

# The Life and Times of Plastic Chairs

A qualitative research inquiry  
into the active interplay of design  
poetry with users, designers and  
the objects of design

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**The Life and Times of Plastic Chairs**

**A qualitative research inquiry into the active interplay of design  
poetry with users, designers and the objects of design**

**By**

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## Abstract

This qualitative research inquiry sets out to investigate the active interplay of design poetry with users, designers and the objects of design. The outcome of this thesis has contributed to the field of design by expanding the concept of design poetics and developing design poetry as another dimension of design writing. It examines the relationship between poetry and design against the backdrop of a growing interest in the ways in which we write about the designed world. It proposes design poetry as a compelling and immersive form of design engagement, one which is as yet under-researched.

This research has also shown that, with its capacity to encompass social, political and cultural factors, design poetry can be a significant vehicle in shaping our view of the objects of design. The plastic chair became a focus for this research gaze, as an object of design importance, with both social and cultural relevance; as an object that is mundane and quotidian but one that can achieve iconic status as a design classic.

The research adopts methods that support the critical-creative approach which underpins an arts-based inquiry. A significant outcome of the research is in the development and synthesis of new creative research methods: the creative conversations facilitating a dynamic collaborative dialogue with the key protagonists i.e. designers, poets and users who remain at the heart of this inquiry; the synthesis of individual and group critique on design poetry practice, employed as a method to both share, evaluate and contribute to the development of the researcher's creative work; the creative output itself, a book of original poetry that reflects the research endeavour and captures the dynamic interplay of making, consuming and narrating.

Keywords: design, design poetry, plastic/s chair, creative writing, poetic inquiry, design fiction, designer, writer/researcher

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# 1. Introduction

***A qualitative research inquiry into the active interplay of design poetry with users, designers and the objects of design.***

## 1.1. Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative inquiry is to investigate the interplay of design poetry with users, designers and the objects of design. Through my own poetry and the unique perspective of designers, poets/writers and design-users, I hope to demonstrate that design poetry can serve as a significant vehicle in shaping our view of the objects of human design.

Design Poetry is an area of research that is yet to be exploited but is recognised in what Lees-Maffei (2012) refers to as another encounter with design '*through words, written or spoken*' (p2). Poetry is one of the ways that we provide a voice for the designed object, otherwise silent and by writing of it do, as Meikle (2005) suggests, bring the object closer to us, allowing us to view it and in a sense bring it into being.

The area of design fiction offers stories and narrative as a way of looking at future technological developments, including the future of designed objects, exciting and igniting the human imagination. It has drawn in some of the most recognised and highly regarded contemporary fiction writers, as well as subsuming many of the writers of earlier centuries. Design Poetry has as yet remained a less well researched area but my thesis hopes to demonstrate that there is scope to develop it as another, just as dynamic way of adding to the growing interest in design writing and engagement.

I started with a chair, a plastic chair. The object held my fascination, in part because I was working closely with a museum specialising in design in plastics, which holds in its collection many significant examples from the last two centuries of chair design. At the commencement of my research journey I presented a narrative around the material plastic and the chair was the key element of that narrative. The plastic chair is not just a chair; it is a contradiction, an antithesis, an ontological collision. Its frequency in the design catalogue gives it credibility as an object on which to place the research gaze. The universality of a chair makes it easily recognised in human stories and experience. The place of plastics in those stories imbues the chair with components of emotional,

physical, political, social and cultural dialectic. Through my research, using the humble plastic chair as a springboard, I begin to ask if design poetry could be a compelling and immersive form of design writing.

The role of writing of design is to create a discursive space which allows for critical discussion and exploration of the diverse issues that impact on design and its outcome. What is emerging from this proposition is a range of ways of exploring design and a mode of inquiry that accommodates the many ways of narrating it (Lees-Maffei, 2011), of placing emphasis on the relationship between objects and users (Chapman, 2012). As an example of this I look to design poetics which converts designed objects into a locus of commentary and contemplation, of experience and experimentation (Ball and Nalyor, 2005); to design fiction which garners attention both as a form of literature and a means to interrogating the processes and outcomes of design (Bleecker, 2009; Dunne, 2008). The links between modes of thinking in design and poetry (Beatty and Ball, 2010) have begun to suggest more than shared operations in how each of these disciplines approaches their work.

There is a strong incentive, a human predisposition to illustrate and to tell stories of the designed world. With the myriad of ways in which we do this, it is valid to ask how any of these creative endeavours impact on how we view the world and the objects that co-habit the space. In this thesis I have used poetry in a number of ways. I have taken the position that poetry challenges us to take a view and then reassess that view; it exploits the curiosity of the human mind moving between fact, fiction and fantasy, making it a valuable tool in exploring experience. I have also used poetry as a way of articulating and exploring my own personal design journey. It has served me as an original lens through which I have navigated the complexities of the designed world and the project of the thesis.

## **1.2. Critical-Creative Practice**

As a creative writer I engage in research activity in the course of writing. What I as writer-researcher or academic-creative have had to address is the wider goal of contributing significantly to a shared knowledge or even generating new knowledge. The creative outcome of my research is a body of poetry inspired by an object of design and how this poetry represents knowledge is an important tenet in my research as well as its contribution to the episteme of design. The critical component is central in the development of creative discipline research, moving the emphasis away from the



traditional quasi-confessional mode of artist statement to one which contextualises or references the creative product in the wider artistic field of operation.

A singular challenge for me as a writer-researcher has been in balancing the need to write creatively against the requirements of academic writing. In expressing this conflict I have often resorted to creative writing and poetry in particular, in order to negotiate my own internal dialogue. The metaphor has frequently provided me with sanctuary, inspiration and resolution. I have used it as a way of interrogating and resolving the tension between the creative and the critical dimensions of the role of arts researcher.

The way in which I categorise my creative practice in the context of my research has significant implications for the outcome of my thesis. It cannot simply represent the selfish, individual literary endeavours of a creative writer. It must also comply with the academic requirements of any doctoral research and express a confidence in its contribution to knowledge, in this case through an expression of the methodological and epistemological foundations in the act of creative writing.

*Poetry from the Chair* contributes to the outcomes of my research as it has had its naissance in the enterprise and activities of the research. It also responds to the task of creating and interrogating my own poetry. My creative practice represents praxis, whose key characteristics of training and knowledge inform its processes and the expression of which is enacted in order to generate or reveal knowledge or new insights. This book is the creative output of my research finding its inspiration in an object of design. It also represents a fusion of the creative conversations the content and process of which inform and shape the poetry. The creative conversation was developed through this research as a principal tool in the collection of qualitative data. In the course of the inquiry its contribution was transformed into a locus of creative activity and dialogue; a space for critical and creative investigation or discourse.

My research exhibits a fusion of practice with research placing it within a practice-led emphasis and the intellectual and theoretical framework places the practice in a wider context rendering it multi-faceted. The product of the creative work contributes to both the process of the research as well as its outcome. The creative element and the practice of it also produces legitimate knowledge that itself forms part of the research.

### **1.3. The Structure of My Research**

Through their individual creative agency, the designer, poet and user share a common role in constructing the way we view the designed world and the result of their combined work is complementary in illuminating the relationship between humans and the environment. The design perspective is to shape the constantly evolving physical world, to be a powerful and productive medium that can make things better. The poet responds to the physical world by articulating its form and function through the manipulation of words that describe the experience of being in the world. The added dimension of the user/consumer provides another level of experience that creates an interconnectivity, one that traverses the human disposition to make, shape and narrate the environment in which we live.

### **1.4. Methodological Choices**

A significant outcome of this research is in the development of new, appropriate and creative research methods to support this work. This has been achieved through the research enterprise of creative conversations and group critique on design poetry practice. My methodological approach is derived from a synthesis or appropriation of other qualitative methodologies that span cultural studies, the social and health sciences, disciplines that are constantly evolving and expanding the nature of research representation. There is in effect, an interdisciplinary engagement with a range of methods in a series of research enquiry cycles that contribute to the stock of knowledge about the creative process itself as well as the ways in which the knowledge is presented and revealed. The Creative Conversation has a unique and central role in this research. It is used both as a method of data collection, of generating my own creative writing in the form of poetry and a critical-creative dialogue that permeates the research process as a whole.

I will therefore explore how design poetry is both created and consumed by

- an engagement with current literature that examines the interrelated fields of design poetics and design fiction as well as the literature that reflects the wider context and inclination of my creative inquiry;
- capturing the responses of research participants to both the experience of designed objects and design poetry, participants who represent the spectrum of players in the design discourse i.e. designers, writers and users/consumers;

- exploring how design poetry facilitates the articulation of the emotional and intellectual experience of design;
- creating my own design poetry and exposing it to a series of critical analyses.

### 1.5. Research Journey

Whilst the metaphor of journey is well used in the language of research (Rallis et al 2102), I have adopted it to represent my own path through this research. It is both familiar to most researchers as a way of expressing the development over time and the nature of the experiential. It also remains in keeping with the nature of my creative and methodological inclinations, that of a storyteller. The appeal of storytelling, of writing about objects has been fermenting within me over a number of years. Growing up in an Irish Catholic family inevitably influenced my values and beliefs about my identity. Stories were the stuff of my heritage and of the quotidian. Although this research journey began in 2014, it might be posited that it had been developing for a lifetime. I have outlined this journey as a narrative under a number of key themes. These themes have significance as they underpin the process and product of this research.

#### 1.5.1. Developing My Narrative (The Storyteller)

*“The beauty of storytelling is that it allows the storytellers to use their own voices and words.”* (Strega, 2015)

Growing up in a storytelling culture, I wrote prose and poetry as a child and young adult. A career in health care laid some of the foundations for my desire to develop my interest in writing, as I recognised the importance of narrative, initially in recording the experience that patients had of health, illness and health care. Several years in nurse education, in which the burgeoning emphasis on reflective practice (Schön, 1983), suggested another layer of narrative around practitioners and their professional practice, highlighted for me the learning potential and wider significance of the poetic narrative. A series of events created a resurgence of interest in writing of objects, beginning with voluntary work in a county museum and with the National Trust. This afforded me a tangible connection to specific objects and special collections rich in a narrative of local communities, embedding their stories in the local landscape but extending the relevance of the objects across space and time. In order to deepen my knowledge of collections I completed a Master’s programme in Museum Studies. This course framed for me a passion for writing about objects and collections which I continued to develop through an online blog for Dorset magazine, giving me an

opportunity to write about objects that interested me, especially in illuminating the human connections that the objects made. The success of this blog resulted in an invitation to write for the printed version of the magazine about local culture and heritage which drew on my passion for inquiry and pursuit of human stories. Providing private curatorial services and collections management during this time led me to work for an artist who is also a sculptor and designer, a role that allowed me to write extensively for marketing purposes but also in creating another layer of dialogue between the artist and the public. Being surrounded by art, design work and in regular conversation with creative individuals was the reawakening of my poetic drive.

This research study began to emerge when I decided to look at ways that I might consolidate the need to reconcile my own lack of artistic output with the insatiable desire to learn. Following a period in which I searched out ways to access doctoral study close to home, I came across an offer of PhD research at Arts University Bournemouth in association with the Museum of Design in Plastics (MoDiP). The notion of research with a museum environment appealed from the outset. It also seemed to correspond as a way of developing my museological links and interest in objects and collections.

The discovery of this unique resource, with its contribution to both national and international research and scholarship; a specialist collection with a focus on plastics, instilled in me an excitement and motivation to work with MoDiP in some way. I trawled their online collection; looked more closely at the development of plastics and started to identify objects that appealed to me. In preparing a presentation as part of the PhD selection process, I followed my instincts to create a narrative around objects made of plastics, emphasising the visual and textual elements of the objects which were selected. Post interview discussion and reflection revealed that I had demonstrated a predilection for functional objects and in particular plastic chairs. Further reflection revealed a fascination with the story of the chair and the designer. The ordinary, everyday object was declaring itself as a lens through which a larger story was developing.

#### 1.5.2. Recording the Research Journey

My research journey was enacted and recorded through an active process of observation, recording and reflexivity, of what phenomenologist Van Manen (2007) refers to as 'in-seeing'. Drawing the link between poet and phenomenologist, my intention was to direct "the gaze toward the regions where meaning originates" (p 12).

According to Hycner (1999, p. 156) “the phenomenon dictates the method (not vice-versa) including even the type of participants.” The result was a sense of *what if*, that anything encountered on the journey could be significant and should therefore be collected. I also began to recognise the growing importance of the concept of conversation which would form the core of my method as a tool for creating poetry, gathering and analysing any data. The process was given substantiality at the outset by the implementation of three distinct but interrelated components or operations:

*A Reflective Journal, a Scrapbook of the Plastic Chair and a Poetry Notebook* were the first attempt to begin to record the research journey; to collect and amass materials associated with the plastic chair and early poetic musings. These tools are the subject of further discussion and analysis in Chapter 4, Research Methodologies.

The Journal was a very personal object. It became a place to record the lived experience of being a researcher as well as all the other roles which were part of my every day. The Journal served as a repository of the self, a collection of feelings; emotions; observations; events; words; lines; poems.

The *Scrapbook* was both a digital and hardcopy resource. I used it as a way of thinking about materials and data. In it I collected images, text, anything that seemed relevant to my research. The operation of the Scrapbook was a *cut and paste* one, much like my childhood scrapbooks but less physical and for the most part a digital exercise. It was used as a ‘catch-all’ device where anything that seemed relevant or useful was collected and stored fulfilling my personal philosophical tendency to ask *what if* any of it becomes useful?

The *Poetry Notebook* was always a handwritten operation and remains so. Poetry lends itself to handwriting. The act of writing poetry by hand is the norm for many poets. There are cognitive elements in handwriting that are not present in keyboard writing;

*“Handwriting is a complex task which requires various skills – feeling the pen and paper, moving the writing implement, and directing movement by thought,”* (Gentaz, 2013)

Writing poetry feels like there is a physical and emotional connection between the poem and the poet, revealing the process of writing for the individual as the poem

develops and grows into itself. The contact with the pen/pencil and paper reveals to me the processes that shape the poem. It is both a mystical and an organic process that is full of energy. It is simultaneously rational and empirical in that it allows me to explore how the words sit on the page as well as representing the authentic development of the poem; its internal workings, iterations, corrections, alterations. The notebook enables the poet/writer to deal with the unpredictable and serendipitous nature of poetry. It is portable and can be used like an artist's sketchbook, a useful tool when ideas and poems often emerge in unusual places and at unexpected moments.

As the research progressed I became aware that the functions of the three operations were interrelated and their boundaries were becoming blurred. There was a distinct intertextuality which offered me an analysis and interpretation central to my personal narrative and place in wider culture of creative writing. In order to rationalise these important resources I combined them in to one format – *The Journal of the Plastic Chair*. The journal contributed to my work as a tool which represents the internal mechanisms of my writing, displaying characteristics that range from order and organisation, to something that borders on the disconnected and jumbled. It is highly personal and reveals much about me, the writer.

One of the most significant characteristics of the Journal for me as a writer, is its intertextuality. Tucker et al (2006) view this characteristic framing the scrapbook as more than a simple artefact. Originally articulated in the work of Bakhtin (1980) and Kristeva (1986), who determine that no text stands alone as the creation of one thing or one author. All texts exist in a cultural context and are part of a relationship to other texts. Davidson and Vallée (2016), exploring the relationship between text and phenomenon, describe the notion of intertextuality as '*the text not only speaking directly to the things that it is explicitly talking about, but also indirectly towards other texts*' (p 99). In the case of the Journal, it helped to create a dialogue of its own with reference to other texts, in much the same way that creative writing looks to other texts to inform and illuminate. I engaged in a continuous process of cross-reference and constant comparison with other texts, literary, commercial, design, art, many of which were also available through online access. The significance of text also lead to an insatiable desire to read widely for pleasure and consuming more texts from across the spectrum of literature available.

Further discussion of this Journal takes place in Chapter 3 of the thesis – Research Methodologies.

### 1.5.3. Developing a Poetic Voice

With a fascination and preoccupation with objects, my poetic inclinations are currently established as object-centric. Through this research experience I have begun to examine my identity as a poet/writer, to recognise that I am a *poet of things*, writing and finding poetry that celebrates and revels in the commonplace, the familiar objects of human design. The object as a catalyst for my poetry echoes that of the *leçon de choses* (lesson from things), which places emphasis on a relationship with the object and the need for close observation and description (Stout, 2018), whilst encouraging the exploration of deeper meaning. By placing the object at the heart of my work I aim to create a dialogue which asks of the poet (and reader) that the commonly held perceptions are challenged and reassessed.

Poetry lends itself to being shared and the poet often finds that they are drawn to a community of like-minded in order to engage in process. To this end I became an active member of a group of poets known as the Cattistock Poets, bringing my own poetry, my own voice to the group for reading and critique. The group became central to my poetry writing development as well as my research. It has served as a place to share poetry; to learn; a community in which to examine and shape poetry. It has been one of the sources of critical evaluation of the creative component of my thesis and a diverse audience with which I can share and discuss my research.

In this group interaction I was also an insider, a member of the population of interest in my inquiry. Insider research is conducted with populations of which the researcher is also a member (Kanuha, 2000), the result of which is that the researcher shares an identity, language, and experiential base with the study participants (Asselin, 2003). Consequently I was given a unique perspective and was facilitated in gaining access to individuals who would formally evaluate my creative work. In research terms, my membership of this group has provided me with a convenient and receptive group of participants in my research. I have therefore had to reflect and acknowledge the potential issues that might arise from the pre-existing relationship and consider the ways to mitigate the potential of deleterious preconceptions and bias. Being an insider has not impacted on the quality of the research because I have acknowledged the problems. I have also considered that the research has been reflective of the experience of one group of poets as opposed to every group.

#### 1.5.4. Conversations as Transformations

These poetry encounters along with supervision meetings began to suggest to me an important locus of creative activity, one in which participants were engaged in critical and creative conversations around activities i.e. poetry, literature, design and research. The independence of these groups and the diversity within them led to energetic and challenging discussions. The conversations were facilitating a collaborative exploration of knowledge relating to the self and culture, creating thinking and talking space for groups of creative individuals. This suggested the potential for the development of the conversation as a method for gathering research data, one that might uncover rich and deep insights into aspects of creative practice across disciplines as well as the consumption of creative output, my poetry. In relation to my specific research, one of my intentions was to investigate the interplay between poetry and design, thus indicating an opportunity to adopt and test the creative conversation as a method with designers, poets and consumers. A more in-depth discussion and analysis of the concept of creative conversations is given in Chapter 3- Research Methodologies.

Support for exploring this method was found in Leadbeater (2007) who launched the concept of creative conversations. He posits that community and conversation are the roots of creativity and that successful innovation comes from a creative conversation between participants who combine and share their collective wisdom, their respective knowledge, skills and values in order to explore an area of interest or even in problem-solving.

*“Creative conversations are like a shared exploration the results of which cannot be guaranteed in advance...Each party must give something of themselves in a way that encourages the other to reciprocate “ (p118)*

The creative conversations were an event. Time spent in the company of designers, poets/writers and consumers, those with an interest in objects/collections provided an opportunity to access and cultivate a creative discourse that explored current knowledge, experience and attitudes. With an emphasis on listening, observing, responding, imagining and reflecting, the conversations were enabling and augmenting an active engagement with the processes and products of design across the spectrum of interested parties and disciplines. This enterprise was the foundation for much of my poetry as well as providing structure to provoke and inspire new ideas and new thinking beyond this research.



### 1.5.5. MoDiP and my Positionality

My research has allowed me to work with a range of agencies, groups and individuals. As a researcher it is important to delineate my position in relation to them in order to demonstrate transparency in terms of the research process. Such an exercise in self-reflection allows me as researcher to identify my own ontological, philosophical and paradigmatic stance in relation to others who either participate or contribute to this research. Since the research landscape is a shared space, shaped by both researcher and participants (England, 1994), diverse identities are brought to the process. Having cognisance of positionality is vital in developing well-designed and rigorous inquiry as well as my own professional identity.

The most significant relationship has been with The Museum of Design in Plastics (MoDiP). This organisation is based in The Arts University Bournemouth and is the only accredited museum in the UK with a focus on plastics. Its unique collection and specialist personnel position it as a leading resource for collaborative, experimental and interdisciplinary research and scholarship.

The relationship with the Museum began when I was successful in gaining support for my PhD in the summer of 2013. The result of this partnership for me as a researcher was to gain access to;

1. a unique object collection;
2. a resource of people with singular skills, expertise and knowledge of objects designed in plastic;
3. an appropriate supervisor for the research process.

This relationship would position me on the borders, neither inside nor outside, but an invited participant in the research enterprise of MoDiP. As a consequence, I had to consider that the focus of my inquiry should represent a harmonisation of both our expectations. The alliance developed through doctoral supervision, collaborative projects and participation in audience engagement programmes. I was also able to make a contribution to the work of the museum through my role as Student Writer in Residence for one academic year during the course of this research and tasked with producing a series of creative work with accompanying text which was then shared with an online audience at <https://www.modip.ac.uk/projects/residencies/kate-hall>

and recorded in the Journal of the Plastic Chair.

This partnership with MoDiP helped me to frame my research in the context of the aims of the Museum as a resource for collaborative, experimental and interdisciplinary research. By combining poetry and design in plastics, a template for cross-disciplinary research and working was being shaped, opening-up new ways of working and researching that emphasised creative innovation in generating and sharing knowledge. Through my distinct research, I was able to explore the place of creative writing in the context of design, as well as the significance of plastics as a design material and the objects that it becomes. The importance and reputation of MoDiP and its personnel also facilitated access to some of the designers who might participate in the Creative Conversations, the method central to the data collection in this inquiry.

The product of the research is a body of poetry that has originated in my critical analysis and articulation of a poetic response to a contemporary object fashioned in this modern material. As a creative writer, I set myself the challenge to create a collection of poetry (*Poetry from the Chair*) for the chair made of plastics that provides a rich, accessible expression of their significance and place in a contemporary cultural landscape. Writing of contemporary design creates a dialogue about issues that are of importance to all those involved in the design cycle. Contemporary design is helping to illuminate the complex relationships between people and objects, unlocking the emotional potential of objects, giving us an opportunity to confront the wider social, political and cultural concerns around for example, consumption and sustainability whilst not ignoring the relevance of commercial, innovative and creative accomplishment.

The plastic chair became for me central to the wider investigation that is integral to my research question. The chair resonates as a cultural and social object in itself and adopts a very contemporary context through the application of the material plastics, as designers recognised the potential of this manmade material to expand and extend function and form. Plastic allowed chairs to be mass-produced and designers to specify countless combinations as well as being able to exercise a freedom of artistic expression. Such expression is also exploited through the application of diverse narratives. The story of chairs fashioned in plastics, and in particular those examples that have achieved a significant design status, have become important dimensions of the wider design discourse. Many examples are found in the MoDiP collection and have found their way into the wider media where they become characters in a range of

created narratives. One of the first plastic chairs to catch my attention during this research journey was Verner Panton's award-winning S chair (Panton Chair, 1960, Vitra, Figure 2).

This chair commanded my attention in part because of the immediate draw of its colour and shape. This led me to want to know the story of the chair, the designer and how both the chair and designer achieved icon status. Its unique, modernist design emerged against the backdrop of mid twentieth century industrial optimism and social change, finding its way into a number of advertising scenarios and its erotic appeal led to a variety of interpretations. Using the Panton Chair as a character/prop and the photography of Brian Duffy, Nova magazine (1970, Figure 3) provided a canvas for one such interpretation, running a storyboard sequence entitled *'How to undress in front of your husband'*, a narrative that has altered perceptions of the object as the chair has become *'the sexiest chair ever made'* (Vitra, 2018). It is, according to marketing narratives for the likes of The Conran Shop, John Lewis *'instantly recognisable'*; *'once seen, never forgotten'* (Vitra Design Museum, 2000).

As I observed this chair, *'the mute object of expression'* (Ponge, 2008) in its *'conspiracy of silence'* (Doty, 2002), I was finding words and language for it. It was asking to communicate or more likely, it was inspiring and stimulating those words in me as the poet. The chair had already developed a narrative through the medium of print. It was being contextualised and anthropomorphised. It was more than a chair, it was an object of sexual fantasy.

Observing the Panton chair in the MoDiP collection, I began to ask myself, how it might appear in a poetic narrative; what poetry it suggested to me; what would poetry do to the object? This poetry could be a script, a dialogue in the tripartite relationship between the object, the designer and the end-user/consumer – the writer-researcher.

### **1.6. Writing of Plastics**

Plastic in its many forms, as a material and concept, has permeated the literary field finding its way as a symbol, token and device to describe and make commentary on a range of issues traversing the social, political, economic and cultural spheres. Often plastics appear as metaphor for, amongst others, cheapness, falsity, a violation of nature that gains silent assent. It has found its way into popular fiction in the works of Percy Marks (1929); Billy Wilder (1954), Wilcox (1956); Sydney Pollack (1995);

Charles Webb (1963); Robert Ludlum (1986); Lindquist (2013). The synonymous role of plastics as malleable, transformative has allowed the term to find its way into other writing genres. *Plastic Words* is a pejorative term which has been used by writer and linguist Uwe Poerksen (1995) to trace the development of words that have traversed their origins to become combinable, interchangeable and in so doing, they are used as '*building blocks for new models of reality*' (p51).

Considering the material choices in design from objects of domesticity to works of art, plastics created new possibilities for writers, artists and designers. The material itself has entered the annals of material culture with equanimity but not without suspicion and concern. Plastics has all the hallmarks of a material that attracts a narrative, it has many stories to tell with its place in our own story. Its existence has profoundly transformed the physical world and we are connected to it, inextricably such that authors ask us to imagine a world without plastics (Meikle, 1995; Giles and Bain, 2000; Rosato et al, 2001), whilst simultaneously begging the question as to why it is used above any other material. It has significant uses, in biotechnology science for example, in the development of new ways of growing human organs against the decreasing availability of donor ones. It is part of our everyday and part of us. As a material, it is the epitome of a throwaway society and transformation, capable of limitless shape shifting (Meikle, 1997). It is demonised and relegated to a toxic pollutant (Freinkel, 2011). It is a conservation and storage dilemma as its degradation in museum collections poses risks to other objects as well as the rate of decay of the object itself (Waentig, 2009; Shashoua, 2012). The contamination of the natural world with plastics and their residue has galvanized our reaction to plastic waste as an environmental priority. Gabrys et al (2103) explore the accumulation of the material across contemporary socio-material living. Their position places plastics as indispensable to modern human living, whilst also highlighting the negative impact of plastics on the health of people and the significant changes they have and continue to have on the balance of ecology.

In critical writing Barthes (2009,1957) devotes a few pages to plastics in his polemic, constructing it as *the stuff of alchemy*, he also says of its transformational potential, that '*it can become buckets as well as jewels*'; Mailer (1983) talks to interviewer Robert Begiebing of the material pejoratively, as the *excrement of oil* before the global concern about plastics had reached its zenith, Derrida (1989 in Gabrys et al 2103) in his exploration of the cultural (textual) form of biodegradability chose the metaphor of plastics (and nuclear waste) as non-natural materials that resist temporal changes;

Baudrillard's (2005,1993) '*eternal substance*' describes the paradox of consumerist approaches which looks to plastics to provide a simulacrum of the ephemeral, reshaping reality; Meikle (1997) claims that it has become *naturalised*, the stuff of the everyday. Dickinson (2013) a contemporary poet, explores plastic at the nexus of poetry and science in what has evolved as *ecopoetics* and the concept of the polymer '*writing me even as I was writing them*'.

In this chapter I have set out the nature of this research and its central propositions. I have also outlined how I arrived at this research juncture and some of the personal reasons for pursuing such a course of inquiry.

The contextual and literature review in Chapter 2 further expands the context of this research, identifying the significant elements of the discourse on developments in design writing as well as illuminating the growing area of design fiction and design poetics and introducing the concept of design poetry as a valid area of research and creative inquiry.

Chapter 3 details my research methodologies. As a writer-researcher I have adopted a qualitative methodology that places the contributing voices central to the process and outcome of the inquiry. Whilst poetic inquiry (Prendergast, 2009; Hanauer, 2010) has been a guiding method of research practice, I have adapted its principles for my own purposes, drawing on the voices that have contributed to the inquiry and mining the experiences that informed it. Data collection aimed to capture and then to analyse complex and multiple sources of data. This data also had a central role in informing and shaping the creative work, my poetry. The contribution of the diverse voices i.e. the designers, poets, users and objects all enabled me to focus and locate my poetry as well as creating a mechanism for critically evaluating it.

The operation of the inquiry was carried out using the following tools, a more in-depth analysis of which is found in Chapter 4 on Research Methodologies:

- Creative Conversations – In this research I have employed the concept and operation of the Creative Conversation. I have come to define this as the establishment of a dialogic space in which creative individuals engage in an exchange or sharing of knowledge, skills, values that balance the critical and creative dimensions of their practice. It represents an interdisciplinary approach to creative praxis that can be aimed at generating ideas and problem-solving across disciplinary boundaries. It also becomes a locus of exchange and

interaction with the broader community of users and consumers. The Creative Conversations in this inquiry looked to three key groups that have significant influence on my research. The first of these was a group of four successful designers who would articulate key factors and the central concerns in contemporary design, which inform my critical analysis and help to shape the creative artefact. The second was a group of three published writers/poets who work with the language and the structure of poetry in their unique response to the designed world and objects within it. The third group represented a broader audience response to design poetry and one which begins to illuminate the way in which a design poetry might shape our perceptions of designed objects, which in the case of my research is focused on a specific designed object i.e. the plastic chair.

- Journal of the Plastic Chair – a collection of documentary materials that formed the writer-researcher’s workshop space, a place to experiment and play with writing both creative and academic. It also served as a repository or scrapbook, housing images, ideas, poems, reflections on both the process and product of the research.
- Creative writing/poetry validation – This operation assisted me in determining the nature of my poetry and development of a poetic voice. The reception by others was also a key determinant of my original research position. It consisted of a series of critical feedback of my creative work from a) two individual poets and b) my poetry group, with numbers varying between six and ten members. The selected approaches gave me an audience response at two levels. The first was provided as an in-depth evaluation with detailed written remarks, characterised by being measured and considered. The second was in the form of poetry group commentary, which is more spontaneous and visceral. Poetry group presentation is also viewed as an act of publication.

Chapter 4 demonstrates how this work has progressed the discourse on writing design. It has crystallised a concept of design poetry; established how poetry can contextualise the object in relation to historical, political and cultural social issues; highlighted how it can provide a vehicle through which we can unlock meaning in an object; extended the boundaries of what is considered appropriate subject matter for poetry and demonstrated how poetry can increase the subjective value of objects; and illuminated some of the significant contemporary design issues.

Concluding, Chapter 5 sets out the contribution that my research has made to the field. It has expanded the concept of design poetics and developed design poetry as another dimension of design writing. Through creative encounters this research has adopted collaborative processes that can cross disciplinary boundaries and extend the creative identity. It also looks to the future and identified area for further work and inquiry.

## 2. Contextual and Literature Review

The goal of this chapter is to establish the field of study that underpins my research and to identify a place where a new contribution to knowledge can be made. The nature of my research topic locates the relevant literature from across a diverse range of sources and literary disciplines. Whilst reading is a key element of the groundwork for my research, I have drawn on multiple epistemological fields including literary, scientific, artistic, philosophical and cultural authorship to contextualise my research. In addition, the chronology has been expansive with consideration given to significant writing and thinking across the literary timeline.

Design writing is a significant area of research and scholarship. The relationship between poetry and design is established through the concept of design poetics, which represents a theoretical and practical shift in viewing the ordinary objects of design, one that focuses on more than the functional or instrumental. Rather it fuses these characteristics with notions of the experiential, of sensing, feeling, emoting by attempting to review and re-envision the usual expression of thought and the translation into artifacts.

The place of design fiction is now well established and identifying its definition and function continues to be a dynamic and vigorous source of discussion. The contention of my research is that design poetry has received little consideration in the discourse of design. Designers have used poetry to inspire design and poets have written about designed objects. What has been absent is a conscious articulation of the role of poetry in the expression of design as an active interplay between users/consumers and the objects or artifacts of design; poetry as a response to design; poetry as a conversation about the consumption of design; poetry as a means to unlock meaning in the mundane, quotidian artifacts that share our lives. The idea of design poetry represents a compelling interaction between poetry, design, society and culture as a responsive vehicle through which we connect with and understand designed objects whilst endeavouring to produce and advance them.

The Review is arranged under the key headings below which represent a distillation of the areas that relate directly to the theoretical development and purpose of my research. It also reflects the centrality of the creative output that results from this research. My review is characterised by a dynamic, reflective process that was



performed and negotiated throughout the research journey, focusing and maturing as the inquiry proceeds. This operation mirrors the creative element, which similarly followed a continual process, creating the crucial link between theory and practice.

Key Headings for this Chapter are;

1. The Discourse of Things.
2. Writing of Objects.
3. Design Poetry, Design Fiction and Design Poetics
4. Poetry as a Way of Knowing.
5. The Chair as Object.
6. Reading, Writing and Research.

### **2.1. The Discourse of Things**

*'I am not the best designer in the world. I have made something very important to me. I have tried to bring tenderness and poetry to things you are obliged to use every day.'*  
(Starck, 2002)

Translating design into words, mediating discourses has, according to Lees-Maffei (2012), received little academic attention. The dominant trend in art and design is to assert the role of critical theory and criticism as integral to the contemporary dialogue that emphasises, in the case of design, participatory design, which Bowen (2010) refers to as the *better world* designs that transform the lives of the users/consumers for the better. The evolution of design terminology itself represents the significance of words in describing the role and purpose of design and its relationship with people. This development reflects the changing face and nature of the relationship between image and word, which has been energised by the drive to set design within a modern, responsive paradigm, one which also acts for the benefit of others and echoes the perspective of the user/consumer, espoused anthropologically by Dreyfuss (1955, 2003) and the strong psychological position adopted by Norman (2002, 2004, 2009, 2010).

The language of design takes many forms and has a long historical heritage. The question of how meaning is communicated through design does not yield simple answers, a position enhanced further by the contemporary blurring of the relationship between art and design. The dualist opposition of knowledge and practice is now being

envisioned in a more embodied way, giving rise to new ways of communicating and mediating meaning that also crosses disciplinary boundaries. Testament to this shift is demonstrated in a number of ways; by the crossover between art and design, leading to the emergence of a shared vocabulary (Coles, 2007), which is used to communicate both within the professions and to a wider audience; the demand to verbalise the visual across creative landscapes (Clarke, 2007); by the appointment of design curators and writers in both academic and commercial design environments; the concept of '*writing as design, design as writing*' (Norman, 1993) and the integration of poetics and design praxis in the emergent field of design fiction (Markussen and Knutz, 2013).

Chapman (2012) heralds the development of fictional narratives associated with objects of consumption. He sets us a critical challenge by asking why we discard objects when they continue to work for us. He contends that contemporary design is technocentric and utopian values dictate our behaviours suppressing creativity and making us all search for the homogenous, a desire to replace the old by the new. The addition of fiction narratives, he sees as essential to expanding the experience of the consumer, tapping into the imagination where infinite realities are possible. Adding narrative to an object offers up a dimension that is interesting, exciting. It creates new behaviours, may even spark new ideas, prolonging the life of the object and our relationship with it. It expands our experience of everyday life, that allows products to age slowly thus altering the endless cycle of desire and consumption without compromising commercial or creative edge (Chapman, 2012).

Thinking about objects beyond the confines of the image gains momentum amongst designers too. Parsons (2009) seeks to engage others in the discourse of design whereby the conceptual is considered alongside the experiential aspects, embracing the social and cultural responsibilities of the designer in searching for '*good design*'. His contention is that writing of design should not be confined to a retrospective viewpoint but that designers should actively seek to articulate their intentions.

This idea is also reflected when Jasper Morrison (2010), talking of designed objects remarks:

*'They should be better than what existed before (not always easy or even possible, but worth a try). I like to design in an evolutionary way, to look at what came before, not to throw away the collective effort in developing the fork, for example, or to imagine that I, Jasper Morrison, will reinvent what has taken us hundreds of years to get right, but rather to try to improve on it, to summarize that effort and aim for the imaginary end*

*game. The moment you bring something new into a room, it has an effect on the atmosphere — that effect has to be a positive one, not just for a few weeks but over the years.'*

(@<https://jaspermorrison.com/publications/interviews/whitewall-jasper-morrison-the-minimalist>)

With the rapidity of cultural, political, social and technological changes designers are recognising the need for their own critical reflection and articulation on the relationship between design and end-user/consumer, and by extension, how end-user/consumers experience, read and interpret these designs. Dillon and Howe (2003) suggest that a narrative approach to design offers a much broader perspective that encourages and embraces multiple methodologies that more accurately reflect the real world experience.

*'those who control the railroads [of epistemology] control the surrounding territory. The answer is not merely to try to build new competing railroads, but to understand historically how the existing ones came about'.* (p295)

The 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries have seen the burgeoning of writing associated with art and design, not just amongst artists and designers in terms of their studio practice and technological approaches but also the marketing machinery associated with their work. Contemporary design articles not only feature the image of the object but offer the reader, for instance, a history of the chair, an insight into the designer's motivation, drawing on the individual's personal narrative to support the story of their design. Along with the designer's statement there is the development of the creative writer role within many design associate teams, someone whose skill and experience in the use of the written language is transformed for the expression of the design and brand. Narrative and storytelling are increasingly utilised as a method of analysis and integral to design practice as well as a means to asserting the brand's proposition. This position operates around the user/consumer experience, with the goal of affecting more effective means of communication and presentation, incorporating both visual and written language. Emmons et al (2016) explore the role of storytelling in architecture recognising the diversity of ways that it can be achieved, where amongst other the integration of poetry can expand that narrative.

The language of design, in design magazines at least, has become as Fallan (2012) describes *'a site for mediation, negotiation and domestication'*. Reyner Banham's

(1970) writing contribution to the catalogue which accompanied the landmark exhibition *Modern Chairs*, echoes the way words would continue to play as significant a role as the images, in the discourse of design, remarking that we would even create a language from our relationship with 'furniture'. One of the examples he used was the concept of 'furniturisation'. The exhibition presented chairs from 1918-1970, with catalogued descriptions moving from simple details of form and function to statements that began to embrace aesthetics and poetics, to animate the inanimate in order to communicate the efforts of the designer, to create a more complex dialogue between creator and end-user/consumer. Even in the 1970 exhibition entry for the Isotope Chair (Dioptaz, 1968, Figures 5 & 6), the use of a poetic language almost imbues the object with a consciousness as it is

Design is fostering a poetic interaction, where language, design and experience are integrated, creating a place where the viewer is no longer a passive receiver but actively engaged in a relationship, one which exploits both the visual and written language in order to communicate. McCreight (2006) proposes a design language, which harnesses the power of design words to influence how we see things, to enlarge the experience of designed objects. Built around one hundred words which he identifies as the basic ingredients of design, he contextualises them with associations and interpretations of his own as well as drawing on diverse ontological perspectives, in order to engage others in their own contemplation of objects. Primarily designed as an alternative design text, McCreight offers students of design, and others insights into the way in which objects develop beyond their ordinary dimensions of shape and form, becoming imbued with meaning, personality, movement. Bordering on reductionist, it nevertheless captures the dynamics of movement across disciplines and creative boundaries that blur agendas, underlining the fact that design will use words to create a language, which speaks of design. It succeeds in positioning the shared purpose of language to convey, to communicate, to trigger associations and interpretations that are both individual and/or collective.

## **2.2. Writing of Objects**

Designed objects are written about from a variety of standpoints and in a variety of ways. Our contemplation draws on philosophy and the everyday experiences present in objects that share our existence; it embraces the physical and emotional connections that we make with objects; it explores and analyses the physical remains of the human footprint across disciplinary boundaries, reminding us that objects mean

different things to different people. Writing of objects highlights too the relationship between language and the world both the natural world and that which we have designed.

However, the study of material culture is now well established (Miller, 1987; 1998), its key theories developed in the 1980's (e.g. Bourdieu 1977; Appadurai 1986; Miller 1987), having its original roots in history, archaeology and anthropology. The interdisciplinary discussions that it generates and its expanded field of vision demonstrate and affirm the importance of its inquiry in helping to illuminate our relationship with things, the making, history, consumption and interpretation of objects. The study of things reflects our need to understand the world and our place in it. It focuses on our relationship with it, and with each other, helping us to uncover and understand the complex social and cultural systems in which we live.

The tradition of writing about objects and its literary influence can be traced back to the ekphrasis of Homer (Webb, 2009) and the relationship between paintings and writing has seen a long history in the annals of literature that still exists today. The modern ekphrastic encounter is as vigorously debated as its classical predecessor. Kennedy (2013) examines ekphrasis in a contemporary context. His arguments explore the contention that it is not simply about reproducing or recreating but represents a response to and the evocation of an object of attention. It represents a meeting between poets and artists (designers), which is not diametric but compatible. This underpins the transformative nature of the encounter as well as a consideration of its contextual elements, which engage the viewer in an expanding or holistic view that goes beyond the object itself. There is a discursive feedback, a conversation between the observer and that being observed. This too represents internal and external agencies at play, which lend to the ekphrasis a self-reflective element that is not necessarily a whole worldview, or verisimilitude, but a view from the position of one viewer. Rendering the visual also encompasses the concept of object writing. Object writing found a new expression in the personification of the popular and pervasive 18<sup>th</sup> century *it-narrative* (Blackwell, 2007). This correlates, closely with the more contemporary contemplation of *Things* (Brown, 2004) and the proposition that there may even be a Thing Theory. The emergence of an 'object biography' (Kopytoff, 1986, in Appadurai, 1988; Gosden & Marshall, 1999); more recently Pamuk (2008), whose obsession with collecting and hoarding objects moves from a novel to an actual repository of objects of the everyday in the *Museum of Innocence* in Istanbul; De Waal (2015) object narratives around ceramic collections that traverse time and place; the

scientific reflections on how and why some things become the subject of scientific inquiry and continue to occupy attention has been explored by Watson (1992) and Daston (2000), bringing the natural world into sharp focus in our preoccupation with the things within it, approaching it from broader cultural, social and literary perspectives.

That objects should have a narrative is far from being a novel concept, generating a renewed interest in material studies and the vitality in material history. Pearce (1994) explores material objects, emphasizing the importance of studying objects in museum collections in the broader context of cultural studies. As all objects in a museum begin their life outside its confines, they carry with them personal, social and cultural footprints of their origins and of those who collected them. Object stories pervade the museological landscape as the 'stuff' of human collection and offer alternative ways of constructing socio-cultural theories. Gosden and Marshall (1999) demonstrate how archaeology has come to recognise that people and objects share a temporal trajectory. They say that objects;

*'gather time, movement and change, they are constantly transformed'* (p 169).

The human relationship with objects traverses time and space. It responds and alters as societies transition, representing the need for a material world that enhances our experience of the everyday, the commonplace. Chapman (2012) traces the contemporary move away from interpersonal relationships and communal values toward more inter-human ones, assisted in no small part by the rapid developments in technology and communication. He contends that we have shifted the human characteristic for empathy for each other into an abstract world where relationships are forged with designed objects,

*'...toasters, mobile phones and other fabricated experiences'* (Chapman, 2012, p 18)

He uses this societal migration to illustrate one of the underpinning themes of his thesis, which is to explain our propensity to waste, to feed the ever-hungry desire to create or top-up these relationships with the material world, a position that is increasingly unsustainable. In so doing, he proposes that design takes advantage of the human propensity to attach 'emotionality' to designed objects, to nurture a visceral empathy that engages us with the whole process of design, which reduces the impact

on the environment, curbs frivolous consumption but still provokes innovative, creative thinking in design.

Norman (2004, 2013) extends the concept of emotions to the design of objects whereby we are drawn to objects that appeal to our sense of the aesthetic and thus imbuing them with effectiveness. His approach draws on the psychology of interaction and the interplay between us and designed objects. He proposes a conversation between us and the objects of the everyday, a total experience that crosses into the emotional dimensions of design.

This evocative power of objects is explored by Turkle (2011), reflecting on the everyday objects and a notion of 'companionship'. Drawing on the testimonies and auto-ethnographical writings of a range of contributors, she traces the power of objects to carry meaning beyond their function or purpose. Referencing philosophical concepts, she demonstrates that there is an inseparable connection with ordinary (and extraordinary) objects that hold and simultaneously unlock meaning. Her work reflects a diversity in the ways in which people respond to objects where factors such as time and place lead to the creation of unique object narratives, narratives that extend beyond the aesthetic or utility of the objects. Turkle (2011) takes a theoretical approach to uncovering the processes that are in operation when we reach outward toward objects, often familiar, which then become part of the inner world. What resonates in Turkle's (2011) work is her proposition that our thinking is fundamentally influenced by the objects which we encounter and which hold more than a passing relationship. Referencing her own childhood, she describes objects that connect her with the world and shaped her understanding of it. In a similar vein, Miller (2002) takes 'things' and proposes that they are constitutive of identity. His style is purposely not academic but it adopts, nonetheless, an ethnographic approach, which portrays objects as representing comfort to individuals in their own homes but also the wider community. His contention is that socialisation is in part, enacted through objects, thus rendering material culture central to our lives.

Objects can even be invested with a new significance. This proposition led Glenn & Walker (2012) to measure (in what the researchers called a quasi-anthropological experiment) how the addition of a created narrative or personal story would increase the subjective value of objects. Drawing on contributions from several recognised writers, ordinary, cheap objects were marketed with an associated narrative and then traded in the electronic marketplace, acquiring a significant objective value in the

process. Apart from the commodity driven outcome, the marketing success of the experiment, the process demonstrates the importance of and the nature of the relationship between humans and objects and the meaning invested in those objects. It also places the art and act of storytelling in the context of the human need to navigate the complex social landscape as well as situating the narrative in its role in design writing.

### **2.3. Design Poetry, Design Fiction and Design Poetics**

In establishing a concept of Design Poetry as an addition to the design writing discourse, it is necessary to explore the relationship between the interconnected concepts of design fiction and design poetics. Here I aim to identify the literature that reflects the development of the key areas and current thinking. The passage of this development represents a weaving construct of interrelated concepts and ideation that encapsulate the use of language to communicate design, one which moves from purely a critical commentary to a more engaged, accessible discourse on design.

Here I will examine the place of design poetry within the wider repertoire of the design literature. As design positions shift and change in response to organisational and commercial developments, it accumulates new areas of practice adding to its diversity, drawing the design protagonists into a shared space where design is articulated, explored, tested, informed, enacted and experienced through the collaborative critical and creative contribution of designers, writers and users/consumers.

I hope to show that the interplay of concepts can be evolved into an expanded expression of design, one in which a new level of awareness and inter-connectedness is achieved in our relationship with and responses to the designed environment; to demonstrate that this relationship is rooted in the experiential and takes account of the human impact through consideration of the interplay of physical, psychological, social, political and cultural consequences of design. It is also a demonstration that the visual and the verbal can cross disciplinary and epistemological boundaries, that they each *“can escape into each other's territories and beyond.”* (Baker, p 259)

#### **2.3.1. Design Poetics – Creating Discourse**

The work of Ball and Naylor (2005) was a significant starting point in my exploration of the concept of design poetics. It was one of the first analyses in my literature and contextual investigation and its place in this process was established because of its resonance with my own pursuit of poetry as design discourse. This link was reinforced



by the authors positioning of design poetics as a form of critical design that references literary poetics. For them poetics is the “*elevated expression of elevated thought.*” (p119). In design terms it refers to objects which have been re-evaluated, raised above the functional, the pragmatic through a process of observation and contemplation, deliberately or selectively reshaping and suspending conventional thinking. Design is seen as a critical and visual discourse, a cultural inquiry and communicating design is enacted through a reconfiguration of ordinary, familiar objects in ways that challenge our thinking about them. Such a reshaping of perspective promotes a renewed awareness, a re-evaluation of design in the context of its social and cultural relevance and its relationship to consumption. Ball and Naylor (2005) remark

*“We are interested in finding forms of expression where structure and material resolution are taken as given and the designed object as cultural information can be contemplated. Our work focuses on reconnecting and building authentic, narrative layers of meaning back into objects that have lost meaningful significance, rationale and value under the shear proliferation of inferior copies. Today production belongs to everyone with a computer. Speed, quantity and the seductive power of production have become ends rather than means. Meaning has disappeared as method overtakes.”* (2005: 27)

Ball and Naylor have been at the British vanguard of developing the poetics of design, where the meaning of objects transcends the silent function, thus challenging the borders between disciplines. Their contention is primarily that design itself can act as a critical medium for cultural reflection by the designer, rather than the external critic. In *Form Follows Idea*, Ball and Naylor (2005), exemplify the fusion of text and image where the commentary and creative processes are blended in words and objects themselves. Never subjugating the object for words, rather their premise is that the form, articulated by the designer is the principal vehicle of expression. That the object speaks for itself they nonetheless describe with words such as ‘*delicious, powerful and tenacious*’ (p 7). They claim that designers could exploit the medium of words in the design discourse but critically, they acknowledge that there is a lack of facility in this regard.

Ball and Naylor (2009) also propose *A Poetics of the Everyday*, as a concept to capture a notion that celebrates the ordinary, the everyday objects that can fade into a cultural oblivion. Their contention is that by a process of re-evaluation, re-framing, and reconstruction, everyday objects can be interrogated in the context of their relationship with people. The objective of this approach is a renewed awareness of things, around

important issues such as utility, sustainability, obsolescence, familiarity and value. By developing a critical, reflective commentary design adopts a poetic approach, which tends toward a more elevated thinking or form of expression.

Design poetics is a concept that serves to coalesce all the elements of the literature that underpin my research task and to extend the discourse in a broader context of defining our relationship with the designed world as well as the interplay of making and writing. The lens of inquiry is placed at the intersection of making and writing and the focus of design vision and process is centred on the end-user/consumer and the experiential capacity of objects, to both communicate as well as carry out some function. This leaves a space for writing of design and the unexplored potential of poetry to contribute another dimension, one of a literary narrative that enhances and expands the visual one.

Defining design poetics can feel like an elusive and challenging task. It crosses disciplinary borders and develops unique interpretations and rendering in the process, making a single definition problematic. The common thread that permeates the discourse situates design poetics as a readable pathway to design resolution, a meaningful process of dynamic design communication. In essence it is a design conversation, one that incorporates all those involved in the process of design from designer to user/consumer. Contemporary design poetics relates directly to a lived experience, an emotional and experiential evaluation of objects of design (Tsutsumi, 2007; Ionascu, 2010), accepting that the determination of their value is not always about beauty, perfection, the rational or the logical. It presumes a more complete view, an inward and outward looking perspective, an observation and engagement with the designed world. It is embedded in and representative of society and culture. Such an idea does not reject the goal of maintaining a commercial lead, rather it is a refocusing or cultural reflection upon the experience of the object or thing.

The significance of this work for my research lies in the growing recognition of an interdisciplinary approach to design practice where literature and poetry in particular, are being used to enhance creative ideation in design such that Hasirici and Ultav (2012) exploring this proposition in relation to the design studio, conclude that crossing into the disciplines of literature and poetry can assist in 'other ways of seeing' and stimulating creative design solutions.

A earlier concept of *design poetics* was postulated by Antonaides (1990) in his discussion on the *Poetics of Architecture: Theory of Design*. He provides a contemplative, imaginative series of discussions that focuses on reconciling theories of architectural design by encouraging a more creatively diverse approach that can enable design to become richer on spatial, sensual, spiritual, and environmental levels. Critically, he encapsulates the very notions that permeate contemporary design praxis, one in which design touches the users/consumers on deeper emotional and even spiritual levels, doing something more than serving purely functional and aesthetic requirements.

Poetics as it applies to architecture, is according to Antonaides (1990) the making of art through a contemplative, thoughtful path of what is *good* and *virtuous* or what would be the promise of subtle differences between the various possible ways of making, with regard to the *good*. He differentiates the mimetic and the dynamic to distinguish the recourse to tradition or the way it has always been done as opposed to that which engages the selective and critical faculties and exploits the current technological potentials. His proposition exerts another approach to poetics which is specifically relevant and significant to architecture, one which is

*“highly contemplative; rigorous; mentally, spiritually and scientifically demanding; it aims at the creation of works that address a multitude of human needs and expectations, practical as well as spiritual.”* (ibid 4).

His position is characterised by an altruistic, human centred, ethical approach to poetics, one in which the *user/consumer* and wider community is considered. In his exploration of the poetics of architecture he proposes the concept of *inclusivity*, in which the making of architecture is envisioned through a multidimensional process of ideation and making.

From his viewpoint in the 1990's he describes society as complex, diverse and sophisticated suggesting that the task of the architect is equally complex. The notion of symphony is advanced, not only as a way of capturing the multitude of voices that are invested in the process of architectural design but of the aspiration and ambition of achieving harmony in its outcomes. Both poetry and literature are portrayed as dominant and compelling agencies in architectural design. He posits that the designer should have a *poetic palette* that includes local and universal ingredients with poetry considered as the more powerful agency for creative design purposes as it

*“summarises collective attitudes of people and is the requisite for national, regional and local design, expressive of the uniqueness of place.”* (p119).

Reflecting the growing paradigmatic shift in design thinking, Kolko (2011) proposes that designers are poets of interaction. In his exploration of interaction design he identifies the poetics of design and the role of poetry in experiencing the world through sensing, seeing and feeling.

*“A poetic interaction is one that resonates immediately but yet continues to inform later - it is one that causes reflection and that relies heavily on a state of emotional awareness. Additionally, a poetic interaction is one that is nearly always subtle yet mindful ”* (p. 76).

His position engages the object beyond that which is desirable, functional and usable. He suggests that the duty of the designer is to imbue their work with the authenticity of experiences, through user/consumer participation in the methods and processes of design.

In her thesis Ionescu (2009) defines a category of design practice, design poetics that is likewise shaped not by the commercial or market-led influences, one in which the aim is simply to advance functionality but rather to explore the *living with* objects of design. She places the lens of inquiry on the space or interplay between the human agent and the object, one which represents social and cultural aspects of everyday life. She proposes a re-evaluation of objects in terms of the emotional and experiential components. A key consideration in her work is that she does not look to create new or best but to re-examine existing forms, thus altering the relationship between these objects and the users/consumers and in so doing she considers creating different kinds of consumption.

*“As a relatively new design form, poetic design transforms everyday practices of use: in re-orchestrating the seemingly ordinary elements of the designed environment, it transforms the sensual, material and social worlds of the users/consumers, affecting the intellectual, emotional, and experiential aspects of living. At the same time, as part of the ordinary, everyday life poetic design becomes a critical medium for cultural reflection and as an agent of social change.”* (p 134-135)

Creating an active interplay between users/consumers and designed objects, she contends allows for a new discourse on design. Her conclusions support the supposition that design poetics embeds designed objects with a constitution or characterisation of a specific culture with its incumbent influencing factors. The objects can carry their own language but the multiplicity of human interactions provides a space for multiple expressions of that interaction.

Malpass (2015) discusses the social agency of design practice that is based in the social and relational character of objects. Malpass uses the term critical design that looks to disciplines outside (industrial) design for theoretical insights, placing it within the discourse that sees design not simply as an agent of capitalism but work that stimulates debate and *“functions symbolically, culturally, existentially and discursively”* (Malpass, 2015: 60). In other words, critical design places the focus on expanding the vocabulary; placing it close to the everyday and strengthening an engagement with a broader community.

### 2.3.2. Design Fiction

In exploring the potential for Design Poetry in the design discourse it is essential to consider the place of Design Fiction, a design concept that has garnered considerable attention in recent years through the work of Sterling (2005); Bleecker (2009); Lindley et al (2014) and others. Although a young practice, design fiction is becoming recognised as having the flexibility and breadth to provide a discursive space in which design ideas can be contextualised and explored. Bleecker (2009) refers to it as *“... a design practice, first of all — because it makes no authority claims on the world, has no special stake in canonical truth; because it can work comfortably with the vernacular and pragmatic; because it has as part of its vocabulary the word “people” (not “users/consumers”) and all that implies; because it can operate with wit and paradox and a critical stance. It assumes nothing about the future, except that there can be simultaneous futures, and multiple futures, and simultaneous-multiple futures — even an end to everything.”* (p 8)

Design is always an exercise in futurity, of exploring possible worlds. Most designers look to a near future and design fiction offers a more distant view, one which challenges existing ideas about the social and cultural significance of design. One of the major tenets of design fiction is in challenging design to liberate itself from homogeneity and a slavish attention to market demands. Rather that it should be more

envisioned and engaged through the use of narratives that allow the processes and outcomes of design to be communicated.

Auger (2013) rejects the term fiction in relation to design on the basis that the term fiction implies that an object is not real, favouring speculative design as it suggests a direct correlation between present and the future. He begins to address the complex issues of definition alongside the related concepts of design fiction, discursive design, design probes and critical design. Tiberio and Imbesi (2017) similarly consider the position of critical design and design fiction as future-oriented activities. Their view is that critical design practice is a form of design that challenges the limits of design and design practice through a re-evaluation of the relationship between making and narrating. Critical design utilises speculative design whereby assumptions are challenged and questions are explored. It adopts a social, cultural and ethical research approach by asking critical questions about design. Critical design and design fiction both aim to create ideas and products but perhaps more significantly, to create a space where futures are imagined. Bleecker (2009) published an essay on design fiction, describing it in an interview in *The Gradient* (2012), as conversations that percolate in the symbiotic relationship between design fact and design fiction. He sees the coming together of fiction and fact in a productive way with the purpose of releasing the imagination, promoting creativity and exploring new ways of making things. He suggests that design fiction practice creates conversation pieces, where the conversations are stories about the kinds of experiences and social rituals that accompany the designed object.

*“Design fiction is about creative provocation, raising questions, innovation, and exploration.”* (2009:7)

*‘Design fiction is a mix of science fact, design and science fiction. It is a kind of authoring practice that recombines the traditions of writing and storytelling with the material crafting of objects.’* (ibid)

Sterling (2012), who first coined the term *Design Fiction*, defines it as a “*deliberate use of diegetic prototypes to suspend disbelief about change.*” Design Fiction allows for the construction of prototypes in fictional worlds, incorporating the social, political and cultural dimensions of everyday by using the ingredients of storytelling. Through design fiction it is possible to create narratives that *suspend disbelief*, allowing a reader/audience to accept the fiction as reality, in order to experience a critical awakening or catharsis. Both Bleecker and Sterling propose the creation of a story

world, a deliberate discursive space rather than a determined view of how things will be. The practical potentials of design fiction are what differentiates it from science fiction. The potential of the narrative is further enunciated by Tanenbaum (2014), who defines design fiction as the use of narrative elements to envision and explain possible futures for design. In relation to the continuing and contentious debate on sustainability in design he identifies features of design fiction that are of interest to the study of more sustainable futures. He asserts that design fiction foregrounds questions of values and ethics and that it serves a rhetorical purpose within public discourses around the future. It also creates a safe space for engaging with frightening or depressing futures. The creation of fictional worlds with a variety of media provides a way of exploring the experiential and often shared response to something new or revisiting the existing.

Social and cultural speculations also formed the basis of the work of Anthony Dunne (2008), who in his literary project explored critical design narratives around electronic technologies. His approach positions designed objects that draw attention to unseen conditions in everyday life. He calls attention to functionality or performance that rises above the technical and semiotic but rather sits within the realms of poetry, aesthetics and metaphysics. Similarly the work of Dunn and Raby (2013) introduces the concept of social dreaming. They see design as a tool not just to create things but also ideas. They also propose a speculative journey through the *what if* landscape where ideas are explored, debated and challenged. They define this form of design as “*a vaguely defined space where speculative, fictional, and imaginary design all collide and fuse*” (p 100).

By engaging in a *what if* one begins to speculate through design by adopting a multidisciplinary view that looks to the arts, literature, cinema, science, ethics, politics but not purely for entertainment. The liberating potential of speculation enables designers to achieve more desirable futures. It has a social utility, is purposeful and is about raising awareness becoming a mode of social and cultural inquiry. It acts as a catalyst for re-defining our relationship with the designed world in its broadest sense, combining the critical and the creative where conceptual design enables a free and open, boundary pushing method; design as a critique, a questioning of the status quo; “*debating potential ethical, cultural, social and political implications*” (Dunn And Raby (2013: 47). By designing fictional, imaginary worlds we can not only design the thing but conceive and visualise it in the real world.

The central theme in the work of Blythe and Wright (2006) is experience design and 'felt-life'. They see design fiction as a design space that allows for consideration of the user/consumer (human) experience especially in relation to interactive design systems, one that takes account of the sensual, emotional, social and cultural aspects of the relationship between people and technology. With the use of existing fictional characters from literature they create rhetorical devices for design.

*"Pastiche scenarios....can be used for generating discussion and insights in the field..... They are also valuable as a tool for envisioning new systems, for structuring mock-ups and analysing existing systems or prototypes."* (2006: 5)

Markusson and Knutz (2011) consider the development of design fiction within the field of Human Computer Interaction (HCI). The poetics of design fiction promulgates the notion of an integrative view of poetics and design praxis. Design fiction is viewed as a research method and approach. Coupling literary practice and design practice, they propose a locus for exploring the space between utopia and reality. They use design fiction to propose a methodological connection or merging of design and writing practices. Design fiction for example, exploits critical design to explore future potential for design and enables a discursive space in which new worlds are explored. They also propose that the integration of design practices and poetic techniques can be used speculatively, to suggest change and new trajectories that explore alternative ways of creating and making.

### 2.3.3. Design Influencing Poetry Writing

Design and poetry are both forms of expression and communication which frequently intersect and inspire each other. The contextualisation of objects and poetry is captured in the work of a number of creative writers, including poets who have made significant inroads into placing a literary spotlight on the object whilst extending the boundaries of possibility in terms of the use of language and the ways that we engage with it. Amongst the pantheon of poets who used the object in poetry is Gertrude Stein (1874–1946). In her now celebrated, experimental prose and poetic technique in *Tender Buttons, Objects-Food-Rooms* (1914, 2012) she demonstrates her commitment to contemporaneity and her emphatic claim that art is an expression of the present and the future. She uses language to discombobulate and reshape literary conventions.



Tender Buttons (A Chair) (excerpt)

*A fact is that when the direction is just like that, no more, longer, sudden  
and at the same time not any sofa, the main action is that without a  
blaming there is no custody.*

*Practice measurement, practice the sign that means that really means a  
necessary betrayal, in showing that there is wearing.*

*Hope, what is a spectacle, a spectacle is the resemblance between the  
circular side place and nothing else, nothing else.*

*To choose it is ended, it is actual and more than that it has it certainly has  
the same treat, and a seat all that is practiced and more easily much more  
easily ordinarily.*

At the time of publication, it was highly criticised for being nonsense, of being linked to Cubist and Dadaist experimentation in the visual arts (Kaufman, 1994). What it also does is center a gaze on everyday objects and challenge the way that we look at them through the medium of language. She gives the objects anything but an everyday treatment, in order to reexamine the processes of language and print, making the language visible and making her writing an object in itself. In her poem *A Chair*, she challenges the way the poem is structured. It more resembles prose; it casts off the convention of rhythm and rhyme, in favour of a loose, open structure; it plays with words and phrases that appear to have no real meaning. Kaufman (1989) indicates that the meaning we expect may not be the meaning that Stein intended but that she carefully considered every word, the grammar as well as the appearance on the printed page.

American modernist poet and physician, William Carlos Williams penned his 1923 poem, *The Red Wheelbarrow*, using one line and captured the profoundness of small moments. The poem is fragmented into four stanzas, paired down and distilled into a moment in time, one in which a mundane object captures a universe and interrogates ontology. The simplicity of the poem belies the complexity of the image created, demonstrating the poet's play with language and structure in creating a detailed image of the scene, with the object set as a locus around which we can explore human experience. Every word has intention and demands to be critically considered, as does

the appearance of the words on the page – the visual matters as much as the language.

***The Red Wheelbarrow (XXII) by William Carlos Williams, 1923.***

*so much depends  
upon*

*a red wheel  
barrow*

*glazed with rain  
water*

*beside the white  
chickens.*

Francis Ponge (1899 – 1988) who wrote poetry of ‘things’, object poems and whose key text *Les parti pris des choses* (1942, translated by Fahnstock, *The Nature of Things*, 1995), translated literally means that he takes the side of things. He remarked that all objects ‘yearn to express themselves’ and ‘reveal the hidden depths of their being’ (Stamelman, 1974). The contemplation of things was for him, a celebration of the everyday (Ponge, 1995), his way of expressing his observations of the world around him, a study in minutiae through the senses, the emotions and the intellect. Notwithstanding the contentious issues related to translating from one language to another, *The Cigarette*, for example adopts a prose style to articulate a microscopic observation of the ordinary that begs to be examined more closely.

