

**A Re-Conceptualisation of Contemporary Sculptural Ceramics Practice From
A Post-Minimalist Perspective**

Wendy Patricia Tuxill

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the extent to which the 1960s process art strand of post-Minimalism can provide an analytical template for critical writing around contemporary ceramic art. A dearth of critical writing is an acknowledged problem in all types of ceramics practice and some of the reasons for this situation will be explored. In the past decade frequent calls have been made by artists, critics, academics, and curators for a body of critical writing to underpin contemporary work and connect with wider cultural debates. During this period, artists have begun to use the process of making the work to form part of the content. Such work has no relationship to traditional studio pottery, and critics have described it as difficult to write about and classify in normative ceramic terms. However, this area of ceramic practice shares characteristics with post-Minimalism, a movement of the 1960s that emphasised the behaviour of materials and the act of making. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* the French philosopher Michel Foucault suggests that a new critical language may emerge from the appropriation of other discourses, providing new interpretations for subject areas not yet theoretically mapped out. Foucault's notions on the formation of discourse are used as a methodological approach to investigate how process-led sculptural ceramics may be articulated by an understanding of post-Minimalist critical writings.

A substantial body of critical writing developed around post-Minimalist process art, providing a context for radical new approaches which broke with modernist traditions and which expanded and changed traditional definitions of sculpture. Key post-Minimalist texts are investigated as an analytical template for a new critical discourse for process-led ceramic art. A study of the sculptural ceramics of Richard Deacon and Kosho is undertaken as a means of identifying process-led tendencies and the possibility of a re-conceptualisation from a post-minimalist perspective. An analysis of the role of process within my own practice is used to provide visual evidence of contemporary ceramic work that can be re-conceptualised from a post-Minimalist perspective. After twenty years of stagnant debate in the ceramics field, this

research might provide a new critical context for process-led ceramic art. The project shows a way that artists may be empowered to develop a critical literacy in a field that has traditionally lacked a research based approach. It is hoped that it may well encourage other ceramics practitioners to explore new ways of presenting an academic critique of their own area of practice. The contribution to knowledge identifies a new critical context and approach to writing for the process-led area of ceramics practice that is currently described as being difficult to write about, as having no appropriate critical language of its own, and of being difficult to categorise in standard ceramic terms.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the extent to which the 1960s post-Minimalist strand of process art may provide an analytical template to fill an identified dearth of critical writing for an area of contemporary ceramic art which is process-led. This area of work is currently described as difficult to write about in standard ceramic terms as it is unlike any other form of traditional ceramics practice.¹ Over the past two decades, in contrast to other art practices, it has become evident that a dearth of critical writing exists for all forms of ceramic work.² Throughout this period, calls have been made by practitioners, critics, curators and academics for the development for a body of writing to critically contextualise the field.³ A lack of critical analysis and intellectual rigour for ceramic writing has become a recurring theme in conference papers and journal articles.⁴ Professor Rob Kessler, writing in *Ceramic Review* in 2008, expressed concern that as an examiner of ceramics and glass, he had become increasingly aware of the growing seriousness of the poor quality of theoretical work that students had been doing.⁵ The hybridisation of contemporary practices, where fine artists engage with ceramic materials and ceramic artists take a conceptual approach towards making, makes the absence of a critical approach to ceramic work more apparent.

What, one might ask, is the value of a critical and theoretical approach for practitioners of ceramics? The ceramic artist, Shelley Wilson, highlighting a lack of discussion and instruction on academic writing in art schools says '*what is needed is a body of serious critical writing against which the ceramist can sharpen perceptions and drive their thinking past the skill*'.⁶

George Baker, Professor of Art History at the University of Los Angeles, has described theory

¹ Daniel-McElroy, S., 'Beyond Cosmic Appearance, The Work of Kosho Ito', in *Virus*, St. Ives: Tate St. Ives, 2002, p. 9.

² Groom, S., 'Terra Incognita', in *A Secret History of Clay*, Liverpool: Tate Liverpool, 2004, p. 14.

³ Tuxill, W., et al, *Critical Studies: Contemporary Writing for the Ceramic Arts*, Conference, International Ceramics Academy, Kecskemet, Hungary, 8-10 November 2006.

⁴ Welch, A., 'Criticism and Meaningful Communicative Action, Developing the Newer Ceramic Criticism', *Ceramics Art and Perception*, no. 66, December 2006–February 2007, pp. 101-193.

⁵ Kessler, R., Letters, *Ceramic Review*, no. 229, January/February, 2008, p. 80.

⁶ Wilson, S., 'Intellectual Challenge', *Ceramic Review*, no. 125, September 2009, p. 100.

as encouraging a more flexible mode of philosophical thinking, reaching outside the limits and boundaries of accepted fields in ways that are sometimes uncomfortable. What theory is, says Baker, is a search for the new which testifies to the need for speculation. It is a speculative space of freedom and invention.⁷

From the 1970s the use of critical theory as an analytical tool for fine arts saw the marginalisation of ceramic work. The domestic, decorative and material connotations of the medium ensured its absence from the cultural hegemony of fine art practices. Ceramics, however, as the critic Michael Darling points out, whilst a reticent and ‘silent’ practice which remains respectful of its own history and traditions, comes loaded with its own inherent codes, hierarchies and prejudices.⁸ The complex reasons for the critical silence that has surrounded ceramic work in both fine and applied art practices will therefore be investigated in this thesis.

Any literature review on writing for ceramics in the twentieth century cannot fail to take account of the influence of the potter and writer Bernard Leach, who rose to prominence with the publication of *A Potter's Book*.⁹ The book articulated what came to be known as a ‘Leachian style’ which dominated the form and aesthetics of ceramic practice for over four decades. Such an authoritative position was held by Leach that probably no one writing, thinking about, or practising in the field could do so without taking account of the limitations on thought and action imposed by his ideals. His idiosyncratic approach to ceramics went mostly unchallenged during his lifetime, but following his death in 1979, polemical views were expressed about his overbearing attitude and overall control of the field. The views of critic Michael Robinson were typical of many when he described Leach as ‘*a tyrant who stamped out all efforts to express other than his own gospel, and retarded any progress in ceramics that*

⁷ Baker, G., ‘Teaching Theory’, *Frieze*, no. 125, September 2009, p. 100.

⁸ Darling, M., ‘Smiles by the Miles’, in *Ripe*, London: Crafts Council, 2000, p. 20.

⁹ Leach, B., *A Potter's Book*, London: Faber and Faber, 1944.

bucked his orthodoxy'.¹⁰ From the late 1970s onwards, as Leach's influence was waning, the paucity of critical writing for the changing field of ceramics began to be discussed, together with ways of addressing the problem.¹¹

Hence in 1979, the critic and gallery owner, Garth Clark, initiated an international organisation '*dedicated to raising the bar for criticism and history in ceramics*'.¹² For twenty years, the Institute of Ceramic History (ICH), later renamed the Ceramic Art Foundation (CAF), hosted a series of international symposia on issues of interest to the ceramics community. As well as being founder and chief fundraiser for the ICH and CAF, Clark's role included the selection of papers presented at the symposia.¹³ His preferences and prejudices became clear in his introduction to the publication *Ceramic Millennium*, an edited collection of symposia papers from 1979-1999. Here, he explained that he had excluded artists' papers from both presentation at symposia and publication in *Ceramic Millennium*, because their views were not of great interest '*as they were not experts*'.¹⁴ Academics were also excluded as they had too many '*airs of superiority*'.¹⁵ For reasons such as these, Clark had become a contentious figure in the ceramics field because of what was described as his '*authority and taste-making power to pick, through his varied pursuits, the leaders of a miniscule field*'.¹⁶ And so, the CAF achieved only limited success in realising its objectives, with no symposia held after a discordant event in Amsterdam in 1999, following which Clark concluded that after twenty years, the CAF '*had not found what it sought*'.¹⁷

¹⁰ Robinson, M., 'Studio Ceramics Since 1946: Pandora's Box, or a Gift from the Gods', in *Pandora's Box*, London: Crafts Council, 1995, p. 9.

¹¹ Clark, G., 'Commentary from 1977', *Ceramics Monthly*, no. 25, October 1977, p. 88.

¹² Clark, G., (ed.), *Ceramic Millennium*, Halifax, Nova Scotia: Press of Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2006, p. xi.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. xii.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. xxxi.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. xxxi.

¹⁶ Lebow, E., 'Preface', in Clark, G., *Shards, Garth Clark on Ceramic Art*, New York: CAF, 2003, p. VII.

¹⁷ Clark, G., (ed.), *Ceramic Millennium*, Halifax, Nova Scotia: Press of Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2006, p. xxxi.

For most of the second half of the twentieth century, then, it is evident that the sparse ceramic discourse that existed was disproportionately influenced by a small minority of powerful individuals. Two of the most prominent, Bernard Leach and Garth Clark, both rose to attain undisputed positions of authority within the field, and at the height of their influence were able to sway any discourse that emerged by effectively marginalising opinions that were at odds with their own strongly held views. By 2000, however, Clark's profile within the ceramics field was less visible. In the same year, *Interpreting Ceramics*, the first electronic peer reviewed academic journal for ceramics, was launched.

Interpreting Ceramics was the outcome of increasing concern during the late 1990s amongst members of academic institutions about the lack of a critical research led context for ceramics, in contrast to other areas of art practice. The journal was supported by the Universities of Wales, Bath, Bristol, and Aberystwyth.¹⁸ An evaluation of the journal's first decade, however, would conclude that its success has been limited. Publication is sporadic, and with each new edition, no date is given to indicate when future issues will appear. The journal frequently re-publishes entire collections of symposium proceedings as can be found in issues 2, 3, 8, 9, 10 and 12 of the journal. The symposium papers may be two years old or more when they appear in the journal, some of which, as the editorial points out, are unedited and not peer reviewed.¹⁹ In recent years, then, progress towards a substantial body of critical or research-led writing has not progressed significantly. Conferences continue to be held on the dearth of critical writing for contemporary ceramic art. The International Ceramic Magazine Editors' Association (ICMEA) Conference in Fuping, China in 2007 was devoted to the topic, expressing concern at the standard of critical writing within the field.²⁰

¹⁸ Interpreting Ceramics: Research Collaboration, (ICRC), 'Editorial', *Interpreting Ceramics*, <http://uwic.ac.uk/ICRC/issue001/>, 16/01/05.

¹⁹ 'Editorial', *Interpreting Ceramics*, <http://uwic.ac.uk/ICRC/issue002/about.htm>, 16/01/05.
'Editorial', *Interpreting Ceramics*, <http://uwic.ac.uk/ICRC/issue003/about.htm>, 16/01/05.

²⁰ International Ceramic Magazine Editor's Association Conference, (ICMEA), *A Critical Appreciation of Ceramic Art*, Fuping, China, November 5-7 2007.

One of the few areas in which writing of a critical nature exists for contemporary work is in the form of commissioned essays for exhibition catalogues. Whilst varying in quality, the essays do provide a useful barometer with which to measure changes in the field over a period of time. In this thesis, therefore, essays accompanying two key exhibitions a decade apart, *The Raw and the Cooked* (1993), and *A Secret History of Clay* (2004), are examined for evidence of significant shifts in practice. For the first time, the exhibition *The Raw and the Cooked* presented ceramics not as craft, but as an authentic medium for sculpture in a major fine art gallery.²¹ Yet the radically unfamiliar nature of the work, together with entrenched views from both sides of the art - craft divide, generated hostile reviews for the exhibition.²² The unsympathetic response, on the other hand, did not deter artists from exploring ceramic materials for a whole range of possibilities throughout the next decade, ranging from installation to performance art, irrevocably changing the nature of the field.

At Tate Liverpool in 2004, changes in the way that ceramic materials were being used to make artwork became apparent in the exhibition *A Secret History of Clay*.²³ Exhibits ranged in scope from early twentieth-century studio pottery to avant garde sculpture, film and interactive ceramic art. The works of a number of internationally renowned artists were included, such as Giuseppe Penone, Tony Cragg, Richard Long, Andy Goldsworthy, Eduardo Chillida, Richard Deacon, and Antony Gormley. The prestige of Tate Liverpool as a venue, the inclusion of so many high profile artists and a symposium with well known critics and exhibiting artists as participants, confirmed the status of the event. Many twentieth-century ceramic works in the exhibition by artists such as Miro and Gauguin were previously unknown. Throughout the twentieth century, well known artists and sculptors had made ceramic work as part of their oeuvre, but critics and art historians chose to ignore it. Tate curator Simon Groom refers the absence of ceramics from the canon of modernist art as a demonstration of the degree of

²¹ *The Raw and the Cooked*, Barbican Art Gallery, London, 8 July - 5 September 1993.

Oxford Museum of Modern Art, 16 January - 10 April 1994.

²² Whiting, D., 'Interview with Ewen Henderson', in *Pandora's Box*, London: Crafts Council, 1995, p. 7.

²³ *A Secret History of Clay*, Tate Liverpool, 28 May -30 August 2004.

repression operating within the constructions of Modernism that the materiality of ceramics was thoroughly conceptualised out of existence.²⁴

Whilst the intention of *A Secret History of Clay* was to present a century of unknown ceramic work in a field that had undergone radical change, critics were dissatisfied with what was described as a flawed exhibition and reviews were generally unfavourable.²⁵ The main criticism levelled at the curators, Simon Groom and Edmund de Waal, was that they had presented a highly selective history that was only one of a number of possible interpretations of twentieth-century ceramics. Furthermore, that whilst seeking to challenge old prejudices between art and craft, they themselves failed to be fully inclusive. For instance, very few women were represented in the exhibition; only four out of a total of seventy-eight artists, and very few examples of studio pottery were exhibited, despite this being the dominant form of ceramic practice throughout the twentieth century. However, the historian Tanya Harrod argued that the fact that the show took place at all in a major gallery such as the Tate is an indication of how far sensibility had shifted towards the acceptance of ceramics as a valid art practice.²⁶

An unplanned outcome of *A Secret History of Clay* was to demonstrate that widely differing contemporary ceramic works have less in common with each other than with other forms of art practice which share similar intentions, such as painting or sculpture. Whilst, traditionally, the ceramic field has been approached as a single discipline united by medium and vessel form, this view is now difficult to sustain as new and diverse practices emerge to challenge the accepted norms. However unsuitable, the aesthetics and style of the vessel continue to be used as a critical context for writing about ceramic work, leading to claims that alternative forms of ceramic work unrelated to the vessel are 'unclassifiable'.²⁷

²⁴ Groom S., 'Terra Incognita', in *A Secret History of Clay*, Liverpool: Tate Liverpool, 2004, p. 14.

²⁵ Margetts, M., *Rethinking Clay*, Symposium, Tate Liverpool, June 5 2004.

²⁶ Harrod, T., 'Hidden Depths', *Crafts*, no. 188, May/June, 2004, pp. 28-33.

²⁷ de Waal, E., 'Very Like a Whale, The Sculpture of Richard Deacon', in *Richard Deacon Out of Order*, St. Ives: Tate St. Ives, 2005, p. 8.

The focus of this research project, then, is the process-led area of contemporary ceramic art. In this area of practice, there has been a shift of interest from the art object as product, to the mental and technical processes of artistic creation. Similar shifts have occurred in painting with the work of the Turner Prize winner, Tomma Abts, and in sculpture with the work of Turner Prize runner up, Rebecca Warren.²⁸ At the College Art Association of America's 2006 Conference, the renewed interest in process was described as a '*recuperation of the materialist and formalist concerns of post-Minimalism's model of art*'.²⁹ Post-Minimalism of the 1960s emphasised the theoretical concepts of the significance of the artists' process and, as a consequence, a substantial body of writing by prominent critics and artists emerged to provide a strong critical framework for the work. Amongst the most prominent exponents of post-Minimalism were the art historians Robert Pincus-Witten, Rosalind Krauss, the artist-critic Robert Morris and the sculptors Richard Serra and Eva Hesse. An examination of a number of post-Minimalist texts has brought to light an affinity with contemporary process-led ceramic art practices. They will therefore be assessed for suitability as an analytical template for a new discursive approach to this area of practice.

The word 'post-minimalism' was coined by Robert Pincus-Witten in 1966 as a means of categorising the work of a group of artists who were exploring process in ways that challenged conventional attitudes towards sculpture, painting and drawing. Post-Minimalism epitomised the consciousness of how process informed practice at all levels, from the studio to the gallery. Process art visualised both the actual conduct of materials and the behaviours of artists in their studios. By the late 1960s, process functioned as a point of intersection between traditional painting and sculpture, and the profusion of experimental practices that occurred in which form and content collapsed into a continuous state.³⁰ Artists used process simultaneously as a natural

²⁸ Turner Prize 2006, www.tate.org.uk/Britain/turnerprize/2006, 26/11/06.

²⁹ 'It's All About Process', in *College Art Association of America 94th Annual Conference 24 – 25 February 2006, Abstracts*, New York: College Art Association, 2006, pp. 86 - 88.

³⁰ Stiles, K., 'Process', in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1996, p. 577.

phenomenon, the focus of their working method, and as a style. This approach represented a great shift of sensibility away from the formalist, modernist art practices of the early 1960s.

Process artists made use of a wide range of industrial materials such as latex, resin, rubber, rope and lead to create their artwork. Such materials had not previously been used for artistic purposes. Despite Pincus-Witten's assertion that post-Minimalism could embrace any medium, ceramic work, however, was excluded from the critical discourse owing to the craft connotations of the material. Pincus-Witten admits that he refused to write about ceramic work because of a feeling of '*snobbishness*' about work he considered to be '*arty-craftwork*' with no history of a structured theory of art.³¹ Similar attitudes were prevalent amongst other critics at the time, and help to explain the absence of ceramic work from the canon of modernist art. Paradoxically, I suggest that Pincus-Witten's ideas can now contribute towards constructing a new critical context for contemporary process led ceramics.

Rosalind Krauss, in her seminal work, *Sculpture in the Expanded Field*, explains how the definition and practice of sculpture changed with post-Minimalism in a major shift away from modernist artistic values.³² With the advent of post-Minimalism, surprising things were included in the category of sculpture such as photographs documenting country walks, and temporary lines cut into a desert floor. This could result in confusion about what constituted the category of sculpture unless, suggests Krauss, the category could be made to become '*infinitely malleable*', existing as one term in an expanded field of forms with a set of related positions for a given artist to organise and explore.³³

The writer and sculptor Robert Morris became a leading figure in post-Minimalism as a result of the theorisation and exploration of process in his own practice of sculpture and

³¹ Pincus-Witten, R., *Postminimalism*, New York: Out of London Press, 1977, p. 131.

³² Krauss, R., 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field', in Foster, H., (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic, Essays on Modern Culture*, Washington: Bay Press, 1983, p. 33.

³³ Krauss, R., 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field', in Foster, H., (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic, Essays on Modern Culture*, Washington: Bay Press, 1983, p. 41.

drawing. His notions on the artist's approach to process are highly relevant to this investigation. Morris suggests that there are 'forms' to be found within the activity of making, as much as within the end products, forms of behaviour that are aimed at testing the limits and possibilities involved in the interaction between the artist's actions and the materials. This, says Morris, amounts to '*the submerged side of the art iceberg*'.³⁴ He argues for a new means of making sculpture that avoids highly formal compositions, his solution being non-composition with the use of malleable materials. In his own practice, Morris used an exploratory approach to manipulating liquid to solid material with the intention of showing the intrinsic properties of his materials in the finished artwork. His theorisation of process is highly germane to the contemporary process-led ceramic work discussed in this thesis.

One of the most striking aspects of post-minimalist art was the expressiveness of the sculpture, exemplified by the work of Eva Hesse. Hesse contested the art practices of her time through her experimental approaches to making and her use of the uncontrolled state of materials to investigate process. She explored the transitive state of liquid to solid materials which could become smooth, rough, rigid, opaque, translucent, and crack or tear. Four decades after Hesse's death, her fragile and ephemeral works remain relevant to any discussion about process in art. From 2009 to 2011, her small scale material experiments, now re-assessed as sculptural works in their own right, are the focus of an international touring exhibition, curated by the art historian Bryony Fer, to galleries in Edinburgh, London, Barcelona, Toronto and Los Angeles.³⁵ Fer considers Hesse a key influence on late twentieth-century art through her innovative exploration of process and she is highly relevant to this investigation of process in contemporary ceramic art.

The expressive possibilities of ceramic materials are visible in the work of the sculptor Richard Deacon: he has explored a range of processes including pressing, massaging, and

³⁴ Morris, R., *Continuous Project Altered Daily*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1995, p. 75.

³⁵ Fer, B., *Eva Hesse, Studiowork*, Edinburgh: The Fruitmarket Gallery, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009, p. 44.

kneading the material between his palms to create smaller scale ceramic forms as well as investigating different processes for larger scale ceramic works.³⁶ Similarly, the Japanese artist, Kosho Ito, demonstrates a parallel and at times conjoined approach to ceramic materials and processes. Ito crushes, folds and twists thousands of pieces of ceramic material by hand.³⁷ This is a reminder of Robert Morris' intention to expose the features of a material without the use of tools in order to reveal it as '*pure material*'.³⁸ The use and investigation of ceramic materials by both Deacon and Ito have been described as difficult to write about and classify in normative ceramic terms as their work has no relationship to the vessel.³⁹ The vessel is the benchmark by which normative ceramic work has traditionally been evaluated and written about. As a consequence, work which has no relationship to the vessel is frequently described as difficult to write about and classify in normative terms. In contrast, if the ceramic work of Deacon and Ito is re-examined from a post-Minimalist perspective, it may be possible to critically analyse this process-led area of practice in a way that has not previously been thought of or written about.

An analysis of process within my own practice has led to a body of work that investigates new ways of drawing with liquid porcelain. Here, the flexibility and limitations of the material are explored in two and three dimensional sculptural drawings that alter in transitional states, from liquid to solid, during the making, drying, and high firing processes. Unpredictable changes take place in which cracking and warping take the work from order to disorder, allowing different kinds of ordering to emerge. The work is not predetermined and does not depict a specific object or thing, but is created in the making, the result of risk, control, and chance. The audience is asked to re-consider traditional assumptions that surround drawings, materials, and processes, in order to explore new ideas and approaches to ceramic materials.

³⁶ Stecker, R., *Richard Deacon, The Size of It*, Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 2006, p. 83.

³⁷ Daniel-McElroy, S., 'Beyond Cosmic Appearance, the Work of Kosho Ito', in *Virus*, St. Ives: Tate St. Ives, 2002, p. 13.

³⁸ Morris, R., *Continuous Project Altered Daily*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1995, p. 77.

³⁹ de Waal, E., 'Very Like a Whale, The Sculpture of Richard Deacon', in *Richard Deacon Out of Order*, St. Ives: Tate St. Ives, 2002, p. 9.

 Todate, K., 'A View from Japan of the Ceramic Artist Kosho Ito', in *Virus*, St. Ives: Tate St. Ives, 2002, p. 22.

Key examples of my practice are selected to articulate this thesis in relation to post-Minimalism, specifically the *'Liminal'* and *'Lacuna'* series of sculptural drawings, providing evidence of a process-led approach towards ceramic work. In the *Liminal Series*, delicate qualities of line are explored in a series of drawings that use the fluidity of the material to create thinness, thickness, softness, hardness, fragility, and strength. In the *Lacuna Series*, two dimensional high fired liquid porcelain drawings are raised from the horizontal to the vertical position, propping each other up to become three dimensional sculptural drawings which radically expose the fragility, vulnerability, and potential ephemerality of the work. Some of the ways in which my own work might articulate contemporary process-led ceramics practice from a post-Minimalist perspective are examined, thereby answering the research question posed at the start of this submission.

The methodological approach for this project is informed by the French philosopher Michel Foucault's concepts of the formation of discourse which appear in his seminal work, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*.⁴⁰ Discourse is one of the most frequently used terms from Foucault's work and he himself defines it in a number of different ways in different works.⁴¹ However, in this thesis, the term discourse is used in the way that Foucault defines it in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* as *'the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualizable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements'*.⁴² Mills explains that *'by the general domain of all statements'* Foucault means that *'discourse'* can be used to refer to all utterances and statements which have been made which have meaning and which have some effect; when he speaks of *'regulated practices that account for a number of statements'* he is referring to the unwritten rules and structures that produce particular utterances and statements.⁴³ The reason that many people find the term discourse to be of use, argues Mills, is that Foucault stresses that discourse is associated with

⁴⁰ Foucault, M., *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Oxford: Routledge, (1969), 2002.

⁴¹ Mills, S., *Michel Foucault*, Oxford: Routledge, 2003, p. 53.

⁴² Foucault, M., *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Oxford: Routledge, (1969), 2002, p. 90.

⁴³ Mills, S., *Michel Foucault*, Oxford: Routledge, 2003, p. 53.

relations of power.⁴⁴ This is particularly relevant in a field such as ceramics which, as I will show in this thesis, is widely acknowledged to be hierarchical in nature.⁴⁵

Foucault's approach to discourse in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* is of further use to this research through his proposal that the appropriation of an existing set of statements from one field of study to another may provide the possibility of a new critical language for a theoretically unmapped area. He argues that '*taken up again, placed, and interpreted in a new constellation, a given discursive formation may reveal new possibilities*'.⁴⁶ So, in this thesis, key post-Minimalist texts on process art are appropriated as an analytical template for a new critical approach to a specific area of contemporary process led ceramics practice which has been described by Daniel-McElroy as 'unclassifiable' and difficult to write about.⁴⁷

The usefulness of a Foucauldian methodology for artistic researchers has been highlighted by Estelle Barrett, who argues that such an approach is not constrained by working solely within the framework of one's own subject area, but instead pushes against traditional boundaries and so questions ways of thinking.⁴⁸ Such intentions are highly germane to this research which pushes against traditional boundaries of ceramics practice and writing. As Foucault's notions on discourse and appropriation inform the approach to the literature review as well as the subsequent chapters of the thesis, the methodological approach is therefore explained in chapter one.

In the absence of a body of substantial critical writing for ceramics, chapter two examines the writing that does exist in the form of exhibition essays and journal articles from the 1940s to the present decade. Such texts are useful in shedding light on the shifts in practice that have

⁴⁴ Mills, S., *Michel Foucault*, Oxford: Routledge, 2003, p. 53.

⁴⁵ Darling, M., 'Smiles by the Miles', in *Ripe*, London: Crafts Council, 2000, p. 20.

⁴⁶ Foucault, M., *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Oxford: Routledge, (1969), 2002, p. 75.

⁴⁷ Daniel-McElroy, S., 'Beyond Cosmic Appearance, The Work of Kosho Ito', in *Virus*, St.Ives: Tate St.Ives, 2002, p. 9.

⁴⁸ Barrett, E., 'Foucault: What is an Author, Towards a Critical Discourse of Practice as Research', July 2006. http://sitem.herts.ac.uk/artdes_research/papers, 1/11/06

occurred throughout the period up to the present time. The absence of ceramic art from the canon of Modernist art due to the craft connotations of the medium are considered, as well as the hierarchical structures that authorised and controlled ways of discussing ceramics practice in the applied arts during this period. Such factors highlight the complexity of the debate. Chapter three examines key post-Minimalist texts on the process art movement of the 1960s by Robert Pincus-Witten, Rosalind Krauss and Robert Morris. They provide an analytical template for writing about the area of contemporary process-led ceramic work which is discussed in chapter four, including the work of sculptor Richard Deacon, ceramic artist Kosho Ito and my own personal practice.

Whilst the focus of this project, the process-led area of ceramic practice, bears no relationship to functional or decorative craft practice apart from a shared medium, it has still been necessary to consider both craft and fine art ceramics in order to understand the origins of the lack of critical context for the entire field. Whilst in the past, craft associations of the medium have marginalised ceramic work from the mainstream of fine art, over the past decade, more fine artists, sculptors and applied artists have begun to investigate ceramic materials in non traditional ways. Yet at the same time, no substantial body of writing has emerged to provide a critical framework for new contemporary practices. It is interesting to note that craft potters are now regularly invited to write catalogue essays for major contemporary fine art ceramic exhibitions at the Tate St.Ives because of their technical knowledge of ceramic material.⁴⁹ However, a disadvantage of this approach, as I show in chapter four, is the tendency for potters to evaluate non-traditional forms of ceramic work from the perspective of the vessel. For most of the second half of the twentieth century, the vessel was central to ceramics practice, and so the vessel dominated any critique of ceramic work. Such an approach is no longer appropriate as new forms of practice which bear no relationship to the vessel have emerged. The contemporary field is now so diverse that it can no longer be considered a single practice informed by a single body of writing.

⁴⁹ Tuxill, W., Interview with Susan Daniel-McElroy, Tate St.Ives, July 4, 2006.

The primary research outcome of this project is to demonstrate that an area of contemporary process-led ceramic art, examples of which are discussed in chapter four, bears similarities to the post-Minimalist process art movement of the 1960s which, I will argue, may be written about in similar terms. This offers a new critical approach for an area of practice currently deemed by critics, curators and practitioners to be difficult to write about in normative ceramic terms. If a re-conceptualisation of process-led contemporary ceramics can be achieved through a post-Minimalist perspective, a gap in critical writing will be filled which will make a contribution to knowledge in this area of practice. This project offers a research-led approach in an under researched field that could be of relevance to critics, curators, academics and practitioners with an interest in both non-traditional and process-led ceramic art for which there is currently little critical context. The research may also encourage other practitioners to develop an academic critique for their own area of practice.

CHAPTER ONE

The Archaeology of Knowledge: A Methodological Approach to Discourse Formation

‘...a sort of toolbox that people can rummage through to find a tool they can use however they want in their own domain’.

Michel Foucault, Philosopher ⁵⁰

Introduction

The French philosopher Michel Foucault invites his readers to look upon his writings as ‘tools’ for use in their own subject areas, in whichever way it may help to resolve a problem. ⁵¹ The methodological approach for this research project which is informed by Foucault’s seminal work, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, will be set out in this chapter. ⁵² Foucault describes an ‘archaeological’ approach to the archive of a domain as a method of investigating the origins and formation of discourse. The term ‘archive’ is used by Foucault to refer to the unwritten rules which lead to the production of certain types of statements and the sum total of the discursive formations circulating at any one time. ‘Archaeology’ can be viewed as a historically based study of what the discourse within an archive allows to be stated authoritatively, the conditions under which certain statements emerge, and contingent events that play a role in their development. Furthermore, the study of an archive within a particular field can provide an understanding of the roles of individuals in positions of power and their behaviours in a field of practice, drawing attention to the importance of relations of power to

⁵⁰ Foucault, M., in Defert, D., (ed.), *Dits et Ecrits, 11, 1954-1988*, Paris: Gallimard, 1994, p. 523-4, quoted in Gutting, G., *Foucault, A Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 112.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.112.

⁵² Foucault, M., *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Oxford: Routledge, (1969), 2002.

discourse.⁵³ Working through historical archives of various fields can bring to light discursive formations that have created the knowledge by which that field governs itself.

The first section of chapter one provides a summary of the aspects of Foucault's archaeological analysis of discourse formation that are pertinent to this thesis. Foucault's analysis covers a system of unwritten rules which produce, organise and distribute an authorized statement which is the basic unit of discourse as it occurs in a field.⁵⁴ From this perspective, a discourse is made up of groups of statements that establish contexts, and which may disappear only to be replaced by other statements. Whilst a discourse can potentially take in an indefinite number of statements, only a limited number actually constitute any discourse to become the 'authorised' statement of a field. The role of an individual within a series of statements is often related to institutions which provide the statement with authority, and it is suggested that origins of knowledge rarely function in isolation from institutions, and are always tied to power structures.⁵⁵ The ways that events happen should be traced, suggests Foucault, together with an examination of contingent occurrences that may have played a role in their development. This aspect of the methodology is relevant when, in chapter two of this thesis, an archive of writing about ceramics is examined and events surrounding the dearth of critical discourse in the field are traced and brought to light.

The second section of this chapter summarises notions of appropriation put forward in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. This aspect of the methodology is highly germane as a means of filling an identified gap in critical knowledge in contemporary ceramics. Foucault proposes that existing discourses in one field create possibilities for new interpretations in other under-theorised fields. He suggests that previously unrelated concepts and descriptions can be related to each other by techniques of re-writing and that new statements can be developed by

⁵³ Foucault, M., *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Oxford: Routledge, (1969), 2002, p. 73.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

approximating them to previously formulated statements.⁵⁶ Foucault, as the philosopher Gary Gutting points out, adopted the strategy of appropriation himself, for example when he used aspects of his earlier works for future purposes, as in *The Order of Things* (1966) and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969).⁵⁷ So, Foucault's approach is useful to this project in two ways: firstly as a means of shedding light on the dearth of critical discourse in ceramics; secondly as a way of re-aligning contemporary process-led ceramic practices with post-Minimalism, thus providing a way of thinking about a mode of work presently deemed difficult to contextualise and write about. An archaeological approach is a useful tool to consider ways that we know what we know, where that information comes from, under what circumstances it is produced, and how it may be possible to think differently.

⁵⁶ Foucault, M., *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Oxford: Routledge, (1969), 2002, p. 66.

⁵⁷ Gutting, G., *The Archaeology of Scientific Reason*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 234.

1. 1. The formation of discourse

‘...to add a statement to a pre-existing series of statements is to perform a complicated gesture, which involves conditions...and rules...’⁵⁸

Michel Foucault

The term ‘discourse’ can be described, in Foucauldian terms, as a group of statements that are the subject of a set of rules to which speakers unwittingly conform. Amongst the questions posed in *the Archaeology of Knowledge* are why particular discursive statements arise and not others, and what conditions bring them into existence. Such questions are highly relevant to this thesis.⁵⁹ By means of an answer, Foucault undertakes an analysis of the rules of the formation of discourse, drawing attention to the normally hidden structures that produce, organise, and distribute discursive statements. An examination of such structures also sheds light on the roles of individuals in positions of power and their behaviours in a field of practice.⁶⁰

In the *Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault identifies four basic elements in the formation of discourse: the subject matter of the statements; the kinds of cognitive status and authority they have (what Foucault calls their ‘enunciative modality’); the concepts in terms of which they are formulated, and the themes or theoretical viewpoints they develop. In this interpretation, the four basic elements can be a vehicle for discourse about different subject areas. Foucault argues that different disciplines work as a limit on discourse in prescribing what can be counted as knowledge in a particular subject area. Because they have rules, disciplines allow for the production of new propositions only within tightly defined limits, according to conditions of thought prevailing at a particular period in time.⁶¹ For example, academic journals have editorial boards which are responsible for evaluating whether articles fit in with the

⁵⁸ Foucault, M., *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Oxford: Routledge, (1969), 2002, p. 230.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

disciplinary rules for discussing a particular subject and what it is possible to say, and articles which do not conform to those criteria are usually excluded. For Foucault, such practices are an integral part of many disciplines, often excluding knowledge which might challenge them, and limiting those who can speak authoritatively in a situation where discourses circulate according to prescribed rules. This general analysis draws attention to the institutionalisation of discourse, a self evident system of silencing, and the mapping out of power relations. It provides a useful guide to the rules that govern discursive formations.⁶²

When Foucault discusses discourse, he focuses on constraint and restriction; he is aware that any number of sentences could be used, but instead we speak within narrowly confined limits. He argues that discursive practices are characterised by *'a definition of a legitimate perspective for the agent of knowledge and the fixing of norms for the elaboration of concepts and theories'*.

⁶³ Thus, as speakers we must make a claim to authority for ourselves in being able to speak about this subject. What interests Foucault in his analysis of discourse is the way that it is regulated:

*'in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events.'*⁶⁴

Foucault describes the structures and controls which have an effect on what can be said, the procedures which constrain discourse and which lead to it being produced, including external procedures. One of these external procedures, suggests Foucault, is the division between true and false. It is an exclusionary practice in which those in positions of authority who are seen to be 'experts' are those who can speak the 'truth'. Those who make statements who are not in

⁶² Foucault, M., *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Oxford: Routledge, (1969), 2002, p. 41.

⁶³ Bouchard, D., (ed.), *Michel Foucault: Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1977 in Mills, S., *Michel Foucault*, London: Routledge, 2003, p. 61.

⁶⁴ Foucault, M., 'The Order of Discourse', in Young, R., (ed.), *Untying the Text: A Post-structuralist Reader*, London: Routledge, Kegan and Paul, 1981, p. 51.

positions of power will be considered not to be speaking the 'truth'. The notion of 'truth' must not be taken as self evident; Foucault suggests that 'truth' is something which is supported materially by a whole range of practices and institutions who work to exclude statements which they characterise as false and keep in circulation those statements which they characterise as true. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault argues that

'It is always possible one could speak the truth in a void; one would only be "in the true" however if one obeyed the rules of some discursive "police" which would have to be reactivated every time one spoke'.⁶⁵

So, even if we are asserting something which as far as we know is 'the truth', the statements will only be judged to be 'true' if they fit in with all other authorised statements within that part of the discipline.⁶⁶ In addition to external exclusions, Foucault asserts that there are other exclusions to do with classifying, distributing and ordering the statements, including the author, disciplines, and the status of the speaking subject, ultimately to distinguish between those who are authorised to speak and those who are not – the statements which are authorised and those which are not.⁶⁷ Thus, each field lays down rules and procedures, assigns roles and positions, regulates behaviours about what can be said, and so produces its own hierarchies. The importance of discourse argues Foucault, is that it is the means by which a field speaks to itself; it therefore plays a major role in the functioning of that field.⁶⁸

In this thesis, the methodological approach involves working through archival material and references to bring to light the discursive statements that have played a role in forming the bodies of knowledge by which the field of ceramics has functioned. Foucault's work on discourse is useful for gaining understanding of the ways that institutions work, bringing an

⁶⁵ Foucault, M., *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Oxford: Routledge, (1969), 2002, p. 224.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

⁶⁷ Mills, S., *Michel Foucault*, Oxford: Routledge, 2003, p. 58.

⁶⁸ Foucault, M., *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Oxford: Routledge, (1969), 2002, p. 75.

awareness of the relationships between individuals and those in positions of authority. The subject matter, style, and form of any creative production are always part of a wider set of discursive and institutional knowledge and expertise, and where they are at odds with the dominant discourse they tend to be repressed or ignored.⁶⁹ Foucault argues that institutions can be characterised as belonging to either a public or private sphere; the public institution is generally more regulated than the private, with a more fixed set of protocols and procedures. In a private sphere, there is a tendency to be more informal, so rules and regulations are less transparent and more dependent on the individuals who set the organisations up and their particular preferences. These aspects of Foucault's methodology, as I go on to show, shed light on the structures of ad hoc institutions and their controls and exclusions, such as the privately run *Ceramic Art Foundation* and *Think Tank*, which are discussed in chapter two.

Foucault's approach to the formation of discourse .

