

A MODEL FOR THE INTERPRETATION OF THE CERAMIC OBJECT  
LOCATED IN THE MUSEUM DEVELOPED THROUGH POST-  
DISCIPLINARY, POST-STUDIO PRACTICE

DAVID CUSHWAY

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Faculty of Arts, Design and Media, University of Sunderland

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## David Cushway: Abstract

This research is initiated through an examination and mapping of the contemporary ceramics discourse within the United Kingdom and is situated from 1994 until the completion of my PhD study in 2014. This analysis of the practical and theoretical fields of ceramics practice provides a framework within which my own education and development as a practising artist can be measured and authenticated whilst providing a critical overview of the changing critical landscape of ceramics discourse over the last twenty years.

Ceramics as an expanded field is evidenced through case studies of artist peers; and interviews with key critics, writers and curators. It introduces the positions of the post-studio and post-disciplinary practitioner as paradigms of practice that acknowledge an artists' capacity to operate within the field of ceramics, utilising a multitude of approaches, media and mediums.

The practical element of the research is developed outside of the studio within the context of the museum and its collection. This is embodied by employing a bricolage methodology that identifies the artist as an individual who 'works between and within competing and overlapping perspectives and paradigms' (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994).

The resulting practical outputs of *Last Supper at the Glynn Vivian*, *12 People 12 Objects* and *Teatime at the Museum* created through the mediums of film and photography are presented as both completed works and constituent elements of contemporary ceramics practice. They offer an original contribution to knowledge by presenting an adjustable model of engagement with the ceramic object and collection implemented by the post-disciplinary, post-studio practitioner in collaboration with the institution and curator.

## Author Declaration

According to the regulations, I declare that during my registration I was not registered for any other degree. I have not used material in this thesis for any other academic award.

<b>Abstract</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Contents Page</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>0.1 Introduction</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>0.2 Research Questions</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>0.3 Aims of Research</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>0.4 Personal Rationale for Research</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Chapter 1: <i>Research Methodologies</i></b>	<b>19</b>
<b>1.1 Practice Based Research</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>1.2 Qualitative Research and Bricolage</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>1.3 Frames and Methods of Practice</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>1.4 Thinking with the Material</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>1.5 Reflexivity</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>1.6 Reflection-in-Action</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>1.7 Research Methodologies and Practice</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Chapter 2: <i>Towards an Expanded Field</i></b>	<b>36</b>
<b>2.1 Criticality</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>2.2 Makers Who Write</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>2.3.1 The New Theorists Part 1</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>2.4.2 The New Theorists Part 2</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>2.5 The Local and the Global</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>2.6 A Discourse Defined?</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Chapter 3: <i>The Artist and the Contemporary Museum</i></b>	<b>51</b>
<b>3.1 The Post Museum</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>3.2 Intervention or Collaboration</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>3.3 The Artist Curator</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>3.4 Material Absence</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>3.5 The Museum, Ceramics and the Artist</b>	<b>62</b>

<b>Chapter 4: <i>The Post Studio, Post Disciplinary Artist</i></b>	<b>67</b>
4.1 Clare Twomey and Keith Harrison	67
4.2 Clay Rocks	71
4.3 The Reflexive Institution	75
4.4 The Craft of Negotiation	76
4.5 The Post-Studio Artist and the Site of Production	77
4.6 Phoebe Cummings	79
4.7 Clare Twomey - Monument and Made In China	82
<b>Chapter 5: <i>Last Supper at the Glynn Vivian</i></b>	<b>86</b>
5.1 Commission	87
5.2 The Repertoire and Tacit Knowledge	88
5.3 The Glynn Vivian Museum and Art Gallery	90
5.4 Method and Methodology	93
5.5 The Touch Taboo	94
5.6 The Participants	96
5.7 The Animated Object	103
<b>Chapter 6: <i>12 People 12 Objects</i></b>	<b>107</b>
6.1 Material Culture	108
6.2 12 People 12 Objects	109
6.3 The Participants	110
6.4 Artists Practice	117
6.5 The Photograph as an Object	119
6.6 Structure and Frame	121
6.7 Format	123
<b>Chapter 7: <i>Teatime at the Museum</i></b>	<b>125</b>
7.1 Artists Questions	126
7.2 The Curator and the Object	128
7.3 Contemporary Practice as a Narrative Device	129
7.3.1 Fragments	131
7.4 Teatime at the Museum	135

<b>7.5 Privileged Access</b>	<b>139</b>
------------------------------	------------

<b>Chapter 8: Conclusion</b>	<b>144</b>
------------------------------	------------

<b>8.1 Research Questions</b>	<b>145</b>
-------------------------------	------------

<b>8.2 Research Aims</b>	<b>148</b>
--------------------------	------------

<b>8.3 Original Contribution to Knowledge</b>	<b>153</b>
---	------------

<b>8.4 Further Research and Practice</b>	<b>157</b>
--	------------

<b>Appendices: Transcriptions of recorded interviews</b>	<b>161</b>
--	------------

1. Keith Harrison, interview, Bath Spa University, 16 <sup>th</sup> August 2013.	<b>161</b>
--	------------

2. Dr Jeffery Jones, interview, University of Wales Institute, Cardiff, 16 <sup>th</sup> February 2014.	<b>170</b>
---	------------

3. <i>12 People 12 Objects</i>	<b>184</b>
--------------------------------	------------

<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>195</b>
---------------------	------------

### **List of Illustrations**

Figure 1 David Cushway, <i>Room</i> , 1996	<b>15</b>
--	-----------

Figure 2 David Cushway, <i>Earth</i> , 2000	<b>15</b>
---	-----------

Figure 3 David Cushway, <i>Sublimation</i> , 2000	<b>15</b>
---	-----------

Figure 4 David Cushway, <i>Snowdon</i> , 2000,	<b>15</b>
--	-----------

Figure 5 David Cushway, <i>Fragments- Teacup</i> , 2005	<b>16</b>
---	-----------

Figure 6 David Cushway, <i>Fragments-Teapot</i> , 2005	<b>17</b>
--	-----------

Figure 7 Fred Wilson, <i>Mining the Museum</i> , 1992	<b>55</b>
---	-----------

Figure 8 Suzanne Hangaard, <i>Abstentia</i> , 2010	<b>60</b>
--	-----------

Figure 9 Andrew Livingstone, <i>Animated Plate</i> , 2010	<b>60</b>
---	-----------

Figure 10 Clare Twomey, <i>Trophy</i> , 2006	<b>72</b>
--	-----------

Figure 11 Keith Harrison, <i>London Orbital</i> , 2006	<b>72</b>
--	-----------

Figure 12 Keith Harrison, <i>Last Supper</i> , 2006	<b>73</b>
---	-----------

Figure 13 Phoebe Cummings <i>After the Death of the Bear</i> , 2013	<b>80</b>
--	-----------

Figure 14 Clare Twomey, <i>Monument</i> , 2009	<b>82</b>
--	-----------

Figure 15 Clare Twomey, <i>Made in China</i> , 2013	<b>82</b>
---	-----------

Figure 16 David Cushway <i>Last Supper at the Glynn Vivian</i> , 2011	<b>91</b>
Figure 17 David Cushway, <i>Olive</i> , 2011	<b>97</b>
Figure 18 David Cushway, <i>Sandra</i> , 2011	<b>97</b>
Figure 19 David Cushway, <i>Francis</i> , 2011	<b>97</b>
Figure 20 David Cushway, <i>Josette</i> , 2011	<b>98</b>
Figure 21 David Cushway, <i>Sian</i> , 2011	<b>98</b>
Figure 22 David Cushway, <i>Anne</i> , 2011	<b>98</b>
Figure 23 David Cushway, <i>Barry</i> , 2011	<b>100</b>
Figure 24 David Cushway, <i>Tim</i> , 2011	<b>100</b>
Figure 25 David Cushway, <i>Sandra</i> , 2011	<b>100</b>
Figure 26 David Cushway, <i>Lynne</i> , 2011	<b>101</b>
Figure 27 David Cushway, <i>Vanessa</i> , 2011	<b>101</b>
Figure 28 David Cushway, <i>Esther</i> , 2011	<b>102</b>
Figure 29 David Cushway, <i>Peter</i> , 2011	<b>102</b>
Figure 30 David Cushway, 12 People 12 Objects <i>Janet</i> , 2012	<b>111</b>
Figure 31 David Cushway, <i>Sarah and Andy</i> , 2012	<b>111</b>
Figure 32 David Cushway, <i>Susan</i> , 2012	<b>111</b>
Figure 33 David Cushway, <i>Kevin</i> , 2012	<b>112</b>
Figure 34 David Cushway, <i>Judy</i> , 2012	<b>114</b>
Figure 35 David Cushway, <i>Sandra</i> , 2012	<b>114</b>
Figure 36 David Cushway, <i>Dennis</i> , 2012	<b>115</b>
Figure 37 David Cushway, <i>Rob</i> , 2012	<b>115</b>
Figure 38 David Cushway, <i>Colin</i> , 2012	<b>115</b>
Figure 39 David Cushway, <i>Rebecca</i> , 2012	<b>116</b>
Figure 40 David Cushway, <i>James</i> , 2012	<b>116</b>
Figure 41 David Cushway, <i>Jack</i> , 2012	<b>116</b>
Figure 42 Huang Qingjun, <i>Beijing Songzhuang</i> , 2011	<b>118</b>
Figure 43 Joakim Blockstrom, <i>Leatherman</i> , 2013	<b>118</b>
Figure 44 Edmund de Waal, <i>Arcanum</i> , 2005	<b>130</b>
Figure 45 David Cushway, <i>Fragments</i> , 2005	<b>133</b>
Figure 46 David Cushway, <i>Teatime at the Museum</i> , 2012	<b>137</b>

## 0.1. Introduction

This research has developed from my personal experience as a practicing artist. The process of education, through to making and exhibiting work, nationally and internationally over a period of 20 years has provided me with a number of research questions that needed to be explored through the rigour of a PhD thesis. This project has grown out of a conceptual need to understand the discourse within which my practice is embedded – that of ceramics - and as a method of contextualising where my practice is located within that field.

My education and training has been located within the ceramics template: B.A (Hons) degree in Ceramics, Bath College of Higher Education (1986-89) and a Masters degree in Ceramics from the University of Wales Institute, Cardiff (1992-94). The nature of my artistic output since graduation from my Masters degree has included work in ceramic, installation, film, video, performance and photography. I have provided examples of key works, starting with my first mature work *Room* (1994), as a method of demonstrating the development of my practice over the 20 year period. The transition from large-scale installations and unfired clay works into the use of film and video charts a trajectory of conceptual growth and expansion.

As my practice has found increasing acceptance within the discourse of ceramics, it provides a useful mirror image through which to view what is now considered to be the expanded field of ceramics and my personal contribution to that phenomenon. An adjunct to this reasoning is the personal desire to understand how I work and operate as an artist within what was once a clearly defined discipline, but is now a pluralistic multi-medium activity.

It should be noted that the practical element of my PhD study deliberately sets out to test the boundaries of ceramics discourse through film and photography, with the absence of clay and the ceramic object being a fundamental motivation and consideration of the research. As an artist I



physically create nothing in clay and my experience of the ceramic object is reduced firstly, to the anecdotal stories of participants' experiences in the works, *Last Supper at The Glynn Vivian* and *12 People 12 objects*. And secondly by the action of taking tea using a Swansea Pottery tea service in the film work *Teatime at the Museum*.

The removal of the physical presence of clay and ceramic entirely from this canon of practice and its subsequent successful acceptance (chapter 8, 8.2) as part of ceramics discourse demonstrates how far the field has expanded. In this sense I believe my research project is pertinent and timely, which is supported by the analysis of contemporary artists, writers, and critics outputs as case studies. It should be stressed that this is not an historical examination of studio ceramics, the research is situated in the contemporary arena of practice as a method of understanding what is happening in the United Kingdom now as defined in the *Local and the Global* section of the thesis (Chapter 2, 2.5).

This understanding begins with an in-depth analysis of PhD by practice in the research methodologies section (Chapter 1). Doctorial research by arts practice is not without its critics as indicated by Glenn Adamson in his lecture *Doctoring Practice* (2013) at Bath Spa University. Adamson is a significant contributor to ceramics and craft discourse internationally and referenced repeatedly in the main body of the text. However, an increasing number of artists located within ceramics discourse are subjecting their practice to the rigour of PhD study (Chapter 2, 2.2), with their theoretical and practical outputs providing a convincing argument for the benefits of such study.

Through this thorough examination I have developed a deeper awareness of my own practical methods of creating work and can identify what I create as bricolage and how I operate as a bricoleur. My practice is situated within the ceramics discourse and I employ that as my frame of reference; however, I have worked through a variety of mediums and formats as a method of testing both discourse and myself as an artist. I have come to understand, through my research, that the bricoleur borrows and adopts a diversity of approaches

and mediums in order to create practice, and thus, from this patchwork or collage, knowledge is developed as bricolage which produces a new model of engagement with the ceramic object.

This is a major development in the ceramics field, as increasing numbers of artists embedded within the discourse are embracing other media and materials as aspects of their practice. Chapter 2 examines this shift providing a contextual overview of contemporary ceramics discourse through a series of in-depth interviews with leading critics and writers (Chapter 2, 2.4.2). Most importantly, the expanded field of ceramics is now being critically supported and engaged through the globalised dissemination of research and critical writing - research and critical writing that is being undertaken by practitioners and critical theorists whose concerns and responses have re-calibrated how ceramics and its practice is perceived and understood.

A second contextual overview is the focus of chapter 3, described by an examination of the artist's location within the museum and their ability to question and bring new methods of practice to the institution as it faces the challenges of the contemporary institution in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. It acknowledges the value of the artist's unique skill set in order to bring new understanding to existing collections and disrupt normative procedures. The established genre of the artist/curator with regards to the ceramic practitioner is discussed, whilst defining artists practice within museums as an act of *collaboration* rather than *intervention*.

Chapter 4 introduces three key practitioners as case studies: Clare Twomey, Keith Harrison and Phoebe Cummings, an examination of their practical contributions and outputs supports the theoretical arguments advanced by Glenn Adamson and Jorunn Veiteberg of the post-disciplinary, post-studio artist. And as part of my peer group of artists this analysis provides a context within which to locate my own practice as a post-disciplinary, post-studio artist whilst further contextual support is evidenced by the exhibition *Clay Rocks* (2006) at the Victoria and Albert Museum. An examination of Harrison's (*Last Supper, M25 London Orbital*) and Twomey's (*Trophy*) practice and their

working procedures created for this exhibition provides a valuable frame of reference for the development of my own work created within the site of the museum. The artists' impact on the V&A is explored here; as a result of commissioning their practice the institution undergoes an examination through a reflexive process of its protocols and procedures, which are disrupted as a consequence of this engagement. This invitation extended by the museum to the artist evidences its role as a mechanism for the development of contemporary practice.

A commission from the Glynn Vivian Museum and Art Gallery is my first major work created in the context of the museum and under the auspices of doctoral study. Chapter 5 foregrounds the work *Last Supper at the Glynn Vivian* with an analysis of Donald Schön's theory of the creative practitioners' *repertoire* and Michael Polanyi's model of tacit knowledge. As an artist I rely on my repertoire of experience when presented with new and challenging situations, and in considering Schön's philosophical position I develop a framework for the creation of practice as a response to the ceramics collection. *Last Supper at the Glynn Vivian* critiques the museum's curatorial practice regarding its ceramics display by inviting members of the public to select objects from the permanent collection and to then handle and talk about them whilst being filmed. Helen J Chatterjee's (2008) book *Touch in Museums- Policy and Practice in Object Handling* highlights the potential for an intimate experience of the artefact as an action that benefits both the museum and the audience, in that new awareness and knowledge are brought to the object and the museum, and made explicit through practice.

*Last Supper at the Glynn Vivian* marked a major shift in the development of my practice. Firstly, it was my initial experience of creating work within a museum; and secondly, whilst I had produced film works before, there had always been a manipulation of the medium of clay as an aspect of the practice. Here my role as the artist has changed to that of the director and producer with no material engagement, and this was a conscious decision on my part in order to test the ceramics discourse in line with my research questions.

As a result of *Last Supper at the Glynn Vivian* and as a process of reflection-in-action (Schön, Chapter 1, 1.6) two key issues emerged;

1. The importance of the object to the person and how that relationship can be articulated;
2. The impact of curatorial practice on ceramics collections and how this affects the audiences experience.

The framework developed for *Last Supper at the Glynn Vivian* was adjusted and adapted to examine these issues through further practice in Chapters 6 and 7.

*12 People 12 Objects* (Chapter 6) was a second commission that removed the influence of the institution by locating the point of creation in the home. This afforded me the opportunity to employ photography as a medium - previously used purely as a method of documentation - to create practice, advancing my desire to assess its relevance to ceramics discourse while expanding my own personal repertoire. Locating the work in the home enabled a concise focus on the individual's relationship to a cherished object, a relationship that was not subjected to academic influence and museum curation. *12 People 12 Objects* demonstrates the ability of contemporary ceramics practice to operate across diverse discourses of practice. The work is contextualised through examination of material culture studies and relevant photographic work, whilst contributing to ceramics discourse through exhibition.

In order to address the second issue identified above I returned my practice to the museum and focused directly on the role of the curator (Andrew Renton) by making him one of the central aspects of my second film *Teatime at the Museum*. As a method of identifying the issues to be resolved through subsequent practice I examine Edmund de Waal's *Arcanum* and my own practice *Fragments* with regards to Andrew's involvement in both projects.

Whilst using a Swansea tea service from the National Museum of Wales' collection, we discuss the position of the curator, with regards to the ceramics collection and the curatorial decisions he implements on behalf of the museum. The tea set is reanimated as we use it for its intended purpose, while Andrew is placed in an uncomfortable position in what are his familiar surroundings.

## **0.2. Research Questions**

- What models of practice can be developed and employed within the post-disciplinary and post-studio arena?
- Within the expanded field of ceramics can a new model of practice that engages the museum collection and ceramic object be developed?
- How does the employment of alternative sites for practice and exhibition: museums, non studio-based work, the engagement with institutions, collections and the public affect the reading and perception of ceramics?
- Can the development of new practice that contains no physical evidence of clay or ceramic be considered as a contribution to ceramics discourse?

## **0.3. Aims of Research**

1. To examine the phenomenon of the post-disciplinary and post-studio artist and their position within the ceramics discourse through peer case studies and my own practical development.
2. To create a substantial body of work through the mediums of film and photography, to operate outside of the studio environment within the museum to engage with the ceramic collection and object.

3. To create a robust model of practice that questions curatorial and museum taxonomy.
4. To develop and expand ceramics practice through my own artistic output and test this new work where possible through exhibition, contribution to conferences, and relevant periodicals.
5. To illuminate and contextualise my resulting contribution to current ceramics practice providing detailed understanding of my creative process and conceptual concerns.
6. As an original contribution to knowledge, offer a model of engagement with, and interpretation of, the ceramic artefact that is located within the museum collection from the perspective of contemporary arts practice

#### **0.4. Personal Rationale for Research**

A brief synopsis of my own career after graduation from my Masters degree in Ceramics from the University of Wales Institute, Cardiff to date is useful here, to provide the rationale for my decision to undertake PhD study. After completion of the post-graduate course I began to develop my professional practice as an exhibiting artist. My first major work was *Room*, (fig 1) which was selected for East International in Norwich in 1996, a major fine art exhibition curated by Richard Long and Roger Ackling. The work was well received and featured in a review in *Art Monthly* (Durden, 1996).



(fig 1)

My career over the next ten years grew steadily. I was reasonably successful in exhibiting work in fine art venues, notably the Whitworth Museum and Art Gallery, Manchester, who showed my first unfired work *Earth* (2000, fig 2) and my first video work, *Sublimation* (2000, fig 3). The curator Mary Griffiths subsequently asked me to create *Snowdon* (2002, fig 4), my first major commission, as part of The Commonwealth Games arts programme; and in 2003 I was awarded my first major solo exhibition by curator Hannah Firth at Chapter Arts Gallery, Cardiff, now my home town.



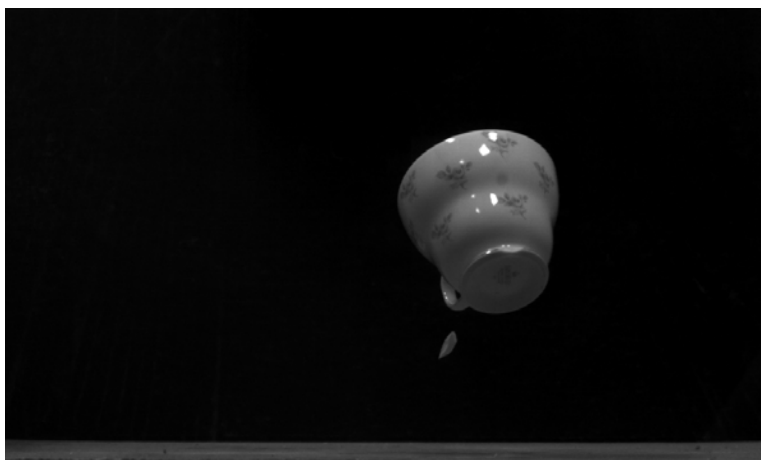
(fig 2)

(fig 3)

(fig 4)

This solo exhibition formed the basis of a successful application to the European Ceramic Work Centre (EKWC) in the Netherlands, where I was based for three months in 2005. This residency proved to be a turning point, in terms of a return to working through, and with, the process of making fired ceramic objects. Although a comprehensive body of work was created whilst at the EKWC, I had arrived at a point where I thought the ceramic object could 'only do so much'; a sharp focus that posed many questions in terms of my practice. I sought to resolve this by exploring film and video making on my return to the UK.

Upon reflection, 2005 was a significant year; I had completed a residency at one of the most prestigious ceramic institutions in the world. I went on to participate in *Bodywork - Figurative Ceramics with a Cardiff Connection*, a touring exhibition curated by Dr Jo Dahn and Dr Moira Vincentelli, which was my first contribution to a major ceramics exhibition. Up until that point (nearly a decade) I had existed as an *artist who worked in clay*, outside of the ceramic fraternity (in the UK). That same year I completed four new film works entitled *Fragments* (fig 5) that proved pivotal in terms of exposure and acceptance of my practice within ceramics discourse; these have, and continue to be, exhibited worldwide from their inception. Most recently, one of the *Fragments* series entitled *Teapot* together with a new work *Teatime at the Museum* have formed part of a Crafts Council Touring Exhibition in 2013/15.



(fig 5)



Dr Jo Dahn had consistently supported my work through conversation, her written output and curatorial practice. In 2007 she exhibited the body of work created at EKWC, and brought Clare Twomey<sup>1</sup> and I together in conversation for *Crafts Magazine* (2007) to discuss many issues including our proximities to ceramic discourse through our use of the material clay, our enjoyment of the material, the importance of collaboration and the difficulty of exhibiting our work.

There was now a burgeoning acceptance of my practice within the ceramics community; receiving increasing recognition through exhibitions and critical writing. In 2008 I was awarded a funded residency at the Philadelphia Clay Studio, USA, where I spent two months exploring drawing through the medium of clay. I was invited back to the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts<sup>2</sup> Conference, in Philadelphia, 2010 where I exhibited *Teapot* (fig 6).



(fig 6)

As the conceptual concerns and motivation that drove my practice had not changed, what had facilitated this acceptance? Had there been a paradigm

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<sup>1</sup> Clare Twomey is a nationally and internationally exhibiting artist, curator and author, she is currently a senior research fellow at the University of Westminster and her practice in clay includes large scale installations, sculpture and site specific works.

<sup>2</sup> <http://nceca.net/about-us-2/about-us/>

shift in terms of the way ceramics was now understood and thought about and if so, what was my role and position within that? These questions were what ultimately prompted me to undertake PhD practice-based research.

## **Chapter 1: Research Methodologies**

*Chapter 1 begins with an examination of practice-based research, which is still a relatively new and emergent phenomenon (within the last 20 years in Art Colleges). PhD by practice still proves to be a contentious issue and areas of conflict are examined, specifically via arguments put forward by Glenn Adamson, a leading writer and critic within the craft/ceramics arena. As a counterpoint I will demonstrate that the on-going and current development of qualitative research methodologies offer the most relevant framework within which to understand practice-based research. As the chapter explores methodologies employed in relation to my working practice, three works developed under the auspices of my PhD study: Last Supper at The Glynn Vivian, 12 People 12 Objects, and Tea Time at the Museum are routinely referred to throughout. As I examine my own working practices, I will firstly introduce the artist as bricoleur, an individual that adopts a multitude of approaches and diverse elements of culture in order to create new work and therefore new insight. Secondly, I will address the process of reflexivity that takes place as I test and critique ceramics discourse through the development of the work highlighted above. The creative process is explored through Donald Schön's theory of reflection-in-action which enables an understanding of how and why I create work within my frame of practice - that of ceramics.*

### **1.1 Practice Based Research**

The methodological approach to this thesis is developed from

- My own practical development
- Theoretical research from reading relevant texts and attending appropriate conferences in order to gather information and assess the current critical climate
- Interviews with key theorists and artists who are operating in the contemporary arena that are developed as case studies

- Analysis of artists work and pertinent exhibitions, established through reviews and personal visits
- The exhibition of my own practice and contribution to relevant conferences and seminars

The above criteria are employed as a foundation for all the chapters within the main body of text and as an introduction to practice based research I will begin by examining this phenomenon in greater detail.

For practitioners, not knowing what happens next is in the nature of the making and the ambiguity of chaos is something to be embraced rather than feared. For researchers a certain (though not complete) approach to prediction is demanded. It is in this overlap between freedom and focus that the creative practice-based PhD has begun to establish its academic claims.

The above quotation (Freeman, 2010, p.61) provides an accurate, and perhaps more importantly current summation of a major issue of research within art and design. Described here as an overlap between freedom and focus, practice-based research finds and defines itself as a position between two polar opposites. As Freeman notes, practice-based research is emergent and a relatively new phenomenon within art colleges (Macleod and Holdridge, 2006, p.1), (Gray and Malins, 2004, p.3), (Barret and Bolt, 2007). This development has proved contentious and continues to be debated as the field advances, as Graeme Sullivan (2006) describes:

On the one hand there are critics to be found within the research community who have a hard time accepting artistic forms as credible research protocols, or the art studio as a valid site for research practice. On the other hand, there are even harsher critics in the political arena who have an easy time proclaiming research policy that is especially limiting and which bears little relationship to actual educational practice.

And as a result of his research, he raises a crucial question in the following quotation, whilst identifying the basic crux of the argument put forward by critics of practice-based research - that art practice and research are diametrically opposed and simply not compatible. However, he offers the

qualitative methodological approach as a model that can be developed, which I will return to later in this text (1.7.1)

Realising that educational research that merely adopts methods from the sciences cannot fully address the complexity of human learning in all its artistic richness, arts-based researchers seek to extend the methodological landscape opened up by qualitative researchers.

This resistance to the acceptance of practice-based research that adopts science-based methodologies is further advanced by Glenn Adamson<sup>3</sup> at the conference *Doctoring Practice*<sup>4</sup> at Bath Spa University which I attended. He contended that:

The way that you might want to walk away from this talk if you're thinking about practice-based research, is to recognise that the very undecidability, that incommensurate and unsatisfiable tension between, on the one hand, the humane possibilities of practice and on the other, the objective and quantifiable quality of research, cannot be reduced to one another - they can be brought into the same space, and that's what you are trying to do here at Bath Spa, that's what people are trying to do all over the UK, as they try to develop this conception of practice-based research. But simply to pretend the two can be put in chain with one another as if they had no conflict, and if they weren't fundamentally different sorts of human endeavor would I think be a big mistake.

Adamson's main concern here is that a quantifiable methodological framework of research is irrelevant and not applicable to art practice, and could in many ways be harmful. He laments that: (ibid)

that there is an intuitive, emotive and fundamentally human quality to great artworks that research simply can't capture and in fact might only crush like a butterfly under a heel.

So, in an emergent field it can be recognised that there are areas of conflict and criticism from both within and outside of discourse. Therefore the development of a methodology that is sensitive and can account for the

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<sup>3</sup> Glenn Adamson is currently director of Museum of Arts and Design, New York (MAD) and was formerly Head of Research at the Victoria and Albert Museum. He is a leading commentator on the crafts and ceramics discourses and has written numerous articles. He is the editor of *The Craft Reader* (Berg 2009), and author of *Thinking through Craft* (Berg 2007) and most recently *The Invention of Craft* (Bloomsbury 2013) Please see bibliography for full list.

<sup>4</sup> Keynote speech given at 'Doctoring Practice' symposium, Bath Spa University 27<sup>th</sup> April 2012, not published

uniquely human attributes of emotion, intuition, personality and the subjective response, whilst being flexible enough to consider the non-linear, organic and fluid multiplicity of practice that defines the contemporary creative process, rather than the objective, dogmatic and exhaustive process of scientific quantifiable research, is key to establishing practice-based research as a legitimate field of academic inquiry (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p.4).

## 1.2 Qualitative Research and Bricolage

As mentioned earlier an effective paradigm for practice-based research has been the increasing development and adoption of qualitative research methods, as consolidated and defined by Denzin and Lincoln (1994, p.2) in the *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, which they describe as follows:

Qualitative research is multi method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them

And from this point they go on to advance the theory of the 'qualitative researcher as bricoleur' (p2), noting that 'the multiple methodologies of qualitative research may be viewed as a bricolage, and the researcher as *'bricoleur'*. They articulate a critical methodology that is multi-faceted and adaptable in its approach, describing the researcher as someone who 'works between and within competing and overlapping perspectives and paradigms' combining a multiplicity of research criteria that provides a diversity of viewpoints.

The phrase 'bricoleur' was first introduced by Claude Lévi-Strauss (*The Savage Mind*, 1966). He describes the bricoleur as someone 'who works with his hands' (Lévi-Strauss, p.16) with 'whatever is at hand' (p.17) and consequently is 'adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks'. This seems a simple and clear definition of how artists operate and navigate through their working process.

Of particular significance to my own research and artistic practice within the context of the PhD is Lévi-Strauss's theory that the bricoleur gathers, rearranges and recycles elements of objects or artifacts that are already in existence (Strauss 1972, p.19).

It might be said that the engineer questions the universe, while the 'bricoleur' addresses himself to a collection of oddments left over from human endeavours, that is, only a sub-set of the culture.

This ordering and rearranging of existing objects, and consequently their meaning, is particularly salient with regards to my practical research within this doctoral study. The three works, *Last Supper at The Glynn Vivian*, *12 People 12 Objects*, and *Tea Time at the Museum* are described in greater detail in subsequent chapters; but it is important to point out here the relationship between my working practice and the need for a robust research methodology that is flexible enough to engage with and take account of the numerous issues identified by my practice.

The three works listed above address institutional critique and power structures, material hierarchy, collections and artefacts, context and site, audience participation, the performative, film and video practice, the curatorial role and the position of the post-studio, post-disciplinary artist. Within this context, bricolage as a term can be employed as a method of gathering meaning that challenges pre-existing structures and received notions of knowledge.

As Matt Rogers (*The Qualitative Report*, 2012) articulates:

From varied, sometimes conflicting, perspectives, a theoretical bricoleur performs multiple readings on an artefact, text, or phenomenon. This process allows bricoleurs to understand the different theoretical contexts in which an object can be interpreted -- providing a multi-perspectival, post-structuralist perspective, showing the plurality of complexities that influence a phenomenon.

Bricolage, although a relatively new research methodology, is becoming

increasingly established within health and social care and within arts practice based PhDs. I will now examine two recent texts that develop Lévi-Strauss's theory and expand Denzin and Lincoln's work.

Christopher Wibberly (*The Qualitative Report*, 2012) gives a uniquely personal account of how as a PhD supervisor he came to understand bricolage as a legitimate research tool. He focuses attention on the way in which a diverse range of information and material can be assimilated into a comprehensive body of knowledge, using the metaphor of a 'collage' or 'patchwork quilt' (Wibberly p.6, Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p.6 3<sup>rd</sup> edition), to describe the constructed whole from a range of relating and often contrasting elements.

He notes that:

It can be said, on the basis of the studies cited, that bricolage brings together, in some form, different sources of data (usually a relatively diverse range of data, to include multiple perspectives).

From this collage of multiple viewpoints we are closer to the complexity of a lived experience, a point that is further expanded on by Matt Rogers (*ibid*, p.4)

For Denzin and Lincoln, adopting a bricolage approach helped researchers respect the complexity of meaning-making processes and the contradictions of the lived world. As they suggest: "the combination of multiple methodological practices, and empirical materials, perspectives, and observers in a single study is best understood, as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry" (1999, p.6)

In the light of my current works, bricolage is the most suitable research methodology for my approach to practice within the increasingly pluralistic field that is contemporary ceramics. The phenomenon of the post-studio, post-disciplinary itinerant artist, an artist that does not muddy their hands with the material of clay, and whose work may contain no physical vestige of the material itself, whilst existing comfortably within the ceramics discourse will be addressed in detail, with my own recent practice being testament to this. In order to achieve this the following procedures were implemented:



- The identification of leading academics and curators with an in-depth analysis of their written and curatorial outputs. I have organised interviews where possible and attended lectures in order to build a comprehensive understanding of the critical arena of ceramics discourse.
- Case studies of peer group artists, including interviews, visits to exhibitions and recorded lectures, to analyse their practical outputs that provides a contextual review against which my own practice can be measured.

The above strategies have ensured an accurate and extensive study of ceramics discourse within this country since the new millennium, within which the phenomenon of the post-studio, post disciplinary ceramic artist can be identified and located. A review of my own earlier ceramics practice where relevant prior to doctoral study has provided a method of recognising my development as an artist and its contribution to the expanded field of ceramics practice. By employing the criteria outlined here I have identified the location of the ceramics practitioner within the museum as an important genre and addition to the artists practice, which is contextualised within the wider framework of artists and museum engagement. This has been achieved through exhibition visits and conference attendance, and from this new understanding and awareness I have created practice, under the auspices of PhD study, which has been tested through exhibition, critical review and the delivery of research papers, thereby fulfilling my aims and objectives and contributing to the discourse outlined above.

### **1.3 Frames and Methods of Practice**

I would now like to examine how and why I make the type of work that I do. This analysis defines the growing awareness of the arena that I was working in and I will use here Donald Schön's theory of a '*frame*' as a method of describing how and where I was located in terms of my education and practice. He notes (Schön 1991, p.310):

When a practitioner becomes aware of his frames, he also becomes aware of the possibility of alternative ways of framing the reality of his practice. He takes note of the values and norms to which he has given priority, and those he has given less importance, or left out of account altogether. Frame awareness tends to entrain awareness of dilemmas.

And he continues (p.311)

Frame analysis may help practitioners to become aware of their tacit frames and thereby lead them to experience the dilemmas inherent in professional pluralism. Once practitioners notice that they actively construct the reality of their practice and become aware of the variety of frames available to them, they begin to see the need to reflect-in-action on their previously tacit frames.

If I consider my *'frame'* to be not only ceramics practice, but also an adherence to a specific medium, that of clay, then this awareness allows me to react by seeking new and alternative methods of making, working, exhibiting and teaching. A practice that attempts to push the boundaries (*frame*) of what is an accepted paradigm is something that I have attempted to do throughout my whole career as an artist, and continue to do now. Schön's theory is developed by Graeme Sullivan (2010, p.67), who reiterates and defines perfectly my approach to making:

What Schön means is that effective practitioners have the capacity to bring implicit and tacit understandings to a problem at hand and these intuitive capacities interact with existing systems of knowledge to yield critical new insights. Hence, the reflection-in-action approach that Schön advocates is a problem solving strategy that is also a resistant process that pushes back against accepted practices.

Here it is important to consider the process of *reflection-in-action*, firstly, in terms of my attitude and approach to the ceramics discourse, that of a method and point of resistance (this is examined in 1.7.4); and secondly as a creative process related to specific works (see 1.7.5). Through constant reflection upon the accepted paradigms of practice within the ceramics field, I understood the types of work that I did not want to make; work, methods and processes that held no interest for me as an artist. In identifying this, I attempted to develop working methods and a practice that questioned and resisted many of the fundamental tenets of ceramics that I understood and

witnessed at that time. Tenets that I believed were conservative and that would ultimately restrict my development as an artist. As John Freeman (2010, p.52) highlights:

Reflective research is determined by readings, writings, thoughts and actions, which are determined by their own creators' histories and influences.

