Correspondence, trace and the landscape of narrative: a visual, verbal and literary dialectic
2014

"help me endure and survive this bitterness"
Overview of research

This book accompanies a body of research examining what literary theory can bring to the practice of visual story telling. Through praxis it examines the underlying systems and techniques that are relative to works of fiction, investigating what impacts and advances narratology can bring to visual communication approaches and methods. My thesis – comprising written and visual responses to the research questions – will argue that literary concepts and methods produce new thinking and perspectives on visual methodologies, by establishing a dialectical relationship between the visual and verbal in creative practice; and in respect of literary theory and visual communication.

The creative practice at the root of this research builds on a professional background in graphic design and illustration – although these descriptors fall far short of the interdisciplinary field within which my practice is now situated. This expansion includes the differences in materials used and the ways in which they are used. Also, there has been a shift in focus as to the relationship between the stories I tell, with regard to their implicit and explicit meanings, and the viewer/reader. What I describe as ‘tissue texts’, ‘tales’ or ‘stories’ are my responses to the Semple letters informed by my examinations of literary theory.

My interest in the project has been to create fragmentary tales through which to examine the edge of memory – that is memory as trace and time. My interest and approach has been to investigate the content through the nuances that lie beneath the surface rather than to articulate a sequence of actions (this happened, then that). It is not so much the story but its traces that I have attempted to capture, in order to communicate the cadences of what I see in the source material.

I have created stories which are not just about what is seen, but attempt to tell tales which resist the effects of closure, to create more open spaces for the reader, whilst aiming for them to be as much felt, as seen or read. The tales are fragmentary, without beginning, middle and end. They are removed from their sequence through fragmentation as fleeting, fugitive tales, suggesting an implicated ‘other’ of which they are a part. They aim to be enigmatic spaces rather than a recreation of the original.

Sources and methods

The sources underpinning this research are threefold. Firstly, the Semple letters – a letter and postcard – correspondence written in 1917 between a soldier and his sweetheart. The letters are part of the ‘Semple Collection’, sourced from the archives at the Imperial War Museum.

Secondly, I have analysed two literary theories: Roland Barthes’ *S/Z* and Gerard Genette’s *Narrative Discourse: an Essay in Method*. These texts follow Structuralist and Post-structuralist approaches – which examine the underlying structures found within fiction, rather than looking at the meaning of the story. These aspects transcend the text and are not ‘visible’ or specific to individual works.

I have analysed these literary theories, investigating what impacts and advances such narratological concepts can bring to visual communication approaches and methods – specifically the particular perspectives on narrative as discussed by Barthes and Genette. I have questioned what literary theory can bring to the analysis and understanding of the Semple letters; how it may extend comprehension and use of my creative materials; how it may be used to interrogate my pre-existing methods and approaches to the visual/verbal and composition; and how it may maximise the narrative potential of the edge of memory and visual story telling.

I provide a brief overview of Barthes’ and Genette’s work here. The written thesis accompanying this book provides a more detailed outline of those theories and a critical appraisal of the transferral, tensions, resolutions and process of translation of concepts between the literary and visual.
My third source is my visual/verbal practice. I have been concerned as much with the means of story telling as I have with exploring and expressing the content. Specific materials and ways in which they are used play a crucial role in my practice.

I have developed a reciprocal relationship between theory and practice: establishing a cross-pollination of ideas and thinking between them. This is also true of the symbiotic relationship I have established between Barthes’ and Genette’s theories, where concepts from each have influenced and augmented comprehension and understanding of the other. One example of this is my initial analysis of the Semple letters was made through Genette’s narratological codes, providing non-visual perspectives through which to analyse and respond to the letters and story. The letters were then examined through Barthes’ framework of lexia, codes and migration of meaning, which produced different perspectives on the letters to those already enabled by my analysis through Genette’s codes. These additional perspectives on ‘reading’ provided different ways to view and comprehend the same information. Evaluation of the letters through both theories extended the ways in which I was able to respond to them; producing different correspondences, new analytical perspectives and fresh insights and understandings, subsequently informing how I expressed and visualised the letters in my story telling.

**Correspondence and a visual, verbal and literary dialectic – practice and development**

This book briefly outlines some of the underpinning processes, development and thinking behind the practical work produced in response to the research questions. Additionally, some images of my practical work are showcased in the concluding pages.

**Impact and context**

What visual communication means and how it is enacted varies across the many and different disciplines which are embraced under this term. The context of visual communication within this thesis relates to my background in graphic design and illustration, and also refers to the expansion of that practice – to a multi-disciplinary one, merging graphics and fine art practices.

