion, they were not materialistic fashion consumers. Instead, they valued investing in vintage fashion, slow fashion, and statement pieces and frequently reused, upcycled, or mended their clothing. These feelings were interlinked with their appreciation of material culture and desire to be sustainable fostered by second-hand shopping.

While only five of the designers were professionally trained or worked in the fashion industry, all expressed an awareness of the fashion industry's negative impacts on the environment, such as waste and pollution, and on workers, such as poor wages and working conditions. This awareness came from a variety of sources, including professional work in the fashion industry, documentaries like *The True Cost* (2015), social media, and the buying and selling of vintage clothing. Jillian, who had an apparel design degree, noted how her awareness of sustainability issues in the fashion industry extended beyond her vintage selling and upcycled fashion businesses.

> As someone who had a fashion background and loves clothes and is, I would say, an aware human, [in] the plight of our planet, the fashion industry plays a gigantic role. I was always the one to turn the lights off every time I left the house. And I am an avid recycler, even though apparently it doesn't do shit now. I was always very sustainably minded. Knowing that and being a shopper, knowing that much of what we're purchasing is being produced with a lot of waste and it goes to landfills. It was always an underlying mindset, understanding that I didn't want to contribute any more to waste.

For Jillian and many other designers, their interactions with the fashion industry combined with their second-hand shopping proclivity were the impetus to adopt sustainable practices into their everyday life, such as recycling, mending, and using renewable energy sources. But most importantly, these were influential in shaping designers' aspirations to create clothing that addressed their love for fashion and "old

things" with their desire to combat waste in the fashion system. They turned to reusing quilt materials to create special statement pieces.

While sustainability was a key motivation of all the designers, it should be noted that not all touted sustainability as a pillar of their design work. Kelsy and Rebecca both expressed concerns over "greenwashing" [19] customers, as evidenced by Kelsy when asked what she hopes her brand says about sustainability.

> It feels like greenwashing a little bit. It feels there's a little bit of falseness there. I'm asking you to consume and I'm asking you to consume my things. Us all slowing down would really be the best – the best option.

Both Kelsy and Rebecca recognized that the most sustainable action they could take was not to produce anything at all. It should be noted that Kelsy and Rebecca also had the largest business operations, working with multiple contract cutters and sewists, and therefore did not produce in the same small-batch production manner as the other designers interviewed. Regardless, awareness of sustainability issues within the fashion industry was prevalent amongst all the designers and influenced their upcycling experience in some manner.

Summary

While the designers shared other common foundational elements, such as an appreciation for quiltmaking and a love for sewing and design, their experiences related to second-hand shopping and the fashion industry were the primary influencers for their interest in sustainability and preserving material culture.

Giving Quilts New Life: Designers' Driving Force

This research explored "why" the designers wanted to upcycle quilt material for fashion garments. Interviews revealed that the driving force was to give quilts a new life. Paula described her actions as "…giving them [quilts] a second life and recycling them and making things that people will see, from this quilt." To the designers, giving new life to a quilt as a garment was how they could share their appreciation for quilts and promote slow fashion and sustainability with others. Through their upcycling-focused design

[19] Greenwashing is the act of misleading consumers about the environmental practices of a company, specifically about the company's level of sustainability (Parguel et al., 2015).

process, they made quilts more visibly accessible to the public than a discarded quilt in a landfill or a quilt sitting in someone's closet, as seen in this quote from Jillian.

> In my mind, while I don't make them [quilts], I'm not destroying them. I'm just evolving them. I'm transforming them into a new existence, a new life. Where they can be appreciated, maybe by people who never would have appreciated them before. And also, at many times, I see myself as rescuing them from a life in a landfill or in somebody's attic, or life of being at the flea market every weekend and nobody, like a dog at the shelter, nobody giving a shit about it. And it's just going back in the bin in the back of someone's truck for the next weekend when they show again. They're going somewhere to be appreciated, to be reimagined, and then appreciated. While I'm not making them, I think I appreciate them and expose them to a whole new world of eyeballs.

When describing the acquisition of sourced quilt materials, designers frequently mentioned that the quilts they found were no longer being valued by society, and they saw it as their mission to rescue these quilts, give them a new life, and provide them with new types of value. Kelsy spoke to this idea of value when discussing how she acquired quilt materials.

> A lot of these textiles, the quilts, are really not being valued when I acquire them. The person who owned them or sold them wasn't subscribing value to them anymore. Often I get them for very low prices in piles. They're not on a shelf for $250. I really do feel like I'm bringing them back out into the world and actually giving them more life, not less.

The designers perceived this new life as increasing the quilt's value in several ways. First, the use value of the quilt material, as often the quilts they sourced were no longer functional as a quilt due to damage and wear. By turning the quilt into a garment, designers could return it to functional use in society. Secondly, designers saw the perceived value of the quilt material increasing, as the quilt-as-garment could evoke sensory feelings and emotions with a larger viewing audience. And lastly, designers felt that they could increase the social value of the quilt material within their community, aka customers, as the quilt could now be recognized more broadly as a special item by becoming a treasured "statement piece" in a customer's wardrobe.

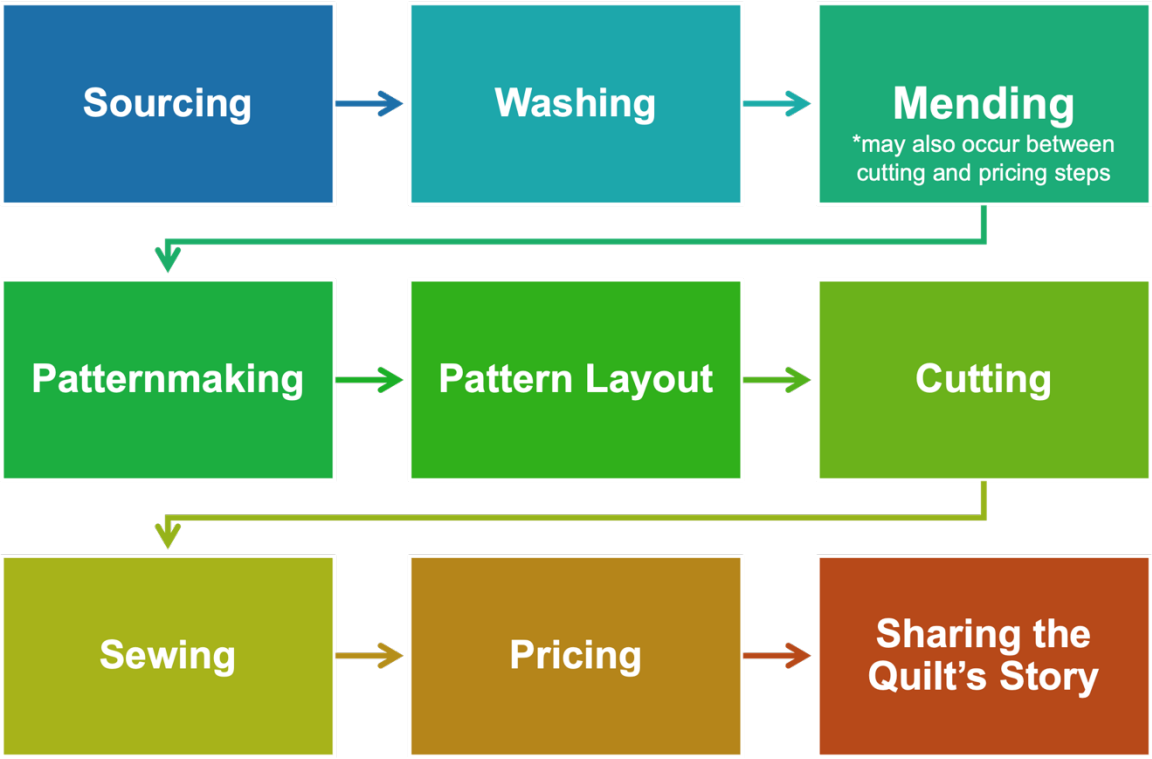
After the "why" that drives the designers' experiences was established, the "what" of their design process experience was examined. How did the desire to give quilts a new life manifest in the experience of designers when upcycling quilt materials into fashion garments?

Design Process Driven by the Designers' Relationship with the Quilt

In general, the steps of the design process for upcycling quilt materials, as described by the designers, were as follows in Figure 15.

Figure 15

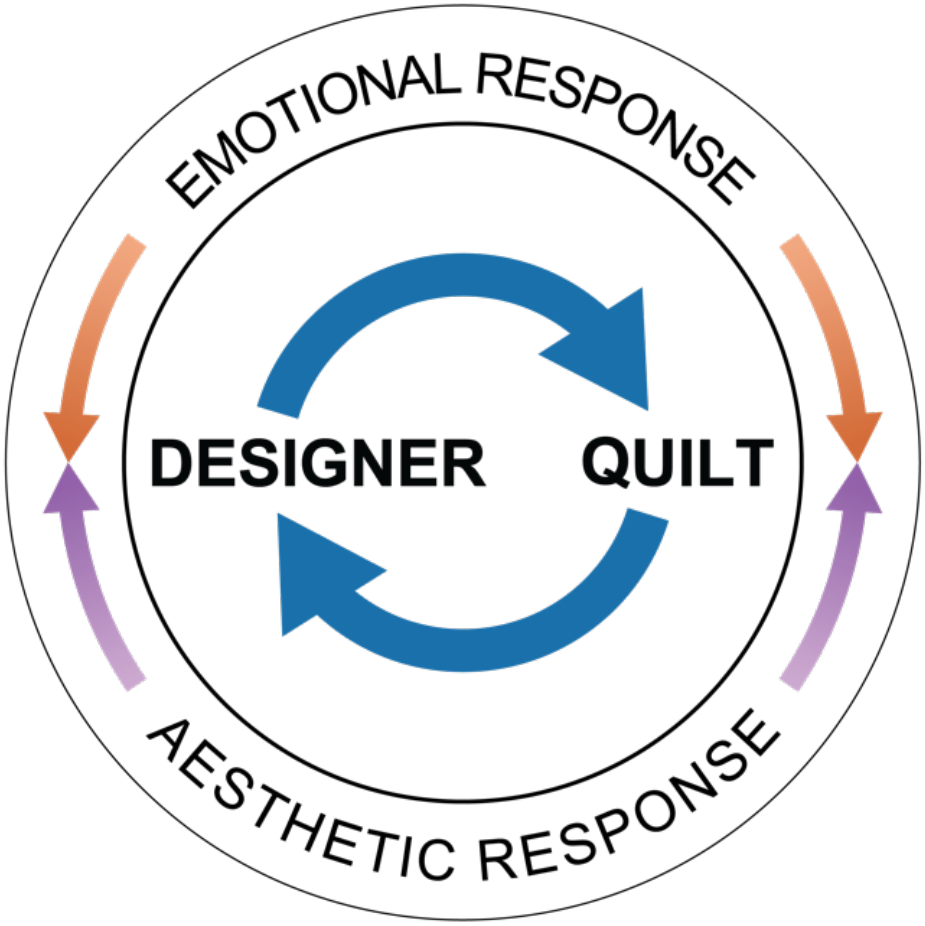
Design Process for Upcycling Quilt Materials into Garments



While the physical steps of the design process were similar to those in traditional apparel design models (Calderin, 2009; Lamb & Kallal, 1992; Thomas, 2017), the results of this study showed that in this space where fashion, sustainability, and material culture merged, designers' motivations were different. The design process shown in Figure 15 was not iterative, nor were designers solving a target market-based problem or focusing on a specific customer. Instead, the design process was driven by their deep and personal relationship with each quilt material they touched. This relationship was at the core of their design process rather than a target market. The quilt materials spoke to the designers on an aesthetic and emotional level, informing the designer as to how to transform it and driving all the subsequent decisions in the design process, as seen in the Designer-Material Relationship Model (Figure 16).

Figure 16

Designer-Material Relationship Model



Note. The relationship between the designer and quilt material was at the core of the design process, which created their emotional and aesthetic responses. From: *Designer-Material Relationship Model*, by C. G. Pokorny, 2023 (https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.23561268.v1). CC BY 4.0.

By letting the quilt speak to them, the designers engaged in a reciprocal relationship, one in which the designer and quilt informed one another through the design process. This process falls more in line with that discussed by Payne (2021) in the literature review, where design consisted of three interlinked components: the design object, the design process, and design agency. In this form of design, the designer and quilt constantly interacted and informed one another. Sandra's experience creating pants from a quilt (Figure 17) illustrated this idea, describing both an aesthetic reaction to the

quilt in terms of how to utilize the quilt design to create a pleasing silhouette and an emotional reaction when the quilt told her what it wanted to be.

> I did meditate on this one. I meditated on all of them. But this one in particular, I really took my time to be like, okay, where, what, what, what silhouette do you want? It all had to come together. And I wanted to look like all women, slim; no woman wants to look like, "Oh, look how cute. Oh, you have a quilted pants, but you look like you're an elephant." I mean, that doesn't work for me…So the first thing is being intentional on where I lay my pattern pieces and what I want my piece to say. Or what I want to stand out in the piece…It [the quilt] just spoke to me, that I want to make pants out of it…I just woke up one day. I'm going to make pants. It spoke to me. It said, "We want to be pants" …And I really do feel that fabric and quilts speak to you. I have a quilt rack. I'll lay fabric on the quilt rack. I just walk past it. Walk past it. It will speak to you.

Figure 17

Pants by Sandra Lee Chandler

Note. Sandra made the pants from the quilt on the left. Photographs by Sandra Lee Chandler. Permission Granted.

MartyO described a similar aesthetic and emotional relationship between herself and a quilt, again giving the quilt a voice in the design process (Figure 18).

> It was a circle skirt dress off a quilt I found at a thrift store for $15. They said they had had it for years and nobody would buy it because it was so fragile. It's like, "Oh, man." And begged to be a circle skirt. You just looked at, it's the only thing that it deserved to be. And so I made a dress out of that.

Figure 18

"Circle Game 1957" by MartyO

Note. MartyO made this dress from a $15 quilt she purchased at a thrift store. Photographs by Marty Ornish. Permission granted.

Beyond personifying the quilt's voice, designers described practical ways in which their aesthetic relationship to the quilt material dictated and constrained their design process. Often the size of the quilt pattern determined the size of the garment made from it. Michele preferred smaller quilt patterns, which fit better on her toddler-sized clothing (Figure 20). Lorelei discussed how the size of a Dresden Plate quilt, both in terms of total dimensions and size of the quilt blocks, along with the amount of damage, were all factors in the sizing and design of the final garment (Figure 19).

> This quilt was smaller. So I couldn't make a large or extra-large out of it. And the design was smaller. That's why that one [the coat] ended up being a medium. So, you know, the quilt actually does speak to me not only in terms of the design, I have to work around the damage, I also have to look at the size of the quilt and the size of a garment I can make from a quilt.

Figure 20

Toddler Vest by Michele Alford

Note. Michele made the vest from the quilt on the left. The size of the quilt pattern was critical for Michele because of the small size of garments she produced. Photographs by Michele Alford. Permission granted.

Figure 19

Jacket by Lorelei Wood

Note. Lorelei made the jacket from the quilt on the left. The size of the quilt and quilt blocks dictated the size of the garment. Photographs by Lorelei Wood. Permission granted.

Other designers described their design process as intuitive and instinctual, inspired by the quilt materials they had on hand. Taylor described how she gets "a craving almost, and I have to just satisfy it" and would dig through her materials, finding something that felt right in the moment and then working in a flow state for hours on end. In comparison, Ashley described a longer, intentional process, also driven by needing the design and quilt to feel "right" for each other. She could spend hours on the layout of her patterns and still have decided the quilt was not ready to be used.

> It sounds funny, but I will not cut something. Sometimes I feel it in my gut, it just doesn't feel right. And I'm not going to, if it doesn't feel 100% right to me, I just won't do it. And sometimes, I'll lay something out, and I'll spend hours doing it and I'll be like, "this just isn't right." So then I'll hang on to a quilt, and then eventually use it for even like a different silhouette of coat. Sometimes I just don't think certain silhouettes look right for something. And it could be a silhouette versus also the functionality of the quilt and what it is suited for.

The commonality among these designers' experiences was that their relationship with the quilt materials guided their design process experience. These designers were not randomly cutting into quilts just to quickly make a product to sell. Instead, they formed relationships with the quilt materials and used that to guide the design process. They connected to the quilt, reflecting on its past life, and envisioning a new, better future for it.

What further distinguished these designers' process from traditional apparel design models was that by wanting to give quilts new life and forming relationships with the quilts, the designers navigated both emotional and aesthetic responses to the quilt material. Aesthetic considerations are a key element of any design process. However, discovering an emotional component in the design process adds a distinct layer to how we think about design.

Emotional Response to the Quilt

The previous quotes showed that designers experienced a strong emotional response to quilt materials. Sandra and MartyO gave a voice to quilts, and other designers similarly personified them, especially when discussing cutting into them, showing concern that they were "injuring" and "hurting" the quilts. Many described their relationship with quilt materials as "transforming," "evolving," and "doing it justice." Tristan's portrayal of his relationship hits on all these points, first describing quilts as

having a soul, then describing how he feels he injured that soul, and lastly, how he transforms that soul (Figure 21).

> There is a feeling like you're cutting into a soul, though. Because I have such an emotional relationship with a lot of these things. I almost kind of feel the spirit. It is like I'm kind of cutting into a soul. But then I realize, no, I am transforming it. And the cutting is just a necessary part of it. But I'm not ruining it. I'm not desecrating it…[I'm] transforming into something that I think it's going to be a lot cooler and have a lot more use.

Figure 21

Jacket by Tristan Detwiler

Note. Tristan made the jacket from a c. 1879-1880 quilt. Photograph by Tristan Detwiler. Permission granted.

Tristan experienced an emotional rollercoaster as he processed his response to a quilt, concluding with giving the quilt new life. To Tristan, the quilts were not inanimate or dead objects; they were alive and capable of feeling. All the designers similarly pinpointed instances of how quilt materials elicited emotional reactions from them. Lorelei felt that quilts gave off "karma," which impacted her experience working with them.

> I actually think that certain fabrics collect karma as they go along. I've had some quilts that [when] you open it up, it just doesn't feel right. It feels kind of, I don't know, could be a smell; I'm very sensitive to smells. And then other ones, you open it up, you just immediately feel, "oh" [sighs] good vibes—sort of a feeling. So I think that there's karma.

Lorelei elaborated further, describing how she felt uncomfortable selling a jacket made from a quilt that gave off particularly bad vibes. As of her interview, the jacket was quarantined in a plastic bag on her patio to protect her other quilts and finished garments from its bad karma.

In addition to personifying quilt materials, designers experienced emotional connections grounded in the historical nature of quilts. They reflected on the maker's life, imagined stories of the maker as they worked on the quilt, and connected emotionally with the maker across time through the design process. Elise reflected on how she connected temporally with the quilt's maker through the lens of mental health (Figure 22).

> I think of a quilt as a canvas. Here's my fabric that somebody else has made and constructed, spent a ton of time on. And I think about what I'm going to make with it. I am constantly realizing that what I'm doing isn't even the hard part. Whoever made this quilt put in so much more time in it. I'm constantly thinking about that. Especially when I'm sewing, and I'm getting super close down looking at my sewing machine, and I see the stitches and all of the work, and I just think of the craftsmanship that goes into that. And then I also connect the dots [that] it was somebody else's distraction from their daily stressors. And now it's mine. I feel just like a weird sense of connection to them when I see them. I just kind of imagine what was that person like on the Oregon Trail sewing their quilt. And now I'm sitting in my nice house, and I have like my own stressors and how different life is. I think about it a lot.

It was clear that for these designers working with quilt materials, emotions played a crucial role in their design process. But why?

Figure 22

Jacket by Elise Wright

Note. Elise made the jacket from the quilt on the left. Photographs by Elise Wright. Permission Granted.

