Looking Back and Looking Forward:
the Silver Studio Collection as heritage asset and educational resource, 1968-2018

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Abstract

The focus of this thesis is the Silver Studio Collection, a body of material that originated as the working contents of a commercial design studio and which is now the focal collection of the Museum of Domestic Design & Architecture (MoDA), at Middlesex University.

The Silver Studio opened in 1880 and after it closed as a business in the 1960s its remaining contents were given to Hornsey College of Art, becoming known as the Silver Studio Collection. This thesis considers the ways in which this Collection has been understood and interpreted both as a teaching resource within a Higher Education institution, and as a heritage asset – signified by its incorporation into a 'museum collection' - in the fifty years between 1968 and 2018. The contents of the Silver Studio Collection have remained the same over this fifty-year period, but the meanings ascribed to them, and the uses to which they have been put as a learning resource, have continued to evolve.

The main body of this thesis is structured around five main chapters, which take a broadly chronological approach to the development of the Silver Studio Collection since the late 1960s. Interspersed between these main chapters are a series of 'intercalary' chapters in which I go behind the scenes into the museum store, and which serve as a reminder of the physical stuff that makes up the Silver Studio Collection. These intercalary chapters are a way of reflecting on, and making visible, some of the tacit knowledge that I have accumulated through working with the Collection since 1999, and most recently in the role of Head of Collections since 2011. This question of what it means to know the Silver Studio Collection, and the many ways that the Collection supports learning and research, is an ongoing theme throughout this thesis.

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Prologue

The focus of this thesis is the Silver Studio Collection, a body of material that originated as the working contents of a commercial design studio and which is now the focal collection of the Museum of Domestic Design & Architecture (MoDA), at Middlesex University. The Silver Studio opened in 1880 and after it closed as a business in the 1960s its remaining contents – original designs, wallpapers, textiles, record books, photographs, correspondence and reference materials - were given to Hornsey College of Art, becoming known as the Silver Studio Collection.[1] My main aim here is to consider the ways in which this Collection has been understood and interpreted both as a teaching resource within a Higher Education institution, and as a heritage asset – signified by its incorporation into a 'museum collection' - in the fifty years between 1968 and 2018.[2] The contents of the Silver Studio Collection have remained the same over this fifty-year period, but the meanings ascribed to them, and the uses to which they have been put as a learning resource, have continued to evolve.

Before this discussion of the Silver Studio Collection can begin, it is necessary, however, to start with a consideration of what the Silver Studio was, and how it operated between 1880 and 1963, the period in which it ran as a business. This Prologue outlines the history and historiography of the Silver Studio in order to provide context for discussion of the Silver Studio Collection in subsequent chapters. It draws on a range of published sources, including academic publications and exhibition catalogues, to offer an overview of the work of the Silver Studio and its relationship to wider scholarship. It also identifies several key themes that will be explored in more

[1] Middlesex Polytechnic was formed in 1973 following a merger of Hornsey College of Art, Enfield Technical College and St Katherine's College, Tottenham. See Andrew Roberts, "Science, Society and Creativity at Middlesex University," accessed November 10, 2018, http://studymore.org.uk/ssctim.htm [Accessed 10-11-2018].

[2] For avoidance of doubt, I use 'Silver Studio' when I am discussing the commercial design firm that was in business between 1880 and 1963. I use 'Silver Studio Collection' when referring to the contents of that Studio that were subsequently given to Hornsey College of Art in the late 1960s.

detail in subsequent chapters, and locates the Studio within histories of design, of textiles and wallpaper, and of domestic interiors.

Many of the publications discussed in this Prologue operate in the intersection between scholarly monograph and populist coffee table book: between serious academic publications on the one hand and illustrated exhibition catalogues on the other. The Silver Studio has been cited in both spheres, and I make no distinction between them here but instead try to draw out the recurring themes and preoccupations of both historians and curators. As Randolph Starn has noted, there has long been a division between "museum work and historical scholarship", and between curators and academic historians.[3] They may have originated in the same field of enquiry, but Starn argues that in the nineteenth century: "…the historians outflanked the competition; from their newly won university positions they relegated museum specialists, archivists, and other "auxiliaries" or "amateurs" to subaltern status as occasionally useful technicians."[4] The Silver Studio Collection's association with topics of general public interest have meant that it has frequently operated within the sphere of popular history and memory, as well as within more academic strands of history and visual culture.

This Prologue first briefly outlines the ways in which historians have regarded the Silver Studio as a business, both as a supplier of designs to other companies, and as a company in its own right. We then turn to discussion of the designers who worked for the Silver Studio, and to the implicit contradictions between approaches to design history that foreground individuals, versus those that emphasize a narrative of anonymous mass-production. The tensions between these approaches are at the heart of this enquiry, since they force us to question what it is that the material evidence embodied by the Silver Studio Collection represents, and where its value lies. We are required to consider how we can talk about the Silver Studio, and by extension the Silver Studio Collection, in ways that make it interesting and relevant to both the

[3] Randolph Starn, "A Historian's Brief Guide to New Museum Studies," *American Historical Review* 110, no. 1 (2005): 69.
[4] Starn, 69–70.

general public and to students, as well as to academic design historians. These issues will recur in later chapters in discussion of the debates around the value and significance of the Collection as a heritage asset and as an educational resource.

What was the Silver Studio?

The Silver Studio was established by Arthur Silver (1853-1896) in 1880, and was subsequently taken over by his eldest son, Rex (1879-1965) after his death in 1896.[5] It produced designs for wallpapers and textiles, which it sold to manufacturers and retailers in Britain and on the continent. The Studio played an important part in the British textile industry and featured in numerous books and publications: in 1893 Arthur Silver contributed several chapters on design techniques for a volume edited by Gleeson White, demonstrating his status as a respected designer.[6] Three examples of textiles attributed Rex Silver (for WH Haynes Ltd., GP & J Baker Ltd., and for Storey & Co. Ltd) were illustrated in *British Textile Designers Today* in 1939.[7] Another four examples of textile designs attributed to Rex had been illustrated in an earlier volume by Paulson Townsend.[8] These books were intended as overviews of the contemporary British textile industry, and the Silvers' visibility within them make it clear that, while not a household name, the Silver Studio was well known to colleagues and peers within the textile industry.

[5] Arthur Silver had trained as a designer at Reading School of Art, but his son Rex received no formal training, aside from around a year of working with his father before he died. Mark Turner, *A London Design Studio 1880-1963: The Silver Studio Collection* (London: Lund Humphries for Middlesex Polytechnic, 1980), 42.
[6] Joseph Gleeson White, *Practical Designing: A Handbook on the Preparation of Working Drawings* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1893).
[7] H G Hayes-Marshall, *British Textile Designers Today: With Introduction and Chapters on the Designer and Design, Notes on Colour, Definitions and Descriptions, Methods of Manufacture, Yarns* (Leigh-on-Sea: F. Lewis, 1939).
[8] WG Paulson Townsend, *Modern Decorative Art in England Its Development and Characteristics: Vol1, Woven & Printed Fabrics, Wall-Papers, Lace and Embroidery* (London: Batsford Ltd, London, 1922).

Figure 1 Portrait of Arthur Silver, 1880s

A leaflet about the Silver Studio produced to accompany an exhibition at the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture in 2001 described the company as a: "…commercial design practice, which between 1880 and 1963 completed more than 20,000 schemes for items such as furnishing fabrics, wallpapers, table-covers, rugs and carpets."[9] The emphasis within the leaflet was on the fact that the Studio "answered the needs of its customers", and that the designers who worked there were both able and willing to turn their hand to any currently fashionable style, from Art Nouveau to 'Moderne'. The wider relevance of the Studio's work, it was argued, was not the quality or innovation of its design output, but the fact that since the majority of its clients were mass producers of wallpapers and textiles, many Silver Studio designs had subsequently found their way (albeit anonymously), into numerous British homes. The unique significance of the Silver Studio, and the reason for the importance of the Silver Studio Collection subsequently, according to this leaflet, was its ability to produce work in a variety of styles at any one time.

[9] Subsequently reprinted as: Lesley Hoskins and Zoë Hendon, "Silver Studio Designated Collection" (London: Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture, Middlesex University, 2008), http://eprints.mdx.ac.uk/3103/.

Figure 2. Design for a dress silk by Edwin Parker for the Silver Studio, 1927 (SD2250)

The leaflet that accompanied the 2001 exhibition expressed the challenge that has been associated with the attempt to explain the Silver Studio's significance (and the Silver Studio Collection's relevance) since the 1960s. As a commercial business the Studio supplied designs to the British textile and wallpaper industries over a long period. The fact that furnishing textiles were replaced frequently within domestic spaces in the early twentieth century meant that, as Christine Boydell notes, the textile industry was a "voracious consumer of designs from a variety of sources."[10] As well as employing their own in-house design teams, firms such as Liberty and Sanderson bought designs from freelancers and from a small number of independent studios such as the Silver Studio. Little detailed evidence of the Studio's competitors survives, so it is difficult to make an accurate assessment of its uniqueness or otherwise within the industry. HG Hayes Marshall listed twelve other independent textile design studios in operation in 1939, yet none would now be considered household names, nor would they have been well known to the general public at the time.[11] Many textile and wallpaper firms had their own in-house teams of designers, but it seems that demand

[10] Christine Boydell, "Freelance Textile Design in the 1930s: An Improving Prospect?," *Journal of Design History* 8, no. 1 (1995): 29.

[11] Barker Studios; Ivan de Coutére; WE Currie and Co.; James Haward; Headon Designs Ltd; Neville Headon; Newbold and Haughton; Sidney M Plaskett; AW Mills Porter; W Fielden Royle; JS Wheelwright; and Wroe and Gee. Listed in Hayes-Marshall, *British Textile Designers Today: With Introduction and Chapters on the Designer and Design, Notes on Colour, Definitions and Descriptions, Methods of Manufacture, Yarns*.

for design ideas was so great in the early twentieth century that the market could support the Silver Studio and a number of similar businesses in addition to these.

Analysis of the Silver Studio's records has shown that in 1928, a typical year in the interwar period, its clients included twenty-six companies, ranging from one wallpaper company (Allan, Cockshut & Co), to a variety of textile companies, each with a particular specialization. For example, Bernasconi Ltd produced silk ties, while other firms specialized in dress prints (Burgess, Ledward & Co. Ltd; Liberty & Co., London; Marshall Field & Co., Chicago) or furnishing textiles (Robert Denby & Son, Bradford; Franklin & Franklin, London; Stonards Ltd, London).[12] The majority of the Studio's output was for printed fabrics or wallpapers, since the technical knowledge required to design for woven fabrics mean that most manufacturers preferred to keep this process in-house.[13] Clients were generally unwilling to risk commissioning cutting-edge design, since they were concerned with guaranteeing high volumes of sales: the high set-up costs of machine production meant that firms had to be certain that a design would repay the investment required to produce it. As a result, the Studio's output tended to reflect existing design ideas rather than break new ground. The Studio's designers have remained less visible within the historic record than contemporaries whose work was closer to craft production. Designer-makers such as Phyllis Barron and Dorothy Larcher for example, have maintained a higher profile because their works, having higher cultural status, have survived more frequently within museum and archive collections.[14]

But what does this mean for the way in which historians position the Silver Studio's significance? Should we regard the Silver Studio as simply an example of good 'workmanlike' design, suggesting competence but lack of imagination? Was its output

[12] For full details see Appendix A in Zoë Hendon, "Behind the Scenes at the Silver Studio : Rex Silver and the Hidden Mechanisms of Interwar Textile Design," *Architecture and Culture* 6, no. 1 (2018): 61–80, https://doi.org/10.1080/20507828.2017.1397963.
[13] Boydell, "Freelance Textile Design in the 1930s: An Improving Prospect?," 31.
[14] see for example, Alan Powers, *Modern Block Printed Textiles* (London: Walker Books, 1992).

innovative and exclusive, implying that it could be described as ground-breaking and market leading? Or was it instead derivative but democratic, suggesting inferior quality but an ability to supply what the market wanted? This question was first raised by journalist Fiona MacCarthy who wrote about the Silver Studio in the 1960s at the point at which it closed. Her question, "Who wants the whole life-output of a medium-famous father and a medium-famous son?" also drew attention to the ambiguous social status of the Silver family, and hence to the questionable value of the evidence of their work.[15] In the 1980s, in her seminal book about design history, MacCarthy's mention of the Silver Studio is brief and rather dismissive: "The Silver Studio which sold designs successfully on the Continent as well as in Britain, was professional in outlook rather than pioneering, bringing good design to the bourgeoisie."[16] MacCarthy's phrase, "professional rather than pioneering" goes to the heart of subsequent discussion about the status of the Silver Studio and its output, and later of the Silver Studio Collection. Was the Silver Studio's 'professional' status evidence of its ability to provide a dependable and high-quality service to clients, or of its contribution to declining standards of taste, the inevitable 'degradation' of design ideas as they spread out to the wider market? This tension is central to the enquiry implicit within this thesis, since it raises questions about the value of designed objects as both historical records and as teaching tools, as evidence of the past and as exemplars for the future, particularly in relation to mass produced items. Which parts of our designed world should be preserved for the future, and why, and how is knowledge embodied within these things?

Silver Studio historiography

In the 1970s, having moved from working business to academic resource, the Silver Studio began to be cited as evidence within a number of wider historical narratives, and later to be discussed as an historical entity in its own right. Alison Adburgham's book about the London department store Liberty &Co, published in 1975,

[15] Fiona MacCarthy, "Wild Nostalgia," *The Guardian*, 1966.
[16] Fiona MacCarthy, *British Design Since 1880* (London: Lund Humphries, 1982), 58.

was one of the first to mention the Silver Studio as an historical, rather than contemporary, business.[17] As a historian and fashion editor for *The Guardian* newspaper, Adburgham was innovative in arguing that fashion and consumption should be taken seriously. Her book celebrated the achievements of the store's founder, Arthur Lasenby Liberty, and discussed his influence on the tastes of British shoppers. She included mention of the Silver Studio's design work for Liberty, particularly Rex Silver's designs for Liberty's *Cymric* silver range.[18] In the same year, an exhibition at the V&A celebrated the centenary of the Liberty &Co, and Middlesex Polytechnic was acknowledged as one of the lenders to the exhibition.[19] Like Adburgham, the author of the exhibition catalogue, Shirley Bury, took a strongly biographical approach, focusing on the life and personality of Arthur Liberty as the driving force behind the creation of this successful retail brand, and noting only peripherally the involvement of his collaborators such as the Silver Studio.

The publications by Adburgham and Bury about Liberty & Co illustrate one of the key themes in the historiography of the Silver Studio, namely the question of the commercial nature of its output. Despite the interest shown by both these publications in Arthur Liberty as an entrepreneur and businessman, there was at the same time an attempt to distance him from the taint of overt commercialism. In an essay in Shirley Bury's book, Alison Adburgham claimed of Liberty that:

> His dreams were not of affluence but of influence. As it turns out he achieved both and was knighted for his services to the applied and decorative arts of the day.[20]

Adburgham's intention, in other words, was to position Liberty as a shaper of taste and to emphasize the cultural, rather than commercial aspects of his achievements.

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[17] Alison Adburgham, *Liberty's: A Biography of a Shop* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1975)
[18] Alison Adburgham, *Liberty's: A Biography of a Shop* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1975), 81–82. Some of Adburgham's attributions of work to Rex Silver were later questioned by other scholars in favour of Archibald Knox, but her book did at least draw attention to the Silver Studio Collection as a resource for other historians.
[19] Shirley Bury, *Liberty's 1875-1975* (London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 1975).
[20] Bury, 4.

Similarly, at least one critic complained that the exhibition at the V&A evidenced a "rather strong hint of commercialism," a criticism which seems a little unfair, given that the exhibition was a celebration of the hundredth anniversary of a shop.[21] Yet this criticism points to a theme that recurs throughout this thesis, namely the question of how museums that collect and display mass-produced designed objects handle the question of their status as commodities.

Figure 3 'Hera' Cotton sample with a design of overlapping peacock feathers, sample from around 1900 (ST178)

Much other scholarly work in the 1970s and 80s focused on the firms that had been the Silver Studio's clients. These were the retailers and manufacturers who had purchased designs from the Studio from the 1880s onwards, and whose names were therefore more familiar to ordinary consumers than that of the Silver Studio itself. Anscombe and Gere's book on the Arts and Crafts movement, published in 1978, featured Arthur and Rex Silver's designs for Liberty, and included a colour reproduction of Liberty's peacock feather design attributed to Arthur Silver, as well as numerous images of other designs attributed to the Silver Studio [Figure 3]. [22] The history of the textile firm GP&J Baker, *From East to West,* published in 1984, also included mention of

[21] Kay Staniland, "Liberty's 1875–1975 The Exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum," *Costume* 10, no. 1 (1976): 91–95.
[22] Isabelle Anscombe and Charlotte Gere, *Arts & Crafts in Britain and America* (London: Academy Editions, 1978).

the Silver Studio.[23] Hester Bury noted Arthur Silver's involvement as a supplier of designs to Warner and Sons (producers of woven silks), in the 1890s. [24] In each case, the Silver Studio was mentioned as a supplier of high-quality designs, whose hidden work contributed to the overall commercial success of its better-known clients.

What these books had in common was an approach to design history that blurred the distinction between craft and mass production. Many of the items sold by Liberty, for example, were expensively produced and retailed as luxury items, but in relatively large numbers compared to the output of a single craftsperson. Silver and pewter ware designed by Archibald Knox via the Silver Studio for Liberty &Co could, for example, be produced much more cost-effectively than the handcrafted silver work of CR Ashbee.[25] Publications such as these emphasized and celebrated the consumption of 'high end' domestic goods promoted by late nineteenth century firms. They justified their approach through attribution of specific designed items to named designers, as will be discussed in more detail later. They also relied on consumers' identification with a particular company, often being published to celebrate a significant company anniversary.[26] The histories of the Silver Studio's connection with firms producing cheaper, more everyday items was effectively overlooked.

A London Design Studio

The first key publication about the Silver Studio itself was *A London Design Studio, 1880-1963*, published to accompany an exhibition at the Museum of London in 1980 [Figure 4].[27] Its author was Mark Turner, who had been appointed Keeper of the

[23] *From East to West: Textiles from GP&J Baker* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1984).
[24] Hester Bury, *A Choice of Design, 1850-1980: Fabrics by Warner & Sons Limited* (London: Warner & Sons Limited, 1981), pp 21 & 26.
[25] Kara Olsen Theiding, "Anxieties of Influence: British Responses to Art Nouveau, 1900–04," *Journal of Design History* 19, no. 3 (2006): 215–31.
[26] Mary Schoeser's book about Sanderson, published much later in 2010, took a similar approach: Mary Schoeser, *Sanderson: The Essence of English Decoration* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2010).
[27] Turner, *A London Design Studio 1880-1963: The Silver Studio Collection*.

Silver Studio Collection by Middlesex Polytechnic in the mid-1970s. Turner's book remains one of the only texts that specifically address the work of the Silver Studio, so it is worth examining his approach in some detail. When *A London Design Studio* was published in 1980 the Silver Studio Collection had belonged to Middlesex Polytechnic (previously Hornsey College of Art) for more than a decade. Mark Turner's task had been to bring some order to the enormous quantity of material contained within the Collection and to construct a coherent narrative around it. His book was thus both an exhibition catalogue and an introduction to the Silver Studio Collection for an audience largely unfamiliar with it.

Figure 4. *A London Design Studio* by Mark Turner, 1980

It was important for Turner to make a statement about the Silver Studio Collection to his internal audience (colleagues at Middlesex Polytechnic) as well as to the wider, museum-going public. The exhibition and book were timed to coincide with the centenary of the opening of the Silver Studio in 1880, and therefore it is not surprising that Turner adopted a somewhat celebratory tone. As Clive Ashwin noted in a review of a book about the Royal College of Art, there is a difference between a publication intended as "an act of celebration" and one written as a "piece of analytical history" and that to confuse the two is to commit what philosophers call a "category error."[28] The exhibition *A London Design Studio* and the accompanying catalogue were

[28] Clive Ashwin, "The Royal College of Art : One Hundred and Fifty Years of Art & Design by Christopher Frayling Review by : Clive Ashwin," *Journal of Design History* 1, no. 1 (1988): 80–81.

both an act of celebration and the outcome of considerable effort and organizational challenge. They were based on detailed archival research on the Silver Studio Collection, which would itself would have been a huge task, especially in the days before computerized databases. So, it is perhaps unsurprising that Turner's book sought to align Arthur Silver with other significant designers of his generation, making the claim for rightful recognition of his place within the wider Arts and Crafts tradition.

The exhibition and publication aimed, Turner argued, to: "present an accurate account of English decorative design history over the period of the Studio's operation, and to publicize the work of Arthur, Rex and Harry Silver and the designers who worked for them."[29] He suggested that their work, "in the normal course of events, would have gone largely unrecognized", were it not for the circumstance of the survival of the Silver Studio Collection.[30] This was because, though it supplied thousands of designs to a wide range of clients over a long period, the Silver Studio's name was not well known outside of the textile and wallpaper industries, and its role within the design process was not visible to consumers. There was more than a hint within Turner's book therefore, of the traditional trope of the 're-discovery' of the 'forgotten' artist; but with the additional claim to the wide-ranging significance and influence of the Studio's output through its association with numerous manufacturers of furnishings for the domestic market. Turner also emphasized the Studio's ability to respond to the requirements of the market and provided a chronological overview of the whole period in which it was in operation.

The 'hero' designer

Mark Turner's book *A London Design Studio* attached great importance to the better-known designers with whom Arthur Silver had been associated, as though to

[29] Turner, *A London Design Studio 1880-1963: The Silver Studio Collection*, 11.
Harry Silver (1882-1972), was Arthur's second son who worked for the Silver Studio from 1901 to 1916.
[30] Turner, 11.

claim credit for him by association. For example, in relation to wallpaper company Jeffrey and Co he noted that:

> An advertisement for Jeffrey and Co. actually lists the designers of their wallpapers. They included AH Mackmurdo, Albert Moore, EW Godwin, Owen Jones, Lewis F Day, Bruce Talbert and Christopher Dresser – as well as Arthur Silver.[31]

He further added: "…there is little doubt that he [Arthur Silver] was regarded as one of the great designers of the late nineteenth century – his name was frequently linked with Walter Crane, William Morris, Lewis F Day, and Christopher Dresser in contemporary newspaper articles…"[32] Turner's aim seems to have been to emphasize the importance of the Silver Studio by aligning it with others whose work had, by the late twentieth century, achieved greater public recognition and who had a recognized affiliation with the Arts and Crafts movement.

Turner also placed a good deal of emphasis on the Silver family, its background and the personal connections of Arthur and Rex Silver to other designers. He outlined Silver's family background, noting that his grandfather had had a cabinet making business and that the Silver family came from Reading.[33] Turner's preoccupation with the Silver family's social background can perhaps be understood as a way of pre-empting the inevitable comparisons with William Morris, a close contemporary of Arthur Silver. It is clear that despite the superficial similarities of the circumstances of their careers, the social backgrounds of Morris and Silver put them at opposite ends of the social spectrum. Arthur Silver established his family home (which initially also contained his business) at 84 Brook Green, Hammersmith, London, in 1880, within a mile or so of Kelmscott House, the London home of William Morris.[34] Both Morris and Silver were designers of wallpapers and textiles in the last decades of the nineteenth century, so comparisons of the two men are to some extent inevitable. The fact that

[31] Turner, 16.
[32] Turner, 20.
[33] Turner, 11.
[34] See for example, Fiona MacCarthy, *William Morris* (London: Faber & Faber, 1994).

they lived in close proximity to one another and that they died in the same year (1896) makes this comparison all the more apparent.

Arthur Silver and the Silver Studio are now relatively little known, but William Morris has achieved a kind of cult hero status within British (or perhaps more specifically English) culture and is well-known internationally. In the century and more since his death, Morris has been the subject of numerous biographies and other studies and his work continues to be explored in exhibitions as well as being widely reproduced commercially.[35] It is not known whether Morris and Silver ever actually met, but it is probable that they were aware of each other. Silver certainly cannot have been unaware of the work of William Morris: Mark Turner was keen to suggest that Silver and Morris moved in similar circles and were influenced by similar sources, notably the collections of historic textiles at the V&A museum.[36] It is more difficult to establish whether Morris was aware of Silver: Silver was less publicly visible than Morris, but he received considerable notice in *The Studio* magazine and showed his work in Arts and Craft Exhibition society exhibitions in the 1890s suggesting that he was relatively well known to his contemporaries.[37]

Yet while drawing attention to links between Arthur Silver and William Morris, Turner also identified important points of difference. He was keen to emphasize, for example, the fact that unlike Morris the Silver Studio did not conform to the modernist

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[35] See for example Harvey, Press and Maclean on Morris's ability to leverage his economic and cultural capital to his advantage, both in his lifetime and afterwards: Charles Harvey, Jon Press, and Mairi Maclean, "William Morris, Cultural Leadership, and the Dynamics of Taste," *Business History Review* 85, no. 2 (2011): 245–71. See also MacCarthy, *William Morris*; Linda Parry, *William Morris* (London: V&A Museum, 1996); Barbara Morris, "'William Morris and the South Kensington Museum,'" *Victorian Poetry* 13, no. 3–4 (1975): 167; Barbara Morris, *Inspiration for Design: The Influence of the Victoria & Albert Museum* (London: V&A Publications, 1986). Charles Harvey and Jon Press, *William Morris: Design and Enterprise in Victorian Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991).

[36] Turner, *A London Design Studio 1880-1963: The Silver Studio Collection*, 17.

[37] "A Studio of Design: An Interview with Mr Arthur Silver," *The Studio* 3 (1894): 117–22.

notion of the singular, autonomous designer in pursuit of a personal vision. Turner quoted from Arthur Silver's interview in *The Studio* magazine of 1894, in which Silver declared that he had "attempted to bring together a body of men and establish a studio which would be capable of supplying designs for the whole field of fabrics and other materials used in the decoration of the house."[38] Turner was implicitly arguing for a rejection of the notion of 'hero designer' which had been prevalent within design history thinking since Nikolaus Pevsner's *Pioneers of the Modern Movement*, and which had identified Morris as the key proto-Modernist.[39] Turner's argument for the significance of the Silver Studio therefore rested partly on the suggestion that design that was anonymous and mass-produced could be worthy of discussion. As will be seen later, the related questions of attribution, authorship, and value, will recur throughout later chapters in discussion of the Silver Studio Collection.

Arthur Silver was himself a designer (he had trained at Reading School of Art), and he also employed a number of people to work with him. It is difficult to say for certain exactly how many people Silver employed since records for the 1880s and 90s are incomplete. Under his son Rex's management in the twentieth century the Studio seems to have employed between eight and ten designers at any one time, with others working on a more casual or freelance basis. We know the names of many of the people who worked at the Silver Studio, so they cannot strictly be described as "anonymous."[40] Yet we know very little else about them, since aside from their work for the Studio they generally left very little trace in the historical record. As historian Alison Light found in relation to her own family history, many of the working people of Britain left "almost no 'ego-documents' as historians now call them – letters, diaries, memoirs – which might give the flavour and attachments of a life."[41] The Studio's employees were no exception, having left very little evidence of their existence other

[38] "A Studio of Design: An Interview with Mr Arthur Silver," 117.
[39] Nikolaus Pevsner, *Pioneers of the Modern Movement: From William Morris to Walter Gropius* (London: Faber, 1936).
[40] See brief biographical details for the Silver Studio's employees in Turner, *A London Design Studio 1880-1963: The Silver Studio Collection*, 157–58.
[41] Alison Light, *Common People: The History of an English Family* (London: Penguin, 2014), xxii.

than their brief mentions in the Silver Studio records. Hence knowledge of the names of individual designers does not provide a way to understanding authorship in the conventional sense.

Figure 5 Portrait of Rex Silver, 1920s

Despite the scant nature of the available evidence, various historians have sought to associate named designers with the work of the Silver Studio. As has already been noted, numerous designs were attributed to Rex Silver in early twentieth century publications, whereas it now seems likely that they were the work of one or more of his employees.[42] More notable perhaps is the scholarly discussion around the work of Archibald Knox (1864-1933), one of the few well-known designers to have worked for the Silver Studio [Figure 6]. Shirley Bury, metalwork curator at the V&A, first noted Knox's association with the Silver Studio in as early as 1963.[43] Bury interviewed Rex

[42] Hayes-Marshall, *British Textile Designers Today: With Introduction and Chapters on the Designer and Design, Notes on Colour, Definitions and Descriptions, Methods of Manufacture, Yarns*; Paulson Townsend, *Modern Decorative Art in England Its Development and Characteristics: Vol1, Woven & Printed Fabrics, Wall-Papers, Lace and Embroidery*.

[43] Shirley Bury, "The Liberty Metalwork Venture," *Architectural Review* Feb-March (1963): 108–11.Turner, *A London Design Studio 1880-1963: The Silver Studio Collection*, 20. Bury and her colleague, Barbara Morris, would later go on to have a part to play the

Silver in the early 1950s and established that some of the designs for Liberty metalwork which belonged to the Silver Studio had been the work of Archibald Knox. Knox is now well-known as a designer of silver and pewter-ware working around the turn of the twentieth century, much of it influenced by Celtic motifs, due to his origins on the Isle of Man. Mark Turner explored the evidence for Knox's involvement in the Silver Studio in Stephen Martin's seminal book first published in 1995.[44]

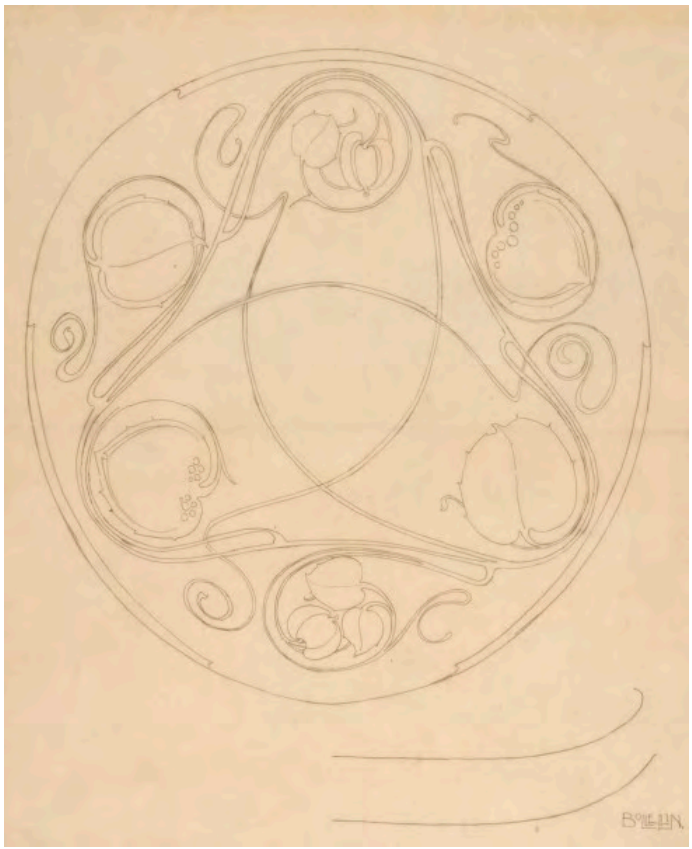

Figure 6. 'Bollellin' pewter dish design by Archibald Knox for the Silver Studio, around 1903 (SD2064)

The details of Archibald Knox's employment by the Silver Studio are difficult to pin down precisely, due to omissions in the Silver Studio's records in the late 1890s. Turner asserts that Knox worked for the Silver Studio between about 1899 and 1903, during which time he supplied designs for metalwork to the Silver Studio's client

acquisition of parts of the Silver Studio collection for the V&A, and of the remainder by Hornsey College of Art, as will be discussed in a later chapter

[44] Mark Turner, "Archibald Knox and the Silver Studio," in *Archibald Knox*, ed. Stephen A Martin (Academy Editions, 1995), 31–37.

Liberty &Co.[45] However, some of the evidence cited by Turner is questionable, and was based more on stylistic similarities of designs with other designs than on documentary evidence. This uncertainty did not deter Turner from claiming Knox as an associate of the Silver Studio, nor has it deterred subsequent Knox enthusiasts from extensive research within the Studio's records in an attempt to establish attribution and provenance of specific designs. Various essays and articles have attempted to prove or disprove that Knox was the designer of particular items from Liberty's *Cymric* and *Tudric* ranges.[46] In many cases, researchers who are interested in Archibald Knox are also dealers or collectors who have a vested interest in demonstrating that items have a verifiable provenance.[47]

The reasons for the ongoing debate around the attribution of designs to Knox are instructive and enable us to draw a useful comparison between his work and the work of Arthur and Rex Silver. Archibald Knox produced designs for silver and pewter-ware for retailer Liberty & Co: these were high value items when they were originally sold in the early 1900s, and they continue to be highly collectible and to have a high market value today. Knox's designs were for items such as large platters, candlesticks, clocks and chalices, objects that would have been bought as gifts for special occasions. They were retailed through Liberty &Co, a company which had a strong sense of brand identity, and which has retained a particular place in the British retail market over a long period.[48] As a result, designs that are known to be by Knox, or that are attributed to Knox, have retained their value both because of the intrinsic value of their materials and because they have acquired the cachet of luxury designer items. This is in contrast

[45] Turner, *A London Design Studio 1880-1963: The Silver Studio Collection*, 21.
[46]Anthony Bernbaum, "More Light on the Liberty Cymric Metalwork Venture . An Evaluation of the Contribution of Oliver Baker," *Silver Society Journal* 26 (2010): unpaginated.
[47] As Hazell and Fallan note, the detailed archival work undertaken by collectors and so-called amateurs rather than institutional scholars is often overlooked and can prove extremely valuable: Paul Hazell and Kjetil Fallan, "The Enthusiast's Eye: The Value of Unsanctioned Knowledge in Design Historical Scholarship," *Design and Culture* 7, no. 1 (2014): 107–23.
[48] Sarah Nichols, "Arthur Lasenby Liberty: A Mere Adjective?," *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 13 (1989): 76–93.Martin Wood, *Liberty Style* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2014).

to the majority of the Silver Studio's output – designs for wallpapers and textiles - which were inherently ephemeral, which were sold largely to mass market manufacturers, and which therefore have no current value as objects to be handed down or sold as antiques. These points are worth making because of their implications for how the Silver Studio Collection would be regarded both as a heritage asset and educational resource in the decades after its closure as a business.

Historians of the Arts and Crafts movement tend to foreground the new and innovative aspects of design, as well as the stylistic characteristic of the products they describe, and to give credence to designers' own assertions that their intention was to improve society through production of 'better' kinds of goods.[49] As Dennis Doordan notes, however, it is necessary for design historians to be wary of taking these claims of innovation at face value.[50] The tendency to foreground the innovative also provides the challenge of how to discuss designers who never made claims for innovation or social benefit in their work. Linda Parry was prepared to admit the Silver Studio into the forward-focussed category in her *Textiles of the Arts and Crafts Movement*, but other historians have taken a different view, seeing the Studio as representative of the worst excesses of the late nineteenth century textile and wallpaper industries, representing poor-quality imitation and the degradation of design ideas.[51] The late nineteenth century was a period during which mechanization and expanding markets meant the possibility of producing more goods but of lesser quality. Brenda Greysmith's book on wallpaper was structured around the assertion that mechanization and the mass market had meant a decline in the standard of design:

> …The results of this expanding market were twofold. On the one hand, the guaranteed outlet meant that enormously ambitious [wall]papers could be produced, hand-printed with a care, skill, patience and financial commitment

[49] Michael Saler, *The Avant-Garde in Interwar England: Medieval Modernism and the London Underground* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).
[50] Dennis P Doordan, *Design History: An Anthology* (Cambridge, Mass., London, England: MIT Press, 1995), xiii.
[51] Linda Parry, *Textiles of the Arts and Crafts Movement* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988).

> that seem incredible to us today. Yet at the same time, undermining this tendency, frantic attempts to supply a growing need led to standards of design becoming secondary to quality of output.[52]

It was, Greysmith implied, companies like the Silver Studio that were guilty of those 'frantic attempts' which had in turn created design of poor quality.

Greysmith's approach is an example of the standard trope within wallpaper history that positioned mass-market products as degraded versions of elite designs. Within this frame of reference, it would always be difficult to talk about the Silver Studio as anything other than producers of inferior and derivative design ideas. Subsequent historians have questioned the notion of the 'trickle down' effect of taste, whereby products intended for the elite are imitated more cheaply for a wider market.[53] Once again, the debate revolves around whether the Silver Studio should be seen as professional or pioneering, and what it means to make this judgement. Wallpaper historian Lesley Hoskins took a different approach, identifying the Silver Studio's role within the wider wallpaper industry at the end of the nineteenth century as one of "sophisticated professionalism." Her book, *The Papered Wall* details the wallpaper companies who were the Studio's clients including Essex & Co, Jeffrey & Co, Sanderson and Wylie & Lochhead, and numerous other firms whose names are now much less well known. As Hoskins notes, the 1890s saw wallpaper firms beginning to employ artists such as Walter Crane, EW Godwin and BJ Talbert as a way of raising both their profile and the standards of their products. But she argues:

> … the relationship between manufacturers and their artistic associates was not always an easy one…most artists and architects had little or no knowledge of industrial processes, and a good deal of re-working must have been necessary to render some of their patterns suitable for machine production…Given these difficulties, it was a great advantage to manufacturers aspiring to produce

[52] Brenda Greysmith, *Wallpapers* (London: Studio Vista, 1976), 92.
[53] See for example, Deborah Sugg Ryan quoting Amanda Vickery in Liz Farrelly and Joanna Weddell, *Design Objects and the Museum* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 52.

> artistically progressive papers to be able to call on the sophisticated professionalism of the Silver Studio…[54]

This quote is usefully illustrative of the historiographic tensions inherent in writing about the Silver Studio: should we see it as innovative and therefore important in its own right, or merely a competent (re)-producer of secondary ideas? If the latter, what status should we accord the output of the Silver Studio (by which we mainly mean the Silver Studio Collection in this context) in a world which places greater status on the new and innovative rather than the imitative? Should we see Arthur Silver as part of the wider panoply of Arts and Crafts designers? Or did his work for more commercial firms create a distance between him and his contemporaries who were able to present themselves as more concerned with craft? These themes underlie some of the arguments in later chapters around the importance and status of the Silver Studio Collection.

The publications discussed so far date mainly from the 1980s and 90s, but more recently Keren Protheroe has taken a rather different approach to the history of the Silver Studio, drawing on the evidence one of its first female designers. Her thesis explores the work of two women designers, Minnie McLeish (1876-1957) and Winifred Mold (1894-1982), the former a freelance designer and the latter a Silver Studio employee in the interwar period. Protheroe considers the extent to which their designs for printed floral fabrics subvert conventional histories of the period, since they: "represent the mass- produced, the popular, and the irrational in direct reaction to Modernism's scientific rationalism."[55] Protheroe's approach is consciously "non-biographical" in the sense that her aim is not to restore these two designers to their 'rightful' place in the historical canon. As she argues:

> Although the working lives of two named designers, Winifred Mold and Minnie McLeish, provide the axis on which this thesis turns, the reclamation of Mold's

[54] Lesley Hoskins, *The Papered Wall* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1994), 163.
[55] Keren Protheroe, "Bloom and Blotch: Floral Print and Modernity in the Textile Designs of Winifred Mold and Minnie McLeish 1910-1930 (Unpublished PhD Thesis)" (Kingston University, 2012), 5.

> and McLeish's work as innovatively important, or of their lives as exceptional, has not been its primary motive.[56]

Protheroe's work takes us beyond the tired tropes of individual design attribution and points towards the necessity of understanding the process of design as a collaborative one. Her discussion of the education that was deemed appropriate for the designers who worked for the Silver Studio in the early twentieth century also usefully hints at later debates within design education once the Silver Studio had made the transition to a Collection and had become part of an educational institution.

Prologue Conclusion

In a sense it is not surprising that historians have disagreed about the significance of Arthur Silver, Rex Silver, the Silver Studio as a whole, and their place within narratives of design history. Even Arthur's own contemporaries, such as the members of the Art Workers' Guild, seem to have struggled to categorize him: was he a craftsman, or did he represent something closer to 'trade' and manufacture?[57] This Prologue has provided an overview of some of the key texts that have made reference to the Silver Studio as a business. It provides a necessary background to the main body of this thesis, the focus of which is not on the Silver Studio itself, but rather on the Silver Studio Collection. An overview of historiographical debates around the Studio itself is a prerequisite for a discussion of the status and significance of the Silver Studio Collection once it became part of Hornsey College of Art in 1968, and subsequently part of a museum within that same higher education institution. In reviewing the literature around the Silver Studio as a business, this Prologue has drawn attention to some of the themes that will recur throughout this thesis. Should we regard the Silver

[56] Protheroe, 10. Winifred Mold worked for the Silver Studio between 1912 and 1935.
[57] Evidence for the ambivalence of his contemporaries towards Arthur Silver can be found in their refusal to elect him to membership of the Art Workers' Guild. A letter of condolence from Walter Crane to (Philip?) Webb after his death refers to Arthur Silver as an: "able and graceful designer and an amiable character." He notes that "I regret he was not elected to the Guild as I believe it would have gratified him," an assessment which seems to have been based on a perception of his personality rather than an enthusiastic appreciation of his work. (Silver Studio Collection, letter of condolence, SE522).

Studio's work as examples of exemplary design, produced by highly talented individual named designers, implying a particular kind of value for students and the wider museum-going public? Or should we see the Studio's output as representative of more derivative, yet more every-day, democratic design, which is of value for other reasons and which implies a different kind of pedagogic relationship between the Collection and those who use it?

Chapter Zero : Introduction

The Silver Studio Collection as it is currently understood (by museum staff, students, researchers, and the wider academic and museum communities) is the product of a long and complex process of meaning making, resulting from its location within a museum that is part of a higher education institution, and specifically one that has its origins with an Art School. The question of why and how this material became a 'Collection,' and its place within the history of design education, is a narrative that necessarily crosses between narratives of the Art School and the Museum. This thesis therefore sits at the intersection of design historical discourses, histories of art and design education, and the literature of heritage and museum studies and the history of collections and will draw on literature from all of these areas. It will include consideration of the Silver Studio Collection's relationship with, and contribution to, wider museum discourses, notably the exhibition practices and collecting policies of the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), as well as its status as the core collection of the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture, Middlesex University. In doing so, this thesis will suggest that consideration of the Silver Studio Collection in this way makes an original contribution to knowledge by locating it at the intersection of design histories, histories of design education, collections histories, and museum studies – a location which has hitherto been largely overlooked.

The title of this thesis, *Looking Back and Looking Forward,* hints at the inherent tension in the idea of a historic design collection within a university. On the one hand, the Silver Studio Collection was acquired as a resource for students, implying an assumption of the pedagogical value to be found in looking to the past. On the other hand, we now live in a culture which privileges the idea that to "move fast and break things" is better than to proceed from a deep understanding of the past, or even from an understanding of the implications of one's actions for the

future.[1] Universities tend to focus on equipping students for the future; on training designers to find new and innovative solutions to current problems. The chapters of this thesis trace the ways in which these apparently irreconcilable ideas about past and future have been negotiated over the decades since the Silver Studio Collection was given to Hornsey. At the same time, other apparent opposites are also explored: art and design within higher education has long struggled to reconcile notions of individual self-expression versus training for the capitalist economy; museums have sometimes found it difficult to decide whether they represent the past, or act as sites of learning for the future. This thesis explores the idea that too much emphasis has been placed on these 'either/or' questions, when it might be more productive to consider that a 'both/and' approach, in which two things can be true simultaneously. The Silver Studio's origins as a commercial practice operating largely within the sphere of mass production, and the Silver Studio Collection's aspirations to be a site of 'high culture,' as part of both museum and university, further reinforce this idea.[2]

0.1 Background and Research Questions

I began this research partly because I recognised a gap in the scholarship around the Silver Studio and the Silver Studio Collection. The only book dedicated to the history of the Silver Studio as a business, *A London Design Studio, 1880-1963,* is an exhibition catalogue that dates from 1980.[3] I was curious about why there had been no serious attempts to revise the history of the Silver Studio as a whole since then.[4] However, this thesis is not concerned with the operation of the Silver Studio as a company, or with its outputs, employees or business relationships. Instead, it focusses

[1] Jonathan T Taplin, *Move Fast and Break Things : How Facebook, Google and Amazon Have Cornered Culture and What It Means for All of Us* (London: Macmillan, 2017).
[2] Nigel Whiteley, "Olympus and the Marketplace : Reyner Banham and Design Criticism," *Design Issues* 13, no. 2 (1997): 24–35.
[3] Turner, *A London Design Studio 1880-1963: The Silver Studio Collection*.
[4] Though as previously mentioned, scholars had certainly tackled different aspects of it. See for example, Protheroe, "Bloom and Blotch: Floral Print and Modernity in the Textile Designs of Winifred Mold and Minnie McLeish 1910-1930 (Unpublished PhD Thesis)."

on the Silver Studio Collection as a whole, as a 'cultural artefact', investigating the personal, political and institutional circumstances that have shaped its physical and intellectual existence during the period since the 1960s. Chapters within this thesis consider the key moments in the Collection's life within Hornsey College of Art, Middlesex Polytechnic and subsequently Middlesex University, taking a broadly chronological approach. My suggestion is that while the contents of the Collection have remained the same, the ways in which the Collection as a whole has been understood, by University staff, students and the wider world, have been constantly renegotiated.

The question I address here is therefore how the Silver Studio Collection can be understood, in both historical and historiographical terms. Precisely what is this collection, and how do the ways in which we talk about it affect what we do with it? As Susan Pearce notes, a consideration of the history of collections is necessary because:

> …museums exist to hold particular objects and specimens which have come to us from the past (i.e. the period up to midnight yesterday), that museums therefore constitute a specific social phenomenon with a unique and explicit role in the western scheme of things, and that material arrives in museums as a result of practice (or practices) which can be described as collecting. It is, therefore, incumbent upon the investigator to try to find ways in which, first, the social meanings of individual objects can be unravelled; second, the significance of the museum as a cultural institution can be understood; and third the processes through which objects become component parts of collections, and collections themselves acquire collective significance, can be appreciated.[5]

In considering this question the intention is to shed light on the position of the Silver Studio Collection within the discipline of design history, within museum studies, and within pedagogies of object-based learning for art and design students.

[5] Susan Pearce, *Interpreting Objects and Collections* (London: Routledge, 1994), 1.

My question is also partly historiographical, in the sense that I am interested in the processes and practices of writing about the Silver Studio Collection, given the challenges (of for example, notions of authorship) that were outlined in the Prologue. In my professional role as MoDA's Head of Collections, I frequently find myself switching between various modes of writing: from exhibition captions or web text, to text for a funding application, a brief for a student project or research for a journal article.[6] In many cases, the words I write are juxtaposed with images of objects from the collection. Josie Barnard explains the notion of the inter-relationship of text and image as 'multimodality', and this is a useful term for the ways in which what I write about here moves between words on the page, digital images of objects in reproduction, and the 'real' objects themselves.[7] While the Silver Studio Collection of course exists as a physical entity, it is also the case that within the pages of this thesis it is necessary to give it form by conjuring it up in words.

The Silver Studio Collection exists, it will be argued, at the intersection between museology, design history, ideas of public heritage, and histories of art and design education, an area that has not so far been well explored. While there have been many excellent histories of art and design education, these have not generally explored the separate (though related) question of the different assumptions that underpin the use of design collections as teaching tools for students versus their use in the context of public visitor attractions.[8] Design collections in general are not well supported by critical scholarship, although recent publications such as Farrelly and

[6] I joined the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture as Assistant Curator in 1999, became Senior Curator in 2004, and was appointed to Head of Collections in 2011.

[7] Josie Barnard, *The MultiModal Writer: Creative Writing Across Genres and Media* (London: Red Globe Press, 2019).

[8] Claire Catterall and Christopher Frayling, *Design of the Times: One Hundred Years of the Royal College of Art* (Shepton Beauchamp,Somerset: Richard Dennis, 1996); Lisa Tickner, *Hornsey 1968: The Art School Revolution* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2008); Stuart MacDonald, *A Century of Art and Design Education: From Arts and Crafts to Conceptual Art* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2005).

Weddell's *Design Objects and the Museum* have begun to redress the balance.[9] In particular the unusual status of design collections within universities and art colleges has largely been overlooked. Histories of collections of this kind have tended towards fairly descriptive accounts of their development, as for example, with publications about the collections at the Central School or Manchester Polytechnic, which are generally broadly celebratory, rather than analytical.[10] An understanding of the often unspoken assumptions that underpinned the development of these kinds of collections is vital, I will argue, for a more informed understanding of how they might be used today and of what might happen to them in the future.

This thesis addresses four key research questions, each of which intersect and overlap. These might usefully be understood as four quadrants of a circle, in which the edges of each subdivision are not clearly defined but bleed into each other. The first key research question is that of the value of the Silver Studio Collection. Here I am not concerned with the market value of individual items (which has always been negligible), or the Collection's potential to generate income through commercial activity (which is similarly limited) but the Collection's value understood in educational or cultural terms. The assumption that the Silver Studio Collection was of value underpinned the decision to keep it in the first place, but as will be discussed, the perception of its value to Middlesex University has altered over the years. It was gradually understood to have heritage value, and in addition to this is now understood as a valuable asset for teaching, learning and research. The process of this accumulation of cultural and educational value interests me here, since it was by no means a foregone conclusion, nor is it the case that this perceived value, once achieved, could not also in future be lost.

[9] Farrelly and Weddell, *Des. Objects Museum*.
[10] Ruth Shrigley, *Inspired by Design: The Arts and Crafts Collection of the Manchester Metropolitan University* (Manchester: Manchester Metropolitan University, 1994). Sylvia Backemeyer, *Making Their Mark: Art, Craft and Design at the Central School* (London: Herbert Press, 2000).

The second related theme concerns the question of knowledge and what it means to create and share knowledge about a museum collection. In a sense this question stems from a need to clarify in my own mind my own sense of my expertise around the Silver Studio Collection. Unlike many other university museum collections, the Silver Studio Collection is not foundational to a particular discipline or subject area (unlike geology or anthropology specimens for example). This is a great strength in the sense that the Collection can more easily be interpreted in different ways, according to changing interests and academic fashions; but it also means that my knowledge of the collection is wide ranging and difficult to pin down precisely to create a clear sense of my own knowledge-based identity. Part of my role is to know about the history of the Silver Studio as a business: more importantly my role is to know how the museum's collections support histories of domestic interiors, housing and architecture, the built environment, pattern making and textile design, wallpaper production or any of the other questions that students and researchers have in mind. I was interested to explore these different registers of knowing in order to assert my knowledge of the Silver Studio Collection gained through personal and curatorial engagement with it, to demonstrate a more academic and theoretical way of knowing about it, and also to draw attention to the fact that knowledge formation is messy, contingent, collaborative, and ongoing.

