

CHOSEN FOR REDESIGN DIY

LOVE & DESTROY, TUTORIAL 1 - UNPICKING THE SURFACE

A!
Aalto University
School of Arts, Design
and Architecture

 t-rex



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Photo: Aino Ahola



Hi!

I am Saimi Parikka, a textile designer graduating from Aalto University. During my studies, I specialised in knitwear. In the summer of 2024, we did a project in collaboration with T-REX and Emmy.fi, where we came up with ideas and made new products out of the unsold clothes from Emmy's second-hand store. In the summer project, I was working specifically with cotton knitwear, unpicking and reworking these. In these tutorials, I'll show you some ideas I've come up with over the summer to revamp old knitwear.

The majority of secondhand clothes that are not sold are in small sizes. When knitwear is modified by unpicking, it widens as the stitches are dropped and at the same time increases in length as the remaining stitches are loosened. This way, a knitwear in size XS can be modified into a knitwear in size M-L. The unpicked surface becomes slightly transparent, lacy and in my opinion interestingly untidy.

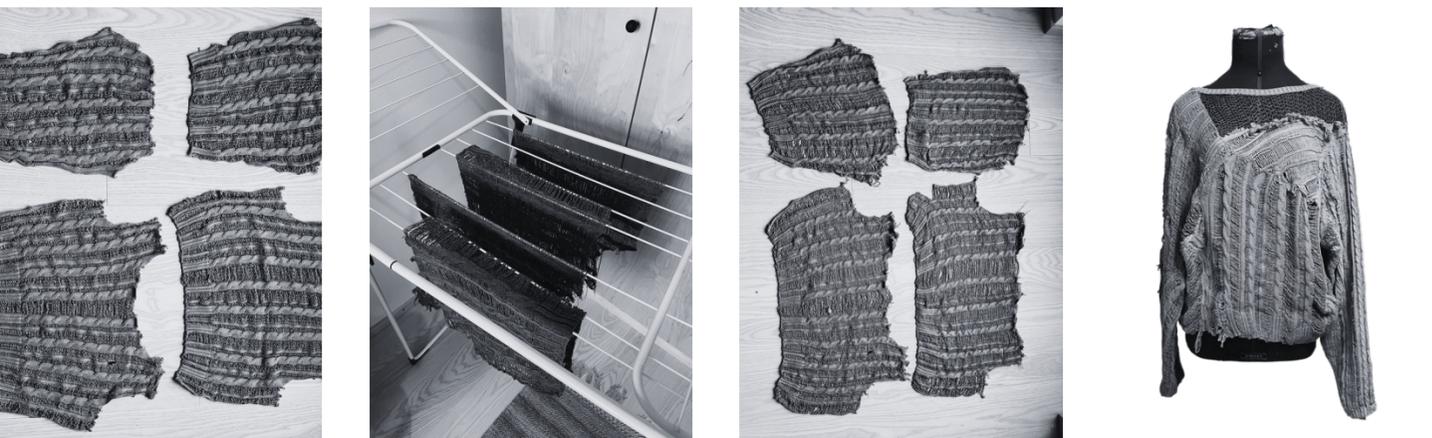
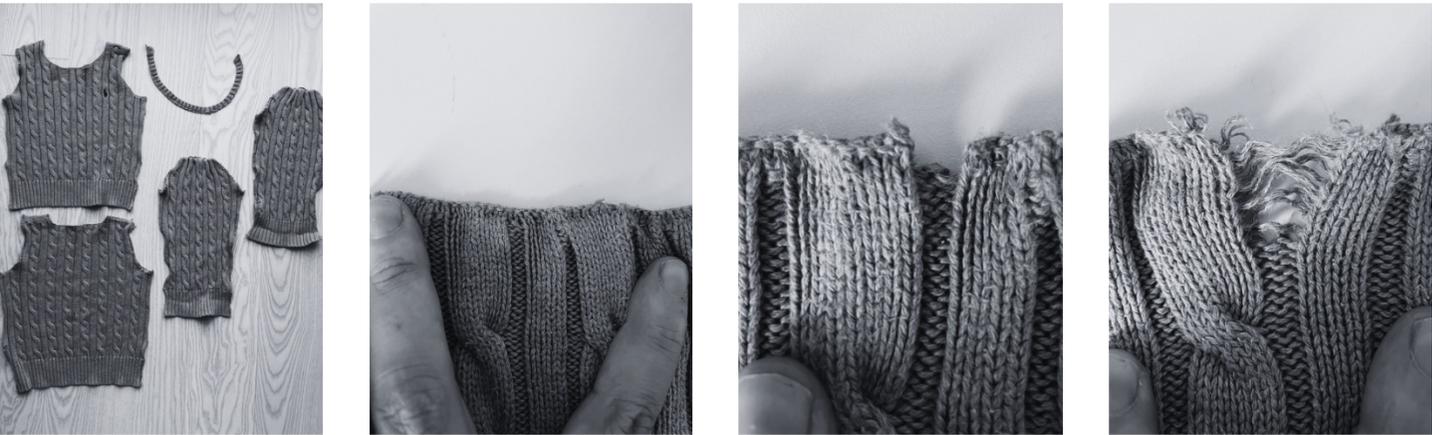
These tutorials are particularly suitable for people who are already knitting enthusiasts, as they have a basic understanding of how the stitches and the structure of knitwear work. Unpicking, like knitting, is a repetitive movement that can even feel meditative. The brain likes repetitive and predictable movement, which is a good counterbalance to mental work, screens and hectic everyday life. Unlike in knitting in general, I think the more irregular and sprawling the surface becomes, the better.

