



# *Designing Engagements with Mending Practices*

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MENDING

CO-EXPLORATION

MATERIAL SAMPLING

RESEARCH PROTOTYPES

DESIGN ENGAGEMENT

## **Introduction: Traditional mending practices with new meanings**

After numerous attempts to bring to the foreground the environmental and social unsustainability within the fashion system (Fletcher, 2010; Fletcher & Grose, 2012), in 2022, it is still chiefly dominated by fast cycles of production and consumption (Fletcher & Tham, 2019). Consequently, an increasing number of people are appealing to activate alternative bottom-up fashion activities (Hirsher et al., 2019; Gurova, 2015), such as the worldwide craftivism movement – community-oriented initiatives acting in the intersection of craft and activism (Corbet, 2017), do-it-yourself (DIY), crafting the commons research network (Commoners Craft Space, 2019), growing number of repair-café (Repair cafés, 2021), and campaigns to repair (Fashion Revolution, 2021). These initiatives are witnessing the shift from passive consumption to alternative fashion practices, such as home-made clothes production, circulation, upcycling, and repair (Durrani, 2019; Twigger Holroyd, 2018; Gurova, 2015).

Within the myriad of sustainable proposals and approaches, particular attention is dedicated to the sustainment and diffusion of mending practices, which until recent years were collocated in the periphery of sustainability discourse (Clark, 2008). For a long time, research on garment mending has suffered from being defined as a ‘humble’ practice from the past (König, 2013), inducing Clark to claim that ‘mending has died out’ (2008: p. 435).

However, since 2008, initiatives have assisted in the gradual resurgence of mending practices, alimeted by an array of community-based projects, initiated by craftivists and based on short participatory workshops (Meissner, 2019; Collective Mending Sessions, 2018; Tom of Holland, 2017). These projects aimed at enabling the exchange of intangible forms of values, such as knowledge and skills. However, it can be argued (Durrani, 2019) that the sporadic nature of such events often does not allow the development of the competencies necessary for the sustainment of the practice. Nevertheless, such activities have shed light on the previously neglected practices from the past within specific social contexts. Moreover, they have been put on display by Vogue (2020), New York Times (2020), The Guardian (2021), and Fashion Revolution (2021), reaching large audiences, and increasing the number of people, interested in engaging with mending.

Simultaneously, it has been recognized within academia that repair can play an important role within the context of environmental sustainability (Durrani, 2019; Laitala et al., 2018) and mending has been explored as a post-growth activity from the perspectives of different disciplines (Graziano & Trogal, 2019).

Despite the growing interest in repair in an academic environment, design research on mending is rather limited, and only a few attempts address the subject of repair, re-design, and DIY in relation to its aesthetic qualities and joyful engagement with clothing. For instance, Otto von Bush provides recycling cookbooks – a series of short recycling manuals (Otto von Bush, 2004). At the same time, Alison Gwilt encourages designers to take into account the phase of clothes’ use and invites design practitioners to develop modular garments, which

can facilitate the repair and altering of the garments (Gwilt, 2014). Another approach is indicated by Anja Hirsher and Alastair Fuad Luke, who suggest adopting co-design within the phase of the creation of clothes (Hirsher & Fuad Luke, 2013), and accordingly, create an emotional attachment to garments, which potentially could increase the lifespan of fashion products and the possibility to being repaired. These few approaches illustrate the attempts of design researchers to take the central role by providing or indicating proposals focused on garment construction, which potentially could lead to repair. Together these studies reveal a fertile terrain for design research exploration where the focus is on how design can facilitate the engagements with mending.

From the designers' perspective, whose key to acting is understanding the situation in context, we are intrigued by contemporary mending practices, carrying new meanings. Today, repairing clothes is often motivated by environmental preoccupations and the desire to reduce consumption (Durrani, 2019; König, 2013), and mending practices are not associated with material deprivation and a thrifty attitude to living. Moreover, we see people's interest in craft and its potential to become a medium of personal expression. Therefore, we propose to utilize design engagements in combination with traditions in mending practices, which to our knowledge, have rarely been linked.

Within this contribution, we will present our exploration of designing engagements with mending practices by raising the question of how design can contribute to a new interpretation of mending as an activity in fashion that may cultivate other interests than the dominant market-driven fashion. Being a part of the green transition and in search of participating in it, it is our aim that such approaches can re-orient the present state of mending and encourage alternative mending futures. The question that has been driving us in our research exploration is: How might we use design to re-introduce mending as a practice of care and finding joy in already existing clothing?

