Writing_Making: Object as body, language and material

Conor J R Wilson

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the subject of Ceramics.

Royal College of Art
London, UK.

February 2016
Copyright Statement
This text represents the submission for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Royal College of Art. This copy has been supplied for the purpose of research for private study, on the understanding that it is copyright material, and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgment.
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reflecting a growing acceptance of human and non-human, living and non-living entities as real, complex and partially withdrawn agents in the world.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’?
Acknowledgements

3-10
Introduction
11-22
(Methodology, or) how I wrote, uncertain of my thesis

11/12
October – March

28
Experiment 16 / Autumn 2011
31
b. 28.12.11 / Home_1 / West country
33
c. 19.01.12 / Walk_1 / It
34
a. 29.11.11 Train_1 / Delayed departure
37-42
Notes on Herzog’s Crocodiles, Animism, Object Oriented Ontology and Yellow
43
e. 20.03.12 / Home_3 / My feeders fill me
45
Time
46
f. 10.02.12 / Home_4 / Snow

January – June (~ January 13)

Experiment 21
49-56
studio journal
62
Carbon (sound work)
65
g. 27.03.12 / Train_2 / Sun pulses
66
h. 10.05.12 / Train_3 / Fields of bright
67
i. 06.06.12 / Walk_2 / Tan gravel

July – August

69
Jerwood Makers / Louis Thompson Hive
73-76
Porched
78
j. 16.06.12 / Home_5 / Ember hesitated

12/13
October – December

81
Time
85
k. 21.11.12 / Home_6 / pull up the blind
86
l. 03.12.12 / Train_4 / This wet and fertile
87
m. December 2012 / Home_7 / He was in bed
88
n. 20.12.12 / Home_8 / Great gouts

December - February

Disruption exhibition (RCA Research Biennial)

Catalogue text: Nils Jean
Proposal (part 1): Translation: Object/Text/Object (Amanda Game & Conor Wilson)
Proposal (part 2): Translation: Object/Text/Object (Amanda Game & Conor Wilson)
Shaping Space (Amanda Game)
Space Shaping_2
Ash Glazes: Daniel Rhodes
Ash glaze recipe (Kevin de Choisy) / Ash wood ash yields
Email to Jamie Wilkes (Metalab Risk Assessor)
Curation (extract) Wednesday, 5 December 2012 07:55
Translation: Object/Text/Object label text (Amanda Game & Conor Wilson)
q. 05.02.13 / Train_5 / outside
p. 31.01.13 / Walk_3 / white roses browning

March

Residency: Cranbrook Academy of Art, Michigan, USA [04.03.13 – 29.03.13]

Cranbrook 1 studio journal
113  r. 07.03.13 / Studio_1 / One bag
116  u. 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 / Cantering 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
British Ceramics Biennial | Three bodies: Red<Buff>White
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
229-330 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
Final show: One Bag
259-262 Studio Journal: Bag hollowing
283-286 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

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

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. 31.01.12 / 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 / Cantering through
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

15

J. 13.02.15 / Home_14 / sleep hung
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>11/12</th>
<th>12/13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26 Living Room [halftone] with Lloyd Loom chair, pedestal table and Exp. 11: 2011</td>
<td>83 C&amp;G, Kensington to Sculpture, Battersea: Wednesday, 28 November 2012 10:02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 Experiment 16: Work in progress, RCA, Autumn 2011</td>
<td>84 Battersea to Colchester Institute: Thursday, 20 December 2012 11:48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 Experiment 16: Ashley Down Living Room 2011</td>
<td>87 Battersea to Kensington Gore: Friday, 2 November 2012 09:11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 Experiment 16: RCA Studio, Autumn 2011</td>
<td>90 Disruption: Diagram of proposed installation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32 Ashley Down to Temple Meads: Tuesday, 31 January 2012 13:07</td>
<td>91 Disruption email_1: Re: words on a pot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33 Experiment 16: coppiced ash / turned leg</td>
<td>91 Disruption email_2: ash/bowl poem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34 Experiment 19: November 2011</td>
<td>93-94 Ashley Down puddle: Wednesday, 21 December 2011 16:46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-42 Experiment 16: living Room 2011</td>
<td>100-102 Translation: Object/Text/Object: RCA Gulbenkian Gallery (stills from video document of installation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43 Koenig Books Ltd. receipt: 16.02.2012</td>
<td>103-104 Metalab Risk Assessment: Jamie Wilkes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44 Experiment 19.2: November 2011</td>
<td>106 Battersea (bridge) to Kensington: Wednesday, 27 February 2013 08:38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 Thonet chair: Ashley Down living room</td>
<td>107 Cranbrook: Inside (apartment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46 Bathroom to Will's Room: Friday, 10 February 2012 12:58</td>
<td>108 Cranbrook: Outside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47 Experiment 21: RCA studio (work in progress)</td>
<td>109-110 Cranbrook Bag 1: hollowing sequence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49 Experiment 21: Glass bottle: Ashley Down living room</td>
<td>111 Cranbrook Bag 1: studio/work in progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57-58 Experiment 21: RCA Studio (finished / green)</td>
<td>112 Cranbrook exhibition detail: Bag 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59-60 Experiment 21: Carbon_Courier: text-image</td>
<td>114 Cranbrook Bags 1 &amp; 2: studio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61 Experiment 21: Black_Courier: text-image</td>
<td>115 Cranbrook: Inside (apartment_2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61 Experiment 21: Black_Futura: text-image</td>
<td>117 Cranbrook Bag 2: studio/work in progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62 Experiment 21: Carbon_Courier_2: text-image</td>
<td>119 Cranbrook Bags 2 &amp; 3: studio/work in progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63-64 Experiment 21: RCA Studio</td>
<td>projection experiment_stills 1 &amp; 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67-68 Fulham to Kensington Gore: Thursday, 7 June 2012 09:15</td>
<td>121 Cranbrook Bag 2: studio (bisque)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70 Louis Thompson: ‘Hive’ (details): July 2012</td>
<td>122 Cranbrook studio: Boxwood point tool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71 Haworth, West Yorkshire to Wuthering Heights: Friday, 27 July 2012, 12:18</td>
<td>124 Cranbrook Bag 3: mallet + wood mallet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77 An oblong puddle (laser-etched acrylic [Nabokov, Bend Sinister, pp. 7-8]): Wednesday, 27 February 2013 12:36</td>
<td>127 Cranbrook Bag 3: studio/soda-fired chisel heads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78 Ashley Down: Tuesday, 1 September 2015 19:22</td>
<td>130 Cranbrook studio: work in progress (Bag 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>131 Cranbrook exhibition detail: Bag 4 (soda + green)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cranbrook exhibition detail: Bags 5 & 2 (bisque + green)

Cranbrook Bag 5: studio/work in progress

Cranbrook Bag 5: studio/work in progress, b + c + d

Cranbrook Bag 6: studio/work in progress

Cranbrook exhibition [details]

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

Passage 298 | Everything is absurd: text-image

Passage 298 | Everything is absurd: text-image, 2

a fat bag: text-image

Karst_1: Phoebe Cummings & Anne Vibeke Mou

Karst_2: Phoebe Cummings & Anne Vibeke Mou

Sebaldian carpark

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

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

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

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

BCB | Four Bodies: Red/Buff/White

England map: Stoke < London > Bristol

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

25 kg Potclays Original Red | Stoke-on-Trent

1_Stoke_Red

2_Bristol_Red

3_London_Red

Red_montage

25 kg Potclays Buff School Clay | London

1_London_Buff

2_Stoke_Buff

3_Bristol_Buff

Buff_montage

25 kg Potclays Harry Fraser Porcelain | Bristol

1_Bristol_White

2_London_White

3_Stoke_White

White_montage

White: Ashley Down studio/finished green

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

Red and buff: Ashley Down studio/work in progress

Red and white: Ashley Down studio/work in progress

Red/Buff/White: The Cobalt Menagerie [1 of 55 projection images]

Four Bodies: Red/Buff/White installation; Pottery Museum, Stoke-on-Trent

Red/Buff/White | projection images: Dr. Sacheverell / Figure a Shepherd / Jewelling

Red/Buff/White installation, British Ceramics Biennial: Pottery Museum, Stoke-on-Trent

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

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

Cranbrook_Bag 1.1 + 11 (video stills)

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

Gouge_55-1 [montage]

Gouge_55-1_2 [montage]

Gouge_55_detail

Centre: video still with transcript

Centre_2: video still

If it’s fine tomorrow / English Craft_2: image+text
243 Belfast to Dundrum Bay_Murlough: Thursday, 26 December 2013 12:45
246 Ashley Down: Sunday, 19 January 2014 16:22
247 Bristol Temple Heads to London Paddington: Thursday, 9 January 2014 15:01
248 Bristol Temple Heads 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

contents: MOVING IMAGE

SOUND

62 Carbon
228 r.07.03.13 / Studio_1 / One bag
Acknowledgements

Thanks to:

My supervisors, Alison Britton and Jonathan Miles, for their patience, encouragement and consistently good advice. Dr. Steve R. Brown for the same, particularly in the early stages.

The Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Ceramics & Glass Department of the Royal College of Art for financial support.

Examiners, Maria Fusco and Dr. Linda Sandino and chair, Professor David Crowley.

Gill Dibben for her kindness and skill in teaching me Adobe Premiere Pro, After Effects and more. Simon Taylor for AV support and advice and Dave Turtle for laser support, and both for their patience and good humour.

Sally O’Reilly for inspiration and puns.

Fellow students for support, friendship and dialogue, particularly Nick Lees, Charlotte Humphries, Shelley James and Claudia Dutson. And Amanda Game for the same, as well as productive collaboration.

Sorscha Galvin for her mellifluous voice and playing the part of ‘Bag’ in Kidney-Bag.


Rosanna Martin, Professor Martin Smith and Kevin de Choisy for throwing lessons, which yielded both tacit knowledge and data. Tom Skeens for throwing me a lovely cup.


Cathy Johns and Dave Thadeus for looking after me in the final stretch.

Jennifer Wilson and Dawn Fretten Wilson for emotional and financial support.

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 reframe, and extend my knowledge and skills acquired during twenty five years of practice and teaching in ceramics. In the latter, it was frustrated by the lack of opportunity in the corner that I seemed to have pointed myself into – let’s call it ‘ceramic art’. It makes me uncomfortable, as it seems blind to the social 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 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.

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;

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

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 processes 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 I of the project (October 2010 to December 2011), which began by connecting, and to an extent confounding, the studio [site of production] and the public sphere [site of production and audiencing, or display]. My interest in the historical association between ceramics 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:


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. I felt challenged and excited by Morton’s heady blend of philosophy and ecology – the idea that ‘ecology is coexistence’.


2 Conor Wilson, ‘You can use clay, but you can’t do ceramics: Some thoughts on why ceramics isn’t sculpture’ in Conor Wilson, ‘Sloppy Craft and Interdisciplinarity’ in Sloppy Craft: Postdiscipliarity and the Crafts, ed. by Elaine Chao (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), p. 135-142
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. I ask greater degree of involvement, even if we 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 systemic matrix that is itself highly determined’. And Drucker that, ‘no matter that a sculptor’s work is about from 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.’

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, Aix-en-Provence, 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”’.16

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 perspective remains fundamental to the formulation of this text.17

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.’ (my emphasis)

While Brownword’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. Neither, in fact, are there any products of practice. It appears that this problem emanates from craft itself which has few, if any, practitioners writing from their perspective of practice.18

With the notable exceptions of Alison Scritton and Edmund de Waal, we could argue. But, while their critical writing is informed 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 Grey 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’. 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 theorising 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.”

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

---

6 RCA Sustain Talk 07.12.11
10 Ibid, p.7
13 Ian Bogost, Alien Phenomenology or What It’s Like to Be a Thing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), p.67
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, Ponge, writing on the relationship writing in the things, is open about where he finds his words — dictionaries and encyclopedias, puns, chymes 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.18

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.19

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 resistance of his or her chosen form, making the object itself become the philosophy". (my emphasis)

That is what The Defense of Things is:20

This could almost be an anti-anthropocentric, OD 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’.21 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)

So, how might the object itself become the philosophy? Philosophy demands words, as does theory, as does research, even artistic research. We have seen how 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 contextualizing individual practice. Two recent projects, by Bonnie Kemke23 and Emmanuel Boos,24 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 Kemke’s objectives was to ‘contribute to the culture of applied arts research through the development of a methodology that fully integrated practice and theory’,25 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’26 is hard to justify. Apart from a short section on ‘In Casting Hugs’ at the start of Chapter 4,27 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 writing centres on touch and the finished object rather than the work of others? What might ‘the right ordinary language’ be, and

[1] [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

16 Ponge, Creative Method, ‘Monday 20 December 1947’
17 Robert Bly, cited in Francis Ponge, Biography, Poetry Foundation http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/fran-
18 Ponge, Creative Method, ‘La Gras-du-Roi 28 February 1949’
19 Ian Bogost, Alien Phenomenology, or What it’s Like to be a Thing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), p. 95
20 Ibid, p. 87
22 Emmanuel Boos, The Poetics of Glaze: Ceramic Surface and the Perception of Depth (doctoral thesis, Royal Col-
lege of Art, 2011)
23 Kemke, 'One Day intimacy', p. 4
24 Ibid, p. 27
25 Ibid, pp. 85-90
26 Boos, The Poetics of Glaze, p.141
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.’

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’ as ‘a brilliant example of a particular kind of artist’s writing.’ Further, it is in 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.’

Is there a normative relationship between PB& 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.’ 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.

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 confusion, 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 rewriting, 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 emphasized 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.


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

33 MacLeod & Holdridge, Thinking Through Art, p.12
discusses the issue of subjectivity in research: in a studio, working collaboratively on an exhibition or typing on a computer. 

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 a context, activist 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'.

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 audience 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 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 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.'

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 formalise 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. (my emphasis)

Research proceeds slowly, through re-reading, re-reading, re-doing. This is why I set aside time to develop activist research and acknowledge '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'.

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.

"The 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."

I read a good 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 Abelson, Tsang Tao, 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.
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.

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 find a paradox in the paradigm of the theory or the problem domain.

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

[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. This is directed towards a certain kind of knowledge — not to 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'.

He writes of endless argument within social science about 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'.

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. I began to think about how I might use different voices to write the thesis, as I went along. A talk by Jane Randall, Sally O'Reilly and Brian Dillon at A Talk by Jane Randall, Sally O'Reilly and Brian Dillon at an RCA design symposium (January 2011) pointed me in the direction of *Writing in Situ*.

A talk by Jane Randall, Sally O'Reilly and Brian Dillon at A Talk by Jane Randall, Sally O'Reilly and Brian Dillon at an RCA design symposium (January 2011) pointed me in the direction of *Writing in Situ*.

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 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:

Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension*, p. 21

The Tacit Dimension of the project as a temporal object.

Ibid, p.5

Ibid, p.5

Ibid, p.5

Ibid, p.5

Ibid, p.5

Ibid, p.5
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. But 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 “disappointingly simple proposition that ‘meaning’ is the product of the dynamic relationship between a speaker and his/her interlocutor.” Andrew Robinson summarises:

A monological world is made up of objects, integrated through a single consciousness. Since other subjects have value 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.”

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.”

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. (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 project) and by Craig Dewarkin’s writing on Nick Thurston’s use of the margins, in his erased copy of Maurice Blanchot’s ‘The Space of Literature’.

I make a conscious decision not to tidy up, to rationalise, to academicize, to impose a methodological order. This seemed like a way, a method in itself, of bringing the writing closer to the making. It’s not sure how ‘theory’ and ‘research’ 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.” Benjamin write, 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.’

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.”