The third, clearly inter-related, research question is a pedagogical one. The Silver Studio Collection was acquired by Hornsey College of Art as will be seen, but seemingly without anyone having a clear idea of exactly what students would learn from their engagement with it. This question of exactly what students should be taught in the art school arguably goes back to 1830s with the establishment of the Government Schools of Design by Henry Cole.[11] The education offered by the Schools of Design was always inextricably linked to the requirements of the economy, and also to the idea of good citizenship encouraged through engagement with well-designed objects. I was interested to question how we might navigate this

[11] Malcolm Quinn, "The Political Economic Necessity of the Art School 1835-52," *International Journal of Art & Design Education* 30, no. 1 (2011): 62–70.

path now, in the context of a post-industrial economy. Is it possible, for example, to use the Silver Studio Collection to encourage students to adopt habits of slow learning and critical reflection, and might this provide a kind of counterbalance to the otherwise instrumentalized learning that tends to take place in current higher education environments?

The fourth, and again related, research question concerns the social role of the museum, or what it means for a museum or collection to make a difference in the world. Here it will be evident that there is a direct link to the question of pedagogy, in the sense that the purpose of a university museum must be to support teaching and learning for the students of its parent institution, and thereby to have an influence on the future of society. Here we can also discern a link between museums and ideas of good citizenship, implying a state-sponsored approval of learning that is directed towards students becoming good producers or good consumers, or both. Here we circle back to the question of value again, in the sense that the museum is asked to navigate between being 'a good thing' in its own right versus one which can demonstrate a more instrumental kind of value through influencing visitors or students towards better behaviour or better consumer choices. We are also again in the territory of the question of knowledge, since we are required to reflect on the museum as a storehouse of knowledge, or laboratory for the generation of new knowledge: how might processes of knowledge-creation and dissemination support socially engaged questions such as that of decolonization for example?

Underpinning these four interconnecting research questions is the idea, drawn from Jane Bennet's *Vibrant Matter*, that we might see the Silver Studio Collection as an assemblage of objects, people, legislation, funding opportunities, physical space, personal and institutional ambition, pedagogical theory and practice, all of which have come together to create particular circumstances through which

the Collection has developed since the late 1960s. [12] The Silver Studio Collection as it exists today evolved without a masterplan, but instead developed because of a series of seemingly small decisions by various people all acting out of slightly different motives over a long period of time. It is a product of the work of many people, not just those I will discuss in detail (Harold Shelton, Joseph Darracott, Barbara Morris, Mark Turner et al), but many others whose contribution generally goes unacknowledged: curatorial and conservation staff; volunteers; visitors; researchers; students; external funders; museum sector bodies; university managers and so on. In other words, I will argue that the Silver Studio Collection as it exists today is socially situated and entirely a product of a particular time and place. At the same time, I will argue that while my focus has been on the Silver Studio Collection, the objects themselves are only part of the story: objects and human agency are intimately related.

0.2 Sources and Methodology

My starting point is of course the primary material of the Silver Studio Collection itself; a body of material that includes approximately 40,000 designs on paper, around 4-5,000 wallpaper and textile samples, and a mass of assorted books, archival documents (letters, diaries and newspaper cuttings) and other reference materials that constituted almost the entire contents of the Studio when it closed in 1963. Archival records pertaining to Middlesex University as a whole, or to the Museum's relationship with the University, are scarce. The University does not employ an archivist and has historically not seen the preservation of institutional records as a priority: as a result, I have relied heavily on unpublished administrative records held within the Museum itself, such as the minutes of Steering Committee meetings from the 1970s and 80s, and more recent museum policies and internal documents.

[12] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

Evidence is also drawn from the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum, since part of my argument rests on the relationship between the two collections. For this I have looked at the evidence of specific museum objects themselves (that is, the contents of the V&A's collections in relation to the Silver Studio); records and correspondence within the V&A's acquisition files; and records now held by the National Library of Art and Design pertaining to Hornsey College of Art. In some instances, I have looked at the evidence of museum publications and catalogues, using these as primary sources. As Anne Massey has argued in relation to the Institute of Contemporary Arts, exhibition catalogues provide an important yet frequently neglected resource for historians of art and design.[13] In many instances, as with other studies of the histories of museums, evidence has been difficult to find, or has been read 'against the grain' of the original writer's intention. This is not an uncommon problem as Sarah Longair notes:

> Depending on the institution and its administrative structure, decisions and discussions might go unrecorded. Historians of museums must use all available evidence to reconstruct the realities of curating, bringing together fragments from registers, photographs, and correspondence, both private and personal.[14]

This fragmentary approach has been deployed here and has been particularly necessary given that the Museum's parent institution, Middlesex University has undergone numerous changes of name, location and administrative structure during the last fifty years.[15] As an institution, Middlesex has not made it a priority to

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[13] Anne Massey, "Cataloguing the ICA's History: An Ephemeral Past," in *Association of Art Historians Annual Conference* (Royal College of Art, 2014).

[14] Sarah Longair, "Cultures of Curating The Limits of Authority," *Museum History Journal* 8, no. 1 (2015): 6.

[15] Middlesex Polytechnic was formed in 1973 following a merger of Hornsey College of Art, Enfield Technical College and St Katherine's College, Tottenham. See Andrew Roberts, "Science, Society and Creativity at Middlesex University," accessed November 10, 2018, http://studymore.org.uk/ssctim.htm. The Polytechnic became a University in 1992. Until the early 2000s the legacy of these various mergers was that the University was spread across a number of North London campuses, including those at Enfield, Tottenham, Bounds Green, Trent Park, Cat Hill and Hendon. The consolidation of these into one campus at Hendon was a long process

maintain detailed records of these changes, as evidenced by the fact that it does not employ a university archivist, and that records have frequently been lost during campus moves or other reorganisations.[16]

This thesis is a history of the Silver Studio Collection between 1968 and 2018 during which time since the contents of the Studio were re-imagined and re-purposed as an historical and educational resource. It considers the ways in which academics, researchers, museum colleagues and others have expressed different kinds of interest in the Collection over time because it chimed with other areas of their interest, and suggests that these interests have shifted over time, contributing to the shifting meanings of the Silver Studio Collection. One of the underlying assumptions of this enquiry is an understanding that museums and collections do not simply contain or represent the past but rather actively shape the ways in which we see the past, and therefore how we might imagine the future. In addition, it is based on the idea that collections are compiled, constructed or otherwise accumulated for specific reasons at particular times, but that their meanings do not cease to evolve once the items have entered the institutional context of the museum. Collections and the information associated with them are not static but constantly evolving in the light of new intellectual enquiry and thus can be seen to have a history in their own right, even if the physical contents of the collection remain the same.

As Huppatz notes in his discussion of methodology within design history, the starting point for historical method, derived from Ranke, was the idea that close examination of archival sources will reveal an objective truth.[17] In this thesis I have

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that was concluded in 2013. See "Our History: 140 Years at Middlesex University," 2019, https://www.mdx.ac.uk/about-us/what-we-do/our-history [Accessed 20-05-2020].

[16] In contrast, See Anna McNally's article about the Visual Arts Project Archive at a comparable institution, the University of Westminster: Anna McNally, "Not Just Curious Objects: The China Visual Arts Project Archive," *Journal of Design History* 31, no. 4 (2018): 383–394.

[17] DJ Huppatz, "Introduction to Methodology : Virtual Special Issue for the Journal of Design History, 2018," *Journal of Design History*, no. June (2018): 1–16.

drawn various kinds of evidence to examine the motivations behind decisions that have affected the Silver Studio Collection since it became part of Middlesex University in 1968. Yet, in writing this history I am aware of the limitations of these sources in particular and of historical writing in general, in the sense that all histories are partial; both because they are limited in scope and because they are necessarily informed by a particular perspective. There is no possibility of objectivity, and not just because of my professional relationship to this Collection. As Carolyn Steedman has noted, the historian, "can always present herself as the invisible servant of her material, merely uncovering what already lies there, waiting to be told."[18] But the choosing of sources, the shaping of a coherent narrative implies a more active role of meaning making for the historian than merely 'uncovering' what is there. In this case, the conventional documentary evidence available is limited in both number and variety: committee papers, for example, offer one kind of perspective on decision-making processes and obscure others.

I am aware of the partial nature of historical writing in another sense too. Histories are continually re-written, because time moves on and new perspectives emerge. As Steedman observes, historians construct narratives that offer the reader the satisfaction of narrative closure, but the story continues after that point despite this, so that historians fully expect their accounts to be superseded: "The very practice of historical work, the uncovering of new facts, the endless reordering of the immense detail that makes the historian's map of the past, performs this act of narrative destabilization on a daily basis."[19] The Silver Studio Collection will continue to exist after the narrative closure achieved by this thesis, and thus will be open to new interpretation and revision. In this way the version of the Silver Studio Collection that I describe here, in words and images, exists only on the page (despite simultaneously existing in physical form) since another historian will describe it differently.

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[18] Carolyn Steedman, "Culture, Cultural Studies and the Historians," in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon Durling, 2nd ed. (London & New York: Routledge, 1999), 46–56.
[19] Steedman, 47..

While it is in a sense true that the body of material now known as the Silver Studio Collection has not changed in the past fifty years, it is simultaneously true that the ways in which it is understood have inevitably changed with the passing of time, and these changes will be discussed throughout this thesis. The "Silver Studio Collection" then, is not a static entity, but a constantly shifting set of meanings and negotiations, that arise as each new student, researcher, or member of the public encounters it anew, and this thesis is itself simply a new contribution to the shifting kaleidoscope of meaning. As Susan Crane points out, this observation is somewhat at odds with the illusion of timelessness associated with museums and their collections:

> A modern museum's mandate is to collect, preserve, and present objects for the public to appreciate. But preservation and conservation never completely 'fix' the contents of the collections or their presentation for all time. Constantly changing needs and interests – economic and political, as well as scholarly – shape the museum and its contents.[20]

While recognizing the impossibility of fixing the meaning of the Silver Studio Collection in the sense of creating a definitive statement that will be valid for all time, this thesis nevertheless attempts to trace some of the factors which have influenced the shifts in its meanings at key points between 1968 and 2018. Thus, it is not my intention to suggest that the 'meaning' of the Silver Studio Collection stops here. Nor is it my intention to suggest, despite the broadly chronological framework of this thesis, that the Collection has undergone a smooth process of evolution. My use of intercalary chapters interspersed between the main chapters is intended to have the effect of moments of pause, of disjuncture, of discontinuity; they are a reminder of the constructed nature of the narrative, and a way of resisting what might otherwise unintentionally appear to be a teleological narrative of seamless progress.

[20] Susan A Crane, "The Conundrum of Ephemerality: Time, Memory and Museums," in *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. Sharon Macdonald (Chicester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 98.

0.3 Ways of Knowing

This thesis begins with a half-remembered fragment of conversation, a fragment so remote that it is not clear to me now whether I witnessed it myself, or simply had it reported to me. The Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture, then at Cat Hill, was hosting a visit by the parents of some prospective Middlesex University students, sometime in the early 2000s. The parents and their student offspring had come to the Museum as part of a tour of the campus; or perhaps the parents were in the museum while the students attended their admission interviews. A colleague was attempting to explain the significance of the Silver Studio Collection to the assembled group. Having listened for a while, and having seen some of the Silver Studio designs, one of the fathers declared: "Ah, so this museum is like a mini-V&A, and Arthur Silver was a poor-man's William Morris." My motivation to write this thesis developed partly from my own need to think through these ideas, in my role as Head of Collections at the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture.

A further impetus behind my need to write this thesis was the relocation of the museum from Cat Hill to Colindale in 2011. As I will discuss in Chapter Four, the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture opened a new building on Middlesex University's Cat Hill campus in 2000. This building was subsequently closed as part of the University's consolidation to one campus at Hendon, and as a result the museum moved to new, smaller, premises in Colindale. This move threw all previous assumptions about the role and purpose of the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture into question and meant that critical reflection on the curation of the Silver Studio Collection was all the more urgent. As the writer on museums Duncan Grewcock points out, "The museum profession is perhaps too busy with the complex business of managing and operating their museums," to be able to critically reflect on exactly *what* they are doing.[21] There is, I will argue, a tension between the acknowledged heritage/museum status of the Silver Studio Collection, and its

[21] Duncan Grewcock, *Doing Museology Differently* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 166.

purpose as a resource for students. These tensions are both practical and institutional, yet until this point they have not been consciously examined or articulated.

I begin by addressing some of the challenges of writing about the Silver Studio Collection from the perspective of someone who has been professionally connected to it over a long period. I began work at the Museum of Domestic Design in 1999, first as Assistant Curator, then as Senior Curator, and now as Head of Collections since 2011. I have curated exhibitions and written articles based on the Silver Studio collection.[22] I have successfully made the case for the Silver Studio Collection's national and international importance, and I was responsible for putting together the successful application for Designated Status for the Silver Studio Collection in 2008.[23] Over the years I have secured funding for numerous conservation and documentation projects. I was instrumental in setting up the museum database, and in the design of the Museum's first website which showcased the collections for the wider public, as well as subsequent iterations of the website. I assisted with the move of the museum to its new building at Cat Hill in 2000, and then oversaw its relocation again to new premises at Beaufort Park in 2011. Through my professional activities I have actively helped to shape the way the evidence of the Silver Studio Collection is organized, further complicating my subject position in relation to it.

[22] Zoë Hendon, "The Silver Studio Art Reference Collection," *Decorative Arts Society Journal* 36 (2012): 65–81; Zoë Hendon, *The Silver Studio and the Art of Japan* (Museum of Domestic Design & Architecture, Middlesex University, 2014). Hendon, "Behind the Scenes at the Silver Studio : Rex Silver and the Hidden Mechanisms of Interwar Textile Design."

[23] The Museum Designation Scheme, now administered by Arts Council England, exists to recognize the outstanding quality and significant of collections held by institutions that are not national museums. "Designation Scheme," accessed April 28, 2019, https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/supporting-collections-and-archives/designation-scheme [Accessed 28-04-2019].

Having worked at the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture for a long time my own decisions have to some extent shaped the way the collection is understood; my intention here is to draw on auto-ethnography as a way of acknowledging my own place within this discourse. Writers such as Grewcock have drawn on this methodology to recognize the 'always-situated' nature of the museum visitors' experience.[24] But the experience of the museum worker is perhaps no less shaped by personal experience and background, as Sandino has recognized in her oral history studies of curators at the V&A. [25] It is something of this awareness that I intend to bring to bear here.

Throughout this time, I have pondered the peculiar nature of the Silver Studio Collection, which never seemed to me to fit existing categories, either in Design History terms, or in museological terms. Part of my motivation for writing this thesis is that it seemed difficult to fit the Silver Studio into a framework of historical explanation that prioritized the individual designer, the innovative and the new, and I wanted to work out why. Design historians such as Judy Attfield had demonstrated that it was possible to question these frameworks within design history scholarship, yet it remained difficult to see how to translate this approach to the medium of the public design-history exhibition.[26] This thesis is in part my attempt to work this all out and explain why there seems to be something here that has not already been said. My narrative sits at the edges of Design History, museum history, Museum Studies and the history of Art and Design education and calls in into question what it means to 'know' a collection. It is perhaps no coincidence that both Museum Studies and Art and Design are disciplines that exhibit a tension between 'theory' and

[24] Grewcock, *Doing Museology Differently*, 187.
[25] Linda Sandino, "A Curatocracy: Who and What Is a V&A Curator?," in *Museums and Biographies: Stories, Objects, Identities*, ed. Kate Hill (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2012), 87–99.
[26] Judy Attfield, "Continuity: Authenticity and the Paradoxical Nature of Reproduction," in *Wild Things: The Material Culture of Everyday Life* (Berg, 2000), 99–120.

'practice'.[27] In both areas there is a privileging of 'doing' over 'thinking', and a lack of a clear framework for conceptualizing action in theoretical terms. Hence this thesis is an extended attempt to express in words some things that I already thought I 'knew' through the tacit experience of managing, documenting, researching and exhibiting the Silver Studio Collection.

My current role is partly concerned with researching and knowing the collection myself, and partly with devising and facilitating teaching and research projects that enable other people to engage with the museum's collections from different perspectives. I am interested in the processes of meaning-making that take place in various ways around the Silver Studio Collection as a whole, and interested in the ways in which the Collection supports creative practice as well as historical enquiry.[28] I also know the museum's collections in the sense of being a museum practitioner: I am aware of the situated nature of my subject-knowledge within the wider landscape of design history and museum studies; I am aware of the status of the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture's collections within other similar post-1992 universities; I have an awareness of the funding landscape, of schemes such as Designation, and the wider political context. My practice consists of the many decisions that support the process of knowing about the museum's collections and making them available to students, researchers and others, both in person and online. These decisions are a blend of historical and subject knowledge, alongside practical, political and pedagogical considerations, and are informed by reflection on that practice over many years.[29]

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[27] J Lynne Teather, "Reflecting on Reflective Practice," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 10 (1991): 403–17; Jenny Rintoul, *Integrating Critical and Contextual Studies in Art and Design Possibilities for Post-Compulsory Education* (London: Routledge, 2016).

[28] Zoë Hendon and Linda Sandino, "Inspiration Examined:Towards a Methodology," *Art, Design and Communication in Higher Education* 17, no. 2 (2018): 135–50.

[29] Donald A. Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

For a long time, I struggled to reconcile the fact that my role crosses boundaries between 'academic' and 'non-academic', but I increasingly recognize that I am not unusual in this. For example, Carton and Ungureanu point to what they call 'scholar-practitioners' and identify some of the tensions inherent in these boundary-spanning roles.[30] Similarly, Celia Whitchurch has identified the development of what she calls 'third space professionals' within higher education, namely those like myself whose roles cross between the academic and professional services domains.[31] All of this contributes to what I mean about the need to 'know' the collection again differently. Alex Elwick has argued that museum professionals need to pay greater attention to the implicit learning of their visitors – the things that people do not even know that they know. If this is the case for visitors, it must surely also be true for curators and other museum professionals whose familiarity with their collections must result in "knowledge we do not know we possess or cannot articulate."[32]

This thesis is partly then an exercise in re-knowing the Silver Studio Collection for myself, and in doing so, articulating a history of it for others. Here I draw upon autoethography as a methodology since, as Carolyn Ellis et al note: "Autoethnographers recognize the innumerable ways personal experience influences the research process…autoethnography is one of the approaches that acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher's influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they don't exist."[33] Kjetil Fallan and Grace Lees-Maffei also provide a useful overview of the way that subjectivity has emerged relatively recently as a concept to be tackled by

[30] Guillaume Carton and Paula Ungureanu, "Bridging the Research–Practice Divide: A Study of Scholar-Practitioners' Multiple Role Management Strategies and Knowledge Spillovers Across Roles," *Journal of Management Inquiry* 27, no. 4 (2017): 436–53.
[31] Celia Whitchurch, *Reconstructing Identities in Higher Education: The Rise of the Third Space Professionals* (London: Routledge, 2013).
[32] Alex Elwick, "Understanding Implicit Learning in Museums and Galleries," *Museum and Society* 13, no. November (2015): 420–30
[33] Carolyn Ellis, Tony E Adams, and Arthur P. Bochner, "Autoethnography: An Overview," *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 12, no. 1 (2011).

historians and design historians.[34] They suggest that there are several ways in which design history could benefit from the recognition of the subject positions of its authors. Firstly, by design historians writing about their own subjective experiences, and secondly from the recognition that areas of interest that might have previously been considered trivial or insignificant have a value and an interest beyond the personal and anecdotal. Anne Massey, for example, has grounded her book about film culture in the experience of her working-class upbringing and of her family's ongoing relationship with cinema over several generations.[35] Similarly, Cheryl Buckley's writing about fashion was influenced by her observation of female members of her family as amateur dressmakers.[36] In both examples, by identifying their own subject positions within the narrative the authors made a claim for the significance and legitimacy of aspects of the past and of culture (the personal, the feminine, the working class, the marginal, the popular rather than elite), and the right to have these taken seriously as subjects of serious academic enquiry.

As Lees-Maffei and Fallan make clear, the admission of personal subjectivity into academic discourse is not synonymous with the abandonment of scholarly standards:

> Writing about oneself entails not only the understanding that the personal matters, but also a rigorous subjectivity necessary to make the personal significant for others. This necessitates an engagement with identity politics that also informs academic writing about things other than the self, of course. Identity politics tie work about the self to a wider political project, for example, feminism. [37]

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[34] Kjetil Fallan and Grace Lees-Maffei, "It's Personal: Subjectivity in Design History," *Design and Culture* 7075, no. November (2015): 5–28.
[35] Anne Massey, *Hollywood beyond the Screen: Design and Material Culture* (London: Berg, 2000).
[36] Cheryl Buckley, "On the Margins : Theorizing the History and Significance of Making and Designing Clothes at Home," *Journal of Design History* 11, no. 2 (1998): 157–71.
[37] Fallan and Lees-Maffei, "It's Personal: Subjectivity in Design History," 13.

However, to write about what is of interest to oneself sometimes requires a leap of faith that it will be recognized as being of interest more generally. Anne Massey acknowledges her own class and gender based subject position, and notes her frequent feeling of exclusion from the mainstream of academia.[38] In a similar way, the Silver Studio Collection exists outside of mainstream design historical discourses, and my role at Middlesex University has been outside of the context of an academic department. For these reasons it has taken a long time for me to see my critical analysis of Silver Studio, grounded in years of experience of and association with the Silver Studio Collection, as legitimate.

We think of museums as taking particular actions, but in fact those actions are the outcomes of a range of conscious or unconscious decisions made by the people who work within them. Therefore, the roles played by individual curators and other members of museum staff in shaping the museum has recently come to greater attention. What curators think they are doing, and what their educational background and personal interests equip them to do, has an unspoken effect on the development of museums as institutions. Linda Sandino has explored the personal investment of curators in the narratives they create in her work with V&A curators.[39] Sandino records the life stories of curators in an attempt to understand what influenced their curatorial practice. Her interest is in the personal motivations that shape and influence them, often in subtle and un-articulated ways; and she traces this outward to consider the influence that apparently small decisions can have on the directions taken by large institutions.

If the subjectivity of the historian or curator is important, then it is necessary for me to outline my educational and other background here. I am an historian by training, having studied History at York University. I subsequently did an MA in Museum Studies at Leicester University. Despite the good reputation of the Leicester course, 'Museum Studies' as a whole was at the time (1996-97) a little confused

[38] Massey, *Hollywood beyond the Screen: Design and Material Culture*.
[39] Sandino, "A Curatocracy: Who and What Is a V&A Curator?"

about itself as a discipline, attempting to provide both vocational training for future museum workers and to offer a slightly more theoretical framework for the notion of 'museum' as an institution. As Duncan Grewcock, one of my contemporaries from the course, notes: "The course lacked any critical or reflexive approach to the field I was studying," and like him, this was: "something I only fully appreciated, or indeed cared about much, much later".[40] At the time, I was concerned with acquiring useful skills rather than adopting any critical reflexivity on 'the museum' in a more abstract sense. As Jesus-Pedro Lorente notes, Museum Studies as a subject discipline is still yet to decide whether it is a vocational training or critical-analytical field of study.[41]

More recently Museum Studies at Leicester seems to offer much greater clarity on the difference between what appear to be two competing strands of Museum Studies. The idea of the museum as a site of cultural production is balanced against the museum as an institution operating within society. The website now states that: "Staff work within and across two overlapping groupings formed around: i) the cultural production of the museum (the production and operation of objects, architecture, policy, knowledge, politics, myths and media) ...and; ii) the social agency of the museum (museum audience and profession focused and tackling social justice, human rights, equality, ethics and learning).[42] It is these two overlapping areas of enquiry that are the focus of this enquiry in relation to the Silver Studio Collection. Namely, that the Collection represents part of a shared project that is the cultural production of meaning; and that it simultaneously plays a role in the museum's social agency and purpose, through making a contribution to the education of university students. The potential tension between these two roles will be discussed in more detail throughout this thesis. Here the idea that a museum can be 'both/and' rather than 'either/or' is relevant again.

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[40] Grewcock, Doing Museology Differently, 169.
[41] Jesus-Pedro Lorente, "The Development of Museum Studies in Universities: From Technical Training to Critical Museology," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 27, no. 3 (2012): 237–52.
[42] University of Leicester, School of Museum Studies website: https://le.ac.uk/museum-studies [Accessed 19th November 2017]

This distinction between museum as locus of social agency and museum as site of cultural production is helpful to some extent, but my experience of working in a museum is of continually attempting to keep these two aspects in balance. As Lynn Teather notes: "We [Museum Studies programs] are involved in a delicate balancing act between the profession and academe and often fall off our high-wire."[43] It is perhaps not surprising then that during my early years at the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture I was very much concerned with museum work as practice, by which I mean the everyday practical business of running and managing the museum and its collections, including conservation, cataloguing, exhibitions, and administration. As Grewcock notes, this practice is partly concerned with the physical space of the museum and partly with the social impact of the museum and is linked to audience research and visitor studies.[44] For this reason, and in common with many museum professionals, I did not have time or opportunity to reflect much on that practice within museum discourse. My colleagues and I were mainly concerned with the daily concerns of running a public building, producing exhibitions and dealing with visitors.

On reflection, I now think that another reason why I stuck to the 'practice' element of my role was that I struggled to align my everyday experience of being "a curator" with the models of curatorship that appeared to be on offer at Middlesex University. I was not engaged in the kind of art curatorship that was exemplified by for example, Hans Ulrich Obrist or Jean Paul Martinon, or by academic colleagues at Middlesex University such as Jon Bird, for whom the word signified something much more akin to 'white cube' art gallery curatorship.[45] I was not able to engage with

[43] Teather, "Reflecting on Reflective Practice," 404.
[44] Grewcock, *Doing Museology Differently*, 167.
[45] Hans Ulrich Obrist, *A Brief History of Curating* (Zurich: JRP Ringier, 2008); Jean-Paul Martinon, *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013). See also for example, Jon Bird, *Leon Golub: Echoes of the Real* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2010). and Jon Bird et al., eds., *The Block Reader in Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 1996).

Middlesex discourses about 'curatorship' because I did not recognize my own practice within those descriptions. Instead I had absorbed the definition of a curator proposed by Leicester Museum Studies lecturer, Gaynor Kavanagh, as someone who: "on the public's behalf, studies a collection, adds to it, documents it, interprets it and enlarges a body of knowledge for a wide audience with very different needs."[46] In other words, I proceeded from the assumption that the museum's collection should be the starting point for any exhibition or other public output. It therefore seemed to me that 'curatorship' as discussed by other members of Middlesex academic staff was an entirely different thing to the way I experienced my day job. Perhaps what I had not fully realised at the time was that there were conceptual and practical differences between the design-historical curatorship which was required at MoDA, and the curatorial practices associated with contemporary design-as-art which were practiced elsewhere.[47]

As a graduate of Museum Studies at Leicester in the mid-1990s, it was constantly borne in upon us that curators were supposed to demonstrate accountability for their collections, as well as making them accessible to the public. In fact, the latter could only be achieved by building on the solid foundations of the former. My sense of curatorial identity was therefore shaped by a sense of public service, which placed an emphasis on professional standards of behaviour and commitment to the general good, both for the present and for future generations. In this regard my motivations were not dissimilar to curators at the V&A, who as Sandino describes, were committed to the public service aspect of their roles even after the reorganization within that institution in the late 1980s: "Contrary, therefore, to the contemporary emphasis on curators as international 'superstars',

[46] Gaynor Kavanagh, "Curatorial Identity," in *Museum Provision and Professionalism* (London: Routledge, 1994), 127.

[47] Jo Gooding discusses the influence of the V&A/RCA History of Design course on curatorial practice at the V&A and elsewhere and notes the importance of the course in the formation of personal and professional networks. These were however networks to which I gained access only later, via the Design History Society. Joanne Gooding, "Design History in Britain from the 1970s to 2012: Context, Formation and Development (Unpublished PhD Thesis)" (University of Northumbria, 2012), 236–37.

established museum curators continue to work within the tradition of public service ethos laid down with the establishment of the Civil Service in 1854."[48] In the early 1990s an Audit Office report had made clear that most museums did not know where many of their objects were, had not looked after collections adequately, and had not been suitably accountable for public money. This came just a few years after the publication of Peter Vergo's *New Museology*, which emphasized the museum's role in relation to the public rather than in relation to scholarship.[49]

The term 'curator' has shifted considerably in meaning since the early 2000s, and my role has shifted also. Hoare and Milliard argue that rather than being primarily concerned with looking after objects for their own sake, curators are now engaged with audiences in a multiplicity of ways, and find their roles encompassing those of commissioner, editor, producer, director, coach, mentor and collaborator with colleagues within their own institutions and frequently beyond it.[50] Their discussion of what they see as a new breed of curatorship focuses primarily on a contemporary art context, but the same shifts are arguably true of curators more generally, and certainly chime with my own experience. In the context of a university museum my role encompasses all of the above, with the addition of manager, educator and more. One of the themes of this thesis is my understanding of my changing role within the institution, over a long period, and the ways in which this reflects the changing idea of the museum as gatekeeper, producer, or disseminator of knowledge.

[48] Sandino, "A Curatocracy: Who and What Is a V&A Curator?," 88.
[49] Peter Vergo, *The New Museology* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 1989).
[50] Natasha Hoare and Coline Milliard, *The New Curator: Researcher, Commissioner, Keeper, Interpreter, Producer, Collaborator* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2016).

0.4 Chapter Overview

The main body of this thesis is structured around five main chapters, which take a broadly chronological approach to the development of the Silver Studio Collection since the late 1960s.

Chapter One, "An Inheritance of Art Nouveau," looks at the acquisition of a small number of items from the Silver Studio into the V&A's collections immediately after the closure of the Silver Studio as a business in 1963. This process I argue, was part of a deliberate strategy of meaning-making on the part of V&A curators, which was shaped by their understanding of the Victorian and Edwardian periods and by their need to create an academic field of expertise for themselves within the area of late nineteenth century design and decorative art. I look at the acquisition practices of the Circulation Department of the V&A and consider what else they were acquiring in addition to the items from the Silver Studio. Close analysis of the kinds of objects that were chosen from the Silver Studio (from a potential selection of many thousands of things), and what was said about them subsequently will help me to argue that the Circulation Department had a specific agenda and that the acquisition of particular items from the Silver Studio must be seen in the context of a larger tradition of design education. The two related questions of value and knowledge are relevant here, since the staff of the Circulation Department decided which items from the Silver Studio had value and should therefore be kept by applying certain standards of 'provenance', a process that enabled them to shape and demonstrate new knowledge of late Victorian design.

Chapter Two, "Souvenir or Sacred?" considers the period immediately after the closure of the Silver Studio, when Rex Silver's step-daughter Mary Peerless was tasked with closing it and dispersing the contents. This was a brief period between 1967 and 68 when the contents of the Silver Studio were in a state of transition, from working contents of commercial design studio to historic artefacts. Here I consider the motivations that prompted Mary Peerless to insist that what became known as the Silver Studio Collection should be kept together in perpetuity, arguing

that questions of value and pedagogy were at play during this period. The efforts of Miss Peerless and others to secure a permanent home for the Collection meant that the body of material moved from having little or no commercial value towards a situation in which it was able to acquire both cultural and pedagogical value.

Chapter Three, "Exciting Things That Are Also Useful," considers the circumstances that contributed to the fact that the remainder of the contents of the Silver Studio was given to Hornsey College of Art in 1967. This chapter places what was by then coming to be called the 'Silver Studio Collection' in the context of educational policy change in the late 1960s, in order to consider what it meant for Hornsey to accept this collection at such a pivotal moment in its history, just one year before the student uprising of 1968. The Hornsey student unrest was in part a pedagogical one, since it centred on a debate over the purpose of design education – industry or self-expression - and the Silver Studio was acquired by Hornsey at a key moment in this debate. In this chapter I use archive correspondence held at the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture and at the V&A to consider the motivations for the acceptance of the Silver Studio Collection by the various members of Hornsey staff who were involved in the decision-making process.

Chapter Four, "The Silver Studio Collection as Heritage," discusses the period since 1968, during which time the Silver Studio Collection moved from the miscellaneous contents of a relatively minor design studio and came to be seen as a major contributor to wider narratives of Britain's heritage. The various internal and external factors that contributed to this circumstance are discussed here. As will be seen, this chapter explores the second key research question, namely the issue of knowledge and meaning making, in the sense that the Collection was beginning to make a contribution to newly emerging areas of study such as Design History and to expanded definitions of national heritage. Yet while general perception of the Collection's heritage status gave it credibility with organizations and audiences outside of Middlesex University, the consequence of its alignment with heritage was arguably also to make it appear of marginal interest and value within the institution itself, diminishing the general perception of its relevance as a learning tool for

students. Here the question of the Collection's value was raised again: what was its value, and to whom? An increasing emphasis on the Collection's heritage value led to the agreement to build a new museum building on Middlesex University's campus at Cat Hill, which opened in 2000.

Chapter Five, "Nice Museum, no café attached," considers the museum building as architectural space and looks at the underlying assumptions that shaped it. This chapter argues that too little thought was given to the very particular requirements and expectations placed on a public museum, and to the very specific challenges associated with displaying examples of mass-produced designed items in a public exhibition context. By this point, I will argue, the Collection had acquired heritage value, evidenced through the Heritage Lottery Fund's agreement to fund the building. But a lack of clarity over the pedagogical potential of the Silver Studio Collection meant that too little thought was given to how objects would actually be displayed. This chapter explores the way in which the architectural layout of the museum building worked against the notion of a museum collection as active and engaging. Instead, it placed constraints on the ways in which people and objects could interact within the space, thereby raising the fourth research question, that of the social role of the museum.

In Chapter Six, "Looking Back and Looking Forward" I outline the ways in which the Silver Studio Collection has been used more recently to support learning and research. I suggest that, though it has taken a long time, circumstances are now such that the Collection can fulfil the educational potential that was hoped for it when it was first given to Hornsey College of Art, albeit in ways that were not imagined at the time. The overlapping themes of value, knowledge, pedagogy and the social responsibility of the museum are brought together more fully in Chapter Seven

The main chapters of this thesis offer an historian's perspective, a critical and analytical perspective on the Silver Studio Collection and its wider context over a fifty-year period. Interspersed between these main chapters are a series of

'intercalary' chapters in which I go behind the scenes into the museum store for a closer look at particular objects. These chapters are a reminder of the physical *stuff* that makes up the Silver Studio Collection, threaded through between the main chapters. They provide a break from the otherwise chronological nature of the narrative and offer an opportunity to reflect on some of the curatorial challenges of looking after the Collection and making it available to users. They are a way of reflecting on, and making visible, some of the tacit knowledge that I have accumulated through working with the Collection. They also provide the opportunity to reflect on other themes such as the agency of objects and the differing temporal dimensions of museum and university. These intercalary chapters demonstrate an auto-ethnographic approach in contrast to the historical approach of the main chapters, and are a reminder that I cannot pretend to possess an objective or disembodied voice: I have spent a long time working with the Silver Studio Collection in a professional capacity and cannot separate my own experience from my understanding of it.[51] Therefore, it seems to me that to hide behind impersonal pronouns would be both pointless and convoluted, and I have attempted to avoid this linguistic device here. My aim within these intercalary chapters is to allow my personal perspective to be evident within the text rather than attempt to efface myself from it.[52]

Before beginning to write this thesis I already knew about the Silver Studio Collection, but it seemed necessary to synthesise the experience I had gained through working with the Collection and to make this knowledge more explicit. My knowledge and understanding of the Collection have formed gradually and incrementally over the years, through looking at it, reading around it and talking to others about it. Yet this thesis must inevitably be presented in a linear narrative, erasing much of the iterative processes of knowing, un-knowing and re-knowing that have taken place.[53] In writing, we shape both the future and the past, and I am

[51] Ellis, Adams, and Bochner, "Autoethnography: An Overview."
[52] This approach was also inspired by Helen Sword, *Stylish Academic Writing* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012).
[53] Teather, "Reflecting on Reflective Practice."

aware that my narrative reaches forwards as well as reflecting backwards. In looking at the history of the Silver Studio Collection since it became part of an educational institution in the late 1960s, I aim to open up a wider discussion about the history of design collections within the discipline of design history, within the context of art and design education, and within Museum Studies. If the Silver Studio Collection exists at the intersection between museology, design history, and histories of art and design education this thesis aims to make a contribution to all of these areas by offering a unique perspective on a unique collection of objects.

**Spotlight: Tour of the museum store

We begin with a tour of the museum store. I want to go 'behind the scenes' to consider the physical nature of the Silver Studio Collection and the conditions in which it is currently stored. I intend to outline the scale and shape of the Collection as a body of material which must be looked after in accordance with museum standards.[1] This gives me the opportunity to discuss the question of the differences between museum, library and archive classification, and to consider where the Silver Studio Collection fits within this and why. I also want to draw attention to the fact that the physical condition and of the Collection as a whole has, paradoxically, improved immeasurably in the fifty years since it was given to Hornsey College of Art in 1968, meaning that it is now much more accessible to students and researchers than it was before.

Here I draw on the work of Geoghegan and Hess to inform my discussion of the store as a space which has been designed specifically to house these objects.[2] Geoghegan and Hess argue that museum storerooms are rich sites for consideration of the emotional and affective aspects of museum practice, and their approach is therefore useful in the context of my own ongoing and personal relationship with the objects and collections for which my colleagues and I are responsible. It is possible to think of the collections store at the Museum of Domestic Design and

[1] Museum collections in the UK must be managed in accordance with Spectrum standards: Collections Trust, "Introduction to Spectrum 5.0," 2017, https://collectionstrust.org.uk/spectrum/spectrum-5/ [Accessed 08-11-2019].
[2] H. Geoghegan and A Hess, "Object-Love at the Science Museum: Cultural Geographies of Museum Storerooms," *Cultural Geographies* 22, no. 3 (2015): 445–65.

Architecture as both a physical space containing objects, as a working space, and as a site of personal memory and meaning making. This raises questions around what it means to 'know' a collection and requires me to reflect on the ways in which my knowledge of the Collection has changed during the course of my research.

To think about the museum store in this way also raise questions about the extent to which museum objects can be thought of as having agency in their own right. On the one hand, the Silver Studio Collection arguably does not exist outside of a network of human relations and human interactions. Instead it is constituted by and through the work of many people, both present and past (museum staff, students, researchers, volunteers, conservators, Middlesex University colleagues, and countless others). Each of these people has shaped the Collection in some way, either by carrying out conservation work, or by adding to our knowledge through research and cataloguing, or by responding to objects or groups of objects through creative practice. At the same time, it's possible to argue that the objects themselves are also actors within these relationships. Following Latour, we can see the museum's objects as not simply passively 'acted upon', but as active participants in dialogue. As we will see later, they resist the usual categories of museum, library and archive classification, make demands with regards to their physical care and storage, and suggest avenues for further exploration.[3]

[3] Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Figure 7 View of the collections store at the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture, around 2014

The Silver Studio Collection takes up a good proportion of the space in the store at the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture [Figure 7]. [4] The museum has around 40,000 Silver Studio designs on paper, dating from the 1880s to the 1960s. They are mainly stored in archive-quality acid free boxes, though a small proportion are still in poorer quality cardboard boxes. It is difficult to be entirely accurate about the exact number of designs, because some are still uncatalogued; those that are catalogued and properly boxed take up a whole bay of shelving. These are ordered by date (roughly by decade) and by size. Designs of a similar size are stored together in each box for efficient use of space, so it is possible to browse through boxes to get an overview of the Silver Studio's design output over a couple of decades, or to locate any specific design via a search on the computer catalogue.

MoDA staff think of the Silver Studio designs as 'museum objects' but this is not an unproblematic category, since unlike works of art these were not unique or final pieces. Instead they were a step in the process towards the production of mass-produced wallpapers and textiles and, in a sense, they have more in common with technical drawings or blueprints. Though not an

[4] The remaining space is occupied by the museum's other collections: the Charles Hasler Collection, the JM Richards library, the Crown Wallpaper collection and the Domestic Design Collection.

industrial product themselves, the designs in the Silver Studio Collection represent part of an industrialised process: to be a successful designer required both a developed aesthetic sense and a keen understanding of mechanized production processes.[5] These designs and preliminary sketches were not originally thought of as an end point but were a means to a further end: once the Silver Studio sold a design the piece of paper itself would become the property of the client, and the Studio had no further control of it. (Interestingly, that means that the designs that remain in the Collection today are either those that did not sell or are preliminary sketches or alternative versions of those that did). The designers who worked for the Studio could not have imagined that anyone would be interested in looking at their designs a hundred years or so after they drew them. They were not therefore concerned to choose materials that would withstand repeated handling and use over many years.

Here it is useful to briefly consider why the Silver Studio Collection came to be regarded as a museum collection and not an 'archive'. The reasons for this are partly a matter of historical accident, and partly the result of a particular way of thinking about the material evidence of the past. Here I am drawing attention to the fact that museum curators, archivists and librarians classify their collections in different ways and that these mental structures subsequently influence the ways in which collections are understood.[6] As Helena Robinson notes, for example, draws

[5] David Brett, "Drawing and the Ideology of Industrialization," *Design Issues* 3, no. 2 (1986): 59–72. Protheroe, "Bloom and Blotch: Floral Print and Modernity in the Textile Designs of Winifred Mold and Minnie McLeish 1910-1930 (Unpublished PhD Thesis)."

[6] Helena Robinson, "Knowledge Utopias: An Epistemological Perspective on the Convergence of Museums, Libraries and Archives," *Museum & Society* 12, no. 3 (2014): 210–24.

attention to the different strategies used by museums, libraries and archives for the creation, storage and retrieval of knowledge and information about the materials in their care. As will be discussed later, in Chapter Two, the question of how to classify the large amount of material that filled the Silver Studio's premises in Haarlem Road Hammersmith when it closed was already an urgent one by 1967-68. In many instances, large collections of paper-based material are thought of as the 'archival' material that is secondary to an artist's 'real work'.[7] However, in the case of the Silver Studio, it was less easy to make this distinction for two reasons. Firstly, because the designs on paper *were* the Silver Studio's work; and because these designs on paper, and the wallpaper and textile samples that accompanied them, greatly outnumbered the small amount of documentary material such as letters, diaries and other written records that were also part of the Studio's contents. In addition, as will be discussed in Chapter One, a precedent had already been set for thinking of the Studio's contents as individual museum objects by the acceptance of a small sub-set of them into the V&A's Circulation Department.

Secondly, as will be discussed later in Chapter Four, Mark Turner was appointed to the position of Keeper of the Silver Studio Collection in 1976, having previously been Senior Keeper of Art at Bolton Art Gallery.[8] Though it seems he did not have a professional museum-sector qualification Turner would no doubt have been guided by colleagues at the V&A in his decision to take a museum approach to documentation. As will be discussed in Chapter Two, the Silver Studio Collection came to be part of Hornsey College of

[7] Judy Vaknin, Karen Stuckey, and Victoria Lane, *All This Stuff: Archiving the Artist* (London: Libri Publishing, 2013).
[8] Robert Hornung, "Correspondence, 16th December" (Silver Studio Collection, Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture, 1976).

Art in 1968 partly through the intervention of curatorial staff from the V&A: their continuing involvement in the Collection (for example as members of the Steering Committee) in the subsequent decades no doubt influenced the decision to take a museum, rather than an archival approach to documentation. This meant giving each object an individual number and identity, rather than thinking of the collection (as an archivist may have), in terms of groups of items or series.

Figure 8 Textile or wallpaper design in charcoal and pencil, by Herbert Crofts for the Silver Studio, 1935 (SD12673)

In addition to the original designs on paper, the Silver Studio Collection includes many hundreds of examples of wallpapers. Some of these are loose sheets, while some are bound together in albums, making the question "how many wallpapers are in the Collection?" a difficult one to answer accurately. Some of the wallpapers were designed by employees of the Silver Studio but others were acquired as design reference in order for the Studio's designers to maintain awareness of current trends. As a result, the Silver Studio Collection contains a significant number of cheap, mass-market wallpapers that have rarely survived elsewhere, and this is one of the things that makes the Collection unique. The

other significant collections of wallpaper in the UK (notably the V&A and the Whitworth Art Gallery in Manchester) were acquired with an eye to improving public taste or celebrating the good taste of donors, whereas those within the Silver Studio Collection are arguably more reflective of the tastes of generations of so-called 'ordinary' or mass-market consumers.[9] [Figure 9]

Figure 9 Wallpaper designed by the Silver Studio and produced by John Line, around 1928 (SW375)

Like the designs, the wallpapers in the Silver Studio Collection were never intended to last. They were regarded as a cheap and ultimately disposable commodity. Many of MoDA's wallpapers are made from inexpensive wood pulp paper, which is inherently acidic. This kind of paper is more prone to deterioration than more expensive wallpapers that were printed on better quality paper made from rags. Again, this is part of the reason for the importance of the Collection since despite (or perhaps because of) the ubiquity

[9] Christine Woods, "'An Object Lesson to a Philistine Age': The Wall Paper Manufacturers' Museum and the Formation of the National Collections," *Journal of Design History* 12, no. 2 (1999): 159–71. Mark Turner, *A Popular Art: British Wallpapers, 1930 - 1960* (London: Middlesex Polytechnic, 1989).

of wallpaper in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it has rarely survived in great quantities elsewhere, either in museums or in historic houses. However, the physical fragility of the cheaper wallpapers presents an unusual challenge from the perspective of the physical care and conservation of the Collection.

Some of the Silver Studio textiles are housed in boxes, but the larger ones are rolled, with little photographic labels attached so you can see what each one is without having to unroll it [Figure 10]. As with the wallpapers, a proportion of the textiles in the Collection were designed by the Silver Studio, but others were acquired from a variety of sources; perhaps sent by clients as exemplars or accumulated by the Studio's designers themselves. The distinction between these two things is not very clear in the museum's documentation, because the detailed archival detective work that would be required to pin this down exactly has never been considered a priority, but if suitable funding were to be available this could be the basis of a future research project.

Figure 10 rolled textiles with photographic labels, around 2004

Despite not being thought of as an 'archive' in a general sense, the Silver Studio Collection does contain a small amount of archival material such as letters, diaries and other business documentation. From the point of view of potential researchers, it is a little frustrating that there are very few letters or other documents from Arthur Silver's time. Perhaps Arthur Silver was not a prolific writer of letters, or perhaps any correspondence (especially anything of a more personal nature) was removed by the Silver family or thrown away at some point before the Collection was given to Hornsey. At this stage it is impossible to tell, but this means we have a less clear view of Arthur Silver as an individual personality, and of his personal and business connections, than is the case for collections relating to other designers elsewhere.[10] This is also consistent with the idea that while Silver Studio designers are not anonymous, we know relatively little about their private lives because they did not leave the kind of 'ego documents' (such as letters and diaries) which, as Alison Light notes, would allow us to piece together a more rounded view of them as individuals.[11]

The Collection does however contain a larger number of letters from the early twentieth century, the period during which Arthur's son Rex ran the business.[12] Rex communicated with the Studio's clients by letter, discussing their requirements, receiving criticism, and confirming orders. There is also a good deal of

[10] In contrast, for example, William Morris was a relatively prolific writer and receiver of letters and the William Morris Gallery in Walthamstow contains a large collection of correspondence of both a personal and professional nature. This gives an insight into Morris as a designer and as a businessman that is not available to us in the case of Arthur Silver.

[11] Light, *Common People: The History of an English Family*, xxii.

[12] Arthur Silver died in 1896, and the Silver Studio was managed by John Illingworth Kay and Harry Napper, two employees of the Studio, until Rex achieved his majority in 1900. Rex continued as head of the Studio until it closed in 1963.

correspondence between Rex Silver and his female employees. Women were only employed at the Silver Studio from the early twentieth century. Before that, in 1899, the Silver Studio placed an advertisement in the Daily Telegraph stating:

> COMPETENT DESIGNER WANTED. For high class printed and woven fabrics. Ladies need not apply. Bring specimens of work to 3. Haarlem-Rd, West Kensington.[13]

By the early twentieth century, this blatant discrimination against female workers was no longer permissible, and the Studio employed a small number of women designers. This has proved useful to historians such as Keren Protheroe, because female designers were required to work from home rather than in the Studio itself with the male employees.[14] Consequently, they submitted their work to Rex Silver by post and the Collection contains detailed letters in which Rex outlined his clients' design requirements and provided instructions and commentary on the women's work. These provide a fascinating insight into this aspect of the design process, a valuable resource since this information went unrecorded for the male designers who received instructions in person from Rex at the Studio in the course of their working day.

Rex Silver seems to have regarded himself as Designer-Manager rather than hands-on designer; his job was to act as intermediary between the requirements of his customers and the design outputs of his employees. As I have written elsewhere, this

[13] Advert placed by the Silver Studio in the Daily Telegraph, 10th October 1899
[14] Keren Protheroe, *Petal Power: Floral Fashion and Women Designers at the Silver Studio, 1910-1940* (London: Museum of Domestic Design & Architecture, Middlesex University, 2011). Protheroe, "Bloom and Blotch: Floral Print and Modernity in the Textile Designs of Winifred Mold and Minnie McLeish 1910-1930 (Unpublished PhD Thesis)."

process was laborious, and required a great deal of detailed administrative work to ensure that clients were billed correctly for the designs they had bought, and that employees were paid for the work they had done.[15] A series of diaries, for example, contain notes of the clients who visited the Studio in the course of the 1920s and early 30s and records which designs they saw. We can cross-reference these to the Studio's photograph albums and daybooks, in which records were kept of each design sold, to whom and for how much [Figure 11].

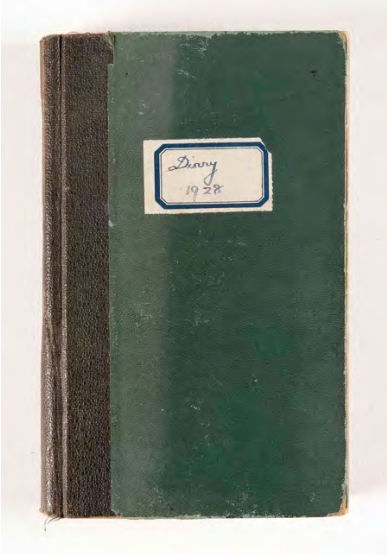

Figure 11 Silver Studio diary, 1928

So far, I've mainly focused on the Silver Studio Collection in terms of its outputs, the things that it produced. But the Studio's employees also accumulated a considerable amount of reference material, and this raises a further question about the distinctions traditionally made between museum objects and library items. When is an object an object in its own right, and when is it merely playing a supporting role? Of the library of books that now form part of the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture's

[15] Hendon, "Behind the Scenes at the Silver Studio : Rex Silver and the Hidden Mechanisms of Interwar Textile Design."

