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**Developing Methodologies for Creating a Textile Design Collection, based on Archive Material**

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My research is involved with working towards a methodology for developing textile designs from archive material and historical collections. At a future point, this will be using Parker Knoll fabric samples, part of the Parker Collection which is stored at London Metropolitan University, as a case study.

As I am an early stage researcher, theses looking at textile design development provide me with a picture of current writing, which shows that this is an area that has a 'scarcity of literature regarding textile design approaches to archive utilization.'<sup>1</sup> The reasons for why this might be are cited in recent PhD papers and published literature.

So although there have been many recreations of archive textiles, as any trip to a museum or National Trust shop will demonstrate, there has been little written on the methodologies employed on the use of archive collections.

Through the PhD thesis of Torunn Kjolberg<sup>2</sup>, I discovered a precedent for the discussion of textile design methodology being inextricably linked with the teaching practices in Higher Education in the UK, which is in turn, historically grounded in the experience of the industry connections of both institute and staff. Although linked with the development of the art school model, design schools invariably started with vocational training, sometimes linked directly to places of work.<sup>3</sup> This heritage is one of the most compelling reasons that there is a lack of academic research into fashion and textile subject areas, which continues up until the present time. Helena Britt, of Glasgow School of Art, speaking in 2012, argues that 'there are comparatively low numbers of staff holding PhD qualifications, and small numbers of design research degree students, <sup>4</sup> in the design subjects, as opposed to traditionally academic'.

In her 2014 PhD thesis, Elaine Igoe asserts that the sparse writing on textile design process reflects that 'the academic field of design research has lacked significant input from textile design'<sup>5</sup> She argues that this is a result of a cultural history which has meant that a bias against the subject as a serious area of study has arisen. One of these factors is gender based, with the predominance of women working in the textile arena. However, any discussion of past practice into the UK industry, reveals that men studied textiles as a trade,<sup>6</sup> and in some areas of the country were employed as much as women.

Susie Norris-Reeves, in her 2014 PhD<sup>7</sup> argues that fashion is 'shifting towards acceptance as high art', aided by being 'traditionally viewed by the image maker- the photographer'. With this momentum, she asks if 'fashion is now emerging' and becomes more 'convinced there is a place for fashion

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<sup>1</sup> Helena Britt and Jimmy Stephen-Cran, 'Inspiring Artifacts: Examining Utilization of Archival References in the Textile Design Process', *Journal of Textile Design Research and Practice* Volume 2, Issue 1, May 2014 pp 35–68

<sup>2</sup> Kjolberg, Torunn, Transfer Report Mphil to PhD, University of Brighton, Faculty of Arts and Architecture, May, 2009, p19

<sup>3</sup> Farrar, H, The Model Mill, Infinite and Various Conference, Bradford College of Design, April 2015

<sup>4</sup> Britt,

<sup>5</sup> Igoe, Elaine, In textasis : matrixial narratives of textile design, PhD, RCA, Oct 2014

<sup>6</sup> Farrar

<sup>7</sup> Norris-Reeves, S, Constructing a Narrative of Fashion Practice as Inquiry, PhD, RCA, Nov 2014

practice in a cultural context'.<sup>8</sup> With the close association between fashion and textiles, we can speculate that both disciplines will be seeing a greater degree of inclusion in the research culture conversation.

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The recent research precedents both published and presented on using textile archive, provide valuable information on how researchers from various disciplines identify, interrogate and interpret the material.

These different approaches I have started to categorise, but there is one approach I have quickly identified as a 'dead end' in terms of a route for further research investigation, and that is the simple re-creation, and re-colouring, of fabrics. To enable the archive to contribute to contemporary culture, I would argue that it must be revitalized, scrutinized, and reinterpreted, and this requires methodologies that can enquire in different ways.