Foucault suggests three sorts of rules for the formation of discourse. The first consists of mapping where the objects of discursive statements emerge, are accorded status, and are subjected to change at different periods of time. The second describes those to whom a structured community, field, or discipline, has given the authority of designating and limiting the subject matter of a given discursive formation. The third concerns the systems by which subjects are categorised and re-grouped, and through which the discursive statements classify and relate different kinds of subject matter.⁷⁰

'*Enonce*' is Foucault's term for the act of speaking the words, the context in which they are uttered, and the status of the author; a statement's '*modality*' is a function of the context from which it originates. The '*enunciative modality*' refers to the authority and laws operating behind the formation of things. A key determinant of modality is the right of certain people to use a

⁶⁹ Foucault, M., *The Archaeology of Knowledge* Oxford: Routledge, (1969), 2002, p. 55.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

given mode of speech.⁷¹ Thus, only those properly qualified may make authoritative statements. The status of the individual making the statement must be considered as well as the institutional site from which the statement emerges and from which it derives its legitimacy.⁷² Such a situation occurs, Foucault explains, with the status of the doctor and clinical discourse. Medical statements cannot come from anybody, and their value cannot be separated from the statutorily defined person who has the right to make them. In addition, the institution from which the clinical discourse derives its legitimacy, such as the hospital, is a place run by a differentiated and hierarchised medical staff. As a consequence, discursive statements associated with those in positions of power are more authorised than others. Thus the ‘*enunciative*’ part of discourse – the act of speaking the words, the context in which they are uttered, the status of the author – is affected not only by an institutional site, but also a ‘*documentary site*’, which might be a book, a case history or another kind of record.⁷³ This is of relevance when we come to consider, in chapter two, what was widely accepted as the authorised statement of the ceramics field, *A Potter’s Book*.⁷⁴

Discourse and the formation of concepts

When searching for a way to account for the emergence of different concepts, Foucault suggests that there are three rules.⁷⁵ The first relates to how descriptions and definitions are linked together and in which certain statements will be related to others as a basis for supposition or conclusion.⁷⁶ The second sets up rules for the formation of concepts that establish various attitudes of acceptance or rejection to classes of statements, including all statements taken up as discourse based on well-founded reasoning.⁷⁷ The third rule covers what Foucault terms *procedures of intervention* that may be applied to the formation of concepts to produce new

⁷¹ Foucault, M., *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Oxford: Routledge, (1969), 2002, p. 55.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

⁷⁴ Leach, Bernard, *A Potter’s Book*, London: Faber and Faber, 1940.

⁷⁵ Foucault, M., *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Oxford: Routledge, (1969), 2002, p. 62.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

statements.⁷⁸ Procedures of intervention may appear in techniques of re-writing. Foucault cites the example of procedures that enabled naturalists of the Classical period to rewrite linear descriptions in classificatory tables that have neither the same laws nor the same configuration as the lists and groups of kinship established in the Renaissance. Procedures of intervention may also occur in the way in which one transfers a type of statement from one field to another, and in the methods of arranging formats that already exist but in different states; or again in the methods of redistributing statements that are already linked together, but which are rearranged in a new systematic whole.⁷⁹

The term ‘discursive formation’ is used by Foucault to refer to the regular groupings and associations of particular types of statements. Thus discourses should be seen as groups of statements which are authorised in some sense, often associated with institutions, and which have some unity of function at a fundamental level. What belongs to a discursive formation and what makes it possible to set the limits of a group of concepts, even though they may be dissimilar, suggests Foucault, is the way in which different elements are related to each other. Also the way in which the ordering of descriptions is linked to the techniques of rewriting, and the way in which the development of the statements are linked to the kinds of criticism, commentary, and interpretation of previously formulated statements. This is highly germane to this thesis in terms of re-conceptualising the area of contemporary process led ceramics from a post-Minimalist perspective.⁸⁰

Foucault places special emphasis on the importance of the interconnection between the various systems that control discursive statements.⁸¹ He suggests that there exists a whole group of relations that determine what is permitted or what should be excluded within a given discourse, with some statements excluded by those in higher authority for no justifiable

⁷⁸ Foucault, M., *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Oxford: Routledge, (1969), 2002, p. 65.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

reason.⁸² Therefore, Foucault argues, at any one time, owing to strategic choices, the discourse of a particular field is essentially incomplete as it does not occupy all the possible capacity that is available to it. A Foucauldian approach looks for the unwritten rules that direct the enunciative function, revealing the discursive statement as something which is capable of being manipulated, transformed, combined, decomposed, and recomposed.⁸³

In certain contexts, discourses establish networks of power-knowledge relations that benefit certain sections of a field or society who have been able to establish their own particular ‘truth,’ a discursive practice that sometimes functions to maintain and justify privileged positions. Thus, a combination of disciplines, commentary and authors produce a ‘truth’ which edits out anything that does not fit within that particular discursive formation; that in any given field at a given time, there are constraints on how people are able to think, involving implicit rules that materially restrict the range of thought, and that the production of discourse is controlled, selected, organised and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures which follow external controls, internal rules, and the regulation of access to knowledge.⁸⁴ External controls work as kinds of exclusion and prohibition of expression. Rules classifying discourses strategically maintain borders between different disciplines, for example as in the case of the complexity of discourse that overlaps the areas of craft and art in ceramic practice and this issue will be referred to in different chapters throughout the thesis.

The term ‘archive’ is used by Foucault to refer to the unwritten rules which lead to the production of certain types of statements and the sum total of the discursive formation circulating at any one time. The archive, suggests Foucault, is first the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events, the enunciative

⁸² Foucault, M., *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Oxford: Routledge, (1969), 2002, p. 75.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

possibilities that are laid down, and the laws that operate behind the formation of things.⁸⁵

The archive is not the total sum of all texts which show a field's past, but often something that is fragmented, becoming clearer and more focussed the more that time elapses. Foucault argues that these fragments should, if only in an oblique way, elucidate the enunciative field to which they belong.⁸⁶ In this way, the fragments of the ceramic archive from 1940 to 2010 elucidate the contemporary ceramic field.

⁸⁵ Foucault, M., *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Oxford: Routledge, (1969), 2002, p. 145.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

1.2 The appropriation of discourse

*'Archaeology wishes... to show...how a single notion may cover two archaeologically distinct elements...'*⁸⁷

Michel Foucault

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* Foucault suggests that a new discursive formation may emerge for under theorised areas of practice through the re-writing of previously formulated statements from a different field.⁸⁸ This element of the methodology is used to inform the central question posed by this thesis, whether post-Minimalist critical writings of the 1960's might provide an analytical template for a new critical commentary for contemporary process-led ceramic art as a means of filling the critical gap that exists in this area of practice.

Foucault describes the techniques for re-writing and modifying discursive statements required to produce new statements, as *'procedures of intervention'*.⁸⁹ He provides historical examples, including the conversion of linear descriptions to tabular formations, the translation of quantitative to qualitative texts, and the transcription of texts from everyday language into formalised grammar. A range of possibilities are set out which include the rewriting of statements, the re-classification of statements, and the application of a statement to a new domain in which the repetition of the same formulation constitutes a new statement. Foucault points out, however, that when one discursive formation is replaced by another, it is not to say that absolutely new concepts and theoretical choices emerge fully organised in the text. Instead, it is to say that a change of relationship has occurred that does not necessarily alter all the elements of the discourse, but that the statements are governed by new rules of formation. One can, on the basis of these new rules, describe and analyse phenomena of continuity, return, and repetition, of which the range and distribution of the discourse is an important aspect. Elements

⁸⁷ Foucault, M., *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Oxford: Routledge, (1969), 2002, p. 178.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

that are constituted, modified, and stabilised in one discursive formation can re-appear later in another, even after a period of oblivion.⁹⁰ Thus, constituent parts of a discourse may be re-used as a major concept to occupy an important place in a later formation, providing a new coherent structure whilst acquiring new semantic contents.⁹¹

Users and uses of Foucault's methodology

Although *The Archaeology of Knowledge* was first published in 1969, Foucault's notions on discourse and the archive continue to have currency as a methodology for a variety of present-day researchers. Key aspects of a Foucauldian approach that may be of use to researchers in different fields include the rules and regulations that characterise discursive practices, the connections that link knowledge, power, and institutional authority, and the notion of the archive. Foucault suggests that it is necessary for the archive to be investigated not only to reveal what it contains, but also the conditions that have made it possible.

The concepts of the archive are applied by the theorist David Bate to construct a model of thinking about photographic practice in *The Archaeology of Photography: Rereading Michel Foucault and The Archaeology of Knowledge* (2007).⁹² Bate argues that the production, filing, and storage of thousands of photographic images in archives, as well as the selection from the archive of materials for exhibitions, demands an approach on how they are used, and this is where Foucault's concept of archaeology is helpful. From an abstract starting point in discourse theory such as the surfaces of emergence of a discourse, or the analysis of change and transformation in a discursive practice, one can then begin to define and determine how to conceptualise the archaeology of photography.

⁹⁰ Foucault, M., *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Oxford: Routledge, (1969), 2002, p. 192.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁹² Bate, D, 'The Archaeology of Photography: Rereading Michel Foucault and The Archaeology of Knowledge', *Afterimage*, vol. 35, no. 3, Nov/Dec 2007, pp. 3-6.

The archaeological approach, says Bate, brings a quite different perspective to the thinking, study and practice of photography. An archaeology of photography would register the various and different ‘*surfaces of emergence*’ of photography – from the complex institutions across which photography emerged in the nineteenth century to the new twentieth-century developments.⁹³ An archaeology of photography would also attempt to show what separates the different discursive practices of photography, such as an art or media institutional discourse, or what they might have in common. Bate argues that the perspective of the photographer, whether or not they experience these discursive differences as contradictions, would provide a valuable contribution to the archaeology of photography.⁹⁴

The usefulness of Foucault’s approach to discourse analysis is drawn attention to by the art historian and academic Griselda Pollock in *Vision and Difference*.⁹⁵ The notion of discursive formation as a means of dealing with the interconnections of power and knowledge, together with the possibilities and restrictions that occur between related statements which define a field of knowledge, are described as a particularly fruitful resource for contemporary cultural studies. Pollock points out that Foucault introduced the notion of discursive formation to deal with the systematic interconnections between an array of related statements which define a field of knowledge, its possibilities and its occlusions. Thus on the agenda for analysis is not just the history of art, i.e. the art of the past, but also art history, the discursive formation which invented that entity to study it.⁹⁶

Kendal and Wickham suggest that Foucault’s methods introduce a new way of understanding the intersection of power and knowledge.⁹⁷ In this way a Foucauldian methodological approach is concerned to establish the interconnectedness of power and

⁹³ Bate, D., ‘The Archaeology of Photography: Rereading Michel Foucault and The Archaeology of Knowledge’, *Afterimage*, vol. 35, no. 3, Nov/Dec 2007, p. 4.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁹⁵ Pollock, G., *Vision and Difference*, London and New York: Routledge, (1988), 2000, p. 10.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁹⁷ Kendall, G., and Wickham, G., *Using Foucault’s Methods*, London: Sage Publications, 1999, p. 4.

knowledge and power and truth and ways in which knowledge does not simply emerge from scholarly study, but is produced and maintained in circulation through the work of different institutions and practices. Such an approach moves us away from seeing knowledge as objective towards a view which sees knowledge as often working in the interests of particular groups. Whilst Kendall and Wickham assert that Foucault's methods are not easy to follow, they find his interpretation of history a useful way of diagnosing the present.⁹⁸

From an artistic perspective, Estelle Barrett argues that a Foucauldian approach can allow artistic researchers to locate themselves within contexts of theory and practice, providing a map with which to chart gaps in knowledge domains and areas for critical intervention. She proposes that the researcher defines a number of texts and works according to their homogeneity in order to assess methodological, conceptual and other links. The genesis of ideas in the researcher's own work, as well as in the ideas of others is traced, compared and mapped to see how they interrelate. Early work is examined to see how it has influenced the development of current work and so the gap or contribution in knowledge or discourse is identified.⁹⁹

The questions that Foucault poses that are of relevance to this thesis are the following - what is discourse? Where does it come from? Where does it derive its authority to speak? How does it become legitimate?¹⁰⁰ Gutting argues that an archaeological approach could apply to any sort of discourse – literary, philosophical, artistic, political, and so on.¹⁰¹ At the same time, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* is depicted as a 'curiously unexploited text', not least by Foucault himself.¹⁰² At the end of *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault questions what the area of application of archaeological investigation might be. He suggests that such a study could

⁹⁸ Kendall, G., and Wickham, G., *Using Foucault's Methods*, London: Sage Publications, 1999, p. 4.

⁹⁹ Barrett, E., 'Foucault: What is an Author, Towards a Critical Discourse of Practice as Research', July 2006, http://sitem.herts.ac.uk/artdes_research/papers, 1/11/06.

¹⁰⁰ Foucault, M., *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Oxford: Routledge, (1969), 2002, p.225.

¹⁰¹ Gutting, G., *Michel Foucault's Archaeology of Scientific Reason*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 250.

¹⁰² Cousins, M., and Hussein, A., *Theoretical Traditions in the Social Sciences*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984, p. 97.

function in a great number of areas, crossing interstices and gaps, establishing an institutional field and practices that have been informed by other types of discourse that have taken place at a given period.¹⁰³ Exclusions, limitations, values, freedoms, and other manifestations that are linked to discursive practice would be brought to light.¹⁰⁴ Such a methodology, then, has much to offer as a critical tool, not only for this research project, but also for other artistic researchers in areas which have yet to build up a substantial corpus of methodological approaches.

Some criticisms of Foucault's methodology

Whilst many of Foucault's notions on discourse inform this project, I do however have a difference of opinion with his view that the role of individual authors and texts in discourse formation is less important than the institutional site from which the discourse emerges.¹⁰⁵

In particular instances, I suggest, the role of an individual author or text can be as influential as any institution from which a discourse emerges. As I will show in chapter two, the ceramic field during the second half of the twentieth century was overwhelmingly influenced by Bernard Leach and *A Potter's Book*. Leach effectively controlled the discursive elements of the ceramic field during this period and succeeded, by means of his authoritative position and a network of influential supporters, in marginalising the views of those who disagreed with his ideological approach.

Similarly, the writer Edward Said disagrees with Foucault on the importance of individual authors and texts. In his seminal work *Orientalism*, whilst Said uses a methodological approach based on *The Archaeology of Knowledge* to investigate Orientalist discourse, he argues for the influence of individual writers on the collective body of texts that constitute the discourse

¹⁰³ Foucault, M., *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Oxford: Routledge, (1969), 2002, p. 174.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

known as Orientalism.¹⁰⁶ Having studied the corpus of Orientalist texts, Said is convinced of the determining imprint of individual writers upon an otherwise anonymous collective body of texts constituting the discursive formation of Orientalism. He highlights the dominating influence of key authors and their texts remarking that '*the unity of the large ensemble of texts that I analyse is due in part to the fact that they all refer to each other: Orientalism is after all a system for citing works and authors*'.¹⁰⁷ Said singles out Edward William Lane's *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* as one of the most important individual texts. This text says Said, is known to have been read and cited by such diverse figures as Nerval, Flaubert and Burton. In fact Lane was perceived as an authority whose use was an imperative for anyone writing or thinking about Egypt or the Orient.¹⁰⁸

Whilst Foucault's opinion is that the individual text or author counts for very little, empirically, Said argues, in the case of Orientalism he finds this not to be the case. His approach therefore is to adapt Foucault's methodological approach to discourse to take account of the influence of individual authors and texts. He uses close readings of the texts to reveal the dialectic between the individual text or writer and the complex collective formation to which his work is a contribution. However despite his difference of opinion with Foucault over the role of the author, Said nevertheless acknowledges his indebtedness to Foucault's notion of discourse in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Said argues that without examining Orientalism as a discourse, one could not possibly understand the systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage the Orient politically, sociologically, and ideologically during the post-Enlightenment period.¹⁰⁹

Mills suggests that problems and contradictions with Foucault's arguments can be seen by many theorists as '*stepping stones, ways of moving Foucault's work onwards, so that it may*

¹⁰⁶ Said, E., *Orientalism*, London: Penguin Books, (1978), 2003, p. 23.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

more adequately describe a world that has changed since Foucault wrote'.¹¹⁰ She argues that whilst Foucault does not offer simple solutions, it is possible to draw on his approach and methods in order to construct our own methodological solutions.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Mills, S., *Michel Foucault*, Oxford: Routledge, 2003, p. 125.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

Summary

This chapter has focussed on two key aspects of Michel Foucault's methodological enquiry into discourse as they are used to inform this research project. Firstly the hidden structures that produce, organise, and distribute discursive statements, and secondly the suggestion that a new discursive formation may arise for theoretically unmapped areas of practice through the re-writing of previously formulated statements from different fields. Section one of the chapter summarised the rules of formation of discourse which identify hidden structures embodied in theoretical texts, practices, and institutions which highlight positions of power in a field of practice. This 'archaeological' approach pays particular attention to the mapping out of power relations which reveal the constraints that occur in the development of any discourse, together with the self regulating system of silencing. Foucault's most significant effect on discourse was to point out that instead of the seamless evolution of forms of knowledge, it was necessary to understand that knowledge undergoes abrupt changes that shift the conditions of understanding, each new set of conditions producing an entirely new organisation of facts. The second section of the chapter explained Foucault's notions on what he termed 'procedures of intervention' which involve the modification of existing statements for re-use into different fields of practice as a means of creating new discursive possibilities for under-theorised subject areas.

A Foucauldian perspective draws attention to the strategic value of discursive statements and the networks of power-knowledge relations that benefit certain groups that have been able to establish what counts as knowledge in a particular field. Such a perspective heightens awareness of the ways in which knowledge is produced and kept in circulation through individuals, institutions, and practices. This is highly germane to the review of the literature in chapter two in which an examination of what exists as a body of writing for all forms of ceramic practice is undertaken. Foucault's notions on discourse have therefore been discussed in the first chapter of this thesis. So, in chapter two the origins of the varied and fragmented collection of writing from what exists as an archive on ceramics from the 1940s to the present day are

examined through journals, catalogue essays and other texts. The chapter begins by considering the influential role of the potter and writer Bernard Leach whose holistic approach to ceramics pottery came to be known as Leachean ideology.¹¹² So dominant was this approach throughout the second half of the twentieth century that other forms of practice were marginalised or excluded by the network of powerful individuals and institutions that supported Leach's ideas.

¹¹² Leach, B., *A Potter's Book*, London: Faber and Faber, (1940), 1944.

CHAPTER TWO

Ceramics and critical writing from 1940

*‘Ceramic criticism lacks intellectual rigour and critical scrutiny. When undertaking comparative analysis between ceramic periodicals and art periodicals, the difference is palpable’*¹¹³

Adam Welch, Academic

Introduction

In this chapter, a review of the literature is undertaken in order to examine the circumstances under which an assortment of writing for ceramics practice has emerged since 1940. This writing exists mainly in the form of journal articles and catalogue essays and 1940 is taken as the starting point as this was the year of publication of *A Potter’s Book* by Bernard Leach. Connections that link power, knowledge, institutions and philosophical practices are considered, together with systems of belief that have operated behind the discursive statements that determine what counts as knowledge in the ceramics field. In any field, people operate in a conceptual environment that limits and restricts them, often in ways of which they are unaware.

¹¹⁴ This is especially so in a traditionally reticent and respectful field such as ceramics. As part of this investigation, the roles of prominent individuals and institutions connected to the development of the dominant form of writing for ceramic practice are examined to shed light on the context for the critical vacuum that surrounds contemporary work.

The investigation starts with an examination of the role of Bernard Leach and *A Potter’s Book* (1940), a publication acknowledged in the field as the twentieth century’s most influential

¹¹³ Welch, A., ‘Criticism and Meaningful Communicative Action’, *Ceramics: Art and Perception*, no. 66, 2006, p. 101.

¹¹⁴ Foucault, M., *Archaeology of Knowledge*, Oxford: Routledge, (1969), 2002, p. 185.

text on ceramics practice.¹¹⁵ In section one of this chapter, the circumstances that enabled Leach to acquire a dominant role in the field whilst marginalising other views that were at odds with his ideological approach, are examined. Section two of the chapter identifies key changes in aesthetics, style and attitudes to practice that came into view in the 1990's, a decade after Leach's death. Throughout the 1990s, there was a growing awareness that there was no critical context for work that was moving towards a fine art aesthetic and away from craft in form and style. Catalogue essays commissioned for two key exhibitions of the 1990s, *The Raw and the Cooked* (1993) and *Pandora's Box* (1995) identify conflicts and struggles that were taking place in the field and assist in providing a context for the changes that were occurring.¹¹⁶

How the debate has moved on in the decade since 2000 will be tracked through the content of the first electronic peer reviewed academic journal for ceramics, *Interpreting Ceramics*.¹¹⁷ In addition, the catalogue essays commissioned for *A Secret History of Clay* at Tate Liverpool in 2004 are analysed to evaluate later changes in practice.¹¹⁸ The final section of the chapter takes an overview of the roles and impact of two organisations, the Ceramic Art Foundation set up in 1979, and Think Tank set up in 2004, with a specific focus on developing a body of substantial critical writing for ceramic work.¹¹⁹ Despite the emergence of journals and organisations dedicated to developing a critical framework for ceramic practices, the problem appears to persist; the topic of debate continues to focus, after all this time, on the continuing critical vacuum.

¹¹⁵ Leach, B., *A Potter's Book*, London: Faber and Faber, (1940), 1944.

¹¹⁶ *The Raw and the Cooked*, Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, and touring, July 1993 - May 1995.

Pandora's Box, Crafts Council Gallery, London, August – September 1995.

¹¹⁷ *Interpreting Ceramics*, issues 01 – 12, 2000 -2010, <http://www.uwic.ac.uk/ICRC/>

¹¹⁸ *A Secret History of Clay*, Tate Liverpool, Liverpool, 28 May – 30 August 2004.

¹¹⁹ *Think Tank*, editions 01 – 07, 2004 -2010, <http://www.thinktank04.eu>

2.1 The dominance of Leachean ideology

*'...the greatest arbiter of taste since Josiah Wedgwood. He single-handedly created a taste, generated a movement inspired by his vision of the perfect, and toured the world guaranteeing his vision, its morality, and legitimacy...'*¹²⁰

Michael Robinson, Critic, on Bernard Leach

Bernard Leach strongly disliked what he termed the 'obsession' of English craftsmen with artistic independence and individuality. Leach believed that this independence stood in the way of a new communal standard for English pottery.¹²¹ To counter this, he presented, in *A Potter's Book*, a sharply defined vision of what he believed constituted studio pottery. He devised a new set of standards and workshop practices as a benchmark for the making of pottery. He succeeded in attracting a number of powerful patrons and supporters to fund and promote his ideological beliefs on pottery and the crafts, and the success of *A Potter's Book* gave him unprecedented authority in the field. Leach strongly disapproved of art school education believing that the standards that he had devised for aesthetically beautiful pottery could only be achieved through the formality of craft apprenticeship and workshop training in which knowledge was handed down from master to apprentice by word of mouth.

Although a prolific writer, the books and articles written by Leach were not highly theorised or critical in nature, but mostly informed by Far Eastern country pottery and his friendships with Japanese potters. Nevertheless, *A Potter's Book* remained in print throughout his lifetime and was so widely used by craft potters that it became known as 'the Potter's Bible'.¹²² Even today, Leach's ideas continue to be promoted through the Leach Pottery in St. Ives, Cornwall, re-opened in 2005 with support from the National Lottery Fund to promote Leach's life and work

¹²⁰ Robinson, M., 'Studio Ceramics since 1946; Pandora's Box or a Gift from the Gods', in *Pandora's Box*, London: Crafts Council, 1995, p. 8.

¹²¹ Leach, B, *A Potter's Book*, London: Faber and Faber, (1940), 1944, p. 16.

¹²² Harrod, T., *The Crafts in Britain in the 20th Century*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999, p. 15.

and provide workshop training for the production of craft pottery based on his communal standards.¹²³

A Potter's Book by Bernard Leach

Bernard Leach, born in 1887, was brought up in the Far East, a key factor which influenced his attitude towards ceramic work for the whole of his life. Whilst identifying himself as the inheritor of the values of beauty and craftsmanship of William Morris, he appropriated the Eastern style of Japanese and Korean pottery to provide the criterion by which good pots could achieve a classic standard.¹²⁴ He constantly set the aesthetics of the Far East against what he perceived as the materialism and superficiality of the West, stating that *'our need of a criterion in pottery is apparent and seems to be provided by the work of the T'ang and Sung potters...widely accepted as the noblest achievement in ceramics'*.¹²⁵ In *A Potter's Book*, Leach refers back and forth to religious and philosophical ideas from Christianity to Zen Buddhism as part of what he describes as a spiritual and holistic approach to making pots:

*'I am told St. Francis of Assisi advocated what he called 'Holy Poverty'. A thing possessed in some manner of the virtue of poverty has an indescribable beauty...beauty accompanied by the nobleness of poverty. The Japanese people have a special word 'Shibui' to express this ideal beauty...'*¹²⁶

Leach aspired to a standard for pottery that he believed had disappeared in England and associated it with *'the breakdown of the Christian inspiration in art'*.¹²⁷ He regretted that

¹²³ Leach Pottery, 'About Us', <http://www.leachpottery.com>, 06/04/08.

¹²⁴ Leach, B., *A Potter's Book*, London: Faber and Faber, (1940), 1944, p. xxxv.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p10.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p8.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p9.

'the age old traditions of hand work, which enabled humble English artisans to take their part in such truly human activities as the making of mediaeval tiles and pitchers and which culminated in magnificent co-operations like Chartres Cathedral, have long since crumbled away'.¹²⁸

Leach argued that English potters, unlike their Japanese and Chinese counterparts, were too obsessed with individuality. This had led to a lack of unity of purpose and faith, with an exaggerated pride in independence which he described as that of *'an artist on a dunghill'*.¹²⁹ The necessity for a psychological and aesthetic common foundation for craftsmen could not be exaggerated in Leach's opinion. His main objective in writing *A Potter's Book*, therefore, was to establish a set of communal standards which included idealised workshop practices exemplifying the frame of mind in which ceramic work should be approached.¹³⁰ Chapter One of *A Potter's Book*, titled 'Towards a Standard', sets out Leach's philosophical approach to pottery; the chapter includes a meditative approach towards making pots on the wheel.¹³¹ Subsequent chapters provide detailed technical rules and step by step instructions for making pots according to the correct 'standard'. For the first time, pottery vessels could be judged and approved according to a benchmark in terms of style, decoration, colour, glaze, and even the type of clay used; individual interpretation of the rules was discouraged and disapproved of. Workshop training of potters served to reinforce the standards, unlike art school training where individual expression was encouraged.

A Potter's Book attracted widespread support amongst the ceramics community; potters now knew with a degree of certainty what a good pot was and that it would gain approval if it reached the standards set out by Leach. The standards gave potters confidence about the style, form and aesthetics of the work that they were producing, the making of pots becoming so full

¹²⁸ Leach B., *A Potter's Book*, London: Faber and Faber, (1940), 1944, p. 11.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p16.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p22.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p11.

of certainty that many of the decisions were removed from the individual potter who could produce work exactly to the master's benchmark.¹³² The pottery made according to the standards laid down in *A Potter's Book* was so distinctive that it became known as 'Leachean' in style.¹³³

The publication of *A Potter's Book* in 1940 was made possible after Leach acquired the financial backing of a wealthy American couple, Dorothy and Leonard Elmhirst of Dartington Hall, Devon, who funded him whilst he wrote the book. The Elmhirsts, whom Leach had met in the 1930's, ran a progressive school on the Dartington Estate as an experiment in educational idealism. They supported Leach's ideological approach to craft and pottery and remained his patrons for over three decades. Their financial backing also enabled him to promote his views at a series of high profile international events at Dartington in the post-war period. Leonard Elmhirst, whose ideas shared much common ground with Leach, saw the crafts as having an essentially therapeutic, compensatory value and he believed that the crafts could make a contribution to a post-war 'healing of the mind'.¹³⁴ Elmhirst funded a series of conferences and workshops at Dartington Hall throughout the 1950s and 60s in which Leach's ideological approach to pottery and craft took centre stage. The international events, financial backing and well connected network of the Elmhirsts boosted Leach's reputation and status; he acquired a position of unprecedented authority in the field during the post-war period that was unmatched by any other individual and which enabled his polemical views to go largely unchallenged for most of his life.

The most notable event that took place at Dartington in the post-war period was the World Craft Conference in 1952. The Conference agenda was dominated by Leach's definition of craft, especially the polarity between Eastern and Western aesthetics which he had first

¹³² Leach, B., *A Potter's Book*, London: Faber and Faber, (1940), 1944, pp. 1-27.

¹³³ de Waal, E., *Bernard Leach*, London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 1997, p. 57.

¹³⁴ Cox, P., *Report of the International Conference of Craftsmen in Pottery and Textiles*, Dartington Hall, Totnes, July 17-27, 1952, p. 7, Typescript, Dartington Hall, 1954, now at National Art Library, V&A, London.

articulated in *A Potter's Book*.¹³⁵ Leach's bias against art school training was in evidence when, as part of the World Craft Conference's events, he organised an exhibition documenting the pottery of the previous twenty five years. The selectors, led by Leach, made a decision to exclude from the exhibition the work of all potters from London art schools.¹³⁶ In Leach's opinion, tutors at art schools lacked the essential pottery skills to teach repetition throwing, kiln building and glaze technology, and he believed that art schools were places where too much individuality was promoted in preference to standard craft skills.¹³⁷ Leach's authority in the field was demonstrated by his ability to marginalise those forms of work that failed to meet with his approval.

Throughout his life Leach advocated a holistic vision of life and workshop practice as the powerful craft counter-discourse in which skills were passed on by the opportunity to observe a 'master' making.¹³⁸ He unfavourably compared what he described as self-conscious art students from the Royal College, the Central School, or Camberwell, who spent short periods of time at his workshops, with potters who had worked '*from generation to generation in the protective unconsciousness of tradition*'.¹³⁹ He deplored what he considered to be Western culture's unhealthy individualism, over intellectualised education system and loss of craft tradition. In this polemical climate of opinion, any form of objective critical writing for a spectrum of ceramics practices became unfeasible if Leach disapproved of the work.

There are documented attempts by individuals and groups of potters to buck Leach's orthodoxy, but so strong was Leach's hold over the field that the outcome was usually the marginalisation of the dissenter's work. Leach famously had a disagreement with a group of art

¹³⁵ Cox, P., *Report of the International Conference of Craftsmen in Pottery and Textiles*, Dartington Hall, Totnes, July 17-24, 1952, p. 139, Typescript at Dartington Hall, 1954, now at National Art Library, V&A, London.

¹³⁶ Wingfield Digby to Peter Cox, 1 May 1952, Leach Archive, 6463, <http://www.csu.ucreative.ac.uk>, 4/10/09.

¹³⁷ Leach, B., *A Potter's Book*, London: Faber and Faber, (1940), 1944, p. 11

¹³⁸ Hamada, S., 'Leach and Hamada in Discussion', *Crafts*, no. 4, September/October, 1973, pp. 17-19.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p11.

school trained potters in the 1950s that became known as the Picassoettes. In 1950 the Arts Council had toured an exhibition of Picasso's paintings, sculptures and ceramics. The exhibition *Picasso in Provence* had a significant influence on a group of potters who had studied at the Central School of Arts and Crafts in London as a result of which they chose to emulate Picasso's free Mediterranean style in preference to Leach's neo-Orientalism.¹⁴⁰ Leach dismissed the work out of hand; he emphasised his disapproval of Picasso's ceramics by labelling him a great acrobat but not a great potter.¹⁴¹ Leach's derisory name for the group, the *Picassoettes*, was a label that stuck. The work of the group was marginalised from the mainstream of ceramics for over three decades until Tanya Harrod published an article in *Crafts* magazine in 1989, arguing that it was time that this previously derided work was re-assessed.¹⁴² By 1989, a decade after Leach's death, 'Leachean' style was no longer the dominant force in British ceramics, but had now become a derogatory term for muddy colours and Orientalist brushwork.¹⁴³

The success of *A Potter's Book* during the 1950s sealed Leach's reputation as a leading exponent of craft and ceramics. An invitation to lecture at Black Mountain College, North Carolina, in 1953 further enhanced his reputation. Black Mountain with its tradition of avant-gardism was an internationally renowned institution which fostered interdisciplinary education in music, drama, and the arts. Leach joined a long list of famous artists who worked there, including John Cage, Josef Albers, Buckminster Fuller, Erik Satie, and William de Kooning.¹⁴⁴ Whilst Leach's authoritative role at Dartington meant that his views were revered and rarely challenged, in contrast, his residency at Black Mountain College brought him into conflict with a well known American potter who totally opposed his ideas. Marguerite Wildenhain, who was also teaching at Black Mountain, publicly challenged his endorsement of Eastern aesthetics as

¹⁴⁰ Jones, J., 'In Search of the Picassoettes', *Interpreting Ceramics*, issue 01, September 2000, http://www.uwic.ac.uk/ICRC_issue001/picasso.htm, 20/10/05.

¹⁴¹ Leach, B., *A Potter in Japan*, London: Faber and Faber, 1960, p. 203.

¹⁴² Harrod, T., 'The Forgotten '50s'', *Crafts*, no. 98, May/June 1989, pp. 30-33.

¹⁴³ de Waal, Edmund, *Bernard Leach*, London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 1997, p72.

¹⁴⁴ de Waal, E., 'The event of a thread, the event of clay: Black Mountain and the Crafts' in *Starting at Zero, Black Mountain College 1933-1947*, Bristol: Arnolfini, Cambridge: Kettle's Yard, 2005, p. 66.

an approach to making ceramics. She articulated her opposing views in a letter published in the American Journal, *Craft Horizons*. She argued that: '*the conscious copying of another culture unrelated to the mind of our generation would only produce dubious makeshifts and turn our potters into dilettantes or pure fakes*'.¹⁴⁵ Wildenhain accused Leach of being unable to acknowledge other forms of pottery which did not match his own taste and standards. Whereas most British potters who disagreed with Leach were effectively silenced because of his dominant position and influential network of supporters, Leach did not have a similar role in American ceramics and Wildenhain was not intimidated by his reputation. Furthermore, she followed up her letter with a book, *Pottery: Form and Expression* (1953). Describing it as an American riposte to *A Potter's Book*, she argued that she wished to demonstrate to American potters that there were credible alternatives to Eastern aesthetics as a way of making pots. Wildenhain remained one of the few potters confident enough to publicly challenge Leach's ideas during his lifetime; very few others dared to speak out in terms of how ceramics should be made, thought about, spoken about and written about against such an authoritative figure, until at least a decade after his death.

It is probably fair to say that British ceramics, for much of the period from 1950 to 1990 was not an entirely free subject of thought or action. To speak of ceramics of this period is to speak mainly of an enterprise led by Leach, whose scope takes in workshop practices, a way of life, style, Eastern aesthetics, the arts and crafts movement, anti industrialization philosophies and wisdom domesticated for the use of English potters. Nevertheless, in the years following Leach's death, after decades of marginalisation, avant garde approaches to a whole range of ceramic work emerged in exhibitions such as *The Raw and the Cooked* (1993), and *Pandora's Box*. (1995). However, throughout the 1990s there were still traditionalist supporters of Leachean ideals who continued to object to any trend towards a fine art or sculptural aesthetic. By 1996 the curator Dr Jennifer Harris argued that that although the more conservative crafts

¹⁴⁵ Wildenhain, M., 'Potter's Dissent: An Open Letter to Bernard Leach from Marguerite Wildenhain', *Craft Horizons*, USA, May 1953, p. 44.

had continued to be important, the last decade has seen a huge growth of objects '*which incline towards a fine art aesthetic, in particular sculpture. Indeed some makers have become almost anti-craft in their attempts to achieve intellectual respectability for their work*'.¹⁴⁶ The competing forces of fine art and craft remained a source of conflict in some areas of the field throughout the 1990's as I will show in the next section. Through a consideration of Leach's role, we may observe how the dominant discursive approach of a field is often linked to the question of power and, as Foucault points out, by its very nature, becomes the object of a struggle for power.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Harris, J., *William Morris Revisited, Questioning the Legacy*, London: Crafts Council, 1996, p. 83.

¹⁴⁷ Foucault, M., *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Oxford: Routledge, (1969), 2002, p. 118.

2.2 Exhibition essays and journal articles, the 1990s

Old hierarchies no longer appeal. Instead personal networks, mostly built up at art school, create a context for work...few graduates from art school would describe themselves as craftsmen or craftswomen'.¹⁴⁸

Tanya Harrod, Art Historian

The 1990s heralded a new era for a range of ceramic practices which were in stark contrast to the communal standard pottery of previous decades. Changes in approach to the making of ceramic work became visible in the first major ceramic exhibition of the decade, *The Raw and the Cooked* (1993). With the exhibition came the demand for a new status and critical context for ceramic art and sculpture.¹⁴⁹ In the absence of other forms of critique, exhibition essays became the barometer of shifts in the field and represented one of the few sources of documentary evidence about changes in practice.

In the years leading up to *The Raw and the Cooked* there had been an increase in the number of students studying ceramics at art schools and with this came awareness that a more theorised approach to practice, similar to that of the fine arts, might be required. In 1998, at a symposium on the role of theory in practice in the applied arts at the University of East Anglia, the convener, critic Pamela Johnson, echoed the views of an increasing number in the field when she said that practice would no longer be enough; more than ever it was now time to put practice into theory. Johnson posed questions that are still relevant over a decade later. How, she wondered, could makers and writers in the applied arts critically engage with current practice, and how might this critical debate connect to the wider culture?¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Harrod, T., 'Afterword', *Crafts*, no. 162, January/February 2000, p. 41.

¹⁴⁹ *The Raw and the Cooked*, Museum of Modern Art, Oxford and touring, July 1993-May 1995.

¹⁵⁰ Johnson, P., *Ideas in the Making, Practice in Theory*, London: Crafts Council, 1998, p. 11.

The debate to highlight the dearth of critical writing for ceramics and other applied arts practices began in earnest in the 1990s. Although the design and artistic content on ceramic courses at art schools had been increasing as far back as the 1960s, there remained little critical or theoretical input. This fact was highlighted by the ceramicist Jacqueline Poncelet in her introduction to the catalogue essay for the 2001 Jerwood Prize for Ceramics. Reflecting on her own experience on undergraduate and postgraduate ceramic courses, including her time at the Royal College of Art, she explained that not all teaching came with a philosophy and that in her own case techniques were taught without a functional or philosophical structure. She says: '*We had to learn to think for ourselves and develop our own opinions about how and why we wanted to make a piece of work*'.¹⁵¹ So, whilst art school education was increasing in subjects areas such as ceramics, critical and contextual studies appeared to have a less important role than on fine art courses. However, a greater role for critical theory was not universally welcomed by some practitioners, critics or curators as I will show, and the polemic views generated by the debate become clear in the catalogue essays for the three exhibitions discussed in the next section, *The Raw and the Cooked*, (1993) *Pandora's Box*, (1995) and *A Secret History of Clay* (2004).

The Raw and the Cooked, 1993

The thoughts behind the exhibition were summarised in the catalogue introduction by David Elliott, the initiator of the exhibition and Director of the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford. Elliott explained that the *Raw and the Cooked* was the third in a series of surveys of recent visual culture in Britain, started by the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in Oxford in 1987. The first had examined painting and sculpture made during the 1980s and the second had looked at the interface between video art, audio art, slide projection and sculpture during the same period. This time the exhibition examined an area of activity in clay, not previously exhibited at

¹⁵¹ Poncelet, J., *Ceramics, Jerwood Applied Arts Prize 2001*, London: Crafts Council, 2001, p7.

