

# Decipher Me

**“Etymologically, the world ‘text’ is derived from the Latin word *textus*, ‘woven’”**

(Müller-Schareck, M. [2018], p137)

The world has begun to revolve more around computers and the coding that lives within them. With the development in technology and the growing feeling of being lost within it. Binary code is fascinating, its intimidating, its fast and unknown. It is the language of computers, understood by a few humans. There is a simplicity in the lines of 0's & 1's, the information hidden within, unless you know how to decipher it. When looking at a line of 0's and 1's I try to see myself amongst it. Naturally, people gravitate towards the 1, as that is a 'something' but then what is a Zero, a thing or nothing?

In Sadie Plants *Zeros and Ones: Digital Women and the New Technoculture* (1998), chapter *Holes*, “Zero is supposed to signify a hole, a space, or a missing piece, and a one is the sign of positivity, digital machines turn these binaries around” (Plant, S. (1998) p56). In the world of machines, when analytical engines which run off binary code come across a 0 it must change its 'nature'. It sees the '0' as either a zero, or, as an infinity, this holds information the machine needs to understand. “In both electronic systems and the punch cards of weaving machines, a hole is one, and a blank is zero” (Plant, S. (1998) p56). For punch cards of weaving machines, the information is within the hole, the hole is the stitch. In my code I take this to convey information, instead of seeing a hole or a blank space, there is the opportunity to contain information in an often-overlooked space. Holes reveal as well as taking away, they physically remove an area, but that has the ability to reveal what's underneath. By creating a hole, I have the ability to reveal knowledge about myself.

As I had a growing feeling of being lost within the new developments in technology through researching 0's & 1's, I found the need to use something analogue and accessible to me which brought me to the idea of textiles & embroidery. Traditionally cross-stitch and embroidery are seen as a feminine practice and not of immense value in the fine art world. Embroidery is connected to my childhood; I grew up watching my mother stitch and my nans house was full of cross stitch scenes and so the act of stitching into fabric is nostalgic to me. Removing distractions that come from technology, stitchery allows me to think and expose myself to my thoughts.

In Rozsika Parkers “The Subversive Stitch” (1996), Rebecca Compton's *Modern Design and embroidery* (1936) is quoted, embroidery “even in its simplest form may become the expression of personal thought and feeling” it's “work which mirrors [a woman's] own thought and personality” (Parker, R. [1996] p 202). By involving one's own thoughts and feelings it becomes a manifestation of self, but “the expression of personality is limited to personal thoughts and feelings” (Parker, R. [1996] p205) instead of the embroiderer themselves being the focus, its more about the physical stitch itself. The embroiderer has the ability to hide behind the stitches, which then creates the perfect way of expressing their thoughts and feelings.

In history women have been overlooked, their place being in the home. Working behind the scenes and not really 'achieving greatness,' often their achievements were forgotten about, buried or had men taking credit for them. As Luce Irigaray says, "She does not set herself up as one, as a (single) female unit" ... "she is neither has nor is a being" (Plant, S. (1998) p55) a woman cannot be contained to a singular 1, there is an infinity of definitions to what she can be. If we reduce a woman down to the simplicity of binary 0's & 1's a woman cannot be contained to the 1, she must be the 0, which yes has negative connotations but is both demeaning and liberating. A woman can achieve greatness, there is no one thing they cannot do, they have the ability to do whatever they want. There are endless possibilities.

Sometimes in life, I feel like I am nothing. Owning the zero, the hole, the nothingness, it allows me to be whatever I want to be. It reveals the endless possibilities of things I can be and achieve. As a zero can mean nothing or an infinity of things it has allowed me to hide my feelings behind the Zero. There is also the hidden aspect of a 0, unless it is thought about it is perceived as a nothing, the hidden ability to be infinity.

In weaving and cross-stitch an image and design must be transformed into a grided cubic version of itself to be created. When approaching a weaving loom, the design is planned out in a grided format. In her book 'On weaving' (1965), Anni Albers illustrates her modified and composite weave designs. These are things often overlooked, but for me I find them fascinating. When a photo is zoomed in on digitally or has a bad resolution the image becomes 'pixelated', much like the grided format textile patterns use. By the digital failing, the analogue can read it. This idea of the digital linking with the traditional weave of textiles is key in my created code.

The warp (vertical) and weft (horizontal) is fundamental in the creation of fabric. The build-up of grids is the foundation to every piece of fabric. According to Tim Ingold, "Making is a practice of weaving, in which practitioners bind their own pathways or lines of becoming into the texture of material flows comprising the lifeworld" (Ingold, T. [2009], p.91). By using a grided format, I am weaving myself into this narrative. The warp and weft lines being used to thread my story together and the hole (stitch) contains my information.

Based on the idea of 0's and 1's, in a grided system I blank out my 'zeros', revealing my truth. The code hides what I want to say but by making my mark on the grid I reveals some of myself, exposing my truth. I have replaced the 0 with a X using the configuration of cross-stitch to visualise my code. X marks the spot on a treasure map to dig hole to find the treasure, X marks the spot to uncover the truth of my thoughts. Although the act of creating a cross-stitch is seen as a 'simple stitch' I am using it as a way to build up an tapestry of myself, and therefore I see it as a form of tapestry, a network of thought-out stitches.

The x of a stitch or a hole in a square holds the information to what I am saying, the void is not a void but the key to what I am trying to say. This has allowed me creative freedoms in my work as I can say what I want to and release my inner thoughts into the world without people actually knowing. The code is tailored to me, it includes punctuation I use and as I do speak Welsh (not so often) there is an inclusion of a few Welsh letters such as 'dd' & 'll'

When you buy a cross stitch pattern, you are given a key to work with, to find what colour belongs to each 'square,' a key to decipher the vague image in front of you. With my code there is a decipher key that goes along with it, to understand

what I am sharing, but giving this key to people, to understand what I am saying, is something I am unwilling to do. That would be revealing too much of my truth, I am not ready to reveal my secrets to the world. By using the code, I have been given agency to create the work I want to without the pressure of outside eyes judging what I am saying. The decipher key is my safety blanket.

In life, I feel trapped inside my own brain, with no one to celebrate the little wins or talk about life lows. Through the loneliness that is my life, I deny myself the freedom of speech by not saying what I am truly feeling. I am desperate to tell people what I am thinking but I fear what they will say and at the end of the day I find myself with no one to talk to. I am alone depressed & trapped. By putting them into code, I can tell people my truth, I am exposing elements of myself, my confessions, things I cannot bring myself to admit outside of the code. I create a dialogue between me and the world which is liberating but safe as unless they have the decipher key, it is unknown.

This code format is my freedom.

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