These different approaches that use enquiring methodologies, I have started to categorise into the following areas-

- Textile archive used as a source of information to recreate a specific textile technique
- Archive, other than textile to create textile outcome
- Textile archive providing historical and sociological information
- Firstly, an example of Textile archive used as a source of information to recreate a specific textile technique-

The printer Trish Belford recreated a printing process that has disappeared from production in a sponsored, two year collaborative project looking at the fabrics from the archive of Turnbull and Stockdale in Ramsbottom, Lancashire<sup>9</sup>. Belford is an accomplished and experienced screen printer, and her collaborators on the project were Dr Philip Sykas, fabric archivist and researcher at Manchester Institute for Research and Innovation in Art and Design, and weaver, Beth Milligan.

The project looked at the production of a method that combines print with weave, by printing on the warp threads before they are woven, a process known as 'Shadow Tissue'. It has similarities to ikat, in which the warp threads are resist dyed, and chine, where they are block printed. The technique was developed into a commercial manufacturing process, by Turnbull and Stockdale, reaching peak production in the 1920s, but stopped during WW2. A brief attempt to revive it during the 1960s failed, and the machinery used, along with the expertise of the workers employed, has now disappeared. Philip Sykas and Trish Belford set out to recreate the fabrics, knowing that they would have to improvise to reconstruct the methods to do so. Belford writes, 'This research was an attempt to bridge that loss. We sought not only to reconnect with the designers and makers of the past through the material examples they left behind, [but also] looking for the craft knowledge embodied within surviving pieces.'<sup>10</sup>

Without details of the original production, Belford experimented with contemporary dyes and methods to mimic the fabrics, using simple screen print motifs from the company prints. As her

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<sup>8</sup> Norris-Reeves, S, Constructing a Narrative of Fashion Practice as Inquiry, PhD, RCA, Nov 2014

<sup>9</sup> Belford, Patricia, The Beauty of Experiment, The Rediscovery of Shadow Tissues, Turnball and Stockdale, Isle of Man, 2013

<sup>10</sup>Sykas, p9

methodology, she took the theory found in the records, and in the original samples, to research by practice. A systematic process of experimentation, recording the results of tests with dye, yarn, and weave technique followed, to recreate similar effects to those of the original fabrics. Her practical recreations were unable to solve some of the technical difficulties encountered, and the research team concluded that although the machinery needed could be reproduced, the associated knowledge had been lost.

The account of working with the Turnbull and Stockdale archives by Trish Belford in *Shadow Tissues*, is a comprehensive investigation into the technical means of recreating the fabrics. This led to subsequently innovating with these processes, to develop and take the technique to another level with outcomes that are aesthetically more contemporary. The results of this method show how far this 'laboratory' style of investigation with archive material can be taken, although there are issues about how it could be used commercially, which was one of the original research questions that was asked.

An example of archive other than textile, used to create textiles, is the Awaken Project.

This was a project in which members of staff at Glasgow School of Art used the Archive and Collections Centre at the School, to inspire fashion and textile related outcomes. Fourteen members of staff selected items, both textile and non-textile related, but the majority selecting non-textile, including photographs, architectural drawings, a travel journal and Charles Rennie Mackintosh's sketchbooks.

In the paper written up on the project which culminated in an Exhibition in 2009, Helena Britt and Jimmy Stephen-Cran, record that the designers needed to be inspired by non-textile artefacts, to create new ideas for their own textiles. Additionally, they also needed to set themselves a brief, or supplement the chosen archive item with their own research material.

The participants design development processes were documented in Creative Practitioner Journals, which they kept for the duration of the project. The journals not only provided an insight to the methodological approaches, but aided self- reflection and understanding. The diverse response from the group of fourteen designers, give examples of different approaches for working with archive material to create textile outcomes. This raises the question of originality in using archive material, and how the designer can be truly innovative. What are the processes and methodologies that can be used?

