

Martin Barker. After.

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When ‘School of’. ‘Attributed to’. ‘In the Manner of’. ‘After’. These are the conventional terms used to describe an artwork created in the style of a master artist but not by their own hand. They are expressions used to explain the relationship between the artist and the work of art, but also allude to the relationship between the master artist and their follower: a dedicated student of the artist, or perhaps another artist who has worked closely under their supervision.

In the weeks that followed Martin’s death - while talking to our mutual colleagues and friends, and reading dedications and testimonies on social media – this phrasing really resonated with me when thinking about the legacy he had left among the media audience research and cultural studies community, and most particularly his PhD students and the early career researchers he had always taken time to support. The artistic metaphor also seemed so appropriate when I considered his own belief in *true* interdisciplinarity and utilising concepts, frameworks and arguments from fields such as theatre and performance, museum studies and art.

During my own PhD, Martin introduced me to the work of art anthropologist Alfred Gell, suggesting there ‘might be’ potential links between the early empirical findings I was describing in our supervision meetings and Gell’s concern with art’s ‘practical mediatory role’ within social interactions. Still rather in awe of Martin at that stage, I sought out Alfred Gell’s *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (1998) and with scepticism read it: cover-to-cover. It proved to be perhaps the most important academic text in shaping the arguments of my final thesis, around how film stars perform varying and evolving functions within mother-daughter relationships. It also was a defining moment in shaping my own ethos and practice in academic research, embedding within it a steadfast rejection of disciplinary boundaries and embrace of multiple theoretical and methodological perspectives and approaches.

From what follows – an informal gathering of testimonies and memories that I requested and kindly received from some of Martin’s former doctoral students and early career academics he supported – this emerges as just one strand of the shared philosophy inherited by those of us who might be considered in the ‘School of’ Martin Barker.

Martin's passion, expertise and sheer pleasure in just *talking* about audience research methodologies was a key draw for many of those who were supervised (officially or informally) by him. At the Aberystwyth University annual postgraduate conference held at Gregynog Hall in Powys, he once led a 'Methodology Mile' walk as an opportunity to indulge his enthusiasm for chatting about methodological issues, ideas and conundrums with PhD researchers (and walking – though more on that later!). Many responses I received suitably capture what they learned from him in terms of methodology and researcher positionality:

The reason I wanted to be supervised by Martin was to learn about audience research. Prior to this my understanding of methodology hadn't progressed much beyond close textual analysis. What I learned from Martin about how to do research helped me establish a postdoctoral career. I got a job doing audience research as part of an interdisciplinary group studying the digital economy. My colleagues - computer scientists, engineers, psychologists, mathematicians - were initially bemused when I presented my PhD research, but my skills collecting data about people's cultural values and practices came in useful. [...] Martin gave me the tools I need to engage with participants in whatever ways suit the context and research questions. **[Sarah Martindale, PhD Aberystwyth University 2004-2010]**

I always remember a piece of feedback Martin gave me... [...] He warned me about needing to be more reflexive about over-identifying with my research participants, which in turn drew my attention to the blind spots of my research generated by this over-identification. This realisation would later guide my encounters with feminist methodologies, which have given more shape and form to the orientation towards the research process that Martin encouraged me to adopt. This helped me to more easily recognise that respecting the dignity of my research participants and upholding ethical standards does not forsake due criticality. In his own wide-ranging work, I'm continuously impressed by the way Martin writes about his subjects and treads this line, and I carry this approach forward into my research as an early career academic. **[Briony Hannell, undergraduate student at University of East Anglia and publicity assistant on the Game of Thrones project]**

I learned from Martin to stop and question ways of doing, to find complexity where others draw a black and white picture, and to always consider the situatedness of discourse and interaction. Although I'm finding myself looking at things like customer segmentation in my new job, I owe to Martin a healthy distrust of research into attitudes and motivations. **[Kerstin Leder Mackley, PhD Aberystwyth University 2004-2008]**

While much of the guidance and wisdom that Martin imparted was directly given and offered in relation to the specific research project being undertaken by his supervisees or to early career researchers he was speaking with, many of us were also inspired by observing his own research practice. Martin was, as Sarah Martindale aptly summarises, a 'fearless researcher'. He led by example, walked the walk, and had the 'energy to pursue research and ideas against all odds' [Kerstin]. Bearing witness to this has had a lasting influence on many of us. As Sarah continues:

If he thought a subject was worth investigating, he pursued it with complete rigour and commitment, regardless of accepted opinion. I think Martin gave his students the courage to be brave.

Martin's ability to instil confidence, courage and belief in oneself as a researcher and teacher was brought about by a particular approach to supervision and support that emerged very clearly in the responses that were sent to me. This approach was two-fold. Firstly, Martin had no truck with academic hierarchies or 'pecking orders', and always made students and researchers at all levels feel respected. As Briony and then Sarah both explain here:

I always noted that Martin treated everyone he encountered, regardless of their rank (or lack of), with the same generosity, candour, and warmth.