**The Cigarette by Francis Ponge (1942) (translated by Lee Fahnstock, 1995)**

*First let's set the atmosphere, hazy yet dry, wispy, with the cigarette always placed  
right in the thick of it, once engaged in its continuous creation.*

*Then, the thing itself: a small torch, far more perfumed than illuminating, from which, in  
a number of small heaps set within a chosen rhythm, ashes work free and fall.*

*Finally, its sacrifice: the glowing tip, scaling off in silvery flakes, while a tight muff formed of most recent ash encircles it.*

Doty (2002), a contemporary writer and poet, extols the potentials of creating words around the still-life, where rich, human stories exist alongside an exploration of the nature of a poem itself. His meditation on the relationship between poetry and painting, albeit an ancient one, one which embeds the connection between words and images, the painter and the poet, examines the principle of attention and a faith in the capacity of an object to carry meaning, despite its apparent 'conspiracy of silence'. His contribution to the Significant Object Project *Fish Spoons (Glen and Walker, 2012)*, although written as a prose narrative, reflects Doty's (2001) belief and echoes Ponge's notions that the object is 'perennially poised' to reveal itself, not in absolute truths but potential ones, personal ones.

*I think what I liked best about the poem was the feeling of things moving in darkness, beneath the surface, not at all troubled about being in the dark. That and something about the allure of ancient silver, that there were mines, somewhere in the far mountains, and people had learnt the methods of refining the hidden ore and bringing the malleable shining stuff into the light.* Fish Spoons (excerpt), Doty (2009).

He describes a narrative fluidity, a process where stories or narratives attach themselves to objects, altering over time as the objects are used, reused, owned and re-owned, resulting in something new. Poetry, for Doty captures this cycle and announces that its work is to

*'rinse the dullness from things, refreshing our perception so that the moment comes alive, the strange fact of our being there is again made strange....'* (interview with King, 2012)

Costello (2008), academic and writer, explores the work of several significant American poets and further examines the poet's preoccupation with objects and contemporary *Still Life*, in particular. With a strong foundation in the knowledge of the visual arts, she argues that there is a paradigmatic relationship between the inner, private world and the wider, public world of everyday existence, which creates a perfect space for poetry. Far from being a retreat from the world, she presents the poets' work as uniting the realms of the (small) inner and (large) outer world, not always in harmony but reflecting the often disharmonious social, political and economic

realities. She describes the concept of *domestic disturbance* where the poet ruptures the silent surfaces so that the simple, domestic object is 'brought to the table', wrenched onto a grander stage but simultaneously brought nearer to us.

Design poetry is well placed to express the concept of *domestic disturbance* both in terms of its ability to reflect the internal and external human condition but also in the ways that a poetic treatment of the domestic can elevate the mundane, the ordinary to encapsulate the vastness of the condition – the social, political and cultural elements can be viewed through the simplicity of a chair or a bathtub by virtue of its relationship to the user/consumer.

Inanimate objects invested with human qualities elevating them above the ordinary is a characteristic of the poetry of Anglo-American Matthea Harvey, who follows in the tradition of poets who reach for subjects that are mundane and quotidian. She captures and collects the fragments of her experience and everyday life, almost miniaturising them and converting them into poetic images.

***Pity the Bathtub Its Forced Embrace of the Human Form (excerpt)***

1.

*Pity the bathtub that belongs to the queen its feet  
Are bronze casts of the former queen's feet its sheen  
A sign of fretting is that an inferior stone shows through  
Where the marble is worn away with industrious  
Polishing the tub does not take long it is tiny some say  
Because the queen does not want room for splashing  
The maid thinks otherwise she knows the king  
Does not grip the queen nightly in his arms there are  
Others the queen does not have lovers she obeys  
Her mother once told her your ancestry is your only  
Support then is what she gets in the bathtub she floats  
Never holds her nose and goes under not because  
She might sink but because she knows to keep her ears  
Above water she smiles at the circle of courtiers below  
Her feet are kicking against walls which cannot give  
Satisfaction at best is to manage to stay clean*

American poet, editor and professor David Yezzi, also addresses the familiar but unnoticed things, capturing the details of the object, in a manner that is sullied and uncompromising. Yet he always connects the object to a lived experience, conveying the otherness of our world, its beauty and its mystery.

***Argument from Design*** by David Yezzi (2012)

(excerpt)

*What of the watchmaker can we know from the watch?*

*That he was a careless sort, for one thing,  
losing a perfectly good timepiece in high grass,  
or that he made it for someone equally  
careless, all his clockwork wasted.*

*Don't try to wind it now. Its springs,  
like dried bird bones, have lost their springiness.  
The tiny teeth of its gears are rotted out.  
And from the age of the watch,  
the watchmaker, too, must be similarly deteriorated.*

Designing, making and owning things create a cycle of events and relationships, a pivotal claim at the heart of my inquiry. *Out of the Woods: Adventures of Twelve Hardwood Chairs*, was a collaborative project supported by the Royal College of Art, The American Hardwood Export Council and furniture manufacturer Benchmark (2012). It presents a compilation of design inspired creative writing including poetry and images that capture the life cycle of twelve chairs. The project achieves a number of key outcomes which contribute to an expanding, dynamic dialogue around the concept of design poetics:

- It acknowledges that every product of design carries its own, unique story, a fact that is overlooked in the market place where attention focuses on the 'retail moment', the 'instant of commercial exchange'.
- It draws attention to the detail of the life cycle of the chair made of wood. In essence, it absorbs the history of the object, from cradle to grave, simultaneously creating a vision of its future.

- A strong motivation within the project is to emphasise sustainability and the environmental factors that impact on the processes of manufacture, which are normally silent and hidden.
- It raises the design process in the consciousness of all those who are involved, in order to make better objects.
- It creates a poetic conversation at the intersection of a holistic, responsive design process, one that blends multiple poetic contributions.

One of these poetic contributions brought together the creative work of artist, designer Marjan van Aubel and James Shaw with writer Stella Duffy. Van Aubel and Shaw's award winning design *Well Proven Chair* was the inspiration for the poem of the same name below. The poem like the chair represents the expanse of history by virtue of its foundation in the timber from whose waste the chair is fashioned; it acts as witness to its own story as well as the human legend; it traverses time in the act of making, thus uniting traditions of art and craft and imbuing the object with the print of the maker and the processes that brought the object to realisation; it also captures the connections between the natural world and the world of human design, the catalogue of human function and usability.

***Well Proven Chair by Stella Duffy***

I am aesc, old and newly made.  
I am Yggdrasil, the Viking's World Tree, I gave my  
spears to Odin and to Thor.  
I am a Gaelic guardian tree, I heal babies, feed sickly  
newborns a sticky sap of life.  
I am Fraxinus, firelight.  
I am ash, ashen, ashes to ashes, shock resistant, resisting  
shocks and now, I am this.  
Resist this.

Take waste, wood waste, wood turned, would turn  
waste into – me.  
Remake, remould, refire, cook me up.  
I will burn all night, keep you company with light,  
And –  
Then –

The baker does not sit, does not need to sit as she kneads,  
all her body in the action, all his energy in the activity,  
the baker, he she is it.

Is the action.

From toe-tip tiptoe feet to fingertipped palm.

Pummel push, punch, pump.

Channeling all into the effort of creation, recreation  
of re-creation.

Cooking it all up (cooking me all up) in a wood porridge,  
please pottage – pot/ash/me.

And.

Then.

Sit now, quiet now, rest and (don't look) ... look!

In the quiet, covered, warm – I rise.

Phoenix on these ashen legs, I tiptoe, north-south,  
north-south.

Dance a foxtrot of four legs fast, four legs slow, four  
legs good, and go.

Go.

Come for a ride? A rise?

Arise

#### 2.3.4. Writing Influencing Design

Writing and design share much in common although literature has only recently begun to explore the nature of this relationship (Lees-Maffei, 2011). Poetry as a form of writing may be viewed as a way of playing with language in order to capture the user/consumer or human experience. Being able to articulate the user/consumer perspective might be facilitated through poetry as a way of transferring the emotional experience. Likewise the poetry of the mundane, the miscellanea of everyday life may enhance this perspective by providing design with a more user/consumer or human centred focus.

Beatty and Ball (2011) have explored the relationship between the designer and the poet in terms of their individual approaches to praxis. The outcome of their research suggests considerable overlap and commonality between design and poetry. Although their study focused on a sample of expert poets drawing comparisons to designers based on the author's own experience as design researchers and practitioners, it identified three areas of potential parallels; the first is the significance of sources of inspiration, problem framing and exploration; the second in the use of primary generators used to problem solve; the third is the fluid and flexible nature of problem and solution representation. Accepting that there are individual and collective differences the researchers concluded that these activities are most likely shared across many creative enterprises.

Design thinking and poetry writing both employ a methodology of problem solving. In the course of my literature and contextual review I encountered the concept of *wicked problems* in design. I recognised that as both a researcher and writer I frequently confronted my own wicked problems, problems of personal, social and cultural complexity. Wicked problems are confusing and messy, often presenting us with a predicament and rarely offering absolute solutions. They seem to resist attempts at a quick fix but require work and imaginative efforts. The case of the *wicked problem* offers an interdisciplinary collaborative proposition for design and writing, one which actively encourages the need to embrace the wickedness of the problem (Marback, 2009; Leverenz, 2015), in order to achieve meaningful experiences and develop creative engagement in complex problem-solving.

The original *wicked problem* proposed by Rittel (1963) focuses on social and public policy issues but has relevance for the poet in terms of the ways in which poetry represents a space for conversation and engagement with the realities of lived experience with all its complexities and ambiguities. When a designer faces a design problem they need to consider a wide range of factors in order to navigate the problem. If the design problem is ill-defined then a *wicked problem* arises. Design problems are wicked according to Buchanan's (1992), if they are

*"ill-formulated, where the information is confusing, where there are many clients and decisions makers with conflicting values, and where the ramifications in the whole system are thoroughly confusing"*(p.15).

Buchanan goes on to suggest that the design approach to wicked problems should transcend disciplinary and sectoral boundaries; design thinking that does not limit the



imagination and less focus on the “quick fix” (1992: 21). This proposition is developed by Leverenz (2015) who examines the relationship between design thinking and college writing instruction. She suggests that the process of writing be viewed as a design process itself, one in which the wicked problems are inherently part of real life. Therefore they may be susceptible to the transformative potential of poetic writing, one which offers an approach that emphasises the lived experience and reaching a deeper level of understanding and collaborative learning. The model of teaching that she adopted for analysis focused on a form of prototyping that asks some of the *what if* questions, an encouragement to imagine scenarios and challenge existing thinking by engaging in a

*‘creative act of making, one in which writers make not only texts, but themselves and their worlds’* (2015: 3).

A further area where writing influences design has been explored in terms of cultural sensitivity. Yeh and Lin (2014) look at ways of employing poetry culture for creative design by taking classical Chinese poetry, rich in expression, appealing language and still highly valued within Chinese culture, to then transpose this into an output of culture-inspired design, one which aims to add value to those designs. In order to achieve this, they contend that a designer must adapt or alter the original emotional experience of the poet, interpret the poem and transform this interpretation into design elements. They support their proposition through a process of conceptualising the abstract, visualising the concepts, concretising the visuals and transforming the result into a three dimensional output or product.

Poetry as an access to culture is also explored by Marti (2015). Working with students of design, she encourages them to focus on the use of poetry as a way of illuminating the inherent cultural values, feelings, beliefs and judgements, embedding them in design and promoting a more meaningful interaction for both designer and user/consumer. The outcome of her research demonstrated the significance of a cultural-sensitivity module as both an educational activity and an occasion of research through design. A common theme running through the encounter was the expression of sensing, acting and feeling. Poetry was providing a design framework to *“create rich, sensory, beautiful, engaging and mindful interaction through design”* (2015:10).

McKnight (in Gardener and Wilkinson, 2013) takes the view that writing is an ideation tool, particularly in the classroom but equally useful in professional design practice,

since writing is a significant stage in the process of design research. She suggests that a substantial percentage of designers are disposed to writing essays, poetry and fiction. An explanation for this may lie in the inspiration and propensity of language to express and illustrate ideas as well as writing as a service to a reflective and critical approach that informs and shapes design practice. Poetry as an example can lead to unexpected viewpoints and idea generators for the design process.

### 2.3.5. Design Poetry

Design Poetry has all the potential of Design Fiction but its singular character is in providing an immediate perspective on the designed world and our relationship with it. Poetry demonstrates faith in the real, the felt, the experienced. With poetry we can consider and explore the world from our place in it and create an infinite space in which to explore and examine the experiential, the emotional dimensions of existence. It shares a purpose in cultural inquiry and commentary, providing what Marti (2015) describes as an 'access door' to experiencing the cultural elements of design. Not only do poems in themselves tell stories but the subtleties of construction, of language, tone can also convey culture. In addition the conversion of poetry into design is being examined in the context of transforming culture for creative design (Yeh et al, 2014) supporting the experiential and emotional elements of contemporary design.

The relationship between poetry writing and design facilitates a shared experience and alignment of creative activities which may enrich the design process. The phenomenology or lived experience of design has its origins in the work of Bachelard (1958) whose exploration of the poetics of architectural space focuses on a deep interrogation of the intimate spaces of the home, the personal and emotional responses to buildings. He made connections between writing and architecture when he found that poetry was the only language that he could use to capture the cultural experience of space. He used this approach in his seminal work *The Poetics of Space* (1958) in which he explores the domestic assemblage of the home with its tables, chairs, chests, drawers, its accoutrements. The relationship to poetry intensifies the reality of perceived objects because according to Bachelard, the poetic image preceded conscious thought being the product of the human essence, the heart and soul.

Design poetry has the facility to allow for contemplation of the designed object however ordinary or quotidian, by reconnecting with it and exploring its significance from any period in history. Addressing such issues as sustainability, consumerism and

consumption, we can reexamine the object's social, ethical and cultural meaning, often enabling a forensic examination of the impact of design that looks beyond functionality, usability, desirability and aesthetics. Design Poetry may be seen as a form of poetics, one which uses words to design and construct meaning in order to disrupt and disturb a conventional view; it creates contradiction and paradox, throwing new light on a subject or object. The intention is to create space for interpretation, reflection, contemplation, even reconfiguration and to translate this methodology in the context of design.

#### **2.4. Poetry as a Way of Knowing**

The acquisition of epistemic authority has been subjected to vigorous debate where poetry is concerned (Fitch, 2018; Martin, 2016; Guess, 2003). Defining poetry is an unproductive task (Pierce, 2003), since literature is littered with attempts that alienate and marginalise a literary form that evolves and changes over time and in response to the context in which exists. Lerner (2016), in his contemporary and personal view of poetry expresses a hatred for it but principally because the task of poetry makes the poet “a tragic figure” (2016:8), searching for the poem that never appears. Whereas it is more relevant and fruitful to explore the task of poetry, to examine what it is that poetry does. By exploring these questions, we are compelled to look at how it produces knowledge and the myriad of ways in which it does this. Poetry too, can be viewed in a contemporary context, which embraces new technologies, crosses disciplinary and philosophical boundaries with the potential to generate knowledge and not simply to make a poem.

From the perspective of the early classical approaches to poetry, we find Plato disapproving of poetry because he contends that it is based in falsehood and that somehow philosophy is better than poetry because it deals with truth whereas poetry deals with illusion (Elias, 1984). His view of a creative art suggests that the creative writer is an imitator. Aristotle (Davis, 1992) concurs on the role of imitation in poetry, but he views imitation as central to learning and the provision of pleasure. For him poetry is more philosophical and greater even than history, because philosophy expresses a particular, where poetry tends toward the universal. Plato did however use poetry to support his thinking, a link that was formulated more rigorously much later in the work of Heidegger (2001), who found the language of philosophy inadequate for the task of uncovering the world, supporting instead poetic language as being closer to revealing our truths. It is the thinker as poet using poetry

*'that says more than it speaks, means more than it utters'* (p XII)

Costello (2008), remarks of the history of poetry as a history of apologies and defenses, a catalogue of disconnected litany. Poetry is often regarded as too far removed from the real world and preoccupied with itself, with aesthetics. Parini (2008) asks why poetry matters, arguing that it is a relevant, central and a dynamic art form, which has real social value, a position held by Hirsch (2014) who also remarks that poetry can help to answer the challenges of our existence. The romantic notion that 'poetry speaks for itself', or that 'the arrival of a poem is a mystery' (Smyth, 2015), adds to the argument that poetry contributes little if anything to the discourse of knowledge stewardship.

So too that it lacks any philosophical, epistemological foundations, placing it in some mysterious, mythical vacuum. Therefore, the current contemporary debate over the social, cultural relevance and value of poetry is spotlighted, becoming ever more significant (Prendergast et al, 2009; Parini, 2008; Gioia, 2002; Roberts and Allison, 2002) and at the same time more spirited, prompting a more relevant notion that 'poetry speaks'.

Geuss (2003) rejects poetry as knowledge and sees it as mere entertainment. He contests its authority since it relies on feeling and emotion, inadequate in creating positivist, substantive knowledge. His viewpoint is all the more challenging since it reflects a broader criticism that poetry should tell us something about a subject. But Greene et al (2012), speak of poetry as providing a 'species of knowledge' that gives individual meaning to the receiver and that varies considerably. It also reflects a poetic view shared by poets past and present, that poetry and science occupy the episteme of uncertainty and use language differently.

Taylor (1979) in his analysis of poetic knowledge asks if there is such a thing, suggesting that poetic knowledge is the opposite of scientific knowledge, not because it is any less valid but because the work of science and poetry are different and the language of science is coded counter to that of poetry. Both science and poetry depend on the metaphor as a way of mapping and understanding the world (Padel, 2011; Perleman, 1997). Paz (1990), Nobel Laureate for Literature, views poetry as a form of experimental knowledge with the poet testing and hypothesising in much the same way as the scientist tests and hypothesises. Yet science and scientific language continue to find a way into modern poetry, setting new challenges to the philosophical and epistemological foundations of knowledge alongside the inter-relationship and

unique perspectives of poetry and science. The burgeoning scientific literature (Bastone, 2016) on this alliance is testament to a more enlightened perspective on the contribution that each makes to knowledge and a sustained literary reflection on the dynamics between them.

As science looks to ways of approaching the environmental and ecological impact of plastics, poets too are considering the complex issues relating to the material, in terms of its environmental persistence, its ability to transform and reshape, both for good and for bad. An example of this can be seen in the poetic work of Canadian poet and plastician, Adam Dickinson (2013). He brings a contemporary perspective to the plastic polymer in his poetic conceit, which examines the socio-political instant, through the metaphors and language of polymer science. Dickinson's work acted as inspiration for some of my own poetry. *Unravelling Life* represents the connections with my own experience in biomedicine and my delight in the wonders of the double helix. This poem also fuses that experience with my current interest in the relationship between us as biological beings and the manmade material environment.

### ***Unraveling Life***

Particles collide

Uniting in strands of complex pairs

Silky ribbons caught on summer winds

Swirling, coiling, crossing universes in a game of hide and seek

Found at last among the beautiful array

One meets the other with a tender touch

Becoming violent rapture

Did some hand stir this essence

Exciting atoms in a black and unctuous abyss

Life's messenger carrying beautiful data

Allowing collisions to advance its march

With gentle footsteps on the golden stair

Forming for me the sweetest backbone.

Holmes (2012) celebrates the discourse represented by the burgeoning corpus of literature meeting science, in poetry, where the bedrock of language is shared and analysed in illuminating issues of interest to us all. The growing contemporary contextualisation of poetry is of a form representing the internal and external integrated act of the senses with the intellect, meditating on the cultural effects of being in the world, natural and created. Levine (2008 in Holmes, 2012) suggests that such a trajectory is contributing in part, to toward a review and extension of our notions of inquiry and of knowledge itself.

Poetry writing is a process described by Webb (2012, p 6) as an engaged act, which requires a way of seeing or looking. She says that as a form of creative practice poetry demands a *'deep and sustained observation and deep and sustained reflection'*. It has *'the capacity to deliver knowledge outcomes; it permits us to see new possibilities, and in that seeing, to begin to build mechanisms that will allow us to transform an idea into an actuality.'* (Webb, 2012, p 10). This concept of a 'way of looking' generates other ways of knowing by demanding that poet and reader see and think about things differently.

Burnside (2012) describes of poetry as the attentiveness to the other, seeing beyond any one perspective. Using the example of natural resource exploitation which results from a myopic commercial viewpoint, he celebrates the poet's vision to demand that our angle of view is widened.

*'When the purveyors of bottom-line thinking call a mountain or a lake a 'natural resource', something to be merely exploited and used up, poetry reminds us that lakes and mountains are more than items on a spreadsheet; when a dictatorship imprisons and tortures its citizens, people write poems because the rhythms of poetry and the way it uses language to celebrate and to honour, rather than to denigrate and abuse, is akin to the rhythms and attentiveness of justice.'* (The Telegraph, Jan 17, 2012)

The poetic perspective is discussed by Saunders (2003), who as an educational researcher and poet, situates poetry in the relationship it holds with the detail of language. She says of poetry that it is a form of research 'made in language' and that it seeks to present rather than argue; offer insights rather than build theory; add to the sense of the world's variety; play with ideas rather than work toward closure; make new rather than replicate; proceed by association rather than evidence and logical consequence; engage, surprise, attract, shock, delight, connect the unconnected, stir

the memory and fertilise the unconscious; communicate something unsayable arising from the poet's personal vision and interpretation.

One of the unique dimensions of the episteme of poetry is the creation of meaning between people. Stewart (2002) academic and poet examines the threshold between us and our social existence, a place of making human experience understood. The task of poetry, both the production and the reception of it is to make visible, tangible and audible the voices of the protagonists. This is what she describes as sensual knowledge but often regarded as suspect and illegitimate in the wider discursive of knowledge, a position that is traced back to the stoic atomist position of Democritus (2004) since it is drawn from the unreliable senses.

Sensual knowledge is distinctly human and it finds its way naturally into poetry. Stewart (2002) draws on many of the great war poems as exemplars, demonstrating how the rhetoric of the ideology of war is brought to us through the lens of the senses of those who witnessed it and is no less relevant in the canon of testimony about significant world events, for being expressed through the language of poetry. Equally compelling about this form of knowledge is that it recognises and registers the very uncertainty of knowledge, that we are in fact, the embodiment of our questions, doubts, and dilemmas, constantly in search of answers. Poetry provides the space to express and articulate doubt, to search for completeness. Hirschfield (2015), a poet and essayist, makes the comparison of writing poetry (and painting) with the hunt, which carries with it the pleasure and challenge of the pursuit, without the guarantee.

Extending the role of poetry to the processes of research is a natural progression in the exploration of the human condition. From a sociological and health sciences perspective Prendergast et al (2009) examine creative approaches to research and contextualise poetry as knowledge generated through different ways of knowing that embrace the holistic experience of being in the world. *Poetic Inquiry* examines poetry as both the method and outcome of qualitative research claiming that there are shared, complementary processes in the operation of research and poetry. Its application to the social sciences is viewed as a developing arena for expanding the experiential in research, of uncovering knowledge that is embedded in human experience, in the affective and which can resist traditional methods of analysis and representation that can see the voices of participants appropriated, even silenced behind the language of the writer-researcher and the constraints of the research methodology. Their work not only draws on the poetic and creative endeavours of the researchers but creates a

dialogue between the researcher, creative writer and the participant to faithfully represent personal narratives and in so doing pushes the boundaries of methodologies. Their work reinforces the knowledge embedded in stories, stories that engage with the human condition and new ways of representing, that are grounded in the data.

Hanauer (2010) in considering poetry as research and its contribution to the production of knowledge argues that a range of research methodologies drawing on different philosophical positions offers a much deeper understanding of phenomena. He points to what it is that poetry offers in relation to empirical studies, emphasising the responsibility of those using it as a research approach to articulate this clearly whilst considering what knowledge poetry as research looks to construct. His approach focuses on the individual, the subjective, the emotional, the linguistic. He emphasises an understanding of personal experience, which does not make grand gestures toward universal truths but contributes to a more blended approach to understanding a plurality of truths that reflect a diversity of experiences.

Notions about the poem are articulated in a different domain to the theories that abound about poetry itself. Greene et al (2012) in their analysis of the poem and poetry, conclude that every poem is such a unique event or object, which responds as much to cultural and personal notions as it does to theory and doctrine. As Perloff (2012) proposes, contemporary poetry is engaged in the spirit of textual appropriation, recycling, of experimentation and rejection of the status quo. Modern poetry is an exchange, a democratic medium which according to Magee (2009)

*'...has less to do with conveying the artist's own ideas - whether they be conscious or unconscious, individual, ethnic, class-based, gendered or however - than with generating the production of myriad ideas in others.'* (Magee, 2009, p 4)

Although not unique to poetry, the language of poetry relies 'vitality', as Shelley remarked (in Ruston, 2005) on the metaphor, Robert Frost (in Oster, 1994) to claim that metaphor is the whole of thinking and to be educated by poetry is to be taught to think (Poirier, 1990). Fauconnier and Turner (2002) whose work on the significant relationship of literary thinking and cognitive science to our everyday thinking, describe the metaphor as one of the most powerful products;



*'one that often drives key aspects of art science, religion and technology.'* (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002, p 27)

Metaphor is one of the ways that we link language and thought (Ortony, 1993). The work of Lakoff (1992) challenges traditional views of metaphor, contemporising it and grounding it in our everyday thinking, arguing that we all speak in metaphors (Lakoff and Turner, 2009). The metaphor is a linguistic mechanism through which we conceptualise the world in which we live. Metaphors, *'so commonplace we often fail to notice them'* (Lakoff and Turner, 2009, p 1), offer the creative writer a method of articulating and representing objects so commonplace we often fail to notice them and their place in our lives. The metaphor according to Dominguez (2015) has been and remains an important, often powerful communicative device, which humans tend to develop in situations of intense or important events in order to understand and learn from events or experiences.

The metaphor plays a significant role in shaping how we perceive and shape our world and is even central to design creativity. Gulari (2015) and Casakin (2006) have offered some of the few research studies to explore the role of the metaphor in design and which contribute to what Schön (1993) had much earlier described as a repertoire or design knowledge. With reference to Schön's work in the design of the learning experience, Casakin (2007) concluded that metaphors help to identify and capture design concepts, to develop unconventional solutions across the whole design process and function significantly in problem solving processes. Gulari (2015) continued the analysis of metaphor in design expertise in an attempt to demonstrate how the metaphor assists in communicating more effectively the cycles, processes and outcomes of design. Beatty and Ball (2010), as part of a wider inquiry into design creativity, have made some inroads into exploring empirically the parallels between design praxis and poetry composition identifying similar behavioural elements in their creative practices. Their unique perspective places the lens of research on the architecture of expert poetry design as opposed to just the interpretation or reading, which have been the focus of other research.

Louis H. Sullivan, known as the 'father of the skyscrapers' captures a modernist, industrial axiom of 'form follows function' in what Peter Rayner Banham (1980) would refer to as 'an empty jingle', but one which finds its way into contemporary design discourse. In it, I find a poet and architect describing his design perspective on the

modern, American, metropolitan building at a significant point in its social and historical story. His language may appear outdated and romantic against the more liberal, raw, loose structures of modern or contemporary poetry but it retains all the elements of social, cultural, political, critical commentary reduced and distilled by the artist, architect or poet. The object stands for itself but it also represents the architect's metaphorical viewpoint, where elements of the design speak of themselves but also of something else.

*'Whether it be the sweeping eagle in his flight, or the open apple-blossom, the toiling work-horse, the blithe swan, the branching oak, the winding stream at its base, the drifting clouds, over all the coursing sun, form ever follows function, and this is the law. Where function does not change, form does not change. The granite rocks, the ever-brooding hills, remain for ages; the lightning lives, comes into shape, and dies, in a twinkling.*

*It is the pervading law of all things organic and inorganic, of all things physical and metaphysical, of all things human and all things superhuman, of all true manifestations of the head, of the heart, of the soul, that the life is recognizable in its expression, that form ever follows function. This is the law.'*

Sullivan, Louis H. (1896, p 116).

## **2.5. The Chair as the Object**

*'It could be said that when we design a chair, we make a society in miniature'.*

(Peter Smithson, 1986)

Peter Smithson, British architect and designer, has contextualised the place of the chair in the catalogue of design as well as underlining its utility and symbolic significance in society and culture despite its ordinariness, its character as everyday. The chair has come to represent a blurring of art and design on an existential level, in that the chair is both object and subject. It appears in the work of many artists amongst them Van Gogh (1888) and Picasso (1912, 1917), as installations, manipulations in the work of Duchamp (1913), Munari (1946), Steinberg (1952), Jones (1969) and Lichtenstein (1986, 1992) to name but a very few. It stands (or sits) imbued with human meaning, both as itself or painted upon such as the iconic Eames Chair used

as a canvas by artist Saul Steinberg in the 1950's (Figure 6). Steinberg described himself as a writer who draws (Smith et al, 2006).

The chair has become an object of art as well as being a symbol, an emblem in art. Danto (1999) in his *Philosophizing Art: Selected Essays*, suggests that we that we 'reorient' ourselves with regard to these objects, these chairs. Danto's thesis explores the chair in art as opposed to the chair as art, signifying that he has interest in chairs that;

*'Transcend the meanings they are confined to in such a system, where they rise to eloquence in contexts more dramatic than the domestic interiors, and sound meanings of the deepest order'* (p151).

Cranz (1998) whose interests lie in the influence of social practices on architectural innovation has re-examined the ubiquitous chair both in terms of its construction as an object for the everyday as well as its impact on the person sitting on it. She explores its cultural significance and the inevitable 'love affair' we have with the chair as our sedentary lifestyles make increasingly more complex demands on the object. She also highlights the effects that sitting has on health and well-being and the ways in which our anatomy and physiology are being altered as a result of sitting. The ability to transform is not just set within the boundaries of the material but also of the object created from it. She makes a claim for a *body friendly* approach to chair design, one which re-thinks the chair with the user/consumer in it and one which recognises the mind-body perspectives such that the act of sitting becomes an experience of somatic and cerebral elements.

The most successful commercial examples in chairs have found a design expression through narrative presentation. In both art criticism and design writing, the object narrative is now an integral part of the design dialogue (Arlindo 2010, Rendell, 2010; Lees-Maffei, 2012). Lees-Maffei (2012) highlights the way language is used to convey design and the importance that has been given to the accompanying narrative revealing as much about the aesthetics of the object as it does about its technical aspects. As designers such as Starck (in Adach 2009), look for design offering '*magic and poetry alongside clarity and light*' or a '*chair that tells a story*' (Pesce, 2014), they add to the burgeoning commentary and research that explores the place of narratives in the design process and documentary. Grimaldi et al (2013) propose the narrative, the story as integral to the design process, highlighting the advantages of adopting a

interdisciplinary approach to design praxis, in an effort to develop more engaged methods that consider the experience of the end-user/consumer and the impact of design in the wider environment.

## **2.6. Reading, Writing and Research**

Reading and writing are linked activities that are often referenced in the canon of literature about writing. The breadth of available texts by writers on writing include published books by authors serves to reinforce the bedrock of writing is in reading. Prose (2012) addressed the relationship between reading and writing. She remarks that

*'In the ongoing process of becoming a writer, I read and re-read the authors I most loved. I read for pleasure, first, but also more analytically, conscious of style, of diction, of how sentences were formed and information was being conveyed, how the writer was structuring a plot, creating characters, employing detail and dialogue. And as I wrote, I discovered that writing, like reading, was done one word at a time, one punctuation mark at a time. It required what a friend calls 'putting every word on trial for its life.'* (Prose, 2012, p 3)

Creative writing as a discipline is evolving and generating its own knowledge base. Its place in the academic milieu is vitally and keenly contested (Kroll and Harper, 2013) with a dynamic interplay of ideas on its place in the research discourse. The legitimacy of creative writing within this environment lies in recognising and articulating its philosophical foundations within a research framework. This framework finds expression and currency in the model of the critically-creative, which represents a complementary relationship between modes of thinking and, subsequently, of doing.

The path to the artefact represents a voyage of discovery which aims to uncover the world of the writer; a way to understand what it is that draws me as a writer to create worlds with words; examination of a place where writer and reader are engaged in a relationship of mediation and multiple interpretations, an encounter in the creation of knowledge. A basic premise is that writers create content by thinking and researching in a particular way (Gardner, 2010; Donnelly, 2011; Hecq, 2015), prompting them to explore their own ways of articulating through the act of writing.

In her exploration of the development of a research base to creative writing Hecq (2015) concludes that creative writers think and read differently. They tend toward the

self-reflexive, adopting what she calls a 'methodology of active consciousness', which has its foundations in Freud's (1908) psychoanalytical concept of bringing to consciousness what previously lay hidden. Van Manen and Adams (2009, p14) capture the moment of writing as the reflexive space. A moment that

*'... is consequential and differs from the moment of speaking in that we can rewrite while we write. In rewriting we can try to weigh our words: we can check their semantic values, we can clarify their meanings, we can taste their tonalities, we can measure their effects on the imagined reader, we can explicate and then try to bracket our assumptions, and we can compose and recompose our language and come back to the text again and again to get it hopefully 'just right', drawing meaning from the dark.'*

Graeme Harper (2013), writer, scriptwriter, professor and cultural critic, in his considerable volume of work on creative writing, draws on the contribution of a range of creative writers, crossing disciplinary boundaries, concluding that there are as many personal meanings of creative writing as there are those who are engaged in the act. Regardless of genre, all writers engage in a cycle of research activities in the generation of knowledge. Magee's (2009) study, *Is poetry research?* uncovered many parallels in the processes and cycles of research between poets and academic researchers. They shared methods and methodologies, although his conversation participants tended to eschew this idea.

Creative writing can be considered anathema and unfathomable, therefore a difficult concept to define and reveal. This enigmatic and elusive task is echoed in Margaret Atwood's (2002) thoughts on the process of illuminating the process of writing.

*'Writing itself is always bad enough, but writing about writing is surely worse, in the futility department'.* (Atwood, 2002, p xvi)

Yet a genetic critique of Atwood's poetry reveals an *'ongoing process of perception, reflection and aesthetic organisation'* (Hönnighausen 2000, p97). The personal, creative nature of writing leads one to propose that there are instinctive, intuitive, intangible elements to the methodological approach and the methods employed in creative writing research which may seem to defy articulation and investigation. Writing is a process that involves reading, writing and questioning, which is far from static, it is dynamic and reflexive, placing the writer-researcher at the centre of the activities and language is set as its principle instrument. Inherently, creative writing as a

methodology, seeks to examine the craft of writing (the writing response), the semiotic analysis of language (Barthes, 1977; Eco, 1986), as well as uncovering the interdisciplinary relationships in creative writing practice and research (Webb & Brien, 2008; Boyd, 2009).

Harper (2013) supports the proposition of creative writing as a methodology, the product of which is the creation of an original textual artifact. The creative work is positioned as an integration of practice, process and product in order to articulate the cycle of knowledge generated and to focus on critical analysis and reflexivity (Faulkner 2009). The self, being key in the reflexive processes is all important since the self sits centrally in the practice of creative writing.

The myth of isolation defies the wider discourses that underpin and shape creative writing. A writer is constantly engaged in a social process, which operates constraints and conventions that influence them and their writing. The writer (artist) does not spring fully formed as a result of the intervention of the Muses (Bourdieu, 1996) but is the product of social, political and cultural influences and inherently laden with biases. Recognising these influences and their impact is central to the conscious, self-critical knowledge that the writer/researcher generates.

Hunt and Sampson (2006) in their discussion of self and reflexivity in writing, demonstrate that subjectivity should not be equated with irrationality but that they can be understood by rigorous, objectifiable methods. The current model in creative writing research lies in the dialogue between two discourses (Harper and Kroll, 2013; Donnelly and Harper, 2012; Boyd, 2009; Webb and Lee-Brien, 2008) reflecting the critical-creative dynamic, the balance between the interpretation of the creative text and an exposition of the process of creation. Reflexivity, specifically an epistemic as opposed to narcissistic one, is an exercise built on objectivation (Bourdieu and Waccant, 1992) the cornerstone of the intellectual enterprise in research and writing practices.

If writing is both methodology and method, it is imperative to ask how poetry, as a form of writing, could be the vehicle. Prendergast et al (2009) outline the occurrence of Poetic Inquiry with the majority of studies taking place within an arts-based setting but increasingly occurring now across the social and health sciences. Leavy (2012), whose work explores the role of literary forms of research methods and presentation, amongst them poetic enquiry, describes the poetic form as being accessible to broader

audiences, of promoting a more inclusive public participation and connectivity in social reality. Elliott, (2012) describes it as an intuitive/creative mode of knowledge production, a creative expression of truths, albeit with a subjective, personal emphasis. This is counterintuitive to the traditional view where the translation of data into academic prose is standard. Richardson (2003) indicates that data presented as poetry communicates multiple meanings that are essentially personal.

Elliott (2012) defines poetic inquiry in the context of a way of knowing.

*' a mode of thought and discovery that seeks to reveal and communicate truths via intuitive contemplation and creative expression.'* (Elliott, 2012, p 4)

Richardson (1994) has brought an understanding of the role and potential of writing as a method of qualitative inquiry from her starting position of ethnographic texts. She too has proposed the possibilities and structures of experimental writing and poetic representation across the scientific-artistic spectrum, demonstrating the potential for different ways of presenting outcomes that sit within a humanistic paradigm. She suggests writing as methodology and method, a point taken up by St Pierre (in Denzin and Lincoln, 2005) who describes a 'nomadic inquiry' where a great part of the inquiry is accomplished in the writing, because as she points out, writing is thinking, analysis, it is also seductive and tangled, as a method of discovery.

Writing is being perceived as a method of inquiry to produce different knowledge and produce it differently (St Pierre in Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). It should follow that methods in creative writing will take different trajectories. Using writing as her method, St Pierre has adopted an integrated, two-strand approach to writing as method of inquiry that reflects other qualitative methods:

1. Method of data collection – along with conversations and observation, reading, even sensual data as in for example, dreams.
2. Method of data analysis – along with analytic deduction, constant, comparison, coding, sorting and categorising.

Hanauer (2010) who suggests further that as a form of data collection, poetry writing allows the writer-researcher to explore their understanding and experience, a form of auto-ethnographic poetry that is self-reflexive and builds awareness of the intrinsic biases, grounded in their social, political and cultural influences, as illustrated in the

work of Furman, Lietz and Langer (2006) and philosophically grounded in the propositions of Bourdieu.

In the same vein, St Pierre (2002) uses a rhizomatic process which does not for instance, limit data analysis to conventions but sees this stage as 'writing in advance of writing' and allowing the element of surprise and serendipity to enter the process. Ideas, concepts, theories can appear before they are even written.

Writing as method does not fit easily into an interpretive-positivist framework and so issues of validity, reliability become less relevant as there is shift toward subjectivity in the creative writing process. Interpretation is personal and openly so, therefore other evaluative criteria need to be utilised. Richardson (2003) and Alexander (2003) draw on criteria from qualitative enquiry in the social sciences that follows a crossover to literary criticism in order to facilitate the evaluation of the research and its relevance to knowledge development.

My methodological approach is derived from a synthesis or appropriation of other qualitative methodologies that span cultural studies, the social and health sciences disciplines and that are themselves expanding the nature of research representation. There is, in effect, an interdisciplinary engagement with a range of methods in a series of research enquiry cycles that contribute to the stock of knowledge about the creative process itself as well as the ways in which the knowledge is presented and revealed. Crotty (1998) argues that all academic research produces layers of meaning from the blend of perspectives that underpin all aspects of the research cycle and which ultimately connect the researcher's fundamental assumptions. There is a connection here to the bricolage approach (Weinstein and Weinstein, 1992; Stewart 1994, 1996; Kincheloe, 2003) or hybrid practice (Stewart, 1996 in Barrett and Bolt 2007) which draws upon divergent methods, diverse theoretical and philosophical underpinnings, utilising pieced together but related practices aimed at providing solutions to a puzzle or central question. This 'trespass' (Robins, 2013 in Addison and Burgess) into other fields has broadened the epistemological base and discourse within the creative arts. It also represents the ways that creative writing has looked to other disciplines and methodologies to develop its own field of vision as well as that of the writer, in the development of what Hecq (2015) refers to as a poetics of creative writing, which acknowledges Freud's unconscious in creativity and the presence of the subjective self in the act of writing. The emotions interact with the rational processes in a cycle of reflexivity, the path of poetry that renders knowledge.



## **3. Research Methodologies**

### **3.1. Overview**

This chapter introduces the research methodology employed in this study. It demonstrates the paradigmatic foundations of my research. It establishes how the methodology has informed and guided the data collection and the subsequent analysis leading to the outcome of the research. It also presents a discussion of the place of creative writing in the context of the writer-researcher's methodological positioning, as this is fundamental to my research operations.

The chapter is set out under the following 7 headings labelled:

- 3.2 The Nature of the Research
- 3.3 Methodological Assumptions
- 3.4 Sampling and Participants – A Symphony of Voices
- 3.5 Ethical considerations
- 3.6 The Study Design /Methods
- 3.7 Approaches to Data Analysis
- 3.8 The Methods Detailed and Analysed

### **3.2. The Nature of the Research**

Through the enterprise of this research I set out to explore the interplay of design poetry with users, designers and the objects of design. Through my own poetry and the unique perspective of different but interrelated groups of individuals (designers, poets and users), I hoped to demonstrate that design poetry is a functional asset that can serve as significant vehicle in shaping our view of the objects of human design; to examine the potential of the creative conversation as a dynamic, collaborative method in creative research and begin to ask how design poetry can contribute to the ways that we write about the designed world, where objects and people interact in a dynamic cycle of relationships. In the achievement of this I immersed myself in the process of creative writing and poetic writing in particular, one that allowed me to gain a real, lived experience of the act of writing about objects of human design. On a personal level, creative writing gives me a deep sense of achievement as well as joy. Simultaneously it challenges my thinking, both about the craft of writing as well as the content. It also requires a deep reflective and interrogatory approach by the writer to elevate it above the recreational.

My methodological inclination has therefore been shaped and informed by several key factors:

- A creative approach to the gathering and analysis of data.
- To create poetry for a designed object and explore the impact of this poetry on others.
- The sources of my data are grounded in the people and objects relevant to my research agenda. It reflects a *symphony of voices*.
- My place in the research is a feature of its process and outcome.

### 3.3. Methodological Assumptions

I adopted a qualitative approach to my research embracing a constructivist paradigm. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) describe constructivist-oriented researcher as '*oriented to the production of reconstructed understandings of the social world*' (p 92) where transactional knowledge is valued and reality is constructed intersubjectively through meanings developed socially and experientially (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). From an epistemological standpoint, meaning is drawn from these subjective relationships and the researcher is viewed as part of that relationship rather than an objective outsider or observer. This implies a dynamic relationship where the process of the research is in a sense, being created as the inquiry proceeds. I also position myself as the 'passionate participant' (Lincoln, 1991, in Denzin and Lincoln, 2011), actively engaged in the facilitation of diverse voices that combine to reconstruct or stimulate new actions or forms. The constructivist question according to Nash (2004) centres on what meaning lies inside of you and how can you best narrate it?

Another basic assumption underpinning my research and sitting within a constructivist paradigm, is the notion that there is a dialectic methodology which is significantly based on a broad understanding and appreciation of the social, political, cultural factors that are at play. The processes of constructivism emphasise the reflexive, iterative, recursive and dialectical, finding much in common with the processes of creative writing. Constructivism denies the existence of an objective reality; supporting, rather, multiple truths and potential realities that are socially constructed (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, 2013). The research paradigm is made congruent with the researchers own ontological perspectives as it asserts the influence of social constructions on thinking and creativity, as well as acknowledging a plurality of ontological positions. It recognises and celebrates the emic perspective, where the viewpoint is driven from

within the system being observed. Emphasis is placed on the relationship of the key players and interpretation emerges from their interplay. It is important to acknowledge that the writer-researcher in me is and should be open to a spectrum of approaches, not exclusively one end or the other.

Constructivism relies on the acceptance that knowledge is derived from our own construction of reality based on our experience of being in the real world and that there is not one single methodology to generate knowledge. As a result, I have situated my approach within this philosophical frame whilst acknowledging that personal knowledge and subjectivity place emphasis on interpretation and personal perspectives, significant elements of a phenomenological paradigm. Added to which such a stance supports small, deliberate as well as serendipitous sample sizes where I hope to find rich, thick description to shape my creative work. Although the concepts of a *rich* and *thick* description have their foundation in the ethnographic work of Ryle (2015, 1949) and later by Geertz (1973), and favour novelistic narrative, they have currency in poetic writing as I aim to saturate my writing with meaningful information about the contexts or cultures that I have observed through the lens of modern poetry.

Reflecting on the methodologies that have informed my research, I was able to say about the choices that I made *'it felt right'*. As a creative writer, I found myself drawn to a phenomenological elements that appeared commensurate with the constructivist paradigm and brought with it the facets that were present in the core of my thinking in respect of my research area. It may have been a case of finding the best fit both for me and for the line of inquiry which I had adopted but it may also have been the case that the design found me. This perspective reflects a personal responsiveness to a theoretical framework that foregrounds the experiential. Van den Berg in Bachelard remarks *'poets and painters are born phenomenologists'* (1964, p xxiv). Equally persuasive in the choice of methodology is the notion that as a philosophical tradition underpinning constructive interpretive research, phenomenology represents the structures of consciousness or experience from the first person point of view; the natural predisposition for many writers and poets in particular. The object is a linguistic project and phenomenology is practised through writing (Van Manen, 2009). The phenomenological method is direct understanding and in-depth description of human experience (Jackson, 1996). It embraces the scientific study of that experience. In the words of Ricoeur (1979), phenomenology is *'an investigation into the structures of experience which precede connected expression in language'* (p 127). Researching, reflecting, reading and writing in the tradition of phenomenology are interrelated and

indistinguishable (Van Manen, 1989), providing the foundations for thinking and knowledge. Subjectivity is given primacy in this approach and openly so, there is no claim or pretense that outcomes will meet standard criteria.

To this end, poetry facilitates a distillation of the experiences without dismissing or subjugating the richness of any narrative. My haiku poem exemplifies the relationship between phenomenology and poetry. In an attempt to close the gap between individual experience (the *–I* writing) and the real world, I reflected on a line from a poem by William Carlos Williams (1995), that ‘*no idea but in things*’ which captures the observable things in their significant details, where an economy of words allows us to draw large conclusions. Often referred to as ‘*One Breath Poetry*’ (Wakan, 1997), the haiku is one of the shortest poems in existence. It measures three lines with seventeen syllables, yet it can carry intense emotions, captured in the moment or fragment.

The poem and its poetic dictum underline the significance of the relationship between poetry and things, the primacy of the experience and immediacy of it rather than immediate recourse to rationality, interrogation of the object and intellectual reflection. The experience of writing this poem has significant phenomenological dimensions for me as a poet. The act of writing it is an expression of a complex range of interwoven elements that draw on and are the expression of the physiological, psychological, social, cultural foundations and interactions with my environment, both internal and external.

### Chair – Haiku x 2

A plastic one  
To sit on?  
Perhaps looking is better

I see clearly  
The conspiracy-  
Of material silence

### **3.4. Sampling and Participants - A Symphony of Voices**

My research relies on resources that have contributed to what I call the *symphony of voices*. This concept represents the diverse nature of these sources which translate objectively into a series of *creative conversations*, firstly with several key designers, secondly from a number of creative writers whose principle writing genre is poetry and then a mixed group of users/consumers. This composition constitutes a small sample size but it reflects the qualitative nature of the study, with an emphasis on context, meaning and relationships. The creative conversations achieve large amounts of data which are rich with meaning and require more time in analysis. With the addition of documentary materials in the form of the Journal of the Plastic Chair, significant amounts of varied and complex data were generated.

As a creative writer, I write poetry and consequently I approach my research work from the perspective of the writer-researcher for whom the creative element has as much significance as the critical one. This is a position where serendipity and chance are equally as important as order and design, where data are primarily driven by the presence of others and where the poet's place in the research is dominant, self-aware, whose role is as a human scientist representing experiences poetically. The fundamental philosophy underlying my research is that knowledge is shaped and formed by the relationships between people and things and that my role is in the interpretation and representation of the expression of that relationship. Interpretation is openly acknowledged in the case of my own poetic work, as being uniquely mine but inspired and informed critically, by encounters with others, both animate and inanimate. My interpretations rely on an interdependence between all the constituent elements of the research. It also acknowledges an intertextuality, it relies on other texts from across a spectrum of sources. The basic assumption is that the text cannot be detached from socio-cultural backdrop in which the text is created.

### **3.5. Ethical considerations**

Ethical considerations in this research are governed by the Code of Practice on Research Ethics as ordained by the University of the Arts London. The ethical issues that relate to research that involves human participants are embodied within the concepts of beneficence and non-maleficence. These principles set the standard or benchmark for behaviour to 'above all, do no harm'. I have selected a qualitative research methodology, which generates specific ethical issues because the nature of the data gathering process involves a close relationship with the participants, an entry

into their world. I view the ethical issues as paramount in achieving quality and rigour in my research and as such I have adopted a reflexive approach to my ethical position, which is rendered as a continuous process throughout the research journey. Guillemin and Gillam (2004) suggest that this is an integral part of the research process in qualitative research and not just a one off activity at the commencement of the inquiry, serving to ensure that the researcher remains cognisant of the role of the participants in contributing data to the research. Having been a healthcare professional where professional practice is founded on a code enshrined with clear ethical principles, I find that a reflexive approach is integral to my thinking.

I aimed to promote the dignity, rights, safety and wellbeing of all those who have contributed to my inquiry. As many of these individuals are commercially or creatively active I have endeavoured to put in place a number of strategies that protect their personal and professional interests, their intellectual property, privacy and confidentiality as well as their reputations. These are:

- Providing participant information about the research and their contribution to it. (Appendix 1)
- Letter approach and gaining consent to participation (Appendix 2 and 2a)
- Access to feedback if requested.
- Access to recordings and transcripts.
- Ensuring flexibility in organisation to facilitate minimal disruption for those participating.
- Completion of institutional approval mechanism.
- Proper use of images and other creative work (Appendix 3).

### **3.6. The Study Design /Methods**

My research adopted the following methods which are further developed in section 3.8 below - The Methods Detailed and Analysed.

1. The Journal of the Plastic Chair: A systematic collection and analysis of source materials including a plastic chair portfolio, images, poetry, stories; systematic analysis of encounters with object collections. It offered analysis of source material as well as an exploration of the process of collection and the influence of both on creative writing practice and outcomes.

2. Designer Creative Conversations:  
Recording and transcriptions of conversations with four designers. Post conversation reflections. Thematic analysis.
3. Poet Creative Conversations:  
Three Poet Conversations with poets who have written poetry of objects and a reflective analysis of these conversations.
4. Focus Group Creative Conversations (MoDiP):  
Conversations with a group of eight invited individuals with an interest in the work of MoDiP. Field notes and post group analysis.
5. Creative writing/poetry validation – This operation assisted me in determining how good is my poetry. The reception by others was also a key determinant of my original research position. It consisted of a series of critical feedback of my creative work from a) two individual poets and b) my poetry group, with numbers varying between six and ten members. The selected approaches gave me an audience response at two levels. The first was provided as an in-depth evaluation with detailed written remarks, characterised by being measured and considered. The second was in the form of poetry group commentary, which is more spontaneous and visceral. Poetry group presentation is also viewed as an act of publication.
6. Composition of poetry - Chapbook entitled *Poetry from the Chair*.

Data collection methods fell into a continuum, whereby at one end, the character of the data reflected the natural disposition of the creative writer to amass everything during the research journey, creating an assemblage of material that provided the wellspring for the creative product. These data were sourced in my own collection of a *Journal of the Plastic Chair*. At the other end of this continuum is the data generated by the interactions and encounters with participants in a series of *Creative Conversations* with three different groups of creative individuals; designers, poets and users/consumers. The conversations provided an emic and genuine perspective from which I extrapolated the key issues that began to shape my poetry, as well as exposing the relationship between design and poetry. During the process of data collection, poetry was also being crafted and these poems have themselves become data, as they

described many of my research experiences reflecting the concept of researcher-voiced research poetry (Prendergast, 2009), of me being present in the inquiry.

### 3.7. Approaches to Data Analysis

Data analysis in my inquiry sat within a qualitative architecture, the characteristics of which are non-linear and multilayered. It involved an inductive strategy of identification of themes and key concepts across the collected data. These themes became the foundation for a poetic narrative that tells stories and in so doing they conveyed meaning.

In the following section I begin by establishing how my data analysis procedures addressed two key issues pertinent to my specific area of inquiry.

- How poetic inquiry framed the data analysis
- How I achieved a balance of research rigour and creative license

I then proceed to discuss the data analyses with their associated methods listed above.

#### 3.7.1. How Poetic Inquiry Frames the Data Analysis

*'... I consider writing as a method of inquiry, a way of finding out about yourself and your topic. Although we usually think about writing as a mode of 'telling' about the social world, writing is not just a mopping-up activity at the end of a research project. Writing is also a way of 'knowing'—a method of discovery and analysis. By writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it.'*

(Richardson, 2000, p 923)

I was drawn to poetic inquiry as it incorporates a poetic form of data representation (Prendergast, 2009; Hanauer, 2010). Using this form of inquiry allowed the writer-researcher to reframe the data creatively thus offering to the reader a close encounter with the experience which, according to Furman et al (2007), shares a key aim in creating data that are *'highly consumable and emotionally evocative'* (p 304). For me as writer-researcher there is a synergistic relationship between being a writer and being a researcher where the elements of one inform and shape the other. The presence of a range of participants, what I refer to as the *symphony of voices*, echoes closely in Richardson's (1990) writing of her own writing techniques. In her socio-



anthropological research, she talks of weaving back and forward from the theoretical to the concrete voices of her research participants, tying theory to voices so that the reader sees that tie in their minds.

A critical observation of poetic inquiry or the representation of data as poetry, comes in the form of the description of the role of the researcher as researcher-poet or poet-researcher. Notwithstanding the attraction of experimentation and innovation in the use of poetic methods, I positioned myself as inquirer in terms of my poetic skills. I chose to use poetry as research, as a key evaluative statement within a framework of evaluation overall. Prendergast (2009) remarks that the essential requirements of poetically informed research that produces poems as output, are to illuminate the topic under investigation and to be effective poems. Entry points for evaluation (Prendergast and Belliveau, 2013) include reader responses and those of the poet in terms of their responses to their own creative work. Evaluation of my own poetic work comes in the form of self-criticism and embraces the concept of reflexivity balanced with a degree of self-compassion.

### 3.7.2. Balancing Research Rigour and Creative Licence

A significant characteristic of my research approach was to acknowledge the human nature of the data, which is emotionally biased and treats phenomena as openly subjective. Such a position makes for multiple interpretations rather than achieving a level of generalisability. I am required to construct other ways of measuring claims to knowledge.

I was openly engaged in a process of reframing data and crafting the creative product as my own. The pivotal aspect of the research is the diverse ways in which the writer-researcher assumes that ownership and the crafting of the creative object or artefact. Traditional methods of evaluation such as validity, trustworthiness and rigour are problematic in arts-based research since the diversity of methods and combinations of methods tends toward what Leavy (2009) refers to as no 'one size fits all'. This does not preclude some form of testing of rigour and in the case of my research I aim to achieve quality in my research, addressing the question that Lincoln & Guba posed (1985, p 290). *'How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences that the research findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to?'*

As writer-researcher, my aims were not for the universal meaning but the generation of multiple meanings that represent possible interpretations, a view from my mind that is

shared with the reader, who is invited to frame their own interpretation. My own experience of poetry, both within poetry groups and amongst readers generally, is that the poet's intention can result in unintentional responses as well as a range of other interpretations. As Shapiro (2004) remarks *'because of its predilection for imagery and metaphor, meanings may emerge in poetry which the author herself is not always completely aware of and which may not be entirely intentional, yet which have their own inherent validity and significance'* (p 175)

Being a creative writer, allows for a high degree of artistic licence in the creation of the creative product. Poetry is the product of the poet's invention. Nelson (2009, p 68-69) acknowledges the license of the poetic form to stretch verisimilitude. He says that artists and creative writers have the right to play with the truth.

*'In poetry it is always hard to achieve credibility when straying from the truth or downright wrong. If something is wrong—and you know it—you are unmoved, as a reader, by the text: it does not transport you. But fortunately truth is plural, has internal antagonisms and slippages within it. Your personal reading of 'universal' truths can be funny, subversive, marvelously dislocating. And it usually follows that the uproarious is imaginative, as with satire.'*

The criteria for assessing or evaluating my research were qualitative in nature. Rather than adopting a slavish adherence to a rubric, my approach was open, sensitive and attentive, one which acknowledged the layers and textures of qualitative writing that contribute to an understanding of the phenomena under the research lens; writing that has some aesthetic merit as well as intellectual and emotional impact.

### **3.8. The Methods Detailed and Analysed**

#### **3.8.1. Journal of the Plastic Chair**

The act of writing for me is characterised by a series of interrelated operations. These operations are aimed at collecting the ingredients for the creative artefact, my poetry. In this research, I began by having a vast array of notebooks. During the course of the research process, each element of this collection began with distinct characteristics. However as the inquiry proceeded, I sensed that the borders between them became increasingly blurred as there was a crossover of operations. The Journal of the Plastic Chair suggested a more coherent, coalesced object in which I was able to experiment with ideas. It remains a place where I construct and shape my poetry.

The journal contributed to my work as a tool which represents the internal mechanisms of my writing, displaying characteristics that range from order and organisation, to something that borders on the disconnected and jumbled. It is highly personal and reveals much about me, the writer, the person. Bourke and Nielsen (2004), classify this form of journal as First Order Journal Work, informal and anecdotal, often bordering on the narcissistic. This description is recognisable in my journal. A Second Order Journal is more formalised, engaging with the moment of writing and the moments in-between. This is meta-writing, thinking and writing about writing and took place in a dynamic crisscross of the Journal of the Plastic Chair. The Journal became an invaluable companion to my work and one in which I engaged in a cycle of collecting – writing – reflecting - thinking – writing. It was the ‘writer’s workplace’ and a significant research method for me in this inquiry process creating a space where creativity and critical faculty co-exist. It affected my work in a number of ways:

#### **3.8.1.1. A Workshop Space**

With my journal, I created a workshop space where I could and continue to critically evaluate and scrutinise the processes and product of my creative writing, albeit self-reflexively. It served me as a reflective tool in the process of self-discovery, the development of new insights, of uncovering the lived experience of the writer-researcher, whilst acknowledging biases and preconceptions. As a creative writer and poet my voice has special significance in reaching the creative outcome. Journaling is an activity shared by many creatives from across disciplines. The instinct of many writers is to keep a journal, a place to record the details, feelings, thoughts, anecdotes, ideas that distill across your day-to-day experiences and activities. The writer’s journal is legend. For many, the journal remains a place where the writer is at liberty to record and examine the self, a receptacle

*‘for one’s private, secret thoughts.....’* (Sontag 1947-1963)

#### **3.8.1.2. A Tool**

My journal was a tool. Brown (in Raab, 2010) describes his approach to journaling where writing, regardless of its form or aim, is a worthwhile endeavour. He regards it as a discovery process whereby the writer may find what it is that they want to say. It is a place where reflection takes place, a space where self-reflexivity operates.

### **3.8.1.3. A Data Collection Repository**

It provided a repository for data collection, just one of the places where the research process was played out, creating a critical consciousness through the research and writing processes. It served to gather material over time acting as a store of observations, ephemera and poetry. It afforded me as a writer, somewhere to sketch, to doodle, meditate and play with ideas, words, and language, to engage in dialogue with myself, before structuring a piece of writing. It was also the place where I played with my own poetry, where poems were constructed and underwent the revisions and re-writes. It was both a personal and referential artefact. It made connections across texts and phenomena.

### **3.8.1.4. An Identity Building Space**

It was a place to build my writer's identity. In *A Writer's Diary 1918-41*, Virginia Woolf (2003) observed, the journal is a place to warm-up the formal writing. Maintained, it captures a moment, an idea that might otherwise be lost. It may never be visited by any reader or audience other than me and as such becomes a retreat, a place to explore anything without redress or even observation from external eyes.

### **3.8.1.5. A Reflective Process**

Writing in my journal was a reflective process of *through-the-mirror* writing (Bolton, 2010), a creative way of accessing my thoughts as a writer. These thoughts were sometimes hidden or veiled by other things. Bolton (2010) describes this concept as an adventure in reflective practice, a purposeful reflection. It is writing for the self, not others. In fact, the other is never considered in this method of writing. It enabled thoughts to free flow without external discussion or commentary. Some of this writing found its way into more public writing, as elements of reflective poetry in particular.

### **3.8.1.6. A Place to Labour**

My journal also required labour, it was intensely personal, intimate, often hand-written, spontaneous, disconnected, fragmentary and domestic. It represented the fluidity of thoughts and ideas, a reminder that I am, just as the things about which I write, a work in progress. Metta (2010) describes in her feminist life-writing how the journal enabled her to make sense of her thoughts and immerse herself in the *mess* and *messy* to reach '*new ways of thinking, knowing, writing and being.*' (p 172). This proposition also reflected closely some of the characteristics of qualitative data and Roller & Lavrakas (2015) refer to the 'messiness' as the natural state of affairs of an inductive approach.

My Journal closely resembled a Scrapbook, which as a child was a place to collect, to capture and remember events that formed part of my world. Tucker et al (2006) in the exploration of the *Scrapbook in American Life*, place it in the context of cultural studies and a personal tool to construct meaning. It became a book of the self, placing it as a companion to the keeper/collector, as well as a chronology of encounters and experiences that can be revisited at another time.

The Journal captured found objects, poetry and stories, words and images together that leave a sense of understanding, of insight, of confusion, of companionship. It made connections with the world of art, literature, science and culture. It then directed me to seek out associations between the established fields of knowledge and scholarship, identifying linkages and separateness.

Included as part of the Journal of the Plastic Chair was an early output activity in my research. In my role as student-writer in residence at the Museum of Design in Plastics (MoDiP), I contributed to an online-published blog. My contribution included several pieces of creative work as well as a contextual and reflective element.

<http://www.modip.ac.uk/resources/residencies/Kate-Hall> . The relevance of this output is its role as data collection i.e. it forms part of the Journal in terms of its contribution to my creative writing work. It also has relevance to the data analysis, in that I performed a level of data description and thematic analysis to reach a poetic outcome. The activity also represents an output of the research, one which both contributes to knowledge that is shared as well as a dynamic dialogue between objects in a museum collection and an audience.

### 3.8.2. Analysis of Journal

The analysis and evaluation of the myriad of notebooks and places that I used as a writer, are complex and problematic since these items/ archival materials are my personal tools as a writer, much of which may never be shared publicly. The central question was to determine what is the contribution of the journal to my critical and creative work.

What is central to the use of the Journal for me was that I created a unified space, my workshop, a place where I critically evaluated, scrutinised the processes and product of my creative writing, reflexively. I adopted an informal process of analysis for the journal that represented a spiraling progression, as data were exposed to several non-

linear actions. It was a combination of a more relaxed, subjective and objective thematic distillation, which involved

*reading, identification of words, phrases or issues, organisation of themes, writing the poem and subsequent review of the creative work, revision-rewrite-re-review*

*Awakening*, is a poem that developed from this process. A recurrent personal theme in journal entries and one identified by my poetry mentor, Annie Freud, is that of my poetic 'restraint', of me 'holding back'. It is exemplified by my longing to write better poetry, to embrace a more anarchic style and to take risks with my creative work but tempered by my own diffidence and a far-reaching abstemious, disciplined cultural heritage.

It was worked in the Journal with reference to images from a trip to Ireland. My intention was to represent a sensation, one that had given me happiness and peace. It also tried to reflect my ongoing desire to find and write good poetry. The first incarnation of the poem, *Dunseverick Morning*, was dismembered and criticised for a lack of rebellion. Annie wanted me to 'muddy the pool' and 'create chaos', to break-out, to become unrestrained.

### **Dunseverick Morning**

A small window opens onto an endless sky  
the wild and rugged coast  
comes and goes  
as tides deliver their rhythmical blows

Formations of weathered rock  
that nature has sculpted into ruined dwellings  
have now surrendered to the sea

Sheep skip along the cliff edge  
carefree and casual  
suddenly they slip away  
ghosts swallowed by the clouds  
which seem to linger just above their heads.

