

## **Nick Gant and Tanya Dean**

### **Meaning Making**

This submission proposes to present research generated by the 'Sole Searching and Material Meaning Making' projects, which use the fabrication of pairs of shoes, each made from a waste material as the methodological basis for forming more 'meaningful' products. The research tests the hypothesis that waste materials can embody and facilitate material narratives which when applied, can imbue products with greater meaning, narrative and value(s).

The research is predicated on the basis that products that are made more meaningful and valued can promote and nurture sustainable attributes including:

- Communicating complex messages of sustainability, science or ethics in accessible ways to consumers
- Providing authentic user experiences, extending product life-spans and forming user attachments
- Helping market and popularise 'more sustainable' products and materials

Each pair of shoes provides a design/craft method for 'meaning making' that is structured around the shoe, the waste material, the process of fabrication and making and its user.

Examples include:

Shoes: Baby booties  
Material: Human breast milk  
Method: 'Taboos and transition'

Shoes: Flip flops  
Material: Plastic beach waste  
Method: 'Provenance and place'

Shoes: Child's slippers  
Material: Dog hair  
Method: 'Karma vs carbon'

Shoes: Businessman's brogues  
Material: Reprocessed plastic corks  
Method: 'Product protest'

Shoes: Secretary shoes  
Material: Office paper  
Method: 'Digital vs physical'

Each shoe 'story' also helps to promote the work of NGOs, organisations and charities (NHS, Marine Conservation Society, Vision Aid Overseas) who use made objects as vehicles for messaging and promotion. The project also promotes and maps a network of exemplar materialists and makers.

The making methodologies were recently tested and data was gathered at a closed exhibition at the headquarters of PUMA in London. Over 100 professional designers from a range of commercial apparel, product and lifestyle brands including PUMA, Adidas, IDEO,

Prada and WGSN were presented with the shoes and methods and asked to evaluate the methods according to their meaning, value and applicability to the attendee's industry. The Baby Booties were utilised by World Breast Milk Donor Day and received international press coverage, debating the value of the materials including the Mail and New York Times and on television and radio on the BBC News.

Dean and Gant propose the presentation of the shoes / methods with first publication of the accompanying data.