**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我也 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 making
- making with writing
- making from writing

23 Walter Benjamin, cited in Das Passagen-Werk (The Arcades Project) - 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.” Benjamin write, 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.’
24 Leiter, Art and Method, p.52
Categorised:
The table below shows how some of the text objects might start to be categorised:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing from site</th>
<th>Writing from writing / language</th>
<th>Making with writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Notes on Herzog’s Crocodiles, Animism, Object Oriented Ontology and Yellow</td>
<td>d. 20.03.12 / Home_2 / Slickly colour, sickly yellow</td>
<td>Experiment 21: Carbon_Courier: text-image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time (unknown)</td>
<td>1. 16.08.12 / Home_5 / Ember hesitated</td>
<td>Experiment 21: Black_Courier: text-image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerwood Makers / Louis Thompson Hive</td>
<td>o. 28.12.12 / Home_9 / White room</td>
<td>Experiment 21: Black_Futura: text-image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Porched</td>
<td>1. 12.04.13 / Home_11 / I dress the workers</td>
<td>Experiment 298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disruption (Video_5, Disruption loop)</td>
<td>y. 17.05.13 / Studio_4 / If it’s fine tomorrow</td>
<td>Experiment 298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karst: Phoebe Cummings &amp; Anne Vibeke Mou, Camden Arts Centre, Ceramics Fellowship Exhibition</td>
<td>A. 20.07.13 / Studio_5 / Red (Stoke)</td>
<td>Experiment 298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time: Wednesday, 12 March 2014</td>
<td>B. 24.07.13 / Studio_7 / Red (Stoke)</td>
<td>Passage 298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kien 1-7</td>
<td>C. 22.07.13 / Studio_6 / White (Bristol)</td>
<td>Passage 298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centring</td>
<td>Beatrice Dahl’s low, wide lounge, 28</td>
<td>Passage 298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occurrence and Classification of Cats</td>
<td>A fat bag: text-image</td>
<td>Passage 298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kien 1-7</td>
<td>RedBuff/White projection</td>
<td>RedBuff/White projection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video _12 Gouge 1</td>
<td>Figure a Shepherd / Jewellery</td>
<td>Figure a Shepherd / Jewellery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video _14 Gouge 3</td>
<td>gill_sans cup</td>
<td>gill_sans cup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video _16 Centre 2</td>
<td>Kien 1-7</td>
<td>Kien 1-7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 Schellebelle’s “threshold” is a zone. Transformation, passage, wave action are in the word schellebelle, swell, and etymology ought not to overlook these senses…

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.

Home is container of information that leads both inside and outside. 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… beats Rice Dahl’s low, wide lounge…

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, wedged 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 world.

29 Bo Bolland, De Drowned World (Harmenworth: Pogon), pp. 28-29
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 supression 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

Alocbia-Murphy compares McGuckian's work to the poetry of Walter Abish and John Ashbery, 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.'

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.33

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; RedBuffWhite and OCCURRENCE AND CLASSIFICATION OF CATS) and for constructing with appropriated text (e.g. Alien 1-27)).

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, I started reading To the Lighthouse. The texts are very obviously working in different registers, but are both ever so

19

20

33. Ibid, p.71
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 brevity 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/Object/Object (2012-13)
4. Cranbrook 1-6 (2013)
5. Four Bodies: RedBuff/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'.34

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: RedBuff/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.

31

32

33

34

35
Living room site: pedestal table
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)
- Copypodex 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

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

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

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)
A dance
Of three
So fast and
Gone.
Perhaps half
A minute
No more
To world pausing.
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
PESSed
Resists,
Cannot smell
My stink
But still
I can open
Myself
To the world
Like having a shit
Said Julian
Of Norwich.
East Country
Out of sight
Blue-black, white
Above,
I Presume
and the dove?
I forget.
Already...
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
PESSed
Resists,
Cannot smell
My stink
But still
I can open
Myself
To the world
Like having a shit
Said Julian
Of Norwich.
East Country
Out of sight
Blue-black, white
Above,
I Presume
and the dove?
I forget.
Already...
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
PESSed
Resists,
Cannot smell
My stink
But still
I can open
Myself
To the world
Like having a shit
Said Julian
Of Norwich.
East Country
Out of sight
Blue-black, white
Above,
I Presume
and the dove?
I forget.
Already...
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
PESSed
Resists,
Cannot smell
My stink
But still
I can open
Myself
To the world
Like having a shit
Said Julian
Of Norwich.
East Country
Out of sight
Blue-black, white
Above,
I Presume
and the dove?
I forget.
Already...
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
PESSed
Resists,
Cannot smell
My stink
But still
I can open
Myself
To the world
Like having a shit
Said Julian
Of Norwich.
East Country
Out of sight
Blue-black, white
Above,
I Presume
and the dove?
I forget.
Already...
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
PESSed
Resists,
Cannot smell
My stink
But still
I can open
Myself
To the world
Like having a shit
Said Julian
Of Norwich.
East Country
Out of sight
Blue-black, white
Above,
I Presume
and the dove?
I forget.
Already...
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
PESSed
Resists,
Cannot smell
My stink
But still
I can open
Myself
To the world
Like having a shit
Said Julian
Of Norwich.
East Country
Out of sight
Blue-black, white
Above,
I Presume
and the dove?
I forget.
Already...
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
PESSed
Resists,
Cannot smell
My stink
But still
I can open
Myself
To the world
Like having a shit
Said Julian
Of Norwich.
East Country
Out of sight
Blue-black, white
Above,
I Presume
and the dove?
I forget.
Already...
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
PESSed
Resists,
Cannot smell
My stink
But still
I can open
Myself
To the world
Like having a shit
Said Julian
Of Norwich.
East Country
Out of sight
Blue-black, white
Above,
I Presume
and the dove?
I forget.
Already...
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
PESSed
Resists,
Cannot smell
My stink
But still
I can open
Myself
To the world
Like having a shit
Said Julian
Of Norwich.
East Country
Out of sight
Blue-black, white
Above,
I Presume
and the dove?
I forget.
Already...
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
PESSed
Resists,
Cannot smell
My stink
But still
I can open
Myself
To the world
Like having a shit
Said Julian
Of Norwich.
East Country
Out of sight
Blue-black, white
Above,
I Presume
and the dove?
I forget.
Already...
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
PESSed
Resists,
Cannot smell
My stink
But still
I can open
Myself
To the world
Like having a shit
Said Julian
Of Norwich.
East Country
Out of sight
Blue-black, white
Above,
I Presume
and the dove?
I forget.
Already...
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
PESSed
Resists,
Cannot smell
My stink
But still
I can open
Myself
To the world
Like having a shit
Said Julian
Of Norwich.
East Country
Out of sight
Blue-black, white
Above,
I Presume
and the dove?
I forget.
Already...
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
PESSed
Resists,
Cannot smell
My stink
But still
I can open
Myself
To the world
Like having a shit
Said Julian
Of Norwich.
East Country
Out of sight
Blue-black, white
Above,
I Presume
and the dove?
I forget.
Already...
To where?
A part
Of me dismissed.
Our planet
Shrinks
When we think
Of where
Our waste goes.
Bloom
Repulsed,
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 jewelling 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, de-train,
pull out late
to First refrain
And a big fat
grey back
Bestriding
Stricken train,
Not for us.
When the filming was almost complete, Herzog received a gift in the form of the discovery of Jean Clottes in Cave of Forgotten Dreams, 19 March 2012

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

1.37

Stalagmites and stalagmatites – creamy white, glistening – solid time-time solid. Like slip, extruded gob by gobbet on top of top, or chocolate, in one of those educational films from my own deep past. Except laid down over earth time, geological time. Not ours, yet... Phallic stalagmatites, BourgeoisKnobs. Cave bear skulls enveloped in soliquid folds, gouts 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 orange ochre. Smooth, rolling, rolling – 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 luminant belly. The shock of tripe. Water gurgling from a vuval 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. “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 they a threat, a mate, or food? Whatever, it is unable to think its way into the mind of another. It never sees itself reflected, it does not see itself if it does not see another croc in the water, does it see itself reflected? What does it see if it does not see another croc in the water?”

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 another croc in the water? Is it able 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, performative magic.