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## When mending and design competencies meet

Traditionally, the development of mending competencies has always required a set of skills, comprising the knowledge about materials (e.g., fibres and structure) (Korneeva, 1989; Fabricon Company, 1951), mending techniques (e.g., stitching, patching, and needle weaving) (Goldsworthy, 1979), and tools (e.g., needles, darners, mending mushrooms, etc.) (Whiting, 1971). This set of skills has been acquired through school education and family learning. Therefore, within the context of traditional repair, mending has mainly had a utilitarian purpose, aiming at restoring the garments without significantly altering the original design. Examples of a thrifty attitude to garments people owned in the past can be found in different museums around the world. For instance, the ethnographic Inuit collection at the National Museum of Denmark displays a range of mended leather garments, which, more likely, have been repaired with practical rather than symbolic values in mind. Looking at these garments makes us think that they have inevitably conveyed the creativity and special touch of the menders, who, through such a mundane act of care, contributed to extending the lifespan of their clothes. These examples illustrate not the only way of personal expression but also the ways of preserving scarce and precious resources - something that a lot of us are trying to reconsider and rediscover today.

The revival of mending practices is not directly associated with material deprivation and often carries the meaning of self-expression. 157.000 posts with the hashtag #mending and 127.000 posts with #visiblemending on Instagram indicate an interest in developing the competencies, going beyond learning the traditional mending techniques, which have been illustrated in a dozen of recently published books on clothes' repair (the list of the references is included in the Mending Concepts Booklet, which will be described in the following sections). These observations suggest that mending can be much more than merely restoring a piece of damaged fabric. It has the potential to become an expressive medium of communication and be reshaped into joyful and convivial practice. Similarly, to what is happening with knitting, which in recent years has been largely explored and influenced by designers (see for example Bagger, <https://www.laerkebagger.com>),

also mending could be potentially elevated to the status of a creative hobby, and enable people to express themselves at different levels.

On these premises, we have started exploration on how design approaches can communicate, guide, support, and stimulate different levels of engagement (Ravnløkke & Kucher, 2021a). From the disciplinary standpoint, designers in fashion have a well-developed set of skills in working with textiles and the aesthetic of colours, textures, shapes, proportions, etc. (Ravnløkke, 2019; Twigger Holroyd, 2013). We use this knowledge in combination with transdisciplinary design approaches. As designers and design researchers, we bridge different ways of knowing by using research prototypes, introduced within different stages of the research exploration (Koskinen & Frens, 2017)

This contribution is our stepping stone of reflecting and analysing our findings, by which we propose to open a discussion of the potential of designing engagements with mending.

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## Methods and materials: Co-exploration of mending through prototypes

To explore the outlined scope, we put together a research program of design experimentation drawing on principles of dialectic design experiments forming and working back on the program (Brandt, Redström, Eriksen, & Binder, 2011; Redström, 2017). Similarly to what occurs within the disciplinary design processes in fashion, where the exploration of a potential garment materializes through material experiments of function and aesthetic expressions, such as shapes, lines, and colours (Albers, 2000), we supported our research scope by engaging with the iterative processes of letting insights of Iryna Kucher's ongoing PhD on mending practices, and Louise Ravnløkke's PhD dissertation on how designers can engage users in a design process through prototypes as a tangible dialogue tool (Ravnløkke, 2019), being part of structuring the research.

Our research program centres around two participatory mending workshops, which have been designed to open a dialogue on how design might support mending practices. We see these workshops as co-explorations within our research. The setting of both workshops



was based on participatory textile-making – an emerging methodology (Shercliff & Twigger Holroyd, 2020a), which combines the familiarity and flexibility of textile practices, used as a means of enquiry in a variety of research contexts, and privileging the social encounter as a space of mutual learning, sharing experiences, and strengthening the shared interests. Therefore, the workshops were established from participatory textile-making principles of informed participation, inclusivity and appropriate planning and resourcing (Shercliff & Twigger Holroyd, 2020b).

The workshops have occurred in two different settings and have been scoped for different durations. However, they have had a common denominator of bringing along one garment to mend, which had damages of holes, tears, or stains. These garments were the basis for the making activities and co-exploration of mending practices with other participants. At the same time, all the necessary equipment was provided by us as facilitators.

## 2.1 Workshop no 1 - Nordic Design Research Conference

The first workshop took place on the 17th of August 2021, on the occasion of the Nordic Design Research Conference (NORDES) in an online format (Ravnløkke & Kucher, 2021a). It aimed at co-exploring our approaches with other design researchers, as well as testing our set-up. The workshop was scoped for three hours and was planned for a maximum number of ten participants and was fully booked, attracting the young academic audience of three postgraduate students, six PhD fellows, and one Postdoctoral researcher. All of them were women operating in the fields of design research or practice.