'Domestic Design Collection' a large proportion originally belonged to the Silver Studio. However, as we shall see later in Chapter Two, when they were given to Hornsey College of Art they were not thought of as part of the Silver Studio Collection proper, but simply as a useful additional resource. As a result, the books were not catalogued as part of the Silver Studio Collection but were instead grouped into what became known as the 'Domestic Design Collection', to which other volumes were added over the years in accordance with the curators' interests. Recent work by MoDA colleagues has made it possible to disentangle the origins of the books in the Domestic Design Collection in order to be clear about which ones belonged to the Silver Studio and thus would have been available to Silver Studio designers.[16] As museum professionals we think of books within a library collection as individual objects, since each one has a history in its own right (such as evidence of ownership by a particular person in the form of inscriptions or marginalia, for example). Thinking of books as museum objects means we would not withdraw or replace them, which might be the approach of a librarian, for whom one edition of a book can be replaced by another.

The distinction between museum objects and library items becomes even more interesting when we think about the Silver Studio Collection's portfolios. These are around a hundred bound volumes, including a number of early albums of photographic representations of flowers and plants, and images of objects from various museum collections. These represented a useful library of ideas and styles to which the Studio's designers could refer in the course of their work, and continue to be a resource for today's

[16] Sian Woodward, Emma Shaw, and Zoë Hendon, "MoDA Collections Development Policy" (Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture, Middlesex University, 2019).

students and researchers. These portfolios look rather like books, in the sense that they have pages and bindings, but they were omitted from the process of library cataloguing the other books in the late 1990s, perhaps because of their non-standard bibliographic status. As a consequence, we have only relatively recently begun to research and catalogue these items [Figure 12]. [17] These volumes demonstrate that the Studio absorbed influences from a wide range of sources, and draw attention again to the idea that museum collections include things which are in one sense 'copies' of the originals, but which also have a significant status in their own right.[18]

Figure 12 Image of a page from Kazumasa Ogawa's *Lilies of Japan,* 1893, part of the Silver Studio reference collection

[17] Hendon, "The Silver Studio Art Reference Collection."

[18] The albums of collotypes by Kasumasa Ogawa within the Silver Studio Collection are particularly interesting in this regard because collotypes are not strictly speaking photographs but are mechanically produced prints. As such they occupy an ambiguous status within photographic history, and have been variously catalogued by different institutions as museum objects or library items. See: 'Lilies of Japan' book by K Ogawa, 1893. SR188. Museum of Domestic Design & Architecture, Middlesex University. Accessed May 30, 2020. https://moda.mdx.ac.uk/object/sr188/. See also Malcolm Baker, "'The Reproductive Continuum: Plaster Casts, Paper Mosaics and Photographs as Complementary Modes of Reproduction in the Nineteenth Century Museum,'" in *Plaster Casts: Making, Collecting and Displaying from Classical Antiquity to the Present*, ed. R Frederiksen and E Marchand (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 2010), 485–500.

It is worth briefly mentioning another category of things that were originally acquired by the Silver Studio as visual reference, and which were initially regarded as rather peripheral within the Collection but which are now proving to be very interesting in their own right.[19] These are the Japanese stencils, or *katagami*. There are about four hundred of these which we believe Arthur Silver acquired in the early 1890s [Figure 13].[20] As we will discuss later, recent research has revealed more about the use of these stencils in Japan, their use by designers in the West in general and by the Silver Studio in particular, and their status as objects which bridge the gap between east and west. This reinforces my point about the fact that though the contents of the Silver Studio Collection may have remained the same for over fifty years, new research continues to open up new ways of understanding it, so that it represents a continuously evolving body of knowledge, not a static one.

[19] The katagami in the Silver Studio Collection were mentioned in an exhibition at the Barbican in 1991 (See Tomoko Sato and Toshio Watanabe, *Japan and Britain: An Aesthetic Dialogue 1850-1930* (London: Barbican Art Gallery, Lund Humphries, 1991)., but received little further attention until we were able to secure Arts Council funding for a project that ran between 2016 and 2018. See https://moda.mdx.ac.uk/2016/10/05/katagami-in-practice-japanese-stencils-in-the-art-school/

[20] We can be certain that Arthur Silver owned these katagami by 1896 because he used them as part of an illustrated lecture on stencilling at the Architectural Association in that year. The full text of his talk, plus notes of the ensuing discussion, were published in *The Builder* Feb, no. June (1896): 152–55., and *The Building News*, 1896, 305–8

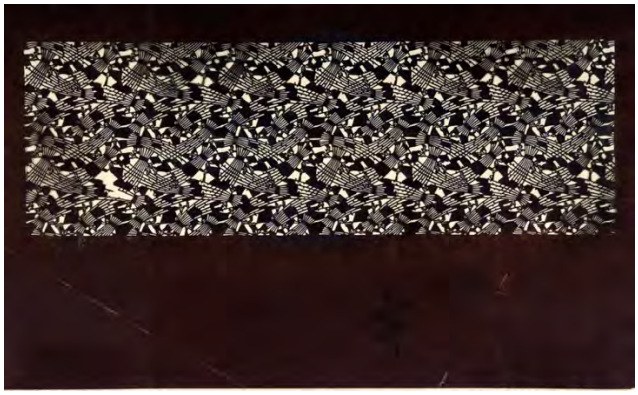

Figure 13 Katagami Stencil from the Silver Studio Collection, 1840-1867 (K1.1)

This brief tour of the store has provided a general overview of the physical size and arrangement of the Silver Studio Collection and has introduced some key themes which will be addressed in later chapters. The store may appear to be a cool, calm, ordered space, in which the museum's objects are lying dormant. But I like to think that the objects within this room are working hard, even though their efforts may not be visible now. The almost clinical appearance of this space belies the fact that conversations are taking place between people and these objects. Objects exist within a web of connections: to other objects in this Collection and elsewhere in the world, and to the research and knowledge that have been built around them over the years. Seen in this light, we can see the museum store as not so much a deep freeze of forgotten objects, but an engine room of active learning. These are themes which relate to the whole reason and purpose of the Silver Studio Collection, and to which I will return in later chapters.

Chapter One : An Inheritance of Art Nouveau: the Silver Studio and the V&A's Circulation Department, 1966-67

The claims made by museum staff for the quality and significance of the Silver Studio Collection have frequently rested partly on an assertion of its completeness; that is, that it includes the entire contents of the Studio when it closed in the 1960s.[1] It has often been claimed that the comprehensiveness of the Collection (representing "the entire contents of a working design studio"), is central to its importance.[2] But while this is broadly correct, what has often been overlooked within histories of the Silver Studio Collection is the fact that the V&A's Circulation Department acquired a significant number of items from the Studio in 1967 and 1968. Consideration of this acquisition makes it possible to add a layer of complexity to the story of the Silver Studio Collection and to simultaneously shine an interesting light on the narrative of the V&A.

In this chapter I look at the period after the closure of the Silver Studio when its contents began to be dispersed, a period in which around two hundred samples of wallpapers and textiles were accepted by the V&A's Circulation department. I consider the motives behind this acquisition and look at what was accepted, and what – by implication – was rejected. I argue that the V&A's selection was based on the perceived value of certain kinds of objects, and in particular their relevance to the revival of interest in both the Victorian period and Art Nouveau. I consider how their selection has exerted a lasting influence on textile histories - and design history more broadly - by shaping the evidence on which subsequent generations of historians have been able to draw. I will also suggest that the V&A's interest in this relatively small proportion of the contents of the Silver Studio shaped its subsequent

[1] This was for example the claim we made for the Silver Studio Collection in our application to the Designation Scheme in 2008. See "Designation Scheme."
[2] Hoskins and Hendon, "Silver Studio Designated Collection."

history, and the way in which historians have viewed the rest of what is now the Silver Studio Collection. As this chapter demonstrates, the staff of the V&A's Circulation department were faced by a problem that was particular to museums of design, namely how to accommodate objects of serial mass production within a tradition of museum collecting that privileged the original, authentic and rare outputs of named individuals.

The focus of this chapter is on the V&A's decision to accept some items from the Silver Studio into its collections. Unlike the personal and emotional resonances of collections that are acquired as souvenirs, the systematically collected object frequently has the weight of institutional objectivity behind it. As Susan Pearce notes: "…systematic collecting, both inside and outside museums, has in all its different manifestations in the various disciplines been accorded an intellectual primacy, which seems to derive from its apparent capacity to demonstrate understanding rather than feeling, and so to extend our control of the world."[3] As this chapter will discuss, the Circulation Department's decision to accept certain objects and not others was made on grounds of criteria such as the quality of the objects and their provenance. But as Pearce argues: "Specimens are selected for collections on the strength of their supposed 'typicality' or their 'departure from the norm' so that they may act as referents, a process which is clearly circular and self-supporting."[4] The Circulation Department's collecting criteria, according to Weddell, was about design for manufacture rather than simply good design: "These contemporary touring collection displays [organised by the Circulation Department] may be seen to act as a distanced but authoritative locus for a meeting between commercial industry and decorative design, allowing them to avoid categorisation as a straightforward agent of commodification or aestheticisation."[5] Yet decisions

[3] Susan Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections: A Cultural Study* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992), 84.
[4] Pearce, 85.
[5] Joanna Weddell, "The Ethos of the V&A Circulation Department 1947-1960," in *Design Objects and the Museum*, ed. Liz Farrelly and Joanna Weddell (Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 19.

about what to accept into the V&A ultimately helped to define and perpetuate what was understood by the term 'good taste'.

This chapter considers the unspoken assumption that the V&A selected the best and left the rest of the contents of the Silver Studio and asks, if this was indeed the V&A curators' motivation, what they understood 'the best' to be? In choosing to accept objects into museum collections, curators are informed by their existing understanding of what is significant and worthy of retention. At the same time their choices help to confirm this significance for future generations through the delineation of a particular view of the world as embodied in that collection. In the first section of this chapter I outline the background to the Circulation Department of the V&A, and the context of the post-war Victorian Revival. I move on to consideration of precisely which kinds of items were chosen by the staff of the Circulation Department from the Silver Studio, with some suggestions as to the influences that are likely to have informed these choices. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how their selection contributed to the 1960s Art Nouveau Revival, and how the choices betrayed a particular approach to design history, reflected through the lens of 'good design' as espoused by bodies such as the Council of Industrial Design.

1.1 The V&A's Circulation Department

The V&A's Circulation Department is increasingly recognized by scholars as having played an important part in shaping the Museum's collections of nineteenth and twentieth century decorative arts.[6] In particular Joanna Weddell has articulated the ways in which the department's ethos shaped its exhibitions and acquisitions in the post-war period. In the immediate post-war period Circulation was the V&A's largest department, under the leadership of its Keeper, Peter Floud. The department had been established as far back as 1848, arguably pre-dating the establishment of

[6] Joanna Weddell, "Room 38A and beyond: Post-War British Design and the Circulation Department," *V&A Online Journal* Issue No., no. ISSN 2043-667X (2012).

the South Kensington Museum itself. Affectionately known as 'Circ', the department arranged touring exhibitions to art schools, libraries and museums around the country, and as such had an intimate relationship with both art and design education and with industry. As Weddell notes, the department struggled with: "tensions between Art and Industry, with 'industrial design' a particularly contested term".[7] The department's acquisition of selected items from the Silver Studio offers the opportunity to look in more detail at how these tensions were worked out in practice.

In the twentieth century, the Victoria and Albert Museum's main curatorial departments were organized according to materials (including Metalwork, Textiles, and Prints & Drawings), and tended to focus on the application of art-historical techniques to the study of decorative art objects. According to Michael Conforti, by the early 1900s, the curatorial departments had lost sight of what Henry Cole had seen as the Museum's original educational mission, namely the education of artisans and working people. Instead they had developed an approach that combined what Conforti calls: "contemporary taxonomic concerns with the English national tradition of erudite antiquarian expertise [which]… fostered a system of connoisseurship based on materials, technique, and the empirical understanding of an object's history…"[8] The classification and study of objects for their own sake, had, it appeared, become more important to some curators than any kind of communication with audiences or visitors.

In direct contrast, the Circulation Department had developed a cross-disciplinary approach, building a diverse collection of objects intended for educational touring exhibitions. Consequently, the interests of staff were not limited to one kind of physical material but were focussed instead on the collection and

[7] Joanna Weddell, "The Ethos of the V&A Circulation Department 1947-1960," in *Design Objects and the Museum*, ed. Liz Farrelly and Joanna Weddell (Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 16

[8] Michael Conforti, "'The Idealist Enterprise and the Applied Arts,'" in *A Grand Design: A History of the Victoria & Albert Museum*, ed. Malcolm Baker and Brenda Richardson (London: V&A Publications, 1997), 12.

display of any object that would be of interest to its audiences, namely art school students and visitors to regional museums. The Department's unusual approach can be attributed, at least in part, to the kind of people employed within it. As Linda Sandino has noted, the staff of Circulation were unlike colleagues elsewhere in the museum in that they were predominantly art-school (rather than Oxbridge) educated. That Barbara Morris, Shirley Bury, and many other staff of Circulation were also members of the Communist Party arguably contributed to their motivation to provide the opportunity for education in the principles of 'good design' to a wide audience, not just a narrow elite.[9] Sandino argues that the Communist staff of Circulation were able to reconcile their Marxist convictions with the Museum's remit to improve British production and trade because although the Museum's broad purpose was: "to increase Britain's manufacturing power in the imperial and international markets of the day", and could therefore be understood in a sense a part of the wider capitalist enterprise, it was also possible to see the Museum as "an engine for the dissemination of learning, the repository of public collection, and as a site for the acquisition of cultural capital in art and design 'for all.'"[10]

The idea that the tastes, and – by extension, the morals – of working people could be improved by exposure to well-designed objects was not unique to Circulation. It was in the tradition of organizations such as the Design and Industries Association and the Council for Industrial Design and was the guiding principle behind other museums and collections in the immediate post-war period. For example, Molly Harrison, curator at the Geffrye Museum and herself a stalwart of the Design and Industries Association and the Council of Industrial Design, can also be seen to have worked on the assumption of the improving possibilities of well-designed objects for the audiences who were exposed to them. Harrison developed a 'modern room' that she hoped would show visitors to the Geffrye Museum how

[9] Linda Sandino, "Art School Trained Staff and Communists in the V&A Circulation Department, c1947-58," in *Artists Work In Museums: Histories, Interventions, Subjectivities*, ed. Matilda Pye and Linda Sandino (Bath: Wunderkammer, 2014), 6
[10] Linda Sandino, "Art School Trained Staff and Communists in the V&A Circulation Department, C1947-58," in *Artists Work In Museums: Histories, Interventions, Subjectivities*, ed. Matilda Pye and Linda Sandino (Bath: Wunderkammer, 2014), 6.

life might be in the future, in contrast to the historic rooms which presented a view of the past. Harrison regularly updated the modern room at the Geffrye Museum, using items borrowed from upmarket furniture firms such as Heals and Troughton & Young. As Julia Porter and Sally Macdonald argue: "The Geffrye's early post-war modern rooms have a 'Britain Can Make it' optimism; for a bright future furnished to universally accepted canons of good taste."[11]

A similar motivation lay behind the development of the Camberwell Collection of Applied Arts in the 1950s and 60s. As Maria Georgaki has noted, this collection originated as part of an Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) scheme that toured exhibitions of objects to schools. Its aim was to improve the design education of inner city children and to raise their awareness of beautiful things in the hope of making them better consumers.[12] Both the Geffrye Museum and the ILEA sought to raise the aspirations of Londoners by exposing them to examples of 'good design', and in both cases, the educational messages were inseparable from a consumerist message about the 'right' kinds of goods to purchase.

What these other collections had in common with the Circulation department then was the shared belief in the power of certain kinds of museum objects to effect positive social change. The Circulation Department's loan exhibitions to schools, Art Colleges and regional museums were underpinned by the belief that the study of well-designed objects helped to inform a better future by educating young people to become both the designers and the consumers of tomorrow. Indeed in the post-war period the greater demand for loan exhibitions was part of the motivation for the Circulation department's move into active

[11] Julia Porter and Sally Macdonald, "Fabricating Interiors: Approaches to the History of Domestic Furnishing at the Geffrye Museum," *Journal of Design History* 3, no. 2 (1990): 178.

[12] Maria Georgaki, "Pedagogies of 'Good Design' and Handling in Relation to the ILEA/Camberwell Collection (Unpublished PhD Thesis)" (University of the Arts London, 2016). See also Jane Pavitt, 'The Camberwell Collection of Applied Arts', *Journal of Design History*, 10.2 (1997), 225–29

collecting, rather than borrowing objects from other departments like a kind of "museum jackdaw."[13] In this sense, museums displaying examples of designed objects could be seen as distinct from other kinds of museums in that they were based on an underlying assumption of the power of objects to project the visitor forward into a new kind of future, rather than present a picture of the past.[14] Whether positioned as potential future designers or potential future consumers, visitors to design museums were invited to see certain kinds of objects (carefully chosen to specific criteria) as beacons lighting the way to an improved version of a shared future.

In the nineteenth century Circulation had been the only V&A department to engage in 'contemporary collecting': according to Anthony Burton the main curatorial departments tended not to be interested in acquiring anything dated after 1830, or at the very least observed a 'fifty year rule' before accepting objects into the permanent collection.[15] By the mid twentieth century the remits of other departments had expanded to include the acquisition of more recent objects, and the staff of Circulation continued to enthusiastically acquire contemporary objects that they thought would be of interest to audiences.[16] The focus here however is on the Department's approach to the acquisition of items from the late Victorian period, and the Silver Studio provides an interesting case study because of its status as a commercial design firm which had been established in 1880 and which closed shortly before the period under discussion.

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[13] Anthony Burton, *Vision & Accident: The Story of the Victoria and Albert Museum* (London: V&A Publication, 1999), 207.

[14] This approach was also consistent with a more general post-war sense of optimism and reconstruction. See for example, Peter Hennessy, *Having It So Good: Britain in the Fifties* (London: Penguin, 2007).

[15] Anthony Burton, "The Revival of Interest in Victorian Decorative Art and the Victoria and Albert Museum," in *The Victorians since 1901*, ed. Miles Taylor and Michael Wolff (Manchester University Press, 2004), 121–37.

[16] See Nicola Stella Stylianou, "Producing and Collecting for Empire: African Textiles in the V&A 1852- 2000 (Unpublished PhD Thesis)" (University of the Arts London, 2012).

According to Joanna Weddell, the ethos of the Circulation Department was based on three elements: "on scholarship, for unique, securely provenanced, aesthetic objects; on materials and processes, supporting students, industry, export and commerce; and on contemporary design, shaping the 'good taste' of the ideal citizen as an arm of progressive government."[17] In other words, the Department saw itself as shaping and influencing society, rather than simply reflecting or documenting it. Interviewed in 2009, Barbara Morris was keen to emphasize that the staff of 'Circ' had seen their work as a continuation of the founding principles of the Museum, with the priority being to serve the public:

> I mean, that's what museums were for: to inform, educate, and generally improve public taste, I mean, going back to what the Museum was founded for in the first instance…although obviously doing research and scholarship was extremely important, the other side was also of equal importance.[18]

In this respect, Morris and her colleagues in the Circulation department saw themselves as working in the true spirit of the V&A's founder, Henry Cole, who had envisaged the museum as an educational tool for artisans and manufacturers: a public resource rather than a private, princely or scholarly repository of precious objects.

The South Kensington Museum was arguably very different to institutions such as the British Museum or the National Gallery, in that it had an explicitly reforming and educational agenda from the beginning. Bruce Robertson has identified the relatively radical populist agenda of the South Kensington Museum, which:

> …unlike the British Museum (which was deeply distrustful of the public good for most of the nineteenth century) and the National Gallery (founded on the principle that high art magically transforms its audience into better people),

[17] Weddell, "The Ethos of the V&A Circulation Department 1947-1960," 17.
[18] Linda Sandino, "News from the Past: Oral History at the V&A," *V&A Online Journal* Autumn, no. 2 (2009): track 07-08:58.

was committed to the notion of *purposeful* educational activities directed consciously to its audiences.[19] [my emphasis]

The Circulation department saw itself as the direct inheritors of this reforming legacy, and their approach to collecting was informed by their understanding of what their audiences would find interesting and useful.

1.2 Victorian Revival

The Circulation department was pioneering in its interest in the Victorian period, beginning with its seminal exhibition *Victorian and Edwardian Decorative Arts.* This was first shown in 1952 at the V&A and subsequently toured elsewhere in various forms. As Burton notes, the 1930s had seen the beginnings of interest in 'Victoriana' among certain circles, mainly an educated Oxbridge elite.[20] But in the interwar years an interest in the Victorian period was frequently positioned as slightly arch and ironic, and with objects frequently described as 'bric-a-brac'. An exhibition of the Victorian period staged in 1931 had featured what Burton calls: "such amusing trivia as a firescreen, a hexagonal concertina case, an ivory workbox, a shell box, a Baxter print of Windsor Castle, sand pictures, silhouettes, playbills and memorabilia from the Great Exhibition".[21] The 1952 exhibition of *Victorian and Edwardian Decorative Arts*, curated by the Circulation department, sought to change the perception that Victorian objects were simply amusing or tawdry, and to elevate the decorative arts of that period to a status that had hitherto been denied them [Figure 14].

[19] Bruce Robertson, "The South Kensington Museum in Context: An Alternative History," *Museum & Society* 2, no. 1 (2004): 4.
[20] Burton, "The Revival of Interest in Victorian Decorative Art and the Victoria and Albert Museum," 126
[21] Burton, *Vision & Accident: The Story of the Victoria and Albert Museum*, 205

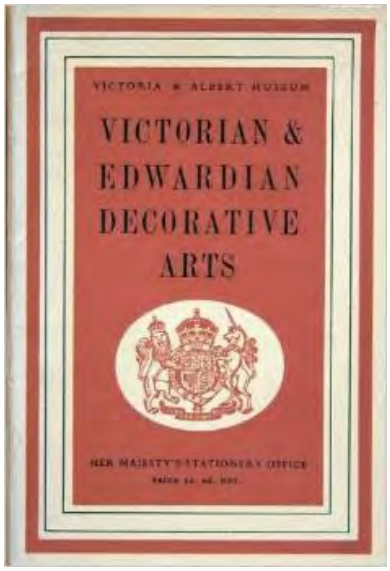

Figure 14 Catalogue for Exhibition of Victorian and Edwardian Decorative Arts, V&A Museum, 1952

The exhibition of *Victorian and Edwardian Decorative Arts* was perhaps one of the first to tackle the thorny problem of how to deal with objects produced in the age of mass production. The curators did this by the application of the same scholarly standards of provenance and of quality as were applied by the main curatorial departments to objects of earlier periods. Their aim was to sidestep what they called: "those quaint and bizarre examples which seem by exaggeration to epitomise what we think of as 'Victorianism,'" and to concentrate instead on: "the work of those original designers who sought to determine the taste of the Victorian and Edwardian age."[22] Pre-empting the Victorian period's inevitable detractors, the author of the exhibition booklet cautioned that the exhibits:

> …must not, therefore, be regarded as mere curiosities, nor as typical specimens of the period. All were in advance of popular taste, many were the result of a conscious revolt against it, and all can claim some solid merit as the work of serious designers.

Victorian objects had until this point been regarded as trivial and amusing, but the curators of this exhibition: "had admitted only what could be assigned to individual designers with secure provenance," with the intention that the period should be

[22] *Victoria &Albert Museum: Victorian & Edwardian Decorative Arts (Small Picture Book)* (London: HMSO, 1952)

taken seriously.[23] As Burton notes: "This exhibition was emphatically not about wax fruit and antimacassars."[24]

For the staff of Circulation, their development of an interest in the Victorian period was a way of establishing an area of expertise that was not already covered by colleagues. Applying high standards of research to objects of this previously overlooked period enabled them to establish their own scholarly credentials. As Barbara Morris later reflected in an oral history interview:

> Peter Floud was determined to turn Circulation into a scholarly department that would have a real, scholarly reputation. So he decided that if we became specialists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, we could be on a level with the other curatorial departments. And we weren't treading on anyone else's toes because they weren't interested. And then he conceived this idea of doing this exhibition of Victorian and Edwardian Art which is now very much regarded as a seminal exhibition which started, you know, the revival of serious interest in Victorian and Edwardian design... [25]

The staff of the Circulation department were therefore interested in acquiring items for the V&A's collection if they met three broad sets of criteria: high standards of scholarship and provenance, so as not to diminish their own academic credibility; relevance to the concerns of students, industry and commerce; and relevance to 'good design', with the aim of shaping the taste of visitors.

1.3 "An inheritance of endless Art Nouveau"

The 1952 exhibition of *Victorian and Edwardian Decorative Arts* may have marked the beginnings of their interest in the period, but the staff of Circulation continued to add to the department's holdings throughout the 1950s and 60s. The

[23] Burton, *Vision & Accident: The Story of the Victoria and Albert Museum*, 207.
[24] Burton, "The Revival of Interest in Victorian Decorative Art and the Victoria and Albert Museum," 132
[25] Interview with Barbara Morris, Track 07 - 30:15, Date 16.02.09, quoted in Sandino, "News from the Past: Oral History at the V&A."

late 1960s was a particularly auspicious time for the acquisition of material relating to the Victorian era because items from that period were becoming available through the deaths of their owners or the closure of key companies. Barbara Morris took full advantage of the opportunities that these circumstances afforded. As Linda Parry noted in her obituary of Morris:

> With the gradual closure of most sections of the British textile industry throughout the 1960s and 70s, she [Morris] was frequently summoned by phone with little warning in order to collect whatever she could from closing factories and shops, and it is thanks to her energy and good taste that the collection [of the V&A] is as comprehensive and important as it is today.[26]

As already outlined, the Silver Studio had been founded in 1880, and was primarily concerned with the design of wallpapers and textiles for the mass market. The designers who worked for the Silver Studio were not well known, and the Studio's outputs were not marketed under the names of individuals. As a result, Barbara Morris and her colleagues within the Circulation department were not interested in memorializing the Silver Studio in its own right, but in selecting objects that could usefully fit into existing narratives with the department's existing collection.

It is important to note here that the material contained within the premises occupied by the Silver Studio while it was a working business did not originally constitute a collection in the formal sense. Acquired with neither scholarship nor connoisseurship in mind, it was a body of material that existed because it was useful to the designers' professional practice, or was the outcome of that practice: it was simply the messy and contingent working apparatus of a creative design business.[27] Barbara Morris and Shirley Bury were already aware of the Silver Studio by the time it closed in the 1960s. It is possible that they had visited Rex Silver in the early 1950s to discuss loans to the 1952 exhibition, *Victorian and Edwardian Decorative Art*,

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[26] Linda Parry, "Obituary: Barbara Morris (1918--2009)," *Journal of William Morris Studies* Summer (2010): 6.

[27] As will be discussed in next chapter, the majority of items that constituted the contents of the Studio were later given to Hornsey College of Art

though the records are a little unclear on this point. As curator of metalwork, Shirley Bury had interviewed Rex Silver in the early 1960s about the Studio's association with the designer Archibald Knox.[28] Thus there was an established personal connection, and with the closure of the Studio and the death of Rex Silver in 1965, Barbara Morris and Shirley Bury stepped in to help his stepdaughter Mary Peerless with the huge task of clearing the Studio's contents.

The problem of what to do with the contents of the Silver Studio seemed insurmountable and was even discussed in the national press: an article by Fiona MacCarthy in the Guardian newspaper outlined the profusion of material and described Miss Peerless in romantic, almost Haversham-esque terms:

> Miss Mary Peerless stands amazed, a little desperate, swept up in her inheritance of endless art nouveau. Her stepfather died last year, aged 86; his work, and his father's, a century of textiles, cram into every drawer, fill presses, trunks and cupboards, and dusty paper parcels. Mary Peerless has a problem, perhaps a monumental one: whatever should she do with the Silver Studio?[29]

The accompanying photograph showed Miss Peerless surrounded by piles of designs, textiles and other assorted materials, seemingly overwhelmed by the task in hand. MacCarthy's description of the material emphasised its Art Nouveau character:

> Arthur Silver's textiles were not the most original: they are obviously the offshoot of Mackmurdo's wavy line. But Silver, unlike haughtier seers of English japonoiseries, made textiles for mass-markets, in medium-price materials, enmeshing the public in novelty, exoticism, twisting, twining, lashing, clinging, long-drawn-out designs. In London, Paris, on through Europe, Liberty prints blossomed, billowing famously, amassing confidence...[30]

MacCarthy's rather over-blown description of the contents of the Silver Studio nevertheless summed up the crux of the issue; namely that Arthur Silver and his son

[28] Bury, "The Liberty Metalwork Venture."
[29] Fiona MacCarthy, "Wild Nostalgia," The Guardian, 1966.
[30] MacCarthy, "Wild Nostalgia."

Rex had not been regarded as the leading exponents of design in their day. As she asked, rhetorically, in the same article: "Who wants the whole life-output of a medium-famous father and a medium-famous son?" The answer was that the Victoria and Albert Museum would have the "prizes", and it was Barbara Morris whose task it was to decide exactly what that meant.

At the instigation of Barbara Morris, the V&A accepted around two hundred items from the Silver Studio in several batches during 1966 and 1967.[31] Aside from a few handwritten notes in the V&A's daybook files there is little to indicate exactly how Morris made her selection, so conclusions are here drawn from the evidence of the objects themselves and from comments she made in later published sources and oral history interviews. Most noteworthy is that almost all the objects chosen date from a brief period between 1895 and 1910, and that the majority of items can be broadly categorized as Arts & Crafts or British Art Nouveau.[32] It is clear now that over the course of its long life, the Silver Studio produced designs for wallpapers and textiles in a much wider range of styles than this. So, it is interesting to consider why both journalistic and curatorial interest of the late 1960s leaned so heavily towards the Art Nouveau items.

The term Art Nouveau is applied to a wide range of sometimes visually dissimilar things dating from around the end of the nineteenth century, ranging from Paris metro stations to jewellery by Lalique and posters by Mucha. The unifying factor is a rejection of so-called historicist styles, and an attempt to reconcile representations of nature with rapid industrialization and urbanization. Whatever the objects under discussion (furniture, glass, silver, textiles or other media), Art

[31] The majority of these went to the Circulation department but notes in the V&A's accession files suggest that a handful of items were acquired by the Prints and Drawings Department and the Textile Department, mainly thanks to personal lobbying of the curators of those departments by Barbara Morris.

[32] The items chosen included only a handful of twentieth century textiles, including some by designer Minnie McLeish, and by manufacturers Foxton and Steiner. These follow the pattern of being attributable to named designers or manufacturers.

Nouveau is associated with the whiplash curve, with stylized representations of nature and with flowing lines. [33] The majority of textiles selected by the Circulation department from the Silver Studio broadly fit this description: there is a preponderance of flattened stylized floral motifs, many with deeply curved ogees or flowing sinuous curves. The colour palette is dominated by sombre tertiary shades of dark blues and ochres [Figure 15], alongside more jewel-like vibrant reds [Figure 16].

Figure 15 Jacquard woven cotton designed by Harry Napper for the Silver Studio, around 1902 (Circ.250_1966)

[33] Paul Greenhalgh, *Art Nouveau, 1890-1914* (London: V&A Museum, 2000).

Figure 16 Silk Damask furnishing fabric, designed by Harry Napper for the Silver Studio around 1900 (Circ.283_1966)

Many of the textiles chosen by the V&A from the Silver Studio feature scrolling acanthus leaves or fashionable flowers such as chrysanthemums and tulips, and were either based on a strong diagonal structure or something more reminiscent of a symmetrical ogee, and the majority feature flattened, stylised floral motifs [Figure 17].

Figure 17 woven cotton attributed to the Silver Studio, around 1905 (Circ.246_1966)

It is easy to think of these purely as examples of flat pattern, but if we consider their existence as physical objects it is clear that the selection of items from the Silver Studio tended towards what might be thought of as higher status. Following Bourdieu, Lou Taylor has suggested that fabrics can be categorized by means of a hierarchy based partly on the material itself, and partly on other marks of 'distinction'.[34] On this basis, silk is of higher status than cotton; fabrics which represent an unusual, hand-crafted or otherwise costly manufacturing technique are of higher status than something mass produced; and a fabric associated with a known, named designer is of higher status than the product of an anonymous designer. Analysed in these terms, the items chosen by the Circulation department are of generally significantly higher status than the remainder that survives in the Silver Studio Collection. Of the fifty or so woven fabrics, a large proportion were costly silk damasks: of the thirty-four printed textiles, the majority were block printed, rather than machine printed, such as that printed by Thomas Wardle [Figure 18]. Other examples include a hand block-printed silk produced for Liberty [Figure 19]. Similarly, of the wallpapers acquired by Circulation, some were Japanese 'leather' papers representing a highly unusual and costly manufacturing technique [Figure 20].[35]

[34] Lou Taylor, "De-Coding the Hierarchy of Fashion Textiles," in *Disentangling Textiles: Techniques for the Study of Designed Objects*, ed. Mary Schoeser and Christine Boydell (London: Middlesex University Press, 2002), 67–80.Taylor's chapter pertains specifically to dress fabrics but the same principles are true of furnishing fabrics and wallpapers. The idea that the V&A was primarily interested in 'higher status' items possibly accounts for the small number of original Silver Studio designs on paper acquired in this process; see for example E.462-1967, which are closer to 'art' than the majority of its designs for repeating patterns.

[35] Yasuko Suga, "Designed Authenticity: Japanese Leather Paper and Inter/National Representation," *Historical Research on the Production and Distribution of Japanese Leather Paper in Japan, Europe and America* Tokyo:Min (2006).Wivine Wailliez, "Japanese Leather Paper or Kinkarakawakami: An Overview from the 17th Century to the Japonist Hangings by Rottmann & Co," *Wallpaper History Review* 7 (2016): 60–65.

Figure 18 Textile of block-printed cotton, around 1885 (Circ.239_1966)

Printed by Thomas Wardle of Leek, given by Miss Mary Peerless

Figure 19. Hand block-printed silk designed by the Silver Studio for Liberty, 1897 [Circ.233_1966]

Figure 20 Portion of 'The Flowers of the Field' wallpaper, around 1891 (Circ.224-1966)

Embossed paper simulating leather, hand-painted; Stamped with the Patent Office registration number 146905 and with Japanese characters. Designed by Arthur Silver, manufactured by Alexander Rottmann & Co., around 1891

As we have already seen, the Circulation Department's preference was for items that could be "securely provenanced" (meaning that they could be confidently attributed as the work of one specific individual) in order to maintain their scholarly credentials. Peter Floud had been clear that Circulation would only acquire the work of known designers, even if a design had been intended for mass-production rather than craft-production.[36] The introduction to the catalogue of the *Loan Exhibition of English Chintz* of 1960, (organized by the Circulation Department) had exemplified this approach. The late nineteenth century section of the catalogue concentrated explicitly on the work of named designers, including Bruce J Talbert, William Morris, Lewis F Day, Walter Crane, CFA Voysey, Lindsay P Butterfield and Harry Napper, almost all of whom were "leading figures in the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society,

[36] Weddell, "The Ethos of the V&A Circulation Department 1947-1960," 20.

founded in 1888."[37] With this in mind, it is interesting to note that the majority of items selected by the Circulation Department from the Silver Studio were attributed to these same specific named designers. For example, among the selection of items chosen from the Silver Studio's contents was a cotton velvet with an aesthetic movement design by Bruce Talbert (Circ.244_1966); a roller printed cotton produced by Turnbull and Stockdale and designed by Lewis F Day (Circ.234_1966); and a block printed cotton entitled 'the Four Seasons' designed by Walter Crane (Circ.232_1966). Further examples include at least eight examples of textiles and wallpapers by CFA Voysey (including Circ.588_1967) and a roller printed cotton by Lindsay Butterfield (Circ.238_1966). This was no doubt in part because the work of these designers had been published in magazines such as *The Studio* and *Der Moderne Stil* and could therefore be attributed with confidence. These designers represented an established part of Circulation's canon, and the acceptance of more examples of their work into the V&A can be seen as an exercise in filling the gaps by acquiring additional examples of their work, or by obtaining additional colourways of examples already held in the collection.

It is also notable that, in addition to a couple of items attributed to Arthur Silver, of the designers whose work was selected from the Silver Studio by Circulation, only Harry Napper is known to have actually worked for the Studio.[38] Napper is represented in the selection made the Circulation Department by around a dozen wallpaper and textiles. In other words, many of the items selected by Circulation were not the products of the Silver Studio but were items that had probably been acquired by Arthur Silver or his employees as reference. As I have argued elsewhere, the Studio's designers gathered ideas from a wide variety of

[37] Victoria and Albert Museum, *Catalogue of a Loan Exhibition of English Chintz, English Printed Furnishing Fabrics from Their Origins until the Present Day. , NAL 77.L V&A Catalogues 1955-65.*, vol. NAL 77.L V (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1960)

[38] Harry Napper worked for the Silver Studio from around 1893 but left in 1898. He subsequently worked as a freelance designer and used the Silver Studio as an agency for the sale of some of his designs. See Turner, *A London Design Studio 1880-1963: The Silver Studio Collection*, 158.

sources: from historic textile sources at the V&A; from photographs of plants and flowers; from collections of reference materials such as Japanese stencils; and from examples of work by their contemporaries.[39] That the Silver Studio had examples of work by other designers on the premises is evidence of the fact that its employees used visual reference from a variety of sources, both contemporary and historic, and is suggestive of ways of working which were more collaborative and complex than is allowed by the Modernist myth of a single named designer as sole origin of a particular work.

If we approach the Circulation Department's choices from within a modernist paradigm that prizes innovation and uniqueness, then the fact that the Silver Studio accumulated examples of the work of better-known designers makes the majority of its output appear to be derivative. But as Judy Attfield notes, the idea of innovation did not have wide currency before modernism established the idea of the professional designer and began to place greater emphasis on originality and the work of specific named individuals.[40] Sarah Ganz Blythe makes a similar point in her observation that designers had traditionally been expected to learn through close observation of historic objects:

> The educational principle of the museum [i.e. the South Kensington Museum] rested on the expectation that to see superior design would lead to the assimilation of good design principles, the production of better design, and ultimately improved industrial production. This built upon the academic model of emulation, but widened the scope beyond classical models to the material culture of the world.[41]

Designers like those who worked at the Silver Studio expected to emulate the best of what had gone before, and therefore accumulated a range of sources from which to develop new variations on existing ideas.

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[39] Hendon, "The Silver Studio Art Reference Collection."
[40] Attfield, "Continuity: Authenticity and the Paradoxical Nature of Reproduction."
[41] Sarah Ganz Blythe, "Keeping Good Company: Art Schools and Museums," in *Museums and Higher Education Working Together: Challenges and Opportunities*, ed. Anne Boddington, Jos Boys, and Catherine Speight (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 85.

The Circulation department's insistence on provenance mean that they only 'saw' a relatively small proportion of the Studio's contents, namely those items which confirmed an existing paradigm of 'good design' because they had been subject to external approval mechanisms such as Arts & Crafts exhibitions. With this in mind it becomes easier to see why, when faced with the Silver Studio's whole output of nearly eighty years, the staff of the Circulation department made their selection based on a fairly narrow period of the late 1890s and focused almost exclusively on one stylistic category. The choices made by Barbara Morris and Shirley Bury must also be seen in the context of a view of the history of design that was almost certainly shaped by the influence of Nikolaus Pevsner. Pevsner's *Pioneers of Modern Design* (first published in 1936 as *Pioneers of the Modern Movement* but reissued in 1960) was a key text for those attempting to make sense of the mass of designed objects that had been produced since the beginnings of industrialisation.[42] It is impossible to demonstrate conclusively whether or not Barbara Morris and her colleagues specifically referred to an edition of Pevsner's *Pioneers*, but we can surely assume they would have been aware of it. Moreover, it is likely that Barbara Morris would have known Pevsner personally through their mutual involvement in the Victorian Society and the William Morris Society.[43]

In Pevsner's view modernism had three key origins, namely, William Morris, Victorian engineering and Art Nouveau. He identified AH Mackmurdo as the founder of Art Nouveau and traced his influence through Rennie Mackintosh and other European designers such as Hector Guimard, Henri Van de Veld and Antonin Gaudi. Design influence was conceived as a series of batons passed from hand to hand, without reference to external influences such as economic circumstances, emerging technologies, or consumer choices. It is certainly the case that the Circulation

[42] Nikolaus Pevsner, *Pioneers of Modern Design: From William Morris to Walter Gropius* (New Haven, [Conn.]: Yale University Press, 2005)
[43] Peter Faulkner, "Pevsner's Morris," *Journal of William Morris Studies 1961-2009* 17, no. 1 (2001): 49–72.

Department's choices were consistent with what Keren Protheroe has called: "Pevsner's roll-call of male pioneers: CFA Voysey, Sydney Mawson, Lyndsey Butterfield and Harry Napper."[44] These were all designers who held prominent positions in organisations such as the Design and Industries Association by the mid-twentieth century, and who had achieved a reputation for 'good design' that followed in the tradition of Morris. The broader point is the pervasive influence of a Pevsnerian frame of reference which meant that items in the Silver Studio that were categorised as Art Nouveau would have appeared to be the natural choice for the Circulation Department's curators, because they could be understood as fitting into a pre-existing chain of influences.

There is a further point about the idea of provenance that is worth making in the context of items produced by serial mass production. The word provenance generally refers to a particular object's pre-history before it enters a museum. In the case of works of art, this might be to do with ensuring that a painting is definitely by a particular old master, not a fake, and that the history of its purchase, ownership and so on, are known. The curators within the Circulation department declared an item provenanced if the design had featured in published sources such as *The Studio* and *Der Moderne Stil*, and they were thus able to confidently attribute a date, a named designer and a manufacturer. In doing so they were attributing provenance to a particular textile design *as a whole* but ignoring the pre-history of the *specific sample* they had in front of them. This point is important because in taking this approach the Circulation department was applying a standard intended for individual works of art to examples of serial mass production. Thus the potentially interesting information about the fact that these specific examples had once belonged to the Silver Studio has become elided in the V&A's public online catalogue records which still simply refer to them as having been donated by Miss Mary Peerless, or that they were designed by the Silver Studio. The further point that these examples were formerly part of the working apparatus of the Silver Studio is

[44] Protheroe, "Bloom and Blotch: Floral Print and Modernity in the Textile Designs of Winifred Mold and Minnie McLeish 1910-1930 (Unpublished PhD Thesis)," 126.

not made clear.[45] Evidently it was not the intention of the Circulation department to acquire a representative selection of the Silver Studio's output, or to tell the story of the influences on its work. Indeed, within a historiographical framework that privileged originality and prioritized the work of individual named designers, it was inevitable that the relationship of objects to other objects, or to the people who owned them, would be glossed over.

1.4 1960s Art Nouveau Revival

Barbara Morris was concerned to accept items for the Circulation Department's collection that she considered illustrative of the best, most forward-looking designs of the late-Victorian and Edwardian periods. She saw this as not just a matter of celebrating good design of the past, but of actively influencing production in the present. As she noted:

> There is little doubt that the exhibition of *Victorian and Edwardian Decorative Arts* in 1952, which was the first post-war exhibition to focus attention on the textiles of William Morris, was responsible for the reprinting of Morris's designs by Sanderson's and other firms, textiles that have become -and remain - best sellers with the public at large.[46]

She made further reference to the part played by Circulation Department exhibitions of English Chintz in "revitalizing the British textile industry" in the 1950s.[47]

Consequently, the selection of items for the Circulation Department made by Barbara Morris arguably represents an attempt to emphasize the craft traditions of the late nineteenth century textile industry, and to present the Art Nouveau style as a natural progression from the flat pattern of William Morris. Her choice of Art Nouveau items can be seen in part as a response to a Modernist agenda, but it can

[45] See for example, http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O89644/burgos-furnishing-fabric-napper-harry/ [accessed 10.10.2019]
[46] Morris, *Inspiration for Design: The Influence of the Victoria & Albert Museum*, 116.
[47] Morris, 116.

also be seen as part of the wider Art Nouveau revival of the late 1960s, exemplified by seminal exhibitions such as Aubrey Beardsley at the V&A in 1966.[48] This revival of interest in the period was a phenomenon for which the activities of the Circulation department arguably provided both the impetus and the ongoing support. According to Barbara Morris herself:

> A good deal of the credit for the initial post war revival of Art Nouveau should perhaps be given to Bill Poole of Liberty's who...raked through the Liberty archives for turn of the century designs and reproduced them as the 'Lotus' collection of dress fabrics. It is unlikely, however, that this would have come about if attention had not been drawn to the original fabrics by the *Victorian and Edwardian Decorative Arts* exhibition of 1952 and the *English Chintz* exhibition of 1956, both of which featured textiles by CFA Voysey, Lindsay Butterfield, and Arthur Silver and Harry Napper of the Silver Studio, many of them produced by Liberty's in the 1890s…[49]

Leading designers such as Bernard Nevill, design director at Liberty, were influential in their incorporation of Art Nouveau motifs into new fashion fabrics, as Liberty's archivist Anna Buruma has noted.[50] Thus we have the beginnings of a kind of circular argument, in which an awareness of late Victorian and Art Nouveau design was created through the scholarly efforts of Circulation, and was in turn developed by commercial entities such as Liberty, leading to further interest in the period and the style by the Museum on behalf of its potential visitors. The Circulation Department's motives for accepting certain objects cannot be separated from its awareness of what was likely to be popular with audiences. The Victoria and Albert Museum as a whole was keen to position itself as shaping public taste rather than following it. Nevertheless, the Circulation Department's greater awareness of

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[48] Brian Reade, *Aubrey Beardsley: Exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1966* (London: HMSO, 1966).
[49] Morris, *Inspiration for Design: The Influence of the Victoria & Albert Museum*, 202–3. Other exhibitions of Art Nouveau were held in Paris, Amsterdam and New York in the late 1950s and early 1960s.
[50] Wood, *Liberty Style*. Anna Buruma, *Liberty and Co in the Fifties and Sixties: A Taste for Design* (London: ACC Editions, 2009).

its audiences meant that if Art Nouveau was high in the public's consciousness by the late 1960s it was not surprising that this should become the focus of the Department's attention too.

It seems that some of the items acquired from the Silver Studio were pressed into service by the Circulation Department almost immediately after they were acquired. According to Fiona MacCarthy's Guardian newspaper article of November 1966, a number of items from the Silver Studio were displayed in the exhibition, *Half a Century of Modern Design*, organized by the Circulation department at the Bethnal Green Museum, the V&A's outpost in London's East End.[51] Further evidence of their immediate use can be seen in the Circulation Department's listing of Loan Collections available between 1968 and 1970, which included an exhibition of Art Nouveau Textiles:

> This is an exhibition of English printed and woven fabrics, dating from about 1890 to 1905, displayed on forty panels under Perspex. Beside the work of leading professional textile designers such as Lindsay Butterfield, Arthur Silver, and Harry Napper, the selection includes particularly striking groups by the architects CFA Voysey and Baillie Scott. Much of the material has only recently been acquired by the Museum.[52]

Interest in the Art Nouveau style was evident more generally in other exhibitions held around the same time, including the Aubrey Beardsley exhibition at the V&A already mentioned, the 1968 centenary exhibition of Rennie Mackintosh in Edinburgh, and the 1969 exhibition *British Sources of Art Nouveau* at the Whitworth Art Gallery in Manchester.[53]

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[51] MacCarthy, "Wild Nostalgia."
[52] "V&A Archive MA/17/7 Loan Collections 1968-70 Victoria and Albert Museum Circulation Department" (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1968)
[53] Andrew McLaren Young, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh: 1868-1928, A Centenary Exhibition* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Festival Society, 1968); Whitworth Art Gallery, *British Sources of Art Nouveau, 29th March - 3rd May 1969* (Manchester: Whitworth Art Gallery, 1969)

In a sense the Circulation's Department's interest in Art Nouveau in the late 1960s points towards a kind of irony: its expressed aim was to provide the public with exhibits that would point forward to a better future, rejecting the historicist styles of the past, and navigating a line between consumer education, ethical production and government policy. As such, the Circulation Department's selection of items from the Silver Studio was consistent with its optimistic view of the progressive possibilities of the material culture of the late Victorian age, and with its belief in the power of well-designed objects to make a contribution to social democracy through touring exhibitions to regional venues. But as Elizabeth Guffey has argued, Art Nouveau can also be seen as the twentieth century's first "retro" style, which rather than supporting Utopian ideals of modernity, instead represented an implicit "loss of faith in the future".[54] Rather than looking to the design of the Victorian period in order to promote a democratic vision of a better future, by the late 1960s, design had, according to Guffey, become characterized by a rapid turnover of new, but ultimately empty stylistic fads. Post-modernism challenged modernism's hostility to mass culture, and elements of Art Nouveau were incorporated into hippie counterculture. The Silver Studio's Art Nouveau textiles were ready to be co-opted and reimagined by some museum visitors into a new variety of romantic bohemianism, which was in opposition to the principles of 'good design' espoused by Circulation.

1.5 Conclusions

This chapter has discussed the reasons behind the Circulation Department's selection of a relatively narrow group of items from among the wealth of other options that were available within the contents of the Silver Studio when it closed. There were of course practical reasons for the V&A's decision not to accept the Silver Studio Collection in its entirety; not least that the Collection was (and remains) large and was, particularly at that time, extremely physically unwieldy. A further consideration was no doubt the fact that the contents of the Silver Studio resisted

[54] Elizabeth Guffey, *Retro: The Culture of Revival* (Reaktion Books Ltd, 2006).

the usual categorizations that divide 'real objects' from 'supporting archives,' and that they cut across the V&A's division of objects according to the material from which they were made (such as Metalwork, Textiles, and Prints & Drawings). Within this context, there were limits to the Circulation department's ability to acquire objects that their colleagues would have seen as both too recent and too numerous. Circulation's acquisition of this selection of predominantly Art Nouveau items from the Silver Studio was therefore consistent with the department's aim of acquiring securely provenanced, good quality, forward-looking design.

As has already been noted, Circulation's stated aim was of "supporting students, industry, export and commerce." Therefore, objects which fitted the Modernist ideal of design that looked forward rather than backward, rejecting the historicism that characterised much of the rest of the Silver Studio's output, would have seemed appropriate. While it is not possible to confirm the motivations for Barbara Morris's selection with reference to documentary evidence, the evidence of the objects themselves suggest that she was drawn to wallpapers and textiles that were characterized by flattened stylised motifs and whiplash curves, rather than naturalistic florals. Other items now remaining in the Silver Studio Collection give an indication of Circulation's selection criteria by their omission. Roller printed wallpapers on cheap paper, sketch designs for interwar dress prints, textiles featuring historicist patterns and so on were items of lower cultural value, because they were inextricably linked with mass-production by machine. Items such as these could not have been construed as representative of craft or hand production in any sense and therefore did not fit the Circulation department's paradigm of 'good design' [Figure 21]. To argue for their preservation might have risked devaluing the status of the Circulation department as a whole by association and may have cast doubt on that Department's hard-won scholarly credibility.

