

Resonant Threads: Crafting Community Voice Through Collaboration and E-Textiles

Resonant Threads employs collaborative techniques to create a series of crafted, e-textile artefacts, which investigate how distinct community voices can be incorporated into a multilayered design practice. Creating social spaces for participants and designers to interact, express ideas and tell stories as part of a discovery phase can facilitate a broad range of insights. This approach perceives a limited scope around technology use and inclusion that can focus too heavily on the products of design rather than processes and experiences of involvement. Participatory design engages with tools and techniques, which develop new knowledge and widens the context of work to benefit participants and others more widely.

To test a range of collaborative techniques, the author set up an exploratory 6-month project with an all female group. They were chosen for their shared memories of local community history over the last sixty years, their needlework and stitching skills. Social encounters and recorded audio narratives encouraged the group to discuss memories and common themes from their past, such as childhood, freedom or change. The desire to cherish and preserve personal and collective narratives charged the anecdotes with significance, producing a sonic archive and a collection of stitched materials.

The development of e-textiles creates opportunities for designers to combine material production with digital technology, integrating novel functionality into textiles using sensors and computation. The familiar, tactile qualities of thread and cloth are enriched by digital capability, leading to new kinds of interactions between people and technical contexts.

The presentation will report on work in progress, tell the stories that emerged and present a selection of crafted, e-textile objects, created by both the author and group. It will reflect on the potential of collaborative processes combined with e-textiles to contribute to the production of more meaningful outcomes by opening up and initiating group and individual interactions in the discovery phase of an enquiry.