

Research Methods and Communication

Project Proposal

Materialising Memories

Olivia Hutchings

Words count- 2814

List of illustrations

Figure 1, Praveen Shrestha, Human Memory Diagram.

Figure 2, Olivia Hutchings, Orangebox project.

Figure 3, Arrange whatever pieces come your way, Quilt 5.

Figure 4, Arrange Whatever Pieces Come Your Way, Quilt 15.

Figure 5 and 6, Shelly Goldsmith, Łódź Blouse Trilogy.

Materialising Memories

Material and cloth play such a vital part of our lives, textile designer or not, we are always surrounded by it. However, as a textile designer I have always been interested in cloth, the way it looks, the way it feels, the texture, fibres, everything. I would usually describe myself as a very process led designer mainly focusing on what process I will use next to screen print. I normally just look at cloth as a surface that I would screen print on, however, I recently have been looking at cloth from a different perspective, I have found an interest into looking at people's different relationship and interaction with cloth, how it effects our memories and creates nostalgia. Materialising Memories.

For this essay, I would like to explore textiles as a narrative and look how cloth has impacted our day to day lives reminding us of stories, past and present. "Textiles can be read as texts on many levels. Literal narratives conveyed through text appear on the surface or are embedded in the structure of the textile and can often be read by the public in the same way that text on paper is read." (Hemmings, 2005) Here Jessica Hemmings compares the way we read narratives in textiles to the way we read normal text on paper, this proves how powerful the use of textile can be to portray stories. It could be as easy as just a simple conversational pattern, but as reader we will be able to see the story of the design.

Reusing and revaluing items is another important topic for me as a designer, I would love to be more cautious in the amount of waste I produce when creating new work. I would also like to explore how we can rework and reuse sentimental items of cloth adding to the stories they already have.

Memory

Memory is the means by which we draw our past experiences in order to use this information in the present' (Sternberg, 1999). Memory is something remembered from the past. I would like to explore coming into existence with finding past memories and stories linked to cloth.

Like cloth, memory plays a vital part of our lives. Memory is the faculty of the brain by which data or information is encoded, stored and retrieved when needed. The quote bellow explains what it would be like without the use of memories "Without a memory of the past, we cannot operate in the present or think about the future. We would not be able to remember what we did yesterday, what we have done today or what we plan to do tomorrow. Without memory, we could not learn anything." (McLoed, 2013). There are 3 types of memory you can reach within your brain, sensory short-term, and long-term. The most important form of memory that helps us recall precious moments is long term, this is what we use to retrieve an event or story that occurred 5 minutes or 20 years ago. Remembering is a process we use to retrieve our memories when requested or triggered. The figure below shows all the different forms of memory we can use.

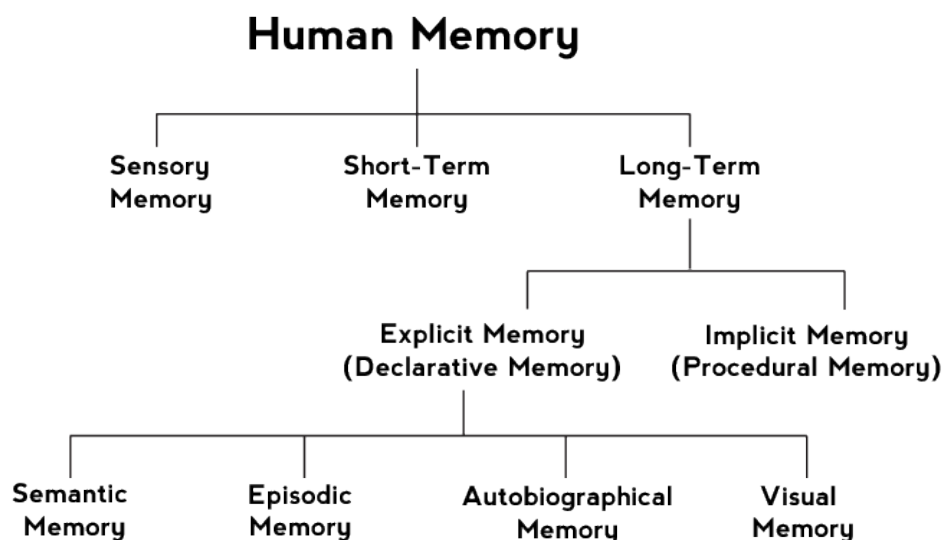


Figure 1, Praveen Shrestha, Human Memory Diagram.