Figure 21 Silver Studio design for dress print, around 1925 (SD2319)

In choosing certain kinds of items from the Silver Studio and rejecting others, Barbara Morris and her colleagues reinforced a canonical narrative of British textile design that positioned certain individual designers as the direct descendants, in design terms, of William Morris. In so doing, they helped to shape the kinds of stories the V&A could tell about British design. Objects originating from the Silver Studio were subsequently featured, for example, in publications such as Linda Parry's *Textiles of the Arts and Crafts Movement* and *British Textiles from 1850 to 1900.*[55] Their selection thus reinforced a particular narrative of British design that positioned design as the work of individual designers, and simultaneously rendered other narratives - about industrial design processes, about consumer choices, and so on - almost entirely invisible. Their selection continued to privilege individual hand production over serial mass production, or rather, blurred the terms of this distinction by presenting textiles and wallpapers as the work of specific individuals rather than as the outputs of complex and collaborative industrial processes.

In many ways, the Circulation Department's project of collecting more recent examples of designed objects, and of creating touring exhibitions that went out to schools and local museums, can be seen as extremely radical. Yet at the same time, this focus on the evidence of the Silver Studio as a case study of their collecting practices suggests that they did not deviate far from existing V&A notions of

[55] Parry, *Textiles of the Arts and Crafts Movement*; Linda Parry and Victoria and Albert Museum, *The Victoria & Albert Museum's Textile Collection, British Textiles from 1850 to 1900* (London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 1993).

provenance and quality when making their selection. Their purpose, after all, was to show examples of what they considered to be the best design in order to inform, educate and inspire the next generation of designers and consumers. This meant that they prioritised examples of design from the past that could be said to exemplify their designers' desire for a better future. Or to put it another way, it meant prioritising the output of those designers whose access to social capital (inclusion in exhibitions and professional bodies and so on) had helped them to position their work as more than mere industrial commodities.[56] Thus, examples of more ordinary (that is, mass-produced) design, including the majority of the Silver Studio's output, could find no place within this paradigm, since it represented simply 'what was' rather than pointing towards 'what might be' in future.

[56] Stefan Muthesius, "'We Do Not Understand What Is Meant by a "Company" Designing': Design versus Commerce in Late Nineteenth-Century English Furnishing," *Journal of Design History* 5, no. 2 (1992): 113–19.

**Spotlight: Objects Make Demands on Us

Here we are returning to the museum store for a moment, to reflect on ideas of continuity and change, progress and stasis within the Silver Studio Collection.

Figure 22 Silver Studio design for a dress print, 1919 (SD12739)

It is the case that though the Silver Studio Collection has ostensibly remained a constant part of this story over the past fifty years, the physical condition of objects within the Collection has improved considerably over this period. This observation is at odds with the idea that a museum store is a place where objects go to sleep, or worse, to die. As Geoghegan and Hess point out:

> Far from reaching a terminal point, objects continue to change, both physically and in terms of the meaning attached to them… objects flake, rot, fade and rust. Interventions to prevent this involve altering the state of the materials and so, physically, museum objects remain in a constant state of flux.[1]

Further, Susan Crane notes that there is something paradoxical about the lengths to which museums go to halt the usual processes

[1] Geoghegan and Hess, "Object-Love at the Science Museum: Cultural Geographies of Museum Storerooms," 451.

of decay and deterioration in their care of museum objects. On the one hand, Crane suggests that we can understand the museum as institution, from the nineteenth century, as representing an aspect of modernity's understanding of time as linear progress; the idea that movement through time is positive and forward-looking:

> Western thinkers from the Greeks to the moderns articulated a sense of time's inevitable movement, but modernity excelled in expressing that movement as positive and forward-inclined... The contents of museums, one might suggest, represent the traces of evolutionary stages, examples of what did not survive but yet, paradoxically, transcended into the present.[2]

At the same time, museums do everything they can to deny the passing of time by preserving objects in an attempt to halt the natural process of decay. Crane is mainly concerned with notions of change and continuity with regards to museums' role as public institutions of collective memory, but her observations are relevant to our discussion of the way in which museums think about specific collections too. As she argues:

> The irony lies in the fact that preservation is the antithesis of progress. Change occurs as a phenomenal aspect of the immutability of time, within which progress occurs… [But in museums] objects that were never intended to last very long have their life trajectories interrupted… Time is frozen in museums to the extent that its objects are preserved, their natural decay intentionally prevented.[3]

As we discussed last time we were here in the store, this is precisely the case for things like Silver Studio designs, which were

[2] Crane, "The Conundrum of Ephemerality: Time, Memory and Museums," 100.
[3] Crane, 99–100.

never intended to have lives of long duration much beyond their immediate purpose.

Crane argues that museums generally freeze objects: "in the moment of their most emblematic value of - singularity, or implementation, or representativeness…"[4] In the case of the Silver Studio Collection, the task of the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture has been to slow down the processes of decay, in order to make as many things as possible available to be used and handled. When the Silver Studio Collection was given to Hornsey College of Art the designs were stored in loose piles and were vulnerable to damage every time they were moved or touched. In fact, the size of the Collection and the fragility of its materials no doubt contributed to the V&A's refusal to accept all of it, as we saw in the preceding chapter. Textiles and wallpapers were stored in cardboard boxes which were often not of suitable sizes: large things were folded or crushed into boxes that were too small to accommodate them, while small things were damaged by being jostled around in over-large boxes. The experience of looking through the designs used to be of handling paper that was so brittle and fragile that they almost literally fell apart in the hands. Wallpapers and textiles were also physically difficult to look at since this often involved unrolling them while trying to avoid damaging them. All of this made it difficult for students and researchers to see more than the small percentage of objects that had been conserved for exhibition purposes and which were therefore slightly easier to handle [Figure 23]

[4] Crane, 99–100.

Over the years my colleagues and I have devised and implemented a number of conservation projects working on a specific part of the Collection at a time.[5] My own involvement in this extends back to the early 2000s, but we were then building on work that had been done by earlier colleagues, a process that started back in the 1970s and 80s.[6] It was evident that money for conservation of the Collection would rarely be forthcoming from the Polytechnic (or later the University), so funding was sought from external bodies such as the Area Museum Council.[7] We can

Figure 23 Silver Studio textiles before conservation project, 2004

This image shows how textile samples were crammed into an over-full box, making it difficult to see or handle them without damaging them.

[5] For an overview of some key recent conservation projects please see: https://moda.mdx.ac.uk/category/behindthescenes/conservation/ [accessed 10.08.2019]

[6] In addition to Mark Turner, the Polytechnic employed a number of other staff from the late 1970s, whose work on the conservation and cataloguing of the Collection laid the foundations for future exhibitions, teaching and research, namely: June Marshall (textile conservator) from 1977; Sarah Mansell (paper conservator) from 1978; and Lesley Hoskins, research assistant from 1985. (Hoskins had previously undertaken the MA in the History of Design at Middlesex Polytechnic). Anon, "The Silver Studio Collection at Middlesex Polytechnic (Typewritten Notes)," 1990.

[7] For example, Sarah Mansell was initially appointed with the help of a 50% grant from South East Area Museum Service, and the post was subsequently supported by other grants from the British Library. See Anon. The Silver Studio Collection at Middlesex Polytechnic (Typewritten Notes)," 1990.

see this as a result of the differing temporalities of the museum sector as opposed to the higher education sector. As will be discussed later in Chapter Four, the Polytechnic was concerned with the short-term requirements of students and the relatively brief time-frame of the student life-cycle. (This can be seen for example in the comments, quoted in that Chapter, of the Bursar Mr Pudney with regards to the pressing needs of space for teaching). The Polytechnic was thus only really interested in projects that would be of immediate and demonstrable benefit to students. In contrast, museum-sector bodies were willing to fund projects (such as the appointment of a paper conservator) which promised long-term stewardship of the Collection for potentially unspecified future benefit.

With the help of various external funders, we have dedicated thousands of pounds and countless person-hours to collections care over many years.[8] Textiles have been cleaned and smoothed; designs and wallpapers have had their tears mended and their edges un-crumpled. Conservation work has included cleaning objects, repairing when necessary, putting designs into melinex sleeves, and placing those in acid-free boxes. We have stored wallpapers and textiles in appropriately sized boxes or rolled them on to cardboard tubes and wrapped them in dust-resistant wrappers. Conservation work has generally focused on one specific part of the Collection at a time and has proceeded in parallel with documentation work. As a result, we have a better idea of what we

[8] Examples of past conservation projects and their funders are detailed on MoDA's website; see https://moda.mdx.ac.uk/category/behindthescenes/conservation/ [accessed 24th March 2020]

have and where it is located, as well as having improved the objects' physical condition and storage.

All of this has brought huge benefit to museum users: the physical experience of looking at the objects in the Collection has changed enormously in the last twenty years. The gradual process of conserving objects and improving the way in which they are stored has made the objects easier for people to handle, because the risk of tearing or damaging them has been reduced. This has become even more important now that the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture no longer has exhibition galleries: all visitors are offered a much more tailored visit which involves seeing and handling items that are of interest to them.[9] Visitors' encounters with objects are now more 'hands-on' and less 'glass-case'. Our priority is to make things accessible to students and researchers, so objects are rarely left alone to 'sleep' but instead are brought out, used and handled frequently.[10] As a result, we concentrate on ensuring that a large proportion of our collections are suitable for handling.

The Silver Studio designs are stored by date, and also grouped by size for the purposes of efficient storage [Figure 24]. Within each box, all designs are also neatly stored within individual melinex sleeves, making it very easy to look closely at them on both sides without damaging them. Visitors frequently comment that they enjoy the feeling that they are looking at something solid, well cared-for and therefore valuable. Paradoxically, careful

[9] As already noted, the closure of the Cat Hill campus in 2011 necessitated the Museum's move to new premises in Colindale, close to the University's Hendon campus, but without public exhibition galleries or exhibition spaces.
[10] Elizabeth Wood, Rainey Tisdale, and Trevor Jones, *Active Collections* (New York, London: Routledge, 2018).

conservation work and investment in acid-free boxes and plastic sleeves for designs, textiles and wallpapers mean that visitors sometimes get the impression that these objects have never been used (or are never currently used), whereas in fact the opposite is true.

Figure 24 box of Silver Studio designs

These were conserved and rehoused in melinex sleeves as part of an AHRC-funded project in 2006

The air conditioning in the store is set to a slightly chilly seventeen degrees centigrade. The environmental system is also set to maintain low relative humidity, as well as low temperature, and this sometimes causes people to experience headaches after a while. It is necessary to maintain a cool and dry environment because the Silver Studio Collection (and the majority of the museum's other collections) are comprised of paper and textiles. We need to protect the collections from the possibility of outbreaks of mould or moths that would destroy them, and both of these are at greater risk in a damp or warm environment. But the temperature is another physical reminder of the way in which the space of the store is marked out as special, and that this is a room that is generally only entered by staff: we select items for students and other visitors to use and take them through to the Study Room where the conditions are more comfortable for humans.

In one sense we might see the museum's objects as passive recipients of professional museum care, surviving in a state of

suspended animation. But in another sense, it is possible to see the objects as having agency in relation to their own storage: they make implicit demands about the various conditions that need to be maintained if they are to survive in perpetuity. As Geoghegan and Hess observe:

> It is impossible to consider the space of the stores without engaging with the collections, both as individual objects, and as a whole. The collections are the purpose of the store and their material qualities dictate its shape and environment. The need to preserve these objects leads to the stores being cool, dry, and cut off from natural light. The qualities of individual objects dictate layout, access and security within the stores.[11]

Here it is also useful to draw on the work of Jane Bennett, who borrows Bruno Latour's term "actants" to describe non-human materials as having a kind of agency. Bennett questions the distinction between subjects and objects, and hence between traditional binary opposites such as organic/inorganic, human/animal and so on. Her work asks us to consider the political implications of thinking of all aspects of material culture as not only alive, but as interconnected. She argues that objects are "alive" in the sense that they are able to make a difference in the world: they have the capacity to have effects, to shape the web of interrelationships of which they are a part. By this argument, humans are not sovereign or autonomous subjects, but instead exist within a complex web of active bodies and materials.[12]

At the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture the physical size and shape of the largest objects (such as flat designs and wallpaper samples) dictated the layout of the store, so that –

[11] Geoghegan and Hess, "Object-Love at the Science Museum: Cultural Geographies of Museum Storerooms," 457.
[12] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*.

for example – all the very large things had to be accommodated on the extra-deep shelves at one end of the rolling racking. Rolled textiles are stored in special slots that can accommodate their length. A recent project involved rolling stenciled grass-papers and storing them in telescopic boxes.[13] It is interesting to reflect on the suggestion that it is the objects themselves which are determining what we can do with them, not vice versa.

Objects are active then in the sense of making demands on us regarding their requirements for conservation plans and storage solutions, in order to slow the inevitable processes of decay. They must also be active in another sense: we do not think of conservation work on the Silver Studio Collection as evidence of an attempt to freeze objects at a particular moment in time, or as an unhealthy preoccupation with the past. It is clear that there is no point in conserving objects if they are not to be used in the present, and with the additional expectation that they will be used in the future.[14] As Crane notes, conservation of museum objects can therefore be seen as a deeply future-focused project:

> Museum collections are built so that future generations will have the benefit of the knowledge and meanings accumulated in the museum – on the implicit assumption that progress has been made, and that future generations will value the results and continue to do so… The future *must* care, else the project is doomed.[15]

[13] See: https://moda.mdx.ac.uk/2019/09/16/stencil-conservation-completed/ [accessed Sept 20th 2019]

[14] Although as William Lindsay notes, there is no consensus among museum and conservation professionals as to the exact definition of 'the future', with most thinking in terms of roughly a century. See William Lindsay, "Time Perspectives: What 'the Future' Means to Museum Professionals in Collections-care," *The Conservator* 29, no. 1 (2005): 51–61.

[15] Crane, "The Conundrum of Ephemerality: Time, Memory and Museums," 102.

In conserving objects within the Silver Studio Collection my colleagues and I are motivated by the expectation of their future use, not by a concern to preserve the past for its own sake.

Chapter Two : Souvenir or Sacred? The development of the Silver Studio Collection

Figure 25 Interior of the Silver Studio, around 1966

This chapter considers the period between the death of Rex Silver in 1965 and the eventual donation of what became known as the Silver Studio Collection to Hornsey College of Art in 1967. During this period, the contents of the Silver Studio underwent a process of transition, beginning as the accumulated paraphernalia of a working environment, becoming objects of personal memory and loss, and ultimately achieving a more formal status as a 'Collection'. The decision by the V&A's Circulation department to accept a small number of objects, discussed in the previous chapter, set the scene for consideration of what would happen to the remainder of the Studio's contents. This chapter first looks at some of the theoretical writing around material culture, ethnography and museum studies to consider ideas around the status of objects, and the potential for objects to move between categories. It then moves on to consider the decision made by Mary Peerless, stepdaughter of Rex Silver, to give the contents of the Silver Studio to Hornsey College of Art, and the changed status of the objects that was both a prerequisite and an outcome of this process. In retrospect it is possible to imagine

that the movement of the Silver Studio Collection from working studio to educational resource was always somehow guaranteed, but in fact its survival was by no means a foregone conclusion. By what route, then, did the contents of the Studio come to be understood as worthy of preservation?

2.1 Object theories

In order to understand the Silver Studio's transition from accumulated contents of a working studio to a formal 'Collection' we need to consider the value we attach to objects, and the ways in which that value might shift over time. Michael Thompson proposed that all objects in the world can be divided into three broad categories: "durable" objects are those to which we have attached spiritual or scientific value, by which means we have elevated them above the market place; "transient" objects are those which may be bought and sold, and the value of which tends to gradually decline over time; and "rubbish," a category of objects having no value at all.[1] Krszysztof Pomian proposed a similar three-part distinction, in which artefacts are categorized as either "useful," as "semiophors" (that is, as carriers of meaning); or as "waste."[2] As discussed in the previous chapter, the V&A's Circulation Department agreed to take a small selection of objects from the thousands that had accumulated within the Silver Studio by the time it closed. In doing so, they elevated those items from the category of "transient" to the category of "durable," placing them outside the ordinary commercial sphere in which they had previously existed, as objects that could be bought and sold. In Pomian's terms they re-categorized those specific items as "semiophors," bestowing value on them through recognition (or perhaps more accurately through creation) of cultural significance or meaning. However, the question remained: what should be done with the rest?

[1] Michael Thompson, *Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Value* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).
[2] Pomian quoted in Paul Van der Grijp, "The Sacred Gift: Donations from Private Collectors to Public Museums," *Museum Anthropology Review* 8, no. 1 (2014): 22.

Much scholarship within museum studies and museology is based on the assumption that collections are formed in a conscious and purposeful way by private collectors before sometimes being incorporated into – or converted into – public museums. It is worth briefly outlining the key thinking in this area in order to put the unusual status of the Silver Studio Collection into a wider theoretical context. Private collectors are frequently seen as motivated by a passion to acquire objects, perhaps as a way of exerting control over the world through their ability to select, reject and categorize.[3] A further motive for collecting may be the acquisition of, "cultural capital" as Van der Grijp notes:

> …the creation of a serious collection equals—or at least represents—the production of culture. A collection is a social identity marker that provides (in Bourdieu's terms) cultural capital and augments the social status of the collector.[4]

Cultural capital is at least partly associated with financial capital, and for some collectors the desire to build a collection of objects is motivated by their sense that this is an investment, the value of which will go up. It is also associated with the development of knowledge, so that collectors may be motivated by the desire to acquire and transmit new knowledge, and to benefit from the enhanced social status that may be associated with this.

The activities of private collectors are frequently characterized by the kind of collecting that Susan Pearce calls "systematic," namely that which purports to be rational rather than emotional. It is this approach to collecting that built natural history and other scientific collections in the world's great museums. As Pearce notes:

> The idea that an understanding of reality lies in the ability to divide and classify, to compare and contrast, and to create classificatory structures into

[3] See for example Russell Belk, "Collectors and Collecting," in *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, ed. Susan Pearce (London: Routledge, 1994), 317–26.
[4] Van der Grijp, "The Sacred Gift: Donations from Private Collectors to Public Museums," 28.

> which all individual examples fit was fundamental [to the museum as modern institution]. Equally fundamental was the role of actual physical objects, material that is essential as evidence for the conceptual assertions which drew their validity from their ability to describe the `real world'.[5]

As discussed in the previous chapter, we can understand the actions of the Circulation Department in relation to the contents of the Silver Studio as motivated by similar impulses, in the sense that the majority of items chosen were aligned with a pre-existing, Pevsnerian, view of what should be regarded as significant within the history of design. Rather like natural history specialists hunting for specimens, the Circulation department chose examples from the Silver Studio to fit existing classificatory structures and models of explanation about the evolution of design. Both private collectors and museums are keen to develop and demonstrate expertise in an area by careful discrimination between objects to be included within their collection and those to be excluded.

Once acquired by museums, objects are removed from the marketplace, separated from circulation within the commercial world. There is an assumption that objects that are acquired by museums will not be sold again but instead acquire a different status in which their cultural value supersedes their financial value. Indeed, this separation from the marketplace is arguably one of the defining characteristics of a formal "collection" as opposed to a mere accumulation of possessions. Discussing the ideas of Pomian, Van der Grijp notes that:

> Pomian's first characteristic of a collection is that the constituent objects are temporarily or permanently removed from the ambit of useful activities. Thus, the stock of a shop would not be included in this definition, and neither would a set of instruments or tools serving within a production context.[6]

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[5] Susan Pearce, "A New Way of Looking at Old Things," *Museum International* 51, no. 2 (1999): 13.

[6] Van der Grijp, "The Sacred Gift: Donations from Private Collectors to Public Museums," 22.

Private collectors may have a slightly different attitude, since they may on occasion decide to sell an item in their collection in order to 'trade up' to a better example of the same thing. Yet, significantly, for private collectors too, there is generally a clear distinction to be made between the "collection proper," and everything else they own.[7] By this definition, the contents of the Silver Studio were not a 'collection' in Rex Silver's lifetime or in the period immediately after his death, because they had not yet been formally removed from the category of useful everyday objects or tools. Nor had they been formed through a conscious process of systematic acquisition but instead represented the accumulated contents of a working studio, including both design outputs and supporting materials.

We can be fairly sure that Rex Silver did not think of himself as a collector, in this formal sense, for two reasons. First because it is clear that he did not think of items that belonged to the Studio as having a "sacred" status during its working lifetime. Items entered the Studio because they were part of the working equipment of the business but could easily leave it again if they were no longer useful. Correspondence in the archive suggests that the Silver Studio had owned a copy of Owen Jones's important nineteenth century publication on design, *The Grammar of Ornament*, but that Rex Silver sold it in 1928. We can surmise that he saw it as no longer relevant to the Studio's work and was at that point keen to realise its monetary value.[8] Secondly, Silver did not explicitly bestow upon Mary Peerless the responsibility to ensure that the Studio's contents remained together and would be preserved in perpetuity. In a letter to Frank Lewis of April 1966, Miss Peerless noted:

> I remember my father [Rex Silver] mentioning to me your suggestion that he should write some sort of record of the Studio and I wish very much that he

[7] For example, the esteemed collectors of Victorian decorative arts, Charles and Lavinia Handley Read, presumably had no problem separating the objects that they regarded as part of their collection from their everyday possessions. Charlotte Gere, "Charles and Lavinia Handley-Read at Home," *Decorative Arts Society Journal* 40 (2016).

[8] For discussion of the sale of the Studio's copy of Owen Jones' *Grammar of Ornament* see: Hendon, "The Silver Studio Art Reference Collection," 78–79.

had. It would also have made it easier if he had left wishes concerning its future.[9]

It was only after Rex's death, therefore, that Mary Peerless and others began to conceive of the contents of the Studio as a 'Collection' in the formal sense, and to refer to it as such. However, as has already been noted, the definitions of what exactly counted as a legitimate component part of the Collection continued to be debated.

2.2 Objects of mourning and loss

Without guidance from Rex Silver on his wishes concerning the contents of the Studio after his death, the task for Mary Peerless was perhaps similar to the challenge faced by anyone on the death of a parent; namely the disposal and dispersal of their belongings in a respectful and appropriate way. For these reasons it is useful to draw upon examples of personal memoir which address this question, in order to imaginatively and empathetically reconstruct the thought processes that may have underpinned Mary Peerless' actions. The Silver Studio was located at Corner House, 1 Haarlem Road in Hammersmith, a space it had occupied for around sixty years by the time it closed.[10] Though not actually a home, it had been inhabited by the Studio's employees over that long period, and it represented Rex Silver's entire working life. The task of closing the Studio and disposing of its contents was perhaps no less daunting than if Corner House in Haarlem Road had been Mary Peerless' own family home.

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[9] According to the Silver Studio Deed of Acknowledgement, on Rex's death: "…there were bequeathed to the Legatee [ie Mary Peerless] subject to certain specific legacies all the deceased's clothing, personal effects, jewelry (sic), domestic furniture, carpets, rings, books, pictures, photographs and chattels whether at his house or at his studio for her to keep or dispose of as she might think fit." Silver Studio Deed of Acknowledgement (agreement between Mary Peerless and London Borough of Haringey (on behalf of Hornsey College of Art), 1983

[10] The Silver Studio was originally established by Arthur Silver at 84 Brook Green then the Silver family home. After his death the business relocated to another domestic dwelling a short distance away in Haarlem Road, but it was used exclusively as a working space (ie it no longer combined living space as well).

Photographs taken in the late 1960s show the Studio to have been crammed with objects of all kinds: original designs clipped to the walls in thick bundles, other framed items crowding the walls, drawers and shelves overflowing with reference materials and business records [Figure 25].[11] These photographs are the only visual

Figure 25 Interior of the Silver Studio, around 1966

evidence we have of the Studio as a working space, yet while they are full of objects, they are curiously devoid of human life. There appears to be no trace of current occupation in the form of even a coffee cup or temporarily placed pencil, reinforcing the impression that it was by then an uninhabited space. These images form an important part of the story of the Silver Studio Collection, representing the point of transition between two states of being, and therefore the starting point for a new unfolding narrative

Descriptions of the physical arrangement of the space within the Studio at 1 Haarlem Road are sparse, and there is no surviving evidence in the form of a floor plan or equivalent to show how the rooms were connected. It seems likely there was one large main room on the ground floor where Rex Silver met with clients and where the majority of the finished designs were kept on hand, ready to be seen and

[11] These photographs appear to have been taken in the late 1960s, after the Studio closed but before the process of clearing it had begun. The exact date and name of the photographer are not recorded.

discussed. Other smaller rooms (perhaps originally intended as bedrooms, since the building was part of a terraced house) were the working spaces of the Studio's male designers.[12] In 1894 the Silver Studio had been described as containing: "Photographs after Botticelli and other old masters, panels of lustrous enamels and gesso-work, scraps of fine fabrics, and books of Japanese drawings," and though some of the contents of the Studio would have changed in the intervening period, the overall effect was doubtless the same by the 1960s.[13]

Despite the apparent profusion of material evidenced in the photograph, this was a highly organized working space. As I have argued elsewhere, efficient administration was a prerequisite of the Studio's success as a business, since it was necessary to know which clients had been shown which design ideas and which were put aside for another's approval.[14] The Studio's secretaries kept meticulous records of the day-to-day running of the business, including a series of diaries. One entry, from February 1928, suggests something of the internal organization of the space:

> Mr AC King of Titus Blatter, New York called at about ¼ to 2 by appointment. He was staying at the Ritz Hotel. He spent a long time here and RS [Rex Silver] turned out everything likely to be of interest for him to see. […] He saw the 3 top drawers in the smaller chest and the main top drawer in the large chest which means he saw all the best designs large and small at the moment in the studio. He was not interested in large designs and would not even consider them as ideas…[15]

This quotation suggests that designs and other items such as books and textiles were organized according to a particular system that was evident to employees but may

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[12] As Keren Protheroe has noted, female designers were required to work from home, and the Studio's only visible female employees were its two secretaries, Miss Cook and Miss Varney. Protheroe, "Bloom and Blotch: Floral Print and Modernity in the Textile Designs of Winifred Mold and Minnie McLeish 1910-1930 (Unpublished PhD Thesis)," 28.

[13] "A Studio of Design: An Interview with Mr Arthur Silver."

[14] Hendon, "Behind the Scenes at the Silver Studio : Rex Silver and the Hidden Mechanisms of Interwar Textile Design."

[15] Silver Studio Diary, February 7, 1928

not have been obvious to others. Large plan chests held designs of different sizes and of various types; shelves held reference books on a variety of topics. Designs that had been seen by particular clients were kept separate from those which could potentially be seen by their competitors. Reference books on various subjects were shelved in different rooms for use by designers in the course of their work.[16] These observations are important because they give some indication of the idiosyncratic nature of both the material and of its internal organizational logic before the Studio closed, and thus of some of the practical and intellectual challenges that faced Miss Peerless when she was required to clear it after Rex Silver's death.

The Studio was strongly linked to a sense of family identity and history and the decisions taken by Mary Peerless with regards to its contents must be read in this light. As Lydia Flem has noted, the process of emptying a parent's home after their death is painful and psychologically traumatic. Flem outlines the desire felt by those left behind to ensure that objects will continue to be used and appreciated by their new owners, as an appropriate form of commemoration of their previous owners:

> Objects live several times over, but once passed on to new owners, do they keep any trace of their former life? It is no matter of indifference to imagine them elsewhere, in other hands, for uses that are superimposed on those they previously had. I needed to believe that these objects that had been chosen and cared for by my parents were loved, had effort put into them, were cherished by their new owners.[17]

Flem's phrase 'needed to believe' is telling here, since it points to the desire to honour loved ones by continuing to honour their possessions, an emotion experienced particularly strongly at the point of grief.

Those charged with disposing of a parent's belongings frequently experience it as a double loss; the loss of the parent is compounded by what feels like betrayal

[16] Book lists, Silver Studio Collection, Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture
[17] Lydia Flem, *The Final Reminder: How I Emptied My Parents' House* (London: Souvenir Press, 2005), 95.

in the disposal of the physical traces of the parent's life. The very fact of having to part with objects (for prosaic reasons such as lack of space) requires the person who has inherited them to attempt to impose conditions on their future use, perhaps in order to atone for the fact that they cannot accommodate those objects into their own lives. As Flem continues:

> In order to give them [my parents' possessions] away, without feelings of regret or guilt, I wanted to know that they were being used and growing old in the midst of attention. Things are not so different from people or animals. Objects have a soul. I felt as though I were responsible for protecting them from too dismal a fate.[18]

Flem's words suggest a transference of her feelings for her parents to an equivalent sense of care and concern for the objects they once owned: a desire to see those objects "growing old in the midst of attention." In her suggestion that objects have a soul there is a suggestion that they are not simply 'acted upon' but to some extent make demands on us as active participants in their ongoing care.

Susannah Walker's recent memoir, *The Life of Stuff* is a reflection on a similar process of clearing her mother's home, albeit one made all the more challenging by her mother's habits of hoarding and the physical neglect of her surroundings.[19] For Walker the process of clearing mountains of rubbish and accumulated dirt after her mother's death became a process by which she sought to understand more about her mother's personality through engagement with the physical traces she left behind. As Walker notes, objects exert a powerful influence over us: we believe that possession of certain objects will keep us safe, or that they are imbued with the personalities of former owners. Her discovery of a silver napkin ring that had belonged to a child who died, stashed at the back of a cupboard, became a key to

[18] Flem, 95–96.

[19] Susannah Walker, *The Life of Stuff: A Memoir about the Mess We Leave Behind* (London: Transworld Publishers Ltd, 2018). Walker draws interesting comparisons between her mother, a hoarder, and her own career as a museum curator: the latter, she suggests is simply a more socially acceptable expression of the same tendency to attach enormous importance to physical objects, and to want to preserve them forever.

Walker's understandings of the connections between deep psychological and emotional loss, and the urge to hoard objects as a way of coping with that loss.

We can see thus see Miss Peerless' determination to ensure that the contents of the Silver Studio were not simply thrown away as the result of a desire to remember Rex appropriately; to see the contents of the Studio – individually and collectively – as souvenir objects. According to Susan Stewart, souvenirs have a very specific function, serving as "traces of authentic experience."[20] The contents of the Silver Studio arguably became souvenirs for Peerless as soon as the business closed: this was not her natural habitat, she was not a designer, and she had not worked at the Studio herself. Yet the fact that a relatively small number of items were acquired by the V&A perhaps added to her sense that these things were important: that their cultural value potentially exceeded their financial value. Fiona MacCarthy's description of Peerless, quoted in the previous chapter ("Miss Mary Peerless stands amazed, a little desperate, swept up in her inheritance of endless art nouveau") may be the result of journalistic hyperbole, but may also be a reasonably accurate impression of the overwhelming nature of the task in hand.[21] Peerless had no relationship to the contents of the Studio in the sense of any experience of it as a working environment; these objects were simply a reminder of the death of her stepfather. Following Stewart, we can perhaps see any one of the Studio's individual objects as metonymic: that is, that a single part comes to represent a larger whole.[22] As Stewart argues, souvenirs always point backwards to a narrative of loss, and that they are always by definition, incomplete.

Miss Peerless gave a number of items from the Studio to friends and former employees as a reminder of Rex Silver and of the work of the Silver Studio. Writing to Miss Peerless in January 1966, the Studio's former secretary, Miss Cook offered help on behalf of herself and the Studio's other secretary, Miss Varney:

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[20] Susan Stewart, *On Longing* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 135.
[21] MacCarthy, "Wild Nostalgia."
[22] Stewart, *On Longing*, 135.

> ….we do sympathise with you having what must be a colossal job of sorting out things at the Studio and would be pleased to help in any way we could… With regards to your kind suggestion that we should have something from the Studio – we would like this very much and when we come along we may see something we would like as a momento (sic). [23]

Thus, various items from the Studio were given as gifts, functioning as personal tokens of esteem and remembrance. Records of exactly what these were have not survived, and presumably most would have been low-value personal items.

The problem Miss Peerless was encountering, though she did not express it in these terms, partly rested on the unusual status of the items in the Silver Studio. Large collections of largely paper-based material are generally considered to constitute the archival material that supports, but is separate from, an artist's 'real work'. In this case, however, no such easy distinction could be made – the designs on paper *were* the Studio's work, and the final products of those designs (wallpapers, textiles) were frequently absent.[24] As Judy Vaknin notes, this is not a problem unique to the Silver Studio, though in the case of fine artists it is sometimes easier to make a distinction between working drawings, personal papers and so on, and the artist's finished product.[25] Professional archivists have to make difficult subjective judgements in order to weed out what they perceive to be the domestic ephemera of an artist's life – laundry bills, shopping lists and so on.[26] Deciding what to keep and what to throw away inevitably involves making judgements about the value of objects. As the Circulation Department had already found, the contents of the Silver Studio represented a challenge to existing ideas of provenance and significance that

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[23] Miss Cook, "Correspondence" (Silver Studio Collection, Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture, 1966).
[24] Caroline Williams, "Personal Papers: Perceptions and Practices," in *What Are Archives? Cultural and Theoretical Perspectives: A Reader*, ed. L Craven (Farnham: Ashgate, 2008), 53–67; Vaknin, Stuckey, and Lane, *All This Stuff: Archiving the Artist*..
[25] Vaknin, Stuckey, and Lane, *All This Stuff: Archiving the Artist*.
[26] Vaknin, Stuckey, and Lane.

were more applicable to pre-industrialised production. Deciding what to keep and what to discard must have presented a considerable challenge.

Mary Peerless distributed gifts to a number of people she deemed to have been helpful to her, or who she knew to have been friends of Rex. For example, as will be discussed in the next chapter, Hull University was briefly interested in acquiring the contents of the Silver Studio, and Peerless seems to have established a good relationship with Malcolm Easton, one of the academic staff at Hull. He wrote to her in February 1967 regretting her decision to give the Collection to Hornsey, but thanking her for the gift of a painting by Francis Bate that she had presented to Hull's Art Collection.[27] As well as providing a clue about the kinds of objects that were given away, this gift also suggests something about the distinction in Mary Peerless's mind between what counted as 'Silver Studio' and what did not. A painting by someone else could legitimately be given away because it was not part of the Studio's own work, and perhaps also because it was so different to the other categories of things under consideration.

Mary Peerless gave a few further items to the silk weaving firm Warner & Sons Ltd of Essex in recognition of the long-established relationship between the two companies: Warner had been one of the Silver Studio's clients since the 1880s.[28] The gift to Warner & Sons Ltd can be understood as a personal token of esteem on the part of Miss Peerless since she would have been aware of the long-standing commercial relationship that had existed between the two companies, and the personal relationship between Rex Silver and Ernest Goodale, the Managing Director

[27] letter from Malcolm Easton to Mary Peerless, no date (Feb 1967?). Francis Bate (1858-1950) was a painter who was a neighbour and family friend of the Silver's from Brook Green. The painting had presumably been given to, or acquired by, Arthur or Rex at some point and hung in the Studio. See https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/landscape-77987 [accessed 10.3.2019].
[28] In addition, Arthur Silver had collaborated with Warner's on a commission to design and produce the fabric for the wedding dress of princess Mary of Teck in 1893. Bury, *A Choice of Design, 1850-1980: Fabrics by Warner & Sons Limited*.

of the company.[29] Mary Peerless also gave a small number of items to other museums and educational institutions, notably the Royal Scottish Museum in Edinburgh, and the Northern Counties College in Newcastle.[30] The latter was interested in developing a teaching museum to support the institution's transition from College of Domestic Science to College of Education, and it requested items in the Art Nouveau style. The Department of Prints and Drawings at the V&A accepted a handful of other items including woodcuts by William Strang and a volume of Christmas cards by WS Coleman.[31]

Even after these small donations and personal gifts were made, however, a huge amount of material remained in the Studio. Correspondence between Miss Peerless and numerous potential recipients of the contents of the Studio during 1966 and 1967 points to a growing compulsion on her part to "do the right thing," both in order to honour the memory of her step father, and from a sense of conviction that the remaining contents of the Studio were sufficiently important to be worth saving for posterity. The contents of the Silver Studio did not constitute a formal collection in the period immediately after Rex Silver's death, but I would suggest that through the process of sorting and refining them, Mary Peerless came to have something of the same attachment to them as would have been the case for a collector who had actively built up a collection over time. In other words, we can perhaps see the creation of the Silver Studio Collection taking place through a gradual process of subtraction on the part of Mary Peerless (the discarding of what she saw as irrelevant items and the dispersal of small gifts) rather than the more common process of addition.

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[29] Jonathan M Woodham, "Managing British Design Reform I: Fresh Perspectives on the Early Years of the Council of Industrial Design," *Journal of Design History* 9, no. 1 (1996): 55.

[30] Mary Peerless, "Letter from Mary Peerless to Mr Oddy, Royal Scottish Museum, Feb1967" (Silver Studio Collection, Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture, 1967); JF Clarke, "Letter from Northern Counties College to Mary Peerless, November 1966" (Silver Studio Collection, Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture, 1966).G Reynolds, "Letter from Mr G Reynolds to Miss M Peerless" (Silver Studio Collection, Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture, 1966).

[31] Reynolds, "Letter from Mr G Reynolds to Miss M Peerless."

2.3 Transition to Silver Studio 'Collection'

For help with the question of what to do with the remaining contents of the Studio, Miss Peerless turned to Barbara Morris of the V&A. As discussed in the previous chapter, Morris had acquired some items on behalf of the Circulation department, but by this point it must have been clear that the V&A could not accept more than a small number. Barbara Morris had good links with industry as well as within the museum sector, and it may have been at her instigation that Mary Peerless briefly considered seeing the contents of the Studio as a commercial asset, rather than a cultural asset, and offering the collection to various companies who had been Silver Studio's clients.[32] Miss Peerless therefore began conversations with representatives from large textile and wallpaper firms such as Warner & Sons Ltd and Liberty and Co, who it was thought might be interested in taking the whole of the Studio's remaining contents.

As John Carman has noted, the term "museum piece" has a double meaning in English, implying on the one hand that something is of high quality and should be preserved for posterity, while: "The other meaning is ironic – that the object is no longer of any use, and that it is old-fashioned, dysfunctional, and needs to be disposed of."[33] The Silver Studio closed as a business at a time when its working methods were becoming increasingly outdated, and the contents of the Studio can be seen to have neatly exemplified both possible meanings. Under other circumstances it seems possible that, once Mary Peerless had dispersed a number of items from the Silver Studio as personal gifts, the remaining items would have been considered "waste" or "rubbish" and would have been disposed of. These low-value, ephemeral items, such as designs on paper and mass-market wallpapers, had

[32] Parry, "Obituary: Barbara Morris (1918--2009)."
[33] John Carman, "Promotion to Heritage: How Museum Objects Are Made," ed. Susanna Pettersson et al., *Encouraging Collections Mobility - A Way Forward for Museums in Europe*, 2010, 74, http://www.lending-for-europe.eu/handbook/.

already been passed over for acquisition by the V&A and therefore it might have been reasonable to decide they were of no further value to society. However, Miss Peerless seems to have experienced a growing conviction that the remaining contents of the Silver Studio were worth preserving for the benefit of future generations. [34]

Writing to Sir Ernest Goodale of Warner in March 1966, Peerless appeared keen that he would agree to take the contents of the Studio, and significantly, this is perhaps the first time that it was referred to as a 'Collection'. But again, the question of how to define the Collection's boundaries was implicitly raised. Mary Peerless wrote:

> We are much attracted to your offer to house the whole collection of Silver designs, and feel it would be in the best possible hands. We should be very glad to hear further how you would propose dealing with the material after it had been sifted and sorted as we feel we should like it to be of some permanent use or interest.[35]

It is interesting that her letter makes reference to the Silver designs but not the associated business records, textiles, wallpapers and so on that now constitute the Silver Studio Collection: these were never under consideration by Warner's because they would not have been considered to have had commercial value. Nevertheless, her phrase "permanent use or interest" was an indicator of Peerless' growing conviction that this material was worth preserving for a long- term future, rather than exploiting for immediate commercial gain.

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[34] Though it is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is worth briefly reflecting on the hidden (often gendered) labour that is involved in persuading and influencing institutions of power to retain museum or archive collections for posterity. As is clear from this example, the Silver Studio Collection did not survive by accident, but through sustained lobbying and persuasion on the part of both Mary Peerless and Barbara Morris, aided by secretaries Miss Cook and Miss Varney. As Lianne McTavish has noted, the development of museum collections has historically been a highly gendered process, although this is an area which has only recently received scholarly attention. See: Lianne Mctavish, "Strategic Donations: Women and Museums in New Brunswick, 1862-1930," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 42, no. 2 (2008): 93–116.

[35] Mary Peerless, "Correspondence, 2nd March 1966" (Silver Studio Collection, Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture, 1966).

As well as offering the contents of the Silver Studio to Warner's, the possibility of giving it to Liberty & Co or Carpet Trades Ltd was mooted, since both were firms that had been clients of the Silver Studio. But it was inevitable that companies such as these were only mildly interested in the Silver Studio's designs if they could see a potential to exploit them commercially, and not at all interested in the idea of them as material that embodied cultural or educational value. Thus, the suggestions that either of these companies might acquire the remaining contents of the Silver Studio were politely declined. Neither Ernest Goodale of Warner nor Mr Llewellyn, the representative of the firm Liberty, could see a commercial use for the contents of the Studio for their own firms. Following Van Der Grijp it is possible to see that companies such as Warner and Liberty saw the contents of the Studio as having already moved beyond the category of "tools" or "transient" objects: they were no longer objects that operated within the sphere of commercial circulation, but had already become "museum objects" in the negative sense implied by that phrase.

Under other circumstances, having been rejected by the V&A, the remainder of the contents of the Studio might have moved unambiguously into the category of "rubbish." But paradoxically, the fact that certain items had been elevated to "sacred" status by their acceptance into the V&A suggested that the other items might be similarly culturally valuable. In addition, the sheer number of designs, wallpapers and textiles, and the apparent comprehensiveness of the records no doubt added to the sense that the contents of the Silver Studio were significant and worth saving for posterity. Perhaps as a result of her correspondence with firms such as Warner and Liberty, Mary Peerless became more convinced that she wanted the collection to be kept together "in its entirety" rather than dispersed, and that it should become part of an educational, rather than commercial, organization, for the long-term benefit of students.[36] In other words, she was becoming more convinced

[36] Martyn Haxworth, "Pers. Comm. Martyn Haxworth, 2014," 2014. Martyn Haxworth was the grandson of Harry Silver, Arthur Silver's second son, and was

of the value of the Silver Studio as a cultural and educational entity; and therefore, ensuring that the collection remained "of permanent use or interest" became the crux of her ambition for the Silver Studio Collection.

Miss Peerless therefore became concerned to keep the rest of the Silver Studio Collection together, despite already having given away various items to different people. Much of her correspondence from the latter half of 1966 deals with the willingness of potential recipients to acquire it in its entirety. In another letter to Sir Ernest Goodale of March 1966, she again asked: "…I shall want to know what you suggest doing with the remainder of the collection after sorting what is of use to you."[37] His reply the following day asserted

> …we mean selecting those parts of the contents of the house that *really are the Silver collection*, [my emphasis] and leaving behind of course, those that are family possessions or items which the family desire to retain…"[38]

Goodale's response goes to the heart of the challenge faced by Mary Peerless: what exactly was this large body of material, and where did its value lie? Who was responsible for making the judgement as to what should be kept and what could legitimately be given or thrown away?

Miss Peerless did not document exactly what she disposed of in the process of clearing the Silver Studio in Haarlem Road. But based on what remains in the Silver Studio Collection today it is possible to imagine what a difficult task it must have been, since the conceptual edges of the Silver Studio Collection were extremely blurred. The everyday and mass-produced nature of the Studio's designs and sources of inspiration meant that, by definition, the items themselves tended to defy categorization. The question of what counted as worth keeping and by whom must

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involved in helping Mary Peerless with the task of deciding what to do with the contents of the Silver Studio in the late 1960s. He was subsequently a long-serving member of the Steering Committee.

[37] Mary Peerless, "Letter from Mary Peerless to Sir Ernest Goodale, 20th March 1966" (Silver Studio Collection, Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture, 1966).,

[38] Sir Ernest Goodale, "Correspondence, 21st March 1966," 1966,.

have been a difficult conceptual challenge. What counted as the real stuff and what was extraneous family or personal stuff? Which were the real objects and which were 'merely' supporting material such as library books? How important were things like cigarette cards which were low-value and low-status, but which had been accumulated by the Studio's employees as visual inspiration? Did designs on paper for wallpapers and textiles (the Silver Studio's own output) count as real objects or supporting archival material?

It appears that the contents of the Silver Studio were subject to numerous rounds of sifting and sorting, by a variety of people. Susan Lambert was a young curator at the V&A in the late 1960s and remembers helping to sort through the collection; her recollection was that it was the fact that the V&A's institutional structures were too rigid to enable to acquisition of the whole contents of the Silver Studio that lead to the perception that they had "missed an opportunity," and subsequently contributed to the setting up of the Archive of Art and Design a few years later.[39] My point here is not to suggest that more should have been kept, or that Miss Peerless and others did the collection a disservice. Indeed, as historian David Lowenthal notes, "…salvage demands subtraction. Archivists, past managers par excellence, limit intake to about 2 per cent of what they are offered and then, perforce, ruthlessly sieve even that."[40] The quote from Miss Cook above suggests that three women, Peerless, Cook and Varney (all of whom had a personal loyalty to the memory of Rex Silver), rolled up their sleeves and got on with "sorting things out." They doubtless applied what would have appeared to them to be common sense notions about what to keep, what to reject and what to give away.

[39] Susan Lambert, Head of the Museum of Design in Plastics at Bournemouth University: Susan Lambert, "Pers. Comm. from Susan Lambert, Jan 2014," 2014. The contents of the Silver Studio included designs, textiles, wallpapers and correspondence etc; which was incompatible with the V&A's materials-based departmental classification systems.

[40] David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 422.

Miss Peerless did not record her exact reasons for coming to the conclusion that what remained of the contents of the Silver Studio should be kept together. However, it seems reasonable to conjecture that that part of her motivation may have been the impulse to remember her step-father appropriately, by ensuring that his work would be retained for posterity. And though she was not the original collector of the material, it was nevertheless the case that she shaped and refined what came to be called the Silver Studio Collection through the process of deciding what should and should not be kept. This process can be seen as one in which the formerly "transient" quotidian contents of the Studio were given "sacred" status. Further, Paul Van der Grijp argues that donations to public museums by private collectors represent a change of status for the donor themselves, as well as for the objects, suggesting that:

> …donating to a museum an original creation in the form of a private collection implies a transfer of magical force that then radiates especially on the donor.[41]

In the case of the Silver Studio Collection the gift was made to Hornsey College of Art, not to a museum *per se*, but the larger point remained. Namely that the gift of the Silver Studio Collection to Hornsey bestowed benefits upon Mary Peerless in turn, in the form of an "effect of sacred radiation, aura and magical force."[42]

2.4 Conclusions

In 2001 Mary Peerless wrote some notes for the then Curator of the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture, Lesley Hoskins, detailing the circumstances around the acquisition of the Collection by Hornsey.[43] She noted that Barbara Morris and Shirley Bury of the Victoria & Albert Museum were "towers of strength" during

[41] Van der Grijp, "The Sacred Gift: Donations from Private Collectors to Public Museums," 33.
[42] Van der Grijp, 33.
[43] Lesley Hoskins was employed as Research Assistant with the Silver Studio Collection between 1985 and 1988, and subsequently as Curator of the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture between 1998 and 2004.

that period, and that it was through Shirley Bury's husband, Morley Bury (then a tutor at Hornsey) that the connection was established.[44] The fact that both Barbara Morris and Shirley Bury had been trained in Art Schools perhaps gave them a breadth of vision about the potential of a body of material such as the Silver Studio Collection to support art and design teaching in higher education.[45] It is likely that they used their personal influence with Mary Peerless to encourage her to see donating the Collection to Hornsey College of Art as both an achievable option and an important act of cultural preservation. Correspondence or other documentary evidence to explicitly support this assertion has not survived, but this conjecture seems reasonable given what is known about the people involved and the ultimate outcome.

Thus, this key period between 1966 and 1967 marks a period of transition during which the contents of the Silver Studio changed from working studio to institutional body of material. The material that had previously filled the rooms of the Studio in Haarlem Road, Hammersmith, underwent a transition from working paraphernalia of a commercial design studio, to objects of memory and souvenir: they would subsequently become objects that were deemed to hold both cultural heritage value and pedagogical value. Mary Peerless was motivated by a sense of contribution to the wider public benefit (albeit one which was relatively loosely defined), and also to the idea that the Silver Studio Collection would become a resource for students. The contents of the Silver Studio that remained after Barbara Morris and Shirley Bury made their selection on behalf of the V&A underwent a transition from potential "rubbish" to items that were deemed to have "durable" status. This meant both that they were worthy of long-term preservation and that they were officially removed from the realm of commercial transaction: it would not subsequently be possible for Hornsey College of Art to sell items from the material that was becoming known as the Silver Studio Collection. As will be discussed in

[44] Handwritten notes by Mary Peerless in correspondence with Lesley Hoskins, Curator of the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture, 2001.
[45] Sandino, "Art School Trained Staff and Communists in the V&A Circulation Department, C1947-58."

Chapter Three, Hornsey was primarily interested in the Silver Studio Collection because of its potential as a teaching resource for students. Yet the question of whether the goal of the Collection was to support student learning, or whether it had a wider cultural heritage value was to remain a source of ongoing debate, with the debate reframed periodically in the light of shifting political and educational priorities.

**Spotlight: Things Take Time

In this section I want to consider the idea that universities and museums can be understood to be moving in different temporal dimensions. What I mean by this is partly the relatively short (generally three year) timeframe of the student lifecycle, versus the much longer temporal perspective of the museum. But I also want to think about time in relation to the museum's collections in two slightly different ways. Firstly, my own experience of time in relation to the collection, namely the long timescales required to carry out conservation and other work and to see significant results. (As we will see in the next chapter, Joseph Darracott estimated that sorting out the Silver Studio Collection would take a couple of months at most: in fact, it took years). Secondly, I want to think about the experience of students in thinking about time in relation to the Silver Studio Collection, arguing that this temporal dimension of their engagement with objects is an important part of their learning experience.

My own perspective on time in the museum is of course informed by the experience of working here for so long. Sometimes this results in feelings of frustration on my part at the time it takes to get anything done: at the same time I am able to look back over a long period and recognize how much we have achieved. Browsing the shelves in the store means coming across labels in the handwriting of current and former colleagues, and reminds me of successful projects completed, conservation and documentation

work achieved and external funders satisfied.[1] Other shelves and other boxes remind me of under-graduate student work undertaken, or research and creative projects carried out by artists, designers and PhD students. Here my knowledge of the Collection is intimately linked with, and has been informed by, the many students, researchers, and creative practitioners with whom I have interacted over the years.[2]

An example of a recent research project which has expanded our understanding is the work we carried out on the Silver Studio *katagami* collection in 2016. Katagami are traditional Japanese stencils used in the printing of kimono fabric, and these were acquired by Arthur Silver as design reference in the 1890s [Figure 26].[3] These stencils are made of mulberry paper and were cut by hand by skilled craftsmen.