Quilts as Handmade Objects

Understanding why designers had such strong emotional responses to quilt materials was brought to light when they were asked to compare their experience working with quilts to other second-hand objects. All the designers upcycled and designed with other second-hand and vintage textiles, like chenille, tablecloths, towels, coverlets, and denim. And most responded that working with quilt materials felt more "special," more "magical," more "spiritual," and contained more "emotional weight" or "emotional connection" than working with other materials. Olivia described this feeling as "textile alchemy."

> It just feels more magical. I call it textile alchemy, transforming things. It just feels, I don't want to use the word "heavy" because it doesn't feel like this weight on my shoulders, but it feels like there's more weight to the material [quilts], like emotional weight…The amount of time that went into the original creator's time really makes me feel things.

This feeling of specialness, this "aura" (Benjamin, 2014), was based on the handmade nature of the quilts, a quality that set quilts apart from other mass-

manufactured textiles. Sandra, who also worked extensively in upcycled denim, described denim as having multiple voices due to its mass-manufactured nature, compared to the single voice of a quilt.

> They [quilts] have a history. I mean, denim has a history too, but these quilts have one person. When I work with denim, there's multiple voices speaking to me. It's like multiple voices, and they're all chattering, almost like a little crowd [makes chattering noises]. I'm like, "shh, shh! We're going to work together. We're going to all get together." Where when it's a quilt, it's like this "mmm" [quietly hums]. It's more of a one-person, took her time, a space and time in her life to create this piece. I want to honor and elevate and highlight her work.

Michele expressed a similar sentiment, noting that while she appreciated other household linens, they were not made through a singular labor of love, and she felt less of an emotional connection to them.

> I had more hesitation cutting up a quilt than anything I've ever cut, including very expensive fabric. The other things are household items. But not things that people made. You know what I mean? I use towels for bathing suit cover-ups. But they didn't make those towels. They wash them, they folded them. They had them in the linen closet. Yes. But they didn't make the towel…it's a totally different feeling. I'm honoring the textile, but I don't feel like there's any kind of connection with a person that I need to thank. Somebody sat in a factory and did that. It was not a labor of love.

Designers felt a strong emotional connection to quilt materials because a single maker was behind the object. They wanted to honor that single voice and bring it to life. The multiple voices or hands behind mass-produced textiles interfered with this emotional connection, preventing the designers from forming a strong emotional bond with other textiles.

For these designers, quilt materials literally carried their makers' stories, emotions, love, and labor across time and space. This temporal aspect of quilt materials, their living history, connected designers to a point in time. Tristan described how quilts connected him to a time and a maker, manifesting in a "spiritual connection."

> When I touch and feel quilts and you hear about where it's from, you hear about the area, you can envision that. You can envision a time. Sometimes it comes with photos of the maker in black and white from like the 1800s. And it's like, "wow, what a time that is not at all like today." There's this imagination that your mind goes into of what that person experienced. And then that road that one piece traveled, like a time capsule. It kind of takes me back in a way. There's is just some spiritual connection within that.

Designers felt as if they were interacting with another human, sensing the maker's love and care. The handmade nature of quilt materials elicited a strong emotional response from designers, forming the basis for their relationship and affecting their experience with the upcycling design process.

Aesthetic Response to the Quilt

The designers' aesthetic response was the second element that drove their relationship with quilt materials. Aesthetic considerations are key to most design processes, especially in apparel design. Designers inherently respond to the look and feel of inspiration sources, materials, trims, colors, etc. In Lamb and Kallal's (1992) Apparel Design Framework, aesthetics was one of the three criteria central to their Functional, Expressive, and Aesthetic Consumer Needs Model. They defined aesthetics as how consumers responded to an object's formal properties of beauty. But within the context of this research, the designer's relationship to quilt materials was at the core of the process, not the consumer. The aesthetic response was directly tied to how the designer reacted to the look and feel of the quilt and how they translated that reaction from a two-dimensional quilt to a three-dimensional garment.

This aesthetic response was demonstrated in ways already described, such as the size of the quilt pattern determining the garment size. It was also seen in what types of quilt materials designers gravitated toward for their designs. Many noted preferences for the look and feel of hand quilted or hand pieced patchwork, as described by Ashley and seen in Figure 23.

> I just love the texture that comes out of the hand quilting a lot of times. It does lend a different sort of texture in the way that the batting spreads out over time and kind of settles into the quilt, is different. I strongly prefer hand quilting…It's just the imperfection, honestly, of hand stitches. It goes back to that texture that it lends to the whole quilt, but also the texture in the hand quilting area…I really like that depth of texture and thinking about the time and history that goes into that.

Designers' preferences were tied not only to an appreciation for the texture and look of hand quilting but were deeply reflective of their emotions towards handmade objects. Designers also aesthetically responded to the wear and tear of quilt materials, the tangible reminders of its life cycle. Holes, fraying, degraded fabrics, and thread-bare spots were all physical and visible connections to the quilt's biography, as seen in Figure

24. As Lorelei put it, “If it’s shabby, that just means it was well loved.” Through this form of haptic feedback, the quilt communicated its story, history, love, time, and labor to the designer.

Figure 23

Hand Quilting Texture

Note. Close-up image from a jacket by Ashley Saville. Photograph by Ashley Saville. Permission granted.

Figure 24

Jacket by Olivia Jondle

Note. Left panel: A "shabby" quilt that showed sign of damage and wear in the red squares. Right panel: Olivia incorporated the quilt's wear and tear into the jacket, as seen in the grey squares. Photographs by Olivia Jondle. Permission granted.

Designers' aesthetic response impacted how they translated the quilt material from two-dimensional to three-dimensional when laying out the pattern. When describing how they approached laying out patterns on the quilt, designers discussed wanting to showcase the quilt's pattern in the best manner possible. They preferred symmetry in the final garment and were intentional about respecting its original aesthetics while putting their own mark on the garment. Sandra called her approach to design "take it and toss it." She took time to carefully study the quilt to decide the piece's focal point, often "tossing" the quilt pattern in unexpected ways, such as making the secondary pattern the primary pattern or interrupting a quilt block. When describing her design process on a coat made from a Lone Star quilt (Figure 25 & Figure 26), she noted she intentionally cut through the primary star design to tone down the visual impact of the coat.

> Do you see how big that star is? I mean, it's huge. And I'm like, what the heck? It takes over the quilt. I'm like who would want a big star like that anywhere on this? Look how big it was! I was like, what am I going to do with that? Like, how do I? You don't want it on your back as a target. Like, that wouldn't work either, you know? So I'm always like, okay, so how and when and where? But when you have it, see how the front [referencing the front of the jacket]? You complete it [the star pattern]. It totally tones down the quilt…I cut into the block. I interrupted the block.

Figure 25

Jacket by Sandra Lee Chandler

Note. Sandra made the jacket from a Lone Star quilt (Figure 26) by interrupting the primary star design. Photographs by Sandra Lee Chandler. Permission granted.

Figure 26

Lone Star Quilt

Note. Original Lone Star quilt used by Sandra to create the jacket in Figure 25, showing the entire star design. Photograph by Sandra Lee Chandler. Permission granted.

Sandra's approach showed her appreciation for the original aesthetics of the quilt but translated through her personal design approach. Similar to Sandra, most designers discussed how they spent time examining and appreciating the quilt material, marveling at the usage of color and the pattern, enjoying the unique fabrics, and picking out their favorite parts. Taylor, one of the few designers who did not personally source her quilts, was excited each time she received a new batch from her pickers, spending time getting to know each of the quilts first.

> Every time one of my pickers, my people who source for me, message me, "I got a stack for you," my heart skips a beat almost. I can't wait, you know? And they'll send me a picture of them all laid out. It lights me up, and I love it. I love

> all the different colors and fabric. And I like being surprised, you know, not that I think I've seen it all, but I like being surprised and unraveling a quilt. I definitely with each quilt, I take time. I like to soak it in almost before I cut it up, in a way...So yeah, every time I get a quilt, I kind of dissect them and kind of marinate it in a little bit and just soak it up.

In the process of slowly examining the quilt material, designers noticed elements that otherwise might be missed, such as unique fabrics, stitching details, wear and tear, and areas of past mending. These elements were then incorporated into the final garment, informing the design process. Through careful consideration of the aesthetics of the quilt plus their own aesthetic preferences, designers developed a deep appreciation for the time, labor, and love that went into the quilt. They wondered about the maker's life, imagined where the fabrics came from (were the fabrics scraps from dresses?), pondered why certain fabrics were used (why is this one square different from all the others?), and formed a bond with the quilt. In a sense, through their aesthetic response, designers collaborated and communicated with the maker across time.

Tensions Within the Design Process

Interviews with designers revealed that they experienced a series of tensions during the design process due to a push-and-pull between their aesthetic and emotional responses to each quilt material. Working with quilt materials was fraught with complexities, as designers constantly wrestled with balancing their aesthetic point-of-view, maintaining the quilt's aesthetics and originality, and coping with their emotions elicited by the quilt and society's perception of their work. Designers' intersecting and often conflicting aesthetic and emotional reactions to the quilt material had to be navigated while transforming it into a garment.

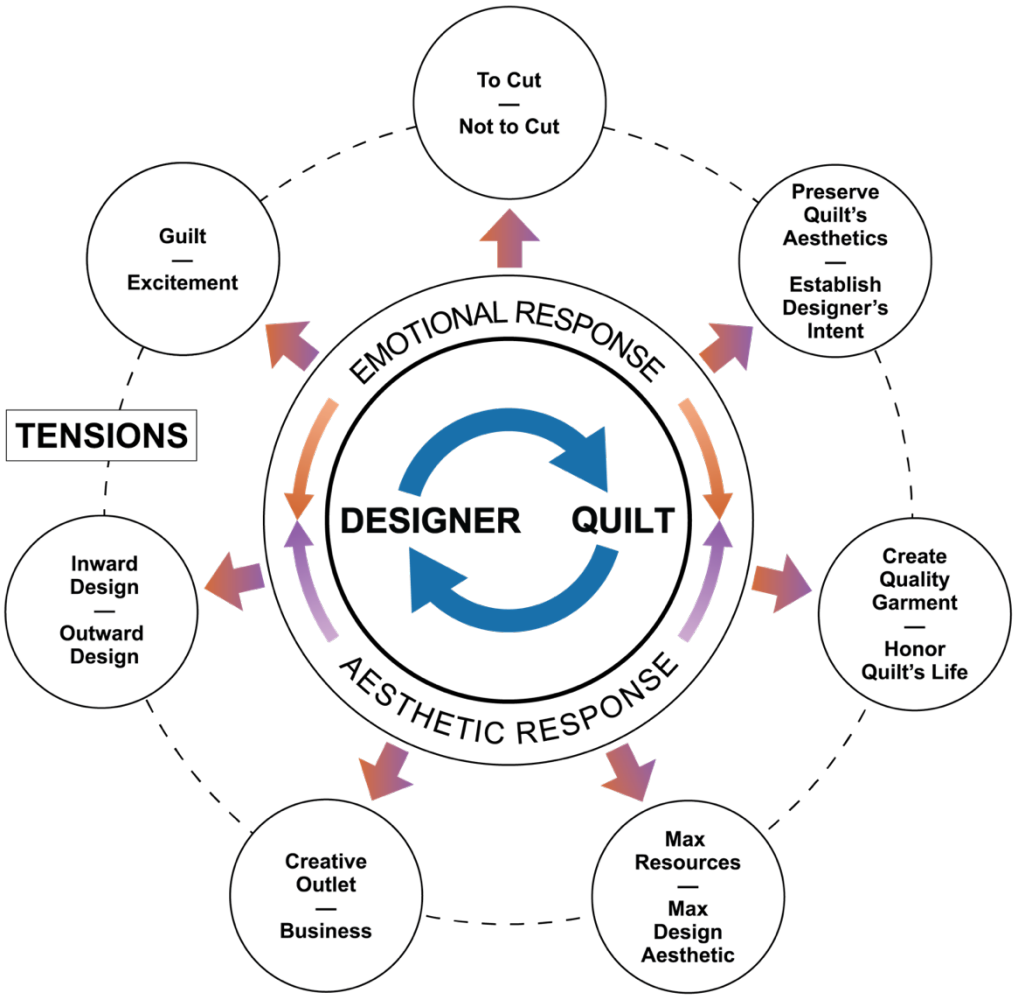
These tensions were reflected throughout the design process, as seen in Figure 27, Designer-Material Relationship Tensions Model. Decision-making in some aspects of the design process was more aesthetically driven, while others were more emotional, and some required rectifying both responses. Each quilt material presented a new opportunity to work through these non-dualistic tensions. Many designers reflected that their thinking and approach to upcycling quilt materials had changed over time in terms of what they felt comfortable using, how they incorporated the quilt material into the final design, and

how they shared its story. As a result of these tensions between aesthetic and emotional responses, the designers' experiences were constantly evolving and changing. But these tensions also kept the designers consistently engaged in their work as they evaluated and re-evaluated their actions alongside their "why" of giving quilts new life.

The following section provides seven specific thematic examples of how designers mediated the tensions between their emotional and aesthetic responses within their design process in order to give quilts a new life.

Figure 27

Designer-Material Relationship Tensions Model



Note: Designers navigated a series of tensions during the design process because of their emotional and aesthetic responses to quilt materials. From: *Designer-Material Relationship Tensions Model*, by C. G. Pokorny, 2023 (https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.23561304.v1). CC BY 4.0.

To Cut—Not to Cut

The most evident tension designers experienced when upcycling quilt materials was during the act of sourcing. Navigating the tension of which quilt materials they felt comfortable upcycling into garments was one of the first and most important parts of their experience. Deciding what to use was fraught with tensions between how designers aesthetically responded to a quilt and their emotional bond with it. Designers expressed feelings of guilt, confusion, and apprehension over which quilt materials were acceptable to cut. Some had never been asked to define what was acceptable to cut. They processed their decision-making out loud during their interview, often changing their opinion in real-time as they thought more deeply about the issue. For example, Lisa and Rachel discussed their apprehensive approach to each quilt and how they carefully examined it to decide the best use – cut or keep.

> *Lisa:* Rachel's like, "We got a new quilt!" I'm like, "Oh, great, is it a cutter?" And she's like, "I don't know." I do the same thing. I don't know. And I feel like I have to wait a while.
>
> *Rachel:* You just kind of have to study it. Weigh the pros and cons. Are we going to use it, or is it just going to be sitting there? Well then, let's cut it! You know?
>
> *Lisa:* Right. If I have the perfect thing in mind that it would be great for, yeah, I guess I'll cut it.
>
> *Rachel:* We think about it a lot. We put a lot of thought into it.
>
> *Lisa:* Because I think we have both sides. We have the quilts that we keep and treasure.
>
> *Rachel:* And collect.
>
> *Lisa:* We're not just in a business where we don't care about the product that we're making.

Like Lisa and Rachel, many designers had personal collections of quilt materials amassed during sourcing that they set aside for being too pristine. They felt that cutting these quilts would not improve upon their lives, and instead kept them to use on their beds, for picnics, or in the house. When Rebecca talked about her personal quilt collection, she recognized that while a pristine quilt might make a beautiful garment, emotionally, it felt wrong to use it.

> I try when I'm cutting up quilts to not cut up pristine quilts. I actually have a little stack of quilts that I'm like, "too good. These are just too good." And I know they would make excellent garments too, but I'm just like, ooh, I don't know, these could definitely be on a bed, and they're such good quilts. So I try when I'm looking for the quilts, I try and find ones that are worn and that are torn somewhere, or that definitely feel like I'm potentially improving upon this thing.

Most designers felt that if a quilt could still serve a functional life as a quilt, then it should be used as such. This decision was tied to their aesthetic response of the quilt being "too good" or "too nice" to be upcycled and an emotional response of wanting to find the best way to improve the quilt's life and honor its maker. Like most of the designers, Jillian refused to cut a quilt in perfect condition.

> When a quilt is perfect, when it is truly no stains, no wear. When it's museum quality. Absolutely not. I will not touch it…I'm trying to rescue these things and reinterpret them. If they're already so beautiful and perfect, I don't want to mess with it. That's not right.

Since most designers were uncomfortable cutting pristine, functional quilts, they sourced torn "shabby" quilt materials with holes, damage, and stains. A quilt's damage alleviated some of their guilt about it, even if the designer aesthetically loved the quilt, as stated by Lisa: "I think the more I love the quilt, of how it looks, the more ripped up it has to be for me to actually cut into it." MartyO described how it felt acceptable to use damaged quilt materials because they had already lived a full life, as seen in Figure 28.

> I look for quilts that are damaged. I do not want a beautiful, intact vintage quilt. That's for collectors. If people want to give me one, I'll go "I'm not the right person." I have some of my own from my family, but I don't look for those. Don't want them. Because I wouldn't cut it up. I have quilts and blankets. It's wasted on me. I want people that are going to display it in their house or use it on their bed or keep it for a quilt collection. Or if it's worthy, go to a museum. But most of the museums, they don't want them. They have too many. It has to be falling apart somewhere. Has to have holes in it or moth damage or, you know, you see the batting…Because then I know there's no issue cutting it up. It's been loved to death. And I see no reason to cut up a perfectly intact quilt because it has a life as a cover quilt. It's functional, and there's too many out there that are damaged.

Figure 28

"All Tied Up" by MartyO

Note. MartyO reconstructed the scraps of the Double Wedding Ring quilt from the bin to make the bodice of the dress. Photographs by Marty Ornish. Permission granted.

Designers also noted that their opinions changed over time as they learned more about the history of quiltmaking and grew in their appreciation for the craft. Allie discussed how she changed her perspective and mainly used damaged quilt materials sourced from rag houses.

> I think from the time that I cut my first quilt to now, I have grown a major appreciation for quilting. Because I never really thought of what all goes into quilting. And I will say that the first few quilts that I cut up, I also was not thinking about that, unfortunately. But I've learned…And that has shifted my focus more to mostly be using; so I use quilts that are really tattered and stained. That's kind of the first thing, is now I have changed my perspective on what I think should be cut up and what I think shouldn't be cut up.

For some, the longer they worked with quilt materials, the more they questioned the ethics of their work. Tristan noted that as he learned more about quiltmaking history, "there's a lot of question now that I'm raising about if I should cut it up and if it needs

this transformation." For these designers, the tension of "to cut—not to cut" never disappeared; it constantly evolved alongside their design process.

Overall, designers' decisions about what to use returned to their "why" – to give quilts new life. They processed their decision through this lens, wanting to truly do what they felt was the best for each quilt material. Michele described the emotional arc she went through while deciding if she would use the quilt in Figure 29.

> By the time I get to a clean, dry piece of textile that I'm about to cut, I just I still wasn't sure about. I went through that "should I, or shouldn't I?" And I went through the giving up the prayer to the - I'm sure it was a woman who made it. Just thinking, "I hope you understand that this is honoring your work, not desecrating it. I feel like this is a way to let people appreciate your art for longer." By the time I made my little negative pattern and figured it out and cut it and got so excited about how it was looking, by the time I left that night, I was like, "yes!" You know what I mean? It was full arc of "should I, or shouldn't I?" And then just excited. And then just, "this is going to be so precious." It was kind of like exhausting to go through all that. [laughs] Just over cutting out a coat. But there was a lot going on in my heart and in my brain about that.

Figure 29

Jacket by Michele Alford

Note. Michele made the toddler girl's jacket from the quilt on the left. She experienced an emotional arc while working on this jacket. Photographs by Michele Alford. Permission granted.

Michele's conflicting feelings showed how her emotional bond to the history and maker of the quilt existed simultaneously with her excitement about the look of the garment she was planning to make. Ultimately, Michele saw herself as honoring the maker's work, and that feeling allowed her to move forward with using the quilt.

