So thank you very much for having me today. As Helen said, I'm a Research Assistant at TED, the Textile Environment Design Project at Chelsea College of Art & Design where I work with Becky Earley and Kay Politowicz. My role is looking at sustainable textile design and what that means for textile designers, exploring strategies for how textile designers can design in a more environmentally and I guess more socially-enriched way. This role has been an amazing experience for me because designing and research is still quite new to me. I was going to explain to you a little bit about my history.

So I'm going to start by explaining about my personal evolution as a designer and I think it's quite interesting that what's been happening to me throughout my career, is I guess mirroring what's been happening culturally around slow and slow design. Then I will, like all of us here, attempt a definition of what I mean by slow design and explain how it relates to my practice as a textile designer, and how I'm trying to negotiate a way through making a career out of exploring these ideas. Then finally I'll explain about some of my work and I'm going to be framing it in terminology using an archaeologist's analogy: a designer's archaeological study of textiles, objects and emotions.

Personal Evolution and Slow Design Evolution

So in terms of my history, I'm originally from Australia and I did my first BA in broadcast journalism in Australia when I first left school, which was in 1993/95. We were trained to become news journalists, so it was about going out there in a small town, a bit like Stroud, and finding the local newsworthy story of the day and learning how to capture the story, write the report and present it to camera or radio, then either go onto radio and do a live news broadcast or put your news TV item on the local community TV channel, all within a day.

In thinking about the first part of my tertiary education, I've realised I could frame it that that first degree was about 'fast' - it was about news, about current stories, that you didn't go into much depth with and I was so deeply uncomfortable with this. I was clearly heading down the wrong path, as you often do when you are young – looking back on it, what I really wanted to do was to tell real people's stories, in depth and with proper research and contexts, but in a more visual way.

Then I graduated and I was very, very confused. So in terms of my professional practice I didn't know what to do with what I had just learnt. But what I did do while I was being unemployed, was doing a lot of work with groups of people from disadvantaged backgrounds. So I would go out to the outskirts of Sydney and I would run workshops using cameras and using TV production equipment. I worked with a lot of young people who had drug problems. I was very interested in giving them tools to give them a voice in society. I worked with Vietnamese refugee women who'd recently arrived in Australia who
were sufferers of domestic violence, so there were lots of personal issues for them. I taught them screen printing, I taught them English, I did all sorts of things with them.

Then in 1997 I moved up to live in far North Australia, up in Weipa, in North Queensland. I was very drawn to what is a very big issue/problem in Australia, which is the plight of the Aboriginal Australians and how they're integrating into mainstream Australian society or how they aren't. I realised in putting this slide together that there's quite a lot around my interest and relationship to the Australian Aboriginal culture that I'm still exploring. I think I was very interested in this tribal culture that was trying to co-exist with a modern society and how conflicting it was and currently is. This deep feeling for me of their sense of injustice and rejection from society, and I couldn't see any solution as to how the two sides were ever going to co-exist and I think that's still ongoing.

So then I left Australia for the first time, having never been overseas, and came to Europe in 1998, a typical Australian with my backpack! Thinking again in putting this presentation together, what did I do? I did the kind of backpacking thing around Europe but what I was very interested in was WWOOF-ing. Anyone heard of WWOOF-ing? It's 'Willing Workers On Organic Farms' and I think it was quite big in the 70s and the 80s, although I don't know why it's not a mass movement now because I think it's amazing. How it works is - there's a booklet, and say in Italy, all the organic farms in Italy who want to be part of the scheme, go in the booklet (I guess now its all online). If you're travelling in one of these countries, you can organise to go and stay on the farm and it's a kind of this swap. So they give you accommodation and food and you help them on their farm. You do about four to five hours a day of work on their farm - I worked on an olive oil growing farm and also a vineyard picking grapes.

I was very interested in food and in the agricultural traditions, and very interested in the organisation that facilitated you to become part of that.

Then I moved to London and have ended up being here for the last 10-11 years. I tried various things when I first arrived, trying to get into the film industry. One day I ended up walking into a high end fashion boutique in Soho called Yasmin Cho, which turned out to be run by an Australian woman and she gave me a job. So then I spent two years working in the high-end fashion industry. I went to fashion shows and I got a sense of how the fashion and textile industry worked, although admittedly it was very high-end fashion, mainly independent designers and artisans.

