

Conference: Digital/Material: developments in printed and woven textiles

University for the Creative Arts Rochester. 29 October 2017

Current developments encompass digital and hand skills and with this conference focussed on these two seemingly opposing approaches, remembering that it is not necessary to set up dichotomies, it shouldn't and doesn't need to be either or, but both. The speakers were: Phillip David Stearns (Keynote), David Mabb (Keynote), Dr Sonja Andrew, Dr. Katherine Townsend and Dr. Ania Sadkowska, Sue Prescott, Coral Fowley, Sharon McElroy, Evelyn Bennett and Rebecca Waterworth. The day ended with a performance by Collectress and Rambert Dance Company with the Project "In the Making: Lightdial" December 2016.

Abstracts

Phillip David Stearns

Ubiquitous screens

A meditation on the origins of screen based technologies, digital textiles, and emerging forms of photography in the post-internet age.

Dr. Sonja Andrew

Print and perception: exploring the relationship between content, cloth and context.

Semiotic sign systems located within visual imagery on cloth enable textiles to function as a channel for the production and exchange of cultural meaning between maker and their audience, but is the maker's authorial intention truly interpreted by the viewer? We read printed images on cloth, but do we share a common visual grammar by which we interpret them? This paper explores printed textiles from within a communication paradigm, considering the relationship between content, cloth and context and their impact on our interpretation of the visual image.

The paper begins by examining perceptions of cloth and the relationship between cloth and context, considering how dominant cultural codes are applied, and subverted, to generate meaning. The historical precedent for printed textiles as communication is then highlighted, considering how visual narrative traditions, such as toile de jouy, can be traced through to contemporary print practice. The selection and grouping of signs, the creation of 'visual syntagms', and the function of commutation tests (Barthes, 1967), are considered in relation to the development of printed textiles as cultural signifiers. The paper concludes with reflections on the narrative role of textiles by discussing printed textile work developed to communicate the story of a conscientious objector in World War 1. This work examines how family histories and cultural values can be communicated through visual imagery in printed textiles, discussing viewer interpretations of the work to reveal the dichotomy between authorial intention and viewer perception.

Dr. Katherine Townsend and Dr. Ania Sadkowska

Fashioning print: surface pattern as embodied narrative and emotional expression

This paper explores the role of digital print within a bespoke context, from the perspective of an ongoing research project, Emotional Fit (Townsend et al 2016). This creative collaboration between a group of researchers and 40 women from Nottingham, is exploring the physical and psychological needs of members of the Baby Boomer generation (55+) in relation to various aspects of fashion design, including printed textiles. The methodology, which combines Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith et al 2009) with design practice (Sadkowska 2016) includes in-depth interviews, wardrobe studies and workshops, enabling participants to discuss the silhouettes, colours and patterns that they have worn in the past and significantly, would like to wear in the future.

In-depth analysis of the visual and textual data revealed print as having meaningful emotional associations in relation to fashion aesthetics as experienced by the study participants. In response to this finding initial designs were produced as digitally printed swatches, featuring photographic motifs of natural objects, interior and landscape based phenomena, reflecting the everyday activities alluded to by the women who are mostly semi/retired. Feedback on the samples provided by the participants informed the selection and production of the most popular designs, printed on a range of different fabric qualities. When scrutinising and handling the swatches, particular colour ways, textures and imagery elicited responses from the participants relating to experiential associations with garments from the past, such as the 'orchid printed silk' reminding someone of a kaftan-style dress worn in the 70s, designed by Zandra Rhodes, offering contemporary interpretations of familiar aesthetics. Similar embodied 'narratives of wear' (Townsend 2011) emerged in relation to other printed textiles, demonstrating the powerful trigger

effect that the visual and sensorial tactility of embellished cloth has on embodied fashion and textile memory, while highlighting the intersection of continuity and transition in the ways these individuals negotiate their ageing identities.

