

Transfer Report Mphil to PhD

University of Brighton, Faculty of Arts and Architecture

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Title of thesis

Visual Research in Fashion and Textile Design Undergraduate Education and Implications for Pedagogy.

Research question

What is visual research and what functions does it serve in fashion and textile design students' learning experience and practice?

Aims of research

- To form a functioning definition of 'visual research' in the context of fashion and textile design education based on empirical data and relevant literature.
- To investigate the process of visual research in a longitudinal ethnographic study of fashion and textile design students.
- To consider the ways in which the students engage with Victoria and Albert Museum in their visual research.
- To present a contribution to new knowledge through the development of a theoretical framework of visual research to inform future design pedagogy.

Introduction

This project set out to explore the practice of visual research within the discipline of fashion and textile design at a higher education institution. The process of visual research, as evidenced through a quantitative survey and literature review undertaken, is widely embedded in design education in the United Kingdom. Nevertheless the process of 'visual research' is, with a few exceptions, under-theorised and under-researched and stands as an instrumental, rather than constitutive part of the design process. My research

shows that students perceive that they are assumed to know what visual research is, the purpose it serves and how it should be done, but that this is not made explicit to them. Instead they are presented with frequently contradictory advice from teaching staff, often in conflict with their own preferred approach. The pedagogy such as it is, offers little in the way of a framework for structured reflection and analytical tools. The students' approaches to learning, from deep to surface, bear direct relation to the strategies they adopt in their visual research as was demonstrated in a study by Drew, Bailey and Shreeve¹. Visual research is not neatly defined for students with regards to its purpose, function or content and a result of this is that students have to undertake a search for their own approach to a greater or lesser extent consciously and deliberately. For 'deep learners' this is a significant part of their learning journeys and a key 'threshold concept'². For many students however, this 'guesswork' and search is less successful and can be dis-empowering. My argument, based on almost two years of fieldwork, shows this is due to:

- The process of research in design is poorly articulated and disengaged from teaching contexts.
- Confusion about what constitutes research and the recording or gathering of material i.e. no clear conceptual separation of methodology and research tools or methods. (Practicing drawing techniques for example may be a part of visual research training but is not visual research in itself.)
- Emphasis on product rather than process in learning and teaching.
- Time restraints reducing opportunities for deep engagement.
- Separation of (technical) skills and conceptual development –students believe they can choose to develop one as opposed to the other.

¹ Sue Bailey, "Student Approaches to Learning in Fashion Design: A Phenomenographic Study," Art, Design & Communication in Higher Education 2.2 (2002). And Alison Shreeve, Sue Bailey and Linda Drew, "Students' Approaches to the 'Research' Component in the Fashion Design Project: Variation in Students' Experience of the Research Process," Art, Design & Communication in Higher Education 2.3 (2004).

² Jan Meyer and Ray Land, "Threshold Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge: Epistemological Considerations and a Conceptual Framework for Teaching and Learning," Higher Education 49.3 (2005).

- Emphasis on summative over formative assessment and ‘ticking boxes’ leading to surface and strategic approaches in visual research.

A central argument in my thesis is that visual research, as a creative practice, is transformational. Visual research should be concerned with making connections between the past and the present and the personal and the collective. Rather than being verbally expressed, the process and outcome of the research are in some way or another materially and/or visually articulated. This transformation needs to occur on two levels –materially and subjectively. Both are deeply intertwined and interdependent:

- ‘Materially’ transformational: bringing about change in the research material, from *what is* to *what becomes*; enabling synthesis informed by intuition, experimentation, observation, and deep questioning. It necessitates critical awareness and knowledge of tools, materials, processes and sources integral to design practice. Visual research enables the designer or design student to articulate ‘new and meaningful relationships amongst otherwise disparate parts.’³
- ‘Subjectively’ transformational: leading to conceptual change and awareness of how our practice is embedded in ethical, aesthetic, culturally and historically located values and contexts. Here, visual research is a psychosocial process of meaning-making and a practice which encourages the student’s personal growth and development.

My PhD project aims to identify the central characteristics which underpin the practice of ‘visual research’ and to develop a definition and methodological framework to inform learning and teaching in creative research practice. This study is theoretically grounded in a constructivist conception of learning as developed from Vygotsky’s socio-cultural perception of human development.⁴ This means I perceive cognitive tasks as inseparable

³ James Corner, "The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique and Invention," Mappings, ed. Denis Cosgrove (London: Reaktion, 1999). P. 229

⁴ Lev Vygotsky, Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes, eds. Michael Cole and et. al. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978). And Lev Vygotsky, Thought and Language, trans. Alex Kozulin (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1989).

from social tasks because learning always has a social component and knowledge as *about* the world rather than constitutive of the world. Visual research is hence an *activity of construction*.