While doing this job, I was very exposed to fashion and textile graduates who were coming to show me their work, so we could buy their collections, and I realised that I wanted to study design. So I signed up to Chelsea to do BA Textile Design and I had Becky Earley and Kay Politowicz as my teachers, and that's where I was introduced to this idea of sustainability within design and to being a practice-based researcher - and I was so excited to have found a form of work that combine a design/making practice, with the ideas around environmental/social issues, and the communication of these ideas to different audiences.

As soon as I graduated, Becky offered me a job as her Research Assistant while I was also starting a practise as a designer/maker.

The Evolution of Slow Design

Well, I've only just started forming this in the last few days: the evolution of slow design. Again, I think we're all trying to chart it. Emma said the slow food movement started in about 1986 which it probably did. So what was happening in Italy with the 'slow food movement' in the 80s was very grass-roots but I would say in the mid to late 90s it really started to become a worldwide movement, where it spread to the US and to the UK.

There have been many thinkers and writers like EF Schumacher or even Stewart Brand, who have explored some of the ideas around Slow, before it was given that title. Brand was a prominent eco-activist in the 1960s and the 70s. In 2000 he wrote a book called *The Clock of the Long Now*. He also
set up a foundation called The Long Now Foundation, who have built a 10,000 year clock. So he's very interested in this notion of time and responsibility. He argues we've only developed short-term thinking, that we actually need to think in 10,000 year terms.

Then designers started to pick up on this idea of slow. SlowLab, was formed by Carolyn Strauss and Alastair Fuad-Luke in about 2003/04. I guess they were the first visible designers to start questioning what slow means for design. In 2005 Carl Honore published In Praise of Slow which was quite a mainstream book. It was the first big mainstream acknowledgment of this notion of slow and slow living. He was the first one to publish the term as a book title and I guess define the territory. Then Kate Fletcher, in her book Sustainable Fashion and Textiles: Design Journeys (2008), helped to frame what it means for fashion and textile design.

Then this last year there's been allot of activity. So Helen Carnac curated the Taking Time: Craft and the Slow Revolution exhibition and the blog that she started. That actually was begun in 2008 - Helen asked me to write for that in 2008. Helen had asked several different thinkers and designers and artists to start a dialogue in a blog format about exploring what slow means for the craft movement.

Then Becky Earley and us at TED. Becky devised a small project that we did last September (2009) called Conversations on (a) Slow Craft, where a group of textile designers went on a barge trip around central London, talking about what slow means for us as textile designers. So that's my overview of the territory.

A definition?

I just thought I'd put some of these words up from Alastair Fuad-Luke, words he is using to describe slow design and which we can add to Emma's list. I really love the first few words 'ritual', 'tradition', 'experiential'. This notion of experience I'll be coming back to at the end of my talk. 'Evolved', 'slowness', 'eco efficiency', 'open source knowledge', and I love that he's got 'technology' but in brackets 'slow' - this very simplistic notion that technology shouldn't really play a part in Slow.

Then also I found this quote quite helpful. Fuad-Luke said that 'slow design encourages a reduction in flows by:' and then there's four ways for designers to reduce flows. So 'Designing for regenerative environmental benefits', maybe that could be upcycling, that could be using low toxicity in your production, maybe compostability and considering the environmental benefits and making them regenerative which I think is a lovely word, which suggests loops and something that we generate. Second, 'Designing for local first, global second', so obviously the notion of local and textile production. Everyone talks about it in relation to food but in textiles and fashion, there's not many solutions that have appeared, mainly because in the UK it's very difficult for us to produce textiles locally. But I think there's lots of scope to do some interesting research in that area.

Thirdly, 'Designing for socio and cultural benefits and wellbeing', so this I guess ties in with what Emma's been talking about. So how can we design to benefit people's wellbeing? Then the fourth one, 'Catalysing behavioural change and socio cultural transformation'. I'm also very interested in what role designers can play in social transformation and I'll talk a bit about some of the work I'm doing with a textile collective. The fifth one is 'Designing to encourage the long view'.

