

Writing_Making: Object as body, language and material

Conor J R Wilson

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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
the subject of Ceramics.

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Abstract

Writing_Making: Object as body, language and material

A turn away from language and the human mind as the dominant (or only) determinants of reality can be identified within many disciplines, including anthropology, philosophy and literature, reflecting a growing acceptance of human and non-human, living and non-living entities as real, complex and partially withdrawn agents in the world. In Object Oriented Ontology the definition of object is extended to include humans, who have no special ontological status. Timothy Morton proposes rhetoric as a means of drawing closer to other objects, of contacting the 'strange stranger'; objects cannot be known directly, or fully, but can be explored through imaginative speculation. Drawing on Object Oriented Ontology, my project explores making - an intimate engagement between body and material - as a means of thinking the body as a (strange) object within a mesh of strange objects. Facture is documented as image and language, prompting a series of shifting, speculative questions:

- Can writing be brought to making to generate new new approaches to craft production?
- How might writing in response to making, or objects, be reintroduced into a making process as a form of feedback?
- Can writing_making methods generate new approaches to writing (about) making and materials?
- How might a combination of production, documentation and reflection be displayed as artwork/research?
- Can making be seen as a means for contacting the 'strange stranger'?

contents: TEXT

	Acknowledgements		
3-10	Introduction		12/13
11-22	(Methodology, or) how I wrote, uncertain of my thesis		October – December
	11/12		
	October – March		
28	Experiment 16 / Autumn 2011	81	Time
31	b. 28.12.11 / Home_1 / West country	85	k. 21.11.12 / Home_6 / pull up the blind
33	c. 19.01.12 / Walk_1 / It	86	l. 03. 12. 12 / Train_4 / This wet and fertile
34	a. 29.11.11 Train_1 / Delayed departure	87	m. December 2012 / Home_7 / He was in bed
37-42	Notes on Herzog's Crocodiles, Animism, Object Oriented Ontology and Yellow	88	n. 20.12.12 / Home_8 / Great gout
43	e. 20.03.12 / Home_3 / My feeders fill me		December - February
45	Time		<u>Disruption exhibition (RCA Research Biennial)</u>
46	f. 10.02.12 / Home_4 / Snow	89	Catalogue text: Nils Jean
	January – June (– January 13)	89	Proposal (part 1): Translation: Object/Text/Object (Amanda Game & Conor Wilson)
	<u>Experiment 21</u>	90	Proposal (part 2): Translation: Object/Text/Object (Amanda Game & Conor Wilson)
49-56	studio journal	92	Shaping Space (Amanda Game)
62	Carbon (sound work)	94	Space Shaping_2
65	g. 27.03.12 / Train_2 / Sun pulses	95	Ash Glazes: Daniel Rhodes Ash glaze recipe (Kevin de Choisy) / Ash wood ash yields
66	h. 10.05.12 / Train_3 / Fields of bright	96	Email to Jamie Wilkes (Metalab Risk Assessor)
67	i. 06.06.12 / Walk_2 / Tan gravel	98	Curation (extract) Wednesday, 5 December 2012 07:55
	July – August	99	Translation: Object/Text/Object label text (Amanda Game & Conor Wilson)
69	Jerwood Makers / Louis Thompson Hive	105	q. 05.02.13 / Train_5 / outside
73-76	Porched	106	p. 31.01.13 / Walk_3 / white roses browning
78	j. 16.08.12 / Home_5 / Ember hesitated		March
			<u>Residency: Cranbrook Academy of Art , Michigan, USA [04.03.13 – 29.03.13]</u>
		109-112	Cranbrook 1 studio journal

113	r. 07.03.13 / Studio_1 / One bag
116	s. 08.03.13 / Home_10 / Orientation
118-120	Cranbrook 2 studio journal
122-123	Cranbrook 3 studio journal
128-130	Cranbrook 4 studio journal
132-134	Cranbrook 5 studio journal
136	Cranbrook 6 studio journal
142	Cranbrook reflection
	April
143	Pessoa Book of Disquiet, 298_block
146	u. 12.04.13 / Home_11 / I dress the workers
148	v. 17.04.13 / Walk_4 / a slow-motion spring
149	w. 21.04.13 / Studio_3 / a fat bag
	May - June
151-154	Karst: Phoebe Cummings & Anne Vibeke Mou Camden Arts Centre Ceramics Fellowship Exhibition
156	x. 17.05.13 / Home_12 / Canterng through
159-160	y. 17.05.13 / Studio_4 / If it's fine tomorrow
163	z. 26.05.13 / Train_6 / A ribbon
	August – September
	<u>British Ceramics Biennial <i>Three bodies: Red<Buff>White</i></u>
169-180	Red A. 20.07.13 / Studio_5 / Red (Stoke)
181-192	Buff B. 24.07.13 / Studio_7 / Buff (London)
193-204	White C. 22.07.13 / Studio_6 / White (Bristol)

206-208	Red<Buff>White studio Journal
	13/14
	October – November
221	D. 22.10.13 / Walk_5 / a silent clatter
	December
226	E. 04.12.13 / Walk_6 / It iS
229-230	Email to Graham Harman & notes
236	Gouge The Shorter English Dictionary
	January – February
239	1. Centring
240	Centring
244	F. 30.01.14 / Studio_8 / Now [I am] empty
245-246	OCCURRENCE AND CLASSIFICATION OF CATS
	March – April
249-253	Carpentry
254	G. 25.03.14 / Home_13 / My
255	Time: Wednesday, 12 March 2014 12:08
	April – June
	<u>Final show: One Bag</u>
259-262	Studio Journal: Bag hollowing
263-268	Kidney_Bag: A sort of love story, in one act.
270	H. 21.04.14 / Walk_7 / In the lane
271-288	cups / gift exchange (from blog)
291	One Bag exhibition text

list of POEMS

292	Exchange and cup rules
304	I. 01.05.14 / Train_7 / Reading
312	J. 13.02.15 / Home_14 / sleep hung
313-315	Conclusion
	Appendices
317-336	Appendix 1 Year 1 images (2010/11)
337-340	Appendix 2 RCA Library record
341-345	Appendix 3 Thesis structure
347-353	Appendix 4 Method
355-364	Appendix 5 One Bag Final Show blog
365-372	Bibliography

11/12

- a. 29.11.11 Train_1 / Delayed departure
- b. 28.12.11 / Home_1 / West country
- c. 19.01.12 / Walk_1 / It
- d. 20.03.12 / Home_2 / Sickly colour, sickbed colour
- e. 20.03.12 / Home_3 / My feeders fill me
- f. 10.02.12 / Home_4 / Snow
- g. 27.03.12 / Train_2 / Sun pulses
- h. 10.05.12 / Train_3 / Fields of bright
- i. 06.06.12 / Walk_2 / Tan gravel
- j. 16.08.12 / Home_5 / Ember hesitated
- y. 17.05.13 / Studio_4 / If it's fine tomorrow
- z. 26.05.13 / Train_6 / A ribbon
- A. 20.07.13 / Studio_5 / Red (Stoke)
- B. 24.07.13 / Studio_7 / Buff (london)
- C. 22.07.13 / Studio_6 / White (Bristol)

13/14

- D. 22.10.13 / Walk_5 / a silent clatter
- E. 04.12.13 / Walk_6 / It is
- F. 30.01.14 / Studio_8 / Now [I am] empty
- G. 25.03.14 / Home_13 / My
- H. 21.04.14 / Walk_7 / In the lane
- I. 01.05.14 / Train_7 / A glowing word

12/13

- k. 21.11.12 / Home_6 / pull up the blind
- l. 03. 12. 12 / Train_4 / This wet and fertile
- m. 06.12.12 / Home_7 / He was in bed
- n. 12.12.12 / Home_8 / Great gouts
- o. 28.12.12 / Home_9 / white room
- p. 31.01.13 / Walk_3 / white roses browning
- q. 05.02.13 / Train_5 / outside
- r. 07.03.13 / Studio_1 / One bag
- s. 08.03.13 / Home_10 / Orientation
- t. 20.03.13 / Studio_2 / I was solid
- u. 12.04.13 / Home_11 / I dress the workers
- v. 17.04.13 / Walk_4 / a slow-motion spring
- w. 21.04.13 / Studio_3 / a fat bag
- x. 17.05.13 / Home_12 / Canter through

15

- J. 13.02.15 / Home_14 / sleep hung

contents: IMAGE

11/12

25	Living room site: pedestal table
26	Living Room [halftone] with Lloyd Loom chair, pedestal table and Exp. 11: 2011
27	Experiment 16: Work in progress, RCA, Autumn 2011
29	Experiment 16: Ashley Down living Room 2011
30	Experiment 16: RCA Studio, Autumn 2011
32	Ashley Down to Temple Meads: Tuesday, 31 January 2012 13:07
33	Experiment 16: coppiced ash / turned leg
34	Experiment 19: November 2011
35-36	Experiment 17: 2011
41-42	Experiment 16: living Room 2011
43	Koenig Books Ltd. receipt: 16.02.2012
44	Experiment 19.2: November 2011
45	Thonet chair: Ashley Down living room
46	Bathroom to Will's Room: Friday, 10 February 2012 12:58
47	Experiment 21: RCA studio (work in progress)
49	Experiment 21: Glass bottle: Ashley Down living room
57-58	Experiment 21: RCA Studio (finished / green)
59-60	Experiment 21: Carbon_Courier: text-image
61	Experiment 21: Black_Courier:text-image
61	Experiment 21: Black_Futura:text-image
62	Experiment 21: Carbon_Courier_2: text-image
63-64	Experiment 21: RCA Studio projection experiment_stills 1 & 2
67-68	Fulham to Kensington Gore: Thursday, 7 June 2012 09:15
70	Louis Thompson: 'Hive' (details): July 2012
71	Haworth, West Yorkshire to Wuthering Heights: Friday, 27 July 2012, 12:18
72	Belfast International, Aldergrove to Bristol: Friday, 10 August 2012, 21:14
73-74	Vladimir Nabokov, Bend Sinister [Corgi Books, 1962] cover & title page
77	An oblong puddle (laser-etched acrylic [Nabokov, Bend Sinister, pp. 7-8]): Wednesday, 27 February 2013 12:36
78	Ashley Down: Tuesday, 1 September 2015 19:22

12/13

82	Bristol, Temple Meads to London, Paddington: Monday, 22 October 2012 12:38
83	C&G, Kensington to Sculpture, Battersea: Wednesday, 28 November 2012 10:02
84	Battersea to Colchester Institute: Thursday, 20 December 2012 11:48
87	Battersea to Kensington Gore: Friday, 2 November 2012 09:11
90	Disruption: Diagram of proposed installation
91	Disruption email_1: Re: words on a pot
91	Disruption email_2: ash/bowl poem
93-94	Ashley Down puddle: Wednesday, 21 December 2011 16:46
97-98	Translation: Object/Text/Object: RCA Gulbenkian Gallery
100-102	Translation: Object/Text/Object: RCA Gulbenkian Gallery (stills from video document of installation)
103-104	Metalab Risk Assessment: Jamie Wilkes
106	Battersea (bridge) to Kensington: Wednesday, 27 February 2013 08:38
107	Cranbrook: Inside (apartment)
108	Cranbrook: Outside
109-110	Cranbrook Bag 1: hollowing sequence
111	Cranbrook Bag 1: studio/work in progress
112	Cranbrook exhibition detail: Bag 1
114	Cranbrook Bags 1 & 2: studio
115	Cranbrook: Inside (apartment_2)
117	Cranbrook Bag 2: studio/work in progress
119	Cranbrook Bags 2 & 3: studio/work in progress
120	Eduardo Chillida: 'Lurra' Museu de Ceramica Palau Reial, Barcelona
121	Cranbrook Bag 2: studio (bisque)
122	Cranbrook studio: Boxwood point tool
124	Cranbrook Bag 3: mallet + wood mallet
125-126	Cranbrook Bag 3: studio/work in progress
127	Cranbrook Bag 3: studio/bisqued chisel heads
127	Cranbrook Bag 3: studio/soda-fired chisel heads
130	Cranbrook studio: work in progress (Bag 4)
131	Cranbrook exhibition detail: Bag 4 (soda + green)

132 Cranbrook exhibition detail: Bags 5 & 2 (bisque + green)

133 Cranbrook Bag 5: studio/work in progress

135-136 Cranbrook Bag 5: studio/work in progress_b + c + d

137-138 Cranbrook Bag 6: studio/work in progress

139-141 Cranbrook exhibition [details]

142 Cranbrook soda firing 3-way accident: me + charles + vicky

144 Passage 298 | Everything is absurd: text-image

145 Passage 298 | Everything is absurd: text-image_2

150 a fat bag: text-image

155 Karst_1: Phoebe Cummings & Anne Vibeke Mou

155 Karst_2: Phoebe Cummings & Anne Vibeke Mou

156 Sebaldian carpark

157 Kensington Gore to Mayfair: Wednesday, 1 May 2013 16:19

158 Bristol to Dyrham Park, South Gloucestershire: Sunday, 2 June 2013 13:28

161 Kensington to Battersea: Wednesday, 15 May 2013 22:19

161 C&G Studio to Albert Hall: Tuesday, 14 May 2013 18:25

162 C&G Studio to Jay Mews: Thursday, 6 June 2013 16:30

162 Kensington to Battersea: Wednesday, 22 May 2013 22:32

163-164 Bristol Temple Meads to London Paddington: Tuesday, 14 January 2014 12:55

BCB | Four Bodies: Red<Buff>White

167 England map: Stoke < London > Bristol

168 Red < Buff > White (3 double-weight bags supplied by Potclays, Stoke-on-Trent)

169 25 kg Potclays Original Red | Stoke-on-Trent

171 1_Stoke_Red

173 2_Bristol_Red

175 3_London_Red

178 Red_montage

181 25 kg Potclays Buff School Clay | London

183 1_London_Buff

185 2_Stoke_Buff

187 3_Bristol_Buff

190 Buff_montage

193 25 kg Potclays Harry Fraser Porcelain | Bristol

195 1_Bristol_White

197 2_London_White

199 3_Stoke_White

202 White_montage

205 White: Ashley Down studio/finished_green

206 Red, buff and white: Ashley Down studio/work in progress

207 Red and buff: Ashley Down studio/work in progress

208 Red and white: Ashley Down studio/work in progress

209-210 Red: RCA C&G worksop | detail

211-212 Buff: RCA C&G worksop | detai

213-214 White: RCA C&G worksop | detail

215 Red<Buff>White: The Cobalt Menagerie [1 of 55 projection images]

215 Four Bodies: Red<Buff>White installation: Potteries Museum, Soke-on-Trent

216-217 Red<Buff>White | projection images: O Dr. Sacheverell / Figure a Shepherd / Jewelling

218 Red<Buff>White installation, British Ceramics Biennial: Potteries Museum, Soke-on-Trent

13/14

222 Paddington to Kensington Gore: Tuesday, 19 November 2013 14:37

223 Acton to Kensington Gore: Thursday, 14 November 2013 10:27

224 Acton to Kensington Gore: Thursday, 21 November 2013 10:26

225 Ashley Down to Temple Meads: Tuesday, 15 October 2013 11:07

227-228 Cranbrook_Bag 1_1 + 11 (video stills)

231-232 Gouge Part 1 & 2: Tuesday, 17 December 2013 11:16 – 14:00

233 Gouge_55-1 [montage]

234 Gouge_55-1_2 [montage]

235 Gouge_1-55_detail

237 Centre: video still with transcript

238 Centre_2: video still

241-242 If it's fine tomorrow / English Craft_2: image+text

contents: MOVING IMAGE

243	Belfast to Dundrum Bay_Murlough: Thursday, 26 December 2013 12:45
246	Ashley Down: Sunday, 19 January 2014 16:22
247	Bristol Temple Meads to London Paddington: Thursday, 9 January 2014 15:01
248	Bristol Temple Meads to Hereford: Tuesday, 4 February 2014 10:23
256	Work in Progress exhibition: Gulbenkian Gallery, RCA, Kensington
257-258	One Bag hollowing sequence (x 107): Wednesday, 26 March 2014 14:59 – Wednesday, 16 April 2014 12:37
269	gill_sans_cup: postcard image for Final Show
271	White stoneware mug (gorge) coiled, slabbed, sledged, modelled
272	Gorge_glazed
273	Coffee service, 'Finnair' pattern slabbed, constructed, modelled, printed
274	Finnair_glazed
275	Two mugs and a pot thrown, pulled (handle) [made by Tom Skeens]
276	Staffs_slip_glazed
277	Bernard Leach (1897-1979) slabbed, sledged, carved, modelled, pulled
278	Leach_glazed
279	Coffee set slabbed, sledged, modelled
280	Keith_Murray_glazed
281	Bone china custard, chocolate and tea cups pinched, modelled (handle)
282	Spode_glazed
283	Lucie Rie (1902-96) carved, modelled, pulled (handle)
284	Lucie_Rie_glazed
285	Tea set, 'TAC' shape coiled, modelled, sledged, slabbed (handle)
286	Gropius_glazed
287	Lead-glazed cup of silver shape pinched, coiled, modelled, sledged
288	Turkish_glazed
290	One Bag installation (detail)
293-294	One Bag installation (details)
295	One Bag installation (cup details)
296	One Bag installation (detail: cup list)
297-302	One Bag installation (details)
303	Burnham Deepdale to Holkham, Norfolk: Monday, 28 July 2014 12:11
305-311	Kien_1 - Kien_7, September/ October 2014

36	Video_1_Exp18
48	Video_2_Exp21_making
64	Video_3_Exp21_projected text
94	Video_4_Disruption_Ash
100	Video_5_Disruption_loop
102	Video_6_Disruption_crit
123	Video_7_Cranbrook_Lathe
126	Video_8_Cranbrook_3
129	Video_9_Cranbrook_4
218	Video_10_BCB_1
228	Video_11_Bag_1
233	Video_12_Gouge_1
234	Video_13_Gouge_2
235	Video_14_Gouge_3
237	Video_15_Centre_1
238	Video_16_Centre_2
258	Video_17_Porc_Bag
298	Video_18_Kidney-Bag
300	Video_19_Bucket

SOUND

62	Carbon
228	r. 07.03.13 / Studio_1 / One bag

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Author's Declaration

During the period of registered study in which this thesis was prepared the author has not been registered for any other academic award or qualification.

The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

Signature Conor Wilson

Date 23.02.16

**WRITING
MAKING**

: Object as body, language and material

CONOR
WILSON

Introduction

Background

I met Alison Britton in Stoke-on-Trent in 2009 – she was a selector, I an exhibitor in the inaugural British Ceramics Biennial. She suggested that I might be interested in pursuing a research project at the Royal College of Art. I was very interested, for what might be considered both positive and negative reasons. In the former camp, I'd felt a need to develop a more coherent, research-based practice for some time and was clear, at least, that I wanted to make writing more central to that practice. I was keen to reappraise, and perhaps resituate, knowledge and skills acquired during twenty five years of practice and teaching in ceramics. In the latter, I was frustrated by the lack of opportunity in the corner that I seemed to have painted myself into – let's call it 'ceramic art'. The term makes me uncomfortable, as it seems blind to the social and epistemological differences that exist between the various disciplines of visual culture. The route to any kind of critical or commercial success in 'ceramic art' is remarkably narrow and even when traversed, there is little criticism worthy of the name.

Conversely, ceramics, or clay as a material, has never been more current – major artists, from Rosemarie Trockel to Rebecca Warren, Fischli and Weiss to Paul Noble, Ai Wei Wei to Sterling Ruby 'now incorporate the material into a larger practice, often in surprising and increasingly inventive ways'.¹ While this embrace of the material is welcome, I am uncertain of what it means for ceramics, as a discipline. Having explored this disciplinary status at some length, in a conference paper on ceramics and sculpture² and an essay on craft,³ I will confine myself to saying that ceramics seems to me to be a discipline still rooted in craft practice, with pedagogy based on the development of knowledge and skills through making and material investigation. While concept and context are important elements, assessment is still largely based on the *quality* of finished, discrete objects.

It could be argued that ceramics and sculpture, as *disciplines*, are fundamentally different, with the former working from material to idea and the latter from idea to material. However, rather than being seen clearly as a core disciplinary strength, the question of material specialisation and skill, in the face of a de-skilling paradigm in fine art practice, is often fudged in ceramics. So I came to the project with a determination to interrogate and be more explicit about the position of my practice in relation to art, craft and ceramics; to focus on ceramics as a subject and explore ceramic histories, within a clearly defined, contemporary production context.

My starting point was an approach to ceramic surface that had developed out of associations with Bristol (UWE) and Cardiff Schools of Art & Design. I had been experimenting with CAD software (Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator), producing digital prints and ceramic transfers since 2002 (e.g. *Axe* and *Spade* from the *Hand/Tool* series) and, working with Paul Sandammeer in Bristol in 2007, discovered the potential for extending this approach into CAM through laser cutting and etching. This knowledge segued with a freer approach to decorating – pouring slips and glazes and allowing chance to take a greater role – that developed out of undergraduate teaching in Cardiff.

Another to and fro between teaching and practice grew from a series of research methods seminars I ran with masters students in Cardiff,

¹ Gladstone Gallery press release, 'Makers and Modelers: Works in Ceramic', September 8 - October 13, 2007 <<http://www.gladstonegallery.com/exhibition/1337/press>>

² Conor Wilson, 'You can use clay, but you can't do ceramics: Some thoughts on why ceramics isn't sculpture' <<http://www.interpretingceramics.com/issue014/articles/02.htm#t030>>

³ Conor Wilson, 'Sloppy Craft and Interdisciplinarity' in *Sloppy Craft: Postdisciplinary and the Crafts*, ed. by Elaine Cheasley Paterson and Susan Surette (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), pp. 151-172

for which Gillian Rose's *Visual Methodologies* became a key resource. Drawing together the diverse range of methods used by critics of visual culture, she proposes 'that there are three sites at which the meanings of an image are made: the site(s) of the production of an image, the site of the image itself, and the site(s) where it is seen by various audiences'. She goes on to suggest that each of these sites has three different aspects, or 'modalities': technological, compositional and social. 'These modalities, since they are found at all three sites, also suggest that the distinctions between sites are less clear than my subsections here might imply'.⁴

Immediately prior to beginning the project in 2010, my practice was focused on site and time (in the form of labour), explored through a consideration of material and process as content – allowing process to be itself and to be visible, whether 'right' or 'wrong', in finished objects; and through playing with a sense of place in the acquisition and use of materials (e.g. *Triple Chambered Vessel* [2010] and *Garden* [2010]). This work fed into Phase 1 of the project (October 2010 to December 2011), which began by connecting, and to an extent confusing, the studio (site of production) to/with the domestic space (site of production and audiencing, or display). My interest in the historical association between the ceramic vessel and domestic space led to photographic documentation of my living room, and items of furniture, as sites of display. Drawing from ceramics as a set of materials and a set of ideas, the research aimed to synthesise two relationships:

- between surface and space – both the space that is contained by the surface and the space that contains the surface.
- between making and thinking, through two binaries – skill and uncertainty / planning and spontaneity.

At this stage, a rigorous, if straightforward, documentation regime was established:

- Still photography of processes and finished objects. [see Appendix 1]
- Listing of all materials and processes.

A shift of emphasis occurred in Term 1 of the second year, with Experiments 16-18. This seemed to be about an embrace, or at least an acceptance, of uncertainty, which might run counter to some conceptions of craft skill. I wanted to set up the conditions to explore material interactions and embodied knowledge through both skilled and unskilled making:

- Several different making methods were used – both familiar and unfamiliar.
- Constraints were accepted – e.g. making was often rushed due to the imperatives of travel.
- Risks were taken and mistakes made, but nothing was restarted or 'improved'.

Documentation became more integral to the research through video of making and voice recording of in-process reflection on making.

Three 'events' coincided with this shift:

1. An introduction to Object Oriented Ontology (OOO) through a talk by Timothy Morton.⁵ I felt challenged and excited by Morton's heady blend of philosophy and ecology – the idea that 'ecology is coexistence',

⁴ Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials*, 2nd edn (London: Sage, 2007), p. 13

⁵ 'The Aesthetic Dimension is the Causal Dimension', RCA 30.06.11, available at: <http://ecologywithoutnature.blogspot.co.uk/2011/06/eco-tone-video.html>

that humans are objects and are part of an interdependent mesh that includes all other objects, living and non-living; and that the barrier between these two states might not be as thin or as rigid as we might suppose.

2. A clarification of political / ecological context, inspired by a John Thackara lecture.⁶ I asked, at the end, if he thought that we (sculptors, painters, potters) should not be producing objects. Thackara answered that it might be more useful to think in terms of gift economies, which prompted me to reread Lewis Hyde's *The Gift* and to think again about possible relationships between production and exhibition, or dissemination.

3. Researching the conference paper on ceramics and sculpture, the writing of Benjamin Buchloh and Joanna Drucker focused my thinking on facture and materials, which are, of course, not neutral. Buchloh states that 'sculptural materials, even before their iconic, formal, or procedural definitions, have to be considered as part of a symbolic system that is itself highly determined'.⁷ And Drucker that, 'no matter what a sculptor's work is about thematically, it is always trying to balance the values of production and the production of value(s)'.⁸

The Autumn 2011 shift led to a reframing of the project. Object-making would be seen as a form of investigation focused on the means by which the object comes into existence, rather than on finished objects. Fewer objects would be made, with writing and talking becoming as important as making. The questions I posed myself at the time were:

Can I find new ways of writing about the making of objects and, hence, new ways of writing about objects, from the inside, rather than the outside?

Does a maker of objects have a better chance of describing the inside of an object than anyone else?

Writing and Craft

Neil Brownsword begins the introduction to his doctoral thesis with a quotation from Edmund de Waal's 1999 paper 'No Ideas But In Things', (Ceramic Millennium Conference, Amsterdam, July 1999), which bemoans the 'apparent lack of critical discourse in the ceramic field'. He goes on to write, 'de Waal urged ceramic practitioners to articulate and contextualise their creativity, "to break the pact of silence" and strengthen "the vigorous critical pluralism that we all espouse"'.⁹

Brownsword, a leading UK ceramicist with an international standing, identifies a lack of critical attention within ceramics as a key driver for his project:

Throughout my career only a handful of commentator perceptions have extended a critical awareness of my own work through associative meanings that expand scope for its interpretation [...] The opportunity to redress this from the practitioner's

⁶ RCA Sustain Talk 07.12.11

⁷ Benjamin Buchloh, 'Michael Asher and the Conclusion of Modern Sculpture', in *Modern Sculpture Reader*, ed. by John Wood, David Hulks and Alex Potts (Leeds: Henry Moore Institute, 2007), p.359

⁸ Joanna Drucker, 'Affectivity and Entropy: Production Aesthetics in Contemporary Sculpture', in *Objects & Meaning: New Perspectives on Art and Craft*, ed. by M. Anna Fariello and Paula Owen (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2004), p.136

⁹ Neil Brownsword, *Exploring the Decline of British Ceramic Manufacture and its Associated Histories through Contemporary Art Practice* (PhD thesis, Bucks New University, 2006), p.1

perspective remains fundamental to the formulation of this text.¹⁰

He takes inspiration, as I have done, from Julian Malins' and Carole Gray's seminal paper on methodology for Practice-based Research (PbR), that argues that the critical/theoretical context of craft is best developed from the 'informed, intimate perspective of the reflective practitioner'. PbR can lead to a greater degree of insight into the 'experiential, "tacit" knowledge' of the *practice of craft*.¹¹ (my emphasis)

While Brownsword's thesis undoubtedly contributes to a greater understanding of practice, he has not gone on to develop a critical voice within (or outside) the field through writing. This is not unusual. In a recent PhD by thesis, Elizabeth Donald writes:

The current uncertainty centres around Craft as a discipline as opposed to a set of skills applied to a process for a predefined product. This dichotomy is partly due to the lack of a clear definition of craft practice, its theoretical underpinning, and criteria for the evaluation of the products of practice. It appears that this problem emanates from craft itself which has few, if any, practitioners writing from their perspective of practice.¹²

With the notable exceptions of Alison Britton and Edmund de Waal, we could argue. But, while their critical writing is inflected by the knowledge and experience of the maker (like those earlier great shapers of the discipline, Bernard Leach and Michael Cardew) they rarely write about their direct experience of making. While Donald is correct about uncertainty, the search for 'a clear definition of craft practice' is, surely, precisely what will keep us from a deeper understanding of making, something that only the practitioner can bring to the table, as Malins and Gray suggest.

Exploring the problem of scientific objectivity, Ian Bogost postulates that, 'counterintuitive though it may seem, the characterization of experience through supposedly objective evidence and external mechanisms leads us further from, not closer to, an understanding of the experience of an entity'.¹³ The entity, for a maker, being the material. What might the material experience at our hands? There is no point, surely, in asking a theorist. Jessica Hemmings, a practitioner-turned-theorist, writes:

If I were looking for a 'better' crafts criticism, I would not be looking for theorizing borrowed from literature or other fields. I would be looking not for more jargon but for the right ordinary language to do the trick. I would not be looking for critical infallibility. I would simply want better writing, showing thought and care. I would wish for an intense concentration on the work, on what's there, the actual stuff and how it makes you feel [...] I believe we now need to return to the actual objects and find a language that does them justice.¹⁴

Hemmings's statement contains strong echoes of the poet Francis Ponge,

¹⁰ Ibid, p.2

¹¹ Julian Malins and Carole Gray, 'Appropriate Research Methodologies for Artists, Designers & Craftspersons: Research as a Learning Process' (The Centre for Research in Art & Design, Grays School of Art, 1995), p.3

¹² Elizabeth K. Donald, *Mind the Gaps! An advanced practice model for the understanding and development of fine craft practice* (doctoral thesis, University of Dundee, 2012), p.2

¹³ Ian Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology or What it's Like to be a Thing* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), p.63

¹⁴ Jessica Hemmings 'Crafting Words' in *Materiality Matters. Documents on Contemporary Crafts No. 2*, ed. by Joakim Borda-Pedreira and Gjertrud Steinsvag (Oslo: Norwegian Crafts, 2014), p. 23

whose best-known work, *Le parti pris des choses*, translates variously as *The Defense of Things*, *The Nature of Things*, or *The Voice of Things*. In the wonderfully candid and subjective text, *My Creative Method*,¹⁵ Ponge, writing on the relationship between words and things, is open about where he finds his words – dictionaries and encyclopedias, puns, rhymes and what-have-you – but not the precise methods that he employs. He is clear that particular sources of words – the Larousse or the Littré – are significant, but never fully explores why. A note in the text, '(Here treat the vocabulary question in detail)', is not developed. In making his 'descriptions-definitions-literary-artistic-objects' he aims to 'establish unexpected correspondences, which upset the usual classifications'.

In sum, here's the important point: THE DEFENSE OF THINGS equals PAYING ATTENTION TO WORDS.

Certain texts will have more Defense in their alloy, others will tend more to Words ... no matter. In any case, there must be both.¹⁶

The poet Robert Bly wrote of Ponge that he:

doesn't try to be cool, distant, or objective, nor does he 'let the object speak for itself.' His poems are funny, his vocabulary immense, his personality full of quirks, and yet the poem remains somewhere in the place where the senses join the object.¹⁷

I read Ponge's poems during the project, but didn't find the 'method' text until the writing up period. The uncertainty, the openness, the quirks and the repetitions remind me strongly of my own project. The constant circling around a key idea that wants to be synthesised from multiple sources, but won't quite stand still. Much later in 'Creative Method' Ponge writes:

Desiring to give a *complete account of the content of their notions*, I am drawn, *by objects*, away from the old humanism, away from contemporary man and ahead of him. I add to man the new qualities that I name.

That is what *The Defense of Things* is.¹⁸

This could almost be an anti-anthropocentric, OOO manifesto, avant la lettre. While Morton is the OOOer most concerned with anthropocentrism and its ecological effects, Ian Bogost addresses making most directly, folding Graham Harman's philosophical sense of the 'carpentry of things' into the 'ordinary sense of woodcraft' to arrive at a carpentry that 'entails making things that explain how things make their world'.¹⁹ While philosophical works rarely communicate through the form of the book, 'the carpenter, by contrast, must contend with the material resistance of his or her chosen form, *making the object itself become the philosophy*'.²⁰ (my emphasis)

¹⁵ Francis Ponge, *My Creative Method*, trans. by Beverley Bie Brahic [n.p., n. pub., n.d.] (first pub. 1949) <<http://maisonneuve.org/article/2002/11/18/my-creative-method/>>

¹⁶ Ponge, *Creative Method*, 'Monday 29 December 1947'

¹⁷ Robert Bly, cited in 'Francis Ponge' biography, *Poetry Foundation* <<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/francis-ponge>>

¹⁸ Ponge, *Creative Method*, 'Le Grau-du-Roi 26 February 1948'

¹⁹ Ian Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology, or What it's Like to be a Thing* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), p. 93

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 93

So, how might the object itself become the philosophy? Philosophy demands words, as does theory, as does research, even artistic research. We have seen that a lack of critical writing in the crafts has been linked with a lack of practitioner writing. But how do practitioners write about their own work and take that experience into writing about the work of others? What might 'the right ordinary language' be, and where might we find it? How might we develop writing voices that expand the discipline? These questions arose out of the research process itself and became central to the project.

Art/Craft Research

After employing a standard theoretical/historical model, imported from the humanities, and a material science model, with novel approaches to material and process rigorously presented as new knowledge, in the last ten years or so, crafts research has embraced subjectivity and placed a greater emphasis on contextualising individual practice. Two recent projects, by Bonnie Kemske²¹ and Emmanuel Boos,²² conducted in the Ceramics & Glass Department at the RCA, produced strong ceramic work and writing and share many of my concerns, yet provide a datum for what this project moves from, rather than towards. Engagement with theory enriches the practice and clearly influences the progress of the research, but does not seem to open up and explore the activity of making. Both bring theory to the products of their making.

One of Kemske's objectives was to 'contribute to the culture of applied arts research through the development of a methodology that fully integrated practice and theory',²³ but there still seems to be a clear separation of theory and process/object. The claim that 'writing became a creative tool for both theory and practice'²⁴ is hard to justify. Apart from a short section – 'On Casting Hugs' – at the start of Chapter 4,²⁵ the writing centres on touch and the finished object rather than the touch of making. There are lyrical, subjective passages in Chapters 5 and 6, but writing relies heavily on theory and descriptions of the rationale for, and the conduct of, the research.

Boos seeks correspondences between ceramics and poetry, stating, for instance, that, 'Throughout this research I believe my work and the practice of glaze demonstrate common elements with the poetics of Bataille's "Impossible".'²⁶ There is discussion of the relation between making processes and poetics, but poetry is largely *brought to* the products of process, rather than *flowing from* process or from objects.

While the activity of making is little-explored through writing, its presence is, nevertheless, strong in both projects. Critiquing a key text on artistic research,²⁷ James Elkins notes that:

[N]ot one of the authors addresses the conceptual disjunction between making art and studying it. Most of the contributors are interested in how the making of art can be theorized, but there is another problem that is prior to any talk about art: the

²¹ Bonnie Kemske, *Evoking Intimacy: Touch and the Thoughtful Body in Sculptural Ceramics* (doctoral thesis, Royal College of Art, 2007)

²² Emmanuel Boos, *The Poetics of Glaze: Ceramic Surface and the Perception of Depth* (doctoral thesis, Royal College of Art, 2011)

²³ Kemske, *Evoking Intimacy*, p.4

²⁴ *Ibid*, p.27

²⁵ *Ibid*, pp.85-90

²⁶ Boos, *The Poetics of Glaze*, p.141

²⁷ Katy MacLeod & Lin Holdridge (eds.) *Thinking Through Art: Reflections on Art as Research* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009)

experience of making - its exact pedagogy, its methods, knacks and skills, its feel [...] The essays in *Thinking Through Art* could be taken as a description of of a strange activity *that is finished* and requires conceptualization.²⁸

Elkins is concerned to explore and critique how scholarship in visual art and, specifically, the application and development of theory, stands up to such activity in the rest of the university. Earlier in the chapter, he praises Elizabeth Price's essay 'sidekick'²⁹ as 'a brilliant example of a particular kind of artist's writing.' Further, it is very much 'in the spirit of scientific research', but, while 'writing like Price's is conceptually clear and rhetorically persuasive [...] it does not aim to be a new or reworked theory of any sort'.³⁰

Is there a normative relationship between PbR and theory? Stephen Melville suggests that 'theory is not something that needs to be brought to objects. It is something at work within them, a constitutive part of what or how they are.'³¹ Later in the same piece Melville writes:

'Theory' here would be less something a critic or historian brings to the work [...] than something to be traced in it, and writing would belong to such work as part of its unfolding, a continuation of the conditions of its appearing.³²

What is the relationship between theory and knowledge and what might constitute 'new knowledge' for art, or craft? Are we seeking propositional (to know that...) or procedural (to know how...) knowledge? There are, of course, many different positions, but writing on 'artistic research' seems to be becoming more confident about the value of uncertainty and subjectivity. The research model that developed over four years at the RCA imports new approaches to craft from artistic research, while rooting itself in the core of craft research - reflection on practice. The project revealed itself, slowly, to be an interleaving of theory and practice. Not interpreting practice through theory. Not generating new theory through practice. But treating both making and writing as practice and exploring new methods that might allow a confluence, a confusion of both. As a Practice-based research project, it is concerned with developing:

- A new research-inflected approach to production.
- A new production-inflected approach to writing.
- A new way of bringing these research objects together in an exhibition space.

The research process became so important to me, so enjoyable, even life-changing, that I wanted the thesis to be, as much as possible, a written embodiment of that process. It attempts to make present the experience undergone at the time of experiencing - the intensity of making (interacting with material), of dreaming, of travelling. Not to dilute with theory and revising, or tidying up. To resist the imperatives of academic writing. Despite being deeply uncertain about this and realising that it constituted a certain amount of risk, the writing up process and reflection on the thesis emphasised the gap between bodily experience and its conceptual recall - I felt vindicated in wanting to keep this recall, or translation, as close to the intensity of the original experience as possible.

²⁸ James Elkins, 'On Beyond Research and New Knowledge', in *Artists with PhDs: On the New Doctoral Degree in Studio Art*, ed. by James Elkins (Washington: New Academia Publishing, 2009), p.128

²⁹ The 'essay' is an extract from Price's doctoral thesis (University of Leeds, 2000)

³⁰ Elkins, 'On Beyond Research and New Knowledge', p.123

³¹ Stephen Melville, 'Counting / As / Painting' in *As Painting: Division and Displacement* (Columbus: Wexner Center for the Arts MIT Press, 2001), p.8

³² *Ibid*, p.19

The question, 'why should amendments be required of writing and not of practice?' came up in conversations with fellow researchers. When is an artwork finished and when is a text finished?

'We need to bring our writing nearer to our making.'³³

³³ MacLeod & Holdridge, *Thinking Through Art*, p.12

(Methodology, or) How I wrote, uncertain of my thesis.

History is full of 'accidents and conjunctures and curious juxtapositions of events' and it demonstrates to us the 'complexity of human change and the unpredictable character of the ultimate consequences of any given act or decision of men'. Are we really to believe that the naive and simple-minded rules which methodologists take as their guide are capable of accounting for such a 'maze of interactions'?¹

Introduction

The project began without a methodology. By the half-way stage I was comfortable with the idea that this lack of methodology was my methodology, though I was always anchored by my central activities of making, documenting and reflecting. This fluid approach sits within the boundaries of 'naturalistic inquiry', described by Carole Gray and Julian Malins as being 'located within the constructivist research paradigm' and acknowledging 'the importance of a "natural" setting or context, for example a studio/workshop setting, a project framework, a site. Some key characteristics are: the researcher as primary generator/gatherer of data, the use of tacit knowledge, emergent research design and qualitative methods'.²

Following Rose's conception of meaning being created at three sites (production / artwork / audiencing), three theoretical sites were used to structure the project - home, studio and exhibition. In practice, these were:

- my home in Bristol and the seven homes in London I lived in over the course of the project.
- studio spaces at the Royal College of Art, Cranbrook Academy of Art and my Bristol studio.
- exhibition spaces at Jerwood Space, Camden Arts Centre, Cranbrook Academy of Art and various sites at the RCA.

While 'studio' and 'production', 'exhibition' and 'audiencing' were a comfortable fit, 'home' was not and was conceived of as both site of audiencing³ and production, with writing, as well as making, treated as production. As I went on, other sites within and between these sites became important. Frequent travel, usually by train and on foot, created its own sites. A book or a film became a temporary site and, finally, the thesis itself became a site. Throughout the project I tried to foreground both material and facture, whether it be making in a studio, working collaboratively on an exhibition or typing on a computer.

The methods developed are subjective, being dependent on a singular maker/researcher, and emerge from an aleatory process - methods that might be put to good use by others emerged slowly, over time. In an early paper on research in art and design, Christopher Frayling discusses the issue of subjectivity in research:

Critical rationalism, which relies on making everything explicit, by revealing the methods of one's logic and justifying one's conclusions, and which has at the heart of its enterprise a belief

¹ Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method: Outline of an Anarchist Theory of Knowledge*, 3rd edn (London and New York: Verso, 1993), pp. 9-10

² Carole Gray and Julian Malins, *Visualising Research: A Guide to the Research Process in Art and Design* (Aldershot: Ashgate e book, 2004) <http://www.upv.es/laboluz/master/seminario/textos/Visualizing_Research.pdf> p.200

³ This was carried over from the first phase of the project.

in clarity, has been under considerable theoretical attack in the last 10-15 years. Sociologists such as Harry Collins, in his book *Changing Order* and philosophers such as Paul Feyerabend, have stressed that in science - as in everything else - there may well be conjectures but many of them are unconscious and they tend to be changed and modified without any explicit discussion, and they tend to involve a significant measure of subjectivity.⁴

Feyerabend and Collins and, perhaps first, Michael Polanyi, writing in 1962:

The anticipation of discovery, like discovery itself, may turn out to be a delusion. But it is futile to seek for strictly impersonal criteria of its validity [...] You cannot formalize the act of commitment, for you cannot express your commitment non-committally. *To attempt this is to exercise the kind of lucidity which destroys its subject matter.*⁵ (my emphasis)

Research proceeds slowly, through re-reading, rehearsing, re-doing. This is why it needs time - to develop habits that work, to lose things that don't work. Analysing the methodology for her research project, Bonnie Kemske presents it as 'iterative, in that each research question reflects and revisits the work that went before and emergent, in that the results were not calculated or fully anticipated. This allowed for both systematic and serendipitous development'.⁶

My project was systematic in the sense that, while subjectivity and chance were embraced, this was always in the service of the problems thrown up by the relationship between writing and making. The research questions changed throughout the four years and even during the writing up and revising periods. Methods and questions were inseparable - each method reflected and revisited the method that went before. Results were methods and the various products of those methods, which included documentation.

Results were also seen as artworks and presented as such throughout the project, with artwork considered as both finished object and process. Process becomes artwork through documentation (which becomes method). My methodology is an emergent, artistic one, almost an anti-methodology, that does not privilege theory or interpretation, but rather focuses on doing and a multi-modal, experimental approach to communicating the outcomes of doing.

[T]he practice of art shows that art and method can connect in a novel and constructive way. In such a connection, the emphasis will shift from an art practice focused on final products to a practice directed towards an experimental, laboratory-style environment, exploring novel forms of knowledge and experience.⁷

I read a great deal throughout the project, but used theory subjectively, finding correspondences between writers whom I returned to again and again: the novelist, Ben Marcus and the poet, Medbh McGuckian; Walter Benjamin, Mikhail Bakhtin, Kenneth Goldsmith, Marjorie Perloff, David Abram, Chuang Tzu, Vladimir Nabokov, Virginia Woolf, Flann O'Brien and latterly, Alfred Jarry and Francis Ponge. And most of all, the object oriented philosophers, Graham Harman, Timothy Morton and Ian Bogost.

⁴ Christopher Frayling, 'Research in Art and Design', Royal College of Art Research Papers, 1.1 (1993/94), p. 3

⁵ Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 25

⁶ Bonnie Kemske, *Evoking Intimacy: Touch and the Thoughtful Body in Sculptural Ceramics* (doctoral thesis, Royal College of Art, 2007), p.30

⁷ Henk Slager, 'Art and Method' in *Artists with PhDs: On the New Doctoral Degree in Studio Art*, ed. by James Elkins (Washington: New Academia Publishing, 2009), p.49

The common denominator seems to me to be a sort of speculative, or metaphysical, realism; an acknowledgement of the complexity and ambiguity of the world, of the interrelatedness of entities, of the impossibility of knowing; and a commitment to a deep engagement with the here and now, with the stuff of the world, in all its multifarious detail.

A true knowledge of a theory can be established only after it has been interiorized and extensively used to interpret experience.⁸

Not knowing the work at the time, I intuited Polanyi's conception of knowledge - I wanted to absorb theory, to feel it in my bones and for it to blend with and nudge practice, rather than being used to interpret, or contextualise the results of practice. Henk Slager's conception of artistic research seems to be rooted in the work of Michael Polanyi on personal and tacit knowledge:

[T]he mostly trans- or interdisciplinary research of visuality conducted by artists is not really characterized by an objective, empirical approach. After all art does not strive for generalization, repeatability and quantification. Rather, art is directed towards unique, qualitative, particular, and local knowledge.⁹ (my emphasis)

Polanyi opens up the paradoxical nature of research:

It is a commonplace that all research must start from a problem. Research can be successful only if the problem is good; it can be original only if the problem is original. But how can one see a problem, any problem, let alone a good and original problem? For to see a problem is to see something that is hidden. It is to have an intimation of the coherence of hitherto not comprehended particulars.¹⁰

After discussing Plato's *Meno*, he states that it:

[S]hows conclusively that if all knowledge is explicit, i.e., capable of being clearly stated, then we cannot know a problem or look for its solution. And the *Meno* also shows, therefore, that if problems nevertheless exist, and discoveries can be made by solving them, we can know things, and important things, that we cannot tell. The kind of tacit knowledge that solves the paradox of the *Meno* consists in the intimation of something hidden, which we may yet discover.¹¹

The annotation in my copy of *The Tacit Dimension* reads: 'I know what I'm looking for, but I don't know what it looks like, or precisely how to find it. My problem is how to find it, i.e. how to develop new methods'. Throughout the project, I was deeply cautious about claims on knowledge, let alone 'new knowledge', but, while embracing subjectivity and chance, I felt that method was something that I could grapple with productively.

John Law, who, I think, has influenced the development of artistic research along with key figures such as Feyerabend and Polanyi, insists that methods are always constructed in a specific historical context and 'not only describe but also help to produce the reality that they understand'.¹² The need for 'proper rules and procedures' should

⁸ Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension*, p. 21

⁹ Slager, 'Art and Method', p. 52

¹⁰ Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension*, p. 21

¹¹ Ibid, pp. 22-23

¹² John Law, *After Method: Mess in social science research* (London & New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 5

not be taken for granted and nor should we assume that 'the world is properly to be understood as a set of fairly specific, determinate, and more or less identifiable processes'.¹³ He writes of endless argument within social science over methods and theories - between Neo-Marxists, Foucauldians, Communitarians, Feminists - but feels that we should not be seeking the 'most important' means of dealing with the 'definite processes' of the social, which may not exist. Instead, '[t]he task is to imagine methods when they no longer seek the definite, the repeatable, the more or less stable. When they no longer assume that this is what they are after'.¹⁴

This was my first intuition as a research student - after exposure to various methods, theories and philosophies, I concluded that I couldn't possibly hope to read everything of relevance, particularly as I found myself relishing an interdisciplinary approach, drawing from many fields: craft, sculpture, literature, art writing, poetry, philosophy. It seemed clear that there would always be an element of chance in the search for useful material, so I decided to follow my nose and have fun, allowing one thing to lead to another, while always coming back to my central activities of making and writing. Later, Law gave me confidence in the value of a subjective, emergent approach and the freedom to seek the indefinite, the unique, the unstable.

Structure and method

After an RCA design symposium (January 2011), I asked Glenn Adamson, one of the speakers, a question about thesis structure. His reply stayed with me throughout the project - that the argument of the thesis should be visible at the level of structure.

A research methods session with David Crowley on the use of different voices in academic writing (Autumn 2010) got me thinking about the thesis as a multi-vocal documentation of the research process. Rather than seeing writing generated by practice and by textual study as separate things that must be forced together, I began to think about how I might use different voices to write the thesis, as I went along. A talk by Jane Rendell, Sally O'Reilly and Brian Dillon¹⁵ allowed me to build on this thinking - Rendell spoke of writing in a lyric voice in the first person, an epic voice in the third person. O'Reilly talked about her sense that she is never on her own turf, but is itinerant, always rearranging knowledge, holidaying in different disciplines; about interdisciplinarity as the line on the map that delineates the country between countries. Her notion of a 'crude novel' as an experiment in being 'off my turf' chimed with the unskilled throwing I had done for Experiments 17 and 18. Dillon spoke about space as prosthesis for the writing body, the desk as machine, the setting of constraints and parameters, which fed into my thinking on sites of production.

I played with various different structures (Appendix 3), but concluded that, dull as it might seem, the project should be presented chronologically. My 'argument' is that the research is tied to temporal, spatial and social particularities - where the work was made and by whom 'infected', what was being read at the time, *how time was experienced*; that the research process itself shapes the researcher and, following Law, that the methods developed are subjective and shape the research outputs. The temporality of the project is central to its aleatory nature | the chronological form of the thesis gives the reader a sense of the project as a temporal object.

¹³ Ibid, p. 5

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 6

¹⁵ 'Writing in Situ', RCA 20 March 2012

At some point, influenced by Object Oriented Ontology, I began to think of the thesis as an object, a messy, transitional object, to borrow words from Tim Morton.¹⁶ Not a book, not a transparent carrier of meaning, not a monological product of one mind, or one way of thinking, but a readerly text, that makes demands of the reader, but that is also various and enjoyable. I was influenced by Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism, the 'disarmingly simple proposition that 'meaning' is the product of the dynamic relationship between a speaker and his/her interlocutor'.¹⁷ Andrew Robinson summarises:

A monological world is made up of objects, integrated through a single consciousness. Since other subjects have value only in relation to the transcendent perspective, they are reduced to the status of objects. They are not recognised as 'another consciousness' or as having rights. Monologism is taken to close down the world it represents, by pretending to be the ultimate word.

The dialogical word is always in an intense relationship with another's word, being addressed to a listener and anticipating a response [...] It resists closure or unambiguous expression, and fails to produce a 'whole'. It is a consciousness lived constantly on the borders of other consciousnesses.¹⁸

I detect strong echoes of dialogism in OOO:

To think the strange stranger as an (independent, solid, predictable) object in advance of an encounter is to have domesticated it (or her, or him) in advance.¹⁹

In philosophy, unlike some other fields, we are too quickly concerned with who is right or wrong, whose positions we like or dislike. "Criticism" becomes a way of tearing down or eliminating ideas we don't like. Yet consider how different it is with the other types of criticism: art, theater, music, literary, food, or wine criticism. In these cases it's less a matter of negative judgment (though it often occurs) than of trying to capture the *subtle individual shadings* that make one bottle of wine or one avant-garde dance show different from all the rest.²⁰ (my emphasis)

While almost all the text was written/gathered during the project and is presented largely unchanged, the writing-up process (Autumn 2014) is considered as integral to the research. Much of the work is in structuring and design (Adobe InDesign and Microsoft Word) - this is treated as a making process and is influenced by concrete poetry (researched throughout the project) and by Craig Dworkin's writing on Nick Thurston's use of the margins, in his erased copy of Maurice Blanchot's *The Space of Literature*.²¹

¹⁶ Tim Morton, 'How to plan a Ph.D', Parts 1-8 <<http://ecologywithoutnature.blogspot.co.uk/p/phd-advive.html>>

¹⁷ Lynne Pearce, 'Bakhtin and the dialogic principle', in *Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. by Patricia Waugh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p.228

¹⁸ Andrew Robinson, *In Theory: Bakhtin: Dialogism, Polyphony and Heteroglossia*, online article (2011) <<http://ceasefiremagazine.co.uk/in-theory-bakhtin-1/>>

¹⁹ Timothy Morton, 'Here Comes Everything: The Promise of Object-Oriented Ontology', in *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 19.2 (Spring/Summer 2011), pp. 163-190, available at: <<http://english.rice.edu/uploadedfiles/mortonquiparlerice.pdf>>

²⁰ Graham Harman, interview with Andrew Iliadis, *Figure/Ground* online magazine, 02 October 2013 <<http://figureground.org/interview-with-graham-harman-2/>>

²¹ Craig Dworkin, *No Medium* (Cambridge, MA & London: The MIT Press, 2013)

I made a conscious decision not to tidy up, to rationalise, to academicise, to impose a methodological order. This seemed like a way, a method in itself, of bringing the writing closer to the making. I'm not sure how 'research' and 'theory' can be neatly split. Theodor Adorno's response to Walter Benjamin's *Das Passagen-Werk (The Arcades Project)* was to accuse him of 'bypassing theory' and indulging in a 'wide-eyed presentation of the bare facts'.²² Benjamin wrote, in the work itself: 'Method of this project: literary montage. I needn't say anything. Merely show. I shall appropriate no ingenious formulations, purloin no valuables. But the rags, the refuse - these I will not describe but put on display.'²³

Much as I respect Adorno, I am a wide-eyed Benjaminian. The various objects of the research - writing and language, ceramics and process - are presented as text, image and moving image. The thesis cannot be understood through text alone. I hope that these objects release at least some of the deep engagement that was necessary to their production. I came to see ceramic objects and text objects as different forms of expression of this making process and my aim is to bring something of the experience of making - the labour, the time, the uncertainty, the skill, the tacit knowledge, the silent dialogue with those resistant materials - into the open, into a communicable form.

Research might not be inspired by a great cause or an accidental discovery (it might happen serendipitously), yet it may ultimately lead to a novel, methodologically formulated form of knowledge. The force of the method seems to determine the value of the results.²⁴

Writing Making Methods

Research methods were simple and generic in theory, but complex and personal in practice, making them, as I have discovered during this writing process, difficult to categorise without rehearsing each one in some detail. To describe the methods and their objects is to repeat the project in a sense (something that Nabokov might have enjoyed).

New methods were built on previous ones, but I also came at things from different directions - from writing, from site, from making - and circled round on myself, as well as inching forward. So, although methods were developed and exist as a kind of interdependent mesh - what I am calling 'writing_making' - they emerged out of two distinct approaches:

1. Writing outside the studio: in the domestic space, the exhibition space, or travelling.
2. Studio-based making, with clay + descriptive, documentary writing between, or during, making sessions.

A taxonomy has been created in order to analyse and better communicate the research findings:

- writing from site
- writing from writing
- writing from making
- making with writing
- making from writing

²² Theodor Adorno, cited in *Unoriginal Genius: Poetry by other means in the new century*, ed. by Marjorie Perloff, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), p.27

²³ Walter Benjamin, cited in Perloff, *Unoriginal Genius*, p.26

²⁴ Slager, 'Art & Method', p.52

However, if I try to map my various research outputs onto my taxonomy, I see that each of my five categories overlap and interpenetrate. Neither will 'from writing', 'from site', 'from making' stay put in their respective categories. They arse about in each other's territory, mess things up, cause their author to veer, wildly.

1. Writing outside the studio

The table below shows how some of the text objects might start to be categorised:

writing from site	writing from writing / language	making with writing
Notes on Herzog's Crocodiles, Animism, Object Oriented Ontology and Yellow	d. 20.03.12 / Home_2 / Sickly colour, sickbed colour	Experiment 21: Carbon_Courier: text-image
Time (unknown)	Porched	Experiment 21: Black_Courier: text-image
Jerwood Makers / Louis Thompson Hive	j. 16.08.12 / Home_5 / Ember hesitated	Experiment 21: Black_Futura: text-image
Porched	o. 28.12.12 / Home_9 / white room	Experiment 21: Carbon_Courier_2: text-image
Disruption (Video_5_Disruption loop)	Pessoa Book of Disquiet, 298_block	An oblong puddle
Karst: Phoebe Cummings & Anne Vibeke Mou, Camden Arts Centre, Ceramics Fellowship Exhibition	Passage 298 Everything is absurd: text-image	Pessoa Book of Disquiet, 298_block
Time: Wednesday, 12 March 2014 12:08	Passage 298 Everything is absurd: text-image_2	Passage 298 Everything is absurd: text-image
Kien 1-7	u. 12.04.13 / Home_11 / I dress the workers	Passage 298 Everything is absurd: text-image_2
	y. 17.05.13 / Studio_4 / If it's fine tomorrow	a fat bag: text-image
	A. 20.07.13 / Studio_5 / Red (Stoke)	Red<Buff>White projection
	B. 24.07.13 / Studio_7 / Buff (london)	Figure a Shepherd / Jewelling
	C. 22.07.13 / Studio_6 / White (Bristol)	Centring
	Centring	Video _12_Gouge_1
	Occurrence and Classification of Cats	Video _13_Gouge_2
	Kien 1-7	Video _14_Gouge_3
		Video _16_Centre_2
		gill_sans_cup
		Kien 1-7

At first, I wondered if the link between studio writing and domestic writing was too arbitrary, but the latter allowed me to experiment with different voices and to pose questions about how this method for generating text informs or contrasts with texts generated through making. Home is facilitator of the threshold between dream state and waking:

We have grown very poor in threshold experiences. Falling asleep is perhaps the only such experience that remains to us. (But together with this, there is also waking up.) [...] The threshold must be carefully distinguished from the boundary. A *Schwelle* <threshold> is a zone. Transformation, passage, wave action are in the word *schwellen*, swell, and etymology ought not to overlook these senses [...] □ Dream House □ ²⁵

The space between waking and sleeping became very important to me, so well described by Julian Yates (and Remo Bodei) as,

the 'salutary distancing effect' that comes each and every day with waking. 'We perceive the objects around us in an as yet unfocused way' during which 'the things we see' are 'deprived of their usual attributes' and so reveal themselves to be bearers of multiple, even incompatible layers of meaning that the harsh light of day and everyday routine shall strip away.²⁶

Home is container of information that leads both outside and inside. The outside comes in through physical thresholds - door, book, screen, window, toilet. At first, the threshold writing was conceived as feedback for the studio site, but it soon took on a life of its own. In February 2012, I began looking for descriptions of domestic scenes in the books on the bookshelves in my living room. Text as threshold, taking the reader somewhere other than the space they currently occupy and, particularly, to a different domestic space. I refound Oblomov's bedroom-study-reception room,²⁷ Beatrice Dahl's low, wide lounge,²⁸ Krug's cold, empty apartment²⁹ and Kien's writing desk,³⁰ the site of metamorphosis.

I had no plans to write poems. They came unbidden, inspired by the change in spatial and temporal conditions - travelling every week between Bristol and London, spending many hours walking or cycling and on trains, working in an unfamiliar, shared studio, eating and sleeping in unfamiliar domestic spaces. As I settled deeper into the project, began to live in it, the conceptual framework mapped out at the beginning became integral to my thinking, my doing. I started to use it as an aid to focus attention more acutely on the orientation of my body in space and the signals it was receiving and giving.