Maker, Material and Memory

Textile designers and makers are always in close contact with materials. The next part of this essay will investigate the connection between maker, material and memory. Does the memory have more meaning if it was created by them than someone just buying and wearing an item of clothing?

“Encountering the artifact some time after a project’s completion can be quite a powerful experience. All the various elements of the project are reunited once more, momentarily, in its materiality. It evokes a medley of sensations, emotions, and sounds that, like flashbacks, appear close at hand but immediately move out of reach. Its forceful physical presence is literally felt: its weight, its density, and compactness; its smell, the richness of its color, and the subtle variations of materials used—all impossible to fully capture in photographs. I am reminded of connections between individuals, between motifs and individuals, and of topics of conversation.” (Shercliff, 2019)

Here, Emma Shercliff explains how textile designers and makers can experience deeper memories and connections to a textile project sometime after it has been made by them. She explains how the whole project can come flooding back to you, almost like a narrative from beginning to end, with all the different senses involved. I agree with this, throughout my time at University I can look back at certain pieces of work that I have produced and remember the specific project it was made for vividly. A specific project in my second year of University always brings me joy when I think of it, it was my first ever live brief project with furniture company Orangebox. I can remember almost everything about the project, the reason we did it, the workshops we undertook, the making of the product. It especially reminds me of happy times when I used and combined the processes I love the most, screen printing and free hand machine embroidery. The memory feels even more special recently as we are unable to use the University facilities due to the Covid19 pandemic, meaning I haven’t been able to use the print room and screen print as much as I would like lately. As Emma explains, I can also remember the weight and the colours of the material we used, it

wasn't like the normal type of material we would use, the vivid shade of orange. I can even remember what the material felt like to touch, a heavy wool with a slightly rough raised surface texture from the screen printed puff binder.



Figure 2, Olivia Hutchings, Orangebox project.

She mentions how you can also remember topics of conversations between individual too, I also agree with this. When Orangebox, visited us halfway through our project to look at our work so far, I remember the conversation I had with them. They couldn't believe I machine embroider the amount of detail I had on my samples all myself, this still makes me smile and feel proud that I impressed them so much. Whenever I am not feeling motivated or feeling my best as a designer I always look back to this project as it reminds me of a time where I worked so hard and the work paid off. Still to this day thinking back to it makes me feel confident in myself as a designer.

She also explains how it can bring back a range of sensations and emotions, I have encountered this on multiple occasions for different projects. Recently, I undertook a project involving precious sentimental pieces of clothing from my Nan and Grandad. I cut up a skirt and a shirt and needle punched them together. When I now look at the finished piece it reminds me of them don't get me wrong, but also reminds me of the continuous punching noise coming from the machine. Reminds me of the tearing noise when I cut up both items. Reminds me of the soft feeling to touch the two pieces of material woven together.

Cloth

From the moment we are born we are wrapped in cloth, the moment we die we are wrapped in cloth, it is always around us. Cloth is one of the first surfaces we touch after our mother's skin when we are born, we find comfort in it.

This part of my essay will investigate the relationship between clothes and memories. Clothes are a way to portray our personality and style, but they can also portray the history of our past. Cloth holds and triggers our memories, especially in the form of clothes, we can all remember a certain outfit we wore to a certain event. Clothes are arguably narratives in material forms, narratives are sequences of connected events, they are part of the stories we actually live. Goett explains how "Clothes are imbued with memories, intertwined with our histories and identities, interwoven into the "fabric of our lives" (Goett, 2008). A certain item of clothing or tactile surface can remind you of a certain time or person in your life, it's thought revoking and triggers the material memory in your head. This is similar to how certain smells can remind you of certain moments.

Some items of clothing are more than just clothes, they are keepsakes that remind us of people and places in our lifetime past and present. From baby clothes to school clothes, prom dresses to wedding dresses, we refuse to throw them away, even when we have no use for them anymore. They remind us of our experiences through triggers of memory, the touch of a certain material could trigger your memory to bring back a certain point of your life. The sentimentality of items that memory attach to is priceless. I am guilty of this, I refuse to throw away certain items of clothing that I associate certain events with, its usually dresses that are associated with nights out, they remind me of good times with my friends. We also associate certain clothes with certain people, for example I always associate a checked shirt with my Grandad.