Figure 26
katagami stencil, 1850-1880 (K2.85)

[1] See for example, https://moda.mdx.ac.uk/2016/03/21/funded-conservation-palladio-wallpapers/ [accessed 13.08.2019]
[2] For an example of a project of this kind, see for example, Zoë Hendon, *The Hasler Gallery* (Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture, Middlesex University, 2015). Also Ellis, Adams, and Bochner, "Autoethnography: An Overview."
[3] Alice Humphrey, *Katagami - the Craft of the Japanese Stencil* (University of Leeds International Textile Archive , 2017).

The katagami stencils are an example of the way in which conservation and research projects unfold over a long period. When I first started at MoDA we knew little about these: the only mention of them had been a brief one in the catalogue of an exhibition held at the Barbican in the early 1990s.[4] At that time they were stored in over-full boxes, and inter-leaved with tissue paper, making it difficult to handle or look at them. In 2008 we ran a series of small conservation projects which enabled us to make these Japanese stencils more physically accessible. We subsequently featured several katagami in one of our exhibitions, and lent a small number to an exhibition called *Katagami Style* which toured Japan in 2012.[5] Improvements to the objects' physical storage opened them up to new understanding, through for example, the visits of Japanese professors who generously shared their knowledge in the course of carrying out their own research. In 2016 we were able to secure Arts Council funding for a large research project called *Katagami in Practice,* which involved four researcher/ practitioners and several related student projects.[6]

Like much else in the Silver Studio Collection, the *katagami* stencils were not originally intended as an end in themselves but were part of a whole assemblage of traditional tools and techniques used by Japanese craftspeople to print patterns on to fabric.[7] They are a form of embodied time, in that they represent an investment of hours of skilled and patient making, and hundreds

[4] Sato and Watanabe, *Japan and Britain: An Aesthetic Dialogue 1850-1930*.
[5] Hendon, *The Silver Studio and the Art of Japan*; Akiko Mabuchii et al., *Katagami Style (Exhibition Catalogue)* (Nikkei Inc, 2012).
[6] https://moda.mdx.ac.uk/2016/10/05/katagami-in-practice-japanese-stencils-in-the-art-school/ [accessed 13.08.2019] See also the Middlesex University data repository, Figshare: https://mdx.figshare.com/MoDA
[7] Humphrey, *Katagami - the Craft of the Japanese Stencil*.

of years of the refinement of a craft, handed down through generations. These stencils are now a source of fascination for students, who sometimes struggle to grasp the reality of the many hours of labour and skill that went into making them. They tend to assume that such delicacy could not have been achieved other than by a machine and imagine that they are the work of a computerised laser cutter. As a result, the stencils allow us to have different kinds of conversations with students about time, skill and temporality. One kind of conversation might be about craft and slow making; about the expectations we place upon ourselves these days to do things quickly and to achieve instant results. We might also have conversations around the fact our orientation towards speed is not natural and inevitable but is the result of decisions we make in the twenty-first century about how to do things.

Another kind of conversation prompted by the *katagami* stencils results from the fact that they are some of the oldest items in the Silver Studio Collection, with some dating back to the 1760s and most dating from the early 1800s. Students are frequently amazed that things this old have survived, and that they are allowed to handle them. Sally-Anne Huxtable has written about the way in which the discovery of the fossil record in the mid-nineteenth century caused designers and others to recalibrate their sense of humanity's place within the earth's history, expanding shared temporal horizons back millions of years beyond what had previously been understood.[8] In a similar way, these *katagami* stencils require students to expand their own temporal horizons back far beyond the span of their own lives and that of their

[8] Sally Anne Huxtable, "'The Drama of the Soul': Time, Eternity and Evolution in the Designs of Phoebe Anna Traquair," in *Design, History and Time: New Temporalities in a Digital Age*, ed. Zoë Hendon and Anne Massey (London: Bloomsbury, 2019).

parents' lives. They are able to hold something in their hands that is much older than they ever expected to find at Middlesex, yet it is something that doesn't seem 'old-fashioned' in the way they might usually conceptualize this.

While the *katagami* extend time backwards, they also simultaneously extend students' temporal horizons forward into the future. Students are asked to be careful when they handle them, out of respect for the objects themselves and also out of consideration for future generations. The *katagami* therefore prompt discussions about care, and about ideas of ephemerality versus durability. Interestingly, many *katagami* stencils were acquired by Westerners at the end of the nineteenth century because Japanese craftspeople no longer had a use for them in the context of a rapidly industrializing society. By collecting *katagami* and placing them in museums and art schools across Europe we have extended their lifespan, thanks to Western fascination with the intricacy of the cutting and the stylization of the motifs. They might now prompt discussion about re-use, disposability, care for objects and the different ways in which objects are valued over time, as well as about the practices of slow making versus industrialized methods which prioritize speed.

I'll return to the question of how students use the Silver Studio Collection, and the Collection's relationship with time and temporality in the chapter entitled "Time, Pleasure and Flow".

Chapter Three : "Exciting things that are also useful": The Silver Studio Collection and the Hornsey College of Art, 1968

How did the body of material now known as the Silver Studio Collection move from the accumulated contents of a working studio to a Collection formally accepted by Hornsey College of Art? This chapter moves on to consideration of the context within which the remainder of the contents of the Silver Studio acquired a distinct identity as the Silver Studio Collection. The decision to accept this Collection was made by Hornsey College of Art in 1967, just a year before the upheaval of the student protests of 1968, a point that was a pivotal moment in both the institution's history, and arguably in the history of art and design education. Hornsey's decision to accept the Silver Studio Collection bears closer examination, because it places the Collection at the heart of debates around appropriate methods of teaching in art and design, and about the relationship of art and design education to the wider economy and society, debates which are still current today. The decision to accept the Collection into an Art College, rather than a museum, also implied a different kind of status for the objects and suggested that their value would lie not in their ability to illuminate the past, but rather to inspire the future.

Until now historians have focused on the history of the Silver Studio as a commercial enterprise, and have considered the Studio's contribution to design histories in terms of its own output as a design business.[1] Historians have also considered the output of the Silver Studio from the perspective of its employees, in particular its female designers.[2] Much less attention has been paid to the Silver Studio as a Collection, located within the very specific context of a Higher Education

[1] Turner, *A London Design Studio 1880-1963: The Silver Studio Collection*.
[2] Protheroe, *Petal Power: Floral Fashion and Women Designers at the Silver Studio, 1910-1940*; Protheroe, "Bloom and Blotch: Floral Print and Modernity in the Textile Designs of Winifred Mold and Minnie McLeish 1910-1930 (Unpublished PhD Thesis)."

institution since the late 1960s. To look at the history of the Silver Studio Collection in the context of its role within an educational institution enables us to see it as an integral part of the history of teaching and learning at Hornsey College of Art (subsequently Middlesex Polytechnic and later Middlesex University). This focus shifts us away, at least momentarily, from the world of museums and design history, and into a different pedagogical space, that of the classroom and the teaching studio. The focus of this chapter is specifically on the circumstances in which the Collection was accepted by Hornsey College of Art. The next chapters will consider its contribution, in the following decades, to academic and public discourses of heritage, and its subsequent reintegration into pedagogical discourses as part of Middlesex University.

In this chapter I have drawn on archival sources from the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture and the V&A's National Art Library where these are available, as well as published documents and reports, some of which I have read as primary sources. I have also considered the wider circumstances at play within art and design education in the late 1960s, through comparisons with other institutions. Much of the discussion around the decision that Hornsey College of Art should accept the Silver Studio Collection seems to have taken place in person or by telephone, rather than by letter, and was therefore not documented. My approach, therefore, has been to piece together evidence where available, and to read between the lines where documentary evidence has not survived. This chapter will outline some of the broad concerns that were at play within Higher Education in general, and Hornsey in particular, at the end of the 1960s, and to suggest how these might have contributed to circumstances in which the acceptance of the Silver Studio Collection would have been seen as a good idea.

3.1 Background to Hornsey in the late 1960s

In order to understand Hornsey's acceptance of the Silver Studio Collection in 1967, it is necessary to first briefly outline the institution's background, and the circumstances of the time more generally. Hornsey College of Art had been

established in 1881, one of a number of Schools of Art built up by Henry Cole. Cole helped to establish Schools of Art in towns all over Britain, with the goal of improving the education of the artisan classes in order to improve the country's manufacturing output. Unlike many other Art Schools established under the South Kensington system however, Hornsey was not located in a town with a specific manufacturing focus. Instead, its location on the outer edge of London meant that it attracted more suburban and middle-class students, including a large proportion of women. As Lisa Tickner has noted, throughout the early part of the twentieth century Hornsey tended to emphasize the educational (as opposed to vocational) nature of its offer, perhaps because its suburban location meant that students could afford to think of education in its broadest sense rather than as simply vocational training.[3]

By the 1960s, Hornsey College of Art was generally regarded as a progressive educational establishment. As commentator Robert Strand has noted:

> Hornsey in the late 1950s and early 1960s had under its principal, Harold Shelton, become a highly successful and much publicized college, particularly in the field of design. It was never short of student applicants; it had a large staff of varied talents; and it sought out and succeeded in securing a great many 'outside' design commissions from industrial and commercial firms. It was in fact so successful in its blend of vitality and entrepreneurial efforts that it seemed to some observers to be bidding fair to rival the Royal College of Art.[4]

However, the context in which Hornsey operated was about to change dramatically, due to a combination of the introduction of new government policies, changes in the design profession itself and the emergence in society as a whole of new ideas about youth, creativity and modernity. All of these factors were at play in the decision to accept the Silver Studio Collection and will be discussed in turn in the following section. All of these factors also contributed to the student protests of May 1968. In

[3] Tickner, *Hornsey 1968: The Art School Revolution*.
[4] Robert Strand, *A Good Deal of Freedom: Art and Design in the Public Sector of Higher Education, 1960-1982* (Council for National Academic Awards, 1987), 84.

one sense it is entirely coincidental that the Silver Studio Collection should have arrive at Hornsey immediately before a moment of student unrest, and in connecting the two events it is not my intention to imply causation. Nevertheless, it is necessary to discuss the reasons for the student protest since these circumstances provide a background and context for the Silver Studio Collection's subsequent pedagogical uses.

The 1960s saw a significant shift in the Government's approach to Higher Education in general, and to art and design education in particular. Since 1946, the qualification offered by Art Schools had been the National Diploma in Design (NDD), which was however characterized by a high failure rate for students, an unwieldy centralized syllabus, and an over-emphasis on handicraft rather than design. According to Lisa Tickner, the NDD was seen as not only failing to produce good designers, but was actively contributing to the country's economic decline:

> Despite its title the NDD had been about handicraft rather than design, and mechanization threatened the vocational viability of courses in bookbinding, marquetry, mosaic work, tapestry or lace. The lack of industrial designers was hindering the impetus to improve trade products, modernize production and increase exports in a period of intensified international competition. In this sense the reform of art and design education, the consequence of liberal pedagogy and ministerial pragmatism, was one aspect of a broader strategy to modernize higher education in the context of the Cold War.[5]

To counter this, the government-commissioned Coldstream report of 1960 led to the establishment of the foundation year course in art schools followed by three years of studio practice and complementary studies.[6]

[5] Tickner, *Hornsey 1968: The Art School Revolution*, 15.

[6] William Coldstream, painter, part of the Euston Road school of realist portraiture. After World War II he became Head of Painting at Camberwell School of Art, and in 1949 was appointed Slade Professor of Fine Art. In addition to his own artistic practice, Coldstream had a life-long interest in art education and was the author of two Government reports (1960 and 1968), which took his name.

This new Diploma in Art & Design (DipAD) was consciously intended to have the same status as university degree. However, increasing the status of the qualification also raised the question of whether the purpose of Art Schools should be to offer practical training for artisans or a more broadly defined liberal education. More than that, it called into question whether or not art and design education should produce graduates in possession of skills that were relevant to industry, or whether it should encourage personal self-expression. In the case of Hornsey, the increasing emphasis on students' academic achievement in order to satisfy the requirements of the DipAD meant a shift of emphasis from a grounding in materials and techniques (which were coming to be seen as vocational skills-type training); and towards an educational system in which students learned a systematic approach to problem solving and were praised for creative solutions. Creativity and innovation were gradually to become the new justification for art and design subjects, rather than the replication of old established ways of doing things.[7] But creativity implied an innate ability rather than a set of skills that could be taught, casting doubt on the value of art and design education at all. As Jenny Rintoul argues, by the late 1960s:

> Creativity was perceived as impossible to instil pedagogically; the view of creativity as innate, unspoilt and in need of being 'liberated' was also considered problematic. 'Creativity' gave way to 'attitude', which although perhaps an equally difficult term to pin down, is supposedly more concerned with criticality - or perhaps, suspicion and doubt.[8]

The Coldstream reports were central to this shift of emphasis away from 'talent' and towards 'attitude', and arguably led to great confusion about what should in fact be taught and to whom.

At the same time, by the early 1960s, there was an increasing emphasis on the value of youth rather than experience, and a growing lack of concern for

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[7] Nicholas Houghton, "Fine Art Pedagogy after Modernism : A Case Study of Two Pioneering Art Schools," *Art, Design & Communication in Higher Education* 13, no. 1 (2013): 7–18.

[8] Rintoul, *Integrating Critical and Contextual Studies in Art and Design Possibilities for Post-Compulsory Education*, 9.

tradition. Creativity (meaning personal self-expression and innovative problem solving) was coming to be seen as more important than adherence to traditional ways of doing things. This change was taking place in part because of a massive demographic shift: the number of young people in Britain was growing rapidly, representing an alteration to the balance of power within society. As Barry Curtis has noted:

> Between 1956 and 1963 in the time between the Suez crisis and the Profumo affair, the number of fifteen to nineteen-year-olds increased by twenty per cent. The interests and tastes of youth were beginning to interest manufacturers as well as journalists and sociologists.[9]

There was increasingly the sense that just by virtue of being youthful students would come up with good ideas, yet the idea that young people were innately creative was itself new and somewhat shocking.[10] This notion undermined the need for students to acquire traditional skills, and suggested that there was no longer a need to learn from the past; or at least that the past was simply a dressing up box that could be raided at will without reverence for traditional associations of meaning. It was increasingly understood that there was a need for art and design education to begin to reflect this new relationship to traditional design, and by implication to both the past and the future.

One further circumstance of particular interest here is the subtle shift in the meaning of the word 'designer.' This was a change which had been taking place gradually over the preceding century, but which was arguably accelerating towards the end of the 1960s. As Penny Sparke has noted:

> Throughout the nineteenth century, the term 'designer' was surrounded by a mist of vagueness and ambiguity. As a simple job description it was applied to fine artists, architects, craftsmen, engineers, inventors, technicians and lowly

[9] Barry Curtis, "'A Highly Mobile and Plastic Environ,'" in *Art & the 60s: This Was Tomorrow*, ed. Chris Stephens and Katharine Stout (London: Tate, 2004), 49.
[10] Alexander Massouras, "Patronage, Professionalism and Youth: The Emerging Artist and London's Art Institutions, 1949-1988 (Unpublished PhD Thesis)" (Birkbeck, University of London, 2013).

> employees of companies. The nineteenth century was one of unrelenting transition and the designer, along with every-thing else was in a state of flux, caught half-way between the eighteenth-century fine artist producing pattern-book motifs and the twentieth century industrial designer complete with office, design team and management structure.[11]

Arthur Silver had called himself a designer, and he was responsible for producing thousands of designs for wallpapers and textiles. Rex Silver had continued the business in the same tradition. But in the newly emerging context of the 1950s and 60s, the word designer took on a different meaning, for two subtly different though related reasons. Firstly, designers were achieving greater personal visibility and status: Lucienne Day, for example, appeared in a 1951 publication called 'New Fabrics and Their Designers'.[12] In this booklet, as Protheroe notes, Day was:

> …presented as a glamorous, successful, modern public figure, an authority on, and participant in the successful contemporary modern home. Her T-square alludes as much to her personal skills of draughtsmanship as it does to the post-war middle-class home she represents, that is, home as a forum for the expression of personal discernment, modernity and the appreciation and accumulation of well-made things.[13]

Secondly, the role of designer was no longer assumed to be concerned only with the decorative surfaces of things, but with the design of products, or environments, or methods of communication: the emphasis was now on problem solving, or at least on influencing the world for the better. In his seminal book *What is a Designer?* first published in 1969, Norman Potter commented that: "In this respect he [the

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[11] Penny Sparke, "Consultant Design: The History and Practice of the Designer in Industry" (London: Pembridge, 1983), 7.

[12] Anon, "New Fabrics and Their Designers," *Furnishings from Britain*, 1950, (BADDA4642). Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture (Badda4642)

[13] Protheroe, "Bloom and Blotch: Floral Print and Modernity in the Textile Designs of Winifred Mold and Minnie McLeish 1910-1930 (Unpublished PhD Thesis)," 25. As Protheroe notes, Rex Silver and some of his male contemporaries from the textile industry were also featured in the same leaflet, but in contrast to the glamour of Lucienne Day they appear "uncomfortable with the publicity machine and instead appear as key men in the administrative side of the production chain."

designer] might be seen as a medical man, with the responsibility a doctor has for accurate diagnosis (problem analysis) and for a relevant prescription (design proposals)…"[14] Thus the meaning of the word designer was beginning to shift from something equivalent to 'pattern drawer' as the Silvers and their contemporaries had understood it, and towards a new definition more synonymous with 'industrial designer'. The designer was no longer an anonymous person working in the service of industry but was now assumed to be a more visible professional person, devising technological solutions to societal problems.[15]

These circumstances provide the background for debate about the appropriate form and content of art and design education by the late 1960s. On the one hand, in the wider world there was an increasing disregard for history, for the past, and for tradition. At the same time, within newly introduced Diploma in Art and Design courses there was the requirement for students to pay more attention to the academic histories of their disciplines, through what became known as 'complementary studies'.

3.2 Art History and Complementary Studies

In order to understand why staff at Hornsey College of Art might have been interested in acquiring the contents of the Silver Studio it is necessary to look more closely at the newly introduced qualification, the Diploma or 'Dip Ad'. By late 1950s and early 60s, Hornsey was at centre of what was becoming a major debate about the nature of art and design education. Art Colleges had traditionally been a place for people whose talents did not lie in academic writing, but whose strengths lay in making and in the visual. The new Diploma challenged this tradition by, firstly, introducing more formal entry requirements; and secondly by inserting an academic

[14] Norman Potter, *What Is a Designer*, 2nd ed. (London & New York: Studio Vista, 1980), 19. Potter's book was first published in 1969, to great critical acclaim. He also sided with the students during the 1968 protests at Hornsey. See Tanya Harrod, "Obituary: Norman Potter," The Independent, 1995. [accessed 01-02-2015]
[15] Bruce Archer, "Design as a Discipline," *Design Studies* 1, no. 1 (1979): 17–20.

art history/complementary studies/visual research component into the curriculum for all studio-based students in an attempt to bring courses up to an equivalent standard of those offered by Universities. As Woodham notes: "Following the publication of the 1960 Report by the National Advisory Council on Art Education (the Coldstream Report) from 1963 onwards all art and design diploma students in Britain had to follow a significant percentage of their studies in art history."[16] Complementary studies was part of the attempt to provide students with a broad liberal education, and this new requirement provides some of the context for Hornsey College's decision to accept the Silver Studio Collection.

However, despite the government's approval of the Coldstream report, it seems clear that nobody had clearly defined what complementary studies should actually consist of. According to Tickner: "At Hornsey College in 1967…Warren Piper proposed combining general studies and visual research to create a richer more unified programme." However, she argues that this was more for administrative convenience than for students' benefit.[17] One of the tutors employed at Hornsey in the mid-1960s was Stuart Brisley, who was among a number of young lectures who were drafted in to try to meet the new requirements of teaching Visual Research and complementary studies.[18] Interviewed in 1996, he remembered the 1960s at Hornsey as a time when tutors and students were largely "making it up as they went along":

> What is visual research? I asked myself. Yes, I'll try and answer that, I don't think I can. Anyway, visual research, I taught there [at Hornsey] from 1964 to 1968, and with occasional visits to other places, but, and eventually I was doing three days a week on this, I ran a Visual Research programme and had

[16] Jonathan M Woodham, "Designing Design History: From Pevsner to Postmodernism," *Working Papers in Communication Research Archive, Vol 1(1): Digitisation and Knowledge.*, 2006, unpaginated.
[17] Tickner, *Hornsey 1968: The Art School Revolution*, 74–75.
[18] Brisley later became a performance artist. Melanie Roberts, "National Life Stories, Artists' Lives: Stuart Brisley," *National Life Stories, The British Library*, 1996. Stuart Brisley, "The Official Website of Stuart Brisley," accessed November 22, 2015, http://www.stuartbrisley.com/pages/4 [Accessed 22-11-2015].

> a group of students in. The Hornsey College of Art was an interesting place at the time, because it seemed to be expanding by leaps and bounds, you know, all over the place. There were 1,000 students in the end and 300 members of staff, or roughly 1,000 students, and on eight campuses. So, it was a gigantic sort of thing that seemed to have its own sort of volition as it were of generating itself. And because of the Coldstream/Summerson Report there was also a complementary studies programme developing as well as visual research. Now all students from all different departments were required to do both these, so, students were required to do either two I think it was, two days a week visual research as well as shoe design or painting or sculpture or graphic design, furniture design or whatever it was, and there would be a mixture of students doing visual research…[19]

As Brisley indicated, some students and tutors found this approach extremely stimulating, while others experienced it as frustrating and disorientating, since it was not clear exactly what should be taught or learnt.

The impression given by Brisley's description is that visual research and complementary studies were well intentioned (but not yet well developed), attempts to broaden students' minds and give them the benefit of a full liberal education, rather than simply training them in practical, vocational or trade skills. In a sense, the vagueness of the programme was part of the Coldstream report's intention: rather than dictate the curriculum the intention was to prepare art and design students for the uncertainty and challenge they would inevitably face in later life. As former Middlesex University Fine Art tutor, Jon Thompson, later noted of Coldstream:

> He [Coldstream] wanted to empower a small number of independent specialist schools, by providing a reasonably stable institutional framework but without a general curriculum. Beyond a general rubric to teach some art history and provide for some intellectual enrichment of their programme, to

[19] Roberts, "National Life Stories, Artists' Lives: Stuart Brisley," 140.

> be determined by the schools themselves, under the heading 'complimentary (sic) studies' what these art schools did was to be filled in by them.[20]

However, the effect of the lack of clarity around general studies and complementary studies was resentment on the part of some of the staff at Hornsey who taught in Studio areas. These academic components took up valuable time that they thought would be better spent on the students' main areas of study. As Massouras comments, the introduction of the DipAD was likened by staff at Hornsey to the "Norman invasion," giving a clear indication of the hostility with which they perceived it.[21]

This negative perception on the part of studio-based staff was presumably not helped by the teaching methods employed, which seem unlikely to have engaged students. 'Complementary Studies' seems to have been conceived a kind of early form of design history, and was largely based on the model provided by Pevsner's *Pioneers of Modern Design* (first published in 1936 as *Pioneers of the Modern Movement*) but reissued in 1960, which became a key text for the emerging field of design history.[22] Jonathan Woodham notes that Pevsner's book blended:

> … German art and architectural historical methods [and] embraced an emphasis on designers, individual creativity, styles and movements together with an implicit critique of the mass-consumption and visual encyclopaedism of the Victorian era…"[23]

In other words, it attempted to provide a general overview of the highlights of design history of the previous century, but the discipline of Design History had not yet had time to evolve into something that was of more immediate interest and

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[20] Jon Thompson, "Art Art Education: From Coldstream to QAA," *Critical Quarterly* 47, no. 1–2 (2005): 219–20.
[21] Massouras, "Patronage, Professionalism and Youth: The Emerging Artist and London's Art Institutions, 1949-1988 (Unpublished PhD Thesis)," 53.
[22] This is perhaps not surprising, given that Pevsner was himself on the Coldstream committee, more properly known as the National Advisory Council on Art Education (NACAE). See Susie Harries, *Nikolaus Pevsner, the Life* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2011), 615–17.
[23] Woodham, "Designing Design History: From Pevsner to Postmodernism."

relevance to studio-based students. Hazel Clarke argues that: "the lack of scholarship in design history at the time resulted in 'history' teaching often consisting of little more than dossiers of styles, materials and techniques," a situation that was likely to please neither students nor tutors.[24]

3.3 Harold Shelton and Joseph Darracott

There were two key figures in in Hornsey College of Art's decision to accept the Silver Studio Collection and this section examines the slightly different motivations and perspectives of each of them, beginning with the principal, Harold Shelton. Shelton represented the tail end of the generation of 'designers' in the more traditional sense of the word; he was as a 'teacher, painter, designer and printmaker' who had originally trained at the Royal College of Art.[25] He had worked as a designer for Grafton Furnishing Fabrics after the Second World War and became Principal of Carlisle School of Art before later moving to the role at Hornsey.[26] His close links with the traditional textile industry can be seen in a letter from Alastair Morton of the textile firm Morton Sundour, while he was still Principal at Carlisle:

> I was exceedingly interested to see your exhibit this afternoon and to be shown the general work of the School. I do congratulate you on what you are doing. From what I have seen of the work of other schools I think you will certainly put Carlisle in the first flight. We expect, during the next few years, to build up our studio here in Carlisle both for woven and printed designs. This will mean bringing in young staff at intervals. I would like to discuss the question with you sometime during the summer to see if we can work with

[24] Hazel Clark, "Design History and British Design Education. An Appraisal," *Pedagogia Del Disseny* 6 (1991): unpaginated.
[25] "Archive of Art and Design: Harold Shelton Papers" (Archive of Art and Design, V&A Museum, London, n.d.), http://www.vam.ac.uk/archives/unit/ARC60872.
[26] "Artist Biography S: Artists in Britain Since 1945, Chapter S," Goldmark Gallery, n.d. [accessed 12.08.15]

> the School in this matter. I was particularly interested to see the emphasis you are placing on flower drawing…[27]

Shelton's personal experience was of a design profession and of designers' relationship to industry that was rapidly becoming obsolete by the end of the 1960s. That is not to suggest, however, that he was unaware of the changing context in which he was working. Shelton was ambitious for Hornsey: he wanted to rival the Royal College of Art and was in favour of the idea that the institution should move to university, rather than (as was subsequently the case) polytechnic status. This was because he understood that the design profession would increasingly need graduates with all-round design skills rather than with specific artisanal skills:

> …It is after all the universities which generally provide the people who go to the top in industry. The polytechnics have a role to play in providing for regional needs, but we need designers at top management and research level. It is very rare to find a man on the shop floor influencing policy.[28]

As this quote suggests, Shelton was aware of the potential class barriers inherent in the design profession, and conscious of the way in which design education was changing from the training of artisans towards the provision of a full liberal education for a middle-class profession. This shift of emphasis within design education was in part the result of new developments in the wider world of employment. Changes to manufacturing techniques meant less demand for skilled manual trades such as pattern cutters, print technicians and draughtsmen. (Indeed, the very kind of people who had been employed by the Silver Studio were those whose jobs were on the wane). As Houghton notes:

> Providing education for these trades had been a major part of the provision of many art schools. Therefore, an imperative for these institutions was to change the focus towards producing designers; that is people who earned a

[27] letter to Harold Shelton from Alastair Morton, April 1952; V&A Archives, AAD/1997/9

[28] Shelton, quoted in Peppy Barlow, "Waiting for Coldstream," Education & Training April (1970): 142–43.

> living through the originality of their ideas, rather than exclusively through their hand skills.[29]

The challenge faced by Shelton, then, was how to provide a suitable education for this new generation of white-collar designers, rather than blue-collar artisans.

As Principal of Hornsey, Harold Shelton was an enthusiastic champion of close links between education and industry, and he recognized that students needed the right kind of experience of the wider world in order to give them a good start in the employment market. He was responsible for the introduction of numerous 'outside projects' intended to give Hornsey students real life experience. During the early 1960s he regularly invited representatives from the textile, furniture and other creative industries to Hornsey student exhibitions and private views. But striking the right balance between encouraging students to be innovative and teaching them how to be commercially practical was not always easy. This tension was hinted at in a letter to Shelton from furniture designer John Reid of 1964. He and his wife Sylvia Reid were leading figures from industry who were frequently invited to student events at Hornsey. Their support for Shelton's no-nonsense approach to design was very clear:

> I would like to tell you how much Sylvia and I enjoyed our visit to the College fashion show…All the clothes were 'wearable' which is most important. It is very easy to produce interesting or startling results, as at the RCA. It is much better to produce exciting things which are also useful.[30]

Shelton's goal of providing an education in which students gained both practical skills and creative ability is part of the context for his acceptance of the Silver Studio Collection, as will be seen later.

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[29] Houghton, "Fine Art Pedagogy after Modernism : A Case Study of Two Pioneering Art Schools," 9–10.

[30] John and Sylvia Reid, "Letter to Harold Shelton from John and Sylvia Reid" (Archive of Art and Design, V&A Museum, London, 1964). John Reid later became a member of the College's governing body and was appointed Dean of Art and Design in 1975. Clive Ashwin, *A Century of Art Education 1882-1982* (London: Middlesex Polytechnic, 1982), 41.

Harold Shelton saw himself as an advocate for the importance of design in industry in general, as well as an advocate for Hornsey education more specifically. We can glean more evidence about his ideas from a number of sources, including a television interview and a number of unpublished letters in the V&A archive. In his ambition to promote the College he agreed to be one of a number of public personalities interviewed for a television programme between September 1967 and June 1968 [Figure 27]. This interview, now part of the British Film Institute (BFI) archive, provides one of the few fragments of evidence as to Shelton's philosophy of design education.[31] The interviewer, Bernard Braden, was a Canadian journalist who had established himself as a TV presenter in the UK in the 1960s. Braden conducted the interviews for this new programme, provisionally titled 'Now and Then'.[32] The premise was to interview people in public life about a key idea and to re-interview them subsequently to see how things had turned out. (Other participants included Enoch Powell, Robert Maxwell, Quentin Crisp and many others). Over three hundred interviews were filmed, though the idea seems to have been shelved before the second round of interviews were completed, and the interviews were never broadcast. The interview was recorded in February 1968, several months before the student protests which began at Hornsey in May of that year.

Figure 27 image of Harold Shelton from interview with Bernard Braden, BFI, February 1968

[31] http://collections-search.bfi.org.uk/web/Details/ChoiceFilmWorks/150746557
[32] "Screen Online: Now and Then," British Film Institute, 1968, http://www.screenonline.org.uk/tv/id/1374884/ [Accessed 20-6-2015].

It is possible that the interview as it survives is incomplete since it appears to start without much pre-amble or introduction. Shelton seems to be referring to a large-scale plan for something that he never fully defines or articulates on screen, but which he and the interviewer (Braden) seem to be mutually aware of. In the interview Shelton grapples with the problem of how he, as head of a School of Art, was to help meet the requirements of a rapidly changing economy by providing designers ready to provide fresh ideas for products and exports. His master plan seems to have involved the creation of a group of design experts to act as consultants to industry. He stated that: "I'm trying to bring together a group of people… who can talk to industry and show them new ways of thinking".[33] He went on to outline the problem as he saw it:

> At the moment, as you know, we're passing through an economic stress and a strain in which this country suffers very considerably. But for a number of years now, both in my capacity as Principal of one of the largest Colleges of Art in the country, and as - in relation to my contact with industry where I've previously had various positions – I've come to feel that we're not using this potential to the full. My plan at the moment is to try to bring together inventors, people working in research, people working in industry, productivity and engineering, and so on.[34]

His main argument was the need for what we might now call 'design-led thinking', in which designers would be given more creative freedom to find solutions to problems, and in which ideas could be constantly kept fresh.

Shelton appears to have been acutely aware of the economic imperative for this, and of the changing landscape of Britain's industries:

> Now if this country is going to export it's logical that we can't export by the production of a *volume* of goods; we must breakdown this volume to different *varieties* of goods so that we can begin to attack some new markets

[33] Harold Shelton and Bernard Braden, "Harold Shelton, Interviewed by Bernard Braden" (British Film Institute, 1968), 10.41-11.03, http://collections-search.bfi.org.uk/web/Details/ChoiceFilmWorks/150746557 [Accessed 22-02-2016].
[34] Shelton and Braden, 1.00-1.36.

> [my emphasis]. It was all very well in the industrial revolution age when we had a monopoly, the machine age took over and perhaps I think we've still got this concept. And the electronic industries which have been brought up in a different environment to the heavy industries they have to face this high level competition, and therefore they at the present moment are able, because of this experience of working in this atmosphere the electronic age, the atomic age and so on, they've faced up to it inevitably, and design-wise they're breaking through.[35]

The key point here is that Shelton saw design education as forward thinking and intimately linked to the requirements of industry. Shelton's emphasis on practical designing (by which he meant design which had an immediate commercial applicability), and his predisposition towards working closely with industry, are likely to have been reasons why he considered that Silver Studio collection would be a useful addition to Hornsey's resources. After all, despite the old-fashioned nature of some of its methods, the Silver Studio had been exactly the kind of practical, client-focused and commercially driven company that he admired.

Interestingly, the interview ends with Shelton tying himself into a semantic knot when the interviewer picks him up on a casual reference to 'taste' and asks him to define this. Shelton laughs and almost squirms with embarrassment, and attempts to shrug off the question: "I don't like to associate myself with good taste and bad taste – probably if I used that terminology I used it without thinking. I think everything we have about us should be in association with our lives, we can't design for one person, we must design in a very broad concept because the world is very large, ideas are very different, and people are different…"[36] Shelton's reluctance to be drawn into the question of 'taste' is revealing because it is perhaps indicative of a breakdown of older definitions of 'good design' by the late 1960s. That someone in Shelton's position was no longer prepared to defend older notions of 'good design' signalled the very challenge that designers then faced, namely that of meeting the

[35] Shelton and Braden, 3.58-4.49.
[36] Shelton and Braden, sec. 18.27.

needs of consumers without risking putting their names to what might be regarded as commercial rubbish.

The second key figure to play a part in Hornsey's decision to accept the Silver Studio Collection was lecturer Joseph Darracott. By the late 1960s the academicization of art schools following the Coldstream and Summerson reports meant there were calls from teaching staff for improvements in the teaching of design history to studio-based students. This was seen as important both in order to make this aspect of study more relevant to studio-based students and in order for it to become a recognized discipline in its own right. It is important to remember that 'Design History' as a discipline did not exist at this point: it had yet to be invented, a few years later, through just this kind of debate.[37] What did exist was a kind of "museum-approach" to the history of objects which was closer to the tradition of decorative arts connoisseurship, and which seemed very far from anything that would interest students engaged in their own practices of making. Within this context it probably appeared that the Silver Studio Collection would be useful for teaching complementary studies, offering the opportunity for the development of a kind of 'proto design history', since the contents of the Silver Studio were closer to students' own practice than were objects of remote classical art history.

The mid 1960s saw the beginnings of academic interest in what would eventually evolve into an area of interest known as Design History. People like Joseph Darracott, Lecturer in the History of Art at Hornsey, were among a new breed of academics teaching in art schools and polytechnics who saw themselves in opposition to the old style art histories of the traditional academy and of institutions such as the Courtauld. They were interested in finding new methods of teaching an awareness of history to studio-based students in a way which made sense to them.[38]

[37] Gooding, "Design History in Britain from the 1970s to 2012: Context, Formation and Development (Unpublished PhD Thesis)."
[38] Joseph Darracott, "The History of Design," *Higher Education Quarterly* 22, no. 3 (June 1968): 344–47.

Joseph Darracott was in charge of General Studies at Hornsey in the late 1960s, and was a great supporter of what was to become the new discipline of Design History. He was one of the driving forces behind Hornsey's acceptance of the Silver Studio Collection, doing everything he could to persuade Harold Shelton of the value of the collection to Hornsey students.[39]

As a young member of Hornsey staff, Joseph Darracott was interested in the Silver Studio collection for reasons that were subtly different to Shelton's; the former seeing the Silver Studio Collection as a potential resource for training textile designers, the latter seeing it more as an opportunity for teaching design history. Darracott saw the study of the history of design as of fundamental importance to students, as he noted in an article published in 1968:

> The history of design should be studied for the same essential reason as all branches of history, as part of man's achievements. There are additional urgent reasons in its favour here and now. First and foremost, its educative value: design is one aspect of visual education, without which some children cannot develop fully. Secondly, the history of design is directly relevant to the education of designers. Thirdly it is important to the adequate preservation of examples of design, notably in the museums. Fourthly, it has considerable potentialities, as yet unexplored, as a subject which could form a link between other disciplines.[40]

The distinction between these two views of the Collection's importance, the former emphasizing creative practice, the latter emphasizing history/theory, was perhaps not recognized at the time.

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[39] Martyn Haxworth, great-grandson of Arthur Silver, was involved in helping Mary Peerless with the transition of the Collection to Hornsey in the late 1960s. He remembered Joseph Darracott as the "driving force or key point of liaison" between Mary Peerless and the Hornsey authorities, represented by Harold Shelton. Darracott was then in charge of the department of General Studies at Hornsey. Haxworth, "Pers. Comm. Martyn Haxworth, 2014." See also John Letts, "Obituary: Joseph Darracott," *The Independent*, 1998, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/obituary-joseph-darracott-1151497.html [Accessed 20-1-2017].

[40] Darracott, "The History of Design."

Darracott made a strong case for the need for more design historians in Higher Education, which, he argued, was partly in order to meet the needs of students:

> Art college courses in textiles, graphics, three dimensional and industrial design need historical knowledge. Such special needs can only be very partly met by the courses in art history on which the Summerson Council insist as necessary to the Diploma in Art and Design… The potential value and importance of design history can be insisted on. Not only is it interesting in its own right but also closely interwoven with other studies such as economic and social history, and this histories of art and education... The problem is how to define an area of study sufficiently clearly to constitute an acceptable academic discipline...[41]

Darracott's article neatly encapsulated the dual nature of design history as it developed in subsequent decades: it originated as a means of educating practice-based students in the history of their disciplines, but also began to develop an identity as an area worthy of historical study in its own right. The question of how to achieve this balance was central to the Hornsey student protests, which were in part concerned with making the curriculum more relevant to current design practice.[42]

The main reason put forward by supporters of the proposal to accept the Silver Studio collection was that it would be a valuable resource for students in their design historical studies. It seems to have been assumed that if students were to be required to do some kind of contextual studies or design history as part of their course, then there was an obligation on the part of the College to make this as interesting and relevant as possible. The fact the Silver Studio Collection represented

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[41] Darracott.

[42] This tension is still inherent within art and design within higher education today. See for example Nicky Ryan, "Millstone or Milestone? The Perceived Value of Cultural Studies for Art and Design Students and Teachers," *Art, Design & Communication in Higher Education* 8, no. 1 (2009): 9–25; Rintoul, *Integrating Critical and Contextual Studies in Art and Design Possibilities for Post-Compulsory Education*.

a form of industrial design was presumably seen as an advantage, since it aligned with the need for sources of inspiration that were 'useful' as well as 'exciting'. In his internal report on the Silver Studio Collection's potential uses, written in 1967, Joseph Darracott asserted that it offered:

> Teaching material for the history of design. Reference material for departments in the college, particularly the Department of Fashion & Textiles. Course material for post-diploma students and graduates, who could base research on aspects of the collection. Display material for exhibitions in the college. As the basis of a research library in the history of design.[43]

Hornsey was not alone at this point in beginning to develop a design collection for the use of students: studio-based teachers in other polytechnics were also beginning to develop design collections as a way of providing students with resources for both practical and historical learning. Unlike the Silver Studio Collection, however, collections in institutions comparable to Middlesex generally evolved from the interests of teaching staff. For example, Constance Howard's Collection at Goldsmiths grew out of her interest in the history and practice of embroidery. As Hazel Clark noted in an early overview of design collections in higher education: "the intention [of the Constance Howard Collection] was to create a properly stored collection of textiles which were not considered too precious to be handled," that is, used as a learning aid by students.[44] Similarly, the Betty Smithers collection at Staffordshire University developed as a resource for the teaching of the new discipline of design history and included numerous 'ordinary' objects from the recent past, collected by members of staff.[45]

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[43] Joseph Darracott, "Report on the Silver Studio Collection" (Silver Studio Collection, Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture, 1967).
[44] Hazel Clark, "Design History Society Textile Collections in British Colleges," *Journal of Design History* 1, no. 1 (1988): 73.
[45] Liz Allen, "The Betty Smithers Design Collection, Staffordshire University," Museum Practice, 2013, http://www.museumsassociation.org/museum-practice/touch/15022013-betty-smithers-design-collection [Accessed 15-10-2015]. [accessed 15.10.2015]

Hornsey's decision to accept the Silver Studio Collection therefore developed from a set of circumstances that were at once specific to that institution, and simultaneously comparable to circumstances in similar higher education institutions at the time. However, the fragile nature of the Silver Studio Collection and the huge numbers of designs and other materials that were acquired when the Studio closed meant that it took much longer than anyone had anticipated to make it available to students. Joseph Darracott had assumed that the job of "sorting it all out" could be achieved with the help of a few graduate students within a matter of months: in fact the process was to take many years.[46]

3.4 Hornsey Accepts the Silver Studio Collection

At some point in 1966, Miss Peerless began discussions with Hornsey College of Art with a view to their accepting the remaining contents of the Studio. Several other institutions, notably Hull University and Hammersmith School of Art were also interested in acquiring it. Hammersmith's reasons for interest in the Silver Studio Collection do not survive in the archive, although it is possible that they were somewhat similar to Hornsey's with the added attraction of the fact that the Silver Studio had been based in their area. It is instructive to consider the motivations of Hull University, an institution in quite different circumstances and with very different motivations. In the late 1960s, Hull was a newly founded University rather than a long-established Art College that would shortly be merged with a polytechnic. Like York and Sussex, Hull was one of a new kind of University that was opening in the late 1960s to meet the need for an expanding higher education sector.[47] Dr Ivan Hall of Hull wrote to Miss Mary Peerless in November 1966, setting out the reasons why Hull University wished to acquire the Silver Studio Collection. Hall's arguments are interesting, as they shed light on what was seen to be important for relatively new institution struggling to differentiate itself from its competitors. Hull was, he wrote,

[46] Darracott, "Report on the Silver Studio Collection."
[47] Maureen Spencer, "From Practical Idealism to the Ideology of the Market: Whitehall, Westminster and Higher Education, 1963-1983," *International Journal of the Legal Profession* 22, no. 1 (2015): 27–49.

"a new (and geographically isolated) university wishing to build up an art collection whose elements are excellent in themselves, and which will become the basic material for research." He added that, "Because of our remoteness from the national collections, our aim is to serve, eventually, as a valid centre for further research," and perhaps aware of Miss Peerless' concerns to keep the collection together, he emphasized that:

> We can offer to take the whole collection. Our poet-librarian Mr Philip Larkin, has offered to give such a collection a specially named room with enough exhibition space for selected material, when our new library is complete in 1969.[48]

It is significant that Hall saw the Silver Studio Collection more in terms of art than of design, and it is likely that Hull University's bid for the Collection was part of a wider strategy of collecting British Art of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As the current Director of the University of Hull's Art Collection, John Bernasconi, noted recently, the decision was largely informed by the fact that art from that period was "out of fashion and cheap."[49] Ivan Hall seems to have seen the Silver Studio Collection as potentially important as an art-historical resource rather than as a resource for practice-based or studio-based students. Along with his colleague, Malcolm Easton, Hall was attempting to put a geographically remote educational institution on the map through the creation of a prestigious art collection.[50] Their motivations were in this sense a very different to that of Hornsey or indeed of the V&A, both of which envisaged that students would engage with objects at least in part to inform their practice as designers. Eventually, however, Hall's offer on behalf of Hull University was turned down, and Miss Peerless reached an agreement with Harold Shelton of Hornsey about the future of the Silver Studio Collection.

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[48] Ivan Hall, "Correspondence" (Silver Studio Collection, Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture, 1966).
[49] quoted in Matthew Reisz, "Campus Close-up : University of Hull," *Times Higher Education*, April 2, 2015.
[50] Malcolm Easton, "The Story of a University Art Collection," *Higher Education Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (1966): 48–51.

Surviving correspondence does not spell out Harold Shelton's exact reasons for accepting the Silver Studio Collection on behalf of Hornsey. As has already been argued, he placed great emphasis on practical designing, meaning design that had an immediate commercial applicability. This and his predisposition towards working closely with industry were both good reasons why he might have considered that Silver Studio collection would be a useful addition to the College. It is likely that he imagined that textile students, for example, would be able to use it to learn some of the necessary technical skills, such as how to make successful repeating patterns. The fact that the Silver Studio's designers had worked closely with clients, paying attention to such technical matters as the width of pattern repeats, the number of colours required and so on, would surely have appealed to Shelton. Writing in the Guardian newspaper in 1963, Fiona MacCarthy noted of Shelton that:

> …his fundamental belief [was] that design training must 'quickly adapt to the rapid pace of technology and science, the revolutionary change which must inevitably follow in industry, and the philosophy of commercial practice in a world of changing markets'. Designer and engineer should be taught to cooperate early; this is surely only common sense. [51]

Shelton perhaps considered that the Silver Studio Collection would be a way for students to understand the need to bring together technical and aesthetic considerations in a commercial context, as this had been the Studio's strength.

In a letter to Miss Peerless of December 1966 Shelton apologized for the lengthy negotiations he had been required to hold with the Governing Body of Hornsey College of Arts and noted his personal connection with the Silver Studio Collection:

> I am personally very pleased to think that the Hornsey College may acquire the collection in view of my own particular interest in textiles, and the fact that I at one time was a Producer with FW Grafton &Co of Manchester. At

[51] Fiona MacCarthy, "Boundaries of Design," *The Guardian*, March 20, 1963.

> that time I met Mr Silver on a number of occasions when I was buying examples of his work.[52]

With this in mind, it seems that Shelton envisaged that Hornsey's textile students would find the Silver Studio Collection useful in learning how to make successful repeating patterns, because this would have been the way that he had himself been trained. In retrospect, his decision could be perceived as deriving from oddly old-fashioned notions of education, given the many exciting and innovative things that were going on at Hornsey at the same time.[53] In a letter to the Chief Education Office of Haringey council in March 1967, Shelton admitted that the value of the collection was "mainly historical" but that it was his hope that Hornsey would be able to make it "available to students from this college, and, in fact, nationally."[54] Yet the agreement to acquire the Silver Studio Collection also represented Shelton's attempt to introduce real world experience into Hornsey in order to benefit students. With hindsight it could be argued that this showed him to be out of touch with modern design world, since the Silver Studio represented an approach to design that was becoming outdated by that point. But at the same time, it demonstrated his attempt to balance the need to prepare students for industry with the wider challenge of offering a broad liberal education, as mandated by Coldstream.

There is no suggestion that the decision by Shelton and the Hornsey governing body to accept the Silver Studio Collection was in any way a cause of the student uprisings of 1968. However, the decision to accept the Collection suggested an attitude to design education which had not yet recognized the extent of the change happening within wider society and education. In his defence it can be argued that none of the higher authorities of any of the art colleges had seen the

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[52] Harold Shelton, "Letter from Harold Shelton to Mary Peerless, 29th December 1966" (Silver Studio Collection, Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture, 1966).
[53] See for example, Anna Kontopoulou, "Young Contemporaries 1968: The Hornsey Light/Sound Workshop," Lux artists' moving image, 2011, https://lux.org.uk/writing/young-contemporaries-1968-hornsey-lightsound-workshop [Accessed 20-05-2017].
[54] Harold Shelton, "Correspondence: Shelton to Slater" (Silver Studio Collection, Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture, 1967).

student uprisings coming either. As Robert Strand notes, Shelton was not alone in his inability to foresee the future:

> Looking back at the world of the 1960s and at the rapid social, economic and technological changes that were taking place, as well as the concurrent developments in art and design education already described, with the benefit of hindsight we may think it curious that, against a background of turbulence in other parts of the education system at home and abroad, when unrest broke out in the colleges of art so many among the senior staff, governing bodies and local authorities should have been taken by surprise. For so indeed they were.[55]

The acquisition of the Silver Studio Collection was formally agreed by Hornsey College of Art in late 1967. The following year, 1968, saw a series of student protests at Hornsey and elsewhere, including Brighton, Guildford and Manchester Schools of Art.[56] Hornsey students staged a six-week sit-in, the effects or achievements and significance of which are still debated. Broadly speaking, the students were not arguing for a full transformation of the relationship between art education and wider society. Instead they called for a greater say in how they were taught, and they opposed what they saw as the overly narrow and specialized structure of the DipAD which, they believed, prevented them from working across disciplines.[57]

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[55] Robert Strand, *A Good Deal of Freedom: Art and Design in the Public Sector of Higher Education, 1960-1982* (Council for National Academic Awards, 1987), 82.
[56] Philippa Lyon, "1968: The Student Revolution," in *Art and Design at Brighton, 1859-2009*, ed. Philippa Lyon and Jonathan Woodham (Brighton: University of Brighton, 2009), 309–28. Lisa Tickner, *Hornsey 1968: The Art School Revolution* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2008); Ben Cranfield, "Students, Artists and the ICA: The Revolution Within," in *Sixties Radicalism and Social Movement Activism: Retreat or Resurgence?*, ed. Bryn Jones and Mike O'Donnell (Anthem Press, 2010), 111–31; Stephanie Boydell, "We Want People Who Can Draw: Instruction and Dissent in the British Art School," (Manchester Metropolitan University Special Collections, 2015).
[57] Marie McLoughlin, "'The Textile Student Needs Little Giotto, (or a Little Will Go a Long Way)' (Pevsner. Nov 1968). The 1970 Coldstream Report in Response to the Art School Unrest of 1968," *Journal of Design History* 32, no. 2 (2019): 170–187.

Whether or not the protest at Hornsey achieved its goals in the short term, it is nevertheless important to note that the immediate consequence for the College was that a number of key staff members were sacked or chose to leave, including Joseph Darracott.[58] Thus, the newly acquired Silver Studio Collection lost one of its most dedicated champions almost immediately. More upheaval and upset followed in the early 1970s, when Hornsey College of Art was amalgamated into the Polytechnic system (involving the merging of Hornsey with Hendon Technical College and Enfield Technical College), against the wishes of many staff. Shelton remained within the new management structure until 1977 but had arguably lost the confidence of many of his colleagues.[59]

3.5 Conclusions

The student uprisings of 1968 (at Hornsey and elsewhere) and all that they stood for, represent a critical turning point in art and design in higher education in the UK. This period can be seen as a shift from the modern era, with its faith in the certainties of progress, to the post-modern, where everything was open to re-

[58] Darracott left Hornsey to take up a post at the Imperial War Museum. See: Letts, "Obituary: Joseph Darracott."