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

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 a tropical biosphere, brought to life by the super-heated cooling water from a nuclear power station on the Rhone, 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. J.G. Ballard’s chef protagonist in The Drowned World, Kersans, 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 odd 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 indiscriminately devour 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. 6

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

Notes


2. Jean Clottes in Cave of Forgotten Dreams.

3. Jottina Robinson, The Drowned World [SF Masterworks No 17], online middle, infinity plus, 04 Dec 1999

4. Ibid.

5. Swimming with Crocodiles. BBC 19:02:12, dir. by Helen Simpson, prod. by Ingrid Kvale.
Fluctuality 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.

Recently 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 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.

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 transgressed, the distinction between objects and subject, humans and the non-human is disturbed or transgressed. It is 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 sesquioxide. The Royal College of Art Ceramics and Glass department has run out of Etruria Marl. I sniffled 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 glass 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 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 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 western peoples 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 animistic 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.
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, 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.

---

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).

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

---

12 From notes taken during S. Yellow, BBC 2 documentary (20 mins), 1991.
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 breathless
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.
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, making, writing—both words and numbers. Also, the various waste products associated with making and writing and the waste products that come directly from the body—gases, liquids and solids. Input is air, energy in the form of heat, light and food and the sense perceptions—smell, taste, touch sensation, image sensation (including words, numbers and other symbols) and sound sensation.

The physical materials and facture and facilitation of making have a complex, multi-level relationship with input and output. Progeny and the processes and substances involved are input. Travel is also in a not making or touching, energy used for the manufacture, making and writing—both words and numbers. Also, associated with making products that come directly from the body—gases, liquids and solids. Input is air, energy in the form of heat, light and food and the sense perceptions—smell, taste, touch sensation, image sensation (including words, numbers and other symbols) and sound sensation.

The physical materials and facture and facilitation of making have a complex, multi-level relationship with input and output. Progeny and the processes and substances involved are input. Travel is also in a not making or touching, energy used for the manufacture, making and writing—both words and numbers. Also, associated with making products that come directly from the body—gases, liquids and solids. Input is air, energy in the form of heat, light and food and the sense perceptions—smell, taste, touch sensation, image sensation (including words, numbers and other symbols) and sound sensation.
Experiment 21: RCA studio (work in progress)
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


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 Boullier (Phaidon Video, London: Phaidon), 1996.
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?

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

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

---

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
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

Though there are points when I have had only to breathe on any particle of his stupendous vocabulary to have that particle live and expand and throw out tremendous tendrils 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.

Experiment 21: RCA Studio (finished / green)
Experiment 21: CarbonCourier: text-image
Experiment 21: RCA Studio | projection experiment_stills 1 & 2
Fields of bright yellow rape
shining the dusk
channelling
the slow light left

divided, enhanced
by lumpy hedgerow
yew-deep yet

Advance revenant
grey cloud backing white
divided on the pool
of golden salmon
pink the palest
of cold blues

and gone
in the time it takes
for Gordon
to haul his arse
out of Didcot Parkway.

Fields of bright yellow
shining the dusk
channelling
the slow light left

divided, enhanced
by lumpy hedgerow
yew-deep yet

Advance revenant
grey cloud backing white
divided on the pool
of golden salmon
pink the palest
of cold blues

and gone
in the time it takes
for Gordon
to haul his arse
out of Didcot Parkway.
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.
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 myselfs 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 re-reject 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. Hot lace, but Miyake folds, the finest pastry, lusciously transparent. Light and shade folded into each other - not kneaded, but joined, conjoined, precisely. 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 anus 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 relaying space into the wild. Transformation. Transubstantiation. The changing of one into another. Men, 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 buzzing.
He took off the one "to quietly expecting him".
Porc Hed, 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. 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.

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.
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.

Ember hesitated.
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. Ar-

istotle also says of him that he said the magnets has a soul in it, because it moves the iron; further that all
things are full of gods.'

1 Burnet (Early Greek Philosophy. P.51) questions this last saying.
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 barrague, from Spanish barraca (mid-13c); in Medieval Latin “soldier’s wren,” literally “cabin, hut,” perhaps from Basque barra “clay, mud,” which is probably of Celt-Iberian origin. Meaning “permanent building for housing troops” (usually in plural) is attested from 1890s.

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 Game & Conor Wilson

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.

Notes

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

The length is approximately 2.5m

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.
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
soft clay
relationship
inside that ash
white room.

Daniel Rhodes,

Wood or vegetable ashes have been used as glaze materials since antiquity, and they may lend a quality to glazes which 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.

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.

Ash glazes can be made from ash, feldspar, limestone, and clay... 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...

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.

Ash Glazes

Wood ash
Potash feldspar
China clay

Glaze Recipe (Kevin de Choisy)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ash</th>
<th>Wood</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wood</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>8 lbs seasoned wood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potash</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>6.5 lbs fresh wood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China clay</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: 14.5 lbs / 6.5 kg

Yields: 90g charcoal
90g wood
90g ash

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.
..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..
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
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
(refer to the Risk Rating Matrix)
Low Medium High

X

RISK
What is the risk?
This work presents the following categories of risk:
1. Slips, trips and falls.
2. Overcrowding.
3. Structural collapse / falls from heights.

WHO
Who is at risk?
All (makers, curators, visitors, reviewers).

HAZARD
Why?
1. Slips, trips and falls:
   - Presence of time-based media (slippage between past, present etc.).
   - Ash (Phraonius excelsior) 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 curvatures).
   - Ceramics (coil-built), ceramics (thrown), curating, film-making, performance, writing, promiscuously mixed.
3. Structural collapse / falls from heights:
   - Hanging AV platform might drop to floor (metal fatigue, sabotage etc.), its cables snapping horizontally round necks and arms of innocents. Dread tableaux giving rise to Lawdon 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
History of risk and current frequency. Are there any patterns?
1. CW and AG both expressed specific concerns re. excessive tension applied to connection between research and object production (see above).

RISK MITIGATION
How can the risk be managed or lowered? Any existing controls?
1. All purses/wallets 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 PIN or © [Artist’s Name] 2013.
4. Hand-built / hand-thrown ceramics to be replaced with objed/material with consistent reflective properties.
5. Ensure all reviewers adequately briefed to ascribe genre/artistic mode to installation.
6. Ensure qualified first-aid and psychotherapist present at all times when installation open to public.
7. Process/deliverables hinged to be bolstered with wooden battens, nails, glue gun, tarpaulin, mild steel rods, laminate, etc. and surmounted with effigy of St Alcuin, patron saint of bell 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

warm blood moved
by black rot-juice
of the earth

white roses browning
on Battersea bridge
of private acts in public
of the earth

BS 857 TF
HEAT STRENGTHENED
LAMINATED
INSIDE

TUFgIND

p. 31.01.13/Walk_3/white roses browning

p. 05.02.13/Train_5/outside

Battersea (bridge) to Kensington: Wednesday 27 February 2013 08:38
04.03.13 – 29.03.13
Residency: Cranbrook Academy of Art, Michigan, USA
Cranbrook Bag 1: hollowing sequence

Zuhandenheit is the ‘reality’ of objects, but it is a reality with it, according to Heidegger - we can never know the totality of a person and not know them at all. Objects withdraw from contact with it, as with another person, although you can interact with them through traces of time and labour? 1

What do I want it to do? Will we understand each other and that comes from experience with a material. What will it do? How will it relate to my living space (the plan I came with is not there, but I don’t yet have a starting point). 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 glee, 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. That 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 deeper delving. 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 ‘sulphur’, or ‘concealment’, 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, and he (Heidegger) has already described 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 characteristics under which they were produced.’ 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, wool 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 new 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

1 While I have dipped into the relevant section of Heidegger’s Being and Time [ II: “The Norm of the World” pp. 51-148, 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.

sion, 2011).