A new emerging design practice

So in terms of my practice, putting this presentation together I did realise that slow design can potentially embody everything I am currently doing. So I've got three facets. I've got my design work where I hand print and produce wallpapers, there's some samples here, and textiles for interiors. I also work at TED and I do my research and my writing, and then the third part of my practice is this collaborative factor. I've recently co-founded a collective of textile designer/makers called bricolage. Since I've been part of TED I've realised the importance of working collaboratively, how it's absolutely key to how I want to work as a designer.
I was thinking a lot about this presentation and what slow design means to my practice, particularly while I was in Berlin recently with TED colleagues - we had got stuck because of the volcano eruption. We had to spend an extra four days in Berlin and in the end we took a slow train journey back to London overland. One of the highlights of staying in Berlin for the extra time, was going to the new Neues Museum. It's recently been renovate and restored by David Chipperfield, the English architect. It is a remarkable museum full of Egyptian artefacts. I think it's their equivalent of the British Museum.

It was such a powerful experience for many reasons. It was lovely to go with my colleagues. It was almost like we were on a research trip because you were with people who you can think and talk with. We're always having these ongoing conversations whenever we travel together so that was lovely to experience it with them. It's in an amazing building, I'm not sure of the heritage and the dates but David Chipperfield has restored it in this beautiful way, where there are the old parts of the building still intact, and beautifully added new parts that reveal the old.

The collections of Egyptian objects was just beautifully presented. I was very struck by these 3,000 year old objects and the way they were made. Obviously they were all made by hand and the attention to detail is so beautiful. The reason I think it was quite powerful was the contrast of the experience we had that morning, before visiting the Museum. We had gone to the main flea market in Berlin, with all these people gathering and trading their unwanted goods. All these people sitting on blankets with all their rejected/ready to be traded objects lying out on the blanket. Most of the objects they were trying to sell were literally cheap, plastic, mass produced pieces. But, they were still treating each object with a sort of reverence, the way they were lovingly placed on the blankets, no different really to the object that the next person along may have, and I guess they would most likely be selling each item for a very small amount.

I know it's a bit simplistic to say all the objects made in Egypt 2,000 years ago were all great and all the objects we're making now aren't, but there was something about the two experiences and what it says about the way we're living with objects. Also, what does it say about the way we're designing objects as designers? how are we preserving them, what's our relationship to them?

A designers archaeological survey of textiles, objects and emotions

In light of that, I thought it was helpful to explain a little bit about my own personal design work. I wanted to include some examples of the work I actually did at college, as some of the themes I was exploring are still resonating with me. So for this presentation I spent three days in my studio, where I literally just took out my sketchbooks and just looked through and reflected. This has been very valuable because I've been able to make some new connections.

In terms of my design inspiration and what I was drawing, I have always been interested in everyday objects in the domestic space. So I've always drawn still lives, which started with a love of Cezanne and other Impressionist’s still life paintings.

[Shows slide] Here I started to do lots of drawings of pots and vases and I was starting to make patterns from these shapes and old crockery. Then this leads me into a big focus in my work which is the notion of the everyday. I'm very interested in the beauty in our everyday lives and how we live with objects and the textiles. I've put this William Morris quote up: ‘It seems to me that the real way to enjoy life is to accept all its necessary ordinary detail and turn them into pleasures by taking interest in them whereas modern civilisation huddles them out of the way, has them done in a very slovenly manner till they become real drudgery which people can't help trying to avoid'.

For this project, I had just been to the Charleston House in Sussex, owned by Vanessa Bell, Virginia Woolf’s sister. It was this house full of art and creativity and all the walls had been hand painted, everything had been touched and embellished by these artists and their friends I was also very intrigued by the social/cultural context of this activity - the Bloomsbury group, the Modernists, how they were transforming art and design, and how they were socially transforming or turning social structures on their head.
I used Charleston House as my inspiration to create textiles. – as I continue to do in my work, I use interiors and houses as inspiration for textiles that I often turn into fashion garments. I had also recently discovered Francesca Woodman who was a very mysterious photographer, who tragically killed herself I think in her early 20s, but she literally only had three to four years of making work. She took self-portraits of herself and I was very interested in this notion of a young woman, images of a female figure always in an interior space, that’s empty of other people, mostly dilapidated, peeling wallpapers. She was very often using textiles and wallpapers in her work, but also very subversive, and I was very interested in the unsettling nature of it.

