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Original Citation

Barber, Claire (2014) Weaving Technologies in the Construction of a Ferry Ticket. *Radar*, 1 (4). pp. 36-37. ISSN 2049-4327

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Weaving Technologies in the Construction of a Ferry Ticket

Claire Barber



I have been part of the Hythe to Southampton ferry commute for a number of years. I have been one of other commuters, eating mince pies offered to us by skippers on a cold December evening, travelling with my Hythe Ferry Ten Journey ticket grasped in my hand to be clipped by the ferry mates as I disembark at Hythe, which is then placed back into the deep red pocket of my coat.

The commute begins at the Hythe Ferry ticket office at the top end of the High Street in Hythe. Passengers then board a narrow pier train that takes commuters along the quarter mile pier to the Hotspur IV ferry at the far end. On arrival, the commuters disembark to queue in line, waiting for the ferry staff to punch a hole into their ticket before they board the ferry. The Hotspur IV ferry makes the crossing to Southampton in about fifteen minutes. Every day that the commuter community traverses Southampton Water, they occupy a transient place on a small family run transport service; a place that is at once familiar and ever-changing, responsive to the weather.

In 2006, the painter Richard Webb and I developed *You Are the Journey* on the front of the Hythe Ferry Ten Journey Ticket as a site for a piece of on-going public art. It formed part of an Arts Council Art Plus Award for Art in Public Places. *You Are the Journey* generates a stream of text that helps draw a series of contemporary social portraits of the commuter community. By posing questions on the front of the Hythe Ferry Ten Journey ticket, commuters were invited to respond through hand written commentary on the front of their ticket. On subsequent batches of tickets, the commuters' responses were then positioned in the spaces where the punch hole is made creating an ephemeral poetry that is erased as the tickets are punched each day. The punch hole eliminates a line of text, illuminating the temporality of the remaining phrases.

Once the ten journeys have been used up a new ticket is purchased. This cycle is repeated as an on-going process, combining print and hand writing onto the surface of the transport ticket; a social interaction which defines the ticket's ultimate form.

A conceptual symmetry can be found with the Jacquard loom, as multiple commuter patterns are created through the punch in a card, indicating the number of journeys that have made over Southampton Water. The programming mechanism of a Jacquard loom works on the principle of a series of punch cards, whose perforations determine the pattern of the cloth being woven, and the lifting and dropping motion of the loom shaft. Both Jacquard weaving and ticketing production employ mechanical processes based on the punch of a card, with the facility to create multiple combinations and many different patterns. The spatial organisation of text in the ticket is based on the arrangement of punch-hole cards in weaving. This enriches the underlying content of the commuters' phrases, signifying the potential of punch-hole spaces to carry the significance of a particular commuter community through the inter-related composition and form of each phrase. The commuters steer the production of the work even if the artwork goes unnoticed. Further, if a commuter chooses to write on the ticket, they incorporate a re-patterning of phrases onto subsequent tickets. Asserting the weaver's eye, this process utilises a theoretical warp that can be re-threaded to create countless patterns of mutual significance to the specific commuter community.

In addition to the structure of this public artwork being analogous with textiles, it also provides the opportunity for commuters to contribute to a larger production, reflecting the rhythms of the seasons and ebb and flow of other commuters crossing Southampton Water each day. As passengers' tickets are clipped, the small clipped circles of paper lying at the skippers' feet suggests the tickets' mortality, and the ephemerality of people's on-going reflections on board a boat to work. Within this context, the commuters' actions can further be linked conceptually to the production of cloth.

The Hythe Pier train shuttles commuters back and forth between land and water. It contains the passengers' journey with the narrow 363 meter stretch of planks and metal ballasts which lead them to board the ferry at the far end. In the position of this long walkway and pier train track at each end of the journey, a parallel can be found with a selvedge — the process which forms a firm configuration of warp and weft threads at the extreme lateral edges of the cloth, in order to contain the fabric and stop it fraying. So too, the edge of the ticket is intensified by the punch holes spaces, and by passengers' quotes which carry meaning through the inter-related composition and correspondence of each phrase. The metaphoric entwining of the quotes creates another link; between weaving and communication. Here, an archive of commentary is momentarily collected and logged, connecting commuters through an everyday commodity, but also through textual poetic device, as a weaver's shuttle connects disparate threads.

Since *You Are the Journey's* completion there have been two routes to create new work. The directors of the ferry company continue to use our template on the front of their ticket, reflecting the impact of public art at its most ephemeral. And as I weave onto the front of discarded tickets, I replace the allegory of weave with the actuality of textiles, bringing an illusion of functionality, and so contributing to a cyclical process.

Glossary of terms

Jacquard Loom: The Jacquard loom is a mechanical loom controlled by a number of punched cards, which control a series of operations in the formation of the pattern of the loom's weave. It was the first machine to use cards in this way and is considered an important step towards the history of computing software.

Warp and weft: The basic purpose of the Jacquard loom is to hold the warp threads in tension, to enable the interweaving weft threads to pass up and over each warp thread during the weaving process.

Heddle: A heddle is often made of wire, which is suspended on the shaft of a loom. Each thread of the warp passes through the heddle, to ensure that the threads remain taught, in alignment and separate from each other during the weaving process.

Selvedge: This is the finished edge of the weave that are formed during the weaving process, with the main purpose to 'finish' the fabric and stop the cloth unravelling.