All the designers agreed that their choice to upcycle quilt materials was deeply personal. They felt that if they had purchased or found the quilt material, it was theirs to use as they saw fit. Lorelei stated, "It's like the whole abortion concept, right? My body, my choice. It's my quilt. If I want to cut it up, I'm going to cut it up." Several compared the upcycling of quilt materials to painting antique furniture or remodeling a house, noting that fewer people seemed upset about those acts. As Elise noted, the quilt's owner has the agency to decide how best to use it.

> This is mine now, and it's my new canvas. I get to create whatever I want to with it using that. I have bought it, and I get to do that. If you buy it, you get to do what you want with it.

Preserving the Quilt's Aesthetics—Establishing the Designer's Intent

Once designers navigated tensions related to sourcing quilt materials, they moved onto a new set of tensions associated with the layout of their pattern pieces and cutting. The tension of "preserving the quilt's aesthetics—establishing the designer's intent" was based on balancing a designer's strong aesthetic response to the quilt material with their personal design style. The research findings showed that some designers were pulled towards the "maintain designer's intent" end of the spectrum, resulting in reinterpretations of quilts. For example, Sandra's "take it and toss it" approach was a more unexpected and less literal way of translating a quilt into a three-dimensional garment. She looked for ways to arrange pattern pieces that created new patterns and design elements from quilt blocks.

> I really feel that my aesthetic is different than even the quilted clothes that come out now, because my whole idea is "take it and toss it." I taught a class the last two weeks. I said, so you could take like the quilt in my background here [gestures to denim quilt in behind her]. I could lay my pattern the front two pieces going straight across horizontally. That's the expected. Let's throw it on its side and let's put it at an angle. Let's take a border. Like in the pants I made [see Figure 17]. Let's take something that is a secondary pattern and make it a primary pattern by the way lay your pieces on that quilt. To me, it's so interesting to take something that's maybe even frayed. Let's work around that fray. Or let's not.

> Let's use that as a design element…So I always try to push, in my students and push myself, to not be literal when I'm working with the quilt. You don't literally have to see the whole block to know that's a quilt block. So I'm always thinking, your eye completes everything, so you can have a corner of a block and your eye's going to complete it.

Sandra's quote showed how she found ways to highlight the quiltmaker's work while inserting her unique design sensibilities. MartyO took a similar, less literal approach to upcycling quilt materials. She primarily draped most of her work, likening her design process to assembling a puzzle. Her work was iterative and intuitive, auditioning and assembling bits of quilts and other textiles on mannequins until the design felt right. Unlike most designers who sold their garments, MartyO exhibited hers in shows worldwide. Many of her garments contained a level of profundity, like *Cage a' Crinoline,* which was simultaneously an homage to women being in bondage and a metaphor for protecting women (Figure 30).

> This skirt was made out of a good friend of mine, her aunt's double wedding ring. It had so many gaping holes it looked, when I started draping it, just like trash. It was just like, "Wow." I spent hours putting layers of old lace underneath all the holes - just gaping holes. That took two weeks, solid, just to repair it till it could be fabric again…So I made this huge skirt out of it. And then the bodice is made of hexies. It was also hers. And just awful. But I had enough of it that I could make giant sleeves…And I use chandeliers to make the necklace. And you see in the back it crosses, right? So that's kind of an homage to being in bondage. In the sexual way, but in the work in a sweatshop or, you know, whatever. And then the front, I wanted to be more queen like and regal. I love the juxtaposition of that. I covered the sleeves with tulle to make them even more ridiculous. This was really fun to make because I felt like I was both powerful as a woman because this is a very powerful dress, and also, I made a cage to protect people who are abused or in forced labor. There are so many stories in this piece. And so I loved making this piece. The whole time I made it, I felt like I could finally do more than make a beautiful dress and talk about honoring your fabric and heritage. But I could talk about women's issues.

Figure 30

"Cage a' Crinoline" by MartyO

Note. MartyO made this dress from a hexie quilt. Top left panel: Cutting the sleeve panels. Top right panel: Draping the bodice on a dress form. Bottom panels: Final garment front and back views. Photographs by Marty Ornish. Permission granted.

Whereas Sandra and MartyO reinterpreted the quilt's pattern in their own ways, other designers were more literal in their interpretations, focused on preserving the intent of the quilt material. For most, this meant featuring specific elements of the quilt material that spoke to the designer in prominent garment areas. Ashley used a particularly damaged Lone Star quilt to make a denim jacket inspired garment (Figure 31). She worked hard to honor and highlight the original quilt pattern and create visual interest and flow across the garment, all while avoiding heavily damaged areas.

> It does look like a denim jacket. And using that [blue color] as the base color for the coat and then using the star pattern for all the details and to highlight especially on the back. Really focusing on the middle of the back and continuity of that Lone Star bringing it down. This quilt was heavily damaged, and anywhere above the neck where you see the burgundy star, it was all shot out. There was actually no fabric left for the middle of the star. I honored that as much as I could. But then for the collar, sometimes inverting it. So flipping and using the other direction to go up towards the neck and playing on that pattern and kind of making my own Lone Star design there [at the center back neck] ...You have the continuity of the star pattern up by the shoulders, coming down to the elbows and really drawing the focus up there. I also wanted the base of the sleeves to be blue and plain so that way, that pattern of the star on the bottom waist towards the hips - I wanted that to pop a little bit. So being mindful the choose the color and pattern on the sleeves, that way it wouldn't take away from that aspect.

Figure 31

Jacket by Ashley Saville

Note. Ashley made this jacket from a Lone Star quilt. Photographs by Ashley Saville. Permission granted.

Several designers described working with Double Wedding Ring quilts, a pattern known for its large, scalloped edges. For Taylor, it felt intuitive to use the shape of the scalloped edges along the center front and bottom edge of her jackets and hems of dresses (Figure 32).

> The double wedding ring, I mean, that scalloped edge just makes sense to be on the bottom to me. When I do my jackets with the scalloped edge, it just makes sense...The double wedding ring, that speaks for itself. That just kind of makes sense. The silhouette, that quilt took on that shape, or was that shape already, and I just formed it into a dress.

Figure 32

Jacket and Dress by Taylor Randal

Note. Left panel: Taylor used the scalloped shape of the Double Wedding Ring quilt for the center front, bottom hem, and sleeve hems of the jacket. Right panel: Taylor used the scallop shape of the Double Wedding Ring quilt top for the hem of the dress. Photographs by Taylor Randal. Permission granted.

Many designers began their design process by selecting an element of the quilt material as a focal point, either for the center back of a jacket or the center front of a top or dress. They also wanted to preserve the symmetrical nature of quilt patterns, aiming for symmetry across the center front of garments and on the sleeves. Paula described this technique in her design process (Figure 33).

> When I cut out the pattern, I made sure that I picked out what I thought was pretty for the back. And then for the front, I wanted the yellow and black to be down the center. When I cut out, I'm very careful about making sure they align. To some people, they don't care. But if there's a border on a quilt, I try to put it down the middle front or on the sleeves.

To further preserve the quilt's aesthetics, some designers utilized its original binding in their garments. They aligned the bottom opening and center front edge of the garment's front panels along the edge of the quilt so the binding could act as the edge finish. This method was also used for the back panel and sleeve by aligning the bottom opening to the binding edge, as seen in Figure 32 and Figure 34. From a practical standpoint, using the original binding meant less labor for the designers as the edges and bottom openings were already finished. But they also recognized the amount of labor that went into applying binding by the quiltmaker, as noted by Lorelei.

> The body of the quilt, I like to cut it so that the original maker's edging is used in body of the quilt. So I don't alter the edge. And what I do is I cut the front and the back of the quilt so that the edging is maintained. The original maker's edging – which they usually do a fabulous job on these types of quilts…It does make a lot easier, but it also maintains the line of the quilt. It just looks better. It also maintains the integrity of the original maker, for heaven's sakes. That's the binding that they – when you're making a quilt that's often very time consuming, making the binding look good.

Figure 33

Jacket and Pattern Pieces by Paula Campbell

Note. Top panel: Front, back, and sleeve pieces after cutting, showing how Paula used the yellow and black hexagons on the center front of the jacket, picked out a favorite part of the quilt for the back panel, and maintained symmetry across the whole garment. Bottom panel: Front and back of the finished jacket. Photographs by Paula Campbell. Permission granted.

Figure 34

Coat by Lorelei Wood

Note. Lorelei made the coat from the quilt on the left. She used the quilt's original binding around the bottom, sleeve, and hood hems. Photographs by Lorelei Wood. Permission granted.

By maintaining the original bindings, designers honored the labor of the quilt's maker in the garment and preserved the quilt's aesthetics. Designers could maintain the authenticity and identity of the quilt as much as possible. But not all the designers felt this way. Several noted that the bindings on sourced quilts were typically not in good enough shape to be used, and therefore they had to replace them with new fabrics. For designers like Rebecca, who worked primarily with quilt tops, and Lisa and Rachel, who applied quilt patches to garments, using original binding did not factor in their design process. Ashley prioritized the aesthetics of her designs over using the original binding. Kelsy stated that the scale of her business and the quality of the quilts she sourced made using original bindings difficult.

> I pretty much almost never do that. There's been places I've considered it. I've probably done it once or twice. The fact that I don't love to use pristine quilts is a factor. And the edges are frequently the place that gets worn away first. So I've never really designed into that element because I know it's going to be hard to source in the way I would want to. I think if I was more in the business of really making completely one-of-one garments, I might, you know, sometimes get a garment and be like, we should use this edge here.

Regardless of their approach, all the designers faced the decision of how to honor the quilt material best while maintaining the integrity of their own aesthetics to make a unique garment. Do they take an entirely new spin on the quilt or incorporate its pattern into their design? This decision was personal for each designer and could change with every quilt material. But all of them felt, as stated by Rebecca, "When you cut it up and put it together in different ways, it changes the look of it, and you're kind of adding to the artistry that's already there" (Figure 35).

Figure 35

Dress by Rebecca Gholdston Wright

Note. Rebecca made the dress from a quilt top. Photograph by Rebecca Gholdston Wright. Permission granted.

Creating a Quality Garment—Honoring the Quilt's Life

While the previous tension of "preserving the quilt's aesthetics—establishing designer's intent" was mainly aesthetic based, "creating a quality garment—honoring the quilt's life" added a layer of emotional tension into the pattern layout and cutting steps. Designers wanted to incorporate signs of wear to honor the quilt material's life, but starting from an inherently damaged textile meant there was a potential to compromise the quality of the final garment. When discussing the quilt used to make the garment in Figure 36, Ashely described how she included damaged areas as they connected her physically and mentally to the quilt's history.

> They're little flowers on it and the centers of them have started to wear through a little bit. But I love the texture and history that can give. It's still a very stable quilt but has some really nice history too. Because I think it's nice to show that. I think it gives it character and shows its past life and how it was loved…I think the texture experience is very, very cool. Just to see even damage and wear, where that comes from and why? Was it a natural thing that was going to happen to that fabric over time? Did somebody particularly love and connect with one block? If it was a little kid, did they spend time like rubbing that one block a lot, rubbing it on their face when they're sleeping? And so I don't always work around that. I do like to include that as well if I think it's going to be stable, because I really love that history.

Figure 36

Jacket by Ashley Saville

Note. The wear on the fabric connected Ashley to the past life of the quilt. Photographs by Ashley Saville. Permission granted.

Ashley hoped that by including this damage, her customers would also connect to the quilt's history that resonated so deeply with her. Taylor similarly incorporated signs of wear or mended small areas. She tried not to avoid damage unless it compromised the garment's integrity. To her, wear and mending added layers of meaning to the quilt and promoted a sustainable mindset.

> I don't really avoid [damage] unless it's damaged severely to the point where it's not worth mending and depending on where it's at on the quilt. I will cut around, but if it's simple little holes, I think that adds more character…I think it's just honoring the history of it and showing the sustainability side of it and promoting sustainability in that way. And reinforcing the longevity of something. Showing people that "if it's broke, fix it" kind of a thing, you know? I think it's a beautiful way to honor the quilt. Zero waste and promote the sustainability side. I'm not just blowing through these nice quilts; I'm honoring what they were and what they've been through and giving them a second life.

Underlying this tension was the designers' desire to honor the quilt material and give it a new life. However, that new life could only be accomplished through making a quality garment, and while designers wanted to keep signs of the quilt material's life for an emotional connection, the garment needed to have considerable potential for longevity.

Ashley carefully considered adding certain design elements, like pockets, based on the quilt's stability, thus balancing the garment's utility and longevity. Sandra and Lorelei both talked about ensuring their garment seams were not placed in bulky areas of the quilt material or stress already damaged areas. Designers also frequently mended quilt materials. They repaired areas of seam slippage, tacked down loose fabrics, fixed lumpy batting, and patched holes so the quilt would be stable enough for use. But the more repairs they made, the less of the quilt's life they could share. Jillian discussed the dilemma of mending to maintain garment integrity versus incorporating the damage of the quilt used to make the top in Figure 37.

> I mean, this quilt in particular was in really bad shape. I did a lot of mending just so the fabric wasn't hanging off. But I did leave a little bit of it because I felt like it was important for the recipient, for the customer to see how old it is and to see how worn it is. It just lends to the fact that this lived a life somewhere else. It's so soft and sort of floppy, like someone got comfort out of it. [points to the image on the computer screen] At the very bottom, that strip, right under the green line. That pattern was a plaid. It's basically falling apart – all those fabric squares. I do think there is something to be said about seeing the wear and tear. I do leave a

> little bit of it if it is pervasive. I don't want to leave so much someone's like, "Why am I buying an item that's falling apart?"

Figure 37

Top by Jillian Hertzman

Note. Jillian made this top from a quilt with damage. She did some mending but also left some of the damage visible. Right panel: Bottom right corner enlarged to show the damaged plaid fabric referenced in Jillian's quote. Photograph by Jillian Hertzman. Permission granted.

Jillian's quote brought up a critical aspect of the upcycling experience – that designers wanted to leave signs of wear so that customers could also connect with the quilt's history. Yes, the relationship between the designer and the quilt was at the center of the design process, but it was also important to them that customers could experience this relationship in their own way. One approach to communicating the relationship to customers was through these haptic connections of the quilt's past. However, Rebecca commented on the irony that society seemed to discourage the cutting up of pristine quilts, but customers often did not want a garment that had holes or damage, so she felt pressured to mend the quilt to hide signs of wear.

> Sometimes there's big holes that you try and skip completely. Or big pieces of major wear…And so then you have to like cut around that and try and work around that. This is the thing; everybody doesn't want you to cut up a pristine

> quilt. But also, people don't want clothes where the stuffing is coming out of them. So, you're like, "Okay, well." [laughs] You want me to mend this whole quilt and fix this whole quilt, and then I'm allowed to? I actually don't mind a little bit of fluff sometimes. I use the stuff that's got some visible wear, but there's definitely some that's worse than others.

As indicated by these quotes, designers upcycling quilt materials were often caught in a catch-22: how to preserve and pass along the single voice of the quilt material while satisfying their desire to make a long-lasting, high-quality garment. For designers working in this unique space, there was no easy solution for this tension. Taylor perhaps best summed up an approach to this predicament: "I don't avoid it, and I accept the challenge."

Maximizing Resources—Maximizing Design Aesthetics

Due to the handmade one-of-a-kind nature of quilt materials, designers could not run to the store to buy another one if they made mistakes or needed more fabric. In this sense, they viewed a quilt material as a limited resource, one that was precious and could not be replaced. This limitation created the tension of "maximizing resources—maximizing design aesthetics." Designers had to reconcile the limited nature of quilt materials within the design process. As discussed previously, some designers maintained original quilt bindings to honor the original intent of the quilt. This decision also reflected the need to maximize all aspects of the quilt. During the pattern layout stage, designers frequently made difficult decisions about how to best utilize a quilt material by minimizing waste and working around damage. Allie experienced this tension while working on the jacket in Figure 38, saying, "Laying out patterns on the quilt is like, how can we use as much of the original creations as possible and have the least amount of waste?"

Figure 38

Jacket by Allie Chamberlain

Note. Photograph by Allie Chamberlain. Permission granted.

Lisa talked about how she navigated both emotional and aesthetic responses to the quilt when laying out her design; constantly questioning if she was making the "right" decision created a level of stress in the process. The many layers to her decision-making process included: how to use the quilt to prevent waste, how to make an aesthetically pleasing garment, how to maximize the number of items made from a quilt, how to best honor the quilt, and how to maximize her profit (Figure 39).

> When I'm making the decision of what piece of the quilt am I going to put on this sweatshirt or this pair of overalls, it's probably the stressful part for me sometimes. Because I want to make the right choice. I don't want to use too much of the quilt or make a mistake and have it go to waste. There's just so many options, right? One quilt will have different squares with so many different colors. I have to hold the sweatshirt up to each square, decide which color combination do I like the best. But I'm also thinking about how can I preserve the largest piece of the quilt so that if I want to make something else later that takes more quilt, I'll

have that option. I'm always just trying to find the best combination of like color and pattern, plus keeping the quilt together as much as I can.

But then once I make the decision, and I like how it looks, then I get more excited…Honoring the quilts and appreciating it fully and not letting it go to waste. I try to think about if I leave this strip on the edge, it's fine because I can make a scrunchie or whatever. But if I leave this random circle or whatever, I don't know what I would do with that. So sometimes I think of what else am I going to make out of it? Because financially and I don't want to throw it away. So then I will have to use it so it's not just sitting around.

Figure 39

Toddler Playsuit by Lisa Cross and Rachel Pulliam

Note. Rachel applied upcycled quilt patches to the front and back of the playsuit. Photographs by Rachel Pulliam. Permission granted.

Lisa's quote also alluded to the fact that many quilt materials were financial investments. Yes, they wanted to honor and showcase the quilt as much as possible, but the designers also needed to make a living. And while some designers sourced quilt materials more cheaply from rag houses and thrift store bins, others invested several hundred dollars into a single quilt. Maximizing the number of garments made from each

quilt material was crucial to their economic survival, leading to careful consideration when laying out their patterns for cutting, as noted by Kelsy.

> The cutter would have also placed a lot of consideration on utilizing the quilt as much as possible for this style because it is a vest, and we were able to get like two or three vests out of most quilts when we were making this. He would have been conceiving of all of those vests at the same time and like jig sawing it together. How could they all look nice and not making one that was mismatched and stupid looking and the rest were all lined up. He had to make all the choices together to maximize the use of the quilt.

Dealing with this tension also meant designers sometimes sacrificed their design aesthetic in order to protect and maintain as much of the quilt material as possible. Zero-waste design was important to MartyO; she found great joy and excitement in making a garment with nothing left over. But, as evidenced by her quote, not wasting fabric to make the jacket in Figure 40 meant relinquishing some control over the final design of the garment.

> This was a challenge to figure out how can I use this quilt? Maybe if I had set it on point, it might have been possibly more flattering, but it would have wasted the quilt fabric. So I didn't do it…And even using a vintage quilt when you're making coats out of them, you can really capture the edges. So one, work's done for you. And it has a pleasing edge. So had I done this coat on point, I would have wasted a lot more fabric. It would have been possibly more flattering.

Similarly, Ashley noted the sustainability aspect of maximizing the use of the quilt material, relating this concern to more significant issues within the fashion industry.

> It's important to me that I don't waste any fabric because I'm coming at it from a creative perspective and I'm choosing to use quilts that are damaged and not cutting up perfectly good quilts, which again, that kind of starts going into the topic of should you or shouldn't you? And I know there's a very vast range of where people sit on that. But for me, I like to cut ones that I want to give a second life to that aren't really suitable for beds or couches or whatnot anymore. So when I do cut one, it's really important to me that I use as much of the material as I can. Because also, coming from a sustainability perspective, the fashion and textile industry is extremely problematic.

Figure 40

Zero-waste Jacket by MartyO

Note. MartyO made the jacket from the quilt on the left. She noted that if the quilt was set on-point (blocks set diagonally), the coat might have been more flattering, but it would have wasted fabric. Photographs by Marty Ornish. Permission granted.