However, the question of to whom and in what ways this research could be of interest or relevance needs to be further refined. I have established a more specific contextual framework within which to locate this body of research: those analysing visual story telling; visual practice where the use of specific materials, such as stitch or clothing are deployed for story telling; visual practice that incorporates both the visual and verbal; and memory and narrative in visual practice. Examples of such practitioners include artists, illustrators, designers, calligraphers and textile artists. Additionally this research has relevance to those beyond the field of visual communication, such as to epistolary scholars, historians or those interested in narrative.

References for quotes used are available in the thesis bibliography.

Original book in A3 format.
The Simple Letters
Private Papers of M Semple — Imperial War Museum, Item 5821

IWM item description:

‘A collection of 70 ms letters (133pp, plus 91pp photocopied ts transcript), July 1917, written to her by Jock McLeod during training at Invergordon as an NCO with the 3rd Battalion Queen’s Own Cameron Highlanders, active service at Ypres Salient with the 5th Battalion (26th Brigade, 9th Division), then a period of hospitalisation back in the United Kingdom at Gosforth, Belfast and Bolton, Lancashire, with a lung wound, February 1916-February 1917, and brief service with the RFC at the Wireless Testing Park, Biggin Hill, providing useful descriptions of his training and anxiety to experience ‘real modern warfare’, the dress and traditions of his regiment, poor trench conditions on the Western Front, his narrow escape from mortar explosions, his frustration at being hospitalised during the wait for examination by the Medical Board, who pronounced him unfit for active military service, his intense hatred for ‘the hun’ and the Germans’ alleged fear of the Scottish based upon rumours of crucified Highlanders, criticisms of high prices charged by the YMCA in France, and his regiment’s contempt for conscientious objectors, with his final letter informing her of his love for another girl; together with three ms letters from her (5pp), January 1914-June 1917, including her draft reply to Jock’s final letter, photocopies (179pp) of ms originals and ts transcripts of letters sent to her from various correspondents, July 1911-December 1968, including material concerning her application and work for the Women’s Legion and WAAC during the First World War, very brief diary entries and a chronology of her career; plus two photographs, of her and Jock.’
Dear Meg

Wireless Testing Park,
Biggin Hill,
Westerham, Kent

Thanks for yours to hand yesterday, & sorry to hear they make you work such long hours. You must be fed up now. You’re lucky to have such a chum tho!

I had a letter from Will the other day, & he says he’s up in the trenches now, facing Fritz & dodging all sorts of things. I’ve not heard any further from the G.P.O. yet, so I’ll drop them a line to tell them where, & how, I am now-a-days, I think. But there’s something I want to tell you, about, Meg, something which I didn’t mean to ever tell you, but now feel I must tell. I expect you’ll think all sorts of things about me, but it’s better to know now than when too late, so I’ll tell you everything. Well, when I was in Hospital I met a Nurse there, & we became very friendly, & it was n’t long before I realized how much I was in love with her, so I told her & found that she also cared for me, but, alas, she’d sworn never to marry, owing to a weak heart, due to rheumatic fever or something; & nothing I could say or do would make her relent, but she promised always to write & let me know how she was getting on, & she writes yet, but never a word of love or anything of course. So I gave it up in despair, & then you came along, & I forgot, – but not for long, however. Try as I might she remains with me just the same, & won’t be forgotten. So, althou’ you know how much I like & respect you, you can see how hopeless it is for me to really care for you as I ought to. I’m sorry Meg, Heaven alone knows how sorry, but I won’t stand in your light any longer & spoil your other chances. I can only hope you’ll meet some boy who’ll love you as you deserve to be loved, while I must just go on hoping & waiting that someday she’ll want me & forget all the rest. I’ve not asked her again since, of course, for I not only knew it was no use but as I said before, I hoped I should have no desire to. I know how cruel I’ve been to you, Meg, but try to forgive, & tell me what & how I should do now. Won’t you write and tell me, please? If I don’t hear from you again I shall conclude I’ve offended past all forgiveness; but you’ll know how Fate treats me if ever you hear of me being engaged, or getting married, for I’ll never marry any but this one girl. So I’ll conclude, Meg, hoping I may ever sign myself

Your sincere friend,

Jock

The heart of me is not to “tell you what and how you must do”
May fate one day grant you your heart’s desire, and time be good enough to help me endure and survive this bitterness.

