Narrative: Memory: Perception Dr Sonja Andrew

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Project Description

Narrative: Memory: Perception comprises research works examining cultural memory and viewer perception. Exploring WW1 narratives, and perceptions of making processes, the outputs contribute to an ongoing semiotic-based visual research practice that positions textiles within a communication paradigm for critical dialogue and application via artefacts.

Project Duration: 2014 - 2018

Funder:

University of Lisbon: travel and accommodation funding as an invited keynote speaker 'Textiles, Identity and Innovation' 1st International Textile Design DTEX Conference, November 2017. Adidas: travel, accommodation, materials and subsistence funding to deliver Creative Inspiration Day lecture and workshops, April 2016. Arts and Humanities Research Council: £4,000 Image Gallery Award, June 2014.

Research Partners, consultants, collaborators: N/A.

Figure 1: *We Regret to Inform You* (2015). Reactive dyes digitally printed on cotton with additional fabric bonding and stitch, 67.5cms width x 103.5 cms length.

Research Aims & Objectives

Research Aims:

- To explore WW1 narratives in a second phase of research, building on and extending an existing body of work on this topic by Andrew.
- Locate new documentary material, and create new textile artefacts.
- To examine individual and cultural memory in relation to viewer perception, focusing on how images, materials, processes and contexts are read, within the field of contemporary textile practice.

Research Objectives:

- To locate new information in recently digitised National Archives, unpublished diary extracts, and West Yorkshire newspapers, that bring fresh insights on individual and collective experiences of conscientious objectors in the First World War.
- To employ the semantic value of image, colour and surface treatments to visually encode a WW1 narrative of loss within the textile artefact We Regret To Inform You.
- To critically reflect on viewer perception data gathered in response to earlier textile installations of a WW1 narrative, to exemplify relationships between individual/cultural memory and the reading of images, materials, processes and contexts.









Figure 2: Textile details from We Regret To Inform You (2015).

Research Context

The outputs in this portfolio form part of an ongoing research enquiry bridging textile practice, communication, narratology and perception from a post-structuralist perspective (applied within visual rather than linguistic paradigms). Situated with a communication paradigm for critical discussion, printed cloth is considered as a narrative form, examining textile semantics and the impact of collective cultural understanding and personal memory on the construction of meaning from visual narrative held within the textile object.

An earlier research investigation involving narrative textile works *The Ties That Bind (I) and (II)*, aimed to visually communicate the experiences of John Edgar Bell, a WW1 conscientious objector, and were presented in a range of public contexts to enable qualitative surveys of artefact interpretation with over 450 participants. Several outputs in this portfolio reflect on specific sections of data gathered during this previous study, in order to examine the relationship between authorial intention and viewer interpretation of visual narrative, exemplifying areas of divergence and commonality in relation to different areas of perception and cultural memory.

'Dichotomies of Representation and Interpretation: A Pacifist's Story' focuses in greater depth on the conscientious objector's narrative in written form, bringing to light new research material; whilst 'We Regret To Inform You' (Figure 1) was constructed to communicate the loss women faced when they received War Office notification letters of family members killed or missing in action. 'Dichotomies in Textile Making: Exploring Technology and Retaining Authenticity' and the adidas industry event, focus on readings of images, materials and processes within a textile context, exploring viewer perception and cultural memory, and how dominant cultural codes of meaning impact on interpretation. The book chapter considers technology usage in fine art practice (Hockney, 2001; Steadman, 2001) before examining perceptions of technology in textile artefact production, investigating if viewers identify and verify craft skill through the handmade, particularly when digital technologies are incorporated as part of the methodology of contemporary textile making. Responses to artefacts by S. Andrew

and K.Diamond are explored in relation to this question, reflecting on printed textile installations for public spaces, and knitted products within a micro-enterprise as part of the UK contemporary craft economy. The lecture 'Perception and Memory: Reading Textiles – Content, Cloth and Context' and supporting workshops for designers at Adidas, focused on semiotic readings of textiles and fashion, considering how individual memory and shared cultural understanding influence perceptions of image, cloth and context, and if we share a universal visual grammar.

Research Methods & Process

The book chapter 'Dichotomies of Representation and Interpretation: A Pacifist's Story', brings fresh insights to John Edgar Bell's narrative, combining fragments of previously unpublished oral history and diary extracts from Bell's daughter, with new research material in the National Archives and West Yorkshire newspapers (available through recent digitisation of WW1 records). This new information reveals individual and collective experiences of WW1 conscientious objectors in greater depth, particularly individual and family persecution. The chapter then discusses how the history of Bell's pacifism was developed as an act of remembrance and commemoration, to explore how narrative textiles might function as mnemonic products.