This report will first debate and describe the process of research, methodological underpinnings and the analytical process. The second part begins to expound some of the findings and its indications for how this project will move forward and finally section three, its context and expected contribution to knowledge.

Section 1. Research undertaken

This research project has utilised an ethnographic methodology, emphasising qualitative interviews and observation. The project has also used some quantitative material in the form of two questionnaire surveys to support the qualitative evidence. However, the emphasis is on the qualitative data and it is this material which will be employed to address the core research question.

The methodology employed is intrinsically connected to the perception of learning and theoretical emphasis which underpins it. Informed by constructivist theories, which sees learning as human development and a form of meaning making, the methods have sought to extract complexities and trajectories in the students' experiences through a longitudinal study. Ethnography has a considerable credibility and utility within (general) educational research but less so within studies of learning in Higher Education. A review of abstracts of journal articles published from 2004 to present, in addition to a review of the qualitative methodologies which formed the basis for the most influential theories of learning⁵, found that research methodologies in post-compulsory education where stated, tend to emphasise case study methodology, experimental methods, action research and phenomenographic research. In the field of design pedagogy peer-reviewed and published research papers using ethnographic methods offer relatively few examples.⁶

⁵ Here I include Kolb's learning cycle and learning style inventory, Biggs's SOLO taxonomy, Marton and Säljö's deep and surface approaches.

⁶ Exceptions include Webster's research on one-to-one tutorials in architectural education: Helena Webster, "Facilitating Critically Reflective Learning: Excavating the Role of the Design Tutor in

However, phenomenographic methods, linked to the study of qualitative differences in students' learning, use approaches which closely resemble ethnographic methods. Significantly, phenomenography as a methodology focuses on specific phenomena in the student's experience and learning, and attempts to study learning in 'naturalistic' settings.⁷

Fieldwork

A pilot study was conducted in the summer term of 2007 with three students recruited from Level 2 (the second year of the BAHons) Fashion Design and four from Level 1 (the first year of the Mdes) Textile Design courses. These students were interviewed and observed over the course of a term. The data collected in the pilot will not be used to inform the content of the thesis but the process was invaluable and informed the main study in terms of research tools and methods adopted, sequencing of questions and topics, organisation of data and strategies for data analysis.

The fieldwork undertaken for this thesis started in November 2007 and will be completed in June 2009. The longitudinal study has followed a group of fashion design and textile design students over a period of two academic years using observation in various learning settings and regular interviews.

The participants were self-selected from a single cohort of Level 1 fashion design and textile design students. There was an equal number of students participating from both courses but the proportion of fashion students was greater as this course has fewer

Architectural Education," Art, Design & Media in Higher Education 2.3 (2003). And on pedagogic impact of the design jury in a school of architecture: Helena Webster, "A Foucauldian Look at the Design Jury," Art, Design & Media in Higher Education 5.1 (2006).

⁷ Examples include: Noam Austerlitz, "The Internal Point of View: Studying Design Students' Emotional Experience in the Studio Via Phenomenography and Ethnography," Art, Design and Communication in Higher Education 5.3 (2007).

Bailey, "Student Approaches to Learning in Fashion Design.", Ference Marton and Shirley Booth, Learning and Awareness, The Educational Psychologies Series, ed. Robert J. Sternberg (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associated Publishers, 1997).

Ference Marton and Roger Säljö, "Approaches to Learning," The Experience of Learning: Implications for Teaching and Studying in Higher Education, eds. Ference Marton, Dai Hounsell and Noel Entwistle, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1997), Anna Reid and Ian Solomonides, "Design Students' Experience of Engagement and Creativity," Art, Design & Media in Higher Education 6.1 (2007).

students. Of the twenty students who volunteered at the start of the study ten were followed to completion of their second year (level 2). This number of subjects/participants is deemed to provide significant depth and breath in responses. The (demographic) data demonstrates that the participants have had a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences, though many concerns are shared across the participants. The data gathered from participants who withdrew during the study will also be analysed with regards to specific phenomena in their learning experiences where relevant. As it is not possible to examine development in these students the ten followed to completion will form the focus of the analysis.