Meg’s ‘draft’ reply

No.1 Officers Co.
Command Depot,
North Camp,
Rippon.
13.6.17

The heart of me is not to “tell you what and how you must do”
May fate one day grant you your heart’s desire, and time be good enough to help me endure and survive this bitterness.
Narratology
‘Meaning is not “at the end” of the narrative, it runs across it’
S/Z is a textual analysis or ‘deconstruction’ of Sarrasine, (a novella by Honoré de Balzac written in 1831). The themes under discussion in S/Z revolve around the concepts of plurality and the migration of meaning. Through these Barthes exposes the possibility of the expansion of interpretation and meaning potentially immanent in fiction through connotation/denotation. This may be through cultural, linguistic and/or other subjective multiplicities. He demonstrates that difference is produced through individual readers and what they may bring to the reading of a text, what Barthes describes as writerly texts. He discusses intertextuality – how we continually reference other sources which inform and influence how we interpret and understand things, whether internal or external to a specific text. Barthes’ system is designed to show that fictional texts have the potential to be plural, to have multiple meanings – that there is not one, pre-established meaning.

Barthes highlights different semantic levels of meaning to be found in fiction, which he establishes through five codes. These are isolated through what he describes as ‘lexia’ or small units of meaning. Barthes’ system demonstrates how meaning and difference can be found through these codes and lexia: through the structure, development of themes and different layers or ‘voices’ present in words, language and narrative. Additionally Barthes shows us how these codes run across the narrative, not necessarily following a logical narrative or grammatical order. The codes are the Hermeneutic (enigma), Proairetic (actions, such as ‘to stroll’), Semic (connotation/denotation), Symbolic and Referential (cultural). These codes enable a text to be viewed and read thematically and simultaneously through a ‘stereographic space’, where multiple voices are shown by Barthes to co-exist in the text.

S/Z and visual practice

- Intertextual, migratory examination of materials
- Thematic analysis of the letters
- Composition – fragmentation; lexia and migration; relationship of text and surface
- Visual/verbal – migration and thematic layering; relationship between text and image; visibility of language in use; the effects of language

2014 visual/verbal dialectic; ‘may time be good enough to help me endure and survive this bitterness’
‘Narrative always says less than it knows, but it often makes known more than it says’
Narrative Discourse: an Essay in Method — Gérard Genette

Narrative Discourse: an Essay in Method — Gérard Genette

Genette's Narrative Discourse is a comprehensive examination of and discourse on narrative theory. Using Proust's *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* as his main source, Genette's study deals with the ways in which narrative is deployed within Proust and other works of fiction. He marks the distinction between the *histoire* — the events, and the *récit* — how those events are narrated and evident in the narrative, and the ways in which they variously come to the reader. *Narrative Discourse* discusses only the *récit*. Genette examines the underlying systems at work in fiction, unravelling the complex relationship between a story and how it is told.

Genette’s extensive dissection of *A la Recherche* does so through a set of five rhetorical codes — Order, Duration, Frequency, Mood and Voice. Genette discusses how stories come to us through those codes, how the narrative is organised — its pattern across the text, and how the reader traverses the story world. These mechanisms transcend any linear ordering of the story. He discusses meta-narratives (those off to the side), which may be used to fill in gaps not covered by the first narrative, or which may be used to provide additional details or background information to support or augment a character, place or event not covered by the first narrative. These stories within stories provide a further conceptual expansion of what and where the story world may be, by making reference to external sources and additional conceptual spaces.

*Narrative Discourse* exposes us to the underlying structures potentially found in fiction and introduces us to a new story world, one that is not connected to the story's meaning, but what goes on behind the story. It provides fresh ways to contemplate the page, the people in the story and the spaces they inhabit, and so brings the story world to life.
2014  Exploring perspective, émotif and story through the nurse, with increasing fragmentation of ‘the page’, looking at time passing, distance and elusiveness through materials and composition, and her place in the story and space in the narrative.
Practice, the Semple letters and narratology
‘How great a lustre they mutually reflect upon one another’
Practice

Materials, text, processes, formats

Materials include:
- Paper – pre-used, tissue, tracing, baking
- Clothing/cloth
- Lace
- Talcum powder and dust
- Ice/water
- Oil
- Cobwebs
- Sunlight
- Books
- Boxes, cases
- Thread, string
- Wire
- Clay
- Ephemera
- Cardboard
- Pastels
- Chalk
- Charcoal
- Paint – acrylic, oil, water colour
- Milk
- Lemon juice