David Mabb

A Provisional Memorial to Nuclear Disarmament

A Provisional Memorial to Nuclear Disarmament was made in response to a visit to HMS Courageous, a decommissioned nuclear powered submarine furnished with William Morris 'Rose' fabrics. The Ministry of Defence commissioned the fabric for its nuclear submarines for over 30 years, from the 1960s through to the late 1990s, including the Vanguard Class nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines that are armed with Trident nuclear-armed missiles. *A Provisional Memorial to Nuclear Disarmament* consists of old projection screens in which the white screen fabric has been removed and replaced with William Morris fabrics. The fronts of the screens are mostly black, with some Morris patterns. On the back of the screens the William Morris patterned fabrics have been painted with anti-nuclear slogans and signs. As a group, the screens look like a protest march, with placards jostling or clustering in solidarity, they contribute to a political struggle for a nuclear free world.

A Provisional Memorial to Nuclear Disarmament is an Arts Catalyst Nuclear Culture Commission. It was first exhibited as part of 'Material Nuclear Culture' at KARST, Plymouth, UK, in 2016. It is now touring as part of 'Perpetual Uncertainty: Contemporary Art in the Nuclear Anthropocene' which was at the Bildmuseet, Umea, Sweden, 2016-17 and is currently on show at Z33, Hasselt, Belgium until 10 December 2017. The exhibition then moves to Malmo Konst Halle from February 2018. Both exhibitions are curated by Ele Carpenter.

Sue Prescott

Materiality and the body

This research examines the performativity of fabric on the body, as a live travelogue in the creation of clothing during a journey. As a method of design enquiry for enriching understanding of materiality and the body, an emergence of the relationships and interplay between materiality, surface embellishment, location and creator is disclosed.

A piece of fabric documents a personal journey, offering a narrative through print, stitch, folding, cutting, and augmented with artefacts that map and preserve stories. Few traditional tools of my craft as a fashion designer were taken on the journey, but resources were found, gifted and in some cases purchased, relative to location. Driven by the constraints of travelling, portability of fabric in combination with frugality of resources, were fundamental to the realisation of this project. Print, embroidery and diverse textile techniques play a powerful role in creating association across environments, unpacking symbolic meaning across cultures, culminating in fabric transformed into a wearable outcome.

This material story-telling reveals auto-ethnographic information through fabric, print, embellishment and artefacts that map a journey. If clothing is a form of non-verbal communication, enabling materiality and place to be mutually connective, as suggested by Umberto Eco, the garment explores a connection between the maker or wearer entering the locality as an unheard performance, highlighting the impact of the relationship between maker and fabric performativity. Capturing the continual state-of-becoming through the narrative of the garment, creative reordering occurred as the garment evolved and transformed. Interacting with the environment and exposing tensions between longevity and the ephemeral, established parallels between the movement associated with physical travel and the language of cloth.

Coral Fowley

Digital printing and accessibility and the impact on printed textile design.

Digital print and computer aided design (CAD) is no longer exclusive to the industries from which it derives, nor is it just seen or used as a manufacturing production tool, but as a key creative one.

"The nature of that materials will determine the nature of the tools.' (McCullough, 1998:63)

The increase of web based printing services, which ensure fast turn around and no minimum print run requirements, allow the designer to create digital printed products and samples without the need of studio space and set up costs.

'Digital ink-jet printing technology is changing the visual characteristics produced.' (Treadaway, 2004)

Techniques such as dye sublimation printing allow for a relatively low start-up cost for designers and companies. Designers are provided with affordable access to these facilities, boosting localised production. This paper will question the future of textile design, considering the increasing accessibility of digital printing techniques, facilities and practitioners.

As a digital print practitioner, I believe this localisation of printing and production allows for the creative process to flourish. Enabling the hands-on, craft like interaction through sampling which is sometimes lost due to the nature of digital printing. For example, outsourcing, time frame and a large quantity requirement.

Treadaway (2004) states that digital printing techniques are 'stimulating a renewable interest in the physical interaction with cloth.' Bunce (1999) reiterates this: 'ink-jet printing can create closer relationships between the designer, CAD, and textile product.' The textile creative process, regardless of methods used, is usually verbal, visual and through thorough tactile sampling. I will be questioning whether access to nearby printing facilities increases creative viability and momentum during the design process.