I had a long held fascination of clay and ceramic as a medium, and still do, which had resulted in a conscious decision to attend a ceramics B.A (Hons) degree course, and then a ceramics Masters. I enjoy the history, tradition and process of making that is fundamental to ceramics; but do not see this as a barrier to alternative modes of working and practice within the discipline. The restrictions and limitations of the material and discourse that were placed upon me only sought to encourage me creatively. I wanted to break rules and work against the accepted paradigms of practice rather than reinforce them.

#### **1.4 Thinking with the Material**

Within the creation of my practice I have always considered what clay is, what it means, what it has traditionally been used for, how it is used now, and what it could be used for in the future (Rawson, 1971, Staubach, 2005). Employing this maxim, I have explored, and continue to explore, all aspects of ceramics as a material and its ubiquitous position within our daily lives. I describe this process of research and making as '*thinking with the material*' in this case clay/ceramic.<sup>5</sup>

This approach may not result in a work of clay or ceramic; rather it can, and has, resulted in a performance, a film, photographs and works that are socially engaged - whichever medium best articulates my original concept.

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<sup>5</sup> The phrase thinking with the material is a direct reference to Paul Carters seminal text, *Material Thinking*, 2004. Within the book he examines several case studies that include digital media and performance and highlights how theory and research are connected and this in turn brings new cultural understandings and perceptions. Another excellent resource is *Studies in Material Thinking*, an international electronic journal developed by Nancy de Freitas at The Auckland University of Technology <http://www.materialthinking.org>

However, my practice, created within the context of PhD study, has little or no ceramic element that exists within ceramics discourse . This may seem on the face of it a complete paradox, but it is one that I have deliberately set out to test. I am an artist who is considered to be embedded within ceramics discourse, but whose current body of work is concerned with the unique qualities of digital media and how this can be employed in relation to the ceramic object. My investigation is defined in the following quotation from Graeme Sullivan (2010, p.162) who notes that:

In addition, the digital image may include sound and text, thereby increasing the capacity to embody experience, carry information, and offer up new understanding in a dynamic, interactive, and immersive way.

He continues:

Therefore, artist-researchers working within the digital domain are opening up more varied opportunities to explore the capacity of visual images to be created and critiqued as sources of new knowledge and understanding.

The development of participation, film, photography and digital media that is situated outside of the studio opens new avenues of knowledge and experience in relation to ceramics as a discipline. This diversity of approach situates the work in multiple discourses concurrently, while occupying and contributing to a visible position within the ceramics field.

### **1.5 Reflexivity**

If I consider my practice as an opposition, or opposing force, then I must consider my position and its effects upon the discourse within which it is situated. I am fortunate enough to be given a regular platform in which to exhibit, comment and teach, and my work is given regular coverage and critical reception through the media, conferences and exhibitions, contributing to current discourse. Therefore my analysis of ceramics discourse and my subsequent reaction to it through my practice and teaching has a direct influence upon it, a phenomenon that Gillian Rose (2007, p.136) describes:

There, reflexivity is an attempt to resist the universalising claims of academic knowledge and to insist that academic knowledge, like all other knowledges, is situated and partial. Reflexivity is thus about the position of the critic, about the effects that position has on the knowledge that the critic produces, about the relation between the critic and the people or materials they deal with, and about the social effects of the critics work.

If one considers the above quotation in relation to the works, *Last Supper at the Glynn Vivian* and *Teatime at the Museum*, which are located and produced within museums and employing their collections, then it becomes apparent that the reflexive process is operating firstly, as a method of resistance within ceramics discourse (my reaction to and testing of a conservative field of practice by presenting new work that has no ceramic element that is subsequently peer reviewed); and secondly as a system of critique within the institution. With regards to these two works, existing dominant practices and theories that are deeply embedded within institutional contexts, ie museums, are analysed, questioned and re-evaluated through practice. However it should be noted that the institution is not merely a passive receiver of the artists' critique. By inviting and accommodating the artist within its structured environment, in this case the museum becomes complicit and performs a reflexive process itself.<sup>6</sup>

A recent major research project by Tate Britain, *Tate Encounters: Britishness and Visual Cultures* (Dewdney, Dibosa and Walsh, 2013) evidences the increasing phenomenon of museums and institutions evaluating their positions and professional practices through the employment of reflexive methodology. As they note (p.225):

Reflexivity has become a benchmark in recent sociological research as a mechanism for recognising that the agency of the researcher is an active ingredient in shaping meaning in the design, execution and interpretation of data. Reflexivity offered the research a means of acknowledging that what was being examined and the method of examination needed to be understood as both subject and object and

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<sup>6</sup> The museum as an active participant in the construction of contemporary practice is explored in greater detail in Chapter 3, 3.2

cause and effect. Reflexivity also offered the research a method by which its findings could be verified over the duration of the research in terms of the acknowledgment of the reflex of 'acting back' upon hypothesis and data.

This is supported by Graeme Sullivan's observation that (p.110)

Reflexive practice is a kind of research activity that uses different methods to work against existing theories and practices and offers the possibility of seeing phenomenon in new ways.

He goes on to quote Mat Alvesson and Kaj Skoldberg (2000, p.249)

Reflexivity arises when the different elements or levels are played off against each other. It is in these relations and in the interfaces that reflexivity occurs. This approach is based upon an assumption - and implies - that no element is totalized; that is, they are all taken with a degree of seriousness, but there is no suggestion that any one of them is the bearer of the Right or Most Important Insight.

Alvesson and Skoldberg make an important point by identifying that the reflexive process is not an issue of status or hierarchy; but an identification and examination of different, perhaps seemingly disparate elements, allowing them equal countenance, and examining their relationships to articulate and define new knowledge and phenomena, which challenge existing theories and paradigms. As will become clear with *Last Supper at the Glyn Vivian* and *Teatime at the Museum*, this methodological approach is an effective tool for exposing curatorial procedures and museum taxonomies that are institutionally embedded.

It is important to acknowledge that, by inviting artists into museums the institutions themselves are engaging in a reflexive process, as their own curatorial decisions and nature of display, access and knowledge are questioned and represented to them in a new light through artistic practice. This bi-directional relationship between the museum (*instigator*) and the artist (*agent*) examines existing phenomenon, a ceramics collection, and introduces a third party (*public*) who bring alternative readings and information to their selected objects. The participants' observations and physical interactions are articulated and re-presented back to the museum and subsequently

disseminated to a wider audience through exhibition and conference. This phenomenon is described by Alvesson and Skolberg (2010, p.271):

We also view reflexivity as being about 'ways of seeing which act back on and reflect existing ways of seeing' (Clegg and Hardy, 1996:4)

A cross-fertilisation of information, ideas and new knowledge occurs, flowing between the *institution* (who gain an alternative awareness of their collections through the introduction of an external dynamic), the *artist* and the *public*. The *public* gain new awareness and knowledge through touch and closer proximity to their chosen object; and the *artist's* practice is expanded and developed which in turn affects the very institution that he/she is embedded within. This concept is further expanded in the work *Teatime at the Museum*, where curator Andrew Renton considers his own position, responsibilities, his curatorial practice and that of the museum by engaging with me in a conversation where we consider many of the issues initially identified in the previous work *Last Supper at the Glynn Vivian*. The filmed dialogue takes place in one of the ceramics galleries within the National Museum of Wales whilst we drink tea using a service from their collection.

At the very heart of this body of practice is our relationship to and interaction with the ceramic object. The enabling of a physical tactile experience, generates new, or what I will term *other knowledge*. This is knowledge that is not grounded in museum practice but focused towards human experience, warmth, memory and feelings. These elements are consolidated and explored in the work *12 People 12 Objects*. This work is centered within the home and focuses on the individual's relationship to the object without intellectual and curatorial judgement. The weight and presence of the museum, directly referenced and exploited in the other two films is removed, thereby shifting the emphasis of inquiry towards the participants, who become the subject of the work. Reflexivity takes place as the participants reconnect with and reconsider their objects through storytelling and dialogic engagement.

## 1.6 Reflection-in-Action

By examining and reflecting on the relationships between the three works - *Last Supper at The Glynn Vivian*, *Teatime at the Museum* and *12 People 12 Objects* - enables me to illuminate how issues can be identified as a common thread running through the work. These reoccurring themes act as a binding agent that defines a systematic body of inquiry and research.

However it is important to note that although the works were created and are examined within a linear time frame, this is not a true picture of how my (*the*) creative process works. The conceptualisation of practice and its potential development into new work is a continual process, and not an ordered or regimented method. Ideas for new work develop whilst I am engaged in the process of making; ideas have the potential to be stored or triggered by the action of such making, and hence they may exist long before they are realised. Earlier practice may be revisited in order to resolve issues that are identified, and subsequently considered important at a later date, or quite simply, ideas and practice may be developed in a haphazard, non-linear fashion due to time, financial and other practical constraints encountered by the artist.

Schön defines this constant reflective phenomenon as *reflection-in-action*<sup>7</sup> (1983, p.129) - a constant dynamic reframing of the problem that is presented, as he notes (1983, pp.131-132):

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<sup>7</sup> I would refer the reader to the chapter *The Structure of Reflection-in-Action*, pages 128-167. Schön dedicates a whole chapter to the analysis of this phenomenon, and compares the very different professions of architecture and psychotherapy that both rely on contrasting systems of knowledge, training and results and examines similarities in their investigative approaches, noting, (p130)

I propose that by attending to the practitioner's reflection-in-action in both cases it is possible to discover a fundamental structure of professional inquiry which underlies the many varieties of design or therapy advocated by the contending schools of practice.

This is particularly pertinent to arts practice based research, where the conceptualisation of practice is examined and articulated through the rigor of PhD study. Schön looks for common ground between two seemingly unrelated fields and in this case we might consider arts practice and research as identified in the beginning of this chapter 1.7. This chapter is also



In order to see what can be made to follow from his reframing of the situation, each practitioner tries to adapt the situation to the frame. This he does through a web of moves, discovered consequences, implications, appreciations, and further moves. Within the larger web, individual moves yield phenomena to be understood, problems to be solved, or opportunities to be exploited.

He continues:

But the practitioner's moves also produce unintended changes which give the situations new meanings. The situation talks back, the practitioner listens, and as he appreciates what he hears, he reframes the situation once again.

This continual reappraisal and consideration of what I am absorbed with, how I am working, and what is being produced, is a procedure that I recognise as a creative practitioner. The uniqueness of the situation, or the problem and opportunity that the artist encounters and is presented with, and how they respond to its influence, is a constant consideration, a dynamic and on-going dialogue, both metaphorically, and in the case of the aforementioned works, literally.

## **1.7 Research Methodologies and Practice**

If I identify myself as a bricoleur in terms of how I operate as an artist - an artist that works across a series of disciplines of practice through a variety of mediums (in this case film and photography) whilst being embedded within ceramics discourse - then the multifaceted perspectives that are brought together in a cohesive form as a finished work can be defined as bricolage. A work that employs bricolage as methodology, for example, *Last Supper at the Glynn Vivian*, offers a unique view on both the ceramic object and on the institution and the practice employed to support the collection that houses the artefact.

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significant in that it introduces the concept of a practitioners 'repertoire' (p138). This is explored in relation to my practice in Chapter 5, 5.2

The bricoleur addresses the remnants or residue of human endeavour, which are appropriated, rearranged, recycled and reconfigured to create meaning that may have been ignored, hidden, suppressed and perhaps more profoundly, considered unimportant. In this film work I have deliberately created a series of abrasive interfaces that centre around the taboo of touch within the museum, between the public participant, the museum (curator) and the artist; these act as a methodology of demonstrating the latent meaning and information that objects carry. This practice offers, in line with my original contribution to knowledge, a model of engagement and framework within which this meaning can be extracted and made explicit.

An engagement with the artist (bricoleur) and the employment of this model (bricolage) instigates a reflexive procedure on the part of the host institution, whereby its own practice is scrutinised and presented back to itself in the form of observational and practical critique. As a practising artist, the reflexive process is applied as a methodological approach to understanding my position within ceramics discourse and how practice can be developed as a reaction to the conservative and restrictive parameters within discourse.

Here we can consider Schön's identification of the practitioner's '*frame*'. I consider my '*frame*' to be ceramics discourse for this is where my practice is situated as an exhibiting artist; and considered by critics, curators and gallerists. In order to identify its parameters (so that I might push against it) and locate my position within it, as a methodological investigation I have examined exhibitions, specific artworks, artists practice, curators practice, critics and their texts, conducted interviews with the aforementioned, attended and contributed to conferences and the critical debate that supports ceramics discourse. This in-depth examination enables me as an artist to contextualise my own practice within a frame that can be identified as the ceramics field; a frame that I can exploit by developing work that deliberately contradicts accepted paradigms of practice. And if for a moment we substitute Schön's '*frame*' for '*field*' (as both words define an area, an enclosure or structure) then we can consider, as my research makes explicit, that the '*field*' of ceramics has expanded to a point where I can operate as an artist through the

mediums of film and photography, outside of the studio- without making anything in clay- and exist comfortably within it.

In conclusion I have analysed and established a research methodology that is flexible enough to consider my diversity of practice, how I operate as an artist to create that work, and finally how I navigate through the various discourses I encounter, resulting in a deeper understanding of where my practice is situated and contextualised. My employment of this research methodology is described succinctly in the following quotation from Graeme Sullivan (2010, p.111):

The prospect of conducting inquiry that is *self-reflexive, reflective, dialogic, and questioning*, so that each informs the other, has considerable appeal for visual arts researchers whose practice, in general, is investigative, multi-layered, and inclusive of a diversity of theories and practices.

*This chapter has defined my research methodologies that are employed throughout this practice based doctoral investigation. It provides the robust platform that forms the basis of my investigation and the framework within which to view my research and practical outputs. As a consequence I will continually refer back to this chapter throughout the main body of the text as a point from which all aspects of work, new knowledge and understanding are generated.*

## Chapter 2: Towards an Expanded Field

*Chapter 2 maps the major developments within ceramics from the New Millennium until present. By introducing key commentators and analysis of their theoretical positions it provides evidence with which to gauge the wholesale changes that have taken place in the preceding 20 years (at the time of writing). The chapter explores principle aspects of ceramics discourse as it moves towards an expanded field of practice and how practitioners have adapted and changed their skill sets in order to navigate the field that ceramics now occupies, as defined by Glenn Adamson and Jorunn Veiteberg. Expertise from outside of the ceramics field demonstrates that practice is now in a relational field of activity that can be defined as a post-disciplinary condition. An in-depth interview with Dr Jeffery Jones provides evidence of the importance of the now commonplace globalised networks of communication and their significance to the changing systems of ceramics education.*

### 2.1 Criticality

Garth Clark's professional activity as a writer, historian, gallery owner, dealer and curator have provided a foundation with which to identify ceramics discourse, both through his analysis of the historical development and legacy of studio pottery through to the contemporary field of practice. Since his graduation from the Royal College of Art in 1978, Clark has established himself as a leading writer and critic in the ceramics field. His book *Shards* (Clark, 2003) is an anthology of his essays and is testament to his expansive contribution of and commitment to the mapping of ceramics practice on the international stage. A second publication *Ceramic Millennium - Critical Writings on Ceramic History, Theory, and Art*, (Clark, editor, 2006) sees Clark acting as editor to assemble a series of essays that span 20 years, from 1979 when the *First International Ceramics Symposium* at Syracuse University was convened, (organised by Clark) until 1999 when the *Ceramic Millennium: A Leadership Congress for the Ceramic Arts* took place in Amsterdam. Whilst Clark had organised a series of conferences in America (ibid., Introduction,

pp. xi-xxxii) this was the first major international European event of this scale focusing on the current state and future of ceramics globally.

Of specific interest here is the influential paper given by Edmund de Waal *Not in Ideas But Things*<sup>8</sup> where he outlines the need for ceramics to be considered and understood within a broader framework of artistic practice relating it to alternative discourses, cultural practices and disciplines

My contention is that we have to reground ceramics within the material cultures from which they come, that is in the materiality of their making and in their commoditisation as objects. Both of these aspects are crucial. If we can take the complexity of the making of objects more seriously, rather than regarding their creation as an essentialist outcome of various cultural factors, then we may find there is more to talk about in these ineffable objects than we thought. For instance when we overhear anthropologists, ethnologists or other writers on material culture talking what do we learn about the ability of objects to change their meanings? Due to the widely appreciated collection of essays edited by Arjun Appaduri we are familiar with the proposition that things have 'social lives': that is that the same object can be successfully recontextualised and that its meanings are radically contingent.

Edmund de Waal is acknowledged as being a significant figure within contemporary ceramics and through his canon of practice, writing and teaching he has sought to map a framework within which all ceramics practice can be considered. An argument he develops in his first major publication, *20<sup>th</sup> Century Ceramics*, published in 2003, which he identifies as a guide, that 'attempts to map a century of ceramics' (p7) from 1900 to 2000. Of particular note here is De Waal's last chapter *1965-2000* (pp.165-212) where he examines clay and ceramic work from both within and outside of the discourse, drawing on artists who have engaged with the material, gauging their potential impact in terms of an expanded field of ceramics practice. To support this concept he references established fine art critics and the seminal texts of Lucy Lippard, in particular *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (p.176 and p.191); and Rosalind Krauss's *Sculpture*

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<sup>8</sup> Excerpts from this paper were subsequently republished under the title *Speak for Yourself* in *Ceramic Review* no182 2000 pp. 32-4 and again in issue 5, 2004 of the online journal *Interpreting Ceramics*, <http://interpretingceramics.com/issue005/speakforyourself.htm>

*in the Expanded Field* (p.184). Both texts define the 'definitive rupture' or paradigm shift that occurred within sculpture through the development of Land Art, Installation and Performance Art, mapping the move away from the authority of the autonomous object as a work of art and the 'white cube' gallery as the central site where art is viewed and hence marketed as a commodity<sup>9</sup>. De Waal makes an important point in that he identifies that the *art landscape* that had been so effectively articulated and redrawn by Lippard and Krauss had remained largely ignored by artists immersed within ceramics discourse, because of a fixation on achieving comparable status with sculpture through the autonomous ceramic object:

The desire for ceramics to achieve parity with sculpture in 'the white cube' of the modern gallery and museum, placing objects on plinths, had led to a less interrogative sense of what was possible-only to find that these sites were being regarded as conventional and outmoded by sculptors and painters.

The obsessive pursuit of a comparable status with fine art/sculpture by makers, writers and curators, as identified by De Waal, led to the lack of a sustained exploration of clay and ceramics potential, which created a critical and contextual vacuum. This echoed Garth Clark's concerns for the need to develop a cohesive contextual language that was globalised and robust enough to consider all aspects of ceramics practice. A view shared by Glen R Brown<sup>10</sup> (2009) who notes that:

While it may be true that contemporary ceramics constitutes a discipline unto itself -- a field of discourse and practices based on a unique history and a strong sense of tradition -- ceramics is still a part of contemporary culture and if its proponents wish for it to possess any relevancy for the broader art community they cannot expect to do so by promoting concepts that are grossly out of sync with generally accepted ideas about criticism, art, history, politics, psychology or language. There is no question that the circulation of misinformed,

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<sup>9</sup> Edmund de Waal was instrumental in securing a major 3 year funding award from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) for University of Westminster, entitled *Ceramics in the Expanded Field - Behind the Scenes at the Museum*. Dr Jo Dahn references Lippard's text in her essay *Elastic Expanding - Contemporary Conceptual Ceramics* (Buszek 2011) as does Andrew Livingstone in his doctoral thesis (see bibliography).

<sup>10</sup> Glen R. Brown is Professor of Art History at Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kansas, US and a regular contributor to *Ceramics: Art and Perception* and *Ceramics Technical*.

amateurish and irrelevant ceramics criticism has been a primary reason that the larger art world has regarded ceramics as a rather backward discipline among the arts.

This analysis when positioned against the existing paradigms of theory and practice performs a reflexive action, where alternative methods and systems of thought that employ clay and ceramic are presented to and address the established, and perhaps more importantly, accepted examples of making, theory and criticism (Becker, 1982, p.278). As a multiplicity of new perspectives and approaches are considered and potentially adopted - and include artists writing about their own practice - the frames of reference are increased and the field is expanded.

## 2.2 Makers Who Write

If you believe as, I do, that in making something it is possible to enrich even further the possibilities for exploring ideas, then the critical lacunae around ceramics seems even more heart-rending. Where in ceramics is that synergy between criticism and making that has become so common in other arts? I am a potter who writes, not a writer who pots.

These words of De Waal's<sup>11</sup> assert the artist's potential to further enrich the understanding of practice through the empirical knowledge that is unique to the maker's practical experience. And that, as makers, we have a responsibility to articulate our intentions and motivations because if we do not '*speak for ourselves*' then someone else will. This '*call to arms*' at the turn of the new Millennium coincided with the emergence of an increasing number of artists embedded within ceramics discourse engaging with practice-based research under the auspices of doctoral study<sup>12</sup>. The decision by many leading and established practitioners to subject their practice to the rigor of PhD examination has subsequently introduced a new generation of critically engaged artists with an expanded awareness of the multiple and related discourses of creative activity.

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.interpretingceramics.com/issue005/speakforyourself.htm>

<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that this is still a relatively new phenomenon and is not without its high profile critics, please see Glen Adamson's response in the research methodologies Chapter 1, 1.1

The following three artists are prime examples: Dr Julian Stair<sup>13</sup> (2002) is the Principal Research Fellow at University of Westminster; his most recent major solo exhibition *Quietus* opened in Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art and toured to The National Museum in Cardiff and Winchester Cathedral. Dr Neil Brownword<sup>14</sup> (2006) is Research Reader at Buckingham University and Professor of Clay and Ceramics at Bergen Academy of Art and Design. He has recently co-led a major research project in conjunction with Bergen Academy of Art and Design and The British Ceramics Biennial, *Topographies of the Obsolete* (2013). Dr Andrew Livingstone<sup>15</sup> (2007) is Reader in Ceramics and Leader of the Ceramics Arts Research Programme (CARCuos) at University of Sunderland; and whose recent major solo exhibition *Parallax View* (2010) was a response to the Tullie House Museum and Collection in Carlisle.

Since the completion of their doctoral studies the aforementioned artists have adopted a multitude of working practices in relation to ceramics discourse. Through their teaching, research positions, writing, conference papers, exhibiting and curating, their findings and outputs are disseminated and made available to a global audience. A brief glance at their websites makes apparent that the contemporary '*ceramic artist*' now operates within a broad arena of practice; one that is not necessarily tied to the tradition of the studio based potter/crafts person creating the finely crafted ceramic object, but has a focus on alternative methods, modes of practice, collaborations and sites for creation that are actively sought, encountered and exploited.

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.julianstair.com>

<sup>14</sup> Neil Brownword (1970, UK) is an artist, senior lecturer and researcher at Bucks New University, as well as professor in Clay and Ceramics at Bergen Academy of Art and Design. His PhD (2006) combined historical and archaeological research on ceramic production in North Staffordshire from the eighteenth century to the present, and the creation of a body of artwork in response to this. He is co-leader of the artistic research project *Topographies of the Obsolete* along with Anne Helen Mydland.

<sup>15</sup> [www.andrewlivingstone.com](http://www.andrewlivingstone.com)



### 2.3.1 The New Theorists Part 1

The phenomenon of the mobile artist/craftsperson, who is not bounded by the convention of a single medium, that is reliant on the studio as a site for production and its attendant theoretical discourse, has been defined by two key theorists, Jorunn Veiteberg<sup>16</sup> and Glenn Adamson<sup>17</sup>. Publications include *Craft in Transition* (Veiteberg 2005), *Thinking through Craft*, *The Craft Reader* and *The Invention of Craft* (Adamson 2007, 2009, 2013); both Adamson and Veiteberg have made significant contributions to contemporary ceramics discourse nationally and internationally through their critical writing and curatorial practice. Although both situated outside of the United Kingdom, their critical essays for the exhibition *Possibilities and Losses-Transitions in Clay*<sup>18</sup> (Twomey 2009) mark a clear awareness of the changing nature of ceramics practice in this country. *The Persistence of Craft*, (Greenhalgh 2002) and *The Craftsman*, (Sennet 2008) also provide an in-depth analysis of the changing definition and position of craft in relation to fine art. Issues of status and hierarchy are addressed, but more importantly both Veiteberg and Adamson advance debates surrounding the current and future role of the craftsperson and how they operate within a contemporary arena of practice. Veiteberg, in her provocatively titled chapter, *The End of Craft?* (ibid., pp.11-43), draws attention to the breakdown in defined boundaries and genres (p.12):

Traditions and values are no longer frozen in place, but are gradually melting away. Fine art and popular culture are melting into one another, and the boundaries between artistic genres have become similarly fluid.

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<sup>16</sup> Dr.Jorunn Veiteberg is currently Professor of Curatorial Studies and Craft Theory at Bergen National Academy of the Arts. In 2008 she became the project manager of "Creating Artistic Value", a research project that will take place for 3.5 years. It focuses on the development within ceramics during the latest 10-15 years when the use of rubbish and ready-mades has become more and more common as material in ceramic practices. The project will unfold through internal seminars and international conferences, exhibitions and publications. *Ting Tang Trash- Upcycling in Contemporary Ceramics* was a major exhibition of ceramics in Bergen Norway curated by Veiteberg in which I exhibited the '**Fragments**' series of film works. Please see bibliography for full list of publications.

<sup>17</sup> Dr Glenn Adamson was Head of Research at the Victoria and Albert Museum from 2005 until 2013. He is currently Director of New York's Museum of Art and Design.

<sup>18</sup> *Possibilities and Losses- Transitions in Clay* was an exhibition curated by Clare Twomey for Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art which included her own work **Monument** (please see chapter 4, 4.7) and the artists Neil Brownsword, Linda Sormin and Keith Harrison

She continues (p.13)

Contemporary post-modern artists are no longer interested in crossing boundaries within art, they simply take no notice of them.

The working method outlined above is a process that I recognise within my own artistic output, and it should be noted that Andrew Livingstone, Neil Brownsword and Julian Stair have all adopted film, video and materials other than clay and ceramic as integral parts of their practice. Where once it may have been controversial, or a central consideration of the artist or curator to try to break down barriers between disciplines, this action is now commonplace, and all boundaries, genres and distinctions of discipline and practice are permeable. To support the theory that all fields of artistic activity are now relational and that there are no longer definitive hierarchies of material and practice, I will now examine Glenn Adamson's definition of the *post-disciplinary condition*:

Innovation, these days, is often not a matter of creating a work; rather it is a matter of inventing a whole new way of working. This is a signature of the post-disciplinary condition: the free movement of makers in relation to their own practices, and the ensuing discovery of new forms of friction, from the physical to the political (Invention of Craft, 2013, p. 33)

He continues:

Post-disciplinary practitioners do not necessarily make things by hand (though they might). They are more likely to function as "producers," in the sense that the word is used in the film industry. They bring about the specific conditions that make the work happen. (ibid., p.34)

The second quotation highlights the changing and relevant skill-set that the artist/craftsperson adopts in order to navigate in the current arena. As indicated by Adamson, the contemporary maker may create work or orchestrate the creation of work on his or her behalf through a series of distributed authorships, an issue that is particularly salient to my own practice and, as will become apparent through two case studies, to the work of Keith Harrison and Clare Twomey. Whilst it can be acknowledged that both Veiteberg and Adamson are embedded in craft theory as is evident from their

literary and curatorial outputs, and as Adamson notes '*I'm principally a craft specialist*' (Pogrebin 2013) I would now like to examine similar positions adopted by theorists from outside of the craft/ceramics arena. Beatrice von Bismarck<sup>19</sup> an established art historian, expands their standpoint further with her theory of '*constellational modes of practice*' in her paper *Curating Institutions - Subjectivities on Demand*:

I am talking here about activities such as producing, putting together, showing, making public, analysing, criticising, theorising; as well as for example, administering, supporting, enabling, distributing and writing or educating. The curatorial voice not only goes beyond the traditional activity of curating, or what we used to call curating but encompasses a constellational road in which objects, information, people, space and discourses are set in relation to one another.

A view supported by Professor John Roberts<sup>20</sup> (2007, p.11)

Many younger artists see their identity as linked to the execution of tasks across formal, cultural and spatial boundaries. Commitment to one method of production or form of distribution, one set of cognitive materials, one outlook, is decried.

He continues (ibid., p.12):

In the absence of the pressures of the traditional artistic and cultural hierarchies, artists are freed up-indeed encouraged-to become curators and critics, and curators are freed up to become artists and critics, in ways that benefit the multiple commercial ventures of mass distribution.

The convergence of thought demonstrated by the above quotations evidences the collapse of hierarchies and disciplinary boundaries to a point of equivalence, where roles are fluid and interchangeable; and practice no longer revolves around the adherence to a single medium or discipline<sup>21</sup>. Discourses of practice and theory are relational to each other where the artist can move seamlessly between fields adopting a multitude of mediums and

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<sup>19</sup> Professor Beatrice von Bismarck is Professor for Art History and Visual Studies at the Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst (HGB) Leipzig and Programme Director of the academy's own gallery. *Curating Institutions - Subjectivities on Demand* which was part of a Victoria and Albert Museum conference entitled *Artists Work in Museums: Histories, Interventions and Subjectivities* 12<sup>th</sup>- 13<sup>th</sup> October 2012, unpublished.

<sup>20</sup> John Roberts is Professor of Art and Aesthetics at The University of Wolverhampton.

<sup>21</sup> It should be noted here that Rosalind Krauss had defined the phenomenon of the mobile artist whose practice was not reliant on a single medium as early as 1979 in her seminal essay *Sculpture in the Expanded Field*, as referenced by Edmund de Waal in his book *20<sup>th</sup> Century Ceramics*.

professional capacities to create work. If we again consider the adoption of film and video as a component of practice by artists embedded within ceramics discourse (Brownsword, Stair, Livingstone and my own practice) then this can be defined as a further example of the reflexive process, as the employment of non clay/ceramic mediums are presented to, within and as an element of the ceramics discipline. Alternative methods of approach and processes of work, act back upon the discourse expanding the potential within the field of practice.

#### **2.4.2 The New Theorists Part 2**

The artist's diversity of techniques, media and practices that now form a fundamental element of the expanded field of ceramics has been mapped in the new Millennium by three leading critical writers: Dr Jeff Jones<sup>22</sup>, Dr Johanna Dahn<sup>23</sup> and Dr Mathew Partington<sup>24</sup>. Their positions within the higher educational system and subsequent research outputs, teaching and curating have contributed to a broader theoretical and critical framework in which contemporary ceramics practice can be considered, understood and flourish.

All three were founder members of the online journal *Interpreting Ceramics*<sup>25</sup> which is supported by the institutions they each teach in: Dahn, Bath Spa University; Jones University of Wales Institute, Cardiff; Partington University of the West of England, Bristol and Aberystwyth University. Launched in 2000 as a result of '*shared research interests in recording, interrogating, interpreting and communicating the practice and history of ceramics*', with an inaugural event at the Victoria and Albert Museum, it is the first free peer reviewed electronic journal for ceramics that has an open submission policy, whose aim is '*to establish and maintain the highest scholarly standards for the*

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<sup>22</sup> Dr Jeffrey Jones is Professor of Ceramics at University of Wales Institute, Cardiff, for a full biography see here <http://cardiff-school-of-art-and-design.org/staff/jeffreyjones/>

<sup>23</sup> Dr Johanna Dahn is Senior Research Fellow at Bath Spa University, for full biography see here <https://applications.bathspa.ac.uk/staffprofiles/profile.asp?user=academic%5Cdahj1>

<sup>24</sup> Dr Mathew Partington is Senior Research Fellow in Applied Arts at University of West of England, for full biography see here

<http://people.uwe.ac.uk/Pages/person.aspx?accountname=campus%5Cm-partington>

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.interpretingceramics.com/issue001/about>

*content of the articles published'* (ibid). The initiative fulfils two important criteria: firstly, it is testament to their commitment to the development and dissemination of their research findings and knowledge creating a dialogue with a global audience, which as Jeff Jones explained was a prime consideration and motivation for the development of the website (Appendices, p.170)

Absolutely, yes it was, and that's one of the things that we wanted to do, was to give opportunities to show what was going on in other countries. So yes that was something that we very much wanted to do.

And secondly it enables, identifies and considers ceramics within relational fields of activity and discourses, as outlined in the first issue:

The members of ICRC are committed to exploring ways in which collaborative effort, on both a national and international level, can lead to broader and more interdisciplinary research into all those categories of human activity which are indicated by the term 'ceramics'.

And they continue:

The fields covered would therefore include studio, industrial, architectural, traditional, sculptural and figurative ceramics as well as the relevant branches of anthropology, archaeology, material culture studies, museum studies, archiving etc.

*Interpreting Ceramics*, now in its fourteenth year, has proved to be a valuable academic resource for artists, lecturers and students, as the journal has identified, examined and reflected upon the wholesale changes that have occurred since its inaugural issue in 2000. And it should be noted that the initiative has provided a template for other subsequent online developments, such as *Critical Craft Forum* -

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/310882667610/> and

<http://www.cfileonline.org> created by Garth Clark that '*brings together ceramic creative from art, craft, design and architecture*'.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> It should be noted that the printed journals *Ceramics Review*, *Crafts Magazine*, *Studio Potter* and *Ceramics Art and Perception* all have an online presence.

## 2.5 The Local and the Global

It is important to stress that the focus of this PhD study is centred within the United Kingdom. In order to achieve a measure of balance I have examined and included contributions from established critics and curators that are not based in this country: Glenn Adamson and Garth Clark (America); Beatrice von Bismark (Germany) and Jorunn Veiteberg (Scandinavia) have all made and continue to make, important contributions to ceramics discourse, the post-studio, post-disciplinary artist and museological practice both within the United Kingdom and on the international stage. And it should be noted that the academics and curators Dr Jo Dahn, Dr Mathew Partington and Dr Jeff Jones are committed through their practice to reaching and engaging with individuals, communities and organisations both nationally and internationally. The globalised networks of communication that now exist and that are employed by artist, curator and critic alike ensure that creative outputs are available and considered worldwide.

The artists selected for examination as case studies all have successful international profiles. Within the time frame of the PhD, as an artist and researcher I have exhibited in the United Kingdom, Germany, Denmark, Norway and been invited to present a paper in Fuping, China. The issues identified and examined as part of my study are relevant and occurring on an international stage and in this sense the United Kingdom can be seen as a reflection and microcosm of practice and debate that is being discussed globally. This illustrates the mobility of the creative individual and the constant development and flow of informational networks; which in turn can be examined and utilised to assess and debate, practical issues and themes that are occurring and recurring across countries and continents.

With regards to ceramics practice being located in the museum I have been fortunate enough to be included in two major exhibitions; '*Ting Tang Trash: Upcycling in Contemporary Ceramics*' at the West Norway Museum of Decorative Arts, Bergen, Norway (Veiteberg, 2011) and '*The Magic of Clay*', at gIHoltegaard, Copenhagen, Denmark, (Damsbo Sorenson, 2011) whilst

engaged in PhD study. The *Fragments* films were exhibited as part of these group shows that developed narratives within, and as a response to, an existing collection and the architectural structure of the museum respectively (please see Chapter 7, 7.3) for a further examination of this phenomenon). Similarly a research trip to Paris to visit '*Circuit Céramique aux Arts Décoratifs*' (Bodet, 2010) at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris - an exhibition of contemporary ceramics placed within the museum's substantial existing collection - highlighted the practice of creating dialogues within institutions by employing existing artists' work.

Whilst this provided a useful background within which to consider my own potential projects, it did not position the artist within the museum as a method of creating new practice in response to the institution's structure and/or collection. There was no direct questioning or exposure of the museum and its practices through the engagement with ceramics practitioners and their practice. However this phenomenon was in evidence within the United Kingdom through exhibitions such as *Clay Rocks*, 2006 (Chapter 4, 4.2) curated by Alun Graves at the Victoria and Albert Museum and '*Arcanum*', 2005 (Chapter 3, 3.5) curated by Andrew Renton at the National Museum of Wales. Subsequent projects developed by the University of Westminster under the umbrella of '*Ceramics in the Expanded Field: Behind the Scenes at the Museum*' (Chapter 3, 3.4) all served to illustrate the importance of this genre that is now well established within the United Kingdom as an aspect of the artists' canon and museum practice.

The range and magnitude of projects that have been developed in this country within the last decade signals the United Kingdom's leading position within this field, an analysis of which has informed my practice, contextualised it and so makes/made a contribution to it. This has been an invaluable resource in terms of developing my original contribution to knowledge, through practice, of a model of engagement with the ceramic artefact that is located within the museum, a model that can be adapted to suit any institution regardless of language or country of origin.