2010 landscape and narrative; binding/deconstructed book
2014 'endure and survive'; linguistic meaning and correspondence – with time passing, enigma, elusiveness, fragility and ephemerality of ice; melting ice/lead type impression
2013 fragmentation of materials, narrative potential of the edge; ephemera (jewel box hinges)
2014 'endure'; linguistic meaning and solidity, continuation and time passing, enigma, landscape; blotting paper/lead type impression
2014 relationship of surfaces, edges and exploring the page; lexia and materials; printed page/oil/talcum powder
2014 'endure'; linguistic meaning, solidity and fragility; talcum powder/charcoal/lead type impression
2013 fragmentation of materials, narrative potential of the edge; ephemera (jewel box hinges)
2014 'endure and survive'; visual/verbal and distance and surface; ice/cloth/stitched text
2014 'bitterness'; physical proximity, impact of last word, clay impression/grated charcoal
2014 'bitterness'; physical proximity, impact of last word, clay impression/grated charcoal
2012 'But there's something'; text, emotion and physical space of letter; ink/baking paper/shadow
2010 landscape and narrative; binding/deconstructed book
2014 'help me endure and survive this bitterness; visual/verbal and distance and surface; ice/cloth/stitched text
2014 'bitterness'; physical proximity, impact of last word, clay impression/grated charcoal
2014 relationship of surfaces, edges and exploring the page; lexia and materials; printed page/oil/talcum powder
2014 'endure'; linguistic meaning and correspondence – with time passing, enigma, elusiveness, fragility and ephemerality of ice; melting ice/lead type impression
2014 'endure'; linguistic meaning, solidity and fragility; talcum powder/charcoal/lead type impression
2014 'endure'; linguistic meaning and correspondence – with time passing, enigma, elusiveness, fragility and ephemerality of ice; melting ice/lead type impression
Text formats include:

Handwritten
Wire
Stitched
Impressed
Scratched
Digitised

Photocopied
Printed – monoprint,
letterpress (hand/machine)

Embossed
Debossed

2014 ‘the nurse’; émotif (mood
and psychology), perspective and
narrative space; ephemerality and
fragmentation; machine
letterpress/gradated paper and ink

colour

2011 fragmentation and surface;
handwritten text/ink/baking
paper/sunlight

2012 ‘tell you something’;
visual/verbal and migration; mood and
narrative space; stitched
text/handwritten facsimile/shadow

2012 exploring the page and
relationship of surfaces; difference,
the fold and enigma and narrative
space; narrative and mood; crushed
boxed facsimile pages/shadow/folds

2013 ‘something I want to tell
you’; narrative, trace and surface;
paper/pastels/pen nib/shadow

2013 ‘weak heart’; traces and
time passing; pre-used
paper/pastels/pen nib/shadow

2014 ‘endure’; linguistic
meaning, visual/verbal and solidity
and fragility; monoprint/talcum
powder/lead type

2014 ‘endure and survive this
bitterness’; visual/verbal, mood and
landscape; stitched text;
cloth/thread/knots/shadow

2013 (whole letter); time passing
and forgetting; enigma; baking
paper/printed text/charcoal/pastel
2011 (whole letter); mood and landscape; time, memory and forgetting; escaping the materiality of the letter; fold/facsimile letter pages

2011 (whole letter); rise and fall of the narrative plot and correlation with emotions and the landscape; card/digitized text

2011 (whole letter); enigma emphasis and narrative landscape; facsimile text/rolled/boxed

2011 ‘but alas’: perspective, emotion and Meg in narrative space; fabric/stitch/facsimile text/rolled/scroll

2012 (found text): opening the narrative space, meta-narratives and new correspondences; rolled pre-printed paper/sunlight

2012 exploring the page and relationship of surfaces; difference and density of the page, the fold, enigma and narrative layers and space; narrative and mood; crushed boxed facsimile pages/shadow

2013 fragmentation; explicit/implicit text; boxed and rolled paper/printed and stitched text/thread/sunlight

2011 ‘but alas’: perspective, emotion and Meg in narrative space; fabric/stitch/facsimile text/rolled/scroll

2011 ‘endure and survive’; surface and narrative, visual/verbal; frozen: ice/cloth/stitched text

2014 ‘bitterness’; linguistic meaning and time passing; ephemerality; visual/verbal; impression/nib/talcum powder

2014 ‘departed’; trace and surface; text and mood; glove/oil/text/talcum powder

2014 ‘bitterness’; memory and forgetting; scratched text/blotting paper/water/nib

2011 (whole letter): mood and landscape; time, memory and forgetting; escaping the materiality of the letter; fold/facsimile letter pages

Processes include:
Folding
Wrapping
Binding
Rolling
Boxing/containing
Printing
Lighting – sunlight, shadow, candles, spot
Dissolving
Oiling
Freezing
Practice and development