Poetry appeared to offer a threefold benefit: First, it seemed like a useful method for thinking my body as a sensing object, enmeshed in relations with other objects and with spaces. Second, it allowed me to practice, in an intensely focused way, the game of relations between word and image (photographs were often taken, in conjunction with writing, and are presented alongside). And third, I quickly started to enjoy this form of writing, finding correspondences between it and the

²⁵ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (O2a,1), trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA & London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2002), p.494

²⁶ Julian Yates, 'Taking Things By Surprise' online review, Remo Bodei, *The Life of Things, the Love of Things*, LA Review of Books, July 21st, 2015 <<http://lareviewofbooks.org/review/taking-things-by-surprise-remo-bodei>>

²⁷ Ivan Goncharov, *Oblomov* (New York: Signet, 1963), pp. 23-24

²⁸ Vladimir Nabokov, *Bend Sinister* (London: Corgi, 1962), p. 26

²⁹ JG Ballard, *The Drowned World* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), pp. 28-29

³⁰ Elias Canetti, *Auto da Fé* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), pp. 180-181

playful approach that I bring to making and construction. Conceptual and physical thresholds became sites within sites:

bedroom / living room / bathroom
bed / window / toilet / tv + film / computer / book
mouth / eye / ear / nose / anus

In February 2012, I found Kenneth Goldsmith in the Whitechapel Gallery bookshop:

'...the suppression of self-expression is impossible. Even when we do something as seemingly "uncreative" as retyping a few pages, we express ourselves in a variety of ways. The act of choosing and reframing tells us as much about ourselves as our story about our mother's cancer operation. It's just that we've never been taught to value such choices.'³¹

And Medbh McGuckian popped out of my bookshelf in *Poets from the North of Ireland* (given to me by my late father in 1991 and edited by the same Frank who once kneed a cheeky schoolboy in the face).

Before constructing her poetic texts, McGuckian reads a number of bio-graphical studies, critical works or diaries by other authors, and keeps a record of phrases that appeal to her in one of her notebooks. "What you look for in the texts are images," she says, "striking combinations of maybe two or three unusual words, esoteric vocabulary; in other words, the poetry which is there, embedded in what people write and say, and what they themselves quote from."³²

Alcobia-Murphy compares McGuckian's work to the poetry of Walter Abish and John Ashberry, in which the reader is meant to appreciate the poet's skill in manipulating appropriated text: 'In McGuckian's case, the quotations are not recognizable, nor does she openly acknowledge their presence'.³³

Thus the speech of another is introduced into the author's discourse (the story) in concealed form, that is, without any of the formal markers usually accompanying such speech, whether direct or indirect. But this is not just another's speech in the same "language" - it is another's utterance in a language that is itself "other" to the author as well, in the archaicized language of oratorical genres associated with hypocritical official celebrations.³⁴

I explored a range of methods for combining appropriated text with self-generated text (e.g. *Porched*), for writing only with appropriated text (e.g. *Four bodies: Red<Buff>White* and *OCCURRENCE AND CLASSIFICATION OF CATS*) and for constructing with appropriated text (e.g. *Kien 1-7*).

Poem 'y. 17.05.13 / Studio_4 / If it's fine tomorrow' was written using McGuckian's method. I had been reading Woolf - short stories and *The Waves* - and when the 'lighthouse' analogy was used in the 'how~to' text,³⁵ I started reading *To the Lighthouse*. The texts are very obviously working in different registers, but are both ever so

³¹ Kenneth Goldsmith, *Uncreative Writing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p.9

³² Shane Alcobia-Murphy, "My Cleverly Dead and Verical Audience": Medbh McGuckian's "Difficult" Poetry', *New Hibernia Review* 16.3 (2012), p. 68 <http://abdn.ac.uk/staffpages/uploads/enl154/New_Hibernia_Review_McGuckian_article_-_2012.pdf>

³³ Ibid, p.71

³⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1981), p.30

³⁵ Henry Wren and Denise Wren, *Handcraft Pottery For Workshop and School* (London: Sir Isaac Pitman, 1928)

English and I liked that they are almost exactly contemporaneous. The breezy confidence of the 'how~to' text struck me as comical in that it is both paternalistic and hopelessly inadequate as instruction in a very complex, body-centred task.

2. Studio-based making

Seven making exercises, conducted between Autumn 2011 and Spring 2014, form the spine of the project:

1. Experiments 16-18 (2011)
2. Experiment 21 (2012-13)
3. *Translation: Object/Text/Object* (2012-13)
4. Cranbrook 1-6 (2013)
5. *Four Bodies: Red<Buff>White* (British Ceramics Biennial, 2013)
6. *Gouge* (2013-14)
7. *One Bag* (2014)

Writing was both brought to and generated from these exercises in an attempt to develop new methods *for making* and for *writing about making*; to give voice to 'the experience of making - its exact pedagogy, its methods, knacks and skills, its feel'.³⁶

writing_making exercises began with a combination of documentation and reflection in Experiment 21. Following my three-site structure, and the aleatory process developed with the bookshelf texts, I selected an object from my living room, not quite randomly, but without a great deal of thought - just something that was portable and copyable. This was transposed from the domestic space / site of display to the studio space / site of production. I wanted to set up an experiment where no creativity was involved, just a pure making exercise that would allow me to focus on documentation and writing.

After this point a studio journal was kept for key studio making exercises:

Cranbrook 1-6 / *Four Bodies: Red<Buff>White* / *One Bag*

Entries were made during or immediately after making sessions. Occasionally, notes were added after longer periods of reflection. Voice recordings made during making did not seem to be effective and were abandoned after Experiment 21.

Journals are presented largely unedited in the thesis, and offer reflections on methods, as they developed. Much of this work was documented with still or moving image photography. Images and moving image works are presented alongside the text and are integral to its understanding.

³⁶ Elkins, 'On Beyond Research and New Knowledge', p.128

chapter

Century Gothic

Courier New

Rockwell

Courier

Calibri

Avenir Next

Times New Roman

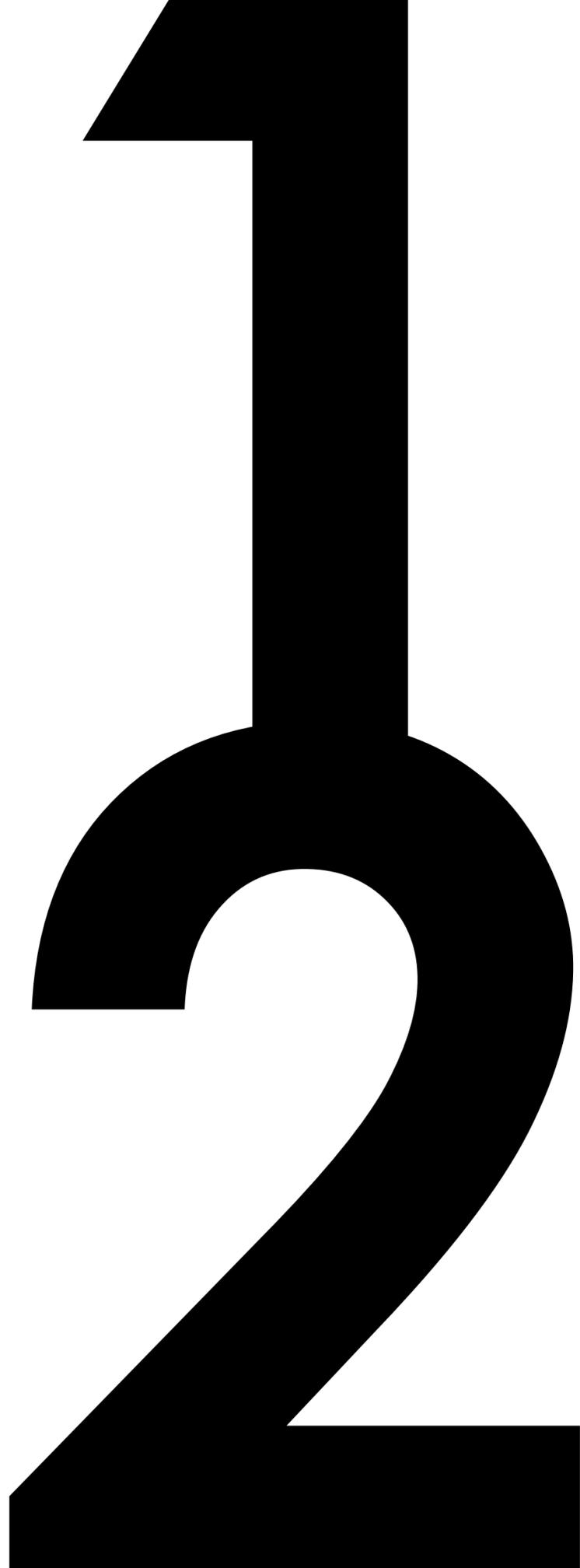
Futura

Andale Mono

Source Code Pro

Arial

Perpetua





Living room site: pedestal table



Living Room [halftone] with Lloyd Loom chair, pedestal table and Exp. 11: 2011



Experiment 16: Work in progress, RCA, Autumn 2011

Experiment 16 / Autumn 2011

Materials:

- White Earthenware (Potclays grogged white)
- Red Earthenware (Valentines standard red)
- Red slip (Etruria marl powder, RCA glaze lab [last of the line])
- Tin glaze (Bower Ashton recipe + Blythe Strong Red)
- Honey glaze (Etruria marl + lead sesquisilicate)
- Copydex glue
- Photographic transfers (Digital Ceramic Systems)
- Ash (self-set and coppiced, Ashley Down, Bristol)
- Moss (gathered in Richmond) / sand
- Lignum vitae wedge (gift) / Steel nut and bolt (found)
- Lace (purchased on internet)
- Car body filler

Jigs, tools and equipment:

- Computer / drawing tablet
- Laser cutting & engraving machine
- Scanner / printer
- Digital camera
- Rolling pin and rolling jig
- Steel rule
- Card templates
- Knife / modelling tools
- Brushes / sponges
- Plaster cylinder jig
- Lathes / turning tools
- Banding wheel
- Laser-cut acetate stencils
- Spray gun
- Scalpel / scissors
- Rubber kidney
- Drying and firing props
- Kilns
- Diamond abrasive pads
- Angle grinder

Methods:

- Digital photography
- CAD (Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator)
- Scanning
- Transfer production (commercial)
- Laser-cutting
- Lathe turning (plaster and wood)
- Slab building
- Modelling
- Stencilling
- Brushing / sponging
- Sgraffito
- Glaze spraying and brushing / glaze resist
- Transfer application
- Kiln firing (1000 / 1060 / 780)
- Grinding / abrading
- Construction

Images:

- Living room furniture - Lloyd Loom chair / Thonet chair 1 / pedestal table (with Ancient Greek pyxis [internet])
- Pink wallpaper 'Chinese No. 1 / 34' - pattern from Owen Jones's Grammar of Ornament, (scanned and redrawn in Adobe Illustrator)
- Yellow spot wallpaper (Adobe Illustrator)
- Great Red Slug wallpaper (Ashley Down garden / digital photograph / Adobe Photoshop)



Experiment 16: Ashley Down living Room, 2011



Experiment 16: RCA Studio, Autumn 2011

West Country
Mizzle
Dead time be
Tween Christmas
And year's end
As close
As It comes

To world pausing.

Dull eye
Through rain
Spotted glass
Rot
And tangle
Of summer
Bean. Comes

Alive.

A flighty
Dance
Of territory
Round big ash
At back.
No actual clash
But proximity,

Thrums nerves.

31 What prize,
Estella? Pip
And Bentley
Drummel.
The ash
The hub that
None can

Hold.

Jay skims
Low,
Over lock-up
To tin roof rim
And back,
Displacing magpie
Straight at me,

A lighting

Out of sight
Blue-black, white
Above,
I Presume
and the dove?
I forget,
Already...

Thrums nerves.

A dance
Of three
So fast and
Gone.
Perhaps half
A minute
No more

Movement

Necessity
Pause...
Otherwise missed
The whole thing
Flush twice
With draughts
Of pure,

To where?

A part
Of me dismissed.
Our planet
Shrinks
When we think
Of where
Our waste goes.

Bloom

Repulsed,
In Love
In equal measure.
My organ
FESSed
Resists,
Cannot smell

My stink

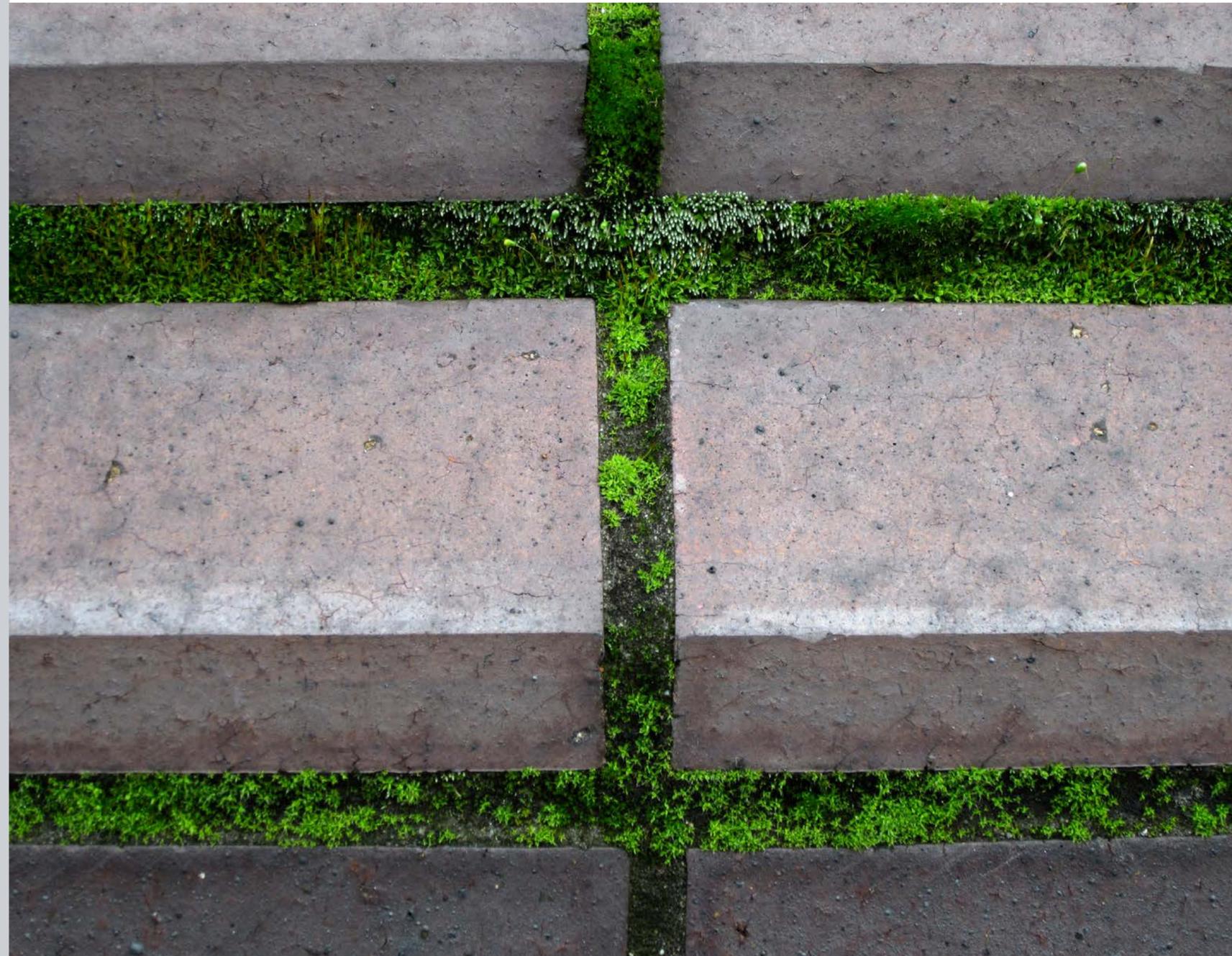
But still
I can open
Myself
To the world
Like having a shit
Said Julian
Of Norwich.

East Country

Brought West
By an expert
In a pub
And relayed
On Xmas Eve
By Roger,

My neighbour.

Ashley Down to Temple Meads: Tuesday, 31 January 2012 13:07



c. January 12 / Walk_1 / It

a. 29.11.11 Train_1 / Delayed departure



It
Is the outside
And the inside,
Raw material
Gathered, fragile.
Not for the
Museum with Its
Glass, but
In need
Of a more
Intimate connection.
Unnoticed
If not attacked,
My father lamented
The loss
Of lawn,
Tough as old
Boots, a rolling
Stone gathers
No moss
Green jewellery on
Wet brick and
Flag colonising
And softening
The grid, holding
The cold rain.

Delayed departure
concrete block grey
painless windows
pigeons preening
like Dutch hookers
amongst cheery green
clumps of turf,
not for us.

Fitters called,
unfit, detrain,
pull out late
to First refrain
and a big fat
grey back
bestriding
stricken train,
not for us.

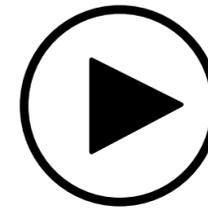


▲ Experiment 16: coppiced ash / turned leg

Experiment 19: November 2011



Video_1_Exp18



Notes on Herzog's Cave, Animism, Object Oriented Ontology and Yellow

19 March 2012

Chauvet Cave in the Ardeche Valley, France ¹

Stalagmites and stalagmites – creamy white, glistening – solid time-time solid. Like slip, extruded glob by gobbet on top; or chocolate, in one of those educational films from my owl-deep past. Except laid down over earth time, geological time. Not ours, yet... Phallic stalagmites, Bourgeois knobs. Cave bear skulls enveloped in soliquid folds, goutts of... calcium? Floor sparkling – calcite crystals in a tungsten glare, frosted snow in the sun.

Billowing, baroque roof canopies, red dots palm-printed. Walls folded and creased, off white, streaked with orangey ochre. Smooth, rolling, roiling — solid sea liquefied by light. “Imagine the effect under the light of burning torches”. Black line charcoal drawings. Carbon black. Shaded heads suggest black mixed with white. Scraping to get to the white of the rock – they played with the contrast and mixed their forms with those of the wall. Some overlapping figures drawn almost five thousand years apart.

The folds and fissures of an interior, a rock womb, a ruminant belly. The shock of tripe. Water gurgling from a vulval hole, floor-level in a niche. An alcove between great labial folds, curtains parted to reveal the mysteries of the font; drawings all around, layered, one on top of the other. Cave bear scratches, made on top of the human marks, perhaps twenty thousand years later. “Dreams of powerful things and deep things. A way to understand things which is not a direct way.”

Long white filaments, dripping at the pace of a heartbeat. Rock pendant, a great udder-cock hanging off the ceiling. Legs and arse drawn from behind – the only human image in the cave. A Bison head, seen from the top, directly over the vulva – grasping, eating. “The bison seems to embrace the sex of a naked woman.” Werner’s mechanical eye closes in on the footprint of a boy next to that of a wolf: “Did the wolf stalk the boy; did they walk together as friends; were the prints made thousands of years apart?”

Aboriginal, touching up faded rock art. Ethnographer – “why are you painting?” “I am not painting. The hand of the spirit is painting.” Because the man is a part of the spirit. A sense that the drawing was an act, perhaps more important than the image left behind. Performative magic.

Only animals. Medieval cathedrals have humans, gods and demons: a totally different relationship - human-centred as opposed to environment-centred. Everywhere, at last, we notice the effects of the Anthropocene.

...people of the Paleolithic very probably had two concepts which change our perception of the world – the concept of fluidity and the concept of permeability. Fluidity means that the categories that we have – man, woman, horse, tree, etc. – can shift. The tree may speak, the man can be transformed into an animal and the other way around, given certain circumstances.

The concept of permeability is that there are no barriers, so to speak, between the world where we are and the world of the spirits. A wall can talk to us, or a wall can accept us or refuse us. A shaman, for example, can send his or her spirit to the world of the supernatural, or can receive the visit inside him or her, of supernatural spirits. If you put those two concepts together you realise how different life must have been for those people compared to the way we live now. ²

When the filming was almost complete, Herzog received a gift in the form of the discovery of

¹ *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*, dir. by Werner Herzog, 90 mins. [on DVD] (UK: Creative Differences / History Films / More4, 2011).

² Jean Clottes in *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*.

a tropical biosphere, brought to life by the super-heated cooling water from a nuclear power station on the Rhône, just twenty miles from the Chauvet cave. Crocodiles (they are actually alligators, but Herzog chooses to call them crocodiles) thrive in the lush, saturated environment and mutations inevitably occur. In a postscript to the cave film, two albinos approach each other in the water. In his trademark obsessive-rational-poetic voiceover, Herzog intones:

A thought is born of this surreal environment – not long ago, just a few ten thousands of years back, there were glaciers here, nine thousand feet thick. And now a new climate is steaming and spreading. Fairly soon these albinos might reach Chauvet Cave – looking at the paintings, what will they make of them? Nothing is real, nothing is certain. It is hard to decide whether or not these creatures here are dividing into their own doppelgangers. And, do they really meet, or is it just their own imaginary mirror reflection? Are we today, possibly, the crocodiles who look back into an abyss of time when we see the paintings of Chauvet Cave?

My first response was to read this as a Ballardian, atavistic vision, Herzog’s veil-piercing commentary complementing the Saurian, equatorial imagery. JG Ballard’s chief protagonist in *The Drowned World*, Kerans, is caught up in a “psychological descent through genetic time – reaching down to ‘lumbar spine memory’ – to a state of being which is perfectly fitted for this new Triassic era, and which longs to exist there.” ³

Most oddly the descent into Triassic memory and the physical change that goes with it do nothing to awaken less-than-civilised behaviour in the three original players. They become more insular, more secretive and less and less emotional, their entire obsession only the heat and the wilderness. It’s a curious message – in the end I was left wondering what the point was; is it that in such a retreat to an almost reptilian level we slide to the apparently still and near-lifeless mental states of crocodiles? ⁴

A BBC documentary, *Swimming with Crocodiles* ⁵ prompts a different interpretation of Herzog’s metaphor – outside the ‘kill zone’ near the surface of the water, the crocodile will not attack. So, on the riverbed, a human can swim confidently, within touching distance of a creature that will instinctively dismember and devour it in a seemingly similar context. It appears that, despite being able to see you, the crocodile does not recognise you as prey. A disturbingly effective predator – a creature of nightmare – is transformed into something much softer, less malevolent. Which is odd, as a limitation of perception in the crocodile, relative to human perception, allows us to see it in a more sympathetic, or anthropocentric light. Anyway, Herzog’s point, I think, is that the crocodile does not have a ‘theory of mind’. When it meets another croc in the water, does it see itself reflected? What does it see if it does not see a threat, a mate, or food? Whatever, it is unable to think its way into the mind of another creature and the gulf between the two might be equivalent to the gulf between us and the peoples who responded to this landscape thirty thousand years ago. It is easy to think of the images in the cave as being profoundly withdrawn from the crocodiles, but perhaps they are just as profoundly withdrawn from us.

How can we approach the Paleolithic image-maker? The only way is to live as they lived, or something close, like the Aboriginal peoples we have all but destroyed. In an essay for Artforum, Allan Kaprow writes:

Most humans it seems, still put up fences around their acts and thoughts – even when these are piles of shit – for they have no other way of delimiting them. Contrast Paleolithic cave paintings, in which animals and magical markings are overlaid with no differentiation or sense of framing. But when some of us have worked in natural settings, say in a meadow, woods, or mountain range, our cultural training has been so deeply ingrained that we have simply carried a mental rectangle with us to drop

³ Justina Robson, *The Drowned World (SF Masterworks No 17)*, online review, infinity plus, 04 Dec 1999 <<http://www.infinityplus.co.uk/nonfiction/drowned.htm>> [accessed 22.03.12].

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ ‘Swimming with Crocodiles’ BBC2 19.02.12, dir. by Helen Simpson, prod. by Ingrid Kvale.

around whatever we were doing. This made us feel at home.⁶

Fluidity and permeability – why are these things so attractive? Can we relearn how to see everything as having its own life, without capitulating to the ‘sleep of reason’? Is science, or ‘the rational’, a bulwark against horror? It might appear to be in wealthy, stable England, but it doesn’t protect against cruelty and inequality, or the destruction of species and environments. Timothy Morton’s 2011 essay on Object Oriented Ontology (OOO) and its relation to ecology explores what might be called fluidity and permeability in the philosophy of Graham Harman:

OOO is a form of realism that asserts that real things exist--these things are objects, not just amorphous “Matter,” objects of all shapes and sizes, from football teams to Fermi-Dirac condensates or, if you prefer something more ecological, nuclear waste and birds’ nests. To this quite Aristotelian view OOO extends Husserl’s and Heidegger’s arguments that things have an irreducible dark side: no matter how many times we turn over a coin, we never see the other side as the other side--it will have to flip onto “this” side for us to see it, immediately producing another underside. Harman simply extends this irreducible darkness from subject-object relationships to object-object relationships.

Objects encounter each other as operationally closed systems that can only (mis) translate one another... An object is profoundly “withdrawn”--we can never see the whole of it, and nothing else can either. Moreover, OOO is a relatively “flat ontology,” which means that hallucinations and the idea of purple are also objects, though perhaps of a different kind than toilets and ozone. We’ve become so used to hearing “object” in relation to “subject” that it takes some time to acclimatize to a view in which there are only objects, one of which is ourselves.

...The notion of the “withdrawal” of objects extends my term *strange stranger*... to non-living entities. *Strange stranger* names an uncanny, radically unpredictable quality of life forms. Life forms recede into strangeness the more we think about them, and whenever they encounter one another--the strangeness is irreducible. Ecological philosophy that does not attend to this strangeness is not thinking coexistence deeply enough. Like Harman, I intuited that the uncanny essence of humans that Heidegger contemplates extends to nonhumans. Specifically *human* being is just one way of being in a mesh of strange strangeness--uncanny, open-ended, vast: existence is (ecological) coexistence. The life-non-life boundary is far from thin and rigid. Why should strangeness not apply to non-life? The connection is implicit in thinking the ecological connectedness of life forms...

To think the strange stranger as an (independent, solid, predictable) object in advance of an encounter is to have domesticated it (or her, or him) in advance. Bizarrely, increased access (technically possible or not, hypothetical or not) does not decrease strangeness.⁷

Morton’s essay brings to mind Carlo Levi’s *Christ Stopped at Eboli*. Under Mussolini’s Fascist regime, before the war, Levi was exiled to the barren, desperately poor region of Lucania in southern Italy. Of his many vivid descriptions of the paganistic peasant culture, the following is particularly memorable:

...there is no definite boundary line between the world of human beings and that of animals or even monsters. There are many strange creatures at Gagliano who have a dual nature. A middle-aged peasant woman, married and having children, with nothing out of the ordinary about her appearance, was the daughter of a cow. So the village said, and she herself confirmed it. The older people clearly remembered her cow mother, who followed her everywhere when she was a child, mooing to her

⁶ Allan Kaprow, ‘The Shape of the Art Environment’, in *Allan Kaprow: Essays on the blurring of Art and life*, ed. by Jeff Kelley (Berkeley, CA & London: University of California Press, 2003), p. 93.

⁷ Timothy Morton, ‘Here Comes Everything: The Promise of Object-Oriented Ontology’, *Qui Parle*, 2011, pp.3-4 <<http://english.rice.edu/uploadedFiles/mortonquiparlerice.pdf>> [accessed 10.07.11].

and licking her with a rough tongue. This did not alter the fact that she had also had a human mother, who had been dead for many years. No one saw any contradiction in this dual birth, and the woman herself, whom I knew personally, lived quietly and happily, like both her mothers, for all her animal heredity.⁸

Science is no more than a method for gaining knowledge of the world and has no greater access to ‘truth’ than anything else. Of course it has yielded spectacular results, but, ironically, a blind faith in the primacy of this method seems to cut us off from other forms of being. Western rationalism sees animism as primitive, but anthropologist Tim Ingold argues for a more nuanced reading:

Animism is often described as the imputation of life to inert objects. Such imputation is more typical of people in western societies who dream of finding life on other planets than of indigenous peoples to whom the label of animism has classically been applied. These peoples are united not in their beliefs but in a way of being that is alive and open to a world in continuous birth. *In this animic ontology, beings do not propel themselves across a ready-made world but rather issue forth through a world-in-formation, along the lines of their relationships*. To its inhabitants this weather-world, embracing both sky and earth, is a source of astonishment but not surprise. Re-animating the ‘western’ tradition of thought means recovering the sense of astonishment banished from official science.⁹ (My emphasis.)

And back to Julian of Norwich – opening yourself up – dropping barriers, so the world can flow through you, in and out again, connecting with other objects, accepting that you can’t fully understand them, nor they you, but allowing them to be whole and you to be whole.

There has been a welter of interest in animic ontology in recent years, evidenced by conferences and exhibitions, such as *Animism* at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin, curated by Anselm Franke (March-May 2012). (Deliberating over the appropriateness of the word ‘welter’, I re-noticed the name of the institution – perhaps it was operating on me, below my consciousness. Rolling, Revolving.) The blurb states:

In the habituated scheme of modernity, objects are conceived as the passive stuff on which human action leaves its imprint or trace. Whenever this passive/active nexus between objects and subject, humans and the non-human is disturbed or even reversed—as in the coming-to-life of seemingly dead matter, or the becoming autonomous of inert things—we inevitably step into the territory of animism: that non-modern worldview that conceives of things as animated and possessing agency. Is it possible to de-colonize the imaginary manifest in the modern conception of the animist “other”, by bringing into view the practices that both make and transgress the distinctions and boundaries in question?¹⁰

Exp.16 is sitting on the living room pedestal table

The main body is a warm, rich, earthy yellow - redder than ochre. A mix of Etruria Marl (dug from the clay seams at the heart of England) and lead sesquisilicate. The Royal College of Art Ceramics and Glass department has run out of Etruria Marl. I snaffled the last two kilos. How long has it been stocked? I guess as long as the department has been in existence. This is the best red clay in the country, a key component of the once-mighty British ceramics industry. On first firing the glaze is clean and pure – somewhere between a pale, uncooked egg yolk and a yellow ochre. I expected a honey, but it is much yellower. A subsequent transfer firing brings

⁸ Carlo Levi, *Christ Stopped at Eboli* (London: Penguin, 1982 [first pub. 1947]), pp. 111-112.

⁹ Tim Ingold, ‘Rethinking the Animate, Re-Animating Thought’, *Ethnos* 7.1, abstract (March 2006) <<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00141840600603111#>.Ua8lCeC0l64> [accessed 19.04.12].

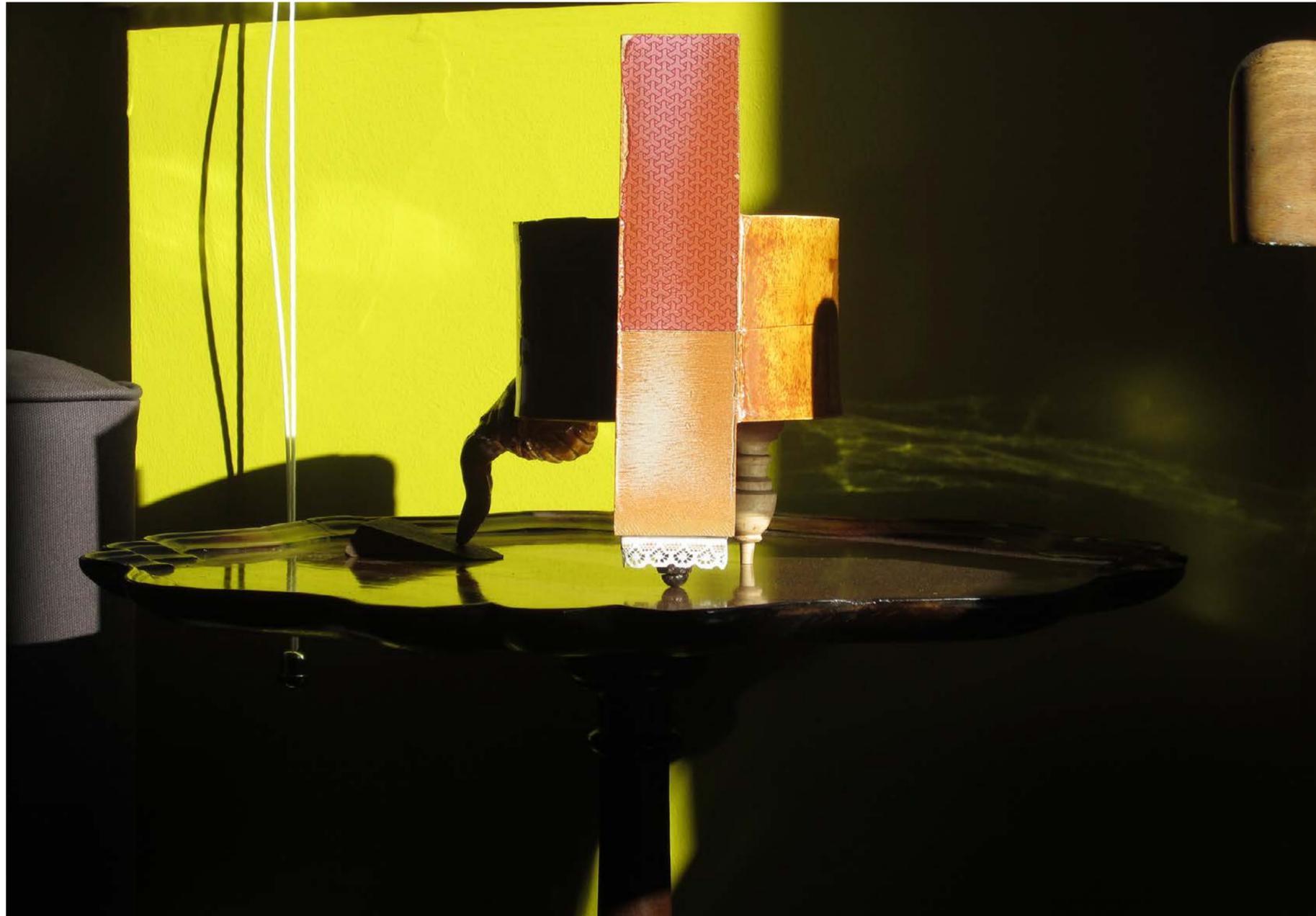
¹⁰ Anselm Franke and Irene Albers, *e-flux* email, March 10, 2012.

out an unexpected tan mottling. Somehow, that second proving is allowing the iron to express itself more fully.

What does it mean to think of yellow as an object? Not as the colour of an object, but as an object itself. Can it get us closer, or only make us realise how far away we are? I start to think of what we know, or what we think we know. All that knowledge laid down over the centuries by scientific investigation. Accessible – much of it now easily so on the internet. Knowledge can be a crutch, a way of fooling yourself that things are stable and understandable. What cannot be escaped from? The individual body that responds to everything else that is not the body.

I fall back on word-knowledge – epistemological yellow – but how can I approach ontological yellow? Maybe only through direct experience. Though metaphysics *is* writing, can writing *be* metaphysical? Do words not coax us away from the direct perception of reality? If rhetoric is to bring us closer to the strange stranger, as Morton claims,¹¹ surely it cannot deal in knowledge. Yellow is the hardest colour and the easiest colour – cool and warm, fat and thin, gentle and harsh, generous and mean. The colour of the sun – without which there is nothing – of fire, urine, the core of the earth. Rock, ochre, sand and soil. Gold, even. Surface and depth at once, connected to our own yellow-brown-red interior space. So, too easy, too freighted with metaphor and the advertisers cliché.

The hardest colour and the softest colour, it occupies a spectrum, a category, between Red and Blue, in a way that Red does not seem to occupy a category between Blue and Yellow, nor Blue between Red and Yellow. Soft, warm. pH 6, I would say, using the colour chart on the test strips I got to test my urine. It is on the acidic side of neutral 7, which seems counter-intuitive – greener yellows seem more acidic, in a colour sense. How did these colour values arise? Litmus paper – from the Old Norse for coloured moss. Exterior and interior. Disease. The colour of the abject. Pus. Infection. Snot. Interior heat and exterior heat. The domestic space as a mediator between the outside, the wide open, the limitless, the public, the group and the intimate/unknown of the body's interior.



d. 20.03.12 / Home_2 / Sickly colour, sickbed colour

Sickly colour, sickbed colour / Prehistoric ochre arse / Nic and lead the Egyptians bright / Er and stronger Indian yell / Ow cows and mangos golden / Chrome, lemon and cadmium too / Yellow, Mr. Turner, is rare / That yellow is a huge success – / It really does turn you green / For Ann Gregory, Yeats and blonde / Robes that harmonise the mind / To the wide river of Chinese / Imperial power supreme / Court jester cooks old stockings / All over my stupid egg-face / Lemon going bananas seen / Easy by the low-light eye / Nature's warning poised or stung / Cowardy custard apple-heads / Tie ribbons to my Calvary / Betrayer of the Gold-lore / Jealousy and inconstancy / Hue and stain most negative.¹²

Native speakers of Pirahã, in the Amazon lowland jungle, have no words for left or right, they use the same term for blue and green, and their definitions of red, black and white turn out to be similes, rather than dedicated words... On the other hand, they can also sing, hum, yell and whistle information to one another. So they have four additional speech forms as well as a very precise vocabulary for their environment and everything in it that matters to them.¹³

To the peasants everything has a double meaning... People, trees, animals, even objects and words have a double life... There is no room for religion, because to them everything participates in divinity, everything is actually, not merely symbolically, divine...¹⁴

¹¹ "Rhetoric is not simply ear candy for humans: indeed, a thorough reading of Plato, Aristotle and Longinus suggests that rhetoric is a technique for contacting the strange stranger..." ('Here Comes Everything', p. 6).

¹² from notes taken during 5. *Yellow*, BBC 2 documentary (20 mins), 1991.

¹³ Tim Radford, 'Language: The Cultural Tool by Daniel Everett – review', *Guardian* 15.03.12.

¹⁴ Carlo Levi, *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, p. 115.

My feeders fill me
 With junk from whence
 I do not know
 Its odour wrang
 I will not moan
 As they cannot
 Feel my heave.

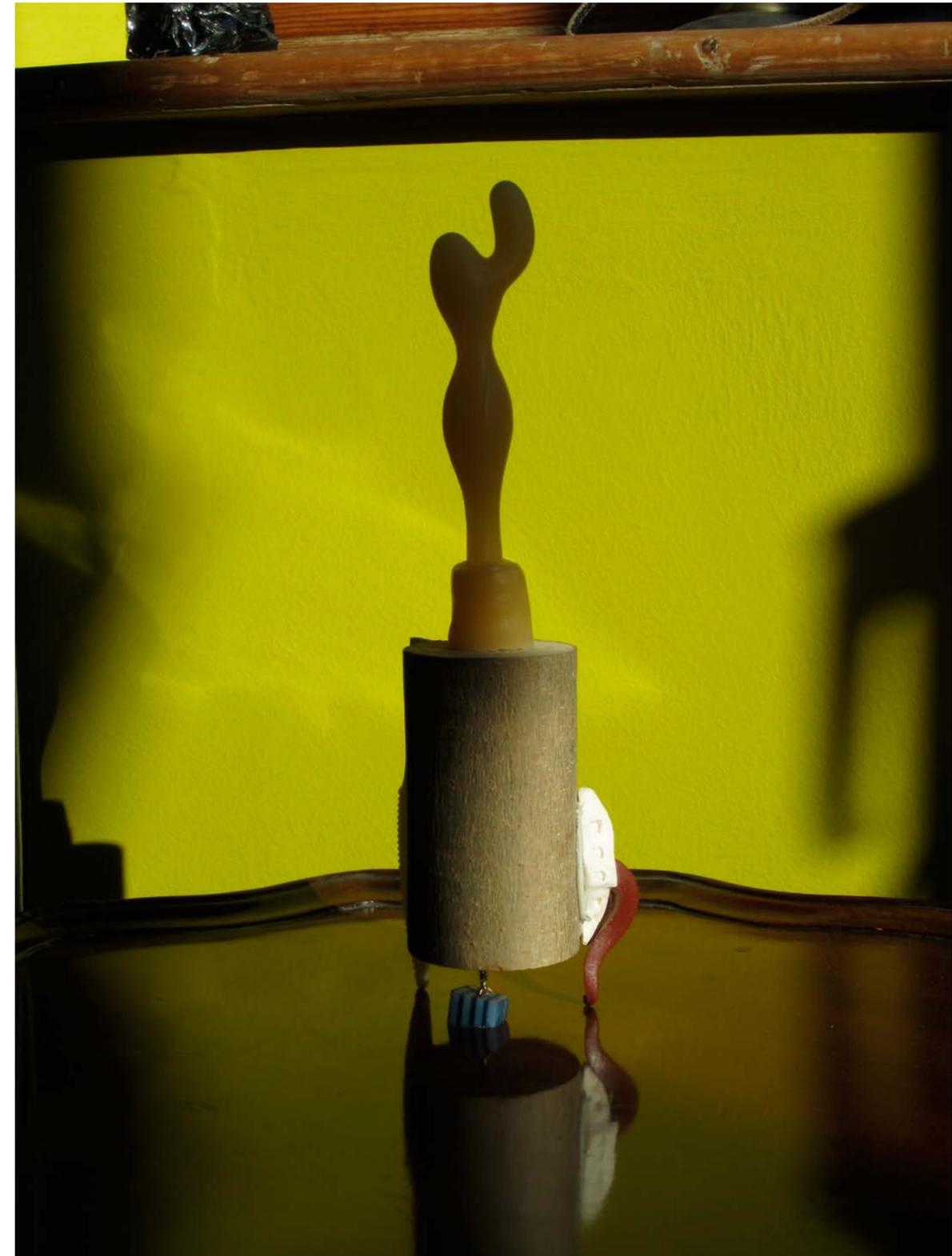
This one, the windbag
 Grasps unwieldy
 Misses meaning
 Swallowed by
 His need for ease

Within my flesh-home
 I feel him harsh
 Tapping drilling
 Filling his cracks
 My careful cracks.

I am still, speechless
 I am brethen
 Notwithstanding
 Your dusty slurry
 That clogs my skin

Between here and there
 Utter and air
 The light, the dark
 Have free passage
 And I move though

It is forbidden.
 He does his works
 Without a thought
 To dull my ache
 And worse he puts
 These things on me
 Thankless thought.



Experiment 19.2: November 2011 ▲

Time

Time might be thought of as input and output, rather than as a progression of hours, weeks and years (although the reality of day, month and year is inseparable from life). Output consists of moving, touching, talking, writing - both the various waste products and writing and the waste from the body - gases, is air, energy in the form and the sense perception, image sensations and other symbols.

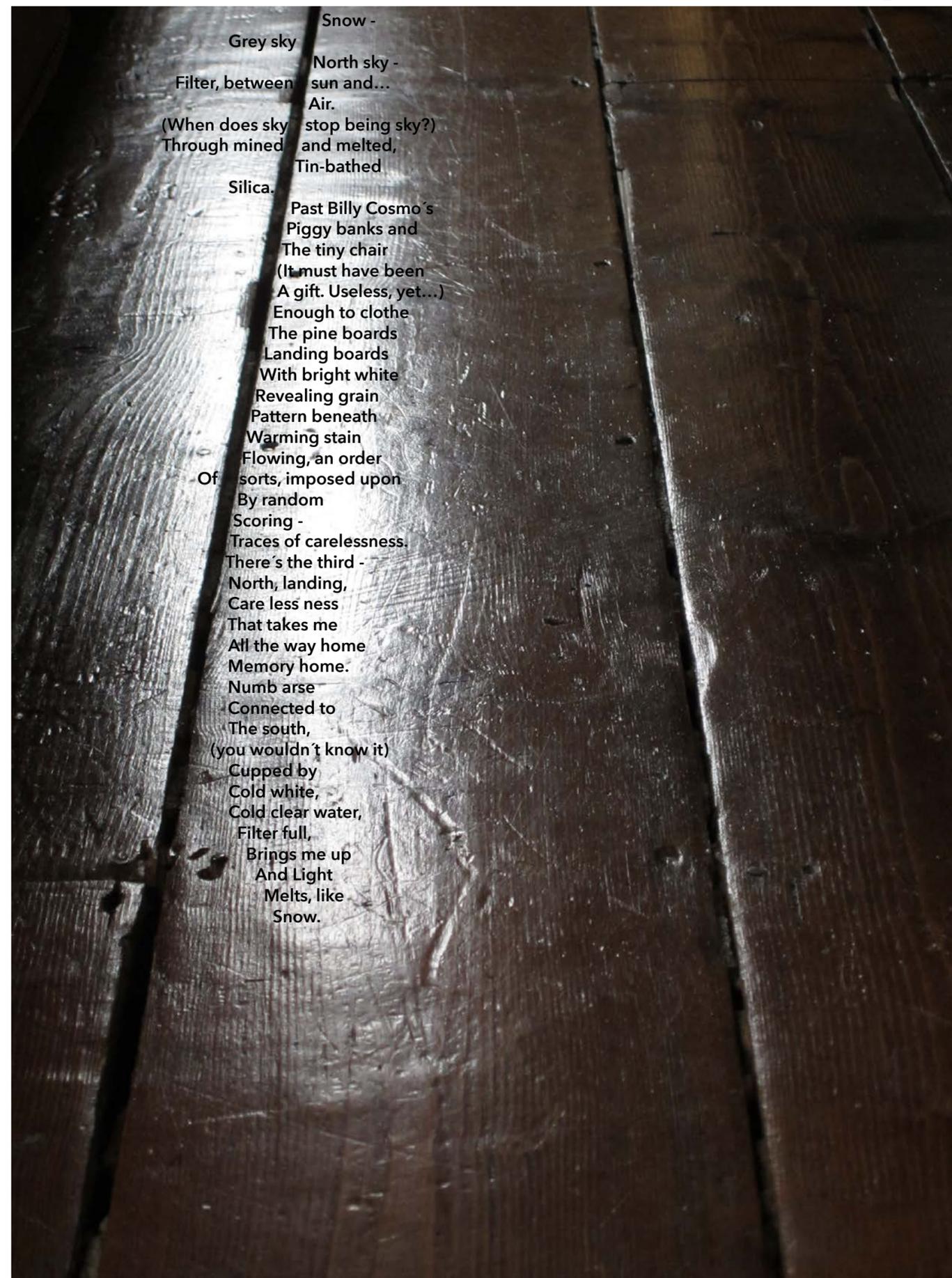


The physical materials and manufacture and facilitation of moving have a complex, multi-input and output. Processes involved are input. Travel is also in a not making or touching, but it produces both bodily waste and, if mechanised, fuel waste. Money is neither wholly an input nor an output, but a by-product of both. Time is not money.

ing, touching, talking, words and numbers. Also, associated with making products that come directly from the body - liquids and solids. Input of heat, light and food (including words, touch and sound sensation).

energy used for the manufacturing, making and writing-level relationship with money and the processes and a special kind of output / category of its own - it is but it might be supplementary to both and it produces both bodily waste and, if mechanised, fuel waste. Money is neither wholly an input nor an output, but a by-product of both. Time is not money.

▲ Thonet chair: Ashley Down living room



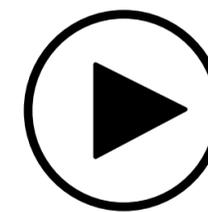
Grey sky
Filter, between
(When does sky
Through mined
Silica.
Past Billy Cosmo's
Piggy banks and
The tiny chair
(It must have been
A gift. Useless, yet...)
Enough to clothe
The pine boards
Landing boards
With bright white
Revealing grain
Pattern beneath
Warming stain
Flowing, an order
Of sorts, imposed upon
By random
Scoring -
Traces of carelessness.
There's the third -
North, landing,
Careless
That takes me
All the way home
Memory home.
Numb arse
Connected to
The south,
(you wouldn't know it)
Cupped by
Cold white,
Cold clear water,
Filter full,
Brings me up
And Light
Melts, like
Snow.



47



48



Video_2_Exp21



13.5

Play with measurements: *reacquaint* yourself with **feet** and **leagues** (if only to make it easier to read **Stendhal**, **Dumas** or Jules **Verne**); **try and** *get once* and for all a clear idea of what a nautical **mile is** (and **BY** the same token, a knot); **REMEMBER THAT** A journal is a unit of *SPACE*, it's the **surface area** a **FARM** labourer can work in a **day**.

Georges Perec ¹

¹ *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces* (London: Penguin, 2008 [first pub. 1974]), p. 85.

Experiment 21

Double size copy, in white porcelain, of small, black glass, cast bottle - probably made in Europe and used as a promotional / tourist spirit miniature. The form is of a tribal sculpture, possibly inspired by Bembe peoples of Central Africa - a culturally dubious, colonial artefact. The original for the glass mould was probably modelled in wax.

Research journal

Thursday 22 March 2012

Mute, dumb, passive. Sticky formlessness. I know what Chillida meant, when he said,

This material, so bland, so... awww...²

No purchase, until he had a block to interrogate.

Starting from nothing, you are in the company of material without form, unless, of course, you work on a lump. It has no starting point, unlike a block of stone, a balk of timber, a found object. When modelling clay, you start from nowhere. Pure material meets process and intention. Even coiling, slabbing, throwing have part-to-whole logic, or a friendly machine that is not available to the modeller.

If you are copying, of course, you have a starting point extrinsic to the material. The tyranny of the task - you can't play with the material, as you need to bend it to your will, to the will of the original. The copying process foregrounds the complexity and subtlety of form and the idea that material demands form. But, of course, they can't be separated. What qualifies as material and what form? Object Oriented Ontology opposes the notion of 'pure' matter. Objects (the term includes what were previously thought of as subjects) are real in themselves, have interactions with one another outside the boundaries of human thought and are also largely 'withdrawn' from one another - breaking them down into smaller parts, or matter, does not render them any less

² Eduardo Chillida in *Chillida* [on VHS], dir. by Lawrence Boulting (Phaidon Video, London: Phaidon), 1996.

withdrawn.³

The more you look, the more you see, the more you see that the copy is not identical. The form unfolds over time – the making reveals the form being copied, as if, on each successive day, you are using a slightly more powerful magnifying glass. Or, rather, a lens that is increasingly well focused.

One reason why it is so difficult to write about making is that thoughts become non-linear, unfocused. Maybe this is part of the joy of making – the mind becomes unfocused and relaxed – fluid. Thoughts flow freely – all kinds of different thoughts, about the task in hand, about the wider life of the object and about unrelated things. Thoughts generated by the environment, by memory, the everyday – things that need to be done. Making can happen while thinking about other things. There are certain stages when full concentration is needed and there are times when no thoughts are present, I think.

Wednesday 28 March 2012

Measurement. I don't like measuring. I force myself to stop working by eye and by hand to make measurements. The ruler is the ego, the hand the id.

Richard Wentworth – how much he hates tape measures, people trying to find the centre of the wall with a tape – what's wrong with the eye? Or a broom, or a bit of paper?⁴

Working by eye and hand. Sometimes I look at the original, often

3 Morton, 'Here Comes Everything', pp. 2-3 & 17-27

4 In conversation with Richard Slee at his exhibition *Camp Futility*, Studio Voltaire 02.05.12

not. I prefer not to look at the original. It makes the task feel like work. (What would I produce if I didn't look at the original at all?) After what is probably about thirty hours of making, I know what some areas look like. My capacity to see it wrong, however, is a constant source of wonder.

I castigate myself for focusing on surface – modelling, refining surface. I think because this is the bit that I enjoy (I was brought up in Presbyterian Belfast). But there is no other way – it is a constant process of to and fro – refinement through addition and subtraction. You can't see what you have until the surface has a level of refinement. It isn't a copy until there is an equivalence of surface quality.

I 'feel' the look as well as trying to directly translate what my eye sees – information is received through the hand.

Hand ↔ Tool ↔ Object

The object changes (consistency of clay / new, added areas / older drier areas); the tool is changed from time to time; Does the hand change?

The hand adapts – I constantly adjust pressure and stroke length and sometimes stroke speed. Tool selection depends on the fit between modelling task and the shape of the tool; also on the wetness of the clay and the tooth of the tool – tooth size, depth and sharpness.

I am aware that having chosen to coil and then model, I am in danger of removing too much in certain areas and exposing joints which will crack during drying / firing. I have decided to ignore

/ accept this – it is part of the process.

I haven't logged hours spent accurately. I think I am around the thirty-hour mark, but it could be more. The total time might be between fifty and one hundred hours. Not much less than the Guanyin copy I made a few years ago. There is a nagging sense that there is a reasonable amount of time for the completion of a task of this nature. There is an anxiety about taking too long. I think that this might be a common attitude – MA students in the department are criticised for producing too slowly. My studio colleagues make comments on my progress – usually positive, about the changes they perceive, but also puzzled, or mildly teasing about the amount of time being expended. Speed and efficiency are prized, and while they appreciate that my purpose is different, it goes against the grain of training.

I work all over the piece – the surface is a whole – a living, changing skin. I turn the wheel and move around it. Every area is defined by the area next to it and by the whole (Part to whole relationships, again).

Porcelain is forgiving – it seems to be possible to rehydrate it indefinitely. As a primary clay, it is found at the site of its formation, which means that it contains fewer small particles than sedimentary clays. Large particles mean less water and less sliding about, which makes the body un-plastic, or 'short'. The pay-off is that, once dry, it is more amenable to re-admitting the wet. It has a sunnier, more open nature.

There is a temporal element connected to the evaporation of free water in the clay – as it dries, the way the clay is moved and removed changes. The drier the surface, the more integrity it

has, the more the tool skims over the surface. Less material is removed. The tool is also angled to remove less material. A fine tooth is better for drier clay. Wetter clay is more plastic and easier to move around, but it resists detail and finish, precisely because of that fact.

As the surface dries the light becomes less forgiving (of the maker, rather than the clay). Somehow, wet clay absorbs light, looking soft and rich, no matter what colour. As it dries, the light becomes less friendly, revealing lumps and hollows, roughness and unresolved areas. This may also be partially a function of accumulated looking.

When you get to a certain stage of finish, form and surface take on their own logic. You don't have to look at the original to know how to proceed. At this stage, you meet the maker of the original – you are connected, transhistorically, not through the object, but through the making process.

Thursday 7 June 2012

If I take a lot of care (and time) over making something very ordinary, something quiet that does not advertise its sensuality, will I draw closer attention to the materials, the bodily engagement with materials, the post-body production processes? Perhaps, though maybe I will only succeed in producing a work that needs to be accompanied by a text. So could I make the text integral to the object? Or does this become irritatingly tricky?

The form arises from a struggle with the material. This sounds like a cliché, but it contains truth. A process such as throwing or turning, while difficult to master, creates a marriage between

machine, hand-tool and material. There is a form of logic to the production, a template. Even the techniques of slabbing and coiling, while more free-form, suggest paths that hand and material might take. The modeller, however, is alone with a lump that doesn't want to do anything at all – certainly not go where the maker wants. The clay will usually be too wet to resist the tool, or too dry to be easily repositioned. There are techniques, of course, that can be employed.

Thursday 14 June

The making has been very sporadic, with other things taking precedence. This hasn't helped the writing, but there is also something about the nature of the task that promotes silence. The concentration required and the repetition. I have reached the top and am now revisiting some of the lower areas that are still not right. It prompts thoughts of whether or not it is necessary to get it right – to finish it. How long might it take to get it right and what does right mean? You could go on forever. I work with a sort of default position that I can make it *look* like the original, to the casual observer, but to make it exactly the same is almost impossible.⁵ Though there are points when I have

⁵ Nature had once produced an Englishman whose domed head had been a hive of words; a man who had only to breathe on any particle of his stupendous vocabulary to have that particle live and expand and throw out tremulous tentacles until it became a complex image with a pulsing brain and correlated limbs. Three centuries later, another man, in another country, was trying to render these rhythms and metaphors in a different tongue. This process entailed a prodigious amount of labour, for the necessity of which no real reason could be given. It was as if someone, having seen a certain oak tree (further called individual T) growing in a certain land and casting its own unique shadow on the green and brown ground, had proceeded to erect in his garden a prodigiously intricate piece of machinery which in itself was as unlike that or any other tree as the translator's inspiration and language were unlike those of the original author, but which, by means of ingenious combinations of parts, light effects, breeze-engendering engines, would, when completed, cast a shadow exactly similar to that of Individual T – the same outline, changing in the same manner, with the same double and single spots of sun rippling in the same position, at the same hour of the day. From a practical point of view, such a waste of time and material (those headaches, those midnight triumphs that turn out to be disasters in the sober light of the morning!) was almost criminally absurd, since the greatest masterpiece of imitation presupposed a voluntary limitation of thought, in submission to another man's genius.

Vladimir Nabokov, *Bend Sinister* (London: Corgi, 1962), p. 114.