## 2.6 A Discourse Defined?

The expansion of ceramics practice and the practitioner's changing methods of operation in the post millennium questions the very notion of a definable ceramics discourse; an issue I discussed at length with Jeff Jones: (Appendices, p.170)

So that seems to be the tension that's happening at the moment, what's the difference between using clay and engaging in this discipline called ceramics? And does this discipline called ceramics actually exist anymore? Now, well I think this is an interesting question because there's still an awful lot of people around who do think that it does, and there are still things like journals, there are still ceramics journals, you know, there are still plenty of those around, and they depend on the idea that there is this thing called 'ceramics'; there are ceramics conferences and symposia around, more than ever; there are exhibitions around which are quite clearly ceramics exhibitions,

And he continues: (ibid)

Well yes, I do think that there is. The fact that you want to come and talk to me about the subject is evidence of it. It's not that I think there should or shouldn't be a ceramics discourse, it's just that people go on talking about it. There is a longevity to it, there is something which keeps it going which we just have to recognise, I can't see that going away. However much ceramics education changes, however much you can or you can't do ceramics as a named subject in universities or whatever it is, that there are going to be some people who are going to continue to be interested in this thing called ceramics, and the fact that ceramics exists as something, some area or field of interest which somehow goes on reinventing itself.

Jones theorises that ceramics discourse can be potentially identified, rather than firmly defined (as my research into changing working practices illustrates) as a multiplicity of materially related activities and outputs. As already discussed, if we consider the employment of film and photography as an aspect of the field of practice, the material of clay and ceramic may not be present in the physical sense, but its implicit reference through the moving or still image enables the work and the practitioner to operate within an identifiable arena of practice. An arena that is supported by a globalised network of communication, that permits academic journals, teaching, conferences, exhibition spaces and critical rigour to be accessed and



engaged with instantaneously. The phenomenon of the absence of the material of clay/ceramics in practice (chapter 3, 3.4) that is embedded within the ceramics discourse as indicated by Jones (and my research) is a key aspect of my rationale for PhD study. My practice and its position within the ceramics discourse can be tested through the measure of success in the continuing development of my exhibiting, teaching and research pedagogy. I am engaged in an avenue of practice where the manipulation of clay or the material employment of ceramic no longer functions as the primary or central (Livingstone, 2009) focus of my output.

*This chapter has explored the development of an emergent cohesive globalised structure in terms of practice and research within the ceramics discourse. Ceramics can now be considered in terms of a relational field to material culture and other associated disciplines. The contemporary artist is a mobile entity whose practice is not restricted to a medium based discipline; rather, ceramics exists in a series of relational fields without preconceived structural hierarchies and boundaries. Significantly, the expanded field of ceramics is now being critically supported and engaged through the globalised dissemination of research and critical writing- research and critical writing that is being undertaken firstly, by critical theorists whose rigorous examination, concerns and subsequent theoretical outputs have re-calibrated how ceramics and its practice is perceived and understood. Secondly, by practitioners, which is reflected in the advent of PhD by practice, that has introduced a new generation of makers/writers/researchers whose knowledge is empirically based through their experience of making (as signalled by de Waal). This paradigm shift<sup>27</sup> in terms of ceramics discourse has led to an*

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<sup>27</sup> Chapter 2 demonstrates the radical changes that have taken place within the ceramics discourse either side of the new millennium. Taking Thomas Kuhn's theory of the paradigm shift outlined in his influential book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, he theorises that when an established field of practice cannot support or is challenged by new types of activity, processes and thoughts, a series of anomalies occur that in turn causes a crisis within the field, enabling new working practices and avenues of thought. If we consider this in terms of the events outlined in relation to the ceramics discourse;

- Ceramics adopting a worldview of its own position as part of a relational field
- The identification of a critical vacuum
- The permeability of boundaries of practice
- The collapse of hierarchies of practice and material

*artist that is adaptable in terms of a multiplicity of skills, which the contemporary maker now utilises when required in the pursuit and development of practice within the arenas in which they operate.*

- 
- The employment of new and alternative media by makers
  - The mobility of the contemporary artist
  - The collapse of the single honours ceramics degree within art schools

I would argue that the above actions demonstrate all the relevant criteria for a paradigm shift to have occurred within the ceramics discourse.

## **Chapter 3: The Artist and the Contemporary Museum**

*Chapter 2 has examined and mapped contemporary ceramics discourse and the significant changes in practice and theoretical approach since the new millennium. The identification of an expanded field of practice provides the context for chapter 3, which examines the artist-curator with regards to current ceramics practice and explores the museum's relationship to the individual ceramic practitioner. A clear distinction is drawn between 'the artists' intervention' and 'the artists' collaboration', reaffirming the location of the museum and the curator as active agents in the construction of the contemporary ceramics discourse. Through an analysis of the Crafts Council touring exhibition *Reel to Real* the issue of materiality is explored and particularly the absence of clay and the employment of film as a significant aspect of the craft-person's repertoire. Chapter 3 provides a framework within which my own subsequent practice, established in museums, can be situated and measured.*

### **3.1 The Post-Museum**

It must be acknowledged that the work of social theorist and philosopher Michel Foucault has formed the bedrock upon which museum studies has been constructed, particularly his theories of disciplinary discourses that organise and categorise knowledge (1970, 1990). His important contributions are still proving influential; however in terms of my own practice situated within the museum, that seeks to expose and disrupt the accepted paradigms of museum practice, it should be noted that there are limitations in a Foucauldian analysis of museum discourse, as identified by Gillian Rose (2007, p.191)

Chapter 7 notes that Foucault insisted that wherever there was power, there were counter-struggles, but a common criticism of Foucauldian methods is that they concentrate too much on the disciplining effects of institutions and not enough on the way these disciplines may be disrupted.

And perhaps most significantly (with regards to *Last Supper at the Glynn Vivian*) she draws our attention to the viewer (ibid., p.192):

Similarly, few of these studies consider the possibility that visitors may be bringing knowledges and practices to the museum or gallery that are very different from those institutions' knowledges and practices

The development of discourses of practice surrounding the museum from the Foucauldian standpoint, to where museum theory and practice is situated in the contemporary arena (Bishop 2013, Vergo 1989), is identified and supported by Dewdney, Dibosa and Walsh (2013, pp.12-13) in their major research project entitled *Tate Encounters: Britishness and Visual Culture*, culminating in the publication *Post Critical Museology: Theory and Practice in the Museum*. They identify that:

Approaches influenced by Bourdieu<sup>28</sup>, Foucault and the post-colonial critique more generally have dominated academic literature in the formation of museum studies as an academic subject. One of the central arguments of this book is that important and seminal as these studies have been, under the new conditions of hypermodernity their explanatory power over the museum has now reached its limit. Newer forms of critical knowledge now need to build upon that legacy.

This shift in theory and practice has signalled a wider engagement and consideration with the audience, and a re-examination of the knowledge generated and advanced by the museum. As hinted at by Rose, there is a wealth of information and knowledge that can be presented to the institution (and its collection) by the audience that is not academically positioned. Instead, the procedures for gathering and articulating data are open to debate and scrutiny through the presentation of alternative definitions that can be based on personal narratives and experiences. The institution no longer

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<sup>28</sup> (My footnote) Bourdieu wrote extensively on art (please see bibliography) and employed the theory of the cultural field, proposing that society cannot be defined in terms of class and ideology, similarly to Foucault he focused on the structures of power in society. As Dewdney, Dibosa and Walsh highlight, the work by Foucault and Bourdieu has provided the foundation on which the dynamics of power and hierarchies were exposed particularly in institutions. It is Dewdney, Dibosa and Walshs' contention that these structures of authority can be addressed and transformed by the implementation of innovative approaches to curation and taxonomy. I would present as an example the artist's role and practice in the museum of this in action.

occupies the position of definitive knowledge, due to the globalised networks of information and communication. Facts, data, knowledge and experiences can be accessed, exchanged and brought to bear upon the museum and its artefacts from a variety of cultural positions. Through this analysis the object placed within a collection ceases to be a form of static statement where meaning is constructed - often anonymously by the curator - through a visually and historically authoritative narrative, and moves towards an emphasis on human experience and interaction. Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (2000, p.152) identifies the changing nature of the museum from the 19<sup>th</sup> century modernist model to the 21<sup>st</sup> century as the 'post-museum' condition, noting that:

The great collecting phase of museums is over. The post-museum will hold and care for objects, but will concentrate more on their use rather than on further accumulation. In addition, the post-museum will be equally interested in intangible heritage. Where the tangible material objects of a cultural group have largely been destroyed, it is the memories, songs and cultural traditions that embody that culture's past and future.

Here Hooper-Greenhill firstly highlights a change in emphasis with regards to the museum collection, as one that places the use of the object and its subsequent relationship to the viewer at the forefront of consideration. So procedures can be implemented that can accumulate, understand and interpret these interactions. Secondly she theorises that there will be a shift towards a rigorous engagement with dialogue, story, anecdote and ritual activity as a method of ascertaining culturally significant meaning. This section has identified the changing theoretical and practical position of the contemporary museum. Leading cultural commentators and institutions acknowledge that there is a need to engage directly with their audience and to examine how they operate in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, which is summed up in the following quotation (Dewdney, Dibosa and Walsh 2013):

The book's argument, if not plea, is for the art museum to recognise and work with a greater and more open sense of the paradoxical present. Such an 'opening out' of the art museum would require a renegotiation of its traditional form of authority and a new embrace of

the informational networks, with its multitude of human as well as media migrations. The book makes the case as forcibly as it can, on the evidence used, that the most obvious way for the art museum to relinquish the constraint of the historical system of representation is to relocate the development of audiences at the centre of its practices and to work with it on a grand scale.

These assertions identified above have been recognised and exploited by myself as an arts practitioner and addressed within the museum. Through the development of my practice I demonstrate that meaning can be extracted and elucidated through a direct engagement with public and the employment of artefacts from collections, creating a framework where dialogue can take place leading to a richer understanding of museum collections, one that is not reliant on an academic historical narrative developed independently by the institution. As a method of contextualising my own recent practice located within museums I will now examine in greater detail the role of the artist within the institution.

### **3.2 Intervention or Collaboration**

The artist's '*intervention*', as it has been largely termed, within the museum is now an established and important genre within arts practice. A useful introduction and contextual overview of the historical development of this practice from its very beginnings through to its contemporary setting is provided by James Putnam, *Art and Artifact - The Museum as Medium* (2009 revised edition).

Putnam, from his perspective as a curator, focuses on what he describes as the '*ideological exchange*' (ibid., preface) that takes place between the artist and the host organisation, whereby the artist acts as an external force or pressure on the museum by providing new insights into their collections and practice. The changing role of the curator and the museum's shift from an institution that organises and orders knowledge, towards an outward facing, civic amenity that engages readily with its public (and artists) in a range of initiatives can be acknowledged. This has led to alternative readings, subversions of collections, hierarchies and structures which is illustrated

through the breadth of practice analysed. A prime example of this practice is Fred Wilson's project '*Mining the Museum*' (ibid 2009 p157- 158, fig 7) at Maryland Historical Society in 1992.



(fig 7)

Through extensive research of the museum's collection and the subsequent juxtaposition of artefacts from their reserve, Wilson exposed the historical racism upon which the institution and its collection was built. His piece '*Metalwork 1793-1880*' placed a collection of 'silver vessels in Baltimore repousse style 1830' with a pair of 'Slave Shackles' inferring that the wealth of Baltimore's elite was built on slavery, as Puttnam (ibid., p.157) notes:

He was thus able to illustrate the way in which many unpleasant aspects of social history had been conveniently overlooked.

Wilson's project illustrates perfectly how the 'eye' or vision of the artist can expose and depict new narratives within existing collections of objects housed within the museum structure. Whilst this process can make for an uneasy alliance as indicated by my own practice *Teatime at the Museum*, where I deliberately set out to make the curator Andrew Renton uncomfortable (Chapter 7) and the project *The National Museum and I*, highlighted by Jorunn Veiteberg (Chapter 7, 7.1) it should be stressed that the artist is invited to develop practice as a method of examining curatorial procedure by the host institution, their unique vision is employed here as a mechanism to develop curatorial practice(s). A phenomenon that will be examined in chapter 4, 4.2 in

regards to ceramics practise with an analysis of *Clay Rocks*. Putnam views artists practice within museums as an '*intervention*', as he describes in the preface of *Art and Artifact -The Museum as Medium* (ibid., preface)

I have set out here to show an emerging museological tendency in art which is matched by the use of the traditional museum as a site for artists' interventions.

A position he further entrenches in a more recent paper, *Museum, The Artist and 'Intervention'* delivered at the first symposium of the research project *Ceramics in the Expanded Field- Behind the Scenes at the Museum*<sup>29</sup> at University of Westminster, where he maintains that:

These so-called 'interventions' involve the interweaving or juxtaposing of artists' work so that it merges or interferes in some way with the museum collection or site.

And continues:

Interventions often tend to address museological policies of acquisition, interpretation and display or other provocative topical issues, thus challenging the traditional impartiality of the institutional context.

Whilst I would agree with Putnam's analysis of the multiplicity of roles that artists adopt in order to operate and develop practice within their host institution, I take the view point and oppositional position highlighted by Alun Graves in a paper, *Beyond the Collection: The V&A and Ceramics in the Expanded Field*<sup>30</sup> where he maintains that:

The activities of artists in museums are frequently described as interventions. This is a term I intensely dislike, for it suggests that this type of engagement is something that happens to the museum, the role

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<sup>29</sup> *Ceramics in the Expanded Field - Behind The Scenes At The Museum* was a major three-year project, initiated by the University of Westminster and funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council that began in 2011. <http://www.ceramics-in-the-expanded-field.com/home>  
The inaugural symposium took place on the 10th January 2012 at the Victoria and Albert Museum. James Putnam's essay is available at <http://www.ceramics-in-the-expanded-field.com/essays/james-putnam-gb>

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.ceramics-in-the-expanded-field.com/essays/alun-graves-gb>



of which is entirely passive. It suggests that embracing contemporary activity is not part of normal business, and is an unwelcome interruption. The track record of the V&A over the last decade, I think, tells a rather different story.

Here Graves is supporting his theory, as evidenced by his own initiatives, that museums are instrumental in the development of contemporary practice; that their role is not as a compliant receptor of artist's requests, but rather that they are enthusiastic participants in the generation and support of work that places their own practice under intense scrutiny. Graves signals that the discourse has shifted from a paradigm of practice that is described as the artists' *'intervention'* to that of *'collaboration'*. There now exists a point of equivalence between the artist and the institution where information, knowledge and expertise is freely traded and can be adopted by both parties. This phenomenon will be explored in Chapter 4, establishing that the boundaries and distinctions of practice, be they curatorial or art, no longer exist. The artist has moved into the curator's arena (examined in greater detail in the next section of the text 3.3), and the curator has embellished their own practice through creative inputs into, and the commissioning of, artistic practice. A symbiotic relationship has now been established between the artist and the museum that has resulted in this important artistic genre.

### **3.3 The Artist-Curator**

James Putnam identifies the role of the artist-curator (ibid., 2009 p.132), and reaffirming this mutually beneficial and interdependent relationship, he notes:

As a result of the recognition by museum curators of artists' intuitive sense of perception and presentation, there has been a growing tendency for museums to invite artists to choose and arrange material from their collections.

He continues:

The increasing phenomenon of the artist-curator often crosses the boundaries between exhibition design and installation and is regarded by some artists as a natural extension of their everyday practice.

The above quotation makes explicit that the museum as an institution recognises the unique skill-set that artists hold and that this can be exploited to develop new narratives within existing collections; and recognises the artist's expansion of practice and responsibilities into what traditionally has been defined as curatorial territory. Beatrice von Bismark further illuminates this phenomenon in her paper, *Curating Institutions-Subjectivities on Demand* given at the conference, 'Artists Work in Museums: Histories, Interventions and Subjectivities'<sup>31</sup> at the Victoria and Albert Museum (chapter 2, 2.3.1)

It has become the standard and accepted practice in the cultural field since the 1990s and the late 80s for artists to take up various tasks that were once the reserve of the curator. This not only includes the use of texts but also the conception of the exhibitions themselves as well as the design and accompanying programmes. The strategies pursued here are very decidedly blurring the boundaries between what were once separate professional tasks which can allow for successful establishment of a new or hitherto barely noticed artistic approaches, it can encourage the development of collective work structures and it can create an expanded range for discourse and studies critical of institutions.

The above quotation reaffirms a key issue, that of the emergence of the artist-curator and their movement into jurisdictions and expertise outside of the established artists' remit; or perhaps more importantly how curatorial practice has been absorbed and become an established element of artists practice. This emphasises the changing skill-set required and developed by the artist in order to successfully curate exhibitions and negotiate practice within institutions, thereby accessing the potential benefits of such pluralistic approaches and collaborations.

Four significant and recent examples of artists embedded in ceramics discourse that employ aspects of curatorial practice are: Edmund de Waals' 'Arcanum' at the National Museum of Wales in Cardiff; Clare Twomeys'

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<sup>31</sup> The conference explored the impact and historical precedents of artists working in museums, the changing role of curator and the emergence of the artist/curator, specifically through their own developments as an institution and their residency programme. James Putnam also contributed a paper, *The Museum as Medium*.

'*Plymouth Porcelain; A new Collection*' at Plymouth Museum and Art Gallery 2011; Julian Stairs' *Quietus*, a major touring exhibition that began at Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (2012), moving to The National Museum of Wales in Cardiff (2013), Winchester Cathedral (2013) and Somerset House (2013-14)<sup>32</sup> and Neil Brownswords' recent project, *Divided Labour: The Unsung Crafts of Ceramic Industrialisation*, which at the time of writing has just reached completion. Commissioned by Shrewsbury Museum and Art Gallery, Brownsword has created a new body of work in response to the existing collection and led on the curating of their nationally important ceramics collection (2014).

It is important here to acknowledge the wide range of practice that artists are engaged with as a method of contextualising my own practice within this discourse. This serves two purposes: firstly, to identify that my practice operates in many different - yet is related to - fields and arenas of activity other than purely ceramics. Secondly, that the four examples given above retain a material engagement with clay; clay is employed and manipulated by the artists as a constituent and fundamental aspect of their projects, and the material has a presence within the finished outcomes. Whereas in contrast the works - *Last Supper at The Glynn Vivian*, *Teatime at the Museum* and *12 People 12 Objects* - do not engage with the material directly, or manipulate it in its unfired state. As an artist I create nothing through the medium of clay; rather I act as the director of proceedings that ensures the outcomes are made manifest through the medium of film and photography. The focus of my work here is on our relationship to the existing ceramic object, which is compounded by the absence of the material.

Most significantly my three works indicated above occupy a position within, and contribute to, ceramics discourse by virtue of their nexus to the material

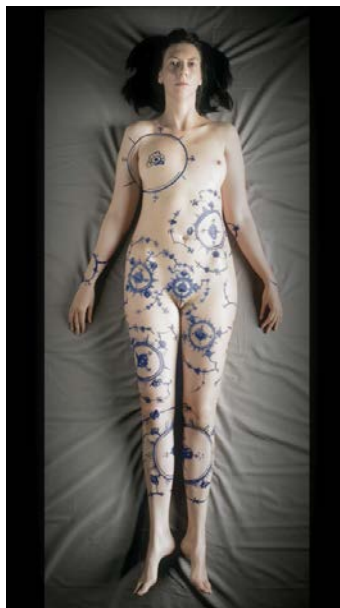
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<sup>32</sup> I visited Julian Stairs' exhibition at MIMA and at The National Museum in Cardiff and it is interesting to note that whilst MIMA offered a blank canvas in terms of an exhibition space, Stair adopted and included existing artefacts from the National Museum's collection as a method of establishing relationships with contemporary ceramics. A short film of Stair explaining his rationale at the National Museum of Wales is available here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pdGCft1Rfcw>

and ceramic object. The field of ceramics practice has expanded to a point where clay/ceramic no longer has to be physically present or manipulated by the artist's hand in order for it to be considered within, or as part of, the field of practice.

### Material Absence 3.4

As identified, above the field of ceramics practice has expanded to a point where clay/ceramic no longer has to be physically present or manipulated by the artist's hand in order for it to be considered within, or as part of, the field. Two examples of artists that have successfully engaged with this process through film and digital media are Susanne Hangaard<sup>33</sup> and her work *Absentia* (2010 fig 8) and Andrew Livingstone's *Animated Plate*<sup>34</sup> (2010 fig 9).



(fig 8)



(fig 9)

Both artists' work exploit the culturally embedded nature of ceramics through the employment of recognisable imagery, in this case ceramics decoration

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<sup>33</sup> <http://susannehangaard.dk/dk/>

<http://www.susannehangaard.dk/uk/index.html>

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j3TykG-GWD8>

that is part of a national heritage. These works relate directly to my own practice, *Last Supper at The Glynn Vivian, 12 People 12 Objects* and *Teatime at The Museum* where the conspicuousness of the familiar (the ceramic object) is exploited ensuring that the work is situated and understood within and as part of ceramics discourse- through what I will term their '*material and or object referent*'.

This is further reinforced by the works subsequent inclusion in exhibitions and institutions that contain actual ceramics, where associations and relationships are developed through proximity to the physical presence of the medium. It should be noted that Hangaard's *Abstentia* was exhibited as part of 'Ting Tang Trash-Upcycling in Contemporary Ceramics'<sup>35</sup> (2012) at The West Norway Museum of Decorative Art in Bergen, a museum that has a substantial collection of ceramics and Livingstone's *Animated Plate* was exhibited as part of his solo exhibition 'Parallax View' (2010) at The Tullie House Gallery in Carlisle which houses The Williamson Collection of British porcelain. The artists practice and location within the museum is explored in the next section 3.5 and specifically through case study in chapter 4.

The emergence of a genre of practice that utilises film and digital media that has no physical element of clay or ceramic is one of the central aims and key research questions (0.2, p14) within my doctoral thesis, as I seek to test the boundaries of ceramics discourse. A phenomenon that is further evidenced by the current touring exhibition *Real to Reel: Film as a Material in Making*<sup>36</sup>. Organised by the Craft Council, it presents '*makers' films that are a final product of their practice; artworks in their own right*'. As they highlight in the press release on their website,

*Real to Reel* presents films that are a final product of contemporary makers' practice. Each is an artwork in its own right, and is concerned with craft and design; thematically, technically or materially. Digital and traditional film offer unique possibilities of expression; the ability to capture creation and destruction, as well as material and time-based

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<sup>35</sup> My own work *Fragments* was also included in this exhibition

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.craftscouncil.org.uk/listings/real-to-reel-film-as-a-material-in-making/>

transformations. Film can present singular and multiple narratives, enabling the representation of the temporal and the performative, and it can take a micro, macro or manipulated view.

With regards to ceramics, the exhibition includes work by Neil Brownsword<sup>37</sup>, *Salvage Series*; Adam Buick<sup>38</sup>, *Erosion Series- Porth y Rhaw*; Natalia Dias<sup>39</sup>, *Breathe* and my own works *Fragments* and *Teatime at the Museum*. This exhibition is a clear indication and statement by the Crafts Council that film and video are constituent facets within the contemporary artist's/craftperson's canon of practice, and consequently are legitimately considered as part of craft discourse; a phenomenon that reinforces the authenticity of the post-disciplinary practitioner, who engages with a variety of mediums and disciplines as a method of developing work.

The establishment of the artist-curator and the artist's embedded nature within the institution as an increasingly important paradigm of practice has informed and facilitated my own projects within museums. However it should be noted that my practice, created with regards to my PhD research is not concerned with employing elements of curatorial nomenclature; rather, its fundamental concern is how the artist's insight and subsequent practice can be utilised as a unique tool and method with which to directly examine and question curatorial and museum taxonomy.

### **3.5 The Museum, Ceramics and the Artist**

My interest in regards to working with and being embedded in a museum focuses specifically on the ceramics collections and my recent practice has paralleled this development, contributing to this expanding discourse. Glen R Brown (2012) describes this phenomenon and some of its ramifications succinctly as he observes that:

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<sup>37</sup> [http://bucks.ac.uk/whoswho/profile/neil\\_brownsword#.U\\_W0bksspFw](http://bucks.ac.uk/whoswho/profile/neil_brownsword#.U_W0bksspFw)

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.adambuick.com/film/>

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.nataliadias.com/#/video/4545997548>

In the last quarter of the twentieth century a tide of revisionism swept museum galleries in the West, wreaking havoc on conventional historical narratives that had long conferred cohesiveness, even ostensible objectivity, on practices of display. Under this revisionism familiar historical objects succumbed to recontextualization, yielding new meanings through an artistic curatorship that tendentiously disclosed its own subjectivity and motives.

Brown highlights the radical changes that have taken place within the museum due in part to what he terms as '*artistic curatorship*'. Collections and the artifacts that are contained within them are undergoing a process of reinterpretation and reconfiguration, guiding us towards new narratives and meanings that challenge the accustomed knowledge and experience.

It is important to note here that the above quotation is from one of a series of essays that are part of a University of Westminster initiative, *Ceramics in the Expanded Field: Behind the Scenes at the Museum*. The programme has included a series of essays by leading commentators and artists, exhibitions and conferences (please see footnote 64), Clare Twomey, *Plymouth Porcelain: A new Collection* (2011), *Dreamwork: a research project and exhibition* by Christie Brown at The Freud Museum in London (2012), *Quietas* by Julian Stair at Middlesbrough Museum of Modern Art (2012 and touring) and *Marking the Line: Ceramics and Architecture* at Sir John Soanes Museum London<sup>40</sup> (2013 and touring).

I attended several of the exhibitions and the accompanying symposiums, *Interpreting Collections: Idea, Object, Site at The Freud Museum* (2013) and *Marking the Line: Ceramics and Architecture at Somerset House* (2013)<sup>41</sup>. These were to prove invaluable in terms of locating and testing my current practice within this arena situated within ceramics discourse. Both Glenn Adamson, as keynote speaker, and Andrew Renton in his paper *Deposits and Withdrawals at the 'Collective Memory Bank': Ceramic Artists and the*

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<sup>40</sup> As research I attended all three exhibitions and wrote a review of Marking The Line for Interpreting Ceramics available at

<http://www.interpretingceramics.com/issue015/articles/07.htm>

<sup>41</sup> A full list of contributors and their papers to the symposiums is available at <http://www.ceramics-in-the-expanded-field.com/events>

National Museum of Wales reference *Teatime at the Museum* in the aforementioned symposiums<sup>42</sup>. Michael Tooby (2012) in his paper *Order and Disorder: Some relationships between Ceramics, Sculpture and Museum Taxonomies*<sup>43</sup>, presented at the *Ceramics and Sculpture: Different Disciplines and Shared Concerns* conference at the National Museum of Wales (2012) also described my recent practice:

Two of his most recent works have involved staging performances in ceramics collections. One was made for the temporary closure of the Glynn Vivian Gallery in Swansea. In the course of it members of the Gallery's audience share their thoughts about items as they are packed away. The other was made, at around the same time, in collaboration with Andrew Renton and the National Museum's curatorial and conservation team. It is called 'Tea at the Museum' and shows Renton and Cushway as they remove an historic tea service from a display case in the Museum's principal gallery of historic ceramics, and take tea, with evident pleasure.

The establishment and increasing importance of the artists' practice within the museum as a discourse in its own right has proved significant for ceramics, as illustrated by the widespread critical appraisal and commentary that it receives. Ceramics by virtue of its ubiquitous position in our daily lives occupies a conspicuous position within most major museum collections worldwide. Its prominence in our collective cultural experience and consciousness affords a variety of opportunities with which to engage in these vast collections of objects and artefacts.

An important consequence of this, with respect to ceramics, is the movement of the artists practice from the studio to the site of the museum creating a dialogue between the contemporary and the historic artefact, as Julian Stair elucidates in the short film made by the National Museum of Wales to accompany *Quietus* (footnote 35):

All exhibitions are a dialogue between artist and curator and institution, and this is exactly the case with the National Museum here.

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<sup>42</sup> References to my practice are available in the appendices, Renton p202-203

<sup>43</sup> Michael Tooby's paper is available at <http://www.interpretingceramics.com/issue014/articles/04.htm>



Stair utilises parts of the existing collection to develop a narrative as this *'grounds his work in an historical overview'*. It should be noted that a significant part of *Quietus* was developed outside of the studio in a brick factory<sup>44</sup> in order to take advantage of the skill, expertise and facilities that industry offers, a continuing feature of Clare Twomey's and Keith Harrison's practice. Artists whose practice shares similar concerns are Andrew Livingstone, Neil Brownsword, Keith Harrison, Christie Brown, Edmund de Waal (Adamson 2010, Bevis 2010) and Julian Stair (Vaizey 2010) who are regularly working with institutions and their collections (Gray 2012). However, significant elements of their practice that are situated within museums are developed within the studio as a response to an existing collection housed in an institutional context. Their work is then subsequently relocated to the host organisation enabling narratives and dialogue to develop. In contrast, yet related, is the practice of Twomey and Cummings whose work is developed as a response to a specific site or context and created in situ, where the artist and the process of creativity is visible. This range of practice, how it is developed - as illustrated by the mobility of the artists above - is indicative of the expanded field of ceramics, a field that can be identified as a series of activities, strategies and operations realised through a variety of mediums and materials and employing a diversity of personnel and expertise, but by virtue of its fluid nature continues to defy a definitive classification.

*This chapter acts as a backdrop against which my own practice can be measured and contextualised. Chapter 3 has established the position of the contemporary museum as a structure that is characterised by a move from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century model as an elite institution that holds definitive knowledge over its collection to an expanded prototype that recognises the need to place its audience at the centre of its practice. In adopting this strategy the museum is now subjected and pressured by a wealth of knowledge and expertise externally, due to the globalised networks of communication and information, which can be defined as the 'post museum' phase. Museums have actively*

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<sup>44</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xts5qdXFh2A>

*sought relationships and employed artists as a method of reconfiguring and reinterpreting their collections. From this standpoint the artists' role can be seen as a 'bridge' or mediator between the institution (its collection) and its audience. These collaborations have developed into an identifiable and important genre of arts practice, a genre that is now an intrinsic and significant part of ceramics discourse.*

## Chapter 4: The Post-Studio, Post-Disciplinary Artist

*Chapter 3 has identified a contextual framework of artists practice positioned within the museum that has been afforded by the changing position of the institution in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. To support the phenomenon of the artist as bricolage in line with my research methodologies, Chapter 4 will examine as case studies the work of Clare Twomey and Keith Harrison through their contribution to Clay Rocks at The Victoria and Albert Museum and it will introduce Phoebe Cummings' method of post-studio practice. Considering these artists as part of my peer group, whose expansive models of practice - as defined by Glenn Adamson (Chapter 2, 2.3.1) are related to my own, locates my own position within contemporary ceramics discourse. This is achieved through extensive examination of their practice, through conversation, recorded lectures and interviews.*

### 4.1 Clare Twomey and Keith Harrison

Clare Twomey and Keith Harrison are established artists operating within ceramics discourse<sup>45</sup> on a national and international level, and it is constructive to consider the importance of clay and ceramic as a method of grounding their positions within discourse. As Twomey (2008) describes:

Craft is a vital part of my practice as a maker of objects and material understanding. Historical understanding of ceramic practice and use of material has a huge impact on the evolution of my work.

And in her biographical information at University of Westminster<sup>46</sup> where she is Senior Research Fellow:

For a great deal of my projects my practice can be understood as 'post-studio ceramics', my work engages with clay yet often at a critical distance. I have in the past five years negotiated the realms of

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<sup>45</sup> Both artists have graduated from the Royal College of Arts' MA Ceramics programme, (Twomey, 1996; Harrison, 2002) and have subsequently completed the Ceramics Residency at the Victoria and Albert Museum (Twomey, 2011; Harrison, 2012)

<sup>46</sup> <http://www.westminster.ac.uk/about-us/our-people/directory/twomey-clare>

performance, serial production, and transience, and often involve site-specific installations.

And Harrison<sup>47</sup> similarly:

I am interested in the opportunities that clay offers in its different states; as a liquid, plastic and solid and, ultimately, the potential for the direct physical transformation of clay from a raw state utilising industrial and domestic electrical systems in a series of time-based public experiments. Clay is treated generally inappropriately and variously applied onto an electrical host form. The resulting works are willfully idealistic and impractical attempts to permanently change, in full or in part, the properties of clay or in combination with other raw materials produce a temporary sensory alteration such as the generation of sound or an aroma to fill a space.

Both artists acknowledge clay/ceramic as their primary medium, which occupies a fundamental position within their practice. As I have defined previously it is - in relation to my own interests and practice - the '*frame*' (Chapter 1, 1.3) within which they operate. Of specific interest here, are the '*other*' aspects of practice that they both bring to the medium of clay and ceramics and its impact on the discourse itself. As indicated above, their practice includes the dynamic of the performative action, site-specificity, technology, and direct audience participation and engagement. Harrison's work contains within it such disparate influences as:

The social realist TV drama of Ken Loach and Alan Bleasdale's 'Boys from the Blackstuff', the films of David Lynch and Werner Herzog's 'Fitzcarraldo', Northern Soul, Jah Shaka, Keith Moon, Peter Saville's New Order Album sleeves, left-wing politics and the public lectures of Michael Faraday at the Royal Institute (ibid.)

Here I would refer the reader back to Denzin and Lincoln's definition of bricolage (Chapter 1, 1.2) as an approach to creating meaning through a multiplicity of perspectives, influences and procedures; a position supported by Harrison in an interview conducted with him at Bath Spa University (full

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<sup>47</sup> <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/c/keith-harrison/>

transcript available in Appendices p.161) I questioned him about his influences from outside of the ceramics arena acting as a clash of cultures:

I'm not sure I would agree entirely, I think I had a clashing in terms of wanting to go further, I would take a view outside of that actually and it was the musical analogy and something that would be completely other to an understanding of ceramics and studio pottery, particularly and yet I was in that scenario, I was surrounded by it and I kind of looked the other way for images so I kind of, there was a feeling in some respects, that practice gets enriched by looking elsewhere rather than looking only inwards to the ceramics community.

Whilst Twomey identifies her position as a post-studio ceramic artist, it should be stressed that Harrison formulates, plans and tests his performances/events within a studio environment; however it is in the movement from the studio to the site that the work is realised and completed, specifically the *'live'* or *'interactive'* elements of his practice. It is here that we can draw potential distinctions between the post-disciplinary and the post-studio artist, although it can be acknowledged that the two positions are explicitly linked.

The post-disciplinary artist moves across, navigates and looks towards areas of practice and discourses (disciplines) outside of their identified field, and includes media other than - in this instance - clay or ceramic (Veiteberg Chapter 2, 2.3.1). Whilst the post-studio artist embedded within the ceramics discourse (as identified by Twomey) works on location, or on-site where the work is produced and/or directed by the artist, the studio becomes a mobile platform or entity that is moved to a specific location in order for practice to be created and developed. This point is supported by a conversation with the artist Phoebe Cummings later in the text (4.6).

Allison Smith adds further insight into the complex interwoven series of positions that the post-disciplinary, post-studio practitioner encompasses in her essay *Expanded Battlefields: Craft as a Different Sort of Re-enactment'* (Ravetz, Kettle, Felcey, 2013):

I came of age in the era of so-called post-studio art (Jacob and Grabner 2010: 30-36) and the 'post-medium' condition (Krauss 2000), therefore like many artists of my generation, rather than committing to a primary medium, I negotiate which material and methods are best suited to the work at hand, knowing that even my choices and actions in this regard are citational and carry meaning. In my practice I move freely between variously skilled, deskilled and reskilled modes of production, which I employ consciously. I make many things with my own hands; I also hire fabricators and learn from artisans. Rather than accepting a singular idea of authorship, I believe that all art is collaborative but that we often blind ourselves to the many hands that go into artworks, from the harvesting and processing of materials before they even reach the art supply or hardware store, to the final product and its need for at least one viewer to recognise and complete it as art. Rather than embracing a singular definition of craft, I see myself often acting as a mediator between various ideological camps.

Whilst I would argue here that Twomey, Harrison and Cummings (myself included) are committed to a primary material - clay or ceramic - and embedded within its discourse as practicing artists, it is the employment of it, the introduction and combination of other materials/mediums and methods of work that facilitate the expansion of the discourse. This expansion includes the employment of other makers and fabricators through collaboration and which is expanded upon in an analysis of Twomey's work in 4.7. Of particular importance here is the concept of the artist acting as a mediator between dichotomies of practice, a position that is salient with my own practice situated in museums.

