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The Relationship Between Professional Identity and Pedagogy: Using Objects in Narrative Inquiry Interviews
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Introduction

In 2013, the Contemporary Theatre Review (CTR) dedicated an issue to 'Alphabet: A

Lexicon of Theatre and Performance'. One of the aims of the Alphabet was to 'reflect

on gaps and fissures, moments of fracture and rebellion' (Delgado *et al*, 2013, p.2).

The entry for 'M', 'Mise en Scene', is relevant here:

> One of the biggest mysteries of theatre is not what has been put on the stage,
> but the unseen work that led to the production's first night. While what is
> visible is momentary and transitory, the creativity preceding it is invisible. So
> putting something on stage is akin to putting something in the light, rendering
> the invisible visible, manifesting the creativity of a collective machine, realising
> an artistic concept. (Singleton, 2013, p.47)

Singleton refers to the invisibility of the 'creativity preceding' the production. The

outcome of the design process is apparent on stage 'in the light' but the process of

designing and the position of the designer in the 'collective machine' is only

occasionally lighted upon (Isackes, 2008). The diverse terms associated with design

and designer give some insight into the position and role of both in the 'collective

machine'. These include 'scenographer', 'scenic designer', 'visual theatre artist',

'theatre designer', 'stage designer', 'set designer', 'scenic artist' and scenic

'decorator'. Similarly, terms that denote the visual in performance are also varied.

For example, 'scenography', 'stagecraft', 'performance design', even 'ecriture

scenique' (Howard, 2009, p.55) and 'Narrativism', described by (Casson, 2007) as 'the creation of narrative environments'. These terms allude to differences in the way that design is conceptualised and practiced, suggesting there is a contested space, which is concerned with the degree of what Isackes (2012) calls the 'authorial agency' that designers have within the collective machines of performance making. This diversity might reflect the 'gaps and fissures and moments of fracture and rebellion' (Delgado *et al*, 2013) occurring in creative processes hidden behind the scenes.

One way of understanding the role that designers occupy in 'creative machines' is to consider how the role of the designer and the process of designing are conceptualised in stage design pedagogies. In this paper, I will describe my experience of reconstructing the pedagogy of an early example of a stage design course, called the Motley Theatre Design Course. The reconstruction of the pedagogy of the course was made possible through a focus group with Motley alumni, where participants were asked to bring objects that they associated with being a student on the Motley course. The use of objects as a method for exploring memory and narrative is informed by Roland Barthes' notion of 'punctum' (Barthes 1999) or, described by Hirsch and Spitzer (2006) as 'points of memory' (*Ibid*, p. 358) represented by 'points of intersection between past and present, memory and post-memory, personal and cultural recollection' (*ibid,* p.353), which will be explored in more detail later on in this paper. The rationale for the inclusion of objects in processes of 'narrative inquiry' (Connelly and Clandinin, 2003) in this setting was a response to a series of 'absences', including the absence of the archive and the absence of public discourse on the process of design and stage design pedagogies.

Through this, I will consider how the professional identities of alumni were shaped by the pedagogy of the course. This case study is part of a wider PhD study that examines the relationship between pedagogy, professional identity and creative practices of stage designers in both historical and contemporary contexts.

In the next part of this paper, I will summarise the circumstances under which 'Motley', a group of three theatre designers, first started work as professional designers and as teachers of design. Their theatre connections and early experiences played an important role in giving rise to the core ideas underpinning the pedagogy of the Motley Theatre Design Course, apparent even in the most recent iterations of the course.

The Motley Theatre Design Course

The name 'Motley' represents a group of three theatre designers; Margaret Harris, her sister Sophie, and Elizabeth Montgomery. The Harris' met Montgomery whilst they were training as painters at the 'Queen Anne Studio' in 1920's London (Harris 1992, p.36). In 1930, they chose the name 'Motley' to represent their collective efforts. Harris describes her talent as set design and model making, Sophie was interested in costume design and Montgomery was the painter of the group[1]. The name refers to the multicoloured costume associated with Touchstone the 'motley fool' in *As You Like It* (Shakespeare, 2006). Although the collaborative name created a degree of anonymity for the three designers, and was disliked by Gielgud for this reason, Harris emphasises that recognition was not important to them because they 'just wanted to do the work. And we were very unambitious' (Harris 1992, p.36).

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[1] British Library, 'National Life Story Collection: Margaret Harris Interviewed by Cathy

The friends regularly attended performances at the Old Vic between 1923-1931, making sketches of the costumes. They produced some drawings of John Gielgud in the 1929 and 1930 seasons, as *Richard II, Macbeth* and *King Lear* (Gielgud,1939, p.211) which he later bought from them. Motley needed them back for a 'Women's exhibition' at the Agricultural Hall in Vincent Square (Harris,1992, p.38) and so he returned the sketches and this marked the start of their relationship. Montgomery then produced two costume designs for Gielgud for *Much Ado About Nothing* at Sadler's Wells Theatre in 1931 (Mullin,1996, p.216), however, the first programme credit as 'Motley' was in 1932 for costume designs for *Romeo and Juliet* at the Oxford University Dramatic Society (OUDS) (Harris, 1992, p.38). This is where the Motleys first met George Devine, who was president of the OUDS (Harris, 1992, p.49). Devine later became Motley's manager, and Sophie's husband. It was Gielgud who convinced Devine to employ Motley to do the costume designs. This went against OUDS tradition, which stipulated that only OUDS members could design costumes. Harris explains the importance of their association with Gielgud, because it provided an opening for their developing careers as designers:

> I think it was a sort of renaissance in the English theatre, led by John, and he, he was always looking for people who had the same sort of views as he had himself, I think, and collected them round him, because he was, he was the instigator of all that linking- up. (Harris, 1992, p.50)

The Motley's studio on Garrick Street became a social centre for what Wardle describes as 'the rising theatrical establishment' (Wardle, 1978, p.39) in English theatre. These professional connections led to Motley leading the design courses at the London Theatre Studio and the Old Vic Theatre.