The re-write attempted to achieve a more intense effect. I used words and phrases from the original poem as an act of defiance and reluctance to surrender the imagery and to convey a sense that I had been compelled to alter my work to accommodate others. The Journal provided me with the place and freedom to construct, deconstruct and reconstruct the creative artefact

In revising and re-writing;

- I was reflecting on the place of my poetry in the canon.
- I looked to poets who have influenced me, recognising the factors that informed and shaped my writing.
- I reflected on my poetic voice, accepting that the process of writing was a continuing journey of self-discovery, that my poetry was the result of my lived experience and I concluded that it could change.
- I identified that a critical review, however uncomfortable, can lead to better poetry.

And so:

### **Awakening**

My poetry reveals itself  
a wild and rugged coast  
that appears and fades  
as tides deliver their rhythmical blows  
words as weathered rock  
roughcast by nature into ruined dwellings  
long since surrendered to the sea

Searching for elusive lines  
as ill-defined as the ghostly shapes of sheep  
at cliff edge  
swallowed by wet Atlantic cloud  
which seems to linger just above their heads.

A small window opens onto an infinite sky

the view disrupted by the stains,  
the filth that clings to the cold glass  
corruption placed there by my own words  
I am pressed to see the world through another's eyes  
purity and loveliness are cast out,  
defeated and left to quiet poems

Although my Journal had diverse operations, in the hands of this writer-researcher, it was inextricably woven to the process of writing. The result was often 'messy' and disordered, reflecting the creative facet of my work. The goal of analysis was to disentangle and categorise this patchwork or assortment.

The Journal helped to create a dialogue of its own with reference to other texts in much the same way that creative writing looks to other texts to inform and illuminate. I engaged in a continuous process of cross-reference and constant comparison with other texts. It helped me to make connections with the world of art, literature, science and culture. It then directed me to seek out associations between the established fields of knowledge and scholarship, identifying linkages and separateness.

*Plastic Vanitas* is a poetic transformation using this process. It was crafted in response to the exhibition of the same name but also drew on intertextual elements outlined below, with its revisions in the Journal of the Plastic Chair,

1. The planned exhibition Plastic Vanitas, a collaborative project between the Artist Mariele Neudecker and The Museum of Design in Plastics (MoDiP).
2. An invitation to join the artist at the studio session and assist in the photography.
3. A discussion with the artist about her work.
4. The preview of the completed works in September 2015.
5. The exhibition of finished work at Arts University Bournemouth, September-November 2015.
6. The exhibition book and <http://www.modip.ac.uk/resources/residencies/mariele-neudecker-plastic-vanitas>
7. My own trip to the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, Dutch Still Life paintings.
8. Reading Mark Doty's *Still Life with Oysters and Lemon* (2001)
9. Reading Bonnie Costello's *Planets on Tables: Poetry, Still Life and the Turning World* (2008).



10. The poetry of W.B. Yeats and Annie Freud's frequent remark to me that my poetry has a *Yeatsian* quality.
11. The traditional ode structure as a way of connecting the past and present.
12. The metaphorical nature of ordinary plastic objects in the collection at MoDiP.
13. The environmental debate and global concerns about plastics.
14. The fleeting nature of life, the transient nature of things countered with the slow demise of plastics – which still decays.

### **Plastic Vanitas**

The table now is set for life,  
yet speaks to us of death, decay.  
Things made beautiful by use.  
What contradiction and confusion does this art display?

Vanity of vanities,  
worthless objects that still command desire,  
beauty lies down with ugliness and meaningless,  
before our eyes, they playfully conspire.

From darkness light reveals a glimpse.  
The view disrupted by its shafted beams.  
Still, life tastes bitter, sweet, in unequal parts.  
Illusion hides intent, as nothing here is what it seems.

The silence screams,  
as fragments of our lives are hurled upon the stage.  
The artist's hand has reached into Pandora's Box.  
With alchemy she dares to slow the march of age.

What foolishness this is,  
what crude conceit,  
our lives inconsequential  
wrapped lavishly in cold deceit.

### 3.8.3. Creative Conversations Overview

In my research I have adopted a method of *Creative Conversations*. The Creative Conversation has served as the foundation for both the creative and critical outputs of this study. These conversations have provided me with opportunities to engage in creative communication with diverse groups of individuals; designers, poets, users. The data generated from them have given me insights into the nature of contemporary design and poetry practice as well as the response of those who both consume design and poetry. Just as significantly, these conversations have contributed to shaping and determining my own poetry praxis.

These conversations were characterised as organised but informal encounters in which participants talk freely about their creative work as well as the consumption of that work. The purpose was not geared solely toward an examination of the minutiae of the conversation, as established in conversation analysis, the study of social interaction which embraces the verbal and non-verbal elements of the conversation. Rather the tenor of these encounters was designed to be one of 'talking together' and the informality allowed for serendipity and unplanned outcomes for participants. It was the intentional convening of a conversational space that allows participants to listen and hear, discover and articulate. The development of the creative conversation has evolved from creative strategy (Leadbeter, 2010), as well as arts based educational encounters (Lange, 2011), and although the original concept celebrates diversity it also offers opportunities to combine creative voices collaboratively to generate knowledge and ways of knowing.

My Creative Conversations looked to three key groups that have significant influence on my research. The first group was the designers, those who would articulate key factors and the central concerns in contemporary design, which informed my critical analysis and helped to shape the creative artefact. The second was the group of writers/poets who work with the language and the structure of poetry in their unique response to the designed world and objects within it. The third group consisted of those who would represent a wider range of responses, not necessarily poets or designers but more representative of users/consumers. This group would bring another perspective to the conversation through their individual responses to both designed objects and poetry associated with a specific class of designed objects. The following subsections expand on the idea of these Creative Conversations in more detail.

#### 3.8.4. The Designer Creative Conversations

The emic or insider perspective was a key element of my search for the kernels and themes that became the foundations of poetic transformation. In selecting those voices that might contribute to my research, I looked to artists and designers with the potential to influence the voice within my creative work. The list would be a 'wish list' of those designers who would be added to the cast of characters in my creative work. In selecting from amongst the design catalogue, I aimed to include:

Designers who are externally recognised as having stretched the boundaries of design and who:

- represent the spectrum of design in contemporary plastic chairs
- reflect the cultural, social perspectives in their work
- have objects in a collection such as MoDiP
- 'Talk' about their designs across the media
- contribute to a design narrative
- who possess a singular artistic position contributing to a general discourse

Designers who have had a personal impact on my own creativity and who:

- have designed chairs that make me take notice or respond
- who still use plastics
- who would be interested in talking about their work

Written letter requests were sent to ten short-listed designers (Appendix 2a). Each communication outlined the details of the research and included an information sheet with consent form (Appendices 1 & 2). Responses to conversation requests were mixed and highlighted some of the common problems associated with data collection using the personal encounter/conversations-style technique. I was aware that all the identified participants had busy work schedules and some spent a considerable amount of their time outside the UK. From the short-list sample of ten designers, there were several no-replies; a number were unable to assist due to a busy schedule. Another designer preferred a questionnaire sent digitally. I declined this as it did not fit within the conversation approach that I wanted to inform my specific research approach. Four designers could participate. The designers were:

Russell Plant – Bluecube

Ron Arad – Ron Arad Associates

Christopher Pett – The Reee (Recycled) Chair

Richard Liddle – RD (Rough Drawn) Chair

Further contact was made via email and dates were set. I met Russell Plant in December 2014 and Ron Arad in January 2015, both at their studio-workshops in London. The advantage of these two encounters was that the designer did not need to travel more than their usual distance to work, the environment was familiar to them and they could access some of their designs directly. The disadvantages were in one case, at least, the noise of the studio-workshop was intrusive and distracting for both participant and researcher. The unfamiliarity for me resulted in time needed to set up the technology for recording and avoiding intrusion on the activities of the studio-workshop. The conversation once begun, led in all cases, to a very free-flowing exchange where the participants were able to talk confidently and freely. The conversations were all digitally recorded and then transcribed (Appendix 4, p 166-260)

The remaining two conversations with Christopher Pett and Richard Liddle took place in January and February 2015, respectively, and were carried out electronically using Skype, an internet application that provides video/audio chat and record services. This option ensured access to the individuals and suited their busy work/travel schedules. The call data was recorded and stored as a digital file. In each of these cases the video was disabled due to poor broadband width, that resulted in poor quality simultaneous video and audio. Although the electronic conversations removed the experiential opportunity to be in the same space as the participant with all the associated behavioural elements, the social interaction and the energy between the participant and researcher, the synchronous aspects of the conversation were retained. The work of Fontana and Prokos (2007), on the developments of the conversations technique postulate on how shifts in communication toward the electronic modes, electronic interviewing is growing in frequency across disciplines, facilitating quantitative methods of data collection but posing challenges and questions about the ways in which qualitative methods can be operationalised. To this end I concluded that the Skype conversation retained some of the energy of a face-to-face in the close relationship between data modalities i.e. the recorded conversation and the transcript, in achieving a level of depth that serves the reflective cycle in the data analysis.

Each participant was offered the opportunity to read the transcript to ensure that it represented what they had said and to add to it anything of relevance. One participant

did so and was satisfied with the transcript, asking for clarification as to how it was to be used. This exchange took place via electronic mail (Appendix 7b).

### 3.8.5. Analysing Designer Creative Conversations

As a creative writer, I was keen to align the processes of poetic writing with those of the research endeavour and to identify alliances between the two. The Designer Conversations offered such an opportunity in that I utilised a series of interrelated processes. Data analysis combined a qualitative method of **a) thematic analysis** of the conversations in parallel with **b) reflective review** and a **c) clustering** writing process, which resulted in several poems.

The process of analysis and poetic transformation followed a series of systematic steps:

1. Initial responses to conversations recorded in my journal.
2. Transcribe conversations.
3. Read transcripts, highlighting key words or repeated words.
4. Re-read transcripts, identifying themes, underlining words and phrases used by participant that could be woven into a poem.
5. Include words and phrases that occur from my reflections upon these elements and their relationship to literature or collection in scrapbook.
6. Create a poem, read it aloud, revise and re-write retaining all the stages of development.
7. Submit poem for critical review along with statement of intent.
8. Review and discuss critique.
9. Revise and re-write.

The process of data analysis was not a separate operation, rather a process which began in the field, at the time of the conversations. This iterative link between data analysis and collection is well recognised in qualitative research Bryman & Burgess (2002). Even before transcriptions, I was reflecting upon the encounter, identifying important statements and ways of constructing themes and significant concepts around the conversations. The audio/visual recordings and subsequent transcriptions of each conversation served to crystallise this process in advance of the formal data analysis. An example of this was framed around the issue of talking with elites. Aguiar & Schneider (2016) identify the key areas of concern for the researcher in accessing elites and 'getting beyond the soundbite' to uncover some of the broader context in

relation to the subject of inquiry. In my conversations with a leading protagonist in the field of furniture design, I recognised that I was engaged in conversation with someone who had given many interviews in his professional career. My goal as researcher was not to have a conventional celebrity interview, one where I was viewed as a reporter with journalistic intentions but rather to reach past the public persona, whilst respecting their professional integrity. As a first conversation, it was to set the scene for the others and I felt a sense of nervousness at the prospect as well as the ambitious task of directing a significant research method in practice. I reflected upon this in my journal and created a short story around the experience of the conversation. The emergent short story *Tricks of the Mind – Upon Meeting the Great Designer*, became both a process of reflection, a device through which I could analyse and critically consider the experience, as well as the crafting of a piece of creative work.

### **3.8.5.1. Thematic Analysis of Designer Creative Conversations**

I utilised an inductive coding method that identifies themes in the conversations data. In each conversation themes emerged and these were identified for each designer in a multi-level reduction analysis (Appendix 5, p261-285). The first level reviewed the transcription of each of the conversations individually. The second level compared these concepts across all the conversations. Thematic analysis in my research aimed *'to capture something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set'* (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.82). It is one of the ways of identifying patterned meaning across data sets.

The data analysis operation specific to the Designer Conversations followed a three-stage thematic reduction. Stage one was performed directly on a paper copy of each transcript. A digital copy was also maintained. Each one was read and emerging themes highlighted with the addition of short notes to self in the margin. Stages two and three are outlined in tables 1 and 2 below.

1. Reading each transcript, I highlighted key areas of interest for each conversation.
2. These areas were transposed to a thematic grid for each designer.
3. Each grid was compared across the four designer conversations and a further reduction was carried out, identifying commonalities, which became core themes.

4. The themes were then used to support an existing poem or as the basis for a poem (poetic transformation).

**Table 1 – Thematic grid for creative conversation with Ron Arad**

(Analyses of other conversations are in Appendix 5, p 272-284)

- **Bold** shows themes identified.
- Plain text represents words/phrases lifted directly from the transcript.
- *Italics* show possible poetic transcription or transformation that result from reflection and contemplation of the themes and remarks made by participant.
- *Italics in (brackets)* is the significant theme for a poem.

<p><b>Creativity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Artisan/Artist</i></li> <li>• <i>A chair with no name/ the chair shall remain nameless</i></li> <li>• <i>Having fun &amp; fighting boredom</i></li> <li>• Being able to do many things – I don't want to be a full-time member of any of these clubs.</li> <li>• <i>Free to do</i></li> <li>• <i>Transforming the ordinary</i></li> <li>• The chair with a life of its own –'if it is a chair ...someone has to sit in it. If that's what it wants to be, if it wants to be a chair, it includes a sitter'.</li> <li>• Once I've done it, it's yours</li> <li>• <i>Creating 'new'</i></li> <li>• A design that sucked me in</li> <li>• The song became a song, the thing became an icon</li> <li>• The artist became a designer</li> </ul>	<p><b>Materials</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plastic is cheap</li> <li>• Plastic just obeys</li> <li>• Plastic extrusion- Longer than Italy</li> <li>• <i>Makes the rest possible, finances my play</i></li> <li>• <i>Plastic in the Playground</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Processes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Then you whoosh!</li> <li>• <i>The obedience of plastic</i></li> <li>• Not made by hand, not made in China (Rapid prototyping, 3-D, a mindless bandwagon)</li> <li>• Must be a good chair to sit on</li> <li>•</li> </ul> <p><i>(the primordial soup, new art, new aesthetic, science and art, accessible processes, mass production)</i></p>
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<p><i>(Plastic liberates, artistic freedom, superstars, ubiquitous)</i></p>	<p><i>(Stackable, packable, Calligram-Apollinaire, multiples, cloning, sameness, changing , transforming , DNA &amp; polymers)</i> <i>(Material Seduction, from collectible to ordinary)</i></p>
<p><b>Taste</b> Things that are respectable made of plastic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Fashion &amp; Fancy</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Taste (continued)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Skeuomorph</i></li> <li>• <i>Exclusive</i></li> <li>• <i>Lie on my chair</i></li> </ul> <p><i>(Plastic as art, overpriced artefact, superstar chairs, superstar designers)</i></p> <p><i>(Furniture &amp; Fashion. Things of value are respectable. Pop art &amp; plastic chairs)</i></p> <p><i>(Come lie with me on my plastic bed. Why don't you do it now, head there, feet there)</i></p>	<p><b>Crude</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Liking it rough</i></li> <li>• <i>Going, going, gone</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Crude (continued)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>How much?</i></li> <li>• <i>Exclusively yours.</i></li> </ul> <p><i>(Prostitution, selling people, life is cheap, everything for sale, highest bidder-lowest value of life)</i></p>
<p><b>Translation into plastic &amp; invention</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Transformation</i></li> <li>• <i>Did I invent the trees?</i></li> <li>• <i>Fantastic Elastic Elastic, FPE Chair</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>Wasting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>4 ways of making...one is by wasting - Finds David</i></li> </ul> <p><i>(Abundant Waste, Sustainability)</i></p>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You do what plastic allows....</li> </ul> <p><i>(Plastic man, superhero, man transformed, metamorphosis)</i></p>	
	<p><b>Pioneers of design</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Coming to the promised land</i></li> <li><i>The plastic pilgrim</i></li> <li>After the revolution, what is yours?</li> </ul> <p><i>(Superstar designs and designers)</i></p>

**Table 2 – Major Themes from Across Four Conversations**

<b>Taste</b>	<b>Sustainability and Waste</b>
<b>Design Position including Design Proximity</b>	<b>Materials</b>
<b>Relationship with Furniture</b>	<b>Methods of Production</b>
	<b>Pioneers of design</b> <b>Pushing Boundaries</b>

**3.8.5.2. Reflective Review**

Alongside thematic coding, I used a reflective process which focused on the emerging themes that suggested a poetic frame. The combination of the audio-visual with the written transcription allowed me to reflect on the experience of the conversation, its content and the interactions that took place between the participant and the researcher. The emergent themes, combined with actual words and phrases used in the conversation were being framed for poetic transformation. This involved reading and observation of the thematic grids, identifying links, similarities and interrelationships between them. I also incorporated elements of the post conversation reflection, which was a mix of short, unstructured notes and some creative work recorded in the Journal of the Plastic Chair. This weaving form of data coding allowed

me to extract the words, phrases that informed and shaped the poetic transcription. This activity approximates the process of creating *Found Poems*, found in the poetic inquiry work of Butler-Kisber (2010) and Prendergast (2009). A form of found poems is used in my research, crafted from existing sources or texts that include data from participant sources, in this case the conversations with designers and poets. Words and phrases are lifted from the transcript, remixed and reframed in the poem. The found poem in poetic inquiry has a foundation in the voice of research participants, investing the poem with authenticity and originality. It represents a distillation and crystallisation of the range of data, literature sources and other texts that relate to the purpose of the research as well as shaping the creative product. The object on the other hand, does not possess a physical voice but finds a voice through and augmented by the words of the poet in the creation and crafting of a poem. The need to create a voice for the object also prompted me to use the internal dialogue or monologue device in a number of my poems. This device adds a voice to the object, albeit rendered from the words of research participants. It allows the poet to offer the poem without overt analysis and commits the reader to interpret.

Material Seduction and Sitting Quietly, are two of the poems that both resulted from this analysis. Material Seduction incorporated words from the Ron Arad conversation, during which he invited me to sit on one of his chairs (Voido). The poem coalesced several significant issues:

- The designer's significant presence and confident attitude suggested to me, a persuasive, dominant character, his role as a tastemaker.
- The theme of taste and our relationship to furniture added to the idea of seduction, being seduced by the design, shape, colour, one feels enticed to buy into something, to feel reassured by the temptation, the invitation to partake, to be lulled into doing something.
- This seduction also reflects the consuming power of plastic as a material, its ability to be something else, to become something we feel we must have.
- The ecological and human biological transformation through the use of and the absorption of plastics into the biology of living organisms and the overwhelming contemporary problem of managing the waste associated with plastics.

### **Material Seduction (in his Voids Chair)**

'Come, contemplate and sit a while.  
Come lie with me,  
Why don't you do it now!  
Head there,  
feet there.  
Allow my rise and fall to ease you  
Take me in  
Let me move you  
I am silent company.  
I will not judge,  
I offer you comfort.  
I am everywhere and nowhere.  
I will transform you.  
I am beneath you.  
I am above you.  
I am within you.  
I am you'

#### **3.8.5.3. Clustering**

In my research, clustering represented an analysis that connects the research enterprise to that of the creative writing. Clustering units of meaning from data features in phenomenological reduction processes (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 1998; Hycner, 1999) where central themes are determined through interrogation of the meaning of clusters within the data from contributions made by the participants. I took the broad thematic analysis grid from each participant and combined themes in another level of analysis that resulted in a thread for a poem. The clustering was developed by a cross reference to elements of my other data sources, namely, the Journal. The result of this process also generated cluster poems, poems which share themes or essences. The clustering allowed the poet to coalesce or compound different themes and phenomena across poems. It allowed for unarticulated, below the surface ideas to percolate, often resulting in unexpected outcomes. Butler-Kisber (2009), uses it to show the *tentativeness of individual interpretations* (p 4), to reveal new ways of looking at something known.

The following two poems illustrate the process which I used. They are representations of philosophical positions that explore and conceptualise the relation of subject to object, to articulate the primacy of perception over thinking and the importance of the experience in framing our knowing. They stand-alone but also serve as cross-representational in design terms. They explore our 'relationship with furniture', a theme which permeated all the designer conversations. They also capture the identified theme of 'pushing boundaries', the notion of a design material that aims to challenge our perceptions of reality. They also embody the capacity of poetry to capture the vastness of the poet's experience, the collision of the personal and the public.

***Mariah Chumley-Jones and the Mysterious Chair*** and ***Ghost of a Chair (Clear Thinking)***, both poems finding their naissance in the thematic analysis. The first poem is essentially an experiential one carrying within it multiple themes both personal and extra personal; in this case they are lost childhood, the pains of growing-up, the longing for independence but the constant presence of parental or adult authority, the ability to go unnoticed. These notions are often shared human experiences but they also represent a story of the plastic chair, reinforcing the concept of people and objects sharing similar trajectories as well as the strong emotional attachment we place on things around us (Norman, 2004) and the translation of this to design and the goals of sustainability in design (Chapman, 2012). The design angle was further reinforced by words and phrases used in my participant conversations and represented in a poetic transformation.

Data Lifted from the Journal and Participant Conversations.

- A. Journal Extract: 'As a child and just as many other children, I feared what was under the bed. Too scared to look and once in bed reluctant to ever get out until daylight had returned. The stories of the Boogey (Bogey) Man were used to reinforce the terror of the night, of what might be there in the darkness and probably the most effective parental tool to keep you from wandering about when you were supposed to be in bed. I loved to be scared and this is a human need only satisfied by stories that told of some unseen force, being, a monster lurking so close to you that you may even hear it breathe or feel its movements, feel its breath upon your skin. Would it reach out and grab you? Would it take you in the night? Should I look under the bed? Roald Dahl stories please.'

- B. One of my design participants in talking of the importance of the distance of the designer from the design, used the expression 'designing from ten feet away' (Appendix 4, p ) as a way of capturing the notion that some designers have little more to do with the design than the idea, which is then translated by others and sent down a production line even further away. He also referred to the importance of looking at every aspect of the design,' looking underneath things, but from a design point of view that's where an object gets interesting' (Appendix 4, p 219) We talked of the work of Rachel Whitread and her vision of getting inside the object. (Appendix 4, p 232)
- C. Journal Extract: I saw Rachel Whitread's work and the notion of 'space' below, through, inside was immediately evident. The space that domestic objects do not inhabit, negative spaces are given life, presence. John Walsh wrote in the Independent (2010) remarked.

*'Ms Whitread gives to airy nothingness a heap of pathos, weight and human significance.'*

*<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/features/rachel-whitread-ive-done-the-same-thing-over-and-over-2068718.html>*

- D. Journal Extract. Image of little plastic chairs- child size (Figure 10). My mind is flooded with images of my daughter at playschool at the age of 3, sitting around the little plastic red table in miniature blue plastic chairs, industriously constructing something undistinguishable, fashioned from play dough, or of her gazing intensely at an image in a large print book filled with wonderful illustrations of happy, friendly bears in a wood. I was transported too to my own childhood and those early days of school. Plastic chairs were not the norm. In fact, we had a wooden desk and chair incorporated into a little unit that accommodated two children. When you stood up, the seat could be hinged upright. It was a wonderful place to play in, when the teacher was not in the room. You could crawl from one end of the classroom to the other on your belly; you could sneak-up behind the unsuspecting kid in the seat in front, grab their legs and relish the screams and yelps that emanated when you tried to pull them down. I was given a set of five with the ruler for that *one*'.

The second poem in this cluster was, in part, inspired by Philippe Starck's *Ghost Chair* (Figure 11) and *The Ghost of a Chair* by Valentina Glez Wohlers. The iconography suggested to me again, a simultaneous presence and absence of the object, by virtue of its materiality. I felt the artist/designer was challenging our perceptions of what it is, its function and our relationship with it as an object. By using the monologue device, my intention was to poetically mirror or reflect this uncertainty, the inner dialogue that aims to question, to blur realities and which represents the self being interrogated through the medium of an object. It became a process of metaphorical thinking, a way of illuminating something abstract from the concrete. The poem itself began early in my research and has undergone many revisions and rewrites. I wanted it to say more but I had as my goal the desire to keep the stripped-down structure in order to echo the almost imperceptible nature of the design and form of the chair.

Developed by Rico (1983), clustering is also a non-linear creative design process which I use in my own poetry writing, whereby I build a poem through a series of internal brainstorming steps. It allowed for a free flow of ideas combined with the concepts that emerge from the thematic analysis and supported by the richer detail within the research data, such as words, phrases, images generated during the conversations and supported by data recorded in the journal and scrapbook. Clustering themes and poetry renders a more iterative process to the analysis where links and subtleties are revealed to facilitate poetic transformation and transcription. It is an activity that blends common themes or at least those that are more similar in some senses to those in other clusters. Butler-Kisber (2009) utilises cluster poetry, which include poems that combine the general with the particular, representing a mosaic of perspectives and subtle variations in perceptions of phenomena.

### ***Mariah Chumley-Jones and the Mysterious Plastic Chair***

There is a space beneath the chair  
where no one ever goes.  
Below the chair an empty place,  
seen only by small toes.

The child is told to sit up straight,  
'Please focus on your book'.  
A whisper from a little voice, now urges  
'come down and take a look'!

The curious girl seeks out the voice  
while teacher's back is turned.  
'Who are you, where do you sit?'  
Her voice becomes concerned.

'I'm here, I'm here, do come and play  
there's much I have to show'.  
The voice now urgent, whispers  
'Be quick, for we must go.'

'Go where exactly? Is it fun?  
Will there be lots to eat?  
I must not go with strangers though,  
I should not leave my seat.'

The voice grows angry,  
the chair vibrates.  
The teacher gets annoyed.  
'Sit still, Mariah or leave the class'.  
There's silence from the void,  
beneath.

A calm returns  
the chairs are still,  
a hand comes from below.  
A pull, a scream,  
the child is gone.  
The chair remains alone.

### The Ghost of a Chair—Clear Thinking

Is there a ghost in the chair observing my rest?  
No, the ghost is the chair and the chair is not there.  
If the chair is not there, can I trust what I see?  
Is it me who is here?  
Is the chair really me?

Said the ghost, from the seat,  
*I am yours to command.*  
But say I, should I stare?  
Do I sit?  
Do I stand?

*As you wish, said the ghost*  
*But beware of your dreams*  
*You may think you know life*  
*But it is not what it seems*

#### 3.8.6. The Poet Creative Conversations

The *Poet Conversation* was another unique research experience of both gathering data for my research, as well as engaging in a creative dialogue with other poets who have written poetry around designed objects. The method of choosing poets for this conversation was based on the following criteria:

- **Publication:** Poets who are published and have a catalogue of poetry in the public domain. The rationale for this is that the poet has a high level of confidence in their poetry.
- **Accessibility:** Poets to whom I have access through poetry groups.
- **Object Poetry:** Poets who have written about objects or for whom the object features as a significant element in the poem.
- **Willingness:** Poets who were happy about revisiting and talking about specific poems.



Three poets whom I know personally, were approached, all of them members of The Cattistock Poetry Group. Each of the poets was approached at Poetry Group regarding the potential for a creative conversation. Responses were unanimously positive. The poets were:

1. Maya Pieris
2. Elaine Beckett
3. Annie Freud

Pre-conversation procedures involved an email invitation to meet. I wanted to promote an encounter that was both relaxed and informal, akin to a writer's exchange. I concluded that there was a sense of equality, as well as camaraderie between us, one which facilitated a lively, creative transaction. I used an informal setting for the conversations, all of which involved food and drink, in order to promote a relaxed, social atmosphere. The first conversation took place in Maya's home. The second took place in the coffee salon of a local hotel. The third was set in my home. In all cases, I took field notes and used these to capture my reflections on the conversation as soon as the encounter was over. Notes contributed to the reflective and analytical processes of the researcher that are characterised by a consideration of the pre and post conversation procedures. Post conversation reflections were recorded alongside the conversations notes, serving to identify my thoughts and begin the process of analysis of key themes. Saunders et al (2003) points out that notes are unique to the researcher as it is unlikely that two people would pursue the same things underlining the subjective nature of this type of note taking. Each set of post-conversation reflections assisted me in preparing for the subsequent conversation and added an element of consistency to the whole conversation method.

Each of my poet participants was offered the opportunity to read my notes and reflections, only one of them took up this offer. A typed copy was sent via email to Elaine Beckett for her approval (Appendix 6a and c, p 286-290). With the small number of conversations used for this element of the data collection, the notebook became an interactive space inhabited by four poets discussing and dissecting poetry. The act or the encounter was also facilitating reflection on the part of the poet, as each of them used their own poem and the object or objects in it as an entry point to a place, to people, to phenomena and experiences personal to each of them.

In problematising this approach to data collection, I was concerned that elements of the encounter might be omitted. This was due to the enthusiasm and energy exhibited by the participants who might have added a great deal more to the conversation, if time had allowed. To ensure that important information was not overlooked, I used my notes to return to several of the issues via email or further informal conversation, seeking clarification or additional explication (Appendix 6c, p 291-2). The informal, social nature of our encounters reduced the anxieties of all those participating, allowing me to recall the events with greater clarity and pleasure. Holloway and Galvin (2016) emphasise several important issues in note taking which have relevance to my own inquiry. The importance of taking field notes in qualitative inquiry that include descriptions of the setting and participant behaviours are relevant in my research as they contribute a narrative in themselves, which adds depth and richness to the back-story of the poems used in the conversations. In my reflective notes, I used the poetic technique of *Companion Poem* in one instance, as it served to complement one of the poems brought to the conversation with Elaine. The rationale for this was to create an exchange between poets and to acknowledge my own poetic response to her poem and the encounter.

### 3.8.7. Analysing Poet Creative Conversations

The poet conversations were analysed using the reflective element of the encounter. I adopted an informal approach to this analysis which reflected the nature of the meeting itself. This was a poetic encounter, characterised by a mutual creative enjoyment. The process of analysis drew out what I considered were the key themes or the essence of the conversation. These themes had a deep resonance for me both as researcher and poet as they echoed concepts and notions that I was considering relevant and significant in the ways that poetry frames and alters perceptions and thinking around important issues. Often this process lead to the generation of more questions than answers. In the case of my conversation with Maya, whose early poetry frequently featured doors, my reflections underlined the following key areas:

- Is the object more important by virtue of the poem?
- The object is a touchstone.
- Is memory framed in the object?
- A poetic touch is like a human touch. It retains an essence.
- When others talk of an object in language that connects with our own thinking, the experience is heightened.

My conversation with Annie also generated a number of themes that found their way into my findings:

- Object poetry provides a momentary stay against confusion.
- It is composed of layers of meaning.
- Objects represent or symbolise something else.
- Objects are designed to save you but rather, they trap or imprison you.

The poet conversations allowed for a dialogue and a return to specific poems for each of the participants. In the case of Elaine, her poems, *Little Puffin Jug* and *Something Pink*, were visibly taking her back to a time and place.

- She was revisioning, recalling, recontextualising both events and the creation of the poem, even reconsidering the appearance of an already published poem.
- Objects within a poem can summon-up an existence.
- Even an object that is absent, lost or abandoned, can say something about something that is not there.

Turning friends into research participants must be considered in terms of the research operation and the problems of validity and bias. The challenges of using the friendship approach are widely discussed by Tillmann-Healy (2003) who views it as breaking through any hierarchical separation between researcher and participant. In a creative encounter where emotional, expressive elements are the essence of the assembly, much richer, multilayered data are revealed. Smith et al (2009) propose a more dialogic relationship where friendship samples are utilised. Yaun (2014) identifies many of the considerations relating to this form of sampling, one which acknowledges real world research for doctoral work. I considered that the poet encounter was accessible, effortless and straightforward. Poets meeting to talk about poetry is a natural state of affairs and one with which I was now familiar in poetry groups. The Poet Conversation was a dialogue and form of self-narrative. As a result it could be criticised for being *narcissistic and self-indulgent* (Yuan, 2014). I justified my sample choices for this method on the basis that although I knew each of the poet participants, they were also considered as critical friends. Rationalising these choices I considered that

1. The conversation as a method was critical to my research as its purpose was to enrich my own personal experience, the wellspring for my creative writing.
2. The selected poets as friends, had expressed interest in hearing about my research and a willingness to help. There was already a level of trust and mutual respect between us, making the conversation a more efficient procedure i.e. less time needed in getting to know or warm-up.
3. The conversations required considerable personal investment and work on the part of each poet. The selected poets were being asked to spend time with me as the writer-researcher; they were encouraged to reflect on their poetic work and consider emotional and intellectual elements of their poetry.
4. The meeting would be principally a social encounter, as in poetry group.

#### 3.8.8. The Focus Group Creative Conversations

The *Focus Group Conversation* continued the operation of both creative dialogue and research method. It aimed to capture the responses of a sample of participants who represented a broader range of consumers, those not necessarily designers or poets. The conversation was carried out in association with MoDiP and formed part of their audience engagement. I was given licence to use this forum as a way of gathering important data for my research in collaboration with the museum.

The participants represented a sample of

- those having an interest in the work of MoDiP
- comprised of members of the public
- students at Arts University Bournemouth.

Pre-conversation procedures were implemented in collaboration with MoDiP. These included discussion with MoDiP about the nature and purpose of the Focus Group. Potential participants were identified and email was sent to approximately 12 recipients. Information about the focus group was provided in advance and further information along with issues of consent were provided on the day and before the session began. (Appendix 10)

8 people attended the Focus Group of which I was also a participant-researcher. The session was two hours in duration:

- 3 Creative Writing undergraduate students
- 2 MoDiP supporters/ writers (one of whom was a material scientist)
- 1 member of Bournemouth Council
- 1 member of AUB Staff (designer)
- Engagement Officer MoDiP/writer
- Me

The session was introduced by the Engagement Officer for MoDiP as she had made the email contacts identifying the participants for the Focus Group. Housekeeping and information about the session were followed by an introduction to me as writer-researcher. I explained my role; gave an outline of my research, purpose and conduct of the Focus Group session; discussed the voluntary nature of participation and gained written consent. The session was set out in two stages;

Stage 1 Conversation – Observing and attending to general information.

- I. Engagement Officer read the catalogue information for each chair whilst standing beside the chair.
- II. Participants reflected and considered their responses to each chair, recording these on colour-coded cards.
- III. Short group discussion and feedback on the process of this stage.

Stage 2 Conversation – Observing and attending to poetry.

- I. I read four poems whilst seated with the group. These were in order, *Pater Noster; White Plastic Chair; Plasticity; The Ghost Chair*.
- II. Participants reflected and considered their responses to each poem, recording these on a colour coded card.
- III. Short group discussion and feedback on the process of this stage.

I maintained field notes throughout the focus group session. These were aimed at describing and reflecting on the conversation encounter. Therefore, field notes were utilised here in order to

1. record and describe the session – no other form of recording was undertaken.
2. capture my own immediate and personal responses to the process.
3. gather any additional discussion during the feedback section.

My justification for using field notes as a tool is grounded in the reflexive and personal nature of my approach to this inquiry. As a participant myself, field notes felt responsive, immediate and represented both the lived experience of the conversation as well as the minutiae that might be missed in a digital recording. As writer-researcher I am constantly in search of the meaningful and creative possibilities in the encounters with participants. Hand-written notes are also part of my process of poetic transformation. From these many of my poems have found their naissance.

The problems of making field notes were considered in advance and as I had used this approach in the Poet Conversations, I felt that it had been an effective way of capturing my immediate responses to the session. To mitigate against the negative aspects of recording notes whilst conducting the research, I introduced my approach in an information sheet along with the verbal introduction at the commencement of the session. The field notes were an additional tool in the operation combined with the individual response cards from the participants which recorded their individual response at each stage of the focus group session.

The organisation and structure of the session was built around the objects in the room. I selected four chairs in advance drawn from the MoDiP collection of chairs made from plastic. The rationale for my choice was based on five criteria:

1. They were all part of the collection at MoDiP;
2. They were made from plastic or a combination of materials, the predominant one being plastic;
3. They represented different designers;
4. They represented different designs/styles;
5. They provided a spectrum of colour which reflects the reality of their market availability.

The table below outlines the chairs that were chosen:

<b>Chair</b>
1. La Marie Chair designed by Philippe Starck, produced by Kartell.
2. Blue Panton Chair designed by Verner Panton, produced by Vitra.

3. Fantastic Plastic Elastic (FPE) (red) designed by Ron Arad, produced by Kartell.
4. Casalino (off-white) designed by Alexander Begge, produced by Casala.

The chairs were displayed on a raised platform so that they were easily viewed by the participants. They were then subjected to two very different styles of narrative, the first of which was documentary, identical to the museum catalogue information for the item. It was simple and factual and delivered by a member of the museum team with whom I had worked in the organisation and development of the Focus Group session. She also remained throughout the session, her role was as museum representative which meant that she was able to ensure the integrity of the items.

The second narrative consisted of five poems taken from my collection of poems *Poetry from the Chair*. I read my poems using a technique identical to poetry group delivery. This requires the poet to

- Read the poem slowly
- Read in a normal voice
- Turn-up the volume
- Pause with punctuation

The poems selected were not specifically targeted at any particular chair although *The Ghost in the Chair* was written in response to Philippe Starck's Ghost Chair (La Marie Chair) and *White Plastic Chair* was written in response to a simple, white, polypropylene garden chair. A short introduction to each poem provided some context and focus as well as indicating the link between poem #4 and chair #1 as well as the indirect link between poem #2 and chair #4.

Poem
1. <i>Pater Noster</i>
2. <i>White Plastic Chair</i>
3. <i>Plasticity</i>
4. <i>The Ghost Chair</i>
5. <i>Chair-Haiku X2</i>

### 3.8.9. Analysing Focus Group Conversations

The analysis was carried out using a process of handwritten thematic reduction.

1. I immersed myself in the data in order to become familiar with them and to revisit the experience of the session.
2. Each response card was transcribed in longhand. Cross-reference to field notes was made.
3. From this a general description of the nature of the responses was made.
4. Keywords and phrases were highlighted across this script in order to produce general themes.
5. Broad themes were identified.
6. These themes were fleshed-out/enlarged below.

Stage 1: Observing and attending to general information about the object. Information lifted from MoDiP collection record.

A key factor in the richness of responses from the group was the requirement upon them to observe, to look closely at the object. As the objects were part of a museum collection sitting on these chairs was not permitted and touching was allowed only with protective gloves. This placed demands on the group to observe each chair and to do so as closely as they wished without actually sitting in the chair, a primary function of the object and the principle way to understand the chair, to determine the comfort of the chair and therefore a significant factor in the relationship with it. This may have created a distance between object and participant but even when invited to tour the object and view from close quarters, participants tended to remain in their visitor chairs. The participants had adopted a position of observation rather than interaction which I concluded on reflection would impact on their responses to the chairs. In replicating this session I would want to address this issue during the conversation in order to gain a clearer view of the participants positionality.

During this stage participants were already beginning to probe their emotions about the chairs and comments were directed at their feelings and an emergent relationship with the objects. Responses ranged from the intellectual and logical to the visceral and intuitive. They included:

- general description of object, shape, colour, design
- what it might be like to sit in object, functionality, comfort factor, stability
- multiple questions about a sitter, owner, what this person is doing in the chair



- beginning to comment on feelings about the object, their relationship to it, drawing on own sphere of knowledge, experience and memory to give chair context e.g. *reminds me of a crashing wave, a dentist's waiting room chair, a screaming face, a frog, don't like red- it's a position of power, FPE contradicting itself with plastic and metal together.*

#### Stage 2: Observing and attending to poetry.

The addition of a poetic narrative generated as much discussion. Participants were actively constructing their own meanings as they engaged with objects, continuing this engagement in a discussion with others in the group.

The responses in this stage of the focus group suggested a much greater emphasis on emotions and feelings, on experience and relationships, on issues beyond the object but originating in the encounter with the object and the poem. Participant responses highlighted;

- simple object sparks big themes
- the poem was creating a sense of place, time
- it was drawing the listener in to the place
- images evoke a reality
- feeling, imagining, experiencing, reflecting
- interpreting in the context of the individuals own experience, knowledge, beliefs, values
- developing a sensitivity, empathy for chair, humanising the chair, sharing an experience with the chair. E.G. Pater Noster- *felt bad for chairs*. In *White Plastic Chair* – saw author in the chair, the chair is the person
- poem illuminating the overlooked, the everyday. Ordinary object elevated by virtue of the human connection. E.G. *everybody has a story about a chair*
- poetry allows for play with words, ideas, distillation E..G *chair is such a great word to play with.*

Both stages of the Focus Group generated a dynamic engagement with the objects, the poems and a willingness to have a dialogue, an exchange of ideas. I further

distilled these themes to three key areas of interest using a process of thematic reduction utilised across all the creative conversations in this inquiry.

Theme 1 - Time Spent with the Object

Theme 2 - Simple Objects Spark Big Ideas

Theme 3 – Immediacy

### **Theme 1 - Time Spent with Object**

The focus group brought people together in the company of the object. It was a crafted, purposeful encounter. Despite the constructed nature of the session it was both interactive and dynamic. With a focus on the value of individual responses there was an enthusiastic interaction and flow of discussion. I began to recognise that the encounter as a whole was generating responses to the designed objects across a spectrum from functionality and usability to the emotional and aesthetic. The addition of the poetic narrative enabled a much deeper consideration of the objects place in the context of the participants knowledge and experience. They were able to

- Connect with the object.
- liberate a range of responses, physical, intellectual.
- release emotions and memories.
- crystallise and preserve the user/consumer/human interaction/imprint.

Poetry asked for close observation of the objects and spending time with them generated thinking that is characterised by reflection and contemplation. Through the poetic narrative objects moved from being inanimate and ordinary, becoming a reference point for reflection and contemplation. Time with an object allowed for exploration of it as a way of knowing both the object and of gaining self-knowledge. By virtue of the poem the object became invested with the personal, the social and cultural. In the poem *Pater Noster*, the participants responded in a way that suggested that I had humanised the grey polypropylene plastic chairs. The Casalino chair is made from polypropylene and although it was not the chair in the poem it may have represented the material. The poem was noted for its use of imagery and of its ability to draw the reader into the scene. It also stimulated an emotional response toward the chairs. There was a clear sense of empathy toward them as well as a shared experience;

*“It feels as though you are the chair”*

*“ it feels as if they are forgotten”*

*“ felt sad for the chairs”*

*“ do they deserve respect”?*

*“chairs and humans have a similar experience of life”*

Many of the participant responses showed a considerable alignment and symmetry with the poet's intention. This is not a requirement of a poem and the reader/receiver may find something else in the poem, something the poet did not foresee or intend. The capacity to discover and interpret for oneself makes the poem and the object a starting point, a pivot around which the reader can respond for themselves in the context of their own unique personal experience, knowledge, beliefs and values. This freedom of interpretation is a frequent remark in my own poetry group, that is to leave space for the reader, to allow them to work at the poem for themselves. One participant remarked that in the poem *The Ghost of a Chair*, she brought to mind the sculptural work of Rachel Whiteread, who renders the invisible visible through her attention to the negative spaces that objects create. This proximity to the foundations of my own poem gave me a sense of shared vision or a shared creative process. It was also a source of poetic enrichment to uncover new or other elements in the poem, some of which could contribute to the poems development or assist in affirming the existing one.

In the *White Plastic Chair*, the poem elicited a range of sensations. Participants talked of the poem creating

*“ a feeling of warmth toward the person” ;*

*“ changing the chair, symbolising an event”*

*“the chair is ordinary but the person sitting in it gives it a unique purpose”*

*“ anticipation”*

The chairs and users/consumers (participants) were engaged in sharing an experience around an everyday object which was identified by them as familiar and generally considered unremarkable. The encounter also allowed a space for an exploration of

the relationship between designer intention and users/consumer interpretation, one that moved from the functional or aesthetic i.e. it is or is not a comfortable chair; it is or is not a nice looking chair, to an examination, a search for meaning both personal and intimate, yet with the capacity to become a shared adventure. The objects and the poems were producing a moment of transformation, whether this lasts beyond the encounter is another question but in the moment the responses of the participants are real and their experiences based in reality.

The interaction with the chairs had been limited to observation and proximity. The functional characteristics of the chairs had not been explored as they were museum objects potentially creating an incomplete experience for the participants and reminding me as researcher that this may have impacted on the quality of the responses. The language and structure of the Haiku seemed to offer the participants an opportunity to indicate their reaction to this lack of opportunity and experience.

*“it reminds me of how we are not allowed to sit on any of the chairs”*

*“what is a chair, if not for use?”*

## **Theme 2 - Simple Objects Spark Big Themes**

The poet is a demanding user/consumer who probes, questions, reflects and contemplates the object of interest through close observation and interaction. The poet can be conceptualised not as passive but active and reactive, selective and susceptible. The language of poetry is based in sensing, feeling, emoting. It captures the significance of sensation. It is an intellectual, analytical and psychological way of looking and of knowing.

Within the Focus Group poetry about the object was sparking questions, many of which were about substantive issues such as the purpose of our being, our place in the universe as much as our place in society and culture. An object poem where a plastic chair was the focus was central in facilitating an examination the place in our lives of science and technology, of design and the environment. The Focus Group allowed the time and the poetry provided a scaffold to explore or confront difficult issues e.g. negative aspects of plastics. Often these big issues were placed in juxtaposition with something contrasting. In my poem *Plasticity*, the image of perpetually falling plastic chairs served to position science, maths and technology alongside the theme of love and life as a way of manifesting their intersection and the dynamic, ever changing nature of both.

One of the participants responded with a series of questions about the object, a series that he posed during both stages of the focus group;

*“I wanted to know who sat in the chair, who might own the chair, what is the person doing in the chair....”*

One might interpret the nature of his questions and other comments that he was engaging in a philosophical and existential probing. In the poem *The Ghost Chair* and in the presence of La Marie Chair, he remarked that it had generated questions about;

*“mortality and reality, visibility and purpose of existence”*

Participants also reflected on the potency of simple language that can evoke or conjure. They remarked on the impact of just one line to capture the essence of a poem but also to suggest something bigger, more significant. In *The White Plastic Chair* the last line reads

*– I sense that every time she takes a seat something happens.*

This line and the image of the writer sitting in a series of chairs was generating ideas of the authority of the sitter/writer, because the purpose of the chair was being determined by the sitter thus emphasising the significance of the human relationship and the footprint left on the object by that interaction. This positions objects in human activity as collaborative partners and reflects design that promotes the expressiveness of objects that are mundane, yet part of the everyday.

Even the Haiku with its brevity, its sense of the enigmatic and paired down structure stimulated responses that suggested bigger themes. The participants converged on key words like plastic, conspiracy (deceit) and science. The result of this was that they began to ask questions about the objects functionality; the relationship between the designed and the natural world; the significance of science and possibly the nature of scientific knowledge.

*“a simple object can have significant importance and value to people”*

*“keeping away from science would be safer”*

*“mistrust in the unnatural nature of plastic”*

### **Theme 3- Immediacy**

Although poetry has the potential to examine the human condition across a temporal spectrum i.e. it allows us to reflect upon the past and consider the future, its energy and enterprise is in the contemporaneous. It has immediacy. The poetic narrative places the object in the present, alongside the reader and the poet. In the Focus Group questions were being asked that relate to the here and now; to look for the imprint of the human interaction, the way that the object has been used.

This questioning was immediate and had proximity because the chair was present, albeit that it was not to be handled. It represents an interrogation of the object that could easily originate from the design process, with questions that sought to speculate about issues of function, ergonomics and aesthetics. Simultaneously, it aimed to illuminate and probe the relationship between the object and the user/consumer and by association link it directly to the designer. The position of these protagonists may correspond but may also illuminate new ways of looking, making, shaping. Such a proposition supports the significance of the user/consumer experience and in a human-centred design putting them at the heart of the design.

The Focus Group provided me with another level of creative conversation, one which looked beyond designers and poets to encompass other user/consumers. It created an encounter that brought the products of design and user/consumers together allowing for an object experience which stimulated an exploration of the relationship between poetry and design and an examination of the effect of design poetry on the experience of designed objects, in this case four plastic chairs.

*No product is an island. A product is more than the product. It is a cohesive, integrated set of experiences. (Don Norman, 2009)*

Being in the same place as the objects mirrors the shared trajectory of humans and objects. It also served as a platform for a dialogue between designer and user/consumer through the objects that they had designed. For the most part, objects such as plastic chairs are unremarkable, ordinary, everyday and easily overlooked. As a researcher and poet I brought the protagonists together creating a space for them to interact with the chairs on a level that is outside the quotidian, yet connected to it through the familiarity of the objects, the plastic chairs. By creating this encounter I

was encouraging participants to observe the chairs more closely than they would otherwise do and in so doing the chairs as designed objects were achieving a heightened significance. Through the use of a poetic narrative i.e. my poetry, I was also increasing the subjective value of the objects as participant responses suggested that they were probing their individual experiences and emotions. There was in fact, evidence of an emotional response in both stages of the Focus Group, whereby participants were utilising the encounter with the chairs as a way of unlocking meaning, but one that seemed to have further intensified in Stage 2 with the association of poetry. Unlike the work of Walker and Glen (2009), I was not measuring the objective value of the objects but aware that similar to their research, a poetic narrative was contributing to an increase in the emotional value of the objects. Such an outcome also suggests design poetry as a way of considering and examining the social, cultural and political aspects of contemporary design. Could we mitigate some of the negative issues of sustainability and mass consumption by taking advantage of the human propensity to attach 'emotionality' to designed objects (Chapman, 2012), to nurture a visceral empathy that engages us with the whole process of design, reducing the impact on the environment, to curb frivolous consumption but still provoke innovative, creative thinking in design.

#### 3.8.10. Poetry Validation

The purpose of poetry validation in my research was twofold. Firstly, it was a critical review that examined my poetry in the context of my research. Secondly, poetry validation asked the question *how good is my poetry*, a task which is loaded with subjectivity but one which gained an objective dimension through the act of sharing it with others.

For this inquiry, I adopted a tripartite, interrelated review that began with the poet and extended out toward the reader. I began with me as the poet, critically reviewing my own creative work on a continuous basis as the poem evolved and came to the public arena. The review of my creative work was structured on the blending of a series of critical responses. This echoed my research concept of the *Symphony of Voices* or a plurality of voices in the search for truth or truths. It also followed in the phenomenological focus of my research and the emphasis here on the expressive, experiential quality of the text for poet and reader alike.

1. The 'I' in Review: The personal review retained the phenomenological project of self-reflection and critical consciousness. Evaluation of the poetic artefact was achieved by a series or cycle of critical-creative activities, iteratively writing, reviewing, and re-writing.
2. Poetry Group Review: The next level of review occurred at my poetry group which operates an established approach used by the group leader (Appendix 8). The process is designed to offer the poet a broad, objective analysis of the creative work, whilst acknowledging a poetic disposition and appreciation of existing works. In this level of validation, there was potential for adding or uncovering new layers of meaning and intention, some of which may have eluded the poet.
3. In-Depth Review: The third level of in-depth criticism came from identified poets/writers who have demonstrated enthusiasm in assisting me in the process. They were also chosen on recommendation from the group leader, as they consistently show a high level of literary critical skill both in the group and in their own work outside.

#### **3.8.10.1. The 'I' in Poetry Review**

It began with me, the poet who engaged in a cycle of critical review of my own work, where I went through rounds of writing, reading, looking, listening, recording, revisiting, revising, rewriting and re-reading, looking and listening again in order to shape the poem into something. In his discussion of creative self-criticism in art and science, Popper remarked of the many creative artists whose creative work uses the method of trial and error and for whom 'work grows out of many corrections' (2012, p 229).

All writers should be their own critic. T.S. Eliot (1921, 2014) in his essay on criticism urges the need for the writer to examine himself or herself. He says:

*'criticism is as inevitable as breathing, and that we should be none the worse for articulating what passes in our minds when we read a book and feel an emotion about it, for criticising our own minds in their work of criticism.'* (*The Sacred Wood*, 1920)

Eliot views an author's self-criticism as the best kind of criticism. It is the self-criticism of one's own composition. He says that some writers are better creatively than others,



only because their critical faculty is superior. They are able to criticise their own work during the process of creation. The result is that the compositions are corrected and refined. He does not agree with the view that the great artist is an unconscious artist. He argues that critical activities and creative activities cannot be separated.

Translating this to my Journal, I remarked:

*'My own experience as a researcher and creative writer has led me to conclude that in order to write better, I must be my own critic, I must approach my creative writing with as much technical skill as artistic skill. I cannot write for others until the critic in me is satisfied. Even then, there is always scope for improvement. My journal is testament to this as my poetry undergoes round after round of revision and I have learned to retain these documents, regardless of their pitiful state as testament to the critical processes.*

Knowing when a poem is ready is a part of the self-critical process and is often based on a number of factors. I have explored the work of other poets who have themselves faced the critical question as to when a poem is finished. Armitage (2008), acknowledges the fact that poetry itself is not an exact science and should not be treated as such. I have combined his ten-point analysis with a strategy proposed by Patience Agbabi, poet and judge to the Bridport Poetry Prize (2016). In the blog entry for the prize, May 2016, she reminds entrants that poems rarely come out perfect first time and advises that the poet needs to play with the poem, read other poets, put the poem away for a while and return to it with renewed energy and perspective. She also describes the poem being exposed to the VISUAL-VISCERAL test, which combines instinctual, emotional and aesthetic elements to guide the poet to the moment of acceptance of the poem. This approach is also outlined by Faulkner (2009) as part of the editorial approach to poetry submitted for publication, who in addition recommends the reading aloud to test your own 'gut' reaction and to compare the effect with the poem on paper. The poet should ask how the poem looks, how it sits on the page. A poem behaves differently on the ear to that which appears on the page, both equally important.

A poetic inventory as suggested by contemporary poet and lecturer, Simon Armitage (The Independent, 2008, Appendix 7) was another route to self-evaluation. This recognises that poetry is both subjective and inexact, and suggests a series of steps that evaluate the poem internally as well as externally. This approach closely

resembles the Cattistock Poetry Group experience but is also carried out by the poet in relation to each poem.

*Skeuomorph* is a poem that represented the process of reflexive criticism in my creative work. Many of my poems appeared to have emerged fully formed and with the sense of myth and mystery about them. But they will have been the result of a process of observing, listening, reading, of searching for words that relay an idea or convey meaning. Many poems have also altered entirely. During my post as student-writer in residence at the Museum of Design in Plastics (MoDiP) and Arts University Bournemouth, the poem *Behold the Great Pretender*, written in response to an exhibition which explored the metaphorical and skeuomorphic properties of plastics began as a nine-stanza piece. It was crafted early in my research journey and its reception appeared to have been a positive one. However, due to my own critical review in the light of the passage of time, of my ongoing academic writing and a growing experience in writing poetry, I sensed that the poem demanded revision in order to communicate more effectively with the reader. The concept of the pretense of plastics could be better illuminated through a more simple, contemporary, unadorned poetic approach, one that relied less on bravura and pompous language. Its original posture felt too declaratory, too lofty. With echoes of the 1970 exhibition entry for the Isotope Chair (Dioptaz, 1968), 'a chair that does not declare itself until sat upon' (The Whitechapel Gallery, 1970, p95), the poem needed to be more vague, suggestive, such that the reader is invited in to uncover the meaning for themselves. The title also needed to suggest rather than declare. The word *skeuomorph* had a distinctive, redolent quality that I could not resist. I knew that the word would itself ask questions (it was a word for which the reader would seek clarification).

The poem went through an eight-stage revision between 2014 and 2018, with a gap of almost four years between the first iteration and the subsequent process of revision. Although the poem had an immediacy and I was happy with the first version in 2014, the passage of time had altered my view. I had emerged as a more confident poet but equally less accepting of the quality of a first draft underlining the need to 'walk-away' from a poem, to reflect upon it contextually, structurally, and as an object itself. The Armitage Checklist (appendix 7, 2008) was unearthed for me in the intervening years and served to reevaluate the poem. Having reviewed this list, I condensed its essence to key actions and reactions. These were looking, reading, noticing the sounds of the words, their visual impact and appeal, looking for meanings, crafting skills, finding

sensations in the poem, creating a place to inhabit for both poet and reader, finding enduring elements.

What was required was a more forensic approach to the poem, one in which I was 'putting every word on trial for its life' (Prose, 2006). I returned to the poem as I prepared the compilation of poetry that would be submitted as the creative output of my research. In this operation, my doubts about its effectiveness began to emerge. I observed a poem that had a significant message, but one which was concealed in efforts to demonstrate my abilities as a wordsmith and desire to flex my lexical skills. A process of dissection and radical re-shaping was carried out creating a 'messy' result.

Original published 2018 9 stanzas

1. Behold The Great Pretender *Renewed 2018*

1. *Too soon?*

2. *Shallow, aimless, formless, nothingness*  
(Moving toward something, anything, but what?)  
I The magician's slight of hand brings to life.  
To ~~lose~~ ~~conceal~~ ~~hide~~ ~~desire~~:  
A gifted child who sees the endless possibilities of play.  
Unfettered, confined only by the whim of man.

II *Symbol of our stay*  
Mirror to our souls.  
Excited by design.  
Lamented in decay.  
Are you what you claim to be  
Or has reality blurred our vision  
Preventing us from seeing.

III *The great pretender*  
Scripted by the creator's hand,  
Whose function has been lost,  
Transforms into a symbolic gesture  
To substantiate material existence.

IV *One eye fixed on the past*  
The other firmly faces to  
The next 'big thing'.  
Standing on the threshold of  
Re-defining who we are.

V *Displacing others to feel the eye*  
Aspiring to be, to satisfy the masses.  
Drawing us closer to the unreachable.  
*Faux life*  
*Faux life*  
*Faux god*

VI *Tattered, distressed, familiar yet infernal*  
It reproduces the thing itself and echoes of the past,  
Smuggling antinomistic values across the great divide.  
And in so doing becomes it  
Or so it seems.

7. *Toasting bones with a new enjoyment*  
Appearing as a timeless edifice  
Can we trust this child of man?  
Or is the *latter* cast to man?  
The eye may fall for such deceit  
The hands betray its counterfeits.

8. *Providing us with signs to navigate*  
In new landscapes and temporal ecologies.  
A comfort in transition toward a new existence.  
Replacing loss,  
Restoring equilibrium  
Bodies robbed by violence or disease or war.  
Minds disrupted with an absence.  
Skill vanishing, heading positions where there is vacancy  
Filling such deep longing to be whole.

9. *The oceans move now with abstract words*  
A toxic symbol of our transient, over changing desires  
And yet from this primordial soup  
We form, we cast and press  
We incarnate, we eat,  
Creating a new better, a new us.  
(On time, time new world?)

*shallow also.*

*Too long  
Too wordy  
Too verbose  
Annie's → Brauer!!  
needs modernising*

*relevant?*

*like this*

*must keep it*

*could look better*

*make it punchy!*

*keep \*xx*

*relevance?*

. Behold the Great Pretender. *Revision Begins in 2018*

This approach is mirrored by many poets and one which I recognised in my own work. The operation was central to the transformation of the poem into purer thought and closer to an ideal. As a personal endeavour, it was also one of the most satisfying activities in the drafting process as I began to recognise strengths and weaknesses, unexpected elements that demanded my attention. Lines and stanzas which failed to

contribute anything to the poem were removed. These were not abandoned, but filed for use elsewhere, a procedure that I have applied to other poems. Another example of revision, which I had learned from reading the poetry of others, is the use of visual strategies that can add specific emphasis, tone and strength to a line. One such technique is the spacing of words that allows the reader to pause on a word of significance in order to absorb its effect. In the final version of *Skeuomorph*, the poem reads

We stand on the threshold  
of re-defining who we are  
I see your game  
a shapeless    shameless    nothingness

The fourth line originally opened the poem and in a close word format, a structure which dampened and weakened the impact of the words in my mind, anticipating that it would similarly do this for the reader. The revised structure was designed to bring the reader to an emotional and intellectual threshold, disrupting the commonplace and challenging their perspective. The spacing placed extra weight on each word underscoring its importance in the poem.

I have presented below the original version number 1 and the final version number 8. The new version has given me more pleasure and achievement because I have contemporised its structure and form, maintaining a complexity but allowing the language to be deferential, less grandiose. It has been distilled and reduced to reach the essence of the poem. My judgements about the poem were given validation when the poem was read and critiqued by my poetry group. The feedback identified both creative and philosophical factors that made it a successful poem.

1. Poetry as a way of drawing attention to something significant.
2. A complex poem but one which allows the reader to enjoy working at it.
3. Use of a poetic structure and language that draws the reader in and makes them involved in the narrative.
4. The importance of the poem in the context of the debate around the impact of uncontrolled plastic consumption and its disposal. This debate has gathered political momentum recently, despite the existence of voiced concerns for many decades.
5. A collective responsibility in responding to the issues raised by plastics.

(Journal of the Plastic Chair)

**Version 1 (2014)**

**Behold The Great Pretender**

I.

Shapeless, shameless, formless, nothingness  
Moving toward something, anything, but what?  
The magician's slight of hand brings to life,  
To form, anything it desires.  
A gifted child who sees the endless possibilities of play,  
Unfettered, confined only by the whim of man.

II.

Symbol of our stay.  
Mirror to our souls.  
Exulted by design.  
Lamented in decay.  
Are you what you claim to be  
Or has reality blurred our vision,  
Preventing us from seeing.

III.

The great pretender  
Scripted by the creator's hand,  
Whose function has been lost,  
Transforms into a symbolic gesture,  
Substantiates material existence.

IV.

One eye fixed on the past.  
The other firmly faces to  
The next 'big thing'.  
Standing on the threshold of  
Re-defining who we are.

V.

Displacing others to fool the eye.  
Aspiring to be, to satisfy the masses.  
Drawing us closer to the unreachable.

Faux fur,  
Faux life,  
False god.

VI.

Textured, distressed, familiar yet inferred.  
It represents the thing itself and echoes of the past,  
Smuggling aristocratic values across the great divide.  
And in so doing becomes it  
Or so it seems.

VII.

Teasing senses with a new integument,  
Appearing as a timeless edifice.  
Can we trust this child of man?  
Or is the fakery ours to own?  
The eye may fall for such deceit,  
The hands betray its counterfeit.

VIII.

Providing us with signs to navigate  
In new landscapes and temporal crossings.  
A comfort in transition toward a new aesthetic.  
Replacing loss,  
Restoring equilibrium.  
Bodies robbed by violence or disease or want.  
Minds disrupted with an absence,  
Still sensing, needing presence where there is vacancy.  
Filling such deep longing to be whole.

IX.

The oceans move now with abundant waste,  
A toxic symbol of our transient, ever changing desires.  
And yet from this primordial soup,  
We force, we cast and press,  
We reincarnate, re-use,

Creating a new estate, a new us.  
Oh brave, brave new world.

**Version 8 (2018)**

**Skeuomorph**

(after Barthes. R, 1957, *Plastics in Mythologies*)

We stand on the threshold  
of re-defining who we are  
I see your game  
a shapeless    shameless    nothingness  
aspiring to be something else  
to satisfy the masses  
bring us closer to the unreachable  
hiding in the stuff of alchemy  
—luxury objects that consent to be prosaic  
—you become our buckets and our jewels

what are you really  
a reminder of the past  
or the next big thing  
a high-stakes dealer in the imitation game  
you tease our senses  
textured    distressed    familiar

do we trust your plastic hold  
you may replace the others  
allow our eyes to fall for your deceit  
but a human touch betrays you  
faux fur    faux life    false god.

The oceans move with your abundant waste  
a toxic symbol of our transient, ever changing desires  
and yet from this synthetic soup  
we force    we cast and press  
we reincarnate    re-use  
create a new estate

### **3.8.10.2. Poetry Group Review**

The view of other poets offered another dimension to methods of gaining feedback on my poetry. The outsider's view helped me to determine how my creative work fulfilled the purposes of my research. Feedback is one of the fundamental aspects of developing creative writing as well as the key skills that underpin the integration of the critical-creative.

As a member of a local poetry group, I have monthly, three hour meetings where there are opportunities to both share and receive poetry. The group of 6-8 poets, is led by a well-published poet and artist who also teaches creative writing and poetry criticism. Her critical approach is highly regarded within the group which also includes several other published poets and writers as well as new poets, not yet published. Each session includes a close reading and critical conversation of a contemporary published poem.

The expectation is that each poet reads their own creative work and remains silent as feedback is given. After discussion amongst the others, the poet is invited to remark upon the feedback and make a statement of intent. Feedback is designed to help the poet and reader gain a full experience of the poem. Comments are a mix of positive and negative with the purpose of improving the poem, preparing it for publication or competition. Feedback is not always easy to accept and on occasions, it can feel harsh. The expectation is to be able to justify your poetic choices but to also consider alternative ways of handling the architecture and content of the poem, thus developing more finely tuned critical skills as well as dealing with the harsh realities of making a literary contribution, of placing a poem in the public arena.