MOMA because it straddled the boundaries of craft and sculpture.¹⁵² The interest of the Barbican Gallery, London, in staging the exhibition was instrumental in making the project viable, says Elliott. Elliott's comments are interesting as they indicate a shift away from the perception that ceramic material was purely a medium for craft work.

Elliott sets the context for the exhibition by confronting what he describes as the historic problem of the two abstract entities of myth and logic. Returning to the ideology of Leach, Elliott discusses the idea of craft, of which the field of ceramics is usually deemed to be part, bringing with it the idea that the making of objects by hand is in some sense a moral activity. This seems much more so than in the making of art, says Elliott, so logically, one may ask, why does it need to be the case?¹⁵³ In Elliott's view, this is the question that is at the heart of the exhibition. The design, layout, contents and look of the catalogue, the mixing of people with art and craft backgrounds with the single qualification that they make sculpture or objects out of clay, sets out to challenge conventional categories and expectations of art and craft.

Yet in spite of its moral baggage, craft, in a post-industrial society is essentially a normative description of a range of objects that are produced, exhibited, funded and sold within a particular framework. The practitioners within it tended to have shown their work in the same places, and within their separate media, different and discrete values, both aesthetic and monetary, have been bestowed upon their work. As Elliott points out, such structures tend to reinforce themselves in that they promote a market of ideas and attitudes as well as of objects.¹⁵⁴ Nevertheless, a distinction may be made between this superstructure and the individual whom it co-opts, and it is at this level that the possibilities are open for exploration and transgression. It is these possibilities, says Elliott that the selectors of the exhibition took to be the starting point for *The Raw and the Cooked*.

¹⁵² Elliott, D., 'Acknowledgements', *The Raw and the Cooked*, Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1993, p. 4.

¹⁵³ Elliott, D., 'Foreword', *The Raw and the Cooked*, Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1993, p7.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

Elliott notes that the curators of the exhibition, Alison Britton and Martina Margetts, both refer to the roles played by William Morris and Bernard Leach in determining the British view of craft in the twentieth century. Elliott argues that the moral values that Leach attached to Japanese culture, based, he suspected, on the integration of art with nature and of hand with object, were in some sense a misunderstanding as they were unavoidably Western, and there was no direct equivalent for Zen thought in western culture.¹⁵⁵ Leach's dogma of truth to materials, authenticity, and fitness for purpose within the craft tradition, left little room for the irony or paradox within the complex cultures of post-modernism. However, within the closed atmosphere of British craft ceramics, Elliott sees irony and paradox offering many of the artists in the exhibition a serious alternative to Leach's worthiness of good intent.¹⁵⁶ Elliott's comments demonstrate how far the field of ceramics had shifted in the decade since Leach's death. That the role of Leach and his style of pottery was now open to such criticism brought a new freedom for practitioners to explore different approaches far removed from the restrictive standards promoted by Leach throughout his life.

The co-curators and selectors of *The Raw and the Cooked* were the potter and writer Alison Britton, and the critic and historian Martina Margetts. Their names had been suggested to David Elliott by a Crafts Officer of Southern Arts as Elliott was unfamiliar with the world of ceramics. Britton was one of the most high profile potters of the decade and had contributed texts on pottery to a number of books and journals. Margetts was the former editor of *Crafts* magazine (1978 -1987) and a successful author, having recently published the book, *International Crafts* (Thames and Hudson, 1991). *The Raw and the Cooked* was launched at the Barbican Gallery, London in July 1993 and transferred to the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, in January 1994 before completing its tour in Japan in May 1995. The impact of *The Raw and the Cooked* cannot be overstated despite the mixed reviews that the exhibition generated. The scale of publicity and

¹⁵⁵ Elliott, D., 'Foreword', *The Raw and the Cooked*, Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1993, p. 7.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

duration of the tour was highly unusual for an exhibition of ceramic work and demonstrates the level of ambition for the show. *The Raw and the Cooked* was also important as one of the first exhibitions of ceramic work to be shown in spaces not primarily associated with craft. A contentious issue throughout the 1980s for ceramicists had been the difficulty of finding fine art galleries to show their work.¹⁵⁷

Britton and Margetts both begin their exhibition essays for *The Raw and the Cooked* with references to Bernard Leach. However, from the outset they demonstrate differing views on whether Leach's role in shaping the field of twentieth century ceramics was ultimately beneficial or a hindrance. Britton remained deferential towards the 'spiritual values' espoused by Leach, whereas for Margetts change could not come quickly enough. This change, she believed, would bring with it acceptance of new forms of sculptural practice that she thought were many years overdue. The polemical views of both curators encapsulated the divisions that existed in the field at the time.

From the beginning of her essay, 'use, beauty, ugliness, irony', Alison Britton places emphasis on the importance of the historical and cultural role of ceramics.¹⁵⁸ She reflects on time spent looking at pots and shards in ethnographic museums and frequently uses the words 'tradition', 'culture', 'history' to frame her ideas about ceramic work. Taking a traditionalist view she presents ceramic work as something universally comprehensible with the vessel as 'the crux of understanding.' Britton thanks Leach for his contribution to ensuring the survival of ceramics as a strand of late twentieth century culture and she reinforces the Leachean ideology of a spiritual approach to making, saying:

¹⁵⁷ Harrod, T., *The Crafts in Britain in the Twentieth Century*, New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University, 1999, p. 274.

¹⁵⁸ Britton, A., 'use, beauty, ugliness and irony', in *The Raw and the Cooked*, Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1993, p. 9.

*'The Leach school looked with passionate admiration to the Far Eastern potters, not only for the aesthetics of the pots themselves but for what they perceived to be a more wholesome and spiritual approach to making'.*¹⁵⁹

People who choose to work in clay, whether or not they realise it, says Britton, are tapping in to a twentieth century history of genteel resistance to larger sweeps of modernisation, mass marketing, and *'other aspects of progress that threaten to crush the human spirit.'*¹⁶⁰ To be a potter is a self-conscious activity, she suggests, motivated by spiritual hope and expression, underpinned by William Morris' resistance to dehumanising industrialisation. Britton praises Leach as a maker and craft philosopher who *'defined the territory that we still occupy, despite changes in the appearances of the objects'.*¹⁶¹ She believes that despite changes of appearance, most ceramic work continues to be informed by the ideas expressed in *A Potter's Book*.

Britton appears to underestimate the extent to which the ceramics field had shifted in the previous decade. She describes work in the exhibition that departs from Leach's ideals as *'no more than subversive strands... pleasing and important to include'.*¹⁶² The divisions between the silent, 'spiritual', meditative pottery articulated by Britten, and the transgressive, avant-garde sculptural ceramics promoted by Margetts in 'metamorphosis: the culture of ceramics' are clear.¹⁶³ The divisions are such that it would be difficult in future to think of ceramics as a universal practice simply because of the medium used.

¹⁵⁹ Britton, A., 'use, beauty, ugliness and irony', in *The Raw and the Cooked*, Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1993, p. 9.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹⁶³ Margetts, M., 'metamorphosis: the culture of ceramics', in *The Raw and the Cooked*, Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1993, p. 13.

In the month preceding the opening of *The Raw and the Cooked*, Martina Margetts presented her perspective of the exhibition in an article for *Crafts* magazine. It was titled 'Life after Leach' and in the article she made it clear that the contemporary field was as far removed from Leachean ideals as possible.¹⁶⁴ Margetts was keen to see change in the way that ceramics was thought of by the wider visual arts community and asserted that clay should now be viewed not simply as a craft material for pottery, but as an authentic medium for sculpture. This should, she hoped, finally dissolve the old hierarchical divisions between art and craft that had historically discriminated against sculptural and other ceramic work as a valid art practice.¹⁶⁵

Margetts begins her exhibition essay, 'metamorphosis: the culture of ceramics', by highlighting the battles that have been fought over the position of contemporary culture in Britain, not least over what she describes as the then current position of ceramics. She draws attention to the fact that the post war history of ceramics, as much as the absence of a sympathetic cultural context, was responsible for the delay in the 'present coming of age' of British ceramic art.¹⁶⁶ She argues that there had been a 'tunnel vision' in post war British ceramics brought about by the controlling ideas of Bernard Leach and to a lesser extent the potter Hans Coper (1920-1981). Both, in different ways were responsible for discouraging new approaches to ceramic work.¹⁶⁷ Leach's holistic vision of life and work, producing a harmony and sense of useful purpose, together with the aesthetic he evolved, became a badge of allegiance, a symbol of belief beyond the simple making of a pot. In Margetts view, the whole realm of the brown and green pot betokened such values, becoming, a political and social, as much as a cultural statement. Coper's influence on the other hand arose from his teaching role at Camberwell School of Art and the Royal College of Art. The critic Peter Dormer refers to his

¹⁶⁴ Margetts, M., 'Life After Leach', *Crafts*, no. 123, July/August 1993, p. 23.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁶⁶ Margetts, M., 'metamorphosis: the culture of ceramics', in *The Raw and the Cooked*, Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1993, p. 13.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

considerable impact on those he taught and describes him, together with Leach, as the twin pillars of British twentieth century pottery.¹⁶⁸

Whilst Margetts also depicts Leach and Coper as the ‘twin peaks’ of twentieth century ceramics, unlike Dormer, she takes a more negative view. For five decades Coper and Leach loomed so large, she says, that the ‘coming of age’ of ceramic art was inevitably delayed. During this time, pots remained within the conventional parameters of Leachean ideology, so much so, says Margetts, that non-vessel based ceramics were ‘*cut off from the artery of mainstream sculpture, confined to a black hole.*’¹⁶⁹ As a former editor of *Crafts*, Margetts was well placed to make such insights. During her decade of tenure which ended in 1987, she had attempted to develop a more critical stance for the magazine, and as part of this move, she introduced a ‘Comment’ section for personal views. The column reflected the combative debates that were taking place in the craft world at the time. The development of a more critical approach was not always appreciated by a conservative element in the readership, and the response to her editorials on the ‘Comment’ page was often hostile.

Margetts highlights in her essay the hostility of two prominent craft critics, Peter Fuller and Peter Dormer, towards fine art ceramics.¹⁷⁰ Fuller was renowned as one of the most vociferous detractors of avant garde craft and argued that ‘*the crafts increasingly appeal to the debased fine arts in order, quite literally, to validate themselves.*’¹⁷¹ Dormer on the other hand is described as a critic of wider sympathies.¹⁷² However, he frequently expressed the belief that the pursuit of theory had ‘desperately harmed art’.¹⁷³ In their writings, Fuller and Dormer both frequently espoused traditional views regarding the social context and yardsticks of use and

¹⁶⁸ Dormer, P., *The New Ceramics*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1988, p. 194.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁷⁰ Margetts, M., ‘metamorphosis: the culture of ceramics’, in *The Raw and the Cooked*, Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1993, p. 13.

¹⁷¹ Fuller, P., ‘Textiles North’, Reviews, Exhibitions, *Crafts*, no. 55, March/April, 1982, p. 49.

¹⁷² Margetts, M., ‘metamorphosis: the culture of ceramics’, in *The Raw and the Cooked*, Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1993, p. 14.

¹⁷³ Dormer, P., ‘The Appliance of Science’, *Crafts*, no. 119, November/December, 1992, p. 19.

beauty promoted by William Morris, Lethaby, and Japanese culture, and showed little tolerance towards alternative views of craft practice. A review by Fuller for the exhibition, *Textiles North*, was reported to have shaken confidence in the field so much that avant-garde approaches to textile work stopped for many years.¹⁷⁴ Fuller wrote reviews that were frequently described as hostile and vicious, and both he and Dormer showed little tolerance of views that challenged their beliefs. In one response to a review, the furniture maker Michael Wainwright suggested that Dormer suffered ‘*such a fear of conceptualism in the crafts that it bordered on paranoia.*’

¹⁷⁵ For the most part, Fuller and Dormer were seen as providing ‘expert’ and authoritative opinions on craft matters and as such their ‘expert’ opinions were rarely challenged in a meaningful way.

At the time of *The Raw and the Cooked*, the separate existence of the Crafts Council and the Arts Council, separate galleries, and separate departments in museums and art schools, conferred separate intentions on the works, further emphasising differences between art and craft, of which ceramics had until now been part. Despite such divisions, Margetts was optimistic that a new sense of order was emerging in ceramics. She relates the changing climate of painting and sculpture as propitious and complementary to the role of ceramics, enabling a much wider interpretation of ceramic work to open up.¹⁷⁶ With a sense of optimism, she concluded that ceramics could now be freely made and assessed ‘*across a whole spectrum of structure and purposes.*’¹⁷⁷ As I will show, the optimism was premature. As an exhibition, *The Raw and the Cooked* represented a deliberate move away from functional or decorative ceramic objects displayed on a plinth.

¹⁷⁴ Johnson, P., *Under Construction*, London: Crafts Council, 1996, p. 10.

¹⁷⁵ Wainwright, M., ‘Letters’, *Crafts*, no. 136, September/October, 1995, p. 62.

¹⁷⁶ Margetts, M., ‘metamorphosis: the culture of ceramics’, in *The Raw and the Cooked*, Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1993, p. 14.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

The exhibits varied in scale, concept and meaning. For the first time, forms of work unrelated to the vessel took precedence, including work based on irony and work connected with identity and the landscape. It is also apparent that fine artists were beginning to develop an interest in the investigation of process to explore the properties of ceramic materials. *Laibe* by Tony Cragg is a case in point (fig. 1).



FIG.1 Tony Cragg, *Laibe*, 1991

Sliced fine grained sculpture clay. 42 x 52 x 59cms. Stedelijk Museum, Netherlands.

Laibe, Tony Cragg's sliced and de-constructed clay vessel, was made during a residency at the European Ceramics Work Centre (ECWC) in The Netherlands. We can see how far areas of ceramic practice had moved aesthetically from Bernard Leach's ideal standards. *Laibe* was also indicative of the interest that fine artists were now taking in clay as a material for the investigation of process to construct an art work.

The Raw and the Cooked generated negative responses from both artists and critics. One of the exhibitors, Ewen Henderson, thought that it was '*a big mixed-up bag... no actual structure, or structured idea - the personal taste of two people*'.¹⁷⁸ The critic Marina Vaizey was of the opinion that the exhibition was too safe, that the premise on which it was based was confused, that it was curiously apologetic and a missed opportunity for presenting ceramics to a much wider audience than normally seen at craft galleries. She argued that the show should have gone beyond the medium and its use to the message and what was being done with clay. Crucially she drew attention to the lack of a critical vocabulary used to describe the work.¹⁷⁹ The last comment is highly pertinent; the catalogue essays provide a generalised rather than focussed critical evaluation of the exhibited work, relying too much on short statements by each artist to explain their intentions. What appears to be missing from the essays by both Margetts and Britton is a more substantial appraisal of work that was meant to represent newly emerging areas of practice and, as such, represents a missed opportunity.

The aspirations of the curators to position *The Raw and the Cooked* in a fine art context made the lack of substantial critical commentary for the work even more apparent. Furthermore, whilst Margetts emphasised the conceptual differences between ceramic sculpture and functional and decorative pottery and the need to position ceramic art alongside painting and sculpture, paradoxically she also argued that '*the strength of ceramics has always lain in its universality... a non-verbal, worldwide evocation of spiritual, ceremonial, sculptural, and*

¹⁷⁸ Whiting, D., 'Interview with Ewen Henderson', in *Pandora's Box*, London: Crafts Council, 1995, p. 7.

¹⁷⁹ Vaizey, M., 'Reviews, The Raw and the Cooked', 1993, *Crafts*, no. 125, Nov/Dec 1993, p. 51.

utilitarian functions.'¹⁸⁰ In other words, she was still thinking of ceramics as a universal non-verbal practice linked by medium. Margetts' comments illustrate the historical complexities of the debate. Whilst there is an aspiration for ceramic work to be acknowledged as fine art which, as a practice, is underpinned by a critical, theoretical context, there is also a desire to retain traditional non discursive elements that are strongly associated with craft practice. The two are a source of potential conflict.

Pandora's Box (1995)

The catalogue essay by Michael Robinson for the exhibition *Pandora's Box*, draws attention to the conflict between a fine art approach to ceramics which does not fit into a conventional craft category, and the desirability or otherwise for a theoretical context for such work. Robinson argues that the fine art world did not understand ceramic art, that the work in *Pandora's Box* was art rather than craft, and that a theoretical approach for such work was unnecessary.¹⁸¹ The curator Ewen Henderson's introductory words in the exhibition catalogue articulate his desire for a 'word-proof' practice. He says:

*'An aural instinct compels me to look up. There at 5000 feet are 5000 birds, fellow Londoners. Without warning some leave the main flock, and in lines and columns execute the best drawing I have ever seen – as good as Lascaux. I simply want to make images of this quality; if possible I would like them to be word proof.'*¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Margetts, M., 'metamorphosis: the culture of ceramics', in *The Raw and the Cooked*, Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 2003, p. 15.

¹⁸¹ Robinson, M., 'Studio Ceramics Since 1946: Pandora's Box or a Gift from the Gods', in *Pandora's Box*, London: Crafts Council, 1995, p. 8.

¹⁸² Henderson, E., 'Interview', in *Pandora's Box*, London: Crafts Council, 1995, p. 3.

Henderson makes the point that the exhibitors were artists rather than potters. As if to emphasise the artistic merit of the exhibits, he explains that in a curatorial decision, he decided to exclude thrown pots in favour of hand built work as he considered thrown pots too restrictive to be considered an expressive art form. Henderson also emphasised his preference for work that had associations with other art forms, such as the work of Gordon Baldwin whose ceramic forms were inspired by the music of John Cage.¹⁸³ Many of the exhibitors in *Pandora's Box*, the majority of whom were trained in ceramics at London art schools, had developed a new abstract expressionist style following the lead of the Picassoettes in the 1950s and 1960s whose ceramic forms were inspired by the work of painters and sculptors. For three decades, this style of work had remained on the periphery of a field dominated by Leachean pottery. As well being marginalised by Leach and his supporters, the group felt ignored by the fine art community. Tanya Harrod points out that artists working in this way were given no critical attention and denied exhibition space in both craft and fine art contexts.¹⁸⁴ Belated recognition came in 1995 when Henderson was invited by the Craft Council to curate *Pandora's Box*, a retrospective of abstract expressionist ceramic work dating back to the 1960s.¹⁸⁵

In his exhibition essay, 'Studio Ceramics Since 1940: Pandora's Box or a Gift from the Gods', Robinson points out that ceramics had recently come into view for the first time as an artist's medium. He argued that people trained in pottery techniques had emerged as artists, making a contribution to a wider art scene beyond the limits of what was always known as pottery.¹⁸⁶ Robinson argues that a shift in attitude had been difficult to achieve due to a lack of understanding and appreciation on the part of the critical world. A prejudicial reaction, rejection and distancing by the fine art world and a negative response from both commercial and national fine art galleries had done little to encourage the artists and inform the general public about

¹⁸³ Henderson, E., 'Interview', in *Pandora's Box*, London: Crafts Council, 1995, p. 5.

¹⁸⁴ Harrod, T., *The Crafts in Britain in the 20th Century*, New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1999, p. 274.

¹⁸⁵ *Pandora's Box*, Exhibition, London: Crafts Council Gallery, 5 August – 3 September, 1995.

¹⁸⁶ Robinson, M., 'Studio Ceramics Since 1946: Pandora's Box Or A Gift From The Gods', in *Pandora's Box*, London: Crafts Council, 1995, p. 8.

ceramic work.¹⁸⁷ In the previous three decades there had been so much confusion in the art world as to what was and what was not art, says Robinson, he wondered whether it was possible to look to fine art theorists and critics for rational, reliable guidelines for emerging art directions in ceramics.¹⁸⁸ He bemoans the lack of recognition for ceramic work by the theoretically informed fine art world, declaring:

*'it would seem that it is only in the world of fine art with its baggage train of theories and hype that the remarkable developments in ceramics is a Pandora's Box rather than a genuine gift from the Gods.'*¹⁸⁹

Whilst Robinson wants recognition for certain forms of ceramic work to be considered as art, even though he rejects a supporting critical theory, in the 1990s craft critics such as Peter Dormer dismissed the idea of a critical approach to ceramics for different reasons. From Dormer's point of view, there were only two ways of considering ceramic work, as functional or decorative craft. There was therefore no need for a critical approach and he derided any form of conceptual, artistic, or sculptural ceramic work.¹⁹⁰ In contrast, Robinson believed that the ceramic work shown in *Pandora's Box* was definitely art, but he thought it was different from fine art because of the craft skills needed; he therefore argued that a theoretical context for this type of work was unnecessary.¹⁹¹

These arguments illustrate the complexity of the debate. Robinson treats with scepticism talk of the barriers between art and craft coming down. If they are, he says, it would merely be

¹⁸⁷ Robinson, M., 'Studio Ceramics Since 1946: Pandora's Box Or A Gift From The Gods', in *Pandora's Box*, London: Crafts Council, 1995, p. 8.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹⁹⁰ Dormer, P., 'Reviews, On the Edge, Art Meets Craft', *Crafts*, no. 124, September/October 1993, p. 50.

¹⁹¹ Robinson, M., 'Studio Ceramics Since 1946: Pandora's Box Or A Gift From The Gods', in *Pandora's Box*, London: Crafts Council, 1995, p. 9.

an attempt 'to establish theory, salesmanship and bullshit as art forms'.¹⁹² He argues it is time to acknowledge that attitudes to art are protectionist and inadequate.¹⁹³

Robinson and Henderson's wish to distance themselves from the critical debates that are fundamental to fine art, whilst at the same time wanting ceramics to be acknowledged as art practice, characterise the tensions that existed between fine art and craft. In the early 1990s, in the largely reticent field of ceramics, the hostility of figures such as Henderson, Robinson and Dormer towards theory helped to discourage critical debate. However, by the end of the decade a consensus was emerging that the dearth of critical writing was inhibiting the development of ceramics as a fully fledged sculptural and artistic practice. At the conference *Obscure Objects of Desire* at the University of East Anglia in 1997, the ceramicist Julian Stair argued that:

*'If ceramics specifically and crafts more generally do not control their own critical agendas and become further marginalised, it will not be because they have been imprisoned in the ghetto by a hostile arts establishment, but because they are prisoners of our own ghetto mentality.'*¹⁹⁴

The conferences, *Obscure Objects of Desire* (1997) and *Ideas in the Making, Practice in Theory* (1998), both held at the University of East Anglia, brought the issue of critical engagement for the applied arts to a wider audience through publication of the conference proceedings by the Crafts Council.¹⁹⁵ By 2000, the conferences had inspired a group of academics with connections to the University of Wales Ceramic Archive to set up the peer reviewed electronic journal, *Interpreting Ceramics*. The group, which came together under the banner 'Interpreting

¹⁹² Robinson, M., 'Studio Ceramics Since 1946 Pandora's Box Or A Gift From The Gods', in *Pandora's Box*, London: Crafts Council, 1995, p. 13.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁹⁴ Stair, J., 'Studio Ceramics: Ghetto or Ghetto Mentality' in *Obscure Objects of Desire, Reviewing the Crafts in Twentieth Century Britain*, London: Crafts Council, 1997, p. 157.

¹⁹⁵ Harrod, T., *Obscure Objects of Desire, Reviewing the Crafts in the Twentieth Century*, London: Crafts Council, 1997.

Johnson, P., *Ideas in the Making, Practice in Theory*, London: Crafts Council, 1998.

Ceramics: Research Collaboration (ICRC), expressed shared research interests in recording, interrogating, interpreting, and communicating the practice and history of ceramics ¹⁹⁶

In the next section, the contribution of *Interpreting Ceramics* to the development of a research-led body of critical writing for ceramics during its first decade will be assessed.

¹⁹⁶ 'About the Journal', *Interpreting Ceramics*, September 2000, issue 01.
<http://www.ac.uk/ICRC/issue001/>, 16/01/05.

2.3 Exhibition essays and journal articles from 2000

'Ceramics is an art whose practitioners have become peculiarly suited to silence. Their silence about their work and that of their peers has become a symbol for their seriousness as artists, in a way that is radically different from other arts'.¹⁹⁷

Edmund de Waal, Potter

This section examines more recent moves to advance the development of a critical context for ceramics practice since 2000. This is done in the first part of the section by considering the contribution of the journal, *Interpreting Ceramics*, the first electronic, academic, peer reviewed journal for ceramics. It was launched by four institutions in 2000 with the specific aim of developing a research led critical context for all types of work using ceramic material. The contribution of the journal to improving the standard of critical writing for contemporary ceramics practice will be evaluated. In the second part of this section, the exhibition *A Secret History of Clay* will be discussed. *A Secret History of Clay* (2004) presented a survey of unknown twentieth-century ceramic art by a range of artists and sculptors including Fontana, Noguchi, Chagall, Braque, Picasso and Gauguin. Contemporary artists represented in the exhibition included Cindy Sherman, Jeff Koons and Richard Long. The exhibition essay raised important questions about the exclusion of ceramic work from the canon of modernist art, but paradoxically the exhibition itself caused questions to be raised about its own exclusions.

Interpreting Ceramics

Interpreting Ceramics was launched at a symposium at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, in September 2000. The journal was supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and four academic institutions: the Universities of Wales at Cardiff and Aberystwyth,

¹⁹⁷ de Waal, E., 'Speak for Yourself', *Interpreting Ceramics*, issue 05, 2004. <http://www.ac.uk/ICRC/issue005/speakforyourself>, 16/01/05.

the University of The West of England and Bath Spa University which would collectively be known as *Interpreting Ceramics Research Collaboration (ICRC)*. The aim of ICRC was ‘to establish and maintain the highest scholarly content for the articles published’ and reverse the paucity of research led academic writing for ceramics practice.¹⁹⁸ The editor, Jeffrey Jones, set out the editorial team’s commitment to national and international inter-disciplinary research in all areas of ceramics practice including ‘studio, industrial, architectural, traditional, sculptural, figurative, and branches of anthropology, archaeology, material culture studies, museum studies, archiving etc’.¹⁹⁹ *Interpreting Ceramics* would be freely available to an international readership through the internet.

The first issue of *Interpreting Ceramics* includes symposium papers presented at the journal’s launch. The paper presented by Gabi Dewald, editor of the German magazine *New Ceramics*, raises key questions about the structure and future direction of the publication that are not clearly answered. Dewald asks whether there is a commitment for a fixed number of issues each year and whether there is a planned duration for the project; she expresses concern at the cumbersome organisational structure of the journal as there are six permanent editors and thirty editorial advisory board members; she draws attention to the suggestion in the journal’s manifesto that it does not need to depend upon a certain number of readers and she wonders whether the magazine needs or wants to reach a public at all, or whether its intention is to establish an exclusive research archive on ceramic history? She notes with concern the emphasis on the history of ceramics in the journal’s mission statement, and makes it clear that in such a venture, it is important for contemporary ceramics to be visible as well.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ Jones, J., Editorial, *Interpreting Ceramics*, issue 01, September, 2000, <http://www.ac.uk/ICRC/issue001>, 16/01/05.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Dewald, G., ‘Thoughts, ideas, associations, on the subject of Interpreting Ceramics’, *Interpreting Ceramics*, issue 01, September 2000. <http://www.uwic.ac.uk/ICRC/issue001/speakers/dewald.htm>, 16/01/05.

Whilst being totally committed to the idea that there is a substantial lack of theoretical writing in the field, Dewald, nevertheless, believes that the editorial group have adopted a feudalistic approach to establishing complex rules that the authors must fulfil in order to have their texts published. This, she says, is similar to ‘*the high court of superior writing, with the editorial board as the strict, infallible judges and guardians*’.²⁰¹ Furthermore, she remarks that having read the submission guidelines, she wonders who on earth has the time and inspiration to take on the honorary task of contributing a text and images of up to 5000 words of expected quality to the journal for no payment. It is a high price, she concludes, for a completely unknown product which may be read by only a small circle of insiders. Dewald warns of the danger that *Interpreting Ceramics* may become an elitist journal with a minority readership which is speaking mostly to itself. The hierarchical structure of the editorial board of *Interpreting Ceramics* together with the tightly defined rules for the acceptance of papers for publication draws attention to the institutional controls that will limit those whose voices are heard in the journal. There is a danger that the journal’s highly regulated system, in which the editorial team determines who satisfies the rules for publication, may lead to the silencing of voices that conflict with the agenda set by the editorial board.

As well as papers from the launch symposia, four members of the editorial team, one from each of the supporting academic institutions, take the opportunity to publish their own papers in the journal. One can see how closely related the roles of individuals are to the origins of knowledge and power; they prescribe what is counted as knowledge in the subject area within tightly defined limits. Each of the editorial team’s papers deals with a historical aspect of the field, such as the lifestyle of a traditional country potter, the items on a Welsh dresser and the china collection of a socialite living in the eighteenth century. The topics clearly fit the rules of what the editors have pre-determined are the conceptual frameworks for articles published in the

²⁰¹ Dewald, G., ‘Thoughts, ideas, associations, on the subject of Interpreting Ceramics’, *Interpreting Ceramics*, issue 01, September 2000. <http://www.uwic.ac.k/ICRC/issue001/speakers/dewald.htm>, 16/01/05.

journal.²⁰² However, as Dewald notes at the launch symposium, an emphasis on the history of ceramics in the journal's mission statement must also be balanced by the presence of articles on contemporary work.²⁰³

The second issue of the journal is not published for a further two years until 2002. No reason is given. This issue contains no new writing; it may be due, as Dewald had warned, to the feudalistic approach and complex rules that authors needed to fulfil to get their texts published. It is worth remembering Foucault's point that in each field there are hierarchical structures responsible for laying down rules and procedures that regulate what can be said.²⁰⁴ He points out that only a limited number of statements actually constitute the 'authorised' statements of a discipline and that they rarely originate in isolation from the institutional power structures of a field.²⁰⁵ The thirty editorial board members and six-member editorial team represent a powerful hierarchical structure that determine what is published and therefore what counts as knowledge for ceramics practice in *Interpreting Ceramics*.

In the second issue of *Interpreting Ceramics*, a two-year old collection of papers from a symposium at Camberwell College of Arts is used to provide the content of the journal. Nevertheless, one of the papers *Ends and Beginnings* by Emmanuel Cooper, is worth a closer look as it provides a first hand account of the struggles for power that were taking place in the early 1990s, as craft practices were shifting from an emphasis on function towards a more conceptual approach. Cooper, a potter and editor of the magazine *Ceramic Review*, recounts his

²⁰² Partington, M., 'Ray Finch and Functional', *Interpreting Ceramics*, issue 01, September 2000.
Dahn, J., 'Mrs Delaney and Ceramics in the Objectscape', *Interpreting Ceramics*, issue 01, September 2000.

Vincentelli, M., 'The Welsh Dresser, A Case Study', *Interpreting Ceramics*, issue 01, September 2000, <http://www.uwic.ac.uk/ICRC/issue001, 16/01/05>.

²⁰³ Dewald, G., Symposium, 2000, 'Thoughts, ideas, associations, on the subject of Interpreting Ceramics', *Interpreting Ceramics*, issue 01, September 2000.

<http://www.uwic.ac.uk/ICRC/issue001, 16/01/05>.

²⁰⁴ Foucault, M., *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Oxford: Routledge, (1969), 2002, p. 224.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

experience curating *On the Edge: Art Meets Craft* at Kettle's Yard in 1993.²⁰⁶ Kettle's Yard, a fine art gallery with an extensive collection of Modernist paintings and sculpture belonging to Cambridge University, had previously totally ignored craft, but was now willing to investigate it. The exhibition took place in the same year as *The Raw and the Cooked* and adopted a similar curatorial approach. The exhibition presented a range of objects and installations made with different craft materials and processes which were concerned as much with ideas as form. The work did not fit into the conventional parameters of art and craft. For example, Cooper relates that objects were not placed on plinths but on the floor as he wished to present the work as fine art. Needless to say, he says, when the show moved to the Crafts Council in London, it received almost totally unfavourable reviews.²⁰⁷

The organisers of *On the Edge: Art Meets Craft* had hoped for a new context for craft, but the exhibition aroused great hostility from conservative elements within the crafts community. The greatest objections came from the critic Peter Dormer whose polemical review of the exhibition in *Crafts* magazine saw the work not in a fine art context, but as an undermining of virtually everything that craft stood for. '*This sort of tosh*' said Dormer '*is embarrassing: it is as if one were hearing Mother Teresa trying to tell you a dirty joke*'.²⁰⁸ His main objections were that craft should not need complex explanations, but rather he believed that '*what you see is what you get*'. Referring to the artists and curators involved in the exhibition, he concluded that he was tempted to '*push them all over and into the abyss*.'²⁰⁹ Dormer was a highly influential critic so his views mattered. He was, says Tanya Harrod, '*particularly keen to prick the craft world's pretensions to fine art status*'.²¹⁰ His active discouragement of avant-garde approaches to craft undermined the confidence of many practitioners who were beginning to investigate new areas of practice.

²⁰⁶ Cooper, E., 'Ends and Beginnings', *Interpreting Ceramics*, issue 02, 2002.
http://www.uwic.ac.uk/ICRC/issue002/conf_contents.htm, 03/05/06.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Dormer, P., 'On the Edge: Art Meets Craft', *Crafts*, no. 124, September/October 1993, p. 50

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Harrod, T., *The Crafts in Britain in the 20th Century*, New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1999, p. 424.

Cooper provides a useful account of his experience curating *On the Edge: Art Meets Craft*, highlighting the shifts in practice that were taking place at the time. He draws attention to the highly influential opinions of critics such as Dormer whose exhibition reviews helped to shape the craft debate for the best part of a decade. Dormer's authoritative position was consolidated by his regular contributions to *Crafts* magazine but it appears that after his death in 1996, the debate lost much of its heat as his polemical views no longer dominated the craft critical agenda. Despite what Cooper describes as the 'lashing' that *On the Edge* received, the exhibition nevertheless characterised a significant shift of attitude towards the use of craft materials for artistic practice, something that became more prevalent by the end of the 1990s. Shifts were apparent in all areas of visual arts practices at the time as boundaries overlapped between photography, painting, installation, video, and sculpture. Cooper viewed ceramics as a significant part of these changes. *On the Edge*, he believed, was a show at the wrong gallery at the wrong time. Cooper thought that if the exhibition had been presented at the Serpentine gallery or the South Bank, visitors would have come with a different set of expectations and viewed the work more sympathetically than a craft audience expecting traditional work.²¹¹

Since 2002, *Interpreting Ceramics* has appeared on line approximately once a year. There are no fixed publication dates and intervals between issues vary widely. The journal records only its year of publication, not the month. There is a predominant focus on historical pottery and new writing that has not been published elsewhere is very much in the minority. A recurrent approach is to fill the journal with conference proceedings, usually unedited, which are at least one or more years old.²¹² When new papers do appear, they frequently focus on historical aspects of pottery and in this category there are regular contributions by members of the journal's own editorial team such as Jo Hahn and Jeffrey Jones.

²¹¹ Cooper, E., 'Ends and Beginnings', *Interpreting Ceramics*, issue 02, 2002. http://www.uwic.ac.uk/ICRC/issue002/conf_contents.htm, 03/05/06.

²¹² Conference Proceedings in issues 02, 03, 08,09,10,12, <http://www.uwic.ac.uk/ICRC/>.

In 2004, *Interpreting Ceramics* demonstrated a notable change of approach when readers were invited to discuss the lack of critical writing that surrounded contemporary ceramics practice, a topic of debate largely ignored in previous issues of the journal. Two papers by the editor Jeffrey Jones and the potter Edmund de Waal were used to frame the debate. Jones' paper, *Keeping Quiet and Finding a Voice: Ceramics and the Art of Silence* was first presented at a conference in 2002.²¹³ de Waal's contribution, *Speak for Yourself*, had been published four years earlier in *Ceramic Review*, prior to which the paper had been presented at a Ceramic Art Foundation symposium in 1999.²¹⁴ The dates indicate how little the debate had progressed in the intervening five years. Even so, the papers are worth looking at as they provide a flavour of the arguments surrounding the search for a critical context for changing areas of ceramics practice, including a move towards a fine art aesthetic.

In the journal's editorial, Jones warns his readers that they may fundamentally disagree with de Waal's 'provocative' stance which encourages makers to shape the writing through which their work is understood.²¹⁵ It is, arguably, only in a reticent practice such as ceramics that it might be considered *provocative* for practitioners to engage with critical and analytical writing about their own work. de Waal ponders why theory is not valued in ceramics practice and why makers do not write about their work. He says that he dislikes the status of the 'silent' potter as a symbol of seriousness because the silence opens up an interpretative vacuum which allows the critic, curator, and collector to enter.²¹⁶ As a potter himself, de Waal addresses his concerns to potters as craft practitioners rather than as artists or sculptors. Nevertheless, critical silence permeates all types of ceramics practice, so he raises issues of relevance across the field. A way

²¹³ Jones, J., 'Keeping Quiet and Finding a Voice', *Interpreting Ceramics*, issue 05, 2004.
<http://www.uwic.ac.uk/ICRC/issue005/keeping-quiet.htm>, 16/01/05.

²¹⁴ de Waal, E., *Ceramic Review*, no. 182, March/April 2002.
de Waal, E., 'Not in Ideas But in Things', (1999), in Clark, G., (ed.), *Ceramic Millennium*, Halifax, Nova Scotia: The Press of Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2006, p. 350.

²¹⁵ Jones, J., Editorial, *Interpreting Ceramics*, issue 02, 2004.
<http://www.uwic.ac.uk/ICRC/issue005/about.htm>, 16/01/05.

²¹⁶ de Waal, E., 'Speak for Yourself', *Interpreting Ceramics*, issue 05, 2004.
<http://www.uwic.ac.uk/ICRC/issue005/speakforyourself.htm>, 16/01/05.

of speaking critically about all types of ceramic work is underdeveloped and there exists no canon of writing about ceramics as a critical benchmark for contemporary practice.

Whilst de Waal encourages potters to write about their work, there is no template or guidance on how this might be achieved other than to '*reground*' ceramics within the '*material cultures from which they come... and in their commoditisation as objects*'.²¹⁷ de Waal calls for a return to the simplicity of language and whilst he decries over inflated language, his own writings are frequently interspersed with quotations from old or obscure literary texts which he relates to pottery. Over the past decade, whilst attention has been drawn to the need for practitioners to write about their work, the focus has remained firmly fixed on the problem. The lack of discourse in ceramics has become a discourse in its own right.

The changing nature of contemporary ceramics is the focus of Jones' paper, especially the decline of the dominance of studio pottery in favour of other types of ceramic work. The tradition of silence has often been a conscious choice in studio pottery, says Jones, as well as one forced upon the field. He cites, as examples, the well known potters Hans Coper and Lucie Rie who adopted a strategy of silence by always refusing to speak about their work.²¹⁸ In the Rie/Coper literature, says Jones, the viewer is rendered speechless by work of such evident virtue. Leach reinforced this view by declaring that Rie's pots '*speak for themselves*' with no further need for comment except '*thanks for their integrity*'.²¹⁹ Jones argues that the idea of the silent maker is now used to support arguments for a limited engagement with theory and the preservation of '*an innocent and reticent "craft" in opposition to a corrupted "art" that is too forward for its own good and spoiled by too many words*'.²²⁰ Jones portrays an uneasy relationship between experimental ceramic work and studio pottery and speculates that

²¹⁷ de Waal, E., 'Speak for Yourself', *Interpreting Ceramics*, issue 05, 2004.