Interviews

The participants are interviewed around twice every term, though the frequency depends on their availability. The lengths of the interviews vary from 20 minutes (the shortest) to two hours (the longest). The average length is 50 minutes. The students are interviewed in a room inside the campus but outside their department and are asked to bring along current or recently completed studio work. The interviews are recorded and transcribed verbatim and the studio work discussed during the interview is photographed. To date I have conducted around 100 interviews and collected around 2000 photographs of the students' work. The interviews are semi-structured and relaxed in tone and the focus for each session is based in part on issues raised in previous meetings, specific issues that I want to raise with all the participants and frequently concerns the student would like to raise. The participants have stated that they perceive the interview sessions as useful opportunities for reflection on their learning experiences. A further discussion on how the research has affected the participating students will follow in the section on reflexivity.

Observation

At the outset of this study it was anticipated that observation would constitute a significant part of the data gathering, but in fact has taken a secondary role to the interviews. There are several contributing factors for this; first, the increase in student numbers and the decrease in studio space has meant that students work at home and there is therefore a reduced opportunity to directly observe students in learning contexts.

Second, direct observation situated me to some extent with the teacher, an identity I wished to avoid. Finally, learning situations such as briefings, tutorials and critiques, I had planned to attend, were frequently moved or cancelled without my knowledge.

In contrast to the University/Faculty, the Victoria and Albert Museum has proved a productive site for observation, particularly in conjunction with interviews, being a contained space where behaviour can be observed directly and over a period of time. As a space between public and private, and outside 'formal' learning, my role became less associated with a teacher/student dynamic. As the fieldwork at the University of Brighton ends in May 2009, the V&A will be the main locus of research until June 2009.

Reflexivity

In an ethnographic study it is not only the participants who take part in research: the data gathering consists of social interactions within which the researcher participates. Thus considerations of reflexivity become crucial. Reflexivity is broadly defined as a process of self-examination.⁸ In this case, I, as a researcher turn back on myself, reflecting on how I engage and communicate with my participants, the judgements I make and the subsequent analysis. In this process reflective research diaries are invaluable and the most widely adopted tool for reflexivity in qualitative research.⁹ In this context I found the process of transcribing interview recordings crucially important. Listening to my data allows me to distance myself from the interview and my role within it.

Part of the challenge in this project, as a researcher, has related to my personal experience and knowledge of the discipline: when to suspend this and when to utilise it. My subject knowledge is useful in communicating with participants but also a potential interference. From the outset I was open about my background but found it useful to emphasise my role as a student-researcher rather than a teacher with professional experience. As the research progressed a close and trusting relationship was established with the participants

⁸ Charlotte Davies, Reflexive Ethnography: A Guide to Researching Selves and Others (London: Routledge, 1999).

⁹ See for instance Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner, "Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject," Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials, eds. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna. S. Lincoln, 2nd ed. (London: Sage, 2003).

and several expressed that they valued my role as a sympathetic ‘outsider’ but with knowledge of their discipline. The participants’ reflections on our meetings and my research has been valuable in addressing my own role in this study.¹⁰ That this research project has affected the participants is undeniable; however as this is not a comparative study and my influence on the students is contained and negotiated to ensure it does not compromise the internal validity of the data.

Data analysis

The research data comprises verbal, textual and visual materials: interview recordings and transcripts, observational notes, documents such as briefs and other course material, and photographs of the students’ work. The transcripts are analysed in conjunction with the visual material and the images are ‘tagged’ in the text. This is a labour intensive process and as a result only a first level of data analysis concurrent with fieldwork is feasible. This analysis seeks to draw out major themes, both across the sample and for individual participants. It is important to emphasise that interviews and observational notes are not identical, the data is analysed in the context of its ‘production’. The interview setting is a particular context for ‘artificial’ social interaction and must be considered in this light.¹¹ A further discussion of the process of analysis is included in section 2 of this report.

Coding

The organisation of the significant quantity of qualitative data gathered has been important in the process of data analysis. Initially the data is analysed to extract major themes and more subtly differentiated concepts. Each transcript is read and the subjects discussed are annotated, for example: ‘museum visiting’ or ‘the Internet’. As the process develops these themes are refined to capture greater differentiation, so, ‘museum visiting’ become sub-coded as: ‘drawing in museums’, ‘visiting museums as a

¹⁰ Sagan found in her research with vulnerable adult learners that the narrative interviews had a significant and positive effect on their creative learning experience: Olivia Sagan, "Playgrounds, Studios and Hiding Places: Emotional Exchange in Creative Learning Spaces," Art, Design & Media in Higher Education 6.3 (2008).