I didn’t quite know how to incorporate all this into my design work but I took my own black and white still life photos, to help me create an atmosphere. Then I eventually ended up creating lots of little repeat pattern motifs, that I just gathered like a magpie, just gathering and remaking patterns, using hand printing techniques. Then I produced a dress from the samples. At this point I was already also taking old garments and customising them, taking a wool cardigan and cutting the sleeves out and adding on and embellishing, with lots of layering.

My graduate project was called Everyday Collection and I got my design inspiration from people’s houses. I have realised that what I did as a child - I was obsessed with my mother and my grandmother’s top drawers in their bedrooms, with their cupboards, with anything that was hidden in boxes, that was theirs. I think it was because I wasn’t getting access to them in the way I wanted, and so I had to try and get intimate through their hidden objects. Anyway, I’m not sure if that is related, but I’m quite obsessed with people’s houses. So for this collection I basically found three people and I asked to photograph their houses. I didn’t want their interior spaces to be trendy or ‘designed’. I love going into someone’s house and just photographing the random way they live and the objects and the care that goes on in the home, and the marks and the history.

I also went to charity shops and took photos of all the figurines and the strange objects on the charity shops shelves. I was very interested in this notion of what people have discarded and the eclectic way it had all been thrown together. So I generated a lot of imagery from that. Again I am a bit obsessive about collecting household textiles, any kind of embroidery, any tablecloths, teatowels etc.

I’m really interested in the motifs and imagery of embroidery, tablecloths, any floral, domestic motif but not done in a kind girly way. So these were some of the samples [Shows slide]. There’s some here that I started to produce for the final collection and then this was one of the final pieces. That was bowls of fruit on a skirt and lots and lots of different layers. There was some plastic laminating going on and embroidery. So very embellished and handmade. There was a jacket with a border along the bottom of embroidery and wool and silk. I was printing on wool crepe and silk which was amazing. Funnily, I was learning in my theory course about sustainability but I wasn’t thinking about it in my practice, I just wanted to learn a craft skill, and not to have to be restricted (as I saw it then) by eco concerns.

So I guess as a designer I’m acutely aware of the very personal relationship we have with objects and like an archaeologist does, they try and uncover the mysteries of a lost society or the person through an object, that was what I was like as a child. I think this is an overriding part of me as a designer but I’m just wondering how I can use that knowledge in designing slow objects and experiences. I’ve just come up with a few ways; emphasising the value of tradition and heritage (traditional techniques and social aspects that are tied in with tradition); designing for a long, enduring relationship; valuing materials and resources and, very key; allowing time for reflection.

While I’ve been at TED, I’ve also been trying to make it as a designer/maker, doing hand-printed wallpaper commissions for interiors. [Shows slide] This was my ‘Ivy’ print that I did for a private client. It was a very lucky experience where I worked with interior designers and the client gave us a blank canvas. So I got to do three different rooms, his two dressing rooms and this powder room, whichever way I wanted, I had free rein. So it was a very wonderful commission. [Shows slide] That’s my ‘Moderne’ print. I’ve done two commissions of that print already.
I also work very closely with interior designers called Clarke & Reily. David Grocott is very well-known, as an English antiques expert, where he takes old English antique chairs and sofas. He was the first one to create this kind of re-upholstered trend that's now become quite known where the edges are quite worn and he might use old quilts to re-upholster a new chair. So I work with them a lot on their commissions to private clients. [Shows slide] This was a commission to try out a wooden block print for wallpaper, but I ended up using a lino cut print.