We might not realise it at the time, but cloth most definitely holds our memories, it must just be a small memory, a flashback triggered, but clothing is almost like our hidden archives of memories. “We Don’t Just Wear Clothes, We Wear Memories.” (We Don't Just Wear Clothes, We Wear Memories, 2019)

Reusing Textiles

Reusing things is an important value to me, I try to do my bit for the environment, especially when it comes to cloth, landfill sights are rarely an option for me. I will either keep the items or give them to charity to re-wear. Interreeg Europe explains how bad the textile industry with waste, it states “Thanks to fast fashion’s linear model of take, make and waste, the fashion industry has earned itself a place among the most polluting industries worldwide. Growing concerns have paved the way for an alternative, sustainable ways of organising textile production. One of them is the circular model of the textile industry.” (Circular Economy in Textile Sector, 2020). The circular model ensures that fabrics and fibres are kept at their highest value during use and re-enter the economy, hopefully ensuring it doesn’t end up in waste. By re-working and re-wearing items of cloth, it allows the product to become part of a much bigger circular economy. “A circular economy is an alternative to a traditional linear economy (make, use, dispose) in which we keep resources in use for as long as possible, extract the maximum value from them whilst in use, then recover and regenerate products and materials at the end of each service life.” (WRAP UK, 2021). This is one of my goals for my creative venture project, to recover and regenerate as much material as I can in order to keep the material in the circular economy cycle instead of buying new raw material.

Reusing and mending were important values many years ago, grandparents would pass clothes on to their children and so on, and if any item of clothing ever had a flaw or hole in it, it would be mended. An article below explains how mending has once again become the new in thing. It states “We’re catching on. Mending is trending. It is the simplest way to minimise our material footprint and an ethical and sustainable action within easy reach.” (Textile Beat, 2019) The Textile Beat is so correct, Mending is trending but so is reusing and reworking. Many creatives are now reworking old items to create pieces with narrative and nostalgia.

The book Folk Fashion – Understanding homemade clothes is all about encouraging everyday people to make and mend garments for themselves and their families. In the book

Holroyd explains “While folk fashion is produced by amateurs, it does not indicate a particular level of skill. “ (Holroyd, 2017) Here she is explaining you don’t need to be a professional or even an amateur to mend or rework your clothes, it should be something we all are doing.

I am keen to look into this to reuse, rework, remake, items for my creative work. As a soon to be graduate designer, I have been researching into artists that redesign and rework items from our past. Two creatives that rework items are clothing into beautiful quilts are Sheelagh Boyce and Annabelle Harty who are Arrange Whatever Pieces Come Your Way. They specialise in creating quilts from personal and family collections of clothing. They then design with a specific place and memory in mind associated with that item of clothing, as the quote below states.

“The subject or shapes created in each quilt begin with a relationship between the fabrics chosen and the particular building, landscape or combination of the two that it describes. From collected images, travels, ideas and memories, we take an architect, building or place and respond to these in either intimate detail or broad context.” (Boyce and Harty, 2020)



Figure 3, Arrange whatever pieces come your way, Quilt 5.

Figure 3 above, states the story of how the idea of the quilt happened. They used small unpicked items of clothing to remind them of the sun bleached hilltop towns of Las Alpujarras. When first looking at the quilts you probably wouldn't even notice the unpicked items of clothing in the quilt, you definitely can't explain what it is without the background information. From an outsider's view, you will never see that memory in the quilt unless explained to you, once explained you probably would not feel the memory like Sheelgah and Annabelle. For many people they will just see an abstract quilt, but to Sheelgah and Annabelle this quilt will always take them back to this memory, always remind them of that trip to Southern Spain.

Another example of the quilts bellow in figure 4. This one was a commission for a restaurant in Manchester, they have combined blue overalls and white aprons with white collar shirts. This is really clever as they are all items of clothing in this quilt can be associated within the restaurant trade and I personally would never think of reusing them. However, this description is very detailed but leaves you wondering is there a deeper narrative behind this quilt? The white shirts represent the 'old now demolished' magistrate courts, could this be where the new restaurant is being built? Once again from an outsider's view, it is hard to connect with the quilt because you don't know the full story and memory behind it. Sheelgah, Annabelle and the restaurant all have a relationship with the quilt and can reveal the narrative behind it.

ARRANGE
WHATEVER
PIECES
COME
YOUR
WAY

Quilts Catalogue Quilts 1 - 8 About
Press and Events Contact



— Background

Quilts 15 was commissioned for the new Bistroteque Restaurant, housed within CulturePlex in Manchester.