Sharon McElroy

Patterns of home

Patterns of Home is a semi-documentary style film that explores the often precarious nature of 'having a home' in the 21st century. Four men who regularly attend the Faith in Action drop-in for homeless people in South-West London discuss the obstacles they face in finding and keeping a home, the daily challenges they encounter when sleeping rough and the tactics and resources they use to survive. The film investigates the men's own and other people's attitudes to homelessness, and the phenomenon in which paradoxically, due a lack of affordable housing, homelessness coexists with extensive redevelopment and building in the UK. Referencing 18th and 19th century Toiles de Jouy fabrics, the film recontextualizes timeless vignettes of rural and pastoral scenes along with harsher, contemporary urban landscapes. Situating the imagery within a digital film context forms a contrast to the woodblock, copperplate and roller printing techniques used to produce the original fabric designs. The juxtaposition of these apparently tranquil pastoral and rural motifs with the men's accounts of the transitory, unpredictable and dangerous existence of their rough sleeping lifestyle instigates new and troubling narratives around this once idealized imagery.

'To disobey in order to take action is the byword of all creative spirits. The history of human progress amounts to a series of Promethean acts. But autonomy is also attained in the daily workings of individual lives by means of many small Promethean disobediences, at once clever, well thought out, and patiently pursued, so subtle at times as to avoid punishment entirely...'

(Gaston Bachelard *'Prometheus' Fragments of a Poetics of Fire*, 1961)

Evelyn Bennett and Rebecca Waterworth

In the making: Light Dial part 2

There is a thread that runs through the work that we (Rutter and Bennett) do and it is how our use of printed textiles has influenced and enabled our collaborations, a recent example being the collaboration between ourselves, Collectress and Rambert Dance Company with the Project "In the Making: Lightdial" December 2016.

<https://rutterandbennett.com/2016/12/19/performance-of-light-dial-at-rambert/>

<http://collectress.co.uk>, <http://www.rambert.org.uk/>

I present the "In the Making" Project "Lightdial" with fellow collaborator Rebecca Waterworth (Collectress) to reflect upon how the collaborative process has influenced our practice and how digital media and the use of pattern specifically has enabled work to develop for the project and beyond. The history of our collaboration began with the "Gunfighter Project" (part funded by UCA). Collaborative discussions evolved around sound, music, projection, film, dance/performance, sculpture and printed image. Through these the potential for pattern was explored, along with the use of digital media.

"From a practical point of view using digital media and printing enabled us to derive narrative images from a number of sources and work with them to create 3d anaglyphs that could be printed onto fabric. This gave us the possibility to make wearable sculptures and forms that opened up performance possibilities. This then gave us the chance to create more imagery by collaborating with Genetic Moo, Collectress, Circo Rumbaba and other musicians." **Evelyn Bennett**

"The use of digital media has enabled an analogue practitioner such as myself to explore quick ways of notating sound and music to explore the musical motif as a repeat to create pattern. These weave themselves into layered soundscapes that are reminiscent of ambient surroundings, where you might see pattern, for example in nature or interiors" **Rebecca Waterworth**

"In the Making; Lightdial" was part funded by UCA to develop costumes designed and made by Rutter and Bennett in collaboration with Rebecca Waterworth. The project explored pattern, motif and the notion of repeat, through dance, performance, sound/music, film and printed pattern. Working digitally enabled the transposition of ideas from one media to another, text to sound, sound to image, image to sculpture, image to performance. The instant nature of digital media enabled pattern to be derived within these medias, whether through filming movement to repeat and rehearse or using sounds made through movement to loop as a motif, these methods allowed for a surprisingly organic growth that influenced the development of the textile design and costumes.

In presenting our collaboration at the conference we will demonstrate how digital technologies impact on the potential of digital textiles. We will discuss the potential of new materials, such as electro-conductive tape and thread, for "allowing" for the inclusion of other medias within textiles and question the conceptual nature of what "surface pattern" is. In this "Bauhaus like" collaboration there evolved an inclusivity into how each practitioner operated - a designer became sound maker or a musician became dancer - digital media enabling the conceptual notion of pattern across a broad range of disciplines. This throws up some truly interesting questions about what pattern means and therefore the potential of textile design to inhabit a broader context in the future.