

FROM ONE CHAIR TO ANOTHER

ESTHER HESKETH

1. "A draw! The table that he had used as a desk was one of several items of inherited furniture that had been brought in to the office, placed and not moved since. As the end of the table was against the wall, he had never opened the drawer. He pushed at its base prompting a shift and a jangling from within- it was clearly full of things." (K, Palmer. 2014, p.55)

Here she finds memories and forgotten items, it is a moment of discovery. The stool with three legs and a pentagon top holds memories to her which are not of where it came from. It was an item she had chosen, as requested, then collected from a family members flat. While she didn't remember it in the flat, within its own context, she remembered tales of it now, in her own. The table had been used, in its new space with function and practicality but held no intrigue into the past of it. The contents of the draw had been wrongly predicted on discovery but as it was discovered, it was too closed and the table was continued to be used as he had.

2. She remembers not the people so much, that lived in the houses that no longer hold their furniture; but memories of gold fish trifles and kisses, the specifics of events.

3. All the chairs she will now remember flowed. What seating came first didn't matter but those held in memory did. The long warm days on a rug on the lawn, the long beach days, where the rug folds back over as a blanket. It was said that the rug was not a seat but it could be sat on. She pondered that for a while and led thought on the function of these items.

"As an introduction to the history of seating, it should be noted that despite the huge amount of information documented on seat types, only three types of distinctively different seats developed. These were the stool (both fixed and folding), the bench and its antecedent the chest, and the chair. Associated with the development of the seat are other objects, many of which remain with us today, such as the table and footstool." (K, Gurr, L, Straker and P, Moore. (No Date)

4. Realising a memory is different from information, she thinks about the technicalities of what she thought she saw. The man on the beach is a designer called Max Lamb. She didn't remember him playing in the sand as a child, but she remembered those around her who did, and how it would lead a fascination with this material we all tread. The man that is on the beach is carving a stool into the stand, with three legs, which he will fill with melted pewter and make a cast. The three-legged stool is significant here and in her memory and objects she now has; it is made better because of the idea of the design.

"by making a stool with three legs, even if the legs were not exactly the same length the stool would always sit level on the ground without wobbling, even on an uneven surface." (M, Lamb, 2006, 031- pewter stool)

The pebbles then the lake. The lake with the swans and the pedalos. The stool in the bedroom: three legs with a pentagon top, a perch and step, at the end of the bed.¹

A foot stool from a set with a rocking chair that came from the flat across the lake and the pebbly beach. I don't remember the rocking chair but I remember the others around, the seats of the place and how we'd sit.

Her seat was in front of the dining table where I remember the meal with the gold fish trifle. The upright sofa facing the fire place, was where I sat. It was formal, but like an old lady kiss. Too close.²

Then I was in her room, there was the rocking chair wooden and white. It was there I had to choose the few things I wanted myself. I didn't want the chair. Where would it fit? But the little white stool with three legs and the pentagon top.

To be like a table, perhaps. I would sit on the floor with it and we would dine for two. For one of us the stool to a table, for the other a lap will do.

He asked if I had something for him to use as a prop and he asked me to lend him the stool. I will but not yet, I hold off. I want to wait a little. So I can sit on it a little longer.

Now I've sat too long and it's the rugs I remember.³ When it gets hot enough to sit outside and the in-between becomes the thing one does.

The rugs I remember were for the soft warm sand and a day at the beach. No seating, seated in the sand. She formed a seat like a step in the slope. A slate top and it's made for two, the perfect stop on the hill of the beach.

For one of the long days while camping, she'd wake, head up to the toilet block and return with layers in the wind. We'd all go to the beach. A bicker with a windbreak and find the right spot to spend our day. Rugs flapped out perfect, then the trickle of sand invades. We did the beach right. The sea we saw, the sand made and formed. Soft sand for ticking toes and through your fingers, wet for the building of castles, standing proud.

There are memories of the man on the beach and his childhood, building castles in the same way he does now. He sets up on the wet sand. He doesn't mind about a wet seat, he will have a stool. So, he is on the sand, with the right consistency, carving in a deep column. Three legs going deep.⁴

5. She liked the imperfectness of the three-legged stool, that it could be wrong and still work.

“The ‘goodness’ or ‘rightness’ of a design cannot easily be estimated outside a knowledge of its purpose, and sometimes also of its circumstantial background. This is no reason for timidity of judgement; a man must reserve his right to say ‘I like that; to me it is beautiful and satisfying, and more so than that one over there that works so much better’ - or ‘this is a good workmanlike solution, thank god it has no pretensions to art.’” (N, Potter, 1980, p.45)

But while the stool could be right, she still felt this bench was wrong; not in its form so much, as it was just an expected high street bench, but the fact it was not in the right place. It could have been a work of art as furniture or it could have been as dull but with a spectacular view, the elements could have compromised but it just had no rightness. This bench claimed to be a memorial, it did not satisfy her memory.

6. If she was sitting on a bench with a view, she could have listed all the things she could see, all the things she could have written, all the memories that those for whom the bench was intended, who go to the bench to remember, remember. But they got a bench on the high street.

“You would think that whoever positioned this bench would have noticed that to turn it just 30 degrees would have produced a better sight-line.” (V, Hopley. 2013, p.69)

7. Maybe we do remember them better in their space, or a spot they had to sit, but she couldn’t have that anymore and the memories hadn’t gone. Furniture, from other places, scattered amongst those other people and used in the wrong way, held memories she didn’t have.