While maximizing resources and fabric is part of a traditional apparel design process, these designers' experiences indicated that the bigger picture of the handmade nature of quilt materials and wanting to give the material a second life added a strong emotional component to their decisions. Designers did not take the decision to cut and use quilt material lightly. And when they decided to use a quilt material, they felt responsible for ensuring it was used in the best way possible to not only give it new life but to honor its history, maker, and aesthetics.

Creative Outlet—Business

The tension between creative outlet—business revealed how each designer struggled to define the purpose of their business: as an enjoyable hobby or a business to make money. As illustrated in the designers' vignettes, most of the designers never

intended to start a business when they began upcycling quilt materials. Instead, their business started as a creative outlet or a hobby. As their businesses grew, designers struggled to maintain their creative spirit and enjoyment of the design process due to mounting pressure to produce faster to make money. Most designers wanted their work to serve as a creative outlet instead of one that focused solely on profit. They constantly battled this tension between creativity and business. Elise discussed how she planned to scale back her business to protect her mental health and regain control over her creative outlet (Figure 41).

> I do this for myself, for my mental health. Not making that much profit off of it…And also coming back to the mental health aspect of it. I did take a part time job instead of working full time anymore so I could do this more this year. It's just a fun, "let's see what happens." I've enjoyed it, but I am going to transition back to full time. I think the more I've done it, the less creative power I've had because I'm at the mercy of certain customers. It's taken away the fun, creative outlet. And again, protecting that mental health aspect. When it becomes to not be fun, it becomes to not be good for my mental health. Then I'm going to do less of it and I'm taking control back over the thing and the reasons why I wanted to do it.

Figure 41

Jacket by Elise Wright

Note. Photographs by Elise Wright. Permission granted.

Taylor further portrayed this struggle noting how she could no longer sew for fun without thinking about her business.

> It's hard because when I go to sew, and this is something that I'm struggling with, this balance of doing it for fun and doing it for work. When I go into my sewing room, it's just work mode. And then if I sew for fun, I'm just thinking of dollar signs of stuff that I could be doing to alleviate my tax debt [laughs]. It's hard for me to commit to "Okay, I'm going to spend an hour of doing something for myself" versus "Oh, I could fix this pair of Levi's and put them on my website for someone to purchase."

When asked how much they charged for their work, most immediately responded with some version of "too low" or "not enough" and that they were not making a profitable living. Taylor's reply summed up the tensions present in many of the designers' experiences, "My profits and loss margin is just like 'Oh, so I actually don't make any money.' But I'm having a good time." The notable exceptions to this were Tristan, who had the highest price point; Rebecca and Kelsy, who produced the greatest volume; and MartyO and Sandra, who did not sell ready-made garments but made money through lectures, classes, and custom work.

Another hurdle most designers faced was a balancing act between their desire to immerse themselves in each quilt material fully and their desire to ramp up production to grow their business. Tristan spoke to this conflicting issue, lamenting that when he produced more quickly, he lost touch with the story of each piece.

> Every quilt has such uniqueness. It's such a unique story and history behind every singular quilt that you find. I like to work with my quilts, my textiles in a very, in a close [pause] I want to make everything. I don't want someone else to produce for me. But at a point it's kind of getting hard because I want to make more and more. But I want every experience to be that I understand and give full appreciation to that piece and that history and that story that that quilt represents and do it full justice. Because I do think that every one is so special…I just want to give it full attention. When I started doing these fashion shows, I was producing so quickly. I feel like I lost touch with, I'd produce a garment and then quickly write the story in the piece. I want everything to be so hands on and physical and I want to put in full time and effort into it to give it full justice. Not just have quick, fast production.

Designers expressed concern over how growing their business meant spending less time and attention on each quilt material. The faster they produced garments, the further separated their relationship became from the quilt material, and the more difficult

it was to share the quilt material's story. While they could still give the quilt material new life, the design process felt less intentional, less emotional, and less creative, and they could not celebrate and appreciate each one thoroughly. Scaling-up production often meant hiring additional help, and many designers did not want to delegate laying out their pattern pieces for fear they would have less connection to the quilt, and it would compromise their aesthetic vision.

Contrary to most of the designers who produced in small batches or "drops,"[20] Kelsy followed the traditional fashion calendar producing between 30-100 garments per style per season for wholesale clientele. A team of contract cutters and sewers was responsible for the Carleen brand's production. While she still emotionally and aesthetically connected with her quilts during sourcing, her tension between creative outlet and business was less significant.

Inward Design—Outward Design

Designers dealt with tensions related to inward—outward facing design mindsets in addition to tensions between creative outlet and business. An outward facing design mindset was centered on fulfilling the needs of a target market (Carufel, 2019). This mindset was generally similar to traditional apparel design models, such as the Apparel Design Framework by Lamb and Kallal (1992). An inward facing design mindset was where the designer perceived themselves as the basis for their customer, translating current trends through their personal design aesthetic and needs (Carufel, 2019). As this study has shown, designers upcycling quilt materials tended to use an inward facing design mindset, centering the design process on their relationship with the quilt material.

However, designers still expressed instances where this relationship wavered due to outward pressures. There was a struggle between aesthetically and emotionally fulfilling the designer-quilt relationship versus designing for customers and salability. Some considered the types of quilt materials customers responded to well, while others tried to design solely based on how quilt materials inspired them. For example, Olivia

[20] Drops or "product drops" refers to a limited release of merchandise typically as a marketing technique to promote a brand. The tactic originated with streetwear brands but is also used by small businesses whose primary business is through e-commerce. New collection drops are often announced through social media sites like Instagram.

was primarily inward focused, concentrating on the enjoyment of making and thinking about the history of a quilt as opposed to catering to a specific target market.

> I do think a lot about who would have made it [the quilt]. Like their original maker. And whether or not those are shirts, like that little checkered, was that a shirt? Was that the material that they purchased from the store? I think a lot about the history of it. Alongside making sure that I'm actually making it well. [laughs] I guess I don't really think about who will wear it. That informs a lot of contemporary fashion design choices, is like, who's your audience? I don't really care. All it takes is one person to love it. It's this weird balance of, yes, I have to make something that's relatively conventional or interesting. But I just love the process of making the garment - the construction.

Lisa and Rachel were more outward focused when determining which patchwork designs resonated with their customers. For example, when discussing the Log Cabin patch on the pink sweatshirt in Figure 42, they spoke about how they emotionally and aesthetically loved the garment, but they were unsure how customers would receive it.

> *Rachel:* And I was honestly kind of skeptical of if it would sell or not. Because it is so random what sells, what doesn't. It's almost a little frustrating because we don't really understand the… [waves hand in the air]
>
> *Lisa:* Once we think we have it figured out what customers want, it changes.

Lorelei was also more outward facing regarding her garment silhouettes and details. She knew what styles resonated with her customers and tracked fashion and styling changes, updating her silhouettes accordingly.

> I found what styles are the most commercially viable. Not necessarily my favorites or not necessarily the ones that require the most artistic ability, but the ones that I can produce quickly. They're still one-of-a-kind. And I'm always watching fashion. I go to the mall, not to shop, but I go to the mall to look at what people are buying, what are in the windows. I look at the styles in the windows and then I modify my designs accordingly, depending on what's popular for the season.

Despite a more customer-focused approach to styling, Lorelei still let the quilt material guide her when it came to laying out patterns and deeply thought about how to showcase the quilt's pattern.

Figure 42

Sweatshirt by Lisa Cross and Rachel Pulliam

Note. Rachel applied a Log Cabin quilt patch to the front of a second-hand sweatshirt. Photograph by Rachel Pulliam. Permission granted.

Even mainly outward focused businesses, such as Kelsy's, had to balance personal aesthetic preferences with wholesale buyers' expectations. Kelsy strongly preferred quilts in poor condition with signs of wear and tear. To her, machine quilting, specifically the free-motion quilting pattern known as "stippling" (Kelsy called it squiggle), "devalued" the quilt. But sometimes, she had to break her aesthetic rules to deliver enough products to buyers.

> I know that it's [wear and tear] not going to appeal to every customer and especially not going to appeal to every wholesale buyer who's always concerned about how their customer is going to react. I try to keep other people's concerns in mind when I'm sourcing. And then also keep in mind what appeals to me and what my tolerance is [for damage]. Sometimes that's kind of part of the decision-making with the one we looked at that has the squiggle machine quilting on it. If I

> was purely sourcing for myself, and myself only, that might have been something I rejected. But I know that there's individual customers and wholesale customers who would just be like so thrilled about the wonderful prints and the graphic nature and all the other things that appealed to me [about the quilt]. And not even notice the machine quilting. Or have no concept of the difference between machine quilting and hand quilting.

These examples showed that despite the emphasis on the relationship between designer and quilt material, at the end of the day, the designers were still running a business. They had to decide if and how they would integrate customers' opinions and desires into their design process or if they would be entirely inward focused. The tension between inward and outward design layered on top of the tension between creative outlet and business, further muddying their decision-making.

Guilt—Excitement

As already described, designers experienced a range of emotions when upcycling quilt materials into garments. Specifically, there was an underlying tension between feelings of guilt and feelings of excitement. This conflicting set of emotions permeated every step of their design process and compounded all the previously described tensions.

The designers were cognizant of the controversy surrounding upcycling quilt materials into garments, which created an undercurrent of guilt throughout their design process. Many designers' reactions were heightened as a result of a YouTube video by Mary Fons titled *Stop Cutting up Quilts to Make Clothes* (also known as the "Quilt Clothes Must Die" video) on January 28, 2022 (2022b). In the video, Fons laid out her strong arguments against the cutting up of quilts, compared the act to murder, and reprimanded several designers who upcycled quilt materials, including Ashley.[21] Ashley said the video was "pretty devasting, honestly. I shed a lot of tears over it." Without prompting, ten designers specifically mentioned this video as a source of stress, shame, guilt, and anger. Allie described how the video created feelings of guilt and shame, causing her to doubt herself and her work.

> At first, my response to that video was, "Oh my gosh, I'm doing the worst thing ever. I'm the worst person ever." Equating cutting up a quilt to murder is kind of extreme. But I was kind of like, I'm bad – I'm a bad person. But then I was

[21] Author's personal note: I am acquainted with Mary Fons through the American Quilt Study Group and have discussed this topic with her in depth. The findings presented here are the opinions of my interviewees only and do not reflect my personal feelings or opinions towards Ms. Fons or her views.

> talking to my grandma, and she's like, "Allie, even quilts that are made are a spectrum. Not every single quilt ever made needs to be hanging in a museum and preserved for all of time. And quilting has always been an art of repurposing and reusing. And my family would cut up quilts and make coats when I was a kid. It's not a new thing, and it's not a bad thing…if you're okay with doing it, then be okay with doing it. But know what you're okay with doing and what you're not okay with doing" …So I've definitely felt a lot of guilt and shame, but then I also felt a lot of like, I'm allowed to make a decision and it's not a black and white, right and wrong.

Allie's conversation with her grandmother helped her realize that upcycling and reusing had always been a part of quiltmaking and that, as with most things in life, the decision to cut a quilt fell on a spectrum.

In general, designers experienced a range of emotions tied to guilt and apprehension (Figure 43). They used phrases like "scared," "nerve-wracking," "hesitation," "nervous," and "freak out" to describe their emotions prior to cutting. Others mentioned feeling "bad," "naughty," "worried," or "regretful." Some of these emotions were tied to the quilt materials being an expensive, unique resource. For example, Elise was uncertain if her sewing skills were advanced enough when making her first jacket out of a quilt due to the cost and irreplaceability of the quilt.

> I was so nervous because it's like cutting into a piece of fabric, that costs $100 worth of fabric but you can't get it back. If I mess it up, I can't just order more. I was so nervous, and I was like, "I shouldn't be doing this. I'm not good enough to be doing it." Like the imposter syndrome and stuff like that. But I was just like, "Nope, you just have to commit and do it." And it's a project. She [the quilt's seller] didn't want this. I bought it. I can take $100 and light it on fire if I want, not that I want to do that. But it's a project and this is a fun start to something creative. And if you mess it up, it's okay. The world will keep turning. But I was nervous.

Other designers worried that they would waste the quilt material if they made mistakes, dishonoring its maker's labor and love. Kamber discussed her apprehension before cutting into a quilt due to the labor that went into it (Figure 44), equating it to the feeling she would have if someone cut up something she made.

> I was very nervous…I guess it'd be the same feeling if I knew that someone was taking my jacket and cutting into it to make something of their own. Which at the time it's scary. It's like, "Oh, shoot, I made that." Just as the quilter would think about their quilt…But yeah, I was nervous. I was like, shoot, someone just spent a lot of time on this and I'm taking a pair of shears to it.

Figure 43

Word Cloud Related to Guilt and Apprehension

Figure 44

Jacket by Kamber Elyse

Note. Kamber made the jacket from the quilt on the left. Photographs by Kamber Elyse. Permission granted.

Designers also experienced guilt related to the "creative outlet—business" tension. They expressed concern that their creative hobby was becoming more of a business that disconnected them from the quilt material. Or that they were not charging enough for their garments, shortchanging themselves and their labor, and undermining the value of the quilt material.

The emotional relationship designers formed with quilt materials and their desire to give them a new life was also a source of guilt and apprehension. There was guilt that they could not save or rescue quilt materials before they went to the landfill. They often worried if they were actually improving the life of a quilt. Rebecca described how some customers were drawn to garments due to the quilt material's aesthetics and would purchase the garment even if it did not fit them. While she was glad her garments were selling, she was unsure they were always selling for the right reasons.

> I worry more now that I'm making the right piece. And I think also it's because now I know how much my pieces cost. I see what people are buying. I recognize there's a chance, what if nobody wants to buy this one?...People are drawn to a quilt. I've had people buy things that are not their size, but it's because they're like, "But this is the quilt that I want it in," you know? And you're kind of like, "Okay. It's kind of an expensive thing to have not be in your size." But they're like, "eh, but I looked at the other ones and I don't want the ones that are in my size. I want this quilt." I'm always worried about the really good ones [quilts]. I want to make sure that I'm making it better than it actually is now.

Pushing back against these feelings of guilt were feelings of excitement. Designers described how their initial apprehension to cut progressively changed to excitement as they saw their garment come to life. Olivia described this change in emotions, starting with feeling scared because she did not want to disrespect the quilt's history and ending with excitement because the quilt had a new, more visible purpose.

> So scary. It was really scary. It felt like there was a lot at stake. And I still feel that every time I cut into a quilt, that doesn't go away for me. But it was really fulfilling. I felt like I had made something way more magical than if I just used like corduroy. Yeah, it felt really exciting and scary...What if I fuck it up? Then it's like this beautiful quilt that I could have left it as it was. It already had a life. It could have a purpose. A lot of them that I work with are messed up, so I take comfort in knowing that I'm giving it another chance. On the off chance that I don't do a good job, that really stresses me out and makes me even more motivated to have really solid quality. But it's still scary, I don't want to disrespect this beautiful piece of history…And then I'm like, this is going to be

> worn. People are going to see it. It's not going to sit in a trunk. It's going to not be in a basement…It's going to be something that's valued and celebrated and that's really great.

Rachel initially regretted cutting a quilt she had upcycled into a pair of pants for her daughter due to the quilt's age and poor condition (Figure 45). But when reflecting on how much her daughter loved the pants and the number of additional items she could make from the quilt, her feelings switched to pride.

> After I had cut that quilt, I kind of had a little regret because, well, it was a cutter quilt. It definitely had holes and places that had been super worn. But I think it was a pretty old quilt and so I was like "Uh, maybe I shouldn't have done that." But I did it and I made so many cute things with it. And it definitely was a cutter quilt in my eyes. I was like, no, these are adorable. They're super cute, fall colors with the cream and the reds and pinks.

Figure 45

Pants and Overalls by Rachel Pulliam

Note. Left Panel: Rachel made these pants for her daughter from a quilt. Right Panel: Overalls with applied quilt patches from the same quilt. Photographs by Rachel Pulliam. Permission granted.

Michele went through a similar emotional arc, initially debating if she was doing the right thing. But once the garment in Figure 29 started to take shape, her feelings switched to delight.

> Honestly before I cut it there was some hesitation. But once I started cutting it and seeing, as I was cutting the pattern pieces, how beautifully the pattern of the quilt fit into the pattern pieces. I was sold. I was just like, no, this is going to be an heirloom. Somebody is going to keep this for their grandchild after their child wears it, you know?

Paula felt a similar sense of accomplishment in her work, knowing she was transforming the quilt material into a more useful item. At the end, she said it "feels like an accomplishment. I feel proud that I've made something out of that quilt that might have been thrown away or might have been stashed away."

It was clear that these feelings of excitement were grounded in the designers' purpose to give quilt materials new life. Allie realized the decision to cut a quilt material was not black and white, Elise found a creative outlet, Olivia was excited to better share quilts with the world, Michelle knew her work was transforming the quilt to be treasured in a new way, and Paula gained pride in herself for creating a useful garment out of something meant for the trash. Reminding themselves of their "why" helped them overcome feelings of guilt and shame and find satisfaction and joy in their work.

Beyond the instances presented in this section, the tension between guilt and excitement was woven throughout all the other thematic tensions. For example, guilt was common during sourcing (am I doing the right thing?), as was excitement (I'm saving quilts!). Guilt was more commonly associated with their emotional response to the historical and temporal nature of quilt materials, while excitement was often an aesthetic response to the quilt's appearance as well as the garment's.

Design as a Sign of the Times: The COVID-19 Pandemic Effect

Dress has been a means of personal communication and identity signaling but also has reflected the larger cultural context in which an individual resides (Eicher & Roach-Higgins, 1992). Changes in dress in a culture or society have been linked to economics, demographics, racial and ethnic characteristics, technology, and environmental concerns

(Eicher & Roach-Higgins, 1992). But what about the designer who created that item; what did their design process say about them and, by extension, society?

The conceptual framework of fashion systems proposed by Payne (2021) accounted for the experience of designers, specifically those in the fashion industry. Her framework conceptualized the fashion system as three elements: fashion-as-culture, fashion-as-change, and fashion-as-industry.[22] The designer's experience has not only reflected their production methods (fashion-as-industry) but also changes and trends in their culture (fashion-as-change). And through their work, they have helped to create fashion-as-culture for their consumers. Therefore, designers and their processes have also been a sign of the times.

With that framing in mind, this study revealed an additional external force that impacted designers' experiences and the larger context of upcycling quilt materials into garments: the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic undeniably affected society, consumer preferences, and the fashion industry. The pandemic played a significant role in pushing upcycled quilt material garments to the forefront due to a rise in Cottagecore styling and consumers' desire for garments that provided comfort, safety, warmth, and nostalgic connections (Fons, 2022a; F. Liu et al., 2006; Waller, 2022). The sudden global calamity created opportunities for businesses, new and established, to flourish by catering to this shift in consumer preferences.

This study found that the experiences of designers were also affected by the pandemic. Since the designers were interviewed in late 2022, about two-and-a-half years after the pandemic's start, the impact of the pandemic on their lives and businesses was fresh in their minds. It created the cultural milieu for their work to start or flourish (fashion-as-change) and changed their working modes (fashion-as-industry). None of the research questions directly or indirectly referenced the pandemic, yet it was somehow referenced or mentioned in almost every interview. Ten designers cited specifically the pandemic as a motivating factor in starting their business or upcycling quilt materials, while several others noted the pandemic's impact on how they sold products. For some,

[22] As discussed in the literature review, fashion-as-culture refers to fashion's role in creating symbolic meaning and culture. Fashion-as-industry refers to how human labor and technology produce fashion. And fashion-as-change refers to how the movement of trends and preferences over time reflect cultural themes (Payne, 2021).

like Taylor, their upcycling practice stemmed from an economic need during the pandemic.