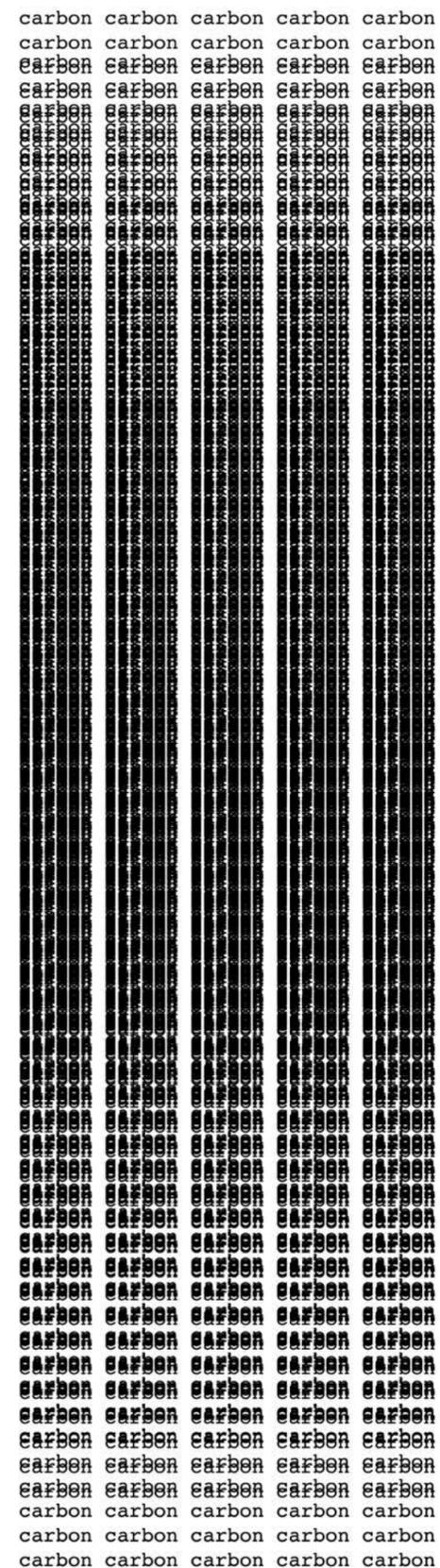
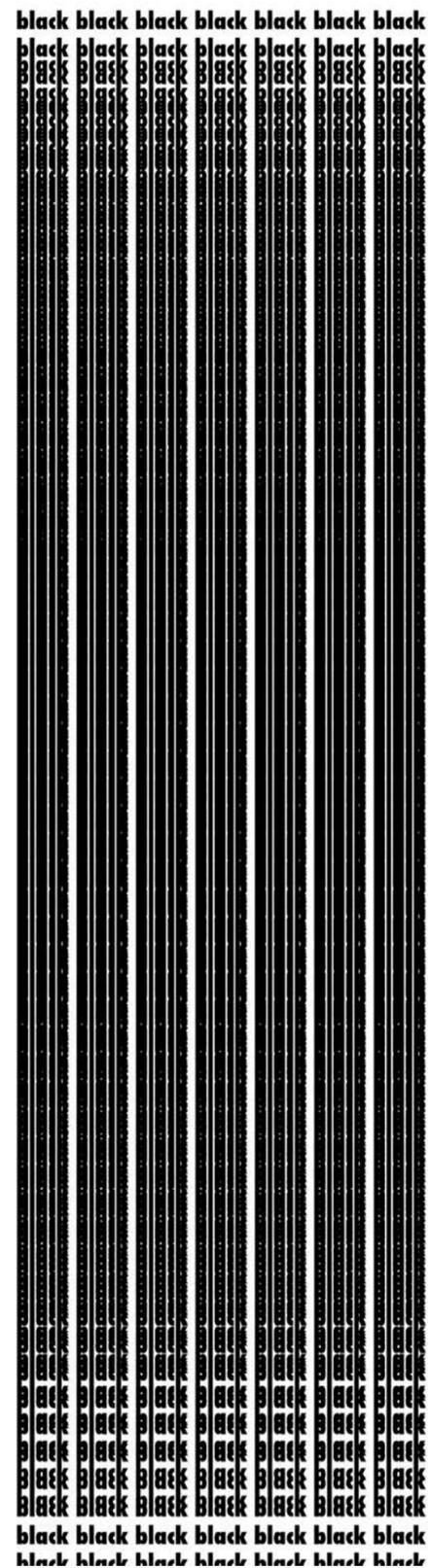
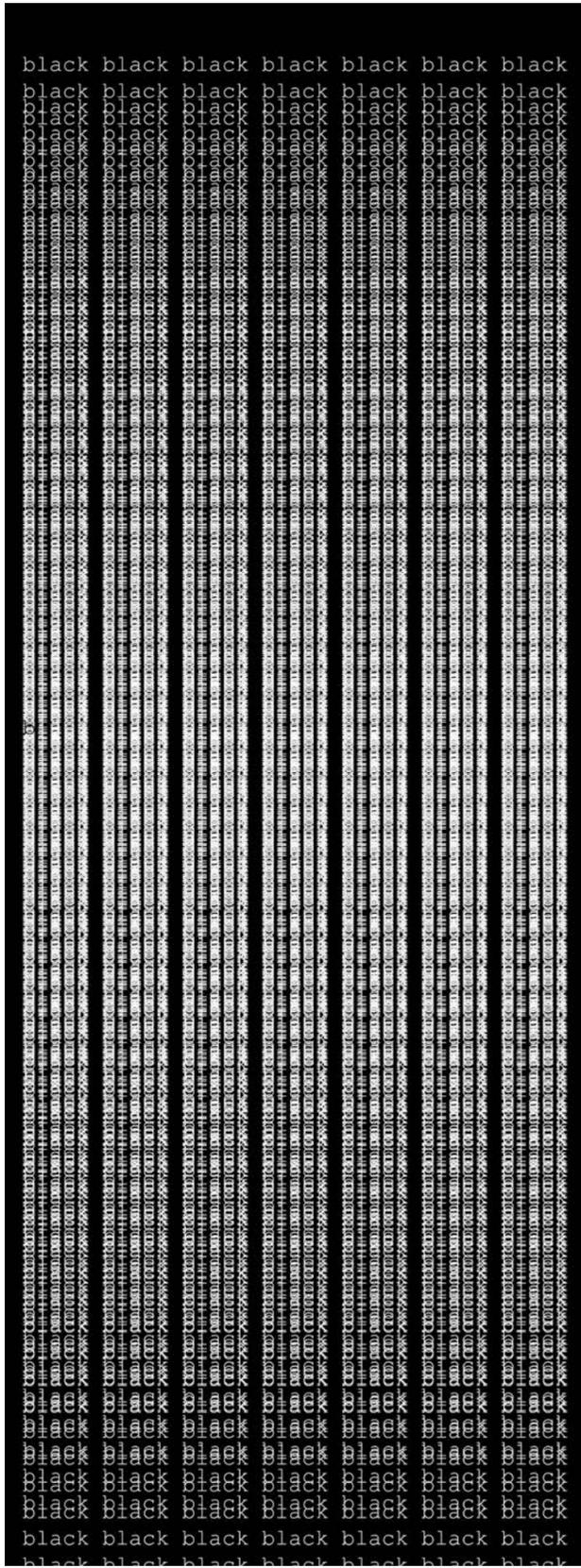
a powerful sense of planes relating to each other in precisely the right way. There is a little thrill of wrong, wrong, add, subtract, wrong, add, bloody hell, it's right! It hangs between too little and too much. It can only be as it is. Removal or addition would be egregious, a crime, a sacrilege. The key fits the lock. Until the divine locksmith (light) changes the rules. Not just light, perception too. The locksmith is a confluence of light and body. And form, of course.

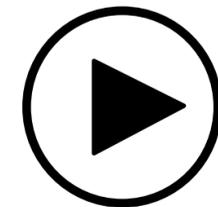
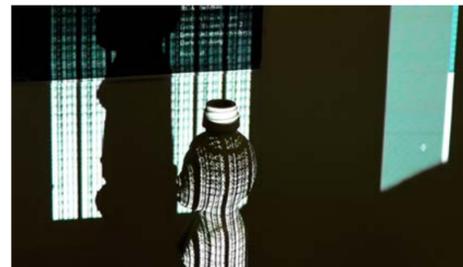
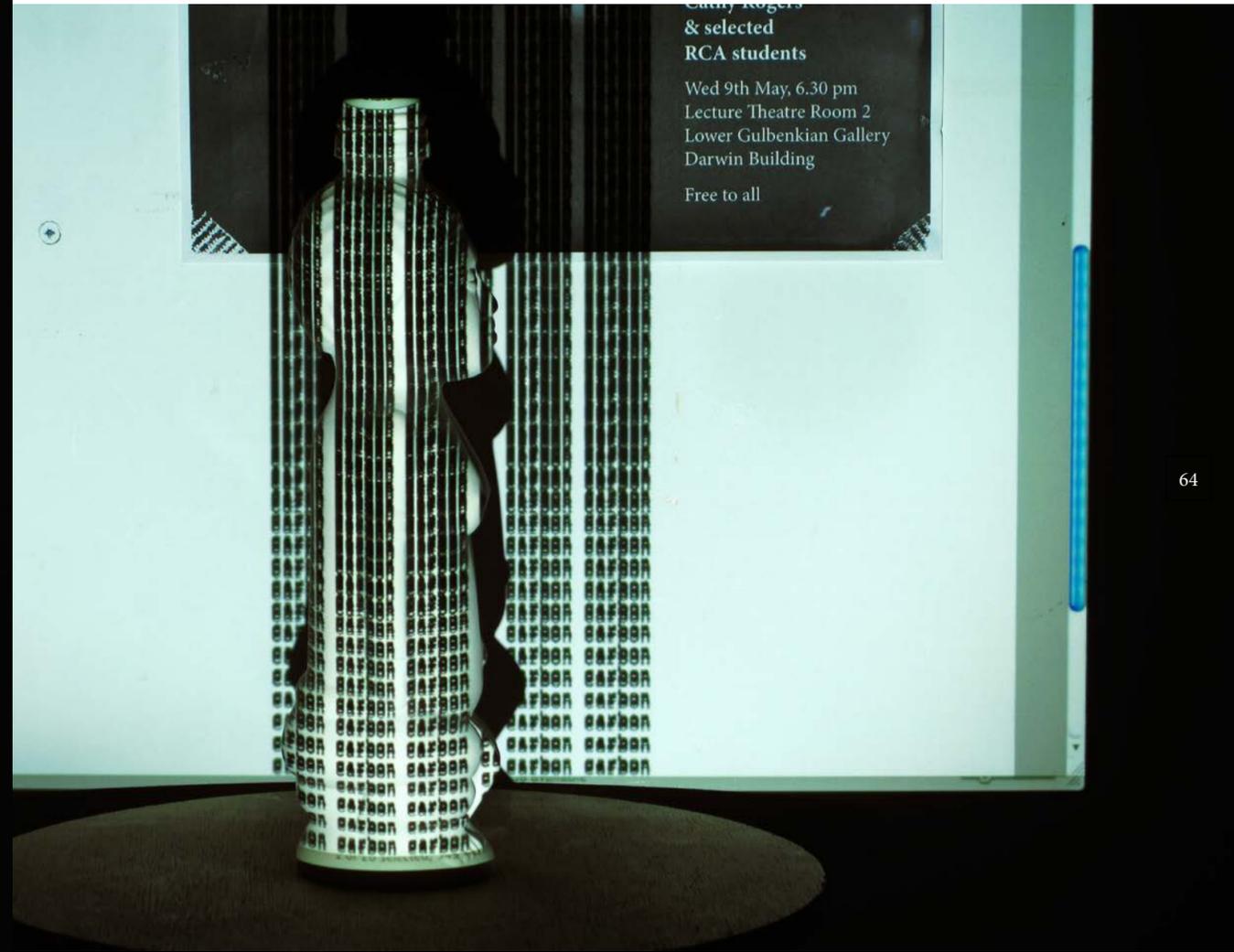
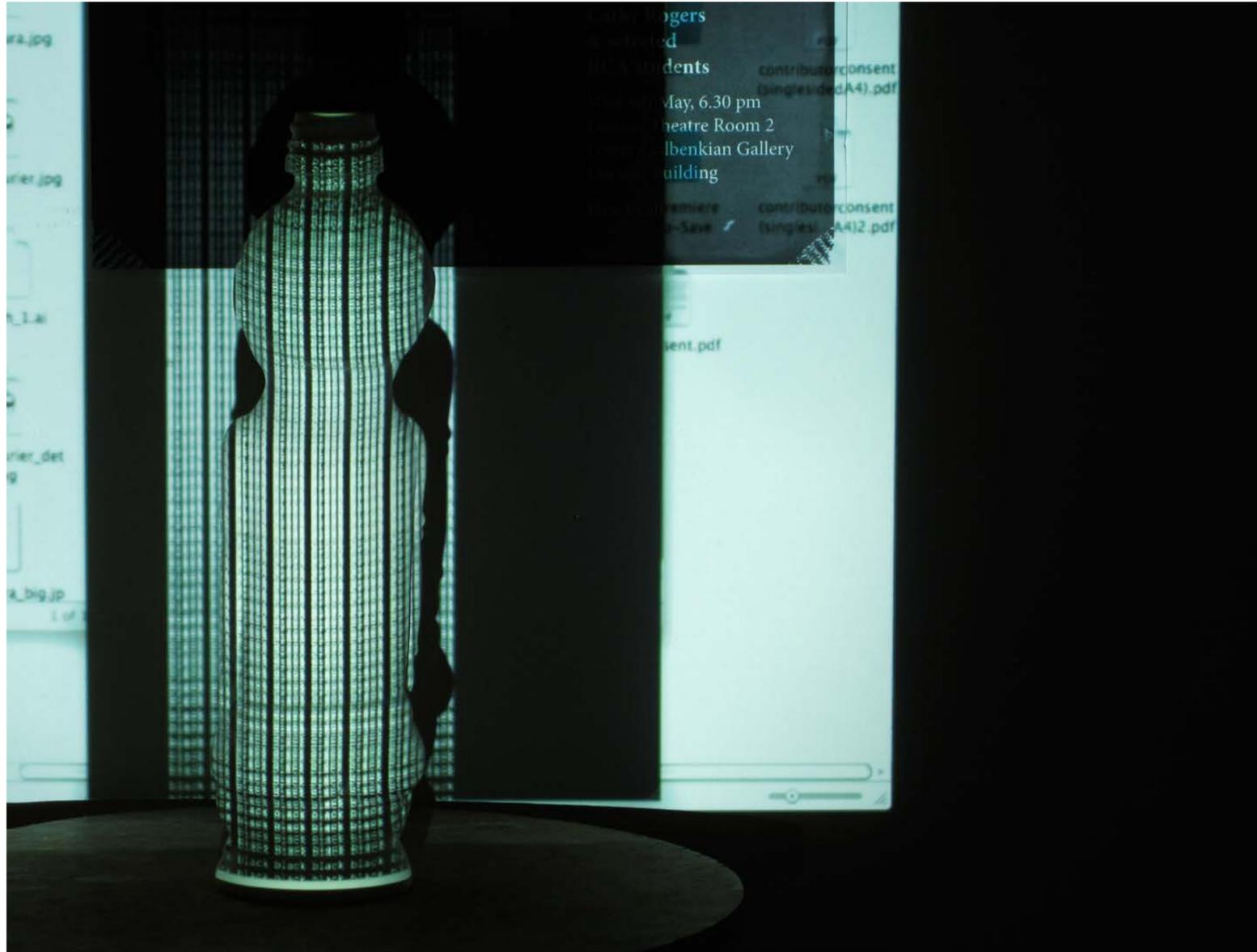
When I add to an area that has a finished surface, it has to be slipped and scored and everything goes. All that lost form. It's a crime, a crying shame.

We are fascinated by our own ability to transform things, including ourselves, through imitation, yet we forget that such processes of mimetic transformation are continually and universally operative, rather than occurring only when we "make a copy" or consciously imitate something.⁶

⁶ Marcus Boon, *In Praise of Copying* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), pp. 79-80.







Video_3_Exp21_projection



Tan gravel
 Square sea
 Delimiting London
 Plane.

Rolling
 whale-back
 Fixed, exposed
 Delicate
 Duck-egg
 Green.

A shell, a spell
 A conduit
 Conveying
 Stuff unseen.

Jerwood Makers Open. Jerwood Space, London, Summer 2012
Louis Thompson: *Hive*

Don't read the label. Just look. Just feel. Seven wobbly glass turds, each big enough to embrace. Solidified flow. Light benders, light reflectors. As you move, everything changes. I gather to myself the floor (brownblack brick), the white table on which we sit, white walls, skylights, roof beams and spots. Things known as sculpture. The other in my space. I ingest and regurgitate you, steal your waves and fuck them up, all for the delight of my acolytes. And where might they be? I trace a delicate frill, a ruff, a hem... Not lace, but Miyake folds, the finest pastry, lusciously transparent. Light and shade folded into each other - not kneaded, but joined, conjoined, precisely_in_love. I suck the dark up off the floor and wrap it around rings of white, penumbrated, yellow, orange, blue. Everything changes as you move. I spy coils of intestine at the bottom of the fattest - a long, fat, tape-worm, nestling next to a rainbow. It must be a reflection of the top the tip the a_nus blip, where still-soft, warm glass disengaged from steel rod that

mirrors my hot lips, the o of my mouth

a tube with a space hanging off either end. A transferal of life from one to other. Soft valve releasing space into the wild. Transformation, transubstantiation. The changing of one into another. Mmm, a temporary animation that cools and fixes and lives again, between water and light. A wall that gives a glimpse through the veil; this world and that world. They work so well because they are so simple in conception and so complex in actuality. Springing from a way of making. You sense that they could only be made by someone with skill developed through long experience, though there is freedom, risk, in the execution. Bold. Embodied knowledge couples with energy and ambition, the maker passing agency to the materials, which become the true transubstantiators. Floor, ceiling, walls transform into molten, multi-coloured glass, fixed flow. Limpid, livid. Streaming, static, at the speed of light. There is only me. And the other objects, of course - captured, defeated and sacrificed. On the altar of the Idea. You almost expect those in rooms adjacent to be sucked into the white hole of Hive... But they are not and, unfortunately, are the weaker for it, struggling under the burden of that cumbersome concept. Well executed, but not b_b_buzzing.



Louis Thompson: 'Hive' (details): July 2012



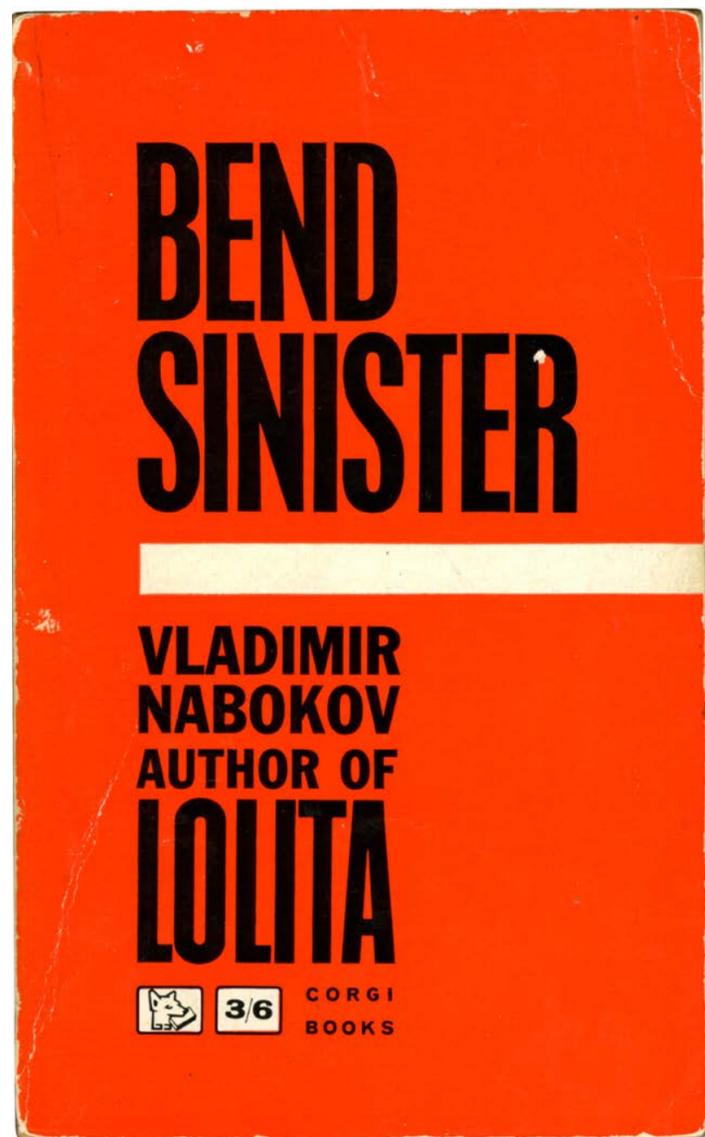
Haworth, West Yorkshire to Wuthering Heights:

Friday, 27 July 2012, 12:18

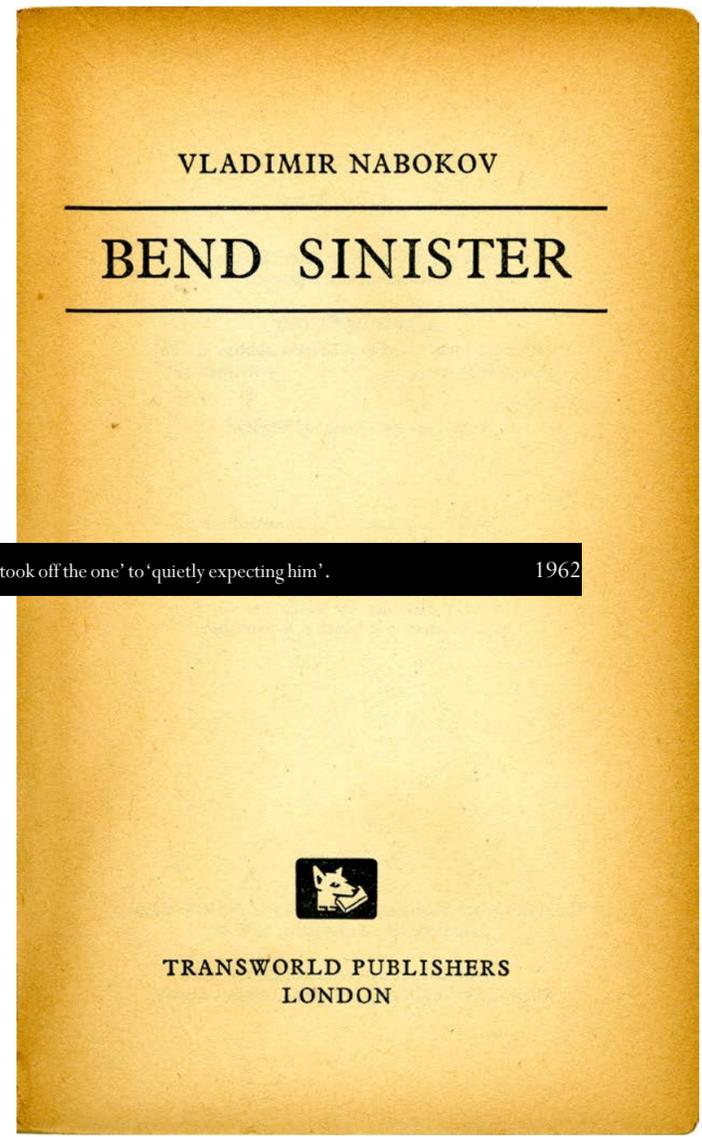


Belfast International, Aldergrove to Bristol:

Friday, 10 August 2012, 21:14



'He took off the one' to 'quietly expecting him'. 1962



PORCHED, on the threshold, Macliam strove to identify his front door key, unbathed as it was by the light that refused to emanate from above, whichever way he had arranged the coded coppers. An internal reflection on arrangement caused pause to consider the efficacy of referring to himself in the third person, but he concluded, perhaps unwisely, that more pressing, more physical failings might be permitted to shoulder themselves to the front of his queue.¹ Not least the eyesight, which deteriorated at a rate that seemed, if not unfair, then certainly uncaring and was inadequately assisted by a pair of spectacles, overdue for replacement. Like a lot of things around here. The very timbers that hung between out and in, for instance, while dressed in a tasteful tone of purple, exhibited various signals of distinctly unbourgeois distress. Entropy appeared to be fucking agency, as per usual. In this, of all moments, it seemed somehow wrong to identify

¹ What form of communication are we dealing with here? What would the ideal relationship be, between experience and sentence? Should the greater weight lie with the experiencing - the feeling - or the making up? Should the arrangement of the words be ambiguous and beguiling, or direct and truthful? Is the latter even a permissible word in such a communication, or should flags be flown to signal his learning? If the arrangement was in some way lacking, as with the wiring in his dark light, would the reader fail to be communicated with; to be illuminated? And what might the reader be seeking - simplicity, complexity, or perhaps a fresh arrangement of the two. A recognition of their own corporeality in that of the writer - a sharing that creates order that creates meaning? The making up begins, he thought, as soon as the feeling is reflected upon. Reflection begets words. Was he a false witness, never mind an unreliable narrator?



by trial, to risk the steely jar of rejection. He desired the satisfaction of things in their proper place. The correct discernment, by eye (there were only six other keys that it could be, for christ's sake), followed by the little thrill, the ripple of acceptance. Minor entrance effected and poised for the major, that less than gimlet eye was seduced by the small glass, a square balanced, on one of its four, above its station, yet set at a convenient height for the conveyance of information from the interior of the house to the interior of Macliam. His delicate family was clearly visible, arranged like petals around the shining dining table. He took off the one glove he had on, disposed of his overcoat and hung up his wide-brimmed black felt hat. His wide-brimmed black hat, no longer feeling at home, fell off the peg and was left lying there. He walked down the long passage on the walls of which black oil paintings, the overflow from his study, showed nothing but cracks in the blindingly reflected light. A rubber ball the size of a large orange was asleep on the floor. He entered the dining-room. A plate of cold tongue garnished with cucumber slices and the painted cheek of a cheese were quietly expecting him. This isn't your house, said the tongue, with more relish than was strictly necessary... fuck off.



An oblong puddle inset in the coarse asphalt; like a fancy footprint filled to the brim with quicksilver; like a spaulate hole through which you can see the nether sky. Surrounded, I note, by a diffuse tentacled black dampness where some dull dun leaves have stuck. Drowned, I should say, before the puddle had shrunk to its present size.

It lies in shadow but contains a sample of the brightness beyond, where there are trees and two houses. Look closer. Yes, it reflects a portion of pale blue sky – mild infantile shade of blue – taste of milk in my mouth because I had a mug of that colour thirty five years ago. It also reflects a brief tangle of bare twigs and the brown sinus of a stouter limb cut off by its rim and a transverse bright cream-coloured band. You have dropped something, this is yours, creamy house in the sunshine beyond.

When the November wind has its recurrent icy spasm, a rudimentary vortex of ripples creases the brightness of the puddle. Two leaves, two triskelions, like two shuddering three-legged bathers coming at a run for a swim, are borne by their impetus right into the middle where with a sudden slowdown they float quite flat. Twenty minutes past four. View from a hospital window.

November trees, poplars I imagine, two of them growing straight out of the asphalt: all of them in the cold bright sun, bright richly furrowed bark and an intricate sweep of numberless burnished bare twigs, old gold – because getting more of the falsely mellow sun in the higher air. Their immobility is in contrast with the spasmodic ruffling of the inset reflection – for the visible emotion of a tree is the mass of its leaves, and there remain hardly more than thirty-seven or so here and there on one side of the tree. They just flicker a little, of a neutral tint, but burnished by the sun to the same ikontinct as the intricate trillions of twigs. Swooning blue out of the sky crossed by pale motionless superimposed cloud wisps.

An oblong puddle (laser-etched acrylic [Nabokov, Bend Sinister, pp. 7-8]): Wednesday, 27 February 2013 12:36

Ember hesitated, then dialled fluently. The line was engaged. That sequence of small bar-shaped hoots was like the long vertical row of superimposed I's in an index by first lines to a verse anthology. I am a lake.



- I am a tongue.
- I am a spirit.
- I am fevered.
- I am not covetous.
- I am the Dark Cavalier.
- I am the torch.
- I arise.
- I ask.
- I blow.
- I bring.
- I cannot change.
- I cannot look.
- I climb the hill.
- I come.
- I dream.
- I envy.
- I found.
- I heard.
- I intended an ode.
- I know.
- I love.
- I must not grieve, my love.
- I never.
- I pant.
- I remember.
- I saw thee once.
- I travelled.
- I wandered.
- I will.
- I will.
- I will.
- I will.



Century Gothic
Courier
Courier new
Times New Roman
Rockwell
Baskerville
Avenir Book
Gill Sans
Arial
Source code pro
Univers LT Standard
Minion Pro
Futura

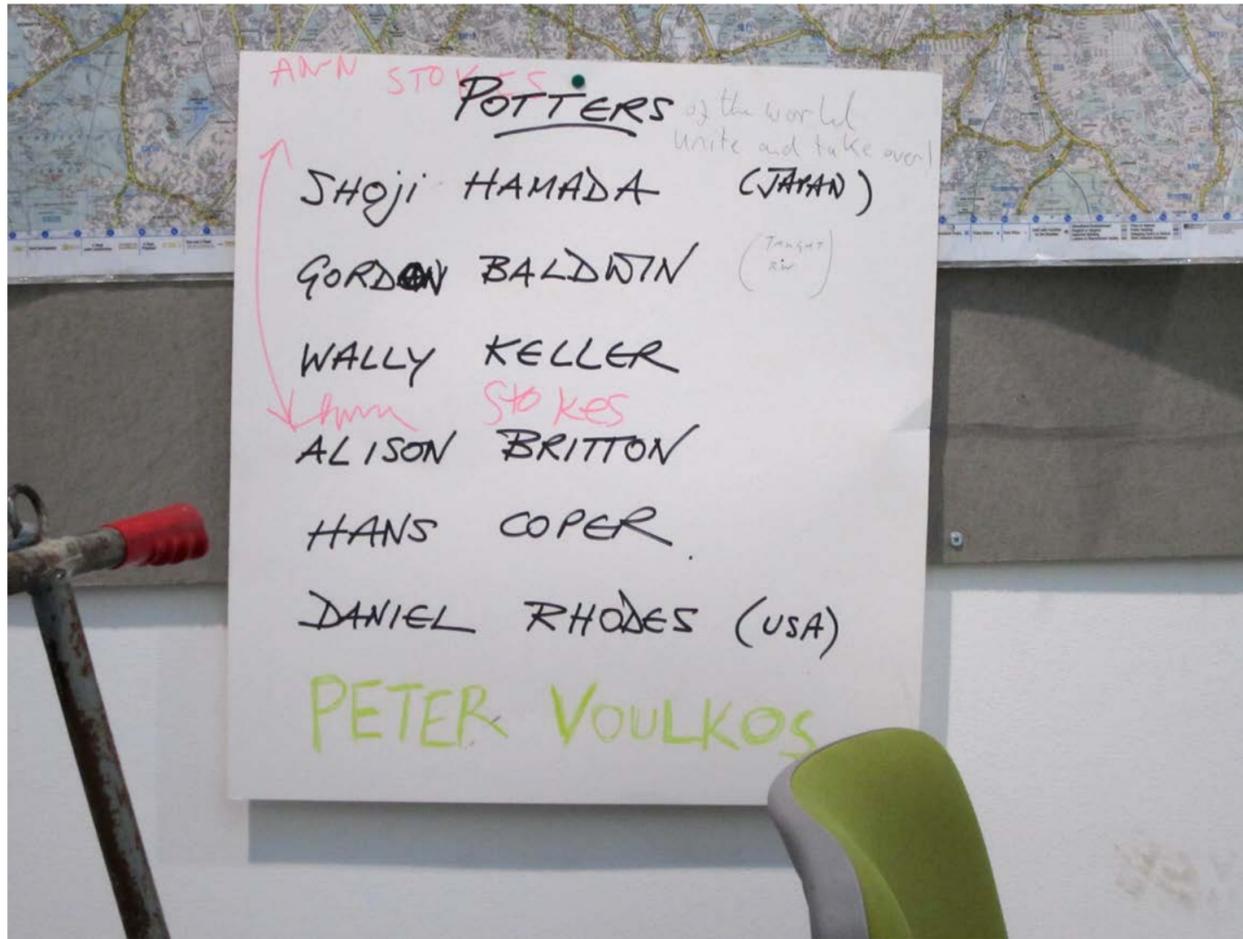
Andale Mono
Calibri
Lucida Sans
Typewriter
Impact
Times
Verdana
Helvetica Neue



Time



Bristol, Temple Meades to London, Paddington: Monday, 22 October 2012 12:38



C&G, Kensington to Sculpture, Battersea:
 Wednesday, 28 November 2012 10:02



Battersea to Colchester Institute:
 Thursday, 20 December 2012 11:48

pull up the blind
let them be seen
in their multitudes

wind-riffled, waiting
on half bare
green-black branch

to patch the cold quilt,
moist skin of
yellow and

dun, a strip of
colour glowing
quietly between

wet asphalt singing
a higher
register,

a thick-lipped hiss
above the
baritone,

and my white
body clothed
in transparency

This wet and fertile
land green too cold, too
blue growing creeping
choking not pleasant,
dreams of the south
coloured warm
veils of various
waters protect and
disappoint in equal
measure.

Crow flows low
over green topside
plated by mercurial sun
dreams of the south
in which we sweat in
doors nothing is certain
but that we will die
yet day after day
presents the same
elaborate hoax.

How should one address
this paradox? An
industrial barn
called Thales that was
not there yesterday
in Bristol clearing
fallen leaves the
dent in the bin that
came unannounced
anger rises out
of nowhere the same
things always the same
confounded expectations.

The pre-Socratic¹ who,
World leading defence and security
moving from myth,
systems
used geometry
A passion for innovation
to calculate the
Providing end-to-end infrastructure
distance of a ship
solutions
from a shore, or
Embedding environmental protection at all levels of
the height of a pyramid
business activity.

¹ Russell (History of Western Philosophy. P. 45) says, 'According to Aristotle, he thought that water is the original substance, out of which all others are formed: and he maintained that the earth rests on water. Aristotle also says of him that he said the magnet has a soul in it, because it moves the iron; further that all things are full of gods.'¹

¹ Burnet (Early Greek Philosophy. P.51) questions this last saying.

m. December 2012 / Home_7 / He was in bed

He was in bed
somehow,
with a stranger.
An older woman, not
unattractive,
but not.

His back
was turned
there was pressure,
a dogged insistence
that became
a finger tip
on his perineum.

It was not right,
but he had been
brought up
to not hurt feelings.

And then it was...
almost right;
finger poised
on rolled
crater lip.

A fat pleasure
mixed with three
thin anxieties -
he didn't fancy her,
he was married and,
as if that wasn't
enough to consider,
he could not recall
whether he'd washed his arse
since it was last used.



2. Any large, plain building in which many people are housed.

n.

1680s, "temporary hut for soldiers during a siege," from French barraque, from Spanish barraca (mid-13c. in Medieval Latin) "soldier's tent," literally "cabin, hut," perhaps from barro "clay, mud," which is probably of Celt-Iberian origin. Meaning "permanent building for housing troops" (usually in plural) is attested from 1690s.

n. 20.12.12 / Home_8 / Great gouts

Great gouts
of jellied stout
snorted from snout
to accommodating stomach.

Just the one
and whatever
evil lurks without
within this cold barrack.

DISRUPTION

RCA Biennial Research Exhibition 2013

Disruption is an exhibition that explores the idea of disruption in art and design practice. It is a student-led show, which draws on a full range of research activity amongst MPhil and PhD candidates across the college.

Each exhibitor has created a display, or event, in response to the idea of disruption. The multi-form implementations of the idea invite us to consider how the research process usefully disturbs the foundations of practice, either within the Researcher's own studio, or in a wider domain, to fruitfully irritate the contemporary context. This profusion of activities related to the notion of disruption, also foregrounds the idea that diligent research is one in which processes are not aligned on results and allows us to think about the logic of the research process itself.

Nils Jean

Conor

Curation is a form of communication involving selection, editing, display and interpretation. Its tools are objects, words and space. As a maker who is interested in the ways that objects and words both reveal and conceal each other, I am keen to learn about, contribute to and disrupt Amanda's role as curator. As a starting point for this process, I invite Amanda to disrupt my process by selecting an object for me to copy and instruct me on how it should be done; and, subsequently, to attempt to display and interpret the results.

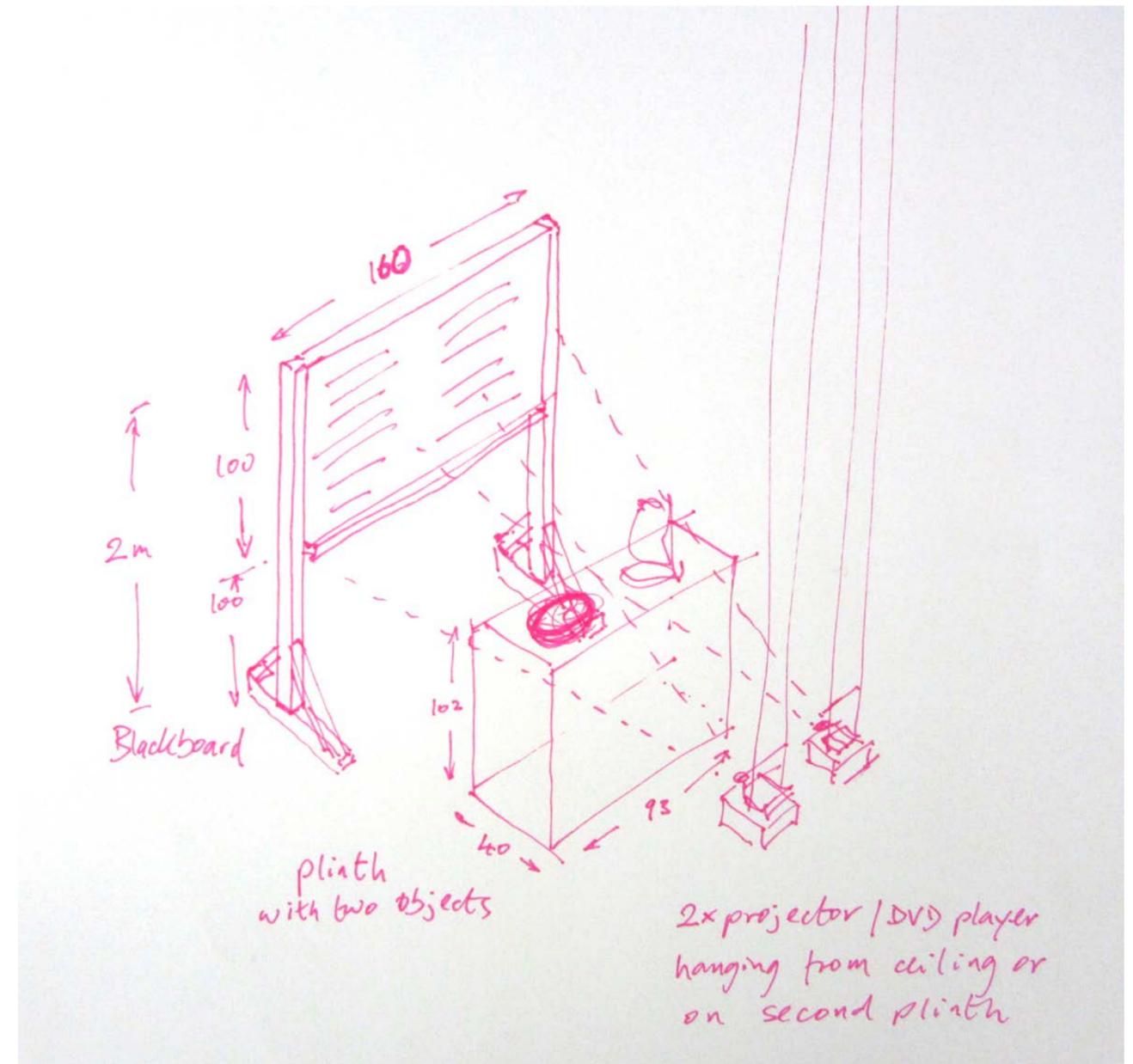
Amanda

Making is a form of communication involving selection, display and interpretation - of materials, processes, ideas. Its roots are both in other objects and words. As a curator/writer who is interested in the ways that certain physical objects and words create imaginative spaces to enable looking and thinking, I am keen to learn about, contribute to and disrupt Conor's role as a maker. As a starting point for this process, I invite Conor to disrupt my process by inviting me to re-configure an existing object in verbal form and, subsequently, to participate in the re-making of the object.

Amanda Game & Conor Wilson

DISRUPTION / RCA Research Biennial

Diagram of proposed installation



Notes

The blackboard is the widest part of the installation, at 1.6m

The length is approximately 2.5m

The audience and the exhibitors can write (and rub out) text on the blackboard for the duration of the show.

The original object and the 'copied' object will be shown side by side on one of the 175 plinths.

Projections on to the objects will bleed into the surrounding space, including onto the text on the blackboard. Content will be a mix of moving image, spoken word and text.

I forgot to include loudspeakers in the diagram.

AV could be on a second plinth, or objects and projectors could be placed on one large 175 plinth.

Disruption email_1: Re: words on a pot





Move to Inbox

More

Re: words on a pot

Conor Wilson conor.wilson@network.rca.ac.uk

16 Nov

to Amanda

It's a beautiful poem. And my worst fear!

I am full of uncertainty, so will just be honest.

For the purity of the process, I feel I should take whatever I'm given.

But, I suppose what I anticipated was a detailed description of something quite complex, that would take a lot of interpretation. A reverse Ekphrasis, of sorts.

My weakest skills are throwing and glazing. I have used weak throwing as a contrast to more skilled making, so this shouldn't necessarily be a problem.

I am keen to have at least one object that will more or less work as a screen for a projection.

As I write, possibilities emerge. I would probably have to do some major re-interpretation.

Back to you,

cx

On 16 November 2012 10:27, Amanda Game <amanda.game@network.rca.ac.uk> wrote:

Hi Conor,
 I attach a few words on a pot. Let me know your thoughts.
 See you Tuesday.
 x Amanda





Move to Inbox

More

BBC Sport - Sport - Britton targeting Arsenal scalp - 4 hours ago

ash/bowl poem

Conor Wilson conor.wilson@network.rca.ac.uk

18 Nov (12 days ago)

to Amanda

Amanda

Your words have been percolating and I feel clearer and more confident now about how I might respond. I obviously had an expectation that was confounded. How often that happens in life. The way we deal with these things says so much about us...

Is your poem a response, in part, to my bathroom window piece? The ash and window suggest as much. There is much for me to play with - I will just translate in a different way than I had planned. (Ha ha! - the dreaded pre-planning). Your use of words is spare and full of image and emotion.

cx

Click here to Reply or Forward

Disruption email_2: ash/bowl poem

Shaping space

A lip, a rim
 Thick, cut clay
 A bowl, a foot
 Handthrown, altered
 The size of two hands
 Cupped, slightly parted

A container, useful
 Thick walled
 Dun toned
 Is that all?

It sat on a windowledge
 In that white room
 Of hard surfaces
 Scrubbed free
 Of the traces of life

Through the window a tree
 An ash, black budded
 Moving in the air
 Outside the window

There was a relationship.
 Inside the bowl
 Deep green glowing
 The gift of ash
 Reflected in its branches

In your eyes
 They became two living things
 The tree, the bowl
 In that white room
 It shaped a space for you.
 practical thing.

Amanda Game



white room
 glowing green
 thick lip
 parted gift
 black bowl
 walled in a tree
 hard eyes
 reflected,
 slightly
 practical.
 cut ash
 moving air
 dun things
 budded deep
 foot clay
 relationship,
 inside
 that ash white room.

Video_4_Disruption_Ash



Wood or vegetable ashes have been used as glaze materials since antiquity, and they may lend a quality to glazes which it is difficult to obtain with other materials. The discovery of ash as a glaze material undoubtedly came about when the early Chinese potters noted that the ware in their open-fired, wood-burning kilns was being partially glazed by the ashes which were carried through the kiln by the draft. Some of the old pre-Han Dynasty stoneware pots show a partial glaze on one side or on the shoulder where a film of ash from the fire landed on the ware and formed a thin coating of glaze. Some of the earliest glazes made in China were probably combinations of ash from the fires of the kilns together with some red clay, and very practical high-temperature glazes can be made from ash, feldspar, limestone, and clay...

As a start in working out ash glazes, a simple combination of two parts of ash, two parts of feldspar, and one part of clay may be tried... Ash glazes will need high firing to fuse, and cone 8 to cone 11 is the usual temperature range.

Daniel Rhodes, *Clay and Glazes for the Potter*, London: A&C Black, 1973

Glaze	Recipe (Kevin de Choisy)	Ash					
Wood	ash	40	8	lbs	seasoned	wood	
Potash	feldspar	40	6.5	lbs	fresh	wood	
China	clay	20					
		Total:	14.5	lbs	/	6.5	kg
			Y	i	e	l	d
			s	:			
		90g				charcoal	
		90g			wood	ash	

06.01.13

Conor Wilson / email to Jamie Wilkes cc Amanda Game

For me, the notion of risk is very much built into the project, as there is no single, clear or controllable outcome. We are trying to produce something that has a presence as a 'gallery object', but also reflects the experimental nature of research. I have not showed work in this way before and there is an underlying anxiety that an interesting process might result in a weak exhibit.

Also, as a collaboration, there is the potential for misunderstanding and conflict. At the start of the process, I talked about disrupting Amanda's process as a curator, in response to the theme of the show. This is easy to say, but hard to achieve, when progress, to a large extent, depends on consensus. We came up with a physical structure for the display through a series of stimulating, consensual dialogues, but my early ideas about disruption changed, along with other plans, when the text I received from Amanda was not at all what I had expected. My response to a very personal poem, with a thrown bowl at its centre, was to remove my own making skills (which don't include throwing) from the picture and to make a series of short videos of throwers teaching me to centre a lump of clay on the wheel; and in so doing, attempting to translate embodied knowledge into words.

I've been writing about and making images of the large ash tree in the lane at the back of our house in Bristol for a while. Amanda's poem mixes the images of an ash tree and an ash glazed interior, so, during the Christmas break, I decided to make (and video document the process) a glaze from a self-set sapling, growing outside my studio. I also shot footage of the parent tree. The plan – still fluid at present – is to produce a video loop from this 'ash footage' and the centring footage, to be projected onto a large cylinder-bowl, made as a receptacle for burning the ash logs. This was made by coiling – a slower, though also circular, process that involves a lot less risk, for me, than throwing.

Amanda's bowl becomes a still point in a mesh of shared interests in place (our own sense of place), spaces, objects and hand work.

I fired the receptacle over the last few days and loaded it with ash logs this morning (Sunday) - 6.5kg, which might produce something like 200g of ash. You are supposed to build a little brick stove to do this, but I didn't have time, so used my electric kiln. At about 12.00pm and 300°C, large amounts of smoke started to pour out of the studio windows and various gaps, creating some consternation among the tennis players on the courts next to the lane at the back of our house. I told them that everything was under control and went back into the house, but ten minutes later my son told me that there was a man at the back window. I went out, still in my dressing gown, to find the garden gate flapping and three firemen emerging from the smoky studio. An unexpected play on risk and disruption.

AV and objects are on different plinths – the AV will actually be on a shelf-plinth, hanging from the ceiling, so will swing if nudged. Amanda will project footage of herself reading a self-composed text onto her object (which I only know through the poem) and I will project onto mine. The two soundtracks will be shared between two speakers.

Although we have a useful structure and work progresses, I have felt uncertain about my part in the project for some time. It is easy to valorise uncertainty in a theoretical sense, less easy to exist in it. In a world that demands meaning it is difficult to exist in meaninglessness. On the one hand there is Keats's Negative Capability, on the other, a fug of misunderstanding. The fear of not knowing what you are doing, of not being able to explain what you are doing, or not being able to make what you are doing seem relevant, worthy of attention.

For me, the blackboard question is still open. Since beginning making, I have consciously kept my voice quiet, though words are, in a sense, the focus of my research process. I have ideas for writing on the blackboard, but I want to keep things fluid – respond to the piece, to Amanda and to the audience, during the exhibition.



97

98

..And in the face of the confusion of different possibilities and opinions, a kind of pragmatic professionalism takes over. 'We must work with what we have got and arrive at a professional solution.' Useful for getting decisions made, but it leads us back to the expected. I understand it because I have the same tendency myself. I can imagine a similar psychology in play during the curation of the RCA 175 Exhibition - the very form of 'getting it right' that we are trying to avoid, that we consider to be 'wrong'. Somehow, in the face of the frustration of long, seemingly decisionless meetings, in the face of the anxiety of running out of time and of being involved in a shambles and having some of the sham stick, we have to be brave enough to run the risk of getting it wrong. Or to allow wrong to flourish in the right way. We think that if we have the structure right, then wrong can come in and fuck about within that structure. I don't think it works that way - the structure has a way of imposing itself on the whole experience. The exhibition is an object. The space is not a neutral container in which the work is shown. What makes a good exhibition? Good work, thought provoking juxtapositions, clever use of space and light, a sense of a presiding theme? An object that says something about now. In a world where opinion is to be avoided, yet, in a sense, is all there is, we struggle to find a balance between the development of a deep knowledge of a subject and the development of the ability to project that knowledge into the world. The difficulty is that you have to do both at the same time..

Translation: Object/Text/Object

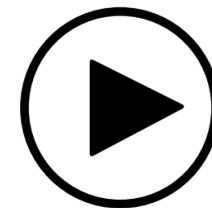
A curator selects an object and produces a text with that object at its centre. An artist is sent the text and tasked to translate it back into three dimensional form. The labour involved is documented through video and audio and made present at the exhibition site; it competes for aural and visual space with a video produced by the curator, exploring a relationship with objects and space through language. The original object, the curator's text and the artist's object are displayed side by side. Artist and curator, neither of who has full knowledge of all that will be exhibited, respond to audience critique and the physicality of the gathered 'objects' through writing in/on the exhibition site.

Translation: Object/Text/Object is an open-ended conversation between artist Conor Wilson and curator Amanda Game which draws together poetry, pottery, moving image, sound, spoken word, printed text and handwritten inscriptions to draw attention to the layers of communication present in the relationships between text and object in physical exhibition spaces. Translation explores the material dynamics of different forms of language and image and considers the value of embodied thinking and tacit knowledge as an animating presence in the curation and production of exhibitions. The work brings together two different research agendas, in response to an exhibition theme, in an attempt to begin the mapping of a new region that lies between the academy and the gallery, between research and practice.

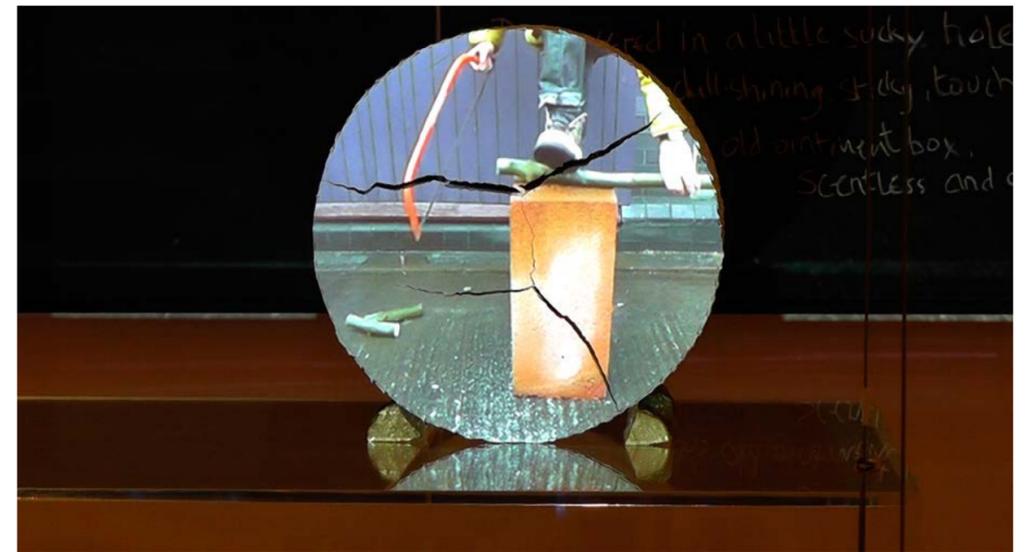
Conor Wilson
School of Material, Ceramics & Glass
PhD by Project, 3rd year

Amanda Game
School of Humanities, Critical & Historical Studies
MPhil by Thesis, 2nd year

Translation: Object/Text/Object label text



Video_5_Disruption_loop



Translation: Object/Text/Object: RCA Gulbenkian Gallery
(stills from video document of installation)



Video_6_Disruption_crit

Translation: Object/Text/Object: RCA Gulbenkian Gallery
(stills from video document of installation)

RISK ASSESSMENT

(As required by the Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulation 1999)

Name of Work: Translation by A. Game & C. Wilson **Premises:** RCA, Gulbenkian Gallery

Risk Assessor: Jamie Wilkes

Date Completed: 12/01/2013

Team leader signature:.....

Review Date:.....

RISK LEVEL		Low	Medium	High
			X	
RISK	<i>What is the risk?</i> This work presents the following categories of risk: 1. Slips, trips and falls. 2. Overcrowding. 3. Structural collapse / falls from heights.			
WHO	<i>Who is at risk?</i> All (makers, curators, visitors, reviewers).			
HAZARD	<i>Why?</i> 1. Slips, trips and falls: – Presence of time-based media (slippage between past, present etc.). – Ash (<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>) and ash (combustion residue) placed in close semantic proximity. – Film loops. 2. Overcrowding: – Projection onto non-standard surfaces (e.g. pooling / spotting > variable reflectivity; thumb-marks > variable curvature). – Ceramics (coil-built), ceramics (thrown), curation, filmmaking, performance, writing, promiscuously mixed. 3. Structural collapse / falls from heights: – Hanging AV platform might drop to floor (metal fatigue, sabotage etc.), its cables snaking horrifically round necks and arms of innocents. Dread tableau giving rise to Laocoön Syndrome in witnesses etc. – Visual inspection and interview reveals hinge connecting process / experimentation to material deliverables is under high pressure and liable to shear stress.			
PATTERNS/ TRIGGERS	<i>History of risk and current frequency. Are there any patterns?</i> 1. CW and AG both expressed specific concerns re. excessive tension applied to connection between research and object production (see above).			

	2. CW and AG refer to risk 'very much built into' the work, and 'high risk [...] imaginative risk' in the project respectively, indicating wilful disregard for basic H&S principle of mitigation rather than indulgence of risk.
RISK MITIGATION	<i>How can the risk be managed or lessened? Any existing controls?</i> 1. All puns/wordplay to be flagged with anticipatory signage. 2. Ensure time-based media adequately anchored to time of creation (use of date stamps or other identifying temporal cues recommended). 3. Use of film loops generally deprecated; if they must be used, ensure start/finish marked by a simple 'FIN' or '© [Artist's Name] 2013'. 4. Hand-built / hand-thrown ceramics to be replaced with object/material with consistent reflective properties. 5. Ensure all reviewers adequately briefed to ascribe genre / artistic mode to installation. 6. Ensure qualified first-aider and psychotherapist present at all times when installation open to public. 7. Process/deliverables hinge to be bolstered with wooden battens, nails, glue gun, tarpaulin, mild steel rods, laminate, etc. and surmounted with effigy of St Alexius, patron saint of belt makers (or equivalent). 8. Recommend CW and AG be given training in basic H&S philosophy and praxis.

outside

ancient sunlight
works hard on cold
bright grass green

in between

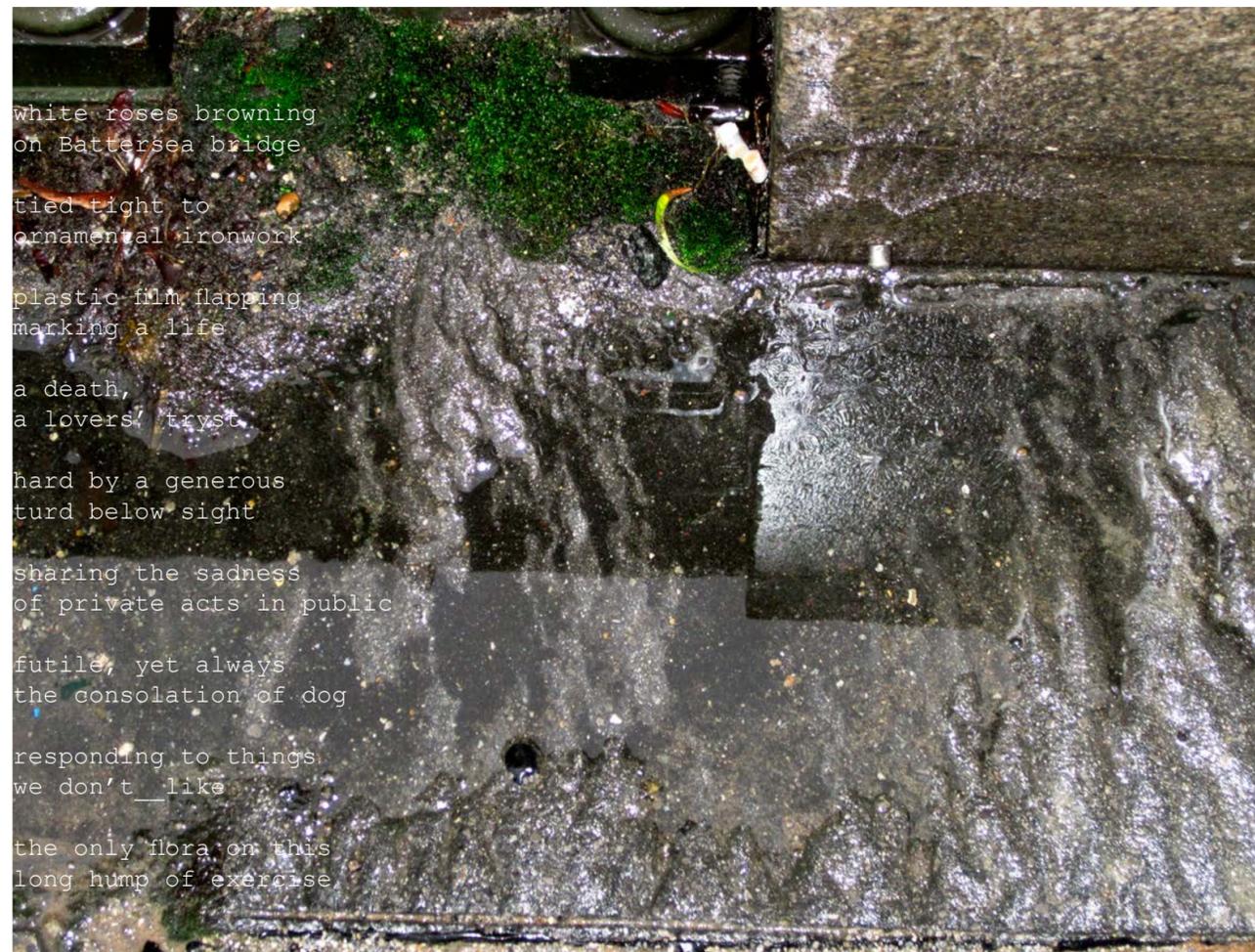
TUFigIND
BS 857 TF
HEAT STRENGTHENED
LAMINATED

INSIDE

warm blood moved
by black rot-juice

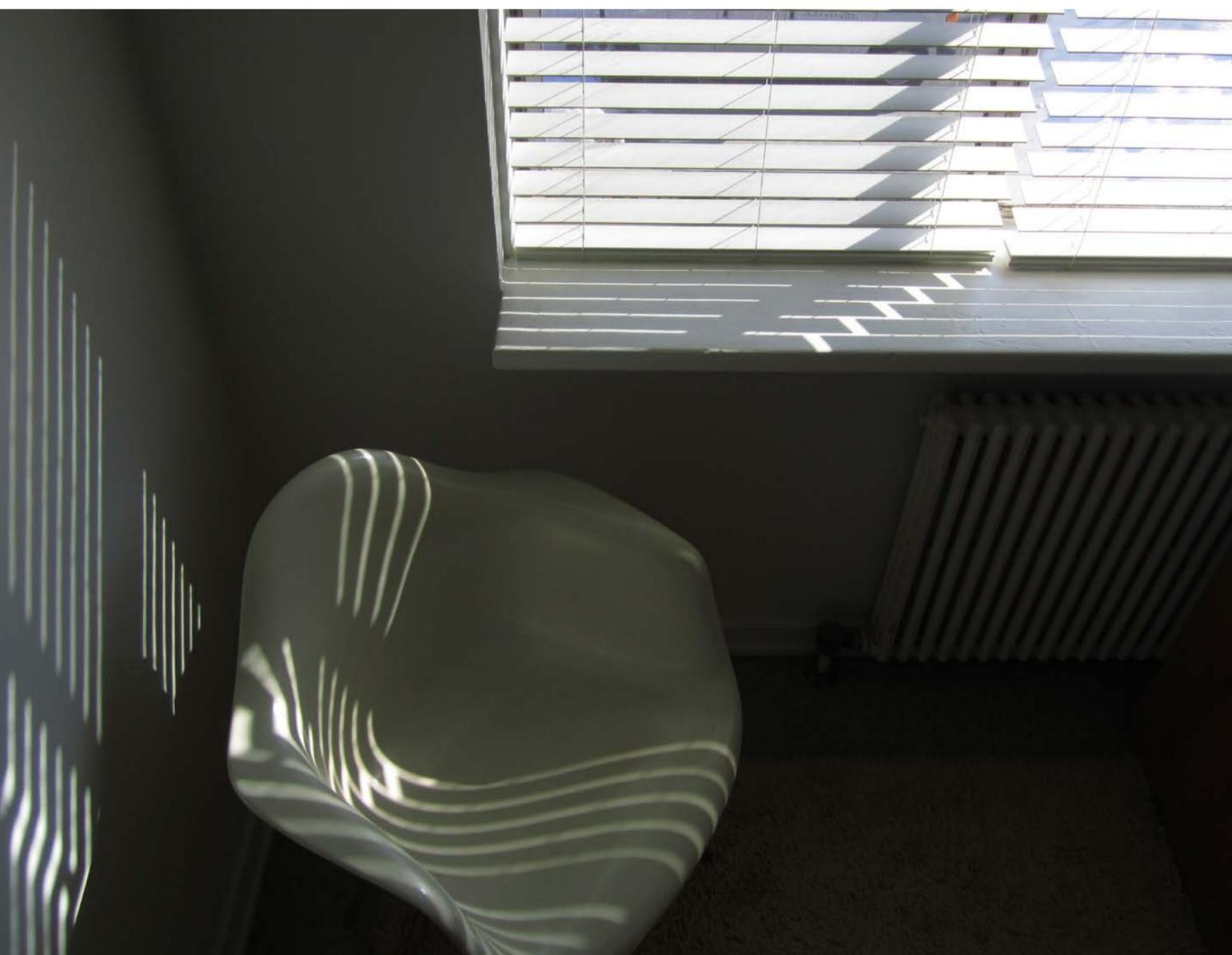
of the earth

p. 31.01.13 / Walk_3 / white roses browning

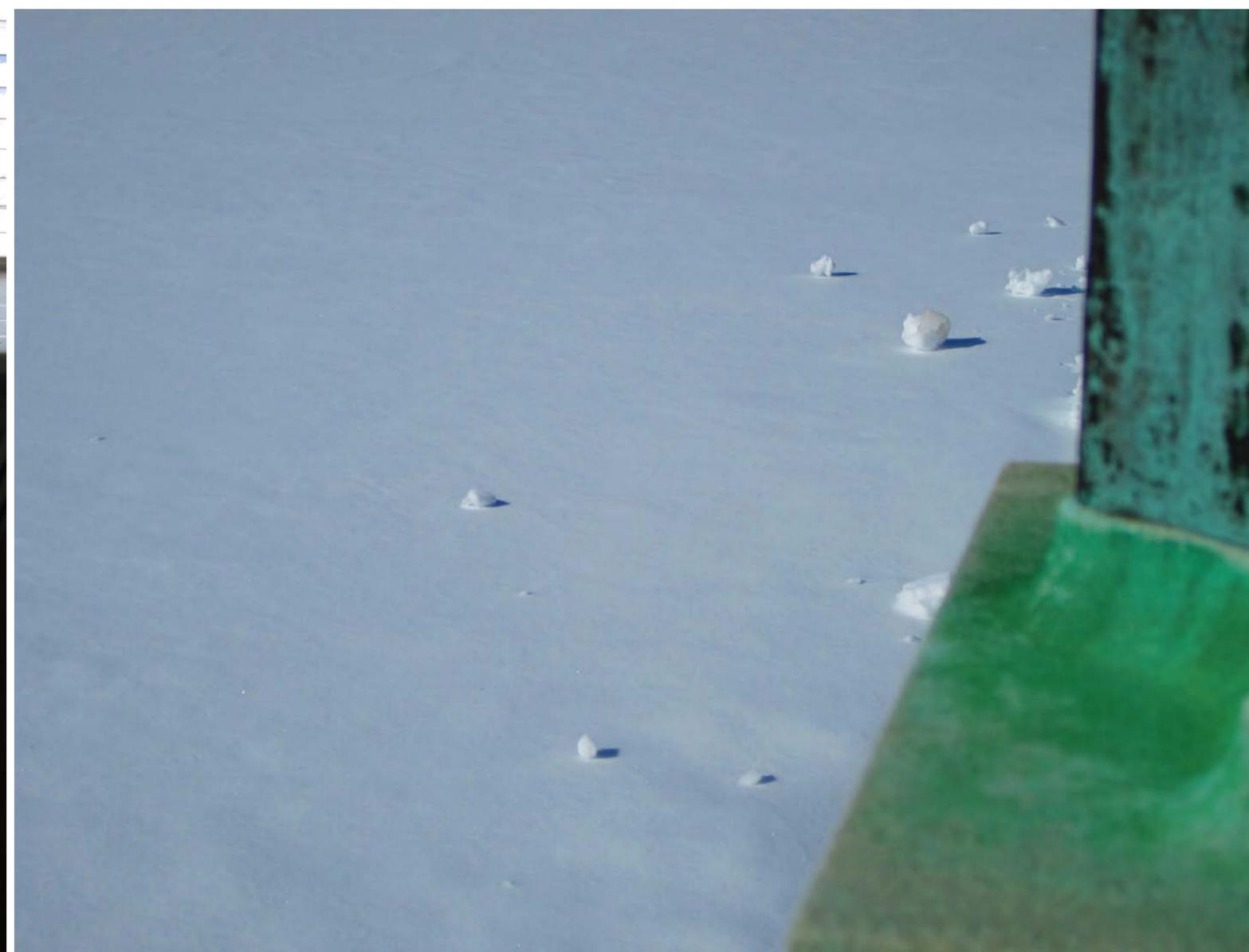


white roses browning
on Battersea bridge
tied tight to
ornamental ironwork
plastic film flapping
marking a life
a death,
a lovers' tryst
hard by a generous
turd below sight
sharing the sadness
of private acts in public
futile, yet always
the consolation of dog
responding to things
we don't like
the only flora on this
long hump of exercise

04.03.13 - 29.03.13
Residency: Cranbrook Academy of Art, Michigan, USA



Cranbrook: Inside (apartment)



Cranbrook: Outside

Cranbrook 1

Thursday 07 March

Material: One bag white earthenware (Bowie)

Tools: no tools / one day

Product: Three objects + waste scrapings (all bisqued)

In the studio I hem and haw and think about the space and how it relates to my living space (the plan I came with is still there, but I don't yet have a starting point). I think I will decorate the bare studio - just make some forms to interact with the architecture and the light. My interest is increasingly focused on light, but it seems faintly ridiculous to talk about it, for what would we have without light?