Many of these issues were brought into sharply into focus for the exhibition *Clay Rocks* at the Victoria and Albert Museum (2006), curated and commissioned by Alun Graves<sup>48</sup>; and in which Twomey and Harrison were exhibitors. A key issue is that much of their practice is not static in the sense of an autonomous object to be regarded or consumed within what can be termed the traditional role or placement of ceramic work. Both artists employ the ubiquity of the material and expectation of the 'ceramic work' as a point of disruption or resistance, within their frames of reference and as a procedure for pushing the boundaries of their practice and potentially confounding what audiences might expect to see upon visiting a 'ceramics exhibition'.

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<sup>48</sup> Alun Graves is the permanent curator of Ceramics and Glass at the V&A

## 4.2 Clay Rocks

*Clay Rocks* was a landmark in the development of a mode of ceramics practice. The siting of *Last Supper*, *London Orbital*, and *Trophy* in an international cultural centre like the V&A is tantamount to institutional validation and suggests that conceptual ceramics, once considered an eccentric minority interest, is becoming mainstream and gaining wider notice.

In her essay *Elastic/Expanding Contemporary Conceptual Ceramics*, Dr Jo Dahn (Buszek, 2011, p.157) highlights two key points: the importance of this exhibition through its position in a culturally significant institution; and what she defines as ‘*conceptual ceramics*’ is now an increasingly recognised and accepted genre of practice within ceramics discourse. Here I will focus on the working practices and processes employed by Twomey and Harrison in order to create the work for this exhibition; specifically the collaborative, negotiative and live aspects of their skill sets that have been developed in order to generate such work.

For the work *Trophy* (fig 10) Twomey collaborated with the Josiah Wedgwood factory, Stoke-on-Trent, to create 4000 ceramic birds made from Jasper Blue<sup>49</sup>. *Trophy* took a year and a half to complete, with an army of volunteers helping whilst Twomey was artist-in-residence at the V&A. By bringing these two historically respected institutions together as part of the creative process, these tiny birds back stamped with Wedgwood, the V&A and Twomey’s names, became coveted, desirable and valuable. Through an interactive experience, the ceramic birds were taken by the attending public from the exhibition space and the work was dispersed to exist in a wholly different format as a series of commodified souvenirs. The new owners were subsequently encouraged to send emails and pictures of the birds in their new environments. The use of websites, blogs and social media such as Twitter and Facebook are constituent elements of Twomey’s practice underpinning

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<sup>49</sup> Jasperware or Jasper Ware is type of pottery developed in by Wedgwood in the 1770’s, the most recognisable colour is that of pale blue which has become synonymous with Wedgwood.

the concept of the post-disciplinary condition. Twomey illuminates *Trophy* further,

So I made *Trophy*. And I went to Wedgwood and said, would you help me? In the sense of identity they didn't make any of the birds, they gave me the Jasper Blue, they were absolute experts, helped me to make the Jasper Blue works, a very problematic material. So by using the identity of Wedgwood, created an object that was worth stealing and in five hours 4,000 of these little blue birds were stolen from the V&A.



(fig 10)

Keith Harrison's two works: *Last Supper* (fig 12) and *M25 London Orbital* (fig 11), designed to be two live firing clay events, address similar practical and theoretical concerns when positioned in the institutional context.



(fig 11)





(fig 12)

Here Harrison (2008) highlights many of the issues encountered as his works were brought to fruition:

My overall plan was to fire two site-specific time-based ceramic works, entitled *Last Supper* and *M25 London Orbital* in front of an invited audience at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, over a period of three hours. This was the culmination of eighteen months' planning that began in March 2005 with a meeting between myself, Alun Graves, curator of the museum's ceramics collection, and Laurie Britton Newell and Ligaya Salazar of the Contemporary Programmes team.

He continues:

The V&A fire officers and electricians were involved at the many meetings to discuss how this could best be achieved, studying preliminary drawings, material tests and samples and making suggestions. As at the RCA, I had to establish a working partnership that struck a balance between maintaining the fundamental unpredictable nature of the project and eliminating undue risk to the public and the building itself. All of my installations involve health and safety concerns and require appropriate fire-fighting apparatus of various degrees of sophistication, which become part of the work.

Harrison draws no definitive line between the process of creating the work and the final outcome of it. Aspects of the mechanisms that enable the work to take place are absorbed directly into, and become a constituent part of, the

practice. Despite the seemingly chaotic nature of Twomey's and Harrison's projects there exists a rigorous and meticulously planned framework that permits the work to operate. This framework, as outlined by Harrison, can take up to two years to implement, for a project that may last for an evening at most. I discussed these issues during an interview with the artist:  
(Appendices, p161)

DC: I'm also quite interested in the way that you set up the system, because you talk about this a lot, and when I do things with film and socially engaged practice then the way that you set up the system within the timeframe, there is a complete lack of control in whatever the ...finished point is? Or maybe it never finishes. I'm interested in that idea of a lack of control, or maybe, not a reliance on serendipity but if we put it in simple terms, seeing what happens.

KH: I feel like there is a controlled point in that you are setting up a timeframe; initially, that was often music that would set that, quite often three minutes. So to some extent that set up the control within those parameters...

DC: So there's a framework and a kind of entropic...

KH: Yes, there's a switch on, and there is often a switch off and then there's a point in-between where I've got some scenarios and notions of what might happen within it even if they're not complete but I don't think it has ever become improvised and there is a structure in terms of how I am thinking in those time-based works, that something happens, that that happened and I don't exactly know quite where that will lead to or quite how effective or ineffective that might be.

One significant aspect highlighted here is that of the artist ceding control of aspects of their practice to third parties and exterior influences. Indeed, this lack of authority over the total process of creation is an important conceptual element within the practice itself (as identified by Twomey, above). Aspects of

chance are embraced and employed as a mechanism for the realisation and completion of the work; but this organic nature of practice exists within a rigorous framework of conceptual thought. And as indicated previously, a major part of their practice is spent in the planning and negotiating of projects that may overlap, be put on hold or suffer postponement - as in the case of Harrison<sup>50</sup> - due to issues beyond their control.

### 4.3 The Reflexive Institution

Through the exhibition *Clay Rocks*, the institution that comprises the V&A found its working practices', framework and very structure questioned through the engagement with artists whose practice presents issues and problems that it would not normally encounter. Twomey's and Harrison's impact on the museum, particularly the interactive aspects of their practice, where procedures need to be implemented in order for the work to function, must be considered. Curators and staff are required to step outside of their standard working remits in order to facilitate the projects they have commissioned, which can require specialist training. Therefore the artist's legacy must be assessed in terms of not only what is left behind as the artwork, however transient. This legacy has a life beyond the artist's creative involvement, and one must consider what is learned and experienced by not only the host institution that has opened itself up to new possibilities; but also by the audience, whose experience of ceramics as an event rather than an object is compressed into a few hours through the performative aspect of the works, and where their expectations are broadened in terms of the experience of ceramics within the context of the V&A and its collection. The artists also have their ambition supported and realised by a world-renowned institution; this is then subsequently received and disseminated throughout the discourse. All

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<sup>50</sup> Keith Harrison's final project for his residency at the V&A, a sound performance involving the Grindcore band Napalm Death was cancelled due to concerns that the loudness of the music could cause damage to the collections and the building itself (see bibliography). The project was subsequently realised at the De La Warr Pavilion in Bexhill-on-Sea (2013) and is available at <http://www.thevinylfactory.com/vinyl-factory-films/bustleholme-napalm-death-keith-harrison-video/>

these facets of experience and practice augment the discourse of ceramics that continually expands as a result of this assimilation.

The V&A instigates a reflexive process where an institution with its embedded methods of practice, existing collection and attendant narratives are questioned through the introduction of alternative modes of work. This self-examination, that is in part due to the embedded and collaborative nature of the project facilitated by its own staff, develops new knowledge, understanding and narratives, as the host organisation is engaged in unfamiliar procedures and territories with regards to its exhibition programming and working practices. Alun Graves (2012), the curator of *Clay Rocks* identifies and questions the contemporary dilemma faced by museums:

What are the appropriate models for engagement between museum and artist? Is the museum's primary role to reflect practice, or to support its development? Should the museum be a passive observer and recorder, or an active agent for change?

#### **4.4 The Craft of Negotiation**

As Alun Graves has highlighted (chapter 3, 3.2), by seeking to engage with artists whose work questions the very structure that creates the opportunity, the relationship between artist and host becomes bi-directional and dependant on each other. All three works - *Last Supper*, *London Orbital*, and *Trophy* - directly test the V&A's capabilities and responsibilities. Therefore, it should be emphasised that the institution and curators become active agents in the development of new practice. The institution extends its role within ceramics discourse, acting as a barometer or measure of what is prevalent within emergent practice. By enabling such work, the ceramics department within the V&A passes from a passive receptor/collector of objects (those it considers important enough to admit into its collection) and generator of knowledge through its own curatorial procedures, to an active agent and contributing mechanism that is instrumental in the development of contemporary practice. Such a development is achieved through profound

and often protracted negotiations (Butler 2007, forward by Declan McGonagle pp. 6-9); a skill that is fundamental to the post-disciplinary and post-studio artist, whose sole aim and concern is to realise their artistic vision, but through dealing with various restrictions, complications and health and safety issues assimilate the art of compromise into their practice.

#### **4.5 The Post-Studio Artist and the Site of Production**

As identified above, the context of the museum or site presents unique challenges to the artist that must be negotiated in order for the work to function. The work of Twomey and Harrison may be planned and developed in the studio or office, but its realisation and completion exists in the commissioned or selected space. During a recent presentation at University of South Wales, Cardiff Twomey comments that *'a lot of the works I make are not made in the studio'* and that many of the issues and problems associated with the work are solved onsite. By engaging in this creative process she can *'enjoy the place'* whilst *'being in dialogue'* with it. Twomey speaks candidly when she recounts that she *'likes working with people'* and being in situations where she is not an *'authoritative voice'*, but a *'lead voice'* and that she does not *'have to possess every skill'*.

The self directed studio-based practitioner - whose outputs consist of a significant body of autonomous fired ceramic objects created within the confines of the studio and whose skill and craft practice enables them to develop and control all aspects of production - contrasts markedly with the post-studio, post-disciplinary artist with their manufacturing values, creative input, point of creation, contextual placement and time-frame of creation. These alternative modes of thought and production are illustrated within the practices of Twomey and Harrison, and can be defined as the post-disciplinary and post-studio condition. With regards to my own practice: *Last Supper at the Glynn Vivian, 12 People 12 Objects* and *Teatime at the Museum* the following criteria apply in terms of post-disciplinary and post-studio practice:

- All practice has been developed outside of the studio on location either in the museum or the home, responding to the site and situation and as a result I have engaged with and have a new awareness of the surrounding discourses of the following:
  1. Museum Studies
  2. Material Culture Studies
  3. Curatorial Practice
  4. Museum Taxonomy
  5. Photography and Film
  
- As an artist/maker I have not engaged with the medium of clay or ceramic through the creation of this body of work. My role has been that of the director and producer arranging and overseeing the project from beginning to end product.
  
- I have engaged the public directly in order to develop practice, and through these methods of working I have developed and honed new skills such as collaboration, negotiation and dialogue with the museum, gallery and the participants.
  
- I have outsourced production, employing skilled people to film, photograph and edit the final works.
  
- All practice has been presented as aspects of ceramics discourse and subsequently tested where possible through exhibition, conference contribution and independent critical appraisal.

Twomey's acknowledgement that she does not need to possess '*every skill*' in order to create her practice echoes Glenn Adamson's and Jorunn Veiteberg's analysis of the contemporary practitioner (chapter 2, 2.3.1). Twomey explains that,

I only make one significant work a year.

And continues:

I might follow an idea or a concept for five or ten years - but it might go to sleep for five years until there's an opportunity to re-engage with some of those narratives.

The complexity of engaging with a multiplicity of procedures, processes, sites, contributors, modes and opportunities of production - that we are terming as bricolage - and that can be identified as the post-disciplinary, post studio condition, can restrict the artist to one or two works or events over the course of a year; rather than a systematic body of practice that exhibits a trajectory of development as a result of a linear time-frame of production. The recognition of a fluid time-frame, where concepts and practices are an interwoven procedure as opposed to a chronological series of works, is identified within my own creativity as a process of *reflection-in-action* (please see Chapter 1) where issues are continually rethought and revisited within a cyclical structure.

#### **4.6 Phoebe Cummings**

As a means of underlining the phenomenon of the post studio artist as indicated at the beginning of this chapter and to return to the 'site' as the context for production, I would like to introduce the artist Phoebe Cummings<sup>51</sup> (fig 13) whose contribution to a recent colloquium organised at the University of Sunderland by Andrew Livingstone, entitled *Site: Situating Ceramics*<sup>52</sup> highlighted her working practices, supporting many of the issues identified here.

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<sup>51</sup> Phoebe Cummings graduated from the Royal College of Art in 2005 (Ceramics and Glass) and was Ceramics Artist-in-Residence at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 2010. In 2011 she was the major award winner at The British Ceramics Biennial for her unfired clay sculptures

<sup>52</sup> *SITE: Situating Ceramics*, 9<sup>th</sup> May 2014 was an initiative as part of the Ceramic Arts Research Centre at University of Sunderland or CARCuos for short.



(fig 13)

The following is a series of questions and answers between Andrew Livingstone, Phoebe Cummings and myself:

**Andrew Livingstone.** And on another note I was thinking that actually your studio moves with you, because the space becomes the studio and I think that's there's a number of artists beginning to operate that way. That they don't have a fixed sense of a studio to go to when it becomes the location which you go to, how has that sort of worked in terms of influencing your practice.

**Phoebe Cummings.** I think initially it was more about the practical thing, it wasn't, well having a studio was not really a realistic possibility and I definitely found that I enjoyed working in that way. I think I quite like that each time is was like starting over and I think that sometimes if I was always going back to the same space that its quite easy to fall into a routine of doing the same things. I think that I quite like that challenge of having to think all over again, about how you might do something.

**AL.** So in terms of your practice are you reliant on residencies or people inviting you?



**PH.** Yeah I don't tend to make a lot, I quite often have quite big gaps between making things, it's not so often that I will just independently make something. I suppose that I feel that I need a place to do that, since the piece I made in Stoke<sup>53</sup> I haven't actually made anything, I've been planning things, I don't have that daily routine that might occur if I had a studio.

**David Cushway.** Do you find that your practice is as much taken up with the planning aspect, and sorting out a framework where you can produce work, you spoke about not actually not making work in the studio on a daily basis, so I am kind of interested in this idea that the studio practice has almost changed into a series of negotiations and plans and the relationship might be now with your computer and email?

**PH.** Yes, I think there is a lot of that particularly I think when things get scaled up as well it tends, well it can become a lot more plan orientated, but then I think maybe as well that's why I quite enjoy the responsibilities of planning to put yourself in a place where you then have that time and chance to experiment. So it tends to be more intensive bursts of activity.

It can be identified that all three artists examined here use clay or ceramic to varying degrees within their practice; that fundamental aspects of their work rely upon collaboration and negotiation; and exploit elements of risk or chance within a given time frame at or in a specific site of production. However in order to draw parallels with my own practice I will now examine two pieces of work by Clare Twomey – *Monument* (fig 14) and *Made in China* (fig 15) - that support a significant aspect of Glenn Adamson's definition of the post-disciplinary artist (Chapter 2, 2.3.1). The phenomenon of the artist-as-director is revealed as someone who effectively is not materially engaged in the process of production – as identified within *Made in China* - and who may

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<sup>53</sup> At the 2013 British Ceramics Biennial Phoebe was commissioned to make a large scale unfired clay installation, *After the Death of the Bear* (fig 13). Since its completion on September 28<sup>th</sup> and the presentation at Sunderland University eight months have elapsed.

acquire or address- as in *Monument* - 'a collection of oddments left over from human endeavour' (Chapter 1, 1.2).



(fig 14)



(fig 15)

#### **4.7 Clare Twomey - Monument and Made In China**

The work *Monument*, which was created for *Possibilities and Losses- Transitions in Clay* - an exhibition curated by Twomey and held at Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art in 2009 - consisted of a monumental pile of broken china artefacts collected and transported from Johnson Tiles waste tip in Stoke-on-Trent to the gallery where it was sited. Glenn Adamson

describes the work in a recent presentation given at The British Ceramics Biennial<sup>54</sup>

So what Clare did was insert herself into this cycle of production. She took a huge amount of material that was awaiting this kind of churn, this recreation and she brought it all by truck up to Middlesbrough and installed it very simply like the pile I showed you in Neil Brownsword's image. In doing so, what she was doing I think, was to create a visual and material analogue, a sort of depiction for us of what it looks like when an industry starts to consider its own demise, the prospect of its own demise, and she suggests actually through creativity of the sort that Johnson Tiles are themselves undertaking - this idea of recycling - perhaps this industry can rise almost like a phoenix from its own ashes, and certainly its something that Clare herself is very interested in.

He continues:

Twomey's piece *Monument* where - and if we look at a detail of this work - you can see how a single piece of intact ceramic which is perched on the edge of this great sculpture stands out from the undifferentiated mass of pieces that make up the bulk of the sculpture and here I think in this little tiny detail of this otherwise unremarkable picture one gets the sense that Twomey does intend for this sculpture - which in some ways is an image of trauma, an image of breakage, an image of loss - can also serve in some way as encouragement, can serve as a reminder that something like the ceramic industry here in the UK can persist - as I said before if one believes in it and believes in its integrity and ability to prevail under difficult circumstances.

The above descriptions by Adamson draw attention to the reflexive nature of *Monument* as a work; it presents the reality of the decline in industrial production in Britain back towards the viewer and the industry itself. But within this decline there lies the potential for new growth through diversity of practices and the potential of recycling. The appropriation and employment of existing objects, artefacts, leftovers and shards of ceramic that are collected and reconfigured by the artist to create new work, is a clear illustration of bricolage or the artist operating as bricoleur.

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<sup>54</sup> British Ceramics Biennial Conference, Stoke on Trent 17<sup>th</sup> -18<sup>th</sup> October, 2013, not published

Twomeys' relationship to industry is further explored in the work *Made in China*. Twomey describes this as 'a Google project', consisting of seventy-nine vases ordered from a manufacturer in Jingdezhen, China. Twomey directed the project from London; all correspondence with the manufacturer was via email and the vases were completed in three weeks and shipped. The finished vases stand alongside one decorated by the British company Royal Crown Derby which took as long to produce as the seventy-nine and cost substantially more.

One example of Twomey's work I find particularly compelling is this extraordinary series of red vases (*Made in China*) which she made through a combination of consultation with Chinese producers who made the vast majority of them and with a producer here in the UK who only did the decoration on one single vase, and as it turns out this decoration is so difficult to execute in this time-honoured artisanal practice of gilding that it actually cost more to decorate this one vase than to have all the other vases fabricated in China. And that is I think a project that shows you not only the subtlety of ceramic artists' engagement through other people's hands, other people's skills, other people's productive capacities, but also the way that an artist can expose the asymmetries that can exist between one arena of production - in this case China, and another arena of production here in Britain. And of course one thing that that project does is point out to you how that asymmetry results in the movement and passage of industry from one place to another. (ibid)

The work highlights discrepancies in the manufacturing power between East and West and explains why so much of ceramic manufacturing has been relocated and lost to the more competitive countries in the East. Exhibited at The British Ceramics Biennale in 2013 in the redundant Spode Factory, the positioning of the work is a poignant illustration of the stark reality of an industry that has declined to a point where only a fraction of the manufacturers still exist. A city that is synonymous with ceramics and renowned for its highly skilled workforce, *Made in China* performs a reflexive action within the city - Stoke-on-Trent; the site - the former Spode Factory; and the viewer.

The artist has a long established relationship with employing industry and industrial processes within her practice, clearly illustrating the negotiative processes that are a requirement when utilising industry, its unique skill set and knowledge. Underpinning all of Twomey's work is the relationship to skill and the craft of making. She questions within her practice the placement of skill through a series of 'distributed authorships'<sup>55</sup> and here I would refer back to the Glenn Adamson quotation in Chapter 2, 2.3.1 where he offers a definition of the post-disciplinary practitioner noting that a key aspect of their practice is their actions as 'producers'.

*This chapter has mapped through case studies the changing paradigms of ceramics practice, with Harrison's and Twomey's work retaining a nexus to clay as a material, and ceramics as a discipline that are both understood through their ubiquitous position in our culture and daily experience. A fundamental aspect of Cummings' practice is that she is engaged with the manipulation of clay, albeit unfired. However, what all three have in common is the temporal nature of the majority of their practice, one that eschews the fired ceramic object in favour of the temporal and the event. Their working practices offer an insight into how the post-studio and post-disciplinary practitioner operates in a contemporary field having embraced and exploited structures of production and communication that exist both within and outside of ceramics discourse. Once these expanded methods of practice are employed in an historical setting - such as the V&A - then Twomey and Harrison deliberately construct a tension through the coexistence of expectation, established paradigms of curation and the introduction of alternative methods of practice. The host institution as a method of rigorous self-examination and scrutiny welcomes the destabilisation of normative procedures and unique insights offered by the artist. The artist and the museum as a collaborative creative force expand the field of practice, offering a significant contribution to discourse.*

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<sup>55</sup> Twomey, C. (2013) *Distributed Authorships* presented at The British Ceramics Biennial, Stoke-on-Trent, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> October, not published

## Chapter 5: Last Supper at The Glynn Vivian

*Chapter 4 has identified the working practices of Clare Twomey, Keith Harrison and Phoebe Cummings as a method of illustrating the post-disciplinary, post-studio practitioner embedded within the ceramics discourse. It should be noted here that all three utilise the material of clay and ceramic within their practice and it remains a fundamental element in their outputs, whilst my own work has dispensed with the clay entirely in its physical presence.*

*Chapter 5 will examine my first major work Last Supper at the Glynn Vivian<sup>56</sup> in support of my doctoral submission. This analysis identifies the new knowledge and awareness that is developed and carried forward through the process of making and exhibition, where it is subsequently employed in the production of further new practice. As an artist in order to produce this work the following skills were utilised and expanded*

- My skills as a negotiator, firstly with the museum as a method of enabling the project by gaining their trust and sharing my artistic vision, secondly, as a point of contact and assurance for the participants, putting them at ease where they felt comfortable to contribute to the project.*
- This led to an intimate understanding of participatory practice as a genre of inclusivity that provides a valuable resource of untapped information and knowledge with regards to the ceramic object.*
- As a director, which required enthusiasm for the project, an ability to organise a film and recording crew, which in turn enabled myself as an artist the opportunity to learn techniques of how the filming and editing process works.*

*During the filming process a documentary photograph of the participants with their selected artefacts was created after each individual filming session. This*

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<sup>56</sup> [http://www.davidcushway.co.uk/2012/Last\\_Supper.html](http://www.davidcushway.co.uk/2012/Last_Supper.html)

*highlighted a potential method of practice that had not been anticipated, as I felt that the images were powerful and intimate expressions of relationships between the individuals and their chosen objects providing a valuable contrast to the filmed responses. I had the opportunity to exhibit the photographs as a body of work and I elected for the images to be produced in life size format, hung at head height in order to provide an ergonomical reference to the individual viewer. For the images to have a weight and material presence- similarly to the original ceramic artefact- the photographs were laminated onto aluminium so that the image cannot be separated from its materiality.*

## **5.1 Commission**

During the spring of 2011 I was contacted by the Glynn Vivian Museum and Art Gallery in Swansea and offered a film commission - to respond to the ceramics collection and its impending closure for refurbishment. This presented a unique opportunity to create a new work in unfamiliar territory, whilst examining my practice through the rigor of PhD research. I could now consider and expand my '*frame*' of ceramic practice (please see 1.7.2 Frames and Methods of Practice) to include a response to a museum and its collection, through the medium of film; a decision that was imposed as a condition of the commission.

It is prudent here to examine the background to my selection as an artist by the education curator Gordon Dalton<sup>57</sup>, who noted that,

David Cushway was an immediate choice due to his wide ranging practice that spanned film, objects, installation, performance, etc, with ceramics as an ongoing theme.

Dalton's considerations of my experience and pluralistic approach to ceramics are important in terms of the development of new work and my ability as an artist and researcher to test the boundaries (*frame*) of ceramic practice and discourse. A wealth of previous experience accumulated and learned through

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<sup>57</sup> <http://www.gordondalton.co.uk/index.htm>

more than twenty years education and practice, an intimate awareness of the material and making processes, developed in studio and non-studio sites, in collaborative projects, in filmmaking and photography provided me with a level of knowledge and expertise that was applied to a new set of issues and problems. An unfamiliar working environment - the museum and its collection - is encountered through the lens of previous experience in order to develop practice in new directions.

## 5.2 The Repertoire and Tacit Knowledge

Schön (1983, p.138) defines this professional experience as *repertoire*, and notes:

What I want to propose is this: The practitioner has built up a *repertoire* of examples, images, understandings, and actions.

He continues:

A practitioner's repertoire includes the whole of his experience insofar as it is accessible to him for understanding and action.

Through the development of new practice the artist's repertoire is expanded, new knowledge and skills are acquired which can then be carried forward and applied to the next project. This cumulative learning and experience can be drawn upon to enable problem-solving in new and challenging arenas. Schön develops the term *professional artistry* (1987, p.22):

I have used the term *professional artistry* to refer to the kinds of competence practitioners sometimes display in unique, uncertain, and conflicted situations of practice. Note, however that their artistry is a high-powered, esoteric variant of the more familiar sorts of competence all of us exhibit every day in countless acts of recognition, judgement, and skillful performance. What is striking about both kinds of competence is that they do not depend on our being able to describe what we know how to do or even to entertain in conscious thought the knowledge our actions reveal.



Schön draws a distinction between two different types of knowledge and action - that of the trained professional and that of the person who negotiates and solves daily obstacles and problems. He goes on to elucidate upon the writing of Michael Polanyi; and here it is important to consider not only the specialist knowledge of a professional artist accumulated through pedagogical development and training, but also the knowledge and experience we carry with us as human beings who use ceramics on a daily basis due to its ubiquitous nature. This knowledge has been identified as 'tacit' or 'personal' by Polanyi (Polanyi 1958, 1966) who subsequently proposed that tacit or personal knowledge is knowledge that is not easily articulated or shared, and often not realised that it is known by the host. It can be said to consist of emotional response, belief and ideals, and consequently be of huge benefit and value to others, and the key to acquiring it is through personal experience. Polanyi who trained originally as a chemist examined scientific or explicit knowledge and theorised that (ibid., p.vii):

... it exercises a destructive influence in biology, psychology and sociology, and falsifies our whole outlook far beyond the domain of science.

This was largely due, he contended, to its detachment, impersonality, burden of proof and pursuit of fact. These two forms of knowledge may seem diametrically opposed and their differences readily identifiable as Polanyi notes on the front cover of his book '*Personal Knowledge: A chemist and philosopher attempts to bridge the gap between fact, value, science and humanity*'. However I will demonstrate, using Schön's and Polanyi's paradigms that through practice the interaction and juxtaposition or '*bridging the gap*' between tacit and explicit knowledge brings forward new understanding and perception when embedded within an institutional structure, in this case that of a museum and its ceramic collection.

My tacit understanding of ceramics combined with my professional knowledge and training influenced decisions on how the work *Last Supper at The Glynn Vivian* was conceived and created, and how the museum and its collection was addressed through practice. Although I was familiar with the museum and

its collection, during the initial site visit it became clear that I was scrutinising the museum in an holistic way. The architecture, method of display ergo the curatorial practice , the ceramic objects and artefacts were all facets and potential elements that could be examined and would effect the reading of the finished work. The museum was approached and assessed through the critical lens of the artist's repertoire as a method of research. I was immersing myself within the institutional framework of the museum and becoming increasingly aware of the possibilities and limitations that this offered to the development of new work; a dichotomy described by Schön (ibid., p.336):

Wherever professionals operate within the context of an established bureaucracy, they are embedded in an organisational knowledge structure and a related network of institutional systems of control, authority, information, maintenance, and reward, all of which are tied to prevailing images of technical expertise.

The artist working and responding to the museum is an established and important arena of creative practice. However as a method of negotiating the structures identified by Schön above, I draw upon my repertoire of knowledge, a phenomenon outlined by Lillegerd Hansen in her essay '*Living in the Material world*<sup>58</sup>:

Artists and designers rely on a vast reservoir of expert skills, knowledge and techniques but they work in experimental, intuitive ways that embody tacit knowledge, a degree of unstructured "mess" and risk-taking. This means that they constantly engage with their practice through actions, experiments and intellectual processes, creating solutions appropriate to the specific situations of a challenge or problems

### **5.3 The Glynn Vivian Museum and Art Gallery**

The Glynn Vivian Museum and Art Gallery<sup>59</sup> is an imposing Grade 2 listed building designed in the Edwardian Baroque style by Glendinning Moxham.

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<sup>58</sup> [https://www.materialthinking.org/sites/default/files/papers/SMT\\_V9\\_06\\_Lillegerd\\_Hansen\\_0.pdf](https://www.materialthinking.org/sites/default/files/papers/SMT_V9_06_Lillegerd_Hansen_0.pdf)

<sup>59</sup> <http://www.friendsoftheglynnvivian.com/glynn-vivian-history.php>

Completed in 1911, it holds an international collection of ceramics and Swansea Porcelain (fig 16).



(fig 16)

The entire ceramics collection is housed behind glass in vitrines; this combined with its grand architecture was the first significant impression I received about the museum and its collection. I identified four key aspects for consideration:

1. The imposing architecture of the museum
2. The entire ceramics collection was behind glass - protected, removed and unavailable for any tactile inspection or experience
3. A great deal of the ceramics collection was domestic in nature and related directly to the area, known as Swansea Porcelain
4. There was little information available on the artefacts other than the traditional historical background, making techniques and dates

From these considerations I developed a framework with which to develop practice that would address the considerations identified above:

1. The architecture of the museum had reminded me of *The Last Supper* painting by Leonardo da Vinci, and therefore the filming would be

situated and framed to directly reference this in the finished film work. I would title the work *Last Supper at The Glynn Vivian* and the ceramics collection would be visible in the background. I felt it was important for the ceramics collection to act as a backdrop, firstly, for its method of display to be recorded for posterity, and secondly as a device to create tension within the film as the participants touched and handled their objects.

2. I requested that the gallery find me thirteen volunteers (again to reference da Vinci's *Last Supper*) who would like to choose a ceramic object from the collection and then talk about their selected artefact whilst their responses were filmed.
3. The participants would be allowed to handle their chosen objects whilst talking about them because I wished to address the 'touch taboo' within the museum and thus enabling the participants an intimate experience with their artefact, an experience that would normally be denied them.
4. There would be no direction or influence from me regarding who would take part, what they said about their chosen objects and the reasons for selecting them. This was implemented in order to reveal alternative narratives and observations about the objects and culturally embed the work within its location.

It must be acknowledged that the framing and the location in which the film was created was rigorously considered to specifically establish and site the work within the authentic museum context and its ceramic collection. As an action, this confirms the disruption of museum protocols, which is reinforced by the noise of the standard working day continuing in the background of the film- telephones ringing, doors banging someone whistling and general chatter. It is however the permission of touch that addresses a fundamental tenet of the museum structure, whose primary concerns are conservation and protection.

## 5.4 Method and Methodology

In line with a reflexive research methodology, considering my knowledge and experience of ceramics, it was fundamentally important that I did not influence, distort or prejudice the participants' responses in any way. Within a rigid framework established by myself in consultation with the museum curators, the practice was allowed to flourish, the uncertain and the unknown in terms of how the participants would react and respond to both the objects and to being filmed. All this was an essential aspect of the practice. It was intended and anticipated that their reactions and animation were to be a sharp contrast to the intellectually determined knowledge, structure and taxonomy of the museum.

This has been a characteristic within my practice that can be traced back to and recognised in previous works; *Room*, *Snowdon*, *Earth*, *Sublimation and Fragments* all rely on an organic, entropic procedure that is built into the process of the works realisation. Whilst the four works here are dependant on the reaction of clay/ceramic as a material to reveal its identity, *Last Supper at The Glynn Vivian* relies on the responses and reactions of the participants for its completion. If we consider here that clay, photography, painting and sculpture have a material form and presence, then we can reflect that people being organised as a cohesive unit in order to create practice have a substantial form also. With regards to *Last Supper at the Glynn Vivian* and *12 People 12 Objects* I have substituted clay for people as a mass to be employed and the finished product of that manipulation is a film or series of photographs. This body of creative practice illustrates the development of my aims to provide a model of engagement with the ceramic object and museum collection; one that critiques museum and curatorial practice, whilst fulfilling the criteria of new models of practice developed within the post-disciplinary, post-studio arena where clay and ceramic have no physical presence.

This key consideration links to the practices of Clare Twomey and Keith Harrison as identified in Chapter 4. Their work as discussed in *Clay Rocks* is not a finished and presented object; it has a recognisable beginning and end

point, but between these limits, the work is in a state of fluidity. Phoebe Cummings' practice, by virtue of its unfired nature, is in a constant condition of flux. As it dries it is subjected to external environmental factors that influence the work. In this sense the practices of Twomey, Harrison and Cummings are in a constant dialogue with their surroundings. Dialogue has a similar resonance with the placement of newly created objects or work into existing collections; Livingstone, Stair, De Waal, Brown and Brownsword employ this approach in order to develop narratives and commentary between the ancient and the contemporary object, practice and site and the artist and the museum, resulting in an on-going exchange. This actuality is explored through my own exhibition of earlier practice – *Fragments* - at the National Museum of Wales, where I interview Andrew Renton and Nick Thornton on their curatorial decision as an aspect of research that foregrounds *Teatime at the Museum* (see Chapter 7).

## 5.5 The Touch Taboo

Helen J Chatterjee (2008) provides an in-depth analysis of the issue of touch within museums and institutions as editor of *Touch in Museums- Policy and Practice in Object Handling*; a collection of essays and studies from projects situated across Europe in leading institutions. She notes in her introduction (p.1):

This book sets out a framework for understanding the role of object handling for learning, enjoyment and health. It represents an extension of some of the themes explored in Pye's volume (2008) and provides new research on, for example, the emotions of touch, innovative touch technologies including haptic devices, and the role of touch in heritage as a social intervention tool.

And continues (p.2):

This 'emotional touch' is crucially important within heritage since it affords strong support for the value of physical interaction with objects, rather than just visual. The scientific evidence also makes clear and strong links between the various senses (vision, touch, smell, hearing, taste), encouraging a multisensory approach to museum access.

Chatterjee highlights above the importance of alternative modes of access with regards to objects located within museum collections, enabling a broader range of understanding that is not overly reliant on the singular visual sense. As identified in Chapter 3, 3.1 the museum is recognising that it is crucial that they implement procedures that can take account of, but also benefit from, their changing position within contemporary culture. This realisation is signalled by the permission from the Glynn Vivian Museum and Art Gallery to commission and support the film *Last Supper at The Glynn Vivian*. Devorak Romanek and Bernadette Lynch writing in the conclusion of Chatterjee's book (ibid., 2013) consolidate these central concerns in the following three quotations (p.276)

Changes in perspective regarding the senses have evolved to such an extent that in museums to day, despite the traditional touch taboos, it is sometimes taken for granted, in theory if not in practice, that touch is a 'good thing'. Having arrived at this notion, the question was raised as to why this is so? Addressing this, participants often returned to the emotional experience that comes with engaging with an object through the sense of touch. When a person has the opportunity to handle an object, they can have the feeling that the object is a part of themselves or, conversely, that they are part of the object-an experience of intimacy that would likely be denied were the object placed behind glass out of reach.

The intimate experience that is afforded by touch is explicitly demonstrated within the film, and sheer joy and excitement of the experience is communicated, not only within the dialogue of the participants but through their actions and reactions to their selected objects. This invigorating emotional display reanimates the objects and thus engages the museum's audience in new and significant ways; a process that develops new knowledge and experience, not only in terms of the participant, but also within the institution itself, as highlighted in the following (ibid., p.280):

However, it was often noted that the benefits to the museum are often ignored by supposing that those audiences with which the

museum works in these programmes are the sole beneficiaries of this action, not recognising that this can be a mutually beneficial experience, with the museum its self learning a great deal from these encounters.

And they continue (ibid., p.284):

Touch is related to experiencing the world in its immediacy, not something we usually associate with museums. Touch therefore opens up the museum as an institution, to begin to engage more fully with the lived experience in the world around it, while delivering a critically important social function.