[59] As a brief aside, it is interesting to note that unlike other institutions, Middlesex University has not compiled any official history for this period. Comparable institutions such as Kingston School of Art and the Royal College of Art have both published booklets that celebrate the development of their respective institutions and demonstrate an interest in institutional history. See for example: Neil Parkinson, *Royal College of Art Special Collections: A Guide to the RCA's Art, Archives and Rare Books* (London: Royal College of Art, 2015)., and Christopher Frayling, *The Royal College of Art: One Hundred and Fifty Years of Art & Design* (London: Lion and Unicorn Press, 1987). My suspicion is that the divisions and institutional fractures that resulted from the events of 1968 at Hornsey are still to some extent unresolved: conversations I have had with colleagues suggest that even now, fifty years later, it would be impossible to publish an institutional history of this kind for what is now Middlesex University. This is partly because of an institutional culture of reinvention and change, rather than reflection on the past, and also because the accepted mode of such publications is celebratory while the narrative of 1968 and even the language that surround it (student uprising? student protest? success or failure? etc) remain contested.

negotiation. Alex Seago has outlined this development of a postmodern cultural moment in the late 1960s through pop culture, avant-garde art and hippie counter-culture.[60] The Silver Studio Collection represents an important part of this narrative because it was acquired by Hornsey at exactly the point at which the idea of learning from the past within design education was undergoing a radical shift. It can be understood as a key moment in the split between theory and practice, or between learning from objects as exemplars (with implications of hands-on and vocational learning), and learning from the past in a more academic, critical and historical way. The Silver Studio Collection also represented the inherent tension between a model of art and design education that aimed to prepare students for industry, and a model that was more akin to a broader, liberal arts educational experience. These tensions are still very much in evidence within art and design teaching in higher education today.[61]

In a sense the acquisition of the Silver Studio Collection by Hornsey College of Art was ahead of its time. It was proposed and supported by people like Joseph Darracott because they thought it would be a useful resource for design history, but design history as a discipline took a long time to evolve away from a modernist emphasis on big name designers and pioneers of design. Meanwhile design education and design museums in general were also changing. In the eyes of some, the Silver Studio Collection shifted in status almost immediately after it arrived at Hornsey, from fantastic prize to symbol of an outdated pedagogy. As the next chapter will discuss, between the late 1960s and early 1980s the Silver Studio Collection was frequently perceived as problematic and not central to concerns of students, even as its status and reputation as a heritage asset grew with external audiences. These changes, and the place of the Silver Studio Collection within them, will be discussed in the next two chapters.

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[60] Alex Seago, *Burning the Box of Beautiful Things: The Development of a Postmodern Sensibility* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).
[61] Malcolm Quinn, "The Pedagogy of Capital: Art History and Art School Knowledge," in *The Concept of the "Master" in Art Education in Britain and Ireland, 1770 to the Present*, ed. Matthew C Potter (London: Routledge, 2017), 215–32.

**Spotlight: Time, Pleasure and Flow

Last time we were here in the store, I was talking about some of the ways in which the *katagami* stencils in the Silver Studio Collection expand students' understanding of time. Here I want to think a bit more about time in relation to students learning with museum objects more generally. As we saw in the previous chapter, it was always the intention that the Silver Studio Collection should be a useful resource for students. The title of that chapter "Exciting Things" quotes a letter from John Reid to Harold Shelton, in which he contrasted the student work on display at a Hornsey fashion show with that of institutions like the RCA which were, by implication, less useful. Reid's suggestion was that Hornsey was achieving the right educational balance of inspiration and utility, of thinking that was new yet grounded in practical reality. His remarks are a useful starting point for consideration of the pleasurable and inspirational experience of student encounters with the Silver Studio Collection, versus the ongoing expectations that students should learn something useful.

Here I'm drawing on the work of Berg and Seeber, who apply the principles of the slow food movement to the practices of academia. Their suggestion is that the speeding up and instrumentalization of contemporary university life results in poorer learning outcomes, both for students and staff, because there is never enough time to absorb, think and reflect. As they note:

> While much has been written on the corporatization of universities, its effect on time begs further attention:

> corporatization has led to standardized learning and a sense of urgency… Corporatization, in short, has sped up the clock.[1]

The effect of this, they argue is increased pressure on academic staff, leading not only to stress and mental ill-health for those staff but also to worse learning outcomes for students. Their response is to suggest the cultivation of a different approach to time, in which 'timeless time' is privileged in order to provide the opportunity for deep thought. This kind of approach would have benefits at a personal level for both students and staff, they argue, and would also further the democratic potential of the university as a space in which people are empowered to think critically and to know things deeply.[2]

As we have already seen, the museum seems to move within a different temporal dimension to that of the rest of the University, and while this has frequently been perceived as a problem, I want to argue for its pedagogical benefits for the university as a whole. As museum staff (that is, university staff employed within the museum) my colleagues and I proceed on the assumption that museum objects must be looked after for yet-unspecified future purposes as well as for present uses, and we are comfortable with the idea that processes (of conservation, of research) frequently take a long time to come to fruition. We are aware that the insights gained through engagement with the museum's collections might not be apparent to a student until many years later. In other words, we operate on the assumption of timescales that are much longer than that of the academic semester, or year, or student lifecycle.

[1] Maggie Berg and Barbara K Seeber, *The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 8.
[2] Berg and Seeber, 32.

In addition, as we have seen, the very process of looking at objects requires a slowing down and a kind of deep attention. In the chapter "Tour of the Museum Store," I previously argued that we engage in dialogue with objects, but this is a helpful metaphor only up to a point. Objects do not of course actually speak: instead, through the process of deep attention and slow looking it is possible for students or researchers to come to new understandings of their subject, their practice (and perhaps even about themselves), through engagement with the object. This is highly dependent on the student or researcher's existing knowledge, interests and motivations. As Linda Sandino and I argued in our exploration of the notion of inspiration in relation to the use of museum collections by studio-based students:

> …students brought their knowledge of textile design techniques … [but] deployed them in different ways, depending on their interests and creative identity. 'Inspiration', then, was not something that was sparked by the object alone, but from the interaction between student, object and interviewer.[3]

Through that study we came to understand inspiration as less about an instantaneous occurrence, and much more about a deep and prolonged process of looking, thinking, questioning and reflecting, often taking place over a relatively long period. [4]

This sense of being comfortable with timespans of long duration puts us at odds with twenty-first century management thinking, which prioritizes immediate results, measurable

[3] Hendon and Sandino, "Inspiration Examined:Towards a Methodology," 148.
[4] This kind of slow looking and deep engagement with museum objects was demonstrated in the One Hundred Hours project at UCL in 2014. Kate Smith, "100 Hours," n.d., https://ucl100hours.wordpress.com/ [Accessed 06-03-2020].

outcomes and speed of action rather than duration and longevity.[5] My suggestion is that engagement with the museum collection in general (and in this case the Silver Studio Collection in particular) offers a kind of antidote to the frantic pace of learning implied elsewhere in the university, and provides a perspective on the possibility of a different way of thinking about the past, present and by implication the future. As Sandino and I argued, the idea of taking inspiration from the museum's collections enabled students to: "resolve the duality of tradition and innovation as a process," or in other words to look backwards and forwards simultaneously in order to develop their creative practice.[6]

Engagement with the museum's collections also gives students the chance to experience a different temporal dimension, an idea that is closely connected to that of pleasure in learning. There are several inter-related reasons for this, namely the idea of pleasure and flow, and the idea of group learning and the power of affect. For example, Berg and Seeber emphasise the importance of pleasure and enjoyment within the classroom and argue that in fact student success is dependent on this. As they argue:

> …it may be the case that pleasure – experienced by the instructor and the students – is the most important predictor of 'learning outcomes.'[7]

Lots of people with an interest in textiles, or pattern or colour would happily submit to being shut up in the museum store for hours if we would allow them to simply rummage in boxes. Likewise, people with an interest in the development of suburbia,

[5] For a critique of this approach see for example, Crawford Spence, "'Judgement' versus 'Metrics' in Higher Education Management," *Higher Education* 77, no. 5 (2019): 761–75.
[6] Hendon and Sandino, "Inspiration Examined:Towards a Methodology," 148.
[7] Berg and Seeber, *The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy*, 34.

or any of the many other historical themes supported by the Collection would be content to browse for house. What these visitors and students have in common is the experience of pleasure and flow when engaging with museum objects. Yet within a culture that prioritizes results and defined learning outcomes, the pleasure of looking at beautiful or interesting objects, and the pleasure of losing oneself in the process, can seem trivial, shallow, beside the point and potentially even a waste of time. But on the contrary, it is perhaps precisely the enjoyment of slow looking and deep attention when dealing with museum objects that is where their value lies. In other words, we learn more when we are enjoying ourselves, and the opportunity to engage with museum objects in a hands-on way can provide exactly these moments of pleasure and flow, experienced as 'timelessness' which are important for learning.

Within the museum sector, more attention has recently been paid to the importance of touch as an aspect of the learning experience. Helen Chatterjee for example, has argued for the importance of the emotions of touch in the context of museum object handling, drawing on psycho-neurology to: "understand the psychology of touch, and the underlying mechanisms behind physical stimulation and its link with emotions experienced during object handling."[8] In my view, the experience of physically touching museum objects only partially explains the importance of this kind of learning, since touch implies a one-to-one relationship between person and object. More often, however, object handling takes place in groups, or in the presence of a museum professional, so the encounter is between objects and multiple people. It is in this

[8] Helen Chatterjee, *Touch in Museums: Policy and Practice in Object Handling* (New York: Berg, 2008), 1.

shared experience of looking at or handling objects (with other people in the same physical space) that something valuable happens.

Berg and Seeber do not address the question of object-based learning directly, but their argument can be seen to be relevant to it, particularly in the emphasis they place on both the embodied experience of learning, and the importance of context and circumstance. They point to growing recognition that IQ is not fixed, for example, but is dependent on context, since learning always takes place within an embodied brain.[9] Learning, in other words, never takes place outside of a physical context, not least because we are all physical beings with real physical brains, and are susceptible to emotions that influence learning:

> …our own and our students' intelligence depends on the context and is particularly susceptible to the emotions generated by that group. In other words, it is not an illusion that when class goes well, we all think better; recent research agrees that we actually *are* all more clever.[10]

Here the idea that looking at objects is enjoyable comes together with the idea of the importance of group emotion: it is increasingly recognised that students learn better and demonstrate greater flexibility and creativity when they are experiencing positive emotions. Therefore, having an enjoyable experience is not a waste of time, but can be seen as a vital prerequisite for learning. Further, this is more likely to happen in a group context, since as Berg and Seeber argue:

> …much more happens in a live classroom than an exchange of ideas or even of observable patterns of emotional responses.

[9] Berg and Seeber, *The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy*, 35.
[10] Berg and Seeber, 36.

> If learning were purely or even predominantly cognitive, then computers would be adequate and there would be no point in people gathering together in a room. But… [the] affective environment influences the nature of cognition: "affects may, at least in some instances, find thoughts that suit them, not the other way around."[11]

Taking time to look at museum objects, therefore, is potentially an extremely valuable part of university students' experience, whatever their discipline.

However, as I will argue in a later chapter, while it is always discipline-specific, this kind of learning is explicitly not about learning about objects in a fact-orientated or connoisseurial way [see Chapter Six]. Rather, as Peter Shaw et al. point out, a slow learning approach to pedagogy means abandoning the idea of cramming in content, and instead points in the direction of:

> …quality over quantity; of deeper processing of smaller amounts of material; of making multiple connections among new concepts, fresh data, the real world and the individual learner.[12]

As they suggest, this approach is one which requires active learning and participation on the part of the student. And as I will argue later, this is precisely how the Silver Studio Collection is used now: Shelton and others may have imagined that the Collection would be a useful tool in the transmission of knowledge, but in fact it is now a tool for the co-creation of knowledge. As Shaw et al.

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[11] Berg and Seeber, *The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy*., quoting from Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 7.

[12] Peter A Shaw, Bob Cole, and Jennifer L Russell, "Determining Our Own Tempos: Exploring Slow Pedagogy, Curriculum, Assessment and Professional Development," *To Improve the Academy* 32, no. 1 (2013): 321.

suggest: "… Slow pedagogy replaces the direct transmission of knowledge with collaborative and individual procedures promoting critical thinking, reflection and introspection," all skills that are undoubtedly valued within higher education, but none of which can be achieved quickly or in the context of a time-pressured environment.[13]

In this discussion I have jumped ahead to consideration of some of the ways in which students use the Silver Studio Collection in the present, as part of creative practice or enquiry, informed by pleasure and flow. The next chapter will take the focus back to the 1970s and 80s, and the development of the understanding of the Silver Studio Collection's importance as a heritage asset.

[13] Shaw, Cole, and Russell, 327.

Chapter Four : The Silver Studio Collection as Heritage

This chapter moves on to consideration of the wider intellectual and academic context in which the Silver Studio Collection found itself during the last decades of the twentieth century. This was a time when the Collection was still not formally regarded as part of a museum either in name, or in the sense of occupying a distinct physical space. Nevertheless, its separation from the world of commerce, the creation of a museum-type cataloguing system, and the production of temporary touring exhibitions based on research associated with it, all meant that while not officially a museum collection, the Silver Studio Collection did have some of the characteristics of one. This chapter traces the various strands of thought which came together to support the creation of new kinds of knowledge associated with the Silver Studio Collection, and subsequently to support the assertion, by the mid-1990s, that it represented an important part of Britain's heritage, and as such should be rewarded by being housed in a purpose-built museum building.

Each of several separate yet related strands will be considered in turn: the reasons for the association of the Silver Studio Collection with heritage from the perspective of Middlesex Polytechnic; the evolution of ideas around heritage and public history more generally, including the development of academic interest in the vernacular, the everyday and the architecture of suburbia; the emergence of the discipline of design history; and the professionalization of the museum sector. Though prompted by slightly different motives, these strands of thought can be seen as related through their recognition of the importance of histories of ordinary people, and of the material culture of everyday life. These became legitimate subjects of serious academic enquiry, and at the same time ordinary people themselves began to expect to see their own lives and experiences represented in public histories such as exhibitions. The Silver Studio Collection, with its connections

to mass-market furnishings and its association with democratic taste, was no longer understood simply as evidence of a relatively minor company within the wallpaper and textile industries. Instead it became associated with these larger histories of design for everyday life, oriented towards a general public, rather than student audience.

This chapter begins by considering how and why the Silver Studio Collection came to be positioned as part of wider national heritage by people within Middlesex Polytechnic, and what the implications of that positioning were. It moves on to outline the wider ways in which knowing about the past was being re-defined in this period: the development of new definitions of heritage; of 'history from below' and design history, both at Middlesex and within the wider sector; and to the emergence of interest in histories of the domestic interior. The Silver Studio Collection represented one of a number of locations for the reconsideration of what knowledge meant, and in particular for consideration of shared understandings of the industrialised, designed, material evidence of our recent past. In a sense this was the same challenge that had faced the Circulation Department in deciding which items from the Silver Studio to acquire. As already discussed, [Chapter One] Circulation had taken the lead from Nikolaus Pevsner and others in their attempt to make sense of the mass of designed objects that had been produced since the beginnings of industrialisation. In the 1980s and 90s new histories of design sought to challenge this method of attributing cultural value only to the work of 'heroic' designers, beginning to see design as the product of a wide range of cultural, social and economic factors, and the Silver Studio Collection was well placed to contribute to these narratives.[1]

In tracing the history of the Silver Studio Collection since the late 1960s my suggestion is that it existed within a changing ecosystem of academic and wider public interests, which shaped, and were in turn shaped by, their engagement with

[1] For example Adrian Forty, *Objects of Desire: Design and Society since 1750* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992)., and Penny Sparke, *An Introduction to Design and Culture in the Twentieth Century.* (London and Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1986).

the Collection's contents. The Silver Studio Collection's status as heritage asset or educational resource was constantly contested and renegotiated in the light of changing intellectual, political and economic circumstances. If we understand museums (or collections of historic objects) as shapers of shared knowledge, not simply as recorders of it, then we can see that the Silver Studio Collection shaped the knowledge of early twentieth century architecture and domestic furnishing, through exhibitions and publications such as *A Popular Art* and *The Decoration of the Suburban Villa*.[2] The Collection was in turn shaped by outside influences, such as its position within a higher education institution, and emerging debate around heritage and public history, as will be discussed in this chapter.

In my discussion of what is meant by 'heritage value' I draw on the work of Laurajane Smith who argues that those objects, places or sites that we deem to be "heritage" have no intrinsic value, but rather are constructed as such to fulfil certain functions.[3] Seen in this light, the decision about which parts of our past are worthy of preservation can be understood not as a neutral process, but as the outcome of systems of power and authority which prioritize certain aspects of the material evidence of the past for reasons which are political rather than objective. As I will argue in this chapter, the emphasis placed on the heritage value of the Collection by staff at Middlesex Polytechnic and in the wider museum and academic sector almost certainly helped to ensure its survival. At the same time, it implied a backward-looking, rather than forward-looking representation of the world. The idea that the value of the Silver Studio Collection lay in its contribution to a shared national heritage placed it within tension, I will suggest, with the idea that it could simultaneously be a resource for students. Aligning the Silver Studio Collection with the past and with narratives of public history and heritage was a necessary strategy for attracting funding from external sources. External funding was required for conservation work to make the objects physically able to be handled, and this was

[2] Turner, *A Popular Art: British Wallpapers, 1930 - 1960*; Mark Turner, *The Decoration of the Suburban Villa, 1880-1940* (Middlesex Polytechnic, 1983).
[3] Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (London & New York: Taylor & Francis, Ltd, 2006).

something which could not come from the institution's core funds. But the Collection's association with the word heritage also created the perception, for some within Middlesex University, that this body of material had little or no relevance for current teaching. The word 'heritage' became a kind of shorthand for something that was admittedly important but not rightfully the University's problem. It is of course entirely possible for something to have both an historic value and a value for current teaching, but this kind of 'both/and' rather than 'either/or' thinking seems not to have been to the fore, and hence it was difficult to resolve these two seemingly contradictory ideas in ways that were productive.

Having discussed the establishment of a shared understanding that the Silver Studio Collection represented an important heritage asset, this chapter moves on to discussion of the apparently logical outcome of this perception; namely that it should be preserved for the benefit of the local and national community through the creation of a purpose-built museum

4.1 Silver Studio Collection as 'heritage'

In 1966 the contents of the Silver Studio, a relatively unknown Hammersmith-based design company, were described by Fiona MacCarthy as being comprised of: "a century of textiles [that] cram into every drawer, fill presses, trunks and cupboards, and dusty paper parcels."[4] By 1996 the Collection was recognized as being of "outstanding national importance" by the Department of National Heritage.[5] How did the Collection make the transition from a miscellaneous selection of objects left over from the working lives of a small number of relatively obscure people, to recognition as an important asset of British heritage? Previous chapters have examined the reasons for the Collection's move from 'rubbish' to 'durable', through the acquisition of key objects by the V&A, and when the remainder was

[4] MacCarthy, "Wild Nostalgia."
[5] Mark Turner and Sarah Mansell, "Museum of Domestic Architecture and Design 1850-1950 Incorporating the Silver Studio Collection: Supporting Information for NHMF Application," 1997, 7.

subsequently given to Hornsey College of Art. But the long-term survival of the Collection was still by no means assured in these early stages. A further move was required, namely from 'durable' to what we might see as 'sacred', through wide public recognition of the heritage status of the Collection as a whole. As this chapter will demonstrate, in order to ensure the physical survival of the Silver Studio Collection as a pedagogical tool it was necessary to also make the claim for its importance as a significant part of Britain's heritage.

The acquisition of the Silver Studio Collection was agreed by Hornsey College of Art for the reasons discussed in Chapter Three: it offered students a set of exemplars for practical, studio-based study, and it also offered the opportunity for object-based study within the newly-emerging discipline of Design History. But in the first instance, the Collection presented numerous practical problems that had perhaps not been as obvious to an educational institution as they might have been to a museum. Firstly, there was the question of how to organize and store this mass of material, a question with which Middlesex Polytechnic was poorly equipped to deal. Museums and archives accepting large collections generally have a good idea of the resources required to make that collection accessible, but despite the advice of various members of the V&A's staff, senior colleagues at Hornsey (and subsequently at Middlesex Polytechnic) seem to have been unprepared for the vast task of making the collection available to students and others, both physically and intellectually.[6] The assertion made by Joseph Darracott in 1967 that: "At a rough estimate it will take six months to sort and catalogue the collection," proved to have been wildly over-optimistic.[7]

[6] A Steering Committee was in place from 1976. Members included the Keeper and members of the Silver family, along with representatives from Middlesex Polytechnic and museums such as the V&A. The Committee operated in parallel with the internal line-management structure of the Polytechnic by which the Silver Studio Collection was managed via the Library Service. Mark Turner and Sarah Mansell, "Supporting Evidence for Application for National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF) Lottery Funding," 1997.

[7] Darracott, "Report on the Silver Studio Collection."

In a sense the Polytechnic was working to the relatively rapid timetable of the three- or four-year student lifecycle. In contrast, those involved with the Silver Studio Collection were working within a museum-sector informed mental framework measured in decades (or even centuries) and based on the assumption that the Collection should be held by the Polytechnic "in perpetuity." There was thus a mis-match between the immediacy of Middlesex Polytechnic's requirements for a resource that could be demonstrably useful to students as quickly as possible, and the longer-term perspective implied by the need to sort, catalogue, preserve and document the contents of the Collection both for the present and for the users of tomorrow. Much of the internal correspondence between Polytechnic staff in the early 1970s in relation to the Silver Studio Collection concerned the practical issues of appropriate storage, and the question of whether the institution had adequate resources to look after it appropriately. The practical difficulties surrounding storage of the Silver Studio Collection are worth noting because they inevitably tended to dominate discussion at official level, leaving no room for more nuanced consideration of the Collection's purpose or significance. It is certainly the case that it took some time for the Silver Studio Collection to fulfil the promises that had been made on its behalf with regards to its potential as a useful resource for students. The problem was that the Collection was both large and physically fragile, and that there was no permanent space within Middlesex Polytechnic to store it and work on it. Until it could be properly catalogued it was difficult to make it available to students, because of the fear that things would go missing or be damaged. Therefore, access to the Collection remained restricted, to the further concern of those who were not convinced of its usefulness.

Yet it must also be remembered that official internal documents such as memoranda and meeting minutes tend to record the most urgent and impassioned problems facing an institution, and perhaps do not provide a clear picture of the ways in which the Collection was used on a day-to-day basis. There are some indications that students and staff of the Polytechnic were aware of the Silver Studio Collection and were already making good use of it in support of teaching and learning by the early 1970s. In 1972, Harold Shelton approved the re-employment of

recently-retired former College librarian, Mrs Gladys Harrison, on a one-day per week contract, having been persuaded that this was necessary in order to make the Collection available to students who wished to use it.[8] In 1975 a memo was circulated requesting the return of several items from the Silver Studio Collection that had been borrowed by members of teaching staff and not returned. While this demonstrates that issues of practical administration of the Collection had not been ironed out, it nevertheless also indicates that members of the art history staff were making use of Silver Studio Collection materials in their teaching.[9]

These examples suggest that by the mid-1970s the Silver Studio Collection was becoming regarded as a practical teaching resource for students. Yet some of the Polytechnic's decisions with regards to access to the Collection now appear curiously short-sighted. A handwritten letter within the archive contains a request from Geoffrey Newman of the Open University who wished to make use of images from the Silver Studio Collection for his new course unit on Design in Britain (1925-1939).[10] Newman was mainly interested in images from trade catalogues and periodicals, but also requested permission to reproduce: "one or two original designs by the Silver firm."[11] If the request had been granted, the Silver Studio as an historical entity, and the Silver Studio Collection as a historical resource, would likely have gained much greater prominence within design historiographical narratives. The Open University's course is now recognized as having been ground-breaking in its approach and a significant landmark in the establishment of design history as a discipline.[12] Newman's request was turned down by staff at Middlesex Polytechnic on the grounds that: "there would seem to be too many legal and administrative

[8] letter to Mrs Harrison from Mr Pudney (Bursar) April 1972. See also an article in internal staff newsletter, Anon, "Meet Lady Who Brought Order to Chaos," *North Circular (Middlesex Polytechnic Staff Magazine)*, n.d. (early 1970s)
[9] memo from David Cheshire to Bridget Wilkins, Feb 1975
[10] Geoffrey Newman, *Units 19-20: History of Architecture and Design, 1890-1939* (Open University, 1975).
[11] letter to David Cheshire (Chief Librarian, Middlesex Polytechnic) from Geoffrey Newman, September 1973.
[12] Clark, "Design History and British Design Education. An Appraisal."

problems to give a rapid reply such as you require."[13] There were concerns about copyright and the legal status of images which nobody had time to address. This decision succinctly encapsulated the Polytechnic's dilemma regarding the benefits of the Collection for the use of its own students versus the benefits that might potentially accrue through sharing it with a wider audience.

1976 marked something of a watershed for the Silver Studio Collection, when various key members of the Polytechnic's staff realized that drastic action had to be taken to either secure the Collection's future or get rid of it entirely. It is interesting to note that those who advocated getting rid of the Collection were those most likely to use the notion of its heritage significance to bolster their arguments. The Polytechnic's Bursar, Mr Pudney, appears to have been one of those who believed that the Collection would be better off elsewhere: Pudney argued for the disposal of the Silver Studio Collection because the space it took up was required for students:

> …from September next the course leader for the 4 year Graphic Design sandwich course is faced with the need to house an additional body of students in the climate of no additional studio space, other than that presently occupied by the Silver Studio Collection. The second round of interviews for this course have already been completed and there is therefore an obligation to those students which the Polytechnic must honour.

He prefaced his suggestion that the Polytechnic should "relinquish custodianship" of the Collection with fulsome praise of "this very valuable collection, which forms part of the national design heritage."[14] Here it seems that the notion of heritage was used to indicate something that - while undoubtedly valuable in the broader sense - was not the proper concern of the Polytechnic. The word heritage enabled its users in this kind of context to renounce responsibility for the Silver Studio Collection and to suggest someone else should take it on, while retaining the appearance of concern for its future.

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[13] letter to Geffrey Newman from David Cheshire, September 1973
[14] Internal memo from AH Pudney to Harold Shelton Mr J O'Neill and David Cheshire, June 1975.

In contrast, those who argued in favour of Middlesex Polytechnic keeping the Collection were more likely to point towards its current relevance to teaching. An internal memorandum from a senior member of the Polytechnic's library staff, John Duke, dated April 1976 confirmed that: "The Collection will definitely stay within the Polytechnic," and argued that in his view: "…there was sufficient evidence that the Art and Design area would take a particular interest in exploiting the collection in the future, beside occasional interest coming from outside individuals and organizations."[15] At this point, agreement was reached to appoint a Keeper, since it was recognized that: "The most pressing need was for the collection to be comprehensively sorted and indexed…and the ground prepared for research workers wishing to use the collection"[16] Mark Turner was appointed to the position of Keeper of the Silver Studio Collection in 1976, having previously been Senior Keeper of Art at Bolton Art Gallery. A memorandum from Robert Hornung to Mr Crowley (both senior Middlesex Polytechnic colleagues), noted that Turner was:

> …a history of art graduate from East Anglia, a student member of the Museums Association, and particularly strong in the arts and crafts (sic) movement and English watercolours and drawings…he was appointed against the most competitive field I have ever known, and we are favourably impressed by his work to date.[17]

Turner's appointment meant that the work of cataloguing, sorting and making the Collection available to students could continue more quickly and on a more professional basis than had been the case up to that point. It represented a clear commitment to making the Collection a more genuinely useful and usable resource for both students and the wider public.

However, it was also clear that the Collection's continued survival was dependent upon Turner's ability to demonstrate its value to the institution, framed

[15] Internal memo from John Duke to RP Hornung, J Reid, H O'Neill, H Shelton, D Cheshire, RMW Rickett MM Edwards, April 1976
[16] ibid.
[17] Hornung, "Correspondence, 16th December."

largely in financial rather than educational terms. Steering Committee minutes from the 1980s show evidence of an ongoing concern with various income-generating schemes such as design licensing. Discussion of licensing agreements with various commercial firms to allow them to create products based on Silver Studio designs (and thus to generate income through royalties) tended to take precedence within Steering Committee meetings over reports of how many and which students had used the Collection to support their learning. For example in 1983, the Steering Committee discussed entering into a commercial arrangement with a Mrs Mindich with a view to developing Silver Studio licensed products in the United States and Canada, with a 60%/40% profit share in her favour. [18] This concern with enterprise can be seen as a continuation of the discussions held in the late 1960s about whether the Collection was to be seen as a cultural/educational asset or a commercial one. As already discussed, various commercial firms had passed up the opportunity to acquire the contents of the Silver Studio, suggesting that its potential to generate income was limited. Nevertheless, the Silver Studio Collection did have limited success with the sale of rights for the development of greetings cards, tapestry kits and so on, meaning that this conversation remained on the agenda for Steering Group meetings throughout the 1980s.[19]

The other consequence of the pressure to generate income from external sources was that Mark Turner successfully secured external funding in the form of grants from museum sector bodies and in sponsorship from commercial firms. For example, the South East Area Museum Service and the British Library (in 1978 and 1981 respectively) contributed funding for conservation projects, and the John Lewis Partnership agreed sponsorship for an exhibition about wallpaper, entitled *A Popular Art*.[20] With these funds, however, came the inevitable requirement to serve a public audience. As Barbara Usherwood has noted in relation to the history of London's

[18] Silver Studio Steering Committee meeting minutes, 1983.
[19] Silver Studio Steering Committee meeting minutes, 1980s
[20] Anon, "The Silver Studio Collection at Middlesex Polytechnic (Typewritten Notes)." See also Turner, *A Popular Art: British Wallpapers, 1930 - 1960*.

Design Museum, the institution's sources of funding inevitably shaped what it thought it was for, and the sorts of audiences it aimed to serve.[21] In a similar way, the more the Silver Studio Collection was required to meet the needs of external funders and audiences, the more it turned towards those public audiences, and paradoxically the less relevant it potentially appeared as a teaching resource in the eyes of some colleagues within Middlesex Polytechnic. A concern with the past, and with external (that is, public) audiences was seen by some to be at odds with Polytechnic's ambition to provide education for students that was orientated towards the future, and with the notion that student learning should be about innovation rather than retrospection.

4.2 Heritage and Public History

These discussions about the value and purpose of the Silver Studio Collection did not happen in isolation but took place within a context in which heritage was beginning to be understood in wider terms than previously. The immediate post-war years saw a growing interest in Britain's history and recognition of the importance of preserving Britain's heritage, partly expressed as a concern for the built environment. This could be seen for example, in the growing membership of the National Trust, following the increased number of stately homes that it had acquired for the nation often in order to avoid payment of death duties. A major exhibition held at the V&A in 1974, entitled *The Destruction of the Country House*, called attention to the great country houses of England and the threat that faced them. The exhibition conflated Englishness and English heritage with the symbolism of the country house, and as Ruth Adams notes, the effect of this was to: "transform the architectural heritage of the aristocracy from a minority interest to a cause with significant popular appeal and support." [22] This was a period in which much of what

[21] Barbara Usherwood, "The Design Museum: Form Follows Funding," *Design Issues* 7, no. 2 (1991): 76–87.
[22] Ruth Adams, "The V&A, The Destruction of the Country House and the Creation of 'English Heritage,'" *Museum & Society* 11, no. 111 (2013): 1.

we now think of as the landscape of Britain's heritage came into public ownership, and much of this concern for the past originated in the aristocratic or elite elements of Britain's past. [23]

At the same time, however, the late 1960s and early 1970s saw the emergence of an interest in different kinds of historical narrative, expanding the definition of whose stories could legitimately be told. The period saw the opening of new kinds of open-air industrial museums: "such as those at Beamish Hall in Durham (opened 1965) and the Museum of East Anglian Rural Life at Stowmarket (opened in 1967)."[24] The lives of so-called ordinary people were beginning to be regarded as worthy of serious historical study and those ordinary people were themselves becoming involved in the creation, as well as the consumption, of those narratives. As Ben Cowell notes: "…subaltern forms of heritage were also developing in the shape of the growing numbers of amateur societies that were established to protect aspects of the railway system, canal boats or agricultural machinery."[25] The development of Industrial Archaeology, for example, as both an academic discipline and an area of popular interest represented recognition that evidence of industry and of working lives were worthy of preservation. This interest in 'history from below' within public history discourses was in alignment with a similar trend within academic history. EP Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*, published in 1963, had been influential in widening the perspective of a new generation of professional historians who were keen to address working class histories.[26] Feminist historians such as Sally Alexander and Anna Davin began to

[23] The William Morris Gallery in Walthamstow is one example of a large house within a park which were both gifted to the local authority in the 1950s; examples of similar circumstances can be found all over the country. In many cases the house was opened to the public as a museum while the park (formerly the private garden of the house) became a local amenity.
[24] Ben Cowell, *The Heritage Obsession: The Battle for England's Past* (Stroud: Tempus, 2008), 119.
[25] Cowell, 119.
[26] EP Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Victor Gollanz, 1963).

write about the lives of women, and to draw attention to the fact of their erasure from historical narratives until that point.[27] Works such as these paved the way for later scholarly consideration of the history of the domestic interior, which had previously been understood as exclusively female and therefore not worthy of consideration.[28]

Beyond the traditional university history departments, a parallel development in the 1970s and 80s saw a flowering of interest in the previously overlooked subject of the interwar suburbs, emerging from architecture and architectural history. As Mark Swenarton has noted, suburbia and suburban architecture had until that point been regarded as "not really architecture", but by the 1980s this aspect of Britain's built environment was beginning to gain a new academic credibility and status. [29] The publication of two key books in 1981, namely Swenarton's own *Homes fit for Heroes,* and Paul Oliver's *Dunroamin*, turned attention for the first time to the suburbs and suburban living.[30] This was an aspect of British life, and arguably a section of British society (not exactly working class, but definitely not 'elite'), that had until then not been regarded as worthy of consideration.[31] The work of Swenarton and others appeared in the context of a growing interest by academics in the ideology of housing (namely the politics of owner-occupation versus municipal housing), and also of an increasing

[27] Sally Alexander and Anna Davin, "Feminist History," *History Workshop Journal* 1 (1976): 4–6.
[28] Judy Attfield and Pat Kirkham, "A View from the Interior: Women and Design" (London: Women's Press, 1995).
[29] Mark Swenarton, "Tudor Walters and Tudorbethan: Reassessing Britain's Inter-War Suburbs," *Planning Perspectives* 17, no. 3 (2002): 267–86.
[30] Mark Swenarton, *Homes Fit for Heroes: The Politics and Architecture of Early State Housing in Britain* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1981); Paul Oliver, Ian Davis, and Ian Bentley, *Dunroamin: The Suburban Semi and Its Enemies* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1981).
[31] Swenarton, *Homes Fit for Heroes: The Politics and Architecture of Early State Housing in Britain*; Oliver, Davis, and Bentley, *Dunroamin: The Suburban Semi and Its Enemies*.

disenchantment with modernism in architecture, following the disaster at the Ronan Point tower block in 1968.[32]

The Silver Studio Collection was well placed to make a contribution to this expanded field of historical studies. As already noted, it represented evidence of domestic taste in furnishings over a long period and was reflective of a part of society that was neither elite nor working class, and which had until that point largely been overlooked. Expanding the focus outwards from the Silver Studio's wallpapers and textiles themselves to the context in which those designs had once been used, the Collection offered evidence of suburban homes that made a direct contribution to these discourses, for example through exhibitions and accompanying booklets that took the material culture and aesthetic choices of suburban dwellers seriously.[33]

4.3 Middlesex Polytechnic and Design History

At Middlesex Polytechnic, the interest in the vernacular and the 'everyday' that was being explored within the wider academic context was expressed slightly differently as a concern for the meaning of everyday things. By the early 1970s a new generation of art historians were carving a niche for themselves, largely as an attempt to define art history differently within the context of Polytechnic teaching. There was a rejection of older connoisseurial approaches to art history, and an attempt to define a discipline that was informed by greater theoretical and political underpinnings, expressed in particular through the journal *Block.* As Kjetil Fallan notes in his overview of the development of the discipline of Design History:

> …Inspired in particular by French social theorists such as Pierre Bourdieu, Jean Baudrillard and Michel Foucault, this new journal spanned art history, cultural studies and design history and 'argued for a rejection of prevalent

[32] Swenarton, "Tudor Walters and Tudorbethan: Reassessing Britain's Inter-War Suburbs," 270.
[33] Turner, *The Decoration of the Suburban Villa, 1880-1940*.

> and established academic approaches of art history influencing the subject in favour of radical alternatives that sought to understand the social and existential meaning of things'.[34]

The contributors to *Block* (including Jon Bird, Lisa Tickner, Tim Putnam, Barry Curtis and others) were developing their research in a context in which most of their time was spent teaching art and design history to studio-based students. Rather like the Circulation Department at the V&A, those associated with *Block* were attempting to create a new intellectual space within relatively uncongenial institutional circumstances. The National Advisory Council on Art Education saw the purpose of teaching art and design history to studio-based student as that of improving their tastes, but contributors to *Block* were more interested in addressing the social, political and material aspects of the creation of both art and design:

> *Block* set out to treat design, like art, as an ideologically encoded commodity, the value and significance of which were dependent on dominant modes of consumption. This approach was in opposition to prevailing versions of design writing which adopted untransformed art historical notions of univocal authorship, inherent meaning and received hierarchies of value.[35]

This was very much aligned with Mark Turner's approach to the history of the Silver Studio, which placed its designs within the social and economic circumstances of late nineteenth century consumer expansion, rather than treating it as the work of individual hero designers.

Several of the authors and editors of *Block* were involved in the emerging discipline of Design History, and one of the earliest Design History Society conferences was held at Middlesex Polytechnic in 1976.[36] It is clear that staff associated with the Silver Studio Collection were also moving in the same circles:

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[34] Kjetil Fallan, *Design History: Understanding Theory and Method* (Oxford, New York: Berg, 2010), 5.
[35] Bird et al., *The Block Reader in Visual Culture*, 131.
[36] "Fourteen Papers given at the Second Conference on Twentieth Century Design History, 1976," in *Leisure in the Twentieth Century: History of Design* (Design Council Publications, 1977).

Mark Turner gave a paper about wallpaper from the Silver Studio Collection at the Design History conference in Brighton in 1978.[37] As Joanne Gooding notes, the 1978 conference included much discussion of the creation of the discipline of design history, and of the difficulty of teaching from primary sources when the scholarly articles or books that would enable students to make sense of them had not yet been written. Gooding suggests that Mark Turner was arguably one of the few at that conference who was presenting the results of research, that is: "actually 'doing' design history' rather than merely 'talking about doing' it."[38] Interestingly, Gooding also notes that the 1978 conference highlighted the ongoing debate around the purpose and content of design education:

> Clive Ashwin highlighted two differing concerns for curriculum content, whether students were to be taught a 'body of knowledge' related to their discipline, or to develop cognitive skills involving logical thinking, the scientific use of evidence, and the ability to synthesise and communicate information.

These were exactly the questions that had been at the heart of the Hornsey protests, and also represented the challenge facing Mark Turner in relation to the Silver Studio Collection.

There is no direct evidence of interactions or conversations between the contributors to *Block* and Mark Turner in the form of meeting minutes or other archival documents, but students from a range of courses visited the Silver Studio Collection on a regular basis, providing an opportunity for informal discussion and

[37] Mark Turner, "The Silver Studio's Contribution to British Wallpaper Design 1890-1930," in *Design History: Fad or Function?* (London: Design Council, 1978), 73–78.
[38] Gooding, "Design History in Britain from the 1970s to 2012: Context, Formation and Development (Unpublished PhD Thesis)," 52. Gooding also notes that the conference highlighted the ongoing debate around the purpose and content of design education: "Clive Ashwin highlighted two differing concerns for curriculum content, whether students were to be taught a 'body of knowledge' related to their discipline, or to develop cognitive skills involving logical thinking, the scientific use of evidence, and the ability to synthesise and communicate information."

development of personal connections.[39] In addition, as colleagues within the same institution at the same time it is highly likely that they would have been aware of each other's work. In her discussion of the development of design history in UK polytechnics in the 1970s and 80s, Gooding argues that: "Those individuals teaching contextual studies to practical students formed a specific *community of practice,* sharing a domain, having conversations and interactions about similar concerns and ultimately becoming important *actors* in a wider *network."*[40] Turner's exhibition and the accompanying catalogue, *A London Design Studio* (1980), were discussed above, and its approach to the material circumstances of the Silver Studio can be seen to have been part of this larger conversation about approaches to design history that were being held by colleagues who worked at Middlesex.[41] It can surely not be a coincidence that the MA in Design History started at Middlesex Polytechnic in 1981.[42] Thus the Silver Studio Collection was a central part of the Polytechnic's contribution to these emerging discourses, placing greater emphasis on a critical analysis of everyday objects and visual culture, and challenging the accepted canonical approach to elite or connoisseurial histories of art and design.[43]

4.4 Movements in Museology

A further strand of development occurring in parallel to this was a shift in the understanding of the role of museums. The developments taking place within the museum sector are usually considered separately from the issues outlined above in relation to higher education. However, in the context of the Silver Studio Collection

[39] Silver Studio Steering Committee Minutes, 1980s, passim
[40] Gooding, "Design History in Britain from the 1970s to 2012: Context, Formation and Development (Unpublished PhD Thesis)," 44.
[41] Turner, *A London Design Studio 1880-1963: The Silver Studio Collection*.
[42] Gooding, "Design History in Britain from the 1970s to 2012: Context, Formation and Development (Unpublished PhD Thesis)," 45. Notable alumni of this course included Judy Attfield, John A Walker and many others; the course was the first of its kind in the world and was extremely influential within the sphere of design history.
[43] The Silver Studio Collection was cited in: Anthony J Coulson, *A Bibliography of Design in Britain 1851-1970* (London: Design Council Publications, 1979)., evidence that the Collection was considered a visible and important part of the landscape of design history by that stage.

it is important to consider these ideas as inter-related and inter-connected because they both prioritized a general public audience, and both represented a challenge to previously existing structures of knowledge. The changes to the roles and expectations placed on museums in the last decades of the twentieth century were essentially about changing expectations of the museum as provider of knowledge, and the redrawing of the relationship between museums and audiences, and the Silver Studio Collection can be seen as a key example of how this played out.

During the 1970s and 80s, the museum sector underwent huge changes, partly influenced by political circumstances. As Morris *et al* note:

> With the arrival of Margaret Thatcher in 1979, came drastic cuts in public expenditure and an increasing pressure to be accountable for the money museums and galleries did receive. For the first time, museums were challenged to relate their public funding to the number of visitors using their services, in other words they were challenged to prove their public relevance.[44]

The museum sector was influenced by publications such as Peter Vergo's *New Museology*, published in 1989, in which he argued that museums should be less concerned with objects for their own sake, and more oriented towards telling stories that would engage their audiences.[45] If the 'old museology' had been concerned with internal museum considerations such as documentation and conservation, the 'new museology' oriented attention towards: "an engagement with the political rationality of the museum as a cultural authority, and its organization of knowledge and power relations".[46] A decade or so after Vergo, commentators such as Stephen Weil challenged museum professionals to demonstrate their value, asking: "Are you

[44] Morris et al., "Never Mind the Width — Feel the Quality!" (Museums and Heritage Show Ltd, 2005), 4.
[45] Vergo, *The New Museology*.
[46] Nuala Morse, Bethany Rex, and Sarah Harvey Richardson, "Editorial: Methodologies for Researching the Museum as Organization," *Museum & Society* 16, no. 2 (2018): 112.

really worth what you cost or just merely worthwhile?"[47] He further argued that museums would only survive if they were to embrace the change from content to purpose. In his 1999 essay Weil proposed that museums should be seen not as static containers of knowledge, but as social instruments, whose only *raison d'être* was to fulfil the purposes that society required of them.[48] Thus rather than simply broadcast knowledge, Weil argued that museums should actively engage their visitors, and should also attempt to attract non-visitors.

The challenge laid down by Vergo, Weil and others that museums should demonstrate their public value was broadly welcomed by many in the museum sector, particularly younger generations of museum professionals who were keen to see their institutions as more relevant to audiences. At the same time, the challenge to demonstrate public value was seen by some as too crudely instrumentalist and therefore dangerous for museums in the longer term.[49] Just how could a museum's value be measured, what should its broader social purpose be, and how would it be clear whether this was being achieved? These intellectual challenges to museum professionals coincided with very real economic challenges, particularly in the context of cost-cutting to local authority museums under the Thatcher government.[50]

The museum sector had also experienced a gradual shift towards a more professional workforce during the 1970s and 80s. As Gaynor Kavanagh has pointed out, to propose a universal definition for "the museum profession" would be all but

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[47] Stephen Weil, "Creampuffs and Hardball: Are You Really Worth What You Cost or Just Merely Worthwhile?," in *A Cabinet of Curiosities* (Washington, London: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1995), 33–38.
[48] Stephen Weil, "From Being about Something to Being for Somebody: The Ongoing Transformation of the American Museum," *Daedalus* 128, no. 3 (1999): 229–58.
[49] In the 1990s local authority museums were increasingly subject to management measures such as Best Value, which asked them to justify museum activities against fairly crude financial indicators. See: Audit Commission, "The Road to Wigan Pier?: Managing Local Authority Museums and Art Galleries," 1991.
[50] Max Ross, "Interpreting the New Museology," *Museum & Society* 2, no. 2 (2004): 84–103.

impossible, due to a lack of professional cohesion and an absence of formal entry requirements.[51] Nevertheless, in the last decades of the twentieth century people who worked in museums demonstrated an increasing sense of professional self-consciousness, through for example their awareness of their generalized and systematic knowledge; their orientation towards the community rather than individual self-interest; a shared system of rewards and recognition; and adherence to a shared museum-sector Code of Ethics.[52] Professionalization, then, tended to go hand in hand with an outward, or public facing orientation, and an underlying assumption of the benefits of making museum collections available to a wide public.

These changes were slower to occur in university museums than in other parts of the museum sector. But in the 1990s it gradually became evident that the UK's universities collectively held important collections that, because they had been acquired over long periods by semi-autonomous institutions, and were often held within separate academic departments, were largely inaccessible to the public. (In this sense, Middlesex Polytechnic had been ahead of many other institutions in its appointment of museum professional Mark Turner to the post of Keeper of the Silver Studio Collection in 1976). The ongoing professionalization of the museum sector coincided with the new availability of funding from sources such as the Heritage Lottery Fund in the late 1990s, with the consequence that university museums were increasingly looking for the approval of the public and external bodies, and prioritizing these over meeting the needs of their own institutions.[53] As has been noted, the Silver Studio Collection was not regarded as a formal museum collection by that point, but it was undoubtedly subject to the same pressures towards public access rather than student engagement.

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[51] Gaynor Kavanagh, "The Museums Profession and the Articulation of Professional Self-Consciousness," in *The Museums Profession: Internal and External Relations* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1991), 37–55.
[52] http://www.museumsassociation.org/ethics/code-of-ethics [Accessed 11.10.2019]
[53] Sally Macdonald, "Real Physical Objects," in *Notes from University Museums Group Conference, Glasgow*, 2011.

4.5 Silver Studio Collection exhibitions, 1980s & 90s

All of the factors outlined above contributed to the tendency to see the Silver Studio Collection as an important part of Britain's heritage, and to see this heritage role as taking precedence over its role as a learning resource for students. The Silver Studio Collection did not have gallery space in 1980s, but instead operated from a series of temporary holding spaces on different campuses. The staff of the Silver Studio Collection developed knowledge around the collection that focussed on histories of wallpapers and textiles as evidence of popular tastes and aspirations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[54] They produced public exhibitions that toured to a wide range of venues and there are three in particular which are of importance here. It is worth noting that the exhibitions themselves were relatively ephemeral – they were each shown for a few weeks or months in different venues around London and elsewhere. But each was accompanied by a catalogue or publication which has ensured their longevity, and which fed into wider discourses of academic design history.

Firstly, in 1983, an exhibition called the *Decoration of the Suburban Villa* drew on the Silver Studio collection to tell the story of how ordinary homes in the suburbs had been decorated by their occupants between 1880 and 1940.[55] This looked at the then still-unfashionable question of the suburbs without sneering and prejudice about the tastes of inhabitants. It took a social history approach to design history – seeing the creation of homes in the suburbs as a social process and taking social aspiration and consumer tastes seriously. Similarly *Little Palaces* was shown at Church Farmhouse Museum in Hendon and venues elsewhere in North

[54] For example, Lesley Hoskins had undertaken an MA in Design History at Middlesex Polytechnic: she was employed as Research Assistant at the Silver Studio Collection between 1985 and 1988, and subsequently as Curator at the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture between 1998 and 2004. Between those two periods she worked at as the archivist at Sanderson and developed extensive expertise in the history of wallpaper. See Hoskins, *The Papered Wall*.,

[55] Turner, *The Decoration of the Suburban Villa, 1880-1940*.

London in 1987 [Figure 28].[56] According to Lesley Hoskins, this was the most popular of the Silver Studio Collection's touring exhibitions.[57] This exhibition

Figure 28 front cover of *Little Palaces*, first published in 1987, reprinted in 2003

continued the approach of taking a design history/social history approach to the previously overlooked subject of the interwar suburban semi-detached house, treating the decorating choices of those who lived in interwar suburbia as a subject of serious academic enquiry. These exhibitions were roughly contemporaneous with

[56] *Little Palaces* was first published in 1987 and subsequently reprinted in 2003: Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture, *Little Palaces: House and Home in the Inter-War Suburbs* (Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture, Middlesex University, 2003).

[57] Lesley Hoskins, "Interiors without Walls: Choice in Context at MoDA," in *The Modern Period Room: The Construction of the Exhibited Interior 1870 to 1950*, ed. Penny Sparke, Brenda Martin, and Trevor Keeble (Oxon: Routledge, 2006), 32. Mark Turner, *Little Palaces: The Suburban House in North London 1919-1939* (Middlesex Polytechnic, 1987); Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture, *Little Palaces: House and Home in the Inter-War Suburbs*. *Little Palaces* remains a key text for design historians: its influence was cited by Deborah Sugg Ryan in her recent book: Deborah Sugg Ryan, *Ideal Homes 1918-39: Domestic Design and Suburban Modernism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018).

the publications of books such as *Homes Fit for Heroes* and *Dunroamin* in which scholarly attention was turned to the history of the suburbs for the first time.[58]

Thirdly, the exhibition *A Popular Art*, produced in 1989 was one of the first to take a serious look at the cheaper end of the wallpaper market. Previous books about the history of wallpaper had tended to focus on the various firms that made up the wallpaper industry, emphasizing narratives around design and production.[59] In contrast, *A Popular Art* examined wallpaper from the perspective of consumption, considering it as a marker of social taste, class and aspiration. Importantly it did so without sneering at the tastes or morals of those who chose cheaper wallpapers, in contrast to a previous tendency to equate cheaper wallpapers with a degraded kind of taste.[60] Its starting point was the fact that from the 1920s, wallpaper was out of fashion with design elites, but continued to be produced in great quantity for the mass market, with over a hundred million rolls sold in 1935. Indeed, the exhibition argued that the lower-class appetite for wallpapers had been the reason for the survival of the interwar British wallpaper industry, with the majority of consumers still preferring wallpaper to distemper, a fact generally ignored by critics.