> I mostly was selling vintage at the time of the pandemic. I was trying to find a job bartending, and the world shut down, and I wasn't able to find a job. Every time I went thrifting and I saw a cool quilt, I would grab it. I'd already made my own jacket prior. And then I just kind of got creative looking around like, what can I sell to keep myself afloat? And I saw my stack of collected quilts, and I kind of just tapped into that resource. I already had a platform through Depop reselling vintage clothes. So I put a quilt jacket on there, and it sold within an hour. And I was like, "Oh, okay." And then I had people messaging me like, "Hey, can you make one in this size? Can you make me one?" And then I was like, "Okay, well, I'm going to do this and pay this month's rent." And then it kind of just snowballed from there.

Taylor's quote reflected how high unemployment trends during the pandemic (Edwards et al., 2022) led her to look for new materials and economic opportunities. Outside of financial need, surprisingly few of the designers began upcycling quilt materials with the intention of starting a business. For most, their newfound time at home to re-explore hobbies or start a new hobby, like sewing, unintentionally led to the creation of their businesses. For example, Ashley recalled how she found more time for sewing during the pandemic and never intended to start a business when she made her first garment from quilt materials.

> I started working with the quilts because I wanted a garment for myself, and I was like, I'll just make it. Why would I buy it when I can? I'm perfectly capable of making something myself and learning along the way…Then 2020 hit, and we all stayed home. So then it really just gave me the time to dig in. And that's when I started doing this and sewing more. It really was just an organic thing. So I started my [Instagram] account in September 2020, and then by probably February or March [2021], I was doing it full time.

In addition, some designers mentioned how sewing and designing became a creative outlet during the pandemic, again unintentionally leading to their businesses. Elise discussed her mental health during the pandemic at length, noting how sewing and designing became an outlet for her anxiety.

> I made myself a quilt coat and I loved it…For me it just became a creative outlet and also like a mental health outlet. I get really bad anxiety. And so somewhere for me to direct my anxiety. I'm not talking to anybody. I'm just in my head paying attention to what I'm doing, just like letting it come out. And so that's just kind of how it, I guess, blossomed from there.

These quotes reflected the interplay of fashion-as-change and fashion-as-industry from the designers' viewpoint. Due to this interplay, designers created upcycled quilt material garments, which informed fashion-as-culture for consumers.

While the pandemic might have been the impetus for some designers to sew their first garment or start a business (intentionally or unintentionally), the seeds for upcycling quilt materials were planted well before through their interests in thrifting, fashion, and sustainability. The pandemic did not create the designers' desire to give quilt materials a new life, but it provided a fertile ground for them to explore this idea and build their businesses. The findings of this study illustrated an example of how design and designers were influenced by the surrounding atmosphere in which they reside.

If the COVID-19 pandemic had not happened, would the upcycled quilt material garment trend have taken off? This research cannot definitively answer that question, but it offers evidence that external events can impact motivations and design processes, the results of which are reflected in designers' materials and products. A few of the designers interviewed were already upcycling quilt materials prior to the pandemic, but the fact that most of them started during this time was significant and cannot be ignored. This provided evidence that the pandemic impacted more than consumers' need to be wrapped in comfort and safety but also designers' need for a similar sense of care. Their work became an outlet for creativity, a form of economic survival, a way to manage their mental health, and a means to express their love of quiltmaking and sustainability. Their emotional connection to quilt materials gave them a form of escapism into the past during a scary and uncertain present.

Results: Summary

This section presented research findings of designers' experiences when upcycling quilt materials into fashion garments. First, two common foundational elements were identified, second-hand shopping and designers' relationships to the fashion industry. These elements influenced designers' interests in combining sustainability and fashion and were the driving force of their design process, to give quilt material a new life. The experiences of the designers revealed a distinct design process, one in which their relationship with quilt materials was at the core of the process, as

opposed to focusing on a target market. Designers had strong emotional and aesthetic responses to quilt materials which guided and informed their design process. The handmade nature of quilts specifically drove their emotional response, a component not traditionally found in apparel design processes.

Designers experienced a series of tensions during the design process due to their intersecting and conflicting aesthetic and emotional reactions to quilt materials. These tensions were evident throughout their entire design process, often changing in magnitude with each new quilt material with which they worked. As designers navigated these series of tensions, they consistently evaluated and re-evaluated their actions alongside their "why" of giving quilt materials new life.

The following seven specific tensions were identified and discussed.

1. To cut—Not to cut
2. Preserving the quilt's aesthetics—Establishing the designer's intent
3. Creating a quality garment—Honoring the quilt's life
4. Maximizing resources—Maximizing design aesthetics
5. Creative outlet—Business
6. Inward design—Outward design
7. Guilt—Excitement

Lastly, this section detailed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on designers' experiences and the larger context of upcycling quilt materials into garments.

Chapter IV: Discussion & Conclusion

My research examines the experience of designers when upcycling quilt materials into fashion garments. This chapter discusses the implications and new knowledge this research brings to fashion studies, quiltmaking, and sustainability studies. First, I discuss how the findings of this study illuminate a distinct apparel design process based on designers' emotional and aesthetic responses to quilt materials. Second, I further examine how quilt materials have a unique power to create emotional connections with designers. Next, I address how this notable design process answers the call for slow fashion approaches in apparel design to address sustainability issues. Lastly, I present research conclusions on designers' experiences and recommendations for future research.

Incorporating Designers' Emotions: A Distinct Apparel Design Process

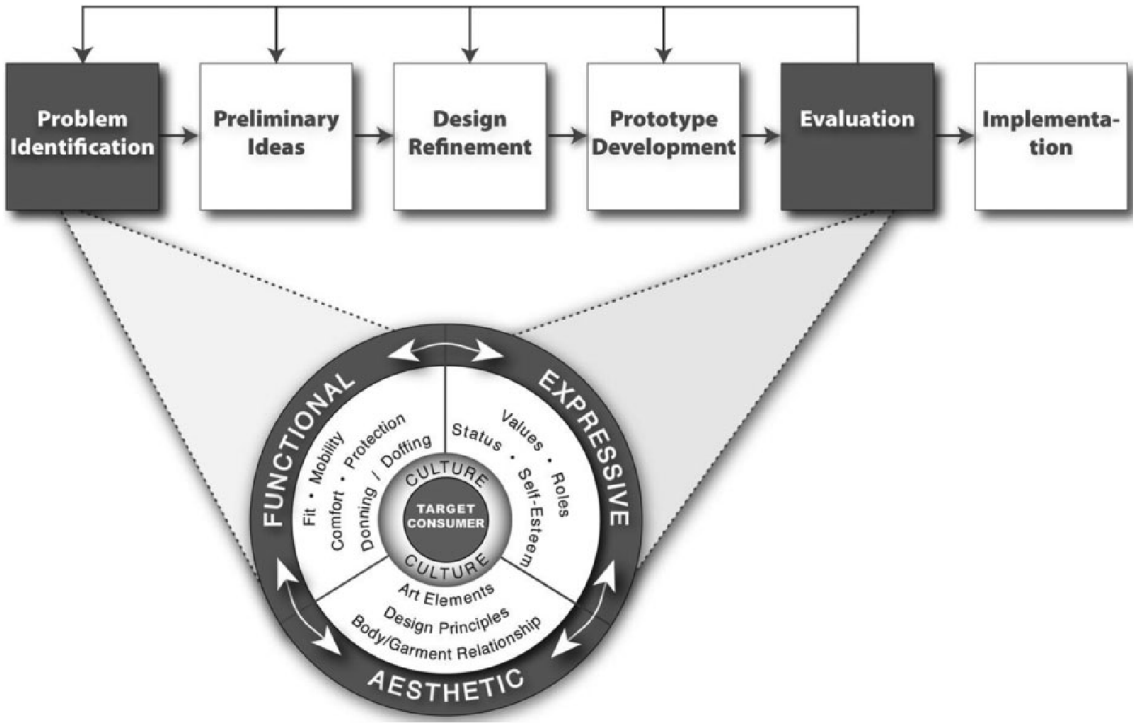
A key finding of this research is that designers who upcycle material culture, specifically quilt materials, experience a different design process than traditional models presented in the literature review, such as Lamb and Kallal (1992), Payne (2021), and Thomas (2017). Within the context of this study, designers' relationships with quilt materials are at the core of their process, as opposed to a target market or customer. Designers form these relationships with quilt materials through their emotional and aesthetic responses. As a result of their intersecting and often conflicting experiences, they navigate a series of tensions while transforming quilt materials into garments.

Designers' emotional responses to quilt materials and the resulting tensions are surprising and exciting findings of this research. I worked in the fashion industry as a technical designer for many years, and connecting emotionally with your work is discouraged. One of the first lessons you learn in the industry is never to become too attached to your designs, lest you become disheartened when the design is inevitably critiqued, changed, or removed from the line. There is little room in mass-produced apparel design processes for feelings beyond those of the target customer towards the product. Similarly, higher education apparel design programs train students to focus on a specific target market and create research-based designs that solve a customer need.

My design experiences mirror Lamb and Kallal's (1992) Apparel Design Framework (ADF), where design is an iterative process that places the target market at the core of the process, as seen in Figure 46. The designer's job is to research and understand the company's target market, identify a problem or need related to that target market, and design a solution. They do not design for themselves but to solve a specific target market problem or need for their company. There is no role in the ADF model for designers' emotions.

Figure 46

Apparel Design Framework (ADF)



Note. The ADF is an iterative process centered around the target consumer. Adapted from "FEA Consumer Needs Model: 25 Years Later," by B. Orzada and M. Kallal, 2021, *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, *39*(1), p. 25.

Similarly, Payne's (2021) interviews with apparel designers regarding their processes showed how designers' emotions were omitted. One womenswear designer described being "hyper-emotional" at the start of the design process, but that she hid these emotions from her cross-functional team and reframed them under the guise of

“inspiration” (2021, p. 62). In this case, the designer’s emotion was only acceptable when attached to the idea or inspiration, not the materials.

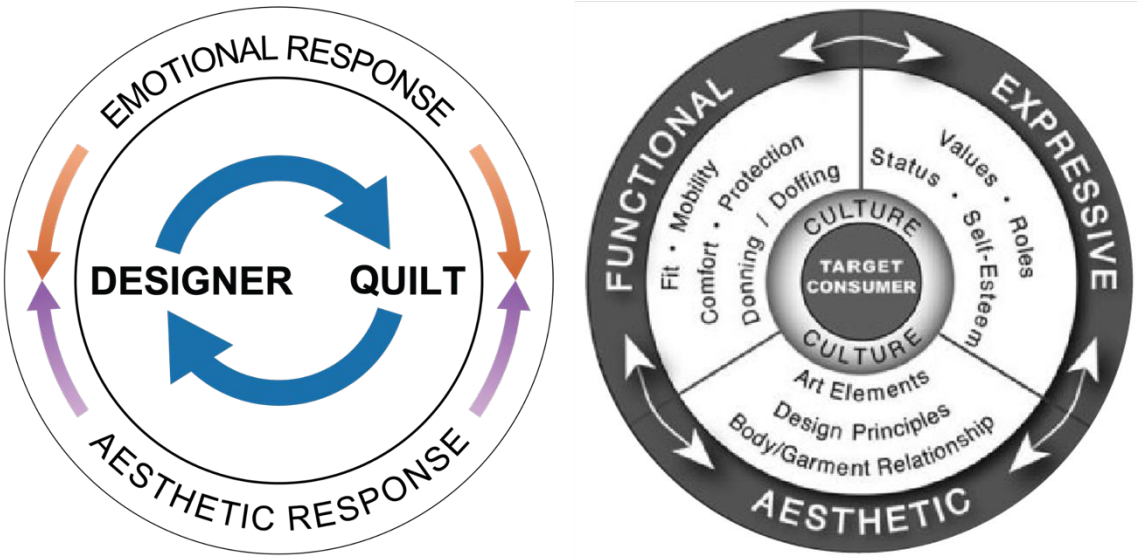
Even research specific to sustainable apparel design only referenced emotional connection within the context of customers’ emotions towards products. DeLong et al. (2013) collected data from interviews with apparel design professionals in Minnesota to examine design strategies for sustainable apparel design. One strategy they noted was encouraging human attachment between customer and product to promote product longevity through designing products that “carry multiple meanings and values for an individual” (p. 56). Again, this design process was still centered on meeting the customer's needs, indicating that the role of designers’ emotional connections with materials had not been considered in the sustainable apparel design process.

As shown in Figure 47, the experiences of the designers upcycling quilt materials do not follow traditional apparel design models. The motivation is different; instead of focusing on customers, they center their design process around their relationship with their materials, and decision-making is based on emotional and aesthetic responses. Quilt materials serve as an impetus for both material and emotional inspiration. Additionally, while tensions within decision-making are always part of any design process, these tensions are typically rooted in balancing elements like aesthetics, functionality, cost, and timing related to the acceptance of the product by a target market (Lamb & Kallal, 1992). However, my research shows that tensions are based in the emotional and aesthetic responses to quilt materials (see Figure 27).

What is their process based on if these designers are not following traditional apparel design models? In the following section, I discuss how the design process experienced by designers upcycling quilt materials takes inspiration from material culture methodologies of examining objects. Through this process, designers reinterpret quilt materials and become storytellers, passing along the quilt’s life to customers. I also further elaborate on how quilts as emotional objects are a critical element behind this distinct design process and experience.

Figure 47

Comparison of Design Process Models



Note: Left panel: Designer-Material Relationship Model. From *Designer-Material Relationship Model*, by C. G. Pokorny, 2023 (https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.23561268.v1). CC BY 4.0. Right panel: Functional, Expressive, and Aesthetic Consumer Needs Model with the target market at the center of decision-making. Adapted from "FEA Consumer Needs Model: 25 Years Later," by B. Orzada and M. Kallal, 2021, *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, *39*(1), p. 25.

A Material Culture Approach to Design

Based on the findings of this study, I theorize that the design process experienced by designers upcycling quilt materials falls more in line with material culture methodologies of examining objects rather than traditional iterative apparel design processes. My theory is based on previous research by Cassar (2021) and the additional element of designers' emotional response, which guides how designers engage with their materials and center their design process.

In Cassar's (2021) phenomenological reflection of her embodied experience while upcycling historical garments, she described her process as a "reading of a piece." She further linked it to Jules Prown's (1982) material culture methodology of object analysis. Cassar described intimately connecting with garments using all her senses, noting the

traces of the past maker and the life the garment lived, empathetically relating her life to that of the garment. After reflecting on her deep emotional and physical connection with garments, she stated that for a designer working with upcycled objects, "…ideas around value and attachment are central. Attachment becomes a necessary step in engaging with a material object for greater use" (2021, p. 344). In her case, the attachment was due to a combination of her emotional connection to the garment's past and her aesthetic exploration of the garment.

The description of Cassar's (2021) upcycling process mirrors that experienced by the designers when upcycling quilt materials. These designers spend time carefully connecting with their quilt material, appreciating its beauty, linking with its maker, pondering its wear and tear, and reliving the past lives of the quilt before deciding how to best give it new life. They form a reciprocal relationship with their quilt material, absorbing meaning from its biography, creating an attachment based on aesthetic and emotional responses, and using this as a guide for their design process. Thus, their design process is based on a relationship with materiality and reflects "how we make stuff and how stuff makes us" (Niedderer & Townsend, 2010, p. 5).

Cassar (2021) and the designers' careful examination of objects is much like the process used to examine objects in the material culture methodology outlined by Prown (1982). This methodology is a process in which the researcher's highly sensory engagement with objects reveals new findings and meanings that would otherwise go undiscovered. While the designers in this study do not embrace the purpose of a material culture study, that is, to illuminate cultural belief systems at a certain time and place through the study of objects (Prown, 1982), they do use a similar set of steps to engage with quilt materials to reinterpret them into garments.

The first step in Prown's (1982) methodology is *description*. This step involves the perceiver observing the physical properties of the object. In the case of designers upcycling quilt materials, they examine the physical properties of the quilt through their aesthetic response, taking note of elements such as colors, size, quilt pattern, damage, and quilting patterns.

Prown's (1982) second step is *deduction*, which Cassar (2021) described as "linking the material object with my world of experience, empathetically transported into

the depicted world" (p. 337). In this step, designers deepen their relationship with the quilt material, taking it from general observation to sensory and emotional engagement. Designers activate all their senses to fully experience the quilt material as part of their aesthetic response (Prown, 1982). Their actions include feeling the texture, weight, and thickness of the quilt material, responding to how it smells, and noting or mending areas of weakness or damage. Crucially, this step includes the perceiver's "emotional response" to the object, answering the questions, how does the object make you feel and why? Designers' emotions, as elicited by the quilt material, are taken into consideration at this step. Engaging with both sensory and emotional elements is necessary for designers to translate the quilt material into a three-dimensional garment.

The last step of Prown's (1982) methodology is *speculation*, where the researcher sums up all they have observed in the previous steps and generates theories based on material evidence. In the case of designers upcycling quilt materials, this is demonstrated by how the designers connect to the material's past lives, imagine its maker, ponder what caused damage, or think about the materials used. The designers connect temporally to the living history of their materials.

Instead of moving forward with a program of research based on speculation, as proposed by Prown (1982), designers begin to conceptualize their garment designs by integrating everything they had seen and felt through this process. Their "research questions" are answering the tensions brought up by their emotional and aesthetic responses. How do I best use this quilt material? How do I create a quality garment while honoring the quilt's life? What part of the quilt resonates most with me as a designer? Am I designing for myself or my customers? Is cutting this quilt material going to give it a new life? This distinct material culture approach to design is a natural evolution of how the designers approach their work. They unknowingly follow these steps, unaware of Prown's methodology or material culture theories in general.

Designers as Re-interpreters of Material Culture

The goal of a material culture study is cultural interpretation through the analysis of objects (Prown, 1982). The designers upcycling quilt materials are not simply studying a cultural object to come to a research conclusion. Instead, the results of this study show

that they were examining a cultural object (quilt material), forming a deep relationship with it, and *reinterpreting* it into a new cultural object (garment).

These designers act as re-interpreters of material culture based on their material culture examination of the quilt materials. This reinterpretation is physical, as the designers aesthetically transform a two-dimensional quilt into a three-dimensional garment. It is also metaphysical in how the designers honor and interpret the aura of the quilt. One participant described their design process as "textile alchemy," as they transformed quilt materials in mysterious ways. Designers see the potential for upcycled quilt materials to be more than discarded objects; they are a material rich with history and emotion. Designers navigate tensions between their aesthetic and emotional responses, leading to a reinterpretation of the quilt. Through this act, they preserve the upcycled quilt material's inherent historical value while transforming it into something with new aesthetic value, new life, and new layers of meaning.

One designer, Jillian, describes this act, noting how quilts accumulated experiences over time, and it was her role to reinterpret these experiences through her relationship with the quilt (Figure 48).

> And when I cut into it, part of me was like, oh, this quilt's so pretty. And it has damage, but not a ton. But the other part of me was like, the person who made this, made it, and it lived a life. It's old. It probably provided warmth for someone, for a whole family. They looked at it and got joy, just like I do, out of how friggin' awesome it is. Beautiful and colorful. It lived a good life. And now it's time to live a different life. And that's how I see much of this "old quilt new life." I'm reinterpreting. It had an experience, maybe multiple experiences, maybe it was passed down through multiple generations or went to different family members or to different friends. And it served its purpose. And now it's time for a new purpose…I'm trying to give people joy by evolving these quilts into something new. Reinterpreting them. Reimagining them into something new and beautiful. Still the same quilt. But just in a different format so that people can appreciate it…it's no longer in hiding.

Reinterpreting quilt materials gives designers an avenue to reach customers and start conversations about slow fashion, quiltmaking, and the value of material culture. Instead of quilts hiding in closets at home or being abandoned at thrift stores, designers are remaking them into more than aesthetic statement pieces, helping them to become visible symbols of history and sustainability. Allie talks about how her garments become discussion points for her to publicly explain issues in the clothing industry.