## 5.6 The Participants

The film begins with Olive (fig 17) who has chosen a Swansea Pottery Cow Creamer because she '*loves Swansea China*' and '*collects some of it*'. She has one like it at home that was given to her and her husband as a twenty-fifth wedding anniversary present. Olive immediately connects the cow creamer to her family and Swansea as a place that she has lived in all her life. Therefore within the first minute of the film we are witnessing the embedded nature of the object within the immediate locale, a recurring theme throughout the film. One of the overriding reasons she selected the object is because it is '*ordinary, but it's beautiful*' - it is very important to her that the objects were used. Olive then goes on to elaborate about how the object would function, making a critique of it from the unique perspective of the user; noting that the spout would probably get '*clogged up*'. Olive's contribution to the project lasted just under 3 minutes, yet in that time through her anecdotal conversation a wealth of information, joy and love has been transmitted. As more testimonies are revealed, the object appears to act as a trace, a repository of memory, an inherited memorial of lives lived and experiences had, linking the past to the present through the discursive and conversational filmed responses.





(Fig 17)

(fig 18)

(fig 19)

This is repeated in the second contribution from Sandra, (fig 18) who selected her 'Cupid' because *'it has a special place in her heart'*. Similarly to Olive and the third contribution from Francis, (fig 19) the objects were chosen because of a connection to their parents and grandparents through memory, objects that have been handed down as heirlooms. It is interesting to note that she is *'is afraid to touch it'* as she was not allowed to do so as a child. Through her experience of owning one and using it *'to drink tea out of'* it she is aware of the fragility of the bone china. She links the cup and saucer to the ritual activity of important occasions *'like christenings'* where the best china is used, reminding her of *'tea parties, garden parties where you would have strawberries and cream'*.

In contrast to the first three contributions Josette (fig 20) describes in detail the decoration process of the Worcester Ware pot she has chosen, *'because of the colour'*. This is the first example of an explanation of technique in relation to the object. She admires the skill and expertise that goes into creating the object and *'would love to see it in the factory... to see how it's done'*. Josette's description of the method of decoration is something we would routinely expect to see within the museum as a system of identification. Caroline A Jones in her essay *The Painting in the Attic* (Turkle, 2007, p.240) succinctly highlights the limitations in the application of technical expertise:

Interpretation always belongs to its present, yet mere technical explanations are never quite adequate to the lived complexities of the past.

The first four contributions perfectly illustrate the inability of a technical analysis to understand or extrapolate the richness of lived experiences and relationships. Sherry Turkle expands this point further in her introduction *The things that matter* (Turkle, p.5)

We find it familiar to consider objects as useful or aesthetic, as necessities or vain indulgences. We are on less familiar ground when we consider objects as companions to our emotional lives or as provocations to thought. The notion of evocative objects brings together these two less familiar ideas, underscoring the inseparability of thought and feeling in our relationship to thing. We think with the objects we love; we love the objects we think with.

It is significant that all four above use the word 'love' when speaking about their selected objects. Sian (fig 21) has a similar reaction to a ceramic object made by her former tutor; she is genuinely excited to see contemporary work in the museum and to have the opportunity to 'see *the back of it*' (the object). This observation is significant in terms of the display of the ceramics collection at the Glynn Vivian in that nothing is seen in the round. All the display cases, as pictured in the film, are set against walls, with the objects are only visible from one viewpoint.



(fig 20)

(fig 21)

(fig 22)

Ann (fig 22) who selected a jug because the '*domestic object appeals*' to her draws our attention to another aspect of display, when she remarks of the functional objects that:

'I always felt, well, they're behind glass now and they're in a cabinet and I sort of wondered have they always spent their life in a cabinet and not been used were they there just for show'

She wonders about the use of the objects and the stories behind them, these simple domestic objects. She questions the history of her chosen jug - what was its use, what was poured in and out of it? She feels that the object has '*so many stories*' that she would like to find out more, to '*try and unlock those stories*', '*who did it belong to?*' '*where it came from?*' She feels like the project has '*opened a door for me*' and finally that she would like to do some '*further research*'. Sian, in an apologetic manner, concedes that she '*doesn't know much about it at all*', and this admission is reflected in the responses from Olive, Francis and Josette who make similar observations. However their testimonies relating to their objects are perfect examples of aspects of tacit understanding or knowledge; knowledge that we do not know we retain or knowledge that we do not deem important. The participants are displaying and articulating knowledge as a result of individual practical experience that is linked to domestic use. It is interesting to note here that Josette has a small collection of objects at home that she considers are '*nothing academically interesting*'.

The next participant Barry (fig 23) introduces himself as an art historian and artist and situates his object within art history by referencing French cave painting and Picasso as examples. Similarly to Sian, he selects an object by a contemporary maker (Mary Wells) that he has a direct knowledge of and relationship with. He embeds the work within Wales though his description of the artist's working practice and her relationship to the countryside where she lives. This locational aspect is further examined by Tim (fig 24) an artist based in Swansea, who selected his object because he is '*attracted to things that are about people*'. His figurative piece '*symbolises what a port town is all about*' and describes the museum in a port town as '*a window on the world*'.

He describes the '*small piece of domestic cream-ware*' as '*a television of its time*' thus highlighting the mixing of cultures and people as indicative of Swansea as a place and centre for trade and exchange.



(fig 23)

(fig 24)

(fig 25)

Sandra's (fig 25) selection of a jug that she is not sure '*where it was made*', maybe Swansea or Cornwall, draws relationships with a wider context of trade outside of Swansea and Wales, specifically with traditional industries of fish, tin and copper situated in Cornwall. Sandra places an emphasis on and interest in people, community, families and relationships which is why she chose a '*common piece*' that reflects this. She goes on to imagine a romantic scene of the use of the jug, whilst performing its action for the camera, theorising that it might once have contained '*rum, beer, cream*' and that a fisherman returning from a long journey may have used it. The jug is being imbued with projected and imagined experience, and becomes a document of activity, shared experiences and life lived. M. Anna Fariello describes this process in her essay "'Reading" the Language of Objects' (Fariello, Owen, 2005, p.149)

From the object as document, we may learn about inspiration, human creativity, and technological experimentation. As a metaphor, the object yields insight into the human condition. The best works capture the motivations of an individual life and, extending specific circumstances and situations, translate these into more universal language to reveal a collective human story. As ritual, a work operates within the realm of day-to-day experience, enriching perception by diverse experiential means: visual, haptic, intellectual, sensual,

emotional and kinaesthetic. As part of daily life, the ritual object invites the viewer or holder to participate in a second creative act, thereby elevating ordinary experience to the extraordinary

As Fariello describes and Sandra demonstrates the jug becomes a universal metaphor for our cultural experiences and the human condition. Another participant, Lynne (fig 26) has chosen a Welsh Ribbon Plate, reaffirming an overriding theme within the film - of domestic objects selected because they relate to people. As she relates *'the fine porcelain does not interest as much, it's the pottery because it's kind of related to people'*. She goes on to describe how the object functions as an item of display, imagining a romantic scene of a *'candle flickering on the glaze'*, situated in the domestic realm, whilst relating the decoration of a heron to her own experience of travelling from Kidwelly to Swansea and seeing the birds standing on the river bank.



(fig 26)



(fig 27)

The relationship of the landscape, the country (Wales) and the city (Swansea) within which the museum is situated is an important motivation for many of the participants and reflected in their selections. An awareness and pride in their cultural identity informs their choices and roots the film in its locale. Contrastingly in Vanessa's (fig 27) selection of the ceramic figure of 'Captain Cat', she contextualises the object through her historical knowledge of Dylan Thomas and his relationship to Swansea, but it is the emotive quality of the object that she finds compelling.

Esther (fig 28) conversely selects the planter because of its historical significance to her, displaying an intimate knowledge of pottery (she is a potter herself) as she examines and demonstrates with her hands the techniques of construction and decoration of the Eweney Pottery<sup>60</sup> planter. We are given an intimate history lesson from the unique perspective of someone who is engaged with the material of clay and the making process. The last participant is Peter David (fig 29) 'who has been involved with the ceramics collection at the Glynn Vivian since 1988'. Here we are provided with a curator's insight into a ceramic figurative scene entitled *The Tempestuous Lovers* by Franz Anton Bustelli. Peter provides an in-depth description and display of information, concisely articulated, relating the historical object to the present: 'this subject is actually timeless, it goes from pre-history right up the present day'. However it is clear from the film that this is not a dry academic exercise in technique, data and historicism that we may be accustomed to; the pride, passion and joy with which Peter (and Esther) impart their considerable knowledge and experience allows for a richer understanding of their objects, and their animated explanations enliven and reanimate the artefacts from a position of regular acquaintance. As the film concludes, the camera pans from left to right and unscripted by me, the thirteen participants can be seen discussing their objects and the collection at large in an excited and animated cacophony of chatter.



(fig 28)



(fig 29)

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<sup>60</sup> <http://www.ewennypottery.com/index.html>

The working methods implemented in the production of *Last Supper at the Glynn Vivian* evidences the practical outcomes in support of my aims and research questions. Situated outside of the studio and located within the museum, the work interprets elements of the ceramics collection afforded through the taboo of touch and addresses the removed, conserved and protected object contingent on museum and curatorial practice. The resultant film work bears no physical evidence of clay or ceramic, yet is clearly related to ceramics through its consideration and assessment of the ceramic object via a series of engaging stories and anecdotes by the participants. Subsequently the work is situated within ceramics discourse through its inclusion in exhibitions and critical debate, evidencing its contribution to the field of practice.

Through the dialogic content, knowledge is generated from the position of personal experience, or '*tacit knowledge*' as identified above in section 5.2. This is brought to bear on the object and museum practice, offering an alternative to the curatorial and academic method. In this sense *Last Supper at the Glynn Vivian* offers an alternative model of practice for the illumination of knowledge in relation to the ceramic object, a model that is aligned to Material Culture Studies, a discourse that is examined in the next Chapter and through the development of *12 People 12 Objects*. The relevance of the work to the discourse of Museum Studies is demonstrated in the next section of this chapter through its engagement with issues identified by Susan Pearce.

## 5.7 The Animated Object

Professor Susan Pearce<sup>61</sup> is widely acknowledged as a leading academic voice within the discourse of museum studies and material culture. In her chapter *Objects in Action* (Pearce, 1992, p.210) she notes that:

The elucidations of meaning in objects is, as we have seen, an important part of the curator's task, and this is done from a range of standpoints. But these stances share one major limitation: they do not

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<sup>61</sup> <http://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/museumstudies/people/professor-Emeritus-susan-pearce>  
Please see bibliography for further reading

help us to understand better the relationship between objects and each of us as individuals, or the ways in which objects can change their meanings as different people start to see them differently. Yet we know that life is never static, but in a continuous flux of change and process in which the contexts described by analysis are always in a state of becoming, and for which such analysis can always offer us a series of Box Brownie snaps.

The above quotation highlights the reality of the static ceramics collection with regards to the Glynn Vivian Museum and Art Gallery and the National Museum of Wales. The specific role of the curator is addressed through practice in Chapter 7 within the work *Teatime at the Museum*. However here I would like to draw attention to how *Last Supper at the Glynn Vivian* has implemented a model through practice that not only can be applied to illuminate the relationships between the individual and the object as a method of elucidating meaning, but also exposes the stasis that afflicts the ceramic object through aspects of museum practice.

As demonstrated by the film we can consider the object to be an active participant, or take on an active role as a producer and originator of meaning. The objects are re-contextualised within their country and city of origin, within their description of use and manufacture and perhaps most importantly their relationship to the individual(s) through the description of life experiences afforded by the participants. Pearce defines this phenomenon as follows (ibid., p.211):

It is therefore, the business of this chapter to bring the individual back to his rightful place in the frame, since only through him can any social experience actually take place, in a museum gallery or elsewhere.

She continues:

Objects are therefore actors in the story, not just the reflection of action, and themselves have a role in creating that change which we call the process of history. Here then, we might say that we are considering not the history of objects, but how objects make history. We might put that another way, and say that we are concerned with some important aspects of



communication, of how people communicate with objects and with each other.

In terms of *Last Supper at the Glynn Vivian* the objects take on a significant role in the production of expanded meanings within their new cultural identity. For a fleeting moment, that paradoxically can be forever replayed, through the medium of film, the objects cease to be contingent on the museum's structure as a way of having meaning attributed to them. Instead a broader, richer, more rounded and three-dimensional social history emerges from the reasoning, logic, stories and anecdotes of the participant and their selections. The objects are reanimated, reimagined, and centrally important, as a means to trigger or define personal memories and experiences. As Susan Pearce (Pearce, 1994, p.1) argues:

It is, therefore, incumbent upon the investigator to try to find out ways in which, first, the social meanings of individual objects can be unravelled: second the significance of the museum as a cultural institution can be understood: and third the processes through which objects become component parts of collections, and collections themselves acquire collective significance, can be appreciated.

If we consider the '*investigator*', as identified by Pearce above as the artist then practice, as demonstrated here, has an important and meaningful role to fulfil in the contemporary museum and the discourse of museum studies.

*Last Supper at the Glynn Vivian* renders explicit, through practice, the value of access to collections and objects that is not predicated purely by the visual experience. It presents a flexible model of engagement where objects can be categorically connected to the human experience highlighting their important social role. As will become clear in the next chapter with an analysis of *12 People 12 Objects* this model can be adapted and utilised outside of the museum structure.

*Last Supper at the Glynn Vivian as a model of practice fulfils the criteria identified by academics such as Susan Pearce, Helen J Chatterjee and M Anna Fariello of a need to expand the mechanisms for developing understanding and knowledge in relation to museum practice. Two overriding*

*themes have emerged through my practice and research; firstly, the relationship of the individual to the object as a way of extrapolating meaning and secondly, the contrasting museum practice that the curator implements on behalf of the institution. It considers previous knowledge as a 'repertoire', of 'tacit' experience (as defined by Schön and Polanyi) that is carried forward by the artist and the public into new situations that can be channelled to develop innovative and alternative understanding. This awareness is achieved through the experience of touch and interaction with the ceramic object; and the subsequent recording of anecdote, opinion and story develops new narratives that are culturally embedded within the location of the city of Swansea. This performs the action of, and analyses how, institutional knowledge and practices can be examined and subsequently challenged through artists practice with public participation. With regards to the expanded field of ceramics and the post-studio, post-disciplinary condition the Last Supper at the Glynn Vivian demonstrates firstly, the mobility of the artist operating and responding to the location and its unique challenges as a method of creating new work. And secondly that the medium of film can be employed and embedded within ceramics discourse, through its subject matter retaining a nexus to the discipline and material of clay.*

## Chapter 6: 12 People 12 Objects

*Last Supper at the Glynn Vivian marked a significant development in my creative practice. As indicated previously, I had elected to photograph the participants with their selected objects to create a series of portrait stills from the film; what began as an aside or modest experiment, developed upon reflection (Schön, reflection-in-action, Chapter 1 1.6) as a procedure with which to create the second major work 12 People 12 Objects. This expanded my field of practice from film - the moving image - to photography - the static image.*

*Chapter 6 will demonstrate how the model developed for Last Supper at the Glynn Vivian can be adapted to sites outside of the museum, specifically within the home.*

- As an artist this enabled me to adapt and test my prior experience developed for the first project Last Supper at The Glyn Vivian. And to further explore photography as a medium in relation to ceramics discourse whilst continuing to test its position within it.*
- I removed the influence of the museum and its curatorial decision making by producing the work within people's homes. By utilising their own personal artefacts this allowed me to accumulate information and knowledge- generated through dialogue- that was not subject to institutional bias.*
- This led to an intimate portrayal of peoples relationships to cherished objects articulated through a combination of image and text.*

*In terms of format the photographs were reproduced as life size images laminated onto aluminium and hung at head height, exploiting the success of the previous work Last Supper at The Glyn Vivian. The text was made available as a series of printed sheets, and on reflection this will be changed, as the subsequent exhibition highlighted the crucial importance of the relationship of the dialogue to the image. So, for future exhibition the text will*

*be given equal countenance with the image, rendered in the same scale; laminated onto aluminium and exhibited alongside the photograph. The voice of the participant will therefore be made explicit through practice where text and photograph can be considered as an object.*

## 6.1 Material Culture

As a method of contextualising this practice, the electronic journal '*Studies in Material Thinking*'<sup>62</sup> has proved invaluable as a resource that provides regular access to current debates and thinking from the perspective of artists, designers and writers. An excellent insight to the examination of how material culture has been developed as a discourse is provided by Daniel Miller<sup>63</sup> in his essay '*Things ain't what they used to be*' (Pearce, 1994, pp.13-18)

By the study of material culture, I mean simply the study of human social and environmental relationships through evidence of people's construction of their material world.

As Miller identifies the role of material culture studies above, it is important to note that within the essay he draws attention to the establishment of academic and scientific analysis with regards to the object(s) at the expense of a wider understanding of the people and their relationships to the objects they produced; a phenomenon that has grown out of the discipline of archaeology, where the object was studied in and of itself. Christopher Tilley's essay '*Interpreting Material Culture*' (Pearce, 1994, pp.67-75) supports this viewpoint and provides a useful analysis of the influence of the archaeological study of objects. He maintains that (ibid., p.70):

In order to understand material culture we have to think in terms that go entirely beyond it, to go beneath the surface appearances to an underlying reality. This means that we are thinking in terms of relationships between things, rather than simply in terms of the things themselves

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<sup>62</sup> <https://www.materialthinking.org>

<sup>63</sup> [http://www.ucl.ac.uk/anthropology/people/academic\\_staff/d\\_miller](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/anthropology/people/academic_staff/d_miller)

Given that the study of artefacts is predominately located within museums and their collections, the influence of archaeology can still be seen today through curatorial practice. As Professor of Material Culture at University College London, Miller has made significant contributions to the development and study of social anthropology and material culture. Of particular relevance to *12 People 12 Objects* are his texts '*Materiality*', (2005), '*The Comfort of Things*' (2009) and '*Stuff*' (2010). As Miller notes (ibid., p.153):

The study of material culture appears a rather circuitous route to understanding people and relationships, but we may arrive more swiftly at our destination, and reach much further, than many more tempting and more direct paths.

## 6.2 12 People 12 Objects

As a method of constantly testing my creative outputs and pushing the boundaries of what is considered to be ceramics practice through the development of work that has no physical clay or ceramic component, I exhibited the photographic stills from *Last Supper at The Glynn Vivian* in *Kith and Kin: New Glass and Ceramics* (2011-12) at the National Glass Centre in Sunderland. This exhibition of glass and ceramics identified relationships between the two distinct practical disciplines, exploring their shared traditions and histories. The exhibition was conceived in two parts and for the sequel *Kith and Kin: New Glass and Ceramics (part 2)*<sup>64</sup> I was commissioned to develop a new work, which became *12 People 12 Objects*. This was an opportunity to explore further the relationships between the individual and the object, as outlined above, and to develop my practice through the medium of photography, exploring its possibilities in relationship to ceramics discourse. Employing and adjusting the framework/model I had developed for *Last Supper at the Glynn Vivian* I identified the following issues for consideration:

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<sup>64</sup> <http://www.sunderland.ac.uk/newsevents/news/news/index.php?nid=1527>

1. To remove the museum and curator as a sphere of influence and power enabling an examination of the importance of the ceramic object to the individual situated within their own home.
2. To utilise photography as a development of my practice in relation to ceramics discourse, reinforcing the authenticity of the post-disciplinary practitioner.
3. To continue to develop work as a post-studio practitioner, responding to the unique situation and location in line with the research methodology of bricolage (Chapter 1 1.2), whilst building my repertoire as identified by Schön (Chapter 5 5.2).

The following strategy was implemented to investigate these considerations:

1. I requested that the gallery find twelve volunteers situated within the local area who would allow me to photograph them whilst they spoke about a ceramic object that was important and connected to them in some way
2. The project would be situated within their homes and the participants would be required to tell the '*story*' or '*history*' of the object and their reason for selecting it, which would then be recorded
3. There would be no direct influence from me with regards to the selection of the object or the ensuing dialogue

### **6.3 The Participants**

The project begins with Janet Ross (fig 30) and her small china dog that was bought for her by her mother when she was nine or ten, some 46 years previously. Janet relates the story of the day spent with her mother and sister as she holds the object. She has a clear and distinct memory of how she came to own it, with an emphasis on the underlying importance of the object

being the connection to her mother, as she says: *'that my mum was there at the time and she wanted me to have it'*. The importance of relationships is reflected in Sarah Cook's and Andy Slater's (fig 31) choice, a couple who had bought three egg bowls together from TK Max, a discount high street store. They were purchased so that they could use them together (the third is a spare in case one gets broken) - *'we can have dinner together'*. The bowls perform two important functions; firstly, as a memory of time spent together on a shopping trip; and secondly, as functional objects that bring them both together through dining. Here the objects are influencing their behaviour, a key issue in terms of how we understand material culture as outlined by Daniel Miller (2010, p.42):

Already we are withdrawing from a comfortable idea that we start with people who make things which represent them or others. It is now clear that in material culture we are concerned at least as much with how things make people as the other way round.

Here Miller is articulating a change in focus in the study of objects (material culture) to one that places the importance of our relationships to them and to others, rather than an academic study of the residue of production; and that from this production societies and people can be defined, through constructed narratives within collections situated within museums.



(fig 30)



(fig 31)



(fig 32)

To reinforce the influence of the object on behaviour, Susan Ratliff's (fig 32) contribution, a *'lustre jug that belonged to my mum'*, remarks clearly that her mother took the time to explain the technique of the surface decoration and what lustre meant. She retains *'a very strong vivid memory'* of this, which is why she has kept the jug although she goes on to say: *'there are certain pieces I've got upstairs in the attic with probably greater value historically, but to me this is quite an emotional piece'*. Susan's experience with her mother and the lustre jug has influenced her decision to keep it and use it as an associative device, not only in connection with her mother, but also as a teaching aid for her own children. She explains:

So I think that's why its important because, to me, although my mum didn't have the education, she took time out, especially now that I am a parent, and realised the importance of taking time and sharing, teaching and explaining and it doesn't always have to happen in school.

Identified here are important experiences influencing future behaviour, experiences that are bound up with, and to, the object. The object acts as a memory locator and repository of shared knowledge that can be passed down through generations; an attribute reflected in Kevin Petrie's (fig 33) choice of his *'nan's chicken teapot'*.



(fig 33)

Similarly to Janet and Susan, Kevin directly relates his choice of object to an absent person, his grandmother. He recalls being with her, and the



conversations that they had; and perhaps most significantly out of all four contributions thus far, he conveys a sense of a specific time and place:

I suppose I always think with ceramics, you know, I think about or look at this object and it reminds me of a room with a china cabinet, with the teapot up on top, and then of course you start to remember stories from that room

The objects presented and described above are acting as conductors for acts of reminiscence. Bernie Arigho in his essay '*Getting a Handle on the Past: The Use of Objects in Reminiscence Work*' (Chatterjee, 2008, pp.205-212) maintains that (ibid., 2005):

To reminisce is more than the ability to remember facts and figures and long lists of things. To reminisce is to recall, retrieve and recollect remembered experiences from one's life: the stories of life that help us to learn how to live and be, how to relate to the world, how to conduct oneself in life, and how to feel about life.

The above quotation makes an important point that is reflected in the works *Last Supper at the Glynn Vivian* and *12 People 12 Objects*. Both employ strategies that are focused on our relationships to artefacts rather than a list of academic facts; knowledge and understanding of the object is elucidated, as a wider frame of reference that is considered in relation to the human experience. As Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (2000, p.109) notes:

Personal experiences can be encoded in artefacts, so that the object represents the memory, the significance and the emotional power of those experiences. Objects can therefore be used to express a sense of self and a feeling of cultural affiliation

The memories of important and emotionally significant events can be celebrated by the acquisition of an object, as demonstrated by Judy Sunley's (fig 34) purchase of a ceramic racehorse that she has named '*See the Stars*' after an actual horse. The object reminds her of '*the wonderful racing season that I enjoyed watching so much*'. Here a memory is being celebrated, consolidated and projected onto the object. In a similar vein Sandra Thomas' (fig 35) decision to buy a Sunderland lustre mug to replace the one she

remembers her grandparents owning when she was a child performs a triple role: it marks a point in time; fulfils an absence of some 50 years; and recalls her family members who lived in Sunderland.



(fig 34)

(fig 35)

As seen within *Last Supper at the Glynn Vivian* and *12 People 12 Objects*, a fundamental aspect of the work is the employment of the object as a device for recollection of both an event and specific people. This recurring theme continues with Denis Jobling's Sumari teapot (fig 36) that once belonged to his wife's mother; and Rob Winter's student pot (fig 37). Both men relate personal histories that are shared through the object, and perhaps more significantly they both speak of 'love'. As Denis says:

I love the colouring, the colourings still really remained the same, its very intricate, its very delicate actually and it shows you that she must have at least liked or loved her son-in-law.

And for Rob 'who fell back in love' with pottery after a 10-15 year absence, the pot acts as a distillation of a time spent together with one of his former students in a shared experience of kiln building, epitomising all that he loves about pottery. Colin Rennie talks of his growing interest and fondness in a USSR teapot (fig 38) seen on a daily basis over a period of three months on his walk to college. He would spend hours looking at it and eventually after

making personal sacrifices bought it. As he says: *'I think I love it because I've never seen anything like it'*.

These accounts illustrate the significance of objects in the lives of the participants, and the emotional investment made by their owners. An object can be treasured as an act of remembrance, love and affection between



(fig 36)

(fig 37)

(fig 38)

people that are living or dead, and in this sense resonates with meaning and importance. Daniel Miller theorises our need to maintain relationships with objects through case studies in his book *'The Comfort of Things'* (2008, p.91):

It is our thesis - that people sediment possessions, lay them down as foundations, material walls mortared with memory, strong supports that come into their own when times are difficult and the people who laid them down face experiences of loss. Having banked their possessions in the vaults of internal memory and external possession, they cash them in at times of need, at times of loss.

Millers' hypothesis of the role of the object, and our inherent need for developing sustained relationships with them is supported by a series of interviews through which he presents convincing evidence of this point.

Contrastingly in Rebecca Elsey's<sup>65</sup> (fig 39) contribution, we encounter the objective eye of the collector from an informed knowledge of her subject matter. She connects her passion for collecting to her brother and mother who also collected: *'you could say it runs in our genes'*. James Beighton's (fig 40) cracked teacup has a convoluted history involving the potters David Leach and John Maltby, a history he has *'never been able to establish whether the story is true or not'*. Herein lies the attraction for James, for the object takes on a mythical status that he enjoys despite its unclear provenance. Likewise Jack Dawson's (fig 41) pot takes his career *'full circle'*, as he buys his own pot back on eBay, that he made in the 1970's. As collectors Elsey, Beighton and Dawson rely on knowledge of their subject matter to make informed choices about the objects they purchase. Their motives may differ from the other participants, but their process still contains the humour and warmth of human experience.



(fig 39)

(fig 40)

(fig 41)

*12 People 12 Objects* demonstrates the important position and function that the cherished object occupies within our lives. Sherry Turkle's study *Evocative Objects: Things we Think With* (Turkle, 2007, p.5) discusses the point that:

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<sup>65</sup> Rebecca decided that she wanted to talk about her two glass dogs that are part of her wider collection of glass as opposed to a ceramic object, I did not want to interfere with any decisions that the participants made, so recorded her response accordingly.

We find it familiar to consider objects as useful or aesthetic, as necessities or vain indulgences, We are on less familiar ground when we consider objects as companions to our emotional lives or as provocations to thought. The notion of evocative objects brings together these two less familiar ideas, underscoring the inseparability of thought and feeling in our relationship to things. We think with the objects we love; we love the objects we think with.

The texts of Daniel Miller and Sherry Turkle help provide a framework within which the emotional connection to the artefact can be considered. This consideration provides a wealth of hitherto undisclosed knowledge accumulated through human experience and relationships, and as evidenced here, artists practice can play a crucial role in articulating this new awareness, through dialogue and visual imagery.

#### **6.4 Artists Practice**

As already noted *12 People 12 Objects* was conceived as a development of *Last Supper at the Glynn Vivian*, to address issues identified in section 6.2, and in order to extend my experiments with the medium of photography in relation to ceramics discourse. In terms of artists practice, two significant photography projects are examined that consider material culture as an element of their subject matter and by extension the individual's relationship to their belongings.

The photographer Huang Qingjuns' (fig 42) recent solo exhibition, *Family Stuff*<sup>66</sup> (Foster A, 2012, Booth H, 2012) is the consolidation of a project that he has been working on since 2005. Quingjun has travelled extensively through China to photograph people's household possessions in front of their dwellings, thus recording the huge social changes and upheaval that China as a nation is undergoing. It is also an indictment of the disparity of wealth in an

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<sup>66</sup> <http://huangqingjun.com>

I visited his solo exhibition at The 798 gallery in Beijing, (2013) and travelled extensively through the country as part of The 3<sup>rd</sup> International Ceramic Magazine Editors Association Symposium [http://www.798photogallery.cn/EN/photographer/photographer\\_46.html](http://www.798photogallery.cn/EN/photographer/photographer_46.html)  
A useful question and answer talk with images is available here  
<http://transparentcities.net/slideshow/introducing-family-stuff-photo-project-huang-qingjun/>

emerging economic power, as Wang Chunchen (2013) notes in the introduction to the catalogue:

Grounded on such a transitional era, the photographic series *Family Stuff* by Hang Qingjun focuses on family materials in our daily lives, aiming to reflect the human nature embedded within them. Thus, *Family Stuff* becomes a prospect within which the life condition of Chinese people is examined. Images from this series are at once pictorial texts that interpret the life presence in Chinese society and a demonstration of the special value and function of photography as art

The above quotation here highlights the effectiveness of photography to portray a changing social history. Qingjun's images are starkly beautiful, and of specific interest to me was the participant's presence within the image, surrounded by their worldly goods. In contrast, Joakim Blockstrom's<sup>67</sup> (fig 43) initiative *Heirloom Project* (Pendleton, 2013) focuses purely on a photograph of the single object; the owner is absent but becomes present through the personal story<sup>68</sup> adding a poignancy to the image. Blockstrom developed the project after he had started thinking about heirlooms in the age of mass production



(fig 42)



(fig 43)

<sup>67</sup> <http://joakimblockstrom.com> I have since contacted Joakim Blockstrom and we have had an email conversation, he has expressed an interest in my own work and I hope to contribute to his project with an object of my own. <http://www.theheirloomproject.co.uk>

<sup>68</sup> <http://www.featureshoot.com/2013/08/photos-of-heirlooms-with-personal-stories-of-identity-memory-and-nostalgia/>

and considered the question '*What is our inheritance?*' Pendleton (2013) describes how the project began:

He asked friends and family if he could photograph special objects they'd inherited, and stories came flooding out. Afterwards, people thanked him for giving them the chance to think deeply about something-and someone-they had taken for granted. '*I gave people an opportunity to reconnect with their feelings about people they had known*'.

She continues:

As word spread about Blockstrom's project, he began to hear from strangers who had objects from him to photograph and their own stories to tell.

The above quotations illustrate the fundamental relationship of the object to the narrative as a method of illustrating the objects significance to the participant. Similarly the dialogue or story is a central element of *12 people 12 Objects* as a method of articulating our personal relationships with our objects. Therefore it is of paramount importance to include the text and show the participant with their object as a method of expressing these connections and cementing the relationships between them. The photograph illustrates the artefact and the participant's relationship to it, locating it in the home through the visual image, whilst the text locates the object's position and importance within the participant's life. Through its realisation into a material object the photograph has the potential to adopt the persona and fulfil the role of the original artefact.

## **6.5 The Photograph as an Object**

Elizabeth Edwards in her essay '*Photographs as Objects of Memory*' (Candlin and Guins, 2009) describes the position that the photograph as a material object occupies (ibid., p.335):

It would appear significant that many of the evocational material forms of photographs have absorbed or adopted the forms of other objects

culturally associated with commemoration and remembrance, such as memorial lockets, miniatures, painting and even plates or mugs.

Here Edwards draws attention to the photograph's ability to adopt and perform the role of the object through its material presence. Through my engagement with photography I have subsequently created a three-dimensional object, as Susan Stewart (Stewart, 2007, p.138) articulates:

The photograph as souvenir is a logical extension of the pressed flower, the preservation of an instant in time through a reduction of physical dimensions and a corresponding increase in significance supplied by means of narrative. The silence of the photograph, its promise of visual intimacy at the expense of the other senses (its glossy surface reflecting us back and refusing penetration), makes the eruption of that narrative, the telling of its story, all the more poignant. For the narration of the photograph will become itself an object of nostalgia.

As demonstrated by Blockstrom's and Qingjun's projects, by employing photography and functioning as artists they are drawing attention to the inherent tranquillity within their images, a tranquillity that demands an act of contemplation on the part of the viewer. Narratives are constructed from and reliant on emotional recall; of events that have happened, of times past, and this reality is reflected in the dialogues and illustrated by the texts of *Heirloom Project* and *12 People 12 Objects*. There are two key issues here: firstly, that the act of contemplation of the photograph is the same experience of the engagement with the isolated, removed ceramic object within the museum collection. Therefore by exhibiting the photographs within a gallery space I have enacted a curatorial decision and returned the viewer's experience back to the museum, object, viewer relationship as highlighted through the practice of *Last Supper at the Glynn Vivian*. Secondly, the combination of the explicit narrative attached to the image enables the photograph to be substituted for the object, whilst the object, through a representation of itself and its subsequent location in the gallery space, becomes an artwork.

Edwards goes on to draw distinctions between film and photography as mediums (ibid., p.334):



Furthermore, the evocative fascination of photographs as they operate in their stillness and materiality is very different from the evocative qualities of film or video. Stillness invites evocation, contemplation and a certain formation of affective memory in a way that film and video, with their temporal naturalism and realistic narrative sequence, cannot. As both Christian Metz and Barthes<sup>69</sup> argue in their different ways, film suggests 'being there' in its temporal immersion, whereas photographs speak to 'having been there': they are fragmentary and irreducibly of the past or of death itself.

Edwards reiterates that we respond to the photograph in a similar way as we do to the ceramic object, via a position that is located in the past; whereas film with its dynamism is situated in the present. This is particularly salient if we consider *Last Supper at the Glynn Vivian* where the nervous excitement is palpable, and the tension; the gestures, the facial expressions and the regional accents convey the narratives which are understood through audible speech and dynamic action. However, *12 People 12 Objects* offers a different experience. The encounter is situated in the home, a place of comfort rather than the revered museum; hence the emotional response is one of quiet familiarity, with the emotive content available through the silent, still image and the written word.

## 6.6 Structure and Frame

As a result of developing my practice with regards to the post-disciplinary and post-studio condition *12 People 12 Objects* fulfils these criteria through the location of production as the home and through the use of photography, a hitherto untried medium with which to create practice. The work is subsequently tested within ceramics discourse through inclusion in the exhibition *Kith and Kin: New Glass and Ceramics (part 2)*. However there are issues to consider here.

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<sup>69</sup> Edwards is referring to Christian Metz's essay 'photography and fetish', and Barthes' 'Camera Lucida', (my footnote) please see bibliography for details.

By removing the practice to the home the work lacks the structural restriction of the museum or an identifiable '*frame*', as defined by Schön (Chapter 1, 1.3) against which to react and measure the success of the outcome of the work. Consequently we must consider, is the work successful in other terms of reference? By locating the practice in the home the restrictions on the selection of objects are removed. Every museum has a finite collection with which to engage, and due to bias the institution may favour certain objects over others, therefore skewing the response from the participants. However, detaching practice from the institution allows for greater freedom of selection and response. A more focused examination of the object and its importance is facilitated, one that is personally embedded within social relationships as Daniel Millers case studies testify.

Whilst *12 People 12 Objects* deliberately sets out to circumvent the edifice of the institution, the work once completed is returned to the structure of the gallery where it is identified and viewed as art practice. So here, paradoxically the work both succeeds and fails. The photographic work is accepted and absorbed into ceramics discourse through exhibition, and understood to be a successful outcome and expansion of discourse, thus creating a robust test of my '*frame*' of practice - ceramics. However, one must consider the placement of the photographs within the institutional context of a white cube gallery as a potential failure of the original function of the ceramic object. By photographing the object and exhibiting it with its attendant narrative the work clearly demonstrates the importance of the object to the owner; but its detached status divorces the emotional relationship to the original object, that is constructed and situated within the domestic context, by removing its physical presence via a representation of it.