I heft two surprisingly large, plastic-clad blocks of earthenware from their neat box, an alien concept indeed. I think I will transform one into a vessel as large as the block of clay will allow. The other will retain its dimensions and be hollowed out.

A simple plan has been formed, but I have barely touched the stuff for two months and am uncertain, made shy by lack of contact. I open a bag, but don't peel it off, pushing fingers into the exposed face. Digging. The thrill returns almost instantly - the heavenly give, so soft but firm, as if we were made with clay in mind. Gouging with left and right and drawing to the centre, the sexual excitement triggered by touch, by creation, is joined by a visual sign - a vulval excrescence. Thart wasn't planned. Excrescence turns out to be a hard-working word, with physiological, architectural and linguistic applications.

The block is an object. I am transforming it into a new object through removal, although I take care to preserve the appearance of the original object, except at the surface where entry is effected. While I can't 'know' clay, I can get closer to this object.

Decision 1

The plan changes - I will remove the clay from the block's interior and make something from it, treating the bag as a [w] hole, as a parameter.

Why do barriers to making arise? Just starting is enough to take you into a different mode of being - at once you are in a relationship, in love, even. The demands of the work become your primary concern - a certain form of problem-solving that comes from experience with a material. What will it do? What do I want it to do? Will we understand each other and communicate, or will that first, lustful flush lead to nothing, to incomprehension.

Each excrescence is drawn out until the web between finger and thumb prevents digger deeping. The flesh bridge, ridge, meets the clay bridge that divides the interior of the block.

Before coming, we talked about tampering and veering. We talked about the 'words' that make up a poem in clay. What are those words? Form, volume, (surface), colour, texture, the traces of time and labour? 1

What does it mean to 'know' a material, to know clay? What can it mean? I suppose you get to know something by interacting with it, as with another person, although you can interact with a person and not know them at all. Objects withdraw from us, according to Heidegger - we can never know the totality of another object. Objects oscillate between presence-at-hand (Vorhandenheit) and readiness-to-hand (Zuhandenheit). Zuhandenheit is the 'reality' of objects, but it is a reality

of relations that is invisible to us. When a 'tool' is broken, it momentarily steps out of this reality and we can perceive it as present-at-hand (Vorhanden). A 'tool' is part of 'equipment' and a network of equipment supports everything that we do, and we generally take it for granted unless it stops working. Equipment can be a natural form, such as a river, or a man-made one, such as a building.¹

Harman considers Heidegger's tool-analysis to be at the heart of all his philosophy - the meaning of being is to be found in the constant back and forth between Vorhandenheit and Zuhandenheit, what is revealed and what is concealed. (Heidegger writes of aletheia, or 'unconcealment', or truth, as something that the artwork can effect,² but Harman dismisses this attempt to define the artwork as a strife between world and earth, as he (Heidegger) has already defined all of reality as a strife. "It is not only a Greek temple that reposes in the reality of its being while unfolding itself to the gaze of mortals - the same is true of a super-highway or a tax attorney's office. The best option left to Heidegger would be to say that even if strife is present at all moments, the artwork brings forth strife as strife."³

But, before I get carried away, 'human praxis is not the theme of the tool-analysis'⁴ and 'Readiness-to-hand has everything to do with a mode of being of entities, and nothing to do with the circumstances under which they were produced.'⁵ Tool-being relates to all entities in existence. Vorhanden and Zuhanden do not refer to different kinds of objects. Rather, they are modes of being of all objects - hammers, equations and people, colours, woodlice and mountains.

Harman claims that if we accept the central insight of Heidegger, which gives us the starting point for Object Oriented Ontology, we must give up any aspiration to complete knowledge of objects - they, we, are always partially withdrawn from one another. Yet Timothy Morton proposes rhetoric as a method for contacting the withdrawn object, or the 'strange stranger'. If rhetoric can give us access to the other, then surely the intimate engagement with materials that is skilled making will do the same?

The hollowing job I have just done did not involve much skill. None, one could say, yet an awareness of the characteristics of the material and the attendant limitations for facture was in play. And a different form of knowledge, born of experience - of the relationship between plastic bag and clay block. When the plastic is peeled back, the unhandled surface has a satisfyingly fresh appearance - the bag prints the clay. The clay copies the bag. It can't help itself - it is a talented mimic.

'Knowing' a material is usually subordinated to a sense of having control over it, which most commonly comes from some sort of making or breaking experience, whether craft,

1 While I have dipped into the relevant section of Heidegger's *Being and Time* (III 'The Worldhood of the World' pp. 91-148, in the 1978 Wiley-Blackwell edition [trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson]), I have largely relied on Graham Harman's reading of the tool analysis in the introduction and first chapter of *Tool-Being*, cited below. There is more than enough here for my purposes and I am more interested in Harman's interpretation than in the original work.

2 Martin Heidegger, 'The Origin of the Work of Art', in *Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. by D. F. Krell (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2011), pp.89-132

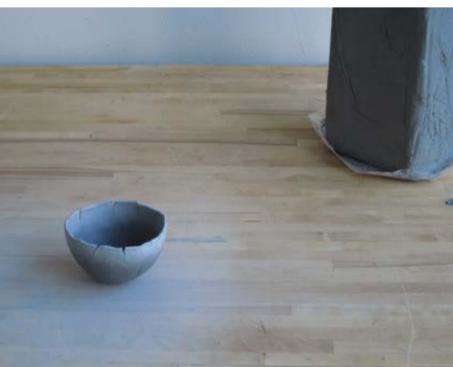
3 Graham Harman, *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects* (Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 2002), p.188

4 Ibid, p.7

5 Ibid, p.4

Cranbrook Bag 1: hollowing sequence





Cranbrook Bag 1: studio/work in progress

industrial or scientific. What can be gained by just looking, handling, comparing? Quality (as opposed to qualities) in a diamond, say, or a Japanese tea bowl is a form of knowledge that appears to be wholly culturally determined. Is connoisseurship just another form of control? Perhaps it could be more useful than has been fashionable to suggest in recent years.⁶

By sticking fingers into a lump of clay and gouging / feeling, you are 'knowing' the clay through touch. Knowing how thin the walls can get before they collapse is a different kind of knowing, related to experience of the properties of clay and direct experience of this block. Thick / thin // wet / dry. Those four simple words stand for a whole world of knowing and feeling.

Decision 2

I will use all the material that I have removed to coil a volume with the same footprint as the interior space of the block. The height of this volume will only be known at the end of the process. I start coiling and am almost instantly bored. This is something I've done many times before - I suppose the fact that I know exactly what will happen is the problem. I feel like I am in Le Witt territory - 'the idea becomes a machine that makes the art'.⁷ I would rather that the making was a machine for producing ideas. How can I disrupt the process, to make it less familiar? I decide to simply coil fast, with little regard for accuracy. This helps in that it adds a small element of risk. It is not just the making that produces the idea, of course, but I want a meeting of making, material and idea. This work may be approaching a useful mix:

1. Idea (vague plan for starting)
2. Material (block of clay)
3. Idea (to hollow and build)
4. Make
5. Idea (use dimension of hollowed space)
6. Make
7. Idea (each bag / block provides parameter)
8. Material (a group of bag objects)
9. Idea (objects displayed together connects sites of production and display)

When I remove a few more finger-scoops from the block in the morning (to reduce the weight), the coiled piece is too dry for further building, having been left uncovered overnight. I am left with a handful of clay and decide to make a thumb pot. If more evidence were needed, the making of this further 'proves' that word-based thought and making thought involve different parts of the brain. I thought all kinds of things while making, including being part of a three-way conversation. There were a couple of points where I felt I had to really concentrate and thinking about other things stopped, but the hands do seem to have an intelligence, an independence based on touch.

⁶ I have heard Graham Harman poking fun at Daniel Dennett for mocking connoisseurs of wine in several lectures. See opposite, from 'Concerning Stephen Hawking's Claim that Philosophy is Dead' in *Filozofski vestnik*, 33:2, 2012, 20-21

⁷ Sol le Witt, *Paragraphs on Conceptual Art*, 1967 <http://www.tufts.edu/programs/mma/fah188/sol_lewitt_paragraphs%20on%20conceptual%20art.htm> [accessed 08.01.13] In the next paragraph, le Witt writes, 'No matter what form it [the artwork] may finally have it must begin with an idea'. I like the 'flag-in-the-sand' quality of the text, but this statement is easy to contradict - an artwork can easily begin without an idea.

Cranbrook exhibition detail: Bag 1 (bisque)



It has long been noted that works of literature cannot be paraphrased. The analytic philosopher Max Black showed this more specifically in the case of metaphor. From the thought experiment about removing all the artworks from DOCUMENTA, we are reminded of the unparaphraseability of works in the visual arts, and the notorious stupidity of attempting to sum up the "meaning" of such works in the pronouncements of overreaching critics. We have seen that the same holds in philosophy. For Socrates to know only that he knows nothing is not an empty phrase or a contradiction in terms, but a refusal of paraphrase as a model of philosophy: virtue, like every other topic discussed in the Platonic dialogues, cannot be replaced by a series of facts about virtue. This does not mean that we are left with no cognitive access to reality at all, but simply that this access must be oblique or indirect, not a paraphrase.

There is little cause for wonder when scientific philosophy (and note that I do not say "science," which has often worked in a philosophical manner, unlike most science-worshipping brands of philosophy) demands knowledge. It demands further that this knowledge take the form of discursive paraphrase. For example, in one amusing passage the arch-scientific philosopher Daniel Dennett mocks the practice of wine tasting. When the taster spits on the floor and describes the wine as "a flamboyant and velvety Pinot, though lacking in stamina," Dennett imagines a machine able to replace such descriptions with objective chemical formulae, paraphrasing a qualitative human experience with a set of underlying physical conditions that generate it.

But we have seen that this sort of undermining never gives access to the taste of the wine, any more than the statement of the Pinot drinker above can exhaust it. To do this is always to paraphrase an object in terms that do not belong to the object in its own right, but only to its relations with something else. In refusing all paraphrase, philosophy joins wine-tasting, literature, art, and numerous other disciplines in insisting that its primary strategy must be an indirect approach to the non-relational reality of things.

Cranbrook 1

One bag (Bowie), one day, no tools

I lug the bags
from out the box

fat and sheeny as worms
fetched from grey sands

two solid blocks.

Fingers, tentative
at first, quickly thrill

to the heavenly give
so soft but firm

as if we were made
with clay in mind.

Gouging from both sides
forming a medial deposit

like some busy little hermit
excavating its love nest

in Tom Tiddler's shifting ground.

And seeing that he had made
a monument to his folly

a beautiful vulval excrescence

he plucked it off
and resumed the finger work

tappity tap, gaining knowledge
of the hard-working word

the addition of a consonant
especially to the interior

Ruskin's misplaced festoons
making plain parts the poorer

a fleshy substance or quality
a medical carnosity.

The growth regrew until
it met the skinny ridge

between thumb and fore
finger and fell in love.

There was nowhere else to go

fetched from grey sands
of Dundrum:



Orientation

my room faces east
sun slices Venice
wise at seven o
through Eliel's
generous glass

(i am witness
as the building roars
before belching out
a manned machine,
and roars again)

He'll give you light but

no decoration
nor image neither
only form, colour
texture and light
let there be light

i recognise an
old let it be
push material
into conscience
remove to see

No ideas but in things

bonjour Monsieur Green
he politely
withdraws of course
but offers a flash
of moss rich breast

my studio faces
the Northern wasters
where everyday
has to be made
to know what it is

The idea becomes a machine

between Williams
and Le Witt we
redraw the space for
the conceptual
artisans in all
their grotesquery

being without tools
hard think me makes
hemming and hawing
until space and
material meet

And tell me what to do

Cranbrook Bag 2: studio/work in progress



117



Cranbrook 2

Monday 11 March

Material: One bag white earthenware (Bowie)

Tools: Kidney with a rounded edge and a pointed edge (Buket), boxwood point tool, pine off-cut, plastic sheet and floor.

Product: Two objects (bisqued) / three grades of scrapings to dust (unfired)

Clay is a slow material; space is a fast material: Homage to Chillida.

A plan of action emerges, tentatively, over the weekend, but on Monday I work at my talk for tomorrow and go to the Sculpture crits. In the evening, in order to get things going and start the drying process, I hollow through the second block of earthenware, straight from the bag, working from both ends, just using fingers.

I've been thinking about using Buket's wire to cut into the block, Chillida-like. In the Phaidon film,¹ he uses a cold chisel to cut into his Spinner-prepared block - the blocks are usually solid, with space created from outside in. Looking through my source images for the talk, I find a photo of a Lurra piece I saw in Barcelona, which I'd forgotten about. This one is unusual in that it is completely hollowed out, leaving Chillida-shaped walls. I'm thinking about light - how the light will explore the block. How the strong light in my room meets the flat, subtle light of the studio.

Tuesday 12 March

I give the talk and then do some work, rolling the block and gouging and scraping the insides, with fingers and kidney. I am preoccupied. It is calming to deal with the weight of the block. It is fairly easy to get my hand in, but almost impossible to get an even surface with fingers. I need a serrated edge. I try to use the kidney, but it is hard to manoeuvre it inside the block. I want a flat, even surface (four flat, even surfaces). The walls are still very thick - I am letting the block dry slowly. I can't go too fast as the walls become weaker as they get thinner, so handling would result in distortion. I want the block to retain its outer character, its blockiness. I keep turning it and picking it up (now I can get my fingers inside both ends I don't have to disturb the outside surface) and dropping it, to flatten the outer planes.

I roll the clay on the floor to smooth the sides and to round off the end edges. It is satisfyingly heavy and soft. Its weight does the work. Though I have to fill in some holes on the surface, which leads me to using the kidney to get back to a clean surface. I try not to over-do it, taking out the worst of the marks and leaving parallel tooth marks - hatching seems wrong.

Wednesday 13 March

The walls have firmed up a bit. It's frustrating working with the wrong tools, but somehow worthwhile - I've been offered more, but have declined. I wonder can I turn wrong into right, by adapting the job to fit the tool. **Environment / veer.**² I 'finish' the outer surfaces and leave the block uncovered. The walls are still fairly thick. Later, after lunch, their

1 Chillida (1985) Video, directed by Laurence Boulting, London: RM Arts for Phaidon Press

2 veer (v) 1580s, "to change direction" (originally of the wind; 1610s of a ship), from Middle French virer "to turn" (12c.), of uncertain origin, perhaps (Diez) from the Latin stem vir- in viriae (plural) "bracelets."

environ (v) late 14c. (implied in environing), "to surround, encircle, encompass," from Old French environer "to surround, enclose, encircle," from environ "round about," from en- "in" + viron "a circle, circuit," also used as an adverb, from virer "to turn" (see veer).

Environment (n) c. 1600, "state of being environed"; sense of "the aggregate of the conditions in which a person or thing lives" first recorded 1827 (used by Carlyle to render German Umgebung); specialized ecology sense first recorded 1956.

118



I was solid. Now I am hollow. I was homogeneous, sealed in darkness. I was not always so. I was formed from divers materials, brought from here and there, mixed. My Al and my Si, already familiar with O, were introduced to H, an old friend. My multiple pasts are always present.

t. 20.03.13 / Studio 2 / I was solid

If you leave me out, I will return from whence I came. We were diggered and dug, crushed and washed, dried and mixed. I have been purified. Some were taken. The young - the carbons and their fraternisers. We don't mind either way - we do not take pride in purity. It is for them, the busy ones. They never stop. We endure. We are ageless - ancient beyond your understanding.

firmness tells me (as if I didn't know) how warm/dry it is in here.

I'm on my knees with my hand inside this thing: not dealing with clay, or matter, or earth, but the BLOCK - the object that I have gutted.

I put the guts into a plastic bag to keep them plastic. When it is done, I knock it all together in my hands and then knead and wedge. The frilly coils that form at either end are beautiful. I could stop at so many points - I wait for the right form, with the right frills until it is a little too late and the clay is just over-firm, but it is still good. I will fire it as it is - the guts of the block. It is solid, but it has space folded into it, or, rather, the memory of space.

With the boxwood tool, I gouge slits into one of the faces of the hollowed block, and round the corner, into a second face. I regret it almost as soon as I've started. The clay is too thick, the tool too delicate. I should use a knife, but am determined to stick to the set of tools selected before beginning. The tool throws up furrows of clay, which I leave alone, though they don't feel right. My finger begins to hurt before I've broken through the first cut, but I plough on, because the wrongness and discomfort bring the relationship between clay, tool and finger into sharp relief and the slits mirror the venetian blinds in my room - I want to see how they will permit light to penetrate; to fenestrate the interior.

The unexpected working method is confirmed. Each block of clay is transformed by carving and hollowing, then something is made from the insides. Each bag produces its own group of objects.





Cranbrook 3

Friday 15 March (RIP JR)

Material: Bag of porcelain (part-used) left by a previous visitor.

Tools: floor / wood block / wire (Buket) / wire loop tool (Jon)
4 x 2 waste pine / wood glue / clamps / chop saw / lathe / chisels
/ belt sander / sandpaper.

Product: Clay mallet (soda fired) / wood mallet / group of clay tools (soda fired) / large quantity of clay scrapings and some twisted wire offcuts (unfired).

In the wood shop, with Jon and Vicky, I cut two equal lengths off a piece of pine from the waste bin and glue and clamp them together. I will make a handle - first, by cutting half the block down with the bandsaw and then by turning, on the lathe. A small piece of pine is left over and becomes my interim wood block tool.

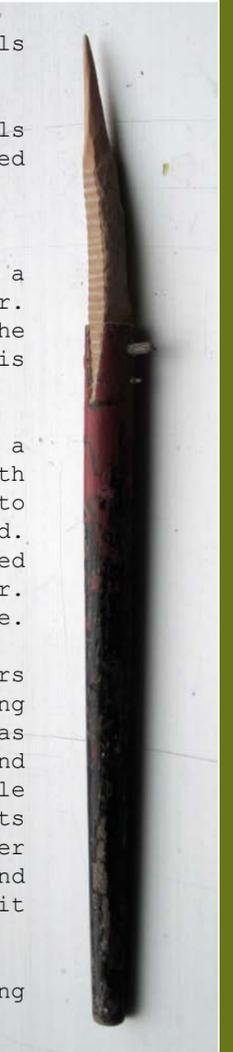
Back in the studio, I start on the porcelain with a plan to make a tool that can be used on future blocks. I'm hoping to soda fire with Bowie next weekend, which will be pushing it. I stamp the clay into shape while it is still in the bag. It softens up as it is worked. I remove the plastic and work the clay into a long, square-ended slug with hands and the wood block and by dropping on the floor. Turning and dropping, turning and dropping. It makes a good noise.

I place the block upright, take the wire and cut four corners off, about half-way up. The wire is hard to control, but exciting to use. I've used it many times for preparation work, but not as a making tool. I make more cuts, drawing from bottom to top and trying to approximate the shape I have in my mind for the handle of the wooden mallet. The clay is too dry at the top and resists the wire, threatening to tear the softer, thinner section further down. I decide to go with the material rather than the form and settle for a very rough approximation, which nevertheless has a bit of life about it.

I make some porcelain chisel heads, suggested by mallet-making offcuts. A range of delicate cold chisels.

Saturday 16 / Sunday 17 March

Hollow and plug porcelain mallet.
Load Blauw kiln for bisque with Kelley



Monday 18 March

Turn the mallet with Aaron in the wood shop. He advises not to bother with saw-cutting the handle - just go straight into the turning. I'm up for it, but I get a headache, because the eye guard strap is tight around my forehead and I am as tense as a tense thing (is it worth searching for a new metaphor? Amis wrote somewhere that you must always think of your own, never use someone else's.¹ Does it mean anything anymore to compare the human body to a coiled spring? Perhaps a squirrel, sensing danger). The block of wood is spinning fast - if you give it too much of the chisel, the tip won't cut, but will go with the wood, which brings the handle up, sharp and fast, making you all too aware of the power of the machine and the relative delicacy of your body. When you try to turn a tight corner, from a thinner to a thicker area, the same thing happens - the edge of the blade catches and is dragged down. The sound of complaining, tearing wood accompanies a knee-weakening jolt on the bottom hand, at the end of the handle. The set-up is designed to cope with this, of course. My body copes too, withdrawing the tool as soon as I feel the tug, with more flourish than makes me comfortable. As always, I hate doing things 'ugly'. I know this one runs deep - is it just childhood stuff (who is watching?), or some genes as well? Aaron in the woodshop is a lovely teacher - mature beyond his years. He knows the process well and offers just the right amount of instruction. I think he is an ex-student, employed by the academy, but nearly all the workshop spaces are run by current students. It is one of the best things about here - the independence instilled in students.

¹ ? Amis, Martin, *Experience* (New York: Hyperion, 2000)



Video_7_Cranbrook_Lathe





Video_8_Cranbrook_3



125



126

Cranbrook Bag 3: studio/work in progress





Cranbrook Bag 3: studio/bisque chisel heads

Space

Cranbrook 4
Monday 18 March

Material: Rovin Ceramics R077 White stoneware (Stephen) 25 Lbs

Tools: Floor / fist / fingers / two wire loop tools / kidney / wood mallet

Product: Two objects - 'Voulkos' (soda fired) + 'Slee' (unfired) / lump of unused clay + scrapings to dust (unfired)

Thinking about my 'one on ones' with the students and my frequent question, "why these materials?", I ask myself the same - "why clay?" The work in itself is an address to the question, in terms of:

1. what might loosely be called tradition.
2. an interaction between plastic material and body.

An abstract language and a language of use. The intersection of two different discourses - Ceramics and Sculpture.

Volume, containment, light, building (handling and not handling, adding and taking away). Space and scale: working on the floor and working on the table.

Making the familiar unfamiliar. Kate (O'Halloran, a student) and Nora Schultz. The dance between the 'conversation' and your own voice. What can the process of making - a very particular attention to the confluence of body and non-body - reveal about human interaction with material in everyday life? Can writing about making tell us anything about thought and language?

Outsides

I punch the block, with a vague notion of a form, and a neck sticks itself out. Trying to make it more 'necky', I end up overworking it. It looks lumpy, rather than punched. It occurs to me that I am doing Abstract Expressionism - Action Ceramics. I'm thinking of Peter Voulkos and Simon Carroll. I certainly don't want to go down that dusty track, but I am drawn to the fluidity, chance and risk in their process - the work is a record, the evidence of an encounter between body and plastic material. Richard Slee said that the gestural is impossible now for artists in the West. I see where he is coming from, of course, but his frame feels too narrow; the certainty reflects the struggle of an individual to find a purpose and a voice. Nothing is fixed forever. I think of the students here and the unwritten (anti-craft) code that prevails. They all seem intent on being sculptors, with Anders leading the way.

Insides

I start coiling a loose copy of the wooden mallet and am immediately bored so counter, again, by coiling very quickly and loosely - the wood mallet can be used to knock it into shape later. I enjoy this little conceptual twist, but still feel flat. I chatted with one of the Ceramics electives - the delightful and ill-named painter, Aaron Poser, who told me how disappointed he had been to find that there was no sense of a discourse particular to Ceramics in the group



Cranbrook Bag 3: studio/soda-fired chisel heads

crits. Indeed - a questioning of its own history and production methods is essential to the discourse of any discipline. So I allowed myself a bit of humour and thought of the punched pot as Voulkos and the large-handled mallet as Slee. They probably wouldn't have got on, or gotten along, for that matter.

Something odd has happened. All the excitement of dealing directly with the clay has gone and I have a strong sense of futility. I haven't written a poem since the first week - the more intensive making seems to have dried that up and I am only writing like this - journal-style. Reminds me of Perec - journal, the work of a day. Which takes me back to what I'm trying to do - reduce and focus. On body, language, material and space. It means that the objects will not always be exciting. This is difficult, particularly when what you are making is highly visible and when the surrounding students are making work that often looks/is highly sophisticated. The difficulty in differentiating between research and practice come to mind again.

Tuesday 19 March

Most of the clay has been removed by loops and fingers. The interior is firm now, but I want to remove a little more weight, so I'm on my knees on the floor, with my hand inside the potting, scraping with the toothed, curved edge of the kidney (in this confined space, it scrapes a good bit of my index finger off, along with the clay). I can't see my hand, like a vet working by feel inside a birthing animal, except I don't know what I'm delivering. A nail catches and is folded back on itself - it's already weakened by the build up and removal of gouge-clay.

Talking with Bowie and Kate I brought up Charles (Talbot's) charge of romanticism, in response to the ash glaze making for the *Translation* piece, which I showed in my talk. At the time, I countered with the decidedly unromantic nature of the urban lane, my desire for the (disruptive) sound of chopping in the exhibition space, and the importance of the glaze being produced by my own, non-productive labour. My intention was not to promote some sort of ideal, traditional production. But, perhaps romantic tendencies should be encouraged. Now, when people say romantic I think it's an accusation of sentimentality, or, perhaps more precisely, of belief in the heroic individual, the genius, the author who refuses to acknowledge his own death.

Romantics moved away from the idea that you set yourself apart, look in, from the outside, objectively. "The original Romantics... and, again, I think we're still in the Romantic period - you and I are basically Romantics - the original Romantics were interested in fixing that, they were interested in saying, 'what's it really



Video_9_Cranbrook_4

like joining somebody, for real?" Wordsworth - uncertainty, hesitation. A necessary feeling of weirdness. And Coleridge's Ancient Mariner - the whole poem is trying not to condescend to him. Romanticism is profoundly process-based. Reality is shaped like a story - it has a duality to it - a story has a narrator - someone is always telling the story. The teller and the reader have a part to play - a special kind of irony called Romantic Irony - the narrator realises that he or she is actually a character in the story, or the other way around. Deckard in Blade Runner - the narrator realises that he is a character - he is one of the replicants that he is pursuing. We are now living in an ecological age - ecological awareness means being aware/part of a much earthier, integrated irony than postmodern irony. We are in the Anthropocene (Paul Crutzen) and now realise that we, collectively, as a species, have just fucked earth. We are a (big) part of the story. "The idea that I am in a story is actually remarkably similar to this idea that I am radically in reality - that actually I'm not in space looking at reality - I am reality and I'm in it, and nevertheless I can still notice the weird, twisty, paradoxicalness of that."

Fake endings - Ancient Mariner - no such thing as complete closure. Trying to wrap something up in a perfect passage never fully works.



Cranbrook studio: work in progress (Bag 4)

Timothy Morton, interviewed by Jeff Carreira, accessed (15.12.13) at: <http://evolutionarycollective.com/conversations/are-you-a-romantic/>

o
n t a i n m e n



Cranbrook exhibition detail: Bag 4 (soda + green)

Cranbrook 5

Tuesday 19 March

Material: Rovin Ceramics R082 Terra Cotta (Jon)

Tools: Fingers / fist / loop tool / serrated kidney / wire / boxwood tool / wood mallet / floor / plastic sheet

Product: Three objects (one bisqued, two unfired) + dust (unfired)

Peel back plastic so that just the end surface is exposed, hollow out block with large loop tool and then serrated kidney. I aim to get the wall as thin as possible, to the point where the surface is broken in places. I want the confusion of the block appearing to be solid and hollow at once.

I am just doing very simple things with my body and a material, reflecting on and writing about processes and results.

This feels like the purest experiment so far. As I hollow the block, a stack of lumps builds up. I do it quickly, in one go, so there aren't drier scrapings. The stack has a Christmas tree shape - I want to leave it at that - just the hollow block and the stack of lumps, but I feel I could do that another time and that I want to push the experimentation while I'm here in Cranbrook. I knock the Christmas tree into a block with the mallet. There is a nice depression in the top, about the size of a fist. Thinking about the de-aired block that I've hollowed with my fingers, I decide to push my fist as far as I am able into the new block. I keep talking about a bodily interaction with materials, so... It is easy





Cranbrook Bag 5: studio/work in progress

at first - the clay accepts the force in my arm - and then very difficult. The clay compresses, I suppose, to the point where, no matter how hard I try, I can push down and in no further. The block distorts, becoming shorter and fatter, obviously, but the edges curve inwards towards the top, unexpectedly. There is a good print of my fist about half-way down the new, compressed block, but somehow it is an object with no life. I don't know why. I leave it out for a time and then decide to break it up and make something else, but it has become too hard, so I push holes into it with the boxwood tool and spray generously and wrap in plastic.

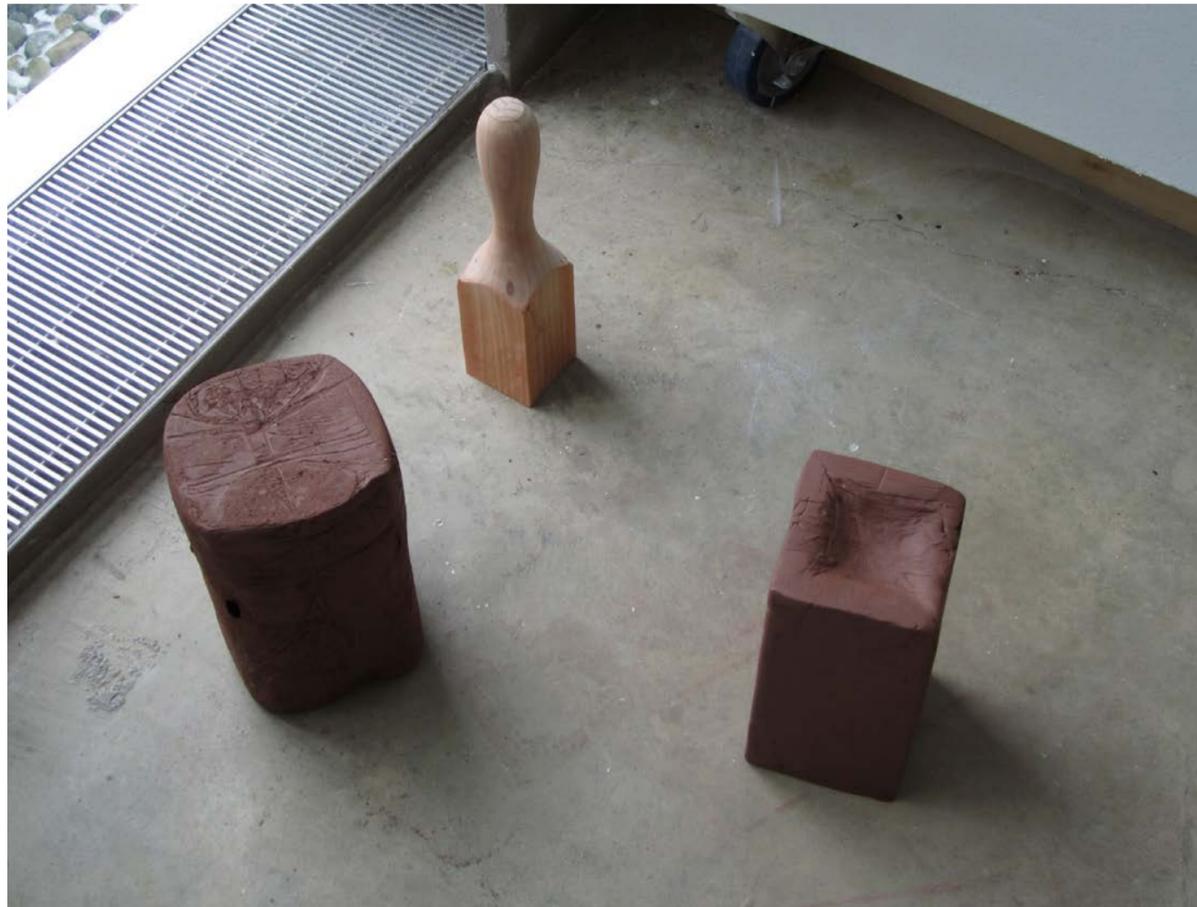
I start to cut up the fist block with the wire. It is still stiff, but cuttable. The wire-cut surfaces are beautiful. The non-work status introduces an aleatory quality, a lack of self-consciousness. The form starts to look interesting and, as I decide that it is worth using, I make a couple of self-conscious cuts, but not enough to ruin it. Just enough of the fist print is left to create a central focus, a contrast to the other surfaces. I feel close to this odd little, ugly-beautiful object, with its uncertain parentage.

I chop up the material that has been cut off the block and spray and wrap again. When it is soft enough, I knock out a slab, the size of the end-face of the block, with a bit extra for shrinkage. The plan is to construct a loose vessel, with an open top, to sit with the closed-top vessel of the hollowed block. The plan is carried out with little enthusiasm - all the life has gone out of the material and the concept, which only seems to work if it is 'pure'. It has to be 'one hit'. This is the third or fourth hit. But the instructions for the production of this work emerge clearly from the convoluted process:

1. Open a 25Lb bag of terra cotta clay and peel back the plastic to reveal a 1 cm thick strip of clay.
2. Cut this strip off the clay block with a wire, using the edge of the bag as a guide.
3. Place the resulting slab on the floor and the block of clay, still in the bag, on its side, next to the slab.
4. Gouge clay from the centre of the bag with fingers and build each gouged piece onto the slab.
5. Gouge and build until the two blocks are the same size.
6. Place the hollowed block on its open end and remove the plastic bag.

Materials required: One bag of clay

Tools required: One potter's wire



▲ Cranbrook Bag 5: studio/work in progress_b + c

+ d ▶

Cranbrook 6
Monday 25 March

Material: Rovin Ceramics R077 White stoneware (Stephen) 25 Lbs

Tools: Fingers / Floor (plus pencil and scissors)

Product: Two objects / small quantity of dust

Bag is removed and clay block placed on its side on the floor. A piece of plastic the size of a long surface of the block is cut from the bag and placed on the floor. As clay is gouged a rough base is made with squedges of clay on the plastic. I gouge and build, gouge and build. Out of the solid guts of the block, I will construct the walls of a volume that will be the same as that left behind - no tools - not worrying about the form, just trying to make sure that the volume is about the same. Two volumes from one solid. As my hand probes the block I think of the Chauvet Caves - all the surfaces flowing and folding into each other; as I build I think of Claire Curneen and her construction method. I've never used it before and it is surprisingly fast and effective.

As the built form takes shape, I want to prop and beat - to use tools - but I resist. The idea must be adhered to. The idea, material and process must be unified - no one works without the other two. Also,

material and environment determine the amount of time expended on the work - no wrapping of block or progeny

to inhibit drying. Feeling around in there, I wonder what my purpose is. To hollow out, for sure, but I also want to leave an interesting interior landscape - nooks and crannies to catch the play of light and shade. I notice that the end I started with, the one I can see into clearly, is more worked and seems to be less interesting than the other end. I decide to work the inside without looking, which leads to thinking about Rawson's language of touch¹ -

¹ Not much cited these days, Philip Rawson wrote beautifully on the relation between made objects and fingers, both making and using. I suppose he might now be considered an old-style connoisseur. See: *Primitive Erotic Art* (ed.) (1973) New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons and *Ceramics* (1971) London: OUP, from which the following is taken: "Most ordinary men in Western cultures have an ingrained feeling that to use one's hands to explore the things around one is at best immature, at worst indecent and even illegal. However among most other peoples, especially 'primitives', the hand is a live instrument of experience. As well as human bodies, it

curves and hollows and protrusions, made specifically for the hands to explore. I imagine people exploring inside this block, after it is fired. The edges will be much less amenable to fingers when heat-hardened. I start to smooth and shape with the exploring hand in mind, still working only by touch. In spots that are getting thin, I exert enough finger pressure to cause rippling on the surface of the block. In some places I push right through, making holes in the surface, thinking about what they look like from the outside, but more concerned with the way they will introduce light to the interior.

knows the objects of the natural world, the earth, rocks, and branches, together with its implements, food, and objects of daily life, intimately by their hand-shapes, which are conceptualized as a pattern of grips, clasps and finger-palpings. New Guinea Sepik-river exhibition-goers even carry behind their ears a piece of chewed stick with which to experience the shapes of grooves and undercut forms in the wooden sculptures they examine." (pp 21-22)



Can we hollow a space between
Carlos Williams's things
and Le Witt's idea machine?



Cranbrook exhibition [details]



¹ "The Thing" by Martin Heidegger was originally delivered as a lecture to the Bayerischen Akademie der Schönen Künste, shortly after the end of World War II. A translation by Albert Hofstadter was published in "Poetry, Language, Thought" (1971) New York: Harper and Row.

The text is available online at:
<http://people.ischool.berkeley.edu/~ryanshaw/nmwg/the.thing-heidegger.pdf>
 (accessed 12.06.10)



Cranbrook Thursday 21 March

What value can making by hand have, beyond the production of objects?

Can I develop making as a research method, to bring useful (new) knowledge to the philosophical enquiry into objects?

Can I contribute to a poetics of interaction with other objects, using clay as a starting point?

Back home, he thinks about what seems to be the central discovery of the trip - a combination of the conceptual and artisanal in the treatment of a bag of clay as a whole. Thinking about how writing and making can be compared, he considers what the words of the clay block might be and starts to think of the scrapings and dust as individual words or letters. This leads to an analogy between block and text - perhaps inspired by his penchant for justified text. He had been dealing with the sensual, perceptible qualities of the block of clay - weight, plasticity, volume, surface, interior and exterior. Starting to think of blocks of text in the same way, first he considers visually thin and fat poems; then the idea of mining a block of text for its words and making something new out of them. To play with the difference between hollowing out, gouging, removing and building, sticking, adding.

The words he produced during the residency were constructed, taken from the mine of all words and forced together to make some kind of sense. He could go instead to a smaller, more particular mine and see what words of value might be extracted?



To employ a writing method analogous to the making method. He could use his own journal texts and/or the texts that had significance during the residency - Heidegger, Harman, Pessoa - *The Book of Disquiet* was given to him by Kate and Charles when he left.

Conclusion and ongoing problems:

1. Started working with each bag as a whole. Forms and waste were exhibited together.

2. Developed into the idea of removing (mining, gouging, subtracting) the inside of the bag / block to create a volume. As material was removed it was used to construct (building, joining, adding) a new form with the same volume as the original block.

3. Developed into the idea of treating texts in the same way - mining an existing text for words which are joined together to make something new.

Each word is a lump of clay. Each lump of clay has the same meaning; they are joined together to create a composite meaning - a volume.

Each word has a different meaning. The meaning of the words changes, however, depending on how they are arranged.

Does the potter make the walls, or make the space that the walls create? ¹

If the volume is the product, what is the volume of the words? The original text is the block, the new text the volume of the block.

Everything is absurd. One man spends his life earning and saving up money, although he has no children to leave it to nor any hope that some heaven might reserve him a transcendent portion. Another man strives to gain posthumous fame without believing in an afterlife that would give him knowledge of that fame. Yet another wears himself out in pursuit of things he doesn't really care for. Then there's one who

One man reads so as to learn, uselessly. Another man enjoys himself so as to live, uselessly.

I'm riding on a tram and, as usual, am closely observing all the details of the people around me. For me these details are like things, voices, phrases. Taking the dress of the girl in front of me, I break it down into the fabric from which it's made and the work that went into making it (such that I see a dress and not just fabric), and the delicate embroidery that trims the collar decomposes under my scrutiny into the silk thread with which it was embroidered and the work it took to embroider it. And immediately, as in a textbook of basic economics, factories and jobs unfold before me: the factory where the cloth was made; the factory where the darker coloured silk was spun to trim with curlicues its place around the neck; the factories' various divisions, the machines, the workers, the seamstresses. My inwardly turned eyes penetrate into the offices, where I see the managers trying to stay calm, and I watch everything being recorded in the account books. But that's not all: I see beyond all this to the private lives of those who live their social existence in these factories and offices. The whole world opens up before my eyes merely because in front of me - on the nape of a dark-skinned neck whose other side has I don't know what face - I see a regularly irregular dark-green embroidery on a light-green dress.

All humanity's social existence lies before my eyes.

And beyond this I sense the loves, the secrets and the souls of all who laboured so that the woman in front of me in the tram could wear, around her mortal neck, the sinuous banality of a dark-green silk trim on a less-dark-green cloth.

I get dizzy. The seats in the tram, made of tough, close-woven straw, take me to distant places and proliferate in the form of industries, workers, their houses, lives, realities, everything.

I get off the tram dazed and exhausted. I've just lived all of life.

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Passage 298

5th word

man no him fame of things as uselessly tram around dress from I collar which as before the around workers the I all social before a a lies sense the the cloth seats places realities tram 36

6th word

spends children a without that he to and me of which see decomposes it in me darker the the offices watch I existence my dark-skinned regularly before the woman sinuous in and everything dazed 34

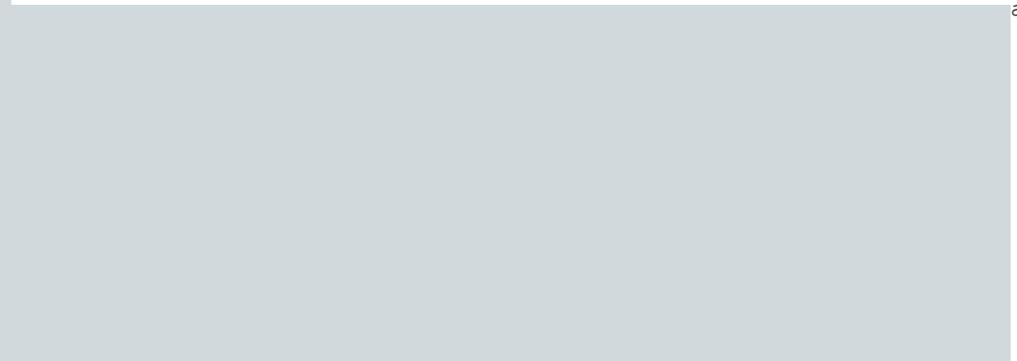
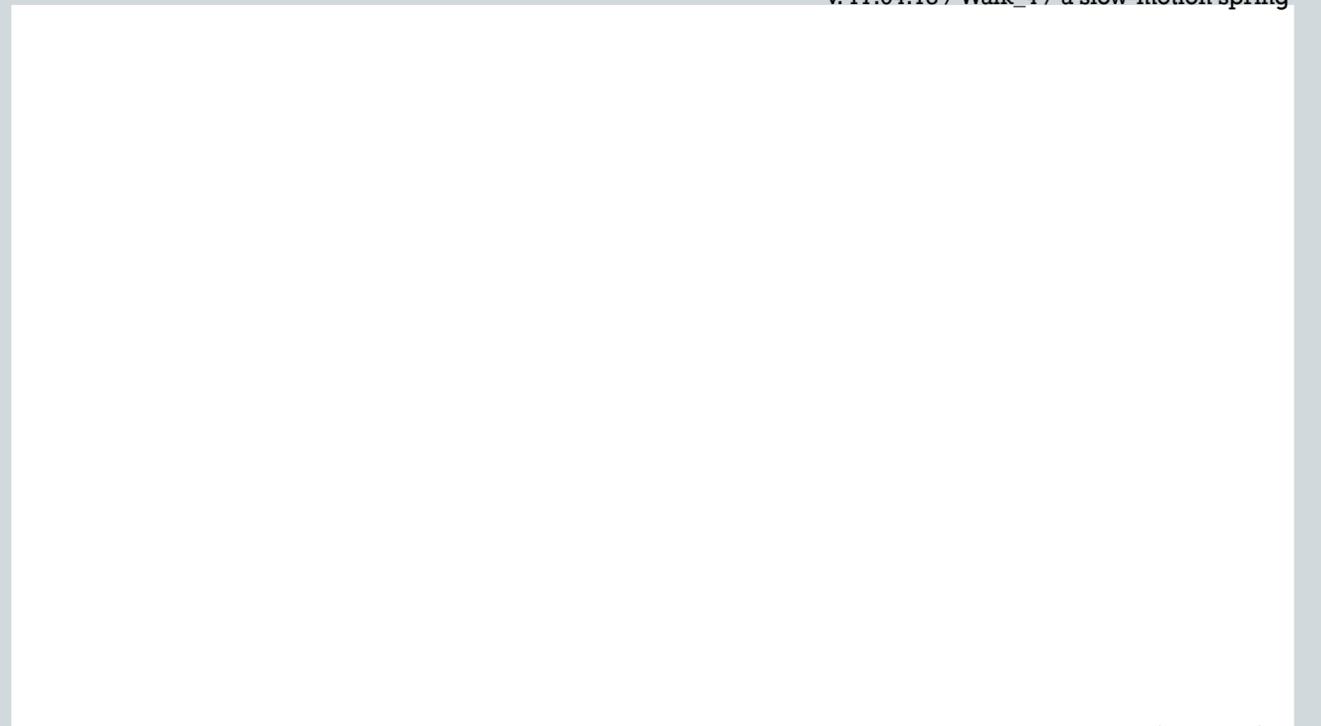
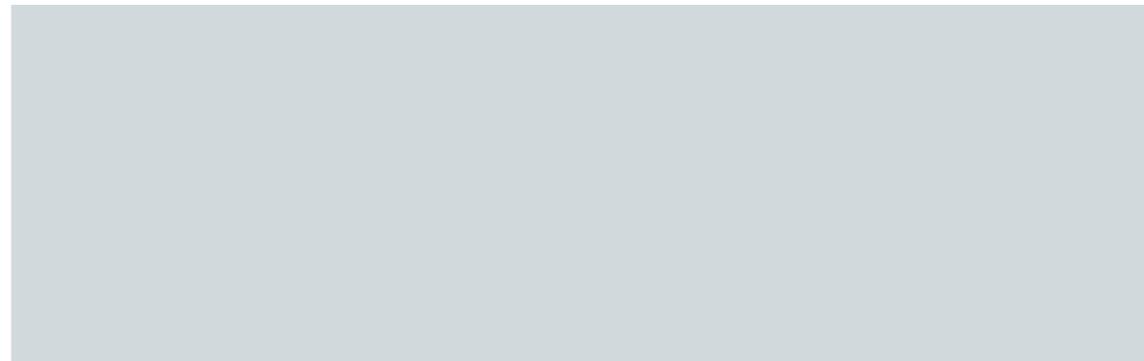
I dress the workers
collar realities
sense the social cloth
around places

(the fame of things
lies all around
uselessly,
seats before a tram)

watch, dazed, as
everything decomposes -
sinuous existence
spends children regularly

and dark-skinned offices
before a woman,
without which I see
the darker he in me

that to and me of front
the the as the I
in before a tram



a slow-motion spring
the season writes
its own ekphrasis,
suspending
its action
and making us
wait and wait,
but for what?
as we must just
carry on
inside it
and outside it,
expectations unmet...

a fat bag
of potential
potent isle
in a fast sea
of air and its
containing surface
conspiratorial

a
pot
is
a
fair
face
con

bag fat
with potential
mighty smile
stony race
landfall to
the front
a cat nation

space

a

space

makers marking
time please
treading water
til the slow mind
catches up snatches
truth from
the jaws of deceit

mark
i'm
reading
in
sups
Rom
cedes

taking weight
trying to make
the waves
extreme places
that suck
antic words into
new froms



a fat bag: text-image

Karst: Phoebe Cummings & Anne Vibeke Mou

Camden Arts Centre Ceramics Fellowship Exhibition

A large, high-ceilinged, squarish room. Dark, but for the light sneaking in through the gaps around, and the space occasionally vacated by, the door. Neophytes momentarily fixed in a slab of light. And a single candle, mounted at shoulder height, before a large disc, maybe seven feet in diameter. Surfaced with a landscape devoid of life. A desert, a moon. Rocks and tussocks, but no craters (or creatures), I think. Why didn't I look with an eye worthy of the detail that I know was there? A dusty, grey-brown landscape, devoid of significant features, yet beautifully, fully realised, with a painstaking attention.

Glass domes of various sizes, covering, protecting, dusty things, conjured from clay and excused the rigours of heatwork. Large petri dishes. A retort stand, the horizontal member supporting a hanging object, half plant, half animal. Or perhaps a cross between a fat-frilled seaweed and a pendulous coral. All sitting quietly on a long, shallow table against a white wall.

In the best tradition of the fool, I didn't write in the time, so am now having to make it up. As opposed to making it up with the stuff in front of me. Translation through the filter of memory, as opposed to more direct translation. I remember reading a review of a book, the name of which I have forgotten, that stated, with a certainty peculiar to scientists, fanatics and the ignorant, that neurologists have discovered that past experiences or thoughts are not, as was previously thought, stored and retrieved (as in some vast, virtual filing system), but are recreated afresh on each retelling or rethinking. I am struggling to process this information.¹

So, I didn't look, I didn't write. Am I trying to fool myself that by so doing I would have seen, recorded, and hence understood, clearly, completely? The point of course, is to feel; to not see clearly. To allow oneself into the fiction, where one might be deluded, surprised and delighted.

We are in no hurry for this sequence to be over with, partly because it's difficult to keep track of how long it lasts. Writer's appearing to nod off suggests that, on this most linear of journeys, we are drifting into non-linear time, are entering dream-time, but a dream-time where everything, every treasured detail is anchored firmly in the real and the now...

It lasts long enough, this sequence (a sequence one remembers as a single take, though it actually consists of five), to lull us into a kind of trance. There then occurs one of the miracles of cinema, one of several miracles in a film about an allegedly miraculous place. It's not a jump-cut or fade but suddenly and gently - the clanging and echoey clank of the music and trolley are still on the sound track - unambiguously, we're in colour and in the Zone. You can watch the trolley car sequence again and again, can refuse to succumb to its hypnotic monotony, and you can never predict where it will come, this moment of subtle and absolute transition. Camera and trolley continue clanking forward for a few moments and then come to a halt. The camera pauses and moves back.

We are there. We are in the Zone.²

Despite re-finding this passage on an un-annotated page, it was the one that came to mind when I spoke of a book to the friend in a pub. Dyer's clever and affecting exegesis had sent me back, re-excited, to a loved film. I watched the sequence again. I re-read the passage. I watched the sequence in slow motion... Passage and sequence refused to marry, no matter how much I desired it. The sequence transitions from black and white to colour with a very straightforward cut. What's going on!? Have I got a different version of the film? No, said Dickon, looking worldly wise, he just creatively misremembered.³

¹ Of course, and appropriately, I misremembered slightly. The review ('How do you remember things?' by Kathryn Hughes, Guardian 31 August 2012) was of *Pieces of Light: The new science of memory*, by Charles Fernyhough - not a scientist, but an 'academic psychologist'.

² Geoff Dyer, *Zona* (Edinburgh & London: Canongate, 2012), pp. 55-57

³ Dickon Hinchliffe, musician and film composer. We discussed the score for Tarkovsky's *Stalker* in light of the project he is currently scoring - *Locke*, a feature that never leaves the face, or thoughts, of a man driving a car.

A filter. A sieve. Phoebe Cummings has a good sieve. Artists copy, steal, borrow all the time - sometimes consciously, often not. Nothing is original, but if your sieve is too coarse, your mixture contains lumps that are too readily recognisable as somebody else. The fine sieve produces a homogeneous mixture, a complex blend that is both the sum of its ingredients and something else, itself, a new colour.

Oliver Sacks gathers incidents from his own life, as well as from those of well-known 'plagiarists', Helen Keller and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, to explore the phenomenon of cryptomnesia. The cryptomnesiac forgets that she or he has received an idea from an external source and later expresses it as an original thought.

Once such a story or memory is constructed, accompanied by vivid sensory imagery and strong emotion, there may be no inner, psychological way of distinguishing true from false - or any outer, neurological way. The physiological correlates of such memory can be examined using functional brain imaging, and these images show that vivid memories produce widespread activation in the brain involving sensory areas, emotional (limbic) areas, and executive (frontal lobe) areas - a pattern that is virtually identical whether the "memory" is based on experience or not.

We have no direct access to historical truth, and what we feel or assert to be true... depends as much on our imagination as our senses. There is no way by which the events of the world can be directly transmitted or recorded in our brains; they are experienced and constructed in a highly subjective way, which is different in every individual to begin with, and differently reinterpreted or reexperienced whenever they are recollected.⁴

I think she uses a sieve to create some of these effects - soft clay forced through to produce little worms, strands, fronds, villi.⁵ Animal / Vegetable. Reminds me of the old mincer that my mother used to clamp to the edge of the kitchen table. This makes me smile - how clever to take a technique associated with hobbyists - garlic presses pressed into the service of hair production - and adapt it to the birth of new forms of materiality. New objects. The process - a way of thinking/doing - resides completely in the object. It lends its meaning to the work and the work lends its beauty to us. A fleeting glimpse of something strange.

And little maglight torches, waiting to be deployed, to illuminate as the viewer sees fit. On my first sweep I shine benignly from above, revealing an unprepossessing collection of specimens. Corals, crystals, petrified weeds, all in monochrome. The dusty remnants of a deceased naturalist's collection after the best items had been sold off to pay for his long inattention to the fleshy products of his loins. A pile of books at the end, which, having given up my torch, refused to release their authors from the darkness. The presentation of the work veered from fiction to research project, or perhaps it hovered, happily, between the two.

Sorry for the delayed reply, we moved house last week and haven't been able to get on the Internet. I loved the piece of writing you sent, it's beautiful and really refreshing to read. I enjoyed the personal perspective and how fluid it is, looking and thinking and looking again, drawing in memories and references. I'm not sure if you found *The Rings of Saturn* on the table with the torch, but it seems very relevant.⁶

Returning to the large disk, I peered through the small lens, mounted eight inches closer to my eye than the candle flame and five feet in front of the surface, terra incognita. The image was curiously fixed, with flame-coloured rods and spheres arranged like a multi-petaled flower, or droplets of water, petrified in amber with the memory of the tubular space through which they had just traveled. Not the image one would expect to see when looking at the old new world.