For reworking, it is worth choosing good quality knitwear. For these tutorials I have used 100% cotton knitwear. Smooth-stranded knitwear, such as mercerised cotton or viscose, is easier to unpick than rough, industrially tightly strung cotton knitwear. Thicker yarns are faster to unpick than thinner ones. Fingernails are helpful when unpicking, they can "pluck" the structure open conveniently. When unpicking a garment, you learn to visualise patterns and structures at the same time, when you see what kind of pieces the garment is made of. Unpicking knitwear can feel a little scary - will the whole garment unravel uncontrollably when you cut a hole in it? However, most industrial knitwear is so sturdily made that it does not easily unravel in undesirable spots.

Plenty of great raw materials can be found second-hand. I hope these tutorials will inspire you to save old knitwear and enjoy making things by hand.



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Love and Destroy, Tutorial 1. Technique: Unpicking

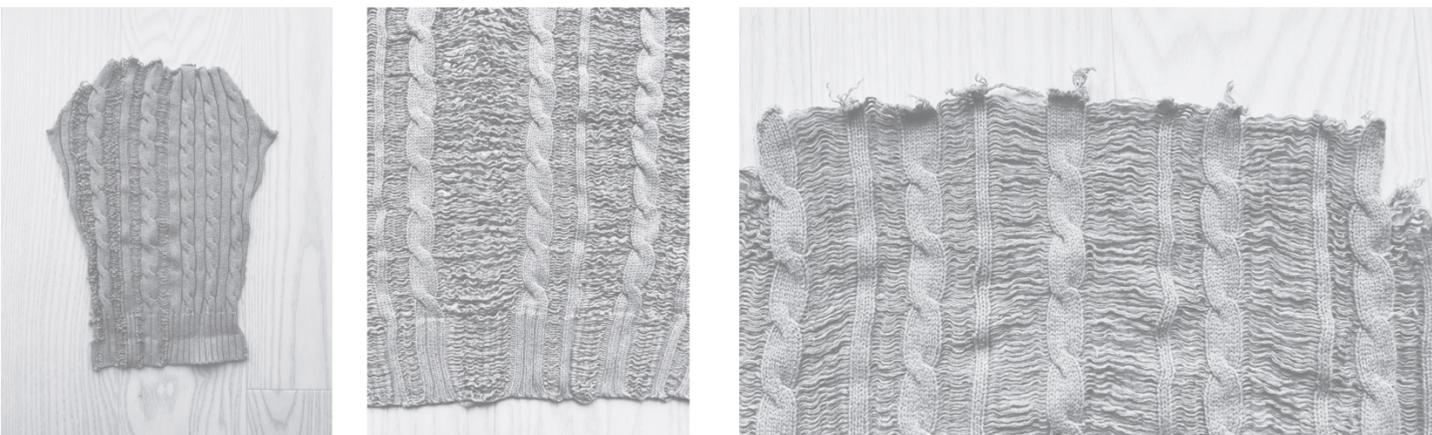
This tutorial shows you how to disassemble a knitted garment and work the pieces using the unpicking technique. With this technique, the knit spreads and increases in length significantly. The surface becomes slightly transparent and lacy.