The event has followed a predefined structure, divided into three main sessions: introduction, mending activity, and common reflection. The damaged garments brought along by participants were utilized within the aperture of the workshop and constituted the basics of the warming-up activity, where the participants introduced themselves and talked about their garments. This activity was followed

by the introduction to our research and prototypes, which we will explain in the following section. The research prototypes facilitated the fruitful discussions which emerged during the workshop, and the overall session was audio and video recorded. At the end of the workshop, all the participants filled out a survey, asking for their skill level and questions regarding their expectations and challenges related to mending practices. Moreover, they have photo-documented the outcomes of their mending projects, developed them during the workshop and provided us with photo materials after the end of the event. The most salient moments of video and audio recordings have been transcribed and thematically analysed, allowing the emergence of recurring themes, which constituted the basis of the narratives described in our analysis.



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Fig. 1. Screenshot from the workshop held online.

## 2.2

## Workshop no 2 – Climate Summit

The second workshop took place on the 3rd of September 2021, at the Climate Summit, an annual public three-day event in Middelfart in Denmark to inspire sustainable actions – for organizations, politicians, businesses, and citizens (Klimafolkemødet [Climate Summit], 2022). Our workshop was planned for eight hours, two of which were dedicated to the structured workshop and the other six to the ongoing drop-in discussion with the summit visitors.

The structured part was aimed at attracting the audience non-familiar with design practice. However, it has attracted three postgraduate students from Design School Kolding, approaching mending within their studies, one volunteer of a repair café, and one person working in a Fab Lab. Also, in this case, all of the six participants were women. Most of them were familiar with mending, and some also with design practice. The overall structure of this part of the workshop was similar to the one of the NORDES Conference. However, it has had a more informal nature. The workshop was divided into an introduction and making activity, which was extended over the two planned hours. The emerging conversations have been documented in the form of notes, and have implemented the narratives, that emerged during the NORDES Conference workshop, which will be described in our analysis.

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Fig. 2. Photo from the structured workshop







The set-up of both workshops aimed at exploring how materials and aesthetic expressions, such as tactility and colours, can be used as tangible means to inspire and involve (Ravnløkke, 2019). Furthermore, we were curious about how the participants would interpret and engage with materials and aesthetics. For this reason, we have provided all the necessary equipment for mending activities, and in the case Climate Summit in Middelfart, it has also resulted in the physical set-up of the tent, hosting our workshop. It was arranged to create a warm, convivial atmosphere, displaying the selection of threads, yarns, fabric scraps, mending tools, and printed materials illuminated by the rays of the early September sun. Within the framework of the workshop, the mended garments by us, which we brought along, resulted in being important catalysts, initiating the discussion with the people approaching the tent. While the focal point of the space was the garment cloth, a design artefact which was developed specifically for that day. The garment cloth was constructed by utilizing discarded garments, which we have collected at the Design School Kolding and among our acquaintances. All the components of the artefact were in different nuances of white, indicating the shift from the mending austerity of the past to a brighter future of the practice. The pieces were sewn together, leaving the empty spaces, aiming at inviting people to collaboratively work on filling out the gaps and simultaneously exchanging their knowledge skills and opening up conversations on the meaning of mending. The garment cloth has had an organic shape, developed longitudinally.



One of its sides was displaced in the centre of the tent, while its parallel side was extended towards the entrance to be visible from outside and to invite people into the conviviality of stitching together.

Fig. 3. Photos of the garment cloth after the structured workshop.

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## Designing engagements with mending

To enact our research prototypes and include the workshop participants in our exploration, we utilized a series of design research prototypes as a part of our research program: mending spectrum and Making a Diagnosis, full-garment (mending) exemplars, a Mending Concepts Booklet, mending probes, and garment cloth. These prototypes were developed to be open-ended objects of design ethnographic enquiry, things to think and act with (Halse & Boffi, 2016). The primary intent of these prototypes, defined as tangible dialogue tools (Ravnløkke, 2019; Ravnløkke & Bang, 2016; Bang 2013), was to initiate the conversations, in the present, on how to re-orient the near future of mending practices. The visual, tactile, and embodied dimensions of research prototypes were intended to engage the participants with the materiality of mending and elicit verbal responses, which probably would not emerge otherwise (Woodward, 2019). Therefore, the materials provided at the workshops have been considered by us as vehicles for challenging perspectives, gathering voices, encouraging new behaviours, and therefore essential for carrying out our research.

Diving into this part of our research exploration, we will now introduce the prototypes and describe the essential parts of developing them. Creating the prototypes has engaged us in exploring how design may support and inspire mending practices. The making and development of them have made us reflect to further analyse how design can re-introduce mending as enjoyment with one's garments.

One of its sides was displaced in the centre of the tent, while its parallel side was extended towards the entrance to be visible from outside and to invite people into the conviviality of stitching together.