4 Ibid. p.1

5 Ibid. p.4
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.1

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 LeWitt territory - 'the idea becomes a machine that makes the art'. 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 working connoisseurs of wine in several lectures. See opposite, from 'Concerning Stephen Hawking's Claim that Philosophy is Dead' in Filozofski vestnik, 31/2, 2012, 20-21

7 Sol leWitt, Paragraphs on Conceptual Art, 1967 [https://www.csufc.edu/programs/ma/lel Witt/paragraphsonconceputaltart.htm](https://www.csufc.edu/programs/ma/lelwitt/paragraphsonconceputaltart.htm) (accessed 08.01.13). In the next paragraph, leWitt writes, 'no matter what form it [the artwork] may finally have it must begin with an idea'. I like the 'beg-ins-to-the-end' quality of the text, but this statement is easy to contradict - no artwork can easily begin without an idea.
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
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
be politely
withdraw 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
artisan in all
their grotesquery

being without tools
hard think me makes
hemming and having
until space and
material meet
And tell me what to do
Cranbrook Bag 2: studio/work in progress

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, 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. I 'finish' the outer surfaces and leave the block uncovered. The walls are still fairly thick. Later, after lunch, their

---

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 environner “to surround, encircle,” from environ “round about,” from en- “in” + environ “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.

I was solid. Now I am hollow. I was homogeneous, sealed in darkness. I was not always so. I was formed from diverse 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. 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 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)
Cranbrook 4
Monday 18 March

Material: Rovin Ceramics RO77 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.
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 – jour nal, 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 pot-thing, 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 faking that, they were interested in saying, ‘what’s it really 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.
Tuesday 19 March

Material: Rovin Ceramics RO82 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 object, a stack of lumps builds up. I do it quickly, in one go, so there aren’t dried 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.
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
malleable. 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
Material: Rovin Ceramics RO77
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 squages of clay on the plastic, I gouge and build, gouge and build. Out of the solid cute 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 touch.

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 free instrument of experience. As well as hand bodies, if
Can we hollow a space between Carlos Williams’s things and LeWitt’s idea machine?
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?

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.

“The Thing” by Martin Heidegger was originally delivered as a lecture to the Bayerische Akademie der Schönen Kunste, shortly after the end of World War II. A translation by Albert Hofstadter was published in *Poetry, Language, Thought* 1959. New York: Harper and Row.

The text is available online at: [http://people.ischool.berkeley.edu/~ryanshaw/martin-heidegger.pdf](http://people.ischool.berkeley.edu/~ryanshaw/martin-heidegger.pdf) (accessed 12.06.10)
Everything is absurd. One man spends his life earning and saving up money, although he has no children to leave it to or 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 economies, 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. 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 see 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 lamentable balminess of a dark-green silk trim on a less-dark-green cloth.

I get dizzy. 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.

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 economies, 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 see 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 lamentable balminess of a dark-green silk trim on a less-dark-green cloth.

I get dizzy. 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.
Everything is absurd. One man spends his life earning and saving money, although he has no child or childlike heaven might reserve him a home between Heaven and earth. Another strives to gain posthumous fame, although he knows that fame is not within the reach of man. Yet another is content to gain a little knowledge of the truth of things, in pursuit of which he devotes all his life to learning. Then there’s one who cannot be content with anything less than to live life like a child. And there’s another who cannot be content with anything less than to build a solitary castle in the air. I get dizzy. The seats in the tram, made of tough, coarse-woven straw, take me to distant places and proliferate in the form of factories, offices, workers, their houses, lives, realities, everythi...
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
space
makers marking
time please
treading water
til the slow mind
catches up snatches
truth from
the jaws of deceit

a

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

mark
i'm
reading
in
sups
Rom
codes

a

taking weight
trying to make
the waves
extreme places
that suck
antic words into
new froms
large, high-ceilinged, squashy room. Dark, but for the light sneaking in through the gaps around, and the space occasionally vacated by, the door. Neophytes momentarily lined in a slab of light. And a single candle, mounted at shoulder height, before a large disc, maybe seven feet in diameter. Surfacced 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 excursed 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 seashore 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 in any case 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 long 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. 2

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. 3

So, I didn’t look, I didn’t write. Am I trying to fool myself that by so doing I would have seen, recollected and hence understood, clearly? 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 fill 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 car sequence again and again, can refuse to succumb to its hypnotic, that, 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, friends, villi. Animal / Vegetable. Reminds me of the old mincer that my mother used - to clamp to the edge of the kitchen table. This made me smile – how clever, to take a trinominal phrase 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 unpropossing collection of specimens. Corals, crystals, petrifed woods, 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. You are 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.5

Returning to the large disk, I peered through the small lens, mounted at shoulder height, before a large disc, maybe seven feet in diameter. Surfacced 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.

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. You are 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

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 first sweep I shine benignly from above, revealing an unpropossing collection of specimens. Corals, crystals, petrifed woods, 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.

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 incognito. The image was 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.
with a diamond to make shadows. And then there is the constructed wall of clay: a fiction, enlarged or shrunken, 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 raze, 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 Anthony, Rebecca Warren and a few others have made good use, but Cummins 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, conjure the silvered moon and the soupy, refracted light of a forested sea. I start to think that I am the God creating this world. Has even the artist seen these things I have on this new world; I can conjure the silvered moon and the soupy, refracted light of a forested sea.

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, conjure the silvered moon and the soupy, refracted light of a forested 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 Tannahäuser Gate. All those... moments... will be lost in time, like... tears... in... rain...” 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 to the process, to the creation, of meaning, in an ordinary, but subtle fashion. Audience 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-expressionist. 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 on closer inspection what we see is the actual artwork, every smear and grain of dust artfully placed. There is also a certain perversion in the artist’s decision to devote many hours and much skill to handicrafting imitations of mass-produced objects.8

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 petrifaction. 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 Duddheim 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

bestiaries to DNA and the new Book of Life, continually reinterprets 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.22

Lucanary texts and unconscious citations: a fragmentary postscript

Is it lary, unrigorous, to leave things as they are, lying in fragments? Laissez-faire, laze fair. 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 as 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 fractures the moment of creation, citation, as inseparable … It only extends itself, through its own movement, its own fragmentation as the promise of future (as) fragmentariness.”15 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.23

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, danced the tantaliser of ecstasy, of being beside himself and subsumed by a greater force. 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 manipulations of the over-controlling producer. Only the experience 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 Fuhli & 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 inconceivable clay to the mesh, perhaps the beautiful mixture contains a few lumps all but, as Sacks reveals, we all quote all the time and process, is insist, is more alike 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.”26-27

14 Ibid, pp. 185-186
15 Ibid. 
21 Ibid. 
22 Ibid. 
23 Ibid. 
24 Ibid. 
25 Ibid. 
26 Ibid. 
27 Ibid.
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.

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
A ribbon of yellow flowing fellows folded in bold light as free and fickel 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 unhungrily 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.
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 Wilson 2013

1 The following pages (165 – 204) were displayed as a record of the research process, in book form, in the exhibition space.
England map: Stoke < London > Bristol
1_Stoke_Red

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.

Guanyin figure


Guanyin is a wise being (Boddhisattva). 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)
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 coated with white slip trailed 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. In his right hand in his right hand associated with charity. In his left symbolises purity. Bequeathed by

SHELF 5:

17th-century dress

Figure of a shepherd press-moulded red. He stands on a rectangular base in his right hand 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
25 kg Potclays Buff School Clay
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)
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)
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,
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
25 kg Potclays Harry Fraser Porcelain
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)
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)
Figure of Dr. Sacheverell, press moulded white salt-glazed stoneware decorated with cobalt blue beneath the glaze.

Made in Staffordshire about 1725-30.

(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
Billy goat vigorously modelled
great landmarks
ceramic history
The Elector of Saxony ambitious project
first discovered
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 1755

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.
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.

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.
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.
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 accrued 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.

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.

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.

I must say 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.

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 Buff White installation, British Ceramics Biennial: Potteries Museum, Stoke-on-Trent
silent clatter of coat hangers side - walk - spread anticipating the dull boot life giving force
It is pointless to press Gertrude’s Tender Buttons.

It is pointless to repress Gertrude’s Tender Buttons.

It is pointless to repress Gertrude’s Tender Buttons.

there is no point to repress the tender buttons of G.
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 think because it is answer throughout with other entities. “ I witholding themselves from relations originating with Aristotle and Liebniz, lineage of the theories of substance think because it is answered throughout...” 1

For instance, one of the object examples that Harman acknowledges 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 Liebniz, but writing against the restrictions they put on its definition, he sets out his stall but writing against the restrictions they put on its definition, he sets out his stall with words acting as a dynamic unity. That continuity of movement is in some sense extraneous to the process, as it carries associations that are beyond the control of the artist to execute.