'WE REGRET TO INFORM YOU' (Figures 1 and 2) attempts to capture the grief of loss during WW1, and the cultural expectation of limited emotional response to death to maintain normalcy and social stability during times of conflict. Stitches over the woman's mouth represent externally imposed silencing, expressing emotion restrained, whilst the unopened envelope aims to signify postponement of knowledge held within the official letter. It continues the exploration of perceptions of image and textile and their semantic value in the communication of WW1 narratives, particularly those that express the impact of war on families.

Unlike other fields such as sculpture, textiles are culturally bound to their processes of manufacture, they are described by them and understood through them, and these processes are changing. Whilst practitioners embrace the 'new authenticity' of textile artefacts incorporating digital making processes, 'Dichotomies in Textile Making: Exploring Technology and Retaining Authenticity' questions if this perception is shared by viewers/consumers, reflecting on our understanding of 'the authentic' in relation to the textile object. Incorporating responses to S.Andrew's printed textiles, and consumer feedback on K. Diamond's knitted products, the chapter considers if an emerging form of digital authenticity in textile craft is being accepted. S.Andrew is the main author of this output, contributing the introduction, section on printed textiles, and conclusion. Discussing semiotic readings of textiles and fashion, the adidas lecture explored authorial intention and viewer perception, examining dominant and aberrant cultural decoding. Incorporating qualitative data from surveys of 'The Ties That Bind (I) and (II)', visual narrative commemoration was examined in relation to Barthes' 'plural text' (1974) in which a multitude of codes are mobilised, creating divergence in the generation and reception of meaning.

Exploring perceptions of aromas, sounds and images as triggers for cultural memory, the workshops focused on music evoked autobiographical memory (Baumgartner, 1992), olfactory memory (Willander and Larsson, 2006), and memento (Erll, 2011). Theory underpinning these concepts was introduced, followed by activities to exemplify and explore memory processes. Perceptions of sounds and music genres were explored, and participants discussed their responses to different olfactory stimulation, bringing objects with them to explain personal memories associated with each artefact's scent. This exploration of aromas and sounds acted as triggers for individual and shared memories that in semiotic terms revealed dominant cultural codes of meaning. Participants explored memory and commemoration associated with family/friends/cultural icons through a collage process, creating 'Memento not Mori' artefacts. This enabled dialogue on the communicative function of individual images and 'micro visual syntagyms' (Andrew 2013), considering the meanings generated through compositional sections and their impact on overall visual narrative.



Figure 3: S.Andrew speaking at adidas Creative Inspiration Days, 25th April 2016.

Research Outcomes & Dissemination

Group Exhibitions:	2015	'We Regret To Inform You' (2015) International Textile Art Biennial (ITA), Haacht, Belgium, 21st February 2015 – 1st March 2015.	Contributions by Invitation:	2014	Communicating Pacifism: Perceptions of a Textile Narrative of John Edgar Bell, Conscientious Objector. Invited speaker, 'No Glory in War: WW1 Day School' Manchester Metropolitan University, 15th November 2014.
	2016	11th Scythia International Biennial Exhibition of Contemporary Textile Art, Kherson, Ukraine, 15th -26th June 2016.			John Edgar Bell, Conscientious Objector. Invited contribution to the Arts and Humanities Research Council WW1 centenary
		Contextile 2016 Contemporary Textile Art Biennial, Guimaraes, Portugal, 30th July 2016 – 16th Oct 2016. <u>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xT9Hfp1hiY0</u>			publication 'Beyond The Trenches: Researching The First World War', October 2016.
		Excellence in Fibres 2016: A juried exhibition in print (image only), Massachusetts, USA, for international distribution.		2015	Reading the Image in Public Spaces. Invited speaker, Visual methods Research group, University of Bradford.
				2016	Perception and Memory: Reading Textiles – Content, Cloth and Context. Invited speaker, adidas Creative Inspiration Days,
	2014	'WW1 research' -experimental pattern books (2014): WW1 research - experimental pattern books. Hatton Gallery Atrium, Newcastle University, 26-27 June 2014, displayed as part of the 'Visual Insights: Theory, Method, Practice' conference.			25th April 2016. <u>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2RE1hAa7120&feature=youtu.be</u> This link is for adidas employees via the adidas online learning commons and is provided here for REF purposes only.
Book Chapters:	2018	Andrew, S. (2018) Dichotomies of Representation and Interpretation: A Pacifist's Story, in Hart, C. (Ed.) WW1 Media, Entertainment and			Perception and Memory: workshops. Invited workshop leader, adidas Creative Inspiration Days, 25th April 2016.
		Popular Culture, London: Midrash Publishing.			A Visual Narrative of Conscientious Objection: Q&A. Invited artist, speaking at the exhibition closing event of the 'Conscience and War'
		Andrew, S. & Diamond, K. (2018) 'Dichotomies of Textile Making: Exploring Technology and Retaining Authenticity' in 'Craft, the 'Handmade' and Contested Commodification', in Luckman, S. & Thomas, N (eds.) Craft Economies, London: Bloomsbury Academic,			exhibition marking the centenary of the introduction of conscription, Quaker Meeting House, Manchester, 12th June 2016, as part of Manchester Histories Festival.
		pp.70-82.		2017	Textile Semantics: Perception and Memory. Invited keynote speaker, Textiles, Identity and Innovation, 1st International Textile Design DTEX conference, University of Lisbon, Portugal, 2-4th November 2017.

