



THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORDS, TEXTS, CLOTHES AND TEXTILES

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Abstract: In this paper we will speculate the possible relationships between “word,” “text,” “textile,” and “clothing”. Many of the terms we use to describe our interactions with words are derived from the common linguistic root and numerous other expressions associated with reading and writing are drawn from the rich vocabulary of cloth. Textiles are one of the most ubiquitous components of material culture and they are also integral to the material history of texts. The intersection between texts and textiles locates the relationship between language and dress, as together they structure the fashion scene over the century. We compare these texts and storytelling with the process of making clothes, they go from fibers that are spun and then create the fabric or the material out of which the clothes are made. Besides the similitude of the words “text” and “textile” that have four similar letters there is also the resemblance in the way they transmit a message. While texts are meant to transmit something to the reader, to enchant and to create emotions in so various ways, just in the same way clothes are also meant to transmit emotions and feelings to the wearer or to the people watching them.

Key words: language, interconnection, words, fabrics, clothing, interpretations

1. INTRODUCTION

How do the fabrics of language intersect with the languages of fabric? The *text/textile* interface has often surfaced as an explicit preoccupation in literature. Many have explored the structural similarities between ancient Greek textual analysis and techniques of weaving, with particular attention to the relationship between the ‘starting border’ of a cloth and the *creation* of a text such as Hesiod’s *Theogony*. Text is not necessarily linguistic, even though we think of text as words—think of text as filled with signs that sometimes consist of something other than graphemes, words or language.

Apart from pockets of thinking that consider the crafts theoretically impenetrable because of their foundation in tactile rather than intellectual knowledge, interdisciplinary research is paying increasing attention to the comparative opportunities textiles offer. In particular, analysis of the similarities between texts and textiles is one of the many areas expanding under this broadened field of vision. Writing and woven textiles, in particular, lend themselves to comparison on many levels,



from the linguistic roots the two words share, to the structural similarities found in networks of words and threads.[1]

“Textile” – 1620s, from Latin *textilis* “a web, canvas, woven fabric, cloth, something woven,” noun use of *textilis* “woven, wrought,” from *texere* “to weave,” from PIE root **teks-* “to make.”[2] “Cloth” is fabric which is made by weaving or knitting a substance such as cotton, wool, silk, or nylon. Cloth is used especially for making clothes.[3]

2. GENERAL INFORMATION

The shared origin of *text* and *textiles* in Latin *texere- to weave* is very interesting and offers many ways to interpret them. Textiles are one of the most ubiquitous components of material culture and they are also integral to the material history of texts. Paper was originally made from cotton rags and in many different cultural and historical settings, texts come wrapped, covered, bound or decorated with textiles. Across the domestic, public, religious and political spheres textiles are often the material forms in which texts are produced, consumed and circulated.

The similitude of printed paper and printed fabric is looked by essayist Amber Shaw as a kind of conflation of the represented thing and the thing itself; in other words with fashion magazines and rag newspaper, the production of the fabric became the very book or magazine, the weave of the page coexistent with the dress fabric, the text with the textile.[4]

India is a land of textiles. Traditionally Indian people are wearing fabrics rather than clothes. Even today lots of Indian women wear sarees on a daily base. So we can say there is a very tight connection between the material i.e. the textile and the clothes themselves.

3. DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO TEXTILES

3.1. Wearing texts on textiles

Words and cloth have drawn inspiration and meaning from each other for centuries, continuing into the present. The incorporation of the written word into textiles appears in two distinct forms: either words are rendered in a legible manner or they are intentionally illegible. From this difference, one can discern two vastly different forms of motivation for the textile artist. On one hand, the written word is employed to communicate an accessible message. On the other, it is a response to the beauty of mark-making.[5]

From this separation comes a further distinction, the technical rendering of the word itself. Words are sewn, woven, or screen printed onto the surface of fabric or transferred with methods that tend to be associated with the printed word such as Xerox or laser printing. Textual transcription onto cloth brings new techniques to textile design, while methods such as embroidery and weaving often have historical associations. Although these delineations may seem simple, the ways in which textile artists have combined these sources of inspiration are surprisingly broad.