## 3.1 No 1 - The Mending Spectrum

To support the initiation of a mending project, we have developed the mending spectrum, which is drawn upon the reknit spectrum developed by Amy Twigger Holroyd (2013), who has showcased a range of possibilities to rework open-knitted garments, including a range of treatments, flexible in terms of aesthetics and finishings. With a similar approach and aim applied to mending, the developed mending spectrum provides an overview of traditional mending techniques, as well as an encouragement to explore and advance one's mending practice. Moreover, it aims at facilitating the phase of analysis of the damaged garment and illustrates the possibilities of different levels of engagement with the practice: from damage control to decorative or reconstructive mending.

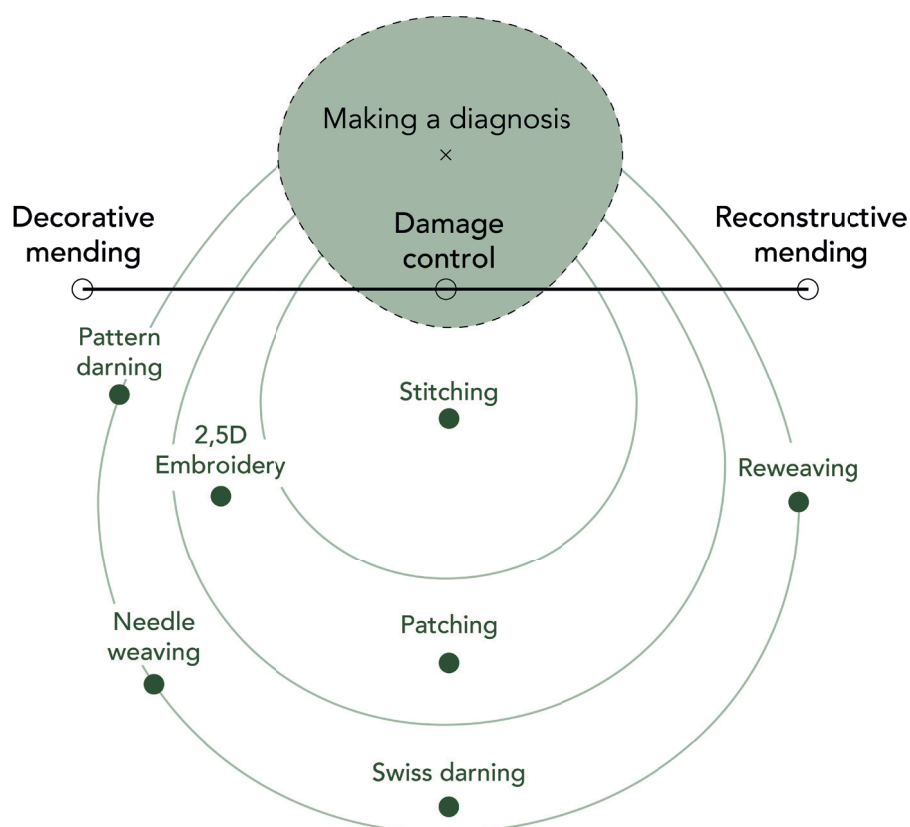


Fig. 4. The mending spectrum.

These levels of engagement have emerged from the wardrobe interviews carried out within the framework of Iryna's PhD. They have illustrated that people who are already engaged in mending practice are able to understand which garments have to be restored and what mends can result in decoration. It depends on numerous factors, such as the position, the degree, the number of damaged areas or the colour of the garment. These glimpses into mundane mending practices, and the tacit knowledge of participants of an ongoing PhD, have underlined the importance of the assessment of the damaged garment to facilitate one's understanding of what mending intervention is needed (Kucher, 2022).

To support the assessment and planning of a mending project, we developed the concept of Making a Diagnosis as a part of the mending spectrum with the intent to guide the mender in the assessment of a damaged garment and also raise awareness towards what the situation inspires for. Furthermore, the intention is to direct the menders' attention to personal aims of aesthetic expression of the mending project and result. We aimed to provide an open framework that allowed personal interpretations of mending approaches, concepts, and techniques. To assist the mender in making choices according to personal ambition and ideas, our guideline of Making a Diagnosis is formed by five to six questions and points of information in each of three steps: 1. Understanding the damage, 2. Understanding your way of aesthetic expression, and 3. Initiating your mending project, which is supposed to guide the mender and facilitate the decision-making (see more via reference link to online publication).