One side, 'the blue collar' side of the quilt, is made entirely of old blue overalls and boiler suits, along with a collection of white aprons. The abstracted shapes are formed by the pattern shapes within these garments.

The other side reflects the interior of the old, now demolished, Manchester Magistrates Courts designed by Brian Henderson for YRM. The white is made up of the architect's own shirts.

Figure 4, Arrange Whatever Pieces Come Your Way, Quilt 15.

Another creative that reworks reclaimed garments into beautiful one of multi-media textile pieces is Shelly Goldsmith. She likes to unpick narratives in clothing, her work interprets memories and emotion associated with whatever item she reworks. Shelly explains that "The notion that clothing, cloth, can carry memory, a sense of experience has driven much investigation. I have constructed work that imagines the external life of the wearer; cloth which bears the imprint or residue of life." (Goldsmith, 2007) She explores the notion of memory, life and experience in worn clothing in her work Łódź Blouse Trilogy shown below in figure



Figure 5 and 6, Shelly Goldsmith, Łódź Blouse Trilogy.

Salvage to Selvedge – My Creative Venture

From the research I have gathered I can say that the growing amount of Textile waste is a problem. Therefore, I am keen to explore the ideas of reusing cloth to push my creative venture module next term and minimise my material footprint. Hopefully I can create a textile collection out of other people's cloth waste that would be my Salvage to Selvedge collection. I will be able to add my own stories, memories and imagery from my favourite places to material that is already rich of its own stories. I hope to add my stories by method of Screen Printing, however, collecting the material isn't going to be an easy job, I will need to start salvaging for the correct types of materials now in order to use certain screen print methods. I am still interested in the connection between memory and material. When I am looking for my salvage material perhaps I'll look for the material that has the most stories, ones that I will be able to add my layer of screen-printed stories on top. However, there is also the magic of not knowing, imaging using material that you know must have impacted someone's memories before, but you just don't know what?

My aim is to focus on Reusing, Reworking and Revaluing.

Bibliography

- Boyce, S. and Harty, A., 2020. *About*. [online] Arrange Whatever Pieces Come Your Way. Available at: <<https://arrangewhateverpiecescomeyourway.com/about-us/>> [Accessed 30 December 2020].
- College Fashion. 2019. *We Don't Just Wear Clothes, We Wear Memories*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.collegefashion.net/college-life/how-clothes-affect-memories/>> [Accessed 4 December 2020]
- Goett, S. 2008. The more art, the more science: narrative interpretations of art (and life). Working papers in Art and Design, 5.
- Goldsmith, S., 2007. *The Textile Artists - Shelly Goldsmith, UK*. [online] Transitionandinfluenceprojects.com. Available at: <http://transitionandinfluenceprojects.com/clothandculturenow/Shelly_Goldsmith.html> [Accessed 4 January 2021].
- Hemmings, J., 2005. *Words Are Not Enough: Textile Narrative* ». [online] Jessicahemmings.com. Available at: <<https://www.jessicahemmings.com/words-are-not-enough-textile-narrative/>> [Accessed 7 January 2021].
- Holroyd, A., 2017. *Folk Fashion: Understanding Homemade Clothes*. 1st ed. London: I.B. Tauris, p.1.
- Interreg Europe. 2020. *Circular Economy In Textile Sector*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.interregeurope.eu/circpro/news/news-article/8457/circular-economy-in-textile-sector/>> [Accessed 7 January 2021].
- McLoed, S., 2013. [online] Simplypsychology.org. Available at: <<https://www.simplypsychology.org/memory.html>> [Accessed 6 January 2021].
- Shercliff, E., 2019. Material Memories in Storage: The Aftermath of Site-Specific, Collectively Made Textiles. *TEXTILE*, [online] 17(4), pp.347-356. Available at: <<https://www-tandfonline-com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/doi/full/10.1080/14759756.2019.1639415>> [Accessed 28 December 2020].
- Sternberg, 1999. [online] Simplypsychology.org. Available at: <<https://www.simplypsychology.org/memory.html>> [Accessed 6 January 2021].
- Textilebeat.com. 2019. *Memories In Cloth | Textile Beat*. [online] Available at: <<https://textilebeat.com/memories-in-cloth/>> [Accessed 6 December 2020].
- Wrap.org.uk. 2021. *WRAP And The Circular Economy | WRAP UK*. [online] Available at: <<http://www.wrap.org.uk/about-us/about/wrap-and-circular-economy>> [Accessed 7 January 2021].