Tutorial 2 will guide you on how to assemble the knit again as a garment.

For the tutorial, you need to know

- how to sew straight stitches using a sewing machine and
- know what a stitch is in a knitted garment.

Supplies: Knitwear to unpick, same colour sewing thread, sewing machine, scissors, seam rippers



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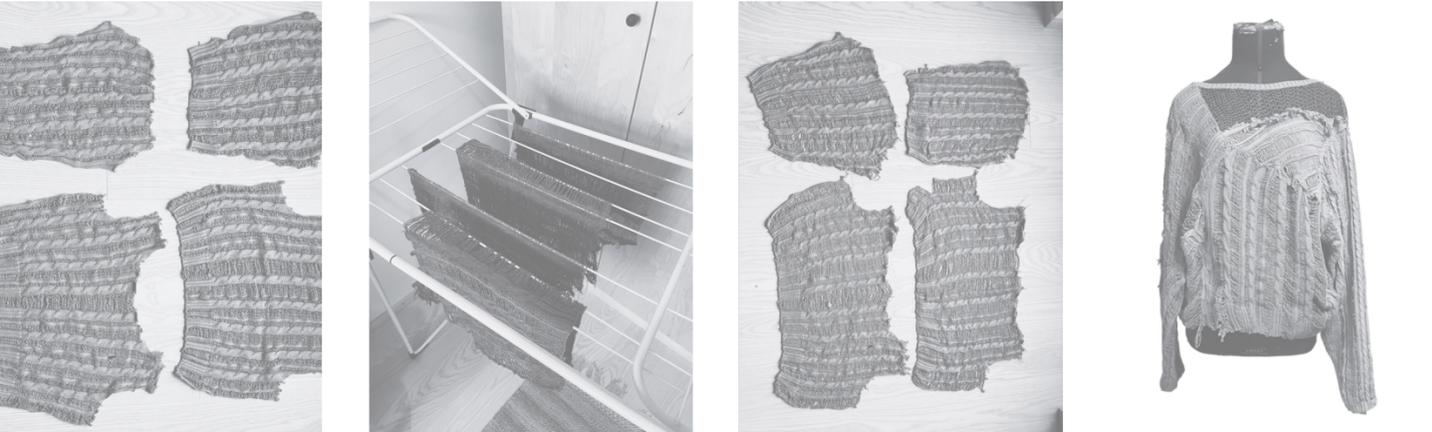


Starting point: Small size children's knitwear. 100% cotton. The knit shows that it has been used, but the yarn is clearly of good quality. The yarn is not linty or frayed.

1. Ripping the seams:

Separate the knit into pieces from the seams. Often knitwear is sewn together with a chain stitch, which unravels by pulling when you find the right spot. Sometimes the knit is sewn together with an overlock, so the knit strand breaks at the seams. You can also use a knit like this, but you have to cut the seams open with scissors and first sew over the cut edges twice with a zigzag stitch.

It's not an issue if you accidentally cut the surface of the knitwear when undoing the seams. This can be finished off by running a zigzag stitch over the cut part. With the unpicking technique, the surface will be uneven anyway, so holes and "blemishes" can be fun details.