Gielgud had seen Michel St. Denis' Paris-based 'Compagnie Des Quinze' in 1935 with their production of *Noe* by the Company's resident dramatist Andre Obey at the Ambassador's Theatre in London (Gielgud *et al* 1979, p.103). Gielgud produced the first English translation of the play that appeared at the New Theatre, directed by St. Denis in 1935 and designed by Motley. This was their first collaboration. By now, financial difficulties had forced the closure of St. Denis' company in France but there was enthusiasm for his ideas in England (Baldwin, 2010, p.86). Tyrone Guthrie offered financial backing for a Quinze-style company based in London which became The London Theatre Studio (*ibid,* p.52). The London Theatre Studio opened in 1935 in a single room in Beak Street, London with more permanent premises opening in 1936 in an old Methodist Chapel in Islington, called Providence Hall (Royal Institute of British Architects, 1936, 1937; English Heritage, 1990) . The Bauhaus architect Marcel Breuer designed the interior of the new theatre (Wardle, 1978, p.52). The School lasted for just three years, closing in 1939 due to the Second World War. The building is intact today but the interior has not been retained.

Harris explains that the approach at the LTS was 'reacting against a certain superficiality which was around at the time, with all the sort of Coward set-up' (Harris 1992, p.50). Although Gielgud suggests that he and contemporaries such as Laurence Olivier and Peggy Ashcroft, provided a kind of 'generational bridge'(Gielgud *et al* 1979, p.109) between these two different kinds of theatre, Harris argues that Gielgud 'opted out' of commercial theatre preferring theatre that was 'more sincere.'(Harris, 1992, p.50).

After the Second World War, Laurence Olivier, artistic director of the Old Vic Theatre invited St. Denis to establish an institute of which the Old Vic School would be a part (Baldwin, 2010, p.89). Glen Byam-Shaw, George Devine and St. Denis led the Old Vic Theatre Centre, with Harris leading the design course at the Old Vic School. The School was again short-lived, and was closed in 1952 by the Board of Governors (Mullin, 1996, p.206) . Baldwin ascribes the closure to 'internecine feuding, rivalries, and conflicting ambitions among the administrators and Board members' (Baldwin, 2010, p.89). Byam-Shaw went on to work as the Artistic Director at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, and then to Sadler's Wells theatre ('Mr. Colin Graham On Wells Staff',1966). Devine founded the Royal Court Theatre and the English Stage Company. St. Denis went on to found theatre schools first in Colmar, then Strasbourg, retiring in 1957. However, he continued to teach at the Julliard School in New York.

In the period between the closure of the Old Vic School and the establishment of the 'Sadler's Wells Design Course' in 1966 ('News in Brief' 1966), Motley worked as professional designers at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre and at the Royal Court Theatre. In 1981 the course moved to the Riverside Theatre, with a new name, 'The Motley Theatre Design Course'. The course moved again to the Almeida Theatre in 1987 and in 1991 the course was housed for a brief time at the National Theatre. In 1992 the School moved into premises at Shelton Street, Covent Garden and then in 1994 into the Drury Lane Theatre workshops (Mullin, 1996, p.207). Harris stepped down from the role of sole course director in 1994, dying six years later, aged 95 (Herbert, 2000). The Motley Theatre Design Course was suspended in 2010 (Motley, 2011). Chitty (2011) explains that there were a variety of factors that made it difficult

to continue the course. The immersion in the professional world of theatre, which initiated and sustained the course for so many years, appears to have hindered its survival and integration with UK Higher Education:

> We don't somehow seem to fit into any of the little areas that they have set up, so we can't be accredited… We tried for three years to find out how we could be accredited and we are trying out lots of different ways in which we may go.

The wider PhD study considers the contribution of aspects of Government and Higher Education policy at end of the twentieth century, and into the twenty first century to the course closure in 2010. The course sought to position itself with professional theatre and away from an increasingly regulatory regime in higher education. This consequences of this positioning meant that the pedagogy of the course became incompatible with contemporary 'quality' mechanisms in higher education.

In previous papers (Richmond 2012, 2014a), I proposed that the ways in which pedagogy and practice were organised at the London Theatre Studio and the Old Vic Theatre informed the development of pedagogy that provided the foundation for the Motley Theatre Design Course. The model of the integrated theatre company and school comprised of 'ensembliers' (Saint-Denis, 1960, p.92) working towards a unity of concept in theatrical production, united around an 'an authorial imprimatur' (Lacey 2009, p.241), in the form of the play. St. Denis describes the author as 'the only completely creative person' and that it is the job of everyone in the ensemble to 'understand the author's intention and to submit to it' (Saint-Denis, 1960, p.92). Harris explains that at the London Theatre Studio they were united around 'the importance of the play...the importance of the dramatist above all' (Harris, 1992,

p.133). I suggested that the emphasis on the ensemble shaped and repositioned the role and status of the stage designer as a collaborative partner alongside the director, as an 'artist-technician' (Wardle, 1978, p.69). I suggested that this positioning, and the rejection of 'decorative' design which was associated with the stage between the wars, contributed towards a particular design aesthetic that Margaret Harris, of Motley, calls 'poetic realism', which I will now summarise.