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

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? 2

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

Best wishes,
Conor Wilson

---

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


1 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...

2 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 behavioral 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.’”


4 Adamson, The Craft Reader, p. 540

---

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


1 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...

2 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 behavioral 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.’”


4 Adamson, The Craft Reader, p. 540
**Gouge** (gou[dʒ], gud[dʒ]), sb.¹ 1495. [- (O)Fr. gouge :- late L. gubia, gultia (Vegetius, Isidore), perh. of Celtic origin (cf. OIr. gulba sting, W. gyffh 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**, vb. 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

---

Centre: video still with transcript

K: Flex it so you've got a blade - push in - and up and over - put the two thumbs together, as you like - go on, push in and squeeze up and over, let's make it feel like a real one - let's really go for it, push in - squeeze, up, right, and let it up. Lift it up, lift it up, keep on, go on - push, push, push, OK - good. C: Not enough pushing? K: No, no, no, not quite, still circulating the clay. I think, with that similarity, you really, you know, again, a really practical throw, and if it's been the same all week, you know, running out and putting it on, don't go, you don't. K: But you need to. K: Come on, let's try. Again, thinking quickly, the systolic/diastolic blood pressure, is it just with the right hand, down and you're taking this rhythm, right and slide down to the bottom, over to the bottom. K: Can you - Don't take your hands off, let's just slide them down. They hand slides to the bottom, and at the same time you're pushing down, with the thumb on the left. Oh. Well, no. no, no. Centre still, you're still inclined to push on you. You do your hand down, and you're struggling. Take your hands off. There, you're trying to control it. I can feel that - just doing it yourself.
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 blade </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 = and <fast> lift it up? lift it up? lift it up? <fast> keep on (.) <whispering> come on = allright = 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: Hmm: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) and: (.). 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
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
Now I am empty when once I was full I was all one part piece of a piece bounded by a bag flowing still within infold in full flow.

I was not always so I was made from many stuffs the wet brought together never left us made us one some so close that only their fire will part us fix us in shapes slow down but we will go back and start again go back and start again.

I was earth I was ground I was sound I was solid FÆST when fingers me found.
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.

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 unexogeneity 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 unshdy 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 19.5% respectively) and the excitatory traces total less than 2%; the Emilio content (expressed as CAt₄ [carbon tetraastatide]) lies between 0.85 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 Wine and String.

Works used:

Alfred Jarry, Exploits and Opinions of Dr. Faustroll, Pataphysician (Boston: Exact Change, 1996).

1. An attempt at exhuming the method of Ben Marcus, buried in The Age of Wire and String.
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 in all the soft and hardnernesses 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 diner). 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 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 component.

‘To understand the subjective experience of any organism is to understand ‘what it is like to be that organism.’ 2 This idea counters ‘physical reductionist positions [that] hope to erase the subjectivity of experience by explaining it away via underlying physical evidences’ 3 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. 4

For Nagel, who desires an ‘objective phenomenology’ that is not ‘dependent on empathy or the imagination,’ 5 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.’ 6 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 recapitulated 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. 7

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. 8

Turning to Graham Harman’s theories on the relations between objects, proposed in his 2005 work, Gravitation 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 “bath”. 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
8. Bogost, Alien Phenomenology, p. 63
9. Ibid, p. 64
we only ever reach for it metaphorically. 18

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-brings. 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 Liebniz – 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, resting 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 couche 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: 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’), largely 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 tetchy, 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. 16

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.’ 21 (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,
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.  

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.

 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. Tor Nørretranders, _The User Illusion: Cutting Consciousness down to Size_ (New York: Viking, 1998), pp. x-xi

my
eyes
close tight
as anal orifice
opens body looksee-
s inward playing itself
a tuba : a muted trumpet a
flowing hole of darkness itself
poured and fringed with blood red
fat-soft edge of the Falls sucks in
and releases permits the gaze if not
in:spect:ion in respect of one holey
connection
to another act of expulsion drawing
in a trunk sucking sustenance
throwing out touchy feely
fingers villi dancing
you press their
claim and
push me
open
into
the
world
atingle
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 councelling 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.
A 12.5 kg bag of porcelain was hollowed out within twelve 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 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). 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 snotfull, 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 individual volume, a gap, the start of a scoop. If the naiw were longer it would be the same shape as the gouge chisel. Thursday 5 April (studio) Having watched precisely half of Oshima's, In The Realm of the Senses last night, I dreamed myself jading expont of Censal Femininomology. And after Rick Pyner's talk on Dom Sylvester Houédard, 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 dis with his Letters 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 Letters 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 - 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.

I started with the primary aim of retrieving the innards - a counterpoint (or semi-counterpoint) to Heidegger's. Volume is made from the inside rather than the outside working. A shapely space appears to gift mental space, to want a fine skin, smooth and even on the inside, baggy and leaving a good skin, a reasonable vessel, but now I can't read the form accurately from the outside, so have to judge thickness by tone. The clay is still wet at the bottom of the bag. 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 is standing upright for a period between 16:35 and 19:08 on the 26th. 4. RCA, Stevens Building: 18:00, 01.04.2014. 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.

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 Letters 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 - 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.

I started with the primary aim of retrieving the innards - a counterpoint (or semi-counterpoint) to Heidegger's. Volume is made from the inside rather than the outside working. A shapely space appears to gift mental space, to want a fine skin, smooth and even on the inside, baggy and leaving a good skin, a reasonable vessel, but now I can't read the form accurately from the outside, so have to judge thickness by tone. The clay is still wet at the bottom of the bag. 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 is standing upright for a period between 16:35 and 19:08 on the 26th. 4. RCA, Stevens Building: 18:00, 01.04.2014. 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.

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 Letters 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 - 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.

I started with the primary aim of retrieving the innards - a counterpoint (or semi-counterpoint) to Heidegger's. Volume is made from the inside rather than the outside working. A shapely space appears to gift mental space, to want a fine skin, smooth and even on the inside, baggy and leaving a good skin, a reasonable vessel, but now I can't read the form accurately from the outside, so have to judge thickness by tone. The clay is still wet at the bottom of the bag. 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 is standing upright for a period between 16:35 and 19:08 on the 26th. 4. RCA, Stevens Building: 18:00, 01.04.2014. 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.

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 Letters 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 - 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.

I started with the primary aim of retrieving the innards - a counterpoint (or semi-counterpoint) to Heidegger's. Volume is made from the inside rather than the outside working. A shapely space appears to gift mental space, to want a fine skin, smooth and even on the inside, baggy and crude at the outside. The space impacts the way of working. A shapely space appears to gift mental space, to want a fine skin, smooth and even on the inside, baggy and crude at the outside. The space impacts the way of working. A shapely space appears to gift mental space, to want a fine skin, smooth and even on the inside, baggy and crude at the outside. The space impacts the way of working. A shapely space appears to gift mental space, to want a fine skin, smooth and even on the inside, baggy and crude at the outside. The space impacts the way of working. A shapely space appears to gift mental space, to want a fine skin, smooth and even on the inside, baggy and crude at the outside. The space impacts the way of working. A shapely space appears to gift mental space, to want a fine skin, smooth and even on the inside, baggy and crude at the outside. The space impacts the way of working.
Kidney: 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 holies - 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: Possibly.
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 be.
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: 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?
In the lane at the back
on the way
to the park
a fast thing
takes the corner
of his field.

Conjoined blips
pulse out from
low station high
confident, clear
that sense plots
mixed signals.
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.