From 2006 – 2009 I was part of Becky Earley's Worn Again project, which was about how textile designers can upcycle textiles. For that exhibition in 2007, my project was called Love and Thrift. So again, like any good archaeologist, I went and rummaged through piles of other people's waste and charity shops and car boots sales, and went through lots of household textiles and came across these lovely tablecloths. I got them laminated with a recycled PVC. I found a company up in Cheshire, they get the waste PVC from the medical industry and they use it to coat textiles for industrial purposes. I basically took five old tatty tablecloths, sewed them together and put them on a roll and pleaded with them to let me put my short five metre run through their processing line - they thought I was mad. Then I got it made into a mac coat.

I also did a lot of overprinting of secondhand textiles and trying out lots of embroidery techniques. I was very interested with the coat, in this idea of durability. The old textiles have an emotional durability to them and I was very interested in how you can make something that's been in your bottom drawer for a while, how you can re-invigorate it and actually make it materially durable. So by plastic coating it, you're giving it a very, very long life. So taking something old that had emotional value and updating it and making it useful.

I've also started doing some writing. I did a piece for ABC Australia and I did some writing for Helen Carnac's blog and I'm currently writing an essay for Becky's Ever & Again final publication, the upcycling textiles book.

[Shows slide] So while I've been thinking about all these things at TED, I've also been involved with Becky in delivering these workshops, Emotionally Durable Designs Workshops. We work with design students and craftspeople and business people. It's a workshop where they're asked to bring in their favourite garment and then something that they have in their wardrobe, a reject that they're not wearing. We run a workshop where we unpick why something is favourite and why something is a reject, and then we try and come up with maybe how that could help us as designers to design, to build in a more empathetic relationship between the object and the person who owns it.

[Shows slide] These are my archiving of all my objects I own and collect, that I did after going to the museum.

Then finally I think I'll talk about bricolage, a textile collective that we formed last summer. We're all graduates from the textile course at Chelsea. Katherine May and myself instigated it because we were sharing a studio together two years ago and we found it very helpful having an ongoing dialogue together. Also my experience with Worn Again, was that it is a very powerful experience being part of a collaborative research project that was about dialogue, was about sharing, and it was about looking at your mistakes, revisiting the mistakes and remaking them and getting someone else’s opinion on them. All of that really made me want to form some kind of collective group.

So we formed last summer. I'm just in the middle of developing a website. We all are sole traders so we haven't formed any kind of collective business as yet. We're exhibiting together, we're sharing a studio together. We had our first official proper meeting last week where we took minutes and we had an agenda. So I guess we're almost like a not-for-profit. What I'm very interested in with what we're doing is this notion of not only crafting products, so we're all designer makers, we're knitters, printers, stitchers, making products for interiors, very bespoke products - but we're also crafting experiences. I'm very interested in how designers can help to do this in light of our current context – the limited resources we have in the next 20 to 30 years, material resources, maybe financial resources. So how
can we meet consumers’ needs rather than them buying a product? What are the other things that they might be looking for in their lives?

So I feel very strongly that bricolage is trying to formulate how we can craft experiences and I thought this quote from the Craft Council was apt. They did research into their current activity that says ‘As products are becoming more available on line, demand for authentic quality products that last and endure has increased, as has demand for unique and extraordinary experiences, and craft has been in a particularly strong position to respond to this’.

We launched last year at Tent London, the trade fair. Then in December and January this year we had a pop-up shop in Brixton Market. There's lots of new activity happening at Brixton Market. So we got two months rent free in a shop and we had all of our products in there, and we also ran workshops. So we're now developing a bit of a reputation for running workshops and I'm doing one tomorrow with Katherine May here where we teach all sorts of textile techniques. Then this ties into my other kind of research interest which is how designers can be social innovators.

[Shows slide] This diagram may help to maybe look at what I am as a designer interested in social innovation. I have got some theory feeding into my work, I'm looking at Ezio Manzini and his systems thinking and how he is promoting designers as social innovators. 'm looking at Alistair Fuad-Luke. Then I'm interested in what would happen if a designer got involved in the Transition Town movement in Brixton, for example, and this is also being fed by really interesting ideas from the New Economics Foundation, Permaculture principles and their notion of energy dissent plans. So that's another big area of interest for me is how textile designers, let alone a designer, can contribute to this kind of grass roots community activity.”

[End of file]