In order to examine and critically appraise the transferral and translation of Barthes’ and Genette’s literary theories into visual practice I have researched this process in different ways. This includes, most significantly, by working and evaluating literary codes, and their relevance, through my own practical work; and by analysing the Semple letters. I have analysed the work of others, as well as my own through literary codes. I have considered adapting Barthes’ codes to create bespoke project specific codes. I have made a translation of literary codes into relevant and credible visual methods – as part of this translation process I have had to reject some literary concepts, as necessary. One example of this is Genette’s codes, which are highly detailed and are relative to large volumes of text (Proust). Many of the finer points Genette makes are not relevant to visual material. Additionally by working literary codes through my practical research, it altered my own critical responses to some of the literary concepts.

There were tensions in the transferral of concepts between the literary and visual, such as the similarities I perceived between Barthes’ thematic codes – which relate to connotation/denotation, symbolic and cultural referencing – and visual forms of communication, where visual imagery is also read through those codes. Likewise, Genette’s codes of order, duration and frequency are concerned with sequence, emphasis and hierarchy, aspects also considered in visual communication. I became aware through critical appraisal that my early responses to Narrative Discourse were more illustrative, rather than specifically exploring what difference the codes may bring to visual forms of communication.

It was by my continued practical research, with both theories, that I slowly began to notice changes in my work, discussed and illustrated in the following pages of this book. I documented my practical research in three research books: the first was a log of what I had done; the second contained work I considered to be working; and thirdly a ‘showcase’ book of the best examples. This showcase book has been updated regularly, in line with my evolving responses to theory.

The following pages discuss and illustrate the changes and impact literary codes have had on my practice. This includes the impacts on how I regard my materials and processes and ways materials are used; my analysis of the source material; the relationship between the visual and verbal; and the story world, composition, narrative and perspective.
Practice, narratology and examination of materials

Taking Barthes’ plural perspective on language and meaning as a starting point, I asked what this conceptual (migratory) approach could bring to my materials and production of my stories. I did this by exploring different thematic perspectives through some of my materials. In doing this my comprehension of the connotative possibilities of them was altered. I gained an awareness of the ‘network of relations’ potentially immanent in my materials, which added significations, correlations and connotations not previously considered. It heightened my sensitivities to those materials, building on visual communication perspectives and methods.

Undertaking this examination added additional ways through which I came to comprehend my materials. For instance, I examined the potential of the fold by considering it as a mental, cartographic and physical landscape, as well as a visual one; to consider folds and folding through mood and emotion; and to investigate the correspondences between folds and narrative; and folds and memory.

This new way of considering my materials added different and subtle layers or ‘voices’ to those materials. These can be considered to be at one and the same time evident, with these traces and networks of meanings being simultaneously overlaid and expressed through those materials, unified in what Barthes describes as the ‘stereographic’ (plural) space.

I divided my materials into two categories for examination, together making up the story world. These are landscape – representing the page, canvas or surface (which may be paper, textiles, clothing or ice, for example); and interactions – between visual and verbal elements, narration, and the integration and correlation of the visual/verbal with the landscape:

Composition and the landscape of narrative
The undulating plane of immanence: Deleuze and the fold
Intensifying the page and story world (surface)
Transcendent treasures: cloth and clothing

Interactions with the page
Text and visible language
Stitch – patterns of absence and presence
The bitter end: knot
The aesthetic of ephemerality
2014 vintage cloth fragment (170x140mm), stretched and stitched to card; intertextual examination of materials – clothing and ‘transcendent treasures’

2014 cloth fragment; developed through tension and sunlight; narrative surface, seam and spine (book/body); the degraded surface and time passing, memory in cloth

2014 as before, cloth fragment with added text; time, trace, mood and the narrative landscape
Analysing the letters

Literary theory provides a non-visual perspective on analysing a story/text. Visual communication methods treat texts more holistically, by looking at the totality of a text, and/or by addressing the organisation of that totality (this happened, then that); and by considering sequence, emphasis and hierarchy, and how these elements are organised visually through design.

S/Z

Migration, lexia and thematic codes have the potential to produce different perspectives on the same story, by increasing the ways in which it may be interpreted, and how meaning may be polysemically evident. Deconstructing the Semple letters through Barthes’ codes led to multiple new ways through which to comprehend and investigate this resource, including looking at the enigmas posed by the letters, and examining other connoted, physical, social, cultural and historical aspects that the letters reference.