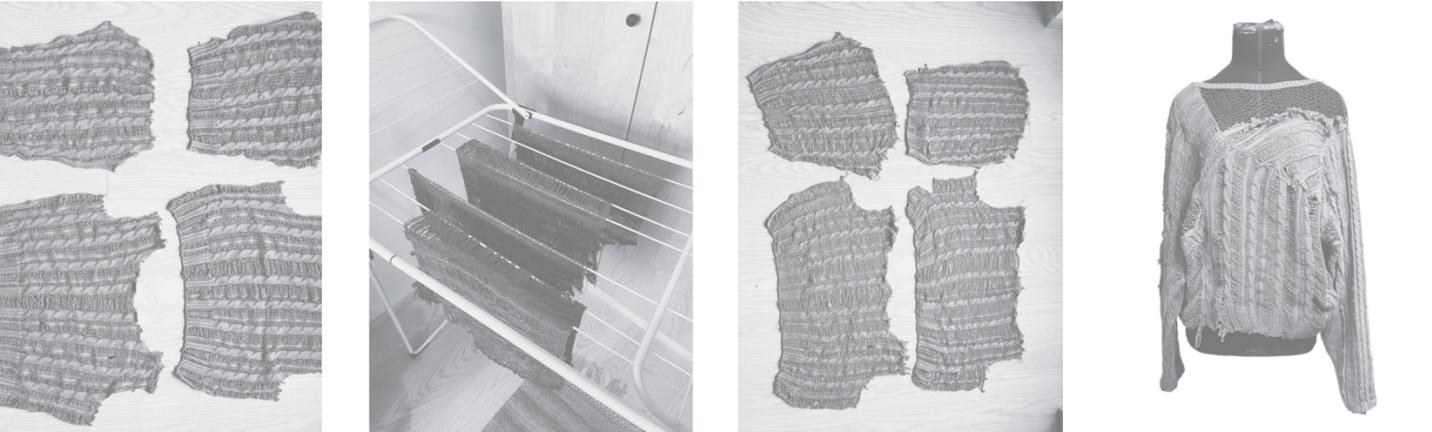
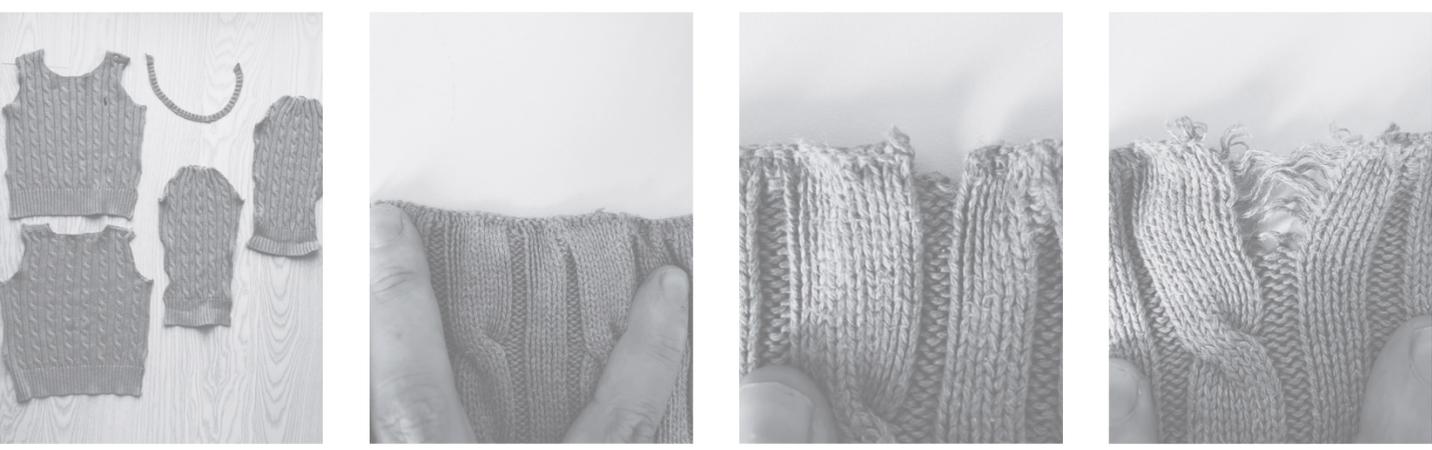
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2. Unpicking the surface:
Unpicking always starts at the top of the piece. Cut open the desired number of stitches (1-4 stitches) from the top edge of the piece. Start unpicking, being careful not to unpick the stitches horizontally. Cut yarn easily unravels horizontally and must not be allowed to escape. We want to drop stitches that drop downwards. The stitches drop easily when the knit is stretched horizontally. You can also help the stitches to open by "plucking" them with your fingernails. Drop the stitches until you reach the hem.