“thanks to the house, a great many of our memories are housed, and if the house is a bit elaborate, if it has a cellar and a garret, nooks and corridors, our memories have refuges that are all the more clearly delineated.” (G, Bachelard, 1994, p 8)

Remembering people by their choice of furniture, the furniture that is now scattered and out for the public. Furniture intended for an intimate home, holds relationships to those around them. The two chairs in her grandparents house, with the flip up leg rests, they were their’s, only for them to sit. She took the sofa, with a restricted view, and a challenge to where she would like to be in the room

8. “Anne is about to take a chair but she hesitates- what if she is in the wrong place on the wrong day at the wrong time?... She picks up a chair but is hesitating. The position of this chair will determine the next, and so on and so on. Maybe she should wait for others to arrive; maybe she should arrange enough chairs for everyone maybe.” (V, Hopley. 2013, p.61)

She takes a seat on a smokers bench to be out in the sun. It’s a perch on the edge of a busy road, parked cars at her knees. But she watches people pass.

He uses small burners and heats the metal. A camping stove and a long cup of tea. Next a walk to the tide and a paddle, but with practical shoes on. Still. Then he returns and digs, like a dog in the sand. A stool, then a bench, made and dug out of the beach. Just a designer at work, labouring at leisure.

If he’d have waited too long in that spot the tide would have rushed up. The long beach, now short and lost. She thinks of the beach, to watch the waves all day. On a rug, a stool, from the window, a bench, looking at the beach out to sea.

Around the corner from another coast, near the high street of a town, there’s a bench. It’s in memory of someone perhaps, but it faces a shop. A narrow corner on a road, with a seat to take and stare, but in the wrong place, facing the wrong way. ⁵

As people walk along they pass through the maybe view. A view that is looking but not a view to be shared, now that’s the wrong seat. ⁶

If I think of memorial benches, in dedication to a friend, aunt, your brother or mine, it’s a place they would have liked, maybe with a view, to sit and remember them. But I don’t know them, I never know or remember. I remember the man playing the saxophone on the benches round the headland. A stormy place with a dramatic view, in a photograph I have in my home. ⁷

Or the benches that face the water. The ones watching the ferry that crosses back and forth. There’s too many of them to know which to sit on but they are positioned like a sofa knows where to look. A red carpet and a room full of sofas.

She had a room full of sofas too. Her seat still faced the sea, in a house I never thought of to have a sea view. Warm, through the glass, it was the grandest of houses. There were two sofas, facing one another, a few chairs and stools and in the corner a sofa bench posed. It was much taller than a sofa but upholstered and with an upright back. A pink sofa made the whole room bright. There were too many seats to choose from. ⁸

Then upstairs in one of the rooms, one chair of two, was the red chair I now have. Separately, I’d imagined a chair for a bedroom. I would sit to do work and read, eat my cereal as I gaze out at the windows opposite me. Gaze at the textured wall above my desk, a grandparent textured wall. The chair I thought about was red and rounded, its circular base and back, with bars and a piece at the top, an old gloss. I think it would have been different in her house, in her guest room that I didn’t know well, but its now my familiar.

9. She" counted 17 people pass by. Are they aware that they are following a well-trodden path..." (V, Hopley. 2013, p.71) She could see the way that people always take the trodden path. These people wouldn't take the astroturf platform. They wouldn't take the first seat at a dinner party, they would wait and watch it play out.

She's close to her home on this seat, on her balcony on the ground. Her stools, seats, chairs, bench, perch rug to hand.

10. "Within this space, chairs too have become spectacle." (S, Mohebbi. 2016, p.28) Stand and watch it all pass you by. It is now the chairs that do and don't want you to move on. It's the stationary furniture she liked best.

11. "the battle between figure and ground, between object and its surroundings, is made especially stark when furniture is pulled from the functional backdrop of our lives and pushed to the forefront of aesthetic appreciation or attention." (M, Darling. 2003, p.5) For this stool was not meant for the beach, as the pots and pans were not either, and the three legged with the pentagon top is not supposed to be without its rocking chair, but it is and it works well here.

The guest rooms that became familiar were my places to stay in but briefly. Places with furniture that wouldn't settle. Where the flats were high, with too many steps and a suitcase too loud.

The one with the balcony greenhouse, was where I felt young. Where the sofa was not sat on and the kitchen had a desk where she was as I arrived.

I needed furniture and it was in one night I got the large carpet, square table and camouflaged print at around 10:00. It was a half hour trip, hour round with one change, where the tiles were blue.

I was waiting in the hallway, when he came out of his dinner party, with the rug, table and print. What a fast transaction it was. But there was a journey back too. A tired trip where I needed a seat and I realised this furniture really wasn't the essential type.

It was busy, so I waited with the rug, too large for under my armpit, a table and four legs detached between my legs and balanced along the journey. A seat wouldn't have been that much better considering my furniture but the waiting without, the expectancy that one will come up, the etiquette of who should sit first.

This was an often taken route, the seat covers worn down like a shortcut on the grass on the curb towards the road. Patched and made do, like a late comer to a party.⁹

The man who gave me the furniture had plenty of seats, and all the same for his party in his house.

These seats that could come outside, were for a meal on the grass, they could line the street, or be a perch in the sun. Seats not too permanent, like the camping chairs released for the day or those same white chairs that I had seen on the platform; there's a stack on the boat, on my cycle home from work too. The quick stay stools, a bus stop bench. You find your spot and wait in the cold.

The front row or the back wall. You won't get a spot in the stands. "Within these spaces, chairs have also become spectators." ¹⁰ Stand and watch it all pass you by. It's now the chairs that do and don't want you to move on. It's the stationary furniture I like best.

The furniture that remembers our home. I remember sitting in. ¹¹

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