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[58] Swenarton, *Homes Fit for Heroes: The Politics and Architecture of Early State Housing in Britain*; Oliver, Davis, and Bentley, *Dunroamin: The Suburban Semi and Its Enemies*.

[59] Charles Oman and Jean Hamilton, *Wallpapers: A History and Illustrated Catalogue of the Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum* (London: Sotheby Publications in association with The Victoria and Albert Museum, 1982); Alan Victor Sugden and John Ludlam Edmondson, *A History of English Wallpaper 1509-1914* (London (UK): Batsford, 1925).

[60] As an example of this almost unconscious snobbery, and for evidence of its persistence since the publication of *A Popular Art,* see for example Stephen Calloway's comments about the Aesthetic Movement, which he suggested: "…sought, through individual design projects and by direct intervention into the processes of mass-production, to transform utterly *the strident, banal and pretentious furnishings and meretriciously overwrought domestic objects of the middle-class home."* [my emphasis].Stephen Calloway et al., *The Cult of Beauty: The Aesthetic Movement 1860-1900* (London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 2011), 12.

4.6 Conclusions

These exhibitions and their accompanying publications used the Silver Studio Collection as a source of evidence about the design and decoration of suburban homes, considering the material culture of everyday homes as a legitimate subject of scholarly enquiry, but presenting the ideas in a way that was entertaining and informative for general audiences. Mark Turner and his colleagues were attempting to address the decorating choices of the so-called ordinary consumer, typified by the residents of North London suburbia where the Collection was located. Their underlying assumption was that homes that were by then thought of as entirely ordinary would once have been aspirational homes for their original inhabitants. The 1930s three bedroomed semi-detached house had represented a massive increase in status and living standards for its first inhabitants, moving to the suburbs from the overcrowded inner cities, and this fact seemed worthy of comment, and indeed of celebration.

These exhibitions were groundbreaking in that they were a break from the Modernist tradition of showing room sets or domestic products that looked forward to a new future in which everything would be better if only the correct products were purchased. The wallpapers in the Silver Studio Collection were not highly prized examples of material culture. They were frequently printed on the cheapest paper and would have been bought by those without design aspirations or self-conscious design awareness. The exhibitions did not, therefore, represent a middle-class elite view of what an 'ideal' home should look like, but rather attempted to reflect what the homes of visitors had actually contained. They also rejected the idea that the only designed items worth being interested in were those by named designers.

In a sense this visitor-centred, non-canonical approach can be seen as consistent with the thinking of Middlesex colleagues who contributed to *Block*, in that these exhibitions re-inscribed value onto previously overlooked examples of design (such as the suburban semi-detached house, or mass-produced floral

wallpaper), and located them within the context of actual products that had been bought and sold, rather than as remote art objects. At the same time, however, these exhibitions placed the Silver Studio Collection firmly into the category of shared local and national heritage, implying an approach that could be read as cosy and celebratory rather than critical or analytical, thus distancing it from the more theoretically informed concerns of *Block.* The museum's then Curator, Lesley Hoskins later reflected on the main permanent exhibition, of the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture when it opened in 2000. The exhibition was entitled *Exploring Interiors*, and Hoskins commented that:

> Recent museum professional agendas reflect and reinforce a political view of museums as a potential tool in the battle against social exclusion, as well as pedagogical changes in attitudes to teaching and learning. The result is that although collections and collections' care remain essential features of museums' duties, there is a new emphasis on visitors and on personal (visitor) *experience*, both as a way of learning and as a subject of learning…This allows for an approach to exhibiting the domestic interior that responds to an academic approach that has, over a longer period, shifted attention away from the elite or avant-garde objects towards processes, the user and the demotic.[61]

The exhibition *Exploring Interiors* will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, but it is worth noting here because this quote draws attention to the many complex considerations at play in the curation of exhibitions which sought to foreground the everyday experiences and domestic environments of visitors.

While an emphasis on public benefit was to be applauded, a perhaps unintended consequence was the growing perception that the Silver Studio Collection was more relevant to heritage (to the past, to nostalgia, to public audiences, and to adult leisure learning), than to student learning, a term that implied innovation, future-focus and clearly defined learning outcomes. In this context, the Silver Studio Collection's association with heritage and with wider public

[61] Hoskins, "Interiors without Walls: Choice in Context at MoDA," 43–44.

narratives could be seen by some within senior management to count against it. It could reasonably be argued by Middlesex Polytechnic (and later University) management that if the Collection's importance lay in its relevance to national heritage, then the expensive business of storing and cataloguing it ought not to be the institution's responsibility. These points are worth noting because all museum and archive collections exist within wider political and economic contexts, in which it is necessary for someone to believe that they are worthy of preservation and to commit the funds to do so. Middlesex Polytechnic – and subsequently the University – operated within a highly political and economically uncertain context. As Maureen Spencer has argued, in the 1960s UK higher education had been driven by "liberal humanism," but this had been challenged by the "neo-liberal programme of the Thatcher administration" in the 1980s.[62]

As a result of these pressures, it became more difficult for the institution to see the value of the Silver Studio Collection, and therefore began to question the reasons for their ongoing stewardship of it. For a time in the 1990s, the disposal of the Collection appeared to be a genuine possibility. The University's motives were partly financial, though it did not stand to win immediate financial gain through the sale or disposal of the Collection. Rather disposal of the Collection would simply have saved the University from the ongoing cost and responsibility for caring for it. In the late 1990s representatives of Middlesex University opened negotiations with various bodies, including the Wolfson Foundation in California, about the possibility of their acquiring it.[63] Yet the threatened loss of the Silver Studio Collection had the opposite effect to the one the University probably intended. The Collection's heritage credentials within the UK meant that its potential disposal was widely regarded as a very negative step. Eventually the UK government achieved an export ban for it, making it impossible for such an arrangement to take place. [64]

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[62] Spencer, "From Practical Idealism to the Ideology of the Market: Whitehall, Westminster and Higher Education, 1963-1983."
[63] Silver Studio Steering Committee minutes
[64] "Despite everyone's best efforts, no suitable British museum could be found…An American museum offered to house the Collection and fund a long-term programme

The longer-term effect of this was that the threatened loss of the Silver Studio Collection prompted its supporters to rally to the cause of raising money for a 'proper' museum building. This impetus coincided with the introduction of the National Heritage Lottery Fund, providing both the motive and the opportunity to do something significant to recognize the Collection's importance as part of national heritage by building a public museum to house it. As Adrian Babbidge has noted, the time around the beginning of the new millennium was "seen by some as a golden age for museums in the UK."[65] Other projects funded around the same time included Tate Modern on London's Southbank, the Museum of Popular Music in Sheffield, the Science Museum's Wellcome Wing, and the Great Court Project at the British Museum. Yet this emphasis on the heritage value and public facing nature of the Silver Studio Collection came at the expense of thinking about how it might be used more effectively as a teaching resource for students. The Collection came to be understood by the University, by its supporters, and by funders as something which was primarily about the past, about looking backwards, and thus had minimal relevance for students more concerned with the creation of a new future.

The following chapter examines the ways in which these ideas informed the architectural layout of what was to become the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture at Cat Hill. Previous chapters have discussed the Silver Studio Collection as a discrete entity, and until the late 1990s, along with other materials that had been accumulated around it, were still known as 'The Silver Studio Collection'.[66] In

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of conservation but it was then that the Department of National Heritage stated that an Export Licence would be refused on the grounds of 'outstanding National Academic Importance.'" Turner and Mansell, "Museum of Domestic Architecture and Design 1850-1950 Incorporating the Silver Studio Collection: Supporting Information for NHMF Application," 11.

[65] Adrian Babbidge, "UK Museums: Safe and Sound?," *Cultural Trends* 10, no. 37 (2000): 3.

[66] The Charles Hasler Collection, the Crown Wallpaper Collection and the JM Richards library were acquired at various points between the late 1980s and the late 1990s. The Domestic Design Collection (previously called the British and American Domestic Design Archive) developed partly from books and pamphlets that had belonged to

around 1998 or 1999 these were collectively rebranded as the 'Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture'. This change of name, and the fact of having funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund, gave the collections the outward appearance of independence and status. Yet the Museum remained administratively simply a very small part of Middlesex University, and the resulting tensions caused by this double vision will be discussed in more detail later.

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the Silver Studio with the addition of other similar material acquired by Middlesex University staff in the 1980s. For a full summary see MoDA's *Collections Development Policy, 2019*

** Spotlight: Wallpaper and Nostalgia

For our visit to the museum store this time, I want to look at the idea of time and temporality from a different angle, this time considering the idea of nostalgia. Here we are looking at a page from a 1930s wallpaper album. I want to reflect on the experience of exhibiting wallpaper in exhibitions, which is rather different, for the visitor, than looking at one in person since rather than turn the pages and feel the paper, one can only see a static object through a glass case.

The rest of this album includes samples of patterns that would have been familiar to visitors to Silver Studio exhibitions in the 1990s, and to visitors to the museum at Cat Hill in the early 2000s, because they were then still very much within living memory [Figure 29].[1] This album contains a variety of designs, with the price and quality of paper generally diminishing the further towards the back you go.

Wallpaper albums like this one provide a useful way in to thinking about nostalgia, because of their associations with 'peeling back time', and because of the experience (familiar to anyone who has ever stripped wallpaper) of the realization of the many lives that have been lived in a house before you. In common with other kinds of material evidence, wallpaper provides a tangible sense of connection with the past, but one which can be particularly potent

[1] A typical museum visitor in the early 2000s might have been in their early sixties, thus born in the 1940s, and would therefore have been familiar with wallpapers from the 1930s through memories of their own homes or the homes of others.

because it is connected with ideas of home, family and the intimacy of domestic space.

Nostalgia has sometimes been regarded with suspicion by some within the museum sector, seeing it as unimportant or trivial, suggestive of an emotional rather than analytical relationship with history and the past. As Fiona Candlin argues, for example, commentators such as Robert Hewison were distrustful of sites such as Beamish Open Air Museum and Ironbridge because they equated nostalgia with a way of sentimentalizing and sanitizing Britain's industrial past.[2] More recent scholars have

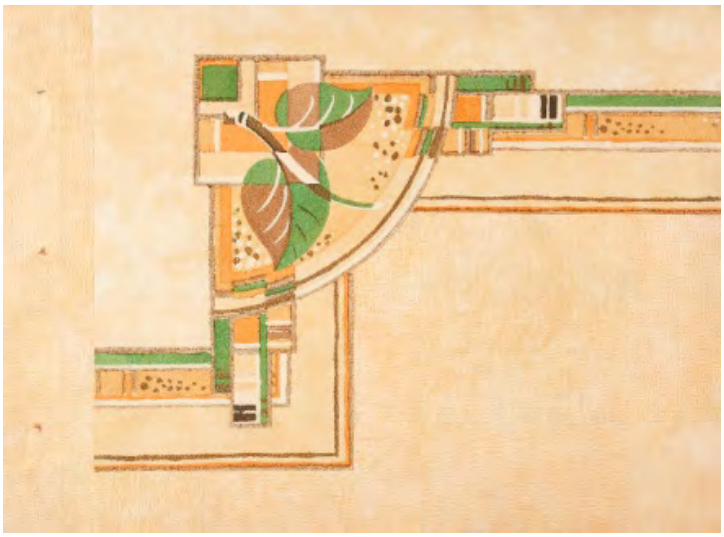

Figure 29 Wallpaper and attached border produced by John Line & Sons, 1934 (SW20-2)

challenged this assumption, arguing that nostalgia is "a valuable way of approaching the past."[3] The work of Christina Hodge is useful here, as she discusses the idea of nostalgia in relation to the presentation of two historic houses. As she notes: "Nostalgia is typically under-regarded, under-theorised or simply dismissed by

[2] Fiona Candlin, "Independent Museums, Heritage, and the Shape of Museum Studies," *Museum & Society* 10, no. 1 (2012): 28–41.
[3] Stuart Tannock, "Nostalgia Critique," *Cultural Studies* 9, no. 3 (1995): 453–64.

scholars because of its assumed regressive agenda."[4] Yet it is particularly pertinent when thinking about the way museum objects were understood at MoDA, a museum that was dedicated to histories of home and the domestic interior, since nostalgia is related to "idealised notions of home, homecoming and childhood, as well as longing for a stable place of origin."[5]

In the 1980s and 90s, the Silver Studio Collection wallpaper was positioned in relation to the history of home and domestic interiors, rather than the history of the Silver Studio as a working design studio. As we have already seen, this approach was exemplified through exhibitions (and accompanying publications) such as *Little Palaces* and *A Popular Art*.[6] As I have argued the decision to present the Collection in this way was taken because visitors were interested in the past as it pertained to their own sense of living memory, and with reflections of their own experience.[7] Visitors frequently had personal memories of homes that included wallpaper of this kind, and so the experience of looking at these wallpapers was related to personal reminiscence, nostalgia, and memories of family and home. The notion that suburbia or the ordinary semi-detached home might be the subject of serious academic inquiry was beginning to be taken seriously by other scholars, such as Stefan Muthesius.[8] As discussed in the

[4] Christina J. Hodge, "A New Model for Memory Work: Nostalgic Discourse at a Historic Home," *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 2011, 119.
[5] Hodge, 120.
[6] Turner, *Little Palaces: The Suburban House in North London 1919-1939*; Turner, *A Popular Art: British Wallpapers, 1930 - 1960*.
[7] Specific documentary evidence to support this assumption (in the form of meeting minutes or internal memoranda etc) has not survived to confirm this, but it is consistent with the move towards the heritage significance of the Silver Studio Collection which was discussed in the previous chapter.
[8] Stefan Muthesius, *The English Terraced House* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982).

previous chapter, Mark Turner's work in this area was important because it helped to give voice and legitimacy to histories which had previously been untold.

However, it is worth pausing to consider what 'work' those exhibitions were doing and why they seemed to be of value to their audiences. Hodge argues that:

> Nostalgia produces linear time by distinguishing past, present and future. Yet it is also convoluted or entangled time, a kind of prospective memory uniting visions of the future based on present perceptions of past conditions (experienced or imagined).[9]

In curating exhibitions at the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture when it was at Cat Hill, colleagues and I consciously paid attention to the fact that adult learners brought both a wealth and a diversity of prior educational and life experiences to any learning situation.[10] This was particularly relevant in the context of exhibitions that addressed histories of ordinary domestic interiors or suburban spaces, since the majority of visitors had their own personal experiences on which to draw.[11] The Silver Studio Collection was well placed to meet these needs, through objects such as the wallpaper album we're looking at here, because it represented popular tastes in home furnishing and thus had a

[9] Hodge, "A New Model for Memory Work: Nostalgic Discourse at a Historic Home," 120.

[10] Here we were basing our approach on Knowles' suggestion that adult learning is dependent on the creation of a climate of mutual respect and collaboration, rather than on the 'transmission' of knowledge. Malcolm Knowles, *Andragogy in Action: Applying Modern Principles of Adult Learning* (San Francisco, London: Jossey-Bass, 1984).

[11] See for example: Elizabeth Lebas, Michael Ann Mullen, and Zoë Hendon, "The Suburban Landscape: 200 Years of Gardens and Gardening. [Show/Exhibition]," 2008.

particular strength in engaging ordinary people in histories of home and suburbia.

Thus, presentation of evidence of 1930s suburban homes such as this wallpaper album would have offered visitors a sense of what Hodge calls "entangled time." Presenting the (relatively) pristine condition of the museum object, these wallpapers would have pointed towards the interwar suburbs at a time when they were newly built, and towards the semi-detached home as a space that was redolent of new possibility and aspiration in the 1930s. This perception of the future-implied-by-the-past would have been over-laid with personal memory of lived experience in exactly the same kind of rooms. As Deborah Sugg Ryan has recently argued, interwar suburbia offered the promise of a new kind of life for people who had previously not been able to afford it, while simultaneously evidencing its own nostalgia for the past in the form of the 'Tudorbethan'.[12] With this in mind, when seen as museum objects between the 1980s and the early 2000s, wallpapers such as these wallpaper acted as both a reinforcement for visitors of the separation of the past from the present, and a way of bridging that separation. These wallpapers may well have reminded visitors of their parents' homes, or of their own homes. As Tannock argues, nostalgia operates both as a search for continuity, and always also for a sense of dis-continuity: "Nostalgia works, in other words, as a periodizing emotion: that was then, and this is now."[13]

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the recognition that the Silver Studio Collection was of national importance led to

[12] Deborah Sugg Ryan drew extensively on MoDA's collections in the research for this book: Sugg Ryan, *Ideal Homes 1918-39: Domestic Design and Suburban Modernism*.
[13] Tannock, "Nostalgia Critique," 456.

the decision, by the late 1990s to create a new purpose-built museum in which to house it. And as will be discussed in the next chapter, there are many reasons why people visit museums, which are not all related to learning in the formal sense. Museum exhibitions frequently function as an opportunity for visitors to reflect on their own past experience and develop ideas about family identity through interaction with family and friends, as well as with the objects on display.[14] Museum visits are frequently the occasion for grandparents to spend time with children or grandchildren, so that the experience becomes one of passing something down from a shared past, as well as having a shared experience in the present. As Hodge argues:

> Memory work is not about retrieving a past truth; it is about reconstructing the past's present, shifting legacies 'in anticipation of the future'.[15] It often comprises the creation of public memories from private ones.[16]

Far from being all about the past, then we can see nostalgia as a process of active meaning-making in the present.

Nevertheless, while it is possible to argue that nostalgia is not necessarily regressive it remains the case that an uncritical nostalgia emphasises stability and continuity, and thus can be seen as deeply conservative. As Hodge notes: "Material preservation, protection and maintenance index passivity and stasis. Mere existence is assumed to be enough."[17] This theme will be explored

[14] Christian Heath and Dirk vom Lehn, "Configuring Reception: (Dis-)Regarding the 'Spectator' in Museums and Galleries," *Theory, Culture & Society* 21, no. 6 (2004): 43–65.
[15] E Hallam and JL Hockney, *Death, Memory and Material Culture* (New York: Berg, 2001), 3.
[16] Hodge, "A New Model for Memory Work: Nostalgic Discourse at a Historic Home," 116.
[17] Hodge, 126.

further in the next chapter, when we look at the design of the museum building at Cat Hill, which was predicated on the assumption that protecting the Silver Studio Collection from external threat was more important than facilitating engagement with it. Describing the way that nostalgia for a shared American past helped to shape and preserve the Akin House, Hodge explains that:

> The tangible presence of the house indexes themes of American historical meta-narratives such as entrepreneurial spirit, principled sacrifice, independence, persistence and self-determination. These histories are created social memory and social values. They are not yet multivocal, critical, progressive or theoretically robust.

This is not unproblematic, she argues because:

> As processes of commemoration, they normalise deeply rooted hierarchical, racialised, gendered and temporalised power structures – just the things historical archaeologists love to decolonise, engender, embody, democratise, de-sanitise etc.

In a similar way, the presentation of the Silver Studio Collection as evidence of suburban homes began as a radical project which gave voice to previously untold stories, but it ultimately risked being seen as a celebration of conservative, hetero-normative, suburban histories which excluded the experience of others. But as Hodge further notes:

> Undermine these narratives, however, and you undermine preservation efforts to date and future hopes for the site.[18]

Thus, the very act of preservation requires a nostalgic approach in the sense that funding is generally dependent on a shared sense of

[18] Hodge, 129–30.

the importance of an object or historic site for both the past and the future.

With the benefit of hindsight, I can see that the exhibitions we developed at Cat Hill were not really about the forward-looking things that might have interested students, such as design process (implying experimentation, risk, messiness and contingency). Instead, we placed more emphasis on interpretations of the past and on product (meaning both the designed product, and the exhibition as an experience to be consumed by the public). Most adult visitors (that is, those visiting for leisure reasons) were interested in how things were in the past, especially if what was on display was in accordance with their own lived experience. An approach which aimed to meet the needs of local visitors was the inevitable consequence of the fact that funding for the building had been secured from the National Heritage Lottery Fund. But it was also the case that this approach was dependent on the prior learning and life experience of adult visitors who had personal experience of the kind of objects we were able to display. As such it was an essentially time-limited approach, with an expiry date that would coincide with the passing of that generation.

As we will see in the following chapter, the design of the building worked against attempts to create a more vibrant and engaging experience for students and was a physical manifestation of an approach to heritage which assumed it to be fixed and static rather than live and relevant.

Chapter Five : Nice Museum, no café attached

The previous chapter outlined the ways in which various strands of thought came together to position the Silver Studio Collection as an example of important national heritage. As a consequence of this, it had been possible - indeed it seemed imperative -to preserve the Collection for the future, by giving it the status that would follow from housing it inside a 'proper' (that is, purpose-built) museum building. While a museum collection and a museum building are clearly different things, the location of the former inside a specific example of the latter has an important impact on the ways it will be experienced and understood. The move to establish the Silver Studio Collection within a purpose-built museum building occurred in the final years of the twentieth century, a period in which old certainties about museums were being challenged, but in which a new order had not yet been established. In this chapter I consider the ways in which the shared understanding that the Silver Studio Collection represented heritage status and national importance affected the plans for the museum building that would hold it.

Here I argue that the perception that the Silver Studio Collection represented important national heritage, as discussed in the previous chapter, influenced the design and layout of the building to the disadvantage of both visitors and, even more crucially, students. On the one hand, this was a problem of practical layout; but more fundamentally there was the intellectual question of exactly how the Silver Studio Collection (and associated other collections) might be presented to the public. The unique importance of the Silver Studio Collection had been established as its relevance to the ordinary domestic interior, and to everyday democratic design, but this was paradoxically somewhat at odds with the language of the museum exhibition. Further it was even more at odds with theories of student learning, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

In September 2000 the new Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture (MoDA) was opened on Middlesex University's Cat Hill campus.[1] The Secretary of State for Culture, Chris Smith, was the guest of honour. The new building was made possible through the Heritage Lottery Fund because, as discussed in Chapter Four, the Silver Studio Collection had by that point come to be seen as an important part of Britain's heritage. The building made the Silver Studio Collection and the other collections by then associated with it available to the public in a purpose-built public museum for the first time. However, the architects and others involved in planning the layout of the building seem not to have considered the delicate relationship between the architectural spaces of a museum building, and the kinds of knowledge and learning that could be produced within it. This chapter therefore takes a detailed look at the architectural plans of the museum building at Cat Hill in order to consider the museum building as an architectural object, using architectural drawings and photographs, as well as personal recollections, to conjure a building that no longer exists.[2]

In the first part of this chapter, I argue that the design of the building privileged the care of the museum's collections over the experience of visitors, and that insufficient attention was paid to what housing a collection inside a 'museum' really meant. As David Fleming has noted:

> The fact is that museum architecture is capable of achieving all sorts of impacts. It can inspire or confuse; dominate or complement; welcome or forbid; include or exclude. It can assist day to day running operations or hinder them in an exceedingly frustrating fashion.[3]

Here I argue that the architecture of the museum building at Cat Hill required visitors to overcome numerous subtle physical and psychological barriers, and thus

[1] Cat Hill is between Oakwood and Cockfosters, in the suburbs of North London, towards the end of the Piccadilly line. The rest of the campus was home to Middlesex University's Art and Design teaching departments.
[2] The museum building closed in 2011 following the University's decision to relocate everything at Cat Hill to the Hendon campus.
[3] David Fleming, "Creative Space," in *Reshaping Museum Space : Architecture, Design, Exhibitions*, ed. S MacLeod (London: Routledge, 2005), 54.

privileged the experience of general adult visitors over less culturally confidant student visitors. The building also relied upon the idea that knowledge was inherent or embodied within museum collections, and that just looking at things would have beneficial effects. Here we can discern an echo of earlier thinking about the benefits offered by a visit to the V&A as early as the 1860s. As Burton notes: "Then as now, the belief that placing works of art in front of people's eyes would somehow uplift their souls was an article of faith."[4] The architecture of the Cat Hill building helped to reinforce the idea that the Silver Studio Collection was associated with heritage, with the past, and with public audiences. By prioritizing formal public spaces such as exhibition galleries (which privileged 'product' over 'process'), the building made it difficult to suggest that the Silver Studio Collection had anything to do with active, experimental, forward-looking learning.

In the second part of the chapter I consider the more general difficulties associated with publicly displaying collections of mass-produced designed objects. My suggestion is that these challenges had not been considered at the start of this project, but that neither had they been successfully addressed elsewhere. Other museums of twentieth century designed objects had also struggled with the question of how to display things in ways that would engage audiences. At the same time, the shared understanding of what a 'museum' should be meant that the museum building at Cat Hill was designed to meet the assumed needs of a particular audience, namely adult visitors; while overlooking the needs of students. Indeed, the very fact that these groups might need to engage with museum collections differently seems not to have been discussed. My suggestion is that this position was not natural or inevitable outcome, but was the result of numerous conscious and unconscious choices about what a museum building 'should' properly be, which aligned the Silver Studio Collection with heritage and the past, rather than seeing it as an active and dynamic resource for learning about the present and the future.

[4] Anthony Burton, "The Uses of the South Kensington Art Collections," *Journal of the History of Collections* 14, no. 1 (2002): 85.

The museum building at Cat Hill should have been the climax of the story. Within the conventional trope of the museum biography, the achievement of a purpose-built museum might be assumed to be the triumphant final chapter, the 'happy ever after' moment. Instead, for reasons that will become clear, this has become one episode among many in the continual reinvention of the Silver Studio Collection; just one part of the long story of continuing re-negotiation and re-inscription of meaning as to the value and purpose of the Silver Studio Collection. The title of this chapter references the controversial V&A advertising campaign of the 1980s by Saatchi and Saatchi, which declared it to be "an ace caff with quite a nice museum attached." The slogan was widely criticised but was an attempt to make the museum a more welcoming public space, in which social activities could take place alongside contemplation of the collections.[5] This is relevant here because it demonstrates the ways in which visitor experience was becoming central to museum discourse, a decade or more before the opening of the museum at Cat Hill, but which was nevertheless overlooked in the planning of that building. Here I draw on my own experience of the museum building at Cat Hill, as well as on other more official sources.

5.1 Museum as architecture

The majority of this thesis has concentrated on the Silver Studio as a collection of objects: the focus has primarily been on the organisation of the objects and their place within broader intellectual and academic frameworks, rather than their place within a physical container such as a building. Here the focus switches to the question of what happens when a collection enters a building which is a purpose-built museum; when what had previously been simply a collection now acquired new expectations in terms of public access and accountability, public visibility, and of the need to create stories around the collection that were relevant to general audiences.

[5] http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O92603/where-else-do-they-give-poster-arden-paul/ [accessed 22.11.2019]

As Duncan Grewcock notes, a single answer to the question "what is a museum?" has never been fixed upon, and indeed it is not clear whether it is even the right question to be asking:

> The development and diversity of museums, museum studies, museums profession and museum practice over the past 40 years around the globe – and its continued diversification into the 21st century – can make questions of definition seem a rather arcane, even irrelevant exercise at first glance.[6]

Each person's understanding of what a museum is or might be is largely shaped by their own experiences, perhaps of visiting with family or as part of a school group, whether in the UK or elsewhere. It is not often that most individuals take these highly personal and specific experiences and consider the museum in a more abstract sense. Yet it is important in this discussion to bear in mind both the abstract notion of the museum, and its potential manifestation as real life examples, in order to discuss the museum building at Cat Hill. The assumptions shared by Silver Studio Collection staff, Middlesex University colleagues and funders about what a museum 'should' be shaped the layout and design of the Cat Hill building, which in turn shaped how visitors and staff could interact with each other and with the collections, within it.

The complex relationship between the architecture of a building, the routes that visitors must take through it, and the experience of the encounter with the collections that they have as a result has long been recognized. As Michaela Giebelhausen has noted: "The intricate relationship between content and container defines the architecture of the museum."[7] In their seminal essay, Carol Duncan and

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[6] Grewcock, *Doing Museology Differently*, 153. This debate extended recently as the ICOM conference attempted to agree a new definition of 'museum': "The Extraordinary General Conference Postpones the Vote on a New Museum Definition," ICOM (International Council of Museums) website, 2019, https://icom.museum/en/news/the-extraordinary-general-conference-pospones-the-vote-on-a-new-museum-definition/ [Accessed 20-11-2019].

[7] Michaela Giebelhausen, "Museum Architecture: A Brief History," in *A Companion to Museum Studies*, 2011, 223.

Alan Wallach explored the way in which the display of art within the Louvre in post-revolutionary France, based on the visitors' processional progress through a series of galleries, served to create a sense of French national identity and national pride.[8] Sophie Forgan developed a similar idea, arguing that the layout and architecture of nineteenth century science museums both reflected - and was a physical expression of - the scientific structures of thought that the museum sought to explain to visitors. In other words, Forgan argued, the architecture of museum buildings was based on the assumption that the classificatory systems that underpinned the display of scientific collections ought to be self-evident to the reasonably educated visitor, since those classificatory systems were reflected in the visitors' spatial engagement with the museum collections on display.[9]

In the case of the Silver Studio Collection, the construction of a purpose-built museum building was seen by those involved as the ultimate achievement in a narrative of resistance to its threatened loss. But little attention was paid, in the planning stages, to the narratives that the Collection would support, as expressed in the spatial layout of the building. As discussed in the previous chapter, staff associated with the Collection in the 1990s had weathered years of uncertainty about its future and therefore simply ensuring its future seemed vital. It was perhaps understandable, therefore, that supporters wanted to design a building to act as a stronghold and a bulwark against further threat. According to the funding application written in 1997:

> While all the Museum's collections are poorly housed and largely inaccessible to either the public or researchers, it is the Silver Studio Collection which is most severely at risk from continued deterioration, due to cramped and unsuitable housing and unavoidable over-handling. The provision of

[8] Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, "The Museum of Modern Art as Late Capitalist Ritual: An Iconographic Analysis," *Marxist Perspectives* 4, no. Winter (1978).
[9] Sophie Forgan, "The Architecture of Display: Museums, Universities and Objects in Nineteenth Century Britain," *History of Science* 32, no. 2 (1994): 139–62.

> adequate museum housing with appropriate environmental controls is now a matter of great urgency.[10]

The priority for the Silver Studio Collection staff tasked with briefing the architects was therefore the preservation of the "fragile collections," and numerous architectural decisions proceeded from this starting point.

Figure 30 Exterior view of Cat Hill museum building, early 2000s

How then were these ideas expressed physically within the architecture of the museum building? Firstly, the building's outward appearance betrayed a lack of understanding of the importance of a welcoming façade and of minimizing the visual barriers to participation [Figure 30]. The museum was entered via a small road within the campus, creating an immediate barrier to access since it could not be seen from the street. A long pathway from that road to the double doors of the museum appeared off-putting to students, so that only those with sufficient cultural confidence (meaning adult visitors, confident about museum visiting) felt able to cross the threshold. More important than this was the problem that the building's outward appearance gave few clues about who it was for or what could be expected within. Visitors entered via the long path and the double glass doors: they were then

[10] Turner and Mansell, "Supporting Evidence for Application for National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF) Lottery Funding," 7.

required to turn right through another set of double doors into the reception area [Figure 31]. Turning left took them to a locked door, since the museum building was physically connected to – though not accessible from – the University's Learning Resource Centre (LRC). This point was emblematic of what appears to have been a series of poor decisions and compromises with regards to the orientation of the building, which resulted in a confusing layout for both general visitors and students.

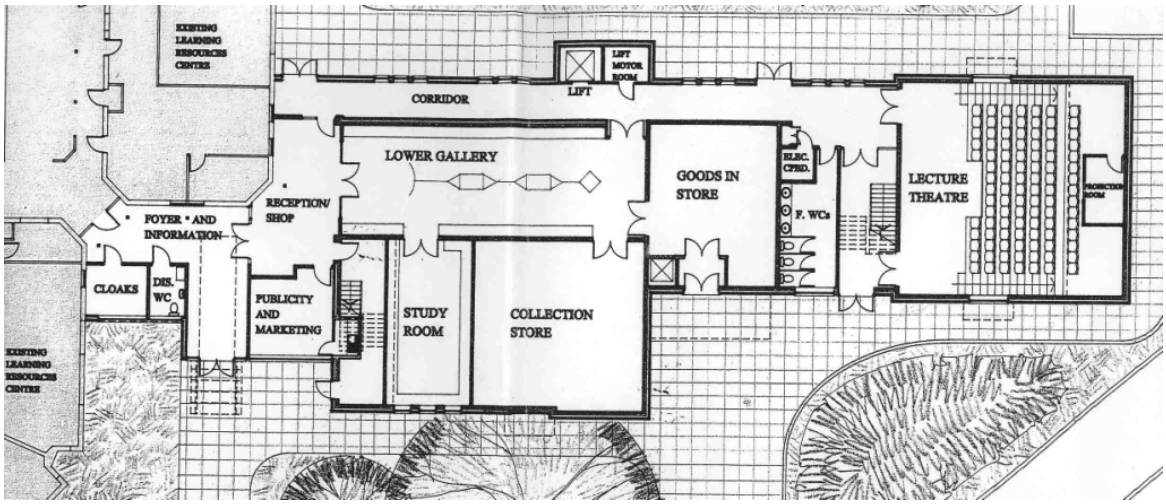

Figure 31 Cat Hill architectural drawings, ground floor (included in National Heritage Memorial Fund application), 1997

All of these problems reflect a tendency common to many museum planners to ignore the subtle psychological barriers to entry experienced by many potential museum visitors. Elaine Heumann Gurian has described this as "threshold fear," a term borrowed from psychology, meaning the factors that discourage people from participating in activities that are intended for them. These factors might include the choice of architectural style; the design or absence of appropriate wayfinding and signage; the availability and accessibility of public transport or parking; the attitude of staff on the front desk, and so on. [11] More than this, Gurian argues that: "It is helpful if the novice visitor can figure out the process of entering by passive

[11] This problem is perhaps particularly acute for university museums as they are frequently located within the footprint of a university campus (presenting an immediate barrier to non-university visitors), and because planning and funding inevitably involves balancing needs of university staff and students with those of external stakeholders.

watching from an anonymous location. A large lobby, or one visible from the outdoors, helps."[12] The building at Cat Hill provided precisely the opposite of this, namely an entrance lobby that was not visible from the outside, and which had not been planned with any of the other considerations in mind.

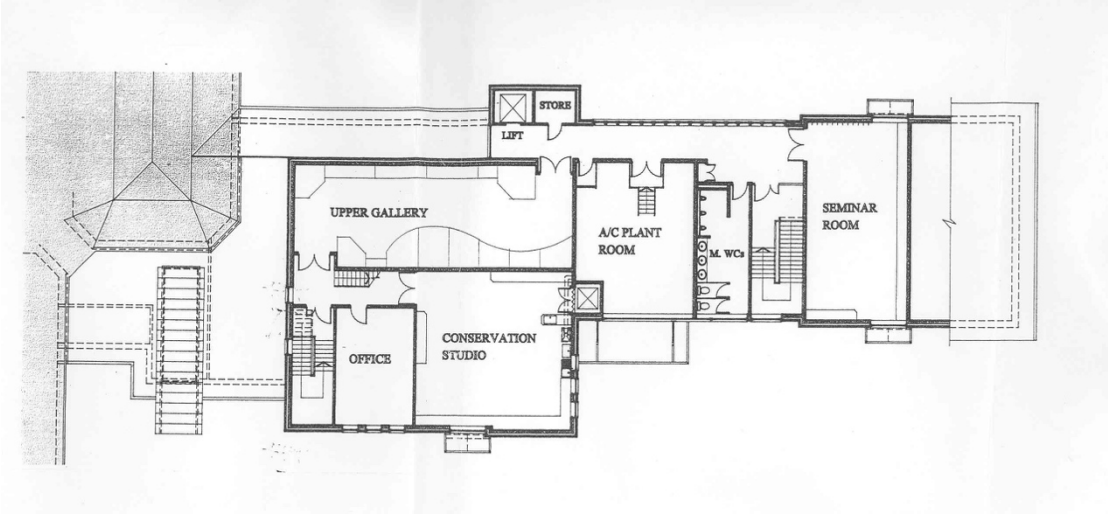

Figure 32 Figure 32 Cat Hill architectural drawings, first floor (included in National Heritage Memorial Fund application), 1997

According to Gurian, this problem frequently arises because of a lack of connection between what museums say about their intention to attract visitors, and their understanding of how buildings actually work:

> I have often found that, prior to embarking on construction of a new expansion or building, the senior museum personnel did not understand the relationship between programmatic intention and physical planning. This has allowed the museum's strategic direction and its architectural development to diverge.[13]

The funding application for the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture made great claims for the projected number of visitors.[14] But at the same time, the

[12] Elaine Heumann Gurian, "Threshold Fear," in *Reshaping Museum Space : Architecture, Design, Exhibitions* (Oxon: Routledge, 2005), 211.
[13] Gurian, 207.
[14] Various documents promised between 20,000 and 25,000 visitors per year: Turner and Mansell, "Supporting Evidence for Application for National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF) Lottery Funding," 17.

physical preservation of the Silver Studio Collection was seen as the priority, so that in a sense the physical planning of the museum was a logical outcome of this goal. It was intended that the building should act as passive protection for the collections, so the first areas to be reached by visitors - the lobby and shop - were conceived as architectural "buffer zones" or a "first line of defence" providing a physical barrier against fluctuations in outside temperature and humidity. This approach clearly prioritized care of the collections over the experience of visitors, for whom the building was confusing and subtly architecturally unwelcoming. The notion of an architectural first line of defence against the outside elements translated into a building that offered almost fortress-like defences against visitors themselves. Rather than make the Silver Studio Collection available and accessible to a wide audience, the building's architecture could be read as an expression of a desire to keep the Collection (and associated other collections that had been acquired alongside it by then) safe from physical, environmental and other kinds of threat.

A further example of the negative unintended consequences of the emphasis placed on the provision of environmentally controlled spaces for the collections was the decision regarding the specifications and location of the plant room. The specifications of the plant room, which would house the machinery to maintain stable environmental conditions such as temperature and humidity, featured strongly in bid documents.[15] The plant room was eventually deliberately located centrally within the mass of the building on the first floor [Figure 32] in order to minimise pipe runs and promote the efficiency of the machinery. As a consequence, the building appeared very large from the outside because a considerable proportion of its volume was taken up by spaces such as the plant room that were entirely inaccessible to visitors. The effect of this was to create a building that looked larger from the outside than the public space available inside, and in which the preservation of the collections was prioritized over the experience of visitors moving

[15] Turner and Mansell, "Museum of Domestic Architecture and Design 1850-1950 Incorporating the Silver Studio Collection: Supporting Information for NHMF Application," 12.

through the space. Numerous visitors complained of this 'reverse Tardis' effect: once inside they were disappointed to find the public spaces smaller than they had imagined based on the building's outward appearance of size.[16]

Perhaps because of the emphasis on the physical preservation of the collections, it appears that the building's architect paid very little attention to the museum as a place through which actual physical bodies would flow. The architects, NBF partners, seem to have been appointed because they had worked for the University before: they had not previously designed a museum, nor is it clear that they had experience of buildings that had a public (as opposed to student) function.[17] Nevertheless, the architects followed museum tradition in one respect at least: as Helen Rees Leahy has noted, museums have had a long history of failing to appreciate the inconvenient fact that their visitors have physical bodies that they insist on bringing with them.[18] The architect of the Cat Hill building appeared to have very little understanding of the fact that visitors would expect to move through the space in a particular way, or that they would have physical needs that would need to be met.

This lack of understanding was expressed most clearly in the location of the lavatories: the building boasted one disabled toilet in the foyer, while the women's toilets were at the end of a long corridor, with the men's above them on the first floor. Visitors arriving after a long journey were faced with a further expedition to find the toilets before starting their visit 'proper' by doubling back on themselves to

[16] Here I rely on personal memory rather than documentary evidence, as this comment was made in passing by unknown visitors, albeit on more than one occasion.
[17] In addition, the experience cited in the bid document for the Project Manager working on behalf of Middlesex University included the design and build of student halls of residences, teaching blocks and laboratories. Turner and Mansell, "Museum of Domestic Architecture and Design 1850-1950 Incorporating the Silver Studio Collection: Supporting Information for NHMF Application," 30.
[18] Helen Rees Leahy, *Museum Bodies: The Politics and Practices of Visiting and Viewing* (London: Routledge, 2012).

begin again in the shop/reception area. Also symptomatic of this approach was the University's decision to omit a café from the plans, on the grounds that the campus already had other catering outlets. This overlooked the fact that these catering facilities were closed at weekends and thus not available to visitors when they were most required. The decision also underestimated the importance of a café as an integral part of the social experience of a museum visit, rather than just a re-fuelling opportunity. It was often the case that older visitors in search of a quiet cup of tea as part of a social afternoon out did not want to jostle in line with students in the campus canteen, and thus their enjoyment of their visit as a whole was diminished.[19]

Following the work of psychologist Csikszentmihalyi, various writers on museums have suggested that museums have the potential to offer visitors an experience of 'flow' or 'dream space'.[20] Yet the possibility of any kind of transcendent or numinous experience was constantly thwarted by the building at Cat Hill: visitors found their route through the building blocked by unexpected dead-ends and doors that led to spaces in which they did not understand whether they were welcome or not. Circulation routes around the building as a whole were unclear. This problem partly arose from the fact that the building made no clear architectural distinction between 'front of house' spaces intended for visitors, and 'back of house' spaces designed for staff.[21] The Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture, as expressed through its architecture, functioned effectively as a strong room or a vault for precious objects. This architectural expression of what a museum could be was arguably at odds with curatorial strategies that attempted to discuss the notions of democratic design and accessibility for all, and even more

[19] Jocelyn Dodd, "MoDA Evaluation Summary Report," 2003.
[20] Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper and Row, 1990); Kiersten F Latham, "Psychological Flow and the Numinous Museum Experience," *School of Library and Information Sciences Working Papers in Museum Studies* 11, no. 11 (2016).
[21] For example, the Collection Store opened on to the Lower Gallery, creating confusion for visitors and practical difficulties for staff attempting to move objects during opening hours

incompatible with the notion that the museum's collections could be a source of learning and inspiration for creative students.

5.2 Design museums: process or product?

Here we move on to consider the relationship of design museums more generally to the objects they display and the audiences they serve. As outlined above, nineteenth century museums were confident in the way in which the arrangement of objects within architectural space reflected, and indeed to some extent were constitutive of, the museum's classificatory systems and mental frameworks.[22] However, by the end of the twentieth century, the confidence of the museum sector in general in the self-evident connection between collections and knowledge, and thus between knowledge and its spatial arrangement, had been eroded. Perhaps even more fundamentally, the connections between collections of mass-produced designed objects and knowledge had not been worked out: should visitors be concerned with the processes of making, or with the characteristics of the end product? Was it even possible to talk about 'good taste' anymore? In the case of the Silver Studio Collection, it appears that very little thought was given to the kinds of knowledge that it represented, and thus how the architectural arrangement of space should give expression to that knowledge.

By the early years of the twenty first century, the museum sector had moved away from the idea of a museum as simply a container of objects, towards a more inclusive model that valued both the idea of public space and the notion of the public's involvement as creators – not just consumers – of cultural experiences. But how could that be expressed in the case of museums of mass-produced designed objects, which had long struggled with the tension between informing and inspiring their audiences, and which had an as-yet unresolved relationship with commerce? This section looks at the ways in which these issues were tackled in other museums

[22] Christopher Whitehead, *Museums and the Construction of Disciplines: Art and Archaeology in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

concerned with design, such as the V&A and the Design Museum amongst others, in the early years of the twenty-first century. I argue that insufficient attention has been paid to design museums as a specific category within museum studies or museum sector discussions, with the result that there is a disconnect between discussion of museums in general and those that relate to the question of what museums concerned with design think they are doing. [23]

This problem of how to define a purpose was not exclusive to the Silver Studio Collection: as Macdonald and Silverstone note, the last years of the twentieth century were a challenging time for all museums:

> Something is happening in the world of the museum which from the inside is often seen as a crisis, above all a crisis in funding and identity, but which from outside (and increasingly from inside too) appears to be expressive of a wider set of concerns. These concerns – with problems of authenticity, representation and the active demanding reader/viewer/visitor – are central to current discussions in the analysis of other cultural industries. Yet the museums should not be regarded simply as a somewhat specialized, or even esoteric, refraction of the issues raised by those other cultural industries. By dealing with the legacy of the past or declining fictions, and in their attempts to write new ones, museums' concerns lie at the centre of the issues surrounding contemporary cultural change.[24]

As the above quote suggests, the ostensible reasons for the challenge to museums at the turn of the twenty-first century were a decline in funding and an increase in visitor expectations. But the other, more fundamental change implied, was that museums were experiencing the beginnings of a challenge to notions of expertise

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[23] indeed as Maddalena Dalla Mura has pointed out, design museums do not even exist as an official classification within the ICOM classification of museums: Maddalena Dalla Mura, "Design in Museums: Towards an Integrative Approach - The Potential of Science and Technology Museums," *Journal of Design History* 22, no. 3 (2009): 259–70. See also Farrelly and Weddell, *Des. Objects Museum*.

[24] Sharon Macdonald and Roger Silverstone, "Rewriting the Museum's Fictions: Taxonomies, Stories and Readers," in *Representing the Nation, A Reader: Histories, Heritage and Museums*, ed. David Boswell and Jessica Evans (Routledge, 1999), 421–22.

and authority that had previously and unquestioningly underpinned their existence. These challenges would only become more acute in the early years of the twenty-first century, with the advance of the internet and social media, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

My suggestion is that this circumstance arises from the different relationship that design museums have firstly with commerce, and secondly with both the past and the implied future. There continues to be an unresolved tension between the status of 'knowledge' and 'commerce' in relation to design collections. Namely, the question of whether the purpose of design museums is to educate people in being better able to design things; or in being better consumers of things. This question is more relevant to design museums than for example art museums, since design museums frequently contain so-called ordinary items that are to a greater or lesser extent familiar to visitors as consumed products in their lived experience of the world, rather than as abstract experiences of 'art'. Design museums therefore present a paradox, as Helen Rees Leahy notes, because they: "include examples of low culture within a medium more comfortable with high culture."[25] She asks: "…what happens to those museums which do admit design into their galleries? Is either the museum or the object transformed?"[26] As will be discussed, design museums embody the unresolved tensions of showing consumers goods that cannot be bought, and of balancing the competing notions of cultural capital versus monetary capital, particularly when the very act of accepting something into a museum, or displaying it in a museum, confers cultural capital upon it.

One response to this challenge has been to redefine the kind of object admitted to the museum of design, and therefore to reconceptualise what this means for how visitors are supposed to relate to it. As Javier Gimeno-Martinez suggests, what now gets collected by design museums is increasingly 'design as art'.

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[25] Helen Rees, "The Culture of Consumption: Design Museums as Educators or Taste Makers," in *The Authority of the Consumer*, ed. Russell Keat, Nigel Whiteley, and Nicholas Abercrombie (London: Routledge, 1994), 156.
[26] Rees, 156.

Gimeno-Martinez suggests that the "museumification of design" has been occurring since the 1970s. Using the example of two avant-garde design groups, Memphis and Studio Alchimia, he argues that both groups produced work that could be considered high art rather than industrial design, but that: "Paradoxically… [both] embodied a certain exclusivity that was counteracted by their ubiquity in popular design magazines."[27] Gimeno-Martinez suggests this approach is new, but in a sense, it is not so different to that already discussed in Chapter One in relation to the Circulation Department's preference for the highest status items from the Silver Studio for inclusion in the collections of the V&A. These were the items that had acquired a status closer to that of 'art' (through association with named designers, and through exposure in certain magazines and exhibitions) and which could thus be accommodated into the V&A's collections without disrupting established hierarchies.

Elise Hodson has drawn attention to the particular challenge that faces museums of mass-produced designed goods, in that they are tasked with displaying contemporary and/or mass-produced items in a context (namely the exhibition) that visitors understand as a medium that prioritizes the authentic and rare. Moreover, visitors are frequently unclear about what messages they are supposed to be absorbing, as she argues:

> Sitting at the intersection of art and industry, and serving both educational and economic roles, the design museum at once denies and promotes the exchange value of consumer goods.[28]

This creates a tension, she suggests, because the capitalist project that underlies all design museums is never made explicit by the museums themselves. For Hodson the hidden nature of the capitalist project places visitors in an ambiguous position,

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[27] Javier Gimeno-Martínez and Jasmijn Verlinden, "From Museum of Decorative Arts to Design Museum : The Case of the Design Museum Gent," *Design and Culture* 2, no. 3 (2016): 259–83.

[28] Elise Hodson, "'I Could Have Visited Ikea for Free': Design Museums and a Complicated Relationship with Commerce," in *Exhibiting Craft and Design: Transgressing the White Cube Paradigm, 1930-Present* (London: Routledge, 2017), 140.

forcing them to negotiate their own role as critics, learners and consumers. According to Hodson, design museums generally fail to engage with the notion of objects as commodities, that is, as items that were intended to be bought and sold, and which were created within the context of concern for supply chains and profit margins. When museums display objects as 'art' they obscure all of this, in favour of a focus on the designer as hero, or design as solution to societal ills.

A further problem is that the language of exhibitions, and the movement of visitors through space is somewhat antithetical to the idea of critical engagement with objects, or to the idea that the new and innovative does not necessarily represent 'better'. A teleological narrative of progress arguably underpinned traditional museum displays, and perhaps continues to inform visitors' expectations of them. Tony Bennett refers to this as "backtelling," that is, the museum convention of the presentation of a narrative in which the present is seen as the inevitable result of the past, through a series of linked events embodied by specimens or artefacts.[29] In the museums which are concerned with design, however, this works differently for two reasons. Partly this is because we might now want to question whether 'progress' (in a more global sense) is embodied within a series of different models of vacuum cleaner, or the like. And partly because within a museum concerned with design, there is a sense in which artefacts not only trace a lineage of a past but are also expected to point towards an improved future, expressed either through improved consumer tastes or through improved design and production, or even both. In other words, unlike museums of geology or anthropology, or ancient history, the museum of designed objects encourages students (as designers of the products of tomorrow) to imagine their own work forming part of the future narrative of progress.

As a type of institution, then, as Ruth Adam notes: "museums are ill-equipped to educate either designers or the public about the full range of

[29] Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995), 179.

complexities of the field."[30] That is not to say, however, that this more nuanced approach has not been tried. As Rees Leahy argues, the prioritizing of "iconic" objects had not been the Design Museum's original intention when it opened at Shad Thames in 1989. Instead it had initially attempted to develop displays that emphasised the cultural meanings of objects:

> Didactic tools – such as interactive computer database, film and video, audio-guides, study notes, lectures and seminars – were borrowed from museums of science and industry, and were fused with the display techniques of decorative arts museums[31]

This approach represented an effort to develop exhibitions that were neither inventing nor promoting a series of canonical objects. The idea that objects could be subject to debate rather than uncritical canonical readings worked for the first two years of the Design Museum's existence, according to Rees Leahy, because exhibitions were supported by an extensive programme of lectures, seminars and films, actively engaging visitors in conversation. But as already noted, the 1980s and 90s were a period in which commercial pressures were beginning to be felt in the museum sector. According to Ballantyne and Uzzell:

> It was the Margaret Thatcher era, and museums were being 'shaken-up' — challenged to pay their way. Museum professionals, who had traditionally been specialists skilled in identifying and classifying objects, were being retrained to communicate the value of their collections and attract the public. [32]

Therefore, the expensive (because labour intensive) education programme initiated by the Design Museum was abandoned in favour of a greater focus on the iconic objects of the modernist canon, largely because this was lower risk and easier to display.