St. Denis makes the distinction between 'deep realism', which 'studies and expresses the nature of things' and 'superficial realism' which he says is more closely related to naturalism (Saint-Denis, 1960, p.50). Lacey (2009, p.240) attributes the first use of the term 'poetic realism' in theatre to Albert Hunt, who used the term in an article for Encore, describing George Devine's work at the English Stage Company. Lacey offers a definition:

> The poetic in poetic realism meant, on the one hand, the crystallizing of meaning in a moment in the dramatic action, in terms that both appealed to a sense of 'everyday' reality and also represented the significance of that reality. (*ibid*, p.240)

Harris attributes the term to the theatre director and filmmaker Lindsay Anderson (Harris, 1992, p.133) who, in talking about his own work, describes a similar intention:

> Probably all my work, even when it has been very realistic, has struggled for a poetic quality - for larger implications than the surface realities might suggest. (Anderson 2013, p.184)

But perhaps more directly relevant to design is Lacey's extension of this idea to the staged play:

> 'Poetic' also suggested a self-referential theatricality which constituted an explicit recognition of its aesthetic strategies - a symbolism that was not

constrained by the need to maintain photographic plausibility, yet did not
sacrifice an essential 'realism'. (Lacey, 2009, p.241)

Poetic realism, then, does not aspire to mimesis or naturalism. It is knowingly theatrical and poetic (it isn't real) but it is not in itself 'theatrical', by which I mean that it does not deliberately draw attention to its unreality through spectacle, embellishment or decoration - and should not usurp other elements of performance. Harris refers to poetic realism as having the quality of 'Truth above all things…rather than theatricality. And yet it had to have a theatrical value.' (Harris, 1992, p.133). It is not within the scope of this paper to consider the features of poetic realism in practice but further information is available in Richmond (2012, 2014).

Through this initial phase of research, I identified five key pedagogic principles of the Motley course, which are:

1. Designers should be integrated with the ensemble as equal collaborators

2. It is the job of the designer to communicate the play

3. The designer and design should serve the play

4. Settings should accommodate, and be built around, the movement of body in space

5. Costumes should assist the movement of actors on stage.

In defining and illustrating the philosophy and practice of poetic realism in the first phase of research, I wanted to understand how the pedagogy of the Motley course characterised the position of the designer within the 'creative machine' and the impact of this on their professional identities as designer and so I invited a group of Motley alumni to participate in a focus group. In the introduction to this paper, I

explained that my decision to use narrative inquiry in a focus group setting, was

informed by a series of absences; the absence of public discourse about the process

of designing and design pedagogy, the absence of a Motley course archive, and the

absence of documented learner experiences of the course. Therefore, I will first

discuss the key 'absences' that have shaped this study, before describing my

approach to the focus group.

The Absence of the Archive

The first absence is the absence of public discourse about the process of stage

design and the designer's role within that process. Halvorsen-Smith (2001)

observes that 'As most widely practiced, the scenic design process has become

frozen, steeped in tradition—tradition so pervasive that we have become blind to it.'

Where attempts are made to articulate the designer's role in the process of

performance making, it too appears to be shrouded in misrepresentation. Howard in

Oddey and White (2006, p. 25) gives an account of a panel discussion at a

conference organised by the Society of British Theatre Designers. The directors on

the panel suggested that their creative collaborations with designers were easy, with

'ideas flowing freely'. In contrast, the designers 'recounted tales of intricate

subterfuge'. The designer is not so much 'unseen' as 'unseeable', adopting what Ball

calls 'socially assumed' invisibility, where the act of maintaining a low profile leads to

'magical powers of concealment[2]'. Maintaining a low profile might be a necessary

strategy for successful collaboration in the process of performance. Isackes

suggests that the concept of 'collaboration' is problematic for designers because it

means 'working together within a clearly defined structure of power'. He describes

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[2] Ball, P. (2014) *Invisible: The Dangerous Allure of the Unseen*, The Bodley Head: London. Location 2904

this as a 'rigid hierarchy' with the fundamental relationship of the designer to the director in this hierarchy as 'one of service' (Isackes, 2012, p.1-2). Isackes suggests that this positioning reflects 'troublesome real-world economics' for designers:

> This plays out in many ways including compensation, recognition and rights to property. It often unfairly awards conceptual credit to the most powerful although not necessarily the most creative or productive collaborator. (*Ibid*, p.1)

Isackes argues that some approaches to design offer 'moments of oppression' for designers. These 'moments of oppression' exclude the voices and experiences of designers who may be required to resort to 'intricate subterfuge' in order to exercise 'authorial agency'. Essin (2011) suggests that disregarding 'the craftsmanship of all but a few high-profile professionals' has the effect of excluding all forms of 'backstage labor' from theatre histories, preventing the expression of 'personal investments' and articulation of 'professional identities' (*ibid,* p.46).

The absence of public discourse about the process of designing in general, appears to extend to the interrogation of design pedagogies:

> What little writing there is deals with either the quotidian concerns of production practice or, when it ventures into considerations of how work is developed, relegates it to the uncritical and mysterious realms of intuition and emotional response—terrains that remain conveniently inscrutable (Isackes 2008, p.52).

In the absence of documentation about the design pedagogy of the Motley course, the analysis of the focus group was guided by Margolis' concept of the 'hidden curriculum' or that which is 'hidden in plain sight, precisely so that it will remain undetected' (Margolis 2001, p.2) and focussed on the values and beliefs about

designing and being a designer which are embedded in the everyday experiences of being on the course.

Alison Chitty, former Head of School at Motley, described the course as 'one of these great best kept secrets' (Chitty, 2004, 2012). The secrecy extended to an absent archive of documents associated with the course. A former teacher on the course explained that when it was suspended in 2010, materials associated with the course were placed into storage. However, it was not possible to either confirm this or to gain access to these materials. The pedagogic principles that I described earlier in this paper were primarily informed by a combination of secondary sources such as theatrical memoire and biography, and primary material that consisted of oral history interviews with Margaret Harris in 1992-1993, held at the British Library. Therefore, the starting point for the reconstruction of the pedagogic principles relied largely on the interviews with Margaret Harris and in this, another absence became clear, which was the absence of the voices of those who studied on the course.

My approach to the focus group was informed by these absences; the absence of public discourse about the process of designing and design pedagogy, the absence of a Motley course archive, and the absence of documented learner experiences of the course. In the next section, I will explain why narrative inquiry was chosen as a response to these absences. Furthermore, I will describe why focus group participants were asked to bring objects to the focus group, by considering some of the qualities of material objects and their connection to memory and identity.