The photographer Martin Parr<sup>70</sup> has addressed the issue of divorcing the subject matter (photograph) from its site of production in a recent exhibition

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<sup>70</sup> Martin Parr is an international exhibiting photographer whose concerns are as Thomas Weski notes 'Leisure, consumption and communication are the concepts that this British photographer has been researching for several decades now on his worldwide travels. In the process, he examines national characteristics and international phenomena to find out how

entitled *Working Men's Clubs*<sup>71</sup> (2010). Parr had been commissioned to document the institution of the Working Men's club in South Wales, with the final outcome of the project exhibited on the walls inside Earlswood Working Men's Club in Cardiff, thereby locating the images within their context. Here we see the potential to retain the image within its milieu without recourse to the institution of the gallery, embedding the work in a location from where it derives, a location that is comfortable and familiar to Parr's subjects. This contextual curatorial phenomenon has potential with regards to developing *12 People 12 Objects* in post doctoral practice.

## 6.7 Format

As already noted *12 People 12 Objects* was exhibited at the National Glass Centre in Sunderland. The work consisted of twelve portrait photographs measuring 46cms by 31cms, effectively life size, and exhibited in a line at head height. Both decisions were made to reference the human body and register with the viewer. During the creative process and as part of my research I read *Camera Lucida* (Barthes, 1993) who maintains that (p.6):

The Photograph belongs to that class of laminated objects whose two leaves cannot be separated without destroying them both

The lamination that Barthes articulates is further expanded by Elizabeth Edwards (Candlin and Guins, 2009, p.331)

My argument is not intended to attempt the impossible- to divorce the materiality of the photographic image from the image itself. Just as Barthes argues that the image and its referent are laminated together, two leaves that cannot be separated, so are the photograph and its materiality, the image and object brought into a single coherent form.

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valid they are as symbols that will help future generations to understand our cultural peculiarities' <http://www.martinparr.com>

<sup>71</sup> I visited the exhibition as part of my research, images from the exhibition are available here; <http://www.martinparr.com/2009/cardiff-working-mens-clubs/>

Here Edwards links the lamination of the image to the materiality of the photographic object. This precipitated my decision to have the photographic images laminated onto aluminium, so that the image and the material became literally inseparable. I wanted the photographs to have the physical presence and weight of an object. The text was made available as a series of sheets on a nearby table. In retrospect this was a mistake, as through this writing process I have come to realise that the text should be given equal countenance to the photograph. The text is as important as the image - they are effectively portraits in themselves - so as an adjustment to the work the dialogue will now be printed onto the same size aluminium and exhibited side by side with the image to signify the relationship in a clearer and more explicit manner.

*This chapter has demonstrated the emergence of the study of material culture as a method with which to understand and extract meaning from objects through our intimate relationships to them. This eschews the archaeological and academic study of the specific object as a signifier of people in favour of a model that examines the constructed world as a series of interactions between people and their artefacts, thus elucidating new meaning that is relevant and embedded within social relationships. An examination of photography projects by Huang Qingjun, Family Stuff and Joakim Blockstrom, Heirloom demonstrates that artists practice has a vital and relevant role to play in the study of material culture. Using Daniel Miller's case studies as a contextual foundation 12 People 12 Objects was developed in response to issues arising from Last Supper at the Glynn Vivian and as a method of testing my practice within ceramics discourse through the medium of photography. As a new medium was adopted in order to develop practice, my 'repertoire' (Schön chapter 5, 5.2) as an artist was expanded. This was not without its problems and unresolved issues as identified above. However it is in the realisation of these problems and issues through a process of reflection-in-action (Schön chapter 1, 1.6) that we can observe 'professional artistry' (Schön chapter 5, 5.2) as a method of problem solving. From this, new understanding and procedures can be implemented and new practice developed.*

## Chapter 7: Teatime at The Museum

*Chapter 7 will examine the work Teatime at The Museum<sup>72</sup> exploring the roles of the curator and the artist through practice. As an introduction the chapter details how artists can engage with institutions offering unique insights and working practices that can extrapolate new knowledge from existing collections. As a method of foregrounding Teatime at the Museum I examine Edmund De Waal's project Arcanum at the National Museum of Wales as a case study, and I consider the placement of 'Fragments', one of my earlier film works, in the same institution with the curators Andrew Renton and Nick Thornton.*

*Teatime at the Museum further identifies the development and importance of negotiative skills as a fundamental part of my artistic practice. A self initiated project, Teatime at the Museum required the agreement and collaboration of The National Museum of Wales and the curator Andrew Renton. My successful approach and implementation of the project was underpinned by two key factors*

- I already had a working relationship with The National Museum of Wales 7.4*
- I had a convincing body of new work (Last Supper at The Glyn Vivian and 12 People 12 Objects) to present to The National Museum in order for the institution to identify its relevance and importance*

*A return to film in contrast to the contemplative still image enabled me to successfully exploit the medium as a method of exposing emotive response and the materiality of ceramic through sensory interaction. Anchored within the context of the museum the intensity of the tea drinking experience is authenticated by the reactions of the artist and curator, whilst the fragile materiality of the objects and its effects on us as protagonists are transmitted faithfully through the film.*

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<sup>72</sup> [http://www.davidcushway.co.uk/2012/Teatime\\_at\\_the\\_Museum.html](http://www.davidcushway.co.uk/2012/Teatime_at_the_Museum.html)

*A significant development within this work was my own presence within the film; here one achieves a sense of the artist in action, as the creative process is made transparent. My location within the work enables direct questioning of Andrew (and by extension the museum) whilst compelling him to engage in what he considers to be a taboo practice. This results in a uniquely moving response to the tea service that circumnavigates the formality of a conventional interview, yet is underpinned by serious critique.*

*The seemingly informal and casual nature of the work influenced decisions when it came to exhibition. Last Supper at The Glyn Vivian and Teatime at the Museum were both exhibited in the institutions where they were created, which added a deeper resonance to the films through direct association with its architectural surroundings. However the tension created in the film does not cease once the film is removed from its point of creation, because the environment is visible as a context within the frame of the film. Consequently the films have been exhibited and can be viewed anywhere, through a multitude of formats and screen sizes. This exploits and reflects contemporary societies familiarity and interaction with- and consumption of- the moving image.*

## **7.1 Artists Questions**

Jorunn Veiteberg in her essay, '*Unease at the Museum: the story of an artistic contribution that a museum did not appreciate*'<sup>73</sup> (2012) has noted that:

*'What ends up in museums is important, because museum collections serve as our collective memory bank. Questions should therefore always be raised about how museum curators exercise their power as writers of history and stewards of our memories'*

The essay above details a film work, *Nationalmuseum och jag (The National Museum and I)* by Zandra Ahl<sup>74</sup> that served to highlight many of the cultural

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<sup>73</sup> <http://ceramics-in-the-expanded-field.com/essays/professor-dr-jorunn-veiteberg-norway>

<sup>74</sup> Ahl is Professor of Ceramics at Konstfack, University College of Arts, Craft and Design in Stockholm, [http://www.konstnarligaforskarskolan.se/wordpress/?page\\_id=740](http://www.konstnarligaforskarskolan.se/wordpress/?page_id=740) and

differences between the curator and the artist with regards to the object. The premise for the film is a series of interviews with staff at the museum in key positions - three curators and the director. The purpose of the film was to address and highlight (ibid.):

How these experts' verbal embracing of post-modernism and the freedom it encourages can be reconciled with the claim that they are presenting history in an objective manner and with the fact that the museum has a permanent exhibition based on the history of style and a modernistic ideal of taste.

These questions resulted in the film being removed from the inaugural exhibition '*The Modern Form*' (see footnote 74) as the staff and the director were unhappy with how they and their working practices had been portrayed. Subsequently the museum was accused of censorship in the national press. The work and the ensuing controversy served to emphasize the polarities of practice between curators and artists exposing their differing agendas in terms of how objects are situated and understood. More significantly it demonstrates how effective artists practice can be when it is directed and employed to expose institutionally entrenched mechanisms of curatorial practice. This is an extreme example, but nonetheless relevant in the current climate of museological development as recognised in chapter 3, 3.1. Two connected issues that are identified here and have become apparent as a result of developing *Last Supper at The Glynn Vivian* are explored through my third work *Teatime at the Museum*. One issue is the relationship that curators have to the collections and objects within their jurisdiction, which manifests itself through curation; and the other is the role of the artist and contemporary practice to reinvigorate, reinterpret and breathe new life into existing collections. Veiteberg (ibid.) describes this:

The problem with permanent exhibitions is keeping the public interested. Artistic interventions are a method that, at one and the

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[http://www.futuredesigndays.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=572%3Aandra-ahls-movie-qnationalmuseum-och-jagq-no-longer-part-of-exhibition-at-nationalmuseum&catid=1%3Aweekly&Itemid=85](http://www.futuredesigndays.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=572%3Aandra-ahls-movie-qnationalmuseum-och-jagq-no-longer-part-of-exhibition-at-nationalmuseum&catid=1%3Aweekly&Itemid=85)

same time, meet people's expectations of changing exhibitions and satisfy the desire to give permanent collections renewed relevance.

## 7.2 The Curator and the Object

Glenn Adamson describes in a recent paper '*More than a Feeling: The Museum as Research Institution*'<sup>75</sup> how he operates as a curator of historical artefacts,

And what kind of things do we do as curators when we operate with objects. Well, we do some very interesting telling things, we turn them upside down a lot, we also write on the bottoms a lot, so we seem to place a great deal of emphasis on the unseen underside of things and in fact if you know any furniture restorers you'll know that they spend a lot of time crawling around on the floor looking at the underside of things and flipping things over. In other words we look at all the parts that you are not meant to look at to the perspective of the standard, normative user or manufacturer. We also look at them in unnatural ways; we subject them to x-rays and ultra violet light which is a good way to tell if a painting has been restored, we put them under microscopes or at least subject them to high definition photography.

Adamson here describes a reductive process of information gathering and knowledge generation, where the object is reduced to a series of quantifiable truths; what it is, where it was made, how it was made, what it is made from, how old it is, how rare it is and its potential value are typical examples of data provided by the curator and the museum. Objects that are subjected to this systematic academic study, where the empirical understanding that is based on personal experience of use is consistently denied, lack the richness of human experience that is illustrated by *Last Supper at the Glynn Vivian*. The curator who is charged with conserving and protecting the object does not have an authentic experience of it. Adamson describes this reality of curatorial practice through his own personal experiences of implementing handling sessions at the Victoria and Albert Museum: (ibid)

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<sup>75</sup> Glenn Adamson- *More than a Feeling: The Museum as Research Institution*, The Anna Freud Centre, Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> January 2013, not published



In other words we look at them unnaturally, and the more unnaturally we look at them the more we seem to feel that we know about them. Also when we teach with them its fascinating that we encourage people not to use them in the way they were intended in fact, to do anything but. So I run a lot of handling sessions with the V&A in specialist ceramics which are fragile of course and its amazing how much a student has to be told before they're allowed to pick up a teacup. And one of the most fascinating things to me, as well as all those things like hold it over the table, don't put it close to other museum objects, they might smash against one another, use two hands, things like that, a great one is, never handle an object by its handle – that's the most fragile bit of it

And he continues

In other words, everything about museum expertise tends towards the subliminal suggestion that normal access to the object is not enough, that you have to gain some sort of hyper perception about the object when you are doing research. So that's a rather cynical view of museum based research which suggests to us that perhaps the things that we've decided that we need to know about objects are actually driven much more by the processes of examination that we wish to be undertaken and that it is almost entirely retro-fitted construction of research. In other words anything that looks like a normal everyday engagement with the object is going to be de-emphasised or ranked down in relation to museum based activities

Here Adamson succinctly describes the limitations and narrowness of academic knowledge formulated through curatorial exercise, whereas in contrast, arts practice demonstrates this phenomenon explicitly.

### **7.3 Contemporary Practice as a Narrative Device**

*Teatime at the Museum* was made at the National Museum of Wales in Cardiff with the curator Andrew Renton<sup>76</sup>. The institution has developed a rich and varied programme<sup>77</sup> of inviting and working with artists since Edmund de

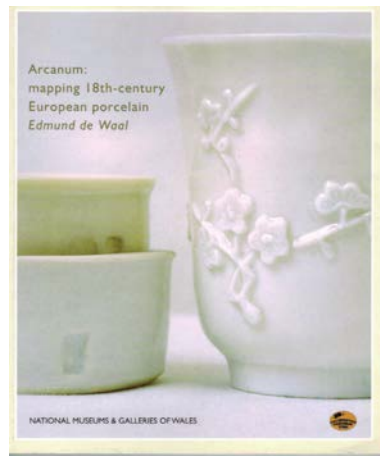
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<sup>76</sup> Andrew Renton is Head of Applied Art collections at the National Museum of Wales

<sup>77</sup> Michael Tooby, *Order and Disorder: Some relationships between Ceramics, Sculpture and Museum Taxonomies* <http://www.interpretingceramics.com/issue014/articles/04.htm>

See also Andrew Renton, *Deposits and Withdrawals at the 'collective memory bank': ceramic artists and the National Museum of Wales*, The Anna Freud Centre Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> January 2013, paper presented as part of The University of Westminster conference *Interpreting Collections, Idea, Object, Site*. Not published

Waal's *Arcanum* (fig 44) in 2004. De Waal's project was significant in that it preceded the exhibition of *Fragments* within the museum, discussed later in this section, and highlights the working practices and involvement of the curator Andrew Renton and the then director Michael Tooby<sup>78</sup>. Both these developments had precipitated and influenced the work *Teatime at the Museum*.



(fig 44)

I had visited de Waals' *Arcanum* in 2005 and attended the subsequent one-day symposium at the National Museum of Wales in Cardiff. *Arcanum: Mapping 18<sup>th</sup> Century European Porcelain* (Rena 2005) was a response by de Waal to the world famous De Winton porcelain collection, whereby he removed elements of the collection and exhibited them on tables alongside his own thrown ware. His rationale is explained in the exhibition catalogue (The National Museum of Wales, 2005, p.8):

This is not an exhibition of highlights, not an exhibition that contextualises, not an exhibition that historicises. It is a collection of personal, episodic responses to this porcelain: a mapping alongside other maps. It is also an attempt to examine the question of display. This project comes out of the shared belief that ceramics is poorly served in museums: why when we see ceramics do we see so much glass? Why is there 'trop de verre': too much glass? What information are we given? Which of the great panoply of labels on the base of the teapot matters?

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<sup>78</sup> Michael Tooby was Director of The National Museum of Wales in 2005 and instrumental in the development of *Arcanum*; please see foreword of the exhibition catalogue.

He continues:

In **Arcanum** I want to tell stories. I want to give the feeling that stories are generative, each story leading to another, overlapping and contradicting each other, but allowing for moments of clarity. Provisional clarity, but clarity none the less. I want to show how beautiful this porcelain is.

A further significant point is made by James Putnam in the exhibition catalogue who draws parallels with *Arcanum* and an intervention at the British Museum in 2007 by the artist Richard Wentworth entitled *Questions of Taste* (Putnam, 2009, p.133). Putnam notes (2005, *ibid.*, p.19):

The museum site provides an aura of authenticity and preciousness around an object, emphasized by the barrier of the vitrine, yet in doing so tends to subtract its fundamental everyday human connection, in this case dining.

This exhibition was to prove significant for my own practice and its subsequent development in the Glynn Vivian Museum and Art Gallery in Swansea and at the National Museum of Wales in Cardiff. *Last Supper at the Glynn Vivian* as already discussed and *Teatime at the Museum* respectively address issues highlighted by *Arcanum*, namely de Waal's questioning of the of the display of ceramics; one that denies any experience of the materiality of the artefact and of the extended entangled network of information around any given artefact that can be accessed through the humble yet eloquent personal narrative rather than the objective museological study. Putnam's similar identification of the removed object obstructed by glass that has its direct relationship to human experience interrupted was also to prove important as a consideration in the development of *Teatime at the Museum*.

### 7.3.1 Fragments

The second case study is my own earlier film works *Fragments - Teacup 1* and *Teacup 2* (fig 45), purchased by the National Museum in 2010 and exhibited in 2011. Andrew Renton in the following quotation discusses the

location of this work and how it is contextualised within the National Museum of Wales highlighting how my practice as an artist is considered in relation to discourses of ceramics,

The primary focus of his practice is plainly ceramics but for whom the relationship between artist and museum has become a key concern. Cush's video diptych *Teacup 1* and *Teacup 2* was made in 2007. Using ultra high-speed cameras to film two cups as they fell and shattered. Each was slowed down and run forwards and backwards, the films presenting a transient process of breaking and reforming, the constant cycle of life and death is a phrase that Cush has used in his work. After acquiring the work the museum showed it in the gallery of historic Welsh ceramics framing the twin Sony Cubes inside a showcase as a metaphor for the way we, in general and we, the museum, seek to reconstruct and control fragmented knowledge. It is a specific example of a "reverse intervention" in inverted commas. The museum intervened in a work of art asserting control of its medium by contextualising it.

My practice is understood to be embedded within ceramics discourse by Andrew Renton and Nick Thornton<sup>79</sup>. By introducing the films into the ceramics galleries they are deliberately drawing comparisons between contemporary practice and the archaic collection, paradoxically reinforcing the static nature of the collection by introducing the moving image, whilst utilising this introduction as a method of developing narratives with the existing display. This concern is explored in an interview with Renton and Thornton that I organised as part of my on-going research under the umbrella of PhD study, the filmed discussion provides a visual record of the context of the work within its curated location and is available as part of this submission. Our conversation proved useful as a foregrounding to *Teatime at the Museum and* of gaining an awareness of how curators

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<sup>79</sup> Nick Thornton is Head of Fine and Contemporary Art at the National Museum of Wales and was instrumental in the purchasing of *Fragments* for the museums collection



(fig 45)

operate, and how their curatorial decisions impact on my practice. As an artist I find this intriguing as my work is constantly recontextualised and subjected to different sites and methods of display, the work is continually experienced afresh<sup>80</sup>.

DC            So, in that way is it about setting up a dialogue or a narrative with the context

Nick           Yes we were very attracted to the work because it's a strong piece in itself and we would be you know entirely happy showing it in a white boxed space, but I think there was a relationship, a narrative with the ceramics collections and that is in this initial display and that's what we were keen to explore as a kind of intervention of this space

DC            Sure, what as a head of applied arts, how does it kind of, is it the same response as you had to it, to the work or I wonder does it bring anything to the existing collection?

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<sup>80</sup> It should be made clear that the curatorial decisions involving the placement of **Fragments** involved discussion and negotiation with me as the artist as a continual part of the process. And it is interesting to note here that we are currently discussing several options as to how '**Fragments**' will be installed for a group show at The National Museum in 2015 'Fragile?'

- Andrew Yes
- DC I'm interested in that dynamic
- Andrew Yes definitely it brings something extra to the gallery I agree with what Nick says but I think it also, for me, it also examines our reactions to what else is in the gallery. There is tendency for people to think of what's in the gallery as being precious and delicate and a lot of people are quite intimidated by the idea of the physicality of these delicate porcelain objects.

Here Nick and Andrew both draw attention to how contemporary practice can be situated within existing collections of ancient artefacts as a method of developing narrative. Their transparency of thought and action demonstrate their willingness to explore possibilities of reinterpretation that crosses boundaries and disciplines within the departmental structures that are engendered in the museum. This is reflected in the following exchange with Thornton.

- DC In terms of you know, as the person who made the piece of work it's been shown in various formats. As an artist I'm interested in the way the work changes due to its context. And I think that it's a wonderful space and I think the work is greatly improved by being in this situation, I've made a decision about making a film, when it comes into this space it takes on more roles or it takes on another role effectively.
- Nick Yes
- DC So it starts to mean, I view the film in a different way because its in a context within the National Museum and but also within an existing collection, so there's kind of two contexts here really. It's within the National Museum and for me as an artist that's quite a validation
- Nick Yes
- DC It's an incredible validation of my work within the framework of a national museum but then I kind of see it in another context which is within the ceramics space or ceramics gallery
- Nick I think that's something that we are in a strong position to do as a multi-disciplinary museum, I think, and an art department that encompasses lots of different forms of practices

DC Sure

Nick Historic art, contemporary art, applied art, so we're often looking, in terms of our collections and our programmes, ways of making those kinds of links between different things and I also think there's an interesting kind of issue about the way when you when an object goes from your control, from an artist's control

The enthusiasm of Renton and Thornton to discuss and expose their working practices informed the subsequent work *Teatime at the Museum*. Whilst drawing on issues identified here and in *Last Supper at the Glynn Vivian* - namely the touch taboo and the removed, isolated object - I wanted to examine in greater detail through practice the curatorial engagement with objects within their collections. I felt this could be achieved by placing the object and the curator as the focal points of the work, gauging their interaction whilst in conversation.

#### **7.4 Teatime at the Museum**

Regarding this third practical work (fig 46) in support of my doctoral study, my proposal was simple and straight forward. I contacted Andrew Renton and invited him to remove a tea service from the museum's collection and have tea with me while we discussed his role as a curator of ceramics. Thus the revered, valuable, protected, removed and conserved object would momentarily be brought back to life by using it for its original intended function. This idea had occurred to me whilst observing the participants who had selected functional objects during the filming of *Last Supper at The Glynn Vivian*. What I had found particularly compelling was the demonstration of the function of the objects such as Olive showing how the Cow Creamer worked and Sandra pouring from her jug. This celebration of function was very significant to more than half of the participants, who had chosen 'ordinary objects' precisely because they were useful. Considering the work already developed - *Last Supper at the Glynn Vivian* and *12 People 12 Objects* - I had identified the following issues for examination through further practice:

1. The role of the curator in the implementation of museum taxonomy

2. Curatorial decisions regarding the display of ceramics
  
3. The functional object removed, isolated object mediated through glass vitrine and rendered ineffective

The following strategy was executed in order to address the concerns identified.

1. Interview the curator directly about his practice, making him the focal point of the work in order to expose curatorial practice
  
2. To use a tea service from the collection in order to drink tea whilst the interview took place
  
3. Therefore reanimating the object by using it for its intended purpose, interrupting curatorial protocols at the same time
  
4. Locate the work in the ceramics galleries in order to situate the tea service and the curator in their familiar surroundings whilst engaging in unfamiliar practice and film the proceedings in order to gauge the curator's response

The film is situated in one of the ceramics galleries at the National Museum in Cardiff, with the wider collection of predominately Swansea and Llanelli functional china visible in the background within the display cases, and serving as a visible reminder of the reality of the removed, protected and static collection. The action of the film is set in direct contrast to this, and begins with the tea service being removed from its position in the display case by Andrew in his traditional role as the museum curator. We see him wearing museum gloves to protect the objects as he places them ready to use on a table. Andrew relates the authenticity of the Swansea Porcelain tea set made



between 1816 and 1825 in Swansea with a Japanese inspired pattern, number 219.



(fig 46)

From the outset the film establishes that this is a genuine experience and when asked ‘*how does it make you feel?*’ he replies ‘*I feel like I am being a bit naughty, it feels like an act of transgression*’ relating that ‘*he feels like he is breaking the rules*’ and what we are engaged in ‘*goes against his instincts as a curator to protect the object*’. We are witnessing a curator being made to feel uncomfortable in what is usually comfortable territory. This discomfort has come about through his participation in a project that requires him to step out of his standard remit. Glenn Adamson identifies this disruptive process and its effect on Andrew in his essay *Handle with Care: Object Encounters at the Museum*<sup>81</sup>

In 2012, for example, the applied arts curator at the National Museum of Wales, Andrew Renton, sat down to tea with the artist David Cushway – using an early nineteenth-century ceramic service in the museum’s collection.<sup>82</sup> (fig.46) Renton has spoken of his initial visceral discomfort with the experience, and indeed the ingenuity of the project was its play on tea drinking’s historical associations with relaxed conviviality.

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<sup>81</sup> This essay will be published in Gerritsen A, Riello G (2015) *Writing Material Culture History* Bloomsbury

<sup>82</sup> See Michael Tooby, “Some Relationships between Ceramics, Sculpture and Museum Taxonomies,” *Interpreting Ceramics* 14 (2012), online at: <http://www.interpretingceramics.com/issue014/articles/04.htm>

The relaxed tableau of conversation and tea drinking constructs a tension between the use of the rarefied object, the subsequent action and the resulting conversation, subtly critiquing the museum's presentation of ceramics and its curatorial decisions, that places the collection behind glass. This creates a situation that I describe as *'neutralising the object'*. Andrew's response to this was that he felt that once three dimensional objects, particularly ceramics intended for use and function, were placed behind glass, you are *'killing off an important dimension of their lives'*, and potentially creating *'a mausoleum for objects'*.

In this denial of a three-dimensional experience of an (originally functional) object, the artefact effectively becomes two dimensional, or at least a representation of itself. The experience of the ceramics collection is relegated to the purely visual, mediated through a glass screen. I asked Andrew if this impacted on his curatorial decisions, to which he responded that by employing the collection they are *'trying to tell a story'* and did select objects that were visually appealing. He went on to concede that, in order to develop a satisfactory narrative, some of the objects were *'quite dull to be honest'*.

As we made and drank tea from the service, I became very aware of and reflected upon the materiality of the objects - the fine porcelain, the weight of the cup, its uncomfortable handle, the delicate clatter of the cup against the saucer – all this became a celebration of the tactility and sensual aspects of the tea service. The action of using the object *'reanimated'* it: its intended purpose was fulfilled. Andrew felt that not only had we brought the object to life, but that it was also influencing our behaviour through its design and delicate nature, or *'imposing an etiquette'* upon us as I commented.

We linked the formality of the process to the ritualistic aspect of tea making and drinking that referenced the ceremonial. Drawing parallels with *Last Supper at the Glynn Vivian* it is interesting to note that Andrew began to imagine a garden tea party along the same lines as Francis Morgan had, and that he was *'performing a social role'* by making the tea in the teapot and pouring it out.

## 7.5 Privileged Access

Our actions here, although disruptive and critical of museum conventions, take place within a controlled environment. Andrew and I are enjoying privileged access to the collection, an access that will seldom, if ever, be afforded to the audience that may witness the final outcome i.e. the film. So the film can be read as an action of curatorial interpretation expressed by an artist and a curator, that is removed further from the viewer by another layer of glass; the screen. Paradoxically this act that is situated within a real experience - as indicated above; that of the intimacy of tea drinking, the effect the objects have on us as individuals, the noise of china, its materiality - all this would be denied to the visitor to the museum and only seen through our actions and dialogue. This illustrates the expansive capacity of the film and its ability to communicate and allow access to other levels of understanding relating to the objects. Glenn Adamson (2014) articulates this succinctly:

A museum may be welcoming, but it is not hospitable in this domestic sense, and Cushway exposed this fact in no uncertain terms. In this sense his project did constitute a gentle form of institutional critique; but it was a rather controlled experiment. One might say that rather than eroding the museum's usual moratorium on use, he simply directed momentary attention to that condition, staging a single exception that did not challenge the rule

Adamson here highlights two key points: first is the ability of the artist to detect and make manifest through practice alternative viewpoints and analysis of objects and collections within the museum structures that support them. Secondly that the objects will be returned to their original location on completion of the film and that the project *Teatime at the Museum* is a brief hiatus in the working life of the museum and of the objects employed. So the legacy of the project in real terms is a film that can viewed in the museum, and with today's globalised networks of communication around the world on-line.

It should be considered that the project can affect curatorial practice in the future. Andrew acknowledges that the museum and the curator are no longer the holders of ‘*definitive knowledge*’ and that information can be ascertained from a variety of sources that are equally relevant, and the museum finds its roles and knowledge being scrutinised from a diversity and plurality of positions. The contemporary museum is a permeable structure where the role of the curator has been de-centered. They are no longer the producer of conclusive evidence within the cultural sphere, but rather a conduit for ideas, opinions, and projects presented by the public and the artist. Andrew describes the experience of working on the project and engaging with artists below<sup>83</sup>,

So we talk about curators, or I talk about curators, using artists to give themselves, to give the curators, permission to indulge our curiosity and to push at the boundaries of conventional museum practice. In retrospect, this seems, on my part, too diffident, lacking in confidence and initiative but perhaps this self-realisation is one of the key benefits of interacting with artists. What began as a subversion of the museums power, its structure and disciplines became a sensory celebration of touch, grace, kindness temperature, movement, sound – a reanimation of neutralised objects, a re-assertion of their identity, a teapot as a teapot

The artist can act as an external force giving permission for activities within an institution that otherwise may not be countenanced. By inviting artists into institutions we are witnessing the fluidity of roles which in turn undermines the traditional procedures of engagement within the museum. The films, *Last Supper at the Glynn Vivian* and *Teatime at the Museum*, render this explicit, offering a peripatetic model of practice that can be transposed to any museum or institution, in any area, in any language and as a result offer a cultural experience and explanation that is rooted outside of the immediate

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<sup>83</sup> Andrew Renton- Deposits and Withdrawals at the ‘collective memory bank’: ceramics artists and the National Museum of Wales- Ceramics in the Expanded Field AHRC-Funded Research Project Interpreting Collections, Idea, Object, Site- The Anna Freud Centre Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> January 2013, not published

parameters of the museum and within its immediate locale. Valerie Casey identifies this as the '*extended experience*'<sup>84</sup> noting that '*where traditional museum visits are discrete*' and are focused within the fabric of the institution the external experience that is brought to the museum locates knowledge within the wider community from where it originates. This knowledge can be accessed remotely through a variety of means, such as websites, social media, online forums, as Casey defines:

In a virtual space, a Web site or kiosk could add value to the visitor experience by providing access to online community or information related to the visitors interests. In this way, the museum experience may be more personalised to the visitor's specific tastes and interests, as well as promoting spontaneous congregation and communication with other visitors. By realising the museum outside its physical architecture, the production of cultural knowledge becomes a more integrated and collaborative event

Casey is signalling an expansion of the museum's practice outside of its own architectural and intellectual boundaries, and in doing so has the potential to remove the singular and isolated museum experience towards community focused initiatives where receivership is located within the arena from which it originates. *Last Supper at the Glynn Vivian* demonstrated peoples' cultural awareness and identification with their environment and the objects that are produced within their area, and how this is important as an aspect of cultural identity. *12 People 12 Objects* has the potential to fulfil the criteria that Casey highlights, in that information can be gathered and knowledge accumulated outside of the institution's physical space and inherent practices that act as a territory of influence, and that this information can be utilised as a method of adjusting curatorial procedures that are tailored to the individual or community.

Laura Phillips examines a community initiative that was developed in order to access knowledge for future programming decisions in her essay '*Reminiscence: Recent Work at the British Museum*' (Chatterjee 2008 p199) as she explains:

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<sup>84</sup> <http://www.archimuse.com/publishing/ichim03/095C.pdf>

In order to build upon previous experience, reach out to local communities and generate knowledge from the development of future programming for older adults, a pilot project was recently completed by the Department of Coins and Medals within the British Museum. The project used the department's handling collection as a focus for discussion, learning and socialising.

The British Museum has explored the value of touch for visitors since 2001 at desks under specialist supervision. Whilst the issue of touch is contentious within museums, as identified by Glenn Adamson in this chapter 7.2, and illustrated by Andrew's discomfort in *Teatime at the Museum*, its benefits in terms of knowledge generation to the institution and its audience are being increasingly acknowledged. *Teatime at the Museum* presents a concentrated engagement with the object on a fundamental level, in that its function is fully realised and expressed, resulting in an interaction with the artefact that would not ordinarily be afforded within the context of the museum. This direct involvement explicitly recognises both the object's substance through an intimate experience, that of tea drinking, and also the object's affect on both mine and Andrew's behaviour, as articulated by Daniel Miller, chapter 6, 6.3.

These realities are transmitted through the resultant film evidencing the work as a model of interpretation situated within the museum. It is the result of contemporary practice, operating as an accessory to material culture studies, whilst directly questioning the curator, his duties and procedures within the National Museum of Wales. The finished work results in no tangible presence of ceramics, yet provides evidence of its materiality through the immersive qualities of film and the ensuing descriptive responses as both our experiences are recorded.

*This chapter has examined the role of curator and the artist within the museum structure and how these separate disciplines can be brought together to create meaningful practice, a process that is not without discomfort and in some cases conflict. However it demonstrates the fruitful outcomes of understanding that can be achieved and developed by embracing this method of practice, methods that operate outside of the*

*standard working procedures. These outcomes are presented as models for interpretation of collections and the singular object that can be potentially adopted by the museum and the curator in order to 'open out' the institution by offering new and alternative insights to their collections. The medium of film can allow unprecedented access to the materiality and purpose of the ceramic object despite the viewers removed and mediated experience, paradoxically a further removal of the object from the display case to the screen results in a more intimate understanding of it.*

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

At the end of each chapter I have drawn conclusions as a method of articulating the research that has taken place. This process of reflection has proven useful in enabling the consideration of what has been achieved and learnt. This knowledge is then projected and used to examine and understand what research and practice needs further examination and development.

In recognising myself as a post-disciplinary, post-studio artist I have employed a bricolage methodology as the most relevant approach for the creation of practice. The bricoleur's ability to work across mediums and disciplines with 'whatever is at hand' (Levi Strauss 1966 p.17) to create different and alternative viewpoints is reflected in the practical outputs, and articulated in detail.

As a *bricoleur*, I negotiate with curators and the institutional framework of the organisation; develop projects in collaboration and select a relevant medium with which to respond to the situation. I organise and direct the work to create practice, employing and involving people with skills that I do not possess where and when required. This multiplicity of approaches that can be adopted when presented with a problem is derived from my *repertoire* of experience as a creative practitioner, enabling me to develop practice from a variety of conflicting perspectives and positions.

At its core, *Last Supper at the Glynn Vivian* offers alternative viewpoints and opinions in relation to the ceramic object through the cultural language of the participants. In doing so the work disrupts traditional meaning-making expressed through the academic and curatorial practice of the museum. In this respect the process of creating *12 People 12 Objects* by combining elements of practice that include the existing object, the participant, their story or narrative, subsequently concentrated into a cohesive body of photography and text can be understood to be a work of *bricolage*. This methodology is employed by Sherry Turkle (Turkle, 2007, p.5) in her quest to connect to her absent father through a series of childhood objects, as she observes:



Ideas about bricolage were presented to me in the cool, cognitive light of French intellectual life. But the objects I tried to combine and recombine as a child had been clues for tracing my lost father, an experience of bricolage with a high emotional intensity. So, from my first introduction to the idea in the late 1960s, I began to consider bricolage as a passionate practice.

Turkle outlines here how, through the process of bricolage we piece fragments and elements together as a form of collage to create a new understanding, or to make sense of the world and events around us. The participants for **Last Supper at the Glynn Vivian** and **12 People 12 Objects** drew on a series of life experiences and emotions using the object as an associative device.

### **8.1 Research Questions**

I would now like to consider chronologically how my research and practice has fulfilled the research questions detailed in the opening section of this thesis 0.2

- What models of practice can be developed and employed within the post-disciplinary and post-studio arena?

As indicated in the preceding section the employment of a bricolage methodology with regards to my own practice offers new models and approaches for the development of practice and knowledge that facilitates the artists area of operation and work within a field that can be identified as the post-disciplinary and post-studio.

This is further evidenced through case study (Chapter 4) by the diversity of Clare Twomey, Keith Harrison, Phoebe Cummings' practice; a recognisable attribute of the post-disciplinary, post-studio practitioner is their ability to respond to challenging situations and opportunities that present themselves,

developing procedures or models of practice in order to solve the problem at hand (bricolage). A prime example of this is the framework Twomey developed in order to realise her work *Trophy* for the exhibition *Clay Rocks* at the Victoria and Albert Museum (Chapter 4, 4.2). Indeed the post-studio, post-disciplinary practitioner actively seeks out difficult situations, in order to develop their practice in new ways, confident that their repertoire of skills and experience will enable a creative response to the opportunity. From my own perspective, I have always attempted to do this as a means of testing myself; my practice, and the ceramics discourse within which I am situated. This is reflected in my decision to work within the museum structure through the medium of film with public participants for the first time under the auspices of PhD study, which brings me to my second research question

- Within the expanded field of ceramics can a new model of practice that engages the museum collection and ceramic object be developed?

The post-disciplinary, post-studio artist is an attractive proposition for the museum and the curator, for their ability to work across and engage with different spectrums of practice whilst engaging with a permanent static collection can bring new and rewarding insights. Here the artist's role is one of permission as Andrew Renton articulates during our conversation in *Teatime at the Museum* (chapter 7). The artist acts as an external force, disrupting standard museum protocols and taxonomy for new experiences and the generation of new knowledge. Discomfiture is revealed as an underlying theme as Andrew Renton comments that he feels he is being a '*bit naughty*' (Chapter 7, 7.4) by drinking tea from a cup from the National Collection.