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[30] Ruth Adams, "Exhibiting Design," *Design Principles and Practices: An International Journal* 1, no. 2 (2007): 24.
[31] Rees, "The Culture of Consumption: Design Museums as Educators or Taste Makers," 160.
[32] Roy Ballantyne and David Uzzell, "Looking Back and Looking Forward: The Rise of the Visitor-Centered Museum," *Curator: The Museum Journal* 54, no. 1 (2011): 85.

The Design Museum's decision to do away with more active strategies of interpretation and debate around objects meant that objects would almost inevitably be understood as "design icons" by visitors, whether or not this was the curators' intention. As Helen Rees noted:

> The language of showcases and plinths encouraged a fetishistic reading of the objects which visitors assumed had been selected according to ill-defined criteria of 'good design' or 'good taste.' It is extremely difficult to refute the view that to exhibit an object is to stamp a museum's seal of approval on it, especially when it is included in a historical survey, rather than a thematic exhibition.[33]

Conversely, it is difficult to discuss ordinary everyday objects within museum exhibitions because visitors do not always appreciate the idea of looking critically at things with which they are already familiar, and which they therefore regard as unimportant.[34] In other words, to deploy the language and mechanisms of the exhibition (the display case, the label, the route through space) is to place an object somewhat beyond the realm of immediate concern, and to align it with the rare and with the past, rather the ordinary or forward-looking. To place an object within a glass case confers the idea that the museum somehow approves or celebrates it, rather than inviting a critical or analytical gaze. To do so also removes it from the world of the workshop or studio, and, in particular, distances it from students' understanding of its potential relationship to their own creative practice.

None of these issues had been fully articulated when we designed the permanent and temporary exhibitions at Cat Hill. It had been assumed in the planning stages that simply having a museum and housing a collection inside it would be sufficient, without giving further thought to how audiences would interact with the objects on display. The nature of the mass-produced items such as

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[33] Rees, "The Culture of Consumption: Design Museums as Educators or Taste Makers," 161.
[34] Hodson, "'I Could Have Visited Ikea for Free': Design Museums and a Complicated Relationship with Commerce."

wallpapers and textiles that made up the Silver Studio Collection meant that we considered that to display 'design as art' was not a realistic option.[35] During the early 2000s, our approach as curators was to continue the tradition that had been begun by Mark Turner and colleagues in the 1990s, namely, to produce exhibitions that explored the idea of design as part of social and local history. This strategy was shaped in large part by our awareness that the success of the museum was measured by the number of visitors through the door (because this was a requirement of the Heritage Lottery Fund), and that it was consequently important to pay attention to the needs and interests of those visitors. We were aware that local audiences liked to see their own lives and homes reflected in the museum's displays. This approach was also informed by a democratic impulse to show that 'design' meant the whole of the designed and experienced world, not just high-end designer products, and that the everyday and the ordinary was equally worthy of consideration and attention.

The Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture's main permanent exhibition was entitled *Exploring Interiors* and we intended it as a chronological exploration of the factors that affected choices in home decoration between 1900 and 1960. We made a conscious decision not to make the history of the Silver Studio the focus of the museum's displays, partly because to place the focus on the designers would have once again presented us with the difficult challenge of how to talk about the Silvers in relation to their better-known contemporary, William Morris. Rather than talk about the Silver Studio and its role within the British textile and wallpaper industry, then, we approached the collection of wallpapers and textiles as evidence of consumer choices. *Exploring Interiors* was not concerned with

[35] In the period 1999-2000 I was Assistant Curator and Lesley Hoskins was Curator: we were jointly responsible for planning and delivering the Exploring Interiors exhibition. As Hoskins has noted there was a complete change of museum personnel between the planning and implementation stages: Lesley Hoskins, "Interiors without Walls: Choice in Context at MoDA," in *The Modern Period Room: The Construction of the Exhibited Interior 1870 to 1950*, ed. Penny Sparke, Brenda Martin, and Trevor Keeble (Oxon: Routledge, 2006)

the presentation of designed objects in isolation, or with presenting certain items as examples of 'good taste': rather the aim was to place those objects within their social and historic context. The exhibition drew on oral history evidence to highlight what Lesley Hoskins calls the:

> …conscious, individual choices of the people who made and inhabited them [i.e. homes], at the same time explicating some of the economic, social, cultural and aesthetic factors that constrained or stimulated those choices.[36]

Exploring Interiors presented wallpapers and textiles as examples of what would once have been aspirational objects, and placed them within discussion of the move to the suburbs in the 1930s, and of post-war design in the context of optimism and regeneration.[37] This approach was successful for our local audience, because adult visitors had prior knowledge and experience of exactly these things on which to draw.[38] It was perhaps less successful for students, because exhibitions did not give them enough clues about how to relate the objects on display to their own creative practice or other interests.

5.3 Public needs versus student interests

This tension between what the public wanted and what was appropriate for meeting the learning needs of students is the crucial point about the history of the Silver Studio Collection and the uses to which it has been put over time. As Philippa Lyon notes, exhibitions of designed objects frequently operate in direct contrast to the ways in which design students want to experience them:

> …In many contexts [i.e. within exhibitions] greater value is placed on the final material form a design takes than on the elements of thought, inspiration, technique and development that went into the making of it. The object has a legitimacy that process does not. One unfortunate aspect of this…was the

[36] Hoskins, "Interiors without Walls: Choice in Context at MoDA," 35.
[37] Hoskins, "Interiors without Walls: Choice in Context at MoDA."
[38] Crucially, it was successful for a particular generation of adult visitors who were, by that point in the early 2000s, retired but still active and able to engage in local cultural activities.

> difficulty [of design students] in finding exhibitions that concentrated on process and the comparative lack of research into design process learning process in higher education.[39]

In addition, the presentation of objects as part of heritage tends to imply that knowledge is static, that the value of objects is inherent within them, and that those objects are passively waiting to impart this knowledge to the viewer.

The Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture had been developed in order to house – and therefore to make available to the public – the Silver Studio Collection. The Silver Studio Collection's strength and significance as part of Britain's heritage was in its anonymous contribution to mass design culture, and its representation of ordinary, as opposed to elite, tastes. As curators at the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture, my colleagues and I attempted to introduce discussion of the price of items in the context of display of wallpapers and textiles. But this was not without its own problems, as presentation of ideas around price, costs, value and affordability are difficult to navigate in the context of something as personal as the domestic interior. Broad historical statements about what proportion of the population could afford a certain thing risked offending or alienating people for whom this did not accord with their own experience.

As this discussion has demonstrated, the display of mass-produced objects within a public museum raises numerous questions which were not addressed in relation to the Silver Studio Collection before the new building at Cat Hill was designed. The reasons for attaching heritage importance to the Collection were somewhat at odds with existing tropes of the display of designed objects within museums. As discussed in earlier chapters, it was not possible to present the designers of the Silver Studio as 'design icons' nor could we claim objects from the Collection were comparable to 'art'. The Silver Studio was both too commercial and too lacking in association with a prestigious name. As I have discussed elsewhere,

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[39] Philippa Lyon, *Design Education: Learning, Teaching and Researching through Design* (Farnham: Gower Publishing Ltd, 2011), 94.

the attribution of design authorship to any one individual who worked for the Silver Studio is problematic.[40] Ironically, the very reason why the Silver Studio Collection had been regarded as an important part of Britain's heritage – its ordinariness and anonymity, and its association with the mass market – became a hindrance when it came to displaying it in ways that would catch the public's imagination in a sustained way over a long period.

5.4 Conclusions

The ostensible reason for the closure of the museum at Cat Hill in 2011 was the University's decision to close the campus and consolidate all of the University's activities on to one campus at Hendon. The University had developed from the mergers of number of separate higher education institutions and colleges, with the result that it was located on various different sites spread across North London. The early 2000s saw the University take the strategic decision to close campuses at Tottenham, Enfield, Bounds Green, and Trent Park: the closure of the Cat Hill campus was just part of this wider process of consolidation to one location at Hendon. It is important to recognize that these decisions also took place within the wider context of increasing pressures on Higher Education funding: it was no longer seen as economically viable for an institution to have functions (such as libraries, catering outlets, and maintenance) duplicated in different places; nor was it seen as acceptable for 'the student experience' of the institution to vary widely between locations. This institutional-level policy decision was the main driver for the decision to close the Cat Hill campus.

However, as this chapter has shown, even if this had not been the case, the physical constraints imposed by the museum building at Cat Hill meant that – regardless of other circumstances – the museum would have struggled to fulfil its potential as learning and inspiration for students and the wider public. By the last

[40] Hendon, "Behind the Scenes at the Silver Studio : Rex Silver and the Hidden Mechanisms of Interwar Textile Design."

years of the twentieth century, anything more than the briefest consideration of the definition of the word museum would have included recognition of it as an entity that implied much more than a building as container for objects. Museums were evolving to meet new societal challenges in various ways; there was growing acknowledgement that museum buildings do not exist in isolation, but instead form part of a wider eco-system of tourist attractions, local amenities and transport links.[41] All of these factors, in addition to the efforts of the museum itself, affect people's decision to visit or not. The presentation of objects within museums had similarly evolved to tell more engaging stories, and to take greater account of visitor needs and interests. The overall experience of visiting museums had generally improved, with the introduction of better cafes, better shops, and other amenities such as gardens or children's play areas. Furthermore, visitor expectations were higher than ever: people no longer expected a museum to be dull and dusty but undertook visits as part of leisure or social activities, generally with friends and family, as part of multi-generational groups.

My criticisms of the design of the building at Cat Hill stem from what the architect and client, Middlesex University, seem to have imagined a museum to be when they signed off the plans. It is clear that they placed more emphasis on the idea of a museum as a container of objects than as a space for interactions between people, or for the exchange of ideas. It can be seen that from the very beginning, the museum building at Cat Hill was out of step with what a museum – particularly one located on a university campus – could have been. The design of the Cat Hill building limited the potential for the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture to be a successful public space and – perhaps more importantly – limited its potential to engage with students. The museum at Cat Hill was a specific example of a museum building, yet its architectural layout betrayed the sense that while its architects knew what the characteristics of a hypothetical museum "ought" to be, they had not considered more deeply what *this* museum "could" potentially be. Their approach

[41] There is a vast literature on the subject of museums as tourist destinations. See for example, Elisa Backer, Friedrich Leisch, and Sara Dolnicar, "Visiting Friends or Relatives?," *Tourism Management* 60 (2017): 56–64.

was to take a rigidly formulaic view of both heritage and of audience engagement with it: they viewed the museum as simply a container for objects, with the result that the building became a series of compromises that ultimately failed to fulfil its potential.

Thus, the museum building at Cat Hill was not to be the triumphant final chapter in the Silver Studio Collection's long history. Instead, it can be seen as just one episode in a continual process of evolution and reinvention. In their efforts to secure the funding, and to gain recognition for the Silver Studio Collection (and the other collections that had been acquired by the late 1990s), those involved in the late 1990s had paid insufficient attention to deeper questions about what a museum that contained designed objects might be, its relationships with audiences (either public or student), or the kinds of exhibitions it would show. The new building did succeed in preserving the fragile Silver Studio Collection and in raising its profile. But since the new building had been made possible by public funding there was an ongoing requirement that the Museum's main audience should be members of the public. The core target audience was assumed to be a general adult one, and museum staff were encouraged to look outwards to meet the needs of this audience, rather than inwards to meet the needs of students. With the benefit of hindsight, it is possible to suggest that the design of the new building at Cat Hill (the "museum as architecture") imposed a variety of problems and constraints on the "museum as institution." In as much as visitors or students were considered at all it was as passive recipients of exhibition contents, rather than active participants in a dialogue about the collections, about the past, or indeed about the future.

Chapter Six : Looking Back and Looking Forward, the Silver Studio Collection, Present and Future

In considering the history of the Silver Studio Collection since it became part of an educational institution in the late 1960s, my aim was to open up discussion about the history of design collections within the discipline of design history, within the context of art and design education, and within Museum Studies. This chapter looks at recent use of the Silver Studio Collection in undergraduate teaching, as well as in research (books, articles, exhibitions and postgraduate research) generated by people beyond MoDA and Middlesex itself. It will move on to consideration of what we mean by the 'digital museum', and to a discussion of whether the virtual experience can ever replace the real in this context. This discussion of the Silver Studio Collection operates at the intersection of museology, design history, and histories of art and design education, and the new dimension of the digital museum, and this chapter aims to draw all of these strands together.

The narrative arc of this thesis spans a period of fifty years, ending just a couple of years before the time of writing. This narrative can be seen as a kind of biography of the Silver Studio Collection, tracing its progress through various different life stages, from the moment it became a 'collection' in the formal sense. However, one significant difference is that biographies of human subjects inevitably end in the death of the person in question, providing a convenient point of narrative closure. The end of this thesis is not the end of the story of the Silver Studio Collection, since it will continue to exist after the final full stop has been placed.

While the Collection itself may have remained the same, the world around it has changed almost beyond recognition, both within the institution itself and beyond: as already noted, Hornsey became part of Middlesex Polytechnic in 1973 and subsequently Middlesex University in 1992. More generally the landscape of higher education has been altered by a series of legislative changes, perhaps most

significantly the introduction of student fees in 1998, which contributed to the increasing marketization of the higher education sector.[1] The Silver Studio Collection has remained a constant presence throughout, containing the same objects as it did fifty years ago (although as we have seen, their physical condition has in many cases improved considerably). The Collection continues to be regarded as an important heritage resource, receiving Designated status in 2008 in recognition of its national and international quality and significance.[2] But perhaps most significantly, our understanding of how students learn with and through collections has altered significantly. It is worth noting that this chapter covers the period in which I have been employed as Head of Collections at the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture, hence I have played an active role in shaping the approach described here. I cannot claim that this is an entirely objective summary but having previously placed the Silver Studio Collection in its historical context, in this chapter I will draw on my own reflective practice to argue that it now makes a genuinely useful contribution to student learning as well as to research.

6.1 Histories of art and design education: Undergraduate Learning

Following the closure of the Cat Hill campus in 2011, the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture moved to Colindale and now operates as a study collection. This means that it no longer has publicly accessible galleries but instead makes the collections available to students, researchers and members of the public by appointment. MoDA staff bring things out of the store that are appropriate to an individual or group's particular interests, and we place an emphasis on helping visitors to answer specific research questions through engagement with the collections. What we are now unable to offer visitors is the opportunity for a more informal or leisure learning experience, based on wandering through galleries, that is

[1] Robert Anderson, "University Fees in Historical Perspective," HIstory & Policy, 2016, http://www.historyandpolicy.org/policy-papers/papers/university-fees-in-historical-perspective [Accessed 20-05-2020].
[2] "Designation Scheme."

more commonly associated with a museum visit.[3] As I discussed in the earlier chapter "Time, Pleasure and Flow," students who visit the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture now engage with the Silver Studio Collection in a much more intimate way than simply looking at things in glass cases. Staff now arrange sessions that are tailored to a particular group's learning needs and interests, and students have the opportunity to look at and handle objects close up. This is doubtless the way in which the Collection was used in the 1980s and 90s, before the move to the museum building at Cat Hill.[4]

So, the question of how students use the Silver Studio Collection now is both a contemporary question and one that invites comparison with what happened in the past. As was discussed in Chapter Three, Harold Shelton and Joseph Daracott seem to have had contradictory ideas about exactly what and how students would learn from the Silver Studio Collection. On the one hand they imagined that the Collection would be useful as a practice-based resource for students; for example, they thought that textile students might learn how to create successful repeating patterns. On the other hand, they also envisaged it as an historical resource for the then newly-emerging discipline of design history, although a more nuanced understanding of how this learning might take place was not available to them at the time. We know from reports to the Silver Studio Steering Committee that student groups made frequent visits; yet even when the records allow us to get an impression of the numbers of students visiting the Collection in the 80s and 90s, evidence of what actually went on within those sessions is lacking, since learning objectives and learning outcomes were not recorded.[5] Student use of the Silver

[3] There have been suggestions that MoDA should be more properly considered an 'archive' rather than a 'museum' for this reason, but as I discussed in the Chapter 'Tour of the Museum Store' there are conceptual reasons why we continue to think of the collections as museum objects, whatever the current arrangements for physical access to them.

[4] Steering Committee Minutes, 1980s-90s, *passim*

[5] Anecdotally, I have frequently met Middlesex alumni who remembered seeing the Silver Studio Collection at various times, but it is impossible to quantify what effect it had on them, since the kind of longitudinal study that would be required to demonstrate long term impact has never been undertaken.

Studio Collection is definitely not new, but we are now more than ever interested in, and conscious of, the learning that takes place, because higher education is now more than ever driven by league tables, performance indicators and measures of student success.

It is only in recent years that scholars have turned their attention to the pedagogical question of how students learn with objects. Much of this recent work has concentrated on different disciplines, specifically those such as the natural sciences where objects are integral to the discipline.[6] Attention has also been paid to the ways in which design students learn from museum collections.[7] Maria Georgaki's discussion of the pedagogical uses of the ILEA Collection at Camberwell School of Arts here provides a useful comparator to the Silver Studio Collection.[8] The ILEA Collection developed as a pedagogical tool for introducing London school children to the principles of 'good design'; Georgaki argues that this notion is no longer useful for undergraduates at Camberwell, but that the benefit to them is the opportunity for handling objects, and of learning through handling. Georgaki makes an important distinction between 'handling' which she sees as an active process of meaning making, and 'touch' which risks seeming passive. To be allowed to handle objects means the opportunity to feel their weight and texture and to observe their construction close up. Judy Willcocks also points to research that suggests that handling museum objects is particularly important for art and design students, because they are more likely than science or humanities students to be interested in the properties of materials and the potential for making in relation to their own creative practice.[9] While agreeing that the haptic and the sensory is an important

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[6] Vincent C H Tong, Alex Standen, and Mina Sotiriou, *Shaping Higher Education with Students: Ways to Connect Research and Teaching* (UCL Press, 2018).
[7] Beth Cook, Rebecca Reynolds, and Catherine Speight, *Museums and Design Education: Looking to Learn, Learning to See* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).
[8] Maria Georgaki, "Developing Expertise and Connoisseurship through Handling Objects of 'Good Design': Example of the ILEA/Camberwell Collection," *Journal of Research Practice* 11, no. 2 (2015): 16.
[9] Judy Willcocks, "The Power of Concrete Experience: Museum Collections, Touch and Meaning-Making in Art and Design Pedagogy," in *Engaging the Senses: Object-*

element of the learning experience, in my view this is only part of the reason for the value of students' hands-on encounters with museum objects. As I discussed in the chapter called "Time, Pleasure and Flow," it is also important that the students' experience of looking, discussing and learning together with their peers, tutors and museum staff generally takes place in small groups and therefore the social aspect of this learning must not be underestimated.

The Object Based Learning that we have developed at the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture over recent years does not rely on learning about the history of the Silver Studio as a business. Instead, use of MoDA's collections is a matter of using objects as a starting point for discussion of something relevant to students. Object Based Learning sometimes involves using museum objects as a source of inspiration for studio work or creative writing; it may also involve consideration of evidence and the critical analysis of sources. It is almost never a matter of consideration of the history of the Silver Studio for its own sake, though it may involve discussion of what museums are, why they keep things, and the way the practices of cataloguing have shaped collections-based knowledge.[10] In recent years Object Based Learning has taken place within the wider context of a higher education system in which what students need to learn is more prescribed and must be assessed and measured. Yet knowledge is not 'imparted' by the museum, nor is it 'embodied' within objects: instead it is created at the intersection of the objects and the students' prior knowledge, interests, and motivation to learn. This learning does not happen in relation to the objects alone but requires the input of museum staff, in partnership with academic staff, to guide students in the creation of new knowledge and understanding.

Based Learning in Higher Education, ed. Helen Chatterjee and Leonie Hannan (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 43–56.

[10] See for example a piece of writing by student Anders Myrset "Banknotes from a desperate period", which involved critical analysis of sources and development of creative writing skills: https://moda.mdx.ac.uk/2018/07/26/anders-myrset-banknotes-from-a-desperate-period/ [accessed 30th June 2019]

Here it is useful to think more deeply about the importance of looking back in order to look forward. Most students on creative courses such as those at Middlesex University, do not begin with a requirement to know the history of objects (in the sense of learning dates or facts about makers).[11] Yet there are several ways in which looking at museum objects supports the development of students' critical thinking skills. Students are able to relate examples from the past to their own practices as designers or makers, since the objects are sufficiently familiar, and yet simultaneously sufficiently different, to prompt useful discussions. In this sense, the historical subject content associated with an object is not irrelevant: printmaking students, for example, are likely to learn from a session which focuses on printing techniques and which uses printed wallpapers and textiles from the museum's collections. Students are able to relate what they see to their own understanding of current printing techniques and relate historic examples to their own practice. An example of this ability to look backwards and forwards simultaneously comes from Alex Beattie, a student who was interviewed as part of a research project in 2013:

> I am just interested in the way the designers of some of this garden- themed [wall]paper solved a particular problem which is depth […] I'm just in the very early stages of planning some domestic textiles like large scale images about garden and countryside, and the one thing that I am sort of, struggling with I guess is how to get depth into a printed image when you are screen-printing with a limited number of colours and you are trying to get that aerial perspective in there, and suggest a world beyond the surface of the, the print, and, it'll be interesting to see how designers of these have tackled that, if they even cared about that, or, how they've done it.[12]

Here looking back is useful in order to enable students to see how previous practitioners dealt with a challenge that they are facing in their own work. In this

[11] Middlesex Polytechnic playing a leading role in the development of design history as a discipline in the 1980s, but in recent years it has not been taught as a stand-alone subject but as a component of complementary studies for studio-based students. Gooding, "Design History in Britain from the 1970s to 2012: Context, Formation and Development (Unpublished PhD Thesis)."

[12] Hendon and Sandino, "Inspiration Examined:Towards a Methodology," 141.

was students develop a sense of themselves as a part of a community of practice which stretches back in time and which builds on the work of generations of other people.[13]

As I argued in the chapter called "Things Take Time," this process of "Looking back to look forward" provides a means by which students are able to connect the present with the past and the future, expanding their temporal horizons in both directions. This notion of expanded temporal horizons is important for non-studio based students in developing critical thinking skills in a further way: MoDA's current curator Ana Baeza Ruiz argues that the use of historic artefacts such as magazines: "provide(s) a historical buffer or distance that gives students a level of detachment," and thus enables them to achieve critical distance from concepts such as gender identity. Baeza Ruiz sees this detachment as important in enabling students to make a: "shift in their fundamental understanding of how male and female identities are socially mediated and constructed…The imagery in the magazines is both seen as sufficiently distant from [the present] but still recognisable as something familiar," to enable students to observe and question their current understandings of previously un-considered concepts such as gender as a social construct.[14]

6.2 Museology

As discussed in Chapter Five, the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture's building at Cat Hill was one of the first to have been built at the turn of the new millennium under the auspices of the Heritage Lottery Fund. As I argued in that chapter, the very fact of receiving funding and getting the building built was seen by many as the crowning achievement of a long period of struggle to have the importance of the Silver Studio Collection recognized and to secure its long-term future. While not underestimating the scale of that achievement, that chapter also demonstrated that the complexity of the museum as institution (rather than

[13] Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice : Learning, Meaning, and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
[14] Ana Baeza Ruiz, "Critical Pedagogies and Temporality (Pers. Comm.)," 2020.

museum as container of objects), had not fully been understood. The success of a museum depends on an elusive combination of numerous factors including amongst others: the architectural layout and internal design of the building itself; the display of and access to collections; and the museum's location within the wider ecosystem of heritage, tourism and the leisure economy. It requires an understanding of a museum as a social space as well as one which can accommodate more formal educational interactions.

The building of the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture at Cat Hill was a success in the sense that it was an expression and consolidation of a collective understanding of the Silver Studio Collection's significance within Britain's heritage. Yet the closure of the building was not the disaster that many assumed it to be, since its design had imposed numerous constraints on the effective and imaginative use of the collections for the University's main purpose, namely undergraduate teaching and research. Indeed, the question of what a museum is, what it is for, and how it is organised continues to be a theme within undergraduate teaching at MoDA. We encourage students to think critically about how museum collections are structured, what is kept and what is discarded, and whose voices are represented. These are themes that Harold Shelton and Joseph Darracott are unlikely to have imagined when they originally agreed to accept the Silver Studio Collection for Hornsey.

6.3 Design Histories

The Silver Studio Collection is used extensively by researchers, academics and authors, artists and creative practitioners, as well as by Middlesex staff and students. In many cases, the same objects have been used by different researchers to explore entirely different ideas. Here it is worth noting that the edges of the Silver Studio Collection remain blurred; as discussed in Chapter One and in the "Tour of the Museum Store", decisions were made at various time about what 'really was' the Silver Studio Collection. These decisions shaped practices of documentation and hence shaped understanding. For researchers today it is sometimes, but not always,

important to know whether a particular item originally belonged to the Silver Studio: other material, accumulated since 1968 might also be of interest, depending on the nature of their research question.

One of the researchers to make most extensive and intensive use of MoDA's collections is Deborah Sugg Ryan, whose book, *Ideal Homes 1918-39: Domestic design and suburban modernism* was first published by Manchester University Press in 2018.[15] This book explores the history of the interwar suburban home, a period in which home ownership became more common, and in which ideals of aspiration and taste were consequently reshaped. Sugg Ryan drew on a wide range of evidence from MoDA's collections, including 1930s estate brochures, trade catalogues, promotional posters and Silver Studio Collection wallpapers. Her approach exemplifies something that many of the researchers who use MoDA's collections have in common, namely their interest in a detailed and critical visual analysis of sources, rather than seeing images as purely illustrative.[16] Here it worth reiterating the point made in the Prologue that the Silver Studio's association with topics of general public interest have long meant that it is capable of operating within the sphere of popular history as well as within more academic strands of history and visual culture.[17]

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[15]Sugg Ryan, *Ideal Homes 1918-39: Domestic Design and Suburban Modernism*. This book has recently been awarded the Historians of British Art Book Prize for Exemplary Scholarship on the Period After 1800. It will shortly be reissued in paperback with the title *Ideal Homes: Uncovering the History and Design of the Interwar House*.

[16] Sugg Ryan's work offers a continuation of themes first explored in publications and exhibitions such as *Little Palaces*, first published in 1987, and of MoDA's own series of Style Guides Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture, *Little Palaces: House and Home in the Inter-War Suburbs*.

[17] As Huppatz and Lees Maffei noted in their overview of design history in 2012:"The vitality of [the academic discipline of] design history would be well served through the building of bridges between the subject as it exists within higher education and the apparently boundless popular enthusiasm for related phenomena such as heritage, family history and domesticity." DJ Huppatz and Grace Lees-Maffei, "Why Design History? A Multi-National Perspective on the State and Purpose of the Field," *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 12, no. 2–3 (2010): 325.

The history of wallpaper remains a strong theme in MoDA's collections and we have contributed to a number of volumes in the past decade, which are notable for the diversity of their approaches. One of the most recent is Lucinda Hawksley's *Bitten by Witch Fever*, a lavishly produced but highly researched history of the use of arsenic within wallpaper in the nineteenth century.[18] An entirely different approach was taken by Dianne Lawrence in her exploration of domestic spaces within homes of new settlers of Australia, and the importance of wallpaper in the creation of a sense of 'home' for people arriving in a new country.[19] Yet a different approach was taken by Wivine Wailliez who focussed on Japanese leather papers, and traced some of the connections between wallpapers designed by the Silver Studio in London at the end of the nineteenth century and extant locations in Belgium where some of these papers survive.[20] As I discussed in the chapter entitled "Wallpaper and Nostalgia", it is easy to dismiss an interest in wallpaper as evidence of uncritical nostalgia for a romantic past. But these writers indicate, in their various ways, there are larger themes of trade, national identity, industry and technology that can be illuminated through investigation of this frequently overlooked aspects of our material world.

While MoDA no longer has public exhibition galleries of its own, it has continued to lend objects to other institutions, including to a number of high-profile international exhibitions in the past decade. An exhibition which drew on the nineteenth century objects in MoDA's collections was the V&A's *The Cult of Beauty:*

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[18] Lucinda Hawksley, *Bitten by Witch Fever: Wallpaper and Arsenic in the Victorian Home* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2016).

[19] Dianne Lawrence, *Genteel Women : Empire and Domestic Material Culture, 1840-1910* (Manchester University Press, 2012).

[20] Wailliez is from the Institut royal du Patrimoine Artistique in Brussels, and received EU research funding specifically to visit MoDA and other collections in the UK in 2015. Wailliez Wailliez, "Japanese Leather Paper or Kinkarakawakami: An Overview from the 17th Century to the Japonist Hangings by Rottmann & Co." A more general overview of the history of wallpaper in Britain was provided by this author, published in 2018, which drew extensively on the Silver Studio Collection: Zoë Hendon, *Wallpaper* (Oxford: Shire Publications, 2018).

The Aesthetic Movement 1860-1900, to which we lent five objects. This began in London in 2011 and subsequently toured to the Musée D'Orsay in Paris and the Mitsubishi Ichikogan Museum in Tokyo. The inclusion of MoDA's images as illustrations in the accompanying exhibition catalogue ensured the legacy of this important contribution to scholarship and is one of the ways way in which researchers have subsequently found their way to MoDA.[21] Yet the overall argument of both the exhibition and the publication hark back to earlier discussions about the Silver Studio's place in relation to 'art' and 'commerce' at the end of the nineteenth century, with an emphasis on a relatively uncritical assessment of Aesthetic Movement pronouncements about art for art's sake. The *Cult of Beauty* exhibition arguably used items from the Silver Studio Collection to bolster the V&A's pre-existing narrative in a way that echoed the activities of the Circulation Department discussed in Chapter One, by, for example, glossing over the narratively inconvenient fact of the Silver Studio's close association with mass production and instead presenting its work as something closer to art.

If the *Cult of Beauty* exemplified a traditional V&A-style museum approach, then MoDA's recent research into the katagami stencils that are part of the Silver Studio Collection, demonstrated our attempts to unite both history and practice, looking back and looking forward. As I discussed in the chapter called "Things Take Time," the katagami stencils belonged to Arthur Silver in the 1890s and were used as design reference by his colleagues at the Silver Studio. In Japan katagami were simply seen as tools, rather than objects to be valued in their own right, and as a result many were sold to Western visitors at the end of the nineteenth century. Because of this, more katagami stencils now survive in Western museum collections than in Japan itself, and some of those within the Silver Studio Collection were included in an exhibition called *Katagami Style: Paper Stencils and Japonisme*, in 2012.[22] This exhibition helped to cement MoDA's reputation as a holder of one of the key European collections of nineteenth century Japanese stencils and

[21] Calloway et al., *The Cult of Beauty: The Aesthetic Movement 1860-1900*.
[22] This exhibition toured to the Mitsubishi Ichikogan Museum in Tokyo, the National Museum of Modern Art in Kyoto and the Mie Prefectural Art Museum in Tsu.

contributed to the success of our bid for funding from Arts Council England for a research project*, Katagami in the Art School*, in 2016.

The katagami stencils are incredibly rich objects, not just because of their fragile beauty, but also because they open up the possibility of conversations about cross-cultural dialogue, trade and fashion, and craftsmanship, among other things. In other words, they sit very precisely at the intersection of design history and cultural enquiry and studio-based or hands-on ways of thinking. The *Katagami in the Art School* project brought together practitioners from various fields, demonstrating the value of both an archival or source-based enquiry and a practice-based enquiry, and showing how the two approaches could complement each other. Sarah Desmarais, for example, brought techniques of slow-making and a careful observation of her own work as a textile practitioner to bear on the processes of making and printing with katagami stencils.[23] For her, the engagement with objects was not only with the katagami stencils in the Silver Studio Collection but with the very material affordances of washi paper, rice paste, and indigo dye which she used to create her own textiles. These revealed much about the techniques of making and the ways in which the appearance of the end product (what we might think of as the 'design') was intimately influenced by those material conditions of making.

The work of Desmarais complemented the work of another of the practitioners, Mamiko Markham, who carried out detailed archival research on the katagami themselves, with a particular focus on deciphering merchants' stamps in order to trace trade routes.[24] The work of Desmarais and Markham on this project demonstrated the inter-relationship of historical understanding and hands-on making, the importance of 'looking back' while simultaneously 'looking forward' to create new things in the present for the future: it also demonstrated the arbitrary

[23] Sarah Desmarais, "Bringing Objects Back to Life: Assimilating and Translating Design Influences from Museum Artefacts through Making," *Unpublished*, 2018.
[24] See https://moda.mdx.ac.uk/2017/02/20/uncovering-the-secrets-of-modas-katagami-collection/ [accessed 29th November 2018]

nature of the theory/practice head/hand divide which has been a common theme within art and design education since the Coldstream Report.[25] New research in this area takes us into the realm of the international influences on the Silver Studio's designers, questions of cross cultural fertilization or cultural appropriation and the movement of objects and ideas, and is a new way in which the Silver Studio Collection can make a contribution to larger historical discourses.

6.4 The Digital Museum

MoDA's move from Cat Hill to Colindale in 2011 necessitated greater attention to the question of how we would engage with our audiences in the absence of public exhibition spaces. We now place much more emphasis on the museum's website as a showcase for the collections, and for the learning and research generated from those collections. The conventional museum website shows the collections by means of a relatively limited search function. When the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture opened at Cat Hill in 2000 it was with a website that provided users access to the whole museum catalogue online, a decision that was in line with museum sector best practice at the time. On reflection it is possible to see that the design of that first iteration of the website was based on an 'acquisition metaphor' of learning whereby it was assumed that knowledge associated with the museum's collections could be divided into units attached to each museum object record, and acquired by website users.[26] Since then the rapidly changing world of social media has meant that it is increasingly recognized that

[25] Quinn, "The Pedagogy of Capital: Art History and Art School Knowledge"; Rintoul, *Integrating Critical and Contextual Studies in Art and Design Possibilities for Post-Compulsory Education*.
[26] Sami Paavola and Kai Hakkarainen, "The Knowledge Creation Metaphor - An Emergent Epistemological Approach to Learning," *Science and Education* 14 (2005): 535–57.

museums must engage in dialogue with their visitors, co-creating knowledge rather than simply disseminating it.[27]

Influenced by these strands of museological and pedagogical thought, my goal has been to use MoDA's website to make visible the ways in which students learn from their engagement with the museum's collections, based on what Paavola and Hakkarainen call a 'participation metaphor'. Our current policy it to do this by showcasing the many ways in which students and others use MoDA's collections, in order to empower students as co-creators of knowledge. This is recognition that, in the era of Wikipedia and other forms of social media, knowledge-creation is no longer the sole preserve of museums as cultural institutions, and that the museum's website should not simply be understood as a means by which to broadcast knowledge but should act as a focus for different kinds of new knowledge creation.[28] It is worth emphasising that this approach has generally meant students and others engaging with collections *in real life* but sharing the outputs of their engagement online or by digital means.[29] As I discussed in the chapter "Time, Pleasure and Flow" above, there is something important about human beings coming together to share a learning experience together.[30] The challenge of making co-creative learning

[27] George Lorenzo, Diana Oblinger, and Charles Dziuban, "How Choice, Co-Creation and Culture Are Changing What It Means to Be Net Savvy," *Educause Learning Initiative* 4 (2006).
[28] Kalliopi; Fouseki and Kalliopi Vacharopoulou, "Digital Museums Collections and Social Media: Ethical Considerations of Ownership and Use," *Journal of Conservation and Museum Studies* 11, no. 1 (2013): 1–10.
[29] The 'Co-Creation' section of MoDA's website showcases the many interesting ways in which students and researchers have used the collections in their work: See https://moda.mdx.ac.uk/creativity-co-creation/ [accessed 21 March 2020].
[30] At the time of writing, in the context of the global pandemic, it remains to be seen whether it will be possible to return to this kind of shared engagement with objects (in real time, in physical space) at any point in the near future, and thus there will be a need for us to think more deeply about how we present the museum' collections within online space, both for general audiences and for students.

processes visible on the museum's website as an end product is something that my colleagues and I continue to reflect on.[31]

With the introduction of a more sophisticated website at the end of 2017 my colleagues and I were finally able to show the many interesting ways in which students and others use the museum's collections, as well as the collections themselves.[32] I see this as further evidence of the idea that though the contents of the museum do not change, they are not static, but are actively engaged in creative processes of enquiry in the present. The intention is that by making the many uses of the Silver Studio Collection visible, we can encourage other people to see how it might inform their own work in the future. In the fifty years since the Silver Studio Collection was given to Hornsey College of Art, there have been massive changes in available technologies and parallel changes to the expectations of students about what and how they learn.[33] At the same time, the very nature of knowledge has become contested, and the relationship of knowledge institutions such as museums and universities to their users/audiences is being rethought.[34]

As I have argued, the Silver Studio Collection makes as an important contribution to the national and international research community, as well as to the students of Middlesex University. New knowledge around the museum's collections is not created by the museum staff alone, but in collaboration with all of these diverse participants, as well as with the objects themselves. Research into the

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[31] forthcoming: Ana Baeza Ruiz and Zoë Hendon, "Displaying Co-Creation: An Enquiry into Participatory Engagement at the University Museum," in *Participatory Practices in Art and Cultural Heritage: Learning Through and From Collaboration*, ed. Ruth Benschop et al. (Springer, 2021).

[32] www.moda.mdx.ac.uk

[33]Diana Laurillard, *Rethinking University Teaching: A Conversational Framework for the Effective Use of Learning Technologies*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2002).

[34] Siân Bayne, Jen Ross, and Zoe Williamson, "Objects , Subjects , Bits and Bytes : Learning from the Digital Collections of the National Museums," *Museum & Society* 7, no. 2 (2009): 110–24; Mathieu O'Neil, "Wikipedia: Experts Are Us: If It Isn't on Google, It Doesn't Exist," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, 2009, https://mondediplo.com/2009/05/15wikipedia [Accessed 20-07-2017].

museum's collections results from a series of conversations: with existing scholarship in the field in question, with the objects themselves, with MoDA staff, and with future scholars, and the research that is generated in turn feeds back into a shared knowledge base that supports Middlesex students in their own encounters with the museum's collections. Learning with the Silver Studio Collection is active learning: students, tutors, museum staff and museum objects are *all* active participants in a dialogue that results in the co-creation of new ideas, artefacts, performances, and so on, through cooperative and collaborative learning.

In this chapter I have outlined the ways in which the Silver Studio Collection (and the museum's other collections) have evolved within the last decade to support changing approaches to learning and research. I have argued that circumstances are now such that the Collection can fulfil the educational potential that was hoped for it when it was first given to Hornsey College of Art, albeit in ways that were not imagined at the time. To recognize my own contribution to this part of the Silver Studio's history is not to position myself as 'hero curator', but rather to acknowledge my role in helping to navigate the Collection through the competing demands of institutional and legislative circumstances, physical space, funding opportunities, pedagogical theory and practice, the changing digital landscape, the availability and expertise of staff and the physical materiality of the objects themselves.

Chapter Seven : Conclusions

In this Conclusion I draw together my findings in the light the research questions that I stated in the Introduction, namely the question of the value of the Silver Studio Collection, its contribution to the creation of knowledge, the evolving approach to pedagogy in relation to it, and the social role of the museum. I also reflect on the future for the Silver Studio Collection and for my own research, including new areas of enquiry such as decolonising the collection. The majority of this thesis was researched and written before the Spring of 2020, when the previously unimagined circumstances of Covid-19 hit the globe. This conclusion is therefore written partly in the light of the new circumstances and the continuing uncertainty – locally and globally – about the future landscape of higher education, museums, and society as a whole, once the consequences of Covid-19 are fully known.

7.1 Value

As this thesis has demonstrated, the Silver Studio Collection has undergone a long period of transition, from the point when it was considered of low commercial and cultural value, through a process of acquisition of cultural and heritage value, to its recognition as a contributor to teaching, learning and research. While in retrospect it may appear that this process was natural and inevitable, I have argued that it was by no means a foregone conclusion, but instead has been the outcome of the numerous small decisions taken by multiple actors since the Collection was given to Hornsey in 1968. So, an ongoing challenge I face in relation to the Silver Studio Collection is how to measure its value while simultaneously resisting the idea that the only important things are those that can be measured. I've worked hard to demonstrate the value of the Silver Studio Collection to Middlesex University in terms of its contribution to student learning, in other words to make it *for*

somebody, not just *about something*. [1] My colleagues and I have done this by embedding museum teaching within particular modules, building relationships with tutors, and thinking carefully about how students experience their encounter with museum objects and staff.

Over the past two decades my goal has been to ensure that the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture is perceived to be value to Middlesex University. I also recognize that this approach is potentially double-edged: while on the one hand I have hoped to align the Silver Studio Collection more firmly within the University's overall strategy and purpose, the risk is that the instrumental value implied in being *for somebody* may be lost if those people cease to be interested. Yet as I have also argued, society's assessment of a museum or a collection's value is fragile at the best of times. As I noted in Chapter Four, following Laurajane Smith's suggestion, it is not the case that items of our physical or intangible past that we deem to be heritage have an intrinsic value: rather, their designation as heritage is constructed as such to fulfil certain political functions.[2] The question of the value of heritage, and of the museum sector as a whole has come into sharper focus since the beginning of the pandemic in early 2020, and will no doubt continue to be debated in coming years. In addition, the question of how we measure or demonstrate the value of online or digital interactions with museum collections will continue to be highly pertinent in the coming decade.

7.2 Knowledge Creation

As I noted in the Introduction, the second related theme of this thesis has been the question of knowledge and what it means to create and share knowledge about a museum collection. I have argued that one of the Silver Studio's strengths is that it is not foundational to a particular discipline or subject area, so that it can

[1] Stephen Weil, "From Being about Something to Being for Somebody: The Ongoing Transformation of the American Museum," *Daedalus* 128, no. 3 (1999): 229–58.
[2] Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (London & New York: Taylor & Francis, Ltd, 2006).

more easily be interpreted in different ways, according to changing interests and academic fashions. This also means that my knowledge of the collection is wide ranging and difficult to pin down precisely to create a clear sense of my own knowledge-based identity. In Chapter One I argued that part of the Circulation Department's motivation for acquiring items from the Silver Studio was that they helped to build a knowledge base in the area of late Victorian Decorative Art, a subject that had not yet been taken seriously by other curators. I do not see it as my role to shape knowledge in quite the same way, partly because that implies rather a top-down model of dissemination, and partly because my role is to use the museum's collections to support other people's research, whether in histories of domestic interiors, housing and architecture, the built environment, pattern making and textile design, wallpaper production or any of the other questions that students and researchers have in mind. Having said that, it is also the case that supporting other people's research requires me to be engaged in research myself, and I will continue to develop my own interests in the physical material that is held within the Silver Studio Collection (wallpaper, textiles, katagami) and more generally in the histories of collections and their use within higher education.

7.3 Pedagogy

The third theme I set out to address was a pedagogical one, and when the large part of this thesis was written, before Covid, I was keen to emphasize the importance of the hands-on, haptic experience of student engagement with museum objects. As I noted in Chapter 3, the Silver Studio Collection was acquired by Hornsey College of Art but seemingly with little clear idea of exactly what students would learn from their engagement with it. But now we remain convinced of the importance of students' engagement with objects, and with each other, for the reasons discussed in "Time, Pleasure and Flow." We see working with objects as an opportunity for students to slow down, to look carefully, and to think critically about the material world and our place in it. We also see this as recognition of the embodied and social nature of learning, which cannot be replicated via an online session. Of course, the pandemic has changed all of this and in the short term, the

consequence of Covid-19 for the museum has been the move to online delivery of teaching sessions and a temporary loss of physical engagement with objects. We are fortunate that our collections database is online and that a reasonable proportion of the objects have been photographed. This has allowed my colleagues and I to continue to develop online resources, teach sessions and answer enquiries from home, without physical access to the collections or the museum space. It is hoped that we will be able to resume face to face teaching and study room research sessions later in 2021.

In more general terms being a digital museum means that we will continue to explore digital methods of engaging audiences, and also increasingly, to use the museum's collections themselves as a dataset for research investigation. We've recently participated in the AHRC's Towards A National Collection project as part of the Deep Discoveries strand. Deep Discoveries is a collaboration between The National Archives, the University of Surrey, Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh and the V&A, along with project partners Gainsborough Weaving Company and the Sanderson Design Archive. At the start of the project the emphasis was on botanical specimens, and we contributed around a hundred designs for wallpapers and textiles from the Silver Studio Collection that featured representations of flowers and plants to the dataset. The question was how far it would be possible to stretch the recognition capabilities of the Artificial Intelligence technology: would the computer recognise a rose in a textile pattern and the same flower in a herbarium specimen, for example? Researchers have been developing and testing various methods for automating visual similarity and training the system to recognize similar patterns and motifs. The ability to match a rose to a rose remains part of the goal but user feedback suggested that this could not be the system's only aim. Instead, it become clear through testing that there is no single answer to the question of similarity: when a user uploads an image and says "show me something like this" they might have many different kinds of similarity in mind. In other words, it is hard to create a single definition of "similarity" that will suit everyone, given the variety of potential users and the diversity of their needs.

Involvement in this project has raised all sorts of questions about what it means to make museum collections available online, both for individual museums, and in the context of the various attempts to build a 'national collection' – meaning a national joined up database of museum collections. This brings us back to questions of value and pedagogy, in the sense that museum professionals are keen to make their collections available online, but nobody is entirely sure what the value of doing so is or how it might be measured. In the context of Deep Discoveries, it became clear in the course of the project that what users wanted was not what researchers had initially imagined: users often have a specific purpose in mind although they may not be able to articulate that purpose at the outset. Consequently, the researchers are now thinking in terms of a faceted search approach, whereby users clarify what they want when they see the first set of results: "show me results that are more like *these*, not like *those*." This is partly about allowing users to confirm whether what they are shown actually are roses or not, and partly about allowing for the fact that they might be looking for similarity in terms of colour or style, rather than motif. This is similar to faceted searching using keywords in library catalogues, but the facility for users to refine the results of a visual search through an iterative process is one of the key innovations of this project.

7.4 Social Responsibility

The enforced pause of Covid has given us time to think more deeply about the ways in which we use the collections in relation to the question of social responsibility, the fourth theme of this thesis. This has become more pertinent than ever in the past year in light of ongoing debate within organizations such as the National Trust about the colonial origins of much of the nation's heritage.[3] I have therefore begun to think about what it might mean to decolonize the Silver Studio

[3] Sally Anne Huxtable, Christo Kefalas, and Emma Slocombe, "Interim Report on the Connections between Colonialism and Properties Now in the Care of the National Trust , Including Links with Historic Slavery," 2020; Corinne Fowler, *Green Unpleasant Land* (Peepal Tree Press, 2020).

Collection, particularly since – unlike other collections – it does not contain items that were forcibly removed from elsewhere.[4] There is a need for a different kind of approach, one which considers design influence and ideas of colonial power operating in a slightly more subtle way. Future research in relation to the Silver Studio Collection will, we hope, focus on the Silver Studio's design output in the 1920s and 30s and the designers' use of the terms "Persian" and "Indian" in the daybook to describe certain kinds of motif. The project will ask what these descriptive terms meant for designers and consumers of British furnishing textiles in the interwar period, and whether the use of certain motifs helped to reinforced ideas of Empire , as well as asking how we might use and conceptualize these objects today.[5]

If we are successful in the funding bid this will move the Silver Studio Collection a long way from a claim to value based on the notion that it represents exemplary design, produced by individual named designers. It will also be a long way from associations with what might have been seen as an overly cosy perception of British domesticity which overlooks Britain's colonial relationships with the wider world. It no longer seems important to debate whether we should see Arthur Silver as part of the wider panoply of Arts and Crafts designers, or whether the commercial nature of his work distanced him from those of his contemporaries who identified more strongly with craft. Rather I now tend to see the Studio's output as representative of more derivative, more every-day, democratic design, which is of value because it enables us to ask a wide range of questions about design influence, thus opening up and a different kind of pedagogic relationship between the Collection and those who use it.

It is perhaps important to note that these questions can be explored more easily now without a museum building in which objects must be displayed. In the

[4] Dan Hicks, *The Brutish Museums The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution* (Pluto Press, 2020).
[5] Funding application submitted to Arts Council National Lottery Project Grant Fund, March 2021, awaiting outcome.

late 1990s it must have seemed relatively straightforward to plan to put some objects in a case and call it a museum but, as I discussed in Chapter Five, the architectural layout of the museum building at Cat Hill was unsatisfactory in multiple ways. Yet it would have taken an architect, client and design team of almost super-human vision to have overcome the issues which I think are inherent in the display of ordinary mass produced objects, or designs for them. In my view the language of display within public museums is antithetical to the display of 'ordinary' objects, if what is desired is a critical or analytical response from audiences. The rhetoric of the display case and the pre-determined route through museum space tends towards the message, even if unintentional, that this is how things were meant to be, making it difficult to address seemingly familiar domestic items in ways that call for critical engagement on the part of visitors, such as issues around decolonizing design. The Silver Studio Collection demonstrates that the step from Collection to public museum is a very large one, the success of which depends as much on other factors (the building, its location, the wider tourist eco-system, the availability of public funding) as on the contents of the collection itself.

7.5 Conclusions

Underpinning all of my interconnecting themes, is the idea, drawn from Jane Bennet's idea of *Vibrant Matter,* that we might usefully see the Silver Studio Collection as an *assemblage* of objects, people, legislation, funding opportunities, physical space, personal and institutional ambition, and pedagogical theory and practice. All of these have come together to create particular circumstances through which the Silver Studio Collection has developed since the late 1960s. As I have argued, the Silver Studio Collection, and the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture in which it is now housed, evolved without a masterplan, out of a series of seemingly small decisions by various people all acting out of slightly different motives over a long period of time. They were responding to changing political and institutional circumstances, but generally operating from the assumption that the Silver Studio Collection was worth keeping and worth looking after. As I have shown, my ostensible focus has been on the Silver Studio Collection, but the objects

themselves are only part of the story: objects and human agency intimately related. My conclusion is that we should see the Silver Studio Collection not as a static example of heritage or a container of fixed meanings since it always exists in relation to people and their interests. Instead we should approach it as no more and no less than the starting point for interesting discussions and collaborations, many of which will change over time. Using this approach allows us to move away from the traditional idea of the museum as holder of static knowledge and towards seeing the museum as an engine room of new ideas, a space (real or virtual) in which to get lost, explore, and take things in new directions. The Silver Studio Collection remains the same, but the way we use it will continue to evolve over time.

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