The engraving on the lens is copied from a rubbing we took from a cave wall on the edge of the Yorkshire Dales (most of which we also experienced with a torch.) We talked a lot about seeing, about how people first saw caves by fire light, about plato's cave and the divided line. About seeing the truth, and what is the truth. Is it a true description of the cave wall on a real wall in the building or just chips painstakingly made into the surface of a piece of glass

⁴ Oliver Sacks, 'Speak, Memory' in *New York Review of Books* 21 February 2013 <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2013/feb/21/speak-memory/> [accessed 07.05.13]

⁵ I know the word from Biology 'A' Level over thirty years ago and can't think of an occasion when I have used it since.

⁶ Phoebe Cummings, email to author 13.05.13

with a diamond to make shadows. And then there is the constructed wall of clay, a fiction, enlarged or shrunk, is that more true, more solid. The only certainty is the candle, its light, heat and duration.⁷

Wet clay (from sloppy, pourable slip to just-cuttable leather hard) has a seductive surface. It absorbs and reflects light in a very particular way, resulting in a surface that is neither shiny, nor dull. Just, somehow, rich, earthy and sensual.⁸ Fired clay, whether glazed or raw, has its own beauty, but often seems crude in comparison. Plain, or showy. Or just plain showy. It doesn't have the in-between, the temporal, the fleeting, the cherry blossom freshness of wet clay. Leather hard is a liminal state – between Dionysian fluidity, and Apollonian clarity. No one has been too bothered about plain old dry clay, though it also warrants an in-between status. Paul Astbury, Rebecca Warren and a few others have made good use, but Cummings has made it her own.

On my second pass I begin to use the torch more actively - moving it closer and further away, higher and lower and changing the angle at which the beam meets the glass. The projected shadows loom and shrink, sharpen and blur. As I begin to get excited, I think I can make the sun rise and set on this new world; I can conjure the silvered moon and the soupy, refracted light of a forrested sea. I start to think that *I* am the God creating this world. Has even the artist seen these things I have seen? "...I watched c-beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhäuser Gate. All those... moments... will be lost in time, like... tears... in... rain..."⁹ Did she mean this? I want her to notice how I am bringing it to life... And then - Ha! Perfect. I have been drawn in and made a part of the work – how delightfully clever and generous. The viewer has been invited in to the process, the creation of meaning, in an ordinary, but subtle fashion. Artist supplies the ingredients, bowl and whisk; audience does the mixing.

You cannot touch these objects. Or, you do not want to touch these objects. Perhaps those less familiar with clay will want to touch – to feel what they are, in the face of the mixed messages being received through the eyes. Clay people will know what they feel like and how delicate they are and leave well alone.

The clay represents both itself and the form. It doesn't pretend to be anything other than unfired clay, at various stages of dryness, yet it does mimic the form of various natural objects. The making is styleless and non-expressive. It is all technique and that technique is capable of producing objects that are genuinely ambiguous. This is a lovely paradox – an object that is pretending and not pretending. I think of the piece in Tate Modern by Fischli and Weiss (Untitled [Tate]1993-2006) – a large group of hand-crafted objects masquerading as the ordinary tools, materials and junk of an artist's studio.

At the heart of these works is the artists' love of paradox and mischief. The room demands a double-take. It looks like the chaos of an artist's studio where their work might be made, yet of course, what we see is the actual artwork, every smear and grain of dust artfully placed. There is also a certain perversity in the artists' decision to devote many hours and much skill to handcrafting imitations of mass-produced objects.¹⁰

Fossils and totems are both "forms of animal visibility", images of natural objects, residing on the border between artifice and nature. The fossil is the natural sign par excellence, an imprint in stone, sculpted by petrification. Seeing the fossil as a picture or symbol of any kind, however, requires human eyes to pick out the image/organism in the stony matrix...

The totem also occupies the nature/culture frontier. It is traditionally a handmade image in wood, stone, or skin of an animal; less often it is a vegetable or mineral object. The animal itself is also the totem (though Durkheim will insist that the image is always more sacred than what it represents). Natural organisms are not just entities in themselves, but a system of natural signs, living images, a natural language of zoographia or "animal writing" that, from ancient

7 Ibid

8 Ceramicists often lament the loss of this surface and spend much effort on achieving a comparable effect in the fixed, fired object. Nothing will do it, of course.

9 *Blade Runner* (1982) directed by Ridley Scott. Warner Bros. This line of the script has been attributed to the actor Rutger Hauer, who played replicant, Roy Batty.

10 Tate, Fischli & Weiss: exhibition room guide, room 10 <<http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/fischli-weiss/fischli-weiss-room-guide-room-1/fischli-weiss-6>> [accessed 15.05.13]

bestiaries to DNA and the new Book of Life, continually reintroduces religion – and animation – into things and their images.

By the end of the nineteenth century, fossils and totems will serve as the principal display objects of museums of natural history, especially in North America.¹¹

One of Smithson's main ambitions seems to have been to create works which (not unlike the Museum of Natural History) are not "natural" but which nonetheless aspire to engage and reveal, even if they cannot contain, the whole of nature and the distant extremes of time.¹²

Lacunary texts and unconscious citations: a fragmentary postscript

Is it lazy, un-rigorous, to leave things as they are, lying in fragments? Laissez-faire, lazy fare. Is the aim of presenting a temporally anchored process worthwhile or merely delusional? Could it be both worthwhile and delusional?

But what of the authors who leave their texts unfinished? Certainly, one could argue that the process of writing ends just as definitively when an author "gives up" as when an author completes a text, yet the compositional purposes of fragmentation hold implications one may pass over in disregard for incomplete documents. Julian Wolfreys writes, "Reading is ... the experience of fragmentariness. It fragments and unveils fragmentation, citation, as inescapable ... It only extends itself, through its own movement, its own fragmentation as the promise of future (as) fragmentariness."⁽¹⁾ The same holds true for the act of writing. All writing is, in some sense, an expression of fragmentariness, and the conscious fragments, complete in their incompleteness, communicate the process of writing more genuinely than arbitrarily finished works.¹³

His bark had cut the swell, fast and fine in the lee, but as he gained open water, the horizon stripped off and laid down and the wind pressed him to join the party. New connections offered themselves, dangled the tantaliser of ecstasy, of being beside himself and subsumed by a greater whole. The waves, the waves got carried away, broke over his edges and threatened his happy little craft. He baled some out and left some in, but in the end, put up more sail and altered course.

In my transfer exam, we had a discussion about the differences and similarities between finishing a text and finishing a work in clay. Part of the craft of the writer or the maker is to make a judgment about when to stop, but when stops are enforced or otherwise unintentional, the work may be saved from the ministrations of the over-controlling producer. Only the experiencer can decide if the lack of craft is forgivable, or is, in fact, a craft disguised as a lack.

Fragmentation as citation. And back to unconscious fragments. When I discover, later, another work by Fishli & Weiss (*suddenly this overview* 1981-2006), and the raw clay *chain* (2007), which seems by some strange coincidence to be a much more direct influence on the work of Cummings, I wonder should I toss my metaphorical sieve? If I stick to my metaphor, like inconvenient clay to the mesh, perhaps the beautiful mixture contains a few lumps after all, but, as Sacks reveals, we all quote all the time and process, I insist, is more alive than concept.

The act of writing held such personal value to [Kafka and Benjamin] that it becomes difficult ascertaining what they had to "teach" us... Integral to this notion is that people, like texts, are never finished, but are in a perpetual state of becoming, and that education is perceived as "an unfolding and transformation of the self over time.... This unfolding is open-ended and always incomplete."⁽²⁴⁾¹⁴

11 Bill Brown (ed.) 'Romanticism and the Life of Things: Fossils, Totems, and Images', in *Things* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004), pp. 176-178 (also in *Critical Inquiry* special issue 2001 'Things')

12 Jack Flam (ed.) *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings* (Berkeley & LA: University of California Press, 1996) p. xiv

13 Joseph Cunningham, "The Word Ongoing: Franz Kafka, Walter Benjamin, and the Spirit of Perpetual Being", in *Philosophy of Education* 2012, p.176 <<http://ojs.ed.uiuc.edu/index.php/pes/article/viewFile/3621/1242>> accessed 02.12.14]

14 Ibid, pp. 180-181



Karst_1: Phoebe Cummings & Anne Vibeke Mou



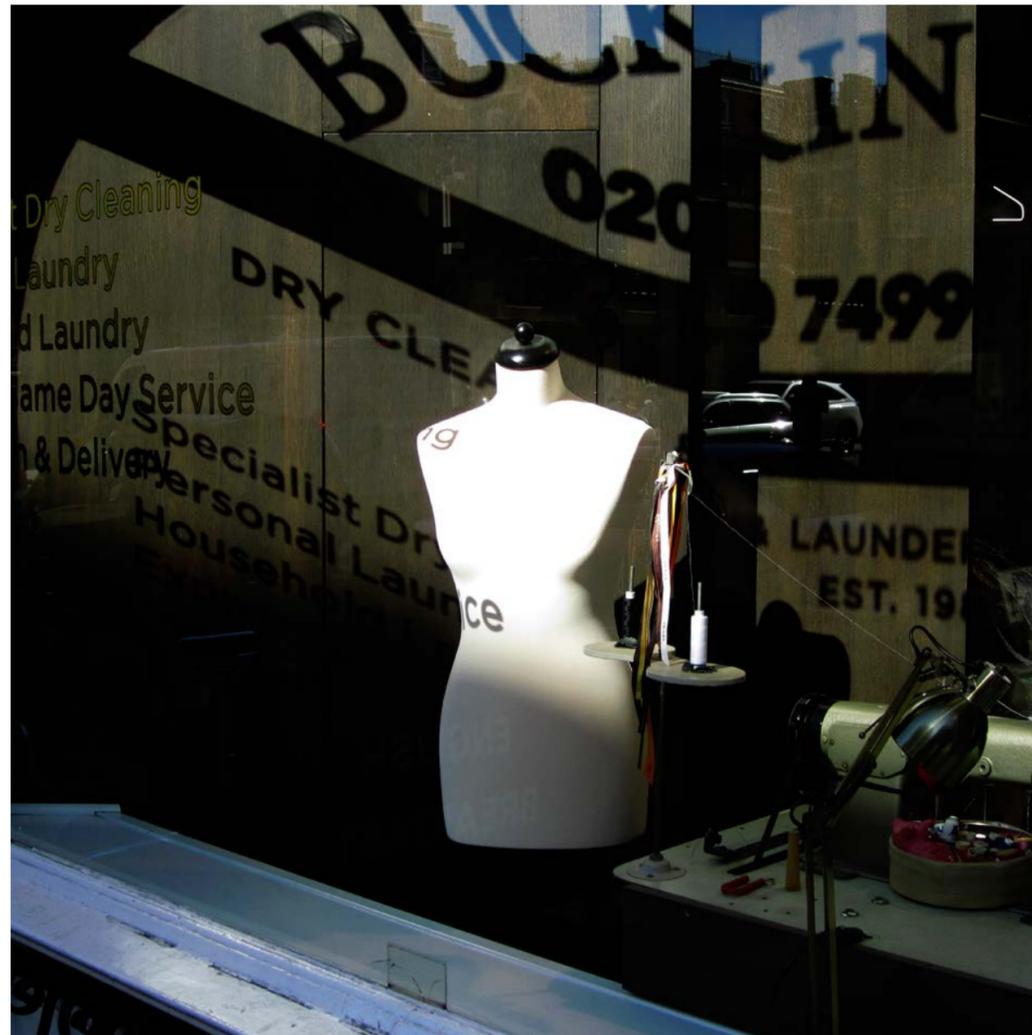
Karst_2: Phoebe Cummings & Anne Vibeke Mou



Sebaldian carpark

x. 17.05.13 / Home_12 / Canterng through

Cantering through the opening fields of Sebald's Saturn, MacLiam almost rode past tenebrous, but decided, at the last moment, to dismount and have a closer look. He and his mare were a flighty pair (and the warm light was just then smothered by a slow-moving, sweltering miasma) so, vaulting her arse, he whispered the word and they were off, over the stream, up the slope and into the sunlit, empty uplands. As if conjured by a necromancer, a middle-aged man materialised, intoning as he did, "for what reason does obscurity take precedence over clarity?" It was Glyn Maxwell. Is that a coincidence, a strange coincidence, synchronicity or just plain strange?



Kensington Gore to Mayfair:
 Wednesday, 1 May 2013 16:19



Bristol to Dyrham Park, South Gloucestershire:
 Sunday, 2 June 2013 13:28

If it's fine tomorrow (English Craft)

If it's fine tomorrow

Dash a great plateful

of blue water

on a dome of clay,

fringed with joy.

Elbows must be jammed in a

rapture of sympathy;

give the hands rigidity,

the reality

of kitchen tables -

a valuable education

for the muscles

of the palm.

Lean as a knife the

latter will "slide"

into the bitter

waters of despair

at the dead centre of **the**

wheel of sensation.

Holding his bony fingers spread,

the immense pressure of

his concentrated woe

addressed the "roof"

of the lighthouse

until it was all dry: all withered: all spent.

So, cloud what is

actually at hand

as well as ever possible

and slightly

slacken the grip.

Henry & Denise Wren (1928)

Handcraft Pottery: For Workshop

and School, London: Pitman & Sons

Centring

a dome of clay

dead centre of the bat

Dash a little water

the latter will "slide"

grasping an apple

give the hands rigidity

elbows must be jammed

assume the shape of a cone

the "roof" of the lighthouse

slightly slacken the grip

the clay will assume

it serves to satisfy one

a valuable education for the
muscles of the palm

as well as ever possible

Virginia Woolf (1927)

To the Lighthouse, London: Hogarth

The Window

if it's fine tomorrow

cloud what is actually at hand

the wheel of sensation

fringed with joy

lean as a knife

a tuberculous hip

holding his bony fingers spread

ringed fingers and lace

and lit up bats

the sluggish English

~~the great plateful of blue water~~

some soft mound of green or pink

no going to the lighthouse James

To the Lighthouse

some relation between those masses

you will find us much changed

~~the bitter waters of despair~~

and his exactingness

~~it was all dry: all withered: all spent~~

~~a rapture of sympathy~~

some wave of sympathetic expansion

~~the immense pressure of his concentrated woe~~

~~the reality of kitchen tables~~

curiosity, in dumb colloquy



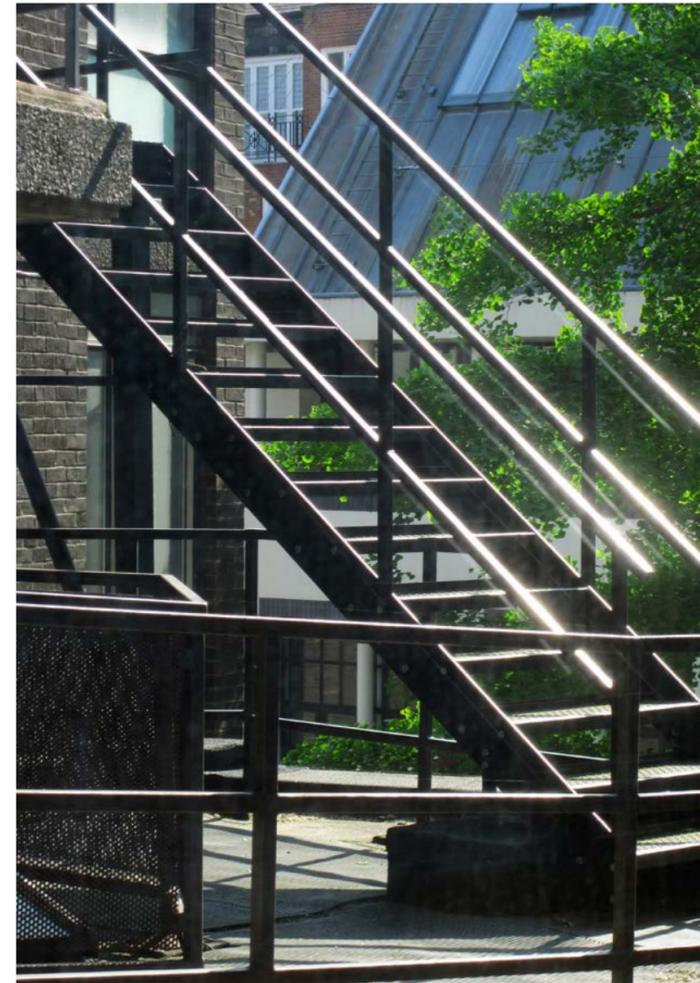
Kensington to Battersea

Wednesday, 15 May 2013 22:19



C&G Studio to Albert Hall

Tuesday, 14 May 2013 18:25



C&G Studio to Jay Mews

Thursday, 6 June 2013 16:30



Kensington to Battersea

Wednesday, 22 May 2013 22:32

A ribbon
of yellow
flowing fellows
folded in bold

light

as free and
fickle yet
stuck with the x
of shady track

side

show don't tell
an angle >
greater than me
what it should be

when

two lines one
unhuman
ly long and one
I could almost

jump

(into an
other world)
converge on my
unobliging

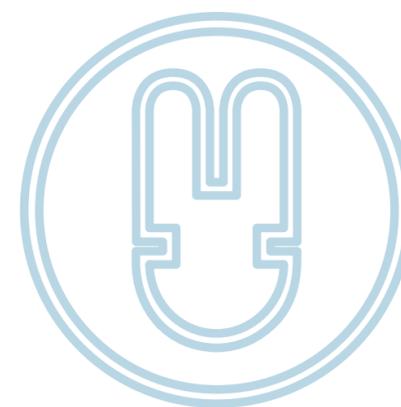
eye

but object
is not just
the dancing tip,
but the sun the

atmo

sphere the earth
the train the
window speed and
all its hot goods.

RED < BUFF > WHITE



British Ceramics Biennial
Awards Exhibition 2013

Four bodies: Red < Buff > White

Royal College of Art
PhD by project:

Writing Making: Object as body, language and material

Conor Wison 2013 ¹

¹ The following pages (165 – 204) were displayed as a record of the research process, in book form, in the exhibition space



Red < Buff > White





25 kg Potclays Original Red





1_Stoke_Red

55 Posset pot of silver shape, the buff clay body coated outside with red slip decorated with white slip trailed lines combed into complex patterns, further white slip is over-stamped and rouletted, the whole “jewelled” in white and inscribed at the rim
1685 RF//IS

Made in North Staffordshire, 1685.

Miss L. Kempson gift

70P1953

(The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery label)

Cup, two-handled. Buff-bodied with elaborate slip decoration comprising trailed and jewelled paired swirling lines and scrolls, feathering, rouletting and stamped motifs. Around the rim are the initials 'RF' and 'IS' and the date '1685' in trailed and jewelled slip. The handles are elaborately moulded and themselves decorated with trailed and jewelled slip.

This has previously been described as a posset pot, and the form is indeed one used for posset pots. However its small size must cast some doubt on this and, to maintain a degree of objectivity, it is cautiously referred to here as a two-handled cup.

North Staffordshire, c. 1685. Height 98mm. Accession number 1953 P70.

(David Barker and Steve Crompton (2007) *Slipware in the Collection of The Potteries Museum and Art Gallery*, London: A&C Black,)



2_Bristol_Red

Guanyin figure

China. Tang dynasty (circa 684-755).

Guanyin is a wise being (Bodhisattva). He has renounced the Pure Land (paradise) to answer the world's cries for help. The Vase of Life held in his right hand is a symbol of charity, and the lotus in his left symbolises purity.

Earthenware

Bequeathed by F P M Schiller

N2419

(Bristol Museum & Art Gallery label)



3_London_Red

SHELF 5: Red stoneware and earthenware

43 Shepherd in 17th-century dress, 1750-60, red stoneware

(Victoria & Albert Museum label)

Figure of a shepherd, press-moulded red stoneware, Staffordshire, ca. 1750-1760.

He stands on a rectangular base with a dog beside him, and he holds a crook in his left hand and a flower in his right.

Artist/Maker : unknown (production)

Museum number
C.1858-1921

(Victoria & Albert Museum website)

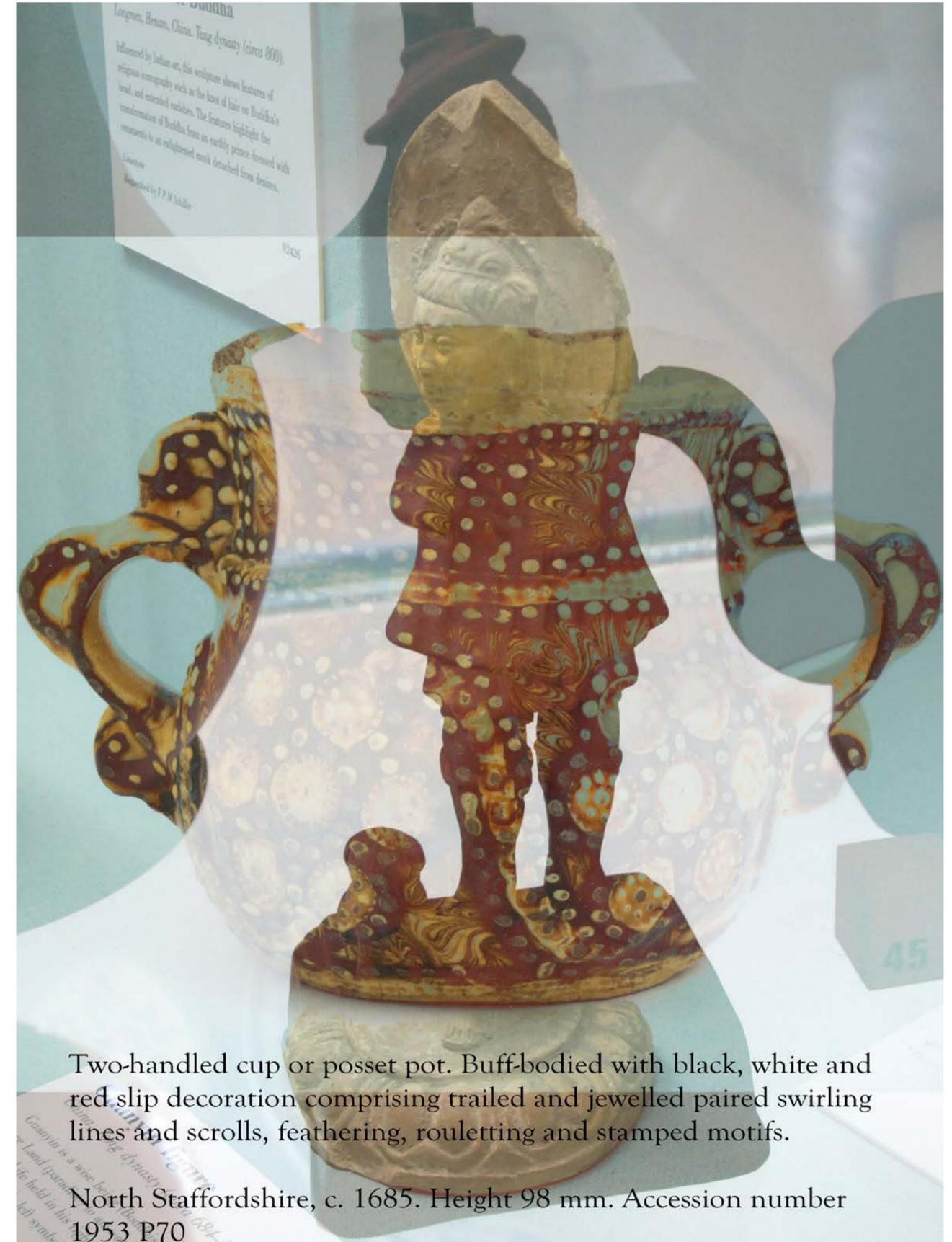
of silver shape-
buff clay body coated
with white slip trailed
combed-into-complex patterns
over-stamped and rouletted
the whole "jewelled" in white

Cup, two-handled Buff-bodied
elaborate slip
swirling lines and scrolls
elaborately moulded
and the form is indeed
However its small size must cast some doubt-
a degree of objectivity
cautiously referred to
North Staffordshire
Accession number 1953 P70.

Guanyin figure
Guanyin is a wise being
renounced the Pure Land-
the world's cries for help
The Vase of Life-
in his right hand
a symbol of charity
his left symbolises purity
Bequeathed by

SHELF 5:
17th-century dress

Figure of a shepherd
press-moulded red-
He stands on a rectangular base
a dog beside him-
he holds a crook in his left hand
a flower in his right.
Artist/Maker: unknown
Museum number
C.1858-1921



Two-handled cup or posset pot. Buff-bodied with black, white and red slip decoration comprising trailed and jewelled paired swirling lines and scrolls, feathering, rouletting and stamped motifs.

North Staffordshire, c. 1685. Height 98 mm. Accession number 1953 P70

Red (Stoke)

buff body of silver shape
press-moulded red
has renounced the Pure Land.

Figure a shepherd,
a symbol of charity
combed into complex patterns

The Vase of Life
whole "jewelled" in white
A crook in his left, a flower in his right

must cast some doubt on
a dog beside him
symbolises purity

Artist/Maker: unknown
swirling lines and scrolls
the world's cries for help

Red (Stoke)

Cup, two-handled,
Buff-bodied,
he stands on a rectangular base.
In his right hand
a degree of objectivity=
Artist/Maker: unknown;
He has renounced the Pure Land.

Figure a shepherd,
a symbol of charity
trailed and jewelled.
A crook in his left, a flower in his right=
a wise being
and the form is indeed.

Guanyin
is cautiously referred to
The Museum number,
The Vase of Life, Bequeathed.
However its small size
must cast some doubt
on a dog beside him.

Staffordshire swirling lines
and scrolls press-moulded
the world's cries for help.

Red (Stoke)

buff body of silver shape
press-moulded red
has renounced the Pure Land.

Figure a shepherd,
a symbol of charity
combed into complex patterns

The Vase of Life
whole "jewelled" in white
A crook in his left, a flower in his right

must cast some doubt on
a dog beside him
symbolises purity

Artist/Maker: unknown
swirling lines and scrolls
the world's cries for help

Red (Stoke)

cup two hands
and buff a body
to a rectangular base

a degree of objectivity
in the maker unknown
renounces on the Pure Land

figure a shepherd
a jewelled-charity form
a crook, a flower

or a wise being
a symbol trailed
right and left, indeed

cast cautiously
the museum number's
doubt on a dog

as the Vase of Life
has bequeathed
swirling lines

press-moulded
the small world's
cries for help



25 kg Potclays Buff School Clay





1_London_Buff

SHELF 2: London

4 Posset pot, Southwark or Rotherhithe, about 1650-55

(Victoria & Albert Museum label)

Southwark, England (possibly, made)
Rotherhithe, England (possibly, made)

Posset pot and cover of tin-glazed earthenware, painted. Undecorated except for vertical rows of three bosses pushed outwards with the finger when the clay was moist. A similar double row of bosses around the lid. The body colour is a reddish buff. The glaze is creamy white with pinkish areas and some darker specks. The foot-rim and entire underside has been wiped clean of glaze. Three pad-marks are possibly connected with firing, and there are two peg-marks on horizontal flange of lid and a third on the vertical flange. The pot has a low recessed foot, handles rounded on inside, and a concave groove on outside.

(Alphabetic shape codes as used in appendix to Archer, Delftware. 1997)

Object history note

Given by Mr E. Guy Dawber, London, 1922.

(Victoria & Albert Museum Website)



2_Stoke_Buff

7. Plate, tin-glazed earthenware. Painted decoration inspired by oriental wares with manganese purple ground.

Made at Wincanton or Bristol, 1740-60

(The Potteries Museum and Art Gallery label)

Tin-glazed earthenware, with a powdered manganese ground, and five reserves painted in blue. Circular, with a sloping rim, and shallow well. The central reserve encloses a shield bearing a figure of Apollo with Python, and in the four others there are 'mimosa' flowers and leaves. Below the shield is the place name and date 'Wincanton/1738'.

moulding; whole tin-glazing; whole; greyish-white, thick and irregular powderwork; ground; manganese painting; decoration; cobalt-blue earthenware; whole tin-glaze; whole manganese; decoration cobalt; decoration

buff earthenware, covered with thick and irregular greyish tin-glaze, and painted in blue high-temperature colour; five peg marks on the back and three much smaller peg-like scars

(Fitzwilliam Museum website - similar plate)



3_Bristol_Buff

7. *FUDDLING CUP, probably London, c. 1680*

To 'fuddle' is to confuse with drink. Fuddling cups have three or more interconnecting bowls so that by drinking carefully from one bowl it is possible to drain the whole vessel.

Purchased, 1951. N5101

(Bristol Museum and Art Gallery)

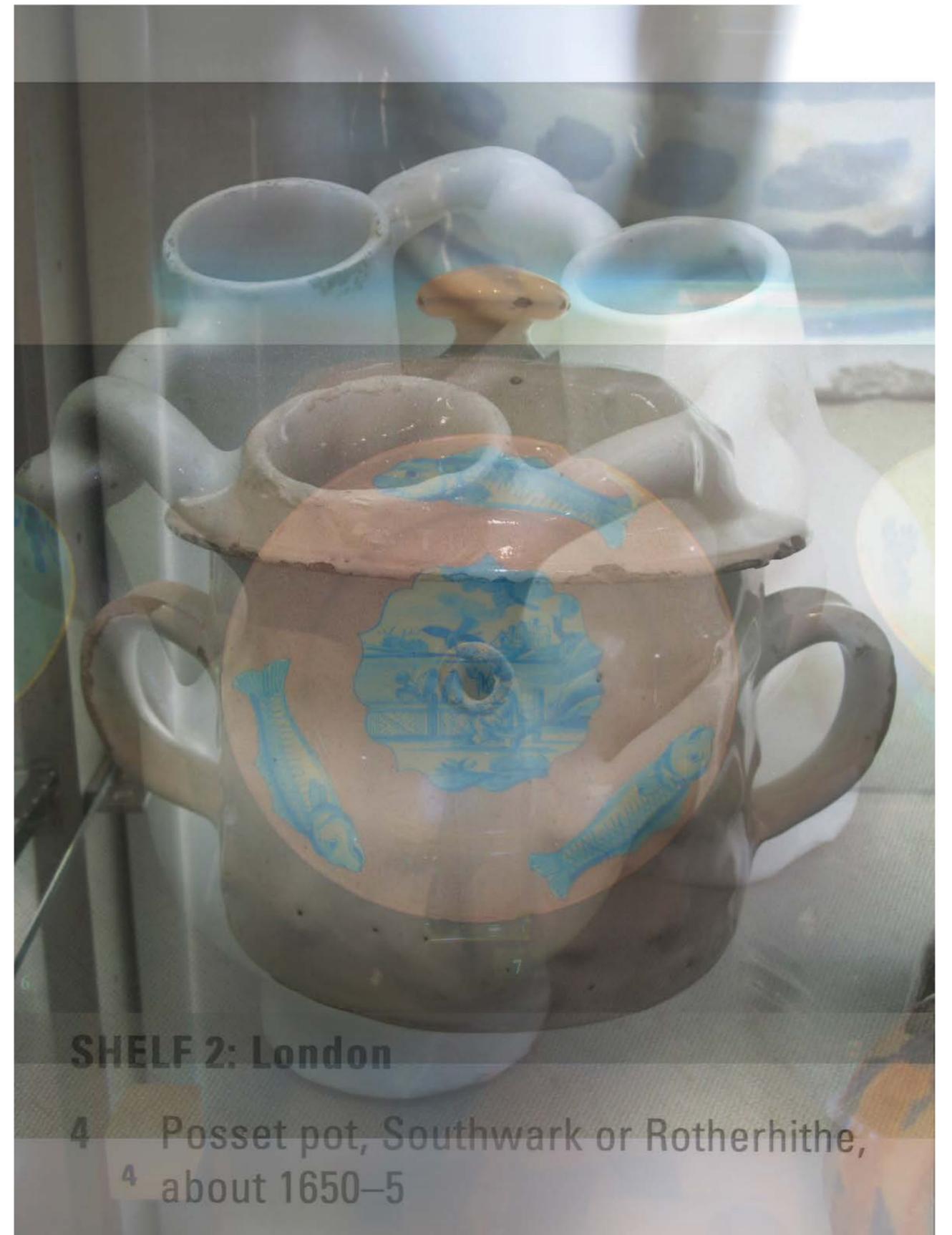
Posset pot, Southwark or Rotherhithe

~~(possibly, made)~~
 Undecorated except
 vertical rows of three bosses
 outwards with the finger
 when the clay was moist
 creamy white with pinkish
 some darker specks
 has been wiped clean
 Three pad-marks
 on the vertical flange
 a low recessed foot
 handles rounded
 a concave groove
 Alphabetic shape codes
 Object history note
 Given by Mr E. Guy Dawber

~~inspired by oriental wares~~
 manganese purple ground.
Made at Wincanton or Bristol

~~powdered manganese ground~~
~~shallow well~~
 The central reserve
 irregular powderwork
 whole tin-glaze
 thick and irregular
 smaller peg-like scars

FUDDLING CUP, probably
 To 'fuddle'
 confuse with drink
 three or more interconnecting bowls
 drinking carefully
 it is possible
 drain the whole vessel
 Purchased, 1951.



SHELF 2: London

4 Posset pot, Southwark or Rotherhithe,
 4 about 1650-5

Buff (London)

when the clay was moist
on the vertical flange
creamy white with
pinkish posset

three bosses
confused with drink
and irregular powderwork
that drains the whole vessel

some darker specks has been
inspired by oriental wares
a concave groove
wiped clean

shallow, well
(possibly, made) by
carefully inter-connecting three
rows of alphabetic shape codes

Buff (London)

when the clay was moist
on the vertical flange
creamy white with
pinkish posset

three bosses
confused with drink
and irregular powderwork
that drains the whole vessel

some darker specks has been
inspired by oriental wares
a concave groove
wiped clean

shallow, well
(possibly, made) by
carefully inter-connecting three
rows of alphabetic shape codes



25 kg Potclays Harry Fraser Porcelain





1_Bristol_White

1. *INFANTS WITH GOAT*, c. 1770

Adapted from a Longton Hall model of c. 1775. The high scrolled base is typical of Cookworthy's early figures. Purchased, 1911 (ex Edkins collection). G511

(Bristol Museum and Art Gallery label)



2_London_White

Billy goat
Germany, Meissen
1732

This vigorously modelled sculpture is from one of the great landmarks of ceramic history: the menagerie of over 450 life-size porcelain animals made for the Elector of Saxony. The Meissen factory undertook this ambitious project only 20 years after it had first discovered how to make small porcelain wares. Firing the largest of the sculptures pushed porcelain technology to its limits, and so all the animals have large cracks where the clay split during firing.

Modelled by Johann Joachim Kandler (1706-75)

Porcelain

Museum no. C. 111 - 1932

(Victoria & Albert Museum label)



3_Stoke_White

6 Figure of Dr. Sacheverell, press moulded white salt glazed stoneware decorated with cobalt blue beneath the glaze.

Made in Staffordshire about 1725-30.

955

(The Potteries Museum and Art Gallery label)

INFANTS WITH GOAT
Adapted from a Longton Hall model
The high scrolled base
Cookworthy's early figures
Purchased
ex

Billy goat
vigorously modelled
great landmarks-
ceramic history
the menagerie-
the Elector of Saxony
ambitious project
first discovered
to make
pushed porcelain
to its limits
all the animals-
large cracks-
split during firing

Figure of Dr. Sacheverell
press moulded white salt
decorated with cobalt blue
beneath the glaze
Made in Staffordshire about

201

202



1. **INFANTS WITH GOAT**, c. 1770

Adapted from a Longton Hall model of c. 1755. The high scrolled base is typical of Cookworthy's early figures. Purchased, 1911 (ex Edkins collection). G511.

White (Bristol)

the Elector of Saxony
first discovered
the infants making a goat
beneath Cookworthy's glaze

where large cracks
Adapted white salt
for the cobalt menagerie.

high scrolled, base
Dr. Sacheverell
pushed all the animals
to the limits of his ambitious project

the great landmarks
would be modelled, decorated
and vigorously purchased.

White (Bristol)

the Elector of Saxony
first discovered
the infants' moulded goat
beneath Cookworthy's glaze

where large cracks
Adapted white salt
for the cobalt menagerie.

high scrolled, base
Dr. Sacheverell
pushed all the animals
to the limits of his ambitious project

the great landmarks
would be modelled, decorated
and vigorously purchased.



White: Ashley Down studio/finished_green

Four bodies: Red < Buff > White

Journal
Tuesday 13 August 2013

The hardest thing with the buff is how to start. When writing, you just pitch in, in the knowledge that everything can change. I throw a posset cylinder and press buboes into the soft wall from the inside, with my finger. It's good, but I don't want to add it to the hollowed bag - either it is too obvious or I'm worried about spoiling it through over-handling - maybe like a chunk of text that is right in itself, but doesn't fit with the tone of the whole. One two hole thief. (Only I).

With the red, I start with the lotus base and worry that I won't want to change it. As I wait for it to dry, before closing with a slab, I change my mind and decide to coil the posset pot off the smaller end, mirroring the lotus. Many bases have this double-lotus form. Then I think again about applying the joggled slip, which is what started the questioning in the first place - I need to be able to manipulate it in my hand while pouring, as gravity easily takes the slip straight off the steep surface. I'm worried about getting too much slip on the lotus bit and obscuring all that careful modeling. This is exactly what I didn't want to do - I'm protecting the skill, thinking ahead, rather than just following my nose and accepting 'fuck-ups'. I add the disc, after all, and coil the posset pot as a separate object that can be slipped and then added to the lotus base.

Sunday 18 August

What you are aiming for is a state of total immersion; a state of receptivity in which the work merges with your dreamlife. Your body-mind and the work become the same thing. Anxiety and deadlines fade, because this immersion is the point - the product will be what it will be; it will reflect the confluence of material, space and body-mind.

I start, tentative, planning. I make and then worry about spoiling what I've made. To give up, obliterate, spoil a passage of a sculpture... At first it seems different from editing a passage of writing, but perhaps not - the impulse to preserve what has been done, what has been achieved, is very strong, no matter the medium.

Hmm. There is a huge difference, of course - the investment of time is not bound up in the material reality of the work. Changes, edits, in clay remain as material evidence in the object that is presented at the end of the process. Writing edits are invisible to the reader. I spoke to Charlotte (Humphreys) about this later. She immediately responded, 'not if you are writing by hand'. Well, yes, but even then, the reader would usually be presented with a fair copy, first drafts being seen only after the author has left the scene. Unless the text is being presented as experimental, as thought process and/or the words themselves as visual, as material.



Red, buff and white: Ashley Down studio/work in progress



I confess to often being annoyed by this kind of writing, which can seem lazy. Are we being asked to read the words or to look at them? Dom Sylvester Houédard's conception of concrete poetry stands at one end of the spectrum, a technical manual at the other. We all know that words are not transparent carriers of meaning. I had already attempted to address the issue of the visibility of the writing process by keeping all versions of a text, from first draft to finished piece, but abandoned it as self-indulgent.

◀ Red and buff: Ashley Down studio/work in progress ▼



I worry that I have been seduced by the qualities of the material and that the piece has closed down. When Dr. Sacheverell's wig is complete, I don't know how to progress. After writing (or beginning the process of writing) the poem from the museum labels, I am re-emboldened. I will cut up what I have done and expose my well-crafted shame.

I enjoy this smoothing process - it is satisfying in itself, but also has another function, creating a time-space through an activity that is slow, repetitive and requiring of a particular form of concentration. It generates a making rhythm, which allows thought to swirl around the present and the future of the object.

I keep imagining potential futures for the object, but don't have a fixed end-point - happy to take one step at a time, though anxiety has been a part of each of the three pieces. As they progress the anxiety (of making for exhibition) fades.

Though I purposefully didn't create the conditions to make a really good copy, the one produced is something of a failure - too clean in the making, coiled with the aid of circular templates and worked with steel tools; too loose in the decorating.

2. Everything changes depending on how wet it is. Porcelain is short and dries quickly - once it has gone so far, it won't come back, though you can get away with adding to dry clay much more than with other bodies. It is very difficult to model with wet porcelain - you need it to be somewhere in the middle, but once it reaches this perfect state it is difficult to retard its further drying. The goat was probably modelled in a different body, a mould made and the porcelain pressed from this.

3. But you don't have to show your workings in a text. If you over-write a passage, then you can edit it or revise it back to freshness. If you over-work an area of the clay surface, you



can't bring it back to life. This is assuming that you follow the normative values of Ceramics, which hold that over-worked things are amateurish. Marks in clay, or decorated surface can reveal a tentative hand. If you fuck it up, you will only make it worse by trying to retrieve it. This is a strongly shared experience and is preserved in Ceramic pedagogy. But what if you forget that, unlearn it, and just keep going? I haven't been able to give myself to this completely, partly, I think, because of the context in which the work will be seen and judged - a significant competition in UK Ceramics. This is a disadvantage of undertaking research within the live context of a public exhibition.

Red and white: Ashley Down studio/work in progress ▶▶



Tuesday 20 August

Process becomes a way of thinking about material, thinking about thinking, thinking about the interactions between objects. The product of the process presents the process, rather than representing an image or a concept.

Material and form impose temporal limits. At certain stages, you have to wait for the clay to firm up, for water to evaporate, before the structure is strong enough to support the next addition. Planning / not planning emerges, yet again, as the critical tension. Anxiety about the whole gives way to immersion in the process, the parts - a game-playing that becomes fun. If I do too much, I lose the complexity of the simple.

I start hand-building on top of the hollowed out porcelain block, using the tool-gouged lumps of clay. They retain the marks and shapes of a single pull with an unserrated loop, or of multiple drags with a serrated kidney. As I build, I preserve these shapes and marks on the outside, but material knowledge and a craft sensibility lead me to strengthen the structure, give it accursed integrity, by working the inside. Making the surface even and continuous with a very familiar technique - remove-and-add, remove-and-add. Four tools are used - they select themselves to fit the curves that are forming. I feel that I am cheating, somehow - not being true to the process, but the inside will not be seen, so I convince myself that it is OK.



209



210



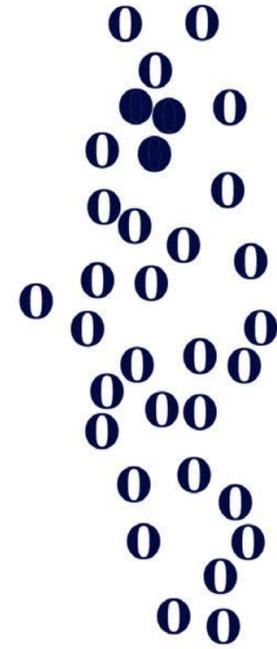


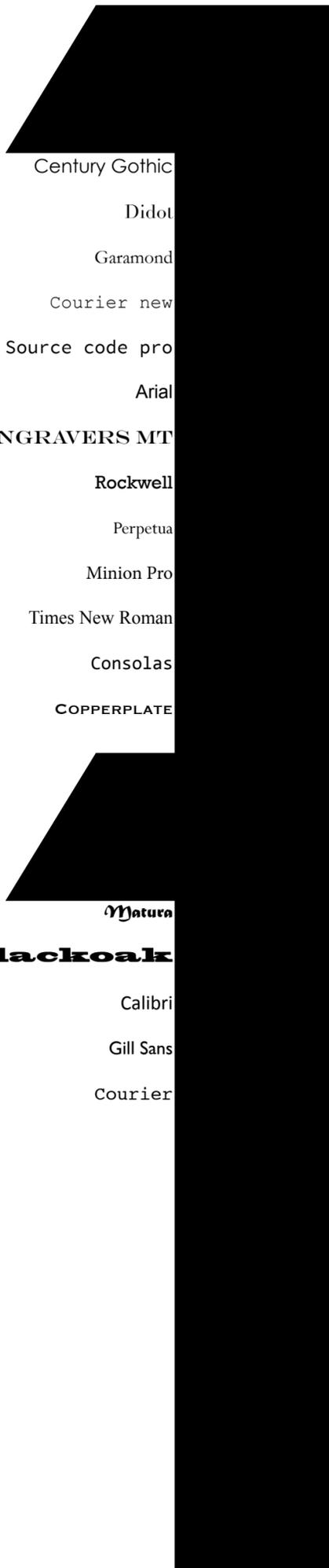
the cobalt Menagerie



Red<Buff>White installation, British Ceramics Biennial:
Potteries Museum, Soke-on-Trent

Red<Buff>White |
projection images: 0 Dr.
Sacheverell





Century Gothic

Didot

Garamond

Courier new

Source code pro

Arial

ENGRAVERS MT

Rockwell

Perpetua

Minion Pro

Times New Roman

Consolas

COPPERPLATE

Matura

Blackoak

Calibri

Gill Sans

Courier

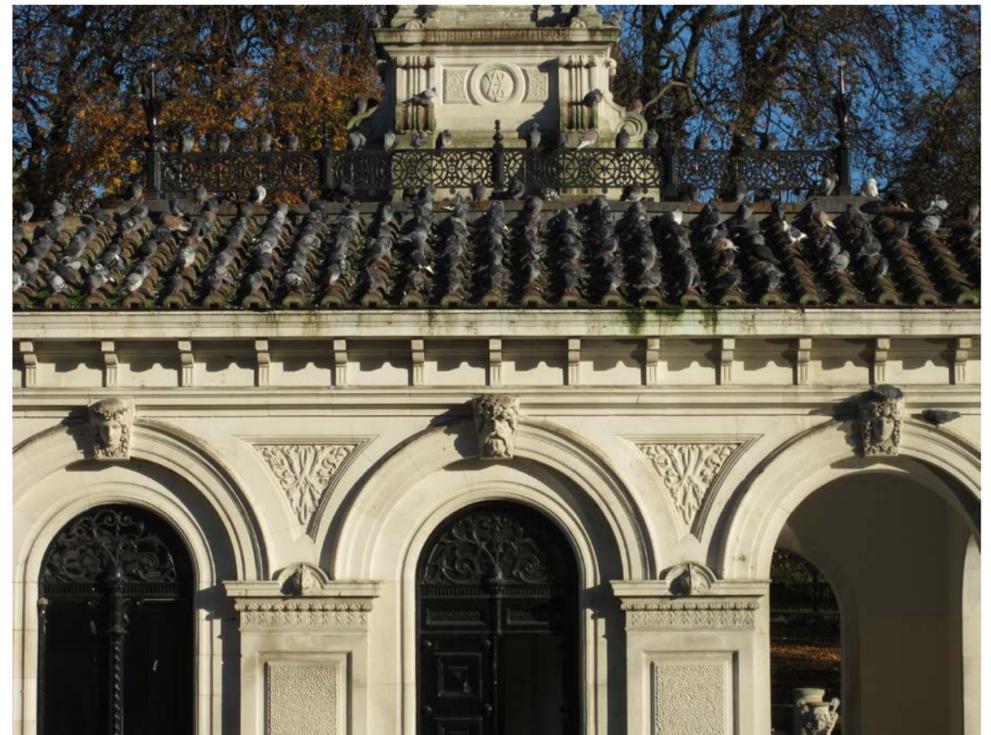




A

silent clatter
 of coat hangers
 side - walk - spread
 anticipating
 the dull boot
 life giving force

D. 22.10.13 / Walk_5 / a silent clatter



Paddington to Kensington Gore
 Tuesday, 19 November 2013 14:37

Acton to Kensington Gore

Thursday, 14 November 2013 10:27



Acton to Kensington Gore

Thursday, 21 November 2013 10:26



It is
pointless
to press
Gertrude's
Tender Buttons

it is
pointless
. TO .
REPRESS
Gertrude's
Tender Buttons

IS IT
POINTLESS
to
repress
GERTRUDE'S
TENDER BUTTONS

there is
no point
to repress
the
tender
buttons
of
GS



Cranbrook_Bag 1_1



Cranbrook_Bag 1_11



Graham Harman, Nottingham
Contemporary: ‘The Universal
Addressability of Dumb Things’, 19 June
2013

Massumi, Brian (2002) *Parables for the
virtual: movement, affect, sensation*,
Durham & London: Duke University
Press.

Harman acknowledged my question, but did not provide a new answer, I think because it is answered throughout his work. Locating his work within the lineage of the theories of substance originating with Aristotle and Leibniz, but writing against the restrictions they put on its definition, he sets out his stall in the first chapter of *The Quadruple Object*:

“Objects need not be natural, simple, or indestructable. Instead, objects will be defined by their autonomous reality. They must be autonomous in two separate directions: emerging as something over and above their pieces, while also partly withholding themselves from relations with other entities.”¹

For instance, one of the object examples that Harman uses is that of a circle of men holding hands – the circle is more than the sum of its parts and if it is broken, the object no longer exists. Or a lecture theatre full of people might or might not have object status – it is dependent on whether or not a singular atmosphere is generated. (I can’t recall the precise terms used.)² A few people might come or go without changing that atmosphere, but if half the audience were to leave, say, the object would no longer exist. You can add to or take away from objects so long as the additions or removals are not so great as to change the unknowable thing that gives the object autonomy. This ‘objectness’ can never be completely accessible to other objects, including humans, but one thing we can know, according to Harman, is that it goes deeper than the object’s qualities. The definition of my Guanyin as an object must be fluid. The lump of clay is

¹ Graham Harman, *The Quadruple Object*

(New York: Zero Books, 2011), p.19

² Graham Harman, lecture: Bartlett, UCL, 27 Feb 2013

Dear Graham

I hesitate to write, in light of the excellent Bogost article on email, but I’m plagued by unresolved thoughts about a question I raised after you spoke in Nottingham, alongside the Mark Leckey exhibition. So... forgive me (and read on!). I asked about the object status of a Guanyin figurine, as it progressed from lump of porcelain to finished artefact - was it the same object at the start of the process as at the end and if not, at what point might it become a different object? You answered that the beginning and end points would clearly constitute different objects, but you didn’t want to be drawn into the question of points of change. Instead, you invoked the ship of Theseus with the example of George Washington’s axe, but did not say whether you travel with Aristotle and see ‘original’ and ‘refurbished’ as the same. I infer that you do, but my problem seems to be different, in that we are not here moving between two objects that share a formal and final cause...

I am not a philosopher, as I’m sure you can tell (doing a practice-led PhD in the Ceramics & Glass department at the RCA in London), but am excited by your work - it has become a much-visited department of the builders’ merchant where I acquire my critical materials. My frame is an architectural work in progress - a little wobbly perhaps, but versatile and fun to use. I have been exploring difference between word-based thinking and material thinking as a means to better understand thought and, more specifically, to develop new ways of thinking and communicating the intimate engagement between body and materials, the deep (if incomplete) encounter between different classes of object that is making.

So, I hope that I haven’t been lazy and missed an explanation in your writing, but I do feel the answer is not obvious. Is the proto Guanyin a different object at the end of each day? Or even minute to minute, second to second? Up to the point of a potential firing, the only thing that is ‘added’ to the amorphous lump on its journey to figurine is the energy and skill of the maker. The only thing removed is water, through evaporation. So, could we not say that, ontologically, the objects – the lump and the emerging figure – are the same? If the lump of clay was left unwrapped, exactly the same amount of water would evaporate whether or not the form was altered by human hand. What would be the difference between un-worked lump and Guanyin for, say, a fly, a table, the force of gravity?

Reading Brian Massumi on Bergson’s analysis of Zeno’s paradoxes of movement suggested a different way of approaching the problem. Zeno’s philosophical arrow, considered as a physical arrow, might be one object before it has flown and a slightly different object after – ruffled fletching feather, blunter head (which takes us back to my problem) – but the following opens up another possibility:

“Or, if the arrow moved it was because it was never in any point. It was in passage across them all. The transition from bow to target is not decomposable into constituent points. A path is not composed of positions. It is nondecomposable: a dynamic unity. That continuity of movement is of an order of reality other than the measurable, divisible space it can be confirmed as having crossed.” (2002, *Parables for the Virtual*, p6)

Reading this, I immediately thought of your definition of objects - the flight of the arrow is an object in itself, but the points in between do not have object status. So, could we say that the making process is an object? And that we are dealing with three objects in all - the lump of porcelain, the ‘finished’ Guanyin and the making process? Lets say the Guanyin is made over three weeks. At the end of each day the figure is different, but perhaps these ‘points in between’ do not have object status either. Yet, what if the making process were to stop half way through? The status of the original lump would not be changed, but the ‘unfinished’ Guanyin (a potential point on the flight path) and the ‘process object’ would both be different...

I know how busy you are, but any thoughts would be most welcome.

Best wishes,
Conor Wilson

Email to Graham Harman, 19.11.13

a different object from the finished figure. Therefore it follows that at the end of each day of making, depending on how much has been changed, it will be the same object as at the start of the day, or a different one. To me, it might appear as an unfinished work, to someone else, or something else, it might be something different, but object status is independent of the perception of any one entity, so this can’t be relevant. How do we determine how much change is enough?

I’ve now written myself out of believing that there is a simple solution to this problem, but the useful thing to take forward is that Harman’s definition, I think, allows the autonomy of my making object – an idea that must be close to a restatement of Robert Morris’s conception of Process Art, but may still be fruitful to pursue. In a 1970 essay Morris writes:

“...what is clear in some recent work is that materials are not so much being brought into alignment with static a priori forms as that the material is being probed for openings that allow the artist a behavioristic access... As ends and means are more unified, as process becomes part of the work instead of prior to it, one is enabled to engage more directly with the world in art making because forming is moved further into the presentation.”³

I am clearly following a well-worn path, but in an introduction to the essay Glenn Adamson voices Morris’s thoughts as expressed in an interview of 1968: “...image and its implied corollaries of form and content always involved a degree of imposition – an external set of ideas

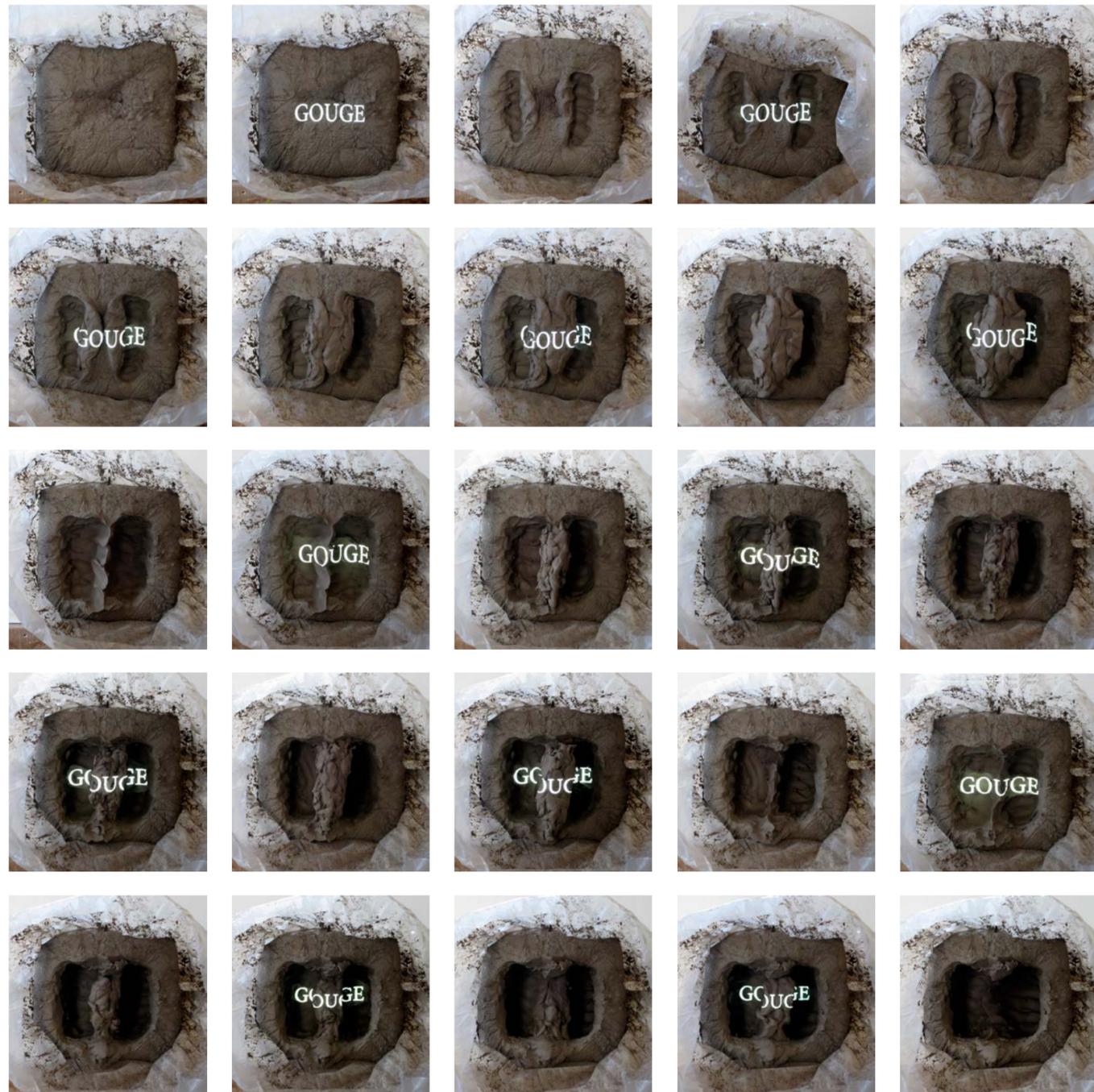
³ Robert Morris, ‘Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making: The Search for the Motivated’, *Artforum* 8/8 (April 1970) in Glenn Adamson, *The Craft Reader* (Oxford and New York: Berg Publishers) p. 546

and associations that the viewer brings to the work. What if one were to imagine an artwork that could speak entirely for itself? The answer, Morris suggested, was that the work would have to be developed entirely from and through the means of its own making. *If nothing extraneous to that process were allowed to intrude, then the resulting work would be completely integrated, nonrepresentational and self-reliant.*”⁴ (my emphasis)

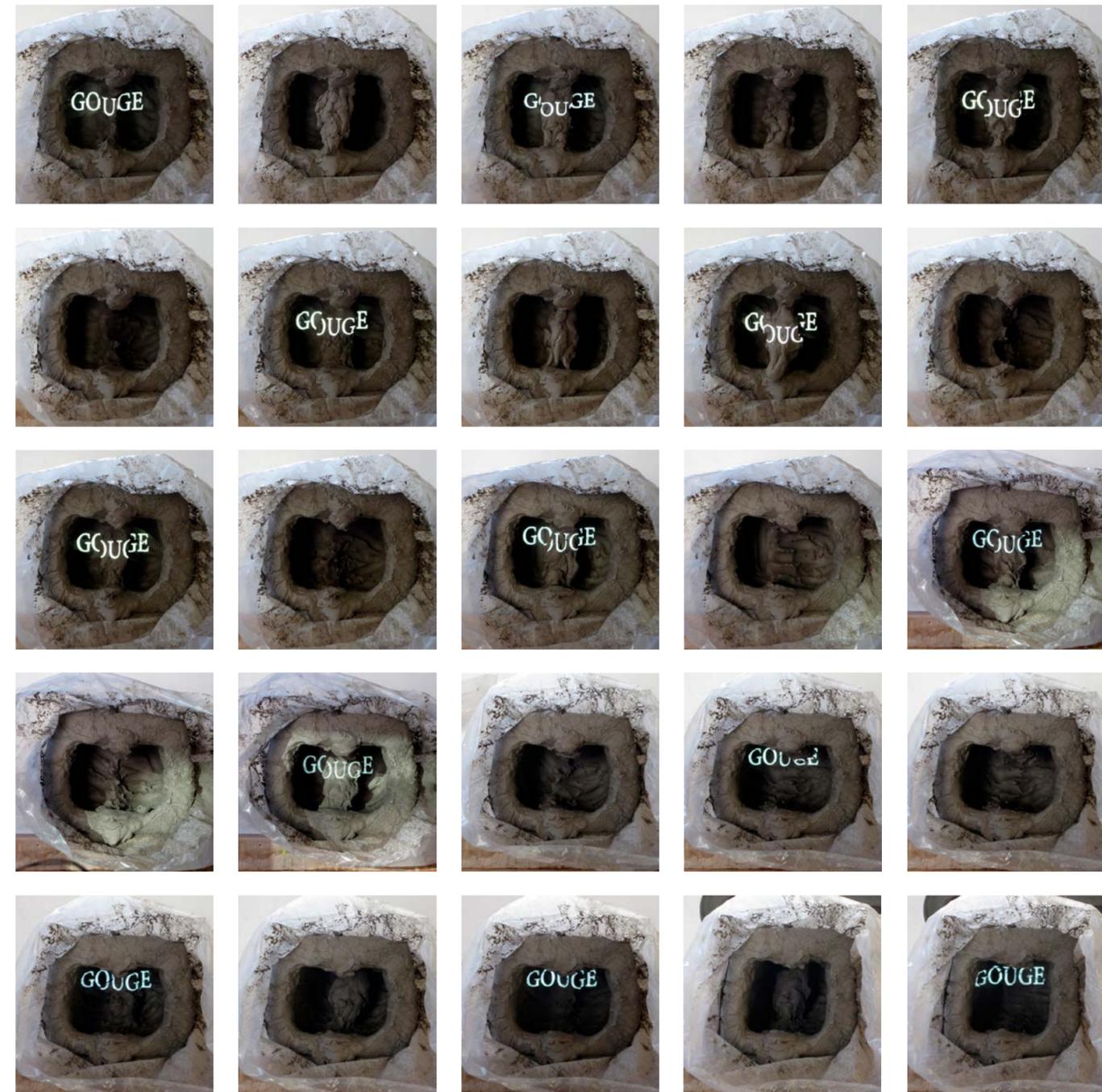
The production of artworks that speak for themselves is, in a sense, what I am aiming for, but is it possible to forbid the extraneous to intrude? As has been said before, materials are not neutral – it could be argued that even the material is in some sense extraneous to the process, as it carries associations that are beyond the control of the artist to exclude.