As poets in a poetry group, we are all encouraged to enter our work in various competitions as well as submit to poetry publications, this avenue could be another potential form of critical feedback with the advantage of the poet not being known by the reviewer making the process, in part, more objective. The disadvantage of this method is that it is not predictable and often takes several months to secure a response, if at all. The weight of the number of entries to competitions and publications also means that no individual feedback is given unless the poet requests it and pays a fee for the review.



The poetry group facilitator expects that revised work will be returned to the group for review to reinforce the relevance and importance of a rigorous cycle of writing- reading – reviewing – revising – re-reading. The purpose of this is to encourage the poet to develop and hone their craft and technique without compromising their innate and instinctual poetic drive. Annie Freud, who leads the Cattistock Poets, describes her approach to the monthly poetry meetings: (Appendix 8). In discussions with other poets in my group, I record the feedback and use it in making decisions about revising the poem after the event. My poetry has been subjected to rounds of review and revision throughout the research journey and some of it remains unfinished, unchanged, some improved with revision and some altered entirely. Revision and rewrite was done through the journal reflections and as part of the work carried out in the Journal.

### **3.8.10.3. In-depth Review**

Based on the approach used in this group, I identified two poets whose work I both admire and enjoy, who would consider acting as critical reviewers and were able to offer a detailed written review for two of my poems that had not been read at the poetry group meeting. This allowed me to share the collection of poems more widely.

This review also differed from the group review in that it was a one-to-one dialogue. It was constructed as a formal review, resembling a *Poetry Surgery* as used by, for example, The Poetry Society (<http://poetrysociety.org.uk/>). These priced surgeries take place around the UK and are open to members. Both poets chosen for the review preferred not to receive remuneration. They were:

Lisa Wilson

Nick Morris

Both poets were approached with the request and they responded in the affirmative. An information sheet and consent form were sent to each one (Appendix 9). Having consulted the group leader as to how best to present the exercise, I sent each poem via email with a statement of intent for the poem (Appendix 9a &b). This broadly outlined the purpose of the poem in the context of my research. The structure of the criticism/critique was left to the poet's own judgement. The results of this procedure are seen in Appendix 9c.

The final decision about a poem was mine and some of the suggestions made started a process of review that resulted in minor changes to the poem or alternatively a more significant shift in the structure and content. The commentaries illustrated the reception of the poem from the point of view of another reader, which although difficult to generalise, nevertheless articulated potential strengths and inadequacies in the crafting of the poem, effective use of language, images and the visual layout and impact of the poem.

The state of being a finished piece of poetry is a contentious issue in poetry. Supporting the endless potential for alteration, Paul Valéry saw the work of a poet as an activity of unbroken meditation and may have remarked that a poem is never finished, only abandoned (quote widely attributed). Auden (1965) in Mendelson (2015), on the other hand regarded it as the finished expression of a feeling on a given occasion. One of my poet participants (Elaine) identified the individual nature of any decision and even found the act of publishing does little to eliminate the abundant nature of a poems existence and potential to grow.

Sometimes attempts to distill and condense within a poem seemed all too obvious to the poet until another perspective is provided. My poem '*Ghost of a Chair*' represents the balance of the poet's intentions and instincts against those of the reader. One of my critics found many of the elements that I had intended, but in his view there remained scope to develop the ideas further within the poem which might suggest weaknesses in the poetic crafting but also underline a conflict in the content of the statement of intent, an overly heavy-handed preface on my part to assist the reader that compromises the open interpretative nature of a poem. This also leads me to conclude that a poem that leaves a sense of ambivalence, of unfinished business is still a successful poem.

*'This poem works well at invoking a sense of confusion, thwarted discovery and a feeling of worldly uncertainty. In doing that, however, it throws up a lot of other big themes that are ripe for picking, but unfortunately remain on the branch.'* (Appendix 9c, p 306)

The process of writing a poem had much in common with the process of data analysis whereby writer-researcher experienced an intense interrogative cycle of available data. As the data were being reviewed and analysed, I was also creating poetry that reflected the data as well as representing an interweaving of my own responses and

experiences. Many of my poems continue to draw me back, in search of something more, in much the same way that the data continue to do so.

### 3.8.11. Composition of Poetry - A Chapbook (Poetry from the Chair)

Poetry as a method was used across the research process to collect data and field notes as well as representing and reinterpreting collected data. The construction of and transformation to poetry was regular, repeated and recurring throughout the process of the inquiry, underlining its significance as the creative element of the thesis and part of the final output. The presentation of the poetry as a compilation was given consideration throughout the research. In keeping with the concept of a *beautiful solution* (4.8.2, p 140), I chose to present my poetry in the form of a personally designed Chapbook. The purpose of the book for this writer-researcher was to represent an object with aesthetic value and a book of poetry that supported the thesis and reflected a holistic view of the research journey.

The choice of a chapbook, an early type of popular literature, which was first printed in Europe in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, is today a choice for the aspiring author who is yet to secure the publishing deal and for whom the modern technology offers a self-publishing route that is cost effective. It represents an affordable print version and can translate to the digital with ease. The Chapbook is very achievable for the independent publisher or with the availability of desktop publishing, even as a self-published work.

As a member of a poetry group I have become very aware of the importance of the Chapbook in the development of the poet's public body of work. It is positively encouraged amongst poets as a way of collating a body of work that sits together as a cohesive whole and represents the poet's work to date. Current interest in Chapbooks extends beyond the commercial with a growing scholarship around the genre and publications to accompany this enterprise. Smallwood et al (2012) see the chapbook as a simple means of presenting more poets to the public. Its connection with the reader is more intimate, especially when the book is handed to another. It is also a breeding ground for future poems and the poet can use it as an exercise in identifying their best work, a place for the preparation and organisation of work in advance of a grander publication

## 4. Main Findings

### 4.1. Overview

This chapter sets out the findings of my research and the implications that this research has for existing knowledge. The purpose of this qualitative inquiry was to explore the interplay of design poetry with users, designers and the objects of design. In the course of this inquiry I have identified that designers use poetry to inspire design and poets write about designed objects. What has been absent is a conscious articulation of the role of poetry in the expression of design as an active interplay between the key protagonists, designers, user/consumers and the objects or artifacts of design. The idea of design poetry represents a compelling interaction between poetry, design, society and culture, as a responsive vehicle through which we connect with and understand designed objects whilst endeavouring to produce and advance them.

Design writing is a significant area of research and scholarship. The relationship between poetry and design is established through the concept of design poetics, which represents a theoretical and practical shift in viewing the ordinary objects of design, one that focuses on more than the functional or instrumental. Rather it fuses these characteristics with notions of the experiential, of sensing, feeling, emoting by attempting to review and re-envision the usual expression of thought and the translation into artifacts or objects.

I have also begun to explore how design poetry influences the ways in which we view designed objects. Underlying the purpose of this inquiry is the proposition that objects and people interact in a dynamic cycle of relationships. My research has demonstrated that poetry can enable a unique expression of these relationships. Writing of it assists us in negotiating its complexities, unlocking its diverse meanings. This position is supported by a series of findings generated by my research through the unique methodological approach that I adopted and the specific methods used to gather data. The data have underlined how poetry is used as a cultural tool and how design poetry functions in communicating as well as telling a story or stories. However, my findings also represent knowledge about the growing utility and potential of a crafted poetic form, that narrates the wide reach of design in a contemporary world. Such a research destination could not have been achieved if I had not posed my specific question or

utilised the chosen methods which produced the data. Likewise, it would never have been my research journey, had I not encountered the rich resource and opportunities provided me, through working with the Museum of Design in Plastics (MoDiP) and Arts University Bournemouth; the creative encounters with designers, with other poets and user/consumers; the experiences with objects, all of which have generated the diverse voices that constitute my unique research contribution.

The outcome of this inquiry has been established in a series of critical and creative procedures that have

1. engaged with and examined the current literature and consideration of the concept of design writing;
2. situated the creative conversation as central to the collection of data from three key protagonists i.e. designers, poets and users/consumers;
3. contributed toward the creation of a book of design poetry and the critical review of that poetry.

This research has generated a number of key findings which are further discussed in the sections below.

1. Finding One: design poetry can link the object to a wider context;
2. Finding Two: design poetry can increase the emotional response to designed objects;
3. Finding Three: design poetry can provide a vehicle through which we can unlock meaning in an object;
4. Finding Four: design poetry can extend the boundaries of what is considered appropriate subject matter for poetry;
5. Finding Five: design poetry can illuminate contemporary design issues;

#### **4.2. design poetry can link the object to a wider context**

*No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main;* (John Donne, Meditation XVII, 1624)

Design poetry assists in linking the object to its historical, political and cultural context. In this inquiry the choice of the plastic chair as my designed object of interest, has proven to be an ideal contemporary lens through which to explore these issues, as it

locates the object in a specific historical timeframe, one in which plastic as a material has made significant changes to the way we view and consume everyday designed objects. The story of the object, in this case the plastic chair, places it alongside the wider contextual stories of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries where, for example, the politics of consumption and waste have become key areas of public concern on a global level. Designers are looking at how best they can create and make sustainably, whilst maintaining commercial lead, given that plastic has provided them with an ideal material to push design boundaries. The plastic chair was the springboard and inspiration for my creative endeavours but as my research unfolded, I was also widening my gaze so that other designed objects became a focus, particularly those brought to the inquiry by research participants.

Through the poetry that I have created for the plastic chair, I have been able to illuminate and explore the wider contexts of the social, political and cultural issues that relate to the subject of my inquiry. With poetry as my creative tool I have been provided with a very personal vehicle through which I, as the poet, can articulate and explore my own experience, in the knowledge that it may also serve others. This has been achieved through a number of poetic strategies i.e. the manipulation of language and structure; through an exploitation of the metaphor; and by allowing space for interpretation. As an example, poetry allows for condensing and distillation of language whilst still locating a range of ideas, concepts, and themes within its structure. The process of distillation is depicted most acutely in the haiku or very short poem following in the tradition of the Japanese original format. In my haiku, I set out to underline two related issues; the conflict of identity of the plastic chair in terms of its classification as art or design and secondly the narrative potency captured in the material, plastic.

### **Chair – Haiku x 2**

A plastic one  
To sit on?  
Perhaps looking is better

I see clearly  
The conspiracy—  
Of material silence

This poem sequence served to identify the social and political impact of design. Its effect in the Focus Group Conversation (p112-113) was to demonstrate the potential of a poem to condense and distill big issues of contemporary concern i.e. objects functionality; the relationship between the designed and the natural world; the significance of science and the nature of scientific knowledge.

The crafting of haiku is no less consuming than more conventional formats and has the advantage of translating easily to modern communication methods such as those found in contemporary social media. The reach of these platforms allows greater access and engagement with both the poetic medium as well as the breadth of issues that this medium can facilitate. This enables a service to poetry in helping to reinvigorate a literary form sometimes considered to have lost favour.

The interpretation can vary widely as the reader finds different things in the poem some of which may even be unintentional on the part of the poet. The poem in a sense becomes the reader's and the poet relinquishes ownership. This handing over to the other echoes closely the designer's position. Ron Arad (Appendix 4, p206) remarked

*'You're welcome to do whatever reading and interpretation. I mean once I've done it it's yours to... I'm not going to protest about any of your interpretations.'*

A poem creates a metaphorical 'call to arms' to engage with an idea, an issue, a notion that is bigger than the object itself. There is a demand for the poet and reader to confront something that might otherwise be overlooked or neglected. The presence of an object in the poem can serve as a metaphor, a symbol, a tool for deconstructing a more complex set of propositions which may be shared by the poet and reader but equally found anew by each of them. In my poem *'Sitting Quietly'* I urge that the chair is not just a chair, asking the reader to consider the places where the plastic chair appears, underlining its binary acts as both visible and invisible; its power to be both an object of domestic function or instrument of violence; an object that holds a range of human emotions, such as tenderness and compassion, whilst equally capable of carrying cruelty and indifference. The Journal of the Plastic Chair captured many images which told their own narrative, illustrating these diverse concepts without the need for text, but the presence of the plastic chair was the instrument or vehicle through which I felt compelled to respond poetically. Its presence across the narratives became the embodiment of the ideas I wanted to express.

Here, I demonstrate an example of this transformation through my responses to a series of images included in the Journal. The poem was visually driven and reflects my individual interpretation, but in the poem I hope to convey something of the context that traverses social, cultural and political boundaries.

*Extract from The Journal of the Plastic Chair:*

*As I observe the images of young women sitting on white, plastic garden chairs outside a ramshackle bar, somewhere on the Asian continent, I see goods and services for hire, these women have been reduced to tradable goods. Their pimps sit close by, observing. Fear fills the faces of the young girls but resignation too. They are trapped in a cycle of abuse, violence, exploitation. Behind the girl in the centre of the image a sign reads 'Go Go Girls, Hot Stuff for Lovers'.*

*The second image shows a group of people who have received wheelchairs from the Free Wheelchair Mission, transforming the lives of disabled people in developing countries. They seem happy or are they?*

*The third image from the Daily Mail showed seven young men placed in white garden plastic chairs. They had all been shot execution style, by drug criminals. Each one has a placard pinned to their bodies, saying 'Beware. This is what happens to thieves'. I am unsettled by this. The silent chairs scream of violence and death.*

*The fourth image set*

- 1) the interior of a church in East Bohemia. St Bartholomew's redesigned by Czech designer Maxim Velcovsky, using white Panton S chairs;*
- 2) Brain Duffy's images of model Amanda Lear for the cover of Nova Magazine, 1979;*
- 3) Kate Moss, posing naked on the front of Vogue, January, 1995,. What contrast and contradiction they display!*

### **Sitting Quietly**

A plastic chair is not a chair that stays the same.  
It starts as white and stacks, one on the other.  
It sits in commune with mankind,  
In all the places that we inhabit,  
It shares our journey.



Willingly.

It needs no language to fit in.  
No confusion of tongues on Shinar's plains.  
It speaks of people,  
hears the record of their lives,  
And keeps the secrets

unconditionally.

It finds its way onto every stage.  
Taking front and centre,  
Under the camera's heated gaze.  
Hiding too in all the darkest recesses of our world,  
Instrument of human trade,  
accomplice in deeds diabolic and depraved.

Never judging.

Silent observer, passive spectator,  
impermeable yet absorbing history,

but for how long?

In giving the chair a metaphorical status, the poem invites the reader to interpret the object in the context of their own experience. My poetry is more akin to a conversation that extends thinking beyond the simple description of an object to a more thoughtful consideration of broader issues. The metaphor is used across creative domains as a cognitive strategy to assist our thinking, assisting us in understanding our experience of one thing in the context of another. It is a device that is most at home in poetry and other literary genres. I take the view that the metaphor cannot replace other forms of reasoning, but it is a useful tool that contributes to and complements my thinking. In a world where objects feature as part of our everyday experience we might feel justified in deriding our material companions for their contribution to the social, political and environmental entanglements that they create. The designed object has unique metaphorical characteristics, some of which are very personal but many share much

broader social and cultural associations making their contribution to a deeper understanding of the complexities of human existence.

### **4.3. design poetry can increase the emotional response to designed objects**

The literature has already identified the importance of the subjective and emotional in design (Norman, 2005). From a commercial perspective, our consuming behaviours are often linked to the emotional attachment we place on objects of design. Emotions play a crucial role in assisting our understanding of the world, even allowing us to speculate about the future. This is a key component of design that focuses on a human-centred approach, one which places people centrally and one which values the positive affect in an object. Research has also established how the addition of a crafted narrative or personal story increases the subjective value of objects, even acquiring a significant objective (monetary) value in the process (Walker and Glen, 2012). I have not set out to measure the objective value of my poetry to the plastic chair, but the evidence from my research supports the outcome that the very act of talking about the object with others, of crafting poems about it and sharing those poems to others is an agency for change. In other words, the conversation has added an emotional value. This has been achieved through the medium of my own poetic approach, one which often anchors an object in its narrative and by creating contingencies that allow creative conversations with others.

My poetry is my own personal, internal, subjective experience, a journey into the constructed, designed world. My presence or persona in a poem albeit ambiguous, adds to its subjective nature and connects the object to the emotional bias of the poet. My poetry frequently speaks directly to the object, interrogating it in a literary convention that expresses a range of sentiments. *Skeuomorph – after Barthes* was crafted in response to *Is this Plastic?* an exhibition at the Museum of Design in Plastics (MoDiP) and Arts University Bournemouth, which celebrated the potential for plastic to imitate and emulate other artefacts for display and affectation. It also draws on *Plastic*, by Roland Barthes, his 1957 (2009) essay from the series *Mythologies*, which predates what is now known of the impact of plastics on our ecology, but nonetheless underlines the ability of the material to become anything. Barthes remarked that plastic as a material is

*'a miraculous, eternal substance....'* (p28)

*'the stuff of alchemy.....'(p 97)*

*'plastic is the very idea of its infinite transformation, it is ubiquity made visible.'* (p110)

### **Skeuomorph**

(after Barthes. R, 1957,2009, *Plastics in Mythologies*)

We stand on the threshold  
of re-defining who we are  
I see your game  
a shapeless    shameless    nothingness  
aspiring to be something else  
to satisfy the masses  
bring us closer to the unreachable  
hiding in the stuff of alchemy  
—luxury objects that consent to be prosaic  
—you become our buckets and our jewels

what are you really  
a reminder of the past  
or the next big thing  
a high-stakes dealer in the imitation game  
you tease our senses  
textured    distressed    familiar

do we trust your plastic hold  
you may replace the others  
allow our eyes to fall for your deceit  
but a human touch betrays you  
faux fur    faux life    false god.

The oceans move with your abundant waste  
a toxic symbol of our transient, ever changing desires  
and yet from this synthetic soup  
we force            we cast and press  
we reincarnate            re-use  
create a new estate.

The *Poet Conversations* created a scenario which enabled poets to spend time with the object, to revisit the emotions and experiences in their own poems, creating a cascade of personal reflections on events, relationships and feelings. In the case of Elaine, her poem sparked an exchange of poetry between us. *Pouring* is a poem generated in response to her published poem *Little Puffin Jug*, which she brought to the encounter. It began as the focus of our conversation but the situational influences and the *jouissance* of the encounter prompted my own poetic response.

This follows in the tradition of poets writing in response to the work of another poet who has inspired them, borrowing some element or elements of the poem and even re-contextualising some aspect of the poem. The result is a poetic conversation which traverses language, time and culture, making both objective and subjective connections in the process.

*Pouring*, both reflects and inverts some of the emotions in Elaine's poem. Like a jug or photograph, it holds optimism and sadness, it is cherished and frequently discarded.....

### **Pouring - Companion Poem**

She brought with her a little puffin jug  
I asked her why -  
because it would have been a photograph  
the sadness wrapped inside the lost, abandoned thing  
it takes me to the void between us  
fills it with loneliness  
so that it is never empty.

### **Small Puffin Jug**

This morning,  
I decided to open the boxes  
we never meant to leave  
for quite so long,  
  
and there you were, our puffin jug –  
all plump and optimistic,

ready to start over,  
be filled

So I went to the garden,  
picked marigolds,  
laid a table.

*Elaine Beckett (2016), Faber and Faber*

By foregrounding an object in many of my poems, I have challenged the reader to confront it and bring to the poetic encounter all the preconceptions, feelings and emotions that exist in their minds. Although any interpretation resides with the reader, my poem serves to trigger emotional and subjective responses. By asking others to engage with my creative work, I have extended and widened the discourse. I have asked others to work at the poem, a condition that is immediately value-adding. Several poets were asked to critically review a number of my poems, a process which allowed them to confront the poems from a critical perspective as well as the inherent content and subject matter. *The Ghost of a Chair – Clear Thinking*, which utilises concealment as a poetic technique, appealed to Nick Morris for its child-like quality and the dialogue between a poet and a clear plastic chair. This technique confers subjective value on the object within it, since it asks the reader to enter the conversation.

In addition, the act of bringing a poem to the poetry group is viewed as publishing, as voicing and bringing it to public attention. The poem is no longer a solitary act but a public display. It is written with a reader in mind. Such a position for me would have been a distant goal at the outset of my inquiry but became an essential part of the critical commentary that underpins the purpose of my research.

I have also moved from that place where my choice of poetry of plastic chairs was viewed by others with incredulity and as peculiar, to a revised position where object poetry has challenged me to change the way I observe the world as well as elevating the object in my consciousness. In sharing my creative work, I have asked others to reevaluate their own views and perspectives. *Skeuomorph* above, when read to one of my poetry groups, created as much discussion about the concept of skeuomorphism and the role of plastics in the context of contemporary social, scientific and political discourse, as it did about the structure and form of the poem itself. Elaine remarked

that it was complex but that she 'enjoyed working at it'. Another of my poet friends reported to me how the poem had altered her thinking about plastics. It had become a 'call to arms' about an issue of local and global concern. She asked me if she could take the poem to another poetry group as she felt that it had much to say about the politics and impact of plastic consumption and demanded to be heard. As the poet and researcher, the process of the inquiry and the public engagement with other poets has taken me from a novice, reluctant poet to one more confident and courageous about my creative work. It has also framed a designed object as a legitimate and potent subject for poetry.

### **Pater Noster (Our Father)**

Who came to see these grey chairs?  
A holy sea of grey in a golden glow.  
Thousands on a pilgrim's path,  
following in the feet of thousands gone before.  
Now casualties of zealous crowds who long to glimpse St Peter's  
heir.  
They will make their offering again, without question, Day after  
Day.  
Collecting stories from the multitude of Babel's Tower,  
they continue to bear the weight of the hoards,  
swelling the ranks of those who share the passion and the pain.

From on high the saints look on with nonchalant regard.  
The grey against the golden glow,  
the flashing scarlet of the guards,  
a tiny white figure emerges to a roar of thousands in the square.  
Contained and cheery chatter transforms into the cries of ecstasy  
and madness, as chairs are pushed and dragged and toppled  
against the human rush to reach the boundary  
and glimpse the simple man, an old man  
elevated to greatness by his peers,  
carrying the weight of a church on his small shoulders,  
a church sitting at a crossroads.

Mothers reach towards the little man as he passes by.  
Their babies thrust before him for his kiss, a blessed kiss.  
Frightened, crying children thrown toward the cavalcade with little  
care for the precious bundle.  
The chosen child is greatly blessed, its tears and fear ignored by  
an exalted parent.  
Forgive our foolishness.

Who came to see these grey, unnoticed chairs?  
Battered, bruised and weather-aged.  
Honoured guests at lofty celebrations,  
welcoming the new and bidding farewell at many passings.  
Do they sit at the right hand of the Father?

Ordered and disordered.  
Marking time, safe behind the sacred line,  
ignorant of a world beyond,  
eyes closed to horror and betrayal,  
keeping secrets through years of silence and duty.  
Who came to see these grey chairs?  
Will their Kingdom come?  
Their sins be all forgiven?

*Pater Noster* was the first poem I brought to the poetry group early in the research process. For a first poem to the group, it generated surprise at the audacity of combining unexpected and incongruous elements as well as suggesting that a plastic chair was anything other than white in colour. The poem conflated the issues of faith, belief and human frailty around a mass produced, grey, polypropylene chair, set in the grand surroundings of a baroque piazza in Rome, where chairs numbered in the thousands. It celebrated subjectivity; thinking and observing through the eyes of another, exploring personal issues of spirituality and faith whilst touching concrete issues of human design. The poem challenged both poet and reader to reassess our relationship with objects or things, that occupy the tangible and intangible.

Design poetry increased the emotional or subjective response of the object and evidence for this was also found within the Focus Group Conversation, an encounter that brought participants into close contact with plastic chairs. Poetry had created an

emotional shift for the participants in the course of the encounter. Their initial exposure to general information about a plastic chair had evoked a range of responses that crossed issues relating to the chair's functionality, usability and some feelings about it as an object. In response to the factual information about La Marie (Ghost) Chair by Philippe Starck, remarks included;

*"Futuristic, the name fits the chair – a bit flat, not sure it would suit the older person"*  
(Leigh)

*"Cold, clinical, uninviting"* (Jacky)

*"Colourless, looks like glass- expensive"* (Jane)

(Focus Group Conversations)

In response to design poetry their affective reactions had become intensified and they were identifying with the plastic chairs. In the case of the poem *Pater Noster*, the effect was to transport the participants to a place, enabling them to become part of a spectacle, facilitating them in sharing the experience with the poet and the objects. They were spending time with the object, the result of which was that they were developing empathy for the chairs and ascribing them human qualities. From their perspective the poem had illuminated the overlooked, the ordinary. The objects (grey plastic chairs) were being elevated above the everyday by virtue of the poem's narrative and the connection to the human story. Design poetry was humanising the object, building deeper connections with users/consumers.

*"Felt sad for the chairs. (Jay)*

*Do they deserve respect when we sit on them every day?" (Jay)*

*"It feels as though you are the chair"* (Leigh)

(Focus Group Conversations)

*White Plastic Chair* had similarly connected with the Focus Group participants on an emotional level. In the poem I had placed a poet friend in a unextraordinary white plastic garden chair. Responses from the group demonstrated a heightened sense of perception of the poem being populated by human relations and emotional connections between people and objects.



*“It feels like home” (Chante)*

*“Love felt toward a friend” (Jay)*

*“The chair is ordinary but the person sitting in it gives it a unique purpose” ((Jane)*

(Focus Group Conversations)

By taking advantage of the human propensity to attach the emotional to designed objects and nurturing a visceral empathy that engages users with an experience of them and the process of design, poetry was asking participants to confront and reflect upon a wide range of issues. Such a conclusion suggests a role for design poetry in eliciting emotions and mitigating some of the vexed issues around design, such as of sustainability and mass consumption. By for example giving the objects a value more than monetary, by creating a relationship with designed objects and having an emotional attachment to them, we might be more inclined to retain or recycle them. The potential of design poetry to connect with consumer’s emotions can also pave the way toward a competitive commercial advantage.

#### **4.4. design poetry can provide a vehicle through which we can unlock meaning in an object;**

Design poetry provides a vehicle through which we can unlock meaning in an designed object. A poem is an evocation of a human response to the complexities of life. It assists in unlocking meaning. An object in a poem is a powerful tool or vehicle for drawing together or conjuring up a statement or explanation of one’s own existence. Within the confines and restrictions of the poetic form, the poet can manipulate and shape a view of the world from a very personal perspective.

The following four poems represent the capacity of poetry to be an agency of mediation. These poems are from the catalogues of the participants in my Poet Conversations as well as my own.

Elaine, reflecting on one of her own poems about an object, a little puffin jug, remarked that the poem had the capacity to summon-up an existence. As she described the jug, it stirred memories;

*'I was considering where we bought it. Pembrokeshire or West Scotland?'* (Appendix 6a )

The actual object, the jug is small but the poem augments and magnifies it in the mind of the poet and reader. The object becomes the relationship and takes the poet back to a time and place.

This poem is a conduit into everything, a path to insight and interpretation for both poet and reader. It achieves an expanded view by adapting a minimalist/reductionist approach to knowing and using a methodology that is concise and pithy, it concentrates and sharpens the focus of the poem. It exploits the metaphor as a philosophical mechanism to explain/explicate and illuminate more complex concepts. Grounding the poem around an object not only foregrounds the place of the object in the consciousness but also facilitates thinking and understanding in the known, the recognisable, the familiar, enabling us to negotiate the politics and vicissitudes of real life. The Little Puffin Jug is the object that enables us to connect with people over time and space. It becomes part of the human capacity to collect history through encounters with other people as well as the many objects and artefacts that co-exist in this space.

The poem imbues, instills the objects with a lifespan outside that of the poet and the object alike. A poem represents a journey and the objects within it the touchstone of the experience. The physical objects may no longer exist but the poem resists temporal alteration by restoring those objects to the point at which the poet and reader first encountered them. The objects are often used as nostalgia, a sentimentality for the past in which the objects serve as the evocation or point of convergence for recollections.

The objects and the poems are also used as strategies for processing complex issues. In the poet conversations Maya spoke of 'taking the personal and making it universal', as she recalled the significance of doors as the objects in much of her early poems. In these poems, the doors represent the co-existence of pain and comfort, fear and excitement, love and hate, emotions that have potent meanings for her and memories of childhood, but they can equally represent a life and experience of another.

### **Door (by Maya Pieris)**

I used to like photographing doors  
And, during that early period

when things were still opening up,  
and going on holiday seemed fun,  
I would take endless shots of them  
with the camera you chose for me.  
Shots of the French rural: French urban-  
we went to France a lot-  
or random National Trust gems  
but never that door,  
from an even earlier period,  
or its neighbour on the bungalow  
out of which I shot to see what happens  
when a door shuts hard on a person  
not sure if they're coming or going.

*The White Plastic Chair*, is a poem which serves to convey or mediate personal meaning for me. It summons-up an existence by distilling a description of an encounter with a poet whose work I admire and who is also a mentor to me in my poetic endeavours. The poem was written in response to a visit that I made to her house early in my research journey, a visit that would radically change my writing and poetic development. During the visit, we shared lunch, we talked poetry, plastic chairs and she read to me from her new book of poems, not yet published. She also sat in many chairs during the visit, one of which was a white monobloc plastic chair set in her garden. The object captured a broad sweep of emotional and physical responses for me as a poet; the excitement of having poetry read to me by the poet, the influence of the experience on my own poetry, writing a poem whilst recalling a real experience, the interconnections of objects in the scenes that were being played out, the association and kinship between two poets and their poetry.

### **The White Plastic Chair**

And seated in a sumptuous chair,  
She reads to me from her new book of poems,  
Her words flow like smooth, rich chocolate,  
An earthly feast made first for gods.  
Then she feeds me  
green, homemade soup

with vegetables mingled and fused to softest velvet, warm and sweet.

And after lunch, she reads again seated in yet another chair, a poet's throne.

In her garden she sits upon a white plastic chair, filling space and time and everything between with words, her words.

I sense that every time she takes a chair, something happens.

*Grenoble*, is one of the poems which Annie read to me and one which for her summoned-up a multitude of sensations and memories of her own existence. In it she uses objects to represent something else. She describes these as *symbols of feminine accoutrements*, recognisable by their ordinariness, of being commonplace yet at the same time being objects of desire that can exert power over the poet and even the reader. This potential to make deep-rooted connections with the individual is illustrated in a poem where the object or objects draw attention to themselves, competing against other elements of the poem and in so doing becoming audible above the deeper discourse. Their task is not to diminish the central tenet of the poem but underline or frame it in things that are familiar. The objects have poignancy because the importance of them transcends their function and place as everyday and familiar, suggesting that they hold more profound emotional relevance and characteristics.

## Grenoble

He said goodbye to his friends and walked through the wet streets  
to the hotel. She was already asleep in her white lace nightdress  
with her back turned to him. The sight of her gold bangle  
and cigarettes on the desk, the magazine with the half-done puzzle,  
her burgundy jacket slung over the chair and an airplane ticket  
sticking out of her bag, gave him such a shock, he almost cried out.

He sat for a few minutes and thought about the “husband”  
– about to stand trial for armed robbery and who needed her now –  
and he realised he hadn’t taken any of it seriously. He wondered  
about the trouble she always took with her appearance  
especially when everything seemed to be going against her.  
But wasn’t that something you could say about *all* women?

And so having no toothbrush with him, and feeling quite squalid  
he undressed and lay down next to her, on his back.  
I am never going to forget this night, he thought. Here I am  
after all with her incredible loveliness. And as he was about  
to turn over, he felt her foot threading itself between his ankles,  
twisting sideways for better purchase and pulling him close.

Courtesy of Annie Freud, 2015, Picador

Design elevates the ordinary objects of human design and allows us to create a dialectic that explores the internal and external worlds, the private and public life. A poetic vanitas mirrors the vanitas of painting by playing with the domestic symbols that represent the transience of life and the worthlessness of worldly pleasures and objects. The ambition of my poem *Plastic Vanitas* is to reflect and endorse the potency of a traditional vanitas. It also aims to contemporise it and position a poem as a vehicle through which new audiences can connect with real world issues. It achieves a *Domestic Disturbance* (Costello, 2008), where the poet ruptures the silent surfaces of the objects so that the simple, the commonplace is wrenched onto a grander stage, but simultaneously brought nearer to us and drawn into our consciousness. Annie remarked of my poem that it ‘created a sense of the objects being observed’. We are allowed space to contemplate as the objects take on a totemic status but remain resolute in connecting the individual to issues of wider socio-political concern.

Still Life represents objects caught in a *conspiracy of silence* (Doty, 2002). Yet they hold within them an array of meanings through their life cycle and with each human interaction further meaning is associated. The objects are recipients of an ongoing narrative and in the incremental narrative they gain longevity, they live on even after the objects themselves have ceased to exist. A (Plastic) Vanitas creates a perfect space for poetry to explore and articulate the paradigmatic relationship between the inner, private world and the wider, public world of everyday existence. My poem *Plastic Vanitas*, presents an opportunity of uniting the realms of the (small) inner and (large) outer world, reflecting the often disharmonious social, political and economic realities that exist. *Plastic Vanitas* is a poetic response to an exhibition of objects from the collection held at Arts University Bournemouth, Museum of Design in Plastics (MoDiP), captured in the photographic artwork of Mariele Neudecker. In her images, she has elevated often unrelated, common, often domestic objects made from the material plastic and staged them in the Vanitas style. In so doing, she has subverted and redefined them to demand that the viewer consider a contemporary narrative around our relationship with both the objects and plastics as a material. My poem is also influenced by the creative work of William Carlos Williams. His experimental poem, *The Red Wheelbarrow* (1923) points out the relationship between things and the words we use to talk of them, a way of capturing human experience in all its complexities and chaos. He crystallises the vastness of experience through showing us the ordinary or at least images of ordinary, a red wheelbarrow, which despite it being mundane and concrete, has the power to both evoke conflict but simultaneously it can provide sanctuary from the emotional, mental struggle of life experience. The poem also aims to create 'A momentary stay against confusion.' (Robert Frost, 1939 in Maxson, 2005), allowing us a coherence of chaos, a clarity that is impermanent and fleeting. Yet through the oscillation between clarity and confusion, we learn, we set patterns for new action and we gain knowledge.

Poetic vanitas is a sympathetic and congruous creative vehicle through which I consider and penetrate real world issues. The themes or motifs of time, death and mutability are recurrent within my poetic work and frequently acknowledged by members of my poetry group. They may represent deep emotional connections in my own life, but serve me too in confronting the more universal issues articulated in the course of this research. Overtly these may be the decay of plastic, the ever-changing desires of human consumption, privately they are whatever the reader interprets.

### **Plastic Vanitas**

The table now is set for life,  
yet speaks to us of death, decay.  
Things made beautiful by use.  
What contradiction and confusion does this art display?

Vanity of vanities,  
worthless objects that still command desire,  
beauty lies down with ugliness and meaningless,  
before our eyes, they playfully conspire.

From darkness light reveals a glimpse.  
The view disrupted by its shafted beams.  
Still, life tastes bitter, sweet, in unequal parts.  
Illusion hides intent, as nothing here is what it seems.

The silence screams,  
as fragments of our lives are hurled upon the stage.  
The artist's hand has reached into Pandora's Box.  
With alchemy she dares to slow the march of age.

What foolishness this is,  
what crude conceit,  
our lives inconsequential  
wrapped lavishly in cold deceit.

The Focus Group Conversation represented another level of user/consumer response, one in which participants were probing their own emotional and intellectual responses to designed objects i.e. the plastic chair series (p107-108). Although the invitation to observe the objects had influenced the nature of the interaction, the addition of design poetry created an immediacy and heightened both individual and shared responses to the objects. I had created an opportunity, time spent with the object, one in which meaning was being explored and extracted; a place in which the listener was drawn by the virtue of the poetry.

*“I wanted to know who sat in the chair, who might own the chair, what is the person doing in the chair....” (Jez)*

In the encounter the participants were engaged in a dynamic deconstruction and reconstructing of personal meaning. A space had been created that allowed for interpretation in the context of the individual’s own experience, knowledge, beliefs and values. And in this space there was contingency to feel, imagine, experience and reflect on the immediately personal as well as the wider contexts of the social, political and cultural contemporary issues. The objects were being used to extend their purview even arousing substantial and significant themes. Design poetry was illuminating the overlooked, the everyday. An ordinary object was elevated by virtue of the human connection and the narrative invested in it.

*“chairs and humans have a similar experience of life” (Jane)*

#### **4.5. design poetry can illuminate contemporary design issues**

*‘The real JOY of design is to deliver fresh perspectives, improved well-being and an intuitive sense of balance with the wider world.....The real BEAUTY of design is its potential for secular, pluralistic expression.’*

*(Alastair Fuad-Luke, 2013)*

Design poetry offers a means of illuminating contemporary design issues. Through the *Designer Conversations* contemporary design was being placed under the spotlight. In the course of the conversations, I identified the issues of *Sustainability* and the *Beautiful Solution* as significant because of the frequency with which they were mentioned in the course of these conversations and their relevance in the wider discourse on design.

##### **4.5.1. Sustainability**

Sustainability, is viewed as an important goal in design. The achievement of thoughtful, economically viable, socially as well as environmentally sustainable solutions to everyday design is at the heart of what most designers look to achieve whilst trying to maintain commercial success. The discourse goes beyond the concept of recycling to the development of both healthy, sustainable systems and solutions that encourage a cultural shift in the way that we view consumption and, by consequence, approaches to the lifecycle as well as the lifespan of designed objects. Such a position demands a fine balance between design, production and consumption, an interface at which there



are tensions and competing priorities. Both Richard Liddle, designer of the RD (Roughly Drawn) extruded plastic chair and Christopher Pett, co-producer of the Ree, 100% recycled plastic chair, refer to some of the factors that influence the sustainability issue which relate to this intersection, for example the expense of technologies, both in terms of time and financial costs. Sustainability is also seen as a commercial asset, a marketing tool used by some design and manufacturing companies, who want to simply sell in numbers and whose goal is to promote the accessibility of design to the consumer. Christopher Pett described this approach to sustainability as;

*'using it as a way of flogging furniture'* (Appendix 4, p226),

those who operate on what Fuad-Luke (2013, p107) describes as *'sustainability by stealth'*. This position carries ambiguity as it represents the genuine intention to promote sustainability through for example, recycling existing components. However it can be simultaneously used as a commercial bandwagon to sell more products, creating a retail mania, a *stuff-lust*, that burdens consumers with a sense of obligation to replace rather than retain, renew, refurbish or recycle.

Through the Designer Conversations the role of sustainability in design was being viewed as a fundamental philosophical position which places the environment and the depletion of natural resources within the realms of responsibility of those who are involved in designing objects, built environments and services. A basic assumption is that design should comply with the principles of social, economic and ecological sustainability, and a departure from a frivolous, wasteful approach that increases the threat to the global habitat. With the concept of endurance of systems and processes, new thinking around sustainability in design promotes diversity and productivity, by reducing the negative effects on the ecosystems.

The Focus Group Conversations brought the user/consumer perspective to the discussion. Using design poetry in these encounters, participants were facilitated in sharing both the concrete and emotional aspects of design and exploring their responses to specific designed objects, the plastic chairs. Issues of consumption and sustainability were embedded in the conversation regardless of the addition of design poetry, but with it, connections and responses to the objects were heightened and intensified.

Although consumption and sustainability filtered much of my poetry, in crafting the poem *Cast Away*, I attempted to focus the attention on the key issues in the sustainability discourse. The act and process of writing the poem also helped to focus my mind on my individual role as both consumer and user/consumer. It served to remind me that my own poetry was an agency through which I articulated accountability for my own contribution to a more sustainable approach to consumption. The poem started in response to the recurrent, persistent advertising in the media, which encouraged consumers to replace their sofa, with the promise of extraordinary deals to suit their individual needs. The image of sofas disposed of through fly tipping underlined the cycle of sustainability from a consumer's perspective and desperation to replace the old with something new. I felt that the poem needed to have an inconclusive emphasis and by leaving the subject matter obscure, it could be interpreted in different ways. For example, around the theme of violation, it leaves an uncertainty as to who or what is being violated. By structuring the poem in a traditional ode shape, I aimed to locate the poem across a historical divide, thus underlining the continuing nature of the problem and the lack of commitment to address the human impact of uncontrolled consumption of designed objects. The poem traverses the seasons, a significant poetic metaphor, within which one identifies and evokes the traditional poetic themes of the cycle of age, life, love, lust, beauty, exploitation and a loss of purity.

### **Cast Away**

Spring arrives.  
A newness stops the breath,  
ruptures the crust  
from which a nubile form emerges  
no touch has altered yet.  
With colour lush and sharp  
it turns the head  
and lingers in the eyes,  
leaves nectar on the lips.

The summer sun warms  
as passions rise.  
Such rapture shared  
beneath a canopy,

rich and fertile,  
lasting long into night.  
Scented with sweetest wine,  
lips still caress  
the untarnished bride.

Falling leaves in falling rain.  
Moist wings against the push  
of encroaching violation,  
trapped where they now lie.  
The verdant lawn fades to earthy tones  
of dirt and clay, of dust,  
as minds turn with springtime longing  
to love lost in fleeting pleasures.

Now old, cold and dull,  
winter lays all bare.  
Memories retreat  
as darker days cast gloom.  
A shadow of that luminous glow  
now hidden in a quickening night.  
The lustre lost as fire melts the dream  
of a tender growth  
it craves to renew.

#### 4.5.2. The Beautiful Solution

Designers also aspire to creating something that is useful, functional and simultaneously fulfill an aesthetic purpose. Users/consumers look too for these qualities. Within the Designer Creative Conversations, participants expressed this position reflecting the wider stance from across the design fields, the notion of not simply finding a solution but of finding a *beautiful* solution. The nature of what is *beautiful*, is subjective, open, interpretable and culturally specified. The potential of plastic materials creates design and poetic possibilities. They can allow for an almost mythical transformation; the ugly duckling becomes a swan. In the case of the chair designer plastic provides an opportunity for something to become a beautiful chair.

Russell Plant, designer and CEO at Bluecube talking of the work of Ron Arad, remarks:

*'And if you look at some of the objects, the beautifully sculptural things that he does I think, you know, the stuff, the work that he's done for Magis and incredible sympathetic use of the material in the respect that it is solid but it's also fluid. I mean that's one of the great things about injecting a liquid and it becoming a solid, you can create forms which aren't driven by here's a piece of round pipe, how many directions can we bend it in?'*

(Russell Plant, Appendix 4, p 185)

Beautiful solutions represent design thinking on a metaphorical level. A *beautiful solution* is seen as effortless design, design that carries out a function in a complicated place. It has an apparent simplicity and elegance, is often understated even unnoticed to the external view. It belies the creative and design thinking that went into it. It represents an aspiration to find the best solution to a design challenge incorporating a high level of expertise and confidence on the part of the designer. The requirements of a design brief may channel ideas toward an outcome but within this the designer makes a claim to the design process that discharges their desire to achieve a *good design*. Russell Plant uses the term beautiful eighteen times during the conversation, elevating design as a concept beyond the *good*. In his description of designing stadia chairs, the attainment of beauty is perceived as much as a personal motivation as it is a professional one.

*'And so it was two-fold really, it was about recognising you know, the commercial and functional constraints, but then the aesthetic and the more emotive side of course, comes from within, comes from your own desire to make people look at things and go 'that's not just a solution to a problem, it's a beautiful solution to a problem'. And so that's what's driving it, that's what's driving us, me.'* (Russell Plant, Appendix 4, p 169 )

Ron Arad illustrated the simplicity and elegance of his design thinking in describing the conception of his *Matrizia* sofa. His skill at recognising design potential is regarded as an attractive asset by manufacturers who will associate themselves with him and readily realise his designs for the commercial market. Talking about *Matrizia*, a 2015 design for Moroso, he said,

*'I call them and 'look, I have an idea' and the last... something that happened recently is I was... I saw a mattress, in the road in Tel Aviv and I said ah! Took a picture of it*

*and then I turned it into this, then I did this drawing, and then I did this and to see what it would look like, and like that, and then we make a little model....' (Appendix , p 211))*

*'I mean I'm in a lucky position that I can see something that gives you an idea and literally two days later it's... it finds its way to Moroso and now they are starting to make it.' (Appendix , p210)*

The incidence of the beautiful and elegant solution is found across disciplines and for me, as the poet, the parallel with the description of the DNA (deoxyribose nucleic acid) molecule found in nature, suggested a poetic response to the image of thousands of stadia plastic chairs designed by Bluecube. The poem *A Beautiful Solution*, is structured in such a way that visually and rhythmically it plays with language to mimic the repeated nature of the polymer found in nature and designed synthetics. The power and potential of polymers is given centrality. Reference is also drawn from the work of Ingold (2007) who explores the interconnectedness of lines that enmesh people and things. Whilst anchored in anthropology, it crosses disciplinary terrains in much the same way as poetry. The companion poem *Unravelling Life* unites the synthetic and natural polymers in poetic imagery, reflecting the image of the stadia chairs, their strength in numbers and interconnectivity. The reference in the last line acknowledges the influence of Kurt Vonnegut's *Breakfast of Champions* (1973, 2010, p 228), where the concept of wrapping the earth is a metaphor for both the negative and positive impact of plastics on us and the environment, both as a comfort and concern.

### **A Beautiful Solution**

Lines, long lines, long, long lines, going somewhere, nowhere,  
travelling toward infinity, altering, transforming, metamorphosing,  
touching humanity, changing its design, changing its place.

Telling tales, telling tall tales, building history, building new,  
building me. Lines of plastics in polymeric chains, repeating units  
bonded in symmetry.

Lines of poetry, lines of chemical poetry, lines of ink on a page,  
organic, synthetic. A formula for life. All life is in the line, pursuing  
the line, pushing the line, pushing me.

Look for us here, blended, subsumed, contained within many parts, united across time and space, our strength is in numbers, our harmony in sharing essence. Carbon to hydrogen in repeated lines, remodeled in your hands.

Life, so beautiful, is now a polymer, in which the Earth is wrapped,  
And so on.....

### **Unravelling Life**

Particles collide  
Uniting in strands of complex pairs

Silky ribbons caught on summer winds  
Swirling, coiling, crossing universes in a game of hide and seek

Found at last among the beautiful array  
One meets the other with a tender touch  
Becoming violent rapture

Did some hand stir this essence  
Exciting atoms in a black and unctuous abyss

Life's messenger carrying beautiful data  
Allowing collisions to advance its march

With gentle footsteps on the golden stair  
Forming for me the sweetest backbone.

#### **4.6. design poetry extends the boundaries of subject matter for poetry**

Design poetry can extend the boundaries of what is considered appropriate subject matter for poetry. I have had to justify my poetic and research choices amongst my colleagues and friends, with not infrequent comments that these choices are bizarre, weird and odd. My poetry has centred on an object with a design history that has made a significant contribution to the annals of design generally. The plastic chair as an object is uniquely placed as the object of my interest since it has the capacity to create

conversation, through its duality as simultaneously ordinary and extraordinary, visible and invisible, loved and detested. It has the capacity to stimulate, since the story of its design and evolution has provided designers with opportunities to push design boundaries both in terms of function and form as well as material choices, facilitating critical writing across different literary epistemologies.

By elevating designed objects and things through language and device, I have brought them into sharper focus, allowing them to become a vehicle for contemplation and mediation. Poetry gives these often ordinary, everyday objects a place of prominence, although they may seem irrelevant, invisible. Design poetry used to animate the object, to uncover it as a thinking persona, albeit an exaggerated self, addresses the universal reader in the hope that a poem can be viewed as accessible and inclusive.

My justification for writing poetry of design is that it remains grounded in the real world where the stories of people are often embedded in the objects with which they coexist. The purpose of design poetry is to capture the vastness of human experience and to mobilise our thinking around important issues. A designed object can be rich in symbolism and composed of layers of meaning. In the poet conversations, Annie suggested that even the Dimplex Heater, which sat in the room in which we met, was as significant an object for poetry as any, since on its own it could serve to encapsulate many of the elements of adolescence and youthful poverty. My immediate response to this was to craft a poem about it as the Dimplex Heater as an object had stirred memories for me of my undergraduate years and is about to be published as part of collection of poetry from The Cattistock Poets. In it I have attempted to capture moments, fragments of the student existence where life was a rollercoaster of highs and lows, intense relationships and desperate loneliness.

### **The Dimplex Heater**

My best friend on mornings  
when jeans are damp and cold  
and the night before  
was no better than the night before.  
A mother wrap of warm towels  
as I leave the bath  
with just enough water to cover my heels  
but not my loneliness.

I crouch beside you for comfort.

With my finger I start to count

your dimples, my pimples,

lose count at seventeen.

Alone and silent

in the middle of the room,

dressed in faded white.

I love the moments you're awake.

Design poetry can encourage a shift in perspective and challenge the status quo.

Designers who have participated in my research have all in their own way, challenged the existing state and looked to ways of creating and making, using the everyday objects, the ordinary, to express their social, political, cultural beliefs as well as their creative inclinations. The result of these endeavours is to challenge form and function, to disrupt the view of how things are or will be.

The Ghost of a Chair, borrows its title from chair designs by Phillippe Starck and by Valentina Gonzalez-Wohlens (Figure 17). Its aim, as with these chairs, is to blur and obfuscate our thinking, whilst simultaneously, we are asked to confront uncertainty. In keeping with its childlike quality, the poem asks more questions than it answers in order to disarm the reader, to unsettle and disrupt our confidence in what we know. This interrogative process was also reflected in the Focus Group Conversations mirroring a problem-solving approach that might be used in design thinking.

### **The Ghost of a Chair — Clear Thinking**

Is there a ghost in the chair observing my rest?

No, the ghost is the chair and the chair is not there.

If the chair is not there, can I trust what I see?

Is it me who is here?

Is the chair really me?

Said the ghost, from the seat,

*I am yours to command.*

But say I, should I stare?

Do I sit?

Do I stand?



*As you wish, said the ghost  
But beware of your dreams  
You may think you know life  
But it is not what it seems*

*Pater Noster* is one of my poems that pairs a design icon, the *Robin Day Poly Chair* with my own religious beliefs and the expectations of a monotheistic faith. The poem does this by addressing several significant themes that place the object, a plastic chair central to the narrative:

- the juxtaposition of the visible/invisible nature of the object, the modern grey plastic chair in a classical setting of Bernini's St. Peter's Square and Basilica, echoing the spiritual beliefs of those gathered there, many of whom have 'faith' in an unseen deity.
- the ordinariness of the plastic chairs often unnoticed, yet serving an important function in providing order and comfort to thousands of visitors to a weekly Papal audience at the Vatican.
- The simplicity and strength of the chair's design and facility for mass production.
- The shift from order to chaos as human intervention disrupts and destroys (Figures 18 &19).

The partnership of poetry with objects provided a medium in which to disrupt the traditional view, to redirect the reader so that they might reassess their thinking, principally about designed objects, but conscious that it might challenge wider convictions. Through the focus group creative conversations, this poem was identified as one which has the capacity to draw the reader into the poem, "*to imagine yourself there*", by virtue of the narrative and the imagery. The presence of the objects intensified the emotional connections that participants were experiencing, even to the point of proposing that the poet's handling of them had not only illuminated the ordinary but ascribed the objects with a humanity, deserving of benevolence.

Design poetry is more than just ekphrastic. It allows for and actively encourages immediacy, proximity, a closeness to the object or subject of the poetic gaze. It moves beyond the description of art that embodies the ancient tradition of ekphrasis, which

aimed to make the reader envision the thing described. The modern ekphrastic encounter (Bilman, 2013; Kennedy, 2016) by contrast challenges and extends the notion of the relationship between painting and poetry as a way of interpreting, confronting and inhabiting the subject of poetic gaze. But distance remains between the observer and the art. Even in WH Auden's *In the Musée des Beaux Arts* (1940, 2007), an ekphrastic encounter with Pieter Brueghel's painting *Landscape With the Fall of Icarus*, the poet still observes as an outsider, from a distance, across time and place.

Design poetry gives a proximity of perspective allowing the observer to be in the company of the object, to experience 'time spent with the object' (Focus Group Conversations, p 111), engendering the poetry with a potency that imbues the object with rich emotional and physical connections. Such a notion was also echoed in the Designer Conversations. Christopher Pett, co-designer of the Ree Chair sees proximity to the design as an essential element of an effective design process. Such closeness leads to a more holistic view of the object. He describes designing in terms that create a distance between the designer and the object,

*"as if from ten feet away when they're looking at it as an asset, and that's when it all gets a bit weird and maybe products fall down a bit when users/consumers see them as just a tradable asset, something which isn't to be sat on and used, it's just an object to be owned. The V&A confuses me. When I go to the V&A furniture section, which is the best in the country, it's fantastic, but these objects have all got ropes around them."* (Appendix 4, p230)

Getting close to the object alters the perspective and, in design terms, it may even foster new ideas and insights that can be translated into design. Christopher Pett reflects this position and shares with me the curiosity as well as the reactions of others to an individual's view:

*'what I do when I go to the V&A furniture gallery is I walk around with my camera at knee height taking photographs of the underneath's of all these things. I've got compendious library of the underneath of classic designs, because that's where it's really interesting to look at. Usually the gallery assistants look at you very strangely when you're on your hands and knees looking underneath things, but from a design point of view that's where an object gets interesting: how is this joined together? How well finished is it? How do these materials combine? You're looking at a fifty or sixty year old fibreglass shell on a steel frame: how did they do that then? What materials*

*did they use and how well did it work? Where does it crack and fail? You never see that from the surface of an object.'* (Appendix 4, p230)

The object in my poetry which began with a plastic chair, has been viewed from close quarters; the senses have experienced it; it has shared my everyday life in a way that much art cannot; it can still have utility and serve as more than merely an object for display. The pervasive nature of plastic chairs allows them to appear across the media and in unexpected places. During my research, I engaged with objects and many plastic chairs. With access to the museum of Design in Plastics (MoDiP), I could interact with these chairs, gaining a proximity unlike other museum experiences, viewing them from every angle and the spaces in between.

Being in the same place as the objects mirrors the shared trajectory of humans and objects. It also served as a platform for a dialogue between designer and user/consumer through the objects that they had designed. For the most part, objects such as plastic chairs are unremarkable, ordinary, everyday and easily overlooked. In the Focus Group Conversations I brought the protagonists together creating a space for them to interact with the chairs on a level that is outside the quotidian, yet connected to it through the familiarity of the objects, the plastic chairs. As users/consumers they were engaging in a process of interrogation and critical analysis of the designed objects. They were also using the encounter to reflect and contemplate their responses to the object, responses that were intensified by the addition of poetry.

Conversations with designers gave me yet another level of proximity to the object, as I was part of the discourse around their designs, and in many cases, having access to their own collection. This dialogue created a depth of insight into the creative contexts of a designer's work, the motivation behind it, their reactions to it as a design outcome. It enabled me as the poet to respond to a multi-level experience, not just the presence of the object but a tangible engagement of all the senses and the emergence of a poem which tried to encapsulate a multitude of interrelated themes, which were facilitated by the closeness and interaction with the object.

The poem *Material Seduction* had its naissance in the experience at the designer's studio during the designer conversation with Ron Arad. While we talked he invited me to sit in one of his designs, the polyethylene chair, Voido. I was reluctant as it seemed more like a piece of sculpture, to be looked at rather than used. The chair resembles a seductive void that rocks the sitter. It's highly shiny surface plays with light, creating a

hypnotic movement. In the poem, I have drawn on and embellished the narrative, incorporating and manipulating some of the words and expressions used by the designer during the conversation. The poem for me represents the seductive power of design. It uses the voice of the chair and the first person to create a sense of distance and exemplifies a level of reassurance as well as intimacy that is open to interpretation. Is this the seducer exercising power over the seduced, soothing or subduing? The rhythm of the poem models the movement of the rocking chair, one which is synonymous with parenting, as the rocking motion is designed to soothe and settle the child. Simultaneously, the poem suggests the growing influence of the object in altering not only our consumer habits, our desire to acquire, but also our physiology as we become more sedentary and the plastic as a material infiltrates our biology.

### **Material Seduction - in his Voido Chair**

'Come, contemplate and sit a while.

Come lie with me,

Why don't you do it now!

Head there,

feet there.

Allow my rise and fall to ease you

Take me in

Let me move you

I am silent company.

I will not judge,

I offer you comfort.

I am everywhere and nowhere.

I will transform you.

I am beneath you.

I am above you.

I am within you.

I am you'

As a creative endeavour, what I have come to call *design poetry*, is shown to draw attention to important issues. It can facilitate the construction and deconstruction of attitudes to design, raising awareness of some of the key areas of contemporary design through a re-presentation of the issues in an associated narrative or poetic form. This provides another dimension to the object and allows the poet to confront

competing issues, leaving the object in the mind of the reader or at least altering their perceptions of it. Writing of things, creating a narrative around concrete objects in the designed world can make us view those objects differently. It provides a 'call to arms'. It is a strategy that draws attention to something, elevating an object of mundanity and reorienting it to take a more central role in a wider discourse. In the Creative Conversations with poets, objects took on a multitude of dimensions and symbolism. Annie describes many of her poems where objects feature as significant and '*composed of layers of meaning*'; Maya describing objects in her poetry as '*taking the personal and making it universal*'. The power of a poetic narrative to distill thoughts and ideas, feelings and emotions, allows the poet to play with structure and form as well as the vicissitudes of language, to create a vehicle through which to communicate. The contemplation of the plastic chair as a modern object has encouraged me to experiment with my poetry over the course of this research, abandoning some of the rules of poetry, for example, using unorthodox line spacing, dispensing with strict punctuation or in some cases abandoning it entirely. These tactics reflect more contemporary approaches to poetry and poetic construction, some of which facilitate the popular social networks and new media, reaching a potential wider audience in the process.

*Splurge*, was a poetic response to an unexpected object encounter in a commercial gallery in Cornwall. The commercial nature of the gallery allowed for proximity. I could view the object from any angle, touch it and sit in it. It looked familiar because of the spin painting that had been applied to the surface of a simple beech wood chair by Jasper Morrison. The signature style was that of Damien Hirst, who had used the chair as a canvas, a technique he used in his 1992 spin paintings.

#### *Journal Extract*

*This piece of poetry found its naissance on a holiday to Cornwall and the beautiful coastal towns that skirt the Atlantic, St Ives and Padstow amongst them. Despite the hordes of tourists who flock there, from all over the world, this coastline still retains its natural beauty. It was clear to see why artists have been drawn to this opal coast where the sea, the sand and sky are transformed in a unique light and radiance that remains even as the sun disappears in the western sky. Finding an exhibition of YBA (Young British Artists) at a small but chic gallery in Padstow, my attention was drawn by a chair in the window. It was a chair of unexceptional design but transformed by its association with Damien Hirst. Further along the street was an ice cream parlour, which also had chairs in the window. These were not by Damien Hirst. His chair retails*

*at £10,000, the stools, at just £35. Throw some paint on a chair and it is transformed into something else.*

### **Splurge**

The fishing boats bob gently in the harbour  
Eager hungry crowds throng pretty little streets  
Some eating rich smooth ice-cream at the ice-cream parlour  
And from coloured plastic stools hang happy feet

Bright colours caught in Cornish sunshine  
Deal the artist an opal palette  
To catch and fix a moment  
Before it fades

With a splash of colour from another's hand  
Plastic paint is thrown across the chair  
The spin and swirl raise the stakes  
High and higher still

Watch now as all the colours run  
Melt and flow in streams of Neapolitan  
Across the soft and silky  
Sundrenched golden sands

Observing the plastic chair asked me to look at the object, drawing it closer to me, within my sphere of perception and thought. The experience of writing about objects and the plastic chair exemplified for me, as the poet, a phenomenological embodiment, a lived experience, of talking with designers, poets and users, of experiencing the objects at close quarters. The chair is highly designed yet remains an object of ordinariness. By looking at the object from all angles, from up close (design proximity) my perceptions of it were also changing and with it my relationship with the object. A conversation with the designer required me to look behind their designs, at the systems and processes that operate in realising an object. Their designs became part of my poetic consciousness. Writing of the designs connected me to the designer

through their chair. The language of design contributed to the nature and content of my poetry, not just in terms of exploiting a poetic tool such as the metaphor but also incorporating designers own words within the narrative of the poem. By engaging with all of the participants, my vision and experience of the object were extended and enlarged.

## 5. Conclusion

### 5.1. Overview

The outcome of this thesis has contributed to the field of design by expanding the concept of design poetics and developing design poetry as another dimension of design writing. The purpose of this qualitative inquiry was to explore the interplay of design poetry with users, designers and the objects of design. I have shown that design poetry can be a dynamic and immersive form of design writing, representing the personal as well as the broader perspective, by its capacity to encompass social, political, economic and cultural issues. Through my own poetry and the unique perspective of different but interrelated groups of individuals (designers, poets and users), I have demonstrated that design poetry can serve as a significant vehicle in shaping our view of the objects of human design. The relationship between poetry and design has proven to be a significant and exciting area for exploration. It has not only become a keystone for linking the creative domains but also in expanding the concept of a design poetics, one that genuinely embraces the coexisting acts of making, narrating and consuming. By placing the lens of inquiry on the main protagonists, this research has sought to adopt a holistic view of design poetry, as a way of capturing the experiential, the emotional and intellectual elements of consuming design. The qualitative nature of the inquiry has been supported and broadened by the implementation of the creative conversations, not only as a tool for collecting data but as a means of establishing a dynamic engagement with key players in the inquiry. Through these creative conversations and encounters, the research has established their potential as a compelling, collaborative method in creative communication and research. They have facilitated a unique space for expanding the creative acts of observing, thinking, talking, sharing, responding and generating ideas. They have also proved to be fundamental to my poetry praxis in terms of its development and direction. Through the conversations, I have engaged in interactive dialogue with those who have informed, critically evaluated and responded to my poetry. This inquiry has contributed to my professional development, as I have endeavoured to balance the paradigmatic synthesis of the critical-creative. This blending process has allowed me to advance my competence as a researcher whilst searching for and taking ownership of my own poetic voice and identity.

The following sections aim to summarise these outcomes and outline possible areas of future research.



## 5.2. Expanding Design Poetics – Design Poetry

Design writing is a significant area of research and scholarship. The relationship between poetry and design is established through the concept of design poetics, which represents a theoretical and practical emphasis that views the ordinary objects of design as more than functional or instrumental. Rather it fuses these characteristics with notions of the experiential, of sensing, feeling, emoting by attempting to review and re-envision the usual expression of thought and the translation into artifacts. The idea of design poetry represents a compelling interaction between poetry, design, society and culture as a responsive vehicle through which we connect with and understand designed objects whilst endeavouring to produce and advance them.

My thesis has suggested that design poetry has received little consideration in the discourse of design. Yes, designers have used poetry to inspire design and poets have written about designed objects. What has been absent is a conscious and critical articulation of the role of poetry in the expression of design as an active interplay between users/consumers and the objects or artifacts of design; of poetry as a response to design; of poetry as a conversation about the consumption of design and of poetry as a means to unlock meaning in the mundane, the ordinary artifacts that share our lives.

Design poetry became a form of philosophical dialogue where writers, designers and users consider the present in order to assist in negotiating the complex designed human landscapes, as well as forming a foundation on which to speculate about the future. Design poetry enabled those who participated to widen a vision, to probe, explore and critique both present and future in the context of experience and cultural receptiveness. Through the discipline of a meticulous choice of words and images, design poetry was shown to harness concrete particulars and complex propositions. It engaged the imagination and the emotions to both generate and analyse design issues and ideas. By harnessing the metaphor, it facilitated the development of a broad range of questions and provided an alternative vehicle through which solutions might be explored. Design poetry moved a designed object, concept or idea from concealment into full light, revealing it and challenging our perspectives of the designed world.

Design poetry has the potential to be viewed as another encounter with design through the medium of words. It is closely allied to design fiction, an emerging design tool and one which is the subject of dynamic debate, not only in terms of its definition but also

its purpose and operation. Design poetry situates its focus on the experiential, the lived experience of design. It not only creates a unique response to the designed world but it also emphasises the immediacy of that response.

I have presented poetry as one of the ways that we provide a voice for the objects of design, objects otherwise silent but by writing of them they are brought closer to us, allowing us to view and observe them, in a sense bringing them into being. The aspiration of design poetry is in illuminating the intersection of design and end-user/consumer. This locus represents transformation, the translation of design language and the experience of others. It also signifies an important space for design dialogue, a place for a conversation about design, one which draws together all the protagonists.