<http://www.uwic.ac.uk/ICRC/issue005/speakforyourself.htm>, 16/01/05.

²¹⁸ Jones, J., 'Keeping Quiet and Finding a Voice', *Interpreting Ceramics*, issue 05, 2004.

<http://www.uwic.ac.uk/ICRC/issue005/keepingquiet.htm>, 16/01/05.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Ibid.

contemporary artists who work conceptually with clay now avoid words such as ‘pot’, ‘pottery’ and ‘studio pottery’ as being too closely identified with craft and therefore something which might diminish the status of the work as art.²²¹ *‘The humble, quiet pot’* says Jones, which draws on strong conservative loyalties, now makes up a minority of the overall output, *‘dragging against restless new tendencies towards a more progressive ceramics’*.²²² Jones’ value laden language resonates with the sense of humility that informed Leach’s ideological approach to making pottery. Paradoxically, coming from the editor of an academic journal, Jones concludes that ceramics as an area of practice is particularly suited to silence. This view is surprising in a practice in which silence is now perceived negatively by many contemporary practitioners. Jones’ paper reflects the complexities of the debate.

The edition of *Interpreting Ceramics* which included the papers by de Waal and Jones was followed by a symposium on critical writing at one of the journal’s supporting institutions, Bath Spa University, led by Jo Dahn of the editorial board. A writing competition for practitioners followed, the results of which were published in issue seven in 2006. Dahn remarks that the essays may not all have been perfectly resolved, but the competition did demonstrate that an effective written account can further inform a practitioner’s work. She adds that the maker who writes can also present the discourses – from philosophy to process – within which they believe the work is most usefully positioned. This is a clear endorsement of the added value of a practitioner writing about his or her own practice.²²³ Issue seven of *Interpreting Ceramics* also included a controversial book review by a member of the journal’s editorial board, the critic and gallery owner, Garth Clark. The review is described in Jones’ editorial as *‘lengthy and hard hitting’*.²²⁴

²²¹ Jones, J., ‘Keeping Quiet and Finding a Voice’, *Interpreting Ceramics*, issue 05, 2004.

<http://www.uwic.ac.uk/ICRC/issue005/keepingquiet.htm>, 16/01/05.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Dahn, J., Introduction to the ‘Speak for Yourself’ Project, *Interpreting Ceramics*, issue 07, 2006.

<http://www.uwic.ac.uk/ICRC/issue007/introduction.htm>, 03/05/06.

²²⁴ Jones, J., Editorial, issue 07, 2006. <http://www.uwic.ac.uk/ICRC/issue007/about.htm>, 03/05/06.

The subject of the review is a book by Richard D. Mohr, professor of philosophy at the University of Illinois, Chicago, *Pottery, Politics, Art: George Ohr and the Brothers Kirkpatrick*.²²⁵ The review reveals the struggle for power and superior knowledge in a specific subject area, such as the pottery of George Ohr, when an acknowledged expert, such as Clark, is challenged and comes into conflict with someone knowledgeable, like Mohr, but who is without status and authority to speak on behalf of the field.

Clark's eight page review, 'Mohr on Ohr: PC Correctness Meets the Mad Potter of Biloxi', questions Richard Mohr's credentials to write about pottery, specifically the work of George Ohr, a renowned early twentieth century American potter. Clark, a well known critic who has already contributed to a book about Ohr, considers himself to be the leading authority on the potter's work and life. The publicity material on the cover of one of Clark's books provides an indication of his status in the field; he is described as '*the leading writer on ceramics today...a deeply informed voice with twenty seven books to his credit...published commentary that has influenced and shaped the critical dialogue and historical record for ceramics today...*'²²⁶

Clark's status in the field provides a context for his antagonism towards Mohr whom he describes as '*a self-professed public intellectual, whatever that might mean*'.²²⁷ His introductory remarks set the tone of the review:

'It is always a dilemma when a book arrives on one's desk that is hopelessly, irredeemably flawed. Does one grace it with time and write a review even though there is nothing positive to say? Does one, by giving it attention, even in damnation, offer it more credence than it deserves, throwing good paper after bad? Are some atrocities best ignored in the hope that they will go away? The discrepancy between the date of this review and the year the featured was published shows that this question was one that I could not answer for some time...eventually

²²⁵ Mohr, R. D., *Pottery, Politics, Art: George Ohr and the Brothers Kirkpatrick*, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003.

²²⁶ Clark, G., *Shards*, New York: Ceramic Art Foundation, 2003, Cover.

²²⁷ Clark, G., 'Mohr on Ohr: PC Correctness Meets the Mad Potter of Biloxi', *Interpreting Ceramics*, issue 07, 2006. <http://www.uwic.ac.uk/ICRC/issue007/articles/09.htm>, 03/05/06

when I saw this book being referred to by other writers it became clear that a voice needed to be raised in protest'.²²⁸

Clark draws attention to the date of publication of Mohr's book, 2003; the date of the review is 2006. For three years, he has deliberated over his response, and finally takes action when others are beginning to reference the book, consequently posing a threat to Clark's reputation and authority. We are told that he, together with almost everyone else who has written about Ohr, is debunked in Mohr's book. At the same time, he is angry that Mohr has sought his help to illustrate a book in which he is criticised. To Clark's annoyance, the only person given any credence in the book is the writer Jeff Perrone. Perrone had previously written an article about Ohr for *Artforum* magazine that was so full of errors, says Clark, that he was compelled to write a three page letter of complaint to the editor of the magazine.²²⁹

The dismissal of Clark's claim that George Ohr was influenced by the sixteenth century potter, Bernard Palissy, clearly angers him. If Mohr were to acknowledge this, says Clark, it would undermine his theory that Ohr had connections with the nineteenth century folk potters, the Kirkpatrick brothers. Clark declares that his own contribution to the Ohr literature, *The Mad Potter of Biloxi: The Life and Art of George E. Or*, is a much more accurate portrayal of the potter's life and works. Clark rejects Mohr's research as 'a pedestrian study' based on unfounded claims and without the facts to shore up his case. Mohr is charged with rejecting as flawed or erroneous, any evidence that is not compatible with his own views.²³⁰ Furthermore, he is accused of 'embedding hot button issues' such as politics, racism, and sexuality, into his argument.²³¹ Clark asserts that the book is merely a medium to express Mohr's own oddly personal fixations. Here is a struggle for the primacy of a discourse to inform Ohr's ceramics, thus the credibility of both men is at stake. Status, knowledge, power and authority are

²²⁸ Clark, G., 'Mohr on Ohr: PC Correctness Meets the Mad Potter of Biloxi', *Interpreting Ceramics*, issue 07, 2006. <http://www.uwic.ac.uk/ICRC/issue007/articles/09.htm>, 03/05/06.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid.

interconnected in the argument between Mohr and Clark. An eleven page response by Mohr to the review appears in the same issue of *Interpreting Ceramics*. He begins by answering Clark's query of why on earth an academic would be interested in writing a book about pottery. Mohr expresses his concern that ceramics as a field is without a contemporary critical and theoretical context for assessing any type of ceramic work; therefore in the book he has set out to achieve:

'the first sustained effort to apply to the decorative arts thought styles of postmodernism - the suite of interpretive techniques made available by social constructionism, deconstructionism, the new historicism, and psychoanalysis, techniques which emphasise strategy over structure, rhetoric over grammar, function over form, and which are sensitive to the political dimensions of art, to irony...' ²³²

Art history departments in American universities have consistently failed to take the decorative arts seriously, argues Mohr. Furthermore, he says that where decorative arts programs are taken seriously, such as the Master's programs at Winterthur, which are the source of virtually all decorative arts curators in America, people there are still unfamiliar with postmodernism. He concludes that judging by the catalogues of touring exhibitions mounted by the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, it appears that postmodern criticism has not yet entered British decorative arts criticism in any substantial way either. ²³³

What Mohr hopes for is that *Pottery, Politics, Art*, may in some small way help *'to upgrade the critical standing of the decorative arts'*. ²³⁴ A way to do this, he believes, is to show that contemporary critical methodologies by which art works are assessed and found meaningful, can beneficially be applied to the decorative arts. It is sad, he says, to see that even in the recently expanded Museum of Modern Art in New York, Ohr is still represented by three

²³² Mohr, R.D., 'The Anamalous: A Response to My Ceramic Critics', *Interpreting Ceramics*, issue 07, 2006. <http://www.uwic.ac.uk/ICRC/issue007/articles/010.htm>, 03/05/06.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid.

mediocre pieces '*tucked away in the ghetto of design*'.²³⁵ Mohr and Clark hold polemical views on Ohr's pottery. Clark, an expert immersed in the history of ceramics, looks back to the sixteenth century to inform Ohr's early twentieth century work, whereas Mohr, the outsider, draws on postmodern cultural references to provide a critical framework for the same work.

As an outsider in the field of ceramics Mohr is placed at a disadvantage, says Clark, because it means that he is unable to speak with authority. This is rejected by Mohr who draws attention to an '*odd feature of scholarly work on American ceramics – interloping*'. As a Professor of Philosophy and of the Classics, he agrees that he fits the outsider model, but believes that American ceramics criticism '*would be wan without the interlopers*'.²³⁶ He points out that a high percentage of all university press, or otherwise scholarly books on American ceramics, are by authors who in some significant way are outsiders to both art history and the decorative arts. The crux of Clark's argument against Mohr concerns his position as an 'interloper' in the field: Mohr's book is portrayed as insubstantial, dull, factually incorrect, and not observant of the protocols of academic research.²³⁷ Mohr, however, establishes his credentials to write the book with a robust defence of his work, rejecting each of Clark's charges whilst highlighting the contradictions in Clark's own assessment of Ohr's work.²³⁸

It would be useful to consider the position of the 'outsider' before concluding this part of the section. The term 'outsider' is commonly used in the field to denote those without specialised knowledge or training in ceramics. For instance, in *20th Century Ceramics*, Edmund de Waal highlights the division between the normative aspects of the discipline, (in this case trained potters and pottery), and '*the outsiders*', usually fine artists, who have made forays into the ceramic world. He adds that the work of outsiders has often been accompanied by fierce

²³⁵ Mohr, R.D., 'The Anamalous: A Response to My Ceramic Critics', *Interpreting Ceramics*, issue 07, 2006. <http://www.uwic.ac.uk/ICRC/issue007/articles/010.htm>, 03/05/06.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Clark, G., 'Mohr on Ohr: PC Correctness Meets the Mad Potter of Biloxi', *Interpreting Ceramics*, issue 07, 2006. <http://www.uwic.ac.uk/ICRC/issue007/articles/09.htm>, 03/05/06.

²³⁸ Mohr, R.D., 'The Anamalous: A Response to my Ceramic Critics', *Interpreting Ceramics*, issue 07, 2006. <http://www.uwic.ac.uk/ICRC/issue007/articles/010.htm>, 03/05/06.

criticism from both within and outside the field. As if to reinforce the field as a closed community, he questions whether artists such as Picasso, Miro, or Tony Cragg who have used ceramic materials to create artworks, 'belong' in ceramics.²³⁹ Ceramics as a field comes with its own inherent hierarchies and prejudices. As well as the outsider status of sculptors and fine artists, the critic Michael Darling identifies others with outsider status - the '*amateur forays with vases, bowls, and plates, to mass production of objects of practical use, on down to cheap decorative tchotchke*'.²⁴⁰

Foucault's ideas shed light on the system of exclusions in a field. He argues that in every society at a particular time, the production of discourse is controlled and selected according to certain procedures that produce a 'truth' which edits out anything that does not fit within that particular discursive formation. He suggests that disciplines work in different ways to limit the discourse of a field because they prescribe what can be counted as possible knowledge within a particular subject area.²⁴¹ As they have strict methodological rules and a mass of propositions, disciplines allow for the production of new propositions only within tightly defined limits. These practices, suggests Foucault, are an integral part of disciplines, and constitute the subject area through rigorously excluding knowledge which might challenge them. There is also '*the rarification of the speaking subject*'. By '*rarification*', Foucault means the limitation placed on who can speak authoritatively. Thus a complex system of restraints acts both internally and externally.²⁴² It is possible to see how Clark attempts to weaken Mohr's argument by questioning his ability to speak with authority in a field in which he is an outsider. Mohr responds by highlighting the contribution that outsiders have made to many scholarly books on ceramics. A consequence for Clark, should Mohr's research be accepted by the ceramics community, is that his authority as the foremost expert on Mohr's pottery will be challenged.

²³⁹ de Waal, E., *20th Century Ceramics*, London: Thames and Hudson, 2003, p. 9.

²⁴⁰ Darling, M., 'Smiles by the Miles', in *Ripe*, London: Crafts Council, 2000, p. 20.

²⁴¹ Foucault, M., *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Oxford: Routledge, (1969), 2002, p. 55.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 135.

Clark therefore defends his position robustly, something that is clearly evident in his review of Mohr's book.

Mohr's riposte to Clark reaches the heart of the debate as he describes his efforts to apply critical postmodernist thoughts in a sustained way to a field in which this type of criticism has been substantially absent. Clark's voice of authority has, for over three decades, been one of the dominant forces determining what stands for knowledge in ceramic pottery, but this knowledge has not included critical theory. Clark's authoritative position and rejection of propositions which challenge the validity of his own interpretation of what constitutes knowledge in the field, provide an example of the sort of obstacles that get in the way of developing new critical approaches for all forms of contemporary ceramics practice. Nevertheless, with the publication of Clark's review and Mohr's response in the same issue of *Interpreting Ceramics*, the readers are in a position to determine the merits of both sides of the argument. Furthermore, as Mohr suggests, outsiders can make a useful contribution by opening up the critical debate, but only if their voice is listened to and allowed to be heard by those who determine what constitutes knowledge in the field.

An examination of the contents of the first decade of *Interpreting Ceramics* indicates that the journal has not developed a substantial body of new writing for contemporary practice but rather has chosen to concentrate on historical aspects of pottery. In addition, a significant number of issues, six out of a total of twelve, have consisted of unedited symposium proceedings which may be one, two or more years old when they appear in the journal. In its first decade, a disproportionate number of papers by members of the editorial board or team have appeared in the journal, some of which have been referred to in this chapter. They include articles or reviews by Jeffrey Jones, issues 01, 02, 05, 08; Jo Dahn, issues 04, 07 and 011; Moira Vincentelli, issues 06 and 010; Edmund de Waal, issues 01, 02 and 05. Papers by other members of the board include Emmanuel Cooper, issue 02; Gabi Dewald, issue 01 and Garth Clark, issue 07. It is unclear whether any of these papers have been subjected to the same form

of peer review as papers by authors not connected with *Interpreting Ceramics*. The situation demonstrates the preponderance of the journal to circulate its own writing.²⁴³ It is regrettable that the format of issue seven which contained new writing by contemporary practitioners has not been repeated. *Interpreting Ceramics* is, predominantly, an archive for historical aspects of studio pottery. It appears not to have fulfilled its mission to become a journal of international interdisciplinary research with a high scholarly content for a range of ceramics practices, as initially proposed. The opportunity to provide a forum for research-led debate which could have developed from this academic structure has not materialised and thus represents a lost opportunity.

Whilst the historical role of pottery and the importance of ceramic objects as commodities continue to shape the debate, at the same time, as I will show in chapter four, artists are investigating new ways of working with ceramic materials that challenge traditional assumptions of the field. The exhibition *A Secret History of Clay* in 2004 touched on some of the new areas of practice; its aim was to gain wider recognition for both new work and the little known twentieth century ceramics of well known fine artists. One of the questions posed by the exhibition was why such work had been ignored by the canon of modernist art.²⁴⁴ The next part of this section looks at aspects of the exhibition, including approaches taken to curating and selecting the exhibits. There will also be a discussion of issues raised at the symposium which accompanied the exhibition and whose panel members included the exhibition's curator Simon Groom, and its advisor, the potter Edmund de Waal.

²⁴³ Back Issues 01, 02, 04, 05, 07, 08, 010, 011, *Interpreting Ceramics*, 2000 – 2010.

<http://www.uwic.ac.uk/ICRC/>.

²⁴⁴ *A Secret History of Clay from Gauguin to Gormley*, Tate Liverpool, 28 May – 30 August 2004.

A Secret History of Clay from Gauguin to Gormley

Tate Liverpool, 28 May – 30 August 2004

In the foreword to the exhibition catalogue for *A Secret History of Clay*, the Director of Tate Liverpool, Christopher Grunenberg provides a reminder of the views of previous influential art critics such as Hilton Kramer who argued that ceramic work was ‘non art’.²⁴⁵ Grunenberg contrasts this view with the contemporary status of ceramic art. He describes a return in recent years to the use of clay by many fine artists as ‘*a visceral concern for the materiality of experience and a rejection of the hierarchical values associated with modernism, both of which are in evidence in this exhibition*’.²⁴⁶ Grunenberg points out that whilst clay has been used by some of the most innovative artists of the twentieth century to create works of art from ceramic vessels to installation and performance art, this work has consistently been ignored.

In both their catalogue essays, the curator of the exhibition, Simon Groom, and the exhibition’s advisor, Edmund de Waal, underline the exclusion of ceramic work from canonical accounts of modern art. Groom argues that this exclusion reveals an anxiety over the status of a material historically dominated by craft practice. Groom draws attention to the invisibility of clay during the twentieth century, all the more surprising because some of the most celebrated artists including Gauguin, Matisse, Chillida, Chagall, Braque and Fontana, made ceramic work that has only recently begun to be acknowledged.²⁴⁷ Furthermore, says Groom, that a revolutionary strand of modern art originated from a functional piece of porcelain, Marcel Duchamp’s urinal, *Fountain*, 1917, is a measure of the degree of repression operating in the constructions of modernism, that *Fountain*’s materiality has been ‘*so thoroughly conceptualised out of existence*’.²⁴⁸ Running like a fault line through any attempt to construct a coherent history of the medium, explains Groom, is the divide between art and craft. He acknowledges

²⁴⁵ Grunenberg, C., ‘Foreword’, *A Secret History of Clay*, Liverpool: Tate Liverpool, 2004, p. 9.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

²⁴⁷ Groom, S., ‘Terra Incognita’, in *A Secret History of Clay*, Liverpool: Tate Liverpool, 2004, p. 14.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

that the use of a material capable of sustaining any number of contradictory qualities for a range of diverse work means that there is no one history of clay, but rather numerous histories that are now only beginning to be constructed and that this exhibition is just one of those histories.²⁴⁹

Whilst the stated aim of *A Secret History of Clay* was an exploration of the complex and extended possibilities of the use of clay over the past hundred years, Groom accepts that it is nonetheless striking the extent to which the exhibition is informed by the vessel form. As the exhibition's advisor was the well known potter Edmund de Waal, it is perhaps not surprising that pots dominated the exhibition; private and domestic pots from the early part of the twentieth century through to broken or deconstructed vessels from the 1960s and a large wall of Edmund de Waal's twenty-first century pots.

The symposium, *Rethinking Clay*, which took place at Tate Liverpool as part of the events accompanying the exhibition, included presentations by both Groom and de Waal.²⁵⁰ Groom explains that prior to curating *A Secret History of Clay*, he had very little knowledge of ceramics as his expertise was in the fine art field. However, since becoming involved with the exhibition he had become aware of the significant number of contemporary artists who were now using clay in a fine art way. Once he had started to conduct research for the exhibition, he realised how fragmented any information about the field was. As there appeared to be no interlocking narrative for the ceramic field, he and de Waal discussed how they could make a correspondence between different kinds of work.²⁵¹ In the absence of any other trajectory, it appears that they constructed their own narrative for *A Secret History of Clay*.

Invited panel guests at *Rethinking Clay* included Martina Margetts who, a decade earlier, had curated *The Raw and the Cooked*. At the start of the Symposium and having just viewed *A Secret History of Clay*, Margetts made a surprising announcement. She said that she was so

²⁴⁹ Groom, S., 'Terra Incognita', in *A Secret History of Clay*, Liverpool: Tate Liverpool, 2004, p. 23.

²⁵⁰ *Rethinking Clay Symposium*, Tate Liverpool, 5 June 2004.

²⁵¹ 'Simon Groom and Edmund de Waal in Conversation', *Rethinking Clay Symposium*, Author's own transcript notes, Tate Liverpool, 5 June 2004.

dismayed by the contents of the exhibition that she decided to abandon her planned presentation and make an impromptu speech instead. Margetts began her talk by drawing attention to what she perceived to be the many exclusions of the exhibition. The language of ceramics practice that it represented, she said, was white, male, and conservative. One of her main objections was that so few women artists were represented, in fact only four out of a total of seventy nine artists from the entire twentieth century. This followed the tropes of modern art.²⁵² Furthermore, said Margetts, the exhibits were not even very exciting or revelatory. Whilst the conceptual content was minimal, there was a strong connection between the presentation of ceramics as commodities; she questioned whether ceramics were free from commodification or hidebound to it. A further criticism was that some of the exhibits were badly shown. For example, she pointed out that the intentions of the sculptor Andrew Lord were completely at odds with the presentation of his work in a domestic room setting as it was in the exhibition. Groom concurred that Lord had not been entirely satisfied with his work presented in this way. Margetts concluded that *A Secret History of Clay* was a flawed exhibition that raised issues of curatorship as a creative act; furthermore, the artists' intentions should always dictate the way that their work is shown. The focus on the vessel was a lost opportunity for presenting an alternative, more dynamic history of clay in Margetts' opinion. This was one version of ceramics, not in any way representative, and there could have been many more.²⁵³

Whilst another speaker at the symposium, art critic Edward Lucie-Smith, also disputed the singular history presented by *A Secret History of Clay*, he broadly welcomed the project. His reservations about the exhibits were mainly to do with the fact that much of the work made a virtue out of apparent clumsiness. In other words, he believed it was classified as 'art' primarily because *'it is self-evidently not very well made in terms of what we know the material can*

²⁵² 'Martina Margetts: Only Connect', *Rethinking Clay Symposium*, Author's own transcript notes, Tate Liverpool, 5 June 2004.

²⁵³ 'Martina Margetts: Only Connect', *Rethinking Clay Symposium*, Author's own transcript notes, Tate Liverpool, June 5 2004.

achieve'.²⁵⁴ Like Margetts, Lucie-Smith was concerned about the exclusions from the show and highlighted certain ceramic sculptors whom he argued should have been included. He thought the exclusions clearly indicated the bias of the show.

Lucie-Smith draws attention to the difficulty of assessing the category of post-Pop art ceramics. These are the product of the same impulses that produced Pop Art he suggests, but they venture into much more dangerous aesthetic territory. He cites the examples of Cindy Sherman's *Soup Tureen* and Jeff Koons's *Puppy Vase*. Sherman's tureen does not in fact refer directly to a Sèvres original, but to the '*tacky copies that flourish at the low end of the market.*'²⁵⁵ On the other hand, Koons' vase is a more direct tribute to a kind of kitsch object, but what distinguishes the people who buy Sherman and Koons from the people who buy what can be thought of as the real 'originals' of their work is economic status and a self-conscious knowingness.²⁵⁶ The ceramic products of Sherman and Koons, which are obviously not physically the product of their own hands, are classified as works of high art primarily because they snigger, says Lucie-Smith, and tell us how different our own fully formed taste is from that of the masses. His rather damning verdict is that the exhibition delivers a lot of home truths about the current artistic situation '*of which the organisers seem to be unaware.*'²⁵⁷ In particular, he says, it demonstrates how unstable current assumptions about aesthetic values really are.

Tanya Harrod's review of *A Secret History of Clay* provided one of the few positive reactions to the exhibition, but even she noted the '*nuanced selectivity*' of the curators in choosing the work for the show. Nevertheless, she considered that they had '*done the field proud*' and argued that a significant shift in sensibility was indicated by the fact that the show

²⁵⁴ Lucie-Smith, E., 'Feet of Clay', Symposium Paper, *Rethinking Clay*, Tate Liverpool, June 5 2004, reproduced in *Ceramic Review*, no. 209, September 2004, p. 35.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

had taken place at all.²⁵⁸ It is interesting to note that both Harrod and de Waal are connected to the same institutional networks as members of the editorial board of *Interpreting Ceramics* and *Think Tank*, the exclusive nine member European organisation set up to develop a critical and theoretical context for ceramic practices. In the small field of ceramics, there are networks, social groupings and connections that link knowledge, power, institutions and philosophical practices that influence who may speak with authority in the field. In this thesis, instances frequently arise of the same small number of names with connections to the same network and groupings. In the final section of this chapter, I consider the roles and influences of two such groupings, *The Ceramic Art Foundation* and *Think Tank*.

²⁵⁸ Harrod, T., 'Hidden Depths', *Crafts*, no. 188, May /June 2004, p. 33.

2.4 An organizational approach to ceramic discourse

'CAF remains the only organisation dedicated to raising the bar for criticism and history in this field'.

Garth Clark, Founder, Ceramic Art Foundation ²⁵⁹

'I therefore envisage Think Tank as a research community, a research centre with no walls, where ideas flow, and where texts, papers and information are circulated, discussed and commented on...I think we should act as an international knowledge bank...it will be necessary to publish working papers ...this is crucial and the place from which to start our power play.'

Louise Manzani, Theorist and Critic, Think Tank ²⁶⁰

Foucault suggests that discourse is the means by which a field speaks to itself and that it plays a major role in the operations of that field. Within its institutions, each field produces hierarchies, lays down a set of rules and procedures, assigns roles and positions, and regulates what can be said. Furthermore, Foucault identifies that institutions can be characterised as belonging to either a public or private sphere: the public institution is generally more regulated than the private, with a fixed or rigid set of protocols and procedures. In a private sphere, the protocols and procedures are less formal, with regulations and unwritten rules devised by the individuals, social groupings or networks that set up an organisation. ²⁶¹ This aspect of discourse is highly relevant when we come to examine the structure of *The Ceramic Art Foundation* and *Think Tank*.

²⁵⁹ Clark, G., 'Introduction', *Ceramic Millennium*, Halifax, Nova Scotia: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2006, p. xii.

²⁶⁰ Manzani, L., 'Statement', About Us, *Think Tank*, 2004. <http://www.thinktank04.eu/page.php4>, 07/10/08

²⁶¹ Danaher, G., Schirato, T., *Understanding Foucault*, London: Sage Publications, 2006, p. 33.

The Institute for Ceramic History was founded in America in 1979 by Garth Clark to promote ‘scholarship in modern and contemporary ceramic arts’. It was renamed the Ceramics Art Foundation (CAF) in 1995.²⁶² *Think Tank*, a European organisation with distant links to the CAF, was established in 2004 by Gabi Dewald, editor of *New Ceramics*, as a result of her continued frustration at the lack of progress in improved critical writing for the applied arts. She invited a group of European critics and art and craft historians that she knew of to form a ‘think tank’ to find ways of developing critical commentaries and writing for ceramics, textiles and other practices traditionally classified as applied arts. The structure and activities of both organisations will be considered. Garth Clark and Gabi Dewald are both editorial board members of the journal *Interpreting Ceramics* which was looked at earlier in this chapter.

The Ceramic Art Foundation (CAF)

CAF emerged in 1979 as the result of an exhibition, *A Century of Ceramics in the United States*, curated by Garth Clark.²⁶³ The exhibition took place, says Clark, as ceramic work was becoming of interest to dealers and collectors who had previously ignored the field.²⁶⁴ Although based in America, CAF developed a network of international links by holding symposia in Toronto, London and Amsterdam, as well as New York and other American cities. The publication *Ceramic Millennium* (2006) includes a selection of papers from CAF symposia over a period of two decades, together with Clark’s account of the history of the organisation which he set up with two other founding members.²⁶⁵ A sense of ownership of the organisation is implied by Clark when he speaks of his highly personal relationship with CAF’s eight symposia, especially when referring to them as his children, each ‘tenderly nursed into life,

²⁶² Clark, G., (ed.), *Ceramic Millennium*: Halifax, Nova Scotia: Press of Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2006, p. xi.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 331.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 331.

carefully shaped and guided, and always funded against the odds.'²⁶⁶ He argues that CAF was the only organisation dedicated to raising the bar for criticism and history in the field of ceramics and highlights what he describes as the '*success, elegance, professionalism, and impact*' of its events.²⁶⁷ Clark's own account of the CAF together with insights by other critics into his role in the field shed light on the origins of the writing that emerged from the CAF.

Clark has always been a highly controversial figure in the field of ceramics; an indication of his attitude to those who disagreed with his opinions could be seen in his review of Richard Mohr's book which was discussed earlier in this chapter. The critic Edward Lebow has pointed out how ambivalent many people in the field feel about Clark's influence. What troubles some about his alternation between writing and selling, says Lebow, is not merely his adeptness at what he terms his ability to '*turn clay into money*', but what many see as his authority and taste-making power to pick, through his varied pursuits, '*the leaders of a miniscule field.*'²⁶⁸ After thirty years, Lebow is in no doubt about Clark's commanding position in the field stating that '*he sits atop the American clay heap – a vitreous chairman of the board.*'²⁶⁹

Over the past three decades, then, Clark has become a significant figure of authority in the field of ceramics. Moreover, as we see from his own account of the CAF symposia in *Ceramic Millennium*, he was able to exercise control over who was allowed to speak and who was not in events staged by the organisation that he founded and funded. Clark's account of the CAF and its symposia is hubristic: he described the eighth and final symposium in Amsterdam in 1999 as '*CAF's crowning glory... a huge million-dollar event... national delegations from sixty-three countries and over 3,500 participants.*'²⁷⁰ Clark controlled proceedings at the symposium to

²⁶⁶ Clark, G., (ed.), *Ceramic Millennium*: Halifax, Nova Scotia: Press of Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2006, p. x.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. xi.

²⁶⁸ Lebow, E., 'Preface', in Clark, G., *Shards, Garth Clark on Ceramic Art*, New York: CAF, 2003, p. V11.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. VI.

²⁷⁰ Clark, G., (ed.), *Ceramic Millennium*, Halifax, Nova Scotia: Press of Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2006, p. xxx.

such an extent that he was able to choose the delegates who were included or excluded from different events. For example, he organised a number of focus groups to which he invited small groups of writers, historians, and curators to discuss various issues that arose from the proceedings of the symposium. Artists were excluded from these events.²⁷¹

In *Ceramic Millennium*, Clark argued that as artists were not experts in the field of ceramics, their views were not of great interest to the wider ceramics community. In addition, when deciding which papers would be included in the anthology for *Ceramics Millennium*, the first papers he chose to exclude were those by or about individual artists. Furthermore, the few artists who were allowed to present papers at the Amsterdam symposium were told by Clark to keep their presentation brief as their papers would be '*interspersed like a taste of sorbet between longer courses of more formal presentations.*'²⁷²

A further group that Clark chose to exclude from CAF symposia were academics. He believed that academia brought with it a culture of amateurism that masqueraded as principle. He argued that academia had '*airs of superiority; an academic ivory tower perspective; and requisite disdain within academe for the vulgarity of the marketplace.*'²⁷³ Clark singled out for criticism academics who disapproved of his commercial interests; he suggested that those who complained most loudly about selling art were '*those who usually take home regular pay checks via academia...they seem determined to trap ceramics in an economic cul-de-sac whereby they claim some specious moral ground.*'²⁷⁴

In setting up the CAF, Clark's original aim was to improve scholarship for ceramic work. Over the years, however, he established such a powerful role for himself within the organisation that his own idiosyncratic preferences determined whose voice was heard and whose voice was

²⁷¹ Clark, G., (ed.), *Ceramic Millennium*, Halifax, Nova Scotia: Press of Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2006, p. xxx.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, p. xxix.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 317.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 335.

silenced. We see a different approach, however, when Clark considers his own presentations at the CAF symposia. He claims that as he gave a major paper at each event it would therefore be 'strange' to exclude them from the anthology published in *Ceramic Millennium*; they are included, he says, '*not out of vanity, but for completeness's sake.*'²⁷⁵

Clark's final word about the foundation is revealing. Despite eight symposia over a twenty year period, he acknowledges that the CAF '*did not find exactly what it sought... there remains for all our efforts and those of others, a missing core to our scholarship that deals with language...*'²⁷⁶ Whilst he regrets that the development of a critical approach to ceramic writing appears to be based upon subjective opinion, friendships, and ideological stance, it is paradoxical that Clark seems unaware that his own policy of exclusions within the CAF has prevented a full and substantial critical debate.²⁷⁷ In a further display of hubris, Clark outlines plans for one more CAF symposium to take place at some time in the future. This event, he predicts, will be called *Ceramic Canon*, and will be unlike any other event. He proposes a dozen invitation only mini conferences for writers, critics, historians who will be personally selected by him; their role will be to argue '*how ceramic achievement should be evaluated and – even more controversially – to select who are the 'greats' of the twentieth century and why.*'²⁷⁸ Artists and academics are once again excluded from Clark's proposed list of participants. Following the mini conferences, says Clark, he will collate the results which he will then announce to an audience at a public symposium in New York.²⁷⁹

Clark's authority to pick and choose those allowed to speak at CAF events draws attention to the fact that the discourse of a field includes a range of elements as well as linguistic analysis, including institutional procedures, practices, social groupings and networks which exclude

²⁷⁵ Clark, G., (ed.), *Ceramic Millennium*, Halifax, Nova Scotia: Press of Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2006, p. xii.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. xxxi.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 321.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. xxxi.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. xxxi.

dissenting voices.²⁸⁰ In conclusion, whilst an awareness of the lack of critical commentary for ceramic practice may have increased over the years through the CAF symposia, there is little evidence to show that the symposia themselves succeeded in raising the bar for ceramics criticism and improving scholarship as Clark had originally hoped. The powerful role that he carved out for himself as founder and director of CAF ensured that he had the authority to exclude those whose ideas were incompatible with his own, and this may well have contributed to the failure of the organisation to meet its original objectives. In the final part of this section, I take a brief look at a more recent European initiative, *Think Tank*, set up in 2004, one of whose objectives was to improve the critical commentary surrounding ceramics practices.

Think Tank

At each of its symposia, the Ceramic Art Foundation continued to highlight the need for a critical commentary to substantiate ceramic practices. However, in the years following the eighth symposium in Amsterdam in 1999, one of the presenters at the event, Gabi Dewald, expressed dissatisfaction that such little progress had been made through international initiatives such as the CAF.²⁸¹ As editor of the major European magazine, *New Ceramics* and as chair of the International Magazine Editor's Association (ICMEA), Dewald had the necessary authority, status, and influence to advance her ideas and in 2004, with a European centred approach, she set up *Think Tank*.

Dewald's stated objective for *Think Tank* was to encourage '*a more serious critical approach to writing*' for changing practices within what had been traditionally labelled 'the

²⁸⁰ Foucault, M., *The Archaeology of Knowledge*: Oxford: Routledge, (1969), 2002, p. 195.

²⁸¹ Dewald, G., 'Statement', Papers, *Think Tank*, edition 01, September 04.
<http://www.thinktank04.eu/>, September 04.

applied arts'.²⁸² As editor of *New Ceramics*, Dewald had access to an influential network of contacts in the ceramic field and succeeded in obtaining sponsorship from several European galleries and organisations for the initiative. Think Tank presented itself as '*a group of 9 leading thinkers, writers, theorists, curators and makers representing a broad range of European countries who are all deeply engaged through writing, teaching, and lecturing.*'²⁸³ Dewald's role within the organisation and the context of the critical debate that has emerged from Think Tank will be looked at.

From the start, Dewald, as initiator, has been influential in the structural organisation of Think Tank. Just as Garth Clark described the CAF symposia as 'his children', similarly Dewald expresses her highly personal relationship with Think Tank as a '*real affair of the heart.*'²⁸⁴ In private organisations such as Think Tank, there is a tendency to have more informal rules and regulations that are less transparent and more dependent on the individuals who set the organisations up, guided by their own particular preferences more so than is the case in public institutions.²⁸⁵ Each member of Think Tank was selected and invited to join at Dewald's personal invitation and access to its membership remains by invitation only.²⁸⁶

Think Tank provides a mission statement on its website, declaring that in providing a platform for leading thinkers, it will develop a discourse for rapidly changing practices within the applied arts, thus addressing a historical lack of critical attention.²⁸⁷ Each group member provides a statement of intent, with Dewald setting out a number of issues for Think Tank to

²⁸² Dewald, G., 'Statement', in 'Papers', *Think Tank*, edition 01, September 04. <http://www.thinktank04.eu/>, 07/10/08.

²⁸³ 'About Us', *Think Tank*, edition 01, September 04. <http://www.thinktank04.eu/>, 07/10/08.

²⁸⁴ Dewald, G., 'Statement', in 'Papers', *Think Tank*, edition 01, September 04. <http://www.thinktank04.eu/>, 07/10/08.

²⁸⁵ Foucault, M., *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Oxford: Routledge, (1969), 2002, p. 55.

²⁸⁶ 'Manifesto', *Think Tank*, edition 01, September 2004. <http://www.thinktank04.eu/>, 07/10/08

²⁸⁷ 'About Us', *Think Tank*, edition 01, September 04. <http://www.thinktank.04.eu/>, 07/10/08.

address through what she describes as ‘serious critical debate’.²⁸⁸ She argues that as long as areas like ceramics are not discussed, published and considered at an intellectual level, they will always be marginalised. Dewald foresees an increasing intellectualisation as the ‘*next decisive shift in the field*’.²⁸⁹ In most cases today, she says, the practitioner has been highly educated at a university and is no longer the archetypal traditional skilled craftsman occupied with endless repetition of the same process day after day.²⁹⁰ Dewald questions what sort of educational training there should be in an age facing the loss of skill, an increase in virtual methods of creation, and an increasing tendency towards conceptualisation. She therefore foresees a need for more critical writing, more university professorships, and a more theoretical approach to the applied arts within universities.²⁹¹ Dewald’s statement presents a paradox, however, as just as in the case of the Ceramic Art Foundation, artists for the most part are excluded from Think Tank’s critical debates.

Seven out of Think Tank’s nine members are writers or art historians; only two are practitioners, one of whom is well known for his commentary on British crafts, the potter Edmund de Waal.²⁹² A look at Think Tank’s annual proceedings sheds light on the way that the organisation functions. The nine members of the group meet once a year for what is referred to on the website as a four day retreat in Austria. The members meet in closed sessions during which they present papers to each other; no-one other than the members are allowed to attend. The format of the event is that each member selects two objects for discussion in relation to a thematic topic chosen at the previous year’s meeting.²⁹³ The objects are not specifically commissioned for the event; they may be new or even some years old. A short statement is

²⁸⁸ Dewald, G., ‘Statement’, in Papers, *Think Tank*, edition 01, September 04 <http://www.thinktank04.eu/>, 07/10/08.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² ‘About Us’, *Think Tank*, edition 01, September 04. <http://www.thinktank.04.eu/>, 07/10/08.