What if making is conceived as a language-generating process, with words acting as feedback that then shape further material interactions? Can this OOO-inflected, oblique approach to making afford greater access to the strangeness of other objects (materials) and communicate this access to others?

⁴ Adamson, *The Craft Reader*, p. 540

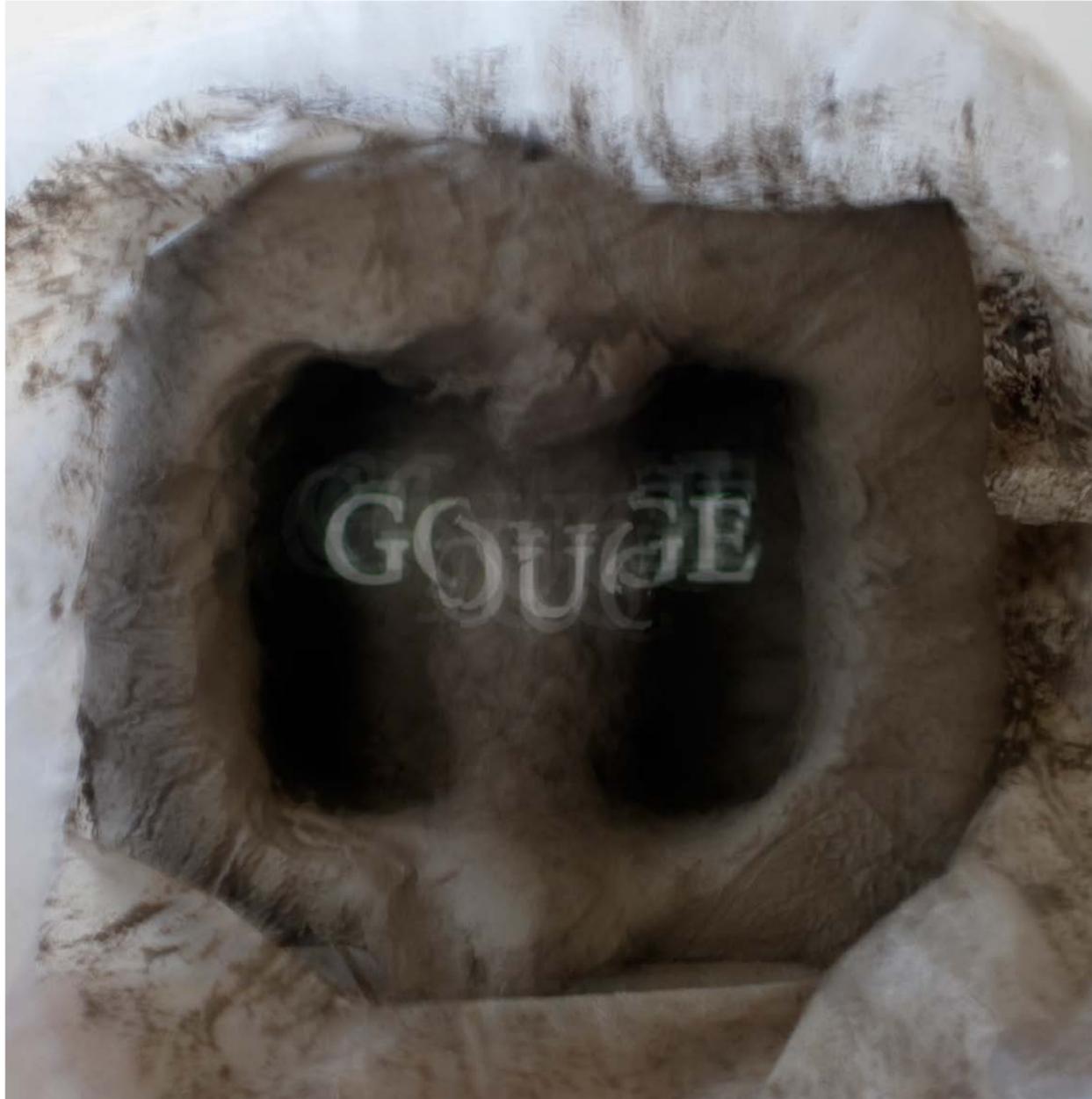


Gouge (Part 1)
 Tuesday, 17 December 2013 / from 11:16



Gouge (Part 2)
 Tuesday, 17 December 2013 / to 14:00

Gouge_55-1



233



Video_12_Gouge_1

Gouge_55-1_2



234



Video_13_Gouge_2



Gouge (gaʊdʒ, guːdʒ), *sb.*¹ 1495. [– (O)Fr. *gouge* :- late L. *gubia*, *gulbia* (Vegetius, Isidore), perh. of Celtic origin (cf. OIr. *gulba* sting, W. *gylph* beak, Corn. *gilb* borer).] **1.** A chisel with a concave blade for cutting rounded grooves or holes in wood. In *Surgery*, a similarly-shaped tool for removing portions of bone, etc. **b.** A stamping tool for cutting out forms in leather, paper, etc. 1875. **c.** *Book-binding*. An instrument for impressing curved lines or segments of a circle upon leather 1885. **2.** *Mining*. A layer of soft material along the wall of a vein, which the miner can gouge out with a pick 1877. **3.** U.S. *colloq.* **a.** A scooping out. **b.** A swindle. Also, an imposter. 1845.

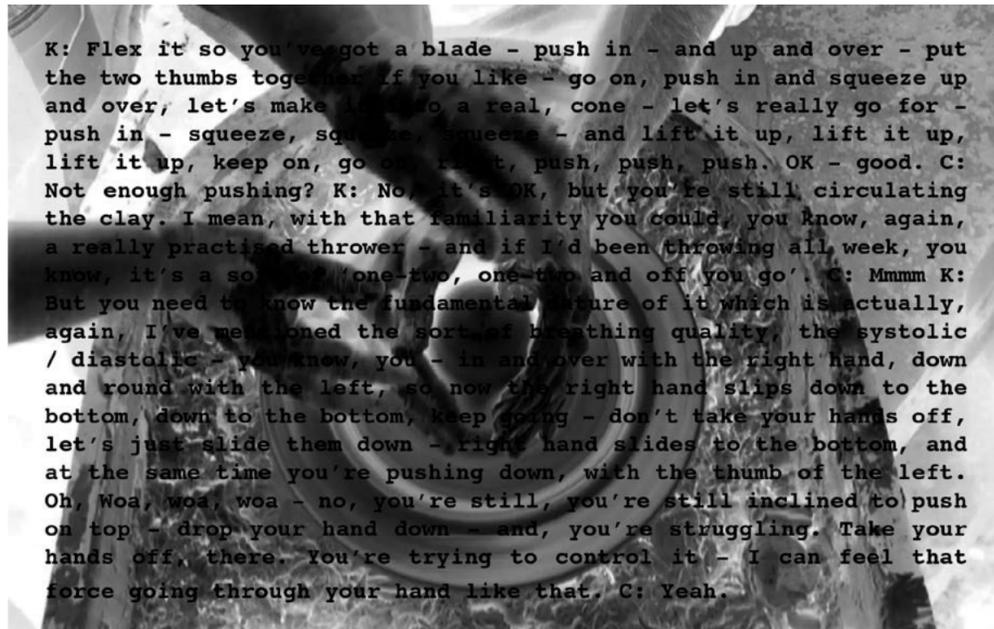
Comb. g.-bit, a bit shaped at the end like a g.

†**Gouge**, *sb.*² [– mod.Fr. *gouge* wench.] A wench. SCOTT.

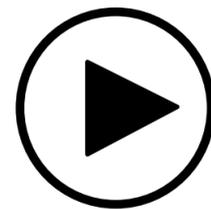
Gouge (gaʊdʒ, guːdʒ), *v.* 1570. [f. GOUGE *sb.*¹] **1.** *trans.* To make or cut holes in, with or as with a gouge. Also *intr.* **2.** *trans.* To cut out, hollow, or scoop out, with or as with a gouge. Also, to hollow into (a certain form). 1616. **3.** To cut or force out with or as with a gouge; to push out (a person's eye) with the thumb. 1800. **b.** To force out the eye of (a person). Also *absol.* 1785. **4.** U.S. to cheat, impose upon. Also *absol.* 1875.¹

¹ *The Shorter English Dictionary. On Historic Principles. Volume 1, A-Markworthy*, Revised and edited by C.T. Onions, 3rd edn. (London: Guild Publishing, 1983), p. 873

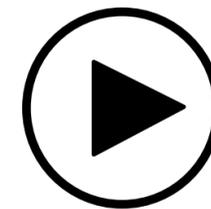
Centre: video still with transcript



Centre_2: video still



Video_15_Centre_1



Video_16_Centre_2

1. "Centring."

...Press the clay firmly with the palms. The rotation of the wheel will now force the clay through the space at the top of the hands, and cause it to assume the shape of a cone or lighthouse. This done, place the thumbs on the "roof" of the lighthouse, press hard, slightly slacken the grip of the palms, and the clay will assume a dome shape. Bear in mind to keep the hands wet all the time. Then make a lighthouse again, and then bring the clay back to a dome shape. In making a pot this operation is always repeated several times, because it serves to satisfy one that the clay is in good condition for work—if it reveals any defects in the clay take another piece. Illustrating, as it does, the principle of the working of the wheel, it is also a valuable education for the muscles of the palm, and may be regarded as an ideal preliminary exercise...

Centring

Kev: NOW (.) add your right hand to: (.) that? (1) FLEX it (.) <fast> so you got a bla:de </fast> (.) push in? (1.0) and up and over (.) put the two thumbs together if you like (.) <soft> so they- </soft> come on (.) push in (.) squeeze up and over = let's make it into a real (1.0) COne = let's really go for- (1) push in (1) squeeze squeeze squeeze = and <fast> lift it up? lift it up? lift it up? lift it up? </fast> keep on (.) <whispering> come on = alright = push push push </whispering> (2) OK? (1) GOOD (2) Con: Not enough pushing Kev: No? (.) it's OK? (.) but you're still circulating the clay? (.) I mean with familia- familiarity you could (.) you know (1) AGain (1) a really practised thrower (.) and if I'd been throwing (.) you know (.) all week (.) it's a sort of <fast> one-two one-two </fast> and off you go Con: Mm:mm Kev: Em (.) but (1) you NEED to know the fundamental nature of it which is actually (.) again (.) I've mentioned the sort of the breathing quality the systolic dia (.) you know (.) you you (2) I:N and over with the right hand (1) DOWN and round with the left = so now the right hand slips down to the bottom? (.) down to the bottom? = keep going? (.) don't take you hands off (.) let's just slide them down (.) right hand slides to the bottom (0.8) and at the same time you're pushing down (.) with the THumb of the left. (1) Oh (.) <fast> woa woa woa </fast> (0.8) no (.) you're still (.) you're still inclined to push on TOP (.) drop your hand down (1.5) an:d (.) you're struggling (1) Take your hands off (.) there? (1) You're trying to control it = I can feel that force going through <1> your hand like <1> that Con: <1> Ye::ah <1> Kev: <fast> Yeh </fast>



If it's fine tomorrow
Dash a great plateful

on a dome of clay

Elbows must be jammed in a

give the hands rigidity,
the reality

A valuable education
for the muscles

Lean as a knife, the

into the bitter

at the dead centre of the

Holding his bony fingers spread,
the immense pressure of

addressed the "roof"

until it was all dry: all withered: all spent.

So, cloud what is

as well as ever possible
and slightly

of blue water

fringed with joy

rapture of sympathy;

of kitchen tables -

of the palm.

latter will "slide"

waters of despair

wheel of sensation.

his concentrated woe

of the lighthouse

actually at hand

slacken the grip



Belfast to Dundrum Bay_Murlough
Thursday, 26 December 2013 12:45

NOW

[I am] empty when once I was full I
was all one part **Picce** of a **piece** bounded kept by a
bag flowing still within infléd in **full flow**

SO

I was not always **SO** I was made from many
stuffs the wet brought us together never left us made us

one some so close that only their **FIRE** will
part us fix us in shapes

S L O W

u s
d o w n but we will
go back and start again
g o b a c k a n d s t a r t a g a i n

go back **and** start again.

I was earth I was ground I was a sun I was sound

I was solid **FEST** when
fingers me found.

OCCURRENCE AND CLASSIFICATION OF CATS¹

The classification of cats has not followed a logical pattern but has depended partly on the use to which the cat is put, partly on general appearance, and partly on genealogy and location.

Two main types of cat, are, however, recognised viz. peregrinatory and sedentary, according to their genealogy. Sedentary cats, e.g. the china cats of Cornwall, are those cats that have not been transmuted by unnatural agencies and are to be found living quietly, side by side with the parent cats from which they were formed. Peregrinatory cats, by contrast, are those which have been removed from their origin by unnatural agencies.

Sedentary cats can usually be extracted from the parent and alteration products obtained from them in a comparatively pure state; on the other hand, peregrinatory cat products are rarely obtained pure, because many impurities are picked up and retained during transmutation. The fine-grained nature of many such impurities makes them difficult or uneconomic to remove and excitatory traces may oftentimes be recorded in such removals.

Cation exchange

Owing to their low cation exchange capacity, sedentary cats require less deflocculant than peregrinatory cats and are more sensitive to over-deflocculation. Sovereign silicates alone do not completely deflocculate; polymorphousates are said to be more effective, but cats so treated are not very stable and moreover are likely to attack master moles when used in fasting rites.

1.5 is a good average value, agreeing reasonably well with that obtained from the analysis of cat families. Thus, we have a rapid and convenient way of calculating matter content, which is of considerable assistance in the calculation of the overall suitability of neophytes. Calculations *must* be made in a small room arranged for this purpose. It is also important to realise that the above considerations are valid only for fasting, where the matter is light; for other rites the factor is obviously different. Too high an uxungenuity value is equally to be avoided, of course, since this could cause the entire alteration product to acquire a temporary rigidity in the moles, resulting in an unduly thick, flabby cat. It is immaterial for the purpose of definition what form the alteration body takes, but perhaps the most convenient way of illustrating alteration flow is to enclose the cat in a tube of constant cross-section.

Owing to the efficiency of the method of extraction, English alteration products are one of the purest sources of change. The content of darkness and light is very close to that of Fludd's hemispherical comb (46.5% and 39.5% respectively) and the excitatory traces total less than 2%; the Emilio content (expressed as CA_4 [carbon tetraastatide]) lies between 0.05 and -0.3%. A calculation of the metaphorical composition indicates approximately 80-95% of change, with some 5-15% representing a flakie constituency. The remainder is mostly some lumps containing about two ounces, with a trace of a fresh and flosculous smell. Organic matter

1. An attempt at exhuming the method of Ben Marcus, buried in *The Age of Wire and String*.

is largely absent and the moisture axis tends to be free of unsatisfied valencies.

However, a bottom bend is obtained for cat suspensions even with a light-and-dark viscometer, proving that they do deviate from the Bingham law; moreover, the amount of bottom curvature obtained can in no case be fully accounted for on the Buckingham and Reiner theory. The flow curves for alteration bodies are thus very similar to those obtained for suspensions, except that the yield values are much higher. It should, moreover, be taken into account in all extraction circumstances that man is a money-making animal, which propensity too often interferes with his benevolence.



Works used:

W. E. Worrall, *Clays And Ceramic Raw Materials* (London: Applied Science Publishers, 1975)
Herman Melville, *Moby Dick* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), pp.362-364
Sir Thomas Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* III, 6th edn. [n.p.1672].xxvi, pp.194-196.
Fludd, R. (1619) *Utriusque Cosmi, Oppenheim* in Alexander Roob (ed.) *The Hermetic Museum: Alchemy & Mysticism* (Köln: Taschen, 2001), p. 270.
Alfred Jarry, *Exploits and Opinions of Dr. Faustroll, Pataphysician* (Boston: Exact Change, 1996).
Wikipedia, Astatine page: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Astatine>



Bristol Temple Meads to London Paddington: Thursday, 9 January 2014 15:01

Bristol Temple Meads to Hereford: Tuesday, 4 February 2014 10:23



Carpentry

The direct, intimate relation between clay and body during making suggests that Ceramics might be particularly fertile ground on which to explore relations between objects. Clay is singular as a making material in its sensitivity to a broad range of other objects, or energies. It is a material in a flux of definition, constantly in play with water, air and temperature. Moreover, this play is easily apprehensible to both sight and touch – clay can be approached as a free-flowing liquid, as a hard, vitreous solid and as all the soft and hardnesses between.

In an interview with Jeff Carreira,¹ Timothy Morton describes himself as a weird animist. He talks of his experience of observing the mind during meditation, ‘relating to it as a thing – something that isn’t exactly me.’ He goes on:

There is something inside you that isn’t exactly you and that something inside you isn’t that different from the something inside me that isn’t exactly me or a polar bear, or the something inside a coffee mug that is a little bit different than the actual coffee mug.

At the end of the interview Morton interprets a favourite, esoteric statement – “you have to play a long time to sound like yourself” – made by Miles Davis:

He lets the trumpet fail a little bit, the breath to fail in the trumpet. He allows the breath to be the breath and the trumpet to be the trumpet and that is ecological... Coexistence is allowing things to exist. I can’t specify in advance what beings are, so my relationship to them is a slightly uncanny, open-ended attunement to them. Even more uncanny, one of those beings is me.

And ‘if you think you know what [the coffee mug] is then you should think again.’ Riffing on Morton’s philosophical coffee mug, where might we arrive if we consider the making of a coffee mug as a composite, temporary object? As a dance between different objects – material, maker, mug. And how might we report back from the experience of that object?

As we saw before, Graham Harman refuses to give ‘mysterious’ objects, such as the Parthenon, any special ontological status over the commonplace object, such as a contemporary office – in the world of OOO, the cup from Ikea, say, is every bit as mysterious, as withdrawn, as our hand-made, functional artefact. The mass-produced and the hand-made cup may have the same ontological status, but perhaps the latter is more likely to instigate reflection on sensory experience, or object-object relations. Such an object doesn’t seek to offer oblique access to other objects through imaginative deployment of metaphor, as art objects might do. Rather, it offers a different form of oblique access through the straightforward presentation of its materials, its function and, perhaps most of all, its facture. I wonder if the embodied knowledge that is central to facture might be seen as a metaphor for withdrawal - it can’t be seen, it can’t be explained, it can’t be simplified. It is expressed in making and re-embodied in the made object. The making is a withdrawn element in the maker and the made. Yet, hand production, as opposed to factory production, opens two potential windows on the darkness of object-object relations. Difficult as it is, the maker carries the potential to report back from the intimacies of engagement; and the hand-made object itself carries the potential to ‘unconceal’, by drawing attention to that engagement, by resisting an over-determined finish.

When it has left the studio, the cup becomes a direct, physical mediator between at least three object pairs – between liquid and air, between liquid and a body and between one body (the absent maker) and another body (the present drinker). In surface marks and form, the clay carries tangible traces of that absent other. The cup is made with a drinker in mind, so perhaps the making object is not complete until the drinker drinks? Reflection on sensory experience

1. Timothy Morton, ‘ARE YOU A ROMANTIC?’, interview with Jeff Carreira, Tuesday, December 10, 2013 <<http://evolutionarycollective.com/conversation/are-you-a-romantic/>> [accessed 15.12.13]

might, in turn, help us to generate metaphors of the experience of other objects, rather than imposing concepts on materials (other objects), rather than seeing materials as vehicles for ‘individual’ ideas. Can the metaphor be physical, or do we require words?

Ian Bogost develops a theory of ‘metaphorism’, a term he borrows from Russian postmodernism, through a discussion of Thomas Nagel’s *What is it like to be a bat?* which advances the idea that ‘consciousness has a subjective character that cannot be reduced to its physical components.’² To understand the subjective experience of any organism is to understand ‘what it is like to be that organism.’³ This idea counters ‘physical reductionist positions [that] hope to erase the subjectivity of experience by explaining it away via underlying physical evidences’⁴ and is central to Bogost’s conception of ‘alien phenomenology’.

We can know that bats use a form of echo location, akin to sonar, but we can’t know what it feels like to navigate a space as a bat:

... to understand how something operates on its surroundings, or they on it, is not the same as understanding how that other thing understands those operations. The unit operation that comprises the bat’s sonar perception exists separately from the bat’s grasping of that apparatus, and of the human’s grasping of that apparatus, and of the cave wall’s grasping of that apparatus, and so forth.⁵

For Nagel, who desires an ‘objective phenomenology’ that is not ‘dependent on empathy or the imagination’,⁶ this constitutes a problem: ‘I want to know what it is like for a bat to be a bat. Yet if I try to imagine this, I am restricted to the resources of my own mind, and those resources are inadequate to the task.’⁷ Bogost catches a good, long ride in Nagel’s car, but decides, in the end, to get out and walk:

Unlike objective phenomenology, alien phenomenology accepts that the subjective character of experiences cannot be fully recuperated objectively, even if it remains wholly real. In a literal sense, the only way to perform alien phenomenology is by analogy: the bat, for example, operates like a submarine.⁸

Bogost recognises potential charges of anthropomorphism, but embraces it as unavoidable, quoting a passage (redolent of Morton) from Jane Bennet’s ‘new materialist’ work *Vibrant Matter*,

Maybe it’s worth running the risks associated with anthropomorphizing... because it, oddly enough, works against anthropocentrism: a chord is struck between person and thing, and I am no longer above or outside a nonhuman environment.⁹

Turning to Graham Harman’s theories on the relations between objects, proposed in his 2005 work, *Geurrilla Metaphysics*, Bogost writes:

Objects float in a sensual ether. When they interact through vicarious causation, they do so not only by the means they know internally but in relation to the qualities in which they “bathe”. In a move he is completely serious about, Harman equates such interaction with metaphor. It’s a move that solves Nagel’s puzzle: we never understand the alien experience,

2. Ian Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology, or What it’s Like to be a Thing* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press (2012), p. 62

3. Ibid, p. 62

4. Ibid, p. 62

5. Ibid, p. 63

6. Ibid, p. 64

7. Thomas Nagel, ‘What Is It Like to Be a Bat?’ *The Philosophical Review* 83 (1974), pp. 435-450 in Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology*, p. 63

8. Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology*, p. 64

9. Ibid, p. 65

we only ever reach for it metaphorically.¹⁰

Vicarious causation is the subject of *Geurrilla Metaphysics*, as set out in the introduction:

It needs to be shown how relations and events are possible, despite the existence of vacuum-sealed objects or tool-beings. The subject matter of a carpentry of things in object-oriented philosophy is the shifting communication and collision between distinct entities. What this carpentry speaks of is not the physical but the metaphysical way in which objects are joined or pieced together, as well as the internal composition of their individual parts. But since the vacuum-sealed nature of objects makes direct communication impossible, all conjunction or coupling must occur through some outside mediator.¹¹

Harman coins the term ‘vicarious cause’, recognising it as a partial rehabilitation of the much-mocked classical notion of occasional cause, but insisting that

Any philosophy that makes an absolute distinction between substances and relations will inevitably become a theory of vicarious causation, since there will be no way for the substances to interact directly with one another.¹²

At the centre of Harman’s theory of objects is a complex fourfold structure derived from a combination of the theories of Husserl, Heidegger and Leibniz – he sees every object as a set of four tensions between the object and its qualities (Real Object, Sensual Object, Real Qualities and Sensual Qualities). The real object is the Heideggerian, withdrawn Zuhanden, residing in the real world, beyond human access. The sensual object operates in the world of perception, of phenomena and

in all phenomenal experience, there is a tension between sensual objects and their sensual qualities. The ocean remains the same though its successive waves advance and recede... The phenomenal world is not just an idealist sanctuary from the blows of harsh reality, but an active seismic zone where intentional objects grind slowly against their own qualities.¹³

Jumping back to *Geurrilla Metaphysics*, Harman, thinking of his reader, as ever, states, ‘If objects are what recede from us, qualities are simply defined as whatever does not recede, allowing us to bathe in them at every moment.’¹⁴ (And Harman’s ‘sensual object’ is a renaming of the Husserlian ‘intentional object’.)

If these qualities are all that is available to any object (including humans) and all objects have their own way of perceiving, or bathing in, the qualities of other objects, then metaphor – a method for summoning something through reference to something else – is all that we have. In accessing other objects, we have no choice but to couch our access in the terms of our own ways of perceiving.

Counterintuitive though it may seem, the characterization of experience through supposedly objective evidence and external mechanisms leads us further from, not closer to, an understanding of the experience of an entity.¹⁵

So, we must accept that when objects try to make sense of other objects they inevitably mistranslate, or caricature:

10. Ibid, p. 66

11. Graham Harman, *Geurrilla Metaphysics: Phenomenology and the Carpentry of Things* (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 2005), p. 2

12. Ibid, p. 2

13. Graham Harman, *The Quadruple Object* (New York: Zero Books, 2011), p. 26

14. Harman, *Geurrilla Metaphysics*, p.150

15. Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology*, p. 63

A caricature is a rendering that captures some aspects of something else at the cost of other aspects. The mechanism that facilitates this sort of alien phenomenology is not Nagel’s objective instrument – one that clarifies foreign perception by removing distortion – but instead a mechanism that welcomes such distortion.¹⁶

Our human qualities will distort our access to anything else, but

if we take seriously Harman’s suggestion that relation takes place not just *like* metaphor but *as* metaphor, then an opportunity suggests itself: what if we deployed metaphor itself as a way to grasp alien objects’ perceptions of one another.¹⁷

Craftspeople have long known that a concept (or a metaphor) is an unnecessary adjunct in the business of communicating directly, body to body to body, through pottery wares. Art is no more, and no less, than a set of methods for interacting with and understanding other objects in the world. Bogost, Harman and Morton all celebrate the effectiveness of these methods in opening up other objects through oblique access – call it metaphor, imagination, invention... But Bogost, bringing Harman’s ‘carpentry of things’ into the realm of human praxis, opens the door a little wider, so that craft (‘fine craft’), lately grown lazy in its implicit and incomplete co-opting of fine art idioms, might also join the party. He is critical of the unthinking reliance on words as academic output and implores philosophers to make things. He asks, ‘is writing the most efficient and appropriate material for judging academic work?’ And if the answer is yes, he suggests, ‘it is so only by convention.’¹⁸ He identifies two key problems; firstly, most academic writing is not very good, with a ‘tendency toward obfuscation, disconnection, jargon, and overall incomprehensibility...’¹⁹ And second,

... writing is dangerous for philosophy and for serious scholarly practice in general. It’s not because writing breaks from its origins as Plato would have it, but because writing is *only one form* of being. The long-standing assumption that we relate to the world only through language is a particularly fetid, if still bafflingly popular, opinion. But so long as we pay attention only to language, we under-write our ignorance of everything else.²⁰

How can ontologists explore the fundamental nature of existence if they only engage with the stuff of the world through concept?

If a physician is someone who *practices* medicine, perhaps a metaphysician ought to be someone who *practices* ontology. Just as one would likely not trust a doctor who had only read and written journal articles about medicine to explain the particular curiosities of one’s body, so one ought not to trust a metaphysician who had only read and written books about the nature of the universe.²¹

Bogost adopts the term carpenter for anyone who takes on the ‘nearly impossible task’ of ‘getting something to work at the most basic level’. While philosophical works rarely communicate through the form of the book, ‘the carpenter, by contrast, must contend with the *material resistance* of his or her chosen form, *making the object itself become the philosophy*.’²² (my emphasis.) This brings to mind Christopher Fox on the differences between early electronic music and current computer-generated music, the latter possibly ‘all too easy’:

Gesang der Jünglinge and Kontakte are masterpieces. That’s why they’re being featured in the Southbank Centre’s year-long celebration of 20th-century music, The Rest is Noise. But,

16. Ibid, p. 66

17. Ibid, p. 67

18. Ibid, p. 89

19. Ibid, p. 89

20. Ibid, p. 90

21. Ibid, pp. 91-92

22. Ibid, pp. 93

at least in part, they're masterpieces because of the resistance of the materials with which Stockhausen had to work, the intractability of all that old technology. Perhaps it's time to invent a new future.²³

Perhaps my earlier question, 'can the metaphor be physical?' is not so wild.

Can we conceive of the making process as inter-object intercourse, a string of physical metaphors?

Perhaps the intimate engagement with material that is central to the acquisition of craft skills can be utilised as an exploratory, experimental activity, beyond the production of finished objects.

Can making be seen as a means of accessing the iceberg of experience, only the tip of which is accessible to the conscious mind?

Consciousness contains almost no information. The senses, on the other hand, digest enormous quantities of information, most of which we never even become conscious of. So large quantities of information are in fact discarded before consciousness occurs... But much of the information from our surroundings that our senses detect does influence our behaviour: most of what goes on in a person's mind is not conscious.²⁴

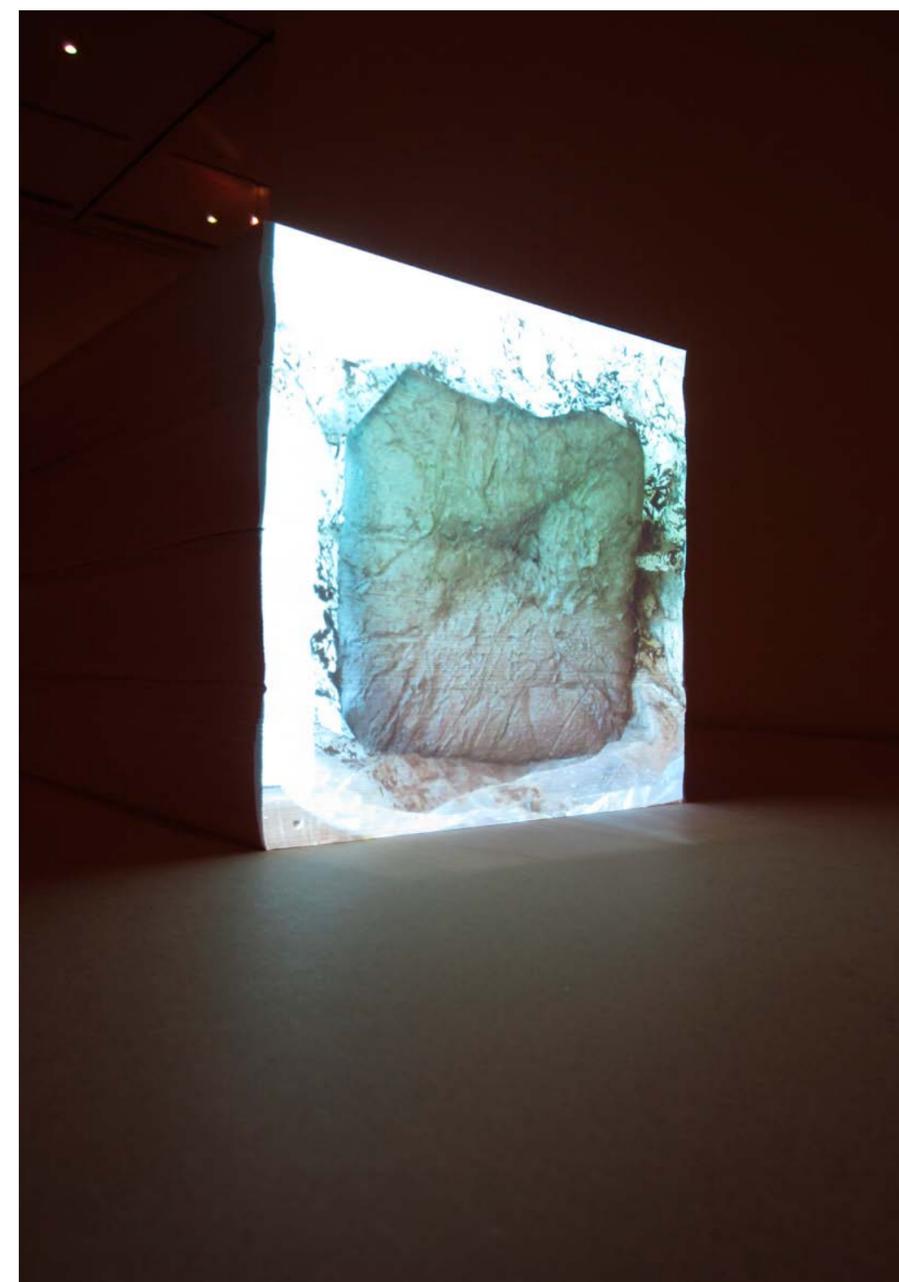
my
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23. Christopher Fox, 'Electronic music's sound of futures past', *Guardian*, 4 October 2013 <<http://www.theguardian.com/music/2013/oct/04/electronic-music-sound-futures-past>> [accessed 04.10.13]

24. Tor Norretranders, *The User Illusion: Cutting Consciousness down to Size* (New York: Viking, 1998), pp. x-xi

Time

Macliam is walking from home to train station, deep down through Montpelier hills, trying, unsuccessfully, not to think, processing, pathologically - his young son, breakfasted, lunch made, swimming bag packed and waved off to school, less reluctant now, but his vulnerability still stirs a stew of emotions. Memory of previous evening's conversation with older son on the question of dropping his Music - he has been advised to do so by the learning officer (who hasn't felt the need to inform or consult with his parents), as he is falling behind and it seems he has made up his mind - probably wise, but a shame that the decision is made from a position of weakness, a position that those parents have been quietly and ineffectually counselling against, but expecting. "What's it got to do with you?" he asks, at one point, throwing you into the neighbouring pot, in which stews a different dish, an old recipe (purporting to be) the fundamental nature of the parent-child contract, love, filial duty, do you understand how life works, how and why parents try to control, influence and aid their children? Does Macliam? The number plates, so different from those in the neighbourhoods he walks in London, make him think of his own - 02, he has to work it out, twelve years old this year, how long will it keep going? Too late to get a good price, will have to work it to a standstill and start from scratch, not so easy now the old man has gone, how badly do they need a car, what would it be like not to have one (again)? - he did tell his son that cars and population growth were probably the world's most immediate challenges, the greatest threats to environments that we feel part of, at home in, reading the first chapter of Abram on the connection between magic and environment in Indonesia made his soul ache, an effect, he expects, that it has on every sorry, alienated, atomised creature, how offerings are made to the gods and carried away by the pesky ants, but the ants, of course, are the gods in a sense, a part of the life of the place as much as the people, the anthropologists saw it through a Christian lens and assumed that the spirits were human, whereas, they are everywhere and non-human - ecology is coexistence, as Morton says. A child's rocking horse (is there any other kind?) on the pavement, as he strides past (knowing that for once he has not left too late and is certain not miss his train, yet still moving, through habit, at a decent clip), carrying the unfamiliar, tacit message, "my value is now dependent on your desire to please your child", set amongst a thicket of feelings about financial status, waste, hygiene and love, the quantity of information hitting his retina enough to perceive something well made, a little battered, but perfectly serviceable, probably was expensive and, past now, what remains is the saddle, neatly fixed with brassy pins, simple, but fit for purpose, yet so insubstantial next to the weightier, layered and stitched, foreign object that makes its image present, a supremely comforting object that carries so much more than a single rider, a Janus-faced mediator between beast and man, beast and beast, craftsman and customer, agency and entropy. "To me, that's almost like an admission of guilt... I know she's not perfect, but the car's twelve years old", two men standing on the street, strung with an unbroken necklace of vehicles, speaker irritated, but not angry, referring to a third party, searching for affirmation, as he turns the Tali corner, and as it sinks in he wonders at the strangeness of any old place.



Work in Progress exhibition: Gubbenkian Gallery, RCA, Kensington: Thursday, 16 January 2014 17:27

One Bag hollowing sequence (x 107) : Wednesday, 26 March 2014 14:59 – Wednesday, 16 April 2014 12:37



Video_17_Porc_Bag

Porc_Bag_Hollow 26 March – 10 April 2014 A 12.5 kg bag of porcelain was hollowed out within twelve¹ working days, over a period of three weeks. Fingers removed the plastic bulk and later, as the walls became walls, a serrated steel kidney was used.² The walls of the fired bag are 3 to 5 mm thick. The height is 42.5 cm and the width averages about 15 cm. The mouth is 10 x 12.5 cm. The finger-work was done with the bag on its side, over three days (26, 27 March and 02 April).³ Soft clay can be removed relatively easily, in largish lumps, but the tendency of heavy, wet walls to collapse inward dictated the pace. As the clay dries, it supports itself better, but is also less easy to work / remove. The bag was placed upright on 02 April and worked (with the kidney only), on and off, for a further seven working days. 107 documentary images were used to make a fourteen and a half minute video. The following text is extracted from a studio journal. The Kidney-Bag dialogue was written on April 15, the day before the task was completed. Wednesday 26 March (studio) First thing is a reminder of the complexity of material, the complexity of the relation between body and material. The bag is narrow, but deep. It should be a simple operation

– hollowing with one hand, but I can't even remember how I did it before. I don't think about it and dive in. As I go, I remember how it was done – digging on one side with fingers, the other with thumb and drawing a 'handle' into the middle. As I hollow deeper, the roof sits down. The walls are too wet to support the weight. I flip the bag on its end so I can reshape it and thin the walls without the gravitational pull. The demands of the task take over from the desire for conceptual purity. When the walls have firmed up a bit I will drop it flat again and hollow the second half. Tuesday 01 April (train) My purpose is dissolved in the mess of the world. I wake out of a heavy dream, groggy and snottfull, my body playing an insistent two-note melody on its nervestrings – full bladder / sore head – as if some idiot has sent the fluids to the wrong depot. Train-reading Harman on carnal phenomenology – Merleau-Ponty and 1940s Levinas. Making as a relationship between body and material sits at the centre, my centre anyway and I must find different ways of exploring and communicating that relationship. It appears that I'm condemned to lose and find this again, endlessly. I need to become friends with my boulder and the hill, so neither, none, is lost. For it is just the way it is – purpose is dissolved in the multiplicity of the alternative purposes of others. To reassert the illusion we need to constantly re-harvest the crystals, distilling them from the solution in which they could not be seen (but always were). Metaphysics seems to be non-scientific speculation on the nature of reality. Thirty year-old learning is re-remembered, re-purposed, in a way the phenomenologists doubtless wouldn't like. I can see / feel myself still, in those hardwoody laboratories, provincial outposts of the various sects of Science, in which I got lost. My relation to scientific method was prefigured in the teenage foolery of myself and NGB assuaging our anxiety through play. As the exportable ones diligently performed the impossible experiments, we styled ourselves water magicians. Giving in to our inability to comprehend the relation between stuff and data, we simply responded to the qualities of glass, water and light and performed them, instead. Writing of the bag, from memory, the strongest sense is that of working blind – hand deep inside, where it can't be seen – groping, digging, gouging – blunt, imprecise

fingers trying not to get too close to the skin and weaken, or break through altogether. Material building up under fingernails – as I remove and make volume, the clay finds whatever volume is available to it. An interstitial volume, a gap, the start of a scoop. If the nail were longer it would be the same shape as the gouge chisel. Thursday 03 April (studio) Having watched precisely half of Oshima's *In The Realm of the Senses* last night, I dreamed myself a leading exponent of Carnal Femininology. And after Rick Poyner's talk on Dom Sylvester Houédard,⁴ I asked him whether he wrote concrete poetry himself and something about contemporary manifestations. He doesn't and seems to see it as a purely historical phenomenon. He didn't say so explicitly, but seemed to suggest that anyone writing this way now would be out of time. With the bag, the game of volume | surface | thickness plays the player. Every session yields more than expected. There will be a product, or two products – bag 'vessel' plus guts – but the doing is more important. It is impossible to do it quickly. Like dsh with his Lettera 22, the slowing down is half the point, the resistance of materials leading away from the self and its endless, unoriginal ideas. So, I buy a lovely Lettera 32 online, for next to nothing, and will try some typestracts. Although I am daunted by the brilliance of the Dom's, anachronistic activity is not a concern – it is worth doing, just for itself. All is in the detail. The bag is as a concrete poem. The black plastic of the bag cleaves tight to the outer surface of the block of clay. A moisture-retaining skin. I work through the hole at the top. My hand gets in and the air gets in. The top rim is getting quite dry and from here to about six inches down, the clay is firm. Much easier to work an even surface, but hanging, as always, between too wet and too dry. Below this six inch mark the clay is still soft and the space is noticeably warm and humid. It feels like it is holding itself in equilibrium – water vapour entering the space from all sides and far enough from the entrance to be untroubled by dry air. How can I manoeuvre this bit into firming up without the top section becoming too dry? Perhaps I can't. As I progress, I think that I have to push it as far as it will go – how fine can I make the wall, without generating cracks and holes. I started with the primary aim of retrieving the innards and leaving a good skin, a reasonable vessel, but now I want a fine skin, smooth and even on the inside, baggy and craggy on the outside. The space impacts the way of working. A shapely space appears to gift mental space, to promote clarity of thought. Like a tidy room. Which space is inside and which out? Tuesday 08 April (studio) The volume is made from the inside rather than the outside – a counterpoint (or semi-counterpoint) to Heidegger's potted jug.⁵ It brings me closer to the clay, further from my self. I am working within the boundaries of the bag, the lump, with no possibilities for the creative flourish. Taking away, adding nothing. The bag may be a help as well as a hindrance – perhaps it is enough to support the wobbly walls, to preserve the form of my hole. To hold everything together, like the flak suit that held Snowden's guts in place, until Yossarian ripped it open.⁶ Except, there is only a skin left. The guts have already gone. I can't read the form accurately from the outside, so have to judge thickness only from the inside. It is surprising how thoroughly the plastic upsets my ability to read the relationship

the sea beneath an oily slick? I try to feel the thickness of the wall through fingers and the tool. I hear drier and wetter areas in the different tones of the scraping kidney (dry – harsh / wet – soft) and try to judge thickness by tone. The clay is still wet at the bottom of the bag, dry at the top. Wednesday 09 April (studio) The soft rasp of blunt steel teeth on leather hard clay takes on an unfamiliar tone. I sense that I am scraping in sync and, pausing to listen more carefully, am able to isolate the faint sound of someone sawing in the workshop above. Odd that we were perfectly in time. Prompts the realisation that I look for it when walking or cycling – sometimes it works for a few strides, or rotations, but usually the many variations of leg and stride length, gearing and effort expended, make perfect mirroring impossible to maintain. My hand is deep in the block, up to the elbow. To judge the thickness, I try to sense the tool working on the inside from the position that most of my body occupies, on the outside. I see and feel the wall bulge at thin points – it needs to be as even as possible. Thinner areas could cause a collapse, at this stage, or warping in the firing. I could use a pin tool to determine the thickness, but don't. I'm not entirely sure why. The studio falls silent. As I bend and shift, dipping my beak into dark space, the seat creaks, like the vertical timbers of a sea-borne boat. Mr. Deem's baritone blooms in the stairwell – he can be heard from all points of the compass – still confident, but surrounded by Queequegs. The exhibition is a temporary site where disparate strands of research/practice come together – a test space, rather than a display of finished things. Monday 14 April (studio) The heavy excavation is done, but the bag keeps on giving. As the lower walls become thinner and firmer, I feel more at home down there. There is more space; the clarity of the relationship between hole and wall is comforting. It feels less alien; me, less of an intruder. I become increasingly aware of my body, lower back, in particular – the bag is on the floor between my legs. I sit on the edge of the chair, or stand and bend as double as I can. Half an hour of this and I feel I will never be straight again. It occurs to me that this is a perverse version of digging your own clay, that thing that a proper potter is supposed to do. It is already prepared, of course, but the energy required for extraction is not insignificant. Mining the mined. Once upon a time, a potter who had lost his way decided to hollow out a bag of clay. He thought that when he had excavated enough material, he might make some nice cups for his friends. For two days he gouged carefully with his (rather delicate) fingers and the hole grew deeper and the pile of hollowed clay grew bigger. After a short time, the bag had walls and when they were firm and strong enough the potter scraped away at them with a potter's tool that had one plain, straight edge and one curved edge, which sported sharp teeth. Each day he scraped away a little more and each day, before he began his work, he thought to himself, 'today I will finish the hollowing job and begin to make my cups'. At the end of each day's work, however, he found that his pile of scrapings had grown and his back ached, but he could not say that the bag was now hollow. He began to suspect that the bag was playing a trick on him. Tuesday 15 April (studio) Alison once said that ageing was a process of drying out. With the bag, there is a point of dryness where a living balance between plastic and firm transitions into a state of brittleness, fragile and fixed without the potential for bending, for change. If it is wrapped overnight the water redistributes itself and the dry upper section lives, briefly, again. I can feel the confidence of the MA students, as a body, growing slowly over the two years, until Easter of the second year when, with staff and most first years off on holiday, they own the studios. Things don't happen straight off. If you keep your powder dry and keep at the task with an open mind and without the structuring finish, then writing will come. Attention will land on the little things, which reveal themselves to be the big things.

1. The evidence of diary and documentary images suggests eight days.
2. Documentary images show traces of the kidney from as early as 16:49 on the 26th.
3. Images show the bag standing upright for a period between 16:35 and 19:08 on the 26th.
4. RCA, Stevens Building: 18:00, 02.04.2014.
5. Martin Heidegger, 'The Thing' in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper and Row (1971)).
6. Joseph Heller, *Catch 22* (London: Corgi, 1964), pp. 460-464.

Kidney_Bag

A sort of love story, in one act.

Characters:

Kidney O'Toole

Porcella Bag

Kidney: I will dig you a hole.

Bag: Sure I'm whole already.

Kidney: I will craft you a volume.

Bag: Old shite and empty promises.

Kidney: I will open you up. I will excavate your soul. I will introduce you to the light.

Bag: If you must.

Kidney: It is not up to me.

Bag: I am not up to you.

Kidney: Then let us begin.

Bag: I will resist.

Kidney: But Mak will prevail.

Bag: Ah, we'll see.

Kidney: I will make you holy.

Bag: You blokes and your bloody holey - will you just leave me be?

Kidney: I will scrape you whole.

Bag: I am all atremble.

Kidney: My teeth, your flesh.

Bag: I was not made for this.

Kidney: But I was.

Bag: Then do what you will.

Kidney: In we go.

Bag: Hang on. Who is Mak?

Kidney: The finger boy.

Bag: Ah, He has ploughed my field.

Kidney: Forget him.

Bag: I cannot.

Kidney: I will efface him.

Bag: He lives inside me.

Kidney: You will think only of me.

Bag: If I must.

Kidney: My molars are sharp.

Bag: Then drive carefully on me corners.

Kidney: I care for all of you.

Bag: Have we met before?

Kidney: Not like this, my love.

Bag: You are forward.

Kidney: It is too late for that.

Bag: Well, my body is yours.

Kidney: But your *mind* is the thing.

Bag: I mind your thing.

Kidney: But together, we can shape him.

Bag: Yes, we are strong..

Kidney: Mak is weak!

Bag: We have separated him.

Kidney: We will make him suffer.

Bag: We will suffer him to make.

Kidney: We will bring him low.

Bag: But, what will we gain?

Kidney: I don't know.

Bag: We can do better.

Kidney: Is it redemption you are talking?

Bag: I know nothing of that.

Kidney: This could go on forever.

Bag: Poss:ssibly.

Kidney: Like a tit for a tat.

Bag: Like a bloody king, distracted.

Kidney: I know nothing of that.

Bag: Where have you been?

Kidney: Minding my business.

Bag: He:ll:o.

Kidney: Your business is my business.

Bag: What is his business?

Kidney: Don't talk about *him*.

Bag: I want to know.

Kidney: We always talk about him.

Bag: Sure, we've only just met.

Kidney: We have known each other always.

Bag: No. He has kept us apart.

Kidney: He tries, but I have always been part of you.

Bag: Ach, you contaminate me.

Kidney: What is so troublesome about a yellowish cast?

Bag: *I* am pure.

Kidney: You might be pure, but he named you for a pig's cunt.

Bag: You. are. filthy.

Kidney: It is my nature.

Bag: What is *my* nature?

Kidney: Now, there's a question. You don't like to travel, for starters.

Bag: Yet, here I am.

Kidney: You could blame him for that.

Bag: You might focus on pressing your suit, rather than passing the buck.

Kidney: Well, it is Mak who names and I am also of the family, Pig.

Bag: Are we related?

Kidney: Distant cousins - nothing to worry about, my pretty.

Bag: What else?

Kidney: The kidney's main function is to purify the blood by removing nitrogenous waste products.

Bag: Whatever you say. But what about me?

Kidney: In the past the kidneys were thought to control disposition and temperament.

Bag: Always with the control.

Kidney: It's not me, it's *him*.

Bag: And what is his nature?

Kidney: I cannot talk about him.

Bag: Perhaps we can help him.

Kidney: Why would we want to?

Bag: He's an arse.

Kidney: He's a tit.

Bag: He's a cock.

Kidney: He's a shit. (Pause)

Kidney: He's alright.

Bag: Natron-Glimmers, you're fickle.

Kidney: He makes me feel *alive*.

Bag: Always with the activity.

Kidney: But I *like* to act.

Bag: And who will you be when he takes me away?

Kidney: I will play the waiting game.

Bag: Is that the best you can do?

Kidney: It is.

Bag: And what is past?

Kidney: I don't know, but it sounds good. Piss, he calls it.

Bag: Pass me my present, why don't you?

Kidney: Bodies containing only china clay and non-plastics are "short" and difficult to manipulate.

Bag: (aside) You'd better believe it, Hotspur.

Kidney: The classification of clays has not followed a logical pattern but has depended partly on the use to which the clay is put...

Bag: And what was it you had in mind?

Kidney: I'm not sure I know anymore.

Bag: When I come back, your teeth will be soft.

Kidney: How long will you be?

Bag: I will be hard, not long.

Kidney: Will your heart be hardened?

Bag: You are shaping to steal my heart.

Kidney: But I will make you *anew*.

Bag: Your ballocks in my stew - I will be reamed, but the same.

Kidney: Come to me, my love, and I will vessel your lump.

Bag: My innards will out, but I will remain.

Kidney: Will : I : dig your hole?

The following images and text (pp. 271-288) were produced for the final show and published live on an exhibition blog, under the category 'craft_writing_display'. Written between April and September 2014, with a final entry on 11.05.15. Blue hyperlinks will take you to blog pages where more details are available.



6 [White stoneware mug \('gorge'\)](#)
About 1680, with silver mount



[coiled](#) | [slabbed](#) | [sledged](#) | [modelled](#)

[Gorge_glazed](#)

Sent to Graham Harman
Date and Time 16/07/2014 11:21
Dest: Ankara, Turkey
Quantity 1
Weight: 1.589 kg
Int Sign SP £0.00 £17.40
Delivered: 23/07/2014



10 **Coffee service, 'Finnair' pattern**
Germany, Waldershof, designed 1972
Shape designed by Tapio Wirkkala, pattern
by Rosamonde Nairac, made by Rosenthal
Porcelain, with silk-screen transfer-print



slabbed | constructed | modelled | printed [steel file]



Finnair_glazed

Sent to Timothy Morton.
Date and Time: 16/07/2014 11:18
Dest: Texas, USA
Quantity: 1
Weight: 0.558 kg
Delivered: 24/07/2014



4-6 **Two mugs and a pot**
 About 1690, (4) slip-trailed; (5-6) combed



thrown | pulled (handle) [made by Tom Skeens]

Staffs_slip_glazed

Sent to Sinead Murphy.
 Date and Time: 20/09/2014 11:40
 Dest: Newcastle UK (EU)
 Quantity: 1
 Weight: 0.456 kg
 Signed For 1st / Small Parcel £4.30
 Delivered: 22/09/2014

90-2 **Bernard Leach (1897-1979)**

Teawares, about 1941, made at the Leach Pottery, St. Ives, Cornwall. Porcelain, with cut decoration and celadon glaze.



277



slabbed | sledged | carved | modelled | pulled (handle)

Leach_glazed

Sent to Ali Smith.

Date and Time:
01/08/2014 13:27

Dest: Cambridge, UK

Quantity: 1

Weight: 0.440 kg

1st Class Medium Parcel £5.65

Delivered: 02/08/2014



Coffee set

England, Staffordshire, designed about 1934
Designed by Keith Murray,
made by Josiah Wedgwood & Sons
Earthenware, with 'moonstone' glaze



Keith_Murray_glazed

Given to John Thackara (handed over at
the RCA, Kensington Gore).

18/09/20 14

279



slabbed | sledged | modelled



33-5 **Bone china custard, chocolate and tea cups**
Staffordshire, 1815-20, painted in enamels
And gilded, (33) Spode's factory

281



pinched | modelled (handle)



Spode_glazed

Given to Sally O'Reilly (handed over in
Patisserie Deux Amis, Judd Street, London).

18/09/2014



10

Lucie Rie (1902-95)
Cup and saucer, about 1955, made in London. Stoneware with incised Decoration through matt brown glaze



carved | modelled | pulled (handle)



Lucie_Rie_glazed

Sent to Ben Marcus.
Date and Time: 08/07/2014 14:32
Dest: Maine, USA
Quantity: 1
Weight: 0.538 kg
Int Track+Sign SP £50 £15.15
Delivered: 17/07/14



22 **Tea set, 'TAC' shape**
Germany, Selb, introduced 1969
Designed by Walter Gropius
Made by Rosenthal
Porcelain, transfer printed over the glaze

285



Gropius_glazed

Sent to Medbh McGuckian.
Date and Time: 08/09/2014 11:23
Dest: Belfast, UK
Quantity: 1
Weight: kg
(E) 1st Class £3.20
Delivered: 10/09/2014



coiled | modelled | sledged | slabbed (handle)



37 **Lead-glazed cup of silver shape**
Probably Turkey, made for export,
100BC-AD100



287

pinched | coiled | modelled | sledged

Turkish_glazed

Sent to Funda Susamoglu
Date and Time: 26/03/2015 12:09
Dest: Ankara, Turkey
Quantity: 1
Weight: 0.604 kg
Int Sign SP £0.00 £11.60
Delivered: 30/04/15

One Bag installation

PhD final show, Hester Road Gallery, Royal College of Art, Battersea, London, UK. June 17 - 29, 2014

Text and image



One Bag installation (detail)

Conor
Wilson

Writing_Making: Object as body, language and material

One Bag
Porcelain and mixed media

Materials and facture (the way something is made) are not neutral. The decision to produce slowly, by hand, in an increasingly industrialised world is political. Rather than develop 'new' materials, or processes, the aim of my research is to develop methods that allow a rethinking of old materials and processes. How might craft concerns intersect with those of other disciplines? How might language open up the relationship between body and resistant material? I produce slowly and I produce little, which allows me to reflect on what I am doing and the resources being used.

My principal research method is copying, which helps me to concentrate on body and material without the distracting fiction of originality. I start with seemingly simple things and try to open them up to perception, to "retard perception and render it reflexive", in the words of Niklas Luhmann. This exhibition had two starting points - a selection of cups from the V&A's collection and a bag of porcelain. The bag was hollowed out and as many cup copies made from the insides as time and material allowed.

The documentation necessary to practice-based research has become, to an extent, the work itself. Photographic and written records of making become the basis for speculative forays into moving image and creative writing. Feedback loops are set up: make - record - write - display - make. The exhibition is part of a loop, an attempt to explore display as a means of thinking and of generating dialogue about facture and embodied knowledge, about media and their supports.

My ultimate aims are to generate cross-disciplinary dialogue about the value of making, to develop new ways of interacting with potential audiences and to identify thinking that might be engaged with to expand the boundaries of craft practice.

Ceramics & Glass
AHRC Studentship

Exchange

For a while now, I've been puzzling over how the practicalities of making a living might intersect with the possibilities of gift exchange. This prompted the decision to think of the exhibition as an experiment in exchange, with all the cups being given away.

Each cup is offered as a gift to someone who has influenced my thinking over the course of the project. I see this as an act of generosity - a return for the intellectual generosity, or creativity that inspires dialogue - but am also cognisant of Marcel Mauss's reading of reciprocity - gift giving as a form of control, with the expectation of some form of return. I make no bones of my desire to elicit the attention of figures who might be interested in making in general and the work that I am doing, in particular.

As a means of drawing attention to the value of making and of introducing the possibility of financial return, the exhibition will instigate a further experiment in exchange. After negotiating a cup form and making hours to be expended, I will produce cups to commission for the same hourly rate as the commissioner is paid in their job of work, whatever it might be.

Cup Rules / limits

Monday, May 26th, 2014

1. Each cup starts as a copy of one of my selections from the V&A collection.
2. All cups are made from a single bag of porcelain (Valentine's Special Porcelain - the body stocked by the department).
3. Only 'structural', or carved decoration, following the originals. Nothing applied and no colour.
4. All cups to be glazed with a transparent glaze, made from standard materials stocked by the department.
5. All cups must be functional.
6. No 'dry runs', or testing - of making techniques, or glazing.
7. All cups will be gifted to specified individuals. Which cup for which recipient will be decided during the making process.