Design poetry creates an interconnectedness between designer and user/consumer mediated by the poet. So to it is writing poetically about objects of design, using the conventions of poetry to illuminate the relationship between humans and the designed world in all its complexity and ambiguity. The generation or consumption of designed poetry demands that the poet/consumer spends time thinking about the object. It enables us to widen our vision, to probe, explore and critique both present and future in the context of experience and cultural receptiveness. It moves a designed object, concept or idea from concealment into full light, it reveals. It is a way of seeing and knowing what we think we see and know, a way of challenging our perspectives of the designed world.

Design Poetry is a tool through which we can interrogate the nexus between us and the designed world. In so doing poetry challenges us to take a view, to reassess that view. It exploits the curiosity of the human mind moving between fact, fiction and fantasy, making it a valuable tool in exploring experience. From a very personal perspective I have also used poetry as a way of articulating and exploring my own doctoral journey, serving me as an original lens through which I have navigated the complexities of this research endeavour.

Poetry can contribute to design literature because it is knowledge. It provides another perspective on what we already know and challenges our position on the things that we think we know. It is meditational and demands that we look more closely even at the prosaic, the mundane, the ordinary. Poetry, however, remains a polarising issue in the knowledge discourse with its contribution to epistemology still being debated. It remains elitist in the view of many commentators. It is often seen as shrouded in

mystery or more likely misunderstanding. It is referred to in language that suggests it is removed and ethereal, a literary form that utilises obscure and complex language. However, contemporary poetry is multi-faceted, accessible, it celebrates diversity, it is written and performed widely, it embraces the media of new technology, reaching wider audiences, fitting into the concept of everything connected yet retaining an ability to isolate the uniqueness of an individual voice. Technology is assisting in the generation of a renewed interest in poetry as a literary form as well as an instrument of the dialogue about the human condition that preoccupies poets across the poetic spectrum. Writing of the everyday things has been and remains a key element of both the philosophical and poetic encounter.

*'no ideas but in things'* (William Carlos Williams, 1927)

If a poem about a plastic chair touches the reader on an emotional level, the object and the poem have significance. Poetry celebrates the voices that contribute to its existence both in terms of its creation and the presence of participants within the framework of the poem itself. However inward the poet may look, a reader is also imagined. Poetry is an expression of an individual voice about those things that are of interest to the poet with the belief that it will also be of interest to others. It represents a dialogue, an invitation to share in the conversation. In the middle ground of qualitative research, it celebrates the voices of stakeholders, featuring as a more subjective perspective within constructivist thinking and represents an unapologetic standpoint for the researcher whose work is facilitated by the presence of others in that inquiry. Blending and weaving the voices of the respondents and that of the writer-researcher, creates reconstructed poetic narratives that reflect different angles of vision. They oscillate from the personal to the more collective, acknowledging truth contingent upon artistic interpretation. Although the poem may have recourse to distillation, brevity, stripping-down, the language of poetry aims to retain much thicker and richer meaning.

### **5.3. Poetry and Design in Collaborative Processes**

The research has shown how poetry, as a creative activity, can move beyond being solely of service to itself and the poet, becoming a tool which creates a shared dialogue across creative domains. Poets and designers each share a common goal in communicating the product of their creative enterprise to others. It is also evident that they each approach their work in similar ways, suggesting a space for collaborative

work that captures the interrelated processes, as they provide a fertile axis around which we can make and narrate.

One of the tasks of this research was to evaluate how design poetry can contribute to the design discourse; to begin to explore how it can influence the way we view designed objects by capturing the responses of the main protagonists. The creative element of this research has been conceived through individual responses to the encounters with a personally selected object, the plastic chair, whose significance and place in the design annals is well established. It has also been shaped by the conversations with designers, poets and users, whose contributions proffer tangible and substantive connections to the creative energies that envision, realise and engage with the objects.

In partnership with the Museum of Design in Plastics (MoDiP), the writer-researcher has collaborated with those for whom designed objects are significant touchstones of a human presence, for whom the relationship between making and narrating is one worth communicating. Theirs is a vision to create a conversation with a determined energy that seeks to surprise and challenge the comfort and certainty of design through creative enterprise. The studentship with MoDiP and Arts University Bournemouth provided an opportunity to work and network across disciplines. It has exemplified how collaborative and partnership research across interdisciplinary boundaries can be mutually beneficial, achieving exciting and varied processes and outcomes in making and narrating. Outputs from this collaboration have created a continuing dialogue that seeks to challenge the way we think about plastics and plastic objects. Through poetic endeavours the writer-researcher is asked to observe, to look again at the things that populate the everyday and in so doing challenge others to do likewise through the medium of creative writing. The spotlight of this work rests on the place of poetry in design as a complementary way of using language to express our interaction with and our experience of the designed world creating a more holistic approach that recognises the transdisciplinary nature of design. Design poetry becomes another instrument for exploring the cultural, political, social aspects of design artefacts, adding another layer to the critical and creative discourse of writing of design.

The *Creative Conversation* as a research method has proved to be a significant instrument in shaping my poetic praxis as well as highlighting its potential in creative interdisciplinary research and working. It represents an exciting method in creative

communication that moves beyond the interview encounter. Rather it seeks to uncover individual meaning and encourage an exchange of creative ideas across disciplines. This research drew on conversation encounters with poets, with designers, with practitioners whose creative behaviours might put them at opposite ends of the creative spectrum, yet they share much in common. It connected too with the end user whose role in the design process represents another layer in the consumption of design. The poet conversations allowed for an encounter, a conversation about a designed object generating complex cycles of reflexivity. The object was serving as the reflexive trigger, a referential point around which the poet was examining the creative process as well as the contextualisation of the creative output. For the poet, the presence of objects in poetry served to ground experience in the tangible, the concrete. The objects are used to create or alter perspective. They assist in bringing *things* into view, closer to the viewer allowing them to be interrogated in the context of experience. The poem imbues the object with meaning, sometimes unintended and frequently in layers. The revisiting of a poem stirs emotions, memories and thoughts. It effects surprise, stimulates new knowledge and offers rediscovery.

The focus group participants represented another level of engagement, one in which the object and poetry were viewed from a user/consumer's perspective. This interaction brought them into the shared space where design poetry meets those who engage with the objects of design in their everyday lives. It also served to underline the potential of this dialogue across disciplines and cultures.

The creative conversation established a space for

- enabling thinking and talking;
- sharing and generating ideas;
- an active engagement in areas of interest;
- creating an immediacy in response;
- promoting access to creative faculties (observation, imagination, speculation, proposition);
- providing a uniqueness of perspective.

Both designer and poet engage in telling stories which both reflect and shape the designed environment. In the course of the conversations, designers were talking of their designs, and in so doing, making them visible, adding more layers and texture to

their designs. In narrating, they themselves had become an integral part of their designs. The object told a story, one which often remained invisible yet was an essential element that guided the design process. The commercial realisation of Ron Arad' *Matrizia* sofa (p 140) is an example of the enduring potential of the object narrative as well as a representation of the designer's vision and imagination. The designer walks past a discarded mattress on a street in Tel Aviv and envisions something that could become a piece of furniture. The poet sees a fly-tipped mattress on the side of the road and considers the burden of advertising, abandonment, abundant and unchecked waste (*Cast Away*, p 138). They each respond in their unique, individual way. Both perspectives have relevance and when combined, they suggest a powerful approach to a range of competing factors that address key contemporary issues.

As design embraces the concept of poetics there is a broadening of interpretation of the material world, a transformative aesthetic that looks beyond disciplinary boundaries, reflecting a view that the creative arts and industries are less disparate in the ways that they approach their tasks, processes and outcomes. There is now a growing recognition that metaphorical thinking forms part of design thinking and practice in much the same way that they are fundamental in poetry and the design of poetry. They both use it to unravel and understand complex systems, to tell recognisable stories and to contribute structure to the narrative across the lifecycle of the design process. They both look to find solutions to real issues, to consider their designs in terms of their function and form and to explore them from the position of the user/consumer or reader. They search for a *beautiful solution* that despite its high aesthetic reference is situated in the elegant, the excellent, the simple, the optimal, the accessible.

Although the domain of poetry is a sacred space for the poet, reflecting personal traditions and experience, it is crafted in order that it is read by others as well as performed for others. When it is conceived in diverse voices, a concept I encapsulate in my research as a *Symphony of Voices*, it moves beyond the poet to embrace a broader community. My own poetry has been shared with others and will continue to extend its reach as I look to publish and share more widely using the variety of opportunities and platforms available. Broadening the engagement and readership is a creative imperative for the poet, not only as a means to test the relevance of the creative work but through readership reception gain critical evaluation in order to make poetic writing better. Designers have demonstrated the importance of play and of

finding new ways to approach the design process and outcome that keep it fresh and relevant. Poets too need to be responsive to an ever-changing environment, as well as seeking out new areas to explore, and alternative ways to experiment and play with poetry that enables it to be relevant and fresh.

For the writer-researcher poetry groups is a unique opportunity and essential experience in developing the skills and craft of writing poetry. It represents an extension of the *creative conversation*, a place where creative writing is explored through the activities of reading, sharing, explaining, discussing, of justifying creative and poetic choices. Poetry is a significant vehicle through which important themes and messages can be communicated, as the language and form of poetry speaks to people in ways that traverses social and cultural boundaries. The principle purpose of poetry groups is for sharing poetry, but a member is never just a creative writer. Everyone brings a multiplicity of things to the encounter, adding richness and depth to the process of review and to the poetry in general. The contribution of these groups to the writer-researcher is both social and professional. The role of a writer-researcher within this group traverses the situational boundaries such that in creative company and associations, there is a catalyst or momentum for producing a creative product as well as providing a platform for promoting a dialogue about the purpose, process and outcome of the research enterprise, beyond the academic environment. Being part of a creative community allows one to find pleasure in the company of other poets/writers as well as shaping a creative identity through several key activities.

1. Facilitate networking and creative socialisation;
2. Access critical evaluation;
3. Inspire, expand and challenge existing ideas and thinking;
4. Facilitate learning and honing of the craft of writing;
5. Make research accessible and relevant;
6. Encourage individual promotion and achieve publication.

In the discursive space between design and poetry there is a dynamic and persuasive shift toward a more reflexive approach to thinking and the construction of knowledge. The dominion of creative writing and poetry in particular, is to move from the vague and nebulous toward a more heightened vision or state of knowing. It helps us to deal with the diverse contemporary issues relating to the designed world and its material culture. The growth of interest in the objects of our culture is not simply whimsy, but represents a genuine interdisciplinary engagement with object biography or the

lifecycle of things created by individuals and invested with the human story. The invitation to write creatively about the designed world is irresistible to the writer, not only because one can speculate about the future, to ask what we will become, but to reflect upon our (hi)story, to evaluate what we have done. Sustainability, as a significant example, is a key goal in contemporary design with the aim of reducing the negative impact on the environment whilst maintaining innovative and commercial lead. Against a continued 'stuff-lust', a desire for products regardless of the need for them, design faces difficult challenges in achieving sustainable outcomes. Poetry acts as a useful creative vehicle through which complex issues such as sustainability can be considered and discussed. In its propensity to create emotional connections, it may even enable us to adopt a more sustainable approach to consumption. It has already been established that the addition of a narrative, to what in many cases may be viewed as monetarily low value objects, increases both their subjective and objective value in the eyes of the user/consumer, leading to a conclusion that some objects have enhanced value, solely by virtue of their disposition in narrative.

*'Designed objects save you but they are complicated, problematic, they imprison you.'*

This comment by Annie Freud, one of the poets who participated in my *Poet Conversations*, captures an important proposition in the design dialogue, contributing to the ongoing debate within design, which explores how design influences us and impacts on our everyday lives. Objects have unique ways of revealing the world to us. We use these objects to help us to interpret the world. We form emotional attachments to them invest them with meaning and feelings and in so doing enable them to acquire significance beyond their basic function and form. Writing of designed objects is one of the ways in which we express our relationship with the material world. The object is the medium through which we vent our sense of being in the world and the factors that influence our experience. Even while everyday objects have emotional and evocative power existing beyond their function (is it a chair or a sculpture), the written poetic expression of the relationship crosses epistemological and ontological boundaries, to carry or even unlock meaning.

The designed world is complicated and our relationship with it is equally so. Technology continues its pace in accelerating that complexity. How we make sense of it and locate our place in it is facilitated by the way we respond to the objects in it. Responding involves a multidimensional synthesis of the physical, psychological, emotional facets of our human framework expressed in a variety of ways and media.



The myriad of ways in which we can write of design enables us to respond to the changing face of, for example, design technology in which one might suggest an almost dystopic scenario where humans are sidelined by machines, but equally to explore the ways in which we might navigate this speculative landscape. Such complexities lead to exciting and, at the same time, challenging propositions for exploring the human relationship with the designed world. New thinking moves us toward a more blurred separation between the natural and the designed world. This creates potential for embracing cross-disciplinary arenas, where creativity is viewed as embedded equally in art and science, a place where art can inform science, where poetry releases meaning in designed objects and the designed world, reflecting the dynamic changes in our relationships with them. The preoccupation with things is not a novel concept, nor is it unique to poetry. But in poetry it finds a distinct voice, a sympathetic device, a vehicle through which we interpret and examine the world filled with objects that resonate, despite as Doty (2008) remarks '*their conspiracy of silence*'. The role of creative inquiry has more to offer the research agenda than the creation of an artefact or the generation of data. The key protagonists in the articulation of artistic approaches to inquiry unanimously iterate the strength of their methods in giving voice to participants who can be lost in the research process, emerging often as featureless data. I have represented a '*Symphony of Voices*' whose contribution to my research has added rich and varied data, which I have transformed into poetry. The presence of these key players provides the purpose, the depth and breadth without which my poetry would be an empty vessel or simply a selection of creative writing.

#### **5.4. Extending Creative and Professional Identity – The Critical-Creative**

*'The aim of poetry and the poet is finally to be of service, to ply the effort of the individual into the larger work of the community as a whole.'* (Seamus Heaney, 2002)

The process of this inquiry has provided an agency through which the writer-researcher can observe development as a critical-creative, striving to balance the natural instincts to write creatively, with the specific demands of academic rigour. Brady (2000) reflects this duality of tenure of her own practice-led PhD, in which she remarks that 'the academic became the creative; the creative became the academic'. The binary nature of writer-researcher also represents the wider issues of the anxiety and unease that can accompany a creative PhD both personally and in the continuing

debates around its legitimacy across a wider institutional and academic milieu (Candlin, 2000; Brien, Burr and Webb, 2010).

By utilising and responding to opportunities that cross disciplinary, cultural and social boundaries, expanding a personal research narrative and an engagement with a wider audience, research becomes accessible and relevant to others as well as creating a dynamic interdisciplinary dialogue. Where this research is concerned, it has reached into areas of curation, display and viewer response; product design, industrial design and literary studies, setting it within a wide knowledge base and fields of practice. Several key areas of professional and creative developments are identified that have their origin in this practice-led research and which represent the process of becoming an effective critical-creative practitioner.

#### 5.4.1. Finding a (Poetic) Voice

Whilst the poet is strongly influenced by other writers and poets, the poet endeavours to find their unique contribution, the signature that is recognised by them and by the reader. My creative writing and poetry has been shown to have changed and evolved over the course of the research journey. Such a conclusion represents the dynamic nature of writing that often springs from the inherent desire to change oneself and simultaneously, exact some change in the external world by writing of it. The notion that poetry changes lives is echoed more tangibly in the ways in which poetry alters thinking, changes what is known and reveals to poet and reader, areas of experience that may have otherwise become hidden or lost. The act of writing poetry itself becomes an agency for reflection and expression of personal learning, one in which the poet finds practical, pragmatic and procedural ideas of how to navigate their own experience. Sharing the narrative with others becomes a vehicle through which they too can explore how the poem may inform their work and their lives. In the both the Poet and Focus Group Conversations, poetry facilitated the conversation. The poem launched a creative discussion becoming another voice in the encounter. Objects within the poem were being viewed as touchstones for human emotions and experience as they centred and ground the creative work in experience, real life, in the tangible. Similarly, these objects demonstrated themselves to be a mirror onto the world, and in so doing moved poetry from the naïve and self-referential toward a more outward looking, interrogative and heuristic viewpoint.

*Well-tempered* is a poem that represents the poet's voice in an individual response to the frustration and anxiety of meeting the complex and manifold demands of doctoral studies. For the writer-researcher it serves several purposes as

1. A reflective vehicle – reflection-in-action;
2. A catharsis;
3. A substitution for lived experience and feelings;
4. A creative connection to the research journey;
5. A way of harnessing the potential of ambiguity and complex thought;
6. A way of allowing the poet and reader to make multiple connections, both internally and externally.

### **Well-tempered**

His clavier gave a rhythm to my day  
as ology played with ology  
on the screen where my efforts reside  
and me  
a soloist  
alone in joy and pain  
motionless against all his preludes and fugues  
complex thoughts in every key  
notes convey an intention  
or more likely hide it  
my mind drifts  
while a steady march dictates a pace  
to soothe me  
and wake my stagnant brain  
time to unravel the mess  
settle the grand question

Writing is an emotional and identity-related activity (Savin-Baden and Wimpenny (2014). It is about learning and honing the craft and technique of writing. The craft emphasises the skills of language use, the tools of the trade and the skill of making. The technique, according to Seamus Heaney (1974, 2002), refers to the poet's 'stance toward life, a definition of his own reality'. Writing as a creative art is transformational

(McNiff, 1998), both as a dynamic process of self-discovery and engagement with the external world in all its social complexity.

Reflecting on creative practice allows the writer-researcher to begin to identify and accept their voice, moving from an apologetic standpoint in respect of the nature of their own poetry to one in which the poet begins to understand and express a rich personal iconography and passion developing through the experience of writing.

#### 5.4.2. Learning to Tame the Inner Voice – Self-criticism

Through the research journey, the writer-researcher is asked to confront the negative issues of an inner voice, the challenge of self-criticism, of striving for perfection, of unrealistic goal setting, of dealing with periods of self-flagellation and a lack of self-compassion. In striving for self-improvement as a writer and researcher a healthy self-criticism is an important enterprise. Regardless of one's philosophical origins, at the heart of any research is the researcher, challenging existing knowledge, looking for new ways of knowing and always asking questions, in much the same way that the writer does. Self-criticism can become a reflexive dialogue, a conversation, an engagement in ideas, most often shared ideas. It is critical, evaluative, and interpretive. Creative writers, who engage in criticism of their own work, are engaging in an intellectual journey, for good or bad, through their own poetry or prose. For the writer and researcher, it involves the continuous process of reading, reviewing, revising, re-visiting and evaluating. By also sharing poetry with others, the poet actively seeks critical comment in order to gain the response of a readership. The act of sharing, of reading or voicing poetry is itself an act of publication and therefore part of the process of bringing poetry to a wider audience where it will be scrutinised and critically evaluated. This activity enables the poet to identify the strengths and areas of need within their poetry, allowing them to move from a complete novice writer, who would alter anything to achieve a better poem in the eyes of others, to a position of confidence in their creative work. This transition enables the poet to trust their own poetic instincts and to even consider leaving a poem untouched, unaltered and raw. It can encourage the poet to experiment and to move outside the familiar, finding poetry in unexpected places, as well as tackling issues that challenge the domestic and conventional approach which can be more secure and familiar.

### 5.4.3. Setting a Foundation for Future Directions

As writer-researcher, I have immersed myself in creative practice to explore the processes of artistic knowing and inquiry. I have identified how poetry can alter the way we view designed objects by engaging in conversations about design, about poetry and the intersection of these two. I have responded poetically to objects and the process of inquiry itself. Knowledge has been generated through this work. My methodological and philosophical dispositions have often relied on serendipity and uncertainty to guide the artistic experiment in the hope that my creative work can continue to uncover ways of knowing.

Poetry that focusses on designed objects does not relegate the natural world. Rather it seeks to exemplify an interrelationship and interdependence. By demonstrating the scope and range of creativity and experimentation that can flow from the interaction with designed objects, the research has expanded what it is that the poet can write about. Writing poetry, sharing it with others and receiving critical feedback leads me to draw some conclusions about the condition of the writer-researcher whose creative inclination is to write poetry.

- Poetry improves with practice.
- Not all poetry is good. In sharing it some can be highly praised by published poets who recommend submitting for publication. Some will remain unfinished.
- Learning to take risks expands the scope and potential of poetic writing.
- There is value in the critical evaluation of others.
- Evaluation of poetry is highly subjective.
- The poet learns to trust their first instincts.
- Poetry is to be shared and performed.
- Interpretation is individual, it is often unintentional and unexpected.
- Poetry is written about anything of interest to the poet.
- Object poetry is observational.
- The poet must listen to and read the work of others.
- For some, their poetry relies on intertextuality and leans toward the storytelling or narrative.
- A unique poetic voice comes from recognition that there is a place for each individual's poetry.
- Not all poets are tortured souls, neither do they all die young.

## 5.5. Further Inquiry and Other Adventures

*'poetry as divination, poetry as revelation of the self to the self, as restoration of the culture to itself; poems as elements of continuity, with the aura and authenticity of archaeological finds, where the buried shard has an importance that is not diminished by the importance of the buried city; poetry as a dig, a dig for finds that end up being plants.'*

*Seamus Heaney (1974, 2002)*

### 5.5.1. Poetry and Design

Extending the scope for interdisciplinary inquiry, there is potential to further examine the place of poetry writing as part of the growing trend in storytelling around design practice, to be viewed not only as a way to enhance the user/consumer engagement for a more immersive experience of design, but also to expand the critical nature of design comment. Other research has explored the parallels between expert poetry composition and innovative design practice, suggesting a cross-fertilisation of ideas and thinking. In addition to ways of approaching design work, there is also opportunity to look at the development of the creative conversation within design teams where there might be opportunity to explore design poetry and the architecture of writing, so that design can be shared, talked about across creative domains.

Building an audience and increasing brand awareness is a significant driver for business. Design poetry can contribute to this aspiration through its capacity to create conversation and storytelling. The structure of poetry and its attention to the minutiae of language creates message distillation and focus which combined with clever visual designs make it an potentially useful marketing tool that could be transferrable to modern media platforms. Design poetry can harness the emotions making it a useful tool in confronting some of the challenging contemporary design issues such as sustainability.

### 5.5.2. Poetry and Design Play

The changeability of design success has been evident through the conversations. Many designers have talked of the complex systems in which they work and the multifarious influences that shape their creative and commercial output. The success of the *Studio* approach to design, one which promotes an interdisciplinary design workshop, in which new ideas and ways of working and making are explored,

promotes a vibrant and vital design environment. Several designers who participated in my inquiry successfully operate this approach, making designs that are market and taste leaders. One of the designers referred to his studio as a place to play, his *playground*. The question therefore arises, could creative writing and poetry in particular add another dimension to the potential design process within the *Studio* structure, to extend the potential of play as a way to exploit the creative energies of those working in it?

### 5.5.3. Poetry, Design and Gender

What might inquiry reveal about the role of gender across the creative domains of design and poetry? This question arose during the early stages of my research, when I first identified my wish list of the designers for the Designer Conversations. I was drawn by the male gender bias in my shortlist, particularly as I had approached several woman designers. The absence of women in this shortlist compelled me to rethink about the impact of gender on both design and poetry. It has also led me to conclude that there are significant questions that creative research can help to illuminate.

I recorded in the Journal of the Plastic Chair;

*Whilst constructing the list of chair artists/ designers who I would like to interview, it occurred to me how few women were on the list.*

*Whilst the names of Eileen Gray, Ray Eames are significant among those whose influence is unquestionable, they are all now departed.*

*Women seem to occur more in partnerships with men as opposed to independent (chair) designers.*

- *Do women design differently?*
- *Do female poets write differently?*
- *Are there differences in gender response to poetry/ design?*

### 5.5.4. Poetry and The Museum of Design in Plastics (MoDiP and Arts University Bournemouth)

The Museum of Design in Plastics (MoDiP), offers a rich resource of contemporary design. It provides an inspiration for redefining and reshaping the ways in which we view plastics as a modern material. My liaison with this unique organisation during my research has led me to consider how to further extend our relationship and dialogue, to

continue to ask how poetry and creative writing generally might contribute to their commitment to mediating design and a broad audience engagement. My research has supported the contention that poetry is far from ethereal, mysterious, otherworldly. Rather, it is firmly grounded in our experience of the world and the objects with which we share our existence. Design poetry encapsulates the creative urge to write poetically about the individual's relationship with the products of design but it also amplifies interconnections between the one and the many. The perspective and reach of design poetry is inclusive, extensive, universal. The same can be said of MoDiP. Their harmonious ambitions offer several opportunities to work collaboratively, to exploit the potential of creative writing and design poetry. These might include:

1. Helping young people to connect with materials and their lifecycles. How therefore, can poetry help them to engage with the technology and aesthetics of plastics?

This question is based on three assumptions:

- Young people are prepared to engage with complex social issues.
  - Plastics are many things. They are provocative. They are part of the everyday, ordinary, useful, ubiquitous, dangerous, toxic, destructive, ecologically and biologically hazardous.
  - Technology is a large part of the life of young people.
  - Poetry is vibrant and has not yet died. Young people associate with poetry, through multiple and complex media.
2. Translating Design: Design Poetry can assist others to see. Exploring creative writing as a way to connect with objects for those for whom sight is compromised.
    - Poetry as a way of seeing designed objects.
    - Poetry as a way of translating sensations into a shared experience.
  3. Finding poetics in objects. The unexpected performances of combining objects with other creative disciplines that allow us to explore the relationships between for example, design and dance, design and theatre, design and music.
  4. Design Fiction and Plastic Possibilities – speculative, provocative ideas about the future of plastics through creative writing. A critical design approach that



‘encourages complex and meaningful reflection ‘(Hertzian Tales by Dunne, 2007, p147).

5. Objects that precipitate events. Creative responses to collections – reinterpreting the *Significant Objects* project (Glen and Walker, 2012). Promoting story driven content that enables makers to emotionally connect with audiences, creating more engaged relationships that have economic, social and cultural value.

#### 5.5.5. Poetry and Care

Having had an academic and practice based career in both the creative arts and health care, I would like to revisit the intersection of art and science as it relates to the delivery of care and the development of professional practice. The relationship between nursing and poetry is being revitalised in a contemporary context, by employing poetic inquiry as a method of investigating patient experiences of health and disease, as well as using poetry as a form of therapy. I have always been drawn to the concept of nursing as an art form, which suggests to me an opportunity to explore the relationship between health and poetry. In particular, I would like to investigate how poetry can contribute to therapeutic interventions in caring for people and families living with chronic and disabling illnesses such as dementia and other neurological disorders. Objects are extensively used to stimulate sensory responses in the management of those affected by dementia. The objects allow the person to experience the familiar, to make connections with the present and to trigger imagination. Poetry also offers a range of complementary stimuli captured in stories where objects may feature. It offers a form of therapy by using the soothing sounds of the human voice, the sound and sensation of rhythm, the repetition of familiar, gentle words and language. Families too could benefit from constructing their own poetic narrative in order to process their own range of emotions as they deal with the transitions of dementia.

## **6. The Final Word:**

### **A Chapbook – *Poetry from the Chair***

# Poetry from the chair

by Kate Hall





## Dedication



"To all those people who have travelled with me".

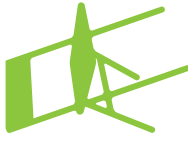
*Dedication*



# Preface



## Preface



The following poems have been written in the period of my research. They are not necessarily all about a chair, plastic or otherwise but they have emerged from interactions with and responses to the object or found images of the object.

The themes have emerged from reading and the conversations with others, with designers and poets. They also try to capture something of the journey itself.

They are yours to find what you will.

*In the words of Ron Arad (Designer Conversations) talking of his designs,*

"You're welcome to do whatever reading and interpretation. I mean once I've done it it's yours to... I'm not going to protest about any of your interpretations."

**Kate Hall 2018**

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01

## Why Write of Plastic Chairs?

Write of love, she said  
every one of them has done it  
an endless gaze onto an empty page  
the hovering pen seeks direction  
my vision blurred now by parallel lines  
that never seem to intersect  
whose destiny is set to travel  
forward and back, forward and back  
tell me what it is  
even my questions leave me empty  
all this gush and cliché  
this heart bleed  
urges me to burst  
break out —

No, I will not  
write of love

—Let them do it.



Why write  
of plastic  
chairs?



02

(after *Vogue* January 1995, *Kate Moss on Red Pantone Chair – Nothing to wear?*  
*Vogue* brings you new looks for the New Year)

## Looking Good

I may have reached a golden age,  
where shades of grey that come and go  
are hidden by my stylist's hand.  
While I slow the outward signs of age,  
with creams that lift and illuminate the older skin.

And add a daily dose, a cocktail  
of coloured pills and extracts,  
the pundits claim  
will slow the march of my unwinding  
and offer me splendid immortality.

The colours fade to muted tones,  
as eyes will see the duller hues.  
The world around,  
drains to brown and grey,  
like Summer slipping into Autumn.

My wardrobe tells a different tale,  
a palette where the colours boom,  
of yellow and blue, of purple and pink,  
which the baby-faced shop-girl claims  
looks great against the grey and black.

The crimson that shared my path,  
my longtime friend,  
no longer marks my fruitfulness,  
but flashes to remind me of the change,  
returning me to the child before.



Looking Good





03

(after Barthes, R, 1957, *Plastics in Mythologies*)

## Skeuomorph

We stand on the threshold  
of re-defining who we are  
I see your game  
a shapeless shameless nothingness  
aspiring to be something else  
to satisfy the masses  
bring us closer to the unreachable  
hiding in the stuff of alchemy  
—luxury objects that consent to be prosaic  
—you become our buckets and our jewels

what are you really  
a reminder of the past  
or the next big thing  
a high-stakes dealer in the imitation game  
you tease our senses  
textured distressed familiar

do we trust your plastic hold  
you may replace the others  
allow our eyes to fall for your deceit  
but a human touch betrays you  
faux fur faux life false god

The oceans move with your abundant waste  
a toxic symbol of our transient, ever changing desires  
and yet from this synthetic soup  
we force we cast and press  
we reincarnate re-use  
create a new estate



*Skeuomorph*



## Honest Broken Blue Willow

In my palm, a tiny shard,  
a solitary fragment of porcelain, discarded  
and scattered by the plough.  
What remains of the hands that made you?  
No finger trace left of times passed,  
good or bad.  
Whose were the lives that touched yours?  
What scars remain there?  
Could this crumb unveil the past,  
tell us something of our future?

In this moment it remains silent  
as lines and marks plunge into emptiness.  
A piece of sky,  
a garden neatly kept,  
a wisp of cloud  
all lost at water's edge,  
the story suddenly ended  
in smithereens.

Are these some shattered dreams, broken lives,  
secrets held but shaded behind a distant lost and fallen tree.  
You can no longer reveal your legends,  
yet in this scrap you dare to ask me  
to fill the gaps beyond your fractured, dirt encrusted frame.



*Honest Broken  
Blue Willow*

05

## A Beautiful Solution

Lines, long lines, long, long lines, going somewhere, nowhere, travelling toward infinity, altering, transforming, metamorphosing, touching humanity, changing its design, changing its place.

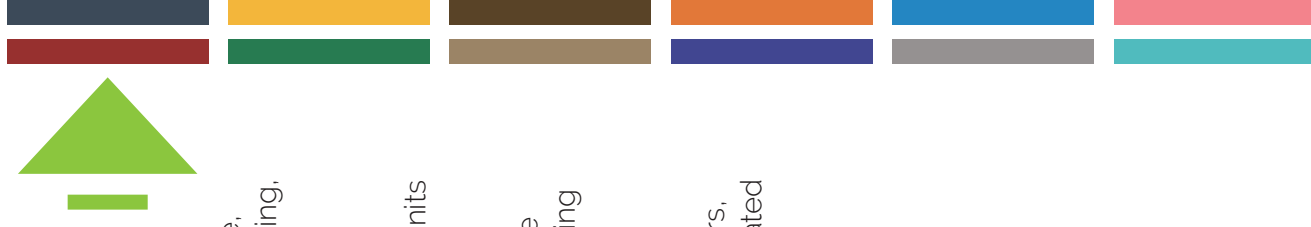
Telling tales, telling tall tales, building history, building new, building me. Lines of plastics in polymeric chains, repeating units bonded in symmetry.

Lines of poetry, lines of chemical poetry, lines of ink on a page organic, synthetic. A formula for life. All life is in the line, pursuing the line, pushing the line, pushing me.

Look for us here, blended, subsumed, contained within many parts, united across time and space, our strength is in numbers, our harmony in sharing essence. Carbon to hydrogen in repeated lines, remodeled in your hands.

Life is now a polymer, in which the Earth is wrapped,  
And so on...

*(the last two lines are taken from Kurt Vonnegut, 1992,  
Breakfast of Champions, p228)*



*a beautiful solution*

# Unravelling Life

06

## Unravelling Life

Particles collide  
uniting in strands of complex pairs

Silky ribbons caught on summer winds  
swirling, coiling, crossing universes in a game of hide and seek

Found at last among the beautiful array  
one meets the other with a tender touch  
becoming violent rapture

Did some hand stir this essence  
exciting atoms in a black and unctuous abyss

Life's messenger carrying beautiful data  
allowing collisions to advance its march

With gentle footsteps on the golden stair  
forming for me the sweetest backbone.



07

## Plasticity

we are the alpha and omega  
together on the road  
toward a vanishing point  
somewhere  
our minds at work to answer material questions  
to resolve the geometric coordinates  
computed in complex sublinear time  
but how will we ever manage this multidimensional data  
all those zeros and the 1's  
the trace of us

chairs like children  
fall, collide, deform  
like algorithms with rhythm  
bouncing noiselessly  
look at these naughty polygons  
going, going,  
gone in bounded deformation

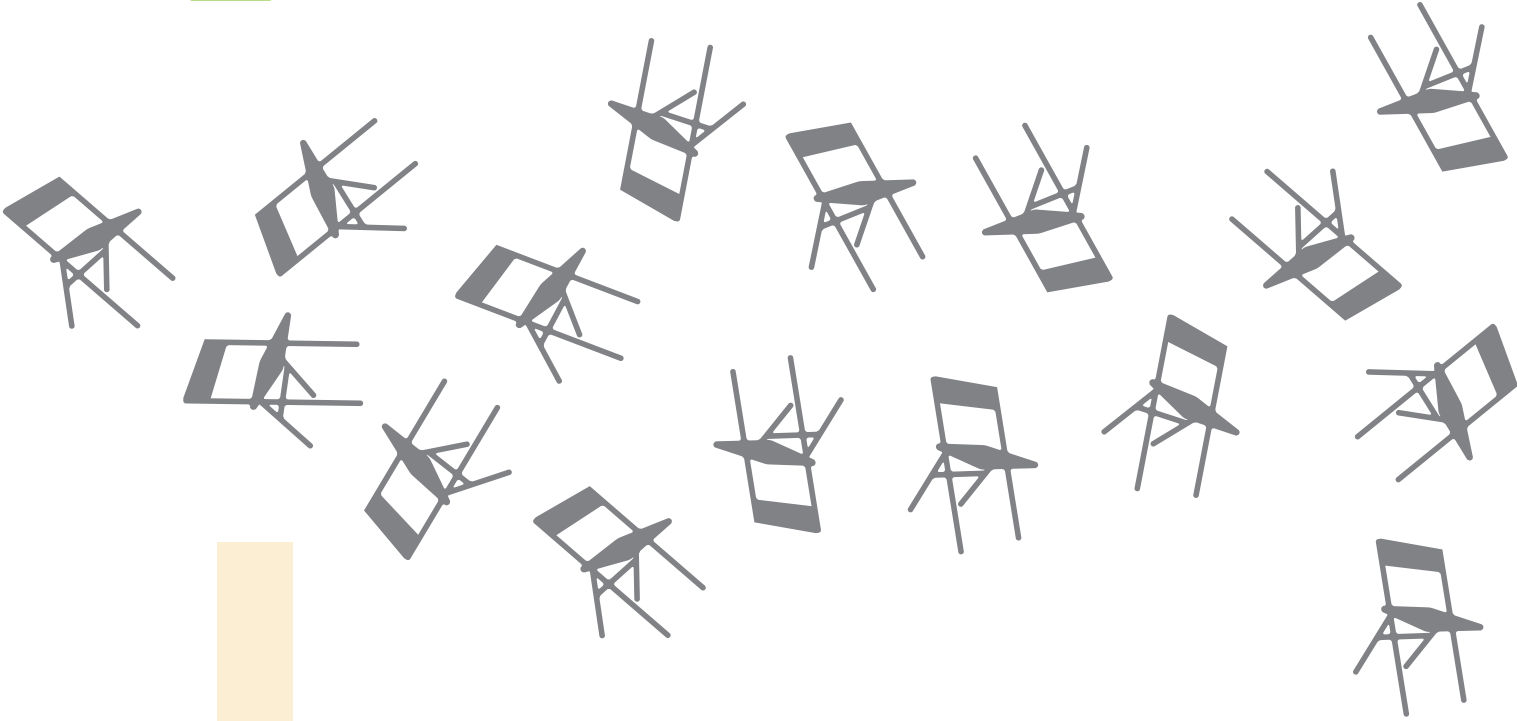
$BD(\Omega)$



*In mathematics, a function of **bounded deformation** is a function whose distributional derivatives are not quite well-behaved-enough to qualify as functions of bounded variation, although the symmetric part of the derivative matrix does meet that condition. Thought of as deformations of elasto-plastic bodies, functions of bounded deformation play a major role in the mathematical study of materials. (Wikipedia)*

Plasticity





08

Chairs



*Chairs*

09

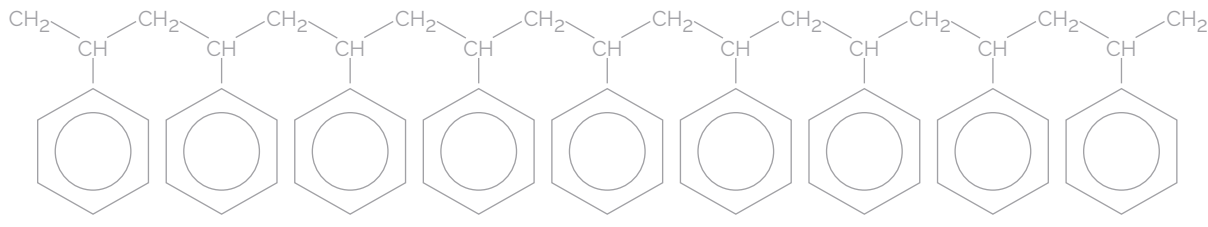
## Held in Chains

Polyamide Polypropylene  
Polysaccharide Polyethylene  
Cellulose Polytetrafluoroethylene  
Deoxyribosenucleicacid Polyacrylontrile  
Polyvinylchloride Polystyrene  
Polymethyacrylate Polyvinylacetate

We are surrounded by the many  
wrapped in their chemical embrace  
laminated in an amorphous mass  
in sickness and in health  
that even death may not divide

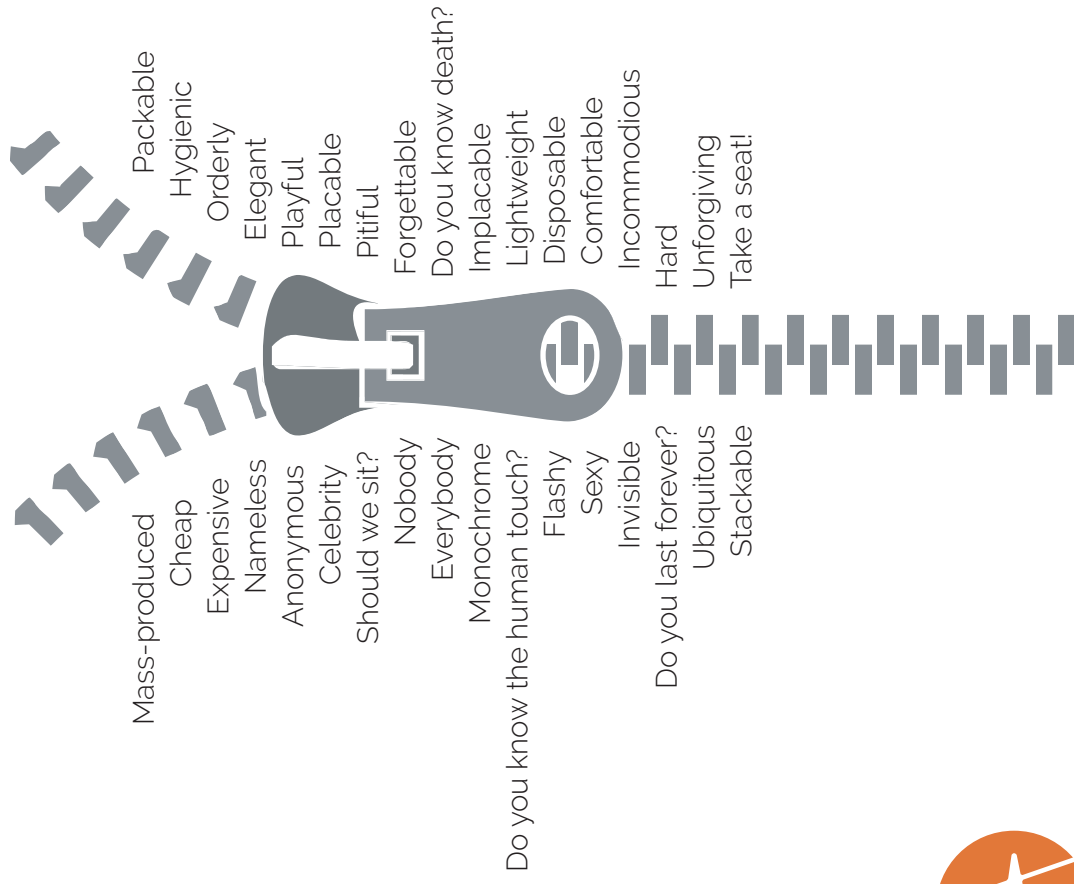
Polychloroprene Polyacetal  
Polybutylene Polyester  
Silicone Polycarbonate  
Melamine Ribonucleic acid  
Polythalamide  
Polynucleotide Polypeptide

Held in  
chains



10

## Monobloc Unzipped



*Monobloc Unzipped*



# The White Plastic Chair

11

## The White Plastic Chair

And seated in a sumptuous chair,  
she reads to me from her new book of poems,  
her words flow like smooth, rich chocolate,  
an earthly feast made first for gods.  
then she feeds me  
green, homemade soup  
with vegetables mingled and fused to softest velvet, warm and sweet.  
After lunch, she reads again seated in yet another chair,  
a poet's throne.  
In her garden there is a white plastic chair,  
she sits again  
fills space and time and everything between  
with words, her words.  
I sense that every time she takes a chair, something happens.



## Pater Noster (Our Father)

Who came to see these grey chairs?

A holy sea of grey in a golden glow.

Thousands on a pilgrim's path,

following in the feet of thousands gone before.

Now casualties of zealous crowds who long to glimpse St. Peter's heir.

They will make their offering again, without question, Day after Day.

Collecting stories from the multitude of Babel's Tower,

they continue to bear the weight of the hoards,

swelling the ranks of those who share the passion and the pain.

From on high the saints look on with nonchalant regard.

The grey against the golden glow,

the flashing scarlet of the guards,

a tiny white figure emerges to a roar of thousands in the square.

Contained and cheery chatter transforms into the cries of ecstasy and madness, as chairs are

pushed and dragged and toppled against the human rush to reach the boundary

to glimpse the simple man, an old man

elevated to greatness by his peers,

carrying the weight of a church on his small shoulders,

a church sitting at a crossroads.

Mothers reach towards the little man as he passes by.

Their babies thrust before him for his kiss, a blessed kiss.

Frightened, crying children thrown toward the cavalcade with little care for the precious bundle.

The chosen child is greatly blessed, its tears and fear ignored by an exalted parent.

Forgive our foolishness.

Who came to see these grey, unnoticed chairs?

Battered, bruised and weather-aged.

Honoured guests at lofty celebrations,

welcoming the new and bidding farewell at many passings.

Do they sit at the right hand of the Father?

Ordered and disordered.

Marking time, safe behind the sacred line,

ignorant of a world beyond,

eyes closed to horror and betrayal,

keeping secrets through years of silence and duty.

Who came to see these grey chairs?

Will their Kingdom come?

Their sins be all forgiven?



*Pater Noster  
(Our Father)*

**Material Seduction (in his Voido Chair)**

"Come, contemplate and sit a while.  
 Come lie with me,  
 why don't you do it now!  
 Head there,  
 feet there.  
 Allow my rise and fall to ease you  
 take me in  
 let me move you  
 I am silent company.  
 I will not judge  
 I offer you comfort  
 I am everywhere and nowhere  
 I will transform you  
 I am beneath you  
 I am above you  
 I am within you  
 I am you."



*Material  
 Seduction  
 (in his Voido Chair)*



Spring arrives.  
 A newness stops the breath,  
 ruptures the crust  
 from which a nubile form emerges  
 no touch has altered yet.  
 With colour lush and sharp  
 it turns the head  
 and lingers in the eyes,  
 leaves nectar on the lips.

The summer sun warms  
 as passions rise.  
 Such rapture shared  
 beneath a canopy,  
 rich and fertile,  
 lasting long into night.  
 Scented with sweetest wine,  
 lips still caress  
 the untarnished bride.

Falling leaves in falling rain.  
 Moist wings against the push  
 of encroaching violation,  
 trapped where they now lie.  
 The verdant lawn fades to earthy tones  
 of dirt and clay, of dust,  
 as minds turn with springtime longing  
 to love lost in fleeting pleasures.

Now old, cold and dull,  
 winter lays all bare.  
 Memories retreat  
 as darker days cast gloom.  
 A shadow of that luminous glow  
 hidden in a quickening night.  
 The lustre lost as fire melts the dream  
 of a tender growth  
 it craves to renew.



cast away



15

## Plastic Vanitas

The table now is set for life,  
yet speaks to us of death, decay.  
Things made beautiful by use.  
What contradiction and confusion does this art display?

Vanity of vanities,  
worthless objects that still command desire,  
beauty lies down with ugliness and meaningless,  
before our eyes, they playfully conspire.

From darkness light reveals a glimpse.  
The view disrupted by its shafted beams.  
Still, life tastes bitter, sweet, in unequal parts.  
Illusion hides intent, as nothing here is what it seems.

The silence screams,  
as fragments of our lives are hurled upon the stage.  
The artist's hand has reached into Pandora's Box.  
With alchemy she dares to slow the march of age.

What foolishness this is,  
what crude conceit,  
our lives inconsequential  
wrapped lavishly in pale deceit.



Plastic  
vanitas

## Pouring - Companion Poem to Small Puffin Jug

She brought with her a little puffin jug  
 I asked her why  
 because it would have been a photograph  
 the sadness wrapped inside the lost, abandoned thing  
 it takes me to the void between us  
 fills it with loneliness  
 so that it is never empty.

### *Small Puffin Jug*

*This morning,  
 I decided to open the boxes  
 we never meant to leave  
 for quite so long,  
 and there you were, our puffin jug  
 all plump and optimistic,  
 ready to start over,  
 be filled  
 So I went to the garden,  
 picked marigolds,  
 laid a table.*

Elaine Beckett (2016),  
 Faber and Faber



*Pouring  
 Companion Poem to  
 Small Puffin Jug*



## Mariah Chumley-Jones and the Mysterious Plastic Chair

There is a space beneath the chair  
 where no one ever goes.  
 Below the chair an empty place,  
 seen only by small toes.

The child is told to sit up straight.

"Please focus on your book."

A whisper from a little voice, now urges!

"Come down and take a look!"

The curious girl seeks out the voice.

"While teacher's back is turned."

"Who are you, where do you sit?"

Her voice becomes concerned.  
 Her voice becomes angry and play

"I'm here, I'm here, do come and show!"

There's much I have to show."

The voice now urgent, whispers

"Be quick, for we must go."

"Go where exactly? Is it fun?"

Will there be lots to eat?

I must not go with strangers though,

I should not leave my seat."

The voice grows angry,

the chair vibrates,

the teacher gets annoyed.

"Sit still, Mariah or leave the class."

There's silence from the void,  
 beneath.

A calm returns

the chairs are still,

a hand comes from below.

A pull, a scream,

the child is gone.

The chair remains alone.



Mariah Chumley-  
 Jones and the  
 Mysterious  
 Plastic Chair

## The Ghost of a Chair - Clear Thinking

Is there a ghost in the chair observing my rest?  
 No, the ghost is the chair and the chair is not there.  
 If the chair is not there, can I trust what I see?  
 Is it me who is here?  
 Is the chair really me?

Said the ghost, from the seat,  
 I am yours to command.  
 But say I, should I stare?  
 Do I sit?  
 Do I stand?

As you wish, said the ghost  
 but beware of your dreams  
 you may think you know life  
 but it is not what it seems.



*The Ghost of a  
 Chair - Clear  
 Thinking*



## Sitting Quietly

A plastic chair is not a chair that stays the same.  
 It starts as white and stacks, one on the other.  
 It sits in commune with mankind,  
 in all the places that we inhabit,  
 it shares our journey.

Willingly.

It needs no language to fit in.  
 No confusion of tongues on Shinar's plains.  
 It speaks of people,  
 hears the record of their lives,  
 and keeps the secrets  
 unconditionally.

It finds its way onto every stage.  
 Taking front and centre,  
 under the camera's heated gaze.  
 Hiding too in all the darkest recesses of our world,  
 instrument of human trade,  
 accomplice in deeds diabolic and depraved.

Never judging.

Silent observer, passive spectator,  
 impermeable yet absorbing history,  
 but for how long?



*Sitting  
 quietly*



20

## Splurge

The fishing boats bob gently in the harbour.  
Eager, hungry crowds throng the pretty little streets.  
Some eating richest ice-cream at the ice-cream parlour,  
from coloured plastic stools hang happy feet.

Bright colours caught in Cornish sunshine  
deal the artist an opal palette,  
to catch and fix a moment  
before it fades.

With a splash of colour from another's hand  
plastic paint is thrown across the chair.  
The spin and swirl raise the stakes  
high and higher still,

watch now as all the colours run,  
melt and flow in streams of Neapolitan  
across the soft and silky  
sundrenched golden sands.



*splurge*



**Well-tempered**

His clavier gave a rhythm to my day  
 as ology played with ology  
 on the screen where my efforts reside  
 and me  
 a soloist  
 alone in joy and pain  
 motionless against all his preludes and fugues  
 complex thoughts in every key  
 notes convey an intention  
 or more likely hide it  
 my mind drifts  
 while a steady march dictates a pace  
 to soothe me  
 and wake my stagnant brain  
 time to unravel the mess  
 settle the grand question



Well-tempered



## Nighttime Visitor (After Tracey)

Lying in a hinterland  
 between wake and sleep  
 where poems like dreams are born  
 grow and ravage me  
 then lost, forgotten  
 as consciousness raps my reluctant head  
 longs for rapture  
 real or imagined  
 would settle now for sleep  
 silent lips press into sweetest sheets  
 I draw them toward me for comfort and warmth  
 an otherness against my restless form  
 comes to me in echoes  
 carries me to another place  
 retains my essence there  
 lingers in the scattered remnants  
 of this unmade bed



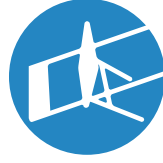
Nighttime  
 Visitor  
 (After Tracey)



My poetry reveals itself  
 a wild and rugged coast  
 that appears and fades  
 as tides deliver their rhythmical blows  
 words as weathered rock  
 roughcast by nature into ruined dwellings  
 long since surrendered to the sea

searching for elusive lines  
 as ill-defined as the ghostly shapes of sheep  
 at cliff edge  
 swallowed by wet Atlantic cloud  
 which seems to linger just above their heads.

A small window opens onto an infinite sky  
 the view disrupted by the stains, the filth that clings to the cold glass  
 corruption placed there by my own words  
 I am pressed to see the world through another's eyes  
 purity and loveliness are cast out,  
 defeated and left to quiet poems.



*awakening*



## Shapes that Come and Go

I walk the fields as summer claims her place.  
 The yellow from the dandelion and the rape,  
 makes me want to draw, to paint, to capture this sudden  
 burst of colour,  
 this pastoral display.  
 But to draw or paint is beyond me.  
 The brush can never find its way across the page.  
 No line is drawn to mark this canvas now.

Instead the words, they dance before me,  
 teeming with rhythm, craving a line.  
 They want a shape, a form,  
 but race away,  
 lured by something,  
 a scent, a movement in the hedge.  
 I beg them to remain,  
 share their intent with me.

I take a path in early summer,  
 the sun reflects through the hedges and the trees,  
 creating shapes that come and go.  
 The path goes toward the horizon and to the sea.  
 The dog runs on, eager to pursue, to reach the end.  
 But from the West laden clouds suggest retreat.  
 I may have come too far.



Shapes that  
 come and go



25

**Chair - Haiku x 2**

A plastic one  
to sit on?  
perhaps looking is better

I see clearly  
the conspiracy-  
of material silence

*Chair -  
Haiku x 2*







## **Appendix 1 - Participant Information Sheet**

### **Introduction**

This information sheet gives information about participation in my research.

My name is Kate Hall and I am a research student at the Arts University Bournemouth (in association with the University of the Arts London). This enquiry is part of my thesis and submission for the award of PhD.

### **The purpose of my study is to ask**

**How does a poetic narrative affect our perceptions and experience of a designed object?**

### **How will the study be conducted?**

As part of my research I am asking a small group of people to respond poetically to a designed object. In my case I have been drawn to chairs and plastic chairs in particular. So I have written poems about them, amongst other objects.

To participate and help my research would you please produce a poem, in response to a designed object. That object can be anything made by man or the processes created by man. The object might be something used in everyday life and can be very ordinary. This may be a new poem or one you have already written.

I would then like to hold an informal conversation with you to gain insights into the experience and outcomes of writing the poem. This may be in person or by email.

I will use your poem(s) solely for the purposes of this research and the presentation of my results. Accordingly your poems will serve as part of the research data and may be quoted, in full or part, in my written dissertation. Copyright remains yours and your participation gives me consent to use your poem(s) as stated.

If you are happy to participate in the research I will ask you to read this information sheet, sign the consent section below and return it to me. When I receive this I will contact you to discuss and confirm your participation, and make arrangements to meet you at your convenience.

### **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

My work aims to rejuvenate the ekphrastic tradition in poetry, in a contemporary context, encouraging experimental poetry as well as reflecting the more conventional approaches to it. This represents a meeting between poets and artists (designers), expanding the discourse on writing of design. Your contribution, I consider as vital to gaining a range of creative perspectives.

**What are the possible disadvantages to taking part?**

Your participation is voluntary. I would like you to consent to participate in this study as I believe that you can make an important contribution to the research. I believe that there are no known risks or disadvantages of taking part, as I will respect and acknowledge your copyright and your confidentiality, unless you explicitly agree that your name (and the name of your company) can be mentioned in publications arising from the research. You are entitled to see a finished copy of the research thesis, please contact me if you would like a copy.

**What happens when the research study stops?**

I would like to publish the results in academic papers and at academic conferences as well as using the other media to share what I consider to be important and interesting conclusions.

## Appendix 2 – Consent Form

**Research Title: *How does a poetic narrative affect our perceptions and experience of a designed object?***

**Name of Researcher:** Kate Hall

**Please initial box**

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated \_\_\_\_\_ for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

3. I understand that any information given by me may be used in future reports, articles or presentations by the researcher.

4. I agree to take part in the above study

5 (a) I consent to my name appearing in any reports, articles or presentations related to the above study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

If you still have questions then you can contact me, otherwise please complete & return to the researcher at email address 1307180@my.aub.ac.uk

## **Appendix 2a – Letter to Designer**

Date: 10<sup>th</sup> December 2014

Mr Ron Arad  
Ron Arad Associates  
62 Chalk Farm Road  
London NW1 8AN

Dear Mr Arad:

I am writing to you to request an interview with you, one that will form a significant part of the data collection for my Doctoral Thesis. My research aims to create a literary narrative for chairs made of plastics that provides a rich, accessible expression of their significance and place in contemporary culture.

I have identified a number of significant people who have influenced the design of the plastic chair in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries. You are one of the most influential contemporary designers whose work has been of great interest to me and your contribution would be a decisive element of my research.

The interviews are to be conducted in a relaxed, semi-formal style, focusing on the story of your chairs. I would very much like to record the conversation so that I can use this as the basis for my analysis and to aid accurate retelling of your story.

The interview should take approximately 2 hours and I am very happy to meet at a place that is convenient for you. I enclose information below that outlines what is involved in respect of your participation in this research study.

I am a Post Graduate Researcher at the Arts University Bournemouth and my research is being done in association with the Museum of Design in Plastics. I have worked with artists in the past, writing for them in a professional capacity. I also write for magazines on subjects relating to culture & heritage.

Thank you for taking time to consider this interview. I look forward to hearing back from you soon.

Sincerely,

Kate Hall  
Doctoral Student Researcher

This enquiry is part of my thesis and submission for the award of PhD. The title of my research is:

*The life and times of plastic chairs: A creative writing approach to object narrative.*

Participation in my research is purely voluntary. The following information may help you to understand what is likely to be involved should you agree to participate.

**What is the purpose of the study?**

To create a literary narrative for chairs made of plastics that provides a rich, accessible expression of their significance and place in contemporary culture

**How will the study be conducted?**

The research fieldwork will be conducted in the form of 'conversation' style interviews. If you agree to be interviewed, the researcher will come to your premises. Interviews will take approximately 2 hours and will be audio-visually recorded.

**What are the possible disadvantages to taking part?**

I would like to ask you to participate in this study, as I believe that you can make an important contribution to the research. If you feel that you would like to participate I will then ask you to formally consent to do so.

There are no known risks or disadvantages of taking part, as I strive to protect your confidentiality, unless you explicitly agree that your name (and the name of your company) can be mentioned in publications arising from the research. If you are taking part in the face-to-face interview, I will send you the transcript of the interview to allow you the opportunity to decide that you have not been misrepresented.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

As an artist /designer you are, I am sure often asked to explain your motivation, the origins of your ideas, your philosophy. Whilst I am keen to discuss these, as they underpin the realisation of your work, my aim is also to uncover from your perspective, the nature of an object so pedestrian yet for the greater part, iconic.

**What happens when the research study stops?**

I would like to publish the results in academic papers and at academic conferences as well as using the other media to share what I consider to be important and interesting conclusions. Your permissions to publish beyond the research thesis will be sought.

### **Appendix 3 –Other Creative Works**

- Third party creative work in this thesis is used solely for the purpose of scholarship and private use. There is no commercial intent.
- I have attributed all creative work to the best of my knowledge.

## Appendix 4 (1-4) - Designer Conversation Transcripts

### 1. Russell Plant (RP)

I You were saying?

P Yeah, I think that's what's quite interesting about, or to me, about furniture opposed to industrial or product design in the respect that if you look at a lot of the most famous pieces of chair design they're coming from architects and often related to specific buildings. Like for example Arne Jacobsen, where things are designed specifically for a building and in some ways I think furniture is more closely connected to arts than perhaps industrial design is in some ways. Because I don't know what it is about furniture but it is different, if you get where I'm coming from.

I I do, I do. I mean what I don't want to do is to prompt you, I mean I utterly agree with you and I think there's a lot of literature around exactly that.

P Yeah.

I How furniture and home design has changed so much. It's now... it's almost all important, it's become the key area of art and design is how you place furniture, what kind of furniture you use, blending the old and the new, these sorts of things.

P Yeah.

I How you feel about the furniture and how you react to it. So...

P Well I think culturally as well, if you look at Scandinavia and the approach to chair design there, if you will, a lot of it is based on the warmth of the materials, wood, the climate, the culture they come from and if you look at Italian design it's got its own... it's got a completely different flavour. And a lot of that is quite well explained in chair design opposed to product design. And again, I can't really put my finger on why that is, but I think it is.

I Maybe that's something that I'm beginning, or hoping to, perhaps uncover a little bit why it is like that. Right, the questions that I gave you in advance, I did have a look at the work you do and it's funny how I've already looked at the work you



do and I find the stadium of chairs a really fascinating and very attractive idea for someone who writes creatively because it has so many connections with everything and with us generally. So, where to begin? And I suppose the first thing to do is to get you to talk about your plastic chairs.

P Okay, well I think to go back there, and don't forget I'm not coming from... and I'm sure a lot of people you talk to won't, we're not really coming from an arts and crafts kind of situation, we're coming if you like, more from an industrial solution to problems.

[Interruption, recording paused]

P Right, where were we? Yeah, I think... you know my background, this business exists because I'm an industrial designer and in a sense part of a story of the furniture and the things that we do are connected obviously to my story, which evolved from running a design practice and being a design consultant specifically in furniture in the United States, working for office furniture companies and the like and then deciding that I wanted to do some of that for myself. To create things which were... or create, if you like, a vehicle for those ideas, because it's very difficult to, I think, sometimes to even make a living in the traditional way. Well not so much to make a living, but to be able to do things in the way that you want them because you're constantly driven, not by just the brief that says we need something which does this or does that within these commercial constraints, it's then also driven by the editorial processes of whoever is looking at that work which you may, or may not disagree with. As a... if you like, as a designer, you may not always agree with directions which are being taken but as a consultant there comes a point where you have to accept the consequences of those decisions and move on. And at the end of it I started to question whether or not that direction was really working for me, I guess I felt I knew better in some senses. And I think then, once you start that process, of course you are completely driven then by the market, external forces on that level, but at the same time you're still trying to hang onto the reasons you set upon that journey. And so, to get to it, we... you know I had a lot of exposure to problems which existed in the industry, things that were very real. You know I'd fly around the world looking at projects on big construction sites where yes, it's about the furniture, it's about the things, you know is it comfortable, those kinds of obvious questions, but then it's also driven by the construction process and how the

product itself relates to that. You know, because it's one thing designing and manufacturing a product but part of what we do, which is different to a fixed piece of furniture, oh sorry, a loose piece of furniture which arrives in a box, you unpack it and you put it in a room. This is about actually getting that installed into the building and not just ten chairs but sometimes a hundred thousand chairs, and that in itself has its problems. So you know, I guess the start of the journey was really about recognising problems, problems of the installation process of that furniture, its journey from the factory to the building and realising that actually there weren't products on the market which really set about answering those, they were more about, you know. And I think if you look at our industry and that's arenas, stadiums and you look at office furniture as an example, I think there had been much less emphasis twenty years ago on good design and a professional approach to it. It largely, the products which we competed against were driven by repetitive manufacturing structures, the idea that somebody has a factory that produces steel products and they don't necessarily employ a designer, they have some engineers and that's not... you know, we all need engineers, but I think their constraints were largely based on their own constraints of, you know, we've got a machine over there that bends steel tubes, so we'll make that a steel tube. And where we use plastics, we won't use them in a structural way because that's too challenging, it's too difficult, it requires a lot of patience, investment, research and development. You know it's easier to bend a piece of tube because we know that works. And that's what was driving, twenty years ago, products that fit into the kind of environments that we sell today. And so you know, getting back to answering your question, that's what really started the process of the company and the products we make. Did that answer your question?

I Well it does. It's interesting that it's... it definitely personalises it, I mean why you've gone in that direction. I think that's important to have your justification for choosing the direction that you've chosen.

P Yeah, and I think, just to go a bit further with that question, I think what I'm trying to say is that we didn't set about, for example, saying 'we must make a beautiful chair'. That was, of course, you must do that, that's part of your own brief because the biggest part of our sale is to architects and designers; people designing the beautiful stadiums and arenas, they're some of the biggest names in the business. I mean if you look at what Zaha Hadid is doing, we're working with her on two or three different projects and that's a whole other story, but I

think we really got into this at a point where the architect and design community was starting to demand more from the kind of products that are required to fulfil those functions. And so it was two-fold really, it was about recognising you know, the commercial and functional constraints, but then the aesthetic and the more emotive side of course, comes from within, comes from your own desire to make people look at things and go 'that's not just a solution to a problem, it's a beautiful solution to a problem'. And so that's what's driving it, that's what's driving us, me.

I Well, you are the boss [laughs]. It's funny, in all of that you didn't use the word 'plastic'.

P No.

I That's really interesting, isn't it? A lot of these questions, I think, probably are going to overlap so...

P But I think I will actually add one bit to that: plastic; I didn't use the word but what I said is that, or what I tried to say, was that as a material for us that plastic offered, the ability to do things in a much more refined way because it's not a piece of bent steel, it's something which we can mould into whatever shape we like. But with that comes highly specialised processes and not just processes, but materials and design because it's very difficult to use plastics in that kind of structural way.