Objects in Narrative Inquiry

In the 'absence of the archive' Brozgal proposes that there is a need to move beyond the denotative idea of the archive - either as documents or a place where documents are kept - in preference to a more expansive idea of the archive where 'archives are all around us' (Brozgal 2014, p.34). Therefore, I decided to substitute the absent denotative archive with the voices of those who studied on the course through narrative inquiry, described by Portillo as 'the scholarship of stories' (Portillo, 2000, p.4). Similar to the processes of traditional archival research, narrative inquiry represents:

> [A] distinct form of discourse…the shaping and ordering of experience, a way of understanding one's own or other's actions, or organizing events and objects into a meaningful whole (Chase, 2011, p.421).

Furthermore, I was aware that I was a 'cultural outsider' (Enslin and Pendlebury 2001, p.362), being neither professional designer nor design educator. I recognised that adopting a phenomenological approach to the focus group (or 'to describe, rather than to explain or analyse'(Kvale and Brnkmann 2009, p.27) and to 'understand the themes of the lived daily world from the subject's own perspective' (Enslin and Pendlebury, 2001, p.364) was important because participant perception of my position could lead to a belief amongst the participants that I would have difficulty understanding their world and might import those misunderstandings into the research. The method of narrative inquiry gave participants choice and control over the stories they chose to tell about their time on the Motley course.

The decision to use objects to facilitate narrative inquiry was influenced here by my experience of attending a workshop led by the American sociologist, Susan Bell (Bell and Bell 2012), which was about the role of objects in biography and narrative

research. Bell draws on Miller to argue that objects are integral to identity and that they do not merely *reflect* who we are but are the very things that make us in the first place. Giving the example of the story of the *Emperor's New Clothes*, Miller suggests:

> If you keep peeling off our layers you find – absolutely nothing left. There is no true inner self. We are not Emperors represented by clothes, because if we remove the clothes there isn't an inner core. The clothes were not superficial, they actually were what made us what we think we are. (Miller 2010, p.13)

In the introduction I explained that the use of material objects as a method for exploring memory and narrative is informed by Roland Barthes' notion of 'punctum' (Barthes, 1999). Before I describe the stages of the method used in the focus group, I will briefly explain how Barthes' ideas relate to the potential of objects to contain and expand memory and why how these qualities have the potential to facilitate processes of narrative inquiry.

In Camera Lucida (Barthes, 1999), Barthes focuses on the effects of photography on a spectator. However, I will argue that these ideas are transferable to material objects. The two effects of photography that he describes are 'studium' and 'punctum' (*Ibid,* p.25). Studium is used to describe a 'polite interest' (*Ibid,* p.27) that one might take in a photograph. Studium is intentional and 'coded' (*Ibid,* p.51), revealing the photographer's deliberate choices. It represents an attentive encounter with (or study of) the photographer's intentions. In contrast, the punctum is a:

> [S]ting, speck, cut, little hole-and also a cast of the dice. A photograph's punctum is that accident ... which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me). (*Ibid,* p.27)

Hirsch and Spitzer (2006) transfer the concept of punctum to objects, making the distinction between studium and punctum here too:

> [W]e might say that while some remnants merely give information about the past, like the studium, others prick and wound and grab and puncture, like the punctum—unsettling assumptions, exposing the unexpected…(*Ibid,* p.358)

In the context of the Motley course, archival 'remnants' could have included course documents like student registration lists or curriculum descriptions. These remnants might be said to have the quality of studium in that they give information about the course. However, in the absence of this documentation, I became interested in the affective dimension of the Motley course and this is where the quality of 'punctum' could play a role in reconstructing this. I will now explain the two qualities of 'punctum' that prompt memory.

Barthes describes two dimensions of punctum. The *temporal effect* of punctum, which can be defined as the past (object) in the present moment. Barthes refers to the temporal quality of punctum as 'the lacerating emphasis of the noeme ("that-has-been") (*Ibid,* p.96). The effect of this temporal quality of 'punctum' is to bring the past into the present, as Barthes summarises: 'I can never deny that the thing has been there. There is a superimposition here of reality, and of the past.' (*Ibid,* p.76). The second quality of punctum that Barthes refers to is that it is both *expansive and metonymic*, with the potential to facilitate expansive and embodied narratives. The expansive nature of 'punctum' arises because of the intersection of the viewer with the thing being viewed (*Ibid,* p.48). He explains that '[W]hether or not it is triggered, it is an addition: it is what I add…and what is nonetheless already there.' (*Ibid,* p.56). Barthes refers to a 'blind field' outside the frame (*Ibid,* p.58) or a life beyond the

frame of the photograph, which may only be present where there is punctum. In the context of narrative inquiry, the intersection of object and self is important because:

> [Objects] become vehicles for us to know ourselves and…our place in the larger world. Objects can be sensed. They can be touched and smelled, picked up and put down, over and over again. These objects have been the vehicles to our memories. (Bell and Bell, 2012, p.68)

In this paper, I have explained the absences that inspired the choice of narrative inquiry and the factors influencing my choice of objects to facilitate narrative enquiry. I have also considered the particular qualities of objects that connect to memory and identity, drawing on Roland Barthes idea of 'punctum'. Before I expand on these ideas by talking about the objects that participants brought to the focus group, I will first describe how participants were recruited and how the focus group was structured.

The Focus Group

Two methods were used to recruit participants to the focus group. In the first stage, all Motley alumni were invited to participate via notices placed on social media on my behalf by the current convenor of the Motley alumni network ('Motley Alumni: The home of alumni and friends of Motley Theatre Design Course' 2011). This approach recruited participants from more recent years of the course, who were perhaps most likely to use social media. However, one of the aims of the focus group was to consider if, and how, the course had changed over time and so the second method of recruitment was to invite group members from earlier iterations of the course, through professional websites and networks. I designed a website for focus group

participants which was circulated at the recruitment stage (Richmond 2014b). In total, seven Motley alumni participated in the focus group.