## 3.2

### No 2 - Mending probes

The mending probes have been utilized to facilitate in relation to one of the workshops, which ended up being held online. Our initial intention was to provide different materials and tools, to elicit participants' curiosity around alternative ways of engagement with mending within the workshop setting. Not having the possibility to meet with participants on-site, and set up physical space, we have decided to equip participants with the mending probes sent via post. The pack-



ages contained three different 3D printed mending tools with interchangeable components, the selection of threads, yarns, and fabric scraps, the selection of the needles, corresponding to the weight of fabrics, and a card with the QR code, linking to the digital version of our mending booklet, which will be described in the following section.

The mending tools have been redesigned after the analysis of the old-time mending tools, documented in various publications (Whiting, 1971), found in online flea markets, and on social media. The analysis has been carried out within the framework of Iryna's ongoing PhD and has resulted in the categorization of the tools according to their function. The re-interpreted mending tools: speed weaver, mending mushroom and embroidery hoop did not differ in their function. However, their aesthetic has significantly changed in form, the combination of materials with different tactile surfaces, and the bright orange or yellow colours, aiming at the creation of the association with the hand tools such as hammers or screwdrivers, usually produced in the colour combination of orange and grey or yellow and grey. These colour combinations have the function of being immediately recognizable within the chaos of the working process. In relation to mending, which historically has inhabited the interstices of mundane domestic life, so grubby to be rendered invisible (König, 2013), the new aesthetics of the mending tools aim at averting the connotations of mending as feminine and austere activity by providing the tools coloured by visible and flashy colours.



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Fig. 5. The re-interpreted mending tools: speed weaver, mending mushroom and embroidery hoop.



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Fig. 6. Material examples of aesthetic parameters. This selection of materials containing fabric scraps and reels of threads/yarns was used to post to participants in Workshop no 1.

At the workshops, the participants were provided with materials for engaging with their mending projects. To co-explore engagements of material expressions, we developed a set of aesthetic parameters. These included a selection of treads, yarns and fabrics with different aesthetic expressions, such as smooth, rough, shiny, matte, textured, solid, and flexible qualities. The selection of colours comprises three lighter and darker neutral tones and two brighter accent colours. Developing the set of aesthetic parameters, we were drawing on design practice and competencies of developing colour harmonies within a colour palette (Ravnløkke, 2019; Mikkelsen, 2019). We aimed to provide materials that would provoke the participants to explore alternative ideas to a smaller or greater extent. The colours are kept in a matching palette that can be combined or used together with other materials according to the garment and personal preferences of the mending project.

### 3.3

## No 3 - Mending Concepts Booklet

The overall process of developing the design research prototypes was an explorative study for us to further reflect on how we can transfer the complexity of navigating multiple mending possibilities without overwhelming the mender on her/his first encounter with the artefact. While simultaneously creating a space for our further design exploration. Discussing this matter, we realized that our prototypes were highly supported by us, facilitating their use. Here the idea of developing a booklet came up as an iteration of understanding our roles as design researchers engaging with mending through design. Therefore, we decided to develop the Mending Concepts Booklet in our co-explorative workshops as a reference work giving additional information, descriptions, and visual examples of our prototypes. Furthermore, it included images of various exemplars of the mentioned mending concepts and techniques, and how they can be applied differently depending on the damage type, size, number of damages, garment material, fabric construction etc.

Hereby, the participants at the workshop could dive into topics of interest and increase knowledge simultaneously – also without depending on us for an explanation, as we could potentially see the booklet facilitate and inspire for improving personal skills and practice. The idea of the booklet is furthermore to provide the mender with terms of the different techniques and showcase how different techniques can be combined through images of the full-garment (mending) exemplars.

Fig. 7. The Mending Concepts Booklet (Ravnløkke & Kucher, 2021b).



Developing the research prototypes became an explorative process for us to further reflect on supporting mending practices through design. Creating the Mending Spectrum and Making a Diagnosis, we had an ongoing dialogue about what and how much information they should provide. Here we were mainly concerned with not overwhelming the beginner, wanting to start mending practice and inspiring the more skilled mender to advance. At the same time, we were considering how to engage people to the extent that it does not take over the control of the process. Amongst other things, we considered how much material knowledge it should contain.

Designers, working with materials, have well-developed skills in analysing the properties of a textile (structure, density, thickness, elasticity, drape, etc.). By touching textiles, designers can analyse the garments' material properties and apply this knowledge to the mending process. This type of knowledge requires experience and skills. To describe what to do, how to handle, and what to replace with various textiles and garments would take a whole encyclopaedia (see, for example, *Textilepedia* edited by Kwan for Fashionary, 2021), including practice. So, instead, we aimed at supporting an individual process of initiating a mending project to leave out space for personal interpretations.

Diving into our insights and findings from our exploration, we will in the next section discuss the emerging narratives that arise from the two participatory textile making workshops together with our design research experimentation of preparing for them.