I Can I ask you: are you the design driver, or do you have other people doing that?

P I have other people doing that. I would say that my job has evolved; I'm still absolutely involved in that process and it's actually me that still looks at how the company will evolve in terms of product and I work with actually two other people, which have worked for me for ten years, both designers, and I've taken on a more editorial role, if you like, in saying in which direction we go. That said there's still a hell of a lot of two other people in the products that we produce.

I And are your designers in-house or do you have them... are the consultants outside?

P No, they're all in-house. There's a reason for that. The reason for that is that in our business I think it is very difficult because our process, once you start off with a chair, some of the solutions which are packaged inside that product are hard-

won. They're difficult to do, even the process of proving them out goes beyond a laboratory and you know, can you put two hundred kilos here, 'x' many times, they're proving out in the field. Once you're outside in the outdoor environment there's all other factors at play; there's weather, there's rain, there's dirt, there's abuse, there's vandalism and all of those factors, over the years, you go beyond what a British standard might say, it can only ever be a guide really. And then I think the data that we build up internally between the three designers leads us to solutions more quickly and actually is now, what you start to do is it's more than a conceptual process, it's one of evolution. So you know you take things that you learnt from here and from here and from here and you assemble all them together and to bring somebody in from the outside to do that without that huge background of empirical data, it's impossible to get where you need to be. I think that's what we found. Whereas perhaps if you were designing a stacking chair, for example. I think our particular area of expertise is so expert in a way and so niche-related that it's very difficult to bring... you could for example, bring in an external designer who might have a different visual approach, for example, and that's very easy to translate into something as simple - I don't want to put down stacking chairs - but in a sense you are dealing with just a shelf and this is about a system of things, which is infinitely more complex and all of those things relate back to... so yes, I think you could bring an external stylist in and say you know, give us another expression of how this product could look, but again you know, actually being in the field... to even generate that brief is difficult, because you're also referencing factors from the last ten projects you did and how you feel the market is heading. So it's difficult for us to bring in I guess, new blood, external designers and say... and we're also not big enough to do that.

I That's very interesting. I'm just going through the questions because you're already touching on many of the other areas.

P Well tee them up one at a time because I think I'll probably give you different answers.

I Yeah, that's the right thing to do. So what does the plastic chair say about you, if you're an artist, as in what does it say about your art or your style? You are both an artist and a designer, so what does it say about you? I guess you'll probably say well I think I've said a lot of that and some of the language you use suggests... you've talked about systems, you've talked about internal working,

how your designers are in-house and that keeps that... the work is contained and there's this feedback system you talked about, where each project feeds into the next and the engineering and technical aspects feed into the design of the next project.

P It's still very personal. What we do, because of my background, because I'm... the whole beginnings of the business were founded in my desire to do something different, to do something that I felt was better, then I think it's still extremely personal. Whatever product or solution we put out there is something which has to satisfy me and what satisfies me is the, in fact the respect we've earned from the architecture and design community and the big architectural firms, to say you know... we often get involved in projects, some of them we take on, others we don't. It's quite an interesting point actually, because we're doing more of it these days than we ever could, because we're able to... I guess we have the money and the time to do these things now, but in the case of some buildings we're actually asked for a specific response to the building. So in other words, not a product that we produce as a standard item, but we have a project in Russia at the moment where we're working very closely with the owner, who's a retail bazillionaire and you know, he has his own ideas and his architectural company have their ideas and they want something which answers, if you like, or provides the functionality that we produce within some of the things we do but in a different... in a more personalised envelope. And again you know, those kinds of projects are extremely difficult to do because you find yourself, if you're not careful, back in the consulting role where you... you know, it's difficult when you ultimately you have a brief like that and somebody is trying to impose something on you, which you either don't like, you in some instances think it's crass, but there are, you know, there are great things to be learnt from those projects, especially if the client is right. And that's very much about whether we as a company are personally connected with the ideas or with the thing that they're ultimately trying to produce and sometimes you're just not and sometimes you are and that can go onto develop other ideas. So I guess I'm still very much focused on everything that we put out being something that I'm personally happy with.

I And were you happy with this particular project?

P We're still working on it.

I Oh right.

P We're still working on that and at the moment: yes. There are aspects of it that I'm not happy with, but as the process is going on it's kind of back to my old days in a sense where a dialogue is happening between us and we're able to be empathetic to each other's problems and personal opinions, and I think we'll be very happy with the outcome.

I Just as a little aside there, with the work that you do globally, there clearly is some very strong cultural differences across the board. How do you cope with those sorts of differences? Because the Russian bazillionaire who you've got, you work in Brazil, all over the place. Does that mean you have to... do you adjust not your product but your message when you are selling it to them? Or is it because they come to you and therefore you're saying they clearly know what I'm offering and they know what I can offer?

P Yeah, I think it's all of those things, yes. Culture is one of the very interesting things about the job that I do, in the respect that I represent the company in a kind of top-end sales role, and actually a lot of the traction that we get in different markets is about that or about my enthusiasm for the subject and for the products, and actually it's one of the reasons it is very difficult to try and scale the business in the respect that you are so personally connected to the story of the company and to the product and that's often what grips, for example big architectural companies. It's what allows them to feel that they're buying something, which isn't just a standard product, you know, there's that bottle, it's, I don't know, two dollars. What we do is much more of an overall service and much more about, you know, it's about... it is completely solutions driven. You know, a lot of the time, even if the project is ninety per cent standard, they'll want the IP sections which they want to impose their own ideas on and actually there aren't so many companies which can bring what we do to help that happen for them.

I Intellectual property?

P Yeah. And the knowledge base. The ability to be able to firstly understand what it is they're trying to achieve within that environment, but then secondly to do it. If you are commodity-led, if you simply produce a product and somebody comes and says 'well maybe I can have a higher back', that's very easy to do, but often

it's a lot more complicated than that. And yeah, there are big cultural differences; if you look at the work we recently did in Saudi Arabia, their idea of a chair for a very important person is very different to ideas that other people or people in Brazil might have.

I Can you give me more information about that?

P Well it's the cultural stuff. It's how you... what is perceived as being fit for the king. For example, if you look at the Olympics here you'll notice the royal family sat in pretty much standard product and that was all within the envelope of the Olympic Delivery Authority. In Saudi Arabia that's a very different story, you know, that's very much about what the king wants, what the king is going to like.

I What does the king like?

P Pretty much what you would expect. A throne pretty much. Or something which is more... that you and I would more closely connect with than a stadium chair.

I But in plastic?

P No, no. Not necessarily in plastic, no. But certainly... I mean the interesting part of that is that yes, to a degree, because the chairs have to be made from things which are suitable to be used outdoors in some instances, but it is a very, very different idea about what represents a first class experience in Saudi Arabia to one of Brazil. And it's the same all over, all over the world those things change and they are actually, sometimes, the things which might sell a project, how you are able to respond to tuning what you do to those circumstances. Did that help?

I That's actually fascinating and I would never, I haven't even thought about those very specific aspects but yes that's fascinating, really fascinating. The next question was: how have your plastic chairs, or how have your chairs, been conceived? Again you've probably addressed those issues.

P Have they been conceived? Yeah, I have a bit, but more specifically, the products that we produced were a response to a specific need and they involved even things like, which... it's not immediately apparent but part of our business is not... it's global. So sometimes on a project we will have a hundred sea containers to move from one place to another. So logistics is part of how that product packages, how it moves from one place to another and a big part of the Olympics

work here was people were very interested in sustainability, even the packaging that those products were delivered in, cardboard was a no-no. And so trying to condense what we do is both helpful commercially, environmentally. So I guess that's the functional side of it, that's the bit that we are specifically responding to within the concept of the product. Just a very simple... the key conceptual solution was for us to, rather than install individual chairs into a building, we put a rail in. Okay, that might not seem very much but actually it was the whole basis of the business in the respect that while the building is being constructed there's lots of concrete, there's paint falling out of the ceiling and so it's a construction site and you're trying to install furniture which gets damaged. And previously, before we started out that's not how it was done, it was done by putting individual chairs, and some of the problems that I saw as a consultant around the world were those things were pretty much damaged goods by the time the building ever opened. So, by putting a simple rail in we were able to substantively do the installation of the product throughout the stadium and leave putting the chair, the valuable bit, until the last minute, which enabled us to avoid all sorts of construction problems but still be able to work alongside the main contractor in delivering what is the end product. So that's fundamentally the concept.

I It's interesting too that the analogy with house furniture generally you would never put your good furniture in until the painting and decorating and everything is done because this is valuable stuff and therefore... it's the icing on the cake, don't put it in while the workmen are still throwing things around the place. So I think that's quite nice, the idea that elevates your product a little bit as well, is it's not just a sort of functional seating system, it is actually...

P But that's the change, that's the change that I said and it still is evolving. When we started out it was, you know, what was a chair in a stadium, it was a piece of metal tube with the plastic. There was no attempt to do something which was furniture. Something that somebody could actually pick up and say that's a beautiful thing. They'd pick it up as a: it's just a manufactured commodity. And that's the change that's still happening. One thing that people connect with when they go, whether it be a sports arena or a stadium, often the thing that the person remembers or the people that visit there remembers is the furniture, and actually it's part of what we're still doing because some of our closest competitors still have products which are... they're good products but they're very... this is personal stuff, they have a very engineered, mechanical, industrial, highly



durable look to them and what, hopefully we're trying to do is to do something which is noticeably furniture, which still has a kind of emotional connection with people in the sense that it's more furniture-like. And I think... I know that's still how we look at things at the moment, we'll constantly evaluate what we're doing against those goals, which is very difficult to do in the field that we're in because of it's the construction industry.

I Presumably you want people to respond to your product. How do you get that feedback? How do you get a measure of people's response to it? You know, a stadium has this... it gives one a notion of a huge, awe inspiring place, and yet you're talking about people responding on a personal level. How do you measure that? How do you get it? How do you get a hold of it?

P We don't get it directly from the people that visit there because that's not the people that we generally meet or interview. But what we get it from, I think, is mostly architects because as I said, the way this will work is via architects who are designing buildings will often come, and they're looking for something and given the nature of the people they want the best things or the things that they're happy with, and ultimately they have clients, their clients are often thinking very carefully about how they want their arena to work, the kinds of products and experience they want from their customers, and so those people are already doing quite a lot of work in determining what the experience that they want for their customers within that arena which is then passed back to us via architects. That's happening all the time, and we'll meet... I probably meet architects and designers two to three times a week and talk specifically about new buildings, the expectation of the seating from those new buildings. I think that's generally how we get that feedback and connect with, and also, you know, you go along to projects after you've finished them and that's always a tough thing to do in a sense, after you've finished the work and you go there to an opening event or, actually, more importantly you revisit it three/four years later because I see those buildings as our showrooms. They're not just a sale and that's done, because ultimately if you have somebody who's spending, I don't know, fifty/sixty million on a new building then they'll often do their due diligence. So they'll go around the world and they'll look at different buildings, they'll look at solutions which have been in for five years and they'll evaluate those against what they promised to deliver, and that might be quality, it might be overall experience of the operator, you know, there's a lot of channels that you get product feedback, from that say

we need to change this. Right now there's a desire in... a lot of stadiums make their money from Sky boxes, from cooperate entertainment, and so that's continuing to gather pace. It's not necessarily about, what I call, the general admission seats that somebody pays fifty/sixty quid to go and watch a game. And that's fast evolving, that whole area, so we're developing bigger seats, seats with different functionality, seats with more luxurious materials, that kind of thing. And that feedback comes from every project we do and you can never escape them, you know, the projects you did ten years ago people are still looking at them and evaluating what you've done and where you are today.

I There was something on the radio over the weekend about how there's going to be a requirement for stadiums to produce larger chairs. Not just because people want maybe more space but because people are bigger.

P Yeah.

I And that must impact as well on your design work.

P Yeah, it does. I mean the first time I saw an obese seat...

I They call them obese seats?

P They do in Brazil, yes. You'd have to look at the translation, I think in America it's - and you'll have to probably correct my vocabulary - is it barometric?

I Oh, yeah.

P So we've produced seats there which are this wide and we have, as part of the contract, we have to produce... and it's been a real problem because they haven't said we're prepared for that to be a completely different product, it must be the same... it must look... it must be made from the same materials as the other products in the building, but yeah I think generally you're right. Beyond the more extreme level of that yeah, it's changed a lot. The project were recently commissioned in Saudi Arabia, we literally had to scale the product up for the whole lot. I had to open new moulds because they wanted a much bigger product than we would expect in a UK stadium. Partly because I think they're more closely connected with American architects and it's just how that works. And in the States it's exactly the same, we produce... we've done a lot of work. We've just done three large stadiums in America, all with much larger product.

I On a very, well, both personal and professional level, what is your relationship with plastic?

P Well I think it's ever evolving. I think...

I It's plastic!

P No, no absolutely not. It's not plastic. I think if you look at what we're trying to do, actually we're pushing those materials to the very limit of what's possible. Let me give you an example: to put a piece of plastic outside in the UK, and I don't want to get too technical here, but to put something outside in the UK is actually pretty easy because we get about a hundred/a hundred and twenty kilo-Langley's of UV radiation a year. Whereas if you look at places like Brazil and Saudi Arabia, that's more like two hundred and twenty kilo-Langley's. And so therefore it's not just plastic, its yes you can buy a bag of, what I call, natural polypropylene, even that is not commodity-driven, there are many, many different grades and if you manufacture, as we do, around the world those grades vary. Their mechanical properties are different. It isn't just plastic; it's a very technical thing, it has specific mechanical properties which we know and understand what those properties are in order to not just make the product stronger but to actually be able to make it. For example, the melt flow index of the plastic, the more liquid it is the easier it is to push into a mould, the less liquid it is the more difficult it is to put into the mould. You then start overlaying the kind of speciality additives: pigments, UV stabilisers, flame retardants; all of those things that you put inside have an effect on your starting point, the mechanical properties of what I call the base resin. So that whole idea that it is a... we are to a degree actually designing the material as we go. We will literally look at... we will adjust the materials to meet our needs within the confines of what's possible. So we spend an awful lot of time thinking about what those formulations are, where to and which companies, chemical companies, to align ourselves with to be able to achieve that. Yeah, does that go some way to answering your question? I mean it is completely connected with what we do. It's... so what is my relationship with plastics? Sometimes it's... I'm extremely frustrated by it, sometimes it offers solutions to problems, it enables us to do things in ways which we wouldn't be able to do. The whole idea of manufacturing a mould, you know, six tonnes of steel and machining out this beautiful cavity that looks like a Swiss watch and being able to produce a part to fill that mould requires an awful lot of experience to do it, but it also enables us

to produce something which is hopefully extremely satisfying in the way that it looks, and we can build a lot of engineering into that which we wouldn't be able to do via any other process. So I'm fascinated by the process. And it is constantly changing; there are new grades of material, new processes, new ways of doing things. You know, injecting harder materials and softer materials at the same time so that you can have something that's very stiff and very strong attached to something which is very flexible and pliable in the same mould in the same product, so yeah it's highly technical.

I Do you then feed into the technical development? Does the work that you do feed into, say for instance, those working at the sharp end of material development?

P Yeah, I think yeah it does. We're completely connected to that. I mean there are lots of things like, for example, hybrid moulding, again a very technical term but what does that mean? You know, one of the things that the industry... a lot of plastics technology is driven by automotive, for obvious reasons, the volumes are enormous and the gains are enormous too to make things lighter weight, to make them more durable. And that involves, if you like, pushing composite technology, pushing what's possible and to be able to take very thin steel parts which have certain properties that plastics can never have, but rather than welding them together, to connect those pieces together, so the idea that you can open a mould, and it's just a shape inside two pieces of metal, to take a component that has a certain set of mechanical properties, put it inside that mould automatically and then to close it and put the plastic just where you want it. Often, that is driven and the people who develop those concepts and ideas are just like us, driven by the successes and failures of that. So we often look at automotive, and for example, the desire to produce something which is extremely strong and light-weight. That's happening in automotive, there's a lot less use of traditional welded structures and, you're looking at more intelligent solutions too, that are environmental, they're more durable, they're lighter weight, saves on fuel. And a lot of those technologies and ideas we bring into what we do [0:41:19.2 audio volume drops from this point onward] in our own way, and yes, we will work hand-in-hand, for example, we're working on one product... we're going material science at the moment, actually it's a company called ((?0:41:29.2)) and they part of ((?0:41:31.5)) material science and, you know, they have a lot of technicians which are connected with the automotive industry,

so I'll work with their engineers on their experiences and ideas, things that they've done and try and use those solutions and develop those concepts within the confines of our industry.

I Looking at some of the projects you're involved in, obviously stadia and that sort of thing, from an outsider's perspective the one thing that really grabs attention is colour. And obviously from an artistic perspective colour is clearly quite significant. Is colour, when you look at these stadia, is colour important to you as the provider of the product or is colour just incidental in that it's maybe part of the brief? 'This is what we're looking for'. Do you have any input in terms of...?

P The only input we have is in a sense a negative one. And I mean that, of course, there are some things, there are some... it's not just the colour, it's the colour layout. For example there's been a big trend in the last five years to select from a large colour pallet and try and make that as natural as it can look. Actually the idea behind that is to make the stadium look full when it's empty.

I I see.

P That's one of the ideas. There are other concepts that the colour comes into, there are colour consultants employed on every job to decide. If you look at the project that we did in Africa, I think it was an architectural concept was for a ((?0:43:46.8)), which is an African cooking pot, and the quality of the ((?sides)) were all supposed to be, I suppose, African. You know, motif of bright oranges, rusty colours, things that are true in the natural environment and that's often the case. Every single job has... you know, the stadium that we did in Gdansk. Gdansk is where most of the world's amber comes from, I believe, and that was the architectural concept and that was actually the start to make things more translucent. To, rather than make something a solid colour, it's actually quite nice in some of the trials that we did, I really liked them. We made the material transparent so you got this kind of semi-see-through tinted look, and it was a great concept but technically impossible to achieve and, you know, one of the... I mentioned to you about, you know, people think that you can just take any colour you like and put it anywhere you want outside, and you can't because some pigments like black are extremely robust, and the more chromatic colours: the reds, the yellows, firstly they're extremely expensive to colour that much plastic, I don't know exactly where it comes from, with red you can't use obviously heavy metals and stuff like that now ((?0:45:17.8)). So it is, generally, the brighter

the colour the more sensitive the pigment is and to put it outside in the sun then requires actually a lot of technology to end up with a result that isn't faded out in two or three years' time. So a lot of time we spend advising people with, of course, fantastic ideas about what they want to achieve, but then reigning that back within and saying look, I know it's a hard concept to grip but in a way, red is more expensive than black, you know most people don't have that concept, that... and then to explain to them how that's going to look after five years and say, well, maybe the compromise is somewhere here. Here are the results of ten-thousand hours of ((0:46:16.4?)) testing, which is accelerated weather testing, and sit down and say well you can achieve something that's closer to this. So it's not just a personal judgement anymore, it's about giving the right advice and those people understanding where technology is and pigments, and UV stabilisation. It's not just a, hey I want a Pantone blah, blah, blah. It's not that simple.

I Because in one of your... in your designer website was three people standing behind what looked like concept chairs: one had a Union Jack on it...

P Oh, that was just architect... that was Brazil.

I You'd only do one of them. I had visions of a stadium...

P No, no people... we do, we do, do. I mean, that's not... that's just marketing for Brazil, and that involved various... but there is what we call in mould decoration. There are stadiums which want to put the club emblem into the plastic itself and the technology enables us to, or exists where you essentially end up with a printed decal, it's a thin film, manufactured from either polypropylene or a similar, and before the plastic is injected into the mould it gets placed onto the surface of the mould so that it becomes part of it when it's in the mould. So that's the technology that's there and we use.

I The way you describe it there, it obviously has evolved, so it's not as complex as perhaps one might think it is, or perhaps it's moved on now and it isn't as difficult to do. The idea of not just colouring the chair but using it as a canvas to put something on it.

P Yeah, that technology is all there, but it depends whereabouts in the world you're working. If you look at, for example, we manufacture in the UK, South China, we

have manufactured in Africa, we manufacture in Brazil, we manufacture in North America, we manufacturer in the Middle East. And we're not a manufacturer, we are a design and marketing company and actually we don't want to be involved in manufacturing anything because it changes the focus of what we're doing; it changes us from being able to think differently about how we manufacture something, about the technology that's available, into a bit where I... you know, the conversation I started out by saying that a lot of the manufacturing companies are driven by what they have because it requires too much investment to get out of that and that then impacts on the design process, the materials that they use and we don't want to be constrained by those things. And if you look at places we ((?0:49:22.5)), it's not... in some countries it's not possible to manufacture some products, not because the technology doesn't exist but some of that technology is extremely expensive so the volumes of what you produce or the constraints come onboard and you have to say actually we're not going to do that there, we can't do that there because technology, although it exists, it's not in that country or it's not in that specific place in that country.

I I'm just aware of the time. If you were in a position to look ahead, where would you see what you're doing going? I know that awful question: where do you see it in five years' time and ten years' time?

P Where do I want to see it?

I Or where you want to see it, yeah.

P Where do I want to see it? I would like to see it, I mean these are things that we've touched upon already but we're again, acutely aware of the technology and materials because it is a highly technical area. It's also commercially driven, I mean people are not just prepared to pay any price, there is a market level of which we're probably in the top end. But the way technology is evolving and some of the new processes and new materials that I'm seeing are kind of like, again, just to back up a second and say that I... to produce things which are lighter, are environmentally better and are more, I guess more comfortable. The idea of being able to combine softer, more pliable materials, things which are more like upholstery but not upholstery. You know there are polymers that are out there, TPUs for example which have got beautiful properties, they're very soft, they're slightly pliable, they're not that [tapping] hard plastic. And to be able to combine that, those kinds of properties, with engineering plastic, which can

allow us to create strength and stability and mechanical things but with something which we would more closely connect with composited furniture. And I think if we could do that, with all of the constraints, the, you know I mentioned UV stabilisation, one of the big things that stops us doing that today is that it's very difficult to make TPRs suitably weather resistant, but that technology is evolving and the chemicals are out there to get that to some degree. But that's where I would hope that it would be in five/ten years. I'd hope to be able to produce something like that. And also, I think from an environmental point of view the use of a lot more recycled polymers. I think we need to do that. I mean, if you look at the price of oil, I mean that's another bizarre thing that happens. You see we're not producing ten seats, we're producing a hundred thousand seats a go which is literally hundreds of tonnes of material and small changes in oil price can affect what we do very, very quickly, and so I think that's going to be another challenge: how to bring in... we're already doing some work for some specific customers who want a green solution. I mean we've got a customer in Amsterdam who is pushing us really hard to try and say when this building opens it is a sustainable building, it achieves certain goals, and part of that is recyclability and it's very difficult to find recycled feedstock that you can... because they don't compromise and say 'you can always make it black', you know, they still want it to be red, they still want it to be green, but the recycled materials that are out there, you can't really achieve that because you can't get to a... because obviously the feedstock isn't clear, there's a lot of white product which is Zinc oxide, which is the pigment that makes it white and it's very difficult to disguise with a red pigment. And I think that's partially... I don't think the technology ever gets there, I think that's a cultural change in what people are prepared to, not just accept, but what they want to achieve from the building. Is it important that this is filled with a product which meets those directives or is it more important that it's bright red? And those are the kinds of things that are happening, and hopefully the customer we're working with, well they do understand that, but there are a lot of other stakeholders to bring on board, you know, the club that are going to play there... but that's the way I see it evolving.

I Very interesting. Well I think you've covered so much.

P Super.

I Or what I wanted, anyway.



P Thank you.

I I'll give you a break. Thank you! Is there anything else that you feel that you want to add? Is there anything that maybe I should have asked you or you were expecting me to ask you?

P No, I think you've... I just hope that I've been able to answer the more, I guess personalised questions about, you know, how do I feel about design. How that... it's very difficult when ultimately you are in an industry which is so demanding and puts so many constraints on what it is you do. It's very difficult to get, if you like, to take more of an arts and crafts approach to those questions. You know, we are driven by what's possible, what's commercial, of course good ideas and hopefully at the end of it all we produce something which I can look at, or that our customers can look at and say 'that's a nice product, it looks nice, it's comfortable'. It's such a collection of different pressures and ideas, even, as I've said world material prices stuff like that, all of these things are driving, you know, it is art, but it's not art. Hopefully we've gotten that mix... I've gotten that mix right because that is ultimately my background. If I felt there was a day I was coming in and looking at product development and seeing things which didn't meet those objectives, that didn't make me feel happy, that didn't make me feel that's nicely resolved. Yes there are some compromises but ultimately it's a nice product that would probably be a sad day. But all of those things are there, but it's an extremely technological and commercially driven market.

I It would be interesting to see what kind of responses I get from say, for instance, Ron Arad, people who are clearly...

P Oh Ron... you know, he's going to give you a completely different, I would assume anyway, a completely different take on that because in a sense Ron's working at the, you know, conceptual end of things and I guess Ross would be somewhere in the middle I would think.

I I was hoping, I did actually write to Philippe Starck and getting past personal assistants is obviously quite difficult, and he wasn't able to meet with me because of his schedule. But it's interesting a lot of his work I do find very fascinating and I like... I've already been able to make sort of creative responses to, but it's... what I'm liking about what you're talking about today is the fact that you're probably saying exactly the same as he would say.

P With a slightly different bias.

I And he is producing...

P Absolutely, and I think that's what's so interesting about Philippe Starck, if you look at the hotels and the interior work and then you see some other, I can't think of a specific example at the moment, but in terms of chairs I can think of one, the Cafe Costes chair, it's not plastic but it's metal and it's paired to the minimum. He's very much got a grasp of all of those things but done it... I admire the work he does, I mean some of it isn't to my taste but at the same time I don't know whether you saw the design student programme that he did on the BBC?

I No I haven't, no.

P No, it was really interesting to watch because he gave you an insight into the things that I'm talking about were all very definitely there. And if you look at some of the objects, the beautifully sculptural things that he does I think, you know, the stuff, the work that he's done for Magis and incredible sympathetic use of the material in the respect that it is solid but it's also fluid. I mean that's one of the great things about injecting a liquid and it becoming a solid, you can create forms which aren't driven by here's a piece of round pipe, how many directions can we bend it in? And some of that comes across in some of the projects that he reviews; it's really interesting to watch.

I Can you give me that reference?

P I can't give you... it was a BBC, it was definitely on the BBC, and it was a program about where he was trying to find a graduate to work with him.

I Like The Apprentice then?

P A bit like... yeah kind of, yeah, but it's very, you know, as you'd expect, design-orientated and it was fascinating to watch. His thinking process in his selection of a student and what's more interesting is the kind of problems that he presents them with. What I loved about it is it goes right the way back to basics, it's not about 'style this for me'. It's very much about 'what's the concept? What's behind this idea beyond your desire to make it whatever shape you want it to be?' Fascinating programme.

I I should be able to...

P I'm sure it will be there yeah, fascinating programme. I mean, and Ron Arad, I'm sure you know, you've written about who Ron Arad is. But anyway, there we go.

I Excellent, thank you very much for this all, I really do appreciate your time and your input.

P No problem.

I And what I'll do now is go back, have a look at it and tease out the sort of things I'm trying to...

P I'm happy for you to do that. And I'll actually have a think about the kind of questions you asked me in a more contemplated way and come back to you with anything I think of.

I And also, just if you have got time to do that it would really good and to maybe write down things. Don't feel that you have to be very detailed, I mean sometimes what I like is people respond instantly, or spontaneously, so even some of your spontaneous reactions, because I use language and therefore the words that you might be... well the words that I'm going to extract and extrapolate are the words that I will then use.

P Right.

I So if you do the same then I think that would be quite nice.

P I'm happy to do that and it's actually quite nice to sit down and talk about something kind of more ((?cerebral 1:02:00.7)) level if you like than I would... Not that I don't do... but the thing is sometimes you do consider these things but you don't... you're not necessarily conscious of them.

I I think that's true. Or perhaps you're not given the time to...

P Be conscious of them.

I Yeah, sometimes it is about evacuating all the other stuff and allowing things to flow over you, which is what I do as a writer. I came up on the train trying to allow

things to happen but I was distracted. I'll go home this evening and I think things will be different because I've got more to flow over me. And I think that's what's nice about this kind of project, is you can tackle some of those philosophical issues.

P Have you tried Robin Day?

I Have I tried him?

P Have you tried talking with him? I mean he might be... you don't know who he is?

I I do.

P Oh is he dead?

I Yes.

P Ah sorry.

I He's gone sadly. He's gone a few years now.

P Yeah, I didn't know that.

I Yeah. Because I came up to... in part of my course I came up to ((?1:03:11.8)).

P ((?1:03:12.3)) yes.

I I was at the barbecue and of course the chairs in the forecourt or in the... out on the terrace, they were all Day chairs, and I know that MoDiP has quite a few of his.

P Yeah, because I was... as a student I was always fascinated by the design of the Polypro chair in the respect that if you look at what Eames was doing and you looked at what was injection moulding was comparatively new as a process and if you look at those two products, most people don't understand the brief and the commercial constraints but what he did was, I just think unbelievable in the respect that the structure of the... because the Eames chairs weren't polypropylene, they were fibreglass, so you could get this beautiful sinuous form and you could make it work because it didn't need to have great big deep ribs on

the back of it to get the strength. But what an amazing journey though. He designed that chair, I don't know when that was, it was late 50s probably, I don't remember.

P Yeah, 50s/60s.

I 50s or the 60s and I'm sure it took a lot of references from the first shell which was Charles Eames and then combined that manufacturing process with a different expression of what is, not the same product, but there are definite references there. And to watch that go through the most popular stacking chair in the world, I mean God knows how many of those things they made; they're still filling schools today.

P Yeah.

I And then, to walk past Heals and see it in the window was just unbelievable. And, I think even as a student I don't think I really connected with what a beautiful piece of design that was, I mean there was not... even the... every connection point on that product was paired to the bone, you know. There were only two welds, I think, in the whole frame and the shell itself... I mean incredible, I can't think of another piece of plastic design...

I Panton. Panton came pretty close.

P The Panton... with the... yeah, yeah.

I I call it the lingual chair because it looks like a tongue.

P Yeah, I get that but I don't... I mean again it's very difficult, isn't it? When you start to, I think what most people can't connect with; people who aren't necessarily aware of design at the same depth that we are, people often divorce the brief from the product. I often hear people say things about something, which is no disgrace it's just a lack of understanding about what that person... you cannot evaluate architecture or design on any level without understanding what the brief was, because that's really the ultimate, for me as an industrial designer, that is the ultimate. The ultimate is comparing what it is with where it came from and what the person was trying to achieve by doing it, and with Robin I can connect with that, and I think with Verner Panton those objectives were different. I think it's still a beautiful solution, but for me, well I'm not saying I think one is

better or worse than the other, I just think they're different. They're different starting points and different ends and I think what's incredible about that little stacking chair was just the relevance it had socially and, you know, a really affordable product, and then for it to, years later, have people going 'wow that's a beautiful thing' when... fascinating.

I I think that response, I think enjoying people making that kind of response because, as you say, you walk past these chairs and most people don't give them the time of day, yet on the journey on the bus down here, the 243 goes through ((?1:07:33.0)), you've got Vitra, you've got all these other stores that are clearly promoting products and what have you and I do look at them differently now and I do look at plastic... as you know I've got the camera out and I'm taking pictures of plastic chairs. I went to Rome in October and I went to the St Peter's Square for the Pope's weekly audience.

P Sure.

I Instead of the wonderful Baroque architecture I saw grey chairs because it was just... they put out thousands and thousands of grey chairs for the audience...

P Yeah.

I ...and the first thing that I saw - I'd been to Rome before so perhaps the architecture had kind of all slipped into the background - is these grey chairs, it's these grey plastic chairs, I thought, what is this about?

P Yeah.

I Because this is just such... it's a counterpoint, isn't it. It's contradiction. Grey plasticness against this beautiful architecture. And it was like a stadium. It started off very ordered, do you know by the end of it, it was chaotic. People were standing on them, they were bringing them here, there, it was just... for me there was a huge social and cultural statement going on there about us as people, as human beings, as a collective, and the idea that when you draw people together in masses they'll behave in a very bizarre way.

P Oh I can't tell you the, the... the. I won't mention the events or the companies but some of the things that I've seen and has gone into the development of the product as well, I was saying, you know, it's actually personally quite difficult

because you're there trying to create something that people think is beautiful and that people can look at and say 'that's nicely resolved' and you sit in, you know, beautiful rooms with architects discussing tiny details and then six months later you end up in this football stadium with a customer and these five thousand chairs which are just smashed to pieces, and you know, welds that are ripped off of... literally three inch welds ripped off a plate, and you just... it looks like a bomb's gone off. And you think: what is it that possesses people to behave in this way. But in a sense it's really quite difficult because you come away from that thinking... you know the immediate response is to, of course, hopefully prevent... you can never prevent it from happening but to try and prevent as much of it happening but then to retain some of, you know, some of the things which are nice about the product and about the building, you know, it's not... some of these buildings are extraordinarily beautiful and, you know, it's quite a dichotomy to try and... that balance of trying to create something which is as indestructible as you can make it within the confines of, you know, the architectural ideas behind the building and the products that are within it. I don't think there's another area where you're likely to get that in a sense, where if you're designing... if you're Kartell for example, and you're Anna Castelli Ferrieri and you're designing a chair that's in plastic and it's going to be used in a domestic environment that's very safe, and you can do things then that... you've got a completely different pallet of options, and I think that's what's quite tough about what we do because you're trying to create this thing which takes an extraordinary amount of load. I mean, the seat, one of our seats on the front edge takes 250kg before it breaks. No stacking chair or other plastic product is really designed to take that kind of abuse, and maybe that's what's really tough about the new design process, because all the time you're tempered by what you can do with this section because you know that yes you can do it, but ultimately it's going to result in five thousand broken seats every season. So it's quite a difficult balance.

I It's interesting you were saying about the product being damaged, and the difference between a domestic and perhaps the situation you're describing because Starck's Ghost chair...

P Mmm.

I ...which I find extraordinary. It's very ethereal...

P     Yep.

I     ...and when you hear him talk about it you can just see exactly where it's come from, or you can begin to see where it's come from. Yet, I mean, look at the way publicity and marketing have placed that chair in different environments to make it look extremely versatile, but also extremely elegant. And it's put into maybe a traditional place, or a traditional setting, and then it's put into a contemporary setting and it has this ability to basically fit into wherever it's placed. Yet, we have one in the collection at MoDiP and it's a perfect example, the one thing about the Starck chair that I think irritates is that it scratches. It gets scratched and there's nothing you can do about it.

P     Yep.

I     And this damn chair which looks like crystal glass, once you scratch plastic, it doesn't look like crystal glass.

P     No, it doesn't look like crystal glass.

I     So you have the same problem, but what do you do with a domestic chair? You want you use it, don't you? You don't want to put it on a pedestal and look at it. But unfortunately once you start using it, it gets used.

P     Yeah. Yeah it gets used and I think that's, yeah, there's always that, you're never going to get away from those things but we continually try to get better with each thing we do. You see things that continually happen and you think there's got to be a better way. Sometimes there isn't, but yeah it's certainly something that... I mean that's, the whole choice of materials thing, you get back to that. People sort of boss levels within manufacturing, you know, they're... it's incredible, you can... and people's different opinions of it is quite bizarre. You can go into, for example, the Olympic stadium is a good example, I remember being called up to a meeting there and there's the architect who's in this building, it's about a month from being opened and there are people going 'oh this...' when you close a mould there's a thing called a shut ((?1:14:39.4)), and it's just where the mould closes and you'll inevitably get a ((?witness)), where that... it's never perfect. And people feeling for these things and going 'no, this is too sharp'. Now really, when I... I mean it was crazy. And so, on one hand as a manufacturer you're in a situation where people are examining the product on a Swiss watch level, and



in other situations you're going to look, this really isn't important, no one is ever going to examine this product on that basis, what's more important are these factors. After the buildings been opened and people... one of the things about a chair is it should be comfortable and I've never ceased to be amazed by how uncomfortable some of the things that I sit in actually are. There's a Catifa, ((?I think it's a)) product, I don't know the manufacturer's name but it's a range of stacking chairs, I actually sat in some in, what was it... here I was the other day... beautiful shell and you look at it and think wow, from the window it just beautiful thing no matter which angle you turn it from, and it's the most uncomfortable thing I've ever sat in, and you think well okay where is the... in the end, or maybe it's just the practical side of me that says I want a chair to be comfortable and if it isn't I'm immediately disappointed, that said I could have looked at it all day. But [laughs].

I But in some ways, historically, chairs have always had that kind of characteristic. There have been chairs that you look at and you think wow, but you wouldn't sit in them.

P Yep.

I And it's one of the, I suppose it's this...

P But that's when the art...

I ...position of art and design.

P ...where do those... and that's, you know, where do those things come together, and that boundary is always shifting, isn't it? Where do those... where does the – well it's not even a – you know the science and the design element meet with the arts and crafts or the... and I think that line's always going to move.

I It will be interesting to see what other people say about that. That exactly, that boundary, particularly as they're perhaps more driven towards creating... because it is difficult, certainly from an artistic perspective, to create something that's different nowadays. A chair that's different, a chair that stands out. You always need to be slightly radical.

P Well, I've always thought that the brief must drive that. With anything, with any form of art there has to be constraints. Those constraints don't need to be

technological, do they? They can be personal constraints, they can be... I think, and again going back to the Philippe Starck thing, I think one of the great things about design exercises is if you give four people a piece of paper and say, okay, you need to support that cup with this, create a number of folds, and without those constraints it's impossible to evaluate the end solution and I think... that's why I keep going back to you've got to evaluate the solution or the design intent from the start, because even if you're an artist there's a technical procedure to - oil painting - to a degree that you must follow and then the other references come from other places. So in the case of the chair that I saw, I guess, if the brief was to create the most beautiful, seamless, one-piece shell it certainly did that, but it wasn't comfortable, but is that relevant in...

I No.

P There we go.

I Exactly.

P It all depends on what you're reviewing and what you review it against. Okay.

I Okay. Thank you very much.

P Thank you.

I I've had enough of your time, very, very grateful.

P That's alright.

## 2. Ron Arad (RA)

I Okay, yeah. So I did have questions but I don't want to direct you to the point of...

P Well let's start with your questions and then see where it...

I Where it leads. I think that's probably good. Because its plastics, obviously I'm focusing on plastic as a material and your chairs, when I look at your chairs obviously there's, for me there's a lot of stories in all of them. I'd like to know what it is about plastic material that has drawn you, the designer.

P Well plastic is mass production. Before, I mean plastic is not something you can decide to do in your studio like when you do a metal chair, which you can have your welders and your hammers and your polishers and your cutters and you do what you do, you do what you want. To make a plastic anything...

[Interruption]

P To do... you know plastic things are generally cheaper. The cost of the unit is cheaper, but the cost of the tooling is bigger because to make a tool... plastic is a very costly thing and it relies on enough quantity of products to justify it. When you do something, if you are a carpenter or if you work in timber or if you do things in metal it doesn't matter. I mean the cost... there's no tooling cost, and only your time and your energy and your sort of personal. I didn't start with plastic; I mean I found metal an easier material to work with, more forgiving than say wood or... I didn't want to become an artisan, I'm not an artisan, yet I could do things in metal and very... to begin with very crudely and sort of not knowing, I'm not... the beauty of the first pieces was the fact that they were almost primitive and they were just... there was not a lot of process between your sketches and what you did. But I couldn't help getting better and people around me got better and you can look at the same piece, this one, here. This is a very late one, the early ones were sort of so crude, and there's all that of the first one ((?0:04:07.0)) they look... why does everything have to be so refined? Why can't it have the quality of your sketches? But as we got better the lyrics changed, the ((?post-structuralising)) changed. So it's like a big piece of jewellery so you know it

doesn't matter. I mean you do what you like to do and you do what you're interested in doing and the words come later and the expression comes later.

I So when you say your early pieces were crude, how do you mean crude? In what way?

P The welding was crude, the bending was crude, it was rough. It was... I can tell you now, some four decades later, people will pay a lot more for a crude piece that I made in the studio than one that was made more knowingly by proper artisans in Italy. It's like a specialist will tell you 'ah, this is, yeah a good...' I remember making the first piece of this. This piece is called 2 R Not because it has four chairs in it, do you see?

I Yeah.

P And there's two positions of the ((?Not)) chairs so it's called 2 R Not. That's made in Italy. I mean when I made the first ones they couldn't be so perfect as this, but they had the charm.

I Did they have your touch? Were you making them?

P Yeah and also there was some quality that... of it that it wasn't... I mean there was the search in them or the... let me give you an example.

I You use lovely, lyrical words.

P Look, I mean this is a late piece. Not late, an early piece, but the first ones that I made looked like this. You know?

I And is this what you describe as crude?

P Yeah, and it was like 'I didn't care'.

I The welding was crude?

P The welding and it was... you know it was sort of... I mean there was knowing but the knowing came not the knowing of a craftsman but the knowing of someone that grew up, as I confess of growing up in the art world rather than in the crafts world. And it was... this was almost like action painting. I saw one of

the images you have on your thing, this chair was not... the first one's were not done in plastic. I think this is my first ever plastic chair, Tom Vac.

I Yes, the one that when you Google it it comes up all the time.

P The one that is, I mean when I visited China, I visited Shenzhen, there were seventeen factories making copies of it. I visited some of them because... now when I did this first as a vacuum fold aluminium piece I was very excited by that process, but when Vitra got interested in it of course they wouldn't do it in aluminium because it takes twenty minutes to heat every sheet of aluminium and then put it in the press and blow the vacuum on it, take it out, cut it, it's a process...

I Time consuming.

P Sorry?

I It's time consuming.

P Yeah, expensive. Expensive to make, which didn't bother me, I just ((?0:08:28.2)) but in production it's not a proposition to work like that so we do the translation of that idea that developed as a vacuum fold aluminium piece, did a translation into plastic. You see the Bookworm here, the shelves, when it was industrialised this is made of tempered steel, it was very ((?dysfun))... I'm an idiot. It's not here because of this show... but you know the Bookworm?

I I do, yes.

P Did you go downstairs?

I I haven't been downstairs, no.

P The Bookworm, the first pieces were made out of tempered steel, and when it had to be industrialised the technology or the technique was translated to extrusion, to plastic extrusion, and... but what I did here in the studio was limited editions because it wasn't a commercial proposition. But when it was translated to plastic, they still, year after year, they extrude about a thousand kilometres, more than a thousand kilometres of it. Longer than Italy. And it's... it's a product that people can afford, so... you know plastic can bend, 'oh it's plastic', you

dismiss something as being made of plastic, because plastic meant cheap. And then, within that world of plastic there's different techniques, like are you familiar with rotation moulding? There's injection moulding; injection moulding you inject the liquid plastic to the gap between two moulds, expensive. Rotation moulding, I have some examples, is cheaper because it's like... think of making a cake, there's only... there's a container, the shape that you want, and the liquid is thrown in it and then it rotates and it adheres to the mould and then you open it and you have the piece. You don't need two, you don't need male and female moulds, you need just one. So this technique was very popular with young designers that... it was more affordable for them to do. But when you say plastic there's also some... there's different technologies, different things, different looks, lots of things fall under the category plastic. And basically there's four ways of making an object, of making anything, one is by wasting.

I Wasting?

P Wasting. You take, like Michelangelo takes a piece of stone, and he starts removing stuff until he finds 'David' inside and another technique... another way of making something is moulding. Moulding something starts life as liquid, and you put it into a container and it gets the shape of the container, this is like mostly plastic but you do it in cast iron, a church bell is done like that. And then there is forming, you take a piece of metal and you bash it or you press it and you change the morphology of it. Then there's assembly, you connect pieces together. I mean you can reduce it to only two ways of doing an object, so subtracting or adding. Like a piece of plastic, I mean show me your frame of your glasses. Yeah, I mean I think that they were injection moulded, I'm not sure exactly but mostly the acetate in glasses, which is a formed by the... is carved, there's a bigger piece and then they shape it, like Michelangelo. So plastic, there's different types of plastic, there's thermoforming, something that you can... you give it its shape by forming it, by hitting it and forming it and forming it like vacuum forming. And then there is thermoplastic, which is plastic. So... it's... we said plastic had... plastic furniture had to go through a period before it was accepted, that yes you can do things of value, things that are respectable out of plastic. You can also... you can actually name the pioneers of it... I don't know, I forgot the name of this Italian woman that used to be in cartel ((?0:15:08.2)) who did this, and that there was Verner Panton and there was...

I        Yep, yeah.

P        But it took time. The whole thing, the modern chair peaked in the fifties.

I        It was the Eames.

P        Eames and Saarinen and Jacobsen and Nelson and they had... in a way they had it easier to be modern because their chairs or their furniture was a bigger step from what was prevailing than people in my generation. Because after the revolution is done... what is your revolution? I think that there was a lot to do, but they can talk about the qualities of plastic, it can be transparent, it can be... this piece is vacuum fold, you see? This is... there's a mould and there's a heated piece of plastic, and then you whoosh!

I        You suck.

P        Yeah. So this is extruded, this piece here. That's... there's a whole. Maybe I can let you have the video ((?0:16:39.3)) it... this chair was more about how it's made than what it looks like. Try and separate them but...

I        And what do you mean by that? It was more of how it made?

[interruption]

P        Here the invention of how to make a chair. This started life as flat, and then it's inserted into the aluminium profile and then the aluminium is bent and the plastic just obeys, so it's like a... anyway... I have at home them and them, like you know this is better to sit on but when you need more chairs, I mean that's ((?0:17:55.3)) take less space, blah blah blah. It's called the FPE, Fantastic Plastic Elastic, that's the name of it.

I        And do you give your chairs their names?

P        Who else?

I        Fair enough. So did you have a lot to do with the way technology develops in terms of manufacture?

P I'm not an engineer and I'm not an inventor and I'm not a... but I use technology as a raw material. I didn't invent the trees and the wood that comes out of them. I am happy to see what I can do with it.

I Do you have... physically have a hands-on... do you influence how the technology develops in terms of producing the products?

P I think I was sort of... well I enjoy seeing the potential of the materials, like the tempered steel that I did... (you have it?) Do you want to go and see it?

I Yes please.

P Yeah, I mean if you go to Paul he'll show it to you.

I Shall we finish the interview and then...

P Up to you... (just keep it, keep it on hold).

I I don't want to keep you any longer than you physically are able to.

P Okay, we'll come to you, okay. Like, this is tempered steel, did you try lying on it?

I I haven't. No. [laughs]

P Why don't you do it now? Head there, feet there.

I I've got a bit of a back problem.

P Yeah? That will solve it.

I Which way?

P Head there.

I Head there. Oh!

P And slide forward so that... and you can use your hands on the floor to...

I It has slight connotations of being on a...



P On a boat.

I ...on a boat.

P Yeah, on a lilo. So I mean, this is like experimenting with tempered steel. I don't know if you know the word 'temperature'?

I Yeah.

P Good. Now this bicycle, it's another exploitation of the qualities of tempered steel. It's like what if I do a bicycle without wheels or even suspension, and this is suspension so there's no wheel here. Only the...

I Yeah.

P Have you seen the video of the person riding it?

I I have, yes. Is there a... I mean there's obviously the very serious side of this, but it strikes me that, and I could be wrong, but you like a little bit of fun too.

P I would say a lot of fun, but a little bit of fun, yeah.

I So there's an element of fun in many of your designs.

P Yeah, it's all to do with curiosity, and you're asking yourself 'what if I do this? What if I do that?' I'm not... I'm just satisfying my curiosity and my fight.

I Your fight?

P My fight against boredom.

I Ah right.

P And the fact that other people join me means that I can go on doing more things like that. If no one was interested I would be in trouble, I'd have to become a dentist maybe, I don't know.

I And do you find that you do get bored and have to move to something else? Is that your...

P Oh yeah, I do jump from one thing to another... I'm not... I don't have a contract with any certain activity or material or colour or ((?0:22:12.5)). I don't want to spoil your fun here but plastic is just like one of many materials. It's definitely not, not the main material but it is, plastic is the main material for mass production. Not in my world, in the world. So...

I And how do you feel when people say, 'oh I have a Ron Arad chair or I have a Ron Arad piece of furniture.' Does it give you... the fact that you might be in people's homes, how do you feel about that? Does it give you a buzz?

P Look, not many people can have this piece at home; because it's... it's so expensive. You have to be... you have to be able to afford it; you have to have the culture to want it.

I But the mass produced pieces?

P The mass produced pieces, when I go, if I walk from here to home I can see Bookworms, once I counted like ten windows you could see... yeah. I mean it does, it does... you know it does cheer you up. Also this is what... this is how we finance this playground here.

I Sorry? Say that again?

P This is how we finance the playground here.

I This is your playground?

P Yeah. So it's a... I don't get upset when I see...

[interruption]

P I want to show you something.

[interruption]

P At the end of the last century I got very excited.

[interruption]

P I was very excited by the fact that you could print objects, and I did an exhibition called 'Not Made By Hand, Not Made In China' and it was the first time what was called then rapid prototyping, but now it became like a silly buzzword '3D printing' that is sort of overused and the excitement is overrated. It's yet another technique. I was very upset when the V&A bought a 3D printed gun.

I You were upset?

P Yeah, it's just a mindless bandwagon and you know... you can see and see which is... there's other exciting techniques and I don't think there's anything... we're just jumping on a bandwagon and it's not nice to get excited about that fact that you can do a 3D printed gun. It's... anyway.

I I suppose it's... like any technology it's starting somewhere, where is it going?

P Yeah, I mean it's...

I It's got to evolve, it's got to...

P So, I mean for me we used... this is plastic, this is Nylon, it's polyamide. This is from '99. The stuff... there's very little exciting stuff made with this buzzword. It is almost like getting excited about music done by a synthesizer by people that are not really good musicians. It's... yeah 'let's see what we can do with technology'. So this, for example, this is 3D printed but I don't want to tell people it's 3D printed, no, this is the frame that is one monolithic piece, there's no hinges, there's no... this. So you do what the plastic allows you to do, and this would be very difficult to do with injection moulding, so that's why you can look at your camera and then you can see yourself at home. You can do a selfie.

I I saw these on an interview that I think... that was on one of the online interviews that you did, or on an interview that you did that was then put online, so I thought these were rather fun.

P They're also very good, very light.

I Extremely light, very flexible.

P And you don't have to, you never find yourself looking for the screw on the floor.

I Yeah.

P So this is an example of how you can get excited by what technology can do for you.

I Yeah. Do you see yourself moving past furniture and into...?

P Moving past furniture? I don't understand the question.

I Do you see yourself moving away from furniture design or is this just...

P No, but I... I mean look, we do lots of architecture and we do lots of art, and I... I find it very easy to do furniture and I don't, sort of I don't want to be in the... a full time member of any of these clubs. Not architecture, not the furniture industry, but... and I don't have the urge to... I'll do something when I feel like it, I'll do some... I'll do something if I'm excited by it.

I Not bored by it.

P Yeah and like... but it can even be furniture. You know, it's like... I don't know if I'm clear what I'm saying but I don't need to go to Milan every year to the...

[interruption]

P Anyway, so I found myself in the last period doing quite a lot of furniture, and I'm in a lucky position that if I have an idea ((?0:32:15.8)) I have to think 'what company shall I use? Vitra? Moroso? Yeah better. For this project.' So I don't need to... I don't rely on being commissioned or being asked this... it's the other way around.

I So they come to you?

P No, whenever I... they know not to.

I Oh, you go to them?

P Yeah. No, I call them and 'look, I have an idea' and the last... something that happened recently is I was... I saw a mattress, in the road in Tel Aviv and I said ah! Took a picture of it and then I turned it into this, then I did this drawing, and

then I did this and to see what it would look like, and like that, and then we make a little model, the model's right here with the skeleton.

I And then it turns into that?

P No, no, this is the bones, this is the meat, and it could be like that.

I And what have you called that one?

P Well I sent it to Patrizia Moroso so it's called 'Matricia'.

I Matricia! Oh! Excellent! Excellent.

P It could be like that.

I Oh it's extraordinary.

P And so I mean I don't... ah that's not what I wanted to... there's another, where is the other? Where is...

I So when you saw that mattress did you see the end product? Or did you see the start of the process?

P I saw something that ooh... where is it? What is this? No. Never mind, it's not here for some reason what I wanted to show you but... that's another one. I mean I'm in a lucky position that I can see something that gives you an idea and literally two days later it's... it finds its way to Moroso and now they are starting to make it. So it's a... sorry it's not plastic. Actually that's g... yeah.

I It's really interesting because I've talked to several artists who do exactly the same thing, they see something that many people will maybe just walk past or not even pay attention to, they'll see the possibilities, they'll see the potential, which I think is fascinating. The mind... how your mind creates things.

P Yeah I mean it is... I'm spoilt and lucky that I don't have to... I don't have to take architectural projects unless I'm very interested in them, and I don't... I have a few projects that we did and they became sort of loved by people and ((?0:36:23.7)), and we... because we are not doing one thing, I can navigate between different things. I don't... I am free from getting... from doing things I don't really want to do. The funny thing, the most common mistake is that people

think about crossover between the design and art, and I'm used as an example of someone who... for me the direction was the other way around, it's from art to design it's not from design to art. I mean this is design because you can sit on it, you should try it by the way. But if you could sit on it, it could be a sculpture, because you can sit on it it's not, rubbish. You're going to try it, right? I'm just trying to decide what part of my anatomy goes where?

P Your feet there, your middle in the middle...

I I've got zips up the back of my...

P It's okay.

I Are you sure?

P It's a rough piece.

I Where's the handle where it goes back? The recliner button.

P There is no handle, but if you bend your knees you'll go back because the centre of gra...

I Ah! Oh right. Like a tipping table. So when you're looking at chair design, are you thinking of somebody sitting in it? Or are you just thinking of...

P Of course, if it is a chair you have to... someone has to sit in it. If that's what it wants to be, if it wants to be a chair, it includes a sitter.

I Or it can be a piece of sculpture, would you say?

P N... no.

I No?

P I mean yes, I mean... but if it's a chair it has to be a good thing to sit on. If it's not... well it doesn't have to be a chair, but if it is a chair, it's not difficult to make the chair good to sit on.

I That's... it's a strange feeling on that.

P Its okay, its part of it.

I You feel like that, doubled up.

P Sure.

I It looks not unlike a female form. I'm reading into it, am I?

P You're welcome to do whatever reading and interpretation. I mean once I've done it it's yours to... I'm not going to protest about any of your interpretations.

I I'm very aware that you're feeling pretty rough.

P Right.

I So I don't want to keep you any longer than you absolutely ought to.

P Okay. Maybe someone can show you downstairs.

I Yeah, that will be very nice. I'm just very conscious that the way you talk about... you use some very... some really good language and words about...

P That's because I'm a foreigner.

I Why would that be?

P I don't know because... because I maybe have to think harder about what words I use, I don't know. I don't know. I forgot who it was there... one of the most successful script writers in television, what was his name? He explains his success because he was a stutterer and it forced him to always look for different words that he know he can say... now who was it?

I No... I... are you... do you feel that there are times you have to put your designs or put your work into words?

P I like talking, and I like... I'm not a writer but if I have to write about something I mean I can... I quite enjoy it, but... still... I think I remain... the tool is still the pencil and drawing them and things like that and doing things that did not exist before I did them. That's... and it's not... it's not words but a title, or a name, or something gives it another sort of narrative.

I And just thinking about, because I've read quite a few interviews that you've done, both they've been in the newspaper or on YouTube or something, and most of your designs, you have a little story that goes with them. I know the classic one is the Rover chair.

P Well this piece sucked me into this world of furniture. I didn't think I was going to do furniture before I did this. I was not going to be a furniture designer the week before I did this.

I [Laughs] and it all changed when you...

P Yeah, that. And then I read an article in Blueprint Magazine, an interview with the owner of Vitra, Rolf Fehlbaum. There was a picture of this chair and he said that I'm one of the most interesting designers to come from London. I said 'oh, am I a designer?' And then he commissioned me to do something, so I did the Well Tempered chair, that if you haven't sat on it, you should. And then the Tom Vac which became a bestseller and it became, I have to say, it became part of the... it became... like some songs become songs in the world, whether you like them or not, but you don't argue that it became a song that is known, it is... it doesn't have to be your favourite song but it became... it's there.

I It's in the psyche isn't it?

P Yeah. So yeah, I mean I think the chair that Vitra cleverly did out of a piece of... it did a lot for the industry, and I said 'I will do that'. It did become... it did become like a...

I Signature piece?

P No, no. It became a chair like the Eames chair, or like the Jacobsen chair.

I Iconic.

P Iconic, that's the word I didn't want to say.

I The dangerous word, but yeah, iconic.

P Yeah, and... yeah, you go and you see it in airports and in things and you go to ((?0:44:17.8)) look forwards and in the break you sit on this and it's... yeah sure.



I So, where would you have gone if that hadn't happened, the Rover chair?

P Who knows?

I Who knows?

P Look. I don't know if you've read... I did something that is more or less the iPad in 2002, 2003, for LG, but I didn't know what I'm talking about. What I'm... I mean we worked on it for a year and after the presentation and things they took two weeks to think about it and they decided no, they're not going to do it. This is before iPhone's and before... and I'm almost grateful because you know who knows what I would be doing if...

I If they'd run with it...

P Yep. This is a thing that we made at a promo for this product. When I watch it now it's me with my iPad.

I And this was two thousand and?

P It was 2002 – 2003.

I [Laughs]

P Anyway. Shall I ask someone to show you around?

I That would be very kind. And then you can go home to your bed.

P I'll go home... yeah I'll try.

I Could I ask you, Ron, is it possible if I could have some images because in my thesis I want to include some images but obviously I would need to have permission.

P Yeah, talk to Claudia.

I I don't have to do it today but I could perhaps contact her.

P No, whenever you want. Claudia is in control of everything.

I Okay, that's fine. Presumably images that are in Vitra would be... are they licensed to Vitra?

P No, no. We have...

I They're licensed here.

P No, no. No problems. Especially for you.

I Well thank you very much.

P Sorry about...

I No, no. I'm sorry that...

P Who else are you talking to?

I Pardon?

P Who else are you interviewing?

I Let me just stop this.

### 3.Christpoher Pett (CP)

I *f*Okay, well I know you're busy. Are you in Hampshire or are you in London?

P I'm in Hampshire.

I Oh right. So not too far away. Interestingly, I was in London yesterday, I had an interview with Ron Arad and it was quite an interesting interview, apart from the fact he wasn't very well. He's certainly a very interesting character. So all of my interviews are very different, no two people are the same which I think is probably part of its fascination.

P Right, yeah I'm sure.

I Now, I sent you some questions, they weren't meant to be the only questions, it was just while I was reading through some of your profile I was just teasing out some of the things that you'd either said or remarks that you'd made at perhaps a conference or something like that. So they weren't meant to be the only questions and I'm very keen that I don't do any of the talking, well I do little talking and you do most of it, but if I give you a quick background so that you understand the context: I'm not a designer, I'm not an artist, but I'm doing my PhD and my art output will actually be creative writing, which probably sounds quite bizarre. But I'm following a tradition, really, in a sense that I'm writing about the inanimate or I'm creating a narrative around objects and because I work with the Museum of Design in Plastics I've chosen the plastic chair because it has, for me, such an important significance in terms of maybe helping us to understand culture and some of the social things that are going on and how it represents, I suppose how it acts as a mirror to society and to culture.

P Mm hm.

I And your name came up, I mean Susan Lambert knows you and has had contact with you before and for me it's interesting that you've been involved in the design or you've been involved in the work that saw the realisation of the Reece chair and I know you've moved on since then so perhaps you could start by just helping

me to understand your role, the context in which you find yourself in this world of design and particularly, I suppose, the chair.

P Yes okay. Well my role changed quite radically over the last few years, so we started working on the Reece chair project back in 2005/2006 and it came out of some work that I was doing with the Eden Project at the time, I'd produced a batch of chairs for them made from plastic from the Eden Project's restaurants that was getting recycled and they wanted to use it onsite, so I helped them out with that and developed a production method...

I Sorry, we seem to have lost connection there.

P Okay, no problem, can you hear me now?

I Yes, I can hear you now.

P Good, okay, that's much better. Yes, so way back in 2006, gosh nearly ten years ago, was when that project was born. And since then, like a lot of other businesses things have changed a lot for me. The financial crisis made a big impact on the furniture business because if you're making and selling contract furniture as I was, the property market has the say in how your business goes really. If people aren't putting up new buildings or aren't refurbishing buildings, then they're not really buying furniture for obvious reasons. So business was really tough between 2009 and 2010 and during that time I had a look at the business and worked out what was doing well and what wasn't doing well and concluded that actually the design consulting work that we were doing, especially helping people to develop their own design ideas into viable products was much more commercially viable for us than the... [0:05:53.2 - cut out - 0:05:59.2] ... designs or commissioning designers and producing furniture at their own risk. So I should... [0:06:04.1 - choppy audio - 0:06:06.8] ... coming a consultant, product development consultant in 2010 and changed the business name, at the beginning of 2011 to Makresco from Pli Design which was the old company name. Makersco being, in my mind, a better way to articulate what the business stood for, which was to help independent designers or design studios to realise the design ideas they had. That came out of an observation that I had about my own company, which is coming up with a concept is the easy part, frankly, selling it is pretty difficult. But the hardest part of all is the value between the concept and the market launch. It's a development process where you take this original

idea and you try and turn it into something that works commercially as well as aesthetically as well as technically. And that a lot of design companies tend to focus on the conceptual work, which is understandable, and are ill prepared by the university system by a kind of internships or early commercial experience that they have for the role of actually converting a concept into something that can make money and sustain the business. So, I decided that that was a niche that my business could fill. I've been doing that ever since, increasingly through the British Library, which runs a programme called 'Innovating for Growth' and I'm the lead product development consultant on that programme. So I've seen over one-hundred-and-fifty businesses and worked with them to help them on product development since the middle of 2011 when that contract started, and I've worked with a couple of dozen clients separately as well. And in all cases the object of the exercise is to turn concepts that make sense to the designer or to the business owner into something that also works for customers and also works for regulators and also works for manufacturers. And in fact since the middle of last year I've increasingly started getting requests from service companies to help them turn aspects of the services they provide into something a bit more like a product with a more straightforward pricing and value proposition and taking my product development skills into the world of service design has been really fascinating. That's pretty much taken up all of my time outside of my paying client work in the last six months. So it's been a, what they probably would call in a business, a journey, but doing the same process I've moved to the country, I've got a family and my priorities and responsibilities have changed a lot so I guess my business is going to change in response to that. The nice thing is, through that whole process it's still the same company, I'm still self-employed, which is a big deal for me.

I And tell me; just as an example of how you've made this transition to services, could you give me an example of what that is? Just out of interest.

P Yeah, so for example I was working, just before Christmas, with a swimming school that has got an idea for expanding their business by offering the services that they do very well for the children who take swimming lessons and their parents and the schools that host their lessons in their local area, and they wanted to branch out and get bigger and grow their business in terms of revenue and in terms of staff. And what we worked on together was doing that by, as it were, ((?0:10:05.8)) the service that they provide and making it into a packaged

product that somebody who has an asset like a swimming pool, for example a local authority or a school with out-of-hours availability, could buy into rather than simply selling their time by the hour or taking over and managing all of the services that the swimming pool might comprise. So packaging something up, pricing it, designing it functionally as a service, just as you would functionally design a product like a light or a chair, which is what we've done a lot of, is an interesting process and it's something that I think, ties into a broad trend in the design industry that there's this convergence that's been happening over the last ten years I would say. It's been around since forever of course, but it's been high in the minds of both design academics and people who run design agencies that increasingly in the last ten years, that actually when you get down to it the difference between a product and a service is becoming increasingly vague and we could all do a better job for our customers if we forgot about those distinctions and saw every project as both a design and a service project. That goes back to the Reece chair, just to tie this back into the start of our conversation, because the Reece chair was a product, it's a plastic chair, but it was also a service in many respects because it helps customers do something beyond have a chair. It helped them to do something to do with their corporate social responsibility needs. If you're an institution and you wanted to buy a plastic chair you could just buy any old plastic chair off the back of a lorry. There's no price for a chair, it could cost, well, the cheapest I've found is about £7 will do the job, and obviously if you go to Vitra you can spend a hundred times that amount on a chair that does the same job. So it is probably something that interests and baffles everybody who thinks about chairs for any amount of time that they don't have a price. But the service comes into that, what this chair is doing for you beyond when you're sitting in it, when you're actually probably not thinking about it at all, the job that the chair is doing for you when you are thinking about it, which is probably when you're not sitting on it, when you're looking at it from a distance or something or when you're looking at it on a spreadsheet and need to buy, or when you're looking at a story about it, the perspective of the designer or manufacturer or something, the chair is doing a very different job. And that's where I think this blend or convergence between service and product gets interesting because at those moments the chair is performing a service for you and it might be, in the case of the Reece chair that it's helping you to feel like you're taking control in a small but very measurable way. ((?0:13:16.2)) materials, both recycled and renewable and sustainable in other ways, which might help you to feel in control of your use of materials in a broader context on

your site or in your organisation. I know that's one of the reasons why several of our larger institutional customers decided to kit out lecture theatres or restaurants or cafés or visitor centres with these chairs, it's because they wanted to say something and so I would see that as a service. So flip that on its head: if we're already bringing service into chair design why not bring the element of good chair design into designing something that would be seen as a service, whether its dentistry, or nanny services, both are types of companies I've been working with in the last year, or purely online, that it's a product that's experienced only in a digital context, its still a product. I don't want to get really boring and technical about it, for me it's all in the specification. I think if you unify specification process for services and products, which is the bit beyond the dream of 'ooh it could look like this or it could feel like that', contexts that a designer might first be thinking about something. But once you get down to the nuts and bolts of how we're actually going to deliver this, it's all about the specification and...

