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## **Book Review**

Book: Textile Design Theory In The Making by Elaine Igoe

Book publication details: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, London: 2021, 246 pages. ISBN: 978-1-350-06156-9

Keywords: textile design thinking; practice-based enquiry; practice theory; creative practice research; qualitative research.

### **Review**

Textile practitioners and academics operating within well-established theoretical paradigms in relation to their practice, and masters and PhD students embarking on new research enquiry, would benefit from this book in both its dialogic approach and its theoretical explorations in relation to textile and design thinking. Prior knowledge of the theories, and to some extent the theorists and their critical positioning when reading 'Textile Design Theory In The Making' would be helpful to all readers, as the written style is interwoven and exploratory; the content diverging and questioning. The book has an unapologetic narrative style; the chapters each form their own individual exegesis and as a reader the experience is one of submerging into a stream of evolving qualitative research enquiry. The concept of the rhizomatic reoccurs throughout the text in relation to both theory and practice and the structure of the book is very much rhizomatic and non-linear in nature. Contributors' chapters branch out and interleave with Elaine Igoe's core explorations and the narrative meshes to reflect the reflexivity of the research process. Igoe notes in the introduction how Rendell's five modes of critical practice: collectivity, interiority, alterity, materiality and performativity are embedded within the book, underpinning her research methodology that she describes as "a montage of qualitative methods, using autoethnography, storytelling and conversation to support textile designers in describing their own process and thinking" (page 7) aiming to "situate these different stories in relation to the established context of design research" (page 7). Igoe speaks honestly about her experiences as an academic designer-researcher early in the text and the book aims to take the reader beyond "oversimplified, transactional or convergent models of design" (page 2) and embrace the interwoven complexities and fluidity of the theory-practice relationship.

Whilst chapters one to three particularly explore the theoretical groundwork and routes in relation to Igoe's personal research investigation, chapter four focuses on textile thinking in relation to design thinking, drawing on the work of numerous authors, including Albers' 1962 book 'On

Designing', Mitchell's 1997 essay 'Textiles, Text and Techne' and Ingold's 2010 paper 'The Textility of Making'. In this chapter Igoe explains that the book "proposes and uses the term 'textile practice' as an application of some of the premises of textile thinking in and beyond fabric-focused design outcomes. It is an effort to move textile thinking away from associations with design thinking and towards a more interdisciplinary conception" (page 43). The chapter explores cognition as indivisible from making very well. However, frameworks of analysis change over time, and academic papers are often aligned to institutional specialisms. The research by Studd and Moxey discussed in Chapter Four (for example) was undertaken when both authors worked in a science and technology focused Russell group university. It's important for readers to be aware of institutional contexts, as this factor, and the time periods in which the papers were written, inevitably shape the nature of the research undertaken. This may explain why their expositions may not have encompassed the 'cognitive aspects of textile design' (page 35) that Igoe identifies as integral to practice.

Chapter five 'Translating and Transforming' explores the semantic nature of textile and our understanding of textile as a text, drawing on the work of authors including Polanyi (1958), Spivak (1993) and Dilnot (1995). Examining the translational role of textile design and how we engage with this as practitioners, the chapter takes us on a discursive journey that links to a contributing chapter by Elena Caratti and Daniela Calabi. Incorporating perspectives from fields including communication design and architecture, they parallel the design process with that of translation and reflect on the semantic value of texture, where "surfaces become the space of communication and exchange between worlds that express cultural characters with different signs" (page 66).

The relationship between textile thinking and broader design thinking is critically considered in depth throughout the book, and the historical placement of textiles as a gendered discipline within the institutional art and design hierarchy weaves throughout the chapters, the canons of practice that have become established, the problems and the opportunities. The writing communicates the underlying threads that have, and are, shaping the identities of the textile discipline. The role of collecting is examined in Chapter eleven and within this decolonising the decorative is acknowledged but this warrants further exploration. Chapter ten 'Tracing Back to Trace Forwards' by Rose Sinclair reminds us of the invisibility of BAME practitioners within the textile space beyond that of other disciplines, including fashion. She emphasizes that being a female, Black textile practitioner is marginalisation through combination, discussing the hyperinvisibility of Black makers' histories and critical voices. She explores tracing roots in relation to forming routes through which to situate practice, discussing the legacy of McNish and also her own work as a textile academic and practitioner. By "Painting in the Traces and Painting in the Absences" (page 121) she explores the Black female creative experience through installations (actual and virtual) such as

'Caribbean Front Room' (<https://sites.gold.ac.uk/windrush/caribbean-front-room/>). Material culture is embedded throughout the book as Igoe, Sinclair and other contributors examine the resonance of objects, exploring how we trace meaning and build our identity through them. In chapter twelve Tom Fisher discusses the meaning of a collection in relation to Baudrillard's (1968) 'System of Objects'. He particularly focuses on the materiality of two objects from his perspective as the maker, reflecting on their materials and construction, and their longevity and proximity.

In Chapter nine Marion Lean reflects on her experiences studying textiles and argues for textile thinking as a tool for analysis that is applicable in other domains. Case studies are presented here, whereas Chapters thirteen and fourteen encompass a broader exploration of the problem setting/problem solving expectations of design. Mark Roxburgh deconstructs the premise of design as solution in his exploration of perceptions of design, examining the prescriptive nature of design theories and how we frame the transformative. The relationship between these chapters reflects the character of the book, which is exploratory and connecting, rather than offering definitive answers. Igoe has actively chosen to continue this approach in the final chapters, as the book does not develop formal conclusions. Igoe's chapter fifteen returns to Ettinger's (2006) concept of the matrixial and the Epilogue by Marianne Fairbanks discusses her own woven textile practice and textilic approach, connecting to Igoe's opening discussions on textility. Drawing on historical and contemporary literature from a range of fields, each chapter in *Textile Design Theory In The Making* is a catalyst for further exploration by the reader. Igoe has ensured the book is a collected work of individual voices and critical perspectives. Igoe's introduction and first four chapters should be read sequentially, but beyond this the reader can explore the book to form their own critical pathways between the chapters and meshes in relation to their own textile practices and theoretical directions.

Note:

All quotes in this review are taken from Igoe, E. (2021) *Textile Design Theory in the Making*. London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, Bloomsbury Publishing PLC.

Reviewer: Dr Sonja Andrew, Associate Professor, School of Design, University of Leeds