Focus group participants were asked to bring objects that they associated with their time on the Motley course. One of the benefits of inviting the participants to bring objects was that it created the conditions in which they could choose how the object would be presented and talked about and this gave them a degree of control over what was discussed. I anticipated that using objects in this way could foster an atmosphere of trust and shared experience, as this had been my personal experience of participation in the workshop led by Bell. Bell's approach was staged and I adopted the three stages of this method, with some minor adjustments appropriate for the context, for example, participants could draw as well as write. In stage one, I asked participants to reflect on the object individually, and in writing, in response to a set of questions about the physical properties, and significance, of the object. In stage two, participants interviewed each other with a set of questions about the object and were again invited to engage in a short written reflection on any new thoughts emerging from their discussions. In stage three each participant introduced their object and reported their discussions back to the group. During stage three, I mediated the discussion. This stage was audio recorded and transcribed. The names and identities of the participants have been changed.

In the next section, I will first describe the ways in which some of the objects that participants bought to the focus group functioned as 'vehicles to memories' by giving some examples of the temporal effect of punctum. Then, I will explore the expansive dimension of punctum, which will illustrate the ways in which design and designer

are conceptualised through the pedagogy and 'hidden curriculum' of the Motley Theatre Design Course.

Andrew's object was a 'block for a sideless surcoat.' He also described this as a 'moll' which was what Pegaret Anthony, teacher of the 'History of Costume' at Motley, called the fabric patterns that students would cut out of thin canvas or muslin. As the moll was taken out of the bag, the group reacted to the strong smell of dampness and decay (the 'noeme' that Barthes refers to that brings the past into the present). The item had not been out of the bag since Andrew had left the Motley course, over thirty years ago. For him, the object represented not just a reminder of his past experiences but of the period between studying at Motley and practising as a designer today:

> It's quite old…it smells…[GROUP LAUGHS] and it's something that hasn't been out of this bag…but on the other hand it's interesting because this is something I'd never done before I was on the course but it is something I'm involved with now…and it's pretty primitive but it's in a way, the start of the process which continues.

The bag included a Foyles bookshop receipt. The dated receipt put the objects in a particular time-frame, but also placed them in a particular cultural frame. Most of the focus group participants (except one - who was the most recent Motley graduate) recognised Foyles bookshop as somewhere they would go regularly because it had a good selection of drama books.

A calico moll for a sideless surcoat in a paper foiled bag. Two separate pieces of calico with markings in pen and pencil indicating balance marks etc. The two pieces are roughly L-shaped with a deep scooping shape around the armhole area. Smells quite damp. It is more than 30 years old. [Andrew's written description]

Similarly, for Jenny, the engineers square was an object that originated with her time on the Motley course, but it had become integrated and essential to her everyday practices as a designer:

> I love this square, I couldn't model make without it and XXXX was saying "Oh God – what if you lost it"…For a day when I had been without it, I think "I can't"! [design/work]

The square had a small mark of blue nail varnish. Jenny explained that this dot represented her ownership of the square when she was on the Motley course:

> It has this dot of nail varnish on it because when we bought the same things, I don't know why even at that stage I thought "Right, it's going to be my tool", so we kind of colour coded each of our tools, so I know that that's the one from Motley

In the written description, Jenny describes the 'patina' that the tool has acquired over time: 'dirt, finger marks, soldering grease'.

A small engineers steel square used for making and cutting right angles. It is a tool that I bought in my fist week at Motley and is the only tool I have still

that I bought at that time. It is dirty and worn - covered in a patina of dirt, finger marks, soldering grease and there is a scratched teal blue circle of nail varnish on one end. Because all the students had all the same tools we marked our particular tools in this way. [Jenny's Written Description]

Sarah's object was a scale ruler. Sarah explained that the ruler she had brought to the focus group was not the original one she had had at Motley but that the object represented an important turning point in the realisation of her identity as a designer:

[T]his is the oldest one I've got because it hasn't got the colour codes, which I'm not saying that this was the one I had at Motley…before I went to Motley, I'd never seen one before…it was just a whole new way of life for me…When I think about the scale and how it changed my life, this one thing…I look at it with great affection and also a bit of awe…that this thing was so much more.

'A scale rule. A plain one - with no colours marking the different scales. 1:25, 1:50 etc. It is shaped in a way you can turn it over for the different scales you use. It always looks to me like a Toblerone chocolate bar. It has small black lines to denote the measurements and numbers relate to each scale'. [Sarah's Written Description]

The calico 'block' and engineers square were objects that existed in the same space and time as the Motley course and carried the markers of the time in-between (the faded blue dot of nail varnish, a smell of dampness). In the case of the scale ruler, it signified both a point in time, i.e., the transition from novice to designer on the Motley course, and the activity of designing which was articulated through tools, and discussion of tools and different materials. These examples demonstrate the potential of objects to incite the temporal quality of punctum. This temporal quality appeared to create the necessary conditions for the expansive dimension of punctum in which participants shared experiences and memories of studying on the Motley Course, prompted by their own (and others) objects, which I will now explore in more detail.

The expansive responses to punctum provided insights into the wider context in which the course was situated and the ways in which this 'hidden curriculum' positioned design and designer. There were two objects that both prompted, and captured, discussion. These were an end of year Motley exhibition flier and a small Art Deco resin head.

Letter format invitation card/flyer for the XXXX year group exhibition. Printed images of the students' work - costume drawings. Printed names of all students in year group. Date of exhibition. Place. Professionally printed flyer. [Stephen's written description. Note: This is an example of a Motley flier and is not the original, to protect the identity of the focus group participant.]