White stoneware mug ('gorge')
About 1680, with silver mount

6 coiled | slabbed | sledged | modelled
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.
Two mugs and a pot
About 1690, (4) slip-trailed; (5-6) combed

threw | pulled (handle) [made by Tom Skeens]
Bernard Leach (1897-1979)

Teawares, about 1941, made at the Leach Pottery, St. Ives, Cornwall. Porcelain, with cut decoration and celadon glaze.

slabbed | sledged | carved | modelled | pulled (handle)
Coffee set
England, Staffordshire, designed about 1934
Designed by Keith Murray,
made by Josiah Wedgwood & Sons
Earthenware, with 'moonstone' glaze

slabbed  |  sledged  |  modelled

Keith_Murray_glazed
Given to John Thackara (handed over at the RCA, Kensington Gore).
18/09/20 14
33-5 Bone china custard, chocolate and tea cups
Staffordshire, 1815-20, painted in enamels
And gilded, (33) Spode's factory

Spode glazed
Given to Sally O'Reilly (handed over in Patisserie Deux Amis, Judd Street, London).
18/09/2014
Lucie Rie (1902-95)
Cup and saucer, about 1955, made in London. Stoneware with incised Decoration through matt brown glaze

Carved | Modelled | Pulled (handle)
22

**Tea set, ‘TAC’ shape**  
Germany, Selb, introduced 1969  
Designed by Walter Gropius  
Made by Rosenthal  
Porcelain, transfer printed over the glaze

Coiled | Modelled | Sledged | Slabbed (handle)

---

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
37  Lead-glazed cup of silver shape
Probably Turkey, made for export, 100BC-AD100

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
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 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.

(Staffordshire mug thrown by Tom Skeens)

Exhibition blog at: http://www.conwilson.com/?page_id=7


Earthenware mug, slip trailed and combed. 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 cup. Probably Turkey, 100 BC-AD 100. Copy for David Abram, or Nuri Bilge Ceylan.

Stoneware cup. Designed and made by Lucie Rie, about 1955. Copy for Ben Marcus.


Earthenware cup. Probably Turkey, 100 BC-AD 100. Copy for David Abram, or Nuri Bilge Ceylan.
A glowing word
red on black
Reading

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

and another
Dally the same pantomime was repeated. Kien's life, shattered under the stress 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 times, for work, but he did not, but what he had once considered work, seemed far away from him now, postponed until some happier hour. 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 fire the benes of fire and embolden the artist should approach his creation. Then Kien spent nearly three hours at leisure before his writing desk. He learned many things to pass through his head, but he kept vigilant watch on them all so that he should not be shown any ease from the matter in hand. Then, when the timepiece in his head, last vestige of the learned art with which he had assumed time, rang its alarm bell—for seven o'clock was approaching—be began very slowly to sit. He felt the conscious gradually returning through his body, and judged it according to the smoothness with which it distributed itself. There were days when his left side grew cold and stiff faster than his right; this caused him the same serious anxiety. "Over with yon" he commanded, and streams of warmth dispatched from his right side made good the error on the left. His efficiency in acquiring grew greater from day to day. As soon as he had reached the consistency of stone, he turned the hardness of the material by tightly 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 strictly artistic sense became superfluous.

From nine to the midnight hour seven to the evening, Kien retained his incomparable pose. On the writing desk by an open book, always the same one. He encountered it not a glance. His eyes were completely in the distance. The woman was at least clever enough not to disturb him during these months. She beat herself solitary in the room. He understood how deeply householding had become ingrained in her body and suppressed an uneasy smile. She described a wide curve round the monumental figure from ancient Egypt. She made it an offering, mother of blood of reproaches. Kien forbade himself longer and all other bodily recession. Seven o'clock he inferred warmth and broke into the stone which quickly came back to life. He walked until Thuyen was in the furthest corner of the room. He had a sense of her whereabouts which never betrayed him. Then he kept up and hurriedly left the house. While he was eating his only meal to the restaurant, he would all but fall asleep out of exhaustion. He entangled on the difficulties of the past day and when a good idea for the morrow came into his head he notified his agreement. Anyone else who tried to turn himself into a stone, he would immediately challenge. At seven o'clock he went to bed and slept.
Duly 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, but 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 art. Without boredom no act 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提示piece of 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 coldness 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 fingers 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 to it some as well. A fall during the day, in the woman’s presence, would have turned his right leg to rickrack, 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 by an open book, always the same one. He watched it out a glance. He was more occupied entirely in the distance. The woman was at heart clever enough not to disturb him during these sessions. She busied herself zealously in the room. He understood how deeply housekeeping had become ingrained into her body and oppressed an unceasing 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 stones which speedily came back to life. He waited until Thamara 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 fill his fall asleep out of exhaustion. He disliked 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 would be dead and slept,
sleep hung
a leaded coat
but
the fish
twitched
inside
Conclusion

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.

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. 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.

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.

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 like 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.

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

---

2 BCA Research Methods Course, 2011
3 Conor Wison 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 9 (2011)
Experiment 11 Process 1 (2011)

Experiment 11 Process 2 (2011)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author/Editor/Case</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The silence (Film on dvd)</td>
<td>Odar, Baran Bo.</td>
<td>Oct 1, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A dangerous method (Film on dvd)</td>
<td>Cronenberg, David, 1943-</td>
<td>Nov 7, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being and time</td>
<td>Heidegger, Martin, 1889-1976</td>
<td>Apr 17, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young adult (Film on dvd)</td>
<td>Keitel, Jason.</td>
<td>Nov 20, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogic of enlightenment (Film on dvd)</td>
<td>Adorno, Theodor W., 1903-1969</td>
<td>Nov 6, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Smithson, the collected writings</td>
<td>Smithson, Robert, 1938-1973</td>
<td>May 9, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Installation art / Bishop, Claire.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Oct 16, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ball (Honey); Sun (Milk); Yumurta (Egg) (Film on dvd) / Kaplanoglu, Semih.</td>
<td>Drive (Film on dvd) / Winding Refh, Nicolas.</td>
<td>Dec 5, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climates (Film on dvd)</td>
<td>Ceylan, Nils Bilge.</td>
<td>Dec 11, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site specificity : the ethnographic turn / Coles, Alex.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Nov 20, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black and blue : the bruising passion of Camera Lucida, La Jetée, Sans Sokei, and Hiroshima Mon Amour / Mavor, Carol.</td>
<td>The look of love (Film on dvd) / Winterbottom, Michael.</td>
<td>Dec 12, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This is our still life (Film on dvd) / Kotting, Andrew.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Jan 14, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before midnight (Film on dvd)</td>
<td>Linklater, Richard.</td>
<td>Jan 14, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Les dialectiques (Film on dvd) / Cloisot, Henri-Georges, 1907-1977.</td>
<td>Out of the past (Film on dvd) / Tourmeur, Jacques.</td>
<td>Feb 13, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le boucher (Film on dvd) / Chabrol, Claude, 1930-2010.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Feb 25, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pandorax's box (Film on dvd) / Palot, G. W.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Feb 26, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel Whiterad : embarkment / Whiterad, Rachel, 1963-</td>
<td></td>
<td>Feb 11, 204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Wilson : from within / Arent Safir, Margery, 1947-</td>
<td></td>
<td>Feb 11, 204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Whitman : playback / Whitman, Robert, 1935-</td>
<td></td>
<td>Feb 11, 204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open city / Cole, Teju</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mar 6, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The craft reader / Adamson, Glenn.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Jan 16, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The spell of the sensuous : perception and language in a more-than-human world / Abram, David.</td>
<td>Alps (Film on dvd) / Lanthimos, Yorgos.</td>
<td>Mar 4, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alps (Film on dvd) / Lanthimos, Yorgas.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mar 27, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week-end (Film on dvd) / Godard, Jean-Luc, 1930.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Apr 1, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camera buff (Film on dvd) / Kiesowski, Krzysztof, 1941-1996.</td>
<td></td>
<td>May 6, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An anthology of concrete poetry / Williams, Emmett.</td>
<td></td>
<td>May 6, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The great beauty (Film on dvd) / Sorrentino, Paolo.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Apr 3, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gravity (Film on dvd) / Cuaron, Alfonso.</td>
<td></td>
<td>May 30, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A grammar of metaphor / Brooke-Rose, Christine, 1923-2012.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Apr 16, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The gift economy / Cheal, David, 1945-</td>
<td></td>
<td>Apr 15, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The gay science / Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, 1844-1900.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Jul 10, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew Lord / Lord, Andrew, 1950-</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dec 1, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The dual muse : the writer as artist, the artist as writer : essays / Drucker, Johanna, 1952.</td>
<td>Intellectual birdhouse : artistic practice as research / Bauer, Uta Meta.</td>
<td>May 1, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studio and cube : on the relationship between where art is made and where art is displayed / O’Doherty, Brian.</td>
<td>is displayed / O’Doherty, Brian.</td>
<td>Oct 1, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes from the cosmic typewriter : the life and work of Dom Sylvester Houdard /</td>
<td>Simpson, Nicola.</td>
<td>Oct 1, 2014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3