When working with others, Martin was egalitarian and took people's opinions seriously regardless of age or seniority.

It manifested even with how he behaved in terms of use of space (at such a premium in Higher Education institutions!):

Martin took the time to advise to PhD students about how to give good written feedback on student assessments. Characteristically, he came to our study space at Aberystwyth University to do this rather than summoning us to his office. **[Stephanie Jones, PhD Aberystwyth University 2007-2012]**

For a while we shared an office when he was a professor and I was a teaching associate finishing my thesis corrections. He was a really considerate and kind roommate. **[Sarah Martindale, PhD Aberystwyth University 2004-2010]**

However, Martin's egalitarian attitude correspondingly meant that he would critically interrogate or question you about your research in likely the same way as he would an established and experienced professor in the field. Therefore, the second element of his supervisory approach was to never patronise or be condescending, but to challenge you as an equal. Stephanie explains this very clearly:

Martin would often give you a hard time, test your assumptions or ask a difficult question when you hadn't invited one. Martin didn't always take care to protect your feelings while he did this. Nevertheless, his actions always seemed to come from a position of support. I often got the impression that Martin, like an older brother, was toughening us all up for the harsh realities of the world. Making sure that he could be confident that we could cope with whatever the world threw at us. Much like spending time with an older brother, spending time with Martin always gave me a better sense of where the limits of my abilities were. In the end, this gave me more confidence in myself, even if the road to that confidence was a rocky one. In that respect, in my experience, Martin was a one-off. **[Stephanie Jones, PhD Aberystwyth University 2007-2012]**

Both Anna Blagrove and Kerstin similarly detail this aspect of Martin's approach, and the resulting self-confidence it subsequently nurtured:

Martin's guidance with my research was encouraging, yet he challenged me to go deeper. He nurtured and supported me whilst also providing the constructive critique that post-graduate researchers need to grow and develop their practices and insights. [Anna Blagrove, PhD University of East Anglia 2012-2020]

He enjoyed a challenge, too, and would put a huge amount of trust and hope in the ability and potential of students and junior colleagues; he often saw in people what they couldn't quite see yet themselves. [Kerstin Leder Mackley, PhD Aberystwyth University 2004-2008]

While many of us have taken forward into our research, teaching, supervision and working lives facets of Martin's professional ethos, the personal memories of his character in people's responses to me say a great deal about why Martin looms large in our consciousness. Memories that we mutually share and make us laugh when thinking about, as Kerstin defines, his 'eccentric, excitable, warm, infuriating, thoughtful and thought-provoking self'. Some will be familiar to a good number of Martin's colleagues and friends:

Martin was legendarily fast walker and would often powerwalk up Aberystwyth's iconic, and very steep, Penglais Hill. The hill was the main route for foot traffic from Aberystwyth town to the University campus. I lost count of the number of times Martin blazed past me and disappeared off into the distance, while I made my own, very slow, way up the hill. **[Stephanie Jones, PhD Aberystwyth University 2007-2012]**

What I remember most clearly is his broad smile, eyes almost shut, at moments of just being there, content listening to others, or being tickled by a particular idea. **[Kerstin Leder Mackley, PhD Aberystwyth University 2004-2008]**

Other reminiscences are individual in their nature, but very recognisable in terms of what they evoke about Martin's kindness and warmth to his doctoral students:

My favourite memory of Martin however is from 2013 when I was at home with my first child who was only a few months old. Martin took it upon himself to visit us. Not only did he bring an adorable red spotty hat and mitten set for her as a gift, but he had also walked the four miles from his house to mine, taking him over an hour to reach me. **[Anna Blagrove, PhD University of East Anglia 2012-2020]**

While it is upsetting and painful to acknowledge the idea of an 'After' in relation to Martin Barker, one of the key legacies he has left is a host of researchers and lecturers employed in a range of academic disciplines (and indeed beyond the academy) who have embedded in their professional and personal approaches to their working lives his philosophy of practice. Martin truly was a master artist in the way he approached supervising and supporting PhD students and early career scholars, and I will certainly continue to aspire to do the same... 'In the Manner of'.

Biographical Note

Sarah Ralph Lane is Assistant Professor in the Social Sciences Department at Northumbria University. She has published in *Celebrity Studies*, *Participations* and *Critical Studies in Television*, and co-authored (with Martin Barker, Kate Egan and Tom Phillips) *Alien Audiences: Remembering and Evaluating a Classic Movie*, a book based on an international audience study of Ridley Scott's 1979 film *Alien*. Since 2016 she has organised workshops and events for young women from local schools, using media and creative arts as a means of exploring and expressing various aspects of girls' experiences of growing up in the North East region.

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