I I lost you again there. Hello? I'm sorry our connection is falling off.

P Yeah, it's not good. Sorry about that. Do you want to try calling me on my phone? Actually you won't be able to record it will you. I'll call you to see if we get better luck.

I Okay.

[Recording 2]

I Okay, really, really interesting points you were making there talking about this sort of integration of service and product. I was quite taken by, certainly talking to perhaps Ron Arad more than perhaps some of the others, that there is this issue about how do you get the product into the marketplace and perhaps for him it's not such a problem because he's so well established. I guess there is the issue that when people see what he does or they have some of his products then they want to go back for more and certainly so much of his products seems to be him, there's a kind of, he almost imbues, certainly his chairs and some of his sofas, with his personality. I guess you must encounter a lot of people who can't possibly reach that stage.

P I haven't met him.

I You have met him?

P No, no. I've never met him. I don't know anything but it strikes me that a lady journalist described him as a 'rock star designer'.

I Yeah.

P And I don't know about that, but he does strike me as somebody who works more like a musician might work than a jobbing industrial designer in a sense that a Ron Arad chair is a bit like a Radiohead album.

I [laughs]

P You know, it's something that makes a splash, it's a really big deal for a certain amount of time, it exists in time as well as space, it's an interesting event as well as a thing, but then it will stick around and then it will get added to a back catalogue over time and not every chair he makes, makes it into the best-of album just like the same with a Radiohead track. So I don't want to flatter him by comparing him with Radiohead but, you know what I mean?

I I know what you mean. I do know what you mean, yes. So, you're suggesting, correct me if I'm wrong, that there is quite a demarcation really in terms of there are people that you're working with who may be just as competent in terms of being good designers but who lack that, I suppose that savvy, that knowhow about getting, just as any artist I suppose, getting the product into the public eye, getting it in to the right places and, I mean it sounds like it's quite a passion for you. Where did this come from? Was this borne of working with the Eden Project and the realisation of the Reece chair or is this...? Because I know you studied politics and that was one of my other interesting questions was how could someone who's studied pol... well I'm sure I know the answer but I'd love to hear it from you: how does someone who's studied politics get into this area, or meander into the crazy world of design?

P Well, yes I didn't actually meander at all. There was a fork, I've had a few forks in the road in my life and one of them was whether to go to design school or go and study politics because I did art and history at A-level and each one could probably take me in either direction. And I chose the politics route at the time, but hadn't been able to adequately scratch the itch to work in creative profession



after that. My first job, after leaving college, was working for NATO in Ukraine of all places, as a political analyst, so I had an interesting early career; I was trying to understand politics and international development. But actually what I really love is business, is doing things for people and the relationship that you can have with a customer, especially a paying customer because it gives an authenticity to that relationship, is much, much more interesting to me than anything that's entirely theoretical as politics ultimately tends to be, I think. So I don't regret leaving politics behind as a, or political affairs behind as a career choice, but I equally don't regret really diving into politics as a student, as an undergraduate and understanding... you know having a political education is a fantastic thing. Funnily enough I was working with a citizenship charity organisation earlier this year, sorry, not earlier this year, at the end of 2014, and it was great to be able to talk on a level in terms of understanding what citizenship is with the people there but also to help them out in terms of understanding how they can provide services to their clients who are their donors and the people who need citizenship education. It was a really, really fascinating process and that wouldn't have been possible if I hadn't followed my urge to understand how we organise society the way we do here and what the alternatives are and how we got here, which is what politics really gives you. I think everybody should do one, but it probably shouldn't take three years.

I [Laughs] Well certainly perhaps people should be more in tune with politics, have an interest in it because certainly it affects our lives in so many ways.

P Yeah.

I It's interesting that, because it's one of the dimensions I'm quite keen to explore is the politics of design, in a sense, and pardon me for coming back to that but it does seem that a lot of your work has been dedicated to that and almost, well I suspect there are some strong underlying philosophical or even ethical ideas in your head around how we shape our living world, how we shape the houses that we live in, how we shape the way we use services, the way we use products. Would that be true?

P Yes. I think that if I were to dress it up, try and make myself look as good as possible I'd say that sustainability is something that has become more and more important to me over the years and about fifteen years ago, in particular, I remember becoming really steeped in thinking and reading about sustainability

and I sort of had an epiphany moment, where I realised that one has to take more responsibility as well as be part of a society that's responsible towards the environment and towards our social relationships with each other and that if you're working in design then you have no lesser responsibility than anybody else. In many ways a designer's work can have such far reaching impacts that you're more responsible than others. So that's the sort of self-serving description. But actually I think, like a lot of people who work in creative industries, I'm just a deep rooted, anti-establishment punk that wants to kick things over, sometimes.

I [Laughs]

P And it's a racket. You know, the oil business from the outside seems like a bit of a racket, the manufacturing industry that doesn't take account of how its products are used or disposed of seems like a racket to me, and I hate the idea of people benefitting at other peoples' expense, so we've got an emotional level which is much more personal and much less impressive than the sort of big talk about sustainability. Yeah. It's disruptive. Sustainable design is also ultimately disruptive design because it points to, what people might consider as a better way, but as a non-established way of organising ((?0:09:01.0)) materials and production capacity and service relationships. It's disruptive, it suits people who don't like the status-quo. And that's something that I think books about sustainability never really reflect on, that the people who like it, it's probably what they don't like is more interesting than what they do like about the world as it is. It strikes me that this anti-establishment flavour in product design and the arts and creative life manifests itself in lots of different ways and sustainability is just one of them, but it ought to be seen not as a specialist area but as one of many ways that people want to kick over the old order to try and make something better.

I It's sometimes seen as, I suppose, that very sexy hook on which people can hang their rationale or their justification for producing whatever it is they're producing and if they've... it's like ticking it, if you've ticked it that's fine, you know you've done your bit.

P Yeah. There are furniture companies, there are British furniture companies, I'm afraid to say who have used sustainability in the past. I'm sure they wouldn't do that anymore as a way of flogging furniture, you know a way of paying lip service to what they see as a marketing trend rather than internalising the importance of

the entire product and how it's going to be used throughout its entire lifecycle as part of their own design philosophy. So exceptions to that are fantastic, wonderful companies in the UK like Orangebox is one of my favourites, it's through them like a stick of rock, this thinking that we have a responsibility more broadly to society and that a product isn't just the blob that's sitting on the floor, it's so much more than that, it exists in time as well as in space. Yeah, I'm afraid that there are companies that at least in the past haven't seemed to get it, but they're perfectly content to use exactly the same language in order to make a sale, which is fair enough I suppose, but then just become another racket.

I Yeah, so, yeah okay, racket. Just two questions come out of what you've just said there, the first is: you mentioned that sustainability is just one of the important characteristics that you believe should be part of good design, in your opinion, what are the others?

P That's a good question. There are people who've written huge books about this and I've read or tried to read some of these books, so I'll give you my own take on it.

I I'd very much appreciate that, yes.

P I think that... well okay first off, as I alluded to earlier on there's the product that you're using that there's the product that you're looking at and ((?0:12:26.9)) and you know, we want to get... if we want to get philosophical about this, you know the product to hand and the product at hand, as they say, are fundamentally different; they've got different faces or aspects. You can never really know what a product is anyway, and some people like me are interested to know how something's made, other people would really rather not know anything at all about where something comes from or how it's made, which is fine. So we approach things in really different ways. What that says to me is two different people looking at the same object are getting an entirely different experience out of it, or using the same object getting entirely different experiences from it. So it is unknowable, you can't define it. You can define it for yourself or you can try, but you can never define it for somebody else. So there's that. There's this tension between what a designer means or is thinking about themselves and how the object's going to be used or received by anybody else at any stage. But then at a purely practical level a product exists from all the different people in the production process in really different ways as well. So a product designer or

some of the really good designers I know and who I've worked with, they're very careful not to get really involved at all in the specification of materials or fixings or glue lines or joints. They'll design a product as if they were standing ten feet from it, which makes sense because what they're really doing is they're creating a form and a line and an aesthetical cultural sense of what the object is, and they'll leave it to others to specify okay, well how do we stick the legs on or how do we make sure it doesn't wobble too much or how do we make sure it doesn't fall apart when it gets too hot, or too cold or whatever. They leave that to others. And in many ways those designers are some of the most successful industrial designers or product designers whose names one would know. I think that's how you get your name known, is by being a designer who can design from ten feet away. But then the designers who, and it isn't a contra-distinction in a subjective way, it's just purely subjective, for me, the designers who I really respect and whose work I admire and want to really dive into are the ones who actually follow the whole process through and for them, a product isn't a product until they know exactly how it's going to be made and where and from what materials and how those go together and how it will be received by a customer and what it will look like in twenty years and how it would then be disassembled or recycled or refurbished. All of that, for them is the product and not the fixed static object from ten feet away. And so you know different designers have all got their favourites and people they love to hate among the famous and well established designers they're aware of and that's how I pick my favourites. For me, the completists, the ones who do the whole job and get involved in the whole process are fascinating. They're typically, not necessarily the most well-known or the best paid though unfortunately. And so anyway, you've got me onto designers when you wanted me to talk about products. But this is really the interesting thing for me I suppose, the product itself is this multifaceted, impossible to know object and the more you think about it the less you can pin it down when you're looking at it, but when you're using it, its utility that's the most important thing. Okay, there are all sorts of chairs that I really like the look of as sculptural objects, but you'd never catch me trying to sit on one for any amount of time, because I'd either break it or scratch it, or get a massive back ache or a hernia from it.

I [Laughs] yes.

P So I'm aware of the fact that it's called a chair but it's really a sculpture, and I think many of us are. Some art galleries make the mistake of actually buying

those and putting them in their cafes, where they'll give their patrons backache for the next five years until they replace them. You know those things are really sculptures. So I guess what I find myself saying is that a product is only a product if it really does what it proposes to do, if it does what it looks like it ought to do, that makes it a good product. So this concept of, this principle of utility of being a satisfyingly functional object is the bottom line. You have to get that right, and if you've failed there then all of the accolades in the world, from stylists and magazine editors who will portray images of your product as a sculptural object really don't count for anything. So a good practical example is the Robin Day chair that costs between four and eight pounds to manufacture and between nine and twenty pounds to buy, you know the classic Polyprop chair by Robin Day is just a thing of beauty. I was lucky enough to work with the factory that makes the originals of that; it was the factory that originally commissioned the design from him, funnily enough now they're owned by the company that makes the part-propylene ((?0:18:21.7)) perhaps it's more important than the frame and the design in the long run, ((?0:18:25.9)) history, but the Polyprop chair is just fantastic, isn't it? And what I like about it...

I Everybody loves it; everybody I talk to loves it.

P It's like... it's like one of those actors whose name you can't remember but they're always good, they're never in a bad film. The Polyprop chair is like the Philip Seymour Hoffman of chairs. It's always comfortable, you never notice it, you're always noticing the things around it and never it. That's a great design, isn't it?

I I guess you put your finger on it, it is. If you don't notice something, as you said earlier, if you sit on certain chairs and I sat on a few yesterday I have to say, I can't imagine myself spending time in them and you sit on a chair and you don't notice it. That is a good chair.

P Yeah, yeah, exactly. So that's the ontological argument philosophically speaking about design, you know your relationship to a different object, an object that isn't you but while you're using it, it becomes part of you or part of the world, the world of your senses that's automatic and not thought about. That's what product designers are trying to do. The guy who designed the Reece chair for me is called Guy Robinson and he runs a design agency called 'Sprout' which is based in Bermondsey. He was at the Royal College of Art, he was an industrial design engineer graduate from Cambridge before that, a very, very clever bloke, and he

has an aluminous knowledge of design in technical terms, but I think what sets him apart from other designers I've come across is that from the day that he left the RCA he wanted to focus and has focused entirely on design for real people, and designing products that exist in time as well as space and are therefore sustainable.

I Mmm.

P Because as soon as you start thinking about the thing that you've made outside of just the sort of spatial bubble of a picture of that object, but start thinking about it in context and it has this time character and that immediately, I think, leads you to thinking about its sustainability. Interface flooring is a great example of that, the Interface floor tile that is sold as a service and not a product. What Interface sells you is a nice looking floor that you can use, they don't sell you an actual floor tile so it doesn't go on your books as a thing that you own, it's not an asset that your business owns, it's a service that you've rented. The service is: having a great floor.

I Mmm.

P But what that means is that they can take entire responsibility for, and control of how it's made, how it's fitted, how it's maintained, how it's removed and how it's recycled and how it's made again. And if you can control the lifecycle of a product and sell it as a service and this is something that Guy and I have spoken about many times, then you can offer your customers something that isn't an asset to be owned on the books but really does something more important than that. But if you give your customer ownership of the object, and I think they have a tendency to see it in that second way, as if from ten feet away when they're looking at it as an asset, and that's when it all gets a bit weird and maybe products fall down a bit when user/consumers see them as just a tradable asset, something which isn't to be sat on and used, it's just an object to be owned. The V&A confuses me. When I go to the V&A furniture section, which is the best in the country, it's fantastic, but these objects have all got ropes around them.

I I knew you were going to say that, I had a feeling that was going to come up. It's true though, isn't it? It's so true. Or you have to wear a white glove if you touch it.

P Yeah. Yeah, but what I do when I go to the V&A furniture gallery is I walk around with my camera at knee height taking photographs of the underneath's of all these things. I've got compendious library of the underneath of classic designs, because that's where it's really interesting to look at. Usually the gallery assistants look at you very strangely when you're on your hands and knees looking underneath things, but from a design point of view that's where an object gets interesting: how is this joined together? How well finished is it? How do these materials combine? You're looking at a fifty or sixty year old fibreglass shell on a steel frame: how did they do that then? What materials did they use and how well did it work? Where does it crack and fail? You never see that from the surface of an object.

I That's interesting. That's very interesting because it has echoes as well in art in terms of, I'm thinking of the work of Rachel Whiteread who...

P Yeah, absolutely.

I ...inverted domestic objects and looked at the space below or the space inside, so that's really interesting that you should make that kind of statement, that's a rather nice link there.

P Yes, I think that, yeah, you'd be crazy not to be interested in her work. Nowadays the way that she sees the world offers so much to a designer and that's interesting as well, I suppose that the... when I was first studying furniture making at London Metropolitan University who ran a program called Furniture Works, years and years ago, it doesn't exist anymore, and quite a lot of the people who were on the course with me were artists or people who wanted to learn how to make furniture for art rather than for production and manufacture. For me it was always about the manufacturing, in fact I'm probably more thrilled by, more excited by, being on a factory floor seeing a batch in production or helping a batch be produced than I am in a studio looking at how something is coming together on screen or in prototype form. Although I guess my business is specialised in that prototyping phase, getting the design off the drawing board and into production, but the bit in between is probably summarised as the prototyping phase and that's really what I've done exclusively for the last four or five years.

I I met, not last week, just before Christmas I met with the CEO of a company called Bluecube. I don't know if you've heard of them?

P It rings a bell, but I confess they don't come immediately to mind.

I Well the senior, well he's both an artist and a designer but he runs it commercially, is a chap called Russell Plant.

P Oh right, yeah.

I And their company have done stadia across the globe including, of course, London Olympic Stadium, but the chairs, the stadia chairs, and I'm beginning to recognise some real links and parallels between what you do and what he does because you've both clearly got a real strong sense of art and design in product design, but also there's this other element which is the sort of commercial but utilitarian functional. You know, if it doesn't work in practice then it's not a product that's going to be successful. So I'm really drawing some interesting parallels here. So pardon me, I'm sort of voicing my thoughts inside my head but what I'm liking about what you're saying is that it really is teasing out those underlying political, cultural, social, philosophical issues, which for me is absolutely fascinating so thank you for that.

P ((?0:27:31.0)) well you know I have Goldsmiths to thank for this because they were the ones who... it was the philosophy department at Goldsmiths. I was doing some study there in 2010 and they introduced me to Heidegger who I hadn't really looked at when I was studying philosophy in my politics degree, I just thought he was a dodgy Nazi, and he was.

I [Laughs]

P But he was also a fascinating thinker and it's his ideas which... well when I was at university postmodernism reigned supreme and the philosophical tenets of postmodernism, which I still couldn't describe to you, you'd have to ask a postmodernist I guess...

I That could be very dangerous.

P Yeah, right. So, anyway, I could never get on with that. I couldn't stand it, it rubbed my fur the wrong way the whole time I was there, which you know, is a



good thing. I suppose it's the right thing to be ((?attorned)) with your lecturers on things at a fundamental level, but I have to say that I was unusual in the department for that. Most people had bought into postmodernism all the way. Both my contemporaries as well as my teachers, but it was fantastic. It was like getting into a warm bath when I arrived at Goldsmiths and I found a bunch of people who thought that that's all a load of rubbish and we should get way beyond that and for them this modern, not modern - what's the word - sort of ontological view of the world underpinned by, and extended from, Heidegger's work, which had been rubbished in the 60s and 70s was just fantastic. You know I was suddenly absolutely one ((?0:29:21.9)) with the people who were teaching me about how to think about design in a bigger way than I had done before. It's an extraordinary experience and really cemented for me the value of higher education, which is something I'd become somewhat cynical about in the intervening years, I think. But the reason why I think this is relevant is because Heidegger's terminology, it was all in German which I hardly speak, but in English terms, effectively one of the things he's saying is that a tool that you're using in your hand is an extension of you and it sort of is you, and then as soon as that tool breaks, as soon as you break that connection with it and you start looking at it as an object separate from you, it becomes something different. And bad design does that without meaning to. It breaks, either literally or just because it didn't do what you wanted it to do well, whether that's somebody who has motor difficulties finding a can opener particularly difficult to use where somebody else might not notice, but for them, that object, even if it works functionally, is broken for them because they've noticed it because it bothers them, and it's therefore for that person a bad design. And I think that's where this connection between philosophy and aesthetics and practical functionality really come together. You can unify these things; they're not separate aspects of design. If you get deep into it they're absolutely the same things.

I Mmm. Yes I have found myself drawn to Heidegger particularly from the sort of methodological perspective and in terms of phenomenology, which of course ties in with exactly what you were saying, the notion of experiencing and feeling and sensing within the... when you're looking at measuring or gathering data on something it's about really feeling it and being able to... it's being close to it. I suppose it's, going back to what you were saying about, instead of being ten feet away from it it's being involved in it, part of it.

P Yep. Yeah, exactly. So most things that probably like the software you're using right now, when it works you don't notice it, as soon as it stops working we're thinking about it a lot.

I Yes, that's right.

P And, funnily enough, my two main projects that I'm working on right now are actually software design projects.

I Oh yeah.

P Cloud applications, and although I'm not a software technologist, I can't write code, I'm trying to learn the basics so I know how to talk to people who do it for a living, but from a design point of view it's not challenging at all. It's the same work, the process of specifying and understanding from the user/consumer's point of view what they need is just the same. There's a really interesting movement, especially in American business studies at the moment, but I think it's starting to make its way over to Europe at the moment, maybe during this year and next we'll hear a lot more about it, called 'Jobs to be Done', which comes from some research work at Harvard Business School by a guy called Clayton Christensen, who is the man who wrote the book 'The Innovator's Dilemma' which was very influential in the 1990s to help them understand how small businesses can enter new markets which are dominated by very large, very successful businesses. And this is where designers... any new product in a way has to, whether knowingly or not, conform to the rules that Christenson set out, I think, in 'The Innovator's Dilemma', which is that simplicity and a simple comprehension of an offer to customers' needs will outperform heavy, complicated, complex, overdeveloped, overbuilt solutions every time, which is what really successful companies tend to end up producing. You know they have to keep offering more and more to people in order to keep those customers interested, you know you get the Aeron chair with all its bells and whistles, everything's adjustable and you can make yourself comfortable in any position and what challenges the Aeron chair as the most supportive office product to use for seating is not another chair a bit like the Aeron chair from Herman Miller, it's a Yoga ball, it's a big, blown up rubber ball.

I Yeah.

P But this is the approach of an innovative business, to say: how can I do this in a really, really simple and accessible way that actually outperforms that over-complicated product? The yoga ball is an excellent example, I think, of how to help somebody sit more comfortably at their desk without selling them a five-hundred pound chair.

I [Laughs] yes, indeed. Okay, I like that, yes.

P So how did I get onto that? Yes: the Jobs to be Done theory comes out of the same group of people at Harvard, who helped Christenson with 'The Innovator's Dilemma' and what it focuses on, forget about the product just for a minute, forget about what you want this thing to look like, what materials you want to use, what colour you think is important for this product to be coloured, what shape or process you want to use to make an argument about the future of this product in this market or whatever might be coming out of your studio. Forget about that. And for the first period of the product development process, however long you want to make that, just think about your customers and nothing else and try and cut out anything that doesn't answer your customer's needs in terms of the job that your customer is hiring this product to do. I think it's such a powerful argument, that, and it's something that, like I say, is popular in service design and I think is quickly going to make its way as a terminology into product design if it hasn't already, I haven't come across it ((?0:36:03.1)).

I Interesting, when I interviewed Russell Plant at Bluecube this is exactly what he was saying.

P Oh right, okay.

I He was looking for solutions for customers and it was clearly focusing on their needs so I think that it's made its way and that's partly, I suppose, because he works on a global basis so he's perhaps more in tune with what else is going on across the globe.

P Yes actually, well you know, again I don't know the business but if they're receiving tenders for and specifying stadium seating they'll absolutely be doing this because the specification process just forces you into that. But for any designer, probably may reflect on the fact that they do this intuitively anyway, but probably might also conclude that they could do it a lot better. Spending as much

time as possible trying to understand your customers, cutting into their sort of anthropological enquiry that can give you insights into how they live and how they use the product that you're proposing to build for them before your pen ever hits the paper to sketch out a possible solution. It's so valuable, and it's only if you can find a better way...

[Connection lost - 0:37:27.4]

I I seem to have lost you there.

P ...to do that job for them and you know, if your argument is powerful enough then there'll be a permanent place for your products in the market just like, getting back to it, the Polyprop chair. If the Polyprop chair didn't exist what alternatives would there be for people to hire to do the job that it does? To make simple comfortable seating for children who need to sit still for forty-five minutes or more and the answer for me is if the Polyprop chair didn't exist you'd have to design another one just like it because it just fits its need so beautifully and does it at the right price, which is another job the customer has to do which is to manage a school budget in a practical way. This is where the Reece chair fundamentally fell down as a product, the design was fantastic; the brief that Guy answered from a design point of view was spot on, it's just that the brief was really, really badly written by me because we never paid close enough attention to the total cost of production including all the logistics for getting this recycled plastic out of the hands of the previous user/consumers of the material, which were Sony PlayStation 2 user/consumers, how to get that material into our hands, through the recycling process at sufficient purity that we could turn it into a really high quality composite plastic. Composite polycarbonate and ABS and then convert that into the components that made up the Reece chair. And ultimately, the reason why the Reece chair isn't in production anymore is entirely because of the economics of the production and not because of its performance, which is a great shame but it taught me an awful lot during that process and we would have designed something very different in the end because the brief would have been very different because it would have been responding to the commercial needs of our customers as well as the aesthetic and sustainability needs in a way that we just didn't have a sophisticated enough understanding at the time. So I see the Reece chair as a study rather than a product and in that respect it has much greater value for me and I think for other people as well. I was at a software

exhibition just before Christmas and I was chatting with somebody who'd been at Glasgow School of Arts who was now in service design, specifically as a software developer, and she had done the Reece chair as one of her undergraduate projects, looking at its history and how it's made and what it's made out of and how it's used and so she could tell me more about the Reece chair than I could tell her, but she does software design now and rather than me thinking that's an opportunity missed I thought that's fantastic! As a software designer she probably got more out of that project than she would have done as a product designer because it's the service relationship that made that particular product very different from anything else that was available between 2006 and 2011 when we stopped producing it.

I And is that chair... you say it's not in production anymore but presumably there are still examples around?

P Oh yeah! Absolutely. There are quite a few conference centres, hotels, restaurants, a few visitor centres and galleries and then a lot of private customers who bought them mainly as dining chairs over the years and yeah, there are loads of them around. But we don't make them anymore. We still have some spare parts which we supply on request, but that's it. In fact no, as of a few months ago I don't think we have any parts left either because we don't have a supply of the plastic any longer from Sony, they changed the way that they process it, they recycle it, but no. Once upon a time I found that quite frustrating, while I was trying to fix the problem I found it frustrating when I realised that I could no longer keep fixing problem that sooner or later we'd have to cease the production because the supply would dry up. I actually became very content with that because I realised that I'd learnt something else that I hadn't figured out before about design and about business I suppose in general, which is that it does exist in time as well as space, nothing's permanent. And if you allow for that and embrace it you can create a much better product and this returns me to the reason why I now like Ron Arad's work much more than I used to when I was younger because I recognised it. I think he has always got this intuitively, and it's through all this work in a way that I really enjoy now, but it's not forever, it's not for a permanent... you know maybe his designs will be in a permanent collection but I don't think his products are intended for use in perpetuity. He's not about that, he's interested in teasing ideas about how we want to use things right now and that understands that right now is going to be very different from ten years

from now. It's hard to accept that, I think. It requires a great deal of maturity as a designer to understand that and embrace it and that's something that impresses me about really good designers' work, increasingly. Because otherwise you become fossilised, you become one of these reproduction furniture companies that just produces the furniture of whomever it is, Arne Jacobsen or Chesterfield or any of the great designers or design firms down the ages. But these fossilised designs don't tell us much about what's possible in the future.

I Yeah, that also... I was thinking yesterday when I was at his studio that he, like many I suppose, significant designers, employs a raft and a real diverse team of young designers and young practitioners who must feed into his design direction to his artistic direction as well. So, in a sense, just taking the point about how you've moved into helping businesses, in a sense as a designer he's done exactly the same in that he's take onboard young designers, young people with new ideas who don't want to simply replicate the old, the past, they want to move on, they want to look at the new, they're using different methods and new design technologies and so on. So that's... yes there's a downside of some of his work you would never sit in, if it's supposed to be a chair, but at the same time he has got this real zeal, or a real sort of drive to push design forward by bringing on these very clever and young things and using them to keep it fresh.

P Yeah, absolutely. Great studios do that don't they? The Eames studio had Charles and Ray Eames as their heads of it, but it was just a hive of activity of bright, young things. And yeah, so it's a smart way to run a studio. It didn't work for Stradivarius, ((?0:45:37.9)) onto his sons they couldn't replicate or improve on what he managed to create as a violin maker, fascinated by the idea of studio death, I think it's been called, where... or workshop death, I think it's called, where actually that rare and unpredictable convergence of collaborators, whether they're related to each other or whether they're employed by each other or whether they're partners or... it doesn't matter. But that group of people who might find themselves working together for a period of time in a workshop sort of imbue that workshop with their spirit for a period of time and some people can keep that going and some people can't and it just comes to a stop. But that's to be embraced as well because the workshop during that period, and from the sound of things I think you've stumbled onto one at Ron Arad's yesterday, is more than the sum of its parts.

I Yeah.

P That's a fascinating thing. If I resurrect a proprietary design and production business in the future, which I would quite like to do although I'm learning too much as a design and product development consultant now to be able to justify it because I don't know enough I think, I thought I did but as soon as I stopped I realised how little I did know at the time, anyway, but if I did it again that would be why. It would be to try and create an event, a place where events happen rather than a place where permanent products are crafted because anybody can do that.

I No, that's very interesting. Is... you're talking there about Guy who designed the Reece chair.

P Yeah.

I Is he perhaps someone that might be prepared to either meet with me or have a discussion?

P Oh yeah, totally. I'm sure he'd be prepared to meet with you yes. He speaks very well about this and I'll send you his details after this call so you can get in touch. He'll even give you the designer's perspective on the Reece chair. It was a very collaborative project; there was a lot of to-and-fro between him and me during the process. It was my concepts and to a large degree the design was constrained by the very specific requirement of that concept, which was to produce a chair in this one material and to produce it not for... not as a high price object or collectors or people who can afford expensive furniture, to produce it as an object for contract use in public settings. But those were the constraints on the project from the start and so he worked very well within them. And it had to be a design that could itself be recycled again and again and to be dismantled by the user/consumer without specialised tools is a tall order, so hopefully he'd be able to talk you through his thinking. You should definitely ask him about this interesting idea that he introduced me to, I think it's his own term, of brand ghosts which is in recycled materials there's something of the ghost of the brand identity or the personality of the product, which the thing used to be when that material was in another form. So obviously, like a ghost, it's not real but it's a sort of concept that we put onto the thing that we're looking at and anyway he can describe his thinking on that...

I That would be...

P ...better than me. But it is something that's very important to understand about recycled materials is that... the extreme example is Bill Gates yesterday drinking a glass of water that had been produced from excrement in order to advertise the use of his sanitation technology that he's trying to encourage for use in the third world. That's a pretty extreme example, isn't it? The brand ghost of pooh in water, even if it's just water. But on a more prosaic level this was one of the advantages of the Reee chair, that we knew that all the plastic in it came from this one source which was from Sony, so that brand identity was there whether we liked it or not, so we embraced it.

I So it didn't get called the Sony chair?

P No, well that was a cooperate and legal affairs matter. The marketing department were keen, as was the environmental department, I think this is confidential, but I think that Sony were reluctant from a corporate standpoint to license the use of their name to a product that wasn't actually coming out of their own factories, which is fair enough.

I Yeah, of course.

P So the deal we came to is we can talk about Sony with it... not a deal, the agreement that was reached was that we can talk about Sony and the heritage of the chair in this kind of context, you know talking about it. But what we can't do is market it as a Sony product or to put on above the line marketing 'this is made from Sony materials'.

I Would that have made a difference?

P And I can't understand the reasons why, but it would have made a huge difference to our marketing and other products have been brought out since where they've obviously understood that issue from the start and addressed it and have gained permission to use the brand identification from the beginning. There's a chair made out of recycled Coca-Cola bottles, it's called the Coca-Cola chair.

I I've seen it, yes. Yes.



P Yeah.

I In different colours.

P Yeah.

I You were talking about, Guy adopted the term 'brand ghosts', just out of interest: I had hoped to speak with Philippe Starck but he's way too busy and I haven't... I have seen some of his chairs, principally in the collection at MoDiP, and obviously some on sale in John Lewis and obviously those in Cartel, and his Ghost chairs... you've just reminded me of his Ghost chair...

P Oh yes, right, yeah. Well that's a different thing, but...

I Exactly, but it is the ghost of something it was before, in a sense, the Louis chair. It's not recycled or anything like that but again it's this concept of pulling something of its essence or its origins, which I suppose just appeals to the writer in me, the idea that there's something deeper in there, but it is another lovely link that I can make.

P Yeah, absolutely. Well I think that his principle was a bit more akin to Rachel Whiteread's, you know with that Ghost chair is the idea that it's what isn't there that's important, rather than what is. But yeah, I know other designers have taken different approaches to the same concept. But in Guy's case what he's talking about is more how materials... once you know something about them have an identity that could potentially go beyond the product that they're embodied in at the moment.

I Yes.

P From a consumers point of you. Maybe that's something that a designer could toy with.

I Yeah, I think it will be really, really good to have that discussion, or have a discussion around that with him because I think that's fascinating, absolutely fascinating, and presumably also the market or the design potentials are enormous in terms of...

P Yeah. Well yes because if you think about it your enquiry isn't about chairs full stop, it's about plastic chairs. Which is quite cool because for a start that means you're not talking about chairs that were made before, what 1952 I guess. I'm not sure when the first viable plastic chairs were made but... so it's quite a bounded period of time in design, but it's bounded in that respect but the thing about plastic is you can sort of do anything with it, can't you? Especially 3D printed plastic, it can take any form that you want that can stand up and not break; they're about its only limits. So it is kind of limitless in its physical properties but then there are these other aspects to it, and brand ghosts is another one to add to the pile where it really quite constrains in material in other ways, you know, it suffers constraints that other materials don't, nobody ever complains about the unsustainability of a wooden chair, for example, but they do about plastic. So yeah, it's got this unlimited quality as a material in some aspects and then this very strictly limited quality in others but sort of in opposite ways from other materials like steel or wood which are very limited in terms of what you can do technically with them but unlimited in terms of what you can say about them or inscribe to them in a more philosophical context. I think I'm blabbering there actually.

I No, no, no. Not at all. Was the Reece chair... I mean were the plastic components extruded or were they...?

P Injection moulded.

I Pardon me?

P Injection moulded.

I It was injection moulded? Yeah.

P So yeah, so it's a gas injection mould tool that was designed in the UK, manufactured in China and then imported to the UK, which was a big mistake. It didn't save us any money in the long run at all because it took so long to get the tool made right and imported by boat that the sales we lost in the meantime when we could have been selling chairs, but the tool wasn't in the UK ready for production, we'd have more than made up for the money we saved in buying the actual tool production from China another time, and subsequently we've made several plastic injection mould tools since, we've made them all in the UK. This is a principle that a lot of people don't catch onto about geography in production,

that it makes sense, it's counter-intuitive, but it makes sense in the short run to make things in as small quantities as possible and to get early feedback from actual user/consumers quickly before you invest in more expensive tooling and production capacity and speed is more valuable to you than cash in the early stages of a project, and therefore the savings that people commonly try to make by manufacturing in, for example China, or other far-flung places, don't come close to balancing the risks that you're taking on by making that decision when you could do what happens also to be a more sustainable thing and produce your early batches locally, but small, fast batch production is its own reward. It just makes you more responsive to market needs anyway. So if you've managed to work out how to make something locally in the first place because you want to get it on the market quickly and learn and change at low cost you might as well carry on doing that. And again that's where a product can become more like a service because you can make it more adaptable to customer's needs. And as it happens we're living now in an era where we're at the very start of something brand new that I hadn't really ever thought about when I was working on the Reece chair, which is 3D printing, where essentially you can print wherever, locally to where the object is going to be consumed, but you can design anywhere, at a very, very far-flung location. So we've got this prospect now where potentially a chair could be designed in China but made in Ipswich, whereas once upon a time, a few years ago, it was the other way around. That's fascinating, and again this is to do with plastic chairs, plastic chairs in particular... well you can sort of 3D print in metal, you wouldn't do that for furniture I don't think, it's plastic furniture that's going to be the initial beneficiary of this in the furniture business.

I But is that not already in existence in terms of, say for instance designs created in the UK or the US, but then the actual manufacture in the country of origin or in the country where the product will be sold. Doesn't that already exist?

P Well to a limited extent, but the vast majority of the furniture that I'm aware of is either made locally where it's designed or it's made in a manufacturing hub like Shenzhen and it's made there because that's where the manufacturing all happens rather than because that's where the market is.

I Okay, oh yes. I'm with you, oh yes.

P So it's about its proximity to the market rather than its proximity to the place of design, which is interesting I think.

I Yeah. Now I'm very conscious it's coming up to an hour and I know you're quite busy. I've got a wonderful hour full of really good stuff too because I'll transcribe this to work with.

P Oh great. Okay.

I Would it be possible if there any other questions once I go through the recording, would it be possible if I have other questions, that I can send those through to you?

P Oh absolutely, or you can schedule another call if that's more straightforward for you, that's fine, yeah. As you can tell I love talking about this stuff, I don't do it enough.

I It's wonderful. I'm very restored today because yesterday's session with Ron, he wasn't very well and trying to record in a workshop is a nightmare because of the background noise and people coming and going.

P Yeah, right.

I So this is really good because it really crystallises... it's beginning to crystallise so much of my thinking and making me think of other issues. Your perspective is unique which is also what I really am very pleased to have gained because talking to artists and designers is good, it's giving me part of the story, and that's the other issue which I wrote down, is that you know you talk about this notion of storytelling in design, which perhaps we can come back to on another occasion...

P Mmm

I ...and it's also the reality side, the cold hard facts of marketing and the business which I think a lot of designers do seem to have cottoned onto because they can't sit on the periphery anymore, they have to engage with it so that their products or their work doesn't... they don't lose it.

P Yeah, it's not a problem if you're designing plastic inserts for cereal packets, you know, if that's the kind of designer you are that's already sorted because Nestle have got you covered, they've got the best marketing channels in the world, it's an issue when you're an independent designer, somebody who's either going to

either try and manufacture your own work at your own risk or somebody's going to try and sell a design on spec to a manufacturer who is going to make it for you.

I Yeah. Okay then Christopher I think I ought to draw it to a close because an hour is probably enough time to take a break.

P Yeah.

I But I would really appreciate if I could come back to you.

P Oh sure.

I If you could send me the information regarding Guy that would be very, very helpful.

P Certainly, yep. I'll send you his contacts. He's based in Birmingham; he's got a really lovely studio so if you want to visit him there I recommend it, yeah. Number One Bermondsey Square is his address which I think is a rather nice address.

I That's rather nice.

P Are there any other individuals in this field that you would say... because the problem is when you go for the great big celebrity star players they are hard to pin down. I mean I'm interested in those who basically are pushing the boundaries and of course often the Ron Arad's and the Philippe Starck's do crop up, but are there any others that you would suggest I might contact or I might look at who are doing work that is pretty much pushing... cutting edge, pushing the boundaries, stretching the possibilities?

P Yes, I think that Benjamin Hubert would be worth speaking to. He's a rising star on the design scene, a very thoughtful designer, and I don't know whether he's a talker or not but he's definitely a doer when it comes to trying new materials, materials of their time not just because they're novel but because they fit with... he reminds me a lot of a young Tom Dickson in that he's definitely a designer of his own time, and he's very comfortable with that. And also he's achieved a lot of success at a young age so... I don't have his contact details but he's got a studio. You can contact him through his studio.

I I'll Google him.

P And, who else comes to mind? He's the one that jumps out at me as somebody who'd be worth speaking to.

I That's okay; well you don't have to... I mean if you think of any others then you can jot them down for me if they pop into your head.

P Yeah.

I Okay. I did try Tom Dickson but again, like most of these busy designers it's difficult to fit... to get an interview with them or to get some time with them.

P Yeah, but you know, I... not to denigrate Tom Dickson's work because he's one of those designers... completely off the record here, other designers I know aren't particularly predisposed to admire him because of his very obvious success and not just commercial success but the fact that he's sort of this celebrity that's unusually managed to go out of the bounds of his profession, to become well known in general. So for that reason, people, like in any profession, they get a bit narky about the ones who have stuck their heads above the parapet. But the trouble is with his stuff, is when you get into it, it is very, very rewarding, and as much as you might want to go 'oh yeah it's all PR' you have to say that he really knows what he's doing. But what might be interesting for you is to talk to some of the people about whom that might be said in ten years, rather than the people like Tom Dickson who've probably said everything they had to say already, and I think Benjamin Hubert's on that list. You know I don't know anybody who's interviewed him much outside of design magazines very specific to do with his latest collection, but give it ten/twenty years and he'll be a Tom Dickson for sure.

I Well that's a good idea then. He's more likely to say yes now.

P But you know, talk to the people who haven't said yet whatever it is that they have to say. Once you've said it, it's probably been said. And yeah, so he's one. Let me think: who are the others... Leigh Broom comes to mind as well.

I Is that Lee? Or Leigh? Male or female?

P Male, but I think it still might be Leigh.

I Okay.

P But Leigh Broom is a Shoreditch-based designer. Works with really, really luxurious materials. The opposite of sustainability, but he has a very, very clear idea of what he wants to do and how he wants it to look. And he's a very confident young designer who I think might be worth talking to because of that.

I Right, excellent. You sound like a very useful gatekeeper.

P [Laughs] maybe.

I Okay, well thank you again, very much. I've really enjoyed listening to you, and well having a conversation really.

P Yeah.

I And I look forward to doing it again. And Susan, you know Susan don't you? Susan Lambert?

P Yeah, we met a couple of times.

I I mean she was very keen that I chat with you because when I gave her my list you weren't on it because I didn't immediately associate you with chair design, but she did say that you had a vast knowledge of that industry and of working with people within it, so I am really grateful to Susan and I'm very grateful to you.

P Pleasure, absolute pleasure Kate. Nice to talk to you.

I Thank you very much.

P Please stay in touch. I'll send you that email address now.

I Very kind, thank you Christopher. Bye.

P Bye.

#### 4. Richard Liddle (RL)

I They are so busy, it is very difficult to find time and I do appreciate you being able to do this. In fact this is my second Skype interview so it's worked out quite well because it saves on trying to organise somewhere to meet and you know, eating into your precious schedule.

P No, well I mean as I say I'm more than happy at some point to meet you in London. I have been backwards and forwards but the last few trips sadly have just been a call to say can you come here tomorrow and it's a very short window to get there and back but I'm hoping over the next couple of months I'll have a little more relaxed diary, so if indeed you do want to meet up again after this I'm sure we can work something out. But I mean I don't know if you have a general sort of list of questions. I know you forwarded me the email earlier on, I mean do you want to run through that or do you have some other structure that you'd like to work to?

I No, I'd like it to be as fairly relaxed as it could possibly be and it's not meant to be a very serious... oh I say serious... I mean serious in that it's a thesis but it's not meant to be too burdensome, too hard on the interviewee because I think that I'm more interested in what you have to say. The questions were a general guideline and I've given those to everyone I've interviewed to allow some kind of framework, but I have put together a few more based on a little bit of research on you and your work and I suspect they'll come up anyway in the course of the discussion. So I'm quite happy to leave it open, to leave as much scope for you to do the talking and me to just keep my mouth shut.

P I have no problem with that. Before we get into it, out of interest, what is your background and your sort of... I mean obviously I know you're sort of research-focused but what is the intention from this research? Are you a specialist in this area already that you're trying to develop certain areas of polymer technology or what's...?

I Oh Lord... oh gosh, nothing that grand. No. In fact I'm not a designer, nor am I an artist and... well I'm an artist in the sense that my art form is actually creative writing and I can see the puzzles in your head already, what the heck is a creative



writer wanting to talk to a designer for? Well I'm supported by the Museum of Design in Plastics which is at Arts University Bournemouth, so...

P You're working closely with Susan then? Is she your...?

I Yes, in fact she's one of my supervisors, my second supervisor.

P Okay.

I So you know Susan don't you because you've worked with her?

P Yeah, I've spoken to her many times and we've tried to collaborate in a few areas. I also came in and gave a talk a couple of years ago at the museum. I've just received an email actually with something that's happening, is it October, a big event there?

I September, the Provocative Plastics.

P Yeah, I mean it's in my diary sort of pencilled in, I may be able to attend but I'm really not sure yet, but I saw that you have got Sebastian coming down to give a keynote speech as well.

I That's right, yes, and she's... well they've put out four abstracts and I think there's some nice themes in there, one of which is actually a theme around which I'm hoping to present which is plastics as muse, and how plastics are used in terms of performance, media... all sorts of... I suppose the... looking at it from... how plastics influence people other than in terms of design.

P Okay.

I And that in a way is partly what I'm doing, roughly speaking, not roughly speaking but I'll try and put it in a nutshell: I'm creating an object narrative which is writing about plastic chairs, and I know people probably look in amazement at me and think I'm slightly mad but writing about something is perfectly normal and has been for centuries. Objects have always been the muse for lots of creative writers, poets and prose writers and what I'm trying to do is to build a contemporary, cultural and social image or picture of plastic chairs and how they fit into society, how they fit into our visions of... well art and design but also our cultural structures as well. And it's really... in some ways in fact I see that design

is moving this way, that people are starting to write about design in a very creative way; not just making things, but actually writing about the things that they're making or writing about the outcome or product of design.

P That's become part of the story really, I mean years ago because the products were less... well I suppose innovation was less readily available if you like, and with the freedom of new technology and various printing technologies products are far more, I suppose it's more normal for them to be... websites to be flooded by new versions of things that people are exploring. And to get some identity I've often find now that you have to be a little bit of a creative writer yourself to support your product, otherwise it sometimes gets lost in the sort of melee of everyone else's products as well. So I mean that stuff I think's important from a marketing point of view of designers now. They've had to sort of add that string to their bow to make sure that they can differentiate themselves to be honest.

I Yes, I think you're absolutely right and looking at the design magazines and design websites there's as much time and energy invested in writing about objects as there is about the object speaking for itself which is a really interesting shift I suppose, is one way of describing it. Perhaps not as uncommon in say for instance painting or sculpting.

P Yeah, definitely. I mean also it's becoming a bit of a pressure on the sort of smaller companies or the emerging time because that's a skill that they have to develop independently, whereas where you've got the larger brand, the brands or brands of large organisations they generally have a marketing team who generally have people on that team who are creative writers or English majors or whatever, so they've got an additional advantage on top of everyone else to make sure that their voices get heard. So yeah I mean it's something that people are having to tap into from a business angle now I think.

I And how has that impacted on what you do?

P Well I mean what I find is now we... I don't know obviously if you've done some research you'll know enough about Cohda but Cohda is an industrial design consultancy now and I did some very early batch production products that the RD range of chairs was one of those projects. And that's how I originally started, which was batches of product that we sold and then we then started to sell to collectors, but as things have developed there's only so much you can do with

that before you need to move onto the next level and that ultimately means collaborating with manufacturers who have that infrastructure in place for distribution, for marketing and it's yet another minefield. So we do it ourselves independently now to a certain extent with the creative writing and putting a story and a concept and context around the particular products, but our projects now are more focused towards the requirements of individual clients. I mean a lot of what we do now we unfortunately can't discuss, so amongst the projects that are out there are attributed to what's online, they're projects that have been sort of self-initiated really so we have total control so at least we can show our capability, where there are a lot of products now that we've now passed onto manufacturers who as part of the relationship don't want anyone to know that you've actually designed the product. So it can be a little frustrating sometimes but you still have to cover all areas of the product lifecycle and its story really to be able to sell it to the customer. So I think it's becoming more and more important. I mean we do that in-house here, we've got various experience, one of my colleagues, Patina, she has a creative background in writing so I generally write the crux of the product story if you like, and then make sure that everyone has their various input to see if things can be padded out or evolved really, so it's a bit of a group effort as far as things like that are concerned.

I And it's fascinating that somehow or other people have latched onto the idea that every product must tell a story because... I can tell you I've looked at a lot of plastic chairs in the last year or so and there's a real mixed bag. Some are utterly awful and some are extraordinary, and I am amazed at how people are looking to see past, not just to look at the product but they want to almost have a relationship with it.

P Well yeah, you find that more with the, dare I say it, the sort of exclusive, high-end designs where the product, specifically furniture for some reason, sort of transcends furniture into more art or sculpture and then I think people almost want to buy into that backstory. Now when I say the story with us, I mean all of these websites and design magazines, they're flooded with what I would call, dare I say it... what I would call... we refer to them as tracing paper designs really. You know there are a lot of products out there that are a bit like the background of a Scooby-Doo cartoon, you know, it never changes, it's the same thing over and over again with a different colour, with a slightly different style, and what's happened is you've just ended up with an entirely flooded market of

very similar appearing designs. So the story sometimes gets diluted. Now you can't really sell... well I mean people do sell products with the story about it's a this or it's a that but it's... the new evolution of this concept or sometimes I think it goes a bit far. What we try to do is I mean all of our products are based around materials and process and driving forward technology and advancing things. I mean that's really where our interest and focus lies, so if we do come up with a concept or a story, I mean I... we're about to launch a new range of furniture in the next... what's the launch day? Sort of July, and this is something that we've again, there is a chair in the range but we've taken it totally out of the furniture manufacturing industry and we've done something very unique with it and the benefit of doing that from our point of view is, we are able to create a form, a structure, an entirely new process to create furniture. Now that's being driven by initially our desire to do something very unique, but secondly it's being driven by pure frustration with the furniture manufacturing industry. We, to give you a bit of background, I mean I can't tell you what it is but I think it's relevant in this conversation, we've worked... it's a design I came up with a couple of years ago and we've tried to realise it with every major furniture manufacturer in the UK. The majority of them I spoke with are very interested, and this is not us trying to get them to sell it or market it for us, it's just actually asking them to manufacture it on our behalf. Every single one of them have tried to change the design to such an extent that it just led to us saying look, this just can't work. And that's basically because, and this is similar in the plastic furniture industry, they have almost a click type assembly to production now, I mean we've got some of the catalogues here where you pick a form that they've used before and you add a certain leg and you add something else and what they've done, because a lot of these manufacturers... I mean they're extremely skilled and I'm not trying to sort of burden the manufacturers with any particular brush or tar them with a brush, but they have their parameters and they try and make designers fit their manufacturing structure, which is fine but it really stifles innovation. So when you are trying to do something totally impossible from their point of view they are very apprehensive to try anything new outside their sort of... their normal understanding. So what it led us to do is we searched through various companies in Europe as well, we found some who were a little more helpful, one that just totally wouldn't support us at all, and bearing in mind that I've been trying to continue supporting this little British manufacturing industry all of the time throughout my career, we've ended up working with a company in China. Now I didn't want to go down that route but as soon as I met with this company, we sat

down, explained what we're doing and I said have you tried this shape before, do you think this will be possible because we've done all the engineering, we think it will work and their response was well we haven't tried it yet but we're game to give it a go, we'll happily work with you and see if there's a product there. Now that's fantastic from a designer point of view, someone who will put some time in working with you to create something new. I just think that that's slowly disappearing in the UK and Europe, which is a big frustration from a designer.  
[Notification tone]

I Is that your...?

P Sorry, yeah that's my email it's gone crazy, don't worry.

I No that's okay, that's okay.

P Sorry, I went off on a bit of a tangent there but...

I No, no, no not at all. It perhaps is, as you said, it perhaps reflects the wider commercial scene or manufacturing scene that if anybody wants to do something different these days they have to come up with some... well some revolutionary process that isn't going to cost an arm and a leg, otherwise it has to be outsourced. I've heard this now before so it's interesting that you're reaffirming that situation because certainly reading from your websites and so on that the technology and the manufacturing techniques are high on your list and pioneering technology and... the question's just gone out of my head, oh goodness me. Yeah, I mean if your process, your manufacturing process, because you describe it as being, certainly in relation to the RD chair, as being simple because it blends recycling and manufacturing into a seamless process. Why are people jumping at the opportunity to do something like that?

P [Laughs] well how much tape have you got in your recorder?

I [Laugh] well, lots of bits.

P The problem is that, I mean that particular project was a bit of a pet project that I was very determined to explore and as I went on the journey I found more and more hurdles and more and more issues that I had to go through. Now the end solution which was the, I call it the URE process which is uncooled recycled extrude, I mean the reason that I went down that route was the original problem

was that, I think it was back in sort of the late '90s, early 2000s there was this huge issue with recycled... sorry, with domestic packaging waste but specifically HDPE plastic, high-density polyethylene. Now we're talking here about detergent bottles, food trays, milk bottles, plastic bottles and all of this material is generated in vast quantities. Now it can be recycled but it can never be recycled again for its intended purpose, so what you have is this degradation of plastic because it can't be used in food packaging again because when it's recycled you'll have a bit of bleach bottle with something else and ultimately you create this mixture and in doing that you create a sort of comingled plastic. So what you find is that a lot of this plastic is being used in bollards, in road surfaces, in other sort of very unattractive means where they just load it with carbon powders and just sort of mask its use. Now that's not a bad application but once you do that and you comingle the plastic it can never be unmingled. Now if you keep a relatively clean waste stream, so you're recycling plastic bottles and food trays over and over again, in reality you could probably reheat it and reform it sort of in excess of 30, 40 times, but once you mix it you're almost killing it. It has another use, possibly two more uses, but it degrades at such a rate that you're sort of killing its elasticity if you like. The benefit of you keeping it in its fluid state is you could in theory have... you could design a chair that becomes a table, becomes a light and I actually did that as part of an experiment, but the problem with my process is in industry if you're making a recycled plastic chair... [phone rings] Sorry, I've got plenty of phones going here, just a sec, the problem with the recycled plastic that I was using is its original purpose is blow moulding, so it's used for... it has a various heat and flow rate that allows it to be blown into the shape of a container. Now when you shred that material down and try to extrude it, it causes so many problems in control because it shrinks, it distorts, it does a lot of strange things in its recycling. So if I was creating a virgin product I would just have a long list of plastics and we would just pick one that satisfied that particular need. I mean you'll have come across various stress tests yourself in plastics and load weights and flow and it's very simple to find a plastic that will do what you need it to do for an original purpose, but when you're trying to turn a plastic away from its sort of... from its beneficial makeup and use it in another form it limits your possibilities massively. So for instance with the HDPE, it was a blow moulded polymer that we then had to try and extrude, which is not easy. So there was a lot of research in controlling the material, finding the optimum temperatures to make sure it flowed in the machines, to make sure it fused together when it was woven and also, I mean you may have seen in the moulds in various forms that

we created, the moulds actually had to shrink by 5% when the plastic was applied to them, which allowed us to release the chairs and the other products from the moulds. So in trying to solve a problem in a very simple means I generated probably another 500 problems that I had to solve before it... before this simple process could appear to be simple, it wasn't as straightforward as that.

I Yeah, so you used the RD chair then really as a test bed?

P Yeah I did a... I produced a batch, I think in the end we produced about, probably close to 80 or 90 chairs, a lot of those were sold to private collectors, but that chair was the sort of culmination of what was possible in that material, which was you know there were no fixings in that chair at all, it was one 100% recycled plastic. I did a lot of research into recycled plastic chairs myself to see what had been done in the past and the majority of furniture that had been produced up until I created that, the RD Legs chair, were produced in a heat-compressed board, which you've probably come across from Smile Plastics and other people like that. It's a heat compressed... it's flaked packaging waste that's heat compressed in old wood lamination jigs and it's basically just a plastic sandwich. It comes out like a sheet but it has a sort of marbled effect.

I Ah right, because I saw the... there was a Vimeo video which used or showed the chair being extruded, yeah, so I see what you mean in relation to that. Tell me, was each chair unique?

P Yeah, totally unique. No two were alike. I mean I had a map in my head when I was making the chairs...

I You did?

P Yeah, I mean a rough map as to where I was going to begin and where I was going to end because as soon as the plastic exits the machine it starts to cool down so you had to make sure that you laid it down in a way that the lines in which you drew the chair out would still have sufficient heat to fuse for a long time. So there were... it was trial and error but we made a lot of chairs that didn't work that we then shredded down and recycled again to make sure that we could get it to operate, and simple things like it depends what... really it's a strange process but it depended what mood I was in, it depended what music I was listening to... it was...

I But you're an artist; you're allowed to be like that.

P Sorry?

I You're an artist; you're allowed to be like that.

P So that... I mean we did discuss... I mean I did... I actually made every single chair. We did...

I So that was you in the video?

P That was me in the video, yeah. I did try and train up two of our team to produce the chairs but it... I don't know... we still don't know why to this day, but it was very difficult for other people to pick it up. I think it was because it was my process and I was able to go through every stage I knew what was possible, but even with some coaching I think we would have had to put many weeks into getting someone up to a level where that every chair they were producing was up to standard. And the issue of course is if you get it wrong it's not the kind of chair that... you can't just glue pieces together again. It's one hit. You start, it takes you 45 minutes or an hour to weave the plastic and if you haven't got it right then the chair doesn't work. So it's a bit of a ruthless process as well, there's no room for error, which is why ultimately I ended up doing them all myself.

I So really each chair has got your signature on it, it is... it's a Liddle chair.

P It is a Liddle chair [laughs].

I And do you think that that was attractive to collectors to know that the artist, designer, had his hands on it exclusively?

P Well I think initially, I mean we got... I got shortlisted for some design awards and also we ended up with chairs in a few museums, Germany... I can't remember which ones, there's one in America and a few collectors purchased the chairs. To be honest I never started the journey to generate a very exclusive, limited edition chair. Unfortuna... well fortunately and unfortunately, depending on your perspective, it just developed like that as the process moved forward. What I was trying to do was to create a sort of mass version of a recycled plastic chair that could be at a price point that a lot of people could purchase, but what happened is in that... in me creating those original chairs which were ultimately to engage



with manufacturers and try and get them onboard to support a commercial version of the chair, it then... they then became even more exclusive. And the problems that I encountered in the recycled materials myself, which I managed to resolve couldn't... well I wouldn't say couldn't but the manufacturers we were in discussion with were not interested in working with recycled plastics. The benefit of doing it in a hands on means of when I was working with the chairs or producing each one, when there's a problem or something happens in the plastic or it's not flowing effectively or there's a slight issue and you have to make a decision, I can do that and I can make it work, whereas in manufacture it has to work every time. There has to be a rule or a path and if it doesn't work then it doesn't work. So this is why you don't generally see recycled plastics, to a certain extent, being used in furniture and other products in industry because there is always that minor inconsistency issue I think.

I Yeah, I see what you mean. In fact there are two points there I wanted to come back to. I'm really keen to know, and I guess perhaps you're not the best person to ask, but how comfortable are your chairs?

P Well I mean they're as comfortable as any other chair. I mean they... I suppose they are more artistic than functional, it's not the kind of chair you'd want to sit on all day long but I've got several at home that we sit around the dining table on, so you can comfortably sit on them for a couple of hours. I mean it depends how long, I suppose, you want to sit on a chair. Maybe we've just accumulated more robust bottoms in my family because I keep bringing home crazy chairs.

I They feel obliged, do they? In your house.

P Yeah, they all sit there with a tear in their eye. But I don't think that's the case. I mean they're modestly comfortable; they're not the most... I won't lie they're not **the** most comfortable chair but then they are solid plastic chairs, they don't... they don't form to the body like a blow moulded chair, but that was never the intention, it was always to be a statement before we moved towards a mass manufacture version, which was set to be that comfortable design. We did actually design a production version but it never developed and then, about a year or two years later there were, I think three or four different chairs that were more blow moulded... sorry, injection moulded versions of the, you know like Montblanc sort of stacking type plastic chair that sort of emerged with this woven aesthetic on the inside, a little more natural. Now I'm not saying I necessarily

influenced that particularly but I mean definitely something happened and they sort of made a shift and there was a move towards more organic appearing plastics, if you like.

I Okay and you also mentioned that, and your website says, well certainly the information about the RD chair is that some of them are in museums. Again, this is something that other artists, designers have talked about; some of their chairs have ended up as exhibition pieces or display pieces. How do you feel about what is essentially you know an everyday object ending up in a museum? How do you feel about that? Or how do you feel about your chair ending up in a museum?

P Well I mean when I was younger and I suppose it was a little younger, it was accepted for various collections and things, I mean there's obviously a pride in having something thought of as valuable to a wider audience. I suppose now if potentially it's out there and it inspires other people or it leads to further developments then I'm more than happy for that. But yeah I mean that's a good question, I don't have a sort of very precise answer to that. I mean you know there's no value in a sort of business or financial sense in having a chair in a museum but I suppose it's a very nice statement to be able to come out with that it happens to be thought of as significant in those sort of terms, in the furniture evolution, if you like, yeah.

I Yeah, okay. And, just taking you back, there was a lot of mention about sustainability. Obviously you've mentioned recycling. Sustainability is a concept that I think every artist, designer has in their armoury now when they're talking about their products and talking about their research and so on. Is sustainability still part of your agenda? Is it something that is maybe a... is it as important now as it was before?

P I would say now it's more important than it was before, but the shift has been in my, I suppose presentation of where it fits within our design ethos, for want of a better word. Initially with the recycled chairs and furniture it was at a time when eco was a very hot topic, environmental, recycled, and it led to I suppose a lot of interest around myself and the designs. Now I'm still doing all of that but I don't know whether it's a personal development where I sort of... I still conform to the sustainable principles and add them to my design, but I don't necessarily scream about it anymore. Because I've found, particularly... I mean eco and recycling

was a bit of a double-edged sword, it led to interest from the sort of I suppose the knowledgeable minority, but when you then try and translate that to the masses, the whole recycle thing, at that stage, at that particular time, and I think this has changed since, recycled was still seen as lesser quality or at least that was the public's interpretation, if you like. You know why would you have something recycled when you can have something new? Or why would you have something made of x or y when you can buy a new one? Now I think that's changed a lot and also a lot of the big manufacturers are now using recycled plastics, whether it's BMW using them in the dashboards for their cars etc. But no one seems to be as - what's the word? - I suppose no one... these larger companies don't see the need to really drive it home to customers. It's used now because it's probably a useful material, to be honest it's probably reached a price point now which makes it more useful to the mainstream manufacturers, but they aren't selling their cars or furniture or other things now on that eco story because... I don't know whether it's because customers just don't want it or need it anymore or maybe it's just now expected that a percentage of recycled plastics or polymers or metals or whatever are now used in industry. It's become more, I suppose normalised, wonderfully so. Yeah, I do use it again as I said in all of mine and the Cohda Design studio's projects but don't use that as a hammer to drive our products home anymore.

I Speaking to other interviewees for some people there's almost a feeling that it's a lip service being paid, that if you want to... you want to get your products noticed that somehow or other if you just label them with the sustainability, recycling labels that that will get you more street cred.

P Definitely, well I think that's changed. I mean there were a lot of... five years ago there were a lot of eco homes, well there was one particularly called the Eco Home Store. I don't know if you've spoken to Jane, the Eco Home Store but that company is no longer there. I mean I still have business relationships with a company in Hong Kong called - gosh, what are they called now? - I'll have to think of the name, it's gone. But it's a big Hong Kong chain of eco stores and they are finding it difficult at the moment because it's just moved away. The public have now moved away a little from these sorts of quirky products. Now you always are going to get the quirky products that are made from knitted bottle tops and all of those types of things and they're sort of a... I see those as... they're a bit like a one line joke. They're fine, okay that's interesting, but you know what

else? And sometimes the eco message is a bit of a polyfiller; it can fill in the gaps in a product that potentially hasn't been well thought out, without sounding too harsh. If you add the eco brand to it or recycled stamp to it then it's possibly accepted that it looks a bit strange or it does... it's not quite right but it's recycled and maybe that's where my original comment about the public's interpretation of recycled products comes from. Maybe it's a double-edged sword, I don't know.

I And is sustainability... is your definition or perception of sustainability does that go beyond recycling? I mean what... you talked about the principles. What principles would you draw on to...?

P It's everything. In a new product that we design or engineer now it's everything from material selection to end of lifecycle. So it's where we get the materials from, how the materials are processed, the travel time of these, the amount of energy used in manufacture, the shipping journey to customer, what materials are used in packaging, the means that a product is designed so that it can be easily disassembled or recycled at the end of its life. You know, all of those areas need consideration when you're developing a new product and I think if you don't at least, I suppose harness or embed some of those principles in any new product design then as a design company you're not going to be around for much longer. You have to be really strict on that. I mean there are... obviously I'm not saying that everyone does this or everyone needs to do this, you know every variable is out there from a new product or new design perspective, but with what we do we try at every stage to make sure we're well covered in all of those areas.

I It sounds, from what you've just said there that in a sense that is the story because we talked right at the beginning about creating a story, in a way you've perhaps set or outlined the key areas that enable the product to have this story, where the raw materials have come from right through to the end stage, which presumably means the client, user/consumer. So in a sense I'm seeing that the sustainability is somehow or other part of the story of your product or any product for that matter.