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## Emerging narratives from utilizing design engagements in combination with mending

Looking at the mending projects made by the participants in the two workshops, which illustrate an array of variations, indicates that we succeeded in engaging the participants at levels of personal expression and different skill sets. All participants attending the workshops were familiar with mending, some being advanced menders and others beginners with aspirations for learning. What is common for the workshops, both from participants' verbal expressions at The Climate Summit and the survey from the workshop at the NORDES conference, is that participants expressed how they were challenged and inspired in different ways of engaging with their mending projects through our prototypes. One participant expressed her inspiration and engagement in relation to both the examples shown in the booklet and the mending toolkit: *"I mostly felt inspired, by seeing the examples in the booklet up close and in detail. Having the physical toolkit also opened up to explore some techniques that I haven't tried before."* (quote from participant survey, Workshop #1). As expressed by this participant, we could observe how the participants challenged themselves in mending techniques and expressions by using the mending tools. Some participants showed interest in trying the mending tools as the primary of their experimentation, and then the expression of the result came in second. Others were driven by pursuing an expression of the mending project. The mending tools and the mending spectrum implied to connect to the individual level of skills and prior experiences with mending. Thus, our different prototypes provided a foundation where both beginners and more advanced menders could find inspiration to challenge their ideas.

The prototypes assisted in supporting mending projects' making and helped establish a common reference point for the topic. As a part of sharing the experiences of mending with the participants, we formed a language – orally and bodily, which showed how the prototypes inspired to seek new ways: *"It [the workshop] prompted me to think about the possibilities of mending which I hadn't really considered before – and I also tried a new technique!"* (Quote from participant survey, Workshop #1).

The workshop setting of co-exploring textile-making made it possible for us to follow the participants in the making and hear their considerations along the way. Furthermore, having the tangible exemplars of participants' mending projects supported our understanding of how trying out a new technique or mending tool encouraged to experiment with the expression of one's mending project. For example, one participant described her changed the perception of the possibilities of mending by poetically explaining that she would try "*to make the mend an embellishment, instead of a scar.*" (participant's quote, workshop #1). The common narrative across the two workshops was that the participants broadened their perceptions of possibilities.

## 4.1 Mending beyond utilitarian meaning. Joyful engagements with clothing

Most often, it's the case that the mender does not have the exact fabric, tread, or colours of the damaged garment in a mending project. Reconstructing the damage 100% is therefore rather difficult, and decorative mending may seem preferred to succeed. Though, like mending techniques, approaching a mending project may require skills to achieve the desired expression (Twigger Holroyd, 2017). Therefore, we were interested in exploring how decorative approaches to mending can be more open and accessible.

All participants in both workshops went with a decorative direction – these varying in expressions of more neutral, supplementing, or directly contrasting character. Some participants found it easy to play with colours and materials; as one participant put it: "*Normally I like combinations of lurex and clashy colours /.../ I think that I will go with fun colours.*" Others were more careful in their experimentation and sought inspiration from our examples in the Mending Concepts Booklet (Ravnløkke & Kucher, 2021b) or in how the other participants worked with their mending projects:

*"I had a big stack of mending to do, which was there for probably two years, and I did it probably all in one day, kind of in a hurry. But it has never caught me that it can be fun and creative. I really like the idea of*

*the spectrum, which is pointing out, it is that you are making choices and not that there is someone who is fixing it for you.”*

As one participant is expressing here, participants said that being introduced to different possibilities, especially planning their mending project through our guideline of Making a Diagnosis (Ravnløkke & Kucher, 2021b), broadened their perception of what a mending project can be. Becoming familiar with the possibilities of the choices one can make within a mending project also changes the perception of the idea of the technically correct way of repairing. A perception that could relate to traditional understandings of handicrafts in relation to societal status (Twigger Holroyd, 2017).

This question of changing perception of what mending might be in the future is one question that has followed us throughout this research exploration. One can easily find video tutorials on how to perform mending techniques by searching online and on social media amongst menders. Thus, it can be argued that the information is available. From the beginning of the research exploration, our idea has been to complement what already exists and yet use design to communicate and support engagements with mending at different levels of skills and ambition. Diving into what designerly means we have drawn upon and what we succeeded in applying, we will explain a bit of our exploration as a part of preparing for the workshops.

In line with our process of developing research prototypes and reflecting upon our roles as designers, we made mending exemplars in the form of material samples and garments to explore our approaches. Both of us rely on experiences of mending garments from our wardrobes and have our individual practice to build on when carrying out this research. Furthermore, Iryna Kucher has, as a part of her PhD research, developed a series of material exemplars showing different mending techniques on fabric samples. They were also used as a source of knowledge to develop further our interpretations and insights into how traditional mending techniques and design meet.

