

Materials of Fashion

From
Analogue
Principles
to
Hybrid
Practices

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RE-SHIRT: Brand New Temporary Prints

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Short Bio of the Author: *After graduating from the University of the Arts Bremen and working as a designer at a fashion company for a number of years, Anna Hadzelek has returned to her favorite object: printed t-shirts and has launched RE-SHIRT, teaming up with Emmy Schumacher. This project is supported by the Bundesstiftung Umwelt.*

We developed the first temporary textile printing ink – and are asking both ourselves and others, why it didn't exist before. A question leading to a few observations about our time.

Many people are familiar with this: one T-shirt, or five, sitting untouched in a closet. One got it as a gift at some event, unworn, or as good as. Totally okay, simply a normal T-shirt. And yet it never comes into question to wear it outside for even a step. Because something is printed on it.

Whether the message is announcing a bachelorette party, a trade fair for the waste management industry, or a charity running event: there is no way we would ever wear it.

And so there remains hope that at some point the kitchen will have to be painted again and that it will be allowed to undergo its well-deserved use and retirement, this one shirt. Or five.

Maybe this will happen, maybe something else comes about and it will go its way in due course towards a bin for old clothes during spring cleaning or the next move. Fair enough: someone will surely need it. Really?

In circular economy, the terms *pre-consumer* and *post-consumer* waste are firmly established. But neither of these expressions can be applied with the printed shirt. It is situated between pre and post and therefore becomes interesting: The *@consumer-waste*. The status of items whose fate is sealed, but which are still dormant. Objects that are no longer within the responsibility of the producers and not yet part of the disposers'. The things that sit here and there in some closet and do not seem to serve any purpose. Not being worn and inducing a guilty conscience: *"I better should have refused it!"*.

Let us stay briefly with responsibility: whose is it? The question gains relevance when we know that approximately 10% of old clothes in Germany are printed textiles. And that these find hardly any interested in the established systems of recycling, or at least promise little profit. Even for fiber recycling, the shredding of textiles into their smallest components, prints are a problem. So those bachelorette parties, conferences and sports festivals leave tons and tons of devalued material in their wake. But because it is rare for the whole batch to be disposed of at once, and instead the shirts go their separate ways, this waste is not noticeable at first. So for now, let us leave the question of responsibility open, and see what issues this material dilemma raises.

Why can't textiles simply be printed for a short period of time and then be used for other purposes?

This is exactly the question that we, the founders of RE-SHIRT, asked ourselves and that may now stir other people as they read these reflections. This question links design with technology, as well as with possibilities to handle material or even to preserve and appreciate it.

Because it is not just about the abundance of textile waste and the annoying question of how to deal with these piles of materials. It is also about the resources that these piles consume. The German Federal Environment Agency has calculated that each individual cotton shirt takes 3,000 liters of water to produce. Most of this water is used in fiber cultivation and textile production, i.e. in regions of the world where water is scarce. In the case of a conference or a running event, this cost is usually multiplied by hundreds, since many people are involved. This is a decisive lever, both for the degree of waste and for the reduction potential.

So back to responsibility: at this point designers come into play at the very latest, as all of these T-shirts pass through their hands. There is a design concept, that is as beautiful as it is outdated, that still maintains that good design is timeless. Certainly, this claim remains valid in some areas: architecture, typography, perhaps even textiles here and there. At the same time, however, it is becoming increasingly important for designers to stay honest about how material flow and design relate to each other.

In short, the question arises as to whether good design, which undoubtedly takes effort, is even worthwhile within our current systems of handling materials. After all, we do not just jokingly call ourselves a throwaway society, we are one.

And so it is a matter of recognising the essential characteristics of our time. We have settled into fleetingness, it is one of the defining characteristics of our time. You may think that this is a good thing, or you may not. How do we outfit gatherings? Always specifically, from one cast. That looks great, has its justification, contributes at best to a team spirit and at least makes for good photos.

But the design attitude: that those large and small items designed for a specific purpose are (or should be) timeless, has no validity here. And so it takes the exciting interaction between technology and thinking, or more precisely: between analogue practices and their application, to solve the dilemma.

First temporary textile printing technology

So what we have developed is a material that solves the dilemma by dissolving it in one cycle in a washing machine: We offer temporary prints for all groups that want to spread a common message or information, that want to be united by sporting one and the same print for a specific occasion. We offer our printing technology on all textiles made of cotton and synthetic fibers, in any size or fit that might be needed. Of course, our process can also be combined with permanent printing: Think of a simple and subtle branding of the company that remains temporarily printed along with the slogan of the company anniversary. People will keep their garment, wash it along with their jeans, and enjoy a blank piece that they will actually wear.

Printed shirts are also available for rent from us – an offer aimed primarily at smaller groups and gatherings looking to reduce both economic and environmental costs. These shirts are returned unwashed, and we ensure that they will see many more events and occasions.

It's unclear why there has been no textile printing technology that allows temporary printing on clothing. Of course, there is an obvious explanation: It simply was not needed. But perhaps now is precisely the time to resolve the tension between growing environmental awareness and the existing, fast-paced nature of what we do with new craft practices of this kind. The anthem of the early 2000s *Just do it* today becomes *Just wash it*. The print is gone, the shirt stays.

We can see that the signs of the times are pointing in precisely this direction from the wonderful responses we receive, ranging from funding by the German Federal Foundation for the Environment, to the award *Kultur- und Kreativpilot*innen* by the German Federal Ministry of Economics, to countless illuminating moments in conversation with people who sometimes wish a print had gone away again.

□ IMAGE-1



T-Shirt sorting plant

IMAGE-2



T-Shirts packed up for recycling
© Anna Hadzelek

IMAGE-3



IMAGE-4



RE-SHIRT
temporary
print © Anna
Hadzelek

Image Credits



IMAGE-1

T-Shirt sorting plant © Anna Hadzelek

IMAGE-2

T-Shirts packed up for recycling © Anna Hadzelek

IMAGE-3 - -4

RE-SHIRT temporary print © Anna Hadzelek