

# **The workshop Opening the Bin - New perspectives on waste, culture and society from the humanities and the social sciences**

## **"Follow the things" - donated clothing in a reuse mall context**

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### Abstract

This study is inspired by the "follow the things" movement that trace and document the history and travels of ordinary consumer goods such as jeans, shopping bags, food, blouses or hair extensions (see <http://followthethings.com/> for a collection of travel reports). Narratives about products' origins and transformations have become part of the discourse on sustainable consumption, and it has been suggested that the post consumption phases of goods should be included in these narratives (Gregson et al (2010). This study can be seen as a response to their call, and we start our inquiry at the containers for textile recycling at the ReTuna mall - the world's first mall for reused goods - (see [www.retuna.se](http://www.retuna.se)). The narratives of garments will be documented through interviews with the donors, and we will shadow the garments through the re-cycle process at the ReTuna mall. ReTuna Mall aims for reuse, i.e., to re-introduce disposed garments to the fashion consumers visiting the mall. Accordingly, some garments will re-enter the consumption phase, but most garments are likely to be sorted out and re-defined into other purposes than being wearable.

Reuse is one of the most common strategies used by fashion companies in their attempt to make the supply chain sustainable (Kant Hvass 2016). Obviously, reuse of fashion reduces the demand for new garments, which in turns reduce the negative environmental impact of the textile production processes (Woolridge et al. 2006, Farrant et al. 2010, Castellani et al. 2015). Reuse of fashion goods has the same basic structure as that of waste management, i.e., organized in three separate phases: collection, sorting and reprocessing. The literature on reuse in general is extensive, and studies on fashion reuse have become popular too. To give some examples, studies of consumers fashion disposal behaviour concentrate in most cases on disposal channels, behavioural motivations, disposal reasons and demographics of consumers that behave in specified ways (Laitala 2014). Studies that focus on donation of fashion as disposal method on the other hand (i.e. Ha-Brookshire and Hodges (2009), Ekström et al. (2015) describes general motives for the disposal, but do not uncover the actual process or the activities that are involved in the donation - i.e. why is the individual garment donated and how is the sorting performed. These type of questions are touched upon in studies of the practices of sorting (Hawley 2006, Botticello 2012), but these do not follow the garments through the whole process. Of interest for us is also studies on waste management in general, e.g., Åkesson's (2012) study on how a disposed goods are transformed and given new meanings as they travel through the phases of reuse; that what is waste at one phase will transform into a resource in another. Disposed goods can also, with or without disassembling, re-appear in different shapes with different meanings at another stage in the process (Gregson et al. 2010).

As stated above, we will trace and document the travel of donated fashion garments through the collection, sorting and reprocessing activities at the mall. For each step we pose two major questions: what happens and who/what are involved in this. In doing so, we take on the ANT approach to our objects of study and consider non-humans as equally possible instigators of actions and inscribers of meaning as humans. From our literature review, we believe that our study provides a somewhat novel approach to fashion reuse, and that it has the potential to contribute to the growing body of knowledge of sustainable fashion.

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