It should be stressed here that the artist is operating in the museum at the request or with the permission of the institution, as a method or opportunity for the host to invigorate their permanent collections and entrenched working practices. And it should be noted that the works, *The Last Supper at The Glynn Vivian*, *12 People 12 Objects* and *Teatime at The Museum* address specific areas of museum practice, that of the display and elucidation of the

ceramic object. These relationships and working collaborations not without issue as Jorunn Veiteberg highlights in her analysis of the film work *Nationalmuseum och Jag (The national Museum and I)* by Zandra Ahl (Chapter 7, 7.1). As new models of practice are developed in response to existing collections and practices frictions develop and difficulties are encountered. Protracted negotiations are often required and compromises sought in order to realise practice, as demonstrated by Keith Harrison's work *Last Supper* and *M25 London Orbital*. Harrison has learnt to actively seek out relationships with maintenance staff, often including aspects of Health and Safety into his practice. Through this negotiative process and subsequent response, practice emerges that challenges curatorial practice and existing preconceptions of ceramics and how artists embedded within the ceramics discourse operate. The procedures highlighted here develop my third research question

- How does the employment of alternative sites for practice and exhibition: museums, non studio-based work, the engagement with institutions, collections and the public affect the reading and perception of ceramics?

The *collaboration* - not intervention (Chapter 3, 3.2) - between museum and artist positions the institution as an active agent in the development of contemporary practice. It is not the passive receiver of the artist's whim, rather that these complex relationships are facilitated by the museum; and in this sense their roles should be seen as equal. Returning again to the example of *Clay Rocks* at the V&A (Chapter 4, 4.2), we see Clare Twomey and Keith Harrison as artists embedded in the ceramics field extend the perception of the medium of clay and its attendant discourse through their practice by questioning its fundamental tenet - that of the fired object. The artists confound assumptions of what ceramics practice is by inviting the audience to steal objects (*Trophy*) from a world renowned institution, and to witness a live ceramic firing (*Last Supper*) and a failed event (*M25 London Orbital*). The actions sanctioned by the institution and these two artists ensure that the

perception and understanding of what contemporary ceramics practice can offer is expanded.

Whilst it must be acknowledged that the practice of Twomey, Harrison and Cummings retain a material presence of ceramic or clay my own practice does not; *Last Supper at the Glynn Vivian*, *12 People 12 Objects* and *Teatime at the Museum* retain a nexus to ceramics through the employment of and the discussion of the ceramic object, yet the finished work is film and photography. This was a deliberate action in order to test my self as a practitioner and subsequently contribute to ceramics discourse in its expanded format, thus fulfilling my fourth research question

- Can the development of new practice that contains no physical evidence of clay or ceramic be considered as a contribution to the ceramics discourse?

The above question is proven in the next section, 8.2, through the continuing development of as a practising artist under the umbrella of doctoral study.

## **8.2. Research Aims**

In terms of research, aim 1

1. To examine the phenomenon of the post-disciplinary and post-studio artist and their position within the ceramics discourse through peer case studies and my own practical development.

Is discussed and dealt with in the preceding section and in greater detail within Chapter 4. The body of practice submitted in support of this thesis demonstrates the completion of Aim 2

2. To create a substantial body of work through the mediums of film and photography, to operate outside of the studio environment within the museum to engage with the ceramic collection and object.

If we consider the phenomenon of ceramics in the expanded field (Chapter 2) and its relationship to the museum (Chapter 3, 3.4) then it is inevitable that artists working in the post-studio, post-disciplinary arena will encounter other discourses of practice. Through the development of *Last Supper at the Glynn Vivian* and *Teatime at the Museum*, I had to become engaged with the procedures of curatorial practice, which subsequently became the focus of the work. As the work critiqued the reality of the removed, protected, lifeless and neutralised object (Chapter 7, 7.4) through touch and engagement, my practice can be seen and used as a model offering a solution to the issues and problems facing the contemporary institution, identified by leading commentators from within the discourse of museum studies (Chapter 3, 3.1). The post-museum phase as identified by Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p.1) advocates a wholesale change in the relationship between the audience and the museum. The relevance of *Last Supper at the Glynn Vivian* and *Teatime at the Museum* is to a third discourse of practice; that of audience engagement or audience studies. The embedded nature of my methodological approach to creating practice ensures that the model is developed through in depth research and the artists' immersion in the discourse of practice that is being critiqued; in short the work is produced at the site, in this case the museum, which guarantees that the model is situated, relevant and rigorously tested against the curatorial practice it seeks to undermine, accomplishing my third aim

3. To create a robust model of practice that questions curatorial and museum taxonomy.

Through the contextualisation of my practical output in the main body of the text it can be demonstrated that ceramics in its expanded capacity operates across a multitude of discourses. If we consider *12 People 12 Objects*, as the practice moves from the museum to the home, and with it, from film to photography, it was necessary to ground the work through an examination of the photographic work of Huang Qingjun, Joakim Blockstrom and Martin Parr (Chapter 6, 6.4). This contextualisation acknowledged that my practice does

not sit in isolation, but alongside artists operating with similar conceptual concerns and in other fields of practice not directly related to ceramics. This actuality is evidenced by an examination of the work and writings of Daniel Miller (Chapter 6, 6.1). His analysis and development of material culture studies is particularly relevant to *12 People 12 Objects*. His methodology for knowledge and information-gathering bears many similarities to my own. From these two different perspectives of arts practice and critical writing we arrive at the same position in our analysis of the importance of the object to the individual. The adoption and employment of *other* methodological approaches and mediums that are not rooted within ceramics enables an expansion of the primary discourse (ceramics) within which my practice is embedded. The completion of aims 4 and 5 (see below) is achieved through *Last Supper at the Glynn Vivian*, *12 People 12 Objects* and *Teatime at the Museum's* acceptance into relevant exhibitions and its subsequent dissemination through conferences, papers and peer review

4. To develop and expand ceramics practice through my own artistic output and test this new work where possible through exhibition, contribution to conferences, and relevant periodicals.

5. To illuminate and contextualise my resulting contribution to current ceramics practice providing detailed understanding of my creative process and conceptual concerns.

Therefore my practice in support of this thesis is testament to the fact that a substantial body of work consisting of film and photography, (in-line with research aim 2 listed above) which has no ceramic or clay element can exist within ceramics discourse; and make a significant contribution to the expansion of it. My three works can be verified through the following;

*Last Supper At the Glynn Vivian*

- Exhibited at *The British Ceramics Biennial* as part of their film programme, at the former Spode Works Factory, Stoke-on-Trent, UK (2013)
- Screened at the 3<sup>rd</sup> *International Ceramic Magazine Editors Association Symposium*. Fuping, China (2013)
- Photographic stills from the film exhibited at *Kith and Kin: New Glass and Ceramics*, The National Glass Centre, Sunderland, UK (2011)
- To be exhibited at '*Fragile?*' *Ceramics and Materiality*, the National Museum of Wales, UK (2015)
- Tooby, M. (2012): *Order and Disorder: Some relationships between Ceramics, Sculpture and Museum Taxonomies* available at <http://www.interpretingceramics.com/issue014/articles/04.htm>

### *12 People 12 Objects*

- Exhibited at *Kith and Kin: New Glass and Ceramics (Part 2)*, the National Glass Centre, Sunderland, UK (2012)

### *Teatime at the Museum*

- Exhibited at *The British Ceramics Biennial* as part of their film programme, Stoke-on-Trent (2013)
- Screened at the 3<sup>rd</sup> *International Ceramic Magazine Editors Association Symposium*, Fuping, China (2013)
- Exhibited in *Real to Reel: Film as Material in Making*, Crafts Council Touring exhibition, the National Centre for Craft and Design, Sleaford, UK and The Guild Design Fair, Capetown, South Africa (2013-14)
- To be exhibited at '*Fragile?*' The National Museum of Wales, UK (2015)
- Tooby, M. (2012): *Order and Disorder: Some relationships between Ceramics, Sculpture and Museum Taxonomies* available at <http://www.interpretingceramics.com/issue014/articles/04.htm>

- Andrew Renton, *Deposits and Withdrawals at the 'collective memory bank': Ceramics Artists and the National Museum of Wales* at the Anna Freud Centre, Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> January 2013
- Adamson, G. (2014): *Handle with Care: Object Encounters at the Museum*

The position that *Last Supper at the Glynn Vivian, 12 People 12 Objects* and *Teatime at the Museum's* occupies within the ceramics discourse corroborates how far the ceramics field has expanded in order to accept film and video as constituent aspects of practice, signalling non clay/ceramic material and medium possibilities as potential aspects of ceramics practice.



### 8.3. Original Contribution to Knowledge

I will now address aim 6

6. As an original contribution to knowledge, offer a model of engagement with, and interpretation of, the ceramic artefact that is located within the museum collection from the perspective of contemporary arts practice.

The practice and research undertaken and produced as the result of this doctoral study demonstrates how an individual artist whose practice is embedded within ceramics discourse has approached and developed an innovative model of engagement with the ceramic object and the museum. As indicated above the practice realised through the digital mediums of film and photography developed from the position of the post-disciplinary, post-studio practitioner exists securely within ceramics discourse, which subsequently expands the possibilities of the field of practice.

The model that has been developed for *Last Supper at The Glynn Vivian* (Chapter 5, 5.3) has been demonstrated as adaptable in the sections preceding the descriptions of *12 People 12 Objects* (Chapter 6, 6.2) and *Teatime at the Museum* (Chapter 7, 7.4). This model is adapted as we move out of the sphere of influence of the museum and its curatorial practice(s) into the home. It relies on the museum or gallery as a method of both framing and facilitating the project, and as a location to where the work returns, in order to be:

- Authenticated as art practice
- Considered as an aspect of and a contribution to the discourse in which it is enmeshed
- Available to an audience for further dialogue and negotiated meaning

As a model of practice and original contribution to knowledge I have identified the following criteria:

- This model places the artist as a generator of new procedures and perspectives in *collaboration* with the museum who facilitate the project.
- The museum is able to act as a frame through its relationships, be they new or existing, with an audience; a relationship that relies on trusting the authority of the museum (as opposed to the individual artist)
- For the audience, the experience is authenticated by the positioning of the museum; and the artist and their practice is then also authenticated and given weight through his/her relationship with the institution.
- Through the knowledge generated by this practice the museum has the potential to reposition itself with regards to its audience and how it communicates through its collection, as highlighted by Dewdney, Dibosa and Walsh (2013, p.8) in Chapter 3 3.1. This is achieved through a *reflexive* process that the museum undergoes, set in motion by the artists development of practice at the invitation of the host institution.
- This model conveys the richness of human experiences related to the object as pertinent knowledge, and as identified by Andrew Renton, museums are no longer the '*holders of definitive knowledge*' (Chapter 7, 7.4). This point is supported and expanded by Hooper-Greenhill, (2000, p.3):

Individual objects have shifting and ambiguous relationships to meaning. Being themselves mute, their significance is open to interpretation. They may be viewed from a number of positions, which may be diverse in history and culture. They may be drawn into a conversation through a number of different strategies, by

a range of different individual subjects, who talk about them in ways that are meaningful to themselves as speakers. They may be understood through factual information, or may be invested with emotional significance. Although they all have life-histories, these may be well-known or, alternatively, unknown or forgotten. Objects are subject to multiple interpretations, some of which may be contradictory.

It should be noted here that the model is reliant on human interaction and the object's affect on the individual. The model I have identified relies on the participants using language to describe or articulate a sense of wonder, desire or emotion connected to their object.

Therefore, the affect of the object is only made meaningful within language – in this instance, in their own words, without using an academic discourse, but through their own cultural use of language.

- This model offers a method of engagement outside of the institutional structure that can be located within the community as evidenced by *12 People 12 Objects*, whereby knowledge can be situated in the location where it is generated. In this sense the model is adaptable, reflecting the post-studio, post disciplinary practitioner as an artist that moves from situation to situation and from medium to medium.
- By analysing what people have in their homes, what is important to them within specific age groups and ranges, there is potential for the museum to develop different strategies around curation, display and interpretation in order to attract a wider, more diverse audience. This model can be employed to direct museum practice as identified by Hooper- Greenhill (2000 p.1)

The biggest challenge facing museums at the present time is the reconceptualisation of the museum/audience relationship. After almost a century of rather remote relationships between museums and the public, museums today are seeking ways to embrace their visitors more closely. As museums are increasingly expected to provide socially inclusive environments

for life-long learning this need for closeness to audiences is rapidly becoming more pressing.

- *Last Supper at the Glynn Vivian* and *Teatime at the Museum* render explicit entrenched practices of curation | through touch, direct engagement and conversation as identified by Candlin (Chatterjee, 2008, p.19) who notes that:

Thus object handling as part of contemporary access programmes might mean that the established dichotomy between elitist, connoisseurial approaches and contemporary contextual and inclusive approaches to art objects has to be rethought.

- The model developed here is not medium or discipline specific, but is adaptable for any aspect of material culture and could be developed as an audio work, text work, book, film or photography.

The post-disciplinary, post-studio artist is reframed as a bricoleur with a repertoire of experiences at their disposal. Working across the expanded field of ceramics allows them to confound and push against the boundaries of what ceramics is, resulting in practice that can be film, photography, text and, but which are now identified and accepted as constituent aspects of ceramics discourse.

Itinerant in nature, the artist as bricoleur deliberately seeks out challenging or difficult situations and feel confident with this discomfort. The post-disciplinary, post-studio artist is recognised and desired by the institution as the museum acknowledges the need to reframe itself and its collection. Acting as bricoleur, the artist can engage with and reanimate objects on a number of different levels: through materiality (touch), through dialogue and through documentation.

Both – the artist and the museum –rely on each other, resulting in an equal relationship identified as collaboration. The model identified here as an

original contribution to knowledge mirrors this by being adaptable and, offering engagement with those that wish to share their attachment and relationship to (their) objects. This offers a unique opportunity for the museum to re-examine and change their curatorial and interpretive strategies.

#### **8.4 Further Research and Practice**

Under the auspices of Doctorial study my practice has undergone a major shift from material based (clay/ceramic) sculpture and installation towards work developed solely through the mediums of film and photography. The autonomous art object has been replaced by the artist's presence at the site of production and within the completed project; people, places and collections are now manipulated, reconfigured and formed rather than material of clay. This development of practice has been located within the museum and the home and I would now like to detail further practice that I hope to develop in the future under the working title of *Testing the Museum*.

**Sound Work:** the issue of sound in relation to ceramics and the feeling of discomfort felt when we hear it breaking is the basis of the second proposal; a significant departure in my practice, as it would be the first use of recorded sound as an artwork. I will record the sounds of ceramic objects being smashed, broken, which would then be played through a series of discreet speakers positioned within the ceramics collection. The ubiquitous nature of ceramics would ensure that anyone hearing the work would instantly assume that something in the collection had been broken, challenging their expectations of their experience of the ceramics collection. If this work is not deemed feasible, I would like to explore the possibility of reprogramming the live audio guides so that the regular commentary is punctuated by the disconcerting noise of ceramics being broken when approaching specific objects.

**Japanese Tea Ceremony:** this proposal is for the building of a traditional tatami floored room made from shuttering plywood, situated in a busy thoroughfare, courtyard or city street. The construction would deliberately

mimic building site cladding, a material that is familiar to everyone who lives and works in a city. The interior would be a purpose built room designed for the Wabi style of tea ceremony in complete contrast to the exterior. I intend to use an original Japanese tea service from a museum collection, for the ceremony, locating and employing a traditional host for this process. As the participant enters the construction, the ceremony would act as a point of ritual and quietude within the noisy bustling museum, giving the guests an experience of calm refreshing contemplation that is lost so often in our contemporary lives.

**Dinner Party (at the Victoria and Albert Museum):** The proposal is to have a dinner party using the Spode service, a collection of ceramics that has not been seen in its entirety since 1902 when it was donated to the Victoria and Albert Museum. I would invite contemporary makers, curators and writers who are involved in the ceramics discourse to the dinner party and film the resulting conversations (whilst also taking a series of photographic stills).

As a method of engaging the public with the creative process I propose a series of collaborative projects using the museum collection and infrastructure. Below are examples of proposals that will give the public an experience and insight into the development of the creative process

**Redefining Objects:** this would be an on going and changing project for the entirety of a residency. Members of the public/school groups would be invited to select and describe objects from the collection. Similarly to *Last Supper at the Glyn Vivian*, this activity would question the validity of the traditional museum taxonomy within the host institution, allowing for an alternative response to the collection. Their opinions and observations would be recorded, noted and used to label their chosen objects, which would then be exhibited along side the permanent collection.

**Exhibition Invitation 1:** members of the public would be invited to bring ceramic objects that they own to the museum for exhibition. Their unique stories would be recorded and used as labels. This intervention would

question the notion of value and worth of an object as the museum would relinquish any curatorial control over the ceramics exhibited.

**Exhibition Invitation 2:** I would invite employees (from cleaners to curators) of the museum to bring ceramic objects they own to the institution, (as above). Therefore allowing 'behind the scenes staff' to have a visible presence through their own personal objects at the public interface.

If appropriate and feasible I would like to consider a similar initiative to the British Museum's collaboration with Pentonville Prison and Helen Chatterjee's arts intervention project in University College Hospital. Both programmes facilitated the lending and display of museum artefacts to partner organisations in order to reach as diverse an audience as possible; but also to monitor the effect of ancient artefacts on the health and wellbeing of patients and prisoners.

**Outreach Project 1** I would propose in consultation with the host institution to identify partner organisations or individuals that would be willing to engage with artists practice in their homes or place of work with the placement of artefacts from the ceramics collection.

A second outreach project for consideration would be a development *12 People 12 Objects*.

**Outreach Project 2** I would propose to visit audience/visitors or staff's homes in and around the immediate locale to examine their collections of ceramic(s). The work would take the form of a photographic record, conversation and book.

These series of proposals demonstrate the flexible peripatetic nature of the model developed that can be employed through practice or theoretical research in order to gain new knowledge and awareness of the relationships between the individual and the ceramic object. As a method of practice this model can be utilised by the artist or the curator to articulate and extrapolate

human experience providing unique insights into our perception of ceramics and its fundamental position within our lives.



## Appendices

### 1. Keith Harrison interview with David Cushway

**Bath Spa University 16<sup>th</sup> August 2013**

David Cushway: I'm interested in the performance work you did because I'm interested in this idea of the visible maker and when we think about ceramics studio based practise from what I know of your work I assume that your training is similar to mine in that it is as much about the fired object, that was the paradigm that was held up to us. So I'm wondering what kind of significance this idea of me or you being visible during the making process and the process being visible in terms of ceramics, what kind of significance that would have. Was it a conscious decision on your part or was it just an extension of the work?

Keith Harrison: I think it was and I think I can take a fairly logical...it certainly steps back right the way through to BA ceramics and that work which was, well, I don't show it so much anymore but it was trying to create or deny functionality within pieces. They were fired and about kind of industrial objects or somewhere between the two and I would set something up and then deny and to me there was a tension in that potential and what they could do that they had been denied. Then as that work developed, increasingly there were my own thoughts on art college training and college sensibility that I was working with and increasingly asking where does my situation now and my background, and maybe slightly more autobiographical but just the sense of where do other things come in and I had this really strong sense of my family and background in terms of electricity and wanting to show that and there's an image of my dad in a lab, experimenting, trying something out, it was an experience I was aware of, I had been to the university, didn't know particularly what it was but I remember it – and all that process was there, all the mechanics were there and trying to do something.

DC: Yep, because I was listening to you on the radio and you talk a bit about your background because I come out of a bit of a similar background of builders, my dad was a metalworker and my mother was a gardener and they were kind of...all of the creative processes were around me from a very early point you know. I was used to seeing things being made and people making things.

KH: But not with the label of 'art' on it?

DC: Not at all, but I think that's what...did that attract you to ceramics in the end? In a way I kind of wanted to learn a process, it was almost like an apprenticeship. And then once I had learnt it I completely reacted against it. Which brings me to another point because you talk about this, and I talk about it all the time within my own practice, you talk about resistance, which is actually another electrical term, and you talk about a resistance to studio pottery and yet this oppositional in this kind of paradigm that was held up to me in college, and I'm assuming you at college. I wanted nothing to do with it; I found it incredibly limiting the actual objects, the autonomous objects.

KH: I guess I came at it from a slightly obscure angle because I was doing product design in Cardiff, got disillusioned with that and was making these objects that were destroying themselves, it became increasingly about obsolescence, I questioned the whole reason why I was making more stuff to go out there in the world and I think that was then but no different to some of the kind of questions people have about themselves and their practices but it led me to a point where I didn't want to continue as a product designer and then, almost by happenstance I had a conversation with Paul Greenham??? in a lift he talked about ceramics and I'm doing a small project, an airline project I was doing about smashing plates on an airline and it appealed to me and I knew Cardiff had a good reputation so I didn't come with a knowledge of ceramics history at that point it was kind of added on and you know, as a kind of whole lifestyle it was really 'wow! That's amazing' it was almost this kind of alternative lifestyle and so I guess I did kind of respect that but I never wanted

to make those kind of pieces and never really went down that route at all, that functional side or if it was it would become quite quickly undone.

DC: I kind of feel the same, I came from a point of resistance really against what was being held up to me, you know I left here with a lot of objects and things and I kind of felt I had missed out on something and that's when it started to shift. Anyway, it's not about me! Anyway, you talk about clashing cultures as well quite a lot, which I find quite interesting. When I say clashing cultures I mean it's bringing something that you might consider contemporary like electricity and performance to something that might be considered archaic in terms of material, certainly prehistoric is there.

KH: I'm not sure I would agree entirely, I think I had a clashing in terms of wanting to go further, I would take a view outside of that actually and it was the musical analogy and something that would be completely other to an understanding of ceramics and studio pottery, particularly and yet I was in that scenario, I was surrounded by it and I kind of looked the other way for images so I kind of, there was a feeling in some respects, that practice gets enriched by looking elsewhere rather than looking only inwards to the ceramics community and then I thought, well, I'll look at it, it's there and I'll kind of challenge it you know? There it was, there was Lucy Rie, I'm a student, and I'll bring something representative of me, and there's Lucy Rie and this process on these wheels that I don't use and I'm not a thrower so I think the obsolescence and that sort of aspect is there but I think equally electricity and those kind of visible things are equally obsolescent now and to a certain extent more and more hidden so I think I am really keen to bring that kind of materiality.

DC: Because there is something about looking outside that really relates to me, you know I looked out to Gormley, Deacon and Cragg and a whole range of artists that were working in different ways to show, who also worked with the material but then people like Cornelia Parker and Mona Hatoum and this very kind of transient, temporal work which I liked.

KH: But also out to science as well, that whole link back into that concept of experimentation and testing and laboratories, and something not working and being alright with that. That is equally looking, taking a look outside. I think actually ceramics has got a huge aspect of technologies everywhere, chemistry, science, so I don't think they're necessarily completely divorced but...

DC: I equate that to thinking in the medium. What I call thinking within the frame. I think about and within the material, I don't know if this is the same for you its a consideration of what ceramics is, what it does, what it can do, what it has been used for, and looking at all those aspects of the practice rather than, say, domestic pottery and working within a tradition. Do you consider yourself to be immersed in ceramics discourse in terms of practice?

KH: by that do you mean the debates that are going around or do you mean a particular group of practitioners?

DC: I think both of those aspects because its something that I think about, and in reality I guess you are immersed in the discourse because your stuff is being written about in terms of ceramics.

KH: Yep, but I don't create the discourse though, I think I make the works, and I'm quite removed and I make in the South West and I'm not part of a kind of cohort in London, although alot of the work inevitably goes there. There's connections and people that have shown me and people you inevitably know and have conversations with but I've always felt a slightly peripheral practitioner and in a way quite happy for that to be the case and I've always felt like its on the edge of that and the edge of this and by being on the edges of something it makes you potentially drop completely but I just think that for me that is where the interest lies, in these slight overlaps and blurring.

DC: So your prime motivation, your prime focus is simply your ideas and your motivation to make more work as opposed to any kind of consideration as to where it might fit or kind of contextualisation

KH: Yes, because I don't think I can kind of...I can't second guess that and I wouldn't second guess it because its just the work and an interest I have and I just follow that, and I start to play records and disks on turntables with clay and I just want to try it out and that's not with any kind of forethought. Often the places that I try that stuff out is not even within that ceramic arena. Those early bits were kind of performance related in Southampton, in testing grounds and in a gallery where there were other performers and I felt similarly peripheral in that. You know? But I am interested in doing it and I think because it's theatre and its spectacle.

11.39

DC: Do you ever think about your own influence on the discourse? What your practice brings to it? Do you ever think about any kind of influence? I mean you're a tutor, same as me, you make, your work is kind of out there, it's been critiqued its been written about and held up as examples of good practise?

KH: Yes, which is brilliant, but I don't think when I am in a scenario with a student when I just go to their position rather than from my own position and I hope the conversation and the discussion is lively and challenging and out there but not my vision, that's where I fall, in fact sometimes I find that hardest when someone is at a point where they're...I almost find that too hard, there can be a point when were almost too close, I quite like having a conversation that is quite outside...that you are meeting from two positions that are different. And sometimes outside of ceramics completely. Because I think there is something in materials that goes beyond what we would think of as a part of ceramics.

DC: You talk about discomfort and setting up a system of discomfort which is something that I am very very familiar with as its a central tenet in alot of ways to what I do so I am really interested in that idea of discomfort, pushing clay to its limits or breaking points. Where does that desire come from? Is it about having a material that you want to just push in different directions?

KH: I think it was from thinking 'What can I do?' and it's an exploration of that in very simple terms but I think there is also that sense of myself and pushing myself and initially that was on the limits of my own knowledge about, certainly, electricity, what was driving it and having to use other peoples technical input or their own knowledge and relying on that and then that works on this point of working/ not working exploding/ not exploding, nothing happening and out of all those scenarios it became a little bit uncomfortable.

DC: Do you intend to make the audience feel uncomfortable?

KH: Yes, I want them to be similarly naturally so, but I do want to set something up where there is this unknown, what on earth is going to happen here, maybe what is happening here initially and then what might happen and that can be the set up of having to wear safety equipment and goggles, that can to a certain extent add to it.

DC: My argument is that you could only ever achieve that through performance related work, it can't necessarily be achieved through an autonomous object by engaging the audience in a certain way and addressing the audience, confronting the audience very directly and making an audience participate.

KH: I think it's partly that I have always thought of art as something that is live, whether that's me or when I have switched it on and it becomes live. I think I've been increasingly interested not all that consciously, but of what that live constituent means and increasingly, but not always, I seem to be more lately 'in' it as well as being an activator, disrupter, resister. And that's changed but that brings new discomforts of being performance and performer.

DC: I'm also quite interested in the way that you set up the system, because you talk about this a lot, and when I do things with film and socially engaged practice then the way that you set up the system within the timeframe and there is a complete lack of control in whatever the finished, not necessarily

article but finished point is? Or maybe it never finishes. I'm interested in that idea of a lack of control, or maybe, not a reliance on serendipity but if we put it in simple terms, seeing what happens.

KH: I feel like there is a controlled point in that you are setting up a timeframe, initially, that was often music that would set that, quite often three minutes. So to some extent that set up the control within those parameters...

DC: So there's a framework and a kind of entropic...

KH: Yes, there's a switch on, and there is often a switch off and then there's a point in-between where I've got some scenarios and notions of what might happen within it even if they're not complete but I don't think it has ever become improvised and there is a structure in terms of how I am thinking in those time based works, that something happens, that that happened and I don't exactly know quite where that will lead to or quite how effective or ineffective that might be.

DC: Are you responding to the work as it is going along within these performance pieces, are you kind of wishing...because it struck me that there are elements of a performance that is still open to external influence or influences outside of your control however you set up the structure.

KH: Yes, that is interesting because in my mind I've got the choreography, almost a very loose choreography in my head and I go to there, I do that then I go and do that then I do that and then I do that again and then that ends it sort of and I do feel like there is a sort of fair element of control within that and then what happens in those intermediate points and I think it's just what I had to react to. I do feel like I try and be quite passive in terms of... and deadpan in what I do.

DC: Do you think you try to disappear in the performance because when I did the platespinner thing I just wore a black suit and I think I was pretty quick in becoming aware of the fact that I disappeared effectively, even though I was

there and I was doing things I very quickly became the secondary point of influence, the attention swaps from the person to the action – from me spinning the plate or you working the decks I just wondered if that was an aspect of what you do?

KH: I am purely the operator on the decks. I operate the decks. But increasingly aware that I am in there and similarly I have started wearing a white lab coat because I was quite interested in Fitzcarraldo .

DC: Because I was quite interested in that 'whiteness' you had for that piece of work and it is kind of a uniform in a way.

KH: It was just after those riots as well, the London riots but it was equally, probably moreso at the time, the Herzog Fitzcarraldo wearing this white suit in the middle of the Peruvian jungle equally, so I wanted my equivalent of that at the same time sound systems often allowed it.

DC: That relationship really underlines what you were saying earlier about taking things from outside, from all over the place.

KH: It doesn't suit all people but to me I am making some connections and trying to pick up wider cultural references. Not deliberately high and low but whatever interests me – they feel kind of equal.

DC: Last question. Its a statement actually I'm just curious what what you would say if I said beauty in action rather than aesthetic.

KH: So the deed is the beauty rather than the object?

DC: It might be the deed or the motivation for doing something as opposed to, and again I come back to this idea of a finished object. But is there a beauty in the aesthetic of performance?



KH: Well I would argue that a lot of this comes out of drawing for me and some of the drawings are not drawings of performance but of pieces of work that I want to make and so they have formal considerations and thoughts about colour and coding sometimes, certainly form and certainly sometimes modular try and bring those references and create my world initially in drawing on a 2D plane often with a reference to a 3D space. Then I make the work, the performance with knowledge that it is going to possibly happen and obviously before that it has all those formal considerations for me and qualities of aesthetics, or that feel like aesthetics to me they might not necessarily feel like aesthetics or beauty to others but they are things that I am quite attracted to maybe in that quite industrial examples.

DC: Because when I think about your work I think it is quite formal in the way that you arrange it.

KH: I think that consciously there is a sense of the formal, the constructed, the set-up and then there is the awareness of the action then there is the unimagined and the unforeseen and the unpredictable that can happen within that formal set-up, in the way music gives you a formal structure. I do think often it isn't a chaotic roundabout when I am making or even the set-up I have created it is quite a careful and considered set-up which can break down or fall apart. I'm trying to think if there is something that would completely break that and test the work sometime but no, I do feel that there is a formality in the set up and that they have to work in that respect as well and perhaps that makes it even more illogical and without sense that I do sometimes completely break up. But I think there has to be that or there's no sense of feeling that a field is being engaged because it's like the drumkit, I had this drumkit and I wanted it to have a sort of presence and then in the last piece, smashed it to bits.

DC: I mean, do you consider the work to have a life after the performance in terms of photograph or film or...

KH: I come and go on that bit. There is a sense of well, how do you then create the next opportunity and the next when deciding how you show it and where. I do think there is almost no real substitute for that live experience of being with the work, I've never found anything that will replicate that or will replicate it directly. So it becomes the thing in itself there, essentially the film becomes about film as well and you know that you are in that arena, perhaps more than myself and I would much rather be dispassionate and see it as a pure document of that time. There are things that are missing inevitably, I mean you capture one thing and you don't capture another. I'm not trying to recreate an all round sensory experience! But obviously other people have documented and for the last piece, that drumkit piece, I was really keen that rather than saying 'Don't photograph, no photography' that everyone documented it and I didn't so it's out there and it's gone. It's out there and people tweet it and a film crew did come in but through the theatre and performance department at the V&A so it will be archived as theatre and performance so I feel quite happy with that actually. I think, that's their document and the work happened there. It's their decision. Often I just haven't got the time to think of that, to similarly set up that scenario and capture it. But sometimes I'm just happy that it's out there and it's gone.

## **2. Dr Jeff Jones interview with David Cushway University of South Wales, Cardiff 16 February 2014.**

David Cushway: Give me a bit of background about you; this is an interview with Jeff Jones.

Jeff Jones: I am now Professor of Ceramics at Cardiff School of Art and Design, part of Cardiff Metropolitan University. So we are here in my office at the Howard Gardens site, it's the School of Art and Design Howard Gardens site, due to close this summer, and we will all be over the new campus in Llandaff.

DC: I'm quite interested in, you've mapped the history and development of studio ceramics in your recent book *Studio Pottery in Britain*. I'm particularly interested in the paper you wrote *Studio Ceramics: The End Of The Story*,

which also was in the recent book *Interpreting Ceramics*. Did you come to any conclusions, do you think that that paradigm of practice is disappearing?

JJ: The first thing to say about that was that that was written and published right at the beginning of this century, 2000 - 01, and I was very conscious of this phenomenon which was happening at that time which was 'Endism', where everything is coming to an end. So it's very self-consciously written in that kind of context. But I don't think I've changed my mind all that much about it. I think the main point I was making in that article, in that conference paper, was that studio ceramics had kind of taken on a responsibility for taking forward ceramics in the 20th century, and I was wondering what would happen in the 21st century – whether it would continue to do that, or whether some kind of new understanding of ceramics would take over. And I was specifically referring to Garth Clark's book where he talks about it in terms of a relay race. If I remember correctly he starts off by talking about the peasant potter as he called them, or the traditional potter, then you get the industrial potter, then you get the art potter, then you get the studio potter. And I suppose at that time I found difficult to imagine what can come next, you know – if there is this development of ceramics, what comes after studio ceramics? Does it all just fragment?

DC: Sure. I'm really interested in that because I think there are several issues there, and I'll just ask your opinion: do you think that some of this is tied to the closure of all but one ceramics degree course? Do you think that the change is about ... You talk about an ideological phenomenon of studio pottery, I wonder, is that tied to the way we now perceive ceramics through the rise of the study of material culture, and that everything now is relational, there's no hierarchical aspects within practice, and we're all engaged in relational field, and it's all practice?

JJ: There's a couple of things there: first of all, in terms of ceramics education there have been huge changes obviously since the year 2000, not for the better in the sense of the number of places where you can study ceramics is now a fraction of what it was. So that is bound to have an impact I'm sure, and perhaps we haven't seen the end of that yet; there aren't many places left. There's us in Cardiff where you can do a BA in Ceramics, Central Saint Martins possibly ...

DC: My current research ... A degree in ceramics can only be done here, BA Hons.

JJ: Really?

DC: There's an awful lot of postgraduate, and also there's a massive rise in research because that's where the funding and the money lot is. So in some ways the ceramics education has changed into postgraduate and PhD practice by research, but the BA system has been absorbed into material culture-based courses, materials-based courses.

JJ: And I think that is following the example of what's been happening in America really. For a long time it's been the case in America that you do your specialisation at Masters level; at BA level what you do is you would major in the subject but you couldn't exclusively concentrate on one subject at BA level, and that seems to be what's happening in this country, and that's the reality of it. I can't see that being reversed, I cannot see it be reversed, that's what we have to live with now. But as you say, there are still places where you can do ceramics.

DC: I think several university colleges would argue that you can do a ceramics degree, but you don't do it in a manner that I did a ceramics degree in that ceramics degrees were taught throughout the country up until five, six, seven years ago.

JJ: Exactly. That's right. Now there's another quotation – I can't remember where I am getting this from – in our current issue of *Interpreting Ceramics* there's an article which is by one of our ex-BA students Lauren Hadley, and that's about the future of ceramics education, and Lauren wrote that three years ago now. But the issues in that are even more pertinent now. Now, I'm thinking of this quotation, I'm not sure if it's from Lauren's article or not. Somebody somewhere, a student went to study ceramics, or inquired about doing ceramics somewhere, and was told: you can come and use clay here, but you can't do ceramics here. So there is this distinction made – you can use clay as material but you can't come and practice the discipline of ceramics here. So that seems to be the tension that's happening at the moment, what's the difference between using clay and engaging in this discipline called ceramics? And does this discipline called ceramics actually exist anymore? Now, well I think this is an interesting question because

there's still an awful lot of people around who do think that it does, and there are still things like journals, there are still ceramics journals, you know, there are still plenty of those around, and they depend on the idea that there is this thing called 'ceramics'; there are ceramics conferences and symposia around, more than ever; there are exhibitions around which are quite clearly ceramics exhibitions, you know – go to the Mission Gallery in Swansea and Claire Curneen's work is on there, and at the same time Ingrid's work and Ann Gibbs' work was shown there at the same time. So clearly all those things say, well – ceramics hasn't gone away.