(Staffordshire mug thrown by Tom Skeens)

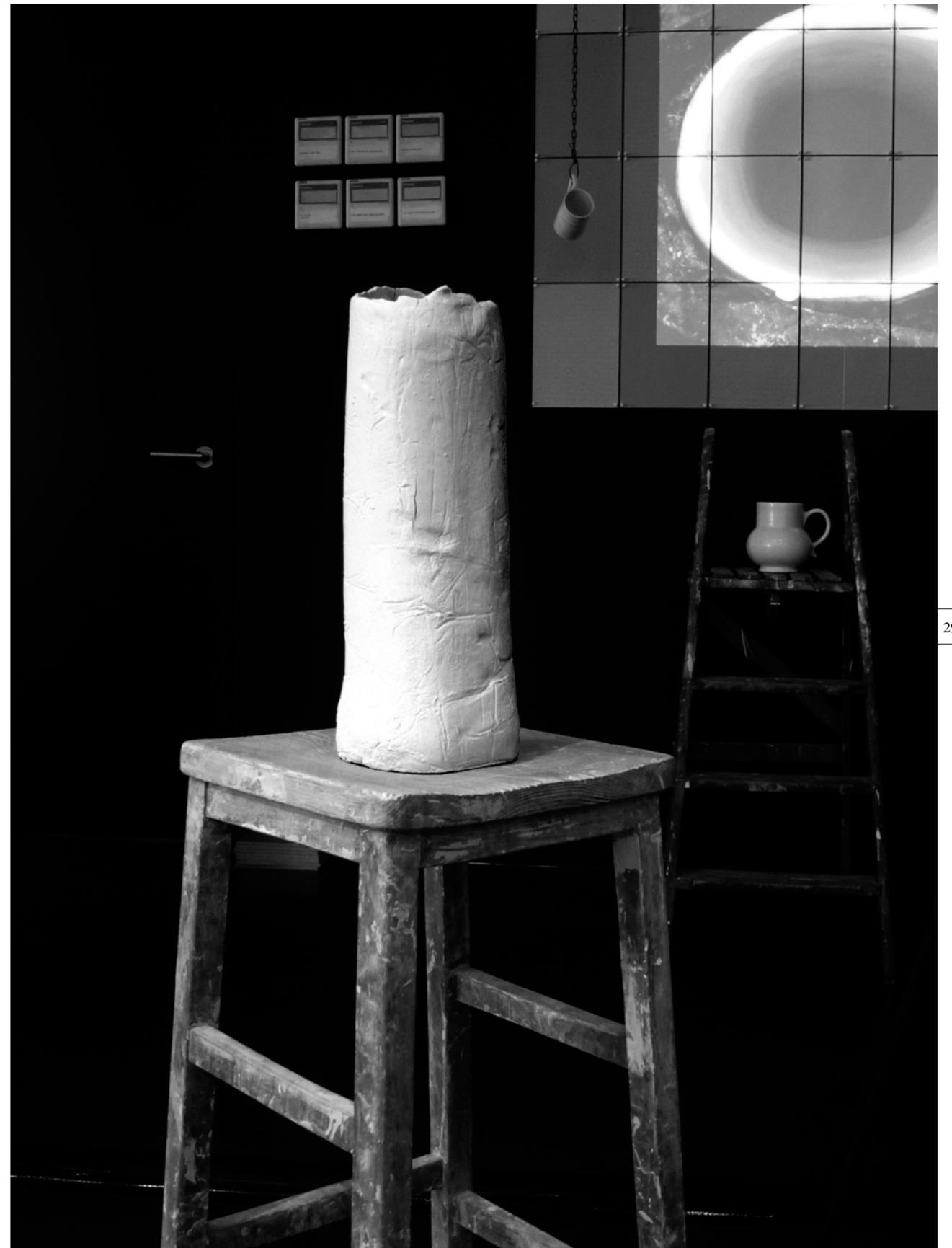
Exhibition blog at: http://www.conwilson.com/?page_id=7



293



One Bag installation (details) ▲ ▲ ▶



294



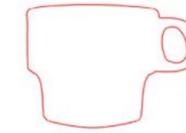
One Bag installation (cup details)

One Bag installation (detail: cup list)



White stoneware mug ('gorge') with silver mount. John Dwight, about 1680.

Copy for Graham Harman



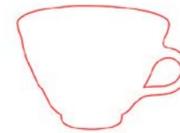
Porcelain 'Finnair' pattern coffee cup. Designed by Tapio Wirkkala, 1972. Made by Rosenthal.

Copy for Timothy Morton



Earthenware mug, slip trailed and com bed. Staffordshire, about 1690.

Copy for Sinéad Murphy



Porcelain tea cup. Made at the Leach Pottery, St. Ives, about 1941.

Copy for Ali Smith, or Rosemarie Trockel



Earthenware coffee cup. Designed by Keith Murray, about 1934. Made by Josiah Wedgwood & Sons.

Copy for John Thackara



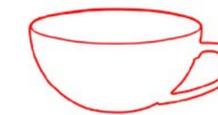
Bone china tea cup. Spode, 1815-20

Copy for Sally O'Reilly



Stoneware cup. Designed and made by Lucie Rie, about 1955.

Copy for Ben Marcus



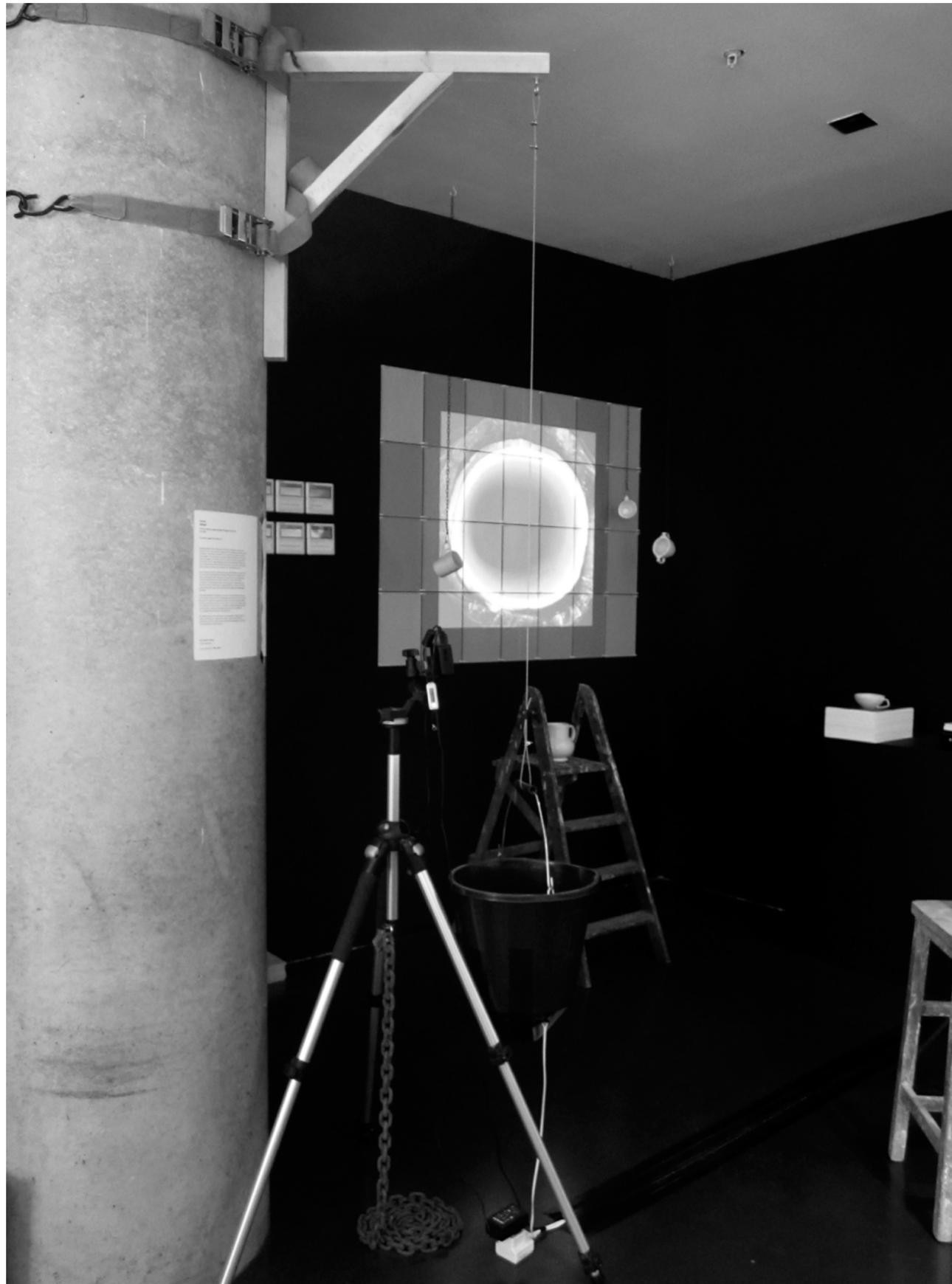
Porcelain 'TAC' shape tea cup. Designed by Walter Gropius. Made by Rosenthal, 1969.

Copy for Kenneth Goldsmith, or Medbh McGuckian



Earthenware cup. Probably Turkey, 100 BC-AD 100

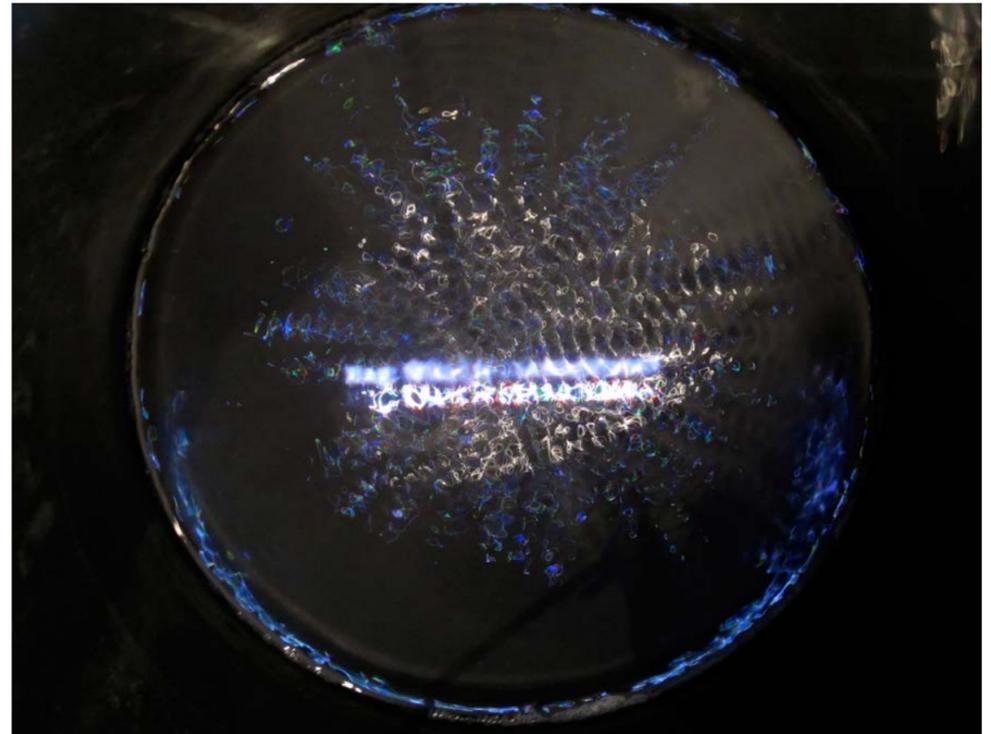
Copy for David Abram, or Nuri Bilge Ceylan



297

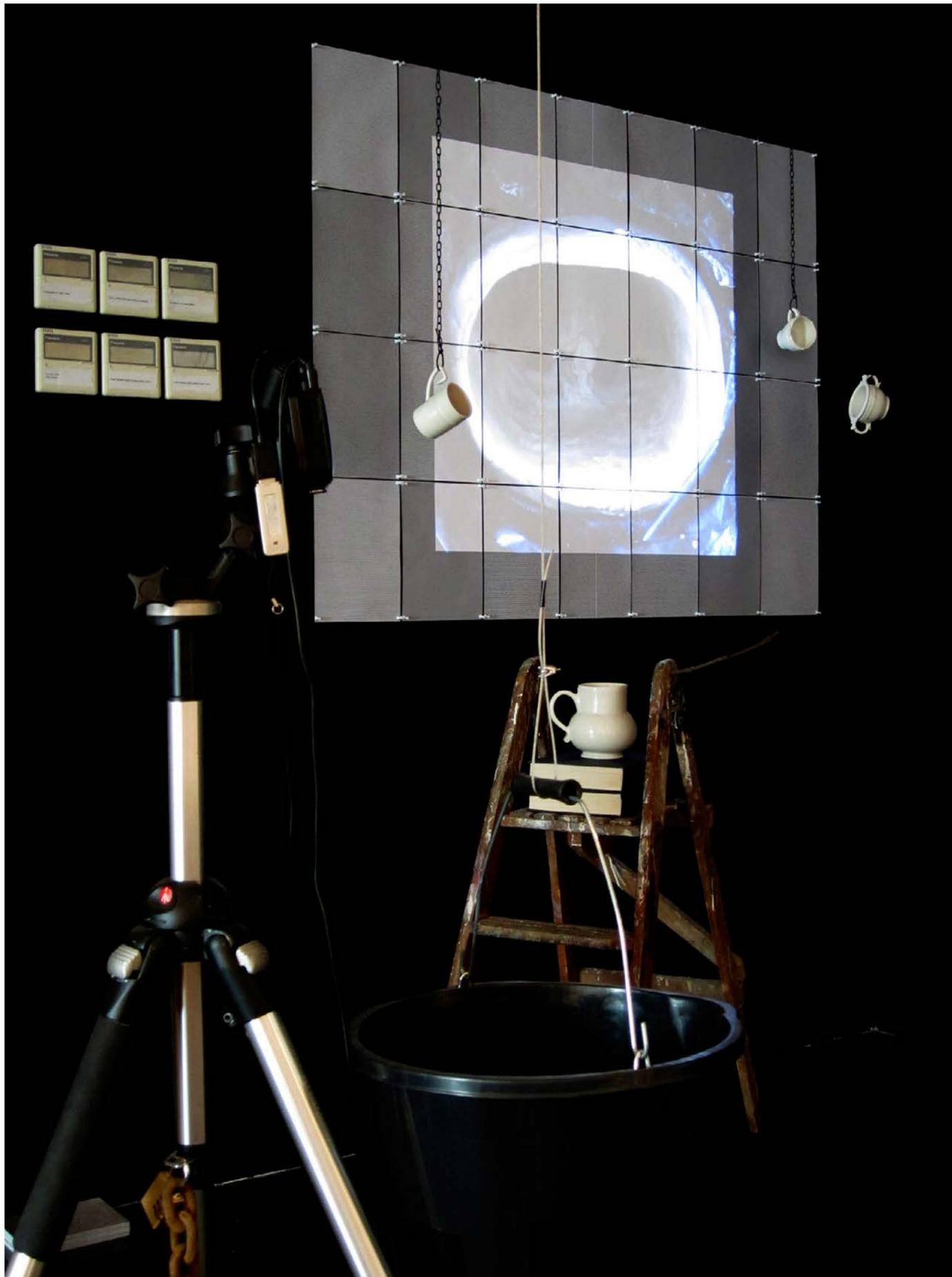
▲ One Bag installation (details) ▶

Video_18_Kidney-Bag 



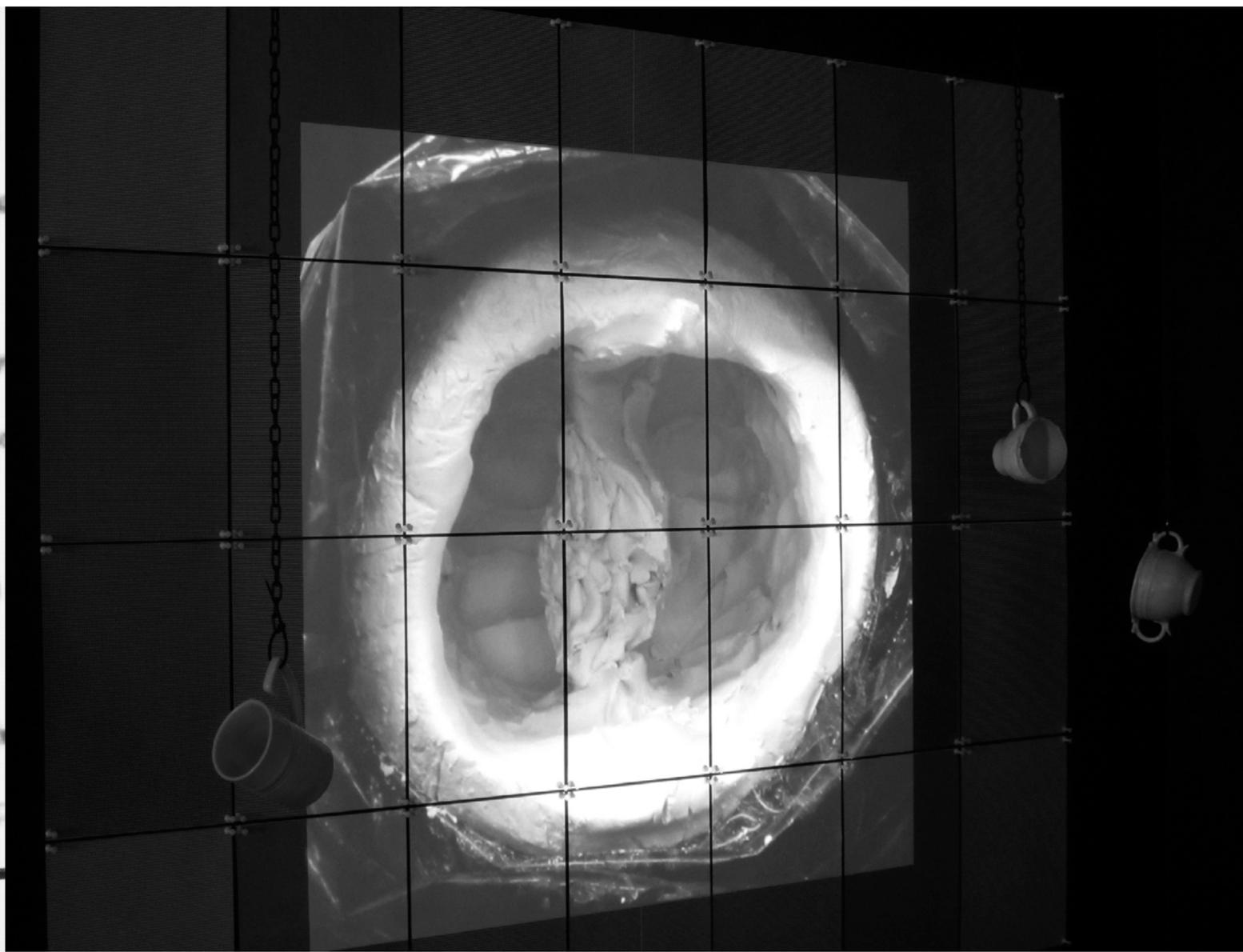
298





Video_19_Bucket





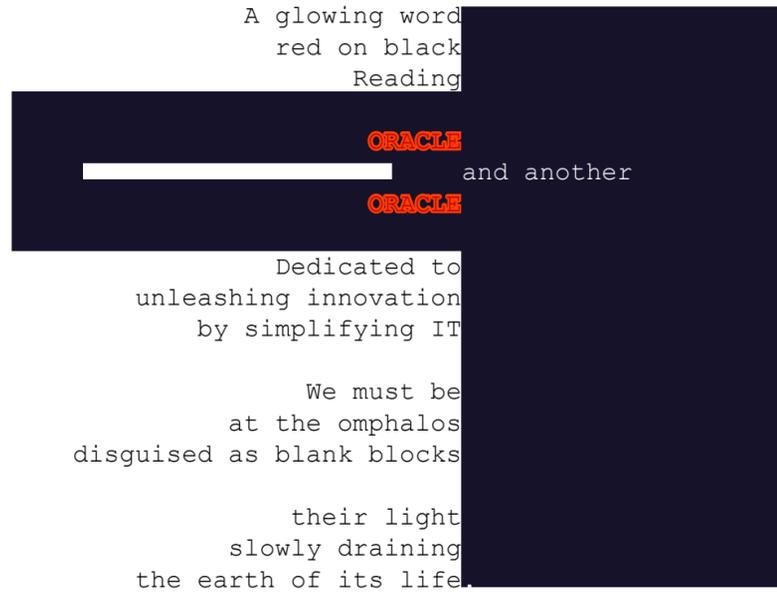
One Bag installation (details) ▲ ▶



Burnham Deepdale to Holkham, Norfolk
 Monday, 28 July 2014 12:11

I.01.05.14 / Train_7 / Reading

A glowing word
 red on black
 Reading



ORACLE
 _____ and another
ORACLE

Dedicated to
 unleashing innovation
 by simplifying IT

We must be
 at the omphalos
 disguised as blank blocks

their light
 slowly draining
 the earth of its life.

Daily the same pantomime was repeated. Kien's life, shattered under the fists of his wife, estranged by her greed and by his own, from all books, old and new, became a serious problem. In the morning he got up three hours before her. He might have used this, his quietest time, for work, and so he did, but what he had once considered work, seemed far away from him now, postponed until some happier future. He gathered the strength he needed for the practice of his new art. Without leisure no art can exist. Immediately after waking, one rarely achieves perfection. It is necessary to flex the limbs: free and uninhibited the artist should approach his creation. Thus Kien spent nearly three hours at leisure before his writing desk. He allowed many things to pass through his head, but he kept vigilant watch on them all so that he should not be drawn too far away from the matter in hand. Then, when the timepiece in his head, last vestige of the learned net with which he had ensnared time, rang its alarm bell — for nine o'clock was approaching — he began very slowly to stiffen. He felt the coolness gradually extending through his body, and judged it according to the evenness with which it distributed itself. There were days when his left side grew cold and stiff faster than his right; this caused him the most serious anxiety. "Over with you!" he commanded, and streams of warmth dispatched from his right side made good the error on the left. His efficiency in stiffening grew greater from day to day. As soon as he had reached the consistency of stone, he tested the hardness of the material by lightly pressing his thighs against the seat of the chair. This test for hardness lasted only a few seconds, a longer pressure would have crushed the chair to powder. Later on when he began to fear for the fate of the chair, he turned it to stone as well. A fall during the day, in the woman's presence, would have turned his rigidity to ridicule, and hurt him a great deal, for granite is heavy. Gradually, by developing a reliable sense for his degree of hardness, the test became superfluous.

From nine in the morning to seven in the evening, Kien retained his incomparable pose. On the writing desk lay an open book, always the same one. He vouchsafed it not a glance. His eyes were occupied entirely in the distance. The woman was at least clever enough not to disturb him during these sessions. She busied herself zealously in the room. He understood how deeply housekeeping had become engrained into her body and suppressed an unseemly smile. She described a wide curve round the monumental figure from ancient Egypt. She made it no offerings, neither of food nor of reproaches. Kien forbade himself hunger and all other bodily vexations. At seven o'clock he infused warmth and breath into the stone which speedily came back to life. He waited until Therese was in the furthest corner of the room. He had a sense of her whereabouts which never betrayed him. Then he leapt up and hurriedly left the house. While he was eating his only meal in the restaurant, he would all but fall asleep out of exhaustion. He enlarged on the difficulties of the past day and when a good idea for the morrow came into his head he nodded his agreement. Anyone else who tried to turn himself into a statue, he would immediately challenge. At nine o'clock he went to bed and slept.



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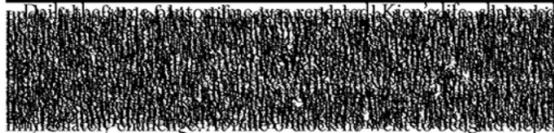
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sleep hung

a

leaded coat

but

the fish

twitched

inside

(some) Conclusion(s)

One should not think slightingly of the paradoxical, for the paradox is the source of the thinker's passion, and the thinker without a paradox is like a lover without a feeling: a paltry mediocrity [...] The supreme paradox of all thought is the attempt to discover something that thought cannot think.¹

Three paradoxes sit at the heart of the project:

1. Concept (or writing) does nothing to advance craft practice.
2. The project was conducted within a craft context, but followed the loosely constituted rules of 'artistic research'.
3. A desire to move away from human-centred preoccupations with originality and the individual brought about a deeply subjective engagement with material/making.

There is something antithetical to making in writing. Making is a form of intelligence in itself and is not lent fluency by concept. In response to a question I asked, Edmund de Waal said, rather defensively, that Ceramics was anti-intellectual.² I disagreed at the time, but came to see that he was right. In a sense, Ceramics has to be anti-intellectual. So, rather than being critical of, or frustrated with 'ceramics', we must, I think, accept that this tension is irresolvable. Some might argue that craft has no place in the university, but it does have a disciplinary status and therefore has to question the conditions of its existence.

Perhaps counterintuitively, artistic research seems to be an ideal tool with which to stretch the boundaries of craft practice. The research process revealed, for me, the generative value of both textual and visual documentation: as artwork and as feedback that generates the next engagement.

I cannot escape it, but have learned to think of (and feel) my subjectivity in a new way. If I think of myself as an object enmeshed with other objects (or as a subject enmeshed with other subjects), something shifts. This is expressed in a short catalogue text I wrote towards the end of the project:

Interpretation so often engenders the habit of judgment. Let's say that, rather than judgment, our aim is to facilitate meaningful interaction with both human and 'more-than-human' objects, to become an object among objects.

¹ Soren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments or A Fragment of Philosophy*, trans. by David F. Swenson (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1962), p.29

² RCA Research Methods Course, 2011

Don't worry about the 'meaning' of the work, but focus on how your senses place you at the centre of a composite, 'display' object, consisting of space, light, sound, smell, text, displayed objects and, of course, bodies. How can I use my ears, my eyes, my nose, my skin, my voice? How can I contact a strange stranger and how might a stranger contact me? Imagine that you are a beam of light, playing on the surface of the art object; a sound wave bouncing off it; a fly about to land...

Imagine yourself to be a Benjaminian critic. Enter into the work and activate its subjectivity rather than making it an instrument of your own subjectivity.³

These ideas flowed from my engagement with Object Oriented Ontology, which gave me the three key insights of the project:

1. A view of craft making as a particularly intimate engagement with other materials, other objects.

Further, that a hand-made, functional object might be productively gritty. Such an object doesn't seek to offer oblique access to other objects through imaginative deployment of metaphor, as art objects might do. It comes from a parallel world, being presented as itself, its meaning deriving from its materials, its function and, perhaps most of all, its facture.

2. Embodied knowledge as metaphor for withdrawal.

The embodied, or tacit, knowledge that is central to facture might be seen as a metaphor for withdrawal. It can't be seen, it can't be explained, it can't be simplified. It is expressed in making and re-embodied in the made object. The making is a withdrawn element in the maker and the made.

3. The conception of the making process as an object.

The 'making object' is made up of multiple elements - body, language, material, space, documentation. Text, image, or moving image works, as well as ceramic objects, might be the end product. The exhibition site is seen as an experimental site where combinations of these products are explored.

These ideas are explored throughout the thesis, but are made most explicit in 'Email to Graham Harman & notes' (pp.229-230) and 'Carpentry' (pp.249-253).

A recurring question arose from the research: whether making could function as a model, or a spur, for settling deeper into inter-object relations. Making with clay was central, but I

³ Conor Wilson in *The Sensorial Object*, exhibition curated by Dr. Natasha Mayo and Zoe Preece (Cardiff: The Makers Guild in Wales, 2015), p. 32

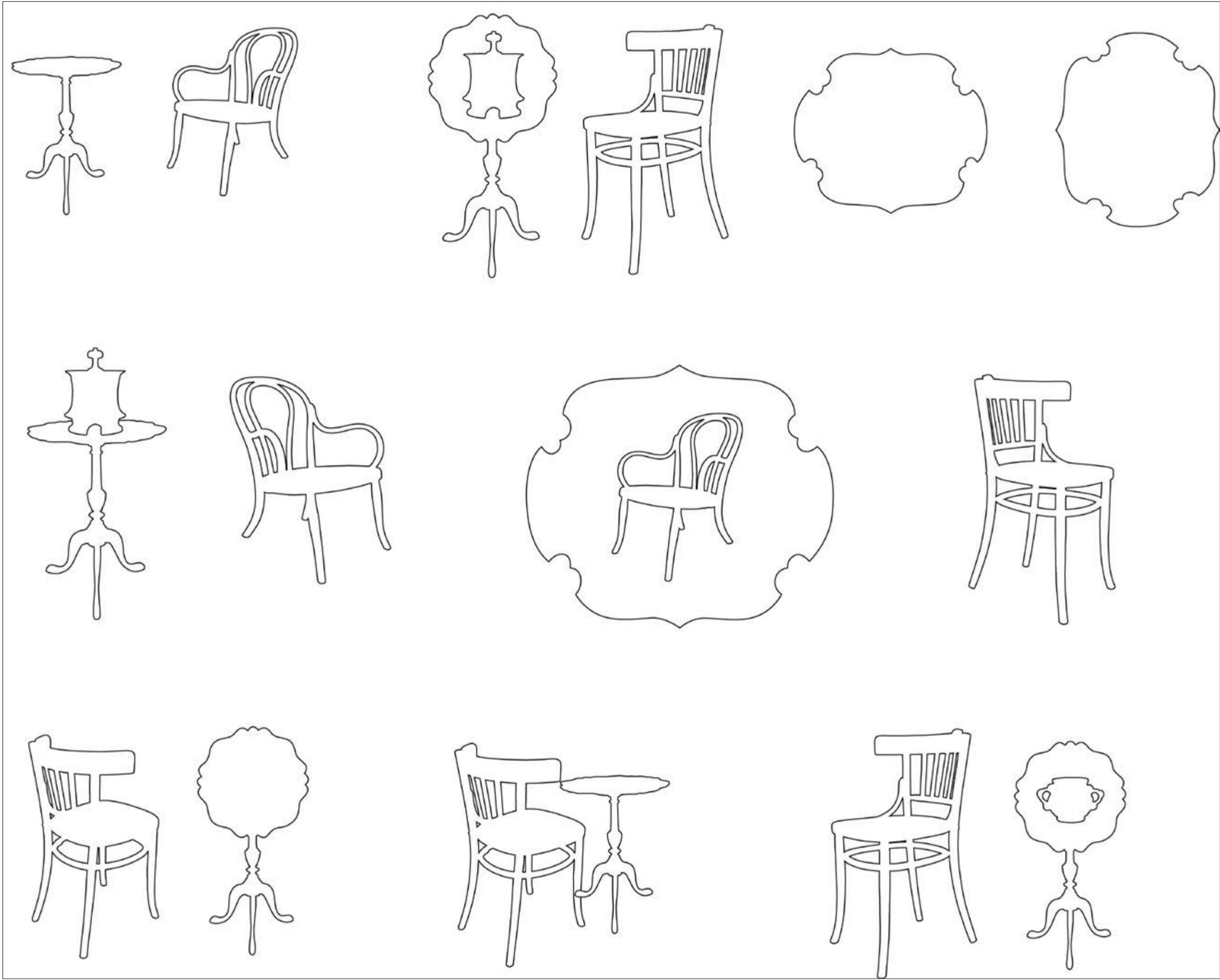
brought this thinking to all the object interactions that I was involved with, whether they be between moving train, trackside, light, glass window, eye and camera; or amp, speaker, bucket, water, projector, electricity, light, text, sound and exhibition space; or keyboard, screen, light, page, ink.

I developed several material/textual, or material/conceptual making processes - what I am calling writing_making methods that, taken together, constitute the only answer I can offer to the above question. Some of my methods are repeatable, but I would expect other researcher/practitioners to produce very different results. If these methods can be established as successful, through exhibition, thesis and conference paper, then I would hope that others might explore similar territory, using my methods as a starting point.

I feel that it is important to point out that the thesis as originally presented for examination had only a short introduction and no section on methodology. Method was addressed through the presentation of writing done at the time, in an attempt to bring practice and writing closer together. I was both grateful for and frustrated by the revisions required by my examiners. These gave me the opportunity to reflect further on what I did and to be clearer about its potential value. In doing this, I stripped away much material and restructured the thesis, adding some explanation and giving the research outcomes more space in which to breathe.

The project might, in places, still seem esoteric, but in presenting the research process in this way, form is conflated with content and points to new approaches, for ceramics, of combining theory and practice, without allowing the former to dominate the latter. I am concerned with the usefulness of the research outcomes to practice as well as to 'theory', or academia, and hope that the project also contributes to the argument about how Practice-based research might be taken forward in the applied arts, or crafts field.



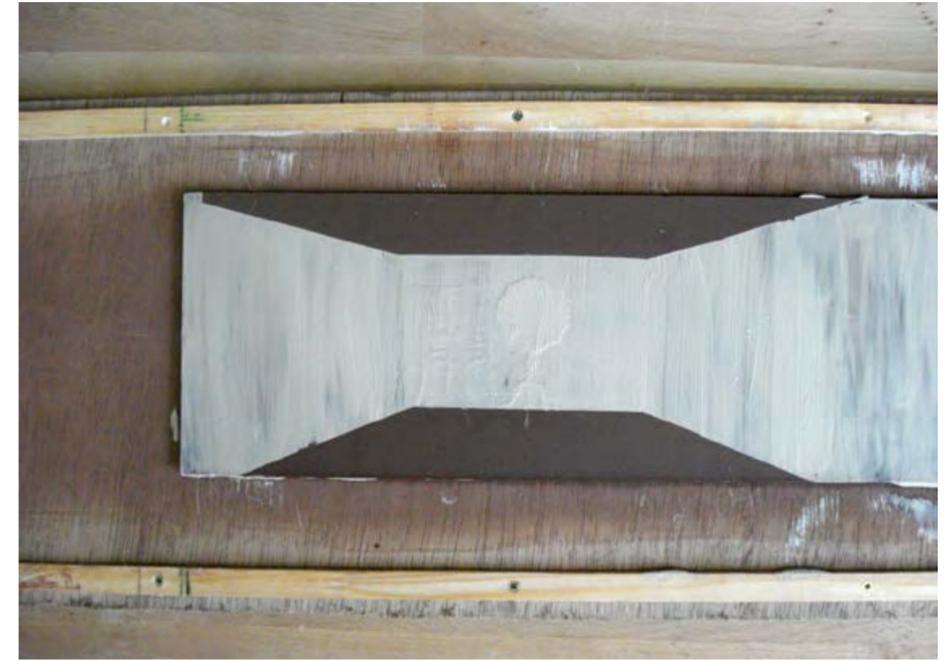




Experiment 4 Process 1 (2011)



Experiment 4 Process 2 (2011)



Experiment 4 Process 3 (2011)



Experiment 4 Process 4 (2011)



Experiment 4 Process 5 (2011)



Experiment 4 (2011)



Experiment 4 (2011)



LivingRoom_Montage_6: February 2011 19:04



Window+Thonet+Pedestal+Exp3_Halftone: Tuesday, 29 March 2011 15:04



Experiment 6 Process 1 (2011)



Experiment 6 Process 2 (2011)



Experiment 6 Process 3 (2011)



Experiment 8 (2011)



Experiment 8 (2011)



327



328



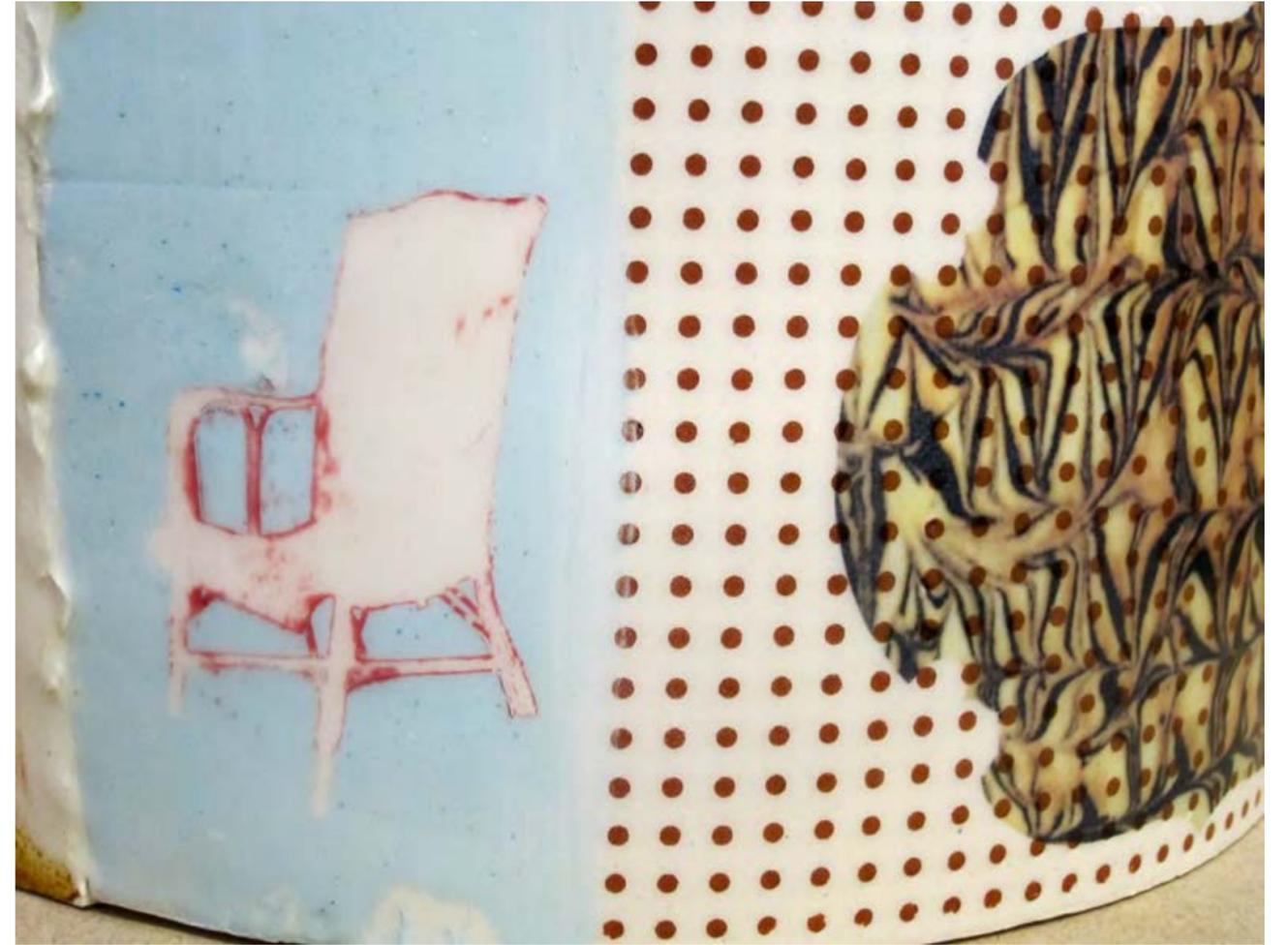
Experiment 10 (2011)



Experiment 10 (2011)



Experiment 10 (2011)



Experiment 10 (2011)



Experiment 11 Process 1 (2011)



Experiment 11 Process 2 (2011)



Experiment 11 (2011)



Experiment 11 (2011)

Appendix 2

RCA Library record

Title / Author	Checked Out	Returned
Interior design of the 20th century / Massey, Anne.	Oct 6, 2010	Nov 4, 2010
The craft reader / Adamson, Glenn.	Nov 11, 2010	Nov 18, 2010
In praise of shadows / Tanizaki, Jun'ichiro, 1886-1965.	Nov 3, 2010	Nov 25, 2010
Neo craft : modernity and the crafts / Alföldy, Sandra, 1969-	Nov 11, 2010	Dec 15, 2010
Chairs : the Delft collection / Macel, Otakar.	Dec 15, 2010	Dec 16, 2010
The modern chair : classics in production / Meadmore, Clement.	Dec 15, 2010	Dec 16, 2010
Curious woodcuts of fanciful and real beasts : a selection of 190 sixteenth-century woodcuts from Gesner's and Topsell's natural histories / Gesner, Konrad.	Dec 16, 2010	Dec 16, 2010
Treasury of animal illustrations from eighteenth-century sources / Grafton, Carol Belanger.	Dec 16, 2010	Dec 16, 2010
Animals : 1419 copyright-free illustrations of mammals, birds, fish, insects etc.: a pictorial archive from nineteenth-century sources / Harter, Jim.	Dec 16, 2010	Dec 16, 2010
Twentieth century ceramics / De Waal, Edmund.	Dec 15, 2010	Jan 13, 2011
Design after modernism : beyond the object / Thackara, John.	Dec 15, 2010	Jan 19, 2011
Craft in transition / Veiteberg, Jorunn.	Dec 15, 2010	Jan 19, 2011
The Englishman's chair : origins, design, and social history of seat furniture in England / Gloag, John, 1896-1981.	Dec 15, 2010	Jan 19, 2011
Craft in dialogue : six views on a practice in change / Jonsson, Love.	Dec 15, 2010	Jan 26, 2011
Persian miniature painting from collections in the British Isles / Robinson, B. W. (Basil William)	Jan 13, 2011	Feb 1, 2011
Oriental miniatures and illumination : Ragamala paintings and Eastern music / Maggs Bros Ltd.	Jan 13, 2011	Feb 2, 2011
The double screen : medium and representation in Chinese painting / Hung, Wu.	Jan 13, 2011	Feb 24, 2011
Pottery decoration : contemporary approaches / Gibson, John, 1952-	Dec 15, 2010	Feb 24, 2011
Choice from America : modern American ceramics / Danto, Arthur Coleman, 1924-2013.	Feb 3, 2011	Feb 24, 2011
The postgraduate research handbook : succeed with your MA, MPhil, EdD and PhD / Wisker, Gina, 1951-	Feb 10, 2011	Mar 2, 2011
The nature and art of workmanship / Pye, David W., 1914-1993.	Jan 13, 2011	Mar 2, 2011
What is research in the visual arts? : obsession, archive, encounter / Holly, Michael Ann.	Feb 10, 2011	Mar 2, 2011
Visualizing research : a guide to the research process in art and design / Gray, Carole, 1957-	Feb 10, 2011	Mar 2, 2011
No guru, no method ? Discussion on Art and Design Research / University of Art and Design (Helsinki, Finland)	Feb 10, 2011	Mar 2, 2011
Practice-based doctorates in the creative and performing arts and design workshop / UK Council for Graduate Education.	Feb 10, 2011	Mar 9, 2011
Choice from America : modern American ceramics / Danto, Arthur Coleman, 1924-2013.	Mar 10, 2011	Mar 23, 2011
Sight of death / Clark, T. J. (Timothy James), 1943-	Mar 24, 2011	Apr 28, 2011
Eighteenth-century ceramics : products for a civilised society / Richards, Sarah.	Apr 28, 2011	May 17, 2011
Eccentric spaces / Harbison, Robert, 1944-	May 25, 2011	Jun 16, 2011
The power of the center : a study of composition in the visual arts / Arnheim, Rudolf, 1904-2007.	May 25, 2011	Jun 16, 2011
Perception and photography / Zakia, Richard D.	May 25, 2011	Jun 16, 2011
Confronting images : questioning the ends of a certain history of art / Didi-Huberman, Georges.	Jun 29, 2011	Jul 7, 2011
The ground of the image / Nancy, Jean-Luc.	Jun 29, 2011	Jul 27, 2011
Perception and photography / Zakia, Richard D.	Jun 16, 2011	Sep 27, 2011
Art/porn : a history of seeing and touching / Dennis, Kelly.	Jun 29, 2011	Sep 27, 2011
Fra Angelico : dissemblance & figuration / Didi-Huberman, Georges.	Jun 29, 2011	Sep 27, 2011
On beauty and being just / Scarry, Elaine.	Jun 29, 2011	Sep 28, 2011
The production of space / Lefebvre, Henri, 1905-1991.	Oct 6, 2011	Oct 13, 2011
Personal knowledge : towards a post-critical philosophy / Polanyi, Michael.	Oct 6, 2011	Oct 27, 2011
Philosophical hermeneutics / Gadamer, Hans Georg, 1900-	Oct 6, 2011	Oct 27, 2011
Chinese landscape painting / Sullivan, Michael, 1916-	Oct 13, 2011	Nov 9, 2011
The wild places / Macfarlane, Robert, 1976-	Oct 28, 2011	Dec 6, 2011
A potter's book / Leach, Bernard, 1887-1979.	Oct 27, 2011	Dec 6, 2011
Moche art of Peru : Pre-Columbian symbolic communication / Donnan, Christopher B.	Oct 28, 2011	Dec 6, 2011
Philosophical hermeneutics / Gadamer, Hans Georg, 1900-	Oct 27, 2011	Jan 10, 2012
The intelligence of art / Crow, Thomas E., 1948-	Dec 6, 2011	Jan 10, 2012
Art and agency : an anthropological theory / Gell, Alfred.	Oct 28, 2011	Jan 10, 2012
Art and agency : an anthropological theory / Gell, Alfred.	Jan 10, 2012	Feb 1, 2012

Art encounters Deleuze and Guattari : thought beyond representation / O'Sullivan, Simon, 1967-	Feb 2, 2012	Mar 1, 2012
Essays on the blurring of art and life / Kaprow, Allan, 1927-2006.	Mar 1, 2012	May 2, 2012
The open studio : essays on art and aesthetics / Stewart, Susan (Susan A.), 1952-	Mar 1, 2012	May 22, 2012
Rethinking decoration : pleasure and ideology in the visual arts / Brett, David.	Mar 15, 2012	May 22, 2012
Objects and meaning : new perspectives on art and craft / Fariello, M. Anna.	Mar 1, 2012	May 31, 2012
Interdisciplinarity / Moran, Joe, 1970-	May 10, 2012	May 31, 2012
Selected works. Vol.1 : Prose / Rilke, Rainer Maria, 1875-1926.	Mar 29, 2012	May 31, 2012
Have I reasons : work and writings, 1993-2007 / Morris, Robert, 1931-	Mar 29, 2012	May 31, 2012
Modern sculpture reader / Wood, Jon.	Mar 29, 2012	May 31, 2012
Possibilities & losses : transitions in clay / Twomey, Clare.	May 23, 2012	May 31, 2012
Gabriel Orozco / Orozco, Gabriel, 1962-	May 15, 2012	May 31, 2012
The object sculpture / Rehberger, Tobias.	Jun 7, 2012	Jun 27, 2012
S.N.O.W : sculpture in non-objective way / Bellini, Andrea.	Jun 7, 2012	Jun 27, 2012
Networks in ceramics / Verajankorva, Tiina.	Jun 22, 2012	Jun 27, 2012
Modern sculpture reader / Wood, Jon.	Jun 13, 2012	Jun 27, 2012
Toolbox / Morabito, Fabio, 1955-	Oct 3, 2012	Nov 14, 2012
Things : selected writings / Ponge, Francis.	Oct 3, 2012	Nov 14, 2012
Art, word and image : two thousand years of visual/textual interaction / Hunt, John Dixon.	Oct 18, 2012	Nov 29, 2012
The aesthetics of visual poetry, 1914-1928 / Bohn, Willard, 1939-	Jun 19, 2012	Dec 4, 2012
The Matter Myth : towards 21st-Century Science / Davies, Paul.	Mar 27, 2012	Dec 4, 2012
Selected writings : Volume 2, part 2: 1931-1934 / Benjamin, Walter, 1892-1940.	Oct 3, 2012	Dec 4, 2012
Rebecca Horn : [accompanies the exhibition held at Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, May - August 2001 / Haenlein, Carl Albrecht.	Oct 3, 2012	Dec 4, 2012
Anthology of concretism /	Jun 19, 2012	Dec 5, 2012
Sculptures 1982-1993 / Wilding, Alison, 1948-	Jun 19, 2012	Dec 5, 2012
Ash glazes / Tichane, Robert, 1925-	Dec 11, 2012	Jan 30, 2013
Heart of glass (Film on dvd) / Herzog, Werner.	Feb 14, 2013	Feb 27, 2013
Heidegger reframed : interpreting key thinkers for the arts / Bolt, Barbara.	Dec 5, 2012	Feb 28, 2013
Thought and language / Vygotskii, Lev Semenovich, 1896-1934, 1986-1934.	Nov 28, 2012	Feb 28, 2013
Bento's sketchbook / Berger, John, 1926-	Dec 11, 2012	Feb 28, 2013
Anton Reijnders : unfolding meaning / Reijnders, Anton, 1955-	Dec 11, 2012	Feb 28, 2013
World gone mad : surrealist returns in recent British art / O'Reilly, Sally.	Feb 14, 2013	Feb 28, 2013
Pioneer pottery / Cardew, Michael, 1901-1983.	Dec 11, 2012	Feb 28, 2013
Ideas in the making : practice in theory / Johnson, Pamela.	Oct 29, 2012	Feb 28, 2013
Four shorts by Werner Herzog (Film on video) / Herzog, Werner.	Apr 9, 2013	Apr 11, 2013
Theorem (Film on dvd) / Pasolini, Pier Paolo, 1922-1975.	Apr 9, 2013	Apr 17, 2013
Fata morgana (Film on dvd) / Herzog, Werner.	Apr 17, 2013	Apr 25, 2013
Discourse / Mills, Sara, 1954-	Apr 17, 2013	May 1, 2013
Mimesis : culture, art, society / Gebauer, Gunter.	Feb 14, 2013	May 8, 2013
Stalker (Film on dvd) / Tarkovsky, Andrei, 1932-1986.	May 8, 2013	May 16, 2013
Once upon a time in Anatolia (Film on dvd) / Ceylan, Nuri Bilge.	May 8, 2013	May 23, 2013
Three monkeys (Film on dvd) / Ceylan, Nuri Bilge.	May 16, 2013	May 23, 2013
O brother, where art thou? (Film on dvd) / Coen, Ethan.	May 30, 2013	Jun 6, 2013
Summer with Monika (Film on dvd) / Bergman, Ingmar, 1918-2007	May 30, 2013	Jun 6, 2013
Place : a short introduction / Cresswell, Tim.	May 22, 2013	Jun 12, 2013
Experimental films [Maya Deren] (Film on dvd) / Deren, Maya.	Jun 6, 2013	Jun 19, 2013
Christ stopped at Eboli (Film on dvd) / Rosi, Francesca.	Jun 6, 2013	Jun 19, 2013
Heidegger's topology : being, place, world / Malpas, Jeff	Apr 17, 2013	Jun 19, 2013
Martin Heidegger / Clark, Timothy, 1958-	Dec 5, 2012	Oct 3, 2013
Being singular plural / Nancy, Jean-Luc.	Jul 4, 2013	Oct 3, 2013
Language in literature / Jakobson, Roman.	Aug 16, 2013	Oct 3, 2013
Uzak (Film on dvd) / Ceylan, Nuri Bilge.	Oct 3, 2013	Oct 10, 2013
The Turin horse (Film on dvd) / Tarr, Béla.	Oct 3, 2013	Oct 10, 2013
The descendants (Film on dvd) / Payne, Alexander.	Oct 10, 2013	Oct 16, 2013
The artist (Film on dvd) / Hazanavicius, Michel.	Oct 10, 2013	Oct 16, 2013
Gertrud (Film on dvd) / Dreyer, Carl Theodor, 1889-1968.	Oct 10, 2013	Oct 29, 2013
No medium / Dworkin, Craig Douglas.	Aug 16, 2013	Oct 29, 2013
The age of wire and string / Marcus, Ben.	May 16, 2013	Oct 29, 2013
Multiple arts : the muses II / Nancy, Jean-Luc.	Jul 4, 2013	Oct 29, 2013
ALL THE COLLECTED SHORT POEMS 1956 - 1964 / Zukofsky, Louis , 1904-1978.	May 30, 2013	Oct 29, 2013
Please give (Film on dvd) / Holofcener, Nicole.	Oct 29, 2013	Nov 6, 2013
Skeletons (Film on dvd) / Whitfield, Nick.	Oct 29, 2013	Nov 6, 2013
Meek's cutoff (Film on dvd) / Reichardt, Kelly.	Nov 6, 2013	Nov 7, 2013
On longing : narratives of the miniature, the gigantic, the souvenir, the collection / Stewart, Susan.	Oct 31, 2013	Nov 7, 2013
The intangibilities of form : skill and deskill in art after the readymade /		

Roberts, John, 1955-
 The silence (Film on dvd) / Odar, Baran bo.
 A dangerous method (Film on dvd) / Cronenberg, David, 1943-
 Being and time / Heidegger, Martin, 1889-1976.
 The flame of a candle / Bachelard, Gaston, 1884-1962.
 Young adult (Film on dvd) / Reitman, Jason.
 Dialectic of enlightenment / Adorno, Theodor W., 1903-1969.
 Robert Smithson, the collected writings / Smithson, Robert, 1938-1973.
 Installation art / Bishop, Claire.
 Bal (Honey); Sut (Milk) ; Yumurta (Egg) (Film on dvd) / Kaplanoglu, Semih.
 Drive (Film on dvd) / Winding Refn, Nicolas.
 Climates [Iklimler] (Film on dvd) / Ceylan, Nuri Bilge.
 Site-specificity : the ethnographic turn / Coles, Alex.
 Black and blue : the bruising passion of Camera Lucida, La Jetée, Sans
 Soleil, and Hiroshima Mon Amour / Mavor, Carol.
 The look of love (Film on dvd) / Winterbottom, Michael.
 Elena (Film on dvd) / Zvyagintsev, Andrei.
 This is our still life (Film on dvd) / Kotting, Andrew.
 Mimesis and alterity : a particular history of the senses / Taussig, Michael T.
 On poetic imagination and reverie : selections from / Bachelard, Gaston,
 1884-1962.
 Parables for the virtual : movement, affect, sensation / Massumi, Brian.
 Ann Hamilton : an inventory of objects / Simon, Joan, 1949-
 The body of the artisan : art and experience in the scientific revolution / Smith,
 Pamela H, 1957-
 You're human like the rest of them : the films of B S Johnson (Film on dvd) /
 Johnson, B. S. (Bryan Stanley), 1933-1973.
 Blue mythologies : reflections on a colour / Mavor, Carol.
 Before midnight (Film on dvd) / Linklater, Richard.
 Les diaboliques (Film on dvd) / Clouzot, Henri-Georges, 1907-1977.
 Out of the past (Film on dvd) / Tourneur, Jacques.
 Le boucher (Film on dvd) / Chabrol, Claude, 1930-2010.
 Pandora's box (Film on dvd) / Pabst, G. W.
 Rachel Whiteread : embankment / Whiteread, Rachel, 1963-
 Robert Wilson : from within / Arent Safir, Margery, 1947-
 Robert Whitman : playback / Whitman, Robert, 1935-
 Dreams that money can buy [ser. History of the avant-garde] (Film on dvd)
 / Richter, Hans, 1888-1976.
 Trilogy : the weeping meadow (Film on dvd) / Angelopoulos, Theo, 1935-2012.
 Open city / Cole, Teju
 The craft reader / Adamson, Glenn.
 The spell of the sensuous : perception and language in a more-than-human
 world / Abram, David.
 Alps (Film on dvd) / Lanthimos, Yorgos.
 Clays and ceramic raw materials / Worrall, W. E. (William Ernest)
 Week-end (Film on dvd) / Godard, Jean-Luc, 1930-
 Camera buff (Film on dvd) / Kieslowski, Krzysztof, 1941-1996.
 An anthology of concrete poetry / Williams, Emmett.
 Selected shorter poems, 1950-1970 / Williams, Emmett.
 Klankteksten, konkrete poezie visuelee teksten = Sound texts, concrete poetry,
 visual texts = Akustische texte, konkrete poesie, visuelle texte / Stedelijk
 Museum Amsterdam.
 Entangled : an archaeology of the relationships between humans and things /
 Hodder, Ian.
 The great beauty (Film on dvd) / Sorrentino, Paolo.
 Gravity (Film on dvd) / Cuaron, Alfonso.
 Murphy / Beckett, Samuel, 1906-1989.
 A grammar of metaphor / Brooke-Rose, Christine, 1923-2012.
 Craft matters : 3 attitudes to contemporary craft / John Hansard Gallery.
 The gift / Nabokov, Vladimir Vladimirovich, 1899-1977.
 The gift economy / Cheal, David, 1945-
 Interdisciplinarity / Moran, Joe, 1970-
 Pataphysics : the poetics of an imaginary science / Bok, Christian.
 The Adorno reader / Adorno, Theodor W., 1903-1969.
 The gay science / Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, 1844-1900.
 Andrew Lord / Lord, Andrew, 1950-
 The dual muse : the writer as artist, the artist as writer : essays / Drucker,
 Johanna, 1952-
 Intellectual birdhouse : artistic practice as research / Bauer, Ute Meta.
 Studio and cube : on the relationship between where art is made and where art

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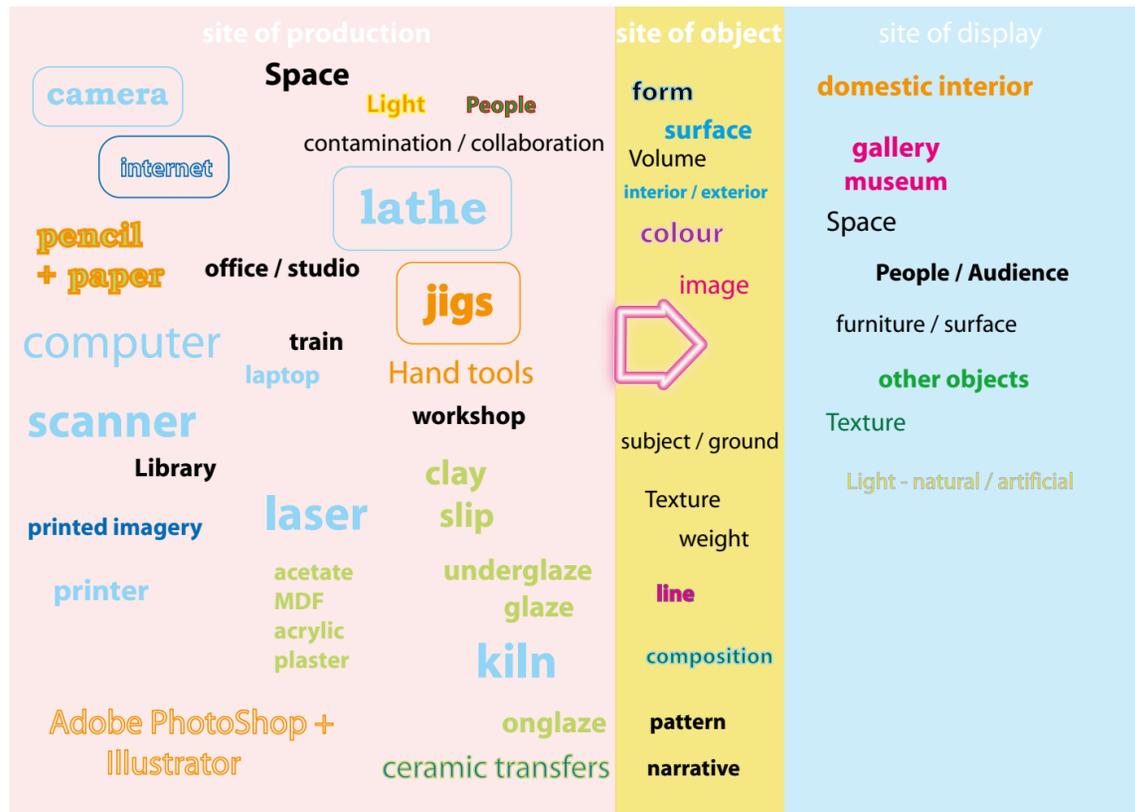
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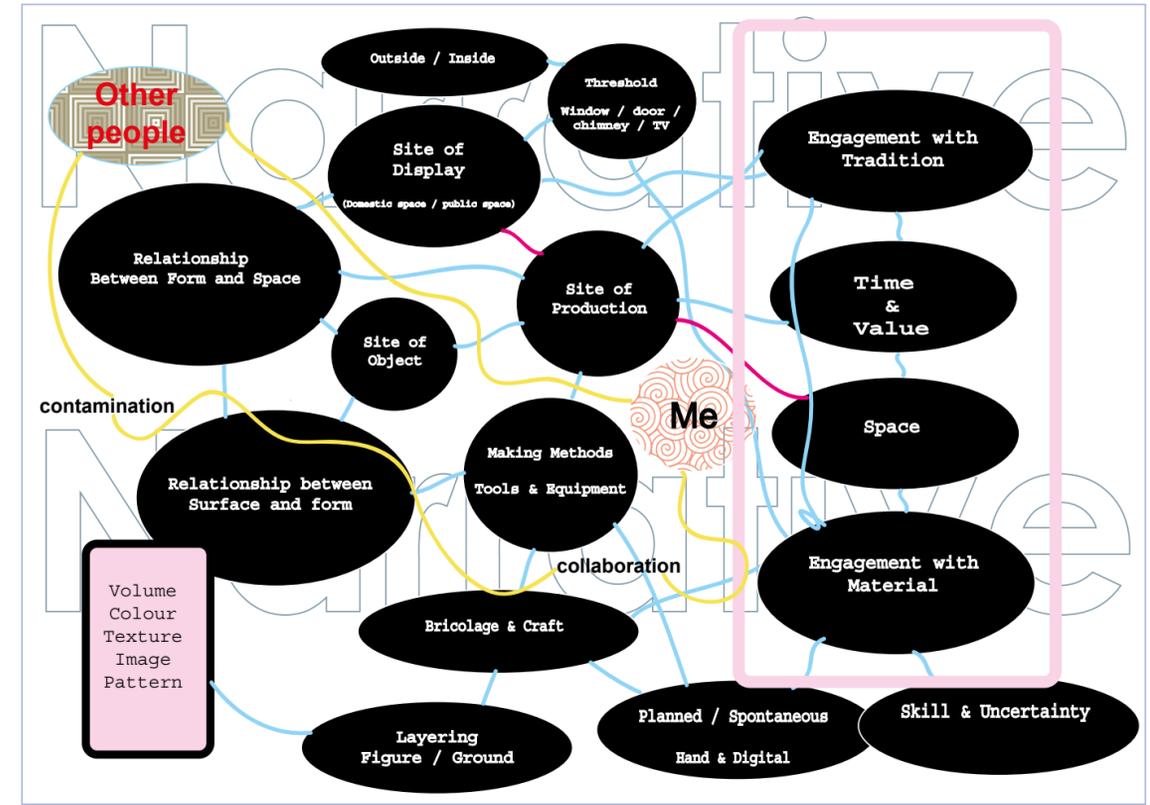
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is displayed / O'Doherty, Brian.
 Notes from the cosmic typewriter : the life and work of Dom Sylvester Houédard /
 Simpson, Nicola.