¹¹ Charles L. Briggs, Learning How to Ask: A Sociolinguistic Appraisal of the Role of the Interview in Social Science Research (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

child', 'social museum visits' and 'local museums' and so on. The wording of the terms and phrases the participants themselves are retained as forms of analytical codes, though some of these are reworded to encompass a constellation of concepts, situations and experiences sharing significant similarities. At the end of the first year of fieldwork the preliminary codes were collated and a process of fine tuning and organising led to a preliminary list of codes, divided into three major themes which are *the self and the social*; *learning and teaching* and; *the visual*. These are further divided into sub-themes, for example, the heading 'visual' includes: 'tools and materials', 'research approaches', 'sketchbooks', 'sources' and 'methods'. The sub-theme 'Research approaches' includes, for example: 'material research', 'market research', 'discipline specific research', 'messy and random', 'editing research' and so forth. As the fieldwork and analytical process evolves and progresses codes are cross-checked, examined and tested. Experiences specific to the participants are teased out through this process refining the fieldwork and the ensuing theory building.

Using codes extracted from the first level of manual data analysis, the data will be coded using a Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS)¹². This tool allows the data to be organised, searched and tested in ways not possible using manual methods with this quantity of data. The coding of the data is a dialectical process where the data provides the codes but the codes again organise and categorise the data.

Section 2: Future development of research

- **Fieldwork**

The fieldwork for this research is nearing completion. The majority of participants will go on to their industrial placements from May to December 2009 and, by the time of submission of this application, the research with this group will have ended (4 May 2009).

¹² ¹² This is an umbrella term for a variety of software systems used in qualitative research, the most commonly used being Nudist and Atlas. The software employed in this research is 'HyperRESEARCH'.

The final stage of fieldwork is concentrated around the Victoria and Albert Museum where observation and interviews with fashion and textile design students from various higher education institutions (HEIs) will take place. Students will be approached both in the museum and recruited through contacts at HEIs within reasonable travelling distance to London. I also want to undertake more interviews with teaching staff. I anticipate that these will take place after the end of the summer term this academic year (2009/10).

- **Data analysis**

Data analysis has to some extent happened alongside the data collection as these inform each other. However, a comprehensive, detailed and in depth analysis has not yet been undertaken due to the labour intensive nature of the data collection.

The analysis has three main stages. At this time stage 1 is completed for data collected in the first year of fieldwork only:

Stage 1) Detailed narrative analysis of transcripts and observational notes. Key issues in the material are noted and collated across the data segment. These are collated and compared to develop appropriate codes. The codes are grouped under themes and sub-headings which indicate the theoretical direction of the project.

Stage 2) The data will be segmented and grouped using the coding concepts developed in stage one. The coded data is analysed and rigorously tested for anomalies and exceptions. This process ensures that the forming of concepts and theories are made with a solid basis in actual findings. The coded data will be analysed both longitudinally and cross-diagonally as individual narratives and as coded segments, enabling me to interpret data on different 'granular' levels. This analytical process will deliver elements and concepts forming the theoretical framework.

Stage 3) The final stage of analysis is on a meta-level, it will refine the theoretical concepts, triangulate the findings from various sources of data, synthesise and examine

relationships between the analytical components extracted in stage two. The outcome will be a theoretical framework which is tested against and so grounded in the findings.

Section 3: Findings

Based on the process of research, this section will focus on what has so far been revealed. Here, 'research' refers not to the work undertaken by myself discussed in the preceding section, but to the 'visual research' undertaken by the students forming the focus of this study. The following three themed headings are preliminary.

The self and the social

The sketchbooks and research folders are material expressions of the participants' ways of being in the world. They are sites of 'identity-work' where the participants explore, and test out, reject and adopt personal and collective identities. As students on their respective degree courses the participants were gradually introduced to the communities of practice relating to their disciplines.¹³ The identification process with the 'community of practice' (which in the most basic, and initial instance might be 'art and design') became increasingly differentiated: what did it mean to be a designer as opposed to an artist? This knowledge is honed through a processes of identification and differentiation as they were introduced to new aspects of this perceived 'community'. This process has not been unproblematic and several participants experienced values and priorities expressed by this 'community of practice' to be in conflict with those held by themselves. These paradoxes were usually navigable but for at least two of the participants who left the course, this conflict was seen as irreconcilable and was a significant motive for discontinuing.¹⁴

¹³ Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

¹⁴ Whether these conflicts are real or perceived is open to debate. I would argue that it is irrelevant as they are perceived to have true impact for those it concerns. For several of the students the negotiation of this conflict continues.