> Using it as a discussion tool, which is one of my favorite things about the quilt coats actually. Because they're such statement pieces, when you are walking around town, people will stop and ask you about it. And it's one of my favorite conversation starters and I'm like, throwing jabs at the clothing industry. And their like "what?" I've started talking about rag houses and all that through wearing clothes that make people ask questions.

Figure 48

Jacket by Jillian Hertzman

Note. Photographs by Jillian Hertzman. Permission granted.

Through reinterpretation, designers make quilt materials more publicly visible, increasing their social value and moving them from a traditional private sphere in the home to a public sphere worn on the body (Eicher, 2021). In this way, their work becomes a visible signaling device, a way to share and celebrate quiltmaking and slow fashion with a wider audience (Janigo et al., 2017; Wobst, 1977). In fact, Rebecca's business name, Bravo Charlie, came from the idea of fashion as an outward signal (Figure 49).

> This whole the Bravo Charlie thing segues into is that it comes from the old nautical flags…The idea is that every flag on the ship corresponds to a letter. And you can hold up these flags and somebody on another ship from across the ocean can see these flags and understand the message that you're putting out there. And

so that's kind of how I feel like what your clothing is. It's this outward expression. It's this message you're sending to the world. It's a visual representation of you and whatever message you're trying to send to somebody that day.

Figure 49

Dress by Rebecca Gholdston Wright

Note. Rebecca made the dress from a quilt top. Photograph by Rebecca Gholdston Wright. Permission granted.

Through reinterpretation, designers feel that they increase the perception and use value and the visibility of quiltmaking. They participate in slow fashion and gain an appreciation for quiltmaking's time and labor. In turn, they pass these same experiences along to their customers through an act of storytelling so that the quilt material will have a new, more valuable life.

Designers as Storytellers

The last step in the design process for upcycling quilt materials into garments, as seen in Figure 15, is for designers to share the quilt material's story with customers.

Based on the literature review for this study, I posed the question, "do designers consider the stories of quilts and American quiltmaking during upcycling?" The results of this study show that designers who upcycle quilt materials do more than consider the stories of quilt materials during reinterpretation. They perceive themselves as active participants in the quilt material's story and as storytellers who connect quilts and customers. The designers in this study have their own manner of storytelling that is different from historical designers who upcycled quilts, such as Ralph Lauren. When Lauren used antique quilts for his Fall/Winter 1982 collection, his customers were buying into a story of American heritage and authenticity (McCormick, 2013). Lauren's relationship with each quilt was not at the center of his design process; his customers were. And while American heritage and authenticity are important to the designers interviewed for this study, glorifying Americana is not their primary focus. Instead, designers recontextualize the feelings and history they sense from their relationships with the quilt materials.

The designers' stories go beyond the literal provenance of the quilt materials. Designers note that most of the quilt materials they find come with minimal information about the maker, place of origin, or even the time period. If quilts have labels or names stitched into them, designers feel it is important to include those on the garment to maintain its informational and historical value and a physical connection to the maker. Most conduct minimal research into the past life of the quilt, perhaps identifying a general time when it was made based on the fabrics or the name of the quilt block. Even though the designers do not conduct significant research into the maker or provenance of each quilt material, as Kelsy describes, "we can sense the story even when we don't know what the story actually is." The designers instead tell the story of their collaboration with another maker across space and time. MartyO describes this as "channeling personal histories" and "making new histories out of old histories." The stories designers can sense are not only of the makers but of the biography of the quilt materials, accumulated in physical form on its surfaces. They incorporate these stories and feelings into their design process and layer their own story as they transform the quilt material into a garment. Through this act of storytelling, designers transport quilt materials from static to active status; "It captures a narrative from the past, makes it visible in the present" (K. Fletcher & Grose, 2012, p. 141).

Designers place importance on the act of storytelling through design to increase the customer's appreciation of the upcycled material. Lorelei feels that by connecting customers to the quilt's history, either through providing information about the quilt, leaving visible signs of wear and tear, or including labels and signatures, customers will value the garment more. This idea is echoed by many of the designers as they reinterpret the story of the quilt in an understandable manner for customers. Through this act, designers hope that customers will appreciate and value the garment more, as Allie describes.

> When you are able to associate more details, I feel like it helps people to understand more. I feel like it communicates a value of "this is important. It came from these times." It helps tell the story. I can't control what someone does with the quilt coat once they own it, right? So if I can communicate as many details about it so that they can continue to understand the narrative and share that with other people and maybe learn more about that, then I want to provide as much information as I can. Because then I feel like when you associate details and stories with something, you want to hold on to it longer, in my opinion. And in my experience, clothes that I have that are sustainably made, even if I don't wear them as much anymore, I try to wear them and I don't want to donate them because I'm like, "no, this was made this way. And it's really amazing because of this." And I think to hold onto those things, you value things more. And I want people to like hold on to the quilt coats forever. And associate value with them, [even] if it's something that they didn't already imagine would have had that kind of value.

Tristan sees his work as a way of sharing the story and value of material culture with a broader audience because it was in a more useful garment form as opposed to being unused and unseen (Figure 50).

> One of the ideas that sparked my interest for making wearable art was that I didn't want to make something that you hung on the wall because I didn't think it would get the attention that it deserved. So I found these stories that were inside these pieces. I thought that it would be a disgrace or not full use of them just to have hanging on walls for one person to see or for a gallery to see, which is exclusive, and only certain people go into a gallery. Whereas I think someone wearing it down the street is going to share that story more and more. It's going to have more value to the world.

Previous research has supported the use of storytelling in upcycling to increase customers' perceptions of the value of objects (Appelgren & Bohlin, 2015; DeLong et al., 2013; Fuchs et al., 2015; Holroyd et al., 2023; Kamleitner et al., 2019). For example,

customer demand for upcycled objects increased when the historical and informational value of upcycled objects was highlighted, especially when attention was focused on the object's transformation story (Kamleitner et al., 2019). Objects with stories could create higher demand because they had the ability to pass on a feeling of specialness to customers. This previous research validated the storytelling of designers upcycling quilt materials. There was power in combining aesthetics with a narrative for both the customer and designer.

Ultimately, designers perceive their storytelling as a way to ensure the quilt material's life continues in a more valuable, and visible way. Through the upcycling process, designers gain an appreciation for quiltmaking, history, and sustainability. They want to transfer this gained appreciation so that customers will embrace the identity and history of the garment. They strongly desire to pass along the history embedded in quilts by reinterpreting them into a different form that customers can better read and appreciate.

Figure 50

Jacket by Tristan Detwiler

Note. Tristan made this jacket from a signature quilt. Photograph by Tristan Detwiler. Permission granted.

Quilts as Emotional Objects

As shown in the proceeding sections, designers' emotional responses to quilt materials are the root of a distinct design process based on material culture methodologies and lead to reinterpretation and storytelling. This section further elaborates on why handmade objects, specifically quilt materials, have a unique power to create emotional connections with designers.

Walter Benjamin introduced the concept of "aura" in his seminal essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (2014). Aura was essentially the spirit of the maker, an element of authenticity that tied the object to the time and space in which it was made. An object further collected aura throughout its life through the physical condition and ownership changes. Benjamin asserted that original objects have more cultural worth and significance than reproductions because the original contained the traces of the maker. Reproductions were disconnected from the aura of the original and therefore lacked authenticity. While Benjamin's writings dealt with film reproduction, his concepts can be equally applied in a modern sense to the comparison between handmade objects and mass-produced objects, such as a handmade quilt and mass-produced denim (Berger, 2014). As shown in the results of this study, the designers have a stronger emotional connection to quilts than to the mass-produced materials they work with, like denim and chenille. Taylor describes mass-produced objects as "flat" and lacking personality.

> Definitely doesn't feel as personal. And it doesn't spark my creativity as much. Feels a little bit more like, I don't know how to describe it other than just like "flat." Like a tablecloth, or a towel, yeah, it doesn't feel the same. It doesn't have an emotion to it. It doesn't have a personality to it. It's still vintage and cool and might be a cool, like, avocado green or whatever. But it's machine made for the most part, like mass-produced. It doesn't really get my rocks off the same way as a quilt.

As seen in Taylor's quote, the mass-produced nature of other textiles does not excite the designers like quilt materials does. While they still appreciate the aesthetics and maybe even the history behind mass-produced textiles, these textiles do not carry the literal blood, sweat, and tears of a singular maker. Because of their aura, the temporal and haptic connection to a maker, quilt materials elicit emotional responses in designers.

The findings of this emotional component of quilts were also noted in the research of Deborah McGuire (2022), who took Benjamin's (2014) concept of aura and applied it to domestic textiles, specifically patchwork and quilts. She noted the ability of domestic textiles in "capturing and communicating emotion through touch and senses, and transferring emotion through generations and across distances" (2022, p. 15). Quilts and patchwork were not just a function of their maker's thrift and utility but tools the maker (mainly women) used to create memory, legacy, and selfhood. Joel Sater, a quilt and antique collector who studied the history of patchwork, similarly described the emotional power of quilts.

> Not all of our quilts are great quilts, but each one carries its own private magic. Most have stories that will never be known. Who made them? From whose dresses, pants, suits, baby clothes did the fabrics come? Every quilt is filled with romance and mystery. Only in very rare cases are the origins known. But each represents loving workmanship and each says something about the time in which it was made and the lady or ladies who made it. (1981, p. 3)

It is this magic, the personal memories of the makers, that resonate with the designers as they form relationships with the upcycled quilt materials. Hence, it is this aura, the temporal connection to the maker, and the accumulated wear and tear of the quilt over its life that elicit an emotional reaction in these designers. They feel and respond to the aura of the quilt material.

As re-interpreters for the quilt material's story and history, the designers hope that the aura they respond to will be felt by the customer. If their customers feel an emotional connection to the past, they might feel an increase in sentimental and cultural historical value and see their garments as potential heirlooms instead of ephemeral fast fashion objects, as Jillian describes.

> It's [quilts] literally living history. It's a piece of art that somebody put time and effort and love, and emotion into. And you want to know who that was or where it was. I think because we live in a world of mass manufacture, like produce on a factory line of stuff, there's no personal connection to things anymore. You just toss shit in the garbage when you're done with it. But if you know that this jacket was made by Betty in Iowa in the 90s and that she quilted all her life, and her great niece kept this quilt and wanted someone to have it - you appreciate that jacket even more. You think about the life that it had before. You value it hopefully a little bit more highly than something that came out of a store where it came on a truck from a factory, maybe in a different country. You can establish

> more of a connection. You can appreciate it for the work and the time and the human that was behind it.

Is it this aura, then, that causes the upcycling of quilts to be so controversial? When the designers were asked why they thought the upcycling of quilt materials caused such an uproar compared to other handmade textiles, two themes emerged: the aura of quilts and the historical aspect of quilts. First, the designers see the aura of quilts through the time, labor, creativity, and love of individual quiltmakers. They recognize that the voice behind a quilt was often a woman's voice and that quiltmaking was a way in which women could express themselves artistically and emotionally. Allie's response shows how quilts reflect women's labor and personal lives (Figure 51).

> I think it's because people who quilt are really invested. Because they've invested a lot of money, time, energy, emotion, creativity. And I think that shows uniquely in every single quilt. So it makes sense that people care…I think that's why people care is because they've invested a lot in it and especially women. I mean, it's a predominantly female art form - craft. I think that quilts are also used to express a lot of voice and emotion that might have been suppressed elsewhere. Or like my grandma, her biggest social thing was sitting in a circle with her quilting club and quilting all the time. And it's just personal, and it infiltrates every aspect of life at that point. I think that's why people care. And I'm glad people care.

Figure 51

Jacket by Allie Chamberlain

Note. Photograph by Allie Chamberlain. Permission granted.

Upcycling a quilt can be seen as undoing or devaluing women's work, essentially the destruction of the aura of the quilt. It is less about the physical act of cutting a quilt but rather the symbolic act of separating it from its maker and story.

The second and more significant theme for the designers is the historical aspect of quilts. Quilts contain both historical and informational value as documents of American history, family history, time, place, and women's labor. As Jillian stated earlier, they are "living history." The designers see quilts as a symbol of American tradition, of a way to keep the past alive. Cutting them up can be seen as destroying this tradition, history, and value, as Lisa and Rachel describe in their conversation.

Lisa: Tradition and family.

Rachel: American tradition.

Lisa: You heard us both talk about our moms, right? We grew up sewing and thrifting. And the same is true; like any woman who quilts, it was probably her grandma or her mom or some woman who gave her that interest or sparked that interest. I think it's like, "How dare you cut into somebody's family history?" It's an emotional thing.

Rachel: Yeah, I think they're just emotional.

Their conversation indicates that beyond an emotional connection to a maker, quilts contain an emotional connection to history at large. The concerns over the loss of the informational and historical value of quiltmaking patterns and American history were notable in the reactions to Ralph Lauren using antique quilts in his Fall/Winter 1982 collection (Bavor, 2014; Edmonds, 1982; Leman, 1982b; McCormick, 2013). The April 1982 edition of *Quilter's Newsletter Magazine* ran an article by Chris Edmonds pleading with the public to stop cutting up old quilts, arguing that "by destroying these tangible pieces of our heritage, we are also destroying bits of our own history as quiltmakers… Don't contribute to the destruction of old quilts and to the demise of our heritage. Don't murder them with your scissors…" (1982, p. 15).

Based on the designers' responses about quilts, the controversy around upcycling seems to go beyond aura and encompasses quilts' greater context within American history. Quilts are the living history of both the maker and of society. They hold a unique place in culture as markers of time, recorders of history and culture, holders of artistic

and emotional expression, and symbols of women's labor. Designers carry the aura and history of quilt materials into their work, reinterpreting it for their customers.

Designing for Slow Fashion

The findings of this study, a distinct design process where designers reinterpret quilts through material culture methods, answer calls for slow fashion approaches in apparel design to address sustainability issues (K. Fletcher, 2010; K. Fletcher & Grose, 2012). Slow fashion has been a call for fashion systems of production that break the mold of fast fashion and corporate models focused on growth and profit (K. Fletcher, 2010). Fletcher noted that slow fashion has been "an invitation to think about systems change in the fashion sector and to question the role of economic growth, underlying values, and worldviews in fashion so that a different and truly 'richer' society develops" (p. 264) The results of this study show that experiences of designers upcycling quilt material fit Fletcher's slow fashion paradigm by challenging society's view of what can be considered material, production methods, and how we think about the designer's role in the apparel design process. While only one designer (Elise) specifically mentioned the term slow fashion, the concept of it is an underlying theme across the experiences of all the designers. They see their businesses as a way to confront society's penchant for over-production and overconsumption of apparel, as Olivia states (Figure 52).

> We already have more than enough that we need. We could never make another material again and figure out how to realistically clothe ourselves. Maybe not the massive amounts that we have at Target, but I can make a small batch thing, small batch amount of clothing. And if every designer did that, we would have enough clothing for the rest of forever. It's just not necessary to be making things at the capacity that we do in big box stores.

Olivia's quote also addresses a specific tactic for implementing slow fashion, offered by Fletcher (2010) - returning to "small-scale production, traditional craft techniques, local materials and markets" (p. 264). The experiences and processes of designers upcycling quilt materials fit within this tactic, as they integrate traditional craft techniques (quiltmaking), source materials from local second-hand venues, and produce small-batch one-of-a-kind garments.

Figure 52

Jacket by Olivia Jondle

Note. Photographs by Olivia Jondle. Permission granted.

In addition, instead of focusing on profit or growth, most designers focus on creating garments that resonate with them, hoping to increase the garment's use and perception value and longevity. It is important that their work passes along a sustainable message or encourages sustainable behaviors in customers. The designers want their work to challenge customers to think more deeply about what they purchase, use, value, and why. For example, one of MartyO's motivations for exhibiting her work is to encourage people to consider what they throw away versus reuse.

> My goal is to have people stop throwing out vintage fabrics and thinking about if they're damaged - reuse them or we restore them…I am fighting the fashion world that is so wasteful, and cutting out garments and having so much thrown out, so much offal[23], that can't be used and often isn't.

Another slow fashion strategy, as suggested by Holroyd et al. (2023), was using visible mending to highlight and encourage garments' repair and reuse. Designers approach this tactic by leaving traces of previous mending or incorporating their own mending into their work, hoping, in turn, to encourage customers to repair and mend their own garments. These visible signs of wear and tear and mending are tangible signals of memory, time, and past lives that are passed along to customers. Tristan actualizes this by

[23] Offal is waste or a by-product of a manufacturing process.

including a needle and thread with each of his garments so that customers become active participants in the lifespan of their garments.

> My intention is for someone to fully buy into this identity of this piece that has a history and that they can forward their history onto. So, for example, I include needle and thread in my packing… [I want to] influence the idea of how when there's a rip or a hole, don't just throw it away. Reuse it. Or if you don't like it anymore, take it apart and make it back into a blanket or something like that…I say also in my note, in my packaging, that there's a lifetime warranty where you can always call me up and send it back and I'll mend it or fix it for you. But you know, I'd rather invoke them to do it themselves to kind of learn that. Not only is it easy and but also, I think people should know the basic techniques of fixing your own clothes. Patch your own holes.

Fletcher and Grose (2012) lamented that the speed and volume at which the fashion industry produced meant that we no longer had a connection to makers or materials, and "our garments have become inanimate objects" (p. 85). To counter this issue, they proposed combining elements of physical and emotional durability in products. Companies already formed emotional durability with customers through marketing with the goal of selling more products. But Fletcher and Grose argued a need for additional design methods that created customer emotional durability, which encouraged customers to value the longevity of garments instead of purchasing more.

I theorize that the experiences of designers upcycling quilt materials present a different way to encourage customer emotional durability by activating the emotions of the designer. Through slow fashion techniques, the emotional engagement of the designer becomes noticeable and is passed along to the customer creating an emotional attachment that hopefully extends the garment's life. The relationship a designer has with their materials and the tensions they navigate creates a physical and emotional feedback loop for both the designer and wearer, causing both to reassess their relationships to garments and use (K. Fletcher & Grose, 2012). The designer's material culture method of reinterpreting quilt materials through storytelling is a concrete example of how slow fashion theories actualize in real life. It provides new ways to preserve, reuse, repurpose, and revalue material culture through design processes.

Customers' Perceptions: Heirloom or Fad?

While the designers interviewed for this study see themselves as re-interpreters of quilt materials, they are uncertain how well that message translates to customers. Even once they navigate the design process, they experience one final tension related to the future lives of their garments. Many designers express concern that their garments are considered a fad, part of another fashion trend cycle, by customers and the public. They are cognizant that some customers are buying for the trend and are not motivated by the sustainable, slow fashion, heritage aspect of upcycled quilt material garments. As discussed, designers want their work to communicate a message of sustainability and use value. Many also have concerns that other designers only make garments to capitalize on the trend and do not focus on a high level of quality and care for the quilt material, as Olivia notes.

> I do have a lot of concern with the trends that are happening, that people are just making quilt coats poorly and quickly just to ride this fad. And I don't want people to associate my brand with that…And some people just don't have the skills to or the machines to make garments that are going to stand the test of time. And that's a huge point of contention for me. Because sometimes those people are charging a lot of money, which I don't think is very ethical, for a product that's going to fall apart. And then they've compromised or ruined this beautiful one-of-a-kind piece of history.

One of the critiques of upcycling quilt materials has been that once the popularity of these garments fades, people may discard their garments and the life of a quilt will end prematurely (Fons, 2022a, 2022b). If that happens, the designers will have failed in their goal to improve the life of the quilt material and will have reduced its use value. The guilt of doing the "wrong" thing with a quilt persists, even once the garment is sold.

Lisa and Rachel discuss the concern about customer perception of their work, noting the trendiness of upcycling quilt materials. However, they also express hope that customers will become as emotionally invested in the garments as the designers do.