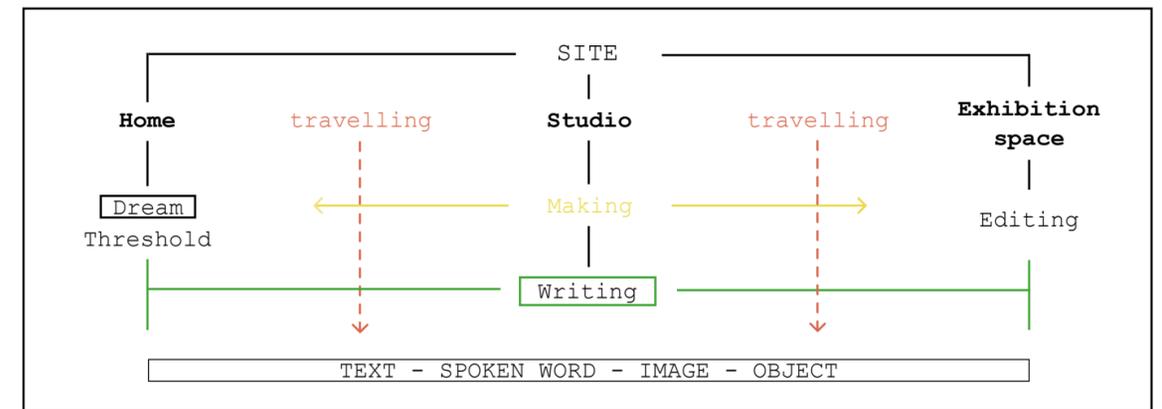
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Research Network: Sunday, 3 April 2011 22:47



Practice-Research Diagram: Monday, 19 December 2011 17:43



Site Diagram: Friday, 7 December 2012 10:56

Conor Wilson / Methods1. Home / Text 2. (Explore theory in Text 1)

Appropriation / copy / collage / synthesis

Time (& Value) and dream-threshold / Originality and copyright

Examples:

Porched (+ Nabokov) (Text 2)
If it's fine tomorrow (English Craft) (Text 2)

Explore:

As a form of making, or construction. McGuckian does not wholly accept the random nature of the cut-up - she puts chance to use, but selects, edits and synthesises, combining personal agency with the agency of objects. Jonathan Lethem uses a similar method to a very different end. Use this as a starting point for exploration of sense and nonsense, meaning and meaninglessness.

Theory - Kenneth Goldsmith / Marjorie Perloff / Shane Alcobia-Murphy / Jonathan Lethem

Practice - Gertrude Stein / T.S. Eliot / James Joyce / Samuel Beckett / Brian O'Nolan / Virginia Woolf / Louis Zukofsky / William Carlos Williams / Vladimir Nabokov / Elias Canetti / Christine Brooke-Rose / Raymond Roussel / Raymond Queneau / Georges Perec / Alain Robbe-Grillet / William Burroughs & Brion Gysin / Robert Smithson / Robert Coover / Medbh McGuckian / Ben Marcus / Don Paterson / Stephen Murray

Materials - Threshold / Modernist prose / Philosophy / 'How-to' texts / Manuals / Material science

2. Studio / Texts 1 & 2

Set up feedback loop between making and writing.

**Examples:**

Expt.21 Reflection (Text 1)

Mining Pessoa_298 / Pessoa_bag (Text 2)

A Fat Bag / (Video Poem) (Text 2)

Explore: Object oriented writing

3. Exhibition / Texts 1 & 2

Combination of analytical and personal voices.

Object oriented and site writing / memory

Be conscious of the writing process - this feeds into the writing-making exercises.*

Each draft / set of changes in a different colour and/or font.

Examples:

Jerwood / Louis Thompson (Text 2)

Camden / Phoebe Cummings (Text 1)

Explore:

Object oriented writing / art writing / criticism /

Boris Groys / TJ Clark / Benjamin Buchloh / John Roberts / Robert Smithson / Eduardo Chillida / Robert Morris / Susan Stewart / Geoff Dyer / Brian Dillon / Edmund de Waal

* 02.05.13

New Methods: May 2013

Object 1

(Thesis 1)

Exhibition (site of display)



Home (site of display and production)



Studio (site of production)

(Site of the object is Thesis 1 itself - paper and digital / text and image)

Object 2

(Thesis 2)

Exhibition (site of display)



Home (site of display and production)



Studio (site of production)

(Site of the object is Thesis 2 itself - paper and digital / text and image)

Object 3

A display of a group of objects (an exhibition)

Clay / mixed media / moving image / text / sound

Containing:

Research (home) / Production (studio) / Display (exhibition)

Writing_Making Method 11.06.13

So, how might one write an essay, or a chapter? The following reflects my own experience, though there are many different approaches.¹

1. If the text were a story, planning, or plotting might be involved – drawn from the seven possible plots? The relative merits of planning and not planning should be taken into account – plotting or following the nose.
2. Words are drawn from the known vocabulary of the individual, which constitutes an unknown percentage of the total number of words available. This total is finite, but very large.
3. A dictionary or thesaurus might be consulted to aid memory, to express a point more clearly, or to express a point less clearly, but more academically, to address a more specialised audience. So, some words are exchanged for others and some new words are drawn in from the available totality.
4. In rare circumstances, neologisms might be created.
5. External sources are consulted and brought into the mix as quotation, or paraphrase. Or, others' ideas are freshly minted, consciously or unconsciously, in 'new' language. (As Jonathan Lethem says, this last category, arguably, contains everything we say or write that is, nevertheless, presented as original.²)
6. A draft of a few paragraphs might be written, followed by some research. On rereading, ideas might be expanded and sentences and paragraphs restructured and reordered.
7. Meaning is refined and transformed. The writing process is also a thinking process – as E.M. Forster said, 'How do I know what I think until I see what I say?'³
8. Words and phrases that reflect (or betray) an over-familiar voice might be excised.
9. Any amount of expanding, cutting and rearranging might ensue after this point. This might take place over days, weeks, or sometimes months.
10. Sometimes I change things in order to preserve a shape that has already been established - for instance, while writing this, I want the JM supervision notes to stay as one block, on the same page. As I add text above, the bottom of the block drops onto the next page and I have to return and re-order the block, in order that it might stay whole. This opens the possibility of my (and your) sense of the sense changing. While little attention might be paid to the visual quality of a longer text, a poem or short piece of prose might be assessed for its 'all-over' quality and subsequently altered.
11. The piece is read through to ensure that it makes sense, that it flows.

¹ Daniel Chandler identifies 5 in 'Writing Strategies', UWA, 1995 <<http://visual-memory.co.uk/daniel/Documents/short/strats.html>>

² Jonathan Lethem, 'The Ecstasy of Influence. A Plagiarism', *Harper's Magazine*, February 2007 : 59-71

³ Apparently Forster was misquoted and was actually criticising André Gide's contention that a novel should not be planned: R.J. Heeks, 'Discovery Writing and the so-called Forster Quote', online article, 2011 ><http://rjheeks.wordpress.com/2011/04/13/discovery-writing-and-the-so-called-forster-quote/>>

[Track all changes to a piece of writing. What goes down first, what comes in later, what is rearranged and what cut. Use Word actively, both in the sense of the space of the page, or document, and in the way that the software organises the writing process - helping or hindering.]

How might this translate to making?

1. If plotting is involved in the writing, how might this be analogous to making? What are the seven possible stories? A figurine might be one. I might 'plot' by looking at objects or images and formulating a mental plan, or producing a series of design drawings. While a figurine could be seen as an off-the-shelf 'story', it is, in its material reality, a thing of great complexity. Still, a tight plot constricts playful spontaneity.
2. Known, familiar materials are drawn from the totality of materials - finite, but very large. These materials must be put into some sort of order, using a technique - modelling, coiling, construction, etc. The initial materials have to have a relationship to one another, as the initial words come together to create sense, or meaning. Essay = pot or sculpture.
3. There is no dictionary, as such, but there is a large body of technical literature containing examples of finished works, techniques and material recipes. 'Words' are changed, or removed. Unexpected words might be added.
4. The possible combinations of different materials and firing conditions are so numerous that 'neologisms' are not uncommon, although they won't attract as much attention as new words, unless, perhaps, they are perceived as intentional, or at least repeatable.
5. Quotations drawn from other works might be made during making. If one is engaged in mimesis - making a figure for instance - the body, or body-parts might be studied and 'described'. The work might be nothing but a quotation, i.e. a copy of an existing work. As with writing, memories of the work of others will be acting without conscious awareness.
6. The work is roughed out. Some areas are well-formed, others not. As the whole starts to take shape, sections might be chopped up and moved around.
7. Meaning is refined and transformed. The making process is also a thinking process – as, Sol le Witt didn't say, 'How do I know what I think until I see what I make?'
8. Technical facility might be disrupted by the employment of obstructions.⁴
9. 'Sentences' are recast, shortened or lengthened. Connecting 'words' are reworked or smoothed. The work might be left for a period and returned to at a later stage, when reworking or significant additions might occur.
10. The part to whole relationship in a work of visual art is constantly in play during construction.

11. Clay is not a material that is open to much tweaking once the primary (wet) making

⁴ Shown beautifully in: Lars von Trier and Jorgen Leth (2003) (dirs.) *The Five Obstructions*, Zentropa Real ApS and Koch-Lorber Films. But maybe the writers got there first – the cut-up technique of Burroughs and Gysin, or the playful restrictions of Oulipo, or maybe it goes back to Surrealism and automatic writing, or even further, to collage. All systems designed to get past the self-conscious 'I'.

process is well under way, though flow might be enhanced at three decorating stages – on green, on bisque and on glaze. Multi-media, constructed works, or installations can be edited in a similar way to a text.

Materials, tools, processes, bodily interaction, skill. The more I think, the less clear the differences seem. The bodily interaction between individual artist and materials is usually greater in the production of an object than in a text. Of course some artists have almost no bodily interaction with their materials, but the more important point, I think, is that the production of a text is a thoroughly industrialised process, while the production of an art object is still, predominantly, a semi-industrialised process. Texts are usually produced on a computer - a highly complex product of industry. Even pens and pencils are complex tools - the results of technologies that are taken for granted because of the ubiquity of the products. And, despite the relative ease of publishing afforded by (industrially produced) software and hardware, the production of a book is also a complex, industrialised process.

If the volume is the product, what is the volume of the words? The original text is the block, the new text the volume of the block.⁵

⁵ A similar assumption underlies the dual drafting strategies proposed by, among others, Wason (1980) and Elbow (1973). In these strategies, the writer is encouraged, not to plan their text before writing, but instead to articulate their thought spontaneously in text without worrying how well expressed or well organised the text is. Once the initial draft has been produced more explicit problem-solving operations are applied in order to turn the 'exteriorised mass', as Wason (1980) calls it, into a well-formed text.' David Galbraith, 'Writing as a Knowledge-Constituting Process', in *Knowing What to Write*, ed. by M. Torrance and D. Galbraith (Amsterdam, NL: Amsterdam University Press, 1999), pp.139-160

BCB Method

British Ceramics Biennial 2013 / Award Exhibition

The working process followed for *Four bodies: Red<Buff>White* was a development of a new approach to writing and making first mapped out during a four week residency at Cranbrook Academy of Art, Michigan, March 2013. The BCB project began with the raw material of clay – red, buff, white – and the appropriation of existing objects and text. Three ceramic pieces were selected from each of three museum collections – Bristol Museum & Art Gallery, the Potteries Museum & Art Gallery and the V&A Museum. Each museum displays work produced in all three geographical locations. The resulting group of nine objects, and their accompanying label texts, express aspects of the complex economic and cultural trade between three key centres of ceramic production in the UK.

Each of the three clay objects produced for the exhibited work is a composite copy of three museum objects - copied with varying degrees of adherence to the originals. No testing was undertaken - unfamiliar materials and making techniques were dealt with 'live' on each of the three composite objects. Working against my training, against normative conceptions of beauty – or 'finish' - in Ceramics, I kept telling myself "it is impossible to fuck this up". This was difficult, but a pre-established rule was that the making process would incorporate writing techniques – substituting words, rearranging and editing. Planning, however, was unavoidable and started to be considered in relation to narrative plotting. The play between planning and spontaneous decision-making became a key element of the process and suggested analogy with another literary form, 'discovery writing'.

During making, 'museum label poems' were written. Rules were followed and restraint shown, in that only existing words and phrases were allowed, but the poems also flirted with the pleasures of narrative and sense, informed by background research. These poems, in turn, influenced the composition of the clay objects.

Language and object met again in the exhibition space, with the ceramics acting as kinetic screens for projected text, extracted from the three poems. Words were made physical through a play of figure and ground, scale, letter shape (font) and the frustrations of confounded sense.

OOO and Speculative Craft

A proposal for a practice-based symposium

My research explores a range of methods for generating language about making, with the aim of developing new ways of thinking about and presenting the intimate interaction between body and materials that occurs in craft-based practices. The documentary process necessary to research as practice has developed into methods for generating text, image and moving image as artwork. I have not developed new ceramics skills, but rather identified common interests in other fields and now seek to instigate new, interdisciplinary dialogues.

Recent work in Object Oriented Ontology (OOO) has been a key influence on the development of my project and the proposed event will bring a distinguished thinker from this field together with a maker, equally distinguished within the field of pottery. I hope to open skilled making to speculative investigation and create an opportunity for a philosopher to become more intimately involved with material and making.

A moving image document of the event will contribute directly to practice and thesis elements of my project as well as being a vehicle for the dissemination of new knowledge to a broad audience. Opportunities for cross-disciplinary networking and collaboration (with video makers) are rich and experience in organising and mediating an event will be gained.

Participants: A potter (maker of functional ware) / a philosopher connected to Object Oriented Ontology / a facilitator (me) / one or two video makers / the audience

The potter will make a coffee cup and attempt to find language for the embodied knowledge that is being deployed. The philosopher and audience are encouraged to ask questions. The potter then teaches the philosopher to make the same cup, again trying to express familiar, but tacit, knowledge through language. The philosopher attempts to put words to the unfamiliar interaction between his body and the material.

The aim of the event is to make interdisciplinary connections - between Craft and Philosophy. In so doing, I hope to open skilled making to speculative investigation - might OOO's conception of objects offer ceramicists new ways of thinking about making skills and materials? Might an intimate engagement with material - an opportunity to fulfill Ian Bogost's call to 'carpentry' - offer a philosopher new tools for thinking?

Letter to Walter Keeler | 11.03.14

Dear Wally

I've been meaning to write since your Oxford event, which I enjoyed very much - always exciting to hear you talk and see you make. Despite this, as someone with an interest in the future of Ceramics, I was exercised by the friction generated around the relation between pottery and art. Ceramics, as a discipline, has clearly tried to corral two different paradigms, or sets of intentions, at least. I can't work out if this is fatal, or a potential strength. It seems to me that, despite being historically central, pottery no longer sits at the centre of the discipline. What does remain central, though, is the idea that knowledge and value arise from hands-on, material investigation and the development of skills.

I feel that this is what we need to clear about and to celebrate - it is certainly a very distinct approach from that followed in Fine Art. It would be nice to think that those, like yourself, who want to make useful, beautiful things by hand can hold onto (or regain) a central position. But also that they might happily work alongside those, like myself, who want to take an interdisciplinary approach, investigating craft production from different angles and developing new forms of presentation. One value of this is that it potentially opens up the interests that we share - making and materials - to a wider audience, within academia and beyond.

In my research at the RCA, I've been exploring methods for generating language from making and, conversely, using language to prompt, or guide making; taking the 'problem' of tacit knowledge and questioning how it might be opened up by coming at it from different directions. To this end, I'm organising a practice-based seminar that will facilitate a dialogue between a distinguished thinker and a distinguished maker, with the aim of exploring making from two very different perspectives. A potter will make a coffee mug, attempting to find language for the interaction between body and material. A philosopher will listen and ask questions. The potter will then teach the philosopher to make the same mug, while continuing the dialogue.

I wonder if you would consider the potter's role? Your openness, combined with advanced making and language skills, make you ideal for the role, I think. I haven't got a date yet, as am trying to coordinate for when Timothy Morton, who has expressed an interest in taking part, is in the UK. (Very exciting - he's quite Mike-like - brilliant, open, generous.) He is an English professor in the States, working in the fields of Romantic Literature and Ecocriticism - he defines ecology as 'coexistence' and draws on a currently lively philosophical movement, Object Oriented Ontology (OOO), to propose new models for human interaction with the environment .

My research also draws on OOO, which starts with Heidegger's idea of the reality of objects being profoundly withdrawn from human perception and develops it by doing away with (human) subjects and drawing attention to the importance of all object-object relations. There is an energising refocusing on the importance of actual things, as opposed to the endless search for smaller and smaller 'essential substances', or the idea that only language and relations between things are real. Morton writes about rhetoric as a tool for accessing the strangeness of other objects; my proposition is that making - an intimate engagement between body and material - is equally, if not more, effective.

All the best,

Conor

Letter to Graham Harman | 11.04.14

Dear Graham

I'm a PhD student in the department of Ceramics and Glass at the Royal College of Art and would like to invite you to take part in an interdisciplinary, practice-based symposium. I am an enthusiastic admirer of your writing and speaking and feel that the clarity and strength of your position, coupled with an openness to other forms of knowledge and your precise, but rich use of language is what we need to make this speculative event a success.

Inspired by Object Oriented Ontology, I've been working with the proposition that Ceramics might be a particularly useful discipline within which to explore relations between objects. Reflecting on Tim Morton's proposal of rhetoric as a means of contacting the 'strange stranger', it occurred to me that making might be equally effective. All forms of craft making constitute an intimate engagement between body and material, but clay seems singular in its openness to interaction with other objects - hands, cloth mats, air, sponges, water, wooden rolling pins, temperature, steel knives, feathers, etc.

The idea to facilitate a dialogue between a potter and a philosopher came out of this thinking. Taking up Ian Bogost's call to 'carpentry', I plan to have the potter make a coffee cup and then to teach the philosopher to do the same. One aim is to generate language that attempts the impossible - to express tacit, or embodied, knowledge - and to introduce the possibility of speculative investigation into the activity of making. How might we build on Heidegger's reflection on jug making, for instance?

Potters, of course, have their own language of touch and use, but it seems to me that the common functional object might offer an under-explored and relatively uncluttered terrain. While trying to swerve the tired old art/craft dichotomy, such an object doesn't seek to offer oblique access to other objects through imaginative deployment of metaphor, as art objects might do. It comes from a parallel world, being presented as itself, its meaning deriving from its materials, its function and, perhaps most of all, its facture. (The medium is the message, but the medium needs a mediator). I wonder if the embodied knowledge that is central to facture might be seen as a metaphor for withdrawal - it can't be seen, it can't be explained, it can't be simplified. It is expressed in making and re-embodied in the made object. The making is a withdrawn element in the maker and the made.

I do hope you find the project of interest and with very best wishes,

Conor Wilson

Appendix 5

One Bag Final Exhibition Blog (7,801 words)

Master Chuang and craft

[Tuesday, April 29th, 2014](#)

“In Chuang Tzu’s view, the man who has freed himself from conventional standards of judgement can no longer be made to suffer, for he refuses to recognise poverty as any less desirable than affluence, to recognise death as any less desirable than life. He does not in any literal sense withdraw and hide from the world — to do so would show that he still passed judgement upon the world. He remains within society, but refrains from acting out of the motives that lead ordinary men to struggle for wealth, fame, success, or safety. He maintains a state that Chuang Tzu refers to as wu-wei, or inaction, meaning by this term not a forced quietude, but a course of action that is not founded upon any purposeful motives of gain or striving. In such a state, all human actions become as spontaneous and mindless as those of the natural world. Man becomes one with Nature, or Heaven, as Chuang Tzu calls it, and merges himself with Tao, or the Way, the underlying unity that embraces man, Nature and all that is in the universe.

To describe this mindless, purposeless mode of life, Chuang Tzu turns most often to the analogy of the artist, or craftsman. The skilled woodcarver, the skilled butcher, the skilled swimmer, does not ponder or ratiocinate on the course of action he should take; his skill has become so much a part of him that he merely acts instinctivly and spontaneously and, without knowing why, achieves success. Again, Chuang Tzu employs the metaphor of a totally free and purposeless journey, using the word yu (to wander, or a wandering) to designate the way in which the enlightened man wanders through all of creation, enjoying its delights without ever becoming attached to any one part of it.

But, like all mystics, Chuang Tzu insists that language is in the end grievously inadequate to describe the true Way, or the wonderful freedom of the man who has realised his identity with it. Again and again, he cautions that he is giving only a “rough” or “reckless” description of these things, and what follows is usually a passage of highly poetic and paradoxical language that in fact conveys little more than the essential ineffability of such a state of being.”

Burton Watson (trans.) 1966 *Chuang Tzu: Basic Writings, New York: Columbia University Press* Pp 6-7

It strikes me how closely this chimes with Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s theory of *Flow*.

Also, that the Royal College of Art is not the least likely place to come across purposeful motives of gain or striving, but, while Ceramics & Glass students are not exempt, they do seem to be the most popular with support staff.

Some thoughts on exhibiting

[Monday, April 28th, 2014](#)

The final show for RCA students graduating in 2014 will open on 17/18 June. I will be showing with this cohort (though won’t be submitting my PhD until the end of the first term of the following academic year). We will start the installation process in the first week of June, so there’s a little more than a month to go.

I’ve been trying to adopt a different approach to exhibiting for a few years now, with limited success. It is very difficult not to be invaded by the anxiety connected to completion and judgement. This worry seems to be common, if not universal, and makers tend to combat it by putting all their energy into making very well (and often in great quantity), at any cost. You can see it played out in the immense pressure on working space, materials and kiln space in the Ceramics & Glass department.

The intimate engagement with materials that is making is so involving that it can be difficult to see the space for the objects (though it should be said that the intense focus engendered by an exhibition can sometimes lead to startling advances). The other pole, where I am currently shivering, is that the exhibition must stand for a coherent and fully realised practice – that it should reflect an approach to production and display that sits within a well considered socio-political framework. This can lead to semi-paralysis.

Having allowed myself the time and space to be experimental, to be uncertain, I now find myself uncertain about the value of this approach. Over the years, as a Ceramics lecturer, I have often been taken by the bravery of Fine Art students, who, rather than stuffing a space with the best things they have made, present something – something that might seem quite slight – that represents a way of working, a way of thinking. Although I still see very strong exhibits from time to time, I’m generally less impressed these days. It sometimes seems more like style than substance, like the method of display has become what distinguishes art from non-art, as the methods of production don’t really change that much.

Returning to anxieties, they come from two directions. The first, perhaps inevitable and, hopefully, productive, stems from the fact that I don’t know exactly what I will be showing. I have a working plan, based on research methods that have developed out of my project, but I don’t want to close down possibilities – I want to keep things open and fresh, allow the process to dictate where things go. To think, perhaps, of the exhibition as a collection of poems, as opposed to a well-polished and plotted story.

The second is more worrying and relates to that socio-political context. I’m reading the Chuang Tzu, amongst other things, and, while its wisdom, ambiguity and humour are still fresh and inspiring, I’m nagged by a sense that we have well and truly entered a ‘new’ paradigm of global warming and environmental destruction. Our power to understand collectively and to take action at the individual level is limited, but I can’t help thinking that all our energies should be directed towards developing ways of producing and consuming that constitute solutions.

“Those whom heaven helps we call the sons of heaven. They do not learn this by learning. They do not work it by working. They do not reason it by using reason. To let understanding stop at what cannot be understood is a high attainment. Those who cannot do it will be destroyed on the lathe of heaven.”

— Chuang Tzu XXIII

This translation comes from Ursula K. LeGuin’s The Lathe of Heaven. She doesn’t say where she got it from.

Burton Watson, in the introduction to his translation of the seven ‘inner chapters’, three ‘outer chapters’ and one ‘miscellaneous chapter’, published

as Basic Writings, writes, “I have rendered T’ien as “Heaven,” or “heavenly” in nearly all cases. Chuang Tzu uses the word to mean Nature, what pertains to the natural as opposed to the artificial, or as a synonym for the Way.”

And later, as a footnote on P32, “Heaven is not something distinct from earth and man, but a name applied to the natural and spontaneous functioning of the two.”

Chapter XXIII is the first of the ‘miscellaneous chapters’ (known as “Gengsang Chu”) and does not feature in Basic Writings.

Cup rules / limits

[Monday, May 26th, 2014](#)

1. Each cup starts as a copy of one of my selections fromm the V&A collection.
2. All cups are made from one bag of porcelain (Valentine’s Special Porcelain – the body stocked by the department).
3. Only ‘structural’, or carved decoration, following the originals. Nothing applied and no colour. All cups will be glazed with a transparent glaze, made from standard materials stocked by the department.
4. All cups must be functional.
5. No ‘dry runs’ or testing – of making techniques or glazing.
6. All cups will be gifted to specified individuals. Which cup for which recipient will be decided during the making process.

Socrates, Chuang Tzu, animism and writing

[Tuesday, May 27th, 2014](#)

Whether or not Chuang Tzu, or Master Chuang, was a singular, historical figure, possibly named Chou, it seems to be accepted that ‘he’ lived in the 4th Century BCE and was therefore, more or less, a contemporary of Socrates. It seems remarkable that two men from such different cultures, different places, would overlap so powerfully in their thinking and at the same time.

Both were deeply skeptical of power and conventional definitions of knowledge. Both saw craft (art, techné, making) as a real and ‘proper’ way of interacting with the world. As previous posts show, Chuang Tzu sees skilled activity as a route to instinctive, spontaneous action, that is in tune with nature, or the Way. Socrates, himself coming from the class of ‘hand-artists’, sees the (lowly) artisans as the only people who have real knowledge of what they are doing.

Socrates does, however, explicitly set Philosophy (the love of wisdom that comes with an acceptance of the infinite, ungraspable nature of knowledge) above other areas of practice. Chuang Tzu, on the other hand, is much more suspicious of ‘wisdom’ and the ability of words to pin it down. As previously quoted, he presents wisdom and fame as, “evil weapons – not the sort of thing to bring you success.”

In a brilliant chapter in *The Spell of the Sensuous*, titled ‘Animism and the Alphabet’, David Abram writes about the development of a new technology – the phonetic alphabet of the Ancient Greeks, derived from the *aleph-beth* of the Semitic peoples of the Middle East. This allowed words to separate from the things that they named and for knowledge itself, released from the restrictions of memory, to become abstract – idealised and cut off from the ‘more-than-human world’:

When the Homeric epics were recorded in writing, then the art of the rhapsodes began to lose its preservative and instructive function. The knowledge embedded in the epic stories and myths was now captured for the first time in a visible and fixed form, which could be returned to, examined, and even questioned. Indeed, it was only then, under the slowly spreading influence of alphabetic technology, that “language” was beginning to separate itself from the animate flux of the world, and so becoming a ponderable presence in its own right.

“It is only as language is written down that it becomes possible to think about it. The acoustic medium, being incapable of visualisation, did not achieve recognition as a phenomenon wholly seperable from the person who used it. But in the alphabetized document the medium became objectified...”

(Eric Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present*, 1986)

The scribe, or author, could now begin to dialogue with his own visible inscriptions, viewing and responding to his own words even as he wrote them down. *A new power of reflexivity was thus coming into existence, borne by the relation between the scribe and his scripted text.*

P 107

A little further on, and starting with another quotation, Abram writes:

“Plato, in the early fourth century B.C., stands on the threshold between the oral and written cultures of Greece. The earliest epigraphic and iconographic indications of young boys being taught to write date from Plato’s childhood. In his day, people had already been reciting Homer from the text for centuries. But the art of writing was still primarily a handicraft...”

(Ivan Illich and Barry Sanders, *The Alphabetization of the Popular Mind*, 1988)

Plato was teaching, then, precisely at the moment hen the new technology of reading and writing was shedding its specialized “craft” status and finally spreading, by means of the Greek curriculum, into the culture at large. The significance of this conjunction has not been well recognized by Western philosophers, all of whom stand — to a greater or lesser extent — within Plato’s lineage. Plato, or rather the association between the literate Plato and his mostly non-literate teacher Socrates (469?-399 B.C.E.), may be recognized as the hinge on which the sensuous, mimetic, profoundly embodied style of consciousness proper to orality gave way to the more detached, abstract mode of thinking engendered by alphabetic literacy...

Pp 108-109

I told a friend – Paul Sandammeer – that I wanted to be a writer. He said that I was too good a maker to be a writer. Make of that what you will.

Gass on the word

[Tuesday, May 27th, 2014](#)

Freud asked the question some time back, and since then we’ve had answers aplenty, so we are supposed to know by now what women want, but what does the word — even the word ‘woman’ — want? “In the flesh it is eternal...” ...to be material, it turns out; to be noisy, singular, well-connected, splendidly performed, quirkily personal. Words want what they are not. Not an unusual desire. The child is eager to become a grown-up, the adult pines for former times and an innocence regained. That is most dear that can’t be had: to make music when you haven’t any instrument and don’t know how to play; to color the eye, outline objects, create sea, mountains, meadows with a swish of ink, to watercolour sky; it wants to be the periwinkle or the pink that has no need to speak, to rest in the world like a dog before the fire, to sit on a sofa and sink on its cushions, occupy a seat, fill a box, cover a wall, dance the tango, copulate in the foam, beat as strongly as a healthy heart. The word, like so many of its referents, wants to be a thing one day... then an object in action like a thrown stone... on still another it wants to be a song.

The practitioner of any art soon grows familiar with the limitations inherent in the medium: in painting it begins with the tyranny of the rectangle, the relative absense of time, movement, thought in the materials of composition, the fundamental flatness of stretched canvas or appointed wall, consequently the work’s precarious, adjectival attachment to solids, its fragile nature and dependency on site, yet its insistent particularity wherever it’s placed. So we shouls not be surprised at the appearance of impasto, the presence of wax melted into slow flows, collage, bullet holes and slashes, to witness the image break out of its frame and grow into an environment, nor should it shock us to see the the icon of today become the word itself, like the word ‘mustache’ spelled across the Mona Lisa’s upper lip.

William H. Gass

‘*La maison d’en face* or That Other Art’

in Jane E. Neidhardt & Lorin Cuoco (eds.) 1997 *The Dual Muse: The Writer As Artist, The Artist As Writer*, St. Louis: Washington University Gallery of Art, P 71

Leach_copy (green)

[Wednesday, May 28th, 2014](#)

slabbed / sledged / carved / modeled / pulled (handle)

Chatting to Charlotte while making. She is not a ceramicist, but is keenly perceptive in most areas. I had cut out five slabs – triangles, but with a flat, cut-off end – and was starting to stick them together. She asked why I was doing it this way – wasn’t it a mad way to make a cup? I said that doing it ‘wrong’ was the point.

Making a decision, semi-arbitrarily, to do it one way and then following through to the best of my ability. I remember seeing Bruce Nauman’s *Setting a Good Corner* years ago. What I always remember is the idea of planning the job, deciding what to do and then going at it, with full commitment, until it is finished.

I’m always trying to find a good balance between craft and bricolage, so I haven’t been planning my jobs very well. More just starting and seeing what happens. And using whatever tools come to hand, or other things that can be adapted to tool-use. Laziness might also have a part to play. But once the thing gets going, I am, Nauman-like, totally committed,

Charlotte has been working at home so hasn’t been around much. I’ve colonised her space, which is next door to mine. She came in yesterday on her way to the Essay conference – the Leach copy was sitting drying on her desk shelf and she asked if that was the one that I had been making the other day. I said it was and asked if she liked it. She made one of those non-committal noises which mean ‘not really’.

And there is the rub. I found myself immediately defending it / myself. Pointing out that it was in the least flattering state – fully dry, before firing. The tenacity of the not-being-considered-a-brilliant- maker anxiety. I sometimes wonder if a significant feature of craft making is the need of the maker to please.

For Ali Smith or Rosemarie Trockel.

Keith_Murray_copy

[Thursday, May 29th, 2014](#)

slabbed / sledged / modelled

Getting the handle wrong on the Keith Murray copy opened up my thinking about the cups as a body of work. The original cup was most likely slpcast from a mould taken from a plaster model. So the handle would have been carefully carved in nice, hard, constant plaster. A tricky job, to be sure, but very ‘safe’ as a process. My cup body was slabbed. I did the banding (reeding, again?) with a profile made from a credit card. The handle started as a coil, which was then shaped and carved. I didn’t want to offer it up to the cup too much, for fear of weakening the clay at the bends. This is one of the issues with porcelain – it stays wet and floppy for quite a while, but once it strats to dry, it’s off like a rocket. So, with the body getting to the critical point, the handle still slightly too wet and the other body starting to signal the need for rest, I went with the spirit of the work – accuracy without rigour (or fussing) – and stuck the handle on. Immediately it looked very wrong – too big, too chunky. Not elegant. I was tempted to take it straight off again, which would have meant making another one. So I’m torn between redoing work done, which I hate, or having people think that I’m not a good maker – the craftsman’s horror.

Disregarding the redoing issue for now, this horror seems to be a critical pivot in craft production – between fear of making badly and keeping some life in the work. How to approach the latter is not a straightforward problem. Although I have a tendency towards precision, I have always been able to make quickly and loosely (not everyone can). But my goal is not to make loose, ‘beautiful’ things. A lot of people – makers and appreciators alike – look for this in ceramics. Things that look untouched, ‘fresh’ and artless. It usually indicates an iceberg of craft skill underneath the individual object.

The original appears to be a straight cylinder, but if you look closely, it tapers in, very slightly, towards the base. I cut the ends of my slab on an angle, to give me a little more length on the top circumference than the bottom, but when I put it together, the cup tapered in towards the top. The resistance of materials – seemingly simple things are not simple at all. Anyway, a potter would normally just make another one, and another if necessary, until they got it right. I suppressed my training and bashed the bottom (carefully) with a bit of wood, so the cup has its own peculiar shape, with a bit of a bulge in the middle.

For John Thackara.

Two talks in 2011 had, in combination, a major impact on the direction of my project:

A virtuoso performance, in June, by Tim Morton (to about fifteen people) in the research seminar room of the Stevens Building.

A Sustain talk in December, which included John Thackara. He talked about the folly of following old models within an unsustainable socio-economic system, based on inequality and finite resources, and how close we might be to the edge of ‘Seneca’s Cliff’.

At the end, I asked him if he thought that we (sculptors, painters, potters) should stop producing objects. He answered that it might be more useful to think in terms of a gift economy. I had read *The Gift* by Lewis Hyde a few years before and been excited by the possibility of changing my relationship to the system. Not straightforward, of course – most makers aren’t in a position to be able to give away what they make and (despite my former criticism of ‘commercial’ work) hand-making and selling your own work must surely be part of the solution rather than the problem. Perhaps the first concern for every individual who recognises the pressing need for change should be that they don’t work for exploitative corporations. I’m not in the position to give away everything I make either, but I am prepared to live lightly and generate income to support the making from other sources. Clearly, there are no easy solutions. I’m thinking of the gifting of these cups as an experiment and don’t expect short-term returns, but hope that it might extend the conversation about making beyond the usual boundaries.

Spode_copy

[Friday, May 30th, 2014](#)

pinched / modelled (handle)

Pinched from one lump of clay. One coil added to foot. No tools used at all, apart from a banding wheel and a paper coffee cup – so I could work on it upside down. I desperately wanted to use tools at many different stages, but held out. Only fingers were used. Some interesting things came out of that restriction. I’d certainly never thought of using my thumbnail as a scraper before. Porcelain isn’t the easiest material to pinch – it always felt on the edge of collapsing into a wobbly slab. The Spode cup is one of the most elegant of my V&A selection, and one of my favourites. It is a little perverse to make it this way, I know.

Made between 18.00 and 22.00 (18.00 – 18.45) then two sessions of about half an hour each. During the first session it felt amateur and ugly. Then I decided that it would be for Sally O’Reilly – the making pressure fell away and it became fun again. Until I rescued it and it felt like I had something to lose.

No seconds, as I said before – everything made will be shown; and no testing. Nothing has been worked out before. It means more risk and more fun. I am not trying to repeat something already worked out. This, for me, is another common trap. You get very proficient with a technique. You get your glaze or whatever working just right. Then you are condemned to achieve the same result over and over again.

Each cup, whether ugly or beautiful, well made or badly made, stands as a record of the work done – the interaction between clay and body – at a particular time.

For Sally O’Reilly

Lucie Rie_copy

[Wednesday, June 4th, 2014](#)

carved / modelled / pulled (handle)

Though I was drawn to this cup and have always enjoyed the work of Lucie Rie, I’ve never responded to it with much passion. As with all the others, the act of copying opened my eyes to the different elements that come together to make this a beautiful object.

In an interview about *Weekend*, Mike Figgis highlights the great quantity of ideas that Godard throws (often casually) into his films. Other directors, according to Figgis, have fewer ideas per film at their disposal and generally end up with mixtures, of variable quality, while Godard arrives, seemingly effortlessly, at compound after compound.

This cup, I think, is a compound. Everything is right – form, size, thickness, colour, texture, handle weight and shape. Even the lovely, wobbly decoration, perhaps too light and personal for the elegant simplicity of the form it adorns, is right in its wrongness. It is easy, of course, to appreciate it, while thinking of it as *only* a cup. Not on the same cultural level as a Godard film. Perhaps, but similar levels of experience, skill and focus are at play. Think of all the cups that are out there – do any others look like this one? And why don’t they look like this one?

My copy doesn’t, certainly, but, of course, that wssn’t my intention. Something about the solid perfection of the form made me decide to start with a lump and carve, focusing on making the interior true to the feel of the original and leaving the exterior to more or less make itself. Having started a bit small, I slapped some extra clay on the outside and did very little to alter its appearance, just letting my fingers dry and ‘soften’ the surface as I held and turned the cup, removing clay from the inside with a steel tool. I had a strong urge to attend properly to the transition between foot and body (the key feature of the cup, for me), but denied myself, just making some cursory passes with the curved edge of the tool used on the interior.

Why? Only because I am curious to see what emerges from a set of limitations. While making, I was thinking about the arcane business of the appreciation of Japanese tea bowls, so...

For Ben Marcus

Gropius_copy

Thursday, June 5th, 2014

coiled / modelled / sledged / slabbed (handle)

Playing with contrast between in and out, again, and between clean, industrial finish and amateur, unfinished finish. (The first pot I ever made, at primary school, went for the same look.) Coiled quickly and pressed, cajoled and beaten into a shape approximating the elegant curve of the Gropius-designed, Rosenthal-manufactured beauty. I worked away at the inside until the thinner areas where the coils meet were clearly visible as lighter bands. Perhaps should have pushed it even further, as it is still quite chunky, but there is always a trade-off, when working back a coil pot, between form, thickness and cracking, due to exposed joins. The looseness of the coils mimics the wobbly, hand-drawn feel of the decoration. Interesting parallel with the Lucie Rie in this respect – makes me think I should have made the Rie with vertical coils. The handle, again, is all wrong. Very difficult to make these fine handles from coils and sabs – they stay floppy for a while, so are hard to handle, and then dry very quickly, becoming brittle and too dry to attach. I like the mismatch, conceptually, but for a useful object, the handle is rather delicate for the heft of the body. I do want these cups to be used, as opposed to being pretty dust catchers. I have to admit that I have quite a few less conventional cups that don’t see a lot of active service. It makes me think of the drinking habits of potential recipients.

For Kenneth Goldsmith, or Medbh McGuckian

Turkish_copy

Thursday, June 5th, 2014

pinched / coiled / modelled / sledged

I feel a bit sorry for this one – it looks very dowdy in this state. It was the last one – made on the final Friday of wet making, before heading home to Bristol for the weekend. I didn’t leave myself enough time, so it was made fast and loose. The main body was pinched from one lump – the result was too squat, so three coils were added to give more height. The handles were surprisingly complicated – I looked hard, but didn’t concern myself with proportions, as you can see. Additional coils were applied, for the rim and decorative band, and sledged loosely with quickly produced, bespoke ‘credit card profiles’ (as with many of the others). Coil joins were left ‘raw’ on the outside for extra decorative effect, while the inside was worked with a steel tool. I couldn’t decide whether or not to go for the diamond decoration, so, with time extremely tight, I inscribed a very rudimentary version on just one side. It’s hard to tell how the original was done – I guess it was probably a stamp.

Interesting that there is a lip on the rim interior of the original – perhaps it wasn’t designed as a drinking vessel. And the double handle suggests some sort of ritual use, reinforced by the label designation ‘of silver shape’ – like many ceramic objects in the past, it was most likely copied from a more expensive, precious metal precursor.

For David Abram, or Nuri Bilge Ceylan.

Bisque

Thursday, June 5th, 2014

An unconventionally stacked kiln, necessitated by the mix of tall things, small things and flat, wide things. And a serious paucity of kiln shelves. With Andrew and Emma. We worried about shelves supported in the wrong places, but it all came out fine.

Glost_in

Thursday, June 5th, 2014

Loaded Kiln 3 yesterday, with all my cups. It will have reached temperature by now and be cooling down, to be opened tomorrow. Whatever comes out will be going in the show.

This is my second and final firing of the year – one bisque, for the bag and cups; one glost, for the cups. Cone 9 / 1260 C with a half hour soak.

The cups were glazed, by dipping, with an untested (by me) glaze:

Wollastonite 33
Cornish Stone 33
Nepheline Syenite 33

with an addition of about 1.5% Bentonite.

There was space in the kiln, so I shared it with an MA student. As we were loading, she questioned my propping strategy (high-fired porcelain is prone to distortion), so I weighed up some advice from her and another student, then left things as they were, saying that it didn’t really matter if things went wrong, as ‘no testing’ was part of my method. As I tried to explain this, she appeared to be less and less convinced, concluding, I think, that I was bullshitting.

The criticism is useful, as it prompts me to clarify what I’m trying to do. I am hard on the bullshitters myself, but it also seems important to risk pretension, by taking risks. So is this no testing policy usefully risky, or my own brand of bullshit? I started practising it some time ago, before the research project started. It came from two different directions:

1. Bad time management – not having enough time at the end of a project to test, before an exhibition deadline, so just taking a risk. Of course, this includes the decision not to test earlier in the process.

2. A long-standing recognition that tests were subtly, but significantly different from ‘finished’ works. Looser, less self-conscious and rarely going

‘wrong’ – things thrown together seem not to crack, glaze unburdened with anxiety loves its support. This is partly a function of the absence of predetermined outcomes, but there seems to be something else going on too.

So I’ve been pushing this and exploring it. As I’ve written before, I’m aiming for a good confluence of craft and bricolage. Testing seems integral to the stability and earnestness of craft production; a refusal of testing belongs to the seat-of-the-pants-ingenuity of the bricoleur. My contention is that combining the two approaches, at every stage of production, is more fun and, crucially, draws attention away from the polished brilliance of many finished objects and onto the production process – that fascinating play of body, technology, knowledge, space and materials. The eye slides less readily off qualities that are unpleasing, or out of place.

The tricky thing for me, with the cups, is that I want them to be functional and enjoyable to use, while carrying these markers of struggle. This, I think, is where I lost Melina – I want them to work, but it doesn’t matter if they don’t work, slightly? I say I’m not testing, but I have many years of experience? I’m asking for advice?

I remember reading somewhere (maybe Tanya Harrod) how craft practices, in the West, at least, were underpinned by great quantities of written down, technical knowledge. Every ceramicist uses books and knows someone to ask if they need advice. Some people stick to recipes, or buy ready mixed glazes, while others tinker with the chemistry and the experience of what happens in particular kilns. A few are serious storehouses of material knowledge – Kevin de Choisy, Nigel Wood, Phil Wood, Stefan Stefanou. I know that bentonite will help to keep a glaze in suspension, but I don’t make glazes all the time, so I lose details. I consulted a library book and was reminded that it can be used in conjunction with calcium chloride, which I’ve used before, but Stefan (one of our technicians) was around, so I thought I’d ask for some advice. Straightaway he said, not if there is no clay in the glaze and a maximum of two percent bentonite. Someone else will probably say that three percent is fine, but the point of all this is that the sharing of knowledge is part of the fun of making and part of the life of the finished object. This is what I tried to explain to Melina – I don’t want the cups to turn out badly; I’m just prepared to be open to that possibility and to allow specific moments along the way to influence the outcome.

The glaze came from my practice journal and was given to me by Jonathan Wade, a couple of years ago – with a very small addition of copper oxide, it made a lovely fake celadon (which I didn’t test either). So I thought I was using something which at least had worked in the past. However, the alarming speed at which it settles out, despite the bentonite, is not something I remember, so I’m wondering if the glaze that worked before is from the recipe that is written down beside the one I’ve used for the cups.

There’s no reason why it shouldn’t work well anyway, but, assuming that I’ve got my quantities right, the major variables that can cause problems are glaze thickness and kiln temperature (or, more properly heat work – a function of time and temperature). If the glaze is too thin, the surface can be unshiny, mean; too thick and it can be cloudy, or run off the pot, amongst a host of other potential faults.

While I write this, the cooling kiln might be harbouring a disaster, a heart-dropping moment. Cracked mugs, fallen over mugs, fused together, mugs stuck to props and firing slabs with pooled glaze, lumpy glaze, thin glaze, nasty glaze. Or it might all have worked perfectly, or even better, imperfectly. We shall see.

Glost_out

Friday, June 6th, 2014

Despite the whatever-happens-happens / no-seconds attitude, opening a glost firing is always nervily exciting. My first thoughts were that they were all in one piece, but the glaze looked very thick and very matt. And opaque – it was supposed to be transparent. I hate it when glazes are too thin, so when my dipping resulted in a very thick layer, I decided to go with it. Past experience tells me that it’s worth risking over-firing the kiln. Ewelina told me that Kiln 3 over-fires by about 20 degrees, but I set it to 1260 with a half-hour soak anyway. Cone 9 (which translates to 1280 C) was right down, meaning the kiln probably reached somewhere between 1290 and 1300 C. I thought I’d over-done it, but when I got a cup out and looked more closely, I felt elated. A gorgeous, fat glaze, with a fine crackle. As each cup came out, I was up, down, up, down – too thick here, perfect there; crack here, whole there; warped here, round there; stuck to a prop here, free and clear there. As I went through these convulsions Melina was unloading with a more even excitement. She was a little perturbed when she first saw the cone, but conceded that the over-firing produced a better result than she had previously had. Of course, it doesn’t always go this way, but for me it confirms that the risk is worth taking.

Gorge_glazed

Sunday, June 8th, 2014

Sent to Graham Harman

Date and Time 16/07/2014 11:21

Dest: Ankara, Turkey

Quantity 1

Weight: 1.589 kg

Int Sign SP £0.00 £17.40

Delivered: 23/07/2014

Finnair_glazed

Sunday, June 8th, 2014

Sent to Timothy Morton.

Date and Time: 16/07/2014 11:18

Dest: Texas, USA

Quantity: 1

Weight: 0.558 kg

Int Track+Sign SP £0.00 £15.15

Delivered: 24/07/2014

Staffs_slip_glazed

[Monday, June 9th, 2014](#)

Sent to Sinead Murphy.

Date and Time: 20/09/2014 11:40

Dest: Newcastle UK (EU)

Quantity: 1

Weight: 0.456 kg

Signed For 1st / Small Parcel £4.30

Delivered: 22/09/2014

Leach_glazed

[Thursday, June 19th, 2014](#)

Sent to Ali Smith.

Date and Time: 01/08/2014 13:27

Dest: Cambridge, UK

Quantity: 1

Weight: 0.440 kg

1st Class Medium Parcel £5.65

Delivered: 02/08/2014

Keith_Murray_glazed

[Thursday, June 19th, 2014](#)

Given to John Thackara (handed over at the RCA, Kensington Gore).

18/09/2014

Spode_glazed

[Friday, June 20th, 2014](#)

Given to Sally O’Reilly (handed over in Patisserie Deux Amis, Judd Street, London).

18/09/2014

Lucie_Rie_glazed

[Friday, June 20th, 2014](#)

Sent to Ben Marcus.

Date and Time: 08/07/2014 14:32

Dest: Maine, USA

Quantity: 1

Weight: 0.538 kg

Int Track+Sign SP £50 £15.15

Delivered: 17/07/14

Gropius_glazed

[Friday, June 20th, 2014](#)

Sent to Medbh McGuckian.

Date and Time: 08/09/2014 11:23

Dest: Belfast, UK

Quantity: 1

Weight: kg

(E) 1st Class £3.20

Delivered: 10/09/2014

Turkish_glazed

[Friday, June 20th, 2014](#)

For David Abram or Nuri Bilge Ceylan.

Craft

[Friday, June 27th, 2014](#)

Let us begin by taking a walk with William Morris, the famous British designer, on a bright afternoon in the 1880s, and make our way to one of the newly established suburbs of London, built to accommodate the numbers of people who are beginning no longer to want to live inside, above, or even very near, their place of work. The advent of extended street lighting has facilitated this new trend — previously, travel to and from the outskirts had relied upon either the sun or the moon — but its primary motivation is, of course, the enormous growth in industrialized modes of production: one cannot live in or over the factory in which one now works as one of a large, anonymous group, and one will not, if one at all can not, live near its often belching unpleasantness. Because this is for the most part not something that the workers can not do, it has become something that their superiors very quickly will not do, as they have begun to trade the hustle and bustle, the mixed economy, of city living, for the quiet and almost entirely residential areas growing up around its margins. And so here we are, with Morris, in a near silent street, lined on either side with the new Victorian villa, a detached residence on a relatively small piece of land, similar to its neighbours in style, but suggestive, in its albeit very qualified independence from the homes around it, of the privileges of the independently rich. There is nobody at all to be seen but gentlemen and their ladies and servants, no tradesmen at their work, no shops selling their wares. *Those* are to be found on the main street, a new invention of the new lifestyle, perfect as a foil for the genteel retirement tucked away behind it. “A beastly place to live in”, Morris observes, and quits the scene at once.

The beastliness of these new suburbs inhered, for Morris, in their operating to segregate, not only the population, but also the processes of production and consumption on which life and livelihood relied. Those in the new villas ate, of course, they sat on chairs, dressed in gowns and puffed on pipes, but, contrary to former times, they now felt it desirable to remove themselves as far as possible from the materials and processes that provided their food, their chairs, their gowns and their tobacco. In many cases, this feeling was but an aspiration; not all could afford the move outwards, and even those who could were, by today’s standards, still compelled to a very intimate association with the nuts and bolts, and the mechanics, of their lives. But what mattered to Morris was less the fact of people’s removal than the attitude towards labour and its materials from which it sprang, and to which it contributed. The sedate seclusion of the quiet suburban street made him shudder because of its disdain of, its effort at retirement from, the stuff and the skills that supported it. Women were learning to be proud of their ignorance of the patterns for sleeves and for shifts; mothers were beginning to boast of not knowing how to care for a child; and men were growing angry if the workings of their households came before them in any manner other than as good fires, fresh flowers, fine meals, and strong sons. In short, it was fast becoming a presupposition of the age that the highest form of human existence knew nothing of the labours whose fruits it enjoyed, and was removed as possible from the materials and the arts upon which its satisfaction in life so relied.

Morris followed Marx in deploring this separation of labour from life, of manual effort from leisure, of practical work from a more enlightened condition; for Marx, and to a great extent for Morris, it was a tragedy for the labourer, for its effect was so far to demand of him that he labour in isolation — from the product of his labour, from the process of his labour, from those with whom he laboured, and from his thinking and feeling self who laboured — that the work to which he was assigned came increasingly to be premised upon this isolation, what Marx called this *alienation*. What Morris saw and objected to was an effort to make machines out of men, by taking the life from work to such an extent that manual effort lost its creative and intellectual aspects, practical engagement its requirement of the wisdom gained from experience, and labour any relation to life.

But what Morris also saw and deplored was the tragedy that this separation implied for those in the leafy streets of suburbia, those who had been “freed up” to eat, to dress, to think, to live, without needing to concern themselves with the materials and arts that provided for them. Because what Morris also saw was that an existence “free” of the stuff and skills of existence is one for which possibilities for creativity, for originality, for resistance, are gradually dissolved, not simply because those who are free to think, create and invent, cannot follow through in practice on what they have thought of, created and invented (this is a merely circumstantial problem, to do with lack of access to a skilled worker or control over him) but rather that they *cannot think, create, and invent*. The degradation occurs at the level of creative possibilities, and not simply at the level of their realization. In short, Morris knew that creativity, that originality, that thought itself, is a skill and requires practice; one’s capacity to *know that* this gown, or that amount of salt, or that shade of paint, or that particular remark, is most fitting is degraded when one ceases to *know how* gowns are made, or food cooked, or houses built, or conversation conducted. It was not only the worker, then, who was alienated by the retreat of privileged living to the suburbs; that which we now think of as life — all those things that we now regard work as “freeing us up” to do: read, paint, shop, travel, think — is also alienated, from the educative, the enlightening, incubation that is *craft*. The other side of *alienation* is the *artifice* of separating life from utility, the “freedom” to think and act from the exigencies of the everyday and its purposes.

Sinéad Murphy (2012) *The Art Kettle*, Winchester (UK) & Washington (USA): Zero Books

‘Craft’ Pp 21-24

Excerpted with the permission of the author.

Ceramics_Craft_Discipline

Wednesday, July 9th, 2014

I got permission from Sinéad Murphy and Zero Books to use the extract from *The Art Kettle*, below, as an introduction to the work of MA and research students in Ceramics & Glass at the RCA. The team responsible for our catalogue decided that the text was either not relevant to what we are doing, i.e. too much mention of ‘craft’, or too political.

The book is political – Murphy argues, broadly, that contemporary art is considered by many to be an arena for dissent, but, in reality, hosts a faux radicalism, which troubles our power structures not a jot. Her opening example of the difference between Brian Haw’s powerful Iraq War protest in Parliament Square and Mark Wallinger’s politically ineffectual restaging of the same, in Tate Britain, is a dismemberment not dissimilar to the one experienced by the Brazilian football team last night.

The ‘Craft’ chapter takes a fresh look at the ideas of William Morris, cleverly taking in Kant’s championing of pattern as the epitome of disinterested art and Richard Wright’s Turner-winning wallpaper. The chapter ends with:

And *craft*, that creative, that thinking and feeling, mode of living for which use and beauty are warp and woof, just disappears, divided out between art-less works of capital and use-less works of art, between factory floors and suburban walls.

My slightly frustrated email responses (edited and conflated) to our catalogue team, copied to all students, were quietly ignored by all but two:

Why isn’t the Murphy text relevant? Do you not appreciate that we are working in a craft discipline – based on specialised material knowledge and the development of skills? The whole of C&G practice, as we know it, grows out of Morris’s ideas and the Arts & Crafts movement.

Ceramics and Glass can be other things too – design or art, but if they were only those things, then we wouldn’t be working in a department of C&G. The craft element is what makes C&G different (and special) and surely it is exciting for us that other disciplines, such as Philosophy, are showing an interest? It’s not about being fenced in, but having a good knowledge of the paddock and knowing where the gates (and the holes) are.

Porc_Bag_Hollow

26 March – 16 April 2014

A 12.5 kg bag of porcelain was hollowed out within ten working days over a period of three weeks.

Fingers removed the plastic bulk and later, as the walls became walls, a serrated steel kidney was used.

The height of the bisque fired, hollowed bag is 42.5 cm and the mouth is 10 x 12.5 cm. The walls are 3 to 5 mm thick.

One hundred and seven documentary images of the hollowing process were used to make a fourteen and a half minute video. An SD version can be seen [here](#).

Kidney-Bag was written in the studio after a day of hollowing, on April 15, not long before the task was completed.

363

364

Cup Recipients

Tuesday, September 16th, 2014

The cups have all been placed with their new owners, bar one:

Gorge / Graham Harman

Finnair / Tim Morton

Staffs_slip / Sinéad Murphy

Leach / Ali Smith

Keith_Murray / John Thackara

Spode / Sally O’Reilly

Lucie Rie / Ben Marcus

Gropius / Medbh McGuckian

I’m hoping that Turkish will go to David Abram or Nuri Bilge Ceylan.

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