Learning and teaching

The research shows students pursue personal priorities and interests which frame their creative practice. It is important to point out that the development of their sense of personal identity cannot be separated from the collective as the personal is always in relation to the social contexts and relationships. There are several actants¹⁵ impacting on students' sense of self as relating to their field of practice, though some more explicitly than others:

- **Teaching**

The participants express that it is important that their tutors understand where the student is 'coming from'. In the context of tutorials and critiques the participants want tutors to make judgements in the context of the student's personal learning project. For criticism to be constructive it must be consistent with 'what they are about', that is, the values and priorities the students perceive as central to their 'creative project'. One participant, 'Peter', stated:

I came out of that crit quite rolled up (...) And rather than me wanting to address that issue –because it wasn't constructive criticism because it's completely irrelevant to what I'm doing. Ahem... rather than me thinking *I need to change it to what he is saying*. (...) I came out of there thinking *I'm going to make it even more uncomfortable*

In addition to permanent teaching staff a considerable proportion of teaching is done by part-time staff and practitioners. These professionals are an important source of knowledge for the students about the field of practice constituting their discipline

- **The course**

'Being on the right course' has been a significant topic of deliberation for many of the participants. It is apparent that many had misleading expectations and conceptions of the content and values of their degree, even if they had all visited the institution during 'open days'. The perception that the course is 'prestigious' was common and often repeated amongst the participants.

¹⁵ The term *actant* is useful in describing the agency of individuals, groups, institutions (concrete or abstract) acting on and influencing the phenomenon in question. According to Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) actants are figurations of actions. See Bruno Latour, Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). P. 54-55

- **‘The industry’**

The singular noun ‘the industry’ is increasingly used by students as they progress through their first two years, particularly as they at the end of their second year and approach their work-placements ‘in industry’. The industry is seen as synonymous with professionalism and usually indicates a shift in emphasis to commercial priorities as opposed to creative and personal expression

- **Peers**

Peers share useful points of reference in terms of developing differentiation and identity. Students use the work of other students on their course, other courses, practitioners and so on, to situate their own practice and understand and express what characterises their own way of working. To develop a ‘personal’ and ‘individual’ style is frequently repeated as being central to what they want to achieve. Students also compare their own experiences to those of friends on other courses in order to better understand their discipline and the values and priorities which are seen to underpin it.¹⁶

It is widely acknowledged, from academic and policy papers to marketing rhetoric, that a central purpose of education, from compulsory (GCSE and A-level) to further and higher education, is the process of self-realisation. That student life and learning is related to identity-work is not new¹⁷ and something that many students are explicitly aware of. For the book: ‘Changing Identities in Higher Education’ an undergraduate student was asked to write about his experience. Here he expresses the link between personal growth and higher education:

For me, how students develop into rounded individuals is as important as, if not more important than, how students develop academically at university. The majority of the facts crammed for those final exams will be forgotten as quickly as

¹⁶ What are the values of fashion design compared to those of sculpture or fine art; how is learning in textile design different or similar to English literature.

¹⁷ Denise Batchelor, "Have Students Got a Voice?," [Changing Identities in Higher Education: Voicing Perspectives](#), eds. Ron Barnet and Roberto Napoli (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007). And [Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity \(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998\).](#)

they were learned, but the person you become shapes your outlook, lifestyle and actions for many years after.¹⁸

It is significant that personal expression is considered an integral part of the disciplinary practice in art and design education. Dineen et al. concluded that 'self-actualization is prioritized over subject-knowledge' in teaching in art and design.¹⁹ In the Subject Benchmark Statement for Art and Design the connection between the individual and the collective is made explicit:

The outcomes of the study and practice of art and design in HE contribute to both the cultural development and the economic well-being of the individual and of society. In both cases, an understanding of the context of the practice is essential. In the former, it enhances their intellect through critical awareness and by locating the individual in an historical continuum. In the latter, it provides knowledge of how an individual's practice relates to that of others which is the cornerstone of originality and personal expression. Without such knowledge, an individual would not have any sense of the nature of their own creativity or the culture in which it is set.²⁰

The visual person

Being a 'visual person' or 'arty person' is something all participants discussed when talking about their personal and educational histories. The way this is nurtured or encouraged is illustrated in this interview extract with 'Catherine' a Level 1 fashion student in her second term:

...this course is really good actually because it has taught us to understand our... this world and really get in tune with what we're doing... and it's obviously taking over our lives a little bit but it's... also just opened our eyes more (...)