In the example knit, I have chosen to save the cables and unpick between them. However, it is a good idea to drop no more than 5 adjacent stitches at a time, so that the yarn floats do not become too big and the garment does not become impractical. It is good to leave at least two intact stitches between the dropped stitches. The stitches can be unpicked in any rhythm. I think the surface becomes more interesting the more irregular the rhythm in which they are unpicked. In the picture, you can see how the knit begins to widen as unpicking progresses.

If the material is slippery and the stitches try to escape, it is a good idea to use a sewing machine to finish the broken strands as you unpick them, following the instructions on the next page. Otherwise, you can disassemble all the pieces before moving to finishing.



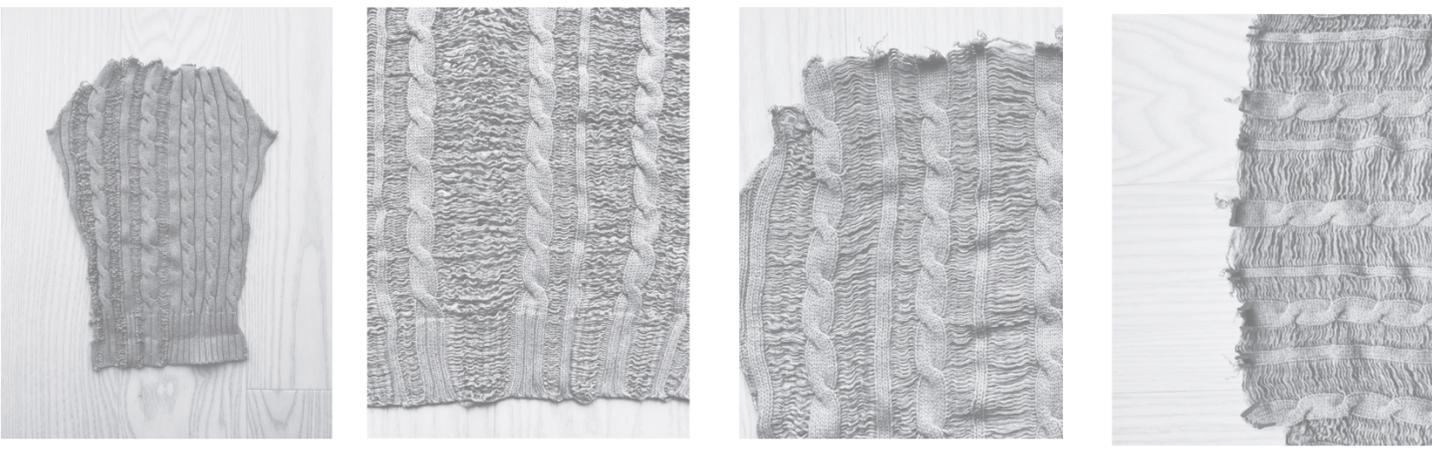
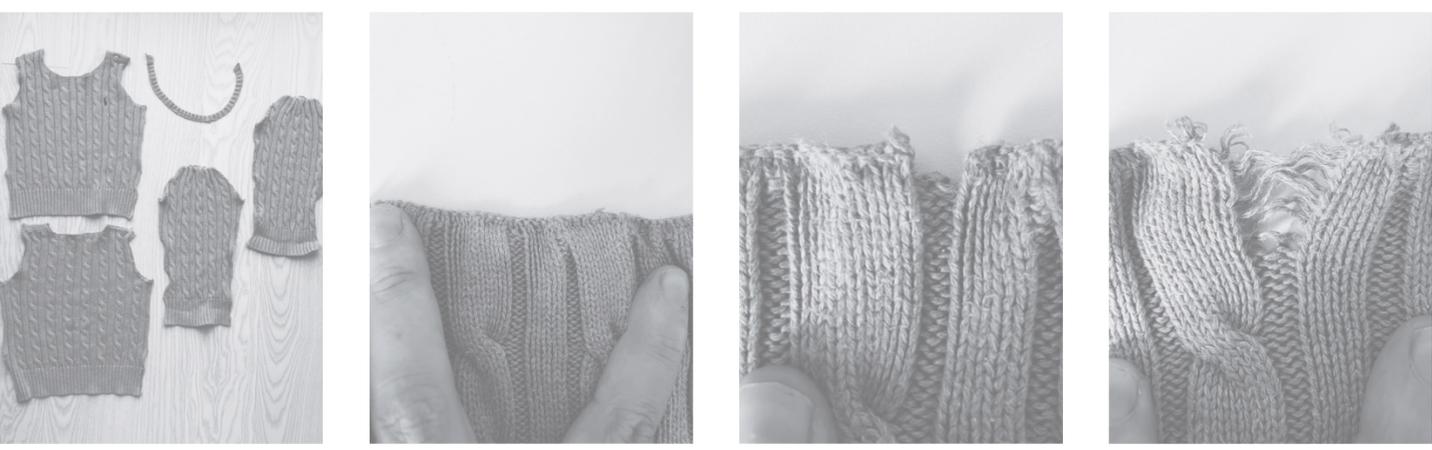
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3. Finishing: Each cut strand and open stitch should be finished by running the sewing machine back and forth over them with a straight stitch. The black lines drawn in the picture indicate where to sew. In the vertical direction, the stitching finishes the cut strands and in the horizontal direction it finishes the open loops.