> *Lisa:* It's hard because I know that the quilt stuff has kind of become a trend, like quilt clothes and stuff like that. But I hope that it's something that the people who buy the items [will] treasure, especially the stuff that's made out of a full quilt like a quilt coat or quilt stockings or whatever. I hope that's something that they passed down in their family.

> *Rachel:* For kids stuff, I think moms are so sentimental, like for the kid overalls. That "heirloom pieces" are very popular right now. So with the overalls, I'm like maybe the mom will save them and put them in their baby box or something…
>
> *Lisa:* I think it's easy to get rid of, "Oh, I paid $15 for this and I wore it for a year. I'm going to give it to Goodwill." And now it's like, "I paid $65 for this, and it has this super unique hand-stitched quilt piece on it." I hope they keep it for like ten years.
>
> *Rachel:* And we send care instructions with it. We send a little card that says "This quilt has a lot of stories and you're part of the next part of the chapter."
>
> *Lisa:* In the quilt's life.
>
> *Rachel:* We want people to take a step back and say, "Oh, I probably should appreciate this. Yeah, it's pretty special." So we kind of tell them to appreciate it.

Lisa and Rachel hope that by involving customers in the life and story of the quilt material, customers will value the garment and break the cycle of fast fashion disposability. This reinterpretation of quilt materials is another example of creating emotional durability, where the customer can be emotionally connected to the quilt material through tactile qualities and by sensing its relationship with the designer (K. Fletcher & Grose, 2012).

Instead of a trend, designers want customers to view their garments as "heirlooms."[24] In interviews, this term was used specifically by eight of the designers. For example, Rachel uses the word "heirloom" in the preceding quote, and Michele's business, Josie & Jane, has the tagline "Modern heirlooms, slow fashion" (Josie and Jane, n.d.). Designers want customers to perceive their work as something that transcends a fad. They want customers to value the garments as something special meant to be worn repeatedly, as Ashley describes: "It's my hope that I'm creating heirloom pieces to be passed down as well. I don't view this as a fad or a trend. I hope these pieces are ones that are handed down for life."

Just as quilts are seen as family heirlooms with high sentimental value, passed down from generation to generation, designers want their garments to be treasured and worn for generations to come. The heirloom concept stems not only from the perception

[24] Heirloom is defined as "something of special value handed down from one generation to another" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

of quilts as heirlooms but connects to designers' larger goals related to sustainability and slow fashion. To create a feeling of specialness, designers realize they need to focus on quality over quantity. Many are mindful of the number of garments they produce to avoid being seen as fast fashion. "We need to stop trends," Taylor says, "Trends are what are filling the landfills. We don't need trends anymore. We need to do what we can with what we have."

Summary

This section discussed themes and new knowledge based on designers' experiences when upcycling quilt materials into fashion garments. It provided new ways to think about preserving, reusing, repurposing, and revaluing material culture through design processes. First, this study revealed a distinct apparel design process based on designers' relationships with quilt materials that aligns with material culture methodologies. As a result, designers acted as re-interpreters of material culture and actively contributed to and passed along the quilt material's story to customers. Second, designers' emotional responses to quilt materials were due to the materials' aura as handmade objects. Designers felt that this aura and the historical aspect of quilt materials were reasons why upcycling quilt materials was so fraught with controversy. Next, this section showed how this distinct apparel design process fits within slow fashion production paradigms. This section theorized that the experiences of designers were a new way to encourage customer emotional durability by activating the designer's emotions. Lastly, customers' perceptions of repurposed garments as either heirlooms or part of a fad were discussed.

Conclusion

This hermeneutic qualitative phenomenological study aims to describe designers' experiences when upcycling quilt materials into fashion garments. This research illuminates the designer's role in deconstructing and transforming quilt materials into new fashion garments. It enriches the knowledge of the design process and the relationship between designers and objects within slow fashion, upcycling, and sustainability. The following research question was posed: What are designers' experiences when upcycling quilt materials into fashion garments?

Literature provided a historical overview of upcycling textiles, apparel, and quilt materials, examined how society values quiltmaking, discussed sustainability paradigms, and evaluated previous research on the experiences of designers. This research entailed a three-pronged approach to phenomenology, including interviews with 17 designers representing 16 businesses, photo elicitation, and content analysis. Data analysis was emergent in nature, following the concept of the hermeneutic circle, aimed at conveying a common essence of the designers' experiences. This approach expanded on methods used to examine quiltmaking by investigating the social and cultural contexts where quiltmaking, fashion, and sustainability intersect.

This research shows that designers share common foundational elements of experiences related to second-hand shopping and the fashion industry, which are the primary influences for their interests in sustainability and preserving material culture. These common elements motivate designers to give quilt materials new life through their design process. Their experiences reveal a distinct design process, where their relationship with quilt materials is at the core of the process and aligns with material culture methodologies for studying objects. Designers have strong emotional and aesthetic responses to quilt materials which guide and inform their design process. The handmade nature and living history aspect of quilt materials initiates designers' emotional responses.

The designers experience a series of tensions due to their intersecting and conflicting aesthetic and emotional reactions to quilt materials. These tensions are evident throughout their entire design process, often changing in magnitude with each new quilt material with which they worked. As designers navigate these tensions, they consistently

evaluate and re-evaluate their actions alongside their "why" of giving quilt materials new life. They become re-interpreters of material culture and actively contribute to and pass along the quilt material's story to customers.

This distinct apparel design process responds to slow fashion's calls for new modes and ways of thinking about apparel design systems. By integrating their emotions throughout the design process, designers hope to encourage customers to value upcycled quilt material garments. The designers want their garments to be treasured and worn for generations to come, instead of becoming part of another fashion trend cycle.

In the following section, I present my revised researcher assumptions, research conclusions on designers' experiences, and recommendations for future research.

Revising Researcher Assumptions

Shortly before I began my interviews, I attended the American Quilt Study Group (AQSG) Seminar in San Diego, California (September 28–October 2, 2022). I participated in a study center called *To Cut or Not to Cut–Uses of Old Quilts and Textiles* (McKarns & Detwiler, 2022). The study center was led by Claire McKarns, who had encouraged me to continue exploring this topic a year prior, and Tristan Detwiler of STAN, who was interviewed for this research. Mrs. McKarns, a quilt dealer, discussed her methods for repurposing and upcycling quilts that, in her opinion, were too damaged to be sold. Tristan shared his brand's origin story, philosophy for upcycling quilts, and examples of his work.

By chance, MartyO, who was also interviewed for this research, attended the session, and shared some of her story and upcycling experiences. The study center was a microcosm for the controversy of cutting quilts and an early taste of what I would later hear in my interviews. That this topic was even discussed was controversial, as AQSG is an organization based on the study and preservation of quilts. Most of the attendees arrived with their minds squarely in the camp of "not to cut," looking for an opportunity to argue against Mrs. McKarns and Tristan. I noted the attendees' opinions and experiences, listening to both points of view in the room. Everyone was aware of my research topic, and they occasionally asked me to provide context on the history of

upcycling quilt materials and the recent growth of the trend. I also used this session as an opportunity to discuss with attendees why cutting quilts was so controversial.

The resulting conversation attendees had with Tristan and Mrs. McKarns was fascinating, touching on subjects of preservation, design for economics, autonomy, sustainability, and who had the right to establish the value of quilts. At the session's end, some attendees changed their minds and became accepting of upcycling quilts. Others did not shift their opinions but stated they had gained an appreciation for Tristan's perspective, work, and philosophy for using quilt materials. And some still firmly felt quilts were "sacred" and should not be cut or upcycled under any circumstance.

Participating in this study center before my interviews gave me an early insight into my potential findings. It also clued me into the tensions designers faced when working with quilt materials, as I listened to Tristan describe his decision-making process on what quilts he felt comfortable using. The three things I wrote in my reflection on the event were "storytelling, conversation starters, and the energy/aura of something old." Returning to these reflections at the end of this research process, I was pleased to see these themes were present in my results.

When I began my interviews, I approached this research from a neutral standpoint, with an understanding of both sides of the "to cut or not to cut" argument. My initial assumptions were that the designers' feelings towards using quilt materials would be similar to their feelings working with other materials: the quilts were simply a material to them, albeit slightly more special. I had many of the same fears expressed by the members of AQSG that quilts were being destroyed without regard for their history and meaning. I hoped my research would uncover a deeper meaning behind the designers' work to disprove the nay-sayers of the trend and relieve my fears.

After in-depth interviews with 17 designers involved in upcycling quilt materials, I am more squarely in the "to cut" camp. I anticipated that designers would have some level of respect for the history and labor that is quiltmaking. This assumption was validated, but at a depth that surprised me. How the designers connect to the quilt materials and the intent behind their work is beyond what I anticipated. The personification of quilt materials and the designers' emotional responses are a refreshing way to think about design and eases my fears about their intentions. I am also surprised

by the push-and-pull within their design process as they navigate repeated tensions with every quilt material. It highlights how we often overlook the individual decisions made at each step of the design process.

Bringing my research experience full circle, I presented an initial portion of my findings at the Costume Society of America Symposium in May 2023 (Pokorny, 2023c). In conversations with attendees, I felt a need to defend the actions of my interviewees. I was proud of their work and wanted others to recognize that these designers did not take their work lightly; they agonized over how to best reinterpret quilts and give them new life. I had a long conversation with one attendee, also a member of AQSG, who was adamantly against the upcycling of quilts. While I respected her point of view, I found I could no longer see full merit in the argument against upcycling quilts.

Concluding Thoughts

In Cassar's (2021) reflection of her embodied experience while upcycling historical garments, she issued the following call to action:

> I believe there is room within this dialogue to document the meaning and struggle the designer negotiates while deconstructing and reforming garments which are very rarely discussed…I believe shedding light on a practice such as upcycling will reframe the designer as a layered maker intertwined within the material world, thus contributing to knowledge in the area of reuse and reformation. (pp. 345–346)

The findings of my study respond to Cassar's call by documenting the experiences and tensions of designers upcycling material culture. The findings add to our understanding of design within sustainability spaces and sheds light on a distinct design process built on a designer's relationship with their materials. Using a phenomenological approach to examine upcycling reveals additional ways to document and study society's relationship with material culture. By integrating material culture methodologies into their design processes, designers become re-interpreters of material culture, contributing to the story of quiltmaking.

It only seems fitting that while upcycling material culture, designers integrate material culture methodologies into their design processes. Designers source existing cultural objects, sense the biographies encapsulated in them, study them, and connect

emotionally and aesthetically before deciding how to reinterpret them into new, more visible forms. In the process, designers navigate tensions based on their relationship with the objects.

Cassar's (2021) reflection on her upcycling experience did not contain any tensions like those found in designers upcycling quilt materials. Perhaps this is because her work did not have an undercurrent of economics, or perhaps apparel does not hold the same emotional resonance as quilt materials. Regardless, for the designers upcycling quilt materials, their decision-making is heavier, containing more weight than Cassar's because of their combined aesthetic and emotional responses to the handmade nature of quilt materials.

This study shows how integrating upcycled material culture into slow fashion paradigms is a way we can begin to address society's current overproduction and overconsumption problems. While upcycling our material culture will not entirely solve these problems, it is an avenue through which designers can spark conversations about sustainability, the value of clothing, and the value of quiltmaking. Researchers have previously addressed issues of slow fashion by highlighting the emotional attachment between customer and apparel products (Appelgren & Bohlin, 2015; DeLong et al., 2013; Fuchs et al., 2015; Holroyd et al., 2023; Kamleitner et al., 2019). My results show a need to re-frame the concept of emotional attachment. We need to consider how the designer's emotions can be conveyed to the customer by upcycling materials with inherent histories and auras. Research by Delong et al. (2013) and Janigo et al. (2017) discussed creating an attachment between customers and apparel products by upcycling materials that have meaning to customers, such as a wedding dress or the clothes of a deceased loved one. By expanding that concept, my results show the potential to create value for customers by upcycling materials that society and culture already recognize as having value and meaning. Through slow fashion techniques, the emotional engagement of the designer becomes tangible and is passed along to the customer in hopes of extending the quilt material and garment's lives.

As a society, we need to reckon with reducing our production and consumption by reusing and repurposing existing material culture. Sustainability is not something designers can tackle on their own. We need to reexamine how we design, the materials

we use, our collecting practices, and how we preserve material culture. Advanced solutions need to be found, and the results of this study offer a different way to think about design processes that can address sustainability issues in the fashion industry. As several designers noted, there are so many quilts in the world that museums cannot and will not "save" them all, nor are all quilts worthy of being in a museum. This theme is echoed in *Active Collections*, calling for radical change in museum collecting practices due to the overwhelming amount of stuff in the world.

> We cannot continue to function in this manner. We live an era of hyper consumption and production. Material goods are produced at a rate that was unimaginable when American museums first started collecting. We've got to change how and what we collect or we'll drown in consumer goods (Jones & Tisdale, 2018, p. 8).

In the introduction to this research, I asked what will happen in 50 to 100 years with all the quilts made during the COVID-19 pandemic. Will we be drowning in quilts that nobody wants? We may be, unless we can acknowledge the validity of designers upcycling quilt materials. Instead of tucking quilts away in closets or throwing them in landfills, why not upcycle them into something more functional and valuable for today's society? As Allie's grandmother told her, "Not every single quilt ever made needs to be hanging in a museum and preserved for all of time. And quilting has always been an art of repurposing and reusing."

One of the arguments against the upcycling of quilt materials is the potential loss of quiltmaking history (Bavor, 2014; Fons, 2022a, 2022b; McCormick, 2013). I argue that quiltmaking history is not lost through the actions of designers upcycling. From their experiences, it is clear that the designers see themselves as saving the history of quiltmaking. They reinterpret these cultural objects so that their history and life can be carried on in a repurposed form. They do not want these expressions of love, labor, and history to be lost; they want them to be shared with the world in an original way that resonates with today's culture. Quilts have always reflected changing values, changing culture, and changing technology. Upcycling them into garments is just another step in the ever-evolving journey of quiltmaking.

Mary Fons (2022a) proposed that "people on both sides of the debate do seem to agree that a quilt has a soul; the battle is over who is better at saving it" (p. 43). My

results show that designers do recognize that quilts have a soul. That soul, the aura, creates their emotional responses, leading to a distinct design process based on material culture methodologies. There is no battle over who is better at saving the soul of a quilt, just different approaches to highlighting the value and history of quiltmaking. Designers are simultaneously saving and reinterpreting quilt materials, encouraging new audiences to engage with and value quiltmaking while pushing for more sustainable approaches to production and consumption.

The controversy behind the upcycling of quilt materials is a through-line in this research and underlays the experiences of the designers. It deeply affects the designers, resulting in feelings of guilt and shame which influences the other tensions they experience. This research is not intended to answer the question of "to cut or not to cut" but to give readers the tools and context behind the experiences of designers so that they can make their own informed decisions. The research adds the voice and expertise of designers to the conversation, illuminating their motivations, tensions, emotions, and design process. My goal is that this research will bring quilt scholars, historians, and designers into conversation to share and listen to each other's points of view. The designers interviewed express a desire to dialogue with the public about their work, quiltmaking, history, and sustainability. And they express a willingness to learn more about the history of quiltmaking to better inform their design process.

The study center at the American Quilt Study Group Seminar is an example of the power of dialogue among designers, quilt scholars, and historians. Through storytelling, designers can generate discourse and understanding about controversial topics and the reuse of material culture. It is further evidence of the need to amplify the voice of designers in this conversation, as those of quilt scholars and historians have been the dominant voices to date.

Due to interviewing these designers, I have reconsidered how we design and our relationship with design. After working in a corporate apparel design environment and teaching apparel design, this approach that is not customer-focused but is based on intentional relationships with materials is exciting. This research shows how designers working in sustainability spaces think about design in original ways. They are thinking about how to make their work more meaningful and authentic to who they are as

designers and to their materials in hopes that customers will feel a similar connection. These findings have made me reconsider how we teach apparel design and question how we prepare the next generation of designers to approach their work more intention to address sustainability issues. How do we harness the power of material culture methodologies in design to reinterpret objects in new and exciting ways? There is more than one way to design; we need to champion all approaches to design, especially if we want to integrate perspectives from other traditions like quiltmaking. We can recenter design with the designer's material relationships at the forefront instead of diminishing the voice of an individual designer. We can teach designers to be emotional, to engage fully with their materials, and to use this as a guide for the design process. This research demonstrates new ways to rethink clothing design in light of our changing world.

Implications for Future Research

My findings related to designers' experiences when upcycling quilt materials into fashion garments reveal many possible avenues for future research. It is important to acknowledge that as this study was grounded in hermeneutic phenomenology, my findings are based on my present understandings and biases (Peoples, 2021). Other themes may be found within my data that were not realized due to my pre-understandings.

First, my findings show a need to study the customer aspect of this phenomenon. The designers interviewed perceived themselves as turning an object that is no longer deemed "useful" by current society into something more useful with new levels of value. What happens when the customer receives their upcycled quilt material garment? How do they value the garment and the quilt? And does the designer's relationship with the quilt material actualize into increased types of value for the customer? Researchers can examine customers' experiences purchasing and wearing upcycled quilt materials garments to see if the ideals of increased use, sentimental, and perception value, longevity, and sustainability are passed along to the customer the way the designers intended. A longer-range study can also examine the lifecycle of these garments after purchase. Are they treasured as family heirlooms, or do they become a fad, discarded once fashion cycles change, as feared by many designers? Comparing the experiences of

designers and customers can illuminate how well the designers' messages are being received.

Second, all the designers interviewed work with other upcycled second-hand materials beyond quilt materials. Yet most note almost no public concern or outcry over their upcycling of other handmade materials such as crocheted and knitted items, hand-woven rugs and coverlets, and embroidered linens. Further research can explore perceptions of upcycling other handmade materials to see if they possess the same aura and emotion as quilts, or if quilts are uniquely emotional objects in American material culture.

Third, as evidenced by the designers interviewed for this study, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly increased people's interest in sewing and designing. It is unknown whether those who started sewing or designing during the pandemic maintained their interest or stopped sewing once their lives returned to "normal." Further research can examine the long-term impacts of the pandemic on sewing, quilting, and independent designers.

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Appendix A: Participant Recruitment Information Sheet

Designers' Lived Experiences when Upcycling Quilts into Garments

PI: Colleen Pokorny
Email: pokor033@umn.edu

Thank you for your interest in my research!

I am a Ph.D. candidate in Design at the University of Minnesota. I'm a longtime quilter and apparel designer studying the intersection of quiltmaking and fashion related to upcycling. For my dissertation, I'm researching the experiences of designers when upcycling second-hand quilts into garments as part of their business.

For this research, I am interviewing designers who upcycle quilts into garments. I want to learn about your story and experiences. This research is not about the debate of cutting quilts but about your relationship with quilts when you upcycle them.

The topics of the interview include:

1. The story of how you started upcycling quilts into garments.
2. Your experiences and design processes when working with second-hand quilts.
3. How you think your work connects to sustainability.
4. The process of obtaining quilts, what you select, and why.
5. The types of quilts you upcycle and how this relates to your design process.

The interview will take place over Zoom and last approximately 90-minutes. Interviews will be scheduled between October – December 2022. You will also be required to provide digital photographs of a few of your garments made from upcycled second-hand quilts to aid in the discussion and for further visual analysis. Participation may also include an approximately 30-minute follow-up interview at a later date to clarify or confirm your responses.

For your time and participation, you will be compensated $75 digital Amazon or Visa gift card.

Book your interview time here: [insert link]
Provide photographs of your work here: [insert link]

Do you know others who upcycle quilts into garments? Please share!
Thank you again for sharing your time and experience with me! I look forward to our discussion.

Please reach out if you have questions. Thank you!