Visual analytical skills are fostered through research and by taking an approach to learning that reaches beyond the studio. There was a prevailing idea amongst the

¹⁸ Oliver Broadbent, "Being an Undergraduate Student in the Twenty-First Century," Changing Identities in Higher Education: Voicing Perspectives, eds. Ron Barnet and Roberto Napoli (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007). The emphasis on personal development is also evident in the promotion and marketing rhetoric of many higher education institutions.

¹⁹ Ruth Dineen, Samuel, Elsbeth & Livesey, Kathryn, "The Promotion of Creativity in Learners: Theory and Practice," Art, Design & Communication in Higher Education 4.3 (2005).

²⁰ Gordon Kennedy, Subject Benchmark Statement: Art and Design (QAA, 2007).

participants that inspiration can come from anywhere so one should always be alert to visual input. This highlights that their approach to their subject is personal and influences their understanding of their surroundings, from the details of a placket or a cuff, to an interest in wider socio-economic and cultural trends. Being a ‘visual person’ was perceived as a particular way of looking at the world, where one noticed aesthetic elements, links and connections where others (non-visual persons) would not. Underpinning the ‘concept-focused’ project and the way (some) participants reflected on the ‘industry’, is the idea of the (fashion or textile) designer as an agent, responding and translating current ideas and societal changes into visual and material manifestations. Following this, it was perceived as important that designers (and so students) have a cultural and social awareness that enables them to ‘sense’ these trends.

Being a ‘visual person’ does not preclude reading and writing as a part of creative research. In fact, the majority of the participants write as a part of their research. Words (particularly descriptive) are useful visually as they are open for interpretation in a way an image might not be.²¹ Equally, words can provide precision, particularly when used in conjunction with imagery.

The ‘sketchbook’ as a transitional/transformational object

Their sense of self was at the core of the participants’ perception of their visual research process; but it is a self always in relation to others and the outside world. The extent to which the inner (‘subjective’) and outer (‘objective’) reality took priority within their work was, in part, a result of their various approaches to learning. Their sense of individual creativity was understood in relation to that of other students’, their tutors, ‘the industry’ and those outside the subject discipline; hence this process of ‘individualisation’ is intrinsically social. The striving for individuality and an understanding of their own creative ‘make-up’ was central to the participants’ perception of their respective learning journeys. As an apparent dichotomy to this focus on ‘self’, is the evidence that this is

²¹ Writing is of course also visual ‘the black marks on white background become objects of visual attention’ and is used both for its meaning content and as ‘ornament’ and image. W. J. T. Mitchell, "Word and Image," *Critical Terms for Art History*, eds. Robert Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

based on an understanding of self which is socially derived. This apparent paradox is, in reality a process of learning feedback informing their identity development.

The oscillation between humans' inner and outer worlds was recognised by Winnicott in his theory of the transitional object and transitional space, alerting the psychoanalytical community to the dependency of people on others and their environments, in short, what he defined as cultural experience. The transitional object offered a resting place in the individual's perpetual 'task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated.'²² I have found a manifest correlation between the participants' material visual research (sketchbook, research folder etc) and Winnicott's notion of the transitional object, but only when the participants engaged in deep learning. The transitional object does of course not have an identical role in the students' lives as it does in the infants'; unlike a child they (the student) understand that the object exists in reality, but the creative practice they are engaged in functions as an *intermediate area of experience*²³ -a transitional space.

Play

The term 'playing around' established itself early as a significant concept. To 'play around' may appear contradictory in relation to the seriousness and rigour of 'doing research', but there is instead a strong correlation between the two. Transformative visual research must involve play. For Winnicott play was a condition of creativity and it is in being creative that the individual discovers the self.²⁴ He located play and cultural experience in 'the potential space' between subjective (the inner) and objective (outer) experience and perception.²⁵ In their study of creativity in art and design education, Dineen et al. confirmed, albeit in passing, how the majority of teachers spoke of play as significant in enhancing creativity.²⁶

²² D. W. Winnicott, Playing and Reality (London: Routledge, 2005). P. 3

²³ Winnicott relates the child's intermediate area of experience, which is unchallenged in regards to it being allocated either to inner or outer reality, to experiences retained in adult life through religion, art and creativity and imaginative thinking. Winnicott, Playing and Reality. P. 18

²⁴ Winnicott, Playing and Reality. P. 72-73

²⁵ Winnicott, Playing and Reality. P. 146

²⁶ Dineen, "The Promotion of Creativity in Learners: Theory and Practice."