²⁹³ Dewald, G., ‘Preface’, *Languages. Papers and Exhibition 2005*, Gmunden: Think Tank e.V, 2005, pp. 02-03.

presented by the member, providing a critical interpretation of the chosen work.²⁹⁴ A longer paper of a more general nature on the annual theme is also presented. The artworks are subsequently exhibited in galleries in one or more of the countries of the individual members; the exhibition is accompanied by a booklet containing the group's written commentaries.

For the exhibition, no statement is provided by the artists; instead, the commentary comes from Think Tank's members who have made the individual selections. The works are interpreted in the context of the group's annual theme rather than from the artist's intentions for the work.²⁹⁵ It appears that the role of the artist is as the provider of the artefact for the group's exercise in critical interpretation. If, as Dewald has already pointed out, practitioners are now university educated and no longer the archetypical crafts person endlessly repeating the same processes day after day why, one might ask, are these artists excluded from the critical debate that surrounds their own work?

Dewald has strongly-held beliefs on the nature of work that contemporary artists are producing; she expresses her dislike of the trend in which practices traditionally associated with the applied arts, such as ceramics and textiles, are developing a fine art approach. At Think Tank's 2008 meeting, the annual theme was 'skill'. In her presentation at the closed session which was later published online, Dewald expressed concern at any overlap of fine art and craft. Her position was unequivocal; she criticised what she termed the '*ongoing melting together of fine art, applied arts, and design, as well as the dying and vanishing of hand made techniques.*'

²⁹⁶ She disapproved of new approaches to craft, for which she blamed the negative influences of fine art; she called for fine art to be excluded from any future debate by Think Tank's members.

²⁹⁷ Dewald's attempt to introduce such exclusions will significantly restrict the discourse that

²⁹⁴ Dewald, G., 'Preface', *Languages, Papers and Exhibition 2005*, Gmunden: Think Tank e.V, 2005, pp. 02 - 03.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 02 - 03.

²⁹⁶ Dewald, G., 'Out of Fashion, Out of Need, Out of Time', in 'Papers', *Think Tank*, edition 05, 2008. <http://www.thinktank.04.eu/>, 03/11/09.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

emerges from Think Tank and is an example of the exclusionary practice by which those in positions of authority who are seen to be ‘experts’ in a field of practice can determine what may or may not be said.²⁹⁸ It is paradoxical that whilst Dewald endorses the growing intellectualisation of the applied arts through university education she is, at the same time, rejecting fine art informed craft which is grounded in a conceptual approach.

The only member of Think Tank to resign since the group was set up is the historian Louise Mazanti, whose ideas at times seemed to conflict with Dewald’s; Mazanti’s wish for an open research-led approach contrasted with Dewald’s rejection of new areas of practice. During her membership, Mazanti drew attention to the historical lack of theoretical underpinning of applied art, seeing it more as an ideological rather than a theoretical practice, something which she said was now even more apparent as a result of the emergence of what she terms ‘*conceptually orientated craft*’.²⁹⁹ Unlike Dewald, who called for this area of practice to be excluded from Think Tank’s critical debate, Mazanti, on the other hand, believed that a practice that was breaking traditional boundaries in a crossover of fine art, craft and design, made it more urgent to define what was going on. Mazanti saw an opportunity for Think Tank to become a research community, a research centre ‘*with no walls*’ where information was circulated, discussed and commented on, a research based forum for theoretical debates about new areas of practice.³⁰⁰ In 2009, Mazanti resigned from the group stating that she had decided to leave Think Tank, ‘*in order to look at other fields of knowledge*’.³⁰¹

The organisational and operational structure of Think Tank reinforces the idea of control; control of the composition of the membership and control over the discourse that emerges from the organisation. Think Tank’s debates are conducted in closed sessions with access only

²⁹⁸ Foucault, M., *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Oxford: Routledge, (1969), 2002, p. 224.

²⁹⁹ Mazanti, L., ‘Statement’, in ‘Papers’, *Think Tank*, edition 01, September 04. <http://www.thinktank.04.eu/>, 07/10/08.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ ‘News’, *Think Tank*, edition 06, March 2010. <http://www.thinktank.04.eu/>, 29/04/10.

available to other group members so there is little direct dialogue with a wider audience. One is left with the impression of a group talking to itself.

Summary

This chapter has examined a number of texts from the archive of ceramics writing from 1940 to 2010, in accordance with the principles of the formation of discourse set out by Michel Foucault in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. In this sense, archaeological analysis can be seen as a historically based study of what the discourses within the archive allow to be stated authoritatively, and the conditions under which certain statements emerge. Archaeological analysis is not interpretive, it describes a partial account of what happens and the conditions under which certain statements can emerge, rather than offering explanations of what happened.

In section one, the influence of Bernard Leach's ideological approach and standards for ceramics practice were examined, highlighting the moralizing tone and dogmatic rules that dominated the style and aesthetics of the field for over forty years. In section two, the changes that emerged in the 1990s were examined through the exhibition essays for *The Raw and the Cooked* (1993) and *Pandora's Box* (1995), illustrating the conflicts that arose as practices were shifting in the 1990s as a result of resistance from conservative elements of the field. In the first part of section three, the electronic archive of the journal *Interpreting Ceramics* was examined. The journal, set up in 2000, was the first peer reviewed academic electronic journal for ceramics aimed at bringing a research led approach to critical writing for all forms of ceramics practices. The journal publishes little new writing that has not appeared in other journals, frequently devotes issues to conference proceedings that are more than one or two years old, publishes a significant amount of writing by members of the editorial board and is predominantly interested in historical aspects of pottery. *Interpreting Ceramics* is published sporadically, approximately once a year with future dates of publication unknown. The journal appears to have made little or no impact on the development of a dynamic critical debate for contemporary practice and thus represents a missed opportunity.

In section three I also considered the premise of the exhibition *A Secret History of Clay*, a survey of twentieth century ceramic art at Tate Liverpool in 2004. Paradoxically, the curators of the exhibition, whilst drawing attention to the divide between art and craft which led to the exclusion of ceramic work from the canon of twentieth century modernist art, caused controversy by displaying the exhibition's own exclusions and prejudices from within the ceramic field. In the final section of the chapter, I examined two organisations, the Ceramic Art Foundation (CAF) and Think Tank, set up more than two decades apart to develop a critical framework for ceramics practice. The exclusionary practices of both organisations were highlighted. It appears that ceramic practices in the twenty first century continue to operate in a field of hierarchical and exclusionary structures and networks of power. The same names frequently reappear in different organisations, forming part of the same social network and groupings, and in which knowledge and canons of taste and value are formed.

Ceramics remains a field in which the developments of critical approaches to practice have been slow to progress over the past decade. During this time new areas of work have emerged that require different critiques beyond a single, traditional vessel-based approach. The focus of this project lies in process-led contemporary ceramic art in which the expressional possibilities of the material are investigated. This work appears to share a number of features of post-Minimalist process art. So, in the next chapter, Foucault's notions of the appropriation of discourse are taken up in order to examine key post-Minimalist texts as an analytical template for a re-conceptualisation of contemporary process-led ceramics from a post-Minimalist perspective.

CHAPTER THREE

Post-Minimalism in the 1960s: a decade of change

'Process visualized both the actual conduct of the materials and the behaviours of artists in their studios'.³⁰²

Kristine Stiles, Art Historian

Introduction

In the past decade an increasing number of fine and applied artists have begun to investigate the inherent properties of ceramic materials to determine the form and outcome of their work. This area of practice bears no relationship to the craft led functional and decorative work that has previously dominated the field and the use of chance and accident as part of the approach demonstrates an intrinsically uncraftsmanlike approach to working with ceramic materials. A number of artists who use this approach have been described as difficult to classify and write about.³⁰³ I will argue, however, that contemporary process-led ceramic work has links with post-Minimalist process art and that if this area of practice can be re-conceptualised from a post-Minimalist perspective, a way will have been found to articulate this critically unmapped area of contemporary work.

In this chapter, then, I will examine key post-Minimalist texts which underline the significance of the artist's process as a means of identifying points of conjuncture with contemporary ceramic work in accordance with Foucault's notions of appropriation. The first section of the chapter examines the major shift in artistic values that occurred with post-

³⁰² Stiles, K., 'Process', in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California, 1996, p. 577.

³⁰³ Daniel-McElroy, S., 'Beyond Cosmic Appearance, the Work of Kosho Ito', in *Virus*, St.Ives: Tate St.Ives, 2002, p. 9.

Minimalism. Key texts by the critic and academic Robert Pincus-Witten, who first coined the word post-Minimalism, are examined.³⁰⁴ Whilst industrial materials such as latex and lead were included in post-Minimalist discourse, the craft connotations of ceramic material excluded it from the art criticism of the period. Also, whilst Pincus-Witten's bias against ceramic work was apparent in his writing, his essays nevertheless are amongst the most important responses to post-Minimalist process art.³⁰⁵ Pincus-Witten identifies Richard Serra's lead work as directly involved in the shift in Modernist sensibility that emerged in the late 1960s; his work is described as the '*sine qua non of the new sensibility*' that process artists were displaying. The first section will therefore examine Serra's early process art.³⁰⁶

The second section of the chapter looks at key texts by Rosalind Krauss and her articulation of the 'expanded' field of sculpture.³⁰⁷ With the advent of post-Minimalism, says Krauss, surprising things came to be included in the category of sculpture. Categories of painting and sculpture were stretched to display a cultural term that by the 1960s could include just about anything.³⁰⁸ In this section, the work of one of the most prominent post-Minimalist artists, Eva Hesse, will be examined. Krauss refers to Hesse as a 'major proponent' of what came to be known as process art.³⁰⁹ Hesse used the transformative properties of materials to create work, exploring the processes of melting, stacking, rolling, and other forms created as material solidified. The term 'post-Minimalism' was first used by Robert Pincus-Witten in relation to the work of Hesse. Forty years on, Hesse's art continues to be of interest. In the past decade, a number of books and international touring exhibitions have brought her avant garde practices to the attention of a new generation of artists.

³⁰⁴ Pincus-Witten, R., *Postminimalism*, New York: Out of London Press, 1977.

³⁰⁵ Krauss, R., *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1981, p. 298.

³⁰⁶ Pincus-Witten, R., *Postminimalism*, New York: Out of London Press, 1977, p. 29.

³⁰⁷ Krauss, R., 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field', in Foster, H., *The Anti-Aesthetic, Essays on Modern Culture*, Washington: Bay Press, 1983.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

³⁰⁹ Krauss, R., *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1981, p. 272.

In the third section of the chapter, I will examine artist and writer Robert Morris' writings on process. In the 1960s, Morris was the first to attempt to theorise process both as a way of articulating his own practice and as a means of contextualising the experimental approaches of other post-minimalist artists. He argued that process in artmaking had hardly been examined and needed to be addressed as the art of the 1960s had made process more visible.³¹⁰ Morris' seminal texts include *Anti-Form* (1968), *Notes on Sculpture, Part 4, Beyond Objects* (1969), and *Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making* (1970). His earlier *Notes on Sculpture 1-3* had been an attempt to theorise the changes that were taking place towards the end of Minimalism as the distinctions between sculpture and painting began to dissolve. Morris' writings represented a significant contribution to developing a critical context for process in artmaking from an artist's perspective, so they are highly germane to this research.

³¹⁰ Morris, R., *Continuous Project Altered Daily, The Writings of Robert Morris*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1995, p. 43.

3.1 Process art and shifts in artistic values

'I noted its emphasis on the process of making, a process so emphatic as to be seen as the primary content of the work itself, hence the term 'process art'.

Robert Pincus-Witten, Art Historian ³¹¹

The term 'post-Minimalism' was coined by Robert Pincus-Witten in the early 1970s, originally referring to art of the middle to late 1960s in the United States, which emphasised sensuality and process. Pincus-Witten reflects that the term 'post-Minimalism' took on a life of its own, and came to include much of the art of the 1970s and early 1980s. ³¹² He places post-Minimalism at a crossroads where the *'rigorous external geometry of Minimalism gave way to the behaviour of materials in the act of making.'* ³¹³ The formalist abstract art of the previous two decades was replaced by a new set of values which focussed on procedures and working methods interacting with materials.

Changes in practice

The variety of post-Minimalist practices extended from the works of artists such as Richard Serra, Robert Morris, Eva Hesse, Barry Le Va, Keith Sonnier, which focussed on material processes and chance structures, to the work of Richard Tuttle, and Louise Bourgeois, who produced 'eccentric objects'. The exhibition, *Eccentric Abstraction* curated by the critic Lucy Lippard in New York 1966, displayed unusual substances such as latex and polyurethane formed into strange shapes by Eva Hesse, Louise Bourgeois and others and provided a more sensual alternative to the impersonal nature of Minimalism. ³¹⁴ Artists sought to create new subjects, forms, formats and modes of production: Richard Serra used the ambient architecture

³¹¹ Pincus-Witten, R., *Post-Minimalism*, New York: Out of London Press, 1977, p. 16.

³¹² Pincus-Witten, R., *Post-Minimalism into Maximalism, 1966-1986*, Michigan: University Microfilms Inc., 1987, p. 11.

³¹³ Pincus-Witten, R., *Post-Minimalism*, New York: Out of London Press, 1977, p. 15.

³¹⁴ Lippard, L., *Eva Hesse*, New York: First Da Capo Press, (1976), 1992, p 83.

to shape his lead splashings, and Robert Morris allowed his felt strips to hang limply from the wall. Process artists '*re-materialized art with a vengeance.*'³¹⁵

Minimal Art, the movement that immediately preceded post-Minimalism, was an avant-garde style that emerged in the early 1960's, most often associated with the early work of Carl Andre, Donald Judd, Sol Lewitt and Robert Morris. Minimal art tended to consist of single or repeated geometric forms, industrially produced following the artist's instructions. It removed any trace of intuitive decision-making, alluding to nothing beyond its literal presence or existence in the physical world.³¹⁶ Cornelia Butler suggests that Minimalism exploited fabrication as the perfect vehicle for eliminating the hand of the artist.³¹⁷ In contrast, in process art there was an emphasis on the artist's engagement with the physical properties of the materials, basic processes and heterogeneous methodologies of making. Sculpture thus came to include all manner of events (actions and performances), industrial materials (plastics, resins, and rubbers), media (film and video), and modes of presentation (site specific and street installation). Photography became an acceptable surrogate when used to document temporal or inaccessible works such as earthworks, installations, and country walks. What held the diverse practices, mediums and forms together were conceptual congruities rather than stylistic consistencies.³¹⁸ Post-Minimalism often involved an emphasis on the artist's touch and the 'hand made', and shifted the boundaries of what was acceptable in the art world.³¹⁹ There was a focus on the material qualities of the object, and a leaning towards reductive forms in an effort to limit metaphorical readings of the work.

³¹⁵ Foster, H., Krauss, R., Buchloh, B., Bois, Y-A., *Art Since 1900*, London: Thames and Hudson, 2004, p. 534.

³¹⁶ Meyer, J., 'Survey', in *Minimalism*, London, New York: Phaidon Press Ltd, 2000, pp. 14-45.

³¹⁷ Butler, C., 'Ends and Means', in *Afterimage: Drawing Through Process*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1999, p. 86.

³¹⁸ Foster, H., Krauss, R., Buchloh, B., Bois, Y-A., *Art Since 1900*, London: Thames and Hudson, 2004, p. 535.

³¹⁹ Zelevansky, L., *Sense and Sensibility, Women Artists and Minimalism in the Nineties*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1994, p. 7.

From the earliest phase of post-Minimalism between 1968 and 1970, it was apparent that the emphasis on the process of making was so emphatic as to be seen as the primary content of the work itself, hence the term 'process art'.³²⁰ When this occurred, as it did in the lead tossings of Richard Serra or in *Drawings that Make Themselves* by Dorothea Rockburne, the virtual content of the art became that of the spectator's intellectual re-creation of the actions used by the artist to realize the work in the first place.³²¹ Pincus-Witten drew attention to the fact that thinking through an argument is not the same as making an object, when the actual doing will lead to many chance happenings whilst engaging with the material, and constantly change the act of making.³²²

Such new practices led critics such as Clement Greenberg to voice concern that as the restrictive rules for making and meaning in traditional mediums were being left behind; art might also become arbitrary, as the protocols of medium specificity were negated.³²³ At this time, artists began searching for other ways to ground art, as in the '*logic of materials*', proposed by Serra, or in '*the order of making behaviour*', a combination of the nature of the materials, and the limited mobility of the body interacting with the materials, proposed by Morris.³²⁴ The essence of most process art was to overcome the traditional conflict between form and content and means and ends to reveal the process of the work in the product, in fact as the product. Thus the term 'process art' was used to describe work in which artists were responding to materials rather than working to a pre-designed plan, thus creating work in the making.³²⁵ As the work became less formal, Pincus-Witten remarks that essays dealing with post-Minimalism also became less formal, reflecting a shift in style from the jargonised and

³²⁰ Pincus-Witten, R., *Post-Minimalism*, New York: Out of London Press, 1977, p. 16.

³²¹ Pincus-Witten, R., *Post-Minimalism into Maximilism, 1966-1986*, Michigan: University Microfilms Inc., 1987, p. 16.

³²² *Ibid.*, p. 11.

³²³ Greenberg, C., 'Recentness of Sculpture', in Battock, G., (ed), *Minimal Art, A Critical Anthology*, Princeton: The University Press Group, 1995, pp. 180-187.

³²⁴ Rosenstock, L., 'Introduction', in Krauss, R., *Richard Serra, Sculpture*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1986, p. 11.

Morris, R., *Continuous Project Altered Daily, The Writings of Robert Morris*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1995, p. 77.

³²⁵ Pincus-Witten, R., *Post-Minimalism*, New York: Out of London Press, 1977, p. 16.

opaque writing of earlier formalist art, to one more accessible to the reader.³²⁶ Opacity and jargon were no longer central critical desirables, thus completing the cycle of change.

Therefore the shift in values that occurred during the 1960s and 1970s was not only in art practice, but also in art criticism. A *'pinched scholarly mode'* is how Pincus-Witten describes much of the critical writing in evidence in the 1960s, which was often, he says, *'inflated to the pompous.'*³²⁷ He singles out the critic Michael Fried's writing as typical of this style. The situation occurred not only because formalist critics such as Fried imposed a hermetic value system on their writing, but also, says Pincus-Witten, because the artists themselves insisted on it.³²⁸ Artists in the 1960s were departing from traditional painting and sculpture to incorporate chance procedures into art making, with values of chaos and surprise, representing a divergence from the *'closed formalist machine of judgement'* on art and art practices.³²⁹ Pincus-Witten noted:

*'younger artists, excluded from a golden circle of elect painters and sculptors and repulsed by an agenda based in modernist self-referentiality, came to view a reflexive formalism and the gallery system that sponsored it as alien and pernicious...and the activities covered by the term post-Minimalism emerged.'*³³⁰

Thus the anthology of essays, *Post-Minimalism*, by Pincus-Witten reveals two histories: one that identifies major shifts in artistic values, the other mirroring stylistic shifts in the language of art criticism that move away from Modernist formalism. A further change noted by Pincus-Witten was that the artists who led the process art movement, including Serra, Morris, and

³²⁶ Pincus-Witten, R., *Post-Minimalism*, New York: Out of London Press, 1977, p. 14.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

³³⁰ Pincus-Witten, R., *Post-Minimalism into Maximalism, American Art, 1966-1986*, Michigan: University Microfilms Inc., 1987, p. 1.

Hesse, also began to function in the capacity of theorists and critical essayists, representing a new departure for art criticism.³³¹

Shifts that took place in art practices at the time of post-Minimalism were influenced by the context and infrastructure in which they were being made and circulated. By the end of the 1960s it was clear that a new set of formal and moral values had emerged. It is suggested by Pincus-Witten that this was tempered by despair over the conduct of American politics in instances such as the Vietnam War, but also energized by the success of the Feminist Movement. Post-Minimalism's relationship to the Feminist movement could not, according to Pincus-Witten, be overly stressed, as many of its formal attitudes and properties, not to mention its exemplars, were derived from methods and substances that up to then had been tagged in a sexist way as female or feminine, whether or not the work had been made by women.³³² Highlighting the change, Pincus-Witten observes that '*what formalist sensibility would have considered eccentric processes, substances, and colorations, were assimilated to emerging socialist and aesthetic imperatives.*'³³³ He noted that recent artistic emphasis was almost directly opposed to the formalist values of the early to mid 1960s.

So, the years 1966-1970 can be seen to have marked a watershed in American art, bringing to an end a decade dominated by the earlier style of Minimalism, geometric, abstract forms based on '*a style concluded before the paintings were begun or the sculptures made.*'

³³⁴ In contrast, post-Minimalist artists saw materials as vehicles of expressive intent, the first requirement being to overcome the traditional oppositions of form and content, and means and ends, to reveal the process of the work in the product, indeed *as* the product.³³⁵ Post-Minimalist's elasticity moved away from Modernist formalism to accept work which could be

³³¹ Pincus-Witten, R., *Post-Minimalism*, New York: Out of London Press, 1977, p. 45.

³³² *Ibid.*, p. 16.

³³³ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

³³⁵ Foster H., Krauss, R., Buchloh, B., Bois, Y-A., *Art Since 1900*, London: Thames and Hudson, 2004, p. 535.

made from any material, including non traditional media not previously associated with art work.

However, the evidence from Pincus-Witten's critical essays is that post-Minimalism's elasticity did not extend to art practices using ceramic materials. Whilst work made of other materials such as rope, wax, resin, and latex was accepted, ceramic work, weighed down by historic associations with craft skills and processes, was not considered sufficiently avant-garde to become part of the canon. Pincus-Witten's attitude towards ceramics is clearly demonstrated in his essay about the work of Jackie Ferrera. When invited to her studio to view some early ceramic work, he admits to an '*anticipated snobbishness*' about a genre that he describes as '*arty craftwork*'. He remarks how easy it is to patronise such work with its '*its folkloric aspirations and earthen organicity...all that art as experience stuff that craftspeople believe in.*'³³⁶ Whilst Pincus-Witten writes positively about Ferrera's work in other media such as rope, cotton batting and papier mache, he dislikes '*certain hangover enthusiasms traceable to her ceramics.*'³³⁷ He speaks of '*the campy stylishness of a fictitious folklore invoked by the arty craftwork of the fifties... going back to an almost physical enthusiasm but no structured theory of art...*'³³⁸ Pincus-Witten, as Professor of Art History at the City University, New York and one time senior editor of *Artforum* magazine, had the status and institutional authority to make such pronouncements, and to be listened to and taken account of.³³⁹ He was therefore in a strong position to influence the exclusions of post-Minimalist discourse.

A further essay in which Pincus-Witten refers to ceramic work is in connection with ceramic sculptor Peter Voulkos (1924-2002). In the 1950s, Voulkos had spent time with John Cage at Black Mountain College, following which he set up the ceramics department at Los Angeles Art Institute. At this time, Voulkos began to think of clay as art, not craft, and as '*another way to*

³³⁶ Pincus-Witten, R., *Post-Minimalism into Maximalism, 1966-1986*, Michigan: University Microfilms Inc., 1987, p. 149.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

³³⁹ Pincus-Witten, R., *Postminimalism*, New York: Out of London Press, 1977, p. 1.

invent form'.³⁴⁰ Voulkos, like Cage was interested in Zen philosophy and chance, and in his ceramic work showed interest in imperfection and the abandonment of fixed forms of thought. An example of Voulkos' experimental approach to ceramic work from this period is a painted abstract expressionist ceramic vase sculpture (fig. 2). The title of the work indicates Voulkos' aspiration for the piece, that whilst a ceramic vessel, he also wishes it to be seen as a 'sculpture'.



FIG. 2 Peter Voulkos, *Untitled Vase Sculpture* 1963

Painted ceramic. 34 x 24 x 17 cms. Stedelijk Museum, Netherlands.

By the late 1960s, Voulkos was attempting to reposition himself as a sculptor, having started to work with metal as well as ceramic material. Pincus-Witten, unimpressed, remarked that

³⁴⁰ MacNaughton, M. D., *Innovation in Clay: The Otis Era, 1954-1960*, in *Revolution in Clay*, Washington: University of Washington Press, 1994, p. 51.

Voulikos was moving from *'ambitious ceramics to a kind of heroic metal sculpture'* and that he was trying to

*'inflate crafts to such a high degree of aesthetic achievement that the essential and fundamental breach between the arts and crafts would be healed - or so Voulikos thought - through the obliteration of the democratic/elitist distinctions that separate the crafts and the arts.'*³⁴¹

Whilst Voulikos clearly wanted his work to be included in a fine art sculptural discourse, he remained excluded whilst Pincus-Witten and other critics chose to ignore his work. Voulikos has been described by Garth Clark as one of the most famous ceramic artists of the twentieth century who nevertheless remains without a body of critical or analytical writing to position his work.³⁴² The paradox here is that Pincus-Witten described post-Minimalism as having undeniable links with craft through the feminist movement, especially the expressive methods of making and materials previously labelled 'female', whether or not the work had been by made women.³⁴³ The 'expressiveness' of post-Minimalist painting and sculpture was, said Pincus-Witten, in marked contrast to the inexpressivity of the geometrical forms typical of Minimalism and marked a revival of Abstract Expressionist attitudes after a lull during the 1950s and early 1960s. This expressiveness was accompanied by what Pincus-Witten described as 'highly eccentric forms' and 'signature substances' which became strong features of process art.³⁴⁴ The signature substances of individual artists included Richard Serra's lead, Robert Morris' felt, and Eva Hesse's latex.

³⁴¹ Pincus-Witten, R., *Eye to Eye, Twenty Years of Art Criticism*, Michigan: University Microfilms Inc., 1984, p. 110.

³⁴² Clark, G., *Voulikos Dilemma: Toward a Ceramic Canon in Shards*, New York: CAF, 2003, p. 321.

³⁴³ Pincus-Witten, R., *Post-Minimalism*, New York: Out of London Press, 1977, p. 16.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

Richard Serra, the artist, the process

Pincus-Witten describes Richard Serra's work throughout the 1960s as epitomising the characteristics of post-Minimalist process art. Serra's investigation of materials and process resulted in a series of works that became a benchmark for process art. Serra's approach, says Pincus-Witten, minimised '*almost to extinction, any valorised finished product*'. Instead he emphasised '*those issues and procedures which are central to the execution of any specific act or set of acts in as clear and didactic way as possible.*'³⁴⁵

Serra became well known for his '*Verb List*' of over a hundred verbs which he created between 1962 and 1968 (fig 3). He identifies action verbs as linguistic equivalents to tasks and his impetus to work is informed by a simple proposition of a verb form such as: *to roll, to tear, to splash, to fold, to crease, to split.*³⁴⁶ The *Verb List* is a working notation, each verb specifying a particular action to be performed on an unspecified material. Rosalind Krauss draws attention to the conceptual distance that separates this from what one would normally expect to find in a sculptor's notebook.³⁴⁷ In place of an inventory of sculptural forms, Serra substitutes instead a list of behavioural attitudes, verbs that are themselves the generators of art forms and capable of creating a work. He describes the verb list as a way of applying various activities to unspecified materials, explaining that the '*the language structured my activities in relation to materials which had the same function as transitive verbs*'.³⁴⁸

The verbs describe a pure transitivity where each action is to be performed against the imagined resistance of an object creating a time in which the action simply acts.³⁴⁹ It is interesting to note that the verbs that Serra omits from *Verb List* are the words most closely

³⁴⁵ Pincus-Witten, R., *Post-Minimalism*, New York: Out of London Press, 1977, p. 21.

³⁴⁶ Serra, R., 'Verb List', in Muller, G., *The New Avant-Garde, Issues for the Art of the Seventies*, New York: Praeger Press, 1972, p. 94.

³⁴⁷ Krauss, R., *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1994, p. 276.

³⁴⁸ Serra, R., 'About Drawing: An Interview in Writings and Interviews', in Fer, B., *The Infinite Line*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004, p. 157.

³⁴⁹ Krauss, R., *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1994, p. 276.

associated with making sculpture: to carve, to model, to mould. These traditional techniques of sculpture were excluded as they were terms that failed to correspond with how Serra saw the possibility of sculpture continuing in the kind of work he was making at the time in molten lead, steel, or fibreglass.

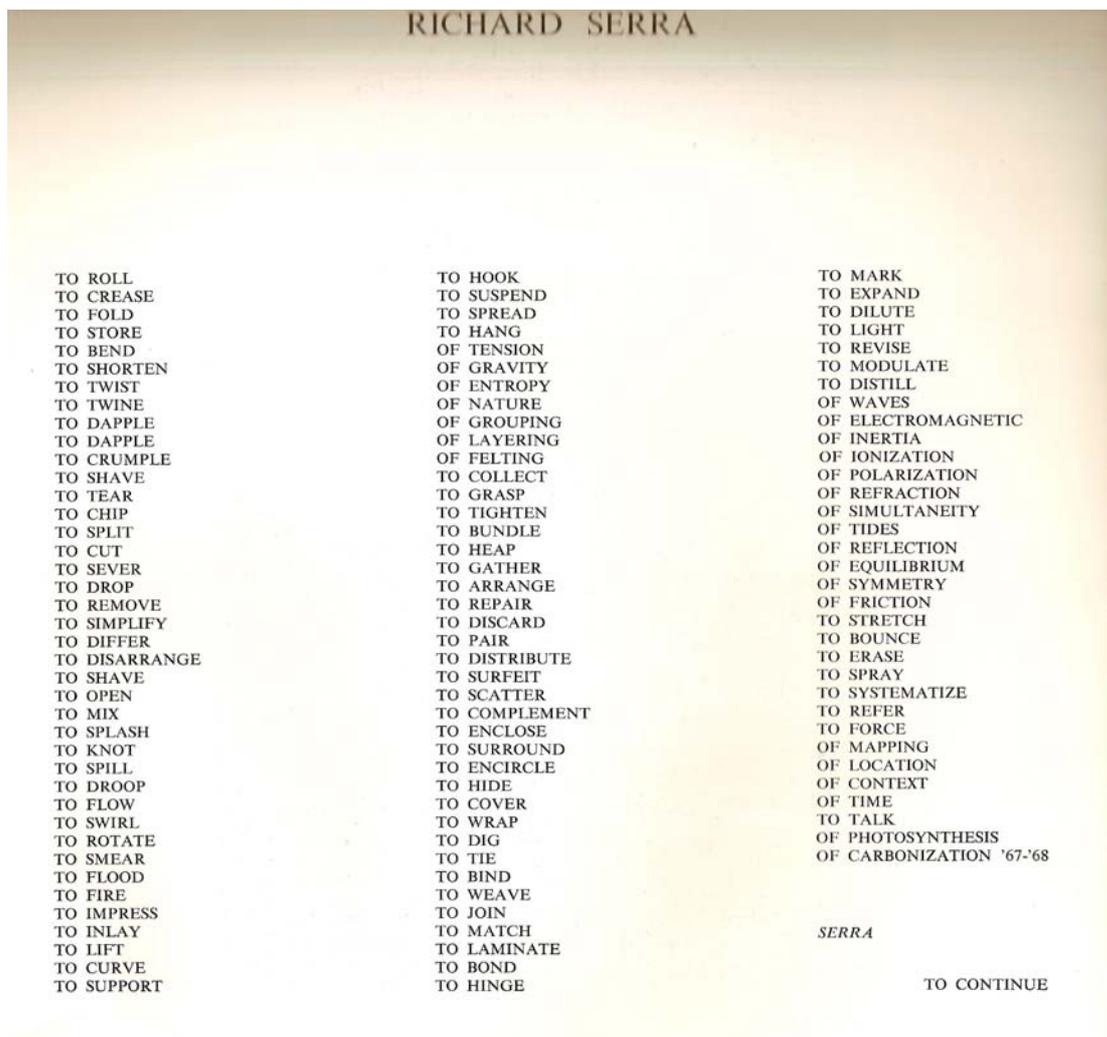


FIG. 3 Richard Serra, *Verb List, 1962-1968* in *The New Avant-Garde (1971)* ³⁵⁰

Shortly after composing his list, Serra discovered the enormous flexibility of lead as a support for the actions he had projected. *Tearing Lead from 1:00 to 1:47* (1968), and *Casting* (1969), all

³⁵⁰ Serra, R., 'Verb List', in Muller, G., *The New Avant-Garde, Issues for the Art of the Seventies*, New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972, p. 94.

result from the variability of the material, soft enough to be torn, malleable enough to be rolled, easily melted enough to be able to be cast. It was during a performance in 1969 of the last of these possibilities, that the portrait of Serra throwing lead was made, recording the throwing of molten metal into an angled “mould” along the floor of the Castelli Warehouse. He had made *Casting* earlier that year at the Whitney Museum of American Art, this time throwing molten metal into the “mould” formed by the angle of the floor and wall of the gallery, pulling the resultant casting away from the angle when hardened to allow for another wave of molten liquid. The form of the finished piece serves as evidence of the result of the actions that were performed upon the material. Materials, processes, time, horizontality, verticality, weight, disorder, perspectives, structures, and physicality are some of the interconnected aspects under which Serra’s work may be considered.

The possibilities of lead as a sculptural material were of interest to Serra owing to its weight, malleability, lack of sheen, and other properties which were directly opposed to the chromium steel and polished glass which had dominated Minimalism.³⁵¹ Serra retained the dull rawness of lead, as he would later maintain the ‘natural’ rusting of steel, thus holding on to the intrinsic properties of the materials in the finished work. For *Splashing* he repeatedly threw molten lead against the angle between the floorboard and the wall moulding, allowed each to cool, and then pulled the shaped wedge away from the wall to form a sculptural series. The work was defined through the characteristic qualities of the material as well as the chance movements of the artist, rather than a pre-meditated compositional structure.

Tearings’ involved the methodological ripping away by hand of successive edges of a lead square. Serra draws attention to both a sense of time shift and to the physical procedure itself. Serra has made different *Splash* pieces in which the hot liquid metal was projected at the angle formed by the meeting of two planes, where it instantly solidified. The form of the finished

³⁵¹ Pincus-Witten, R., *Post-Minimalism*, New York: Out of London Press, 1977, p. 26.

piece serves as evidence of the pure result of simple actions. Pincus-Witten compares the sequence of tearings as very much like the constant chamfers in Brancusi's *Endless Column*, both works marked by constant and repetitive artisanal actions. Pincus-Witten quotes Geist on Brancusi, as he believes comparisons can be made with *Endless Column* and Serra's lead work:

*"The many versions Brancusi carved of 'Endless Column' ...once the proportions are established it is only necessary to lay them out on the beam of wood and proceed almost automatically; the work goes on like a litany, with no need for invention. Every new column, (like each new tear piece), seems to develop its own individuality. From a relatively small effort there is here a great poetic yield."*³⁵²

In 1968, Serra used lead to explore other transitive relationships: *to prop, to lean, to rest*. One sheet of lead, tightly rolled to form a pole was inclined against another still flat sheet, hoisted on the plane of a wall, the dense inert weight of the one propping up the leaden expanse of the other. *Prop* differed from other lead work in the process informing the work: it was not something applied to the materials of the object, imprinting itself upon them; in *Prop* the process was a function of the relationship between the two elements of the piece, working against each other in constantly renewed tension, active within the object at each moment, necessary to the very prolongation of its existence.³⁵³ Serra used the device of propping to raise forms that are only possible by propping. *One Ton Prop, House of Cards* is the most representative of this kind of work. (Fig.4) Serra's *Prop* pieces brought into focus the struggle of the sculpture trying to rise in space without relying on artificial devices such as gluing and welding, which Serra thought '*unnecessary and irrelevant*' to process.³⁵⁴

The works visualised the sculptural properties of weight, gravity, balance, and the precarious points of tension between them.

³⁵² Geist, S., *Brancusi, A Study of the Sculpture* in Pincus-Witten, R., *Postminimalism*, New York: Out of London Press, 1977, p. 27.

³⁵³ Krauss, R., *Richard Serra Sculpture*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1986, p. 20.

³⁵⁴ Muller, G., *The New Avant-Garde, Issues for the Art of the Seventies*, New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972, p. 20.

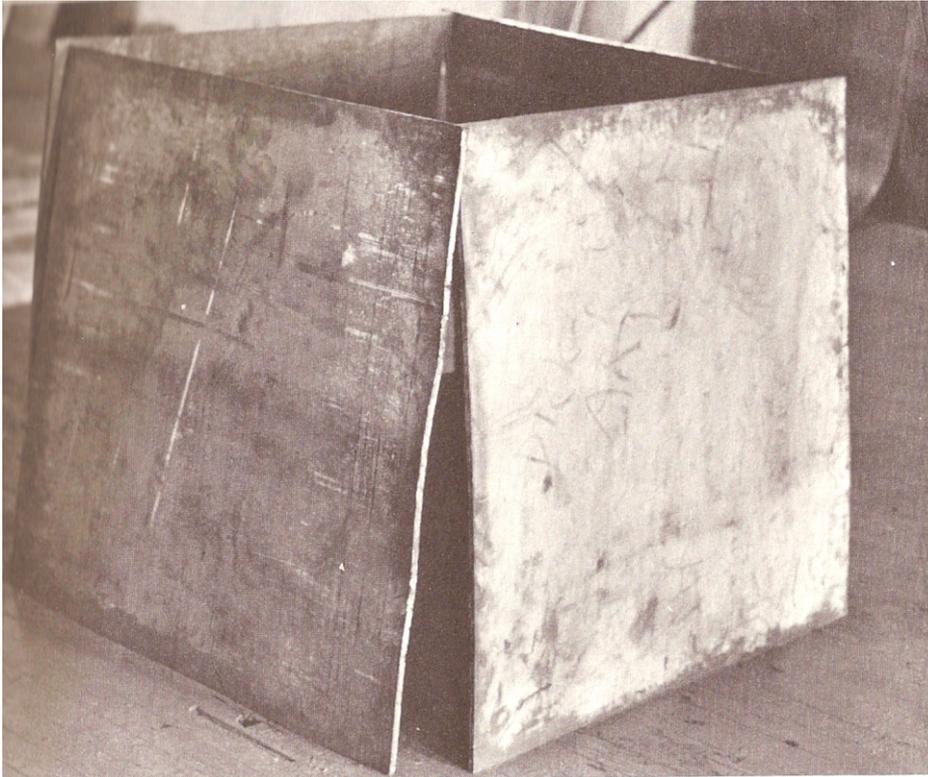


FIG. 4 Richard Serra, *One Ton Prop, House of Cards*, 1969.

Lead sheets 48 x 60 x 60 ins. (Artist's Copyright, DACS).