A small female head in relief. Art Nouveau, Turn of 19th-20th Century style. Resin
cast - fake ivory. Nice modelling, engaging expression. Large flowers around stylised
head. About 5-6.5 cm in size, 2cm deep. [James' written description]

The Motley course was integrated with, and embedded in, the world of professional
theatre. Harris relied upon this professional network to provide situated design
projects, teachers and, on occasion, financial contributions and premises. The close
proximity of the course to professional practice perhaps represents an aspect of the
'hidden curriculum' in the Motley course. Motley students were positioned in a
professional context and network as part of, and serving, a collective endeavour. I
will suggest that this inter-relationship defined the terms of their engagement with the
process of designing.

Stephen's object was a Motley Theatre Design Course end of year show flier. This
object functioned as a metonymic object, 'a single (material) object that represents a
larger whole' (Cassim *et al* 2013, 3). Stephen explained that in the absence of a
formal, validated qualification from the Motley course, the flier functioned as 'a
graduate certificate really':

> The graduation flier which was designed specifically for our group and as
> each group was…it has our names on it and has very proudly, a Motley
> design, it gives your year group which was very exciting and it also had for our
> year, it has in the printing process, they took images from our costume
> drawings and they're all on that, so everybody's got a bit of work on that flier.

The Motley Theatre Design Course was not validated by a recognised awarding
body, as Sarah explained: 'It was unregistered and un-everything else' and that:

> [Y]ou thought you were part of something that was unique because you didn't get a piece of paper…it was the only educational situation where it was about learning, not about what you got.

For Stephen, the flier represented his membership of a specific Motley year group ('everyone's got a bit of work on that flier') as well as his connection to a Motley 'lineage' ('it has our names on it and has very proudly, a Motley design'). The end of year exhibition was a significant event and seemed to have fulfilled two functions. First it was an exhibition of student work that functioned like a debutante's 'coming out' event to the wider theatre network. It also provided an opportunity for Motley alumni to meet, catch up and reaffirm connection to the Motley 'network'. This became an event with some prestige and in the later years of the course, the exhibition was held at the National Theatre. The sadness at the absence of the end of year exhibition, once the course was suspended in 2010 was shared by the group:

> It's more difficult now that there aren't yearly exhibitions and the yearly exhibition itself of Motley…that's such a chaos in a sense…you want to see the students' work right and sometimes you don't really want to see the students' work, you just want to meet people who you haven't met for a while.

Professional theatre practitioners taught on the course and worked with students, as directors, on the projects. From the start, they were learning that becoming a designer would mean working as part of the group. The connection to the world of professional practice and regular access to professional practitioners created a 'real world' atmosphere on the course:

> [I]t felt very real and so every project was based in the Royal Court which you could visit, you'd get plans, the Edinburgh Lyceum, the Cottesloe and you'd go and the directors that were working there were coming to see us and we

had Danny Boyle for a project, one year, which was absolutely fantastic….and so it felt very real rather than little fake projects.

The approach to learning reflected that of real world practice but with some compromises. Rather than the standard four weeks production turn-around times, Motley students were given six week practice based projects. However, students were expected to work with directors in the same way as they might be expected to as professionals, being responsive and flexible to changing circumstances. Rebecca explained that it was:

> [V]ery like a sort of working day in that you might have a deadline in two days or it might be two days for a crit but somebody was swinging by the studio so they were going to come in a talk to you and you'd all have to stop and have that meeting and do that because that person was there and then you'd go back to what you thought you had to be doing

The group talked about the importance of experiential learning, rather than taught input from teachers. Andrew's object (the 'moll' or costume block) prompted some discussion about the exception to this rule (described by one participant as 'a rare thing') which was the taught session called 'The History of Costume', taught by Pegaret Anthony. Participants explained that they did not receive written feedback or grades for their project work. Described by one participant as being free of 'any kind of [administrative] duress from above…or having to tick boxes or having to be P.C'. However, this did not mean there was an absence of feedback because it was not written down:

> Everything [was] in personal, verbal feedback. Which became kind of written in stone in a sense because it was shared as a group…and that was enough.

And the people who popped into to see us for the teaching still had that…it was…the notes were there through them rather than a printed handout…

Sarah explained that the real-world environment of the Motley course allowed for a smooth transition into working as a designer. Rebecca explained that it was the honest appraisals that they received which was so valuable:

An incredible sort of rigor, you know, you could never…He [the director] wasn't going to go in and teach and go "Oh well, you've done a fantastic job with that but you know" He was just going to go in there and be a director and actually the amount that you learned from that…

The group expressed the view that the work-based, real-world context of the learning meant that the feedback was focused on the job at hand and on the function of the design in serving the performance as a whole:

There's no need to be generous, there's a job to be done and so let's not waffle on about things. Lets just go right to what's wrong so that this design serves a purpose. We have got to serve the purpose.

In the context of the day-to-day practices of the course, Harris placed emphasis on the idea of the studio community as central to learning. James explained that:

[O]ne of the rules was that you had to work in the studio, you weren't allowed to work at home because it was that everybody did it communally and everybody learned from each other.

Anthony welcomed this work and social atmosphere, because 'everyone was pushing in the same direction', with group members sharing lunch around 'the lunch table' which doubled as a cutting table (and in later years of the course, a particular

table in a cafe). However, Sarah explained that this aspect of the course did not reflect the reality of her experiences of working as a freelance designer today:

> I miss that extraordinary, you know, having been to Art School, where it was a big studio and then going to Motley where there was a big studio that when you became a solo designer you suddenly thought "Where is everybody?"

This perhaps represents a shift in theatre-making practices that the wider study will explore in more detail.