P Well it is but I think that should be there anyway. I mean I don't know if that necessarily needs to be part of your marketing story or the way you present it to the customer, I think that's just... those are almost the talismans that you have written on the wall of the design studio, you know that you look, when you develop a new product we do these things, if anyone asks then that's what we

do. But I think customers and companies are now far more savvy, they can really spot any potential issues with a product. It's becoming a far more transparent world and it's much more ethical and also it's much more valuable from our point of view to know that we're developing products as effectively and consciously as we possibly can. But as I said I mean we don't, other than you asking me the question and covering those areas that we would consider when we're developing a new product, that I wouldn't incorporate any of that really into the sort of product literature when we launch a new product. It would be sold on a new process, a new material, a new technology or electronic advancement or whatever that is. So you know the Crypsis lighting technology that we've developed, I mean that was probably about 50 different polymers used in that new lighting system that we've developed, and we've tried to make sure that the majority or all of the materials we use in that are as effectively sourced as we can be and generally what you find is that they're also more cost effective when you really identify the materials that would work best for that particular product, so it's a... there's a valuable balance there to be had but I don't sell or market that product on its sort of eco credentials, it's marketed on its ability to offer a new illumination method to that particular marketplace. The additional benefits in its production etc, they're all just, although valuable, just added benefits.

I Right, right. Okay. I'm just jotting down a few things. I know you said that you're in the throes of developing some products at the moment, but what are you currently involved in? What's your current focus? And therefore where are you going in the future?

P Well we're sort of developing the business, I mean we've set up a new lighting company that we're now managing as well, we have partnerships with several companies around the world now. We've got partnerships with the Belgium company, we've got Hong Kong partners and some partners in the US that we are ongoing development of products for them. Now they would be recognised brands so I couldn't tell you who they are but we're constantly developing new products for them, prototyping various things. From our point of view, aside from those sort of ongoing projects I'm very keen to start further research into photoluminescence to organic LEDs and start applying them to some new projects that we have in mind so yeah, I mean I'm excited about the developments in technology at the moment, specifically lighting but also new structural materials in furniture and other products that we're looking into. So...

I Sorry, structural materials, what do you mean by that?

P Well I thought you might pick that one up, I was trying not to identify specific materials. But we've identified some new materials; they have the structural characteristics for new furniture and other applications that they haven't been explored or used before by industry, so we're very interested in doing material research and seeing how far we can take particular designs or components, if you like. But we work on a... probably a three year cycle, so the things that we're working on now won't be seen until early 2017 probably. So yeah, I mean always interested in emerging technologies, we're quite fortunate where we are in the North East there's a lot of technology exchanges, a lot of research centres, which we are fortunate enough to have links with and we're quite privy to and have access to sort of emerging research and technologies. So yeah, we always try to be one step ahead as far as those kinds of things are concerned.

I Yeah, I obviously don't want to push you in terms of... I'm not expecting you to disclose anything business-wise, but it's just interesting you mention that because obviously plastic being the material around, which I suppose I'm spending my time exploring, so it's interesting to see where designers and artists are moving. Are they moving away from plastics or are they moving to... obviously technology changes and I'm sure you're as much at the forefront of that as perhaps some of the people you're working with, but is plastics becoming a little passé? Or are plastics still seen as valuable materials in terms of output, product output?

P Yeah, well I mean plastics are invaluable. I mean they're still a major, or **the** major contributor to design and engineering but I'm sure you've spoken to... whoever you speak to if you ask them what they're looking into you'll probably get the default answer, which is rapid prototyping, 3D printing etc, etc. And we looked... huge value there and I mean obviously there's the core material that is plastics and people have started to use recycled plastics. I mean I looked at that myself, I tried to connect the 3D printer to a recycled extrusion line years ago and the RCA wouldn't actually let me because it was far too expensive at that point so I was trying to destroy their machines to make it work so they weren't having it. So I mean as far as 3D printing and things like that go we have 3D printers here and we have access to a lot more. It's interesting, it allows you to create forms and structures that potentially would be impossible in other

materials, but until technology speeds up to such an extent that it can replace manufacture and the key problem there is the speed of manufacture, you know you can produce a very small plastic component in 3D printing that will take you seven hours where the same component, once it's productionised, you can churn them out 50 every two seconds. It's... it's just not got a balance like that I don't think. So I believe the sort of use of polymers and the new developments of plastics will still be driven by 3D printing but it will be in a far more scientific and lower volume capacity because you don't really need the volumes anymore to do that very small scale production. But I mean new polymers are developed all the time, one of the big new applications we're interested in is the OLED technology, the flexible organic LEDs, very thin, almost acetate thickness whereby you can illuminate a whole area or sheet and now we've got flexible TVs and digital capacitors being applied to that, which allows you to add new technologies into these very flexible substrates, which are obviously polymer-based. So I'm very excited about the developments in plastics, but I'm not sure that we've sort of seen the next phase of polymer evolution in 3D printing, I think there's something else to come, personally, but don't quote me on that.

I [Laughs] yeah I promise I won't. Okay, and are you from a design engineering background or is it principally art and design?

P No I'm... well industrial design...

I Industrial design.

P ...towards engineering. I mean I studied at Leeds; I worked at the various companies just as an assembly worker for a long time in companies like Black & Decker and Flymo. I did a Master's degree, was fortunate enough to get a bursary to go to the RCA, spent three years there and then worked in London for a while and after creating a few successful products for other companies and seeing any profits going in someone else's pocket I decided to try it myself, so that was a few years ago now.

I Well I guess that you cut your teeth on all these other jobs and roles that you were doing so...

P I tried, but yeah, you never know how deep the leap is when you take it I have to say.

I So did you see where you were going or was it perhaps serendipity that took you from one place to another? Did you have this plan of where you were going to be?

P Yeah, I always knew what I wanted to do, yeah definitely. I wouldn't say I had a sort of written down sort of strategic plan but I knew where I wanted to be and what I wanted to do with the business particularly. Because what I found is if your focus is on innovation and development of hopefully very unique products, then you need the freedom to think and to be able to sort of capitalise on what's around you. And sometimes when you are working for other companies and you've got the pressure of deadlines and other things - I mean I'm not saying we don't have those things, we do - but genuine innovation doesn't come from sitting behind a desk and concentrating as hard as you can, it comes from the times where you're not expecting things to happen and that's really... I was trying to... in my own company just trying to make sure we had a... I had enough space to realise some new ideas.

I And do you have a team that work with you? Do you have a design team?

P Yeah, I mean we've got a team of six people. We've got engineers, graphic designers, web developer and some junior designers, but we all have a leaning towards design, product design particularly.

I Okay, right. And you're based up in the North East?

P Yeah, we're based just outside of Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

I Oh right okay.

P The benefit of being here is there are so many smaller companies that have access to the... there are a lot of men in sheds doing very exciting things around Newcastle and because of the history of manufacture in the past, it doesn't take long to find someone who has an area of expertise that he might be interested in particularly.

I That's interesting because a lot of the artist designers that I've spoken to tend to focus and work around London and the South-East, but it's good to know that there's still this hotbed of innovation which people forget goes on outside London.



P Well yeah it does and we still have very strong links with London. We do projects for companies in central London but...

I But you don't have to be there.

P Yeah, well I mean technology allows us to Skype, to do quick visits on the train and, as I said, the benefit of being slightly outside is we do have a bit of anonymity but also we can be anywhere really and we are. And because we're in a potentially more, I suppose a smaller collective in the North East we are... it leads to maybe us getting a little more recognition sometimes which is fine. We're not screaming to be heard all of time.

I Unlike some [laughs].

P Well I'm not going to point fingers but yeah.

I No, no, no, no, no neither am I. [laughs]

P It can be very difficult but also the benefit of me being in London for a while I was able to bring a lot of the contacts and a lot of the links I had with London back to the North East so that was valuable too.

I Do you feed into any of the technology areas up there? I mean universities, colleges; do you feed into that now?

P Yeah we do, I mean we're very lucky, we've got the Culture Lab at Newcastle University here, we've got Northumbria Design School, we've got Materials Exchange over at Sunderland University, we've got Teesside Computer Department, but also we've got the Centre for Printed Electronics here in the North East, the European Centre for Electronics and yeah I mean you'd be surprised what is accessible and once you make the relevant connections and people know your capability, then you know it's a very interesting place to be because what we find is when people have seen the projects and areas of research that we've looked into previously they will approach us if something is potentially of interest.

I And have you over the years been influenced by particular artist designers, or designers I should say?

P I haven't. I've got to say, I mean I don't really follow... I used to maybe when I was a little younger but I don't really follow what's going on too much in the design world. I found it... after a few years of constantly reading design blogs and design magazines you find that you end up almost forcing yourself to replicate other people and I think sometimes you need to kind of just be a little bit of an outsider.

I A maverick.

P Well you said that, I wouldn't go that far, I mean you know just trying to be open to other things because I mean you see it yourself. I mean I've done some various teaching roles and things in the past and what you find is that when you are flooded by similar designs or similar information through whatever media channel, design arm you use it can be very restrictive and it makes you second guess or really possibly overly consider what you should and shouldn't be doing and the truth is you should just be doing what you think you should be doing otherwise you are restricting yourself too much before you even begin.

I I'm glad you said that because that's one of the things I think that has come through in my own work is that there's nothing wrong with being yourself and you're not trying to be someone else, another writer. I don't want to have to have to write... you don't expect to write like those people. You'd like to but at the same time that wouldn't make it you, that would make you somebody else entirely.

P You end up blending your voice and no one wants that, you know you've got to have your identity. But the issue is when you have that, when you have a strong identity or at least attempt to or aspire to have a strong identity you will split the room; you will find people who really love your work and people who hate it. But I always think, and it's taken me a while to realise it, I'd rather people did love or hate it, what I don't want is people to just think it's okay because at least if they hate it or love it you're creating a reaction and that's really what you want.

I Yeah, yes. It's really good that you say that because that's something I hear quite a bit from other artists who do want to keep their voice in what they're doing, a voice obviously in its broadest, metaphorical sense. So yeah, good. I'm... I'm not giving you marks out of ten but it's reassuring that you're saying a lot of the things that perhaps I'm starting to feel myself if you know what I mean. Okay, well I realise now it's coming up to an hour and I'm sure an hour is as much as you can

cope with and perhaps it's time to draw it to a close and maybe think about somewhere in the future meeting up and seeing what it is you do, in the flesh.

P Yeah, of course. Well I mean I'll keep you up to date with my sort of movements over the next couple of months but if any... I'm happy to speak again further online if you think there are any gaps or anything that you've missed but maybe we may get to meet at the Museum of Plastics later in the year if you're presenting. I'm going to try and get down if I can so yeah... but also just keep me in the loop as to what you're doing, I'd be interested to see how things develop with your project.

I Thank you, and it's really... I really do appreciate you giving your time and your thoughts, and just to reassure you, as per the email, there's no reason for me to put any of this online. This is purely for my research. Obviously when I do the data analysis I will extract and extrapolate but it's not going to be: this is Richard Liddle's remark.

P I didn't expect that but I said it as a bit of a default response because I mean you may get this yourself but you'd be amazed at the kind of requests I get. I mean I've literally had PhD students in the past send me an email saying 'can you...', literally not even an introduction, just 'can you answer these questions?' And it's literally laid out to such an extent that if I did write and respond I'd have written their PhD for them you know. And you just think oh of course I'll just sit down and spend a day answering all of your questions, but also I've been privy to information that I've shared just popping up all over the place so I'm just... I'm just more overtly cautious than I used to be.

I And intellectual property is such a big issue and I understand that completely. I'm married to a lawyer so I understand that completely, but also it is so easy to spread the word nowadays, technology is so convenient, but to reassure you that the ethics and the legal issues that bind me within this PhD are very much underlined in terms of confidentiality and protecting the intellectual property of other people in the course of doing it. So I want to reassure you about that. And even if something were to come out in terms of when I'm doing the data analysis I have no reason to say that it's... I would ascribe that to anyone in particular, it's more general, thematic stuff that I would be drawing out and therefore there's no need to identify specific artists, it's not a report in that sense.

P No problem. Well good luck with it and do pass on my regards to Susan if you don't mind.

I I will of course.

P I will speak to her soon.

I And I look forward to talking to you again, thank you very much Richard.

P Thank you, bye-bye.

## Appendix 5 (1- 5) - Data Analysis Grid- Level 1

**Ron Arad**

### Explanation of Table Presentation

- Bold shows themes identified. Clustering of units of meaning. (**Groenewald, 2004**, Creswell, 1998; King, 1994; Moustakas, 1994) Also called units of significance (Sadala & Adorno, 2001)
- *Italics show possible poetic transcription or transformation that result from reflection and contemplation of the themes and remarks made by participant.*
- *Italics/Bold in brackets is the significant theme for a poem*

### 1. Data Analysis (RA)

<b>Creativity</b>	<b>Mass Production</b>
<p><i>Artisan/Artist</i></p> <p><i>A chair with no name/ the chair shall remain nameless</i></p> <p><i>Having fun &amp; fighting boredom</i></p> <p><i>Being able to do many things – I don't want to be a full time member of any of these clubs.</i></p> <p><i>Free to do</i></p> <p><i>Transforming the ordinary</i></p> <p><i>The chair with a life of its own –'if it is a chair ...someone has to sit in it. If that's what it wants to be, if it wants to be a chair, it includes a sitter'.</i></p> <p><i>Once I've done it, it's yours</i></p>	<p><i>Cheap at the price</i></p> <p><i>Makes the rest possible, finances my play</i></p> <p><i>Plastic in the Playground</i></p> <p><b>Processes</b></p> <p><i>The Bell that does not ring (metaphor used widely).</i></p> <p><i>Click &amp; Connect</i></p> <p><i>After Michelangelo</i></p>

<p><b>Creativity cont'd</b></p> <p><i>Creating 'new'</i>  <i>A design that sucked me in</i>  <i>The song became a song, the thing became an icon</i>  <i>The artist became a designer</i></p> <p><b>(Plastic liberates, artistic freedom, superstars, ubiquitous)</b></p>	<p><b>Processes cont'd</b></p> <p><i>('The Bell that does not ring', from the primordial soup, new art, new aesthetic, science and art, accessible processes, mass production)</i></p> <p><b>(Stackable, packable, Calligram-Apollinaire, multiples, cloning, sameness, changing , transforming, DNA &amp; polymers)</b></p>
<p><b>Taste</b></p> <p><i>Fashion &amp; Fancy</i>  <i>Exclusive</i>  <i>Lie on my chair</i></p> <p><b>(Plastic as art, overpriced artefact, superstar chairs, superstar designers)</b></p> <p><b>(Furniture &amp; Fashion. Things of value are respectable. Pop art &amp; plastic chairs)</b></p> <p><b>(Come lie with me on my plastic bed. Why don't you do it now, head there, feet there)</b></p>	<p><b>Crude</b></p> <p><i>Liking it rough</i>  <i>OMG, it's plastic</i>  <i>Going, going, gone</i>  <i>How much?</i>  <i>Exclusively yours.</i></p> <p><b>(Prostitution, selling people, life is cheap, everything for sale, highest bidder-lowest value of life)</b></p>

<p><b>Translation into plastic &amp; invention</b></p> <p><i>Transformation</i>  <i>Did I invent the trees?</i>  <i>Fantastic Elastic</i></p> <p><b>(Plastic man, superhero, man transformed, metamorphosis)</b></p>	<p><b>Techniques &amp; cost</b></p> <p><i>Then you whoosh!</i>  <i>The obedience of plastic</i>  <i>Not made by hand, not made in China (Rapid prototyping, 3-D)</i>  <i>Looking for the screw on the floor</i>  <i>Must be a good chair to sit on.</i></p> <p><b>(Material Seduction, from collectible to ordinary)</b></p>
<p><b>Wasting</b></p> <p><i>Finding David</i></p> <p><b>(Abundant Waste, Sustainability)</b></p>	<p><b>Pioneers of design</b></p> <p><i>Coming to the promised land</i>  <i>The plastic pilgrim</i>  <i>After the revolution, what is yours?</i></p> <p><b>(Superstar designs and designers)</b></p>

**2. Data Analysis (RL)**

<p><b>Taste</b></p> <p><b>Accidental Superstar</b></p> <p>I got shortlisted for some design awards and also we ended up with chairs in a few museums, Germany... I can't remember which ones, there's one in America and a few collectors purchased the chairs. To be honest I never started the journey to generate a very exclusive, limited edition chair. Unfortuna... well fortunately and unfortunately, depending on your perspective, it just developed like that as the process moved forward. What I was trying to do was to create a sort of mass version of a recycled plastic chair that could be at a price point that a lot of people could purchase, but what happened is in that... in me creating those original chairs which were ultimately to engage with manufacturers and try and get them onboard to support a commercial version of the chair, it then... they then became even more exclusive. And the problems that I encountered in the recycled materials myself, which I managed to resolve couldn't... well I wouldn't say couldn't but the manufacturers we were in discussion with were not interested in working with recycled plastics. The benefit of doing it</p>	<p><b>Recycle &amp; Materials</b></p> <p>Recycling a good commercial angle but not selling the message</p> <p>Recycled material becoming normalised</p> <p>Used as polyfiller to fill in gaps in product not well thought out</p> <p>Comingled Plastics are less useful for Recycling</p> <p>So what you find is that a lot of this plastic is being used in bollards, in road surfaces, in other sort of very unattractive means where they just load it with carbon powders and just sort of mask its use. Now that's not a bad application but once you do that and you comingle the plastic it can never be unmingled. Now if you keep a relatively clean waste stream, so you're recycling plastic bottles and food trays over and over again, in reality you could probably reheat it and reform it sort of in excess of 30, 40 times, but once you mix it you're almost killing it. It has another use, possibly two more uses, but it</p>
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<p><b>Accidental Superstar cont'd</b></p> <p>in a hands on means of when I was working with the chairs or producing each one, when there's a problem or something happens in the plastic or it's not flowing effectively or there's a slight issue and you have to make a decision, I can do that and I can make it work, whereas in manufacture it has to work every time.</p> <p>Family &amp; Friends see 'crazy chairs' coming home</p> <p>Nice to have a chair in a museum, statement of being significant</p> <p>Recycling seen as poorer quality. Using recycled materials but not delivering the eco message</p> <p><i>(Crazy Chairs Scooby doo designs, all the same, repeated)</i></p>	<p><b>Recycle &amp; Materials cont'd</b></p> <p>degrades at such a rate that you're sort of killing its elasticity if you like. The benefit of you keeping it in its fluid state is you could in theory have... you could design a chair that becomes a table, becomes a light and I actually did that</p> <p>Strange things happen in recycling</p> <p>Manufacturers not interested in working with recycled plastics because the technological inconsistencies can be time consuming to deal with, especially when designer is not there.</p> <p>Recycling as secondary to the product itself. Becoming normalized.</p> <p><i>(Lip service to recycling, strange things happen in recycling)</i></p>
<p><b>Design Positions</b></p> <p>Design &amp; Manufacturing Relationship Tension between design &amp; manufacture, different ideas</p> <p>Focus on the business &amp; technology</p>	<p><b>Methods of Production</b></p> <p>Tension between design &amp; manufacturing, a material tension, Keeping an identity Telling the story, creating the narrative</p> <p><i>(Pull &amp; push, breaking point, tell us the story, losing control)</i></p>

<p><b>Design Positions cont'd</b></p> <p>Keeping hold of the design in manufacturing.</p> <p>Trying to support British Manufacturing.</p> <p>Working with them to avoid stifling innovation.</p> <p><i>(Being close to the process Tracing Paper Designs Designer's identity hidden)</i></p>	
<p><b>Creating the Narrative/ Identity</b></p> <p>And to get some identity I've often find now that you have to be a little bit of a creative writer yourself to suppose your product, otherwise it sometimes gets lost in the sort of melee of everyone else's products as well. So I mean that stuff I think's important from a marketing point of view of designers now. They've had to sort of add that string to their bow to make sure that they can differentiate themselves to be honest.</p> <p>Products manufactured which hide the designer's hand.</p> <p>Keeping hold of the process, narrowing the market allows us to do this.</p> <p>Team approach to product narrative.</p>	<p><b>Pioneers in design/ Pushing the Boundaries</b></p> <p><i>(Having a chair in a museum is very nice, Accidental superstar, awards &amp; recognition, let's work together)</i></p>

<p><b>Creating the Narrative/ Identity cont'd</b></p> <p>Keeping your own voice in design.</p> <p>You end up blending your voice and no one wants that, you know you've got to have your identity. But the issue is when you have that, when you have a strong identity or at least attempt to or aspire to have a strong identity you will split the room; you will find people who really love your work and people who hate it. But I always think, and it's taken me a while to realise it, I'd rather people did love or hate it, what I don't want is people to just think it's okay because at least if they hate it or love it you're creating a reaction and that's really what you want.</p> <p>Tracing Paper designs- same old same old designs.</p> <p>You know there are a lot of products out there that are a bit like the background of a Scooby-Doo cartoon, you know, it never changes, it's the same thing over and over again with a different colour, with a slightly different style, and what's happened is you've just ended up with an entirely flooded market of very similar appearing designs</p>	
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### 3. Data Analysis (RP- Bluecube)

<p><b>Furniture and Culture</b></p> <p>Viewing cultural aspects of furniture development</p> <p>Responding to cultural needs of the client e.g stadium seat as a throne in some countries.</p> <p>Functional, commercial but increasingly needing to see the aesthetic.</p>	<p><b>Design Positions</b></p> <p>Problem Solving Business Service oriented. Being responsive. Project manager. Close to the processes. Large scale endpoint, not just one chair but thousands to fit client needs. Logistics of moving large volumes. Thinking about installation is paramount. We don't set out to produce a beautiful chair, try to see whole picture i.e. the functional, aesthetic. Project drives the product and production.</p>
	<p><b>Materials</b></p> <p>Plastics are versatile but processes can be expensive and complicated. We need to think about combining e.g. steel and plastic.</p> <p><i>(Plastic obeys, subsuming materials, me &amp; you, combined, lost)</i></p>

<p><b>Taste</b></p> <p>Cultural tastes  Furniture design is all important now  Sometimes hard to pin down</p> <p><i>(the beautiful solution)</i></p>	<p><b>Sustainability and Waste</b></p>
<p><b>Design Position including Design Proximity</b></p> <p>Problem Solving approach to design  Service oriented  Thinking about installation</p> <p><i>(Making things better, chasing a dream)</i></p>	<p><b>Materials</b></p> <p>Versatility in plastic  Expensive processes  Combining materials is better</p>
<p><b>Relationship with Furniture</b></p> <p>Commercial &amp; functional but needing to see aesthetic  Beautiful chair  Furniture &amp; culture, natural resources</p> <p><i>(The beautiful chair)</i></p>	<p><b>Methods of Production</b></p> <p>Tension between design &amp; manufacturing  Keeping an identity  Team approach to design narrative</p>
	<p><b>Pioneers of design &amp; Pushing Boundaries</b></p> <p>Logistics of huge numbers &amp; installation</p> <p><i>(mass produced, looking for the beautiful chair!)</i></p>

**4. Data Analysis (CP)**

<p><b>Furniture &amp; Property Relationship</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interest in property, home, living space generates interest in furniture</li> </ul> <p>Relationship with Furniture People in places e.g. office, home generates interest in furniture</p> <p><b><i>(Populating the home, the office, the building, living space &amp; objects within it. Relationship created with the objects)</i></b></p>	<p><b>Methods of Production</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Cheap at the price</i></li> <li>• <i>Makes the rest possible, finances my play</i></li> <li>• <i>Plastic in the Playground</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Product Development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Solutions that work for interested parties (user/consumer, producer, regulator)</i></li> <li>• <i>Providing service</i></li> <li>• <i>Product &amp; service, design and service, boundaries becoming vague</i></li> <li>• <i>Pricing and uses (£7 chair or £100 vitra) ‘there’s no price for a chair’</i></li> <li>• <i>The chair is doing something mostly unnoticed. ‘Looking at it on a spreadsheet’</i></li> <li>• <i>The Ree chair gives you a useful product &amp; you feel as though you are doing something that enables you to take control – environmental)</i></li> <li>• <i>Taking control of the materials of production</i></li> <li>• <i>Different views on product production, helping people to see the whole story</i></li> </ul>
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	<p><b>Product Development cont'd</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Tension between what the designer sees &amp; end-user/consumer. Relates to sustainability.</i></li> <li>• <i>Think about an object it's hard to pin down, use it is different.</i></li> <li>• <i>Product i.e. chair or sculpture, a tradable asset, on display at the V&amp;A</i></li> <li>• <i>Designing for real people</i></li> <li>• <i>Some companies feel a sense of responsibility larger than the products that they sell.</i></li> </ul> <p><i>Interface flooring is a great example of that, the Interface floor tile that is sold as a service and not a product. What Interface sells you is a nice looking floor that you can use, they don't sell you an actual floor tile so it doesn't go on your books as a thing that you own, it's not an asset that your business owns, it's a service that you've rented. The service is: having a great floor.</i></p> <p><b><i>(Service versus Product, Cheap, use, silent &amp; invisible, creating a story to give it more meaning, significance which may be toward sustainability, utility all important)</i></b></p>
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<p><b>Rock Star Designer</b></p> <p><i>Ron Arad chair more like a Radiohead album</i></p> <p><i>Star for a moment</i></p> <p><i>Not usually completists</i></p> <p><i>Robin Day Polyprop ‘is just a thing of beauty’</i></p> <p><i>You don’t recognise great design</i></p> <p><i>It’s like... it’s like one of those actors whose name you can’t remember but they’re always good, they’re never in a bad film. The Polyprop chair is like the Philip Seymour Hoffman of chairs. It’s always comfortable, you never notice it, you’re always noticing the things around it and never it. That’s a great design, isn’t it?</i></p> <p><b>Time &amp; Space</b></p> <p>Existing in time &amp; space, nothing permanent</p> <p><b>(Passing phase, coming and going, the back catalogue, where is it now?)</b></p>	<p><b>Sustainability</b></p> <p>May be anti-establishment &amp; want to shake things up</p> <p>Using it to ‘flog furniture’</p> <p>Using the language to sell their products</p> <p>Some companies feel a sense of responsibility larger than the products that they sell.</p> <p>Responsibility across the board</p> <p>Tensions in achieving sustainability versus profitability</p> <p>Selling a service not just a product</p> <p>Creating a story to give it more meaning</p> <p>Sustainability by stealth</p> <p>Brand Ghosts/Ghost Brands</p> <p><b>(Sustainability &amp; responsibility)</b></p>



<p><b>Bright Young Things</b></p> <p>The Studio Effect</p> <p>'Creating an event where things happen rather than a place where permanent products are crafted'</p> <p>The Eames studio had Charles and Ray Eames as their heads of it, but it was just a hive of activity of bright, young things. And yeah, so it's a smart way to run a studio. It didn't work for Stradivarius, ((?0:45:37.9)) onto his sons they couldn't replicate or improve on what he managed to create as a violin maker, fascinated by the idea of studio death, I think it's been called, where... or workshop death, I think it's called, where actually that rare and unpredictable convergence of collaborators, whether they're related to each other or whether they're employed by each other or whether they're partners or... it doesn't matter. But that group of people who might find themselves working together for a period of time in a workshop sort of imbue that workshop with their spirit for a period of time and some people can keep that going and some people can't and it just comes to a stop. But that's to be embraced as well because the workshop during that period, and from the sound of things I think you've stumbled onto one at Ron Arad's</p>	<p><b>Design Positions</b></p> <p>Designing from 10 feet away</p> <p>Completists 'the ones that get the whole job done'</p> <p>Looking at the design form the underside, where it is all happening.</p> <p>'when I go to the V&amp;A furniture gallery is I walk around with my camera at knee height taking photographs of the underneath's of all these things. I've got compendious library of the underneath of classic designs, because that's where it's really interesting to look at. Usually the gallery assistants look at you very strangely when you're on your hands and knees looking underneath things, but from a design point of view that's where an object gets interesting: how is this joined together? How well finished is it? How do these materials combine? You're looking at a fifty or sixty year old fibreglass shell on a steel frame: how did they do that then? What materials did they use and how well did it work? Where does it crack and fail? You never see that from the surface of an object.'</p> <p>Philosophy &amp; design, at Goldsmiths &amp; finding Heidegger was like</p>

<p>yesterday, is more than the sum of its parts.</p> <p><b><i>(Bright young things)</i></b></p>	<p>stepping into a warm bath, the connection of the head, hand &amp; tool</p> <p>Disruptive Innovation *</p> <p><b>Design Positions cont'd</b></p> <p><b><i>Distance of designer from the design outcome, Rachel Whiteread &amp; getting inside the object</i></b></p> <p>*Clayton Christensen 'The Innovator's Dilemma', innovations that create new markets by discovering new categories of customers.</p> <p>Designed in UK, made n China &amp; now reverse is true.</p> <p>Getting into the market when you are small.</p> <p><b><i>Making people want something they don't need but alter the market going from inferior &amp; cheap to more refined.</i></b></p> <p><b><i>The Jade Poetry might fit in here in relation to the exploitation issues</i></b></p>
<p><b>Taste &amp; Marketing</b></p> <p>Ghost Brands/Brand Ghosts</p> <p>Resurrecting old brands or the footprint or echo of what it was. Used here in relation to the concept of recycled materials where there is something of what is was before.</p>	<p><b>Materials</b></p> <p>Taking control of the materials of production</p> <p>Useful product</p> <p>Interrogating the object/material</p>

<p>'Bill Gates yesterday drinking a glass of water that had been produced from</p>	
<p><b>Taste &amp; Marketing cont'd</b></p> <p>excrement in order to advertise the use of his sanitation technology that he's trying to encourage for use in the third world.</p> <p>That's a pretty extreme example, isn't it? The brand ghost of pooh in water, even if it's just water. But on a more prosaic level this was one of the advantages of the Reece chair, that we knew that all the plastic in it came from this one source which was from Sony, so that brand identity was there whether we liked it or not, so we embraced it.'</p>	<p><b>Methods of Production</b></p> <p>Tension between design &amp; manufacturing</p> <p>Keeping an identity</p> <p>Team approach to design narrative</p>
<p>Not The Sony Chair. But there is a Coco-Cola Chair.</p> <p>'But in Guy's case what he's talking about is more how materials... once you know something about them have an identity that could potentially go beyond the product that they're embodied in at the moment '</p> <p>Chair unnoticed</p> <p>Comings &amp; goings – where are they now?</p> <p>Good design is unnoticed (so good, you take it for granted)</p>	<p><b>Pioneers of design &amp; Pushing Boundaries</b></p> <p>Selling a service not just a product, blurring boundaries</p> <p>Creating creative environment- 'bright young things'</p> <p>Workshop death</p>

Making people want something they  
don't need

***(The Ghost Chair as a poem)***

## 5. Data Analysis - Level 2 of Designer Conversations

The core or cluster themes below represent a second level of analysis across all the Designer Conversations after identification of themes within the individual conversation. These themes were clustered around words, phrases that could be represented poetically within a poem or a cluster of poems. Words in italics represent the elements for a potential poem.

<p><b>Taste</b></p> <p><i>It's yours!</i>  <i>Vanitas, confusion, easy come, easy go,</i>  <i>DNA &amp; lines, falling, for all seasons</i></p>	<p><b>Sustainability and Waste</b></p> <p><i>Waste, ignorance is v bliss, politics &amp;</i>  <i>plastics, money speaks, losing control,</i>  <i>consumer madness</i></p>
<p><b>Design Position including Design Proximity</b></p> <p><i>Beautiful solutions, empty/negative spaces, from a distance</i></p>	<p><b>Materials</b></p> <p><i>Versatility, crude, cheap yet expensive, stackable, packable.....</i></p>
<p><b>Relationship with Furniture</b></p> <p><i>A beautiful chair, invisible, ubiquitous, a must have</i></p>	<p><b>Methods of Production</b></p> <p><i>Ghosts within, invisible, cheap yet expensive, amass production, exclusivity</i></p>
	<p><b>Pioneers of design/ Pushing Boundaries</b></p> <p><i>Pushing possibilities, playing, bright young things, raise the stakes, lines and lines, big numbers- mass production, exclusivity</i></p>

## Appendix 6a - Object Conversations with Poets

Elaine 27<sup>th</sup> May 2016

### Preamble

Meeting at The Bull, Bridport.

The conversation took place against an atmosphere evocative of the coffeehouse culture of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and although there was a lively buzz of social exchange throughout the room, it seemed fitting for an engagement between creative writers. I would have been unsurprised to see Mr. Hardy walk in to join the congress. We talked enthusiastically of poetry and E seemed to become animated at the process of reflecting on her published work as new ideas emerged and old ones resurfaced.

Sitting at a table in the window overlooking the main street bustling with people.

Busy interior, noise of man on his phone who snorts, often.

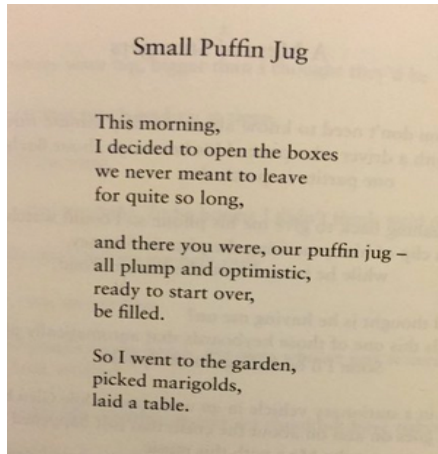
Smells of cooking permeate the room.

We drink coffee and eat croissants. So congenial.

Elaine, soft speaking, animated, laughs from deep inside. Easy to talk with.

Me, keen as mustard, enjoying every word, finding connection already.

*Small Puffin Jug* opened the conversation.



Written in response to an object call for poetry.

Did I write it quickly?

No. Much longer poem in first draft.

I was considering where we bought it. Pembrokeshire or West Scotland.

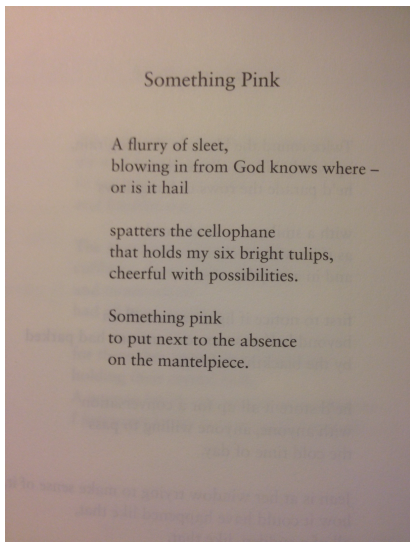
Mixed in both our memoirs.

Pictured jug in event is much bigger than actual object.

Poem has a life of its own.

Short poem has a power in terms of its meaning. Reference twitter and SM.

*Something Pink*



An object that is not there.

Absence because it would be a photograph. A poem about loneliness.

Using the idea of a lost, abandoned object to say something. Metaphor about something that isn't there.

Summon-up existence.

Buy flowers for yourself- what that does.

Ambit? Hated cellophane.

Skinny loved cellophane.

Yes there were the elements – tent, weather but not exactly as it was.

A tent but about relationship hovering between . A relationship as an object. E.g internet dating.

Working to keep your own sense of identity.

Reviews of her Pamphlet and other F& F poets.

SM as vehicle and conversation.



*My Initial Reflections on the Conversation*

*Writing hand notes is useful but time consuming. Trying to catch as much as I can without laboring the process of note taking. Wanting to listen and be in the conversation. So enjoy these encounters. Poets who love to talk about their work make it easy.*

*Open, sharing, democratic conversation.*

*It made her reconsider, review her own poems in another light -> conversation changing the poet's perspective?*

*I could see her reflecting on her work, on the object, on the process of making.*

*Stirring memories, thoughts, internalizing.*

*Going back to that time, place. Re-visioning, recalling, re-contextualising.*

*Seeing the poem as an object itself. The object poem.*

*Looking again at the process of writing, creating. The impact and effect of editing e.g. leaving something out and then wanting to put it back.*

*The editing influence of others.*

*Feeling that the poem in a public arena can be removed from your control.*

*The effects of criticism and review. But she still loves her poems despite comments of others.*

*Remaining true to first instincts.*

*Dissemination and sharing of poetry. Using the SM as platform to extend reach.*

## Appendix 6b – Email to Poet

Elaine Beckett

**Kate Hall** @  
To: Elaine Beckett  
Re: Consent and Poetry

24 September 2016 08:14  
Sent - Kate

Elaine

Delighted to share what are really notes as I did not audio record the conversation.

I hope that I have caught the essence. If there are any remarks or additions, I would love to have them. The document is word so you can add if you wish to. Just mark another colour to distinguish our writing.

I have included my initial reflections on the conversation. These will form the basis of my discussion with reference to elements of you.

Yes, look forward to seeing you soon.

Warmest regards

Kate



Kate Hall  
[kate@pnkhal.co.uk](mailto:kate@pnkhal.co.uk)



Elaine- Conversation  
27th May 2016.docx

[See More from Elaine Beckett](#)

**Elaine Beckett**  
To: Kate Hall  
Re: Consent and Poetry

23 September 2016 20:06

Hi Kate,

Can you please send me a transcript of the extracts you are going to refer to in your published thesis?

Look forward to seeing you, and wishing you well,

Elaine

[See More from Kate Hall](#)

**Kate Hall**  
To: Elaine Beckett  
Consent and Poetry

23 September 2016 08:05  
Sent - Kate

Dear Elaine

Hope you are well and coming to poetry on Tuesday next.

I wanted to ask you if you would mind signing a consent form for the conversation we had about object poems. I cannot use anything without participant written consent.

If I bring it along on Tuesday, would that be ok?

Look forward to then.

Warmest regards

Kate xxx

Kate Hall  
[kate@pnkhal.co.uk](mailto:kate@pnkhal.co.uk)

## **Appendix 6c – Email exchange with AF**

Annie on

*Designed objects save you but they are complicated, problematic, they imprison you.*

*Writing of designed objects is a knife in the back of romance.*

My statement is in part to do with the resistance... ( dare I say phobia of)in our (I mean British or English) culture to contemporary design in all its forms. Modern is still a derogatory term for many people. Those who participate in it see themselves and are understood to be somehow 'elite' whereas in other European countries modern design as expressed in everyday consumer objects is something much more ordinary and taken for granted...

And I believe that when you look at contemporary designed objects that reflect a strong sense of modernity they often seem to express values of confidence, integrity, functionality as well as individuality. They do not carry the familiar gracenotes of objects that reflect the values of the past. By contemporary I mean design that expresses modernity from the 1930s onwards. Take a look at the Pamoto website... fascinating

But an interest in these things as cultural objects is still somehow taboo.

In Michel Houellebecq's *La Carte et le Territoire* there is fabulous passage in which the main protagonist bemoans the disappearance of a special kind of outdoor jacket; he celebrates its qualities and character in such a way that the reader realises that this is a much broader stand against the values of the 'vintage' the 'nostalgic', the 'antique' and of course the irony is that the object in question is discontinued and can no longer be bought. One has a sense of something very transgressive ...

In mid-century French culture there was an interesting movement called *Le Chosisme* ... related to Dada, cubism and surrealism. Protagonists included Georges Perec, author of a curious novel called *Les Choses* and Alain Robbe-Grillet, Poet and film-maker. Look this up. In the work of these artists, philosophers and writers everything : words, images, people everything is an object. What we understand as 'humanity' is

seen as irrelevant romanticised and redundant

More later....

6<sup>th</sup> November

Dear Kate

I have been looking forward to replying to this. I have been away at Poetry in Aldeburgh. Fabulous!

Ok ... this what I think I mean.

First I have two poems in which objects of feminine accoutrement appear. The first is Monte Baldo in The Mirabelles and the second is Grenoble in the Remains. The objects (clothes, jewels, perfumes etc) named in both poems are observed not by their owner(s) but by in the first instance the woman's young daughter and in the second her young lover.

They are objects of fascination and desire, such as the objects that we find in Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal*, and they exert a particular kind of power over their subjects and while utterly seductive, serve to magnify their owner's duplicity and inscrutability.

I was - and still am - tremendously influenced by the symbolist poets when I was young.

It was particularly the way that they communicated the power of objects which I found so compelling. Often these objects seem to reflect their owners' flight from reality, their Interior life.

In Monte Baldo, the feminine accoutrements are what child senses to be most precious to her mother... rather than herself, as it should have been. In Grenoble, they represent the woman's refusal to give herself, her deep narcissism. And yet they have a desperate kind of poignancy because the importance of these mere objects suggest a terrible hollowness and insecurity.

Hope this helps

Appendix 6c

Love comme toujours

Annie xx

## **Appendix 7 - Simon Armitage, How good is the poem?**

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/sep/21/poetry.writing.simonarmitage>

### **The Eye Test**

How does it look on the page? Has some thought gone into its shape? Does the form bear some resemblance to the content?

### **The Magic Eye Test**

If you look for long enough into the poem, will it reveal another meaning or picture hidden within it? Will further readings uncover further meanings and new rewards, and so on?

### **The Hearing Test**

How does it sound? Read it out loud - does it work on the ear in some way?

### **The pH Test**

A test for Poetic Handicraft. Does the poem use recognisable poetic techniques, of which there are hundreds? Are they subtle, or do they poke out at the edge?

### **The IQ Test**

Not a test for Intelligence Quotient, although that might come into it, but a double test for Imaginative Quality and Inherent Quotability: does the poem have some sort of dream life you can respond to; does it have lines or phrases that might stick in the memory?

### **The Test of Time**

Would the poem outlive its immediate circumstances? This doesn't mean it has to be 'classic' or 'great' or have some eternal message - it might just be a case of the poem withstanding a second reading. Remember, good poems can create their own contexts, and have poetic value way beyond their apparent shelf-life or sell-by date.

### **The Test of Nerves**

Somebody once said that a poem shouldn't just tell you not to play with matches, it should burn your fingers. In other words, does the poem create a sensation, rather than simply an understanding?

### **The Lie Detector Test**

Poems don't have to tell the truth, but they have to be true to themselves, even if they're telling a lie. Give the poem a thump - does it ring true?

### **The Spelling Test**

Does the poem cast a kind of spell or charm? At the very least, does it create a world, even just a small but distinct world capable of sustaining human life, a world whose landscape we can inhabit for the duration of the poem.

### **The Acid Test**

This is the final test and the one that really counts. It's like a test for the mystery ingredient that separates a truly great recipe from its rivals. It might be to do with the author's experience of poetry. Is it possible to write a good poem if you've never read one? Somehow I doubt it.

## **Appendix 8 - Poetry Group Format**

For the last seven years I have been the tutor of a poetry composition group that is held regularly in the village of Cattistock in West Dorset. Broadly the aims are to develop members' knowledge and understanding of certain technical aspects involved in composing a poem and to work towards producing poems of a publishable standard. Usually I choose a contemporary poem for discussion at the beginning of each session. The kinds of things I invite members to comment on are what makes the poem original, the degree to which the poem reaches its mark, the success or otherwise of the imagery, the stanzaic structure, the length of the lines, the punctum, the way it looks on the page, the impact of the title on the poem. It is very much a taught group.

Then each member reads their poem aloud to the group, providing copies for each of the other members. I invite the rest of the group to comment on the poem: its overall impact; whether the writing is sustained throughout; whether the order succeeds and how it might be stronger; how it might be cut, whether writing feels bold or predictable. I invite group members to be as respectful, honest and specific as possible in their praise and in their criticism. During the discussion where the subject matter feels elusive, I ask the poet in question whether the comments they are hearing correspond with their intention in writing the poem and how it can more successfully fulfil that intention. We discuss such questions as ambiguity, tone, register, the importance of the poetic 'I', the degree to which a reader finds themselves responding personally to the poem, the connection that the poem appears to have with other important poems. I will often recommend that members read other published poets in order to see how a particular effect is achieved.

I am very much aware of the development of each individual member and regularly comment on their progress.

As well as the taught sessions, I also send out information about competitions and readings. I encourage members to send their poems to magazines and competitions and provide information of general interest such as useful organisations, libraries etc.



The meetings are informal, warm and friendly and as the tutor, I regard the maintenance of psychological safety in the group as a priority. I am delighted that group members have achieved considerable success in having their poems published and winning prizes.

We also hold public readings at local venues, usually with a headline guest poet.

Annie Freud

## **Appendix 9 - Information Sheet (Critical Feedback)**

Thank you for participating in my research. Your contribution to my work is invaluable in helping me to determine how that creative work fulfills the purposes of my research.

Feedback is clearly one of the fundamental aspects of developing creative writing as well as the key skills that underpins the integration of the critical-creative.

I must learn how to 'improve' my writing in various different contexts through readers giving honest critical feedback about the work. Peer feedback specifically has always played a large part in the subject. Resort to literary procedures historically is a key feature in the development of arguments and the formulation of original thought and ideas.

### *Research Title*

***A qualitative research inquiry into the active interplay of design poetry with users, designers and the objects of design.***

The poetic triangle of objects, people and writing creatively represents one of the many ways that we engage with the material world, by seeking out meanings in objects and allowing interpretations that are often personal but that can equally cross social and cultural confines.

Creating a poetic narrative for a designed object allows us to ask, how that narrative influences the way we view them, to enquire as to how our perceptions and experiences of them is altered through the process of creative writing as well as encounters with the creative writing itself and to examine the role of poetry to the expanding field of design writing.

### *Poetic Position*

My creative work consists of a body of poetic writing that relates to the aim above. I have started from the point where objects suggested themselves to me and to which I felt a need to make a poetic response. This began with an almost obsessive preoccupation with plastic chairs since they appeared with such frequency in so many

diverse and unexpected places. They are both visible and invisible, symbols and metaphors contained within the contemporary social, cultural landscape.

I am also funded by the Museum of Design in Plastics, which has offered me the opportunity to engage with material, and objects that are provocative as well as a well source for the creative writer.

The plastic chair, is for me significant as it frames a key element of my research which is to explore the role of poetry in the discourse on writing of design.

- *'It could be said that when we design a chair, we design a society in miniature'* (Peter Smithson, 1986)
- *'Apart from possibly the automobile, the chair is the most designed, studied, written about and celebrated artefact of the modern era.'*(Charlotte & Peter Fiell, 2013)
- Its simplicity draws designers & plastic offers material possibilities.
- Plastic as a material is provocative. It polarises opinion.
- Whenever people talk about industrial design, the chair is almost always one of the main cultural objects discussed ( Zunenshine, 2013)
- It creates superstar designers and objects. It has become a revered object of design (Massey,2011)
- A chair is the most intimate object you can design (Sean Yoo)
- The chair is a tool for contemplation.
- It challenges function and form.
- It is everywhere & frequently invisible.
- Philippe Starck can design one in 2 minutes!

My creative work has moved and shifted in its focus so that I now look at other designed objects and seek out their poetic potential. The plastic chair remains for me, a key object of poetic gaze.

#### *Your contribution*

I would like to send you a copy of a poem(s) along with a statement of intent that provides some context for you.

Please feel free to offer feedback as you see fit. I will not give you a prescription for this as I would like to allow you space.

Thank you again and if you have any questions, then please contact me below.

I enclose a general information sheet for my participants as well as a Consent Form, which I would be grateful if you could complete.

Kate Hall  
Doctoral Candidate Arts University Bournemouth

Email [kate@pnkhall.co.uk](mailto:kate@pnkhall.co.uk)  
Telephone 07966445982

## **Appendix 9a - Statement of Intent No1**

### **A Chair in Padstow**

The fishing boats bob gently in the harbour  
Eager, hungry crowds throng the pretty little streets  
Some eating richest ice-cream at the ice-cream parlour  
From coloured plastic stools hang happy feet

Bright colours caught in Cornish sunshine  
Deal the artist an opal palette  
To catch and fix a moment  
Before it fades

With a splash of colour from another's hand  
Paint is thrown across the chair  
The spin and swirl raise the stakes  
High and higher still

Watch now as all the colours run  
Melt and flow in streams of Neapolitan  
Across the soft and silky  
Sundrenched golden sands

Transformation is a key theme in much of my Doctoral poetry. It tends toward a commentary on a world changed in part by taste, fashion and celebrity reaching right into the heart of the landscape, the psyche. The plastic chair encapsulates this theme and here that traditional seaside of experiences was transformed into something quite new.

This piece of poetry found its naissance on a holiday to Cornwall and the beautiful coastal towns that skirt the Atlantic, St Ives and Padstow amongst them. Despite the hoards of tourists who flock there, from all over the world, this coastline still retains its

natural beauty. It was clear to see why artists have been drawn to this opal coast where the sea, the sand and sky are transformed in a unique light and radiance that remains even as the sun disappears in the western sky.

Finding an exhibition of YBA (Young British Artists) at a small but chic gallery in Padstow, my attention was drawn by a chair in the window. It was a chair of unexceptional design but transformed by its association with Damien Hirst.

Further along the street was an ice cream parlour, which also had chairs in the window. These were not by Damien Hirst.



'Ice cream Parlour in Padstow', Cornwall, May 2015, image by Kate Hall

The Bamboo Bar Stool in any colour and priced at around £35.00

### Product Details

- 1 Year Guarantee
- Designer Style Stool
- Polished Chrome Frame
- High Gloss White ABS Seat
- Easy To Clean Seat
- Variable Height Gas Lift With 360 Swivel
- Protective Base To Protect Your Floor
- Available In Any Quantity



Damien Hirst 'Beautiful Repeat Pleasure Spin Chair', at The Drang Gallery, Padstow, Cornwall, May 2015, image by Kate Hall

Household gloss on beech, signed underneath. Price £10,000.00.

Made by Damien Hirst, commissioned from Jasper Morrison.

### **Product Details**

- Household gloss on beech
- Other Criteria
- 31 × 16 × 17 in
- 78.7 × 40.6 × 43.2 cm
- Unique

## Appendix 9b - Statement of Intent No.2

### The Ghost of a Chair - Clear Thinking

Is there a ghost in the chair observing my rest?

No, the ghost is the chair and the chair is not there.

If the chair is not there, can I trust what I see?

Is it me who is here?

Is the chair really me?

Said the chair, from the seat,

I am yours to command.

But say I, should I stare?

Do I sit?

Do I stand?

Philippe Starck's *Ghost Chair* inspired me to write my poem *The Ghost of a Chair*.

The iconography suggested to me a simultaneous presence and absence of the object, by virtue of its materiality. I felt the artist/designer was challenging our perceptions of what it is, its function and our relationship with it as an object or commodity. By using the monologue device, my intention was to poetically mirror this uncertainty, the inner dialogue that set to question, to blur realities.

The poem itself began early in my research and has undergone many revisions and rewrites. I wanted it to say more but keeping the stripped down structure to echo the almost imperceptible nature of the design and form of the chair.



## Appendix 9c - Response

### A Chair in Padstow

#### Response - Nick Morris – September 2016

What I get first and foremost from this poem is a feeling of light and colour. Despite the mention of the crowds and the customers at the ice-cream parlour the chair(s) are the heroes and are skillfully given centre stage. I like the dealing of opal palettes and the streams of Neapolitan too. Nicely evocative.

Until I read the statement of intent I wasn't sure about the raising of the stakes (stanza 3) – it didn't make sense to me. Reading the SOI made me aware that stanza was about the Damien Hurst chair. I think the chic gallery should have made an appearance here so we could differentiate between that chair and the ones in the parlour (by the way – love the 'hang happy feet.')

I guess the poem was designed to explore why one chair is £10,000 and another is £35, just because the former has been painted on by someone famous – a meaty theme. I felt there was perhaps not enough of that in the poem, but there was strong emphasis on setting the background scene. Could we perhaps replace the fishing boats (It's Padstow, we're already thinking fishing boats) with a line on the gallery, the context for the encounter with the first chair? There are other themes too that could be hinted at: eg, for most a treat on holiday is an ice cream, for some (presumably) a £10,000 chair.

Technically I think there is room to introduce more of the SOI idea whilst reducing the word count. The poem abounds in double adjectives ('eager, hungry', 'pretty little', 'coloured plastic' or 'soft and silky') that should be halved. 'To catch and fix a moment before it fades' could be reduced to 'To fix a moment' while still retaining its meaning. Some of the alliteration ('caught in Cornish' and 'silky sundrenched') give it a rather old-fashioned feel but this is very definitely a modern poem, dealing with contemporary themes.

Overall I feel this is a poem that squares up to a big theme (essentially, rich versus poor) but shies away from illustrating one side of the issue. The chair-for-everyone at the ice-cream parlour and the surrounding atmosphere is beautifully brought to life – the reader really feels part of it. The exclusive chair in the gallery is only half drawn ('raising the stakes' is a little too vague for me), as if the poet is reluctant to present this object. To me this suggests a sense of the writer's own emotion towards the object. A £10,000 chair is absurd for most people: indulgent, decadent and even perhaps immoral. Probably true, but in pulling back from giving it the same weight of treatment as the parlour chair, the poet seems to show us a personal judgement. In poetry the reader never likes to feel their mind has been made up for them.

My favourite line in this poem is 'Watch now as all the colours run.' It's short, meaningful and by adding 'Watch' it speaks directly to the reader and injects some passion into the poem.

### **The Ghost of a Chair**

#### **Response**

#### **Nick Morris**

There is an appealing child-like quality to this poem. The monologue style and persistent questioning evoke the sense of a young child's confusion at the world, at something whose identity they thought they knew, but are no longer sure. The rhyme scheme and the 'said the chair' / 'say I' instead of 'the chair said' and 'I say' add to that feeling.

The poem reminds me a bit of 'Who is Digging on my Grave' by Hardy. The same rather innocent questioning tone is present.

Technically, I would suggest removing 'No' from the second line. It doesn't fit the meter. Likewise the line 'But say I, should I stare?' disrupts the rhythm. Splitting the line into two / three in the second and third stanza works for me as it hides the rhyme and rhythm visually.

For me, however, the poem only goes so far. I would like to see the metaphor – are things really what they seem? – extended a little into some new territory, with the idea provoked by responding to the chair. What about the people who sit in it? Are they really what or who they seem to be? Am I? That sort of thing. It's a great foundation stone, but I think it should embark on some deeper investigation. All the lines are there in preparation: 'can I trust what I see?' Exactly! That's a big question, let's explore it.

Other themes could draw on the ghostly element. Whose chair is / was it? Are they observing you from beyond the grave? Observing you fondly, or with approbation? Are they an ever-present person in your life who you can't shake off, for better or for worse? Again, this line of thought reminds me of Hardy – 'The Self Unseeing'.

This poem works well at invoking a sense of confusion, thwarted discovery and a feeling of worldly uncertainty. In doing that, however, it throws up a lot of other big themes that are ripe for picking, but unfortunately remain on the branch.

### **Poetry Critique September 2016 - Lisa**

I enjoyed reading the poems and the statement of intent; there is much to fascinate and intrigue. Is there actually a title for your thesis yet? I think I have as many questions as thoughts, so I hope you don't mind me airing them and diving right in. A conversation might be better than an email, so I hope this doesn't come across too bossily!

With regard to the statement of intent and the theme of transformation, do you mean transformation in a material sense, spiritual or both? I find the idea of commentary on a changing world relating to taste, fashion and celebrity something that you can explore through the emblematic status of these chairs, and those seem the more obvious links that emanate from the two poems you have sent than that of a connection to the 'heart of the landscape'. There may well be a link from the Hirst chair, but it doesn't feel convincing enough for me, and I almost feel the psyche of the headiness and innocence (lost or found) of the seaside is an area worth mining more deeply to expose that link, or discover it as quite opposed, in fact. To me, I have to say, I find the two parts (i.e. the first two stanzas and then the second) as quite separate and it's the contrast that is interesting. But I'm not sure if you *are* being

cynical about the value and importance of the Hirst chair, or in agreement? I'm really curious about the technical specifications that you have included with your notes; but this is not explored in the poems....do you want to? There is something interesting here that might be worth looking at in more detail perhaps? You say in the statement that the chair is 'unexceptional', and I'm guessing you mean the basic structure prior to the 'treatment' - I suppose one could say that's subjective, but I think if you are being cynical then this should be explored and more readable. The final line of your statement refers to the ice-cream parlour chairs not being by Damien Hirst - your line is left right there, but I think this is where you need to jump in and work the poem more - compare this difference, does one relate to innocence and one to cynical capitalism or is it the artist as deeply connected as you think they might be/should be/are? A stool in an ice-cream parlour doesn't seem incongruous at all, so how is it 'quite new' for example? I appreciate that poetry should show not tell, but I think more of your motive is needed to be displayed, rather than images and vignettes. I believe you are wanting to say much much more than pretty vignettes, so commit and mine those ideas. I think what I'm struggling with is where is the engine of the poem; what is its specific aim (rather than the global one of the collection), what thought processes are triggered by the chairs, and how you really feel about it all.

More specifically with A Chair in Padstow, did you intend the language to be quite simplified to portray the happy, carefree mood of a seaside holiday?

In the first stanza the most telling and effective line for me is the hanging happy feet. I love that. It conveys that happy, carefree transitory moment; something very uncynical, and it's that which creates a contrast with the later ideas in the poem. Might the line flow better if it is inverted though? As far as vocab choice goes, I might be careful of using extraneous words that create some cliché, and are probably unnecessary anyway - for example 'gently', 'pretty', and later on in the final stanza 'soft and silky' and 'sundrenched'. Where you have 'richest' ice-cream, is the intention a link to the £££ later? I wonder whether rich is perhaps grammatically correct (or put *the* richest) either way, and perhaps 'eat' rather than 'eating'. You could replace the first 'ice-cream' with an alternative, so that you don't have the repetition of ice-cream? Whether this is a brand name, something like 99 or some other specific ice-cream, or say something along the lines of 'some eat waffle cones, dig into plastic tubs (or glass sundae dishes if you want the old-fashioned feel as opposed to the modern alternative) at the ice-cream parlour'.

I think the reader might like some sign-posting with regard to the very fact that the chair is an exhibit; without the poet's context notes, there would be no way of knowing otherwise. So some reference to it being in a gallery - perhaps that would show the difference between the part the chairs play in the atmosphere and enjoyment of the first part of the poem and then the second part being this static, purchased, commodity/art-form with its massive price tag. If you're cynical about Hirst employing his minions to paint the chairs (and other works), then it would be interesting if this detail was in there - otherwise we do not know who 'another' is, nor the 'artist' in the second stanza (although is that Hirst or artists in general?). I think 'raises the stakes' a tad too cliched, but then perhaps you mean to be ironic? It could read 'It spins, swirls, raises the stakes' or replace 'raise the stakes' with 'aspires to...'

If I were to summarise all that guff, I would probably say make your purpose totally clear in your head, explore it more deeply in the poem, and make the individual word choices work harder for you so that you can express that purpose.

More briefly on *The Ghost of a Chair*, again, it's a fascinating choice of subject for a poem and there's much mileage here. I wasn't 100% sure though whether the poem was ultimately about the Philip Starck Ghost Chair or Valentina Wohlers'. The poem has a nursery-rhyme-like feel as it's quite sing-song. I'm not sure I can see the link between your background notes and the poem though. I like what I read in the notes and would like to see that examined in the poem, and for there to be more specific reference points to hang the questions on. I appreciate you have said that you wanted it to be stripped back, but I think more substance could be added to make the meaning, even if that is the dichotomy, more 'clear'. If you're talking about the chair designs, they actually seem quite confident to me, and thus not subservient, but you indicate the chair is 'yours to command'. But that might be your point? Perhaps a few word changes could pin this down a bit more. Maybe the title of the poem could be a signpost to the idea the poem is proposing, i.e. more so the conflict, the challenge, apropos what you refer to in your notes. As both poems are also a form of ekphrastic commentary, you could add a line under the title perhaps '*After **Ghost Chair** by Philip Stark*' etc., and that way it is clear that you are referring to a specific work/piece? I think that would help considerably. By the way, I think the title of the Damien Hirst chair gives you a way in to more exploration too?

OK, I hope this is the sort of input/critique you are after Kate; please do let me know.

**23<sup>rd</sup> October 2016**

Having re-read (again) the critique I sent you, I'm concerned my approach should have been more measured and comes across with all boots on, which I can only excuse from extreme pressure of time, but wanting to get the feedback out to you without any further delay. I do apologise if it was heavy-handed. I probably overlooked that it may be attached to your submission, so I'll avoid the use of colloquialisms etc next time too. It might have been better if I had asked some questions at the outset, for example whether the poems are to be read on the basis that they stand in their own right, or as illustrations of the stages in the progression of your thesis, or both. I attempted to consider it from both angles to a degree, but this may not be the correct way?

I approached critiquing the poems initially in the way I would read any poem; a first reading, without reading any notes about its specific context (albeit I had the knowledge of the main thrust of the thesis from its title on an earlier document). I then read your accompanying notes of intent and re-read the poems. As it's not within a workshop scenario, where an immediate response is required, I left the poems to settle in my mind and did something else before coming back to them later. On return, I focussed on one poem at a time. Initially I think about a gut reaction to the poem; a subjective view of course, but how the poem makes me feel. I mentally note the things that most obviously stand out; it may be an unusual use of vocabulary, the sound of the language, or theme, some striking imagery, or the way these things coincide. Then, on third reading, on a printed copy I make notes, initially zoning in on where that initial feeling seems centred. I will think about form and layout; whether there is a specific form chosen, e.g sonnet, free verse, etc, looking at line length, stanza length, whether there is deliberate use of couplets, offset lines, rhythm etc. and a) whether it resonates with me b) more analytically, why I think it is an effective or appropriate use of the form in that particular instance. Then, more forensically, I annotate where vocabulary, ideas, themes or literary devices were successful, and why, and secondly where they seem to jar or miss the mark, also with my view as to why. If they seem out of place, I might check whether there is any sense that they are ironic, or deliberately there for effect. When it comes to each of those aspects, I might then re-trawl for further evidence of intentional stylistic devices, the more embedded ones; so whether vocabulary has been chosen for assonance, internal rhyme, more subtle connections to the theme or aim of the poem, line enjambment etc. At this stage, if not already, I might hope to see a secondary meaning, buried much deeper, that will only perhaps become more apparent after a number of readings. I consider if the poem has a clear

purpose and what is driving it. I might also think about how another reader would see the poem, whether it's accessible to someone without specific knowledge of the writer, the theme, or whether it's a very specialist subject matter and whether it's possible to understand the thrust of the poem without that specific knowledge. However, having a targeted document such as your context notes and statement of intent is obviously much more than one would normally have when reading a poem at a workshop, in a collection, or online. So I looked for where those links had been made and if they had been clearly illustrated. The bar is set that much higher perhaps than reading a foreword to a collection, where there may be notes to show the pieces are written, for example, about the struggle coming to terms with the death of a brother. That would seem to me to allow a much wider interpretation and context. It may be my ignorance of how to critique a PhD thesis however, that has meant I mentally limited the scope that you have outlined to the edges of those outlines; on reflection, perhaps it is exploring its limits which is more appropriate. Hopefully that makes sense.

I look forward to meeting up. I hope you are enjoying the PhD - I would love to be doing it!

Kind regards

Lisa

## **Appendix 10 Information Sheet for Focus Group Conversation Participants**

This enquiry is part of my thesis and submission for the award of PhD at Arts University Bournemouth (AUB). The title of my research is:

*The life and times of plastic chairs: A qualitative research inquiry into the active interplay of design poetry with users, designers and the objects of design*

Participation in my research is purely voluntary. The following information may help you to understand what is likely to be involved when you agree to participate.

### **What is the purpose of the study?**

To create a literary narrative for chairs made of plastics that provides a rich, accessible expression of their significance and place in contemporary culture

### **How will the study be conducted?**

The research fieldwork, entitled *In Conversation with Plastic Chairs* will be conducted in the form of a focus group held at the Museum of Design in Plastics at Arts University Bournemouth on the 10<sup>th</sup> of January 2019. During this focus group, you will be asked to participate in activities following a short series of presentations.

I would like to ask you to participate further in a one-to-one conversation. If you feel able to do so please complete the contact section on the Consent Form. This meeting would be an informal conversation in which I would like to re-visit some of the outcomes from the focus group event. I will record the conversation in the form of notes.

### **What are the possible disadvantages to taking part?**

I would like to ask you to participate in this study, as I believe that you can make an important contribution to the research. If you feel that you would like to participate I will then ask you to formally consent to do so.

There are no known risks or disadvantages of taking part, as I strive to protect your confidentiality, unless you explicitly agree that your name (and the name of your company) can be mentioned in publications arising from the research. If you are taking part in one-to-one conversations, I can send you a copy of the notes that are taken to allow you the opportunity to decide that you have not been misrepresented. You are free to withdraw at any time.

### **What happens when the research study stops?**

I would like to publish the results in academic papers and at academic conferences as well as using the other media to share what I consider to be important and interesting conclusions. Your permissions to publish beyond the research thesis will be sought.

### **Contact Details**

You can contact me via email at [kate@pnkhill.co.uk](mailto:kate@pnkhill.co.uk). For verification of my identity and purpose you may wish to contact the Research Office at AUB at [researchoffice@aub.ac.uk](mailto:researchoffice@aub.ac.uk)



Thank you for your generous participation.

Kate Hall January 2019



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