

# Writing in Creative Practice workshop: *Writing and the Object*

13<sup>th</sup> June 2013, Middlesex University, The Burroughs, London, NW4 4BT

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We write about objects, we produce writing as objects, we write in order to generate objects and sometimes we write in spite of objects, yet within the academy we witness these possibilities in only a limited way. In this day-workshop, seven speakers, or groups of speakers, will consider some of the relationships between writing practices and the object in art and design and how we engage with them at art school.

## 10:00 **Registration**

Visitors to the campus will be met in the Quad, College Building  
Coffee will be available in the main room for the day (tbc).

## 10:30 **Welcome**

## 10:45 **Session 1: Using Objects as Starting Points**

Alke Groppe-Wegener - Staffordshire University

Written assignments seem quite scary for a lot of art and design students, while objects are familiar - they can be seen, handled, explored, sometimes broken but more often made. Alke Groppe-Wegener will propose two ways of using objects in study skills for art and design students, which ultimately lead to formal academic essays for her students: on the one hand using objects as starting points to inspire research and writing projects; on the other hand producing objects based on the exploration of hidden academic practice.

## 11:15 **Session 2: Writing design**

Grace Lees-Maffei - University of Hertfordshire

How do we learn about the objects that surround us? We gather sensory information through viewing and using objects, but we also learn about objects through written and spoken words. The intersection of design and language remains under-explored. Grace Lees-Maffei will introduce her latest edited book *Writing Design: Words and Objects*<sup>1</sup>, its aims and main arguments. Examples discussed will include the reforming zeal of design criticism, and the way words mediate between people and objects, the role of language in design practice, design which rejects words, transcends words and situations in which words fail to describe design.

<sup>1</sup>Grace Lees-Maffei, *Writing Design: Words and Objects* (London: Berg, 2012),

### 12:10 **Session 3: Haunted objects**

Luke White - Middlesex University, History of Art and Design

Most methodological approaches to visual analysis understand themselves as approaching the object in terms of its positivities, naming and examining what the object *is* and what properties it has, and/or determining it in the equally positive terms of an authorial intent, a socio-historical origin, or its significance for a given user or viewer.

What, however, if we understand the object as (necessarily) "haunted", and what if we take these hauntings as the real concern of our engagements with art? Drawing on Jacques Derrida's *Spectres of Marx*<sup>2</sup>, and examining in particular an experience of Damien Hirst's *Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*, I propose a shift from "ontological" to "hauntological" approaches. My contention is that haunting is at the heart of our actual engagement with cultural objects and images, and that we therefore ought to be dealing with a complex phenomenology of spectrality and revenance when we discuss them.

Derrida's essay, written to consider the legacy of Marx's *Communist Manifesto*, also allows us to further ask whether this "hauntology" of the object is particularly apposite to the investigation of the phenomenology of a commodified, capitalist culture such as our own.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: the state of the debt, the work of mourning and the new international* (London: Routledge, 2006)

### 12:40 **Session 4: Art, design and Dyslexia: multisensory routes to writing**

Pauline Sumner Middlesex University, Dyslexia Support

Writing presents particular challenges for dyslexic art and design students. Pauline Sumner will consider some of the myths and the realities of the relationship between dyslexia and art & design, and reflect on some of the multi-sensory approaches she and her colleagues use in addressing these challenges in bringing dyslexic art & design students to writing.

### 13:10 **Lunch**

### 14:10 **Session 5: Writing before animation: generative writing as part of a design process**

Peter Thomas - Middlesex University, Academic Writing and Language

Ossie Parker - Middlesex University, Animation

This session will reflect on the teaching of a generative writing cycle within an animation project. This kind of writing performs what Peter Medway calls a 'shaping' role in the design process<sup>3</sup>. We will show that although rare, explicit instruction on writing within studio practice like this has considerable potential, as it allows us to engage students in exploring often underexploited elements of their repertoire of studio practices.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Medway 'Virtual and Material Buildings: Construction and Constructivism in Architecture and Writing', *Written Communication* (13, 1996) p474

14:40 **Session 6: The creative and the personal in writing on site**

Tony Side and Anne Massey - Middlesex University, Interior Design/Architecture

This presentation will consider the use of writing in analysing sites for architectural projects. In particular it will focus on the value of drawing on subjective perceptions, emotions and creative writing in responding to sites, and reflect on the role this approach can play in final year written portfolios by Interiors students.

15:10 **Session 7: A Museum of Fashion: Writing about Fashion Through Archive Collections**

Emma Dick - Middlesex University, History of Art and Design

Richard Lumb - Middlesex University, Museum of Domestic Architecture

Marion Syratt Barnes - Middlesex University, Library

Peter Thomas - Middlesex University, Academic Writing and Language

'Objects exist both internally and externally'<sup>4</sup>

This presentation considers the importance for novice design writers/researchers of engaging directly with objects they write about, and reflects on an approach to managing this engagement in considered stages. The stages begin with personal (often undervalued) perceptions and move out towards integrating these with facts, contextual information and other people's ideas.

We will refer to work done by a multi-disciplinary teaching group with first year undergraduate students from the Fashion directorate, as part of their contextual studies module.

<sup>4</sup> Jane Rendell, *Site-Writing* (London & New York: I. B. Tauris, 2010) p8

15:40 **Tea**

15:55 **Discussion** involving the presenters, our respondent, Stewart Martin, and the delegates, to reflect on themes emerging from the day, and their application to Art and Design, teaching and writing

17:00 **End**