One Ton Prop, House of Cards was dependent on each passing moment for its very existence. In this way, Serra created an image of the sculpture as something that constantly had to renew its structural integrity by keeping its balance. The massiveness and weightiness were the criteria for the effectiveness of this work. The lead elements were used to support themselves autonomously. Some of Serra's works reveal the process of their making, some clarify aspects of their physical properties and the manner in which they were created, and others redefine the space which they occupy.³⁵⁵

When interviewed, Serra spoke of his work in terms of experimentation and invention, with a degree of 'unforseeability' which, he said, invariably led to new work.³⁵⁶ His structures evolved from earlier pieces and of his experiences of those pieces. He described his use of steel

³⁵⁵ Rosenstock, L., 'Introduction', in Krauss, R., *Richard Serra, Sculpture*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1986, p. 11.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

as ‘*very elastic*’, when ‘*it seems to have been pushed to the limits.*’ His motivation, he explained, was ‘*to be able to use material to invent forms that haven’t been invented before.*’³⁵⁷ His ‘signature’ lead work embodied the changes brought about by post-Minimalism, as attitudes to art practices shifted in a break with some of sculpture’s long standing formalist traditions.³⁵⁸ Serra aimed to make the process of the production of his work transparent, defining sculpture as an activity, as an empirical and experimental investigation of material. Furthermore, the documentation of the artwork often became the art work itself, as in the case of Serra’s film *Hand Catching Lead* which shows the pulsating rhythm of the repetitive action of the open hand to the closed fist as the hand attempts to catch lead.³⁵⁹

The emphasis of modernist art on the formalist art object had shifted to take account of the thought processes and actions that brought the art work into existence. Bryony Fer considers that the studio for Serra was always a state of mind as well as a place, process as a mode of thinking, and in this respect, she says, his post-Minimalist sculptural project was close to Eva Hesse.³⁶⁰ Similarly, Hesse used materials such as latex and fibreglass that would yield to the imprint of the action applied and carry it on their surface as their only mark of structure. In the next section, Hesse’s approach to process is examined, together with further analysis of the changes that led to what became known as ‘*the expanded field of sculpture*’.

³⁵⁷ Rosenstock, L., ‘Introduction’, in Krauss, R., *Richard Serra, Sculpture*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1986, p. 13.

³⁵⁸ Pincus-Witten, R., *Post-Minimalism*, New York: Out of London Press, 1977, p. 26.

³⁵⁹ Krauss, R., *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1977, p. 243.

³⁶⁰ Fer, B., *The Infinite Line*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004, p. 157.

3.2 *The expanded field of sculpture*

“‘Sculpture is what you bump into when you back up to see a painting,’ Barnett Newman said in the 1950s. But it would probably be more accurate to say of the work that one found in the early ’60s that sculpture had entered a categorical no man’s-land.’³⁶¹

Rosalind Krauss, Art Historian

With Minimalism in the mid 1960s, Causey argues, it was possible to say what sculpture was: objects that were mainly single forms made of one material with a hard finish.³⁶² Although there was debate about whether certain of these objects were to be called sculpture, for example Robert Morris said yes, Donald Judd said no, they were ‘things’ in the traditional way of sculpture.³⁶³ By the late 1960s, sculptures were made from hard and soft components, materials like sand, liquids, earth, neon tubes, and light beams. The consensus that sculpture was generally made from single materials such as marble, stone and bronze, collapsed.

Furthermore, reactions against Minimal art led to changes in which an emphasis was placed not on the formal aspects of the work, but on the processes involved in creating it and on the processes of change it might be subjected to thereafter. The importance of the work was no longer vested solely in the finished object. Now, value might be placed on procedures and processes, so that making might acquire significance at the expense of the finished object. In a further shift of attitude, what constituted an individual sculpture might change after initial exhibition. For example, *four Cash 2’67, Ring 1 1’67, rope (gr 2sp 60) 6’67* by Barry Flanagan, originally three works, were combined to form what subsequently was regarded as one sculpture.³⁶⁴

³⁶¹ Krauss, R., ‘Sculpture in the Expanded Field’ (1979), in Foster, H., (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic*, Seattle: Bay Press, 1983, p. 36.

³⁶² Causey, A., *Sculpture Since 1945*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 131.

³⁶³ Foster, H., Krauss, R., Bois, Y-A, Buchloh, B., *Art Since 1900, Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*, London: Thames and Hudson, 2004, p. 493.

³⁶⁴ Causey, A., *Sculpture Since 1945*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 131.

The newly mapped field for aesthetic practice in the late 1960s was seen to offer the greatest possible freedom, entering what came to be called the 'expanded field of sculpture'.³⁶⁵ The art historian, Rosalind Krauss, defined the expanded field of sculpture as a break with the aesthetic field of Modernism.³⁶⁶ Krauss was one of the first critics to undertake an analysis of the changing sculptural practices of the period as a context for the emergence of post-minimalism. The critic and academic, Stephen Melville, describes Krauss' essay, *Sculpture in the Expanded Field*, (1979) as providing one of the best accounts of what made post-Minimalism possible.³⁶⁷ The account by Krauss is looked at in the first part of this section. It is followed by an examination of the work of one of the major proponents of post-Minimalist process art, Eva Hesse.

A new aesthetic language for sculpture

Krauss describes the decade between 1969 and 1979 as a period in which surprising things came to be called sculpture, including narrow corridors with TV monitors at the ends; large photographs documenting country walks; mirrors placed at strange angles in ordinary rooms and temporary lines cut into the floor of a desert.³⁶⁸ Categories like sculpture and painting came to be stretched and twisted in an extraordinary demonstration of elasticity, displaying the way a cultural term could be extended to include just about anything.³⁶⁹ The result was confusion about what might be meant by the category of sculpture, unless, suggests Krauss, the category '*could be made to become infinitely malleable.*'³⁷⁰ Drawing attention to the critical writing about post-war American art which had encouraged a manipulation of the category, Krauss says that the message about the new was made more acceptable by seeming to emerge

³⁶⁵ Krauss, R., 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field' (1979), in Foster, H., (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic*, Seattle: Bay Press, 1983, p. 31.

³⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 31.

³⁶⁷ Melville, S., 'What Was Post-Minimalism' (1999), in Arnold, D., Iverson, M., (eds.), *Art and Thought*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003, p. 160.

³⁶⁸ Krauss, R., 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field' (1979), in Foster, H., (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic*, Seattle: Bay Press, 1983, p. 31.

³⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 31.

³⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 31.

from the past, with historicism providing the paternity for the new work, even when it was not similar.³⁷¹ As the sculpture became more extreme, suggests Krauss, extended genealogies, such as references to Stonehenge, which was not really sculpture, came into play. In doing so, the term became so extended as to be in danger of collapsing.

Historically, says Krauss, sculpture was located as a specific marker for a specific event, representative, vertical, figurative, on a plinth. Krauss believed that this changed in the nineteenth century with the failure of commissioned monuments, such as Rodin's *The Gates of Hell* and his statue of *Balzac*. *The Gates of Hell* were commissioned in 1880 as doors for a projected museum of the decorative arts, and whilst the gates were never used on the original, multiple versions can be found in a variety of museums in various countries, '*the doors having been gouged away and anti-structurally encrusted to the point where they bear their inoperative condition on their face.*'³⁷² The statue of *Balzac* was commissioned in 1891 as a memorial to a literary genius to be set up on a specific site in Paris. However, says Krauss, Rodin executed the statue with such a degree of subjectivity that even he, as letters by him bear out, did not believe that the work would be accepted.³⁷³

With the failure of both sculptural projects, Krauss suggests that one crosses the threshold of the logic of the monument, thus entering the space of its negative condition - a kind of sitelessness, or homelessness, leading to a loss of place.³⁷⁴ It is at this point, suggests Krauss, that one enters Modernism. It is the Modernist period of sculptural production, she argues, that operates in relation to this loss of site, producing the monument as abstraction, functionally placeless, nomadic, and largely self reverential, and through the representation of its own

³⁷¹ Krauss, R., 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field' (1979), in Foster, H., (ed.) in *The Anti-Aesthetic*, Seattle: Bay Press, 1983, p. 31.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 35.

³⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

materials, or the process of its construction, the sculpture depicts its own autonomy.³⁷⁵ By the 1960s, sculpture entered what Krauss terms a categorical 'no man's land'. She describes this as what was on or in front of a building that was not a building.³⁷⁶ One of the purest examples she identified was an outdoor installation by Robert Morris. Krauss describes Morris' *Mirrored Boxes* as forms which were distinct from the setting only because, though visually continuous with grass and trees, they were not in fact part of the landscape.³⁷⁷

So, Krauss argues, sculpture was no longer a privileged term, but only one term on the periphery of a field in which there were other differently structured possibilities. She sees this as '*permission to think the expanded field*', and as something explored by a number of artists between 1968 and 1970, including Richard Serra and Robert Morris.³⁷⁸ With regard to individual practice, many artists found themselves successively occupying different places within the expanded field.³⁷⁹ In contrast, Modernist art criticism had been largely suspicious of an approach that moved beyond the traditional domain of sculpture, with critics such as Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried demanding a purity and separateness of different media together with the specialization of a practitioner within a given medium.³⁸⁰

Post-Minimalism brought about a shift in attitude in which practice was no longer narrowly defined in relation to a given category, but by an approach in which any medium - photography, books, lines on walls, mirrors – might be used.³⁸¹ The expanded field of sculpture offered the opportunity for artists to explore any number of different media and the properties inherent to materials to compose work that became known as process art.³⁸²

³⁷⁵ Krauss, R., 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field' (1979), in Foster, H., (ed.), in *The Anti-Aesthetic*, Seattle: Bay Press, 1983, p. 35.

³⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 36.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 36.

³⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 39.

³⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 41.

³⁸⁰ Fried, M., 'Art and Objecthood' (1967), in Harrison, C., Wood, P., (eds.), *Art in Theory, 1900-2000*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1992, p. 835.

³⁸¹ Krauss, R., 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field' (1979), in Foster, H., (ed.), in *The Anti-Aesthetic*, Seattle: Bay Press, 1983, p. 41.

³⁸² Krauss, R., *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1994, p. 272.

Eva Hesse was interested in the principle of transformation as the observable logic of her work and was a major advocate of process art, suggests Rosalind Krauss. Hesse's work is discussed next.

Eva Hesse (1936-1970)

In the five years up to her death in 1970, Eva Hesse pioneered the use of liquid to hard industrial materials for sculptural purposes in a process-led way. She summed up her approach in her own words when she said to the critic Cindy Nemser '*when I work, it's only the abstract qualities I'm working with, which is the material, the form it's going to take, the size, the scale, the positioning.*'³⁸³ Hesse pushed unconventional materials like rope, latex, resin, fibreglass, wire mesh and rubber to their limits to make sculptural work in untraditional ways. Elisabeth Sussman, the curator of an international touring exhibition of Hesse's work in 2002, suggested that Hesse's sculpture emerged from a liminal space between control and freedom, between what she knew and what she couldn't have known in advance, '*between coherence and fragmentation.*'³⁸⁴

The relationship between painting and sculpture became a major issue in the mid 1960s and the critic Hilton Kramer remarked that forms that were once part of painting had been set physically free to occupy real space, that what was once part of the metaphorical and expressive 'fabric' of painting is now offered as a literal 'thing'.³⁸⁵ Following the exhibition *Eccentric Abstraction* in 1966, the exhibition's curator, Lucy Lippard, remarked that whilst Hesse remained without doubt a sculptor, she had instinctively understood how 'drawing in space' could be re-invigorated with real linear materials – string, cord, wire (fig 5).

³⁸³ Lippard, L., *Eva Hesse*, New York: First Da Capo Press, (1976), 1992, p. 5.

³⁸⁴ Sussman, E., *Eva Hesse*, London: Tate Publishing, 2002, p. 17.

³⁸⁵ Kramer, H., quoted in Lippard, L., *Eva Hesse*, New York: First Da Capo Press, (1976), 1992, p. 191.

Since single and repeated forms and line, rather than composed interrelationships had always been Hesse's strong point, she was able to bring them into sculpture in a unique way.

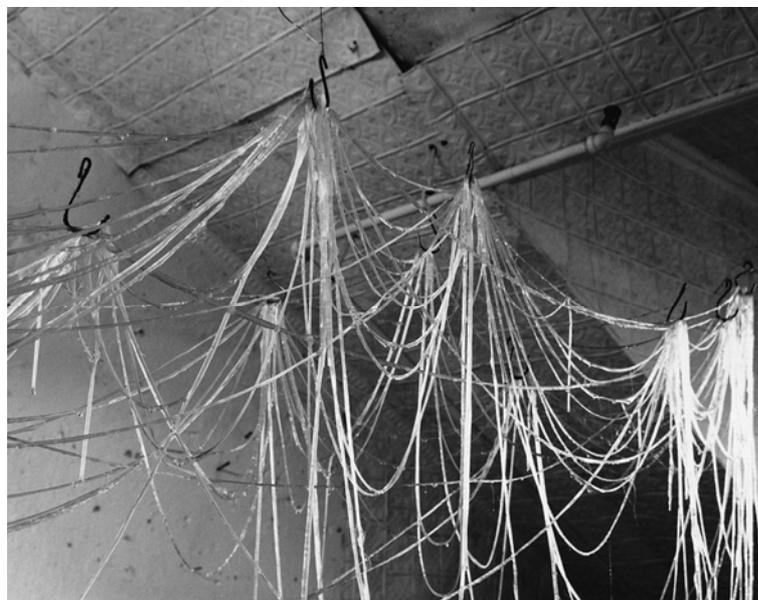


FIG. 5, Eva Hesse, *Right After*, 1969. Fibreglass, polyester resin, wire.

60 x 214 x 48 inches, 3 sections. Milwaukee Art Museum, gift of Friends of Art, 1970.

© The Estate of Eva Hesse, Courtesy of Hauser and Wirth.

Lippard suggested that *Right After* had the gestural intensity of Jackson Pollock's surfaces.³⁸⁶

The art historian Briony Fer also made a comparison with Pollock when she described Hesse's use of fibreglass and latex as being 'close to painting that could reiterate that moment when the fluidity of paint freezes in time and hardens, that was captured in (Jackson) Pollock's drips.'³⁸⁷

Hesse herself described *Right After* as 'very spontaneous.'³⁸⁸ She saturated string in fibreglass resin and festooned it from hooks on the ceiling. Lippard remarked that its sculptural suspension in mid-air deepened the sense of risk. *Right After* is an example of Hesse's unconventional use of industrial materials in ways that they were never intended. Fibreglass in industrial production

³⁸⁶ Lippard, L., *Eva Hesse*, New York: First Da Capo Press, (1976), 1992, p. 172.

³⁸⁷ Fer, B., *The Infinite Line*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004, p. 110.

³⁸⁸ Lippard, L., *Eva Hesse*, New York: First Da Capo Press, (1976), 1992, p. 161.

is normally used over rigid forms. Instead, Hesse allowed her material to find its own shape as it dried over the most minimal of supports. At other times she would allow the fibreglass to dry and take shape on wires suspended from the ceiling of her studio.³⁸⁹ The malleability of a casting material with a viscosity that solidified in time and which could be poured or painted were the properties most interested Hesse about fibreglass, latex and other flexible, translucent materials. Such time based phenomena of variability and instability which became the signatures of her late work made a significant contribution to the expanded field of post-Minimalist sculpture. *Right After* was shown in a black room in the *Plastic Presence* exhibition at the Jewish Museum in New York. Hesse was said to like the fact that her 'delicate feminine' piece was exhibited beside the 'heavy and masculine' work of the sculptor Tom Clancy.³⁹⁰ Pincus-Witten concluded in a review of the exhibition in *Artforum* that Hesse had made a central contribution to new American Sculpture, and that her work surpassed any piece in the show.³⁹¹

Contingent, (1969) is another work that exemplifies Hesse's avant-garde approach to the use of industrial materials to create sculptural form. *Contingent* consists of eight composites of rubberized cheesecloth and fibreglass, run through various proportional and textural changes, the light catching each translucent sheet in a different way. With the opaque weight concentrated in the middle of each piece, they appear to disintegrate from both ends. *Contingent* was dependant upon Hesse's use of the unpredictable fluid-to-solid materials of latex and fibreglass resin in which she experimented with the layering of liquid latex to build up form, rather than casting the material as conventionally used in industry. Hesse used the uncontrolled state of her materials to investigate their artistic possibilities, creating work that could crack or tear, be translucent, opaque, smooth, rough, fragile, or rigid. Like Serra and other post-Minimalists who investigated process, Hesse used chance and accident to play a part in the creation of *Contingent*. She tells Lippard how one piece of *Contingent* is much longer than the

³⁸⁹ Sussman, E., *Eva Hesse*, London: Tate Publishing, 2002, p. 33.

³⁹⁰ Pincus-Witten, R., quoted in Lippard, L., *Eva Hesse*, New York: First Da Capo Press, (1976), 1992, p. 161.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

other seven. She could have cut it off, she said, but chose not to; instead she let it hang differently from all the rest. Furthermore, she says that she did not originally wish to have an even number of eight units, but was told by her assistant that it was too late to add to it as a different batch of rubber would change it too much.³⁹² Hesse demonstrated a lack of concern with ‘truth to materials’ and this is apparent in an interview between Hesse and Cindy Nemser. Hesse told Nemser that she rubberised the cheesecloth for *Contingent* for pragmatic reasons because the artwork needed it both for strength and permanency. She described her approach to process in the following terms:

*‘If a material is liquid...I can control it but I don’t really want to change it. I don’t want to add color or make it thicker or thinner...I don’t want to keep any rules. But in that sense, process, the materials, become important... sometimes the materials look so important to the process because I do so little else with the form. I keep it very simple.’*³⁹³

Contingent was first shown at the exhibition *Art in Process IV* in 1969 at Finch College, New York. Lippard, testifying to the unique nature of Hesse’s work, remarks that *Contingent* hangs differently in every space it is shown, and is impressive even when badly hung and badly lit, as it once was at the Guggenheim Museum, New York.³⁹⁴ Hesse’s statement, written to accompany *Contingent*, is characteristic of the way she expressed her thought processes and artistic decision making with regard to a piece of work:

Hanging. Rubberized, loose open cloth.

Fiberglass – reinforced plastic.

Piece is in many parts.

Each in itself is a complete statement,

³⁹² Lippard, L., *Eva Hesse*, New York: First Da Capo Press, (1976), 1992, p. 164.

³⁹³ Lippard, L., Interview with Cindy Nemser, quoted in *Eva Hesse*, New York: Da Capo Press, (1976), 1992, p. 133.

³⁹⁴ Lippard, L., *Eva Hesse*, New York: First Da Capo Press, (1976), 1992, p. 164.

Irregular, edges, six to seven feet long.

textures coarse, rough, changing

see through, non see through, consistent, inconsistent.

try a continuous flowing one.

try some random closely spaces.

try some distant far spaced.

They are tight and formal but very ethereal. Sensitive. Fragile.

See through mostly.

not painting, not sculpture...

I remember I wanted to get to non art, non connotive,

non anthropomorphic, non geometric, non nothing,

everything, but of another kind, vision, sort.

from a total other reference point. Is it possible?

I have learned anything is possible. I know that.

that vision or concept will come through total risk,

freedom, discipline, I will do it.

today, another step, on two sheets we put on the glass.

did the two differently.

one was cast – poured over hard, irregular, thick plastic;

one with screening, they will all be different.

Both the rubber sheets and the fiberglass. lengths and widths.

can it be different each time? Why not?

how to achieve by not achieving? How to make by not making

it's not the new. it is what is yet not known,

thought, seen, touched but really what is

*and that is.*³⁹⁵

³⁹⁵ Hesse, E., *Art in Process IV*, New York: Finch College Museum of Art, 1970, in Lippard, L., *Eva Hesse*, New York: First Da Capo Press, (1976), 1992, p. 165.

Words themselves became an important feature of Hesse's practice. The sculptor Robert Smithson described her use of language as one that allowed her to give material presence to processes she was interested in linguistically as well as physically.³⁹⁶ Hesse, Serra, Morris, Smithson, Bochner and Lippard are amongst the artists, critics and essayists considered to have contributed most to the move away from formalist criticism towards a more flexible approach to writing about process art. Like Serra, Hesse compiled several lists of nouns, verbs and other words which could generate ideas for making and her 'works on paper' included lists, lists with drawings, descriptions, and memos to herself.³⁹⁷ Lippard describes Hesse throughout the last decade of her life, aided by a large thesaurus, searching for esoteric titles to name her work. Such titles included *Accession*, *Addendum*, *Accretion*, *Aught*, *Augment*, *Compart* and *Contingent*. Hesse left a legacy of notebooks, ledger books, diaries and journals indicating how important the process of writing was to her practice.³⁹⁸

All areas of Hesse's work are dominated by process. For instance, the process of making a drawing for Hesse was just as material as making an object out of string. She began a particularly concentrated series of drawings on graph paper in 1966. The basic element of this series of drawings is the circle, drawn in black ink, repeated and made to fill the form of the grid. Bryony Fer describes them as having intensity even though they are made out of very little, with tiny movements of the hand making something completely static. The process is mechanical but the result is not. It is made by hand, and it is precise: the tiny circles, the unevenness, the miniature work.³⁹⁹ Slight irregularities introduce randomness into the system through uneven pressure of the hand. The critic, Kim Levin, described Hesse's works as *unravelling* to become the antithesis of Minimalism.⁴⁰⁰ Pincus-Witten argued that the forms of

³⁹⁶ Smithson, R., *The Collected Writings*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996, p. 61.

³⁹⁷ Pincus-Witten, R., *Post-Minimalism*, New York: Out of London Press, 1977, p. 45.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

³⁹⁹ Fer, B., *The Infinite Line*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004, p. 124.

⁴⁰⁰ Lippard, L., *Eva Hesse*, New York: First Da Capo Press, (1976), 1992, p. 191.

Hesse's work were interesting not because they lent themselves to elaborate extrapolations of meaning, but because, he said, '*the forms infer... they do not depict.*'⁴⁰¹

A prominent device of post-Minimalism to be found in Hesse's work is an interest in repetition. She repeated and conducted variations on formal themes, making the sculptural elements absurd in themselves and in their multiplicity. Hesse would often make several versions of her artworks. For instance, she made five versions of *Accession* (1967-1968), the first from found material. The cube forms for others were fabricated in aluminium and steel and punctuated with grids of holes. *Accession II* was made of a fabricated steel box into which she threaded vinyl extrusions through thirty thousand holes in order to create rows of small, bulging forms on the external surface. Inside the box, the tubing appears as a mass of tiny circles. Even when Hesse got parts of her work fabricated, she still wished to retain a sense of physical involvement with the process of making, with critics describing her work as '*emphatically hand made.*'⁴⁰² The sense of the handmade is an effect of the palpable materiality of her work and represents a significant shift from the industrial manufacture of the Minimalist art of the previous decade.

Hesse's approach to process continues to generate interest in the contemporary art field. There have been a number of international touring exhibitions and many books published on her work in the past decade, including an anthology of recent essays edited by the art historian, Griselda Pollock.⁴⁰³ Pollock argues that her objective when considering Hesse's work is to break the resistance between *making* as process and *made* as product when, according to such binary logic, the former becomes embedded in a crafting materiality, unthought and inarticulate, delivered in its formal innocence to the wordy interpretive impositions of the theorists and art historians. She refers to the modernist doctrine of 'truth to materials' in which the character and

⁴⁰¹ Pincus-Witten, R., *Post-Minimalism*, New York: Out of London Press, 1977, p. 49.

⁴⁰² Zelevansky, L., *Sense and Sensibility, Women Artists and Minimalism in the Nineties*, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1994, p. 10.

⁴⁰³ Pollock, G. (ed.), *Encountering Eva Hesse*, Munich, London, New York: Prestel Verlag, 2006.

meaning of painting has previously been determined by the nature of its material medium. As an alternative, Pollock puts forward the proposition that process is a mode of thinking; that it may be a theoretical object in itself that could be described as thinking with art, thinking through art, art as thinking, theorising with, in, and through the encounter with the process of the artwork.⁴⁰⁴ This view is highly relevant to the artists discussed in chapter four who are using process as a form of thinking through the encounter with the process of their artworks. Pollock describes this view as displacing the old divisions of practice, theory, and history and instead bringing different kinds of thinking and different modes of making meaning that are not synonymous with our old divisions in art, history, and thought. She identifies Hesse's work as epitomising these features.



FIG. 6 Eva Hesse, *Studioworks*, 1969

Papier maché. Various sizes. Photographs ©Alan Dimmick.

Courtesy The Fruit Market Gallery, Edinburgh, 2009

⁴⁰⁴ Pollock, G., (ed.), *Encountering Eva Hesse*, Munich, London, New York: Prestel Verlag, 2006, p. 18.

Hesse's way of working continues to be of interest to contemporary critics, curators and artists. One of the foremost scholars on Hesse's oeuvre is the art historian Bryony Fer. Most recently, Fer has argued for Hesse's small works (figs. 6 and 7) to be re-interpreted as equally as important as her well known larger works and not just considered as 'test pieces'. In these smaller works suggests Fer, it is possible to get a sense of Hesse's concentrated effort of making an object with focussed and intricate manual and mental effort.⁴⁰⁵



FIG.7 Eva Hesse, *Studioworks*, 1969

Papier maché. Various Sizes. Photographs © Alan Dimmick.

Courtesy The Fruit Market Gallery, Edinburgh, 2009

Fer refers to the small objects as 'studioworks' and suggests that rather than being simply technical explorations, these objects radically call into question conventional notions of what sculpture is.⁴⁰⁶ In her short career, Hesse produced a significant number of small works that

⁴⁰⁵ Fer, B., *Eva Hesse, Studiowork*, Edinburgh: The Fruitmarket Gallery, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009, p. 44.

⁴⁰⁶ Eva Hesse Studiowork, Exhibition Leaflet, The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh, 5 August - 25 October 2010.

remained relatively unknown until 2009 when Fer brought them to public attention through an exhibition and book, *Eva Hesse, Studiowork*.⁴⁰⁷ Fer recalls Hesse's friend, the artist Mel Bochner, criticising the absence of the smaller works from major Hesse retrospectives in the 1990s as a way of 'sanitising the work and making it safe.'⁴⁰⁸ The trend of the late twentieth century towards large scale installations was not sympathetic to Hesse's small works that required intimate viewing. However, a change is indicated by the resurgence of interest in the exhibited works, supported by leading galleries in Edinburgh, London, Barcelona, Toronto and the University of California over a three year period.⁴⁰⁹ Fer has brought the lesser known small scale works to an international audience for a new reading.

A change that is noticeable both through the exhibition and the book is the presentation of the artworks. Lighting has been used to emphasise the delicacy of form and fragility of the objects, showing evidence of a change in the aesthetic approach to Hesse's work from earlier decades. In the 1960s, Hesse's work was photographed in a way that emphasised its rawness. (fig. 5). In contrast, the exhibition organisers propose that the small sculptures are '*beautiful and meaningful objects in their own right*'. Furthermore, it is suggested that '*they pose a fundamental question of not just about what an artwork is, but about the work that art does in our culture.*'⁴¹⁰ Fer calls for a new interpretation of Hesse's historical position and for her continuing relevance to contemporary art, in terms of her use of process, to be fully recognised.⁴¹¹ The next section of the chapter moves on to consider the work of Robert Morris, a contemporary of Hesse, who engaged with the intellectual problems of process through the theorisation of his own practice. For Morris, process was less a way to continue sculpture than to move beyond objects altogether.

⁴⁰⁷ Fer, B., *Eva Hesse, Studiowork*, Edinburgh: The Fruitmarket Gallery, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

⁴⁰⁹ *Eva Hesse, Studiowork*, International Touring Exhibition, Edinburgh, London, Barcelona, Toronto, Los Angeles, 5 August 2009 – 24 April 2011, (Details in Bibliography).

⁴¹⁰ *Eva Hesse Studiowork*, Exhibition Leaflet, The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh, 5 August - 25 October 2010.

⁴¹¹ Fer, B., *Eva Hesse, Studiowork*, Edinburgh: The Fruitmarket Gallery, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009, p. 189.

3.3 A theorization of process

*'Much attention has been focused on the analysis of the content of art making – its end images – but there has been little attention focused on the significance of the means.'*⁴¹²

Robert Morris, Writer, Sculptor

Between 1968 and 1970, Robert Morris became a leading figure in post-Minimalism, both as a critic and artist. He wrote a collection of essays that appeared in the journal *Artforum*, in which he identified changes that were taking place at the time in sculptural practice. In this section, some of Morris's notions on process from the essays *Anti Form* (1968), *Notes on Sculpture, Part 4* (1969), and *Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making* (1970) will be examined. Morris' writings are of interest to this thesis as he wrote from the perspective of both artist and theorist. His collection of essays from 1966-1989 was re-published in 1995 as *Continuous Project Altered Daily, The Writings of Robert Morris*.⁴¹³

In the mid 1960s, Morris was strongly associated with Minimalist sculpture before becoming interested in process.⁴¹⁴ By 1967, he thought that Minimal Art had reached an impasse because the geometrical objects and arrangements in which they were placed meant that the work could be conceived of before it was made, in which case its making became perfunctory. The solution, said Morris, was to focus on the *making* of the art work in which the conception and execution were seamless, rather than on the work's *object* character.⁴¹⁵ Morris was the first artist or theorist to examine the nature of process, a part of art practice which he described as *'the submerged side of the art iceberg.'*⁴¹⁶

⁴¹² Morris, R., *Continuous Project Altered Daily*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1995, p. 73.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁴¹⁴ Pincus-Witten, R., *Eye to Eye, Twenty Years of Art Criticism*, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1984, p. 119.

⁴¹⁵ Morris, R., *Continuous Project Altered Daily*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1995, p. 43.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

Anti Form ⁴¹⁷

In his essay *Anti Form*, written in 1968, Morris argued that the process of making had hardly ever been examined and that it had only received attention in terms of polarity: the action of the Abstract Expressionists and the conceptualisations of the Minimalists. ⁴¹⁸ Of the Abstract Expressionists, said Morris, only Jackson Pollock was able to recover process and hold on to it as part of the end form of the work. Morris therefore saw Pollock's recovery of process as a profound re-thinking of the role of both materials and tools in terms of making artwork; he proposed that '*the stick that drips paint is a tool that acknowledges the fluidity of paint.*' ⁴¹⁹ Like any other tool, said Morris, it is the one that controls and transforms matter, but unlike the brush, the stick is in greater sympathy with matter because it acknowledges the inherent tendencies and properties of that matter. Pollock's approach was to construct dense webs and skeins from flung and fluid paint in which controlled pouring could thicken, thin, and articulate a line in a way that a loaded brush could not. With the drag of the brush eliminated, the spontaneity of Pollock's drawing reached a new point. ⁴²⁰

During certain periods in the nineteenth century, argued Morris, the visibility of process could be seen in the works of Rodin and Rosso who both left traces of touch in their unfinished work. Morris observed that like the Abstract Expressionists later on, they registered the plasticity of material in autobiographical terms. However, it was Pollock, said Morris, who went beyond the personalism of the hand to the more direct revelation of matter itself. Pollock, he said, broke the domination of Cubist form through his investigation of means, the methods of making and the nature of materials. With such an approach, gravity became a tool for the production of the work as much as the sticks from which the paint was flung or the arm's

⁴¹⁷ Morris, R., *Continuous Project Altered Daily*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1995, p. 41.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

gestural reach as it flung the paint.⁴²¹ Because of this, suggested Morris, Pollock's work constituted a direct investigation of the properties of the material in terms of how paint behaved under conditions of gravity.⁴²² Gravity was what had combined with the liquidity of paint as a sign of process in the finished work. The rigidity imposed on most art materials, in which canvas was stretched and clay formed on internal armatures, could be seen as a fight against gravity. Pollock wished to move away from the painter's tools of easel, brush, palette, preferring instead the use of sticks, knives, and dripping fluid paint (fig 8).



FIG. 8 Jackson Pollock at work on *Painting Number 32*, 1950.

Photo © Hans Namuth. Image in *Jackson Pollock* (1983).⁴²³

⁴²¹ Morris, R., *Continuous Project Altered Daily*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1995, p. 44.

⁴²² *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁴²³ Frank, E., *Jackson Pollock*, New York: Abbeville Press, 1983, p. 113.

Whilst on the subject of Pollock, and as a point of interest for this thesis, it is a little known fact that related to his all-over drawings, Pollock made two abstract sculptures in painted terracotta clay (fig.9).⁴²⁴ Held in the Lee Krasner Pollock Collection, they are rarely seen or written about, confirming the absence of ceramic work from the canon of modernist art.

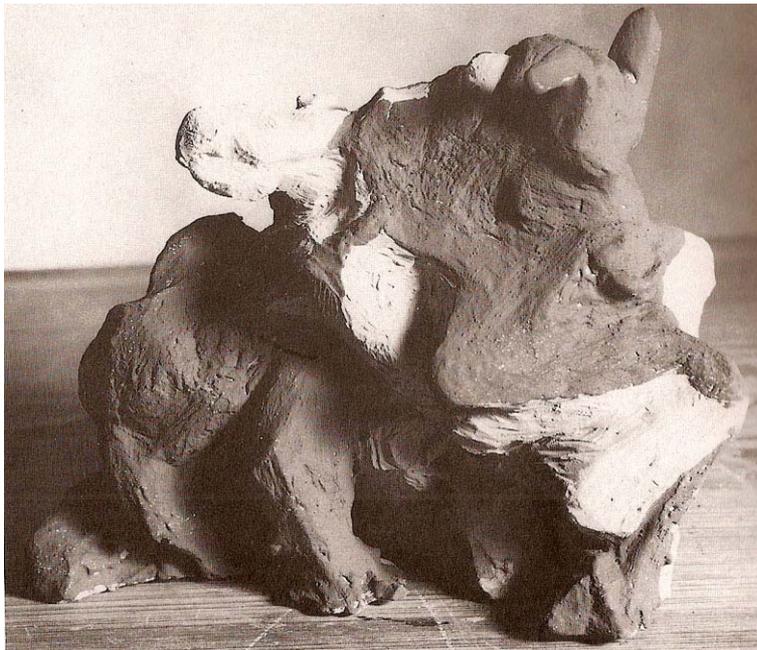


FIG. 9 Jackson Pollock, *Untitled Sculpture*, 1950

Painted terracotta clay. Length 8 inches. Pollock Krasner Foundation.

Image in *Jackson Pollock* (1983).⁴²⁵

So, whilst work in ceramic material was ignored, the use of industrial materials became highly visible in the exploration of process. Furthermore, the use of materials other than rigid materials to create artworks now involved a reconsideration of the use of tools in relation to materials, and in some cases the investigations were moving from the making of things to the making of the material itself.⁴²⁶ Sometimes, observed Morris, a direct manipulation of a given material without the use of any tools had been made. From his experience of the use of industrial felt for sculptural purposes, he observed that with soft materials, considerations of gravity were also

⁴²⁴ Frank, E., *Jackson Pollock*, New York: Abbeville Press, 1983, p. 104.

⁴²⁵ Ibid.

⁴²⁶ Morris, R., *Continuous Project Altered Daily*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1995, p. 46.

important. Morris argued that such works were necessarily casual and imprecise and the use of random piling, loose stacking, and hanging could all give form to the material. Chance was an important feature of the work; re-siting the work could often result in a different configuration.⁴²⁷ Disengagement with pre-conceived lasting forms and the ordering of things therefore became positive attributes for process-led work.

In Minimalist work, form had come to be regarded as prior to substance. In contrast, process artists attempted to reverse that priority with an array of materials that were of low value and without inherent form.⁴²⁸ As a consequence, a different way of making sculpture was emerging in which the making and the final form became one. Seemingly indiscriminate gestures of art-making were being used to this end, with random acts such as splashing, rolling, hanging, scattering, dropping. So, *Anti Form* set out to move away from formalist ideas of sculpture. It was about the processes of making, temporariness, the provisional, the diffusion of materials, maybe even the absence of a finished artwork at all. 'Form' was associated with the word 'formalism', which was part of the language of Modernism, and the kind of monolithic art that it produced.

Notes on Sculpture, Part 4: Beyond Objects⁴²⁹

Notes on Sculpture, Part 4: Beyond Objects was Morris's attempt to theorise his own practice. For Morris, process was less a way to continue sculpture, than perhaps to move beyond objects altogether. This was not a conceptual reduction of art to an essential idea, but an enquiry into its fundamental visuality. To this end, Morris employed a range of materials such as threadwaste or dirt that could not be depicted as an image or object. He believed that the art of the 1960s had been an art of depicting images. If the method of working did not demand prethought images,

⁴²⁷ Morris, R., *Continuous Project Altered Daily*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1995, p. 46

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

then objects were not a necessary or preferential form.⁴³⁰ Such an approach indicated how far Morris had shifted from the geometric Minimalist monolithic structures that he had previously been so strongly associated with.

In a move away from the object, Morris created *Threadwaste* (1968) which comprised of seven hundred pounds of cotton waste (a by-product of textile manufacture), copper tubes and asphalt lumps; the work was an array of heterogeneous matter without any clear centre of attention.⁴³¹ Morris made the point that purposeful undifferentiated perception would result in purposefully unfocussed centreless art. He drew attention to the fact that at that time certain art was beginning to use, as its beginning and as its means, stuff, substances in many states - from chunks, to particles, to whatever – and pre-thought images were neither necessary nor possible.⁴³² Alongside such an approach came chance, contingency, indeterminacy, in short, the entire area of process. The reclamation of process showed art itself as an activity of change, of disorientation and shift, of discontinuity and mutability, of the willingness of confusion to discover new perceptual modes.⁴³³ *Notes on Sculpture Part 4* was a further part of Morris's critical project to define and address some fundamental problems of contemporary sculpture, as well as to attempt a theorisation of his own practice.

Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making: The Search for the Motivated⁴³⁴

In *Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making*, Morris continued his attempt to theorise process. He argued that a variety of structural fixes had been imposed on art - stylistic, historical, social, economic, and psychological. But whatever else art was, he said, at a very simple level, it was a way of making.⁴³⁵ So, he said, were many other things such as oil

⁴³⁰ Morris, R., *Continuous Project Altered Daily*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1995, p. 64.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁴³² *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁴³³ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

painting and tool making, no different on this level, and both could be subsumed under the general investigation of technological processes. However, it was not possible to look at both in quite the same light because their end functions were different, the former being a relation to oneself, the society, the environment, established by the work itself, while a tool functioned as intermediary in these relations.⁴³⁶ The end function of art itself, then, was different from the intermediary function of practical products in society, therefore a close look at the nature of art making needed to be undertaken.

A focus on the nature of art making of a certain kind as it existed within its social and historical framing was Morris's concern. He explained that such efforts had previously been thought of as a systemless collection of technical, anecdotal, or biographical facts that were fairly incidental to '*the real "work," which existed as a frozen, timeless deposit on the flypaper of culture.*'⁴³⁷ Whilst much attention had been focused on the analysis of the content of art making, little attention had been focused on the significance of the means.⁴³⁸ There were 'forms' to be found within the activity of making, observed Morris, as much as within the end products, forms of behaviour aimed at testing the limits and possibilities involved in the interaction between one's actions and materials. This, he said, was '*the submerged side of the art iceberg.*'⁴³⁹ The reasons were probably varied, and went from the deep seated tendency to separate ends and means within this culture, to the simple fact that those who discussed art knew almost nothing about how it was made.⁴⁴⁰ For this and other reasons, the issue of art making had not been discussed as a distinct structural mode of behaviour, organised and separate enough to be recognised as a form in itself, but Morris thought now was the time to do so.

⁴³⁶ Morris, R., *Continuous Project Altered Daily*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1995, p. 71.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

Morris argued that when the body's activity engaged in manipulating various materials according to different processes, it had open to it different possibilities for behaviour. What the hand and arm motion could do in relation to flat surfaces was different from what hand, arms, body movement could do in relation to objects in three dimensions. Morris suggested that such differences of engagement (and their extensions with technological means), amounted to different forms of behaviour.⁴⁴¹ As a result, the artificiality of media-based distinctions, such as those between painting, sculpture and dance faded away. Instead, there were some activities that interacted with surfaces and some with a temporal dimension.