Another exhibition of artists and textile practitioners was the Bradford Pick and Mix Exhibition, held in early 2015, responding to artefacts in the Bradford College Textile Archive. This comprises of remnants of the many mills and factories of the textile industry that dominated the town and surrounding area for centuries. Much of the contents were saved by textile staff at the college, and fellow researchers, aware that as the traditional manufacturing diminished, valuable evidence of a whole way of life was in danger of disappearing forever.

In the Symposium <sup>11</sup> that followed, one of the participants to the Exhibition, embroiderer Hannah Lamb, spoke on how she commemorated the career of a lifelong employee at Lister's Mills, in Mannington, Yorkshire with her stitched and cyanotype tribute, inspired by one of his weave plans.

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<sup>11</sup> Lamb, Hannah, *How to Use Archives Creatively*, paper given at Infinite and Various Conference, Bradford College of Design, April 2015

Textile pieces such as Hannah's are accomplished and evocative, but can only remind us that the disappearance of the skills and knowledge is one of great loss to the heritage of textile production.

Another approach was used by Claire Wellesley-Smith, a community artist, who was inspired by a recipe book for black dyes compiled by David Smith, a Halifax based dyer, printer, writer and strict Baptist minister.<sup>12</sup> Her response was to work with local people on activities that benefitted the community and the area.

She worked with them to grow plants for natural dyeing, and to take part in textile based activities, sewing and telling stories.

The methodology employed by Wellesley-Smith ensures there is a continuation of activity that is of benefit to the community, something that would have been at the heart of the life of the Baptist minister and dyer. In this exercise, the details of the archived information may not be interrogated for knowledge of past practices or lost skills, but the social engagement that has resulted continues a tradition of bringing participants closer to their environment and their communities.

There are two important precedents for textile archive providing historical and sociological information, one well documented, the other in initial stages.

Firstly the textile remnants known as the Foundling Textiles. These are 5,000 scraps of textile used to identify babies who were left at the Foundling Hospital by women, in the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century, the majority of whom used scraps of their own clothing to be used in a hoped for reclaiming of their child at some future date.

Examples of dress from this time are predominantly those of the wealthy and influential, with very few examples of the much more common woollen and cotton garments worn by most of the population. The majority of clothing worn was recycled- handed down, cut up and reused as clothing, household linens, until it was worn away. These small swatches provide an insight into the conditions of life for many thousands of women of the time, but also an accidental source of information on fabrics worn by ordinary women, along with the terminology used to describe them.

In the one year VARI Project, the Victoria and Albert Museum, has worked with researchers and academics to enhance the existing provision by the Museum, in order to make it more accessible to an international and public audience.<sup>13</sup>

Using different formats, such as conferences, object handling and study sessions, as well as museum visits, they looked at cross-disciplinary research.

One example was a workshop which invited spinners into the Museum to use spinning wheels of the type used from 1400-1800. Alongside of the demonstration, fabrics from this time were shown, so the connections could be made between the two, and further understanding of the construction and process, including weave methods and use of yarns.

Other sessions had artists, textile craftspeople and manufacturers meeting to share what they do, and then compare their ways of thinking, and how the knowledge could be translated to other areas.

One of the most precious textile archives, the Leman Album of Spitalfields Silks designs, was the subject of an experiment with a shared object. Fifteen people from very different disciplines

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<sup>12</sup> Wellesley-Smith, C, 'Fragments of Intimacy', paper given at Infinite and Various Conference, Bradford College of Design, April 2015

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including a curator of design, an archivist, textile curator, paper conservator, book conservator, economist, and a historian discussed how they see the Album.

The research from this project has not yet been published, but it is hoped that this will be able to provide the starting point for a range of different approaches into the use of archive material.

These precedents help to sign post my route to where I look next to gather further information. They also serve to remind me of the vast list of background reading necessary to be aware of the context within which I am working. The study of archive material covers aspects of material culture that is informed by study of memory, storytelling, and gender, to name just three themes, amongst many. I will be interrogating the work of those who have lead the way in these fields, in order to understand where I can hope to contribute in the future.