At various points in its history, the survival of the Motley theatre course relied upon the professional and alumni networks that Margaret Harris had established. Group discussion about the wider context in which the course was situated, emerged in response to the tools bought to the focus group by Sarah and Jenny. The group talked about a particular brand of scalpel blade, '10A Swann-Morton', and tips for sharpening and extending the life of the blades. Participants also made reference to a particular type of card they were give on the course that was very thick and difficult to cut[3]. From this a discussion emerged about what they called the 'shoestring' nature of the Course, referring to the 'loyalty' of past students donating 'things', and 'money that came from sources which we were never really told about'. These networks were was key to the continuation of the course. The group did not perceive this as a drawback ('That wasn't a negative though that's just how it was and I think everyone was very sensitive to it and so you weren't hidden from it. You all shared that.') because the same networks that contributed to the Motley Course's continued survival, also facilitated access to professional expertise.

The physical and philosophical positioning of the Motley course was rooted firmly in the world of professional theatre making. At the LTS, Saint-Denis aimed to create a company of 'ensembliers' - individuals committed to the ensemble, and this residual spirit is perhaps what the culture of the Motley course fostered in its students. So, although the course did not offer participants a validated qualification, the value and legitimacy of the course came from its integration with professional networks, reputation and lineage.

In this context, group members talked about the importance and significance of 'being chosen' for the Motley course. Participants explained that the course attracted a high volume of applications and only a few students were requited each year, and this made the act of 'being chosen' all the more significant. James expressed positive feelings associated with the process of being chosen for the course, saying 'It fuelled me totally for that year and a few years afterwards and not a feeling that I was privileged but just, yeah, that I'd been chosen'. However, the prestige of gaining a place on the course brought mixed feelings for some. Participants described the 'tremendous weight'[4] of the history associated with the Motley course and feelings of responsibility as new students. They described the reputation of the course as inspirational as well as potentially burdensome. Two respondents described initial feelings of self-doubt and concerns about whether they would be able to live up to the expectations of graduates of the course.

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[3] Motley focus group transcription lines 325-355
[4] Motley focus group transcription, line 624

The notion of lineage is significant as a starting point for exploring the idea of a 'school' of 'poetic realism'. Madoff proposes the defining features of an art school or movement:

> No school is a school without an idea. Every school embodies an inheritance at least and at most is an invention rising out of its inheritance. (Madoff, 2009, p.1x)

Harris suggests that there is a 'house style' that emerged from the Motley course:

> One can always recognise that it is someone from the course but not who it is...the approach to the play...that it is not a decoration but it is an attempt to express the play itself. (Harris, 1992)

In this section, I have considered how the designer is positioned in the pedagogy and hidden curriculum of the Motley Course. Now I will consider the place of the designer in the process of design.

James's object was a small resin cast Art Nouveau head of a woman. James explained that he had bought the object in the summer before he started the Motley course. He decided to take the object to put in his studio space 'to preserve my own character because I was very afraid of losing my identity in a group'. The object prompted an extended discussion about self and group identity and the visibility of the designer in the process of designing.

James explained the significance of this object in relation to design:

> I brought things with me not to completely decorate my space, just have little things in it and this is actually what we were encouraged to do anyway on Motley, this personalization. **Of course, designing is partly about being**

personal, totally personal but also not being too personal in a way, it's that balance. [My emphasis]

James described design as a balancing act (personal but not too personal). Another participant, Rebecca, spoke about the emphasis that the Motley course placed on the play text, and of the challenge of getting the balance right between text and design:

> I heard her [Harris'] voice in my head yesterday about being true to the text which was her big thing and I…was choosing some colours and I thought "Oh, I'm pushing my own design on to this" and I had her voice going "Just look at the text…The answer's in the text!" So I thought, "Ok, I'll look at the text"!

The emphasis on the play text reflects the philosophy at the LTS that placed the play and the author at the centre of the creative machine. Some members of the focus group offered different definitions of 'play'. They suggested that the word 'play' was too restrictive because it excluded some forms of performance. They drew on different terminology to try and express a more expansive idea, e.g. 'text', 'kernel', 'the remit'. Anthony no longer works as a stage designer but is instead working as an artist and exhibition designer, returns to the idea of 'narrative' as a guiding principle in exhibition design. Sarah, whose specific interest was site-specific devised performance, explained that the approach she learned on the Motley course, continues to guide her practice:

> [A]s long as the narrative drives it otherwise it's just abstraction and I'm not particularly interested in abstraction for it's own sake. That comes from Percy. [Harris]

Participants described the design process as 'extruding from the thing [text] the truth' and 'not being extraneous…it's about what's necessary and what is serving [the

text]' and that it is the job of the designer to avoid 'plonking your design on top of something'.

Involved in 'extruding' the 'truth' from a text was the emphasis placed on research. Students were encouraged to visit art galleries and museums and recalled that one of the Motleys set up and maintained the Motley image library by 'cutting and pasting…anything that came her way'. Stephen described her as 'a really special official archivist in the room that you could go to and any time'. Rebecca explained the process and the importance of research:

> The classic first thing that you would do…is read the text without thinking too much, just get a gut feeling. Then go back and comb it and try and make…a script breakdown. So the next thing is to break down the text so that you can put what you need to do, that's the next thing…you might list locations…amounts of rooms whatever and then from that work what research you need to do. So from the script, everything goes to research…

The ability to research was a core skill emphasised on the Motley course which Andrew described as a 'core foundation' that fostered independence and autonomy:

> [E]ven if there was something you didn't learn there, you have got the core foundation as to how you might find something out later when you do need to research something for a show.

The approach taught at Motley implies the skill of balance between self and text. It is the job of a designer to construe (what the focus group referred to as) the 'truth' of a text, without imposing something. Furthermore, research provides the lens through which the interpretation takes place. This perhaps implies that a necessary condition for success in designing in a poetic realist style is to cede some aspects of identity.

Harris' criticisms of the theatre work of David Hockney and Barbara Hepworth

perhaps reveal something about her view of identity in performance design:

> I think that he [Hockney] is brilliant, and I think that when he designs for the
> theatre, he is also brilliant, but a bit too brilliant. **I think he counts more than
> a designer should [My emphasis].**(Harris 1992, p.34)

> [It was] a wire sculpture, which was very difficult to interpret as anything, but
> just Barbara Hepworth's wire sculpture (Harris 1992, p.77)

Harris appears to suggest that it is the recognisability of an artist's signature style

that perhaps represents a barrier to 'being an effective designer'. The artefacts

created by these artists have an identity (and a creator) beyond the world of the play.