Clothing is one of the most eloquent forms in which we encounter textiles. Ben Cartwright (Cambridge) discussed the way that clothing ‘regestures’ the body, and emphasized the need to wear rather than merely to look at clothing from the past in order to understand its histories. Cartwright’s research explores the ways in which the crafts of spinning and weaving, as ‘learnt bodily histories’ (performing the task requires the learning of certain repetitive body movements and behaviours), contribute to community and individual identity. He is interested in how these crafts shape the means by which people behave and present themselves to themselves and others - not least in the clothes they wore. Clothing is one of the ways in which people, or groups of people, make themselves distinctive. This is likely to have been as true a thousand or so years ago as it is today. When people take on different roles, new clothes give them new ways of behaving. The tailoring,



material, and weave of the cloth restrict or emphasise certain movements that made up a social system of manners.[6]

3.2. Texts versus Textiles

In his *In Search of Lost Time*, the French writer Marcel Proust makes a comparison between writing a book and making a dress. His narrator, who is just about to embark on writing a novel, says that instead of building it “ambitiously like a cathedral” he is going to craft it “quite simply like a dress”.[7] The book-as-a-dress comparison is ingenious in numerous ways. For one, it lends us a way of looking at a novel as so much more than simply its plot or the basic story. While the plot is something that might give an overall shape to a book, like a certain model to a dress, there is a lot more we judge it by than the basic shape — the colour and feel of the material, and how the invisible seams hidden from sight hold it together.

In order to make a quality dress, you need quality material. The fabric needs to be woven with thought and feeling — in the book’s case, *of* thought and feeling. For example in Proust’s own *Search*, despite its colossal scale of over three thousand pages, very little happens. Or rather, very little happens in terms of action, while the stuff you might often gloss over in life becomes hugely important. The crux of Proust, one might say, is that the ordinary becomes extraordinary when it happens to *you*.

Another brilliant aspect of Proust’s ‘not-cathedral-but-a-dress’ imagery is that if writing a book is like making a dress, then reading a book can be thought of as wearing one. It breaks down the subject-object opposition between reader and text: a novel is not a holy shrine with limited access. Instead of visiting a ‘cathedral,’ going in and coming out again, the reader can put the text on and *wear* it out in the world. While someone else has crafted it, the dress subsequently becomes a part of its wearer.

Clothes do not make a man: a garment can never transform us completely, and neither does a book lose its autonomy as a work of art when it is read by thousands or millions of readers and interpreted in different ways. But surely for most of us, what we put on does affect the way we feel, look and behave, and in this sense, what we wear does become a part of who we are. In the same way as with a dress — we can’t just know by looking whether it will fit us — with a book, it is not just what the book is *about* that affects us when we read: where, when and how we read condition our experience too.

If we think of our favourite clothes, those perhaps already a bit worn out, the ones that are so comfortable and incredibly difficult to throw out. It is similar to have a favourite book: when we first ‘put it on’ it seems to shape us and sometimes even change us, but the longer we wear it, the more it becomes moulded to our shape. Indeed, perhaps this is what Proust’s narrator means when he says he wants his readers to be not *his* readers, but “the readers of their own selves”. A book we fall in love with can reveal us a lot about ourselves, for if we love it, we will end up walking around wearing it and embracing life through its textile.

3.3. Textiles and fashion

There has always been a tight connection between textiles and fashion. They have forever been central to life and were a means of communication. The wearing of clothing is exclusively a human characteristic and is a feature of most human societies. It is not known when humans began wearing clothes but anthropologists believe that animal skins and vegetation were adapted into coverings as protection from cold, heat and rain, especially as humans migrated to new climates. Clothing and textiles have been important in human history and reflect the materials available to a civilization as well as the technologies that had been mastered. The social significance of the finished product reflects their culture.



Textiles can be felt or spun fibers made into yarn and subsequently netted, looped, knit or woven to make fabrics, which appeared in the Middle East. From the ancient times to the present day, methods of textile production have continually evolved, and the choices of textiles available have influenced how people carried their possessions, clothed themselves, and decorated their surroundings.

Textiles and fashion can be regarded as a visual language reflecting the spirit of the time, coupled to materials, craft and tradition. Finding a personal balance between textiles and fashion is essential. Textiles and fashion industries are important in economic and social terms, in the short-run by providing incomes, jobs, especially for women, and foreign currency receipts and in the longrun by providing countries the opportunity for sustained economic development in those countries with appropriate policies and institutions to enhance the dynamic effects of textiles and clothing. The potential of the textile and fashion industries to contribute to long-run growth and development will depend not only on the attributes of the investors, but also on the quality and effectiveness of government policies and institutions in developing countries to build on this investment.[8]

4. CONCLUSIONS

We started from a word and tried to show the possible connections the word “text” might have with the word “textile”. “Text” relates to “texture” and “textile” and traces back to “*texo*” – “to weave”, referring to the way words and sentences are “woven” together. We speak of “weaving” a tale or “spinning a yarn.” A “subtle” idea is a “finely spun” one.

There are many possible interpretations to this correlation, but as we could see just like the way words are made up of morphemes, syllables, the textiles are spun up, knitted and then made into clothes. There is a whole process that the morphemes, syllables and words go through when in the end they make up texts that build the stories which have so many connotations and meanings. We can compare these texts and storytelling with the process of making clothes, they go through fibers that are spun and then create the fabric or the material out of which the clothes are made. Finally the clothes industry leads to the fashion industry which is one of the most important industries in the world in the moment.

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