To unfold and explore mending from a (professional) textile design perspective, Louise Ravnløkke made a series of full-garment

exemplars diving into the practice of mending projects. It has provided practical insights into creating expression through mending techniques, what challenges it comes with, and what kind of decision-making it requires throughout the process of a mending project. A mending project comes with one predefined term: The garment has already been designed. Therefore, mending practice as a joyful activity with garments differs from, for example, knitting a jumper by hand. Looking towards knitting in comparison, the market offers a range of products and services which assist people in engaging with knitting at various levels of skills and ambition. One can buy knitting kits pre-packed with recipes and yarns in selected materials and colours. Other knitters are at a level of using recipes as a frame for selecting yarns and colours themselves. Finally, the more advanced knitter changes existing recipes develops personal designs, or knits freestyle. Every level of knitting allows knitters to experiment with expressions of fashion in a more or less personally expressive way. These approaches of engagement are not easily transferred to mending, as making and designing mending projects requires something else compared to creating something from scratch.

Fig. 8. Example of full-garment exemplar using needle weaving to mend holes in a jumper (8.1) and a close-up image of the technique (8.2).





Working on a full-garment mending project requires the mender to consider the existing garment design while also planning for a new design expression which is complex. Small-scale examples of such techniques do not cover this complexity.

Two of the more experienced menders participating in the workshops described their awareness of issues relating to this: “*Sometimes, the damage is placed in areas where one does not want to attract attention*” (participant quote, workshop #2) and “*The place of the hole, seems like a decorative spot somehow.*” (participant quote, workshop #1). Doing a mending project, therefore, requires the mender to create an overview of technical and aesthetic options for intervening with a damaged garment. Our interpretation to support making such an overview was introduced as Making a Diagnosis (Ravnløkke & Kucher, 2021b). The guidelines and questions of Making a Diagnosis guideline supported the participants in planning their mending projects. Through this guideline, they developed their ideas and adjusted them to outcome expectations. In this way, they broke down the complexity of the mending project by making up their minds about ideas and possibilities. Drawing on the concept of handknitting, the Making a Diagnosis guideline can be seen as a guide to roughly making one’s own recipe.

Other elements start to influence when beginning to broaden the idea of mending as solely a matter of repair and consider the creativity of making and personal expression. Elements such as proportions, colours, and composition also affect the mending project which can be experienced as trying to work with these disciplines of creating harmonies and fashioning. Planning our workshops, we supported this by providing visual examples in the Mending Concepts Booklet. Here the different techniques have been explored through decorative approaches where, for example, the use of coloured treads and material expressions have resulted in new interpretations of the existing design. When exploring personal expression in the second iteration of an existing garment design, we find it highly relevant to inspire explorations of the mending techniques – being experimented with individually and in combination with others. Therefore, the participants in the workshops used the Mending Concepts Booklet actively. Not copying or using

the examples as recipes but as a springboard for experimentation. In relation to the participants' experimentation, it was not the provided prototypes, materials, and mending tools alone which encouraged; other elements at the workshops also stood out. The setting of the workshops was relaxed, and the atmosphere created an explorative environment where the participants allowed themselves to explore and experiment with, to them individually, new ways of mending. At this point, we will argue that creating space and atmosphere for explorative engagements with mending practices is as important as learning to master the various techniques. In the workshops, the playful environment and the participants' sharing of thoughts and ideas showed to be of great value to the individual mending projects and a further reference point for future mending practices. Several participants left both workshops by telling ideas they would like to try out as a future mending project. We don't know if, how, or when these visions will be a fact of life. However, the plans and ideas' expressions indicate that our two workshops' design engagements inspired and communicated new interpretations of personal mending practices.

## 4.2

### Envisioning mending as a part of design practice within a green transition

While starting our open research exploration, we were curious how design can support mending as a post-grow activity, how designers' competencies can encourage the transformation of mending practices into joyful ones, and what happens when we start to work with aesthetics as a part of mending processes. Our initial purpose justifies the choice to disseminate our explorations within the context of NORDES, where we hoped to open up conversations on mending possibilities with design researchers and practitioners. Within the framework of the NORDES workshop, eight of ten participants of our workshop regularly were working with sustainability in fashion and were interested in joining this conversation – not only to learn something new but also to discuss and think together about designers' perspectives on mending. As one of the workshop participants noticed, there is a potential to support creative activities in fashion:

*“There are so many engineer solutions to recycling materials and all*

*these efforts of recycling polyester or trying to recycle garments into fibres, into garments again or into new fabric. And I think that it is so tricky somehow while working with redesign or mending, it is a more creative solution, which is completely different. I think that (we are) going from the technical shift into the creative shift of mind” (participant’s quote workshop #1).*

This “shift of mind” which is described above, is of particular interest to the younger generations of designers. This topic was brought up at the end of the NORDES workshop amongst other design researchers in the field of fashion. It was evident within the framework of both our workshops that have attracted mostly young researchers and design students. Even during the workshop at the Climate Summit in Middelfart in Denmark, which was open to a broader audience and where everyone could take part, half of the participants were postgraduate students from Design School Kolding.