Visual research and the Victoria and Albert Museum

My study, rather than seeing people and things, subjects and objects as belonging to separate spheres, perceives both as closely intertwined, dependent on each other and belonging to the same world. In the museum the objects on display, the cabinets and plinths, the museum space and architecture, visitors and museum staff are understood as networks of actors, all active in creating 'the museum experience', though not equipped with equal power to act. As identified by Jordonova²⁷ and confirmed by this research, visitors' perceptions and personal interpretations of museum objects are enabled and disabled through display. Our experiences are directed through how objects are framed, encased, grouped, explained, celebrated or bypassed. When the objective of the visit is to record and reinterpret museum artefacts and incorporate them to form new objects and meanings, the museum becomes a significant force in directing design practices: what we make is conditioned by what we have, the objects of the future are dependent on the objects of the past. However, the museum and its objects are not the only meaning-making forces in guiding design students' interpretations. What is perceived and the meanings that are made are also conditioned by cultural competence, 'aesthetic disposition'²⁸ and the 'regimes of truth'²⁹ operating within our historical and cultural contexts. On a less abstract level the intended outcome of these museum visits (the gathering of inspiration and ideas for design projects) is conditioned by the students themselves, by the methods they employ (be it drawing, photography or collage, and so on) the materials at hand (pencils, crayons, marker pens, etc.), by the display and the museum objects (situation, adjacency, physical properties, aesthetics, cultural meanings, and so on). For the purpose of clarity these elements will be separated out and unpicked in the thesis but it is an important part of my argument that these are not discrete entities

²⁷ Ludmilla Jordonova, "Objects of Knowledge: A Historical Perspective on Museums," The New Museology, ed. Peter Vergo (London: Reaktion, 1989).

²⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste (London: Routledge, 1984 [1979]). P. 28-44

²⁹ Michel Foucault, Power/Knowledge : Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977 (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1980), Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture (London: Routledge, 2000), Tony Bennett, The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics (London: Routledge, 1995), Tony Bennett, The Birth of the Museum (London: Routledge, 1995). P. 49-50 and Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge (London: Routledge, 1992). P. 9-18

but make up a network of interdependent factors. Through students' creative research practices in the V&A, objects and subjects are co-produced and as such the museum offers itself as a potential 'transitional space'.

Section 4: Contribution to knowledge

Previous scholarship

Whereas Rudolf Arnheim pointed out in his critique of the divide between perception and thinking that art's low status is due to its emphasis on seeing rather than thinking³⁰, design can be seen to have occupied an even lower status to that of art,³¹ associated with un-authored and mass-produced goods and its dependence on a capitalist consumer society. Even further down on the status hierarchy of design disciplines comes fashion and textile design with its history of female and often domestic production, sweat-shops, apparent transience, spectacle and conspicuous consumption.³² Similarly, pedagogy and concerns with learning and teaching has a relatively low status within academic research.³³ The RAE 2008 Subject Overview Report on Art and Design stated that 'as was noted in the RAE2001 Subject Overview Report pedagogic research did not feature strongly in the total submission.'³⁴ Within the academic subject of 'education' pedagogy focused on HE and adult learning is barely touched on except in cases of 'deficit models' such as learning difficulties. Research into issues relating to fashion and textile design education can therefore be seen to occupy a somewhat liminal and marginal space within the academic community; the lack of research is noticeable and significant.

Only a handful of published research is directly concerned with the process of research within Fashion and/or Textile Design the most relevant to this study being the Shreeve,

³⁰ Rudolf Arnheim, Visual Thinking, 1 ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1969). P. 3

³¹ Christine Atha, "The Thing Is: Between the Designer Poet and the Artist Bricoleur," Working papers in art and design 3 (2004).

³² See for instance Inge Bates, "'When I Have My Own Studio...' the Making an Shaping of 'Designer' Careers," Youth and Inequality, eds. Inge Bates and George Riseborough (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1993). Angela McRobbie, British Fashion Design: Rag Trade or Image Industry? (London: Routledge, 1998).