DC: I think its more vociferous than ever. But the way that it ... I think the whole thing is much more fluid. I'm kind of interested in, when my idea of studio ceramics from my degree course was maybe someone who taught a couple of days a week part-time, was studio based, and produced a body of work, and teaching supplemented their income. And I think when I came here in 1992 was the year that *The Raw and the Cooked* in, which, and incredibly ... I wouldn't say groundbreaking show because I found myself reacting quite strongly to it, because Gormley's *Field* was on at the same time, and I was presented with a lot of object-based work and that's not where my interest as someone who came do a postgraduate lay really. I made work in spite of what I was seeing. Most of those people who exhibited in *The Raw and the Cooked* were lecturing in ceramics courses. So I'm wondering, do you think that was the zenith of it? Was it almost a culmination, or was it ... because what was claimed for the show and what the actual show did were very distinctive things, I think.

JJ: Well I think *The Raw and the Cooked* is an interesting one because there is a very – not just through the exhibition itself but also through the essays, because of course there were two very important catalogue essays weren't there, one by Alison Britton and one by Martina Margetts. Now I think it's really interesting to look at those essays because they don't quite say the same things, I don't think. What Allison Britton says is actually a little bit different from what Martina Margetts says, but Martina Margetts certainly argues in her essay: she says, doesn't she, here ceramics is presented as an authentic medium for sculpture. That's her tack, that ceramics can be sculpture. Now, ok so how many years have gone past, 22 years on, are we?

DC: 1992-93, the show was.

JJ: So we're more than ... we are about that. In one sense that was the zenith of the argument, but I suppose that show happened at a point where certainly Martina Margetts was expecting something to happen to ceramics, so that from thereon in it would be seen as some equivalent to sculpture. I don't think that's happened.

DC: That's my point precisely, is that what was prescribed for the show or what was intended in terms of that show never happened. I mean, when has clay not been an authentic medium for sculpture would be my first argument. And also to me it was an incredibly important time because I was in a show, the *Young Contemporaries* at the V&A in the same year, *Field* was exhibited. And I think the argument that by parachuting in Gormley, Cragg and Deacon and Cragg talk at the symposium that I went to was, you know, somehow raised or elevated the work to another level, which it didn't because it was all object-based largely, and on plinths. But you come across Gormley's *Field* and I actually thought: this wasn't made by him, it was exhibited in real space on the floor, there were far more other ways and several writers mentioned that at that time when the show was critiqued. So I'm agreeing with you really that ... I mean, I think that things did change but they didn't change in the way that they intended them to change.

JJ: And perhaps they were looking in the wrong place for the change, perhaps that was another thing. That somehow it was ... the status of the objects would do it, if only you raised the status of the ceramic object, the status of the sculpture, everything would be alright. It hasn't worked that way, and I think perhaps they were looking in the wrong place and perhaps there were other places where, maybe there were signs of it at that time but certainly in the last 20 years we've seen a kind of consolidation of that – in the work that you do, the work that Keith Harrison does for example ...

DC: ... Clare Twomey.

JJ: Clare Twomey. Now those are all significant artists, I think we can really say that, these are significant artists. Now I think it's fair to say that they are significant artists working in the field of ceramics, that's what I feel. Because I think that the three of you are drawing on certain things that ceramics offers in order to make your art, and I think you are also drawing on a discipline of

ceramics which means something to you and which is relevant to the art that you make. Now, one of the things that I think is very significant in this – you know, you mentioned Anthony Gormley and the fact that he didn't make the work himself, I think you just mentioned Richard Deacon and of course Richard Deacon has got this exhibition on at the moment, hasn't he, with lots of ceramics in it – did he make the ceramics? I'm not terribly familiar with the working methods of Richard Deacon, but I doubt it.

DC: Some of it he does, some of it he doesn't.

JJ: And that's commonplace amongst many artists working today: they will use ceramic as a material but they will incorporate other people, they will get other people to help them to do it.

DC: Much the same as me, Keith and Clare do.

JJ: Now what's the degree to which you do that, do you think? The degree to which you engage the help of others? Is there a difference in the way that you engage their help and the way somebody like Richard Deacon engages their help?

DC: I don't see, no, I honestly don't. As you know, I make film, I do make ceramics, I have made ceramics, I've also made a lot of film, I've made a lot of unfired work. So I would engage with skills and skillsets that's outside of my own or that people ... skillset that I need. It was quite interesting what you were saying there. If we think, if we come back to this idea that the objects were going to raise the status, I think the difference between someone like me, Clare, Keith Harrison, wasn't our disregard for ceramics but it was it regard for the process, the practice and the making aspects and the use of the material in a way that expanded the field, if I can say that. It was our approach, really, I think that changed. Certainly for me that came from seeing Gormley's *Field* and looking outside to critical discourse when Noel that was here and the whole idea of Postmodernism. But personally I will engage whatever skills are necessary from other people. Sometimes it's important that I don't make it, and I think Gormley made that point, it was that it was important that he didn't sit there and make 50,000 – a) because he couldn't, or yes he could but it would have taken him 20 years, but that was the point of the piece of work. So from personal point of view sometimes it's important that

I am engaged in all the processes, but not always. Sometimes it's actually important that I'm *not* engaged in the process.

JJ: And does that hold good for when you're working with other materials? Does that hold good across the range of things that you do, whether you're working with clay, whether you're working in film, whether you're working with other materials?

DC: Yes, sure.

JJ: So can I ask you then, do you still have any loyalty or attachment to the idea of ceramics as a discipline, and what the nature of that attachment is? Because I think it's there, but I sometimes find it difficult to say what that is, but I think it's important.

DC: Yes, I do have a loyalty to clay and ceramics and I'm absolutely fascinated and obsessed with it, mainly from the point of view that it ... the way that it exists in our daily lives and from our life to our death. It encompasses everything we do on a daily basis, and that's why I'm interested in it. I guess ... And I've been called a video artist, a film artist, but I describe myself as an artist, and I always talk in terms of the material of clay or ceramic, or about ceramic. And the two recent film pieces where I went into the Museum here, *Tea Time* which was shown at Nantgarw ... sorry, *Last Supper* which was shown at Nantgarw is another case in point really where it's this ... You can very quickly illustrate through film as a discursive medium the importance of ceramic object to people. And Ingrid, I was just reading an article in *Ceramics: Art and Perception* where Cath Roche has just written about Ingrid's practice. So I think the way that that exists in our increasingly removed daily experience, it's never more important than it has been, if you see what I mean.

JJ: Yes, so ...

DC: So I will not drink out of a cardboard cup, I won't drink out of cardboard, I won't drink out of a plastic cup. I refuse to, I always want to drink out of something ceramic. I'm quite interested in ... We all have a tacit knowledge about ceramic. I know exactly what that feels like in my hand, before I even ... it's so culturally ingrained in our lives, in all cultures – apart from the cultures that don't have clay under their feet. So that's where my loyalty and interest comes from. I mean, I'm quite interested in ... Where would you see people



like myself, Clare Twomey, and Keith – how do we fit into what might be termed as ceramics discourse? Is there a ceramics discourse?

JJ: Well yes, I do think that there is. The fact that you want to come and talk to me about the subject is evidence of it. It's not that I think there should or shouldn't be a ceramics discourse, it's just that people go on talking about it. There is a longevity to it, there is something which keeps it going which we just have to recognise, I can't see that going away. However much ceramics education changes, however much you can or you can't do ceramics as a named subject in universities or whatever it is, that there are going to be some people who are going to continue to be interested in this thing called ceramics, and the fact that ceramics exists as something, some area or field of interest which somehow goes on reinventing itself. So yes, clay will be used by somebody who calls themselves a sculptor; yes, clay will be used industrially in all kinds of ways, lots and lots of ways where ... different kind of circumstances where clay will be used. But still there is this coherent field or range of activities where people have a special attachment to clay and I think to the history of clay, I think the history of clay is very important.

DC: It certainly is with some of the recent work that I've done revolving around people owning objects. It becomes a locator for people, it's handed down, people become incredibly attached to their mug, you have special mugs. That kind of intimacy I think is incredibly important to people. I never forget the abundance of the material, it's never going to run out, in inverted commas Alan Barrett-Danes used to say, it exists everywhere and in every ...

JJ: That's right, but also I think what's particularly important about ceramics – and I'm thinking this more and more – is the range of its possible transformations. I think that it is a unique material in that. There are other materials that are transformed. Many sculptors use materials and will transform them, so they work with metal or something which can become liquid and then can solidify, or whatever it is; glass obviously can undergo transformations; but I really think that in its range of transformations, there is nothing like clay. There are so many ways that people can work with clay in its different states, whether it's dust, whether it's a slip, whether it's clay that's dried, whether they fire it and of course firing then gives you this huge possibility for transformation. There is such a range it's unequalled, I think;

there isn't another material like that. So I think ... And that's never going to change, that's not subject to fashion, that is just the fact, that range of transformations will always be available to people. Forever, isn't it, that range of possibilities is going to be there. So I think people are always going to find their way back and are going to organise themselves in some way around that range of possibilities, that's what I feel. So in that sense ceramics is always going to exist.

DC: I think I agree. I'm interested, would you draw a distinction between clay and ceramic?

JJ: A little bit, yes because clay is quite clearly a material, and it's not just people who identify themselves as ceramicists who use clay as a material. Clay is used in all different kinds of ways. And I think sculptors will often use clay, like Richard Deacon or Cecile Johnson-Soliz, but they're quite clearly sculptors. They have no loyalty to clay. They will use other materials, it's a means to an end, and that's fine, of course they can do that. People can do whatever they want. And yet at the same time, as I was saying, I don't think this possibility of a group of people cohering an identity around the possible range of expressions in clay, I don't think that's ever going to go away. So in that said there will always be the possibility of somebody calling themselves – whether it's a ceramicist or it's a potter – there will always be that possibility. And as I said at different times and in different places that going to change quite a lot, but it's never going to go away. Even as we're talking now about the kinds of changes that are happening in ceramics education in this country, we're just one country in the world; there are all these other places in the world that are engaging with ceramics and are interested in ceramics. And they will find these different ways of organising themselves around this thing we call ceramics.

DC: You talk about the wider world as it were, my research is very much UK-based because it's what I know, it's what I'm engaged with, although I've exhibited nationally and internationally. Was that one of the rationales for setting up the *Interpreting Ceramics* website, was to reach outside of ... to reach the world, as it were?

JJ: Absolutely, yes it was, and that's one of the things that we wanted to do, was to give opportunities to show what was going on in other countries. So

yes that was something that we very much wanted to do. And I think we've been quite successful in doing it, and there was an issue that we did a few years ago that Moira Vincentelli did, so she edited that issue, and that was on gender and world ceramics. And that again showed this range of activity that's going on throughout the world. There are different ways of approaching ceramics.

DC: I'm also interested in another rationale for why you set up the website. Was it about looking at ceramics – coming back to that word, the ceramics discourse – was it about looking at ceramics in a wider cultural context other than just ceramics and its history?

JJ: It was, I'm not sure the extent to which we have been successful in that or not. If you read, there's a little bit of blurb on the website which we've stuck to from the beginning, it hasn't really changed, and it says we are interested in any kind of activity that relates to ceramics used in any kind of cultural context. So that obviously one of the main cultural contexts is art, ceramics is used in art. But of course there lots of people are interested in ceramics. Archaeologists are interested ceramics because ceramic survives, it's the one material that really survives. And I think we were hoping that we would get more of a cross-disciplinary interest in the journal, and I don't think we've been particularly successful in that. There are one or two, but on the whole I don't think we've been particularly successful in that. But that's something that could still change.

DC: For me the greatest success of – and I've contributed to it, I've read all of it – the greatest success for me was to be able to read about ceramics in a way that was critically relevant, and again I come back to this word material culture – you're saying that you weren't successful in drawing in other disciplines or whatever, but for me the level of writing is ... if we go back briefly to *The Raw And The Cooked*, from there to you started in 2000 ...

JJ: 2000 was the first issue.

DC: So within the space of eight, nine years you'd graduated from, you'd finished your PhD, Jo had finished hers ...

JJ: Around the late '90s, yes.

DC: So all of a sudden there were academics like yourself were writing and engaging in ceramics in a way that I had never seen before. So for me that's the success, I don't know how you feel about that.

JJ: Well I think that's really good to hear that, I mean certainly if we think back to the time when we set it up we were aware of that, we were aware that we were a group of people who could do it I guess, we were suddenly in a position where we could do it, so why not do it? And it's worked, I mean the fact that it's lasted for 14 years is testament to the fact that it worked and I hope it will go on being published. One of the things that – I don't know if you're going to ask about this, but it's an interesting thing and it's a thing that we thought a lot about recently: when we set up the journal we were very conscious that we wanted it to be free, so that nobody had to pay for it. We did think that was significant in terms of reaching a worldwide audience, nobody had to pay for it. Now, I think we were pioneers in that respect, we certainly weren't the first academic journal to publish electronically but we were fairly early on in the game to publish it electronically over the Internet and not have any ambition at all about a print version, that we would just publish it electronically. And now we're at a very interesting position because of course there is this huge discussion about open-access publishing, especially for research. Because the argument is that in this country if public money is given for research projects then the results of that research should be made available publicly: public money has been used to fund it, why should the public have to pay to access that research? And we're very much on that side of the argument, we very much want to continue as an open-access journal. I'll tell you this because it's not confidential, in fact Jo and Matthew might already have mentioned this to you – we were approached by a major academic publisher who wanted to ... I don't know if it was a take-over, it was pretty close to that, they certainly wanted to work with us, and they ... If we'd have gone with them we would have had to have accepted their way of doing things and it would have become a subscription-based journal. And so we would have lost that open access, people would have had to pay to access the content. But our determination is to carry on as an open-access journal. There are problems with that because of course nothing is free, somebody pays for it. You say it's free, well somebody is paying for it, it's

the universities that are paying for it. But what I would say is that I think that now would be absolutely the wrong time to retreat from that open-access model because there's so much going on.

DC: Well Garth Clark has just emulated with [inaudible] on Facebook.

JJ: Yes, the open-access model I think must be the future. So we'll see how it develops.

DC: I'm kind of interested in this availability and wealth of information from the world wide web, the fact that it's free, that must have some impact on the discourse of ceramics because everything is instantly available, I instantly know what people are doing in America, Canada, you know, anywhere in the world. By the same token as an artist I can upload anything I like and it can be visible within seconds around the world.

JJ: That's exactly right. Now – that's great, it's fantastic, but of course there's problems with that as well in that anything can be now made available. So, if we're talking about academic research and academics publishing stuff and having some kind of a peer review process, making sure stuff that's worthwhile is published, that's a tricky balance there, because Internet gives access to anything, so one argument would be, why peer review anything? Why don't we just stick everything onto the Internet and then let the people who read it choose? What we've tried to do is we've tried – I think we've succeeded – we've tried to strike a balance so that everything that comes in is peer reviewed in some way, so we don't just publish everything we receive. Now, that peer review process could be the normal peer review process where we get an article in and then it's sent out to be blind peer reviewed by one of our reviewers who'd give comments, ask for revisions and all the rest of it. Sometimes it works that way, or sometimes what we've done is we've given over an edition of the journal to somebody else and they've guest edited it. For example we've worked with Mary McInnes at Alfred University, she's done a couple of issues for us. So really we've left everything to her and we've trusted her. So whatever she's given us we've published. She's the editor, so therefore we'll publish it, the review process of judging whether the work is suitably published goes on there. So that's the way we've worked and we think we'd like to do that with other places in the world as well, because of course one of the problems is ... sometimes we'll get in a piece of writing from

another country and we are in a bit of a dilemma as to what we do it because, ok if you're going to go according to the strict peer review process you know actually it's not going to be published, you know it's not good enough. While at the same time you think, well there's something, there's a voice there that's worth listening to, you know? So what do you do, do you spend time with that person, working with that author trying to bring it up to a reasonable level? It is a difficult question and it's one that we struggle with and will continue to struggle with. But on the whole what we want to do is to facilitate publication of good quality writing that takes advantage of the fact that the Internet will reach lots and lots of people.

DC: I think it's been more than successful in that. I'm aware that I'm taking up a lot of your time. To come, I'd just like to bring the thing full circle and talk about practice-based research and PhDs, you've been involved in that for – eight, nine, ten years?

JJ: I guess about that now.

DC: I'm quite interested because Glenn Adamson has questioned the validity of it, of practise-based research. So you have on one side of the argument Adamson saying, I don't see the validity in this, he's questioned practice-based research at a conference a couple of years ago at Bath that I was at. And on the other side of the fence you've got Edmund de Vaal who's a potter that writes rather than a writer that pots, quote unquote, you know, he's in print as saying that which I'm quite interested in. And then in the middle of these two positions are supervisors and practice-based researchers. So I'm interested and what you might think about that and the impact of practice-based research.

JJ: The research that I've supervised hasn't really been practice-based research. It's been mainly written theoretical ... they haven't been traditional PhDs, but they haven't been practice-based PhDs. Although a number of very successful practice-based PhD projects have been done here because of course it was Mike Hose that really pioneered it. So it's Mike Hose really that knows most about practice-based research PhDs, but what I would say is, certainly as far as the ones he supervised here through to conclusion, they were very worthwhile projects. They looked to me to be very solidly based projects and of a very high standard, very rigorous. So I think what you've got

to do is look at the evidence, you've got to look at the PhDs themselves that have been coming through and say, well were they worth doing? And as far as I can see they were. So that gives you confidence that there is something worthwhile, and that there are going to be further projects that people can do that will be worthwhile.

DC: I agree, I understand what Glenn is saying because I think we are still writing the criteria for it. We're inventing it in a way, in the last ... What have we had, a practice-based PhD system for 20 years, if that? So I think the thing is in its infancy, effectively. So I can understand what he's saying, but I can also see the validity of it from purely a personal point of view of the way that I can understand what I do in a different level, and part of that comes from understanding my work in a cultural and critical context, contextualising my own practice.

JJ: That's right. I think we are still inventing it and I think it's not necessarily a problem but it's an issue that we all have to face with not just practice-based PhDs but I would say, PhDs in the visual arts generally. So although I haven't supervised practice PhDs, I have supervised PhDs which have produced more of a thesis that people are used to when they think of PhDs, but I think with them all the problem is that you are reinventing the PhD each time you do it. So in some ways you can build on what's gone before, in some ways you can start to establish models of what PhDs in art might be, but that doesn't mean that each time that you start a new PhD you haven't got to start again, this is the problem. You are reinventing the PhD each time anew you do it. Now, what that does mean, I think in reality, is that some of these PhDs are going to take longer than usual, and I think we might get a little bit better at it, we might get a little bit more efficient in doing it, but it's in the nature of art ...

D: ... of practice ...

JJ: ... exactly, that it's going to be new each time. So I can't see that we're ever going to find a shortcut to that. I can remember having a conversation here with somebody from one of the other schools of the university who was saying, why can't we have two-year PhDs. Now, if you're doing it in the subject like chemistry or science or applied science, you might be able to do that, because there are very well established ways of doing PhDs. So a

member of the academic staff might be working in a particular area of research, they see something that needs to be done, they set up a research project, very well tried and tested ways of doing a PhD, a PhD student comes in...

DC: ... with a quantifiable outcome, I think is the difference, isn't it?

JJ: They might be able to do it in two years, they're just not going to be able to do it in art, it's just not the same.

DC: The argument between qualitative and quantitative practices.

JJ: Yes. But even with some qualitative degree say like, I don't know ... if you're doing a degree in English Literature, I don't know, I'm not familiar with it, but I think that even there, there might be models of doing things which are a bit more reliable in terms of getting the PhD through to completion. I think each time you start a PhD in art you're never quite sure what's going to happen, you're always a little bit in the dark about it.

DC: I think mine has changed as I've made work. It started as one thing and it just morphs into all kinds of other things, and I think they are very much of their time actually, because of what's happening. As an artist I think artists just respond to what's happening around them and the world around them. And at the moment the majority of the work that I've been doing in terms of my PhD has been museum based. That was a development of my practice at this time, it doesn't mean that I'm going to carry on doing that for the rest of my life. So I think they are very ... it's where you're at as an artist, what your concerns are, what you're making at that time. Well thanks Jeff, that's been great, I won't warble on any longer.

### **3. 12 People 12 Objects- Transcripts**

#### **Janet Ross, China dog**

This is a little china dog, very small. I think I was probably about nine or ten when we went over to Temple Salby, which is the village where my mum was brought up. We used to go over about two or three times a year to see old friends of hers, elderly people mostly and there was a little junky antique shop in the village that we used to go and look in the windows of and sometimes go into, and in fact I think there was a story to that, that house, because I think it



had been the home of the people that my mother had known when she was a child. In this little antique shop one time my mum said have a little look round and if there's anything you really like and she might buy it for us. So there's me and my sister and I can't remember what my sister chose, anyway, I chose this little dog and my mum did say at the time that I'd have to look after it and that is was actually quite special which made me think that maybe it was very old, possibly valuable, but I never really thought about that at the time.

I think probably just the fact that he's got a lovely expression and it's more to do with... the story that it belongs, it came from the village, from Temple and from that little shop, that my mum was there at the time and she wanted me to have it.

I think he's sweet and he's travelled with me, I suppose that's probably forty, I don't know forty six years ago or something, he's lovely isn't he? Very tiny, I don't know whether he would have had bigger sort of relatives or anything, I don't even know what sort of dog he is maybe a sort of beagle type. He's got a little red collar; he's got a lovely little face hasn't he? I think it's his expression

### **Sarah Cook and Andy Slater, Egg bowls**

SC I bought them at TK Maxx, We were together when we bought them

AS one of the few sorts of things that we have which isn't second-hand?

SC Or vintage or from a charity shop

AS Well that doesn't matter, they're just rather beautiful and I like that they're a pair, they're not sort of a whole set of cups where you have kind of people round for tea they're just something we can have together, we can have dinner together

SC there were three on the shelf and we decided should we buy the third in case we break one

AS Yes the third as a spare

SC Then we decided no we'd just buy the two

AS they can remain a pair and we can enjoy them, shortly after that we went to live in New York for about six, was it six months?

SC nine

AS nine months and we brought them with us so that we could have our own special bowls

SC I think that's when I realised how crazy we were

AS We were living there so we needed to know there was crockery there which we could use

SC we were renting a studio, kind of live work space studio space and so we knew that it would be furnished with the minimum required, but Andy was making the lists of what we should take and I thought ok you're crazy but sure ok that's a good idea because you know they're very good for soup and pasta and you can rest your bread on the side of them

AS I know it's a perfect toast resting spot

SC we call them our egg bowls, it's very funny when you make pumpkin soup as the pumpkin is exactly the same colour as the inside of them which is quite nice

AS You know as far as a lot of the modern ceramics are quite poor quality In terms of the glaze, usually the older stuff lasts better because it's well glazed and it's not just kind of like painted polyfiller. but these ones I guess Villeroy and Bosch are a decent maker because these you know have kind of held up quite well

SC we haven't ever gone to Villeroy and Bosch to look for any others to see if they were ever part of a set, like it would be horrible to discover that maybe it had sort of a tomato salt shaker that went with it or something like that

AS and also I couldn't really imagine a sort of a whole set like six or eight people with matching egg bowls

SC well this is just like the one egg

AS yes they're two halves of the same egg

SC I don't know, I don't really think much about them being eggs, I think it's just that we both quite like this colour.

### **Susan Ratliff, Lustre jug**

When I signed up for the project I was asked to choose a piece of work, this is a lustre jug that belonged to my mum, and I would say it's probably of very little material value. I was born in the Fifties and certainly it was in my home all that time. If my mum were alive I know she'd be saying why are you showing that old vase when there are lots of other nicer things?

She had Royal Albert tea sets which to her generation, china, had that kind of value to it and I think in a way she did have other nicer pieces but the reason for me choosing this is, its something I'll never throw out is that my mum would have been actually ninety seven today, she's dead, but it's her birthday so it's quite spooky getting a phone call this morning.

She's of that generation where she wasn't afforded the opportunity of education but really valued it and why it's so significant to me is that when I was young I loved reading, and read lots and lots of books, one particular book I read was a story about a lustre jug and it was about this sort of 'rainbow jug' that people travelled through and to other lands and other places and at the time I didn't know what lustre meant. I was probably about nine or ten and I asked my mum what lustre meant and she went and got this jug and showed it to me and I think that's what has such significance because it's a very strong vivid memory of being in the room with my mum, her holding the jug up to the light explaining the fact that it sort of had a more opalescent sheen to it and showing me the inside part of it.

So although I know she has, you know, if you're looking at a history of ceramics nicer pieces of ceramics, there are certain pieces I've got upstairs in the attic with probably greater value historically, but to me this is this is quite an emotional piece.

It's interesting when you look at it as well around the bottom it's been chipped and she's obviously glued it together and I think that was at a time, where as now I think if something got chipped, an ornament or something most people nowadays would probably just discard it, whereas, I think that generation valued either; how they obtained things or the few things they had and would have glued it.

So I think that's why it's important because, to me, although my mum didn't have the education, she took time out, especially now that I am parent, and realised the importance of taking time and sharing, teaching and explaining and it doesn't always have to happen in school.

### **Kevin Petrie Chicken Teapot**

This is my nan's chicken teapot and when I think I was about ten she said to me, something like, 'when I die is there anything you'd like?' You know so I'm a little boy and so I said that teapot up on the china cabinet. So maybe few years later she broke it, she broke the handle on it and gave it to me anyway. She said 'you'd better have it' you know because she'd broken it, so I mended it, kept it and I think she then lived for about another twenty years.

But I suppose I always think with ceramics, you know, I think about or look at this object and it reminds me of a room with a china cabinet, with the teapot up on the top, and then of course you start to remember stories from that room. So for example, it comes into my head that she told me, one day she was walking through the kitchen with her dinner, bumped into the door and spilt her dinner down the wall. So, you know, I start to remember these kind of daft stories.

I guess in later life I've done a few drawings of it, maybe twenty years ago, so it's one of those things you have, it's marked my memory as well

### **Rebecca Elsey, Pressed Glass dogs**

You see I have a passion for pressed glass; it's the technique and the way they were made, we are talking about 1865 onwards that the technique in manufacturing as well is fascinating and the colours. I have so many favourites but this pair of little dogs are rather unusual, you don't see them around very much, when you go to antique fairs, I haven't seen any before. There are a lot of these behind me, they're very collectable now, even though they're pressed glass, they're not blown mouth glass and as you can see by the vibrant colours you can see I'm rather fond of collecting the pressed glass. I've been doing it since, seriously, since about 1980, so quite awhile.

I'm collecting anything old as you can see around. I collect collectables, antiques, I just had a passion. My brother was the same and I think my mother collected, you could say it's in our genes something like that. My brother collects more expensive things, mine are not very expensive.

### **Judy Sunley, Racehorse**

This is See the Stars, This is who I call See the Stars he was a magnificent flat racehorse in 2009 and he won all his six races, he won the 2000 guineas, the Derby and the Arc de Triomphe and he was a fabulous animal and I used to back him and I saw this at an antiques fair one day and I got him for a song, so I bought him out the winnings and I always think of him as See The Stars, and he always reminds me of the wonderful racing season that I enjoyed watching so much, he was absolutely magnificent.

When he won the Arc de Triomphe, that was his last race, he was in an impossible position, and how he won? You thought, ah well that's it this is where he's gonna get beat and he came through the pack and he was just unbelievable and the crowd went wild I don't believe there was a dry eye in the house there wasn't in here.

I used to ride horses you know for many, not this calibre I might add, but I love horses and I won the junior championship on George, quite a few years ago, jumping championship and I used to ride a beautiful mare called Shadow, great big dun mare, she was fabulous.

### **Rob Winter, Students pot**

Well why this object? It was made by a student of mine who's now working at Newcastle College who I'm still friends with who's now still doing pottery which is important, and to me it represents everything that's changed about ceramics. I was at polytechnic I fell out with the tutor I didn't do ceramics again for fifteen well ten to fifteen years, came back and fell in back in love with it. Started teaching being a technician and I think that this object summed up everything that I think if you're into pottery, if you buy into it, if you understand it, well, in my opinion, if you understand it, then you'll like this object. If you don't get it then you won't. It's got a beautiful glaze; it's probably too heavy by traditional standards. It's made really intuitively, it's

really fluid, it's got sharp edges but then it's got smooth bits. It's got a turned base but it's not overturned. I think it's gorgeous and the fact that it was done by one of my students who loved it as well, in a kiln that we built together then we must have been doing something right I think. But don't take it to work because I want to keep it for myself.

It's been on me windowsill for ten years and it's one of the only pots that you'll see in my house, most of my pots are at work as I use them as teaching resource.

This one stands out, it's quite a humble pot, it's not particularly big but it's not too small, it's not delicate by any means. You know it just says everything about glaze. Why it's different to paint, why pottery is different to any other material. You can still feel where he's thrown it, put your fingers in the top, there's a lot of decision making in it, not in what to do but what not to do. I think he's understood it and he does because he makes good pots now, slightly more sophisticated ones he makes them functional now but for a third year student I think it's pretty accomplished.

### **Dennis Jobling Sumari Teapot**

A sumari teapot, I don't know where it's from, whether it's from India or Sri Lanka it was given to Grania's grand mum on the day of her wedding 26th November 1933. In those long forgotten halcyon days when things were relatively simple. I've always liked this ever since I first came across it, when I suppose the first time that I got introduced to my wife Grania's mum in Leicester, and it was only about 1 or 2 years ago that she suddenly just said I'd like you to the teapot and it was only really when she gave me it, that, the first thing I did was actually to remove the lid to see that everything was ok and then inside there's a press cutting and a photograph of Grania's grand mum with the date of the wedding it had all the information about the gift on the back.

I've only met Grania's mum, I met her Dad a few times, her grandparents died a long time ago. There's a direct link there with Ireland and my ancestors came across in the mid 1800's and her mum and dad came across in, I think, 1958, 1959. I've been across to Balbriggan which is just north of Dublin and that's basically where Grania's family are from and so there's a link there.

And as I say, I've always really quite liked it. I like the colouring and the history of it, has it been used for tea in the past sort or just decoratively? It's obviously been very well looked after, it's over 80 years old now, I love the colouring, the colouring's still really remained the same, it's very intricate, It's very delicate actually and it shows you that she must have at least liked or loved her son-in-law.

Well to give me such a prize, possession with all the information about Grania's grand mum inside. So I think it's a lovely piece I really do. I don't know whether it's, fully pc as it were, but it came from another time, another age, probably made in the early 30's or maybe late 20's. highly sought after actually, I presume because of the age of them and then if you've got them in families they'll get broken or get smashed if you've got kids around and stuff and Grania's one of five daughters so that's pretty good going for that to survive.

### **Jack Dawson, pot**

I started my career as a potter up in the Scottish borders; we were very much in the Leach Tradition, I started to make a lot of pots, made a lot of work for medieval banquets which were all the flavour of the month in the 70's, the work was very homely, very Leachy. In 1976 I decided to branch out a bit, do something different, make some pots that looked different, so I started making things that were a bit more austere, slightly hard edged.

Anyway, these were exhibited in an exhibition in Edinburgh; there were six of them, all different sizes, this is the smallest one, not long after that, 1978 I decided to pack it in and ever since then I've been an art historian, teaching on glass and ceramics courses.

I was on EBay looking for Jim Malone, Bernard Leach people of that type and there was something entitled Lucie Rie and Hans Coper, So I went onto the site and this thing was on with Hans Coper interest and I thought, well, you know, it's something I do for a living so I recognised that it wasn't a Hans Coper, but I thought I did recognise it from somewhere. I looked at it again and looked at it again and thought, I made that pot, scrolled down and there it was; Jack Dawson, now thought to be doing something with glass at the National Glass Centre.

So I left a bid on it and I ended up having to pay £11 for it. That was fair enough, it was from a dealer in Edinburgh so I got through to find out where he was and I arranged to go and collect it, it was only when I was collecting it he said, 'why have to come all that way', (and I have to say it was £45 rail fare for a £11 pot). I said 'because I made it', and he was actually quite surprised at the whole affair.

So whilst it's not the most valuable pot I've got, it's probably, to many people's eyes, not the most interesting pot that I've got, for me, it takes the thing full cycle and I think in that sense it's the most interesting pot I've got.

### **Colin Rennie USSR Teapot**

This is my Russian teapot, I don't know very much about it at all, apart from that it's got USSR stamped on the bottom of it very subtly and it's a mixture of hand painted and decal, I think, I'm not entirely sure. The reason I've chosen it, is that it's one of those purchases that you shouldn't have made but it was the best thing to do, if you know what mean?

It was originally on sale for £90, I was a poor student at the time, I got the guy down to £80, which wasn't very good, it was much more than I should have ever paid for it because it was about three weeks food money. When I saw it in the shop, (it was in an antique shop on Candlemakers Row in Edinburgh), just up on the top shelf looking out of the window, with its spout facing out and I thought what a weird shape.

It's a really odd shaped teapot, I've never seen quite like it. It's squashed, square but round with this tiny little spout and this tiny little head and I have no idea why I liked it but I saw it every day walking past, because I lived on Candlemakers Row. So, everyday I'd walk past this thing and got fonder and fonder of it, it was there for probably about three months getting more and more and more lonely, It was a bit like Bagpuss's shop window.

I just plucked up the courage one day to go in and ask to see it, so the guy pulled it off the shelf and he turned it round like that and I'd never seen the back. I'd seen the front of it for three months and then he turned it round and I just thought 'wow that's amazing'. I spent hours looking at it and we put it back on the shelf, and eventually, I just decided on one day to go and write out a cheque.



I didn't eat very much for a few weeks but I think I love it because I've never seen anything like it, and I don't know where it's come from apart from The USSR, it must be 1930, 1940 something like that. It's just one of those objects that is just amazing when you hold it and when you use it it's very weird, very quirky. It's got this amazing little pointy spout and it pours really well, it pours 9 cups.

### **Sandra Thomas, Sunderland lustre mug**

My great grandparents lived in Dock Street East in Sunderland and they had two children, one of them being my grandfather and his sister. my granddad, when he got married, I think he moved next door but my great aunt stayed on all the time in that house and she always had a Sunderland lustre mug with a frog inside that she used to show us when we were kids, which was very enthralling.

But through compulsory purchase orders she had to leave the house and a lot of her stuff went missing, including this, I never saw it again. So I'd always hoped that one day I would try and find one for myself, I don't think it's the same size, I think the old one was much bigger.

Three years ago I found this one in our local auction house so I bought it just to say that I'd got one at long last. I last saw the old one about 1961 so that's the tale behind me having this one

### **James Beighton, cracked teacup**

So I've chosen a little, a Saki cup or tea bowl by supposedly David Leach. I've had it many years and bought it on EBay where it was certainly sold as a David Leach. It looks like it might be, it's very competently, I'd say consummately made, very thinly thrown around the top and the fluting looks right. I think what intrigued me about it was that it's damaged, It's got a hair line fracture, quite difficult to see but it's in there somewhere and the story that came with it was that it was given by David Leach to John Maltby and Maltby used to drink his tea out of it and it was through him drinking his tea that it actually got this hair line fracture. So I became fascinated by the fact that actually, this is more

interesting as a David Leach tea bowl because it's been damaged but damaged by John Maltby.

Had it been damaged by anyone else it would have been a second, so being fully aware of the Japanese interest in objects that are damaged through use having added value and added life, I thought it was particularly interesting that this was more valuable because it was damaged by a kind of celebrity really, in the ceramic world. So, anyway, I bought it, didn't pay very much for it and I think it's a lovely thing.

I've never been able to establish whether the story is true or not. However, I did subsequently see another vessel, also on EBay by a different seller, which claimed to have a hairline crack which was caused by Colin Pearson drinking his tea. So either there's some kind of global ceramic conspiracy against these David Leach tea bowls amongst potters of certain generation, or it's a bit of a cock and bull story and they just realised that it added a bit of value to a otherwise slight second David Leach. None the less, I think it's a lovely thing and I'm very happy that I have it. I do occasionally drink my tea out of it and it's never done it any damage.

So it's a special piece to me. I don't know whether I want to know if John Maltby had it or not and if I do meet him I'm probably not going to ask him and I probably don't want to know whether it's a genuine David Leach or not. It just feels like a lovely thing and the story is more important.

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