One example of the different insights gained as a result of my analysis of the story and the letters through Barthes thematic layers is evident through the theme of ‘departure’. It has relevance to Jock, Meg and the nurse. Jock is absent geographically from Meg and the nurse. He is absent romantically from Meg and the nurse, one by choice the other by design. Meg has been separated from Jock by his rejection of her. The nurse has been parted from Jock by her poor health. The passing of time is another form of departure, as the characters and the story move further away as time elapses between the past and the present. A departure has been made from the original intended reader of the letter (Meg), to it being publicly available by its inclusion in the archive at the museum. The theme of departure spans all of the characters, Jock’s letter, and the archive. I have looked at departure through its linguistic meaning, and how it may be considered through physical, emotional and conceptual aspects. Additionally I have looked at departure and its links to time and trace.

Thematic layers have the potential to produce cadences that lie outside of the main story, revealing beneath the surface detail. The letter has been brought to life through my thematic analysis. I have explored the theme of ‘departure’ through my visualisations by looking at specific materials and different compositions to reflect this theme of absence and elusiveness; and also of time passing and trace. I looked at different ways to develop an aesthetic of ephemerality and fugitivity, to suggest movement away from the word and page. I investigated different ways to produce enigma and implicitness of narrative through my materials, for instance by looking at the relationship of the stitched word, trailing threads and specific framing.

Narrative Discourse

Genette divides narrative between the events and the means through which those events come to the reader. This division is not used in visual forms of communication. He examines fiction through the codes of order, duration, frequency, mood and voice. Through these Genette demonstrates the ways in which emphasis, hierarchy, sequence and perspective run across the narrative – that they are outside of the story events – and demonstrates how the narrative is composed. He discusses the ways in which a variable weight and emphasis may be given to an event, in relation to the amount of physical space it occupies in the text and its relevance and impact on the story. I divided the Semple letters through the events/narrative and also through the five codes. The codes of mood and voice made a significant impact on how I analysed the Semple letters, by encouraging me to think about aspects beyond the content of the letters, specifically in relation to perspective, the people in the story and the narrative space.

One example of the different information obtained through Narrative Discourse are the multiple stories I perceived in Jock’s letter, a web spanning time, place and people. These include the lives of Jock and Meg, and the joint world were they unite within the letter. Additional meta-layers of
narrative are referenced through a friend
Will ‘in the trenches’, of the distant war, to
Meg’s ‘chum’ and finally references are
made to an unnamed nurse. These stories
are situated beyond the first level of
narrative. Viewing the letter through the
codes provides the potential for the
characters to escape the main story. This
new understanding provided me with
additional ways to respond to the letters.

In relation to the archive and museum, the
history of the life of the letters is yet
another story within a story. The archive
has been visited approximately 25 times in
the last ten years, the visitor’s name or
purpose is unrecorded. Each visit is a re-
telling of the Semple story, adding to its
history.

These different perspectives on the letter
have been developed through a range of
different practical responses. This includes
looking at the story from the perspective
of the nurse, selecting and composing my
materials to reflect what I perceived as her
elusiveness and intangibility – in relation to
her presence/absence in the story and
letter, and time passing. I examined her role
in the story, which was pivotal, in relation
to narrative space. I examined her, and the
individual characters, in relation to their
place and role in the story and the narrative
space they occupied.

Information/data gathering

Over 80 different responses have so far been
produced, through a variety of formats,
perspectives and approaches, some of which are
included in this book. Those covered so far include:
the whole letter; several sentences; a few words; a
single word. The characters have been explored
collectively and individually; including looking at
perspective, emotions, psychology, hierarchy and
narrative space. I have also looked at the story of
the letters in the museum and my own engagement
with them.

Denotation in the letter/events include:

Meg has written to Jock
Jock is writing to Meg
Will is in the trenches
Meg is working hard
Jock needs to tell Meg something
He is in love with someone else
She is a nurse
She will not marry him
She has a weak heart
Jock was injured
She nursed him
Jock loves the nurse
She loves him
He writes to her
She still writes to him
Jock still loves the nurse
Jock does not want to hurt Meg
Jock ends his relationship with Meg

Processes and formats include:
Division of event/narrative (Genette);
connotation/denotation (Barthes);
numeric data; different thematic layers,
including ‘dodging’, ‘endure’, ‘departure’

Folds and: pages; extent; edges; clothing
fragments, letter, absence, distance;
narrative flow, direction; binding; blind
fold; folds and mood; folds and memory

Scrolls and: narrative; emotions; people;
layering; reading order/disruption to;
explicit/implicit narrative