³³ David Mills and Mary Huber, "Anthropology and the Educational 'Trading Zone'," Arts and Humanities in Higher Education 4.1 (2005).

³⁴ Rae2008 Uoa63 Subject Overview Report: Art and Design (2008). Paragraph 12

Drew and Bailey's 2002 study.³⁵ In a case study of the 'Creative Process Journal' McGilp and Stephen-Cran from Glasgow School of Art, present a systematised form of documenting the research process in the context of a taught Masters course in 'Textile Design for Fashion' in the form of a 'Creative Process Journal' (CPJ).³⁶ Though this method explicates the role of process and research in design, the format is prescribed and restricted and emphasises 'logging' of practice as opposed to visual research. The CPJ format would fit uneasily with this study's perception of visual research as a transformative method which should allow for play and intuition.

Other research includes Eckert's study of garment designers and use of design inspiration, which confirmed the need of designers to research and consequent economic benefits to the company where they are employed.³⁷ She does not however investigate what this process might consist of and approaches the topic from professional design studies rather than education. Her research has relevance only in so far as it confirms that research remains an essential part of design practice also in professional and commercial contexts.

A Finnish study sought to examine the process of design from inspiration to design suggestion through an experimental study.³⁸ Four professional woven textile designers and four design students were given a handwoven rug to use as a starting point. For the duration of one and a half hours the participants were observed whilst sketching out ideas. Though the study provided some interesting points as to the different approaches to sketching, the artificial and restricted research methodology limits its value.

³⁵ Shreeve, Bailey and Drew, "Students' Approaches to the 'Research' Component in the Fashion Design Project."

³⁶ Helen McGilp and Jimmy Stephen-Cran, "Explicating the Creative Process within a Postgraduate Fashion Context," ELIA: Teachers' Academy, eds. David Clews and Anne Boddington (Faculty of Arts and Architecture, University of Brighton, 2007), vol.

³⁷ Claudia Eckert, "Design Inspiration and Design Performance," 78th World Conference of the Textile Institute (Thessaloniki, Greece: Open University Computing Department Research Report 97/08, 1997), vol.

³⁸ Pirita Seitamaa-Hakkarainen and Kai Hakkarainen, "Visualization and Sketching in the Design Process," The Design Journal 3.1 (2000).

Due to the limited sources directly relevant to my study, the literature review will encompass a discussion of relevant topics in design education more generally and literature relevant to creative practice in museums.

Expected contribution to knowledge

This research project places primacy on situated meaning and contextualised experience and seeks to explicate a structural framework of visual research using a grounded theory approach. The framework should be flexible enough to incorporate different sets of experiences but robust enough to maintain agency and meaning. The data gathered demonstrates the complexities in the interactions between the multiple actors involved.

No theory or model would be able to incorporate every actor impacting on the practice of 'visual research', but this model (figure 1) provides a way of seeing the connections between the key issues extracted from the data. The model or framework is not exhaustive but is useful in mapping out connections and relationships in this network.

The theoretical framework will consist of a flexible matrix of methods, sources, tools and other factors which influence the process of learning through visual research. This matrix is not static or dogmatic but non-prescriptive and dynamic and will extend organically as new technologies, sources and tools are incorporated and adopted, whilst retaining its core values.

This multidisciplinary project will conclude with a set of findings which will offer directions for enhancing future teaching within fashion and textile design by formulating a pedagogy grounded in practice. Research shows that at its best design education offers a transformative environment for both teachers and learners³⁹ but for many educators in fashion and textile design, teaching approaches are modelled on own experience and values rather than articulated theories of learning grounded in research. Evidence that students are indeed transformed is difficult to find and verify as there are no systemic studies which have aimed to measure this; but it is clear that these courses are popular and employment of graduates is positive. This project, by acknowledging and building

³⁹ Dineen, "The Promotion of Creativity in Learners: Theory and Practice." And John Danvers, "Towards a Radical Pedagogy: Provisional Notes on Learning and Teaching in Art & Design," The International Journal of Art & Design Education 22.1 (2003).

on effective practice, will begin to establish theoretical grounding for this pedagogy empowering both students and educators. This is based on the assertion that a field of practice which is self-aware and grounded in critical exploration of its own values, history and assumptions, is a stronger, more resilient discipline.

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