At the time that Morris was writing his essay, he detected a sense in which the ends and means of making art had become closer and more visible in the finished work.⁴⁴² He described this as the '*complex interactions of bodily possibility together with the nature of materials, the temporal dimensions of process and perception, as well as the resulting static images.*'⁴⁴³ This form of art making was built more on the basis of order not being sought in *a priori* systems of logic, but in the 'tendencies' inherent in a materials and process interaction. Again, as in *Anti Form*, Morris identified Jackson Pollock as the first artist to make a full and deliberate confrontation with such an interaction.⁴⁴⁴ Pollock became important to post-Minimalism as he created a new definition of surface and touch, a new syntax of relationships between process, making, and materials which contributed to displacing certain traditional hierarchies in art practice. Serra, too, acknowledged Pollock's influence on his approach to process.⁴⁴⁵ So Pollock was the exemplary artist who acknowledged the conditions of both accident and necessity which were open to the interaction of body and materials as they existed in a three dimensional world. This account of Pollock differs from the painter of opticality presented by

⁴⁴¹ Morris, R., *Continuous Project Altered Daily*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1995, p. 75.

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁴⁴⁵ Reinartz, D., *Richard Serra, La Mormaire*, Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 1997, p. 15.

the Modernist critic Clement Greenberg.⁴⁴⁶ For Morris, Pollock's work was less to do with its optical image than its process which was self evident in its making.

The disorientating in innovative art is the, as yet, unknown new structure. Morris suggests that only afterwards can art be seen to have orders and patterns, and that process art presented the least amount of formalistic order, with an ever greater order of making implied. It seemed as though the artist wished to do the '*most discontinuous, irrational things in the most reasonable way*' and for art to renew itself, it needed to '*stop playing with the given forms and methods and find a new way of making.*'⁴⁴⁷ It is paradoxical that art of the past provides little evidence that a precedent was not present. Similarly, new art is not disorientating to those who make it, and the experience of disorder returns to that of order over time. Morris suggested that other kinds of art-making focused on different concerns; the nature of colour in art-making for example would be outside the investigations of process, whereas issues surrounding process could give powerful leverage in opening up new possibilities, either as tendencies in past work, or as self-conscious methods in present work.⁴⁴⁸

A key characteristic of process art was the role of chance, often allowing gravity to shape or complete some part of the work. The effect of gravity could 'automate' part of the process when the work made itself. Morris described this as a '*controlled lack of control*'.⁴⁴⁹ Such controlled stepping aside actually reduced decisions in the production of the work. Paradoxically, it might appear that the artist had turned away from the making. However, in Morris's opinion, art-making could not be equated with craft time, as making art was much more about '*going through with something.*'⁴⁵⁰ Morris explained that if the static noun of

⁴⁴⁶ Greenberg, C., 'American-Type Painting', in *Art and Culture: Critical Essays by Clement Greenberg*, Boston, Mass: Beacon Press, 1961, p. 286.

⁴⁴⁷ Morris, R., *Continuous Project Altered Daily*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1995, p. 84.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

“*form*” was substituted for the dynamic verb to “*act*” in the priority of making, a dialectical formulation had been made.⁴⁵¹ What was underlined was that since no two materials had the same existential properties, there was no single type of act that could easily structure one’s approach to various materials.

Of course, said Morris, the possibilities of basic interactions with the materials were limited, and processes tended to become forms that could be extrapolated from one material interaction to another.⁴⁵² Materials were not so much being brought into alignment with *a priori* forms as the material being probed for openings that allowed the artist behavioural access.⁴⁵³ As ends and means were more unified as process became part of the work instead of prior to it, one was able to engage more directly with art making as forming moved further into presentation.

9 at Leo Castelli (1968)

In 1968, Morris curated the exhibition *9 at Leo Castelli*. The relationship between the studio and the art gallery changed as the art gallery became the studio where the work was created.⁴⁵⁴ For the exhibition, Richard Serra made *Splashing* which involved throwing molten lead into the divide between the wall and the floor. The lead could either be left there, in which case that was a site specific artwork in which the work and site were permanently linked. Or the action could be repeated with each of the L shaped furrows of lead prised away from the wall and lined up along the floor in a process of assembly. That work was called *Casting*. Serra also contributed *Scatter* consisting of torn strips of cast rubber spread over a large area. The art works used such

⁴⁵¹ Morris, R., *Continuous Project Altered Daily*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1995, p. 91.

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁴⁵⁴ Causey, A., *Sculpture Since 1945*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 135.

fragile substances that the forms presented in the warehouse could only be temporary; Serra's pile of torn up rubber strips were described as '*disintegrating as if from the act of looking.*'⁴⁵⁵

Whilst a specific group of works made fragility the central term, most work did look (and was supposed to look) fragile, fleeting, and temporary.⁴⁵⁶ For example, the pliable materials of Eva Hesse's work, *Aught*, consisting of four rectangles of latex rubber arranged horizontally on the wall, were used to soften their hard forms to the point of collapse. Other artists used a variety of materials to create the work – liquids, aluminium, canvas, rubber, lead, plastic. There was great variation in the size of the work with some pieces reaching a length of forty feet and the smallest only a few inches in height. The exhibition showed a strong material presence whilst at the same time having an air of transience. The audience was encouraged to think about process with the spectacle of material on the point of dematerialising. By the time that *9 at Leo Castelli* was staged, the notion of process in art was becoming a curatorial and critical theme. Despite an emphasis on randomness and a rejection of formalism, process art was emerging as an art historical category.

In 1969 Morris took part in another exhibition at the Castelli Warehouse; its title, *Continuous Project Altered Daily*, delivered the procedure as well as the work. The emphasis was on process over product.⁴⁵⁷ For the three weeks of the exhibition, Morris went to the Warehouse daily to work with the broad range of materials that were stored there. He worked with earth, asbestos, cotton, grease, water, plastic and felt without a predetermined plan, using strategies such as piling, lifting, sweeping and hanging his materials.⁴⁵⁸

Continuous Project Altered Daily gained its meaning not from what the work looked like at the end of the exhibition as the materials were disposed of, but from the nature of change that

⁴⁵⁵ Williams, R. J., *After Modern Sculpture, Art in the United States and Europe 1965-1970*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000, p. 89.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁴⁵⁷ Causey, A., *Sculpture Since 1945*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 132.

⁴⁵⁸ Morris, R., *Continuous Project Altered Daily*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1995, p. 63.

it went through in order to explore new possibilities for art making. At the end of each day, Morris took a photograph of the results of the work and stuck it to the wall. Castelli published the pictures in the form of a leaflet showing identifiable states of the artwork and much change between each state.⁴⁵⁹ The project illustrates how far the art of the period emphasised the process as the product. Frequently, the photographic record was the documentary outcome of the process. If some sculptures progressed and survived in new form, others had a finite life. A stress on impermanence was an important feature of process art and seen as a reaction to the impersonal, formalist, and commercial nature of Minimalism.

Blind Time Drawings, 1973-1991

Between 1973 and 1991, Morris went further to explore his ideas about the ends and means of process through a series of drawings which he titled *Blind Time Drawings*.⁴⁶⁰ This time there was a lasting material outcome, an end product in the form of a series of drawings on paper which were exhibited as framed gallery pieces. The first series of ninety-eight drawings were made by carrying out graphic tasks geared to the simple shape and size of the paper or by shapes applied to the sheet. Conditions which facilitated chance were established in advance, each drawing made within an estimated time, determined prior to the drawing's making and with the artist's eyes shut during the process. For each drawing Morris assigned himself a task, sometimes related to the physical givens of the sheet, while at other times based on the task of creating a simple shape then duplicating it on a bordering part of the same page. He then applied dry graphite to the paper with his hands. Eyes closed, he performed his task by 'making a mark' that would deposit a record of his attempt in a smear of velvety powdered graphite mixed with plate oil.⁴⁶¹

⁴⁵⁹ Causey, A., *Sculpture Since 1945*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 132.

⁴⁶⁰ Butler, C., *Afterimage: Drawing Through Process*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1999, p. 94.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

Morris's method of working coincides with the time that has passed between the beginning and end of the act. The act results in a series of movements: the hands make movements and touch the surface of the paper in several directions. Beginnings and endings are possible whilst the movement repeats itself over and over again. The *Blind Time* series resists any form of interpretation. What arises from the observation of one's own act is a subsequent act. The creation of an image is connected to a time structure which encompasses a lapse of time.⁴⁶² The drawings are the product of a series of acts from which images emerge through touch and brushing with the fingertips. The act and the drawing emerge at once as ends and means come closer together.

Morris's theorisation of his own practice engaged with the intellectual problems of process and its visual unfolding. Through *Notes on Sculpture*, he began a systematic exploration of the sculptural implications of process. He addressed the shifts that occur from the conceptual to material states in the act of making, especially in relation to the transition from formalism to what he termed 'anti-form'. A theoretical exploration of process continued to be addressed in Morris's writing and practice throughout the 1960s and 1970s during which he made a unique contribution to art criticism as he located the interconnection between art, language, and behaviour.⁴⁶³ His writing reflected a time in which artists began to examine ways in which language, as the primary source for the epistemological structure of knowledge, could condition the very making, presentation, and reception of art.

⁴⁶² Butler, C., *Afterimage: Drawing Through Process*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1999, p. 97.

⁴⁶³ Stiles, K., 'Language and Concepts', in Stiles, K., Selz, P., (eds.) *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art, A Sourcebook of Artists Writings*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1996, p. 805.

Summary

In this chapter I have examined post-Minimalism through key texts of critics and artists most closely identified with the shifts in practice that became known as 'process art'. Unlike the geometric pre-designed forms of Minimalist sculpture, post-Minimalist art was gestural, expressive and not pre-determined. With post-Minimalism, the emphasis on process was so great that it became the primary content of the work. Artists responded to materials using chance and accident to play a part in forming the work. In contrast to traditional Modernist demands for the separateness of different media, post-Minimalist artists investigated a range of different processes and materials in the newly identified expanded field of sculpture. This brought about changes to practice in a field no longer narrowly defined by a given medium; instead any number of given media could be used. However, materials traditionally associated with craft practices, (such as ceramic materials), remained marginalised from post-Minimalist discourse, whilst industrial materials were investigated in innovative ways.

The practices of Eva Hesse and Richard Serra exemplified key features of post-Minimalist process art. Serra devised a list of transitive verbs to generate working processes not previously associated with sculptural practice. Moreover, he explored transitive relationships in which process functioned as a connection between two elements of a piece working in tension, and on which the prolongation of the work's existence depended. Eva Hesse investigated the uncontrolled state of liquid to solid properties in a form of 'uncontrolled control' of her materials. Work could be deliberately formless and centreless, any size from a few inches to forty feet. A process-led approach often involved a direct manipulation of the material without the use of any tools. Fragile and ephemeral works were documented by film and photography, often the only record of the work's existence. The photography of the work sometimes became the artwork in its own right.

Words became a way of generating work and meaning in the practices of post-Minimalist artists such as Serra, Hesse and Morris. Morris also functioned as a critical theorist in his attempts to theorise process. His seminal writings such as *Notes on Sculpture* (1966) and *Antiform* (1969), became relevant for all artists involved in process-led work, reflecting a mood in which artists began to examine ways that language, as the primary source for the epistemological structure of knowledge, could condition the making, presentation and reception of art. The notion of process in art became a critical and curatorial theme in the 1960s.

Critical texts on process art, by historians such as Pincus-Witten and Krauss and artists such as Morris, Hesse and Serra, are highly germane to this thesis. Taking up Foucault's suggestion that the appropriation of one discourse to another field may provide new discursive possibilities for that field, post-Minimalist texts discussed in this chapter will be used to provide an analytical template for a new critical commentary for process-led ceramics. As I have already shown, this is an area that lacks an adequate critical approach. So, in chapter four, two contemporary artists who have explored process in different ways, but who are representative of a number of artists working in a process-led way, will be discussed from the context of the post-Minimalist critical writings examined in this chapter. Chapter four will conclude with an analysis of the role of process within my own practice.

CHAPTER FOUR

Contemporary ceramics from a post-Minimalist perspective

'In a process-centered analysis the physical qualities of the art object are examined not in relation to the supposed ahistorical material and /or affective qualities of the medium, as they are in formalist analyses, but rather as the result of a fundamentally contextual act of making'.⁴⁶⁴

College Art Association of America, 2006

Introduction

The past ten years or so have seen a revival of interest in post-Minimalist attitudes towards process in different areas of art practice. In 2006, the painter Tomma Abts was presented with the Turner Prize for art in London. The Turner Prize, set up in 1984, is awarded each year to a British artist for an outstanding presentation of work in the preceding twelve months. One of the judges, Louisa Buck, describes the experience of looking at Abts' work as coming *'very close to what is experienced by the artist when in the process of making the paintings themselves.'*⁴⁶⁵ Buck's response calls to mind Pincus-Witten's comments about process three decades earlier when he said that *'the virtual content of the art became that of the spectator's intellectual re-creation of the actions used by the artist to realize the work in the first place.'*⁴⁶⁶ The presentation of Rebecca Warren, the 2006 Turner Prize runner up, included a collection of unfired clay sculptures which were described by the judges *'as projecting a sense of unleashed creativity, appearing to explode out of, and merge back into the amorphous*

⁴⁶⁴ 'It's All About Process', in *College Art Association of America 94th Annual Conference, February 22 – 25 2006, Abstracts*, New York: College Art Association, 2006, p. 86.

⁴⁶⁵ Tomma Abts, Turner Prize, 2006, www.tate.org.uk/Britain/turnerprize/2006/tommaabts.htm, 03/10/06.

⁴⁶⁶ Pincus-Witten, R., *Post-Minimalism*, New York: Out of London Press, 1977, p16.

properties of the material.'⁴⁶⁷ Unlike post-Minimalist artists who explored process through the use of industrial substances and materials such as latex and lead, contemporary artists are now investigating process in an equally innovative way through traditional materials such as paint and clay.

In April 2009, a three day international conference took place at York University, England, with delegates and speakers in attendance from Australia, America and Europe. *Materiality, Process, Performativity* highlighted the critical importance of process as a means of enabling new interventions in the fields of pedagogy and curatorial practice. In the conference literature, the organisers declared that one of the aims of the event was to respond to Robert Morris' comment in 1970 '*that the creative process remained the submerged side of the interpretive iceberg.*'⁴⁶⁸ A further indication of the renewed interest in process came with the decision to re-hang one of the four permanent collection wings at Tate Modern in May 2009. The collection was overhauled and renamed *Energy and Process*. This permanent display now includes a number of iconic post-Minimalist artworks including *Addendum* (1967) by Eva Hesse, *Untitled* (felt hanging, 1967) by Robert Morris, and *Shovel Plate Pro* (1969) by Richard Serra. To coincide with the re-hang, for a two week period the Tate recreated Robert Morris' interactive sculpture, *Bodyspacemotionthings* which had first been shown at the Tate's Duveen Galleries in 1971.⁴⁶⁹

At the 2006 Conference of the College Art Association of America (CAA), the significance of the artist's process was one of the topics of debate. The CAA identified an important trend in contemporary art in which there had been a shift of interest away from the art object as product

⁴⁶⁷ Rebecca Warren, Turner Prize, 2006, www.tate.org.uk/Britain/turnerprize/2006/rebeccawarren.htm, 03/10/06.

⁴⁶⁸ *Materiality, Process, Performativity*, York St John's University, April 15 -17 2009. Conference convener, Dr Vanessa Corby.

⁴⁶⁹ *Bodyspacemotionthings*, 24 May – 14 June 2009, <http://www.tate.org.uk/modern/eventseducation/musicperform/1833.htm>, 27/05/09.

towards the process of making.⁴⁷⁰ It is worth noting that the CAA conference sessions highlight issues that are of topical interest and concern to an international membership of academics, artists, curators, historians and students across the visual arts spectrum. Similarly, the call for papers for the CAA's 2010 conference draws attention to shifts in contemporary ceramics practice which reflect some of the issues raised in this thesis:

*'This session seeks papers addressing the shifting state of contemporary ceramics. Papers should address how significant contemporary artists and their works relate to and challenge current notions of ceramics, institutional pedagogy, and the contemporary art world in general. Papers might also address how specific artists operate within or against prevailing artistic or pedagogical paradigms, or the impact of select groups of dominant institutions on the long term trajectory of disciplinary trends.'*⁴⁷¹

During the past three years, through conference presentations and published papers, I have argued that the diversity of contemporary work makes it no longer possible to critically contextualise ceramics as a single unified practice as in the past.⁴⁷² There continues to be a tendency amongst some writers to use historical links to the vessel to consider all types of ceramic work as one homogeneous entity. In the case of ceramic art that has no links to the

⁴⁷⁰ 'It's All About Process', in *94th Annual Conference Abstracts*, New York: College Art Association, 2006, p. 86.

⁴⁷¹ '2010 Call for Participation', CAA 98th Annual Conference, Chicago, Illinois.
<http://www.collegeart.org>, 06/01/10.

⁴⁷² Tuxill, W., 'Process Art: Towards a Critical Discourse of Contemporary Sculptural Ceramics', Conference Paper, *Critical Studies: Contemporary Writing for the Ceramic Arts*, International Ceramics Academy, Kecskemet, Hungary, 8-10 November, 2006.

Tuxill, W., 'A Re-Conceptualisation of Contemporary Sculptural Ceramics from a Post-Minimalist Perspective', Conference Paper, (07/07), in Follett, G., Valentine, L., (eds.), *New Craft – Future Voices*, Dundee: Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art, University of Dundee, 2007, pp. 353-361.

Tuxill, W., 'A Critical Approach to Process in Practice', Conference Paper, 2nd International Ceramic Magazine Editor's Association (ICMEA) Symposium, Fuping Art Village, Xian, China, 10-14 November, 2007.

Tuxill W., 'The Exploration of Process', *D'A*, Ediemme, Taormina, Italy, no. 73, August/September, 2008, pp. 31-34.

Tuxill, W., 'Ceramics and the Absence of Critical Literacy: A Post-Minimalist Solution', Conference Paper (07/08), in Gibson, M., (ed.), *From Power to Empowerment, Critical Literacy in Visual Culture*, Dallas: University of North Texas College of Visual Arts and Design, 2009, pp. 24, 25; pp. 126-134.

vessel, the work is described as either ‘unclassifiable’ or ‘difficult to write about’.⁴⁷³ In contrast, I will argue that there is an area of process-led ceramic work that has more in common with post-Minimalism than with functional or studio pottery. In this chapter, I will draw on post-Minimalist critical texts as a way of re-thinking an area of process-led ceramic art for which, as yet, no appropriate context has been fully explored.

Since the 1990s, ceramic practices have become more diverse, with some areas moving towards avant-garde practices. As a result, there is a need for new critical contexts; this is a rich and fruitful area for research. Whilst the solution proposed in this thesis is based solely on the process-led area of ceramics, nevertheless, it is hoped that the research will encourage other practitioners, critics and curators to investigate alternative approaches to writing about different areas of ceramics practice that also suffer from a dearth of critical writing.

The first section of the chapter begins with a look at the *Marl Hole Project*, a process-led land art event that took place as part of the first British Ceramics Biennial in Stoke-on-Trent from the 3 October – 13 December 2009.⁴⁷⁴ Whilst the Biennial was ambitious in nature, it also crystallized one of the dilemmas of the contemporary field in its attempt to bring together, as a single category, a disparate range of practices: industrial production; artists in residence in ceramics factories; exhibitions of craft work; studio pottery; ceramic sculpture; installations; one-off pieces and a land art event based in a quarry. The many different types of work had little in common apart from the material used to create the work. One of the main criticisms directed at the Biennial’s curators including Alison Britton and Emmanuel Cooper, was that there was no accompanying text to inform the viewer about any of the works on show.⁴⁷⁵ Such criticism is not unusual in a field in which the work historically ‘speaks for itself’. Of all the works represented in the Biennial, of particular interest to this thesis is the *Marl Hole Project*,

⁴⁷³ de Waal, E., *Richard Deacon, Out of Order*, St.Ives: Tate St.Ives, 2005, p. 8.

Daniel-McElroy, S., *Kosho Ito, Virus*, St.Ives: Tate St.Ives, 2002, p. 9.

⁴⁷⁴ British Ceramics Biennial 2009. <http://www.britishceramicsbiennial.com>, 05/11/09.

⁴⁷⁵ Gibson, G., ‘A Way to Bring Ceramics Back to the Potteries’, Review, *Crafts*, no. 221, November/December, 2009, p. 60.

described by the editor of *Crafts*, Grant Gibson, as ‘*an exercise in the process of making at the bottom of a clay pit.*’⁴⁷⁶ Just as other works in the Biennial had no accompanying texts, similarly, there was no substantive writing to inform this unusual project neither from the artists’ nor the curator’s perspective. The available evidence suggests that the project shares some key characteristics with post-Minimalist land art projects of the 1960s and 1970s. So, in the first section of the chapter, the Marl Hole project will be looked at from a post-Minimalist perspective as a method of putting forward a new critical context for this apparently process-led work.

The second section of the chapter examines the work of Richard Deacon and Kosho Ito. In recent years both artists have explored unconventional approaches to ceramic materials and their work has been described as difficult to categorise and write about. Whilst Deacon is a sculptor who investigates a range of different materials, Ito is a conventionally trained potter who obsessively explores different experimental ceramic processes to create installations of thousands of formless pieces. Deacon and Ito’s work is analysed from a post-Minimalist perspective. Chapter four concludes with an analysis of my own practice through ‘*Liminal*’ and ‘*Lacuna*’, a collection of two and three dimensional sculptural porcelain drawings created through process. The chapter provides evidence of ceramic work that can be re-conceptualised from a post-Minimalist perspective, thereby answering the research question posed at the start of this thesis.

⁴⁷⁶ Gibson, G., ‘Material Values from the Play Pit’, *Crafts*, no. 221, November/December, 2009, p. 12.

4.1 Process in ceramics practice

*'Bizarrely, the curators decided to include little or no text about each piece...the installation was hampered by a lack of information...an important opportunity had been spurned...nothing on the wall threatened to give the game away.'*⁴⁷⁷

Grant Gibson, Editor, Crafts.

From October to December 2009, Stoke-on-Trent, a city with a long history of industrial ceramic production, held the first British Ceramics Biennial (BCB). Media partnerships which supported the Biennial included *Crafts Magazine*. Unusually for such a partnership, *Crafts* was highly critical of one aspect of the Biennial, the lack of writing to inform the audience about the intentions for the work. Grant Gibson, the editor of *Crafts*, argued that the Biennial did not realise its full potential. He expressed frustration at a lack of information about the work on display, a fact, he argued, that denied visitors *'a potentially vital layer of understanding'*.⁴⁷⁸ To illustrate his point, Gibson referred to a series of cast pigheads complete with dog tags. There was no information on display about this installation, but by chance, he met the artist at the gallery and found out that the pigheads represented various Members of Parliament who had been part of an expenses scandal and *'who had been accused of having their snouts in the trough'*.⁴⁷⁹ What Gibson described as good, interesting, well presented work was hampered by a complete lack of information.⁴⁸⁰ In addition to a general review of the Biennial, Gibson wrote a separate article about the *Marl Hole Project*, an ephemeral series of works created specifically for the Biennial. The words 'Play Pit' in the title of Gibson's article, *'Material Values from the Play Pit'*, give an indication of Gibson's reaction to the work, demonstrating the confusion that can arise in the absence of any contextualising information.

⁴⁷⁷ Gibson, G., 'Material Values from the Play Pit', *Crafts*, no. 221, November/December 2009, p. 60.

⁴⁷⁸ Gibson, G., 'A Way to Bring Ceramics Back to the Potteries', *Crafts*, no. 221, November/December, 2009, p. 60.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

The Marl Hole Project ⁴⁸¹

The Marl Hole Project was devised and curated by the ceramicist Neil Brownsword (fig.10) and sponsored by the Ibstock Brick Company at Newcastle-under-Lyme. Brownsword said that his objective was to confront traditional ideas of clay and ‘re-evaluate the status of a material logically consigned to its dominant industrial connections.’ ⁴⁸² The project consisted of a series of experimental processes at Marl Hole clay pit to create works of art over a five day period by Brownsword and three invited international artists. Each artist devised different methods of working in their surroundings with dumper trucks and the most basic of tools such as spades. The resulting ephemeral works represented a radically different approach to the investigation of clay in its raw state. No text was provided by the curators to assist the audience in gaining anything other than a superficial insight into the intentions for the work. Gibson, whilst attracted to the unusual nature of the project, but in the absence of understanding a critical context for the work, treated it flippantly and merely as an exercise in play in his article for *Crafts*.



FIG. 10 Neil Brownsword, *The Marl Hole Project 2009*

Marl Hole Clay Pit. (Photo ©2009 Johnny Magee)

⁴⁸¹ Gibson, G., ‘Material Values From the Play Pit’, *Crafts*, no. 221, November/December, 2009, p. 12.

⁴⁸² British Ceramics Biennial, 2009. <http://www.britishceramicsbiennial.com>, 15/12/09.

Gibson's article, which was mostly taken up with photographs of the project, provided brief factual comments which gave little critical insight into the work even though he visited the site on two separate occasions. He explains how each of the four artists took a different approach to the project. Brownsword, the curator, who took a lesser role in artmaking as he was overseeing the project, made a number of what Gibson describes as 'interventions' in different places across the pit to emphasise contrasts of colour and texture in the clay; the Norwegian artist, Torbjorn Kvasbo, rolled oversize lumps of clay and inserted them into the landscape and the Finnish artist Pekka Paikkari flattened a 25 metre square section of the pit floor on which to paint letters. The work of the Dutch artist, Alexandra Engelfriet, however, is worth considering further as Gibson's brief description of her working method points to an approach that could be linked to post-Minimalist process art.⁴⁸³



FIG. 11 Alexandra Engelfriet, *Intervention, Marl Hole, 2009*

Clay craters. (Photo ©2009 Johnny Magee)

⁴⁸³ Gibson, G., 'Material Values from the Play Pit', *Crafts*, no. 221, November/December, 2009, p. 12.

Gibson refers to Engelfriet's emphasis on the use of the gravity of the clay slope at the edge of the pit to help form her work.⁴⁸⁴ He says she dug out the stones from the side of the quarry with a spade then used her body to manipulate the clay. Each day the rain ran down the slope and altered the work and by the fifth and final day, the slope was pockmarked with deep craters made by a combination of the artist's knees, a digger and the rain (fig. 11). There are few precedents for such work in the ceramic field but if similar intentions in other artistic fields are sought, Robert Morris' essay, *Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making* might help. Morris argued that there were 'forms' to be found within the activity of making as much as with end products. These were forms of behaviour aimed at testing the limits and possibilities involved in the interaction between one's actions and the materials of the environment. The body's activity as it engaged in manipulating various materials according to different processes had open to it different possibilities for behaviour.⁴⁸⁵ The elements that come together to shape Engelfriet's work involve what Morris describes as '*complex interactions involving factors of bodily possibility, the nature of materials and physical laws, the temporal dimensions of process and perception, as well as the resulting static images.*'⁴⁸⁶ Morris argues that this type of process is not based on '*a priori*' systems of logic, but on an interaction between materials and processes in which the ends and means of making become more visible in the finished work. Furthermore, for Morris and other post-Minimalists, as with Engelfriet's exploration of process, allowing gravity and chance to shape or complete some part of the work was an important element in how the work developed and ended in its finished state.

We may find parallels between the *Marl Hole Project* and post-Minimalist land art projects of the late 1960s which often used gravity to form the work. For example, in 1969, Robert Smithson worked on a project in Rome known as *Asphalt Rundown* (fig.12). His landscape intervention comprised a truckload of asphalt released down a steep bank in an abandoned

⁴⁸⁴ Gibson, G., 'Material Values from the Play Pit', *Crafts*, no. 221, November/December, 2009, p. 12.

⁴⁸⁵ Morris, R., *Continuous Project Altered Daily*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1995, p. 73.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

gravel quarry on the outskirts of the city.⁴⁸⁷ A map of the site was provided by a gallery in Rome so it was possible to view the intervention. Rosalind Krauss saw the project as a response to Morris' ideas expressed in *Anti Form*, illustrating the operations of gravity and chance as aspects of process.⁴⁸⁸

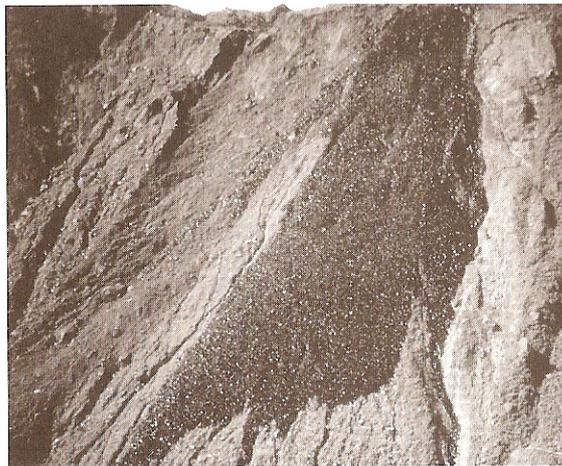


FIG. 12 Robert Smithson, *Asphalt Rundown*, 1969

Poured asphalt, gravel slope (Artist's Estate/DACS).

Asphalt Rundown became well known through a film of the event and a series of photographs which documented different stages of making the work, from the pouring of the steaming asphalt into the truck, to the moment of its release, to images of the results. For Smithson, however, the documentation of his projects not only consisted of photography, but also took the form of maps, drawings and numerous written texts that collectively became known as *The Writings of Robert Smithson*.⁴⁸⁹ And whilst the *Marl Hole Project* was documented by film and photography by the film maker Johnny Magee, no accompanying texts or writings were produced to further inform the project.

⁴⁸⁷ Williams, R. J., *After Modern Sculpture*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000, p. 77.

⁴⁸⁸ Williams, R. J., Krauss, R., quoted in *After Modern Sculpture*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000, p. 77.

⁴⁸⁹ Smithson, R., Holt, N., (ed.), *The Writings of Robert Smithson*, New York: New York University Press, 1979.

To re-think Engelfriet's work from a post-Minimalist perspective offers fresh possibilities for writing about her land based intervention in the context of other process-led work. Such an approach would have more relevance than attempts to position it with studio or other forms of pottery solely on the grounds of the use of clay. I argue that continued attempts to position all ceramic work according to material rather than intention hinders the development a body of writing for the diverse forms of work that have emerged throughout the past decade. A more focussed reading of ceramic work will lead to more focussed writing and thus help to address the dearth of substantial criticism that continues to surround such work.

With no detailed information from the curators or artists about the interventions in the *Marl Hole Project*, Gibson concludes that the lasting legacy for the project is '*watching a bunch of grown-ups give themselves licence to play.*'⁴⁹⁰ This would indicate that the project has failed to convey a more serious artistic intent beyond that of a group of adults playing in the mud. Gibson follows up his article with a comment on the *Crafts* website by remarking that the Marl Hole site reminded him of '*one of those early Dr Who sets.*'⁴⁹¹ The *Marl Hole Project* explores unfamiliar ceramic territory and it is unfortunate that its aims appear to have been neither articulated clearly by the organisers nor understood by the audience.

Robert Morris has argued that new art always disorientates; that '*a shift over time from disorientation to a perceived order in new artwork is the progress towards a definition by its viewers.*'⁴⁹² An attempt by the artists and curators to articulate a critical context for the work in the British Ceramics Biennial through some form of written text, as Smithson and other post-Minimalist artists had done three decades previously, may well have helped the audience to gain a greater understanding of the more unfamiliar work in the show. The first British Ceramics Biennial could not fail but draw attention to the longstanding lack of critical commentary that exists for all forms of ceramics practice, from craft to fine art.

⁴⁹⁰ Gibson, G., 'Material Values from the Play Pit', *Crafts*, no. 221, November/December, 2009, p. 12.

⁴⁹¹ Crafts Council Blog, Marl Hole Project. <http://www.craftscouncil.org.uk/blog/marlhole>, 15/12/09.

⁴⁹² Morris, R., *Continuous, Project Altered Daily*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1995, p. 82.

In the next section, the ceramic work of Richard Deacon and Kosho Ito will be examined from a post-Minimalist perspective. Both artists have produced bodies of work that all the evidence indicates is process-led but which has been described as not conforming to standard ceramics practices and therefore being difficult to write about.

4.2 A post-Minimalist approach to the ceramics of Richard Deacon and Kosho Ito

*'There does not seem to be a critical language that is appropriately responsive to this tide of images.'*⁴⁹³

Edmund de Waal, potter, on Richard Deacon

*'He has, since the early 1970's, tested the boundaries of what is thought of as ceramic art and has been unclassifiable as a result.'*⁴⁹⁴

Susan Daniel-McElroy, Director, Tate St.Ives, on Kosho Ito

Tate St. Ives is one of a small number of galleries of international stature in Britain to exhibit the full range of ceramic work, from pottery to sculpture. The essays commissioned for each exhibition are amongst the few sources of writing for contemporary ceramic work. Over the past decade, it is noticeable how often Tate essays on ceramic work have used the word *'unclassifiable'* to describe a wide variety of work. For example, Richard Slee's objects which are full of irony are described as *'hard to classify'*.⁴⁹⁵ The pottery vessels of Gwyn Hanssen Piggott which she admits are inspired by Leachean ideals are described as *'testing the boundaries of ceramic art'*.⁴⁹⁶ Kosho Ito's thousands of formless pieces of clay are said to be *'testing the boundaries of ceramic art, and unclassifiable as a result.'*⁴⁹⁷ Richard Deacon's process-led ceramic sculpture is described as having *'no critical language that is appropriately responsive'* to its range of forms.⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹³ de Waal, E., 'Very Like a Whale, The Sculpture of Richard Deacon', in *Richard Deacon Out of Order*, St. Ives: Tate St. Ives, 2005, p. 8.

⁴⁹⁴ Daniel-McElroy, S., 'Beyond Cosmic Appearance, The Work of Kosho Ito', in *Virus*, St. Ives: Tate St. Ives, 2002, p. 9.

⁴⁹⁵ Daniel-McElroy, S., *Richard Slee, Grand Wizard*, St. Ives: Tate St. Ives, 2003, p. 5.

⁴⁹⁶ Daniel-McElroy, S., 'The Unassuming Nobility of Forms', in *Gwyn Hanssen Piggott, Caravan*, St. Ives: Tate St. Ives, 2004, p. 3.

⁴⁹⁷ Daniel-McElroy, S., 'Beyond Cosmic Appearance, The Work of Kosho Ito', in *Virus*, St. Ives: Tate St. Ives, 2002, p. 9.

⁴⁹⁸ de Waal, E., 'Very Like A Whale, The Sculpture of Richard Deacon', in *Richard Deacon, Out of Order*, St.Ives: Tate St.Ives, 2005, p. 8.

In an interview with the Director of Tate St Ives, Susan Daniel-McElroy, I enquired about the criteria for the selection of essayists for Tate ceramic exhibitions. I was informed that the author would need to be well known to the institution, sympathetic to the aims of the gallery and have the technical knowledge of someone such as a trained potter.⁴⁹⁹ Tate St. Ives catalogue essays for ceramic work over the decade from 1995 to 2005 show that they are written by a small minority of individuals resulting, I argue, in a limited critical approach. The so-called ‘unclassifiability’ of areas of ceramic practice beyond the vessel is an indication of how little substantive writing exists about contemporary ceramic work. In this section, catalogue essays that have accompanied major solo exhibitions of the work of Richard Deacon and Kosho Ito are looked at in order to examine how this work has, so far, been written about. Links between post-Minimalism and the ceramic work of both artists will then be explored as a means of developing a new critical perspective for the work. Comments from a personal interview conducted by this author with Richard Deacon at his studio provide valuable insights into the sculptor’s approach to the materials and processes that he uses for making work.

Richard Deacon

Richard Deacon has been described as one of the foremost British sculptors.⁵⁰⁰ He is best known for his innovative use of materials and their manipulation. Deacon has used a wide range of materials for his sculptural work over the past two decades, including laminated wood, polycarbonate, leather and cloth. Additionally, in the past decade, he has begun to investigate ceramic material. His sculptural work in wood, metal and other materials, with the exception of ceramic, is made by fabrication and the use of manufacturing techniques. His ceramic sculptures, however, are hand built, the larger works made from thrown elements, the smaller sculptures manipulated by hand. As the scope of this thesis is restricted to ceramic work,

⁴⁹⁹ Tuxill, W., Interview with Susan Daniel-McElroy, Tate St. Ives, July 4 2006.

⁵⁰⁰ Tate St.Ives, Exhibitions. <http://www.tate.org.uk/stives/exhibitions/deacon>, 10/06/05.

Deacon's fabricated sculptures in other materials are not discussed.

The potter, Edmund de Waal, has become one of the most prolific writers of all types of ceramic work in recent years. An article in the Times newspaper described him as someone 'who has begun to exert an extraordinary influence...and who has begun to reshape our sense of history of modern ceramics.'⁵⁰¹ As so few ceramic shows take place in galleries of international renown such as the Tate, commissioned essays for such exhibitions are influential as they are amongst the few sources of 'critical' commentary for contemporary work. In his essay for Deacon's Tate St. Ives exhibition, *Out of Order*, de Waal acknowledges that he has difficulty finding a suitable critical language for Deacon's work as, unlike conventional pottery, it has no relationship to the vessel.⁵⁰² Owing to the unusual nature of his practice, says de Waal, a critical approach based on the vessel does not work in Deacon's case. Instead he chooses to write about Deacon's work by referencing the American philosopher John Dewey's text, *Art as Experience*, (1934). Using a quote from Dewey, de Waal explains that he finds looking at Deacon's work similar to:

*"the sensation that the American Philosopher John Dewey in his seminal book, 'Art as Experience', anatomised as the flight and perchings of a bird – the pull between the activity of the eye and its rest. Dewey stressed the repetitiveness of this activity, suggesting that in a great work of art this experience is endless."*⁵⁰³

Art as Experience has been referred to by de Waal in previous essays in which he has spoken of Dewey's 'rigorous thought' on the subject of process in art.⁵⁰⁴ When Dewey wrote *Art As Experience* which he based on a series of lectures on aesthetics that he presented at Harvard

⁵⁰¹ Sexton, D., 'Reinventing the Wheel, Edmund de Waal, Celebrity Potter', London: The Times, September 13 2003.

⁵⁰² de Waal, E., 'Very Like a Whale, The Sculpture of Richard Deacon', in *Richard Deacon, Out of Order*, St. Ives: Tate St Ives, 2005, p. 8.

⁵⁰³ Dewey, J., *Art as Experience*, quoted in de Waal, E., 'Very Like a Whale, the Sculpture of Richard Deacon', in *Richard Deacon, Out of Order*, St. Ives: Tate St. Ives, 2005, p. 12.

⁵⁰⁴ de Waal E., 'ripeness is all, discuss', in *ripe*, London: Crafts Council, 2000, p. 54.