The design postgraduate students who showed up at our Climate Summit workshop have previously worked on several study projects, trying to incorporate mending into their practice. We see a tendency of interest among other students at Design School Kolding at both Master’s and Bachelor’s levels. Even if it is not a topic they are introduced to, students engage with mending in study projects by themselves. This tendency can be seen as a movement or a collective search for ways to contribute to the green transition. However, this tendency is not a prerogative of the study courses and study outcomes of Design School Kolding. There are several examples of how the study outcomes in different design institutions around the world have been transformed into artistic design practices. Today designers successfully integrate their design skills and competencies with mending by performing (Mingwei, <http://www.leemingwei.com>), mending on demand (Darn+Design London, [https://www.instagram.com/darn\\_design/](https://www.instagram.com/darn_design/)), organizing mending workshops (Studio Mend, [www.studiomend.net](http://www.studiomend.net)), exhibiting their work in museums and writing about their practice (Fulop, [www.lilyfulop.com](http://www.lilyfulop.com)). Probably because designers “miss seeing mending in mainstream fashion/media. Especially mending that is perhaps not perfectly done. I would love to see imperfections in clothes to become more accepted” (quote from

participant survey). Or perhaps, because utilizing design skills in different ways requires a deep analysis of ourselves and our practices, and “(it) makes very clear the tacit knowledge that we have because then we try to think how did we learn or what took us up or...” (participant’s quote workshop #1).

The glimpses of these conversations suggest that within the green transition, which this book is about, designers are taking an active role and trying to bridge different ways of knowing by designerly ways of describing and comparing and by using powerful means of design artefacts. Therefore, by interacting with people within design processes, we are constantly learning not only about other ways of knowing but also about our skills and competencies, which can be used for the common good.

In doing so within this research exploration, we will summarize our findings by concluding our experiences as designers and design researchers. Throughout this research exploration, we have acted out and been within the green transition which in general challenges our ways of doing and automatically makes us seek other directions of contributing through design knowledge, skills, and competencies – in this case within future mending practices.

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## Concluding by opening up

### 5

The overall aim of this research exploration was to unfold the potential of mending practices in combination with design by involving multiple participants in this co-exploration. When starting this research exploration, we could not know how much experience in mending these participants would have. However, we assumed that it would attract participants interested in mending and hoped to meet different levels of experience and skills. Even if the workshop at The Climate Summit did not attract as many participants with non-design backgrounds as anticipated, we still had the experience of enacting our set-up and testing it with others. Besides the fruitful discussions about the co-explorative approach enacting it ourselves made us aware of what design skills and competencies we brought into play. Our insights and findings can be boiled down to storytelling through



the research prototypes and the creation of mending experience constituted by multiple layers – from inscribing the meanings into materials aiming at illustrating different mending directions to creating a setting and convivial atmosphere within virtual and non-virtual places. Inspiring the participants through aesthetic means (physical and visual dimensions) assisted in experimentation and broadened their understanding of what mending can be.

As a result, even the more advanced menders expressed how they have changed their views or gotten new ideas for their coming mending projects.

The participants in our two workshops were all familiar with mending and showed intentions of evolving their practice. Therefore, one could see these participants as frontrunners of a movement and ask: But what about the rest of us not mending? Our exploration indicates that mending has not much to do with skill level and expertise in mending techniques, it is much more about changing perception from chores and handicrafts to an explorative activity of personal expressions with garments. It may take courage to try because one's critical eye on the result might take over the intention of action. Nevertheless, our way of designing engagements with mending demonstrates how traditional mending techniques are cross-fertilized by design experimentations and become a convivial and joyful activity that can reflect menders at various levels of engagement.

It seems that it is time for us to conclude this part of our mending journey. However, we do not wish to conclude but to open up. Open up for new discussions, new mending design engagements, and new mending journeys within green transition. As our final remarks, answering the question which was guiding us through the whole process: Can we design engagements with mending? We can say that we can. With this research exploration, we have illustrated how design may contribute to mending practices. Yet as we consider our contribution a drop in the ocean, we would like to start seeing other drops. So, dear reader, open up your wardrobe, find a garment to mend, embrace imperfection and start your exciting multifaceted mending journey.

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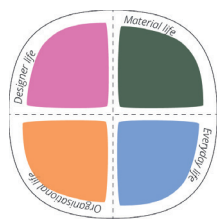
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## *Designing engagements with mending practices*

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