Conference Presentations:	2014	Narrative Memorial: Dichotomies of Visual Representation and Interpretation. Presented at 'War Memories: Commemoration, Re-enactment, Writings of War in the English-speaking World (18th-21st centuries)', University of Rennes, France, 17-19 June 2014.	Conclusion
		Content, Cloth and Context: Examining Readings of Narrative Textiles in Public Spaces. Presented at 'Visual Insights: Theory, Method, Practice', School of Geography, Politics and Sociology, Newcastle University, 26-27 June 2014.	
		Image and Interpretation: A Contemporary Visual Narrative of WW1 Conscientious Objection. Presented at 'Objections to War', Centre for Nineteenth Century Studies, University of Hull, 7-9th September 2014.	
	2015	Reading Place - Shaping Memory. Presented at 'The Place of Memory and Memory of Place' Interdisciplinary Research Foundation Conference, Warsaw, Poland, 22-24 October 2015.	
	2016	Memory and Perception: A Visual Narrative of Conscientious Objection in WW1. Presented at 'The First World War: Commemoration and Memory', Imperial War Museum North, Salford, 26-27 February, 2016.	
		Commemoration and Cultural Signifiers: Perceptions of Christian Signifiers.Presented at 'International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR)' University of Leicester, 27-31st July, 2016.	
		Visualising Dissenting Voices. Presented at 'Dissenting Voices and the Everyday in the First World War', National Archives, London, 8-10 September 2016.	
	2017	Print and Perception: exploring the relationship between content, cloth and context. Presented at 'Digital/Material: developments in Printed Textiles', University of the Creative Arts, Rochester, 27th October, 2017.	
Awards:	2014	£4,000 Image Gallery Award. Arts and Humanities Research Council award to develop an online exhibition outlining the research context and development of visual narrative based on John Edgar Bell's WW1 experiences. https://ahrc.ukri.org/research/	
		readwatchlisten/imagegallery/2014galleries/ atextilenarrativeofjohnedgarbellconscientiousobjector/	

in public spaces, exploring its role as a signifier and mnemonic within these contexts, and proposing a functionality for textile practice beyond the decorative and its expected materiality.
The research has reached a broad range of audiences via a variety of dissemination processes. Outputs such as international exhibitions, to an artist Q&A as part of Manchester Histories

The research within *Narrative: Memory: Perception* contributes to a wider ongoing discourse on the communicative function of textiles

Festival, and the lecture and workshops at adidas, demonstrate the relevance of the research to public and industry audiences beyond academia. Whilst much of the work was visually anchored to WW1 narratives for the 2014-18 First World War centenary, the semiotic approach underpinning the research will now be developed within 'Fabrica Physica', exploring territories for cross-disciplinary collaborative practice, communication and co-creation between arts practitioners and scientists. This commenced with a collaborattion with biophysists at the University of Leeds in 2019, with the aim of investigating, interpreting and communicating science through textile semantic methodologies. Communicating the relationship between the history of x-ray diffraction studies of textiles and their impact on contemporary biophysics practices, this ongoing exploration considers how this relationship can be communicated via textile installations, art-science experiments, and handling objects for public engagement.



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Clover Jette B	Rijkenberg Marian B
Colleen Merrill USA	Rimon Erez Solo II.
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Dekeyser Lieve B	Robinson Rosi UK
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Dupont Veerle B	Samara Anna-Maria GR
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We Regret To Inform You Digitally printed cotton with stitch and appliqué (67 x 104 cm) s.andrew@manchester.ac.uk

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Figure 5: Contextile 2016 Contemporary Textile Art Biennial, Palacio Centro Cultural Vila Flor, Guimaraes, Portugal, 30th July 2016 – 16th Oct 2016, exhibition catalogue evidence.

Figure 4: International Textile Art (ITA) 2015, Haacht, Belgium, 21st February 2015 - 1st March 2015, exhibition catalogue evidence.









Figure 7: Front cover and double page spread from the AHRC publication 'Beyond The Trenches: Researching The First World War', October 2014.









CALLING ALL CREATORS **INSPIRATION DAYS** 18 APRIL - 13 MAY

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Figure 8: Conscience and War information, Manchester Histories Festival, 2016.

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Output Type:

Chapters in edited books, original artistic works, creative body of enquiry, contribution to collaborative group exhibitions, conference contribution