When you choose a sewing thread of as similar a colour as possible, the stitch will sink into the knitwear almost imperceptibly.

Often the lower edge does not need to be finished separately with a sewing machine. In some knitwear structures, however, new stitches may begin to unravel from the bottom. Run the sewing machine with a straight stitch back and forth over these a couple of times. Finally, cut off the strand ends.



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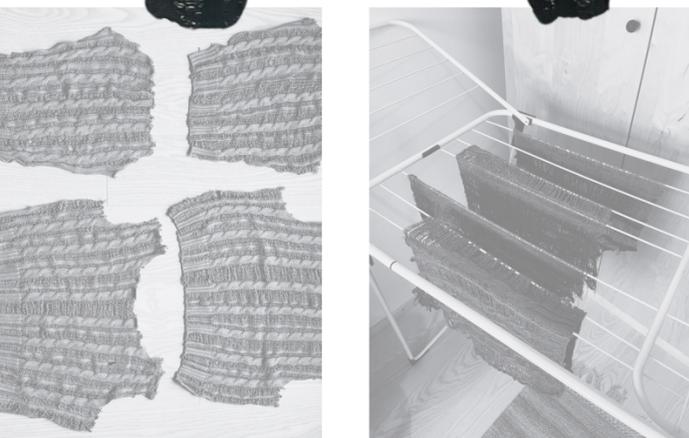


4. Finally:

In the first picture, all the pieces are unpicked and finished. The yarn remains noodle-like curly when unpicked, but straightens out when wet, further widening the piece.

Wet the pieces under a tap. It is sufficient to wet the pieces thoroughly; no further washing is required. The picture shows how the pieces widen further when the curl disappears from the yarn.

Now the pieces are ready to be reassembled into a garment. You can sew the garment back together using the same seams that were initially unpicked or assemble the garment according to Tutorial 2.



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How can you vary the appearance of your product?

The starting point of the knitwear you are working on has a big influence on the end result. You can choose to work with a thick or thin knit - thin yarn will give a more graceful finish and thick yarn will give a more ragged one. Cable knits have been my personal favourite, but smooth surface knits also work well. Multi-coloured patterns do not unpick in the same way as monochrome ones and are therefore not suitable for this technique. The surface can be unraveled sparsely or densely according to your preference. The more densely you unpick the knitwear, the more it expands. It's fun to destroy and break a tidy surface - with love.

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