They have almost become *too* visible. However Harris stresses that managing the

balance between self and text does not imply submissiveness or subordination.

Harris describes the kind of personal qualities designers need in order to navigate

the 'collective machine':

> I think, because if they're not satisfactory people, they can't co-operate with all
> the people they have to co-operate with, and they can't, they can't deal with
> the situation, which is very complex. They have to be somebody who has a
> strong personality, and who has a strong vision of what they want to do, and
> the strength to get it carried through. (Harris 1992, p.144)

A key distinction between artistry and theatre design that the group stressed is that

theatre design is a dynamic form. All members of the group had been introduced to

'storyboarding' on the Motley course in the very early stages. Sarah described this

approach as 'unit-ing', 'the moment to moment of the narrative' and that the designer

needed to have a sense of time which she described as a 'fifth dimension' in

performance. Stephen, now a design educator, described this as the skill of

'anticipation'. He emphasised that this skill developed with experience of performance and that the close proximity of the Motley course to theatre practice and professional networks, had an osmotic quality in this regard:

> You can more easily anticipate a performance, the more you have experienced yourself…we were surrounded by such a wealth of performance that we could walk in and out…and having that access was truly…was I think the real sense, the meat and potatoes of what we were trying to learn.

The responses of the focus group suggest that the Motley course taught a staged design process, which started with the play text and included storyboarding, research and creation of a scale model. This staged process is not particular to the Motley course. Isackes calls this the 'assumed fixed linearity' of the design process:

> [R]ead the play, do research, develop a concept, do sketches, and devise the floor plan. Further, it assumes that the sequence must always originate from the script…It also assumes that the play script has a "meaning" that can be reduced to a "concept" (Isackes, 2008, p.41).

However, I would suggest that although there clearly are parallels between this description of the design process and the approach taught at Motley, there is a point of departure. Where Isackes emphasises the 'concept' as the outcome of the process, the notion of poetic realism (and the position of the designer within this) resists the idea of reducing meaning to 'concept', per se, because this term could imply an imposition of designer identity onto a text. Jocelyn Herbert, one of the first 'graduates' of the design course at the LTS, and a former teacher on the Motley course suggests:

> [T]here seems no *right way* to design a play, only perhaps, a *right approach.* One of respecting the text, past and present, and not using it as a peg to advertise your skills, whatever they may be, nor to work out your psychological hang-ups with some fashionable gimmick (Herbert, 1993, p.15)

The focus group account of the Motley theatre design course provides grounded insights into the teaching practices and philosophy of the course. Their insights into the wider social and cultural context provides a backdrop in which to situate those practices, giving another dimension to the ways in which design and designer are conceptualised. An aspect of the responses that was surprising is how little the philosophy of the course had changed over the forty or so years of its existence, and the group commented on this, that although they had been taught many years apart, they were all taught the same core ideas. As Harris observes 'One can always recognise that it is someone from the course but not who it is' (Harris, 1992)

In concluding, I will make the distinction between the conclusions that may be drawn from the responses of the focus group, about the role of design in performance and the identity of the designer in 'poetic realism' and my reflections on the approach to narrative inquiry that facilitated the group's responses.

My experience of using objects to facilitate narrative inquiry was that it addressed questions about what theatre design is for and who the designer is in the 'creative machine' by focusing on pedagogy. Through the London Theatre Studio and the Old Vic Theatre, Motley were positioned in a professional context and network as part of, and serving, a collective endeavour. This context contributed towards an 'ensemblier' identity (Saint-Denis 1960, p.92) that shaped the terms of their

engagement with the process of designing and their emerging professional identities as designers. The approach to design taught at Motley reflects this, where the skill in designing requires a balance; between designers' own creative identity as 'generative artists' (Isackes, 2012, p.2) and the demands of the text. The pedagogy of the Motley course stresses that it is the job of a designer (in collaboration with others) to construe the 'truth' of a text, without imposing aspects of their creative identity, and resisting extraneous detail, embellishment and decoration. Instead, research of the text (concerned with place, period, colour, texture and character) provides the lens through which the design is realised. 'Harris' selection criteria for the course, and perhaps another dimension of the hidden curriculum, reflect some of the qualities that a designer needs in the context of poetic realism:

> We seldom take anybody who is more interested in the elaboration and visual side of it…And a lot of it is in the personality…One requires generosity, sincerity, and dedication, I think. (Harris, 1992, p.140)

The designer then requires 'generosity' to function in the creative machine, 'sincerity' in their approach to realising the text and 'dedication' to the process of distilling meaning.

My reflection on the experience of using of objects for narrative inquiry was that they facilitate diverse and rich accounts. The objects did not just prompt recollection but appeared to contain and hold those memories. Perhaps, as Beckstead *et al* (2011) suggest: 'Memory is not only "stored in brains" but rather distributed through social artefacts and cultural tools' (*Ibid*, p.195*)* and so represents a useful and transferable tool that could be applied in different research contexts where the relationship between pedagogy and professional identity is being considered. Barthes (1999)

notion of punctum provides a useful framework in which to understand the twin dimensions of the effects of objects on memory and the significance of these in narrative enquiry. The temporal dimension locates the past object in the present, which enables a process of looking back and reflection on the time in between. The expansive dimension enabled the focus group to recount narratives from beyond the 'blind field'. Furthermore, there were unexpected outcomes of using objects. The object appears to become a substitute for both the speaking subject and – at times - the feelings and memories associated with a subject's narrative. The displacement onto/into the object created an atmosphere of trust and intimacy, which enabled the participants stories to be told and in part, to begin to address the absence of the archive.

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