Colleen Pokorny

Appendix B: Participant Recruitment Messages

Initial Instagram Direct Message

Hi ____! I'm a Ph.D. candidate in Design at the University of Minnesota. For my research, I am interviewing designers about their experiences when upcycling second-hand quilts into garments as part of their business. I saw your work on Instagram and thought you would be a good fit for my study. Would you be willing to participate in my study? - Colleen

Follow-up Instagram Direct Message

Hi ____, Thank you for your interest in my research!

Participation includes an approximately 90-minute Zoom interview about your experiences upcycling quilts into garments. It also includes providing photographs of your work to help bring our discussion to life. For your participation, you will be compensated $75.00. I have attached a link to a short description of my research study and how to book an interview time. I look forward to talking with you! -Colleen
[insert link]

Initial E-mail

Hi _____
My name is Colleen Pokorny, and I'm a Ph.D. candidate in Design at the University of Minnesota. I'm a longtime quilter and apparel designer studying the intersection of quiltmaking and fashion related to upcycling. For my dissertation, I'm interviewing designers about their experiences when upcycling second-hand quilts into garments. I found your work on Instagram and thought you might be a good fit for my study!

The interview will focus on your experience as a designer and your relationship with quits; it's not about the debate of cutting quilts. The interview will take place over Zoom and will last approximately 90 minutes. You will also be required to provide photographs of your work to aid in the discussion. For your time, you will be compensated $75.00.

Would you be willing to participate in my study?

Thank you,
Colleen Pokorny

Follow-up E-mail

Hi _____

Thank you for your interest in my research! I look forward to hearing about your experiences upcycling quilts into garments!

The interview will take place over Zoom and will last approximately 90-minutes. I'm scheduling interviews between October – December 2022, so there are lots of dates and

times to choose from. Participation may also include an approximately 30-minute follow-up interview at a later date to clarify or confirm your responses.
You can book your interview time here: [insert link]

The topics of the interview include:
1. The story of how you started upcycling quilts into garments.
2. Your experiences and design processes when working with second-hand quilts.
3. How you think your work connects to sustainability.
4. The process of obtaining quilts, what you select, and why.
5. The types of quilts you upcycle and how this relates to your design process.

You will also be required to provide digital photographs of a few of your garments made from upcycled second-hand quilts to aid in the discussion and for further visual analysis.
Provide photographs of your work here: [insert link]

You will be compensated $75 digital Amazon or Visa gift card for your time and participation.
Thank you again for sharing your time and experience with me! I look forward to our discussion. Please reach out if you have questions.

Best,
Colleen Pokorny

Appendix C: Recruitment Flyer

Researchers at the **University of Minnesota** are looking
for designers to participate in a research project

Do you upcycle quilts into garments?
Talk about your experiences and earn $75.00!

You are eligible if:

- You are a US based designer with an established business selling garments made from upcycled second-hand quilts* for at least 1 year.
- You upcycle second-hand quilts into garments such as jackets, tops, or dresses.
- You source upcycled quilts from second-hand markets, such thrift stores or quilt dealers. The quilts are not new or created with the intent of being used in a garment.
- You design and produce garments made from upcycled second-hand quilts yourself or produce garments with assistance of sewists or manufacturing facility.
- You are 18+ years old

**Includes full quilts, quilt tops, and orphan blocks*

What does participation involve?

- Approximately 90-minute Zoom interview.
- Provide digital photographs of garments you have produced from upcycled quilts.
- *Optionally:* provide photographs of original quilts prior to upcycling. Provide photographs or videos of your design process
- Possible 30-minute follow-up interview.

Compensation: $75.00 Visa or Amazon Gift Card

How do I sign-up? Email Colleen Pokorny at **pokor033@umn.edu**
Use the subject line: *Designers Upcycling Quilts*

Appendix D: Information Sheet for Research

INFORMATION SHEET FOR RESEARCH

Transforming Quilts into Garments: Designers' Lived Experiences with Upcycling

You are invited to be in a research study to describe designers' lived experiences when upcycling quilts into garments for commercial purposes. You were selected as a possible participant because you self-identified as per the following criteria:

- You are a designer with an established US-based business selling garments made from upcycled quilts for at least 1 year.
- Your garments are made from upcycled quilts sourced from a second-hand market, such as a thrift store or quilt dealer. The garments are not made from new quilts.
- You design and produce garments made from upcycled quilts yourself or produce the garments with the assistance of sewists or a manufacturing facility.
- You are 18+ years old.

We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by:

Principal Investigator/ Faculty Advisor	Name: Dr. Elizabeth Bye
	Department: Design, Housing, & Apparel; University of Minnesota
	Telephone Number: 612-624-3751
	Email Address: ebye@umn.edu
Student Investigator	Name: Colleen Pokorny
	Department: Design, Housing, & Apparel; University of Minnesota
	Telephone Number: 515-210-1795
	Email Address: pokor033@umn.edu

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

- Participate in a virtual interview about your experiences upcycling quilts into garments. The interview will last approximately 90-minutes and occur over Zoom.
- The virtual interview will take place between September-December 2022. You will choose the time for the interview using scheduling software.
- Consent to use your name and business name in scholarly presentations or publications. This means your identity will be shared as part of this activity. You may decline this; your name and other identifying information will remain confidential.
- Provide digital photographs of 3-5 garments you have produced from upcycled quilts through an online survey form. *Optionally,* you may also provide photographs of quilts before upcycling and photographs/videos of the design process demonstrating the upcycling process.
- Sign a photo release form for digital photographs so that they may be reproduced

in written findings and presentations. You may decline this, and photographs will be used for analysis and will not be reproduced in any written findings or presentations. A photograph release form will be requested when photographs are entered in the online survey form.

- With your consent, the interview will be audio and video recorded. If audio and/or video recording is not permissible, the investigator will take only meeting notes.
- Participation may also include a 30-minute follow-up Zoom interview at a later date.

Confidentiality:
During the project, information from this study will be kept private and will be stored securely. Only the research team will have access to information that identifies you. Your identifying information will not be shared with others outside of this research study. However, organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the committee that provides ethical and regulatory oversight of research, and other representatives of this institution, including those that have responsibilities for monitoring or ensuring compliance (such as the Quality Assurance Program of the Human Research Protection Program (HRPP)).

Any personal information that could identify you will be removed or changed before we publish any report or share the results or data from this study. Only researchers will have access to audio and video recordings made of interviews and any provided photographs. We may publish the results of this research, including photographs of your garments and quilts, if consent is provided. You have the option to consent to provide your name and the name of your business in the analysis and findings. However, if desired, we will keep your name and other identifying information confidential. If photographer attribution is necessary for photographs, their name may be published in any written findings or presentations.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Will I be compensated for my participation?
If you agree to take part in this research study, we will pay you $75.00 for your time and effort. You may choose either a digital Amazon gift card or digital Visa gift card.

Contacts and Questions:
The researcher(s) conducting this study is (are): Colleen Pokorny and Dr. Elizabeth Bye. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact them at the University of Minnesota, Department of Design, Housing & Apparel. Phone number: 612-624-3751. Email address: ebye@umn.edu.

This research has been reviewed and approved by an IRB within the Human Research Protections Program (HRPP). To share feedback privately with the HRPP about your

research experience, call the Research Participants' Advocate Line at 612-625-1650 (Toll Free: 1-888-224-8636) or go to z.umn.edu/participants. You are encouraged to contact the HRPP if:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
- You have questions about your rights as a research participant.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Appendix E: Interview Questions

Demographics
Business name:
Gender/Pronouns:
Age:
City/State of business:
Race/Ethnicity:

Business Overview
1. Where are you located?
2. What is the size of your business?
    a. How many employees do you have?
3. What kind of garments do you produce from quilts?
4. How would you describe your price point?
5. When did you start/how long have you been in business?

Designer Background
6. Are you a quilter?
    a. How long?
    b. How did you get started?
    c. What type of quilts do you make?
7. What experience prompted you to become interested in upcycling quilts into fashion garments?
8. Describe how your past experiences impacted you as a designer.
9. Describe how your past experiences with upcycling and sustainability impacted you as a designer. (Peoples, 2021)
10. How do you see your work connecting to sustainability?
    a. What do you hope your work says about sustainability?
11. How has your work with quilts impacted your views on quiltmaking? (Moustakas, 1994; Peoples, 2021)
12. You said you [are/are not] a quilter; how does this impact your work? (Peoples, 2021)
13. Tell me about the first time you cut into a quilt for upcycling. What was that experience like? (Cassar, 2021; Thompson, 2010)
    a. What did you make and why?
    b. What quilt did you and why?
    c. How did it feel?
    d. Did your feelings change throughout the process?

Photo Elicitation
Screen share submitted garments. Ask the following questions per garment.
14. Tell me about this garment.
15. What was your experience with this garment?
16. Tell me about the quilt you used, why did you select it?
17. How did you decide the purpose of the quilt?
18. Tell me about the design process. How did you…
    a. Layout the pattern pieces?

    b. Integrate the quilt into the design?
19. What other design decisions were driven by the quilt?
20. What did you do with the remainder of the quilt?
21. What were you thinking/feeling while work with this quilt?

Quilts Used in Upcycling

22. What makes a quilt a [insert business name] quilt?
23. Do you focus on…
    a. A specific time period?
    b. A specific condition?
    c. Specific colors, aesthetics, patterns?
24. Describe you process of sourcing your quilts.
    a. What is your price point?
25. When is it ok verses not ok to upcycle a quilt? Do any of the following impact your decision?
    a. Age
    b. Condition
    c. Labels or signatures
26. How do you refer to the quilts you use? For example, vintage, antique, retro, heirloom.
    a. What does vintage mean to you?
    b. What does antique mean to you?
27. Do you try to find out information about your quilts? (e.g., maker, location, date, fabric types, pattern name)
    a. Why or why not?
    b. Why is it important to you to share that information with customers?
    c. How do you integrate the quilt's story during the upcycling process? (Kamleitner et al., 2019)
28. How is working with quilts different than working with other upcycled materials?
29. Cutting up a quilt is often seen as controversial. Tell me about your experiences related to this controversy?
    a. What do you think it is about quilts that causes such a controversy?
30. Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience upcycling quilts into fashion garments?

Appendix F: Photo Consent Form

Thank you for your interest in my study "Transforming Quilts into Garments: Designers' Lived Experiences with Upcycling". The purpose of this study is to describe designers' experiences when upcycling second-hand quilts into garments for commercial purposes. As part of this study, you will provide digital photographs of some of the garments you have produced from second-hand quilts.

This form will allow you to submit digital photographs of your work to be included in the study and provide consent for their use. Photographs will aid the interview process and be used for further visual analysis. In addition, you may consent to release your photographs to be reproduced for written findings or presentations. Providing photos is REQUIRED to be part of this study and improves the quality of the research and the interview process.

Select 3 garments you have produced from second-hand quilts* and provide the following:

Digital photographs of the finished garment made from an upcycled second-hand quilt
Optionally:
- Photographs of the quilt before upcycling.
- Photographs or videos (e.g., Instagram reels) of the design process demonstrating the upcycling process.

*NOTE: Second-hand quilts are defined as quilts that are sourced from a second-hand market such as quilt dealers, quilt vendors, resale stores, antique stores, thrift stores, etc. This includes fully finished quilts, quilt tops, and orphan blocks. The quilts cannot be new or be created with the intent of being turned into a garment. Please email me if you are unsure if your quilts fit these criteria!

Thank you for participating in my research study. I look forward to meeting you!

Colleen Pokorny
Ph.D. Candidate: Design - Apparel Studies, Dress, Culture, and History track.
Department of Design, Housing, and Apparel - College of Design
University of Minnesota
pokor033@umn.edu

1. Email
2. Please provide your name
3. Please provide your Instagram handle/website/or other social media username

Photo Release Consent
Efforts will be made to limit the use and disclosure of your personal information to people who have a need to review this information. However, we cannot promise complete confidentiality. Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the committee that provides ethical and regulatory oversight of research, and other representatives of the University of

Minnesota, including those that have responsibilities for monitoring or ensuring compliance.

We may publish the results of this research, including photographs of your garments and quilts, if consent is provided. You have the option to consent to provide your name and the name of your business in the analysis and findings during the interview consent process. However, if desired, we will keep your name and other identifying information confidential. If photographer attribution is necessary for photographs, their name may be published in any scholarly written findings or presentations.

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you as a participant unless consent is provided to use your name and business name. However, if consent is provided to reproduce photographs of your garments and quilts, it may be possible to identify you. If photographer attribution is necessary for photographs, their name may be published in any written findings or presentations. Research records will be stored on a University secure server, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

Your data with and without identifiers will not be used for any future research after this study is complete, with the exception of the right to publish analyses and findings.

By selecting “yes,” I agree to release my photographs for use in analysis by the researcher.
- Yes, my photographs may be used in the analysis.
- No, my photographs may not be used in the analysis by the researcher.

By selecting "yes," I agree to release my photographs to be reproduced for written findings or presentations. This means my photographs may be published. It may be possible to identify you based on your garment or quilt, although the researcher will attempt to limit such identification. I understand the risks associated with such identification. If I provide consent for my name and business name to be used during the interview consent process, I understand that my name and business name may be published in accompaniment with my photographs. *Note, by selecting "yes," you are not agreeing to use your name and company name in the analysis and findings. This consent process will happen separately before your interview.

- Yes, my photographs may be reproduced or published in written findings or presentations.
- No, my photographs may only be used for analysis.

Garment & Quilt Photographs *[repeated 3 times]*
Select a garment you have produced from second-hand quilts* and provide the following:

Digital photographs of the finished garment made from an upcycled second-hand quilt
Optionally:
- Photographs of the quilt before upcycling.

- Photographs or videos (e.g., Instagram reels) of the design process demonstrating the upcycling process.

*NOTE: Second-hand quilts are defined as quilts that are sourced from a second-hand market such as quilt dealers, quilt vendors, resale stores, antique stores, thrift stores, etc. This includes fully finished quilts, quilt tops, and orphan blocks. The quilts cannot be new or be created with the intent of being turned into a garment. Please email me (pokor033@umn.edu) if you are unsure if your quilts fit these criteria!

1. Please upload photographs(s) of the garment made from a second-hand quilt AFTER upcycling.
2. OPTIONAL: Please upload photograph(s) of the second-hand quilt BEFORE upcycling
3. OPTIONAL: Please upload photographs(s) or videos (ex. Instagram reel) of the design process demonstrating the upcycling process.
4. OPTIONAL: Please provide a link to a website/social media site with photographs or videos of the garment, second-hand quilt, or design process. This option is provided in case your content is located on a social media site and it is easier for you to provide links (e.g., Link to an Instagram Reel or Tick-Tock)
5. Do any of the photographs or videos need to be attributed to anyone (for example, a professional photographer/videographer)? If yes, please provide their name and the file name of the photo/video so they can be properly credited if reproduced.
6. Do you have another garment to add?
    a. Yes
    b. No

Thank you for uploading your photographs. If you have not already done so, please schedule a time for your interview. I look forward to meeting you!

Please click "submit" to complete the survey.

Colleen Pokorny
Ph.D. Candidate: Design - Apparel Studies, Dress, Culture, and History track.
Department of Design, Housing, and Apparel - College of Design
University of Minnesota
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Appendix G: Content Analysis Matrix

Name	
Company name	
Contact info	
Website	
Social media handles	
Physical locale	
Year founded or length of time in business	
Size of business/number of employees	
Types of garments made using upcycled quilt materials	
Price range	
Other items made from upcycled materials	
Information provided about quilt materials	Provenance: Date: Pattern name: Fabric Type:
Customer facing position on upcycling	

Appendix H: Participant Demographics

Name	Business	Location	Age	Pronouns	Race & Ethnicity
Taylor Randal	Softpaw Vintage	Rhododendron, Oregon	31	She/her	White
Sandra Lee Chandler	Sandra Lee Design	San Diego, California	62	She/her	African American
Kamber Elyse	Kamber Elyse	Chicago, Illinois	26	She/her	White
Michele Alford	Josie & Jane	Fort Worth, Texas	50	She/her	White
Tristan Detwiler	STAN	San Diego, California	25	He/his	White
Rachel Pulliam	Thread and Butter	Portland, Oregon	31	She/her	White, Hispanic
Lisa Cross	Thread and Butter	Portland, Oregon	30	She/her	White
Lorelei Wood	Upcycled Gypsy	Mesa, Arizona	63	She/her	White
Jillian Hertzman	Jillie P	Los Angeles, California	45	She/her	White
Olivia Jondle	The Rusty Bolt	St. Louis, Missouri	30	She/they	White
Paula Campbell	Sew Sassy by Paula	Vilonia, Arkansas	57	She/her	White
Allie Chamberlain	Reclaim Creative	Knoxville, Tennessee	25	She/her	White
Marty Ornish (MartyO)	MartyO	San Diego, California	70	She/her	White
Rebecca Gholdston Wright	Bravo Charlie	San Francisco, California	43	She/her	White
Elise Wright	FRANe	Lexington, Kentucky	33	She/her	White
Ashley Saville	Anemone	Winooski, Vermont	36	She/her	White
Kelsy Parkhouse-Benson	Carleen	Long Beach, California	36	She/her	White

Name	Business	Year started using quilts	Type of business	Types of garments using quilt materials	Price range for outwear
Taylor Randal	Softpaw Vintage	2020	Independent designer	Women's outerwear, dresses, tops, shorts. Thrifted clothes with quilt material patches	$275–$450
Sandra Lee Chandler	Sandra Lee Design	2011	Independent designer	Women's outerwear and pants. Classes and lectures on making jackets from quilts	NA
Kamber Elyse	Kamber Elyse	2020 December	Independent designer	Women's outerwear	$140–$210
Michele Alford	Josie & Jane	2020 June	Independent designer	Toddler girl's outerwear	$100–$150
Tristan Detwiler	STAN	2019	Independent designer	Men's outerwear, pants, shorts, tops	$1595–$3200
Rachel Pulliam	Thread and Butter	2021 January	Independent designer - partnership	Thrifted adult, child, and toddler garments with applied quilt material patches	$40–$75
Lisa Cross	Thread and Butter	2021 January	Independent designer - partnership	Thrifted adult, child, and toddler garments with applied quilt material patches	$40–$75
Lorelei Wood	Upcycled Gypsy	2012	Independent designer	Women's outerwear	$135–$995
Jillian Hertzman	Jillie P	2020 Summer	Independent designer	Women's outerwear and tanks. Thrifted clothes with quilt material patches	$400–$550

Name	Business	Year started using quilts	Type of business	Types of garments using quilt materials	Price range for outwear
Olivia Jondle	The Rusty Bolt	2019 Spring	Independent designer + occasional assistants	Women's outerwear, shorts, hats, dresses	$200 (one price)
Paula Campbell	Sew Sassy by Paula	2021	Independent designer	Women's outerwear	$95–$105
Allie Chamberlain	Reclaim Creative	2019	Independent designer + occasional assistants	Women's outerwear, tops, shirts, sweatshirts, shorts	$405–$525
Marty Ornish (MartyO)	MartyO	2007	Independent designer	Women's wearable art ensembles, outerwear, dresses, spats,	N/A
Rebecca Gholdston Wright	Bravo Charlie	2022	Independent designer + contract manufacturing	Women's outerwear, sweatshirts, dresses, tops, and jumpsuits	$345–$575
Elise Wright	FRANe	2021	Independent designer	Men's and women's outerwear	$280–$415
Ashley Saville	Anemone	2020 September	Independent designer + cutting assistant	Women's outerwear, dresses, pants, sweatshirts, tops, hats, mittens	$545–$645
Kelsy Parkhouse-Benson	Carleen	2012	Independent designer + contract manufacturing	Women's, men's, and children's outerwear, tops, bottoms, dresses	$574–$745 (adult size)

Note: The price range for outerwear is presented to give the reader an idea of the price point for a comparable item across all businesses. While businesses offered a range of products, outerwear was the most common. The range was approximate based on products available as of May 2023.