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 / Methods

1. 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 Lethen

Materials = Threshold / Modernist prose / Philosophy / 'How-to' texts / Manuals / Material science

2. Studio / Texts 1 & 2
Set up feedback loop between making and writing.

Make
(+ Reflective / documentary writing) ➔ Text 1

Write (like making) ➔ Text 2

Text 1 ➔ Make (like writing)*

Clay objects

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:
Jervoud / Louis Thompson (Text 2)
Camden / Phoebe Cummings (Text 1)

Explore:
Object oriented writing / art writing / criticism /

New Methods: May 2013

* 02.05.13
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)

Thesis Structure: June 2013
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. 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.)

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?’

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 payed 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]


3 Apparently Forster was misguided and was actually creating. André Gide’s content that a novel should not be planned. E.J. Hawks, ‘Discovery Writing and the so-called Forster Quote’, online article, 2011 - [http://jahooks.wordpress.com/2011/04/13/discovery-writing-and-the-so-called-forster-quote/]

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 get there first – the cut-up technique of Burroughs and Gysin, or the playful restrictions of Oudadji, or maybe it goes back to Samuelism and automatic writing, or even further, to collage. All systems designed to get past the self-conscious ‘I’.

5 How might this translate to making?

6. If plotting is involved in the writing, how might this be analogous to making? What are the seven possible stories? A figureine 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 figureine 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.

7. 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.

8. 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.

9. 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.

10. 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.

11. The work is rouged out. Some areas are well-formed, others not. As the whole starts to take shape, sections might be chopped up and moved around.

12. 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?’

13. Technical facility might be disrupted by the employment of obstructions.

14. ‘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.

15. The part to whole relationship in a work of visual art is constantly in play during construction.

16. Clay is not a material that is open to much tweaking once the primary (wet) making...

1[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.]
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 ‘interiorised mass’, as Wason (1980) calls it, into a well-structured 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
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 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?

My research also draws on OOO, which starts with Heidegger’s idea of the reality of objects 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.

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
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
Chapter XXIII is the first of the"miscellaneous chapters" (known as "Gengsang Chu") and does not feature in Basic Writings.

### Appendix

#### One Bag Final Exhibition Blog (7,801 words)

**Master Chuang and craft**

**Tuesday, April 28th, 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 recognize 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, in which his actions are not inextricably linked to the observer, but a course of action that is not in action for the sake of action, but for the sake of the useful 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 rationalize on the course of action he or she would take; his skill has become so much a part of him that he merely acts instinctively and spontaneously and, without knowing why, achieves success. Again, Chuang Tzu employs the metaphor of a totally free and spontaneous way of living (or a wandering), 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 it follows that what he says 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."  


It strikes me how closely this chimes with Mikhail Bakhtin'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 exhibition

**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 an exhibition can sometimes lead to startling changes). 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 know to do, have concentrated on making techniques or glazing.

The core of my practice has always been about making, and for me, making is thinking. It is about us as a species and our relationship to matter. To me, the most important thing we can do is to make new things. The things we make have meaning, content and consequence.

Returning to anxieties, they come from two directions. The first, perhaps inevitable and, hopefully, productive, stems from the fact that I don’t know what I am doing. That I have no ‘dry runs’ – of making techniques or glazing.

The other pole, where I am currently shivering, is 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 intense focus engendered by an exhibition can sometimes lead to startling advances).

So, I am currently shivering with anxiety about the exhibition, and I am currently shivering with excitement about the possibilities of what I might make.

### 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, technē), making as a real and proper way of interacting with the world. As previous posts show, Chuang Tzu sees skilled activity as a root of 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 reject 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 Sirens, 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 alphab 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 – idealized and cut off from the ‘more-than-human world’.

When the Homeric epics were recorded in writing, then the art of the hapasophos began to lose its preservative and instructive function. The knowledge embodied 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 what it was used to express – the immediate and unmediated flow of the world, and beginning to conceptually take on an existence of itself.

“...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 separable from the person who used it. But in the alphabetized document the medium became obvious. (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 writing 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 when the new technology of reading and writing was shedding its specialized “craft” status and firmly spreading, by means of the Greek curriculum, into the culture at large. The significance of this conjunction has not yet been well recognized by Western philosophers, as the whole, of whom to say — a greater or lesser extent — within Plato’s Universe. 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...”

**P 108-109**

I told a friend – Paul Sandweimer – 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.
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’ — mean? ‘In the flesh it is eternal...’ *to 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 innovation required. 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 swath 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 throned 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 absence of time, movement, thought in the materials of composition, the fundamental flatness of stretched canvas or appointed wall, consequent on site, yet its insistent particularity wherever it’s placed. So we should 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 the 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.

The Dual Muse: The Writer As Artist, The Artist As Writer, P 71

Keith Murray

For Ben Marcus

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 resilience of materials — seemingly simple things are not simple at all. Anyway, a potter would normally just make another one, and another one, and another, if necessary, until they get 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 loop 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, potter) 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 straightforwardly, 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 am in thinking of the gift economy and don’t expect short-term returns, but hope that it might extend the conversation about making beyond the usual boundaries.

Spode spoke

Friday, May 30th, 2014

pinched / modelled / pulled (handle)

Pinched from one lump of clay. One col added to foot. No tools used at all, apart from a banding wheel and a paper coffee cup — so I could work it upside down. I desperately wanted to tool at many different stages, but held out. Only fingers were used. Some interesting things came out of using my hands. I always tend to think of moments like this as a sculptor before a potter might have 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 24.00 and 32.00 (18:00 – 18:45) each two sessions of about half an hour each. During the first session it felt amateur and ugly. Then I decided that I 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 make something already worked out as a script before it’s dry, it’s off like a rocket. So, with the body getting to the critical 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 starts to dry, it’s off like a rocket. So, with the thing gets going, I am, Nauman-like, totally committed.

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 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, it 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 cup doesn’t, certainly, but, of course, that wasn’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 cusps pass with the curled 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...
coiled / modelled / sledged / slabbed

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, cajolled 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 wobbling, hand-drawn feel of the decoration. Interestingly parallel with the Lucie Rie in this respect – makes me think I should have made the wire with vertical coils. The handle, again, is all wrong. Very difficult to make these fine handles from coils and salts – 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 McCulligan

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 looser. 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 was 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 Nurí Bilge Ceylan.

Głos 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 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 it set 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 realised it was just fine. 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 thought. Of course, it didn’t always go this way, but for me it confirms that the risk is worth taking.
Delivered: 22/09/2014

Date and Time: 08/07/2014
Sent to Medbh McGuckian.

Friday, June 20th, 2014
Gropius_glazed
Sent to Ben Marcus.

Thursday, June 19th, 2014
Leach_glazed
Sent to A4 Smith.

Date and Time: 01/08/2014 13:27
Sent to Cambridge, UK

Leach_glazed

Date and Time: 17/07/14
Int Track+Sign SP
Weight: 0.538 kg
Int Track+Sign SP £50 £15.15
Delivered: 17/07/14

Keith_Murray_glazed

Thursday, June 19th, 2014
Given to John Thackara (handed over at the RCA, Kensington Gore).

Friday, June 20th, 2014
Spode_glazed
Given to Sally O’Reilly (handed over in Patisserie Deux Amis, Judd Street, London).

Friday, June 20th, 2014
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

Gropius_glazed

Friday, June 20th, 2014
Sent to Medbh McGuckian.
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.

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.