Meta-narratives; explicit/implicit; gaps
and spaces; absence/presence; traces
and patina; connectivity and layering;
framing; perspective; and space

Absence/presence and text

Physical effects of words, language and
narrative

Framing

Mood; shadows; sunlight; lighting

Linear/non-linear flow, expansion of the
story world

Intersections and correspondences
tension and release

Focus and perspective: time; vision;
character; angle; scale

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<th>Person</th>
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<td>Will</td>
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<td>Meg’s ‘chum’</td>
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Narrative Discourse, perspective and narrative space; émotif

In response to examining Genette’s codes of mood and voice, along with new narratological ways to consider the story world, I investigated the people in Jock’s letter separately. I analysed them beyond the story’s content, by looking at the nuances of who was ‘speaking’ or being referenced, and from what position in the narrative that happened. I explored the imagined emotions, feelings, physical responses and psychologies of Meg, Jock and the nurse. I looked at the correspondences between the physical text, the narrative and internal character perspectives. I appraised their position within both story and narrative, investigating links between the physical space and dimensions of the letter with perceived power relations between characters, and their individual roles in the story in relation to the physical space.

Genette divides narrative into the events/how those events are narrated – the histoire/récit. I have described the aspects of the narrative discussed above as émotif, adding to Genette’s framework.
Literary codes (including the intertextual examination I made of my materials) have altered my thinking, approaches and methods in visual practice. The includes re-examining the visual/verbal relationship, how I consider composition and changes in my conceptual approaches to the organisation of my stories.

The relationship between visual and verbal elements in my work has been changed by my examination of narratology. In *S/Z* Barthes discusses the migration of meaning in respect of language and narrative and this concept encouraged me to think about words and language beyond the linguistic signifier. I examined different ways of developing verbal elements and the migratory potential of language through my practice, including looking at the visibility and physicality of words and language. I also investigated those elements in correspondence with other thematic layers, such as exploring the narrational and sensory possibilities that a more ‘physical’ text might enable.

I explored enigma, time and the traces of language and narrative through a variety of materials and compositions, including interacting physically with words, for example by folding, layering, ‘dusting’, freezing and fragmentation. These processes provided me with the opportunity to interact with language. This impacted on the visual and linguistic potential of verbal elements in my tales, by making them more visible and textural; merging linguistic, symbolic, visual, physical and narrative elements. These subtle conceptual layers that inform my materials and organisation of the narrative have the potential to distance language further from the linguistic signifier, by fusing the visual and verbal, making text more enigmatic and elusive.

Barthes’ concept of lexia and the migration of meaning encouraged me to think about narrative away from any linear order or narrative logic. Barthes shows us how meaning and narrative run across a story. This mobility opens up the narrative space by expanding the physical and conceptual possibilities of the story world; and what and where the page may be.

Genette examines the mechanisms of narrative and how the reader traverses the narrative space. He discusses first level narrative and secondary ones which are indicated from within the main story. These meta-layers create a conceptual movement away from the first narrative, by referencing layers beyond the boundaries of the page. Meta-narratives, along with Genette’s five codes, encouraged me to consider the story world and the page as being less fixed or static. This builds on Barthes’ concepts of lexia and the migration of meaning, which also altered my understanding of the narrative space.

By considering these aspects in my compositions I looked at different ways to implicate or reference additional conceptual meta-layers through my materials and composition, as demonstrated in the following pages. Narratology encouraged me to think about the page and how visual and verbal elements correlate with the surface (whatever form that may take). I have looked at not only what is written on the page but also what is implicated and nuanced through various thematic layers.

One example of compositional change is evident in my research with ice. Ice is ephemeral and unstable. It can be opaque and transparent. I investigated the effects of creating distance between visual and verbal elements and the surface, by embedding looped and knotted stitched text in water and then freezing it. Using this process meant that language, and its traces, were held in frozen suspension. This enabled me to capture words and narrative both on and beneath the surface, by utilising the ethereal impermanence of ice in my story telling.

The frozen page and composition can be altered by time. Depth and distance between the surface, text and a fluctuating visibility is achieved by
varying states of freezing and thawing. This has the potential to alter the narrative content and the perspective. Melting ice gradually releases text, which makes language both mobile and visible. The iced story world is layered, enigmatic and textured, it both hides and reveals.

My story telling has become less and less concerned with providing ‘information’. I have been examining ways to produce narrative and the possibility of meaning more enigmatically. This I have attempted to achieve through the considered choice and development of materials and processes those materials are put through. I have reappraised the relationship between the explicit and implicit narrative in my tales. This includes considering different ways to enable a reader/viewer to ‘read’ my stories, whilst also leaving an open space for them. What would once have been a finished piece, such as embroidering or printing onto a garment, is now put through additional processes, such as the work with ice already discussed and as illustrated right, and elsewhere in this book.

In response to my examination of narratological codes I consider the story world to be multifaceted, where pages are unbound and physical and meta-layers of narrative coexist. I have come to regard my tales as tissue texts and landscapes of narrative. This corresponds with the different layers of thinking that have transformed my story telling. I have attempted to create narratives which are ethereal, enigmatic and elusive. Narrative and meaning are both explicit and implicit, seen and unseen. Tissue texts also reference distance, time, trace, transparency and opaqueness – between the original story and the present; between remembering and forgetting; and between the story, the surface and the traces of language and meaning.

My story telling has been informed by my research with two literary theories, each bringing new approaches and different perspectives on narrative to visual practice, complementing and extending how I communicate visually.
Cloth and clothing

2008 clothing and ethereality, memory and trace; materials and enigma; paper dress/sunlight/shadow

2008 "Gertrude" – early research installation; vintage chiffon blouse/text/embroidery/paper panels

2009 S/Z, re-examining the ‘Gertrude’ text and garment through lexia and thematic codes, correspondences of visual/verbal; fragmentation and abstraction of clothing; surface detail and narrative

2009 S/Z and lexia ethereality and trace; chiffon blouse/drawn shadow/thread

2009 examining lexia and codes through clothing; text and space; implicit and explicit narrative

2009 S/Z, re-examining the Gertrude story through fragmentation (lexia and thematic codes)

2009 S/Z, re-examining the 'Gertrude' text and garment through lexia and thematic codes, correspondences of visual/verbal; fragmentation and abstraction of clothing; surface detail and narrative

2009 examining lexia and codes through clothing; text and space; implicit and explicit narrative

2009 Genette, perspective and landscape; surface lustre; clothing/sunlight/shadow

2008 clothing, ethereality, trace and clothing; paper dress/text/wire frame
2009 S/Z, lexia and internal space; correspondences between narrative, surface and detail; lace blouse

2011 ethereality, enigma and narrative space; mood and narrative; vintage dress/projected texture

2012 mood, perspective and landscape; Meg and ‘émotif’; vintage sleeve/facsimile letter/sunlight/shadow

2013 ‘she remains with me just the same, and won’t be forgotten’; memory, perspective and trace in cloth; fragmentation and abstraction; internal construction of garment; blouse/talcum powder/black card/sunlight

2014 fragmentation, trace and ethereality of the nurse; chiffon blouse/paper/cobweb

2014 trace, time and the edge of memory, internal space; child’s top/talcum powder

2014 trace, time and the edge of memory, internal space; child’s top/talcum powder

2012 mood, perspective and landscape; Meg and ‘émotif’; vintage sleeve/facsimile letter/sunlight/shadow
2008 figurative use of clothing, text on surface, linear path of narrative

2009 same garment examined through fragmentation and abstraction; correspondences of visual/verbal with surface and detail
Visual/verbal

2010 text and surface, looking back, elusiveness

2009 ‘unspoken word’, visualising language

2010 materials, surface, explicit and implicit narrative

2010 lexia and thematic links; narrative and surface; composition of clothing

2010 lexia, Fragmentation, migration of meaning, visual/verbal relationship

2011 looking at individual characters, and the spaces between letters; examining the visibility of language and immanence
narrative and the visual-verbal relationship; the traces of language

landscape of narrative

‘departure’; where materials end and traces, language and narrative begin; immanence

time and narrative; visual-verbal dialectic

surface and narrative; visual-verbal dialectic
2010 examining a war poem, visualising time, distance, elusiveness

2014 'endure and survive this bitterness'; examining similar themes to the image left, but also considering landscape, interactions, visual/verbal dialectic
Tissue Texts and the Landscape of Narrative
2034

'help me endure and survive this bitterness'
she remains with me just the same, and won't be forgotten
2014

"help me endure and survive this bitterness"
2014

"I must go on waiting and hoping"
2013

"I didn't mean to ever tell"
where, & now, I am
But there's something
about me, that's something
I never told you, but now I
even expect you'll think of sorts
I expect you'll think of sorts
about me, & it's better to tell
when too late, or it'll
Well, when I
there, & we
long before I realized
love, not...
2014
tissue text and the landscape of narrative
2034  ‘departed’: tissue text and the landscape of narrative
'and time be good enough to help me endure and survive this bitterness'
2034

"the heart is not of me to tell you what and how you must do"