University in 1934, he could not have foreseen how attitudes to artistic process would change three decades later. With the emergence of post-Minimalism, it became acceptable to use risk, chance, randomness, contingency, and indeterminacy to make art. These attitudes now seem at odds with the notions expressed by Dewey in *Art As Experience* in which he argued that art in which process was 'spontaneous or uncontrolled' lacked the qualities of art that was pre-determined.⁵⁰⁵ The enjoyment of process, said Dewey, was to do with the skill and intent with which the art work was carried out, thus making it an enjoyable experience because of the certainty and lack of risk involved. Furthermore, Dewey introduces a spiritual dimension to the debate by making a religious analogy to process as a creative act. He says:

*'The process of art in production is related to the esthetic in perception organically - as the Lord God in creation surveyed his work and found it good. Until the artist is satisfied in perception with what he is doing, he continues shaping and reshaping. The making comes to an end when its result is experienced as good...an artist is one who is not only gifted in his powers of execution but in unusual sensitivity ...this sensitivity directs his doings and makings.'*⁵⁰⁶

Following the shifts that have taken place since Dewey wrote *Art as Experience*, it seems incongruous that de Waal continues to refer to Dewey's philosophical approach as a context for contemporary art. As Robert Morris pointed out in a recent essay, when the conceptual art strand of post-Minimalism arrived, the hegemony of Dewey's radical empiricism in *Art as Experience* began to be questioned. Morris argues that this strand of post-Minimalism problematised the hegemony of an autonomous nominalistic and totalising art experience; it was a strategic move against the Deweyan ideology of the visual as autonomous presence.⁵⁰⁷

⁵⁰⁵ Dewey, J., *Art as Experience*, New York: Capricorn Books, 1934, p. 49.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁵⁰⁷ Morris, R., *Have I Reasons, Works and Writings, 1993 – 2007*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008, p. 124.

de Waal, like Dewey, links process to enjoyment. In a previous essay, “‘ripeness is all’, discuss” de Waal explains that because of its links with enjoyment, talking about process is not the same as talking about serious work and he is unsure, therefore, ‘*how to write about process without seeming gauche.*’⁵⁰⁸ The connotations of this approach are that to talk about process is somehow anti-intellectual. When writing about Deacon’s work for the exhibition *Out of Order*, de Waal avoids writing about process. Instead, he restricts discussion on process to technical matters such as the size of kiln used to make the work and the virtuosity and craft skills of Deacon’s assistants who execute the complex larger scale ceramics. An intellectual engagement with process, as I argue is the case with Deacon’s work, is missing. Instead, the work is written about with an eclectic mix of artistic and literary references which include Hamlet, Picasso, Malevich, Gauguin, Serra, the critic James Elkins, visions of flights of birds, meanderings, shifting clouds, and clay as an act of ‘*Ur-creation – God gave man a little bit of mud*’ in de Waal’s four page essay.⁵⁰⁹

In previous writings on craft practice, de Waal has drawn attention to the lack of reserve and ‘uncraftsmanlike’ approach of fine artists towards the use of ceramic material. This, he points out, is an approach that would be difficult for potters to use because of the weight of pottery traditions and the potter’s respect for ‘truth to materials’.⁵¹⁰ Despite being a prolific writer on ceramics, de Waal is a maker of vessels which, he acknowledges, makes it difficult to avoid the potter’s sense of tradition and truth to materials. In contrast, a lack of reserve and an ‘uncraftsmanlike’ approach to materials are key characteristics of post-Minimalist process art; they are also the qualities that signify Deacon’s approach to the use of ceramic materials.

Deacon, during a personal interview which I conducted with him at his London studio in July 2007, spoke of a life long obsession with what materials do, starting as a teenager with an

⁵⁰⁸ de Waal, E., ‘ripeness is all, discuss’, in *ripe*, London: Crafts Council, 2000, p. 59.

⁵⁰⁹ de Waal, E., ‘Very Like a Whale, The Sculpture of Richard Deacon’, in *Out of Order, Richard Deacon*, St. Ives: Tate St.Ives, 2005, pp. 8-12.

⁵¹⁰ de Waal, E., ‘ripeness is all, discuss’, in *ripe*, London: Crafts Council, 2000, p. 59.

interest in looking at stress patterns in plastics.⁵¹¹ He described how, over the past two years, he had become much more personally involved in the investigation of ceramic materials through the making of over a hundred palm sized clay sculptures (fig. 13), some of which had subsequently been scaled up into larger works by his assistants. Although Deacon is better known for his large sculptures, his smaller pieces have also been exhibited as sculptural works in their own right.⁵¹²

As starting points in his exploration of process, Deacon uses ceramic materials in different ways. For example, he might use sheets of clay like paper, crumpling them up in order to build up organic forms. Another approach is to play with ceramic materials in hand, doodling with no particular purpose. He explains that this is something he does a lot of, using it as an approach to try to bypass his own ingrained notions whilst keeping himself open to surprises.⁵¹³ Some of the small pieces are made by pressing the clay with his fingers, massaging and kneading the material between his palms. He creates sharp corners on the material as a result of blows against the table edge and holes and cavities are made by poking with sticks and knives.⁵¹⁴ Deacon demonstrates a sense of empirical enquiry through the small exploratory clay sculptures. He investigates a range of expressional possibilities in order to find out what happens when you do 'this' or 'that', in a 'right' or 'wrong' way to a piece of material.

In my interview with Deacon, he stated that a 'hands on' approach with the small ceramic sculptures marked a departure from his work with other materials such as wood, steel and plastic in which the construction is left to specialist fabricators or assistants.⁵¹⁵ In contrast, with the small ceramic works, his heterogeneous methods of making and emphasis on the

⁵¹¹ Tuxill, W., Interview with Richard Deacon, Artist's Studio London, July 31, 2007.

⁵¹² Deacon, R., *Personals*, Birmingham: Ikon Gallery, 2007, p. 57.

⁵¹³ Tuxill, W., Interview with Richard Deacon, London, Artists Studio, July 31, 2007.

⁵¹⁴ De Durana, J.G., 'Conversation with Richard Deacon', in *The Size of It*, Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 2005, p. 83.

⁵¹⁵ Tuxill, W., Interview with Richard Deacon, Artist's Studio, London, July 31, 2007.

involvement of the hand show compatibility with post-Minimalism. Robert Morris described such an approach as '*the material being probed for openings that allow the artist behavioural access.*'⁵¹⁶

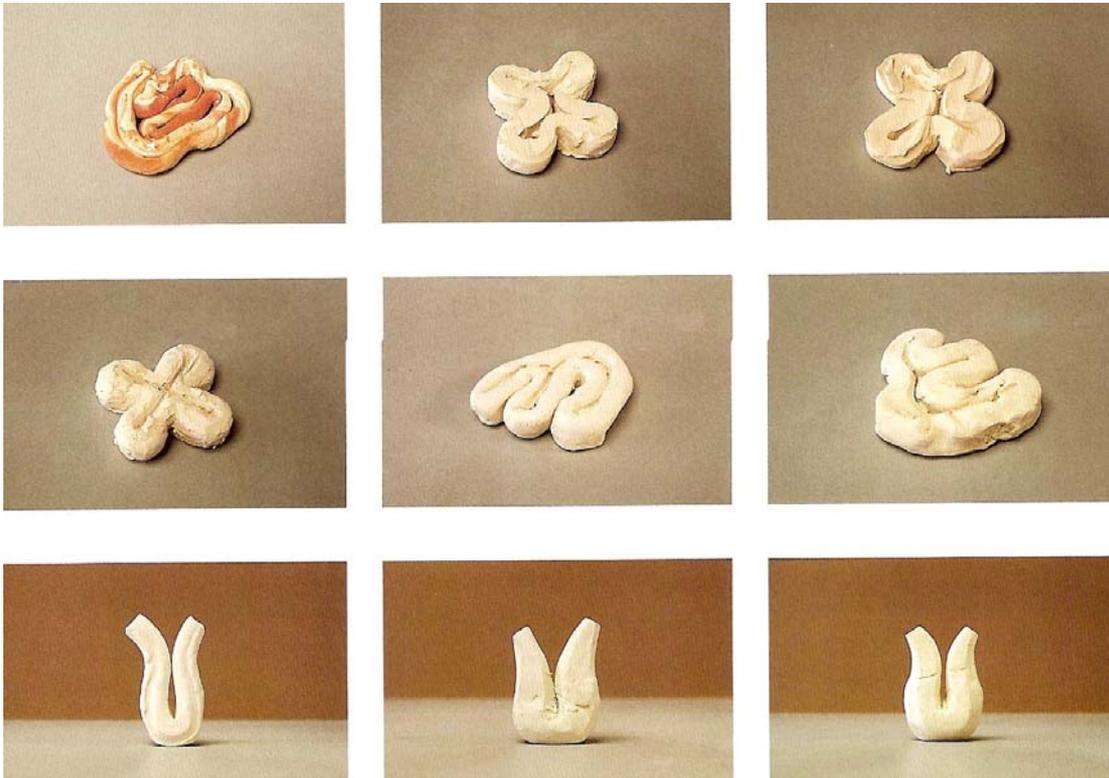


FIG.13 Richard Deacon, *Small Clay Sculptures*, 1999-2003

The Size of It. (Richter Verlag)⁵¹⁷

Deacon says that he is interested in what sculpture *could* be rather than what it *should* be, of wishing to maintain a degree of openness and potentiality about his work. The forms that interest him now have changed since his early practice in the 1980's. Then, he explains, he was more interested in metaphor; he had a tendency to use forms with a likeness to other kinds of things and was concerned with the '*looking like*' relationship. In an interview with Susan Daniel-McElroy, he says that at some point this changed when he set out to make forms without

⁵¹⁶ Morris, R., *Continuous Project Altered Daily*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1995, p. 91.

⁵¹⁷ Stecker, R., 'Monuments to the Timelessness of Enlightenment', in *The Size of It*, Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 2005, p. 91.

a particular identity.⁵¹⁸ He says that it was at this point he became interested in a certain kind of randomness, a certain looseness of form-making which at the same time was part of an elaborate making process. He describes this as a tension between an openness of form and a complexity of making which is to do with a feeling that randomness is empowering. He wished to translate this into a form that had an infinite variety of readings so that there were an infinite set of possibilities.⁵¹⁹ It is interesting to note that Eva Hesse's interests were similar and manifested themselves through many variations of the same form, as in her *Accession Series* referred to in chapter three.

A key feature of post-minimalism was the use of chance to create a work. The exploitation of chance can be seen in Deacon's *Kind of Blue*, which he describes as coming from a piece of clay '*just thrown around the studio until it produced an elongated rhombus.*'⁵²⁰ Similarly in '*Flower*' (fig. 14), Deacon speaks of a process in which the clay is hammered in the same way that the head of a tool would mushroom under repeated blows; '*the form is evolved by hitting and splattering the top and continuously cutting it until it spreads.*'⁵²¹



FIG. 14 Richard Deacon, *Flower 2*, 2004

Glazed Ceramic. (Photo, Tate St. Ives)

⁵¹⁸ Daniel-McElroy, S., 'Interview with Richard Deacon', St. Ives: Tate St. Ives, 2005, p. 6.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid., p. 8.

⁵²⁰ Ibid., p. 7.

⁵²¹ Ibid., p. 6.

Deacon informed me of the impact on his early career of Morris' *Notes on Sculpture*. In his essay, Morris argues that pre-determined images are not necessary to create sculpture. Instead, he advocates chance, contingency and indeterminacy to form the work.⁵²² Such is Deacon's approach to making *Flower*. Just as Serra's transitive verbs provided him with working notations for actions to be performed on materials, so Deacon's words inform the process in which he presses, kneads, crumples, hammers, hits, splatters and twists his material to construct form.⁵²³



FIG. 15 Richard Deacon *Venice Twist*, Venice Biennale, 2007

Glazed Ceramic. (Photo Wendy Tuxill).

⁵²² Morris, R., 'Notes on Sculpture, Part 4' (1968), in *Continuous Project Altered Daily*, Cambridge Mass: MIT Press, 1995, p. 67.

⁵²³ Tuxill, W., Interview with Richard Deacon, Artist's Studio, London, July 31, 2007.

Deacon's titles for individual works, such as *Venice Twist* (fig.15) and *Throw*, point to a use of language that overlaps, physically and linguistically, with the making of sculpture, a reminder of the use of trans-subjective language to indicate the processes required to create a work. Furthermore, like post-Minimalist artists such as Richard Serra and Eva Hesse, Deacon pays great attention to naming his work, in having title and work belong together '*in the same way as name and thing.*'⁵²⁴

Whilst Deacon remains '*one step removed*' from the craft of production of his large works in wood and steel, he applies his personal signature to his larger ceramic sculptures after fabrication by assistants. Through dramatic gestural performative acts, Deacon spontaneously splashes paint and glaze onto the bare clay with no pre-conceived plan. Deacon informed me that the activity of glazing his large ceramic sculptures was '*a very performative gestural act*' and he was particularly interested in the '*runny, very liquid properties of the glazes,*' describing the run of the glaze as a strong indicator of gravity with the liquid glaze running off the sculpture.⁵²⁵

To coincide with a solo exhibition in Cologne, *Made on Earth*, Deacon's work was featured in an article in the German arts magazine, *Stadt Revue*.⁵²⁶ Rather than portraying static images of individual sculptures, Deacon chose to feature film stills of the gestural act of applying glazes to his large ceramic sculptures (fig.16). In doing so, he wished to draw attention to the performative nature of his work, an aspect that he described as very important to him.⁵²⁷ The film recording, published as a series of stills in *Stadt Revue*, reveal the process of their making and the manner in which they were created. The images have a clear precedent in earlier process led activities such as the photographs of Pollock creating his drip paintings and the film stills of Serra's lead splashings.

⁵²⁴ de Durana, J. G., 'Conversation with Richard Deacon', in *Richard Deacon, The Size of It*, Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 2005, p. 45.

⁵²⁵ Tuxill, W., Interview with Richard Deacon, Artist's Studio, London, July 31 2007.

⁵²⁶ 'Made on Earth, Katalog Richard Deacon', *Stadt Revue Köln Magazin*, June 2003, pp. 88-106.

⁵²⁷ Tuxill, W., Interview with Richard Deacon, London, Artist's Studio, July 31, 2007.



FIG. 16 Richard Deacon, *Work in Progress*, 2003

Film still, (photo, Stadt Revue) ⁵²⁸

Penelope Curtis argues that Deacon pushes his materials to the limits in ways that have been described as inherently uncraftsmanlike, with even '*an element of perversity – or cruelty – about some of his material treatments.*' ⁵²⁹ If we recap the key features of Deacon's practice then, we note his engagement with the physical properties of material, his interest in what materials can do, his use of chance, contingency, randomness, openness of form, the transitive nature of language to inform his work and an uncraftsmanlike approach to ceramic materials. In short, these are the key features of post-Minimalist process art discussed in chapter three. From the evidence presented, I would argue that a post-Minimalist perspective provides the most appropriate critical framework for writing about Deacon's work in an area of contemporary sculptural ceramics that has been described as having no appropriately responsive critical language. ⁵³⁰

In 2007, Deacon was selected to represent Wales at the Venice Biennale with a ceramic installation. For ceramic work to be shown at what is arguably the most prestigious international

⁵²⁸ 'Made on Earth, Katalog Richard Deacon', *Stadt Revue Köln Magazin*, June 2003, p. 103.

⁵²⁹ Curtis P., *Richard Deacon, Personals*, Birmingham: Ikon Gallery, 2007, p. 51.

⁵³⁰ de Waal, E., 'Very Like A Whale, The Sculpture of Richard Deacon', in *Out of Order*, St. Ives: Tate St. Ives, 2005, p. 8.

fine art event is unusual because of the material's traditional associations with craft. This shows a shift in attitude in the past decade towards a greater acceptance of ceramics as a valid art and sculptural practice. The Japanese artist, Kosho Ito, whose work is discussed next, has also represented his country with a ceramic installation at the Venice Biennale and, like Deacon, has had a solo exhibition at Tate St. Ives which was described by catalogue essayists as difficult to write about.

Kosho Ito

Whilst Kosho Ito's training, unlike Richard Deacon's, was that of a conventional potter, for more than three decades he has investigated ceramic materials in ways totally unrelated to standard pottery. Daniel-McElroy, Director of Tate St. Ives, recalls how when she first saw Ito's work in 1992 at the Setagaya Museum in Japan, she responded immediately to the '*invasive, subversive, radically exposed installation*' of multiple ceramic forms tumbling down the exterior concrete walls before coming to rest in a large random heap on the ground.⁵³¹ A decade later, she invited Ito to create a ceramic installation for the interior and exterior spaces of Tate St. Ives.

Ito's exhibition, *Virus*, consisted of *Seafolds*, an installation of over one thousand fired porcelain forms for the large interior curved gallery, and *Earthfolds*, a ground installation of multiple lumps of fired, frozen earth for the exterior courtyard gallery. Three catalogue essays were commissioned to accompany the exhibition, 'Beyond Cosmic Appearance, the Work of Kosho Ito' by Susan Daniel-McElroy, 'From Soil to Earth, Earth to the Rhythm of the Universe, On the Art of Kosho Ito' by Yoshiaki Inui of Kanazawa College of Art, Japan, and 'A View from Japan of the Ceramic Artist Kosho Ito' by Kazuko Todate of the Japanese Ibaraki Ceramic

⁵³¹ Daniel-McElroy, S., 'Beyond Cosmic Appearance, the Work of Kosho Ito', in *Virus*, St. Ives: Tate St. Ives, 2002, p. 7.

Art Museum.⁵³² In each of the essays, the authors make clear they find it difficult to write about Ito's work within the '*taxonomic system of ceramic arts*'.⁵³³ As Ito's work is so unlike standard ceramic practice in terms of style, form, aesthetics and use of process, difficulties always arise when critics attempt to write about such work in terms of traditional pottery. A more appropriate critical context is needed for the avant-garde approach to process that Ito's ceramic work represents.

It is paradoxical that in each of the catalogue essays, whilst reference is made to the radical nature of Ito's process-led work, he is not linked to post-Minimalism or process art, a benchmark for avant-garde process for more than four decades. For example, Kazuko Todate argues that as Ito tests the boundaries of ceramic art by not working in conventional ways, it is not meaningful to judge his work against other ceramic practices. His relationship between idea and process puts him in a different category from conventional potters says Todate, and he is therefore unclassifiable.⁵³⁴ Daniel-McElroy makes a similar point when she says that Ito is different from other potters because of his investigation of what ceramic materials can do: he has tested the boundaries of what is thought of as ceramic art and has been unclassifiable as a result.⁵³⁵ Yoshiaki Inui also draws attention to Ito's testing of the boundaries of possibilities of ceramic materials. He points to differences between Ito and other potters who make functional or decorative containers and for whom clay is simply the material to make the object. For Ito, says Inui, the goal of the work is clay as '*pure material*' without the use of tools like the wheel; his material is '*an independent work on its own*'.⁵³⁶ The key features of Ito's practice that the essayists draw attention to are, I argue, key characteristics of post-Minimalism.

⁵³² Daniel-McElroy, S., Todate K., Inui, Y., in *Virus*, St. Ives: Tate St. Ives, 2002.

⁵³³ Todate, K., 'A View from Japan of the Ceramic Artist Kosho Ito', in *Virus*, St. Ives: Tate St. Ives, 2002, p. 22.

⁵³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁵³⁵ Daniel-McElroy, S., 'Beyond Cosmic Appearance, the Work of Kosho Ito', in *Virus*, St. Ives: Tate St. Ives, 2002, p. 9.

⁵³⁶ Inui, Y., 'From Soil to Earth, Earth to the Rhythm of the Universe, On the Art of Kosho Ito' in *Virus*, St. Ives: Tate St. Ives, 2002, p. 15.

Whilst Ito's radical use of process is referred to by each of the essayists, his work is mostly written about in an esoteric manner. The essay titles, listed on page 172, indicate the approaches taken to critique Ito's work, with the use of nature, alchemy and the cosmos as the prime context. So whilst Inui refers to Ito's uncommon practice of digging up clay from the frozen ground in winter and firing it in its frozen state, he relates this process to the rhythm of the universe rather than to Ito's intellectual approach to process.⁵³⁷ Inui talks about '*the process of sincere and endless creation*' which progresses from '*soil to earth, from earth to the rhythm of the universe*' into '*a New World where nature is combined with art*'.⁵³⁸ Daniel-McElroy emphasises how different Ito is from other ceramicists and how difficult he is to classify; she links him with a mystical, magical approach to nature and the cosmos. Ito, like an alchemist, she says, sees beyond his immediate reality because he has '*the power to bring something else into being*'.⁵³⁹ When Ito sees nature, says Daniel-McElroy, he expresses '*a cosmic intention beyond human perspective*'.⁵⁴⁰ The essays reveal the difficulties encountered when attempting to write about a form of practice that radically departs from normative work. As there is little existing critical writing on ceramics to draw upon for a practice like Ito's, I suggest that in these circumstances it is useful to take up Foucault's notions on the appropriation of discourse from one subject area to another in order to create new critical possibilities for this under theorised area of practice.

Describing the installation *Seafolds* (fig 17), Daniel-McElroy talks of Ito crushing one thousand five hundred thin square sheets of clay by hand to create a '*complexity of forms, from small tightly grasped folds to larger, more open softer pieces*'.⁵⁴¹ In executing the work, says Daniel-McElroy, Ito has attempted not to engage his mind, but instead to allow his body to take over and move automatically. Paradoxically, however, Daniel-McElroy takes a metaphorical

⁵³⁷ Inui, Y., 'From Soil to Earth, Earth to the Rhythm of the Universe, On the Art of Kosho Ito', in *Virus*, St. Ives: Tate St. Ives, 2002, p. 20.

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁵³⁹ Daniel-McElroy, S., 'Beyond Cosmic Appearance, the Work of Kosho Ito', in *Virus*, St. Ives: Tate St. Ives, 2002, p. 9.

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

reading of the work, associating the ceramic forms with flowers, food, cloth, and paper. This seems distracting and unnecessary; it is as if Ito's use of the gestural actions of his body and hands to form the work, as in post-Minimalist process art, is not enough. Daniel-McElroy searches for other associations for the work, something that would be unnecessary if Ito's work was linked to process.⁵⁴²



FIG. 17. Kosho Ito *Seafolds*, 2002

Shigaraki clay, Kasama beach sand. (Photo, Tate St.Ives)

Ito's process of making *Seafolds* is described by Inui: he picks up the clay by hand as naturally as possible, grasping and crushing the material. He allows the material to speak, says Inui, as each piece is made with an unconscious movement of the hands so that no two shapes are exactly the same.⁵⁴³ Kazuko Todate draws attention to Ito's actions on the clay as he presses, squeezes, squashes, crushes, compresses and twists the one thousand five hundred sheets of porcelain by hand to achieve the finished outcome of the work.⁵⁴⁴ Serra's list of transitive verbs

⁵⁴² Daniel-McElroy, S., 'Beyond Cosmic Appearance, the Work of Kosho Ito', in *Virus*, St.Ives: Tate St. Ives, 2002, p. 11.

⁵⁴³ Inui, Y., 'From Soil to Earth, From Earth to the Rhythm of the Universe', in *Virus*, St. Ives: Tate St. Ives, 2002, p. 18.

⁵⁴⁴ Todate, K., 'A View from Japan of the Ceramic Art of Kosho Ito', in *Virus*, St. Ives: Tate St. Ives, 2002, p. 24.

which he used to generate his sculptural forms, comes to mind. A similar list for Ito might include *to press, to squeeze, to squash, to fold, to bend, to crush, to twist*.



FIG. 18. Kosho Ito, *Earthfolds*, 2002

Fired frozen earth (Photo, Tate St. Ives).

The use of highly experimental processes which use risk, chance and contingency to form a work are distinctive features of post-Minimalism. These characteristics are also in evidence in Ito's installation for the exterior courtyard at Tate St. Ives. *Earthfolds* (fig.18) was made of fired frozen lumps of clay which Ito dug out of frozen ground in winter. The lumps were fired in their frozen state in cardboard boxes during which time the form and volume of each piece collapsed unpredictably with some forms maintaining their original shape and others ending up as burnt soil.⁵⁴⁵ *Earthfolds* can be compared to post-Minimalist installations that Morris referred to as

⁵⁴⁵ Inui, Y., 'From Soil to Earth, From Earth to the Rhythm of the Universe' in *Virus*, St.Ives: Tate St. Ives, 2002, p. 20.

'fields of material offering a kind of landscape' such as Richard Serra's *Scatter Piece*.⁵⁴⁶ They had no order, no central focus and a tendency to break up into a mass of smaller details. They extended beyond the peripheral vision with a lateral spread; the limits of the space in which the work was shown established the limits of the installation.⁵⁴⁷ As well as Ito's highly experimental processes for making the work for *Earthfolds*, the installation could also be seen to have the other features that Morris refers to, including the lateral spread of a 'landscape' of materials, no central focus and the limits of the installation determined by the size of space in which it was shown.

Todate is the only writer to identify Ito's ideas as '*finding expression in the ongoing process that eventually produces work*'.⁵⁴⁸ Nevertheless, he does not emphasise the centrality of process in Ito's work, but instead expresses how different Ito's approach is from other potters and how difficult he is to classify. Whilst Todate argues that Ito's practice should be measured on an entirely different scale from conventional ceramics, the possibility of linking Ito's approach to process art, or with artists who use process in a similar way but in other materials, is not considered.⁵⁴⁹ From the evidence, it would appear that Ito's work has more in common with post-Minimalism than with functional or studio pottery in which work is classified solely by material.⁵⁵⁰

This section has examined the ceramic work of the sculptor Richard Deacon and the potter Kosho Ito from the perspective of two major solo exhibitions at Tate St. Ives. Tate St. Ives is one of the few important galleries to exhibit a range of ceramic work by both fine and applied artists and Tate essays provide a potentially significant source of critical writing for contemporary practice. The status attached to the published texts, which are supported by the

⁵⁴⁶ Morris, R., 'Notes on Sculpture Part 4' (1966), in *Continuous Project Altered Daily*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1995, p. 61.

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁵⁴⁸ Todate, K., 'A View from Japan of the Ceramic Art of Kosho Ito' in *Virus*, St. Ives: Tate St. Ives, 2002, p. 29.

⁵⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁵⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

institutional authority of the Tate, provide them with a lasting influence as the words about the exhibition are read long after the exhibition is over. It is evident from the texts examined in this section that the critical writing for ceramic work has not kept pace with the shifts in practice. The writers of the Tate essays, including a potter, a curator, an academic and a museum director, each drew attention to the difficulties they encountered when attempting to write about the work of Richard Deacon and Kosho Ito. References to alchemy, transformation, enchantment, the universe, and the spiritual values of making art failed to adequately address the lack of a suitable context for the work. I have outlined the similarities of both artists to post-Minimalist process art which, I suggest, provides a more substantial critical framework for such process-led work.

In the final section of this chapter, some of the ways in which my own practice might articulate a post-Minimalist approach to process are examined, further answering the research question posed at the start of this submission.

4.3 Drawing through process, the porcelain drawings of Wendy Tuxill

*‘Wendy Tuxill investigates ways of drawing with liquid porcelain, exploring it’s flexibility and limitations, in linear unravellings of 3-dimensional white line on white paper’.*⁵⁵¹

In this section, ways in which my own practice can articulate notions of process that have arisen throughout this thesis are examined in *Liminal* and *Lacuna*, a series of two and three dimensional sculptural porcelain drawings made between 2007 and 2010. Drawings in liquid porcelain are highly unusual; the most common use of the material is for casting in industrial moulds in the mass manufacture of crockery and other functional items. A key objective in making the drawings is to investigate the liquid to solid properties of the material for artistic purposes and so test the limits of what is and what it is not possible. The fragility of the work draws attention to the potentially ephemeral nature of the drawings; hence photography has been used as a permanent record of their existence. The *Lacuna* and *Liminal* series of porcelain drawings bear no relationship to functional, decorative or vessel based ceramic work governed by traditional craft practices. Instead, the drawings are not pre-determined, are informed by risk, chance and a response to the material in the making. My intention is to explore new areas of process through the use of ceramic materials, to minimise extraneous effects on the intrinsic properties of the material and to be able to critically contextualise this area of practice from a post-Minimalist perspective in the absence of an alternative discourse.

It is worth re-capping some of the key features of post-Minimalism before going on to discuss my investigation of process. With the advent of post-Minimalism, there was a greater emphasis on *‘the behaviour of materials in the act of making’*.⁵⁵² New working methods evolved which interacted with the physical properties of materials and in which there was a leaning towards reductive forms in order to avoid metaphorical readings. There was

⁵⁵¹ Davies, N., Review, *Interface*, Visual Art Exhibitions and Events with a Platform for Critical Writing, *a-n*, October 2009, www.a-n.co.uk/interface/reviews/single567639, 27/10/09.

⁵⁵² Pincus-Witten, R., *Post-Minimalism*, New York: Out of London Press, 1977, p. 16.

responsiveness to chance happenings that could occur whilst engaging with materials, thus assisting the possibility of change during the act of making. Instead of pre-determined forms, chance was used in methods of production to facilitate new structures.⁵⁵³ The shifts brought about by post-Minimalism became clear as the definition of sculpture began to change, especially with the use of industrial materials not previously considered appropriate for sculptural or artistic use. Diverse practices, mediums and forms were linked by the same conceptual congruities, rather than stylistic similarities.⁵⁵⁴ As part of the shift, photography became an accepted surrogate for documenting new forms of temporal and ephemeral work that emerged with post-Minimalism.

Post-Minimalist artists were searching for new ways of grounding art including re-thinking the role of both materials and tools; the importance of finding a tool to respond to the tendencies of that material was a key objective.⁵⁵⁵ Morris suggested the role of the body in process art, as it manipulated various materials according to different processes, had open to it different possibilities of behaviour.⁵⁵⁶ For example, what the hand and arm motion could do in relation to flat surfaces was different from what the hand, arm and body could do in relation to objects in three dimensions and such differences amounted to different forms of behaviour.⁵⁵⁷ Morris drew attention to the distinct behaviour of the process of art-making that expanded the entire area of art practice.

Rosalind Krauss offered an analysis of the expanding field of practices in 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field'.⁵⁵⁸ She referred to sculpture as an '*infinitely malleable*' term, a category whose expansion included '*the most surprising things*' including ephemeral works of art and

⁵⁵³ Pincus-Witten, R., *Post-Minimalism*, New York: Out of London Press, 1977, p. 16.

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁵⁵⁵ Morris, R., *Continuous Project Altered Daily*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1995, p. 43.

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁵⁵⁸ Krauss, R., 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field' (1979), in Foster, H., (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic*, Seattle: Bay Press, 1983.

work documented by photographs.⁵⁵⁹ With the advent of post-Minimalism ‘sculpture’ was no longer a privileged word, but only one term in a field of differently structured possibilities in which artists were allowed ‘*to think the expanded field*’.⁵⁶⁰ Critics such as Krauss, Morris and Pincus-Witten referred to a new approach to process in which any medium could be used, and in which the properties inherent to a particular material might be employed to compose the form of the work.⁵⁶¹ Pincus-Witten cited Serra’s exploration of molten lead in order to test the limits of its malleability, weight and lack of sheen to compose the sculptural forms of his work (fig.4).⁵⁶²

In relationship to the *Liminal* Series of process drawings which are discussed in this section, it is interesting to note that post-Minimalist artists including Serra, Hesse and Morris placed drawing at the heart of process art’s genealogy. In Serra’s appraisal, says Pamela Lee, the divide between means and ends in drawing collapsed, as if the ways to make a drawing were outstripped by the sheer fact of the gesture itself. Serra, in rejecting drawing’s conventional strategies, refused to make claims for technique and composition.⁵⁶³ Lee argues that the transitive in drawing reveals how the gesture is equally informed by the thing on which it acts.⁵⁶⁴ Thus the transitive works against the neat divisions of form/matter or means/ends as both halves are understood as mutually constitutive of one another.⁵⁶⁵ She suggests that the category of the transitive appeals strongly to process drawings, exposing an oscillation between materials, forms and gestures, citing the wire drawings of Richard Tuttle as a case in point.⁵⁶⁶ Appearing almost weightless and evanescent, they consist of pencil lines drawn on a wall, together with thin pieces of wire fixed by nails over the pencil lines to create a shadow which is cast on the wall by the wire. The wire pieces hover between two and three dimensional work,

⁵⁵⁹ Krauss, R., ‘Sculpture in the Expanded Field’ (1979), in Foster, H., (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic*, Seattle: Bay Press, 1983, p. 31.

⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁵⁶¹ Krauss, R., *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1994, p. 272.

⁵⁶² Pincus-Witten, R., *Post-Minimalism*, New York: Out of London Press, 1977, p. 26.

⁵⁶³ Lee, P., ‘Some Kinds of Duration: The Temporality of Drawing as Process in Art’, in Butler, C., *Afterimage, Drawing Through Process*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1999, p. 25.

⁵⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

both drawing and sculpture at the same time, they beg the question of primacy of either category. They have a temporal element as the shadows suggest the passage of time across a wall.⁵⁶⁷ The quality of time projected by the shadows of the drawings opens up the issue of the contingent. Process art's relationship to the contingent is evident as the artist cedes control to external conditions in the making of the artwork. The temporal boundaries set up by the artist do not so much determine the nature of chance than set up the conditions of possibility. Morris' *Blind Time Drawings* function in a similar way. Conditions which facilitated chance were established in advance, each drawing made within an estimated amount of time, determined prior to the drawing's making. The method of working coincided with the time that passed between the beginning and the end of the act. The hands made movements that touched the surface of the paper in several directions and the movement repeated itself over again until the time for the drawing was completed.⁵⁶⁸

Process drawings, Cornelia Butler argues, in the narrowest definition, might be works in which the making of the drawing becomes the drawing itself. The parameters of its physical conditions determine its eventual form. Part of the effort is to generate the work from qualities inherent in the materials used.⁵⁶⁹ A similar point is made by Krauss when she refers to the physicality of process drawings, part of the effort of which is to generate the work from qualities inherent in the materials used, even to the dimensions of the working surface such as the size of paper used in Rockburne's *Drawing Which Makes Itself*.⁵⁷⁰ So great were the changes heralded by process art, Butler suggests, it was as if the line, movement and graphic quality of the materials used in sculptural work threatened to undo sculpture completely and also unravel the practice of drawing from the inside. Process art, as a philosophy about making,

⁵⁶⁷ Lee, P., 'Some Kinds of Duration: The Temporality of Drawing as Process in Art', in Butler, C., in *Afterimage, Drawing Through Process*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1999, p. 28.

⁵⁶⁸ Butler, C., 'Ends and Means', in *Afterimage, Drawing Through Process*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1999, p. 89.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

⁵⁷⁰ Krauss, R., 'Sense and Sensibility: Reflection on Post '60s Sculpture', *Artforum* 12, no. 3, November 1973, p. 48.

served as a linkage between sculptural strategies, a realm of activity that opened out to other practices, reflecting plurality of approach and the empowerment of artists making and writing their own history.⁵⁷¹

During the course of this research project, I have become even more aware of the dearth of critical writing for all forms of ceramic practice at a time when shifts in practice have meant that old divisions between ceramic art and craft have become less clearly defined. Traditional approaches to writing about ceramic work in terms of style, form and aesthetics, have little connection to my process-led drawings or to the process-led practices of other artists whose work has been examined in this thesis. The writings that have been of most use in helping to address critical issues within my own personal practice have come from key writings on 1960s post-Minimalist process art. Accordingly, I argue that post-Minimalism could also provide an analytical template for the process-led ceramic work of other artists that I have examined in this thesis, such as Richard Deacon and Kosho Ito. The positive responses of different audiences to conference papers and journal articles that I have presented and published in China, Europe and the United States over the past three years appear to support such an approach.⁵⁷²

The *Liminal* and *Lacuna* series of drawings which are examined next are referred to as ‘*sculptural*’ porcelain drawings in the context of Rosalind Krauss’ notions on the ‘expanded’ field of sculpture, explained earlier in this section. The drawings are both drawing and sculpture at the same time, each having the capacity to become two or even three dimensional pieces; they embody moments of experimentation. Drawing is often considered to have a ‘liminal’ status, an ‘in between’ status in both painting and sculpture.⁵⁷³ The title of this series, *Liminal*, reflects a

⁵⁷¹ Butler, C. ‘Ends and Means’, in *Afterimage, Drawing Through Process*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1999, p. 112.

⁵⁷² Tuxill, W., ‘La Teoria Del Processo’, ‘The Exploration of Process’, *D’A*, no. 73, August/September 2008, Ediemme, Italy, pp. 31-34.

Mansfield, J, Editorial, *Ceramics, Art and Perception International*, no. 71, 2008, p. 2.

⁵⁷³ Lee, P., ‘Some Kinds of Duration: The Temporality of Drawing as Process in Art’, in Butler, C., *Afterimage, Drawing Through Process*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1999, p. 31.

position at, or on, both sides of a boundary. The *Liminal* drawings sit on the boundaries of drawing, painting and sculpture. The word 'liminal' can also mean a transitional stage of changing from one state to another, as in the transitional states that the *Liminal* drawings go through during the process of their making.

The starting point for my research was to use liquid porcelain or 'slip' as a casting material for abstract sculptural forms which altered spontaneously as they were handled on removal in a semi solid state from the mould so none was the same. One of the multi-part plaster moulds which I made for casting the small abstract sculptural forms is illustrated in fig. 19. Porcelain slip is an industrial material for mass production in moulds of crockery and other domestic ware; it is not normally used as an artistic material in its own right.



FIG. 19. Wendy Tuxill, Multi-part plaster mould for porcelain casts, 2007



FIG. 20. Mould, Detail of pouring hole and straps



FIG. 21. Wendy Tuxill, *Cast Form*, 2007, Liquid Porcelain, 41 x 24cms

Detail, cast section of mould, pouring hole and strap.

In my search for new forms, I made a multi-part plaster cast of the mould itself, but used only individual parts for casting in order to avoid metaphorical readings of the work (fig.21).

As my research progressed I began to feel restricted by a process that was so dependent on the mould as a tool to form the work. Furthermore, I was now becoming interested in a method of working that would use the physical properties of porcelain to respond to chance happenings instead of the pre-determined forms of casts, even though the forms were altered on removal from the mould. I had never investigated the possibilities of the material's properties in terms of thinness, lightness, fragility, weakness, temporality and ephemerality to push it to the limits in those areas. To achieve these new objectives I would make a series of two and three dimensional porcelain drawings that would be process-led. I was curious to see what would happen if I did 'this' or 'that' in the course of making a body of work whose form was completely unknown and highly dependent on risk and chance for the final outcome.

It is difficult to ignore the matrix of assumptions that surrounds porcelain, in particular notions of preciousness and perfection. Much art historical analysis has focused on the status and the economic significance of porcelain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in particular the production of luxury goods by industrial manufacturers such as Meissen and Sèvres.⁵⁷⁴ However, the two series of porcelain drawings that form part of this research and which use the inherent properties of porcelain to allow the work to crack, fragment, distort and shrink during the process of making, inevitably raise questions about traditional notions of perfection and preciousness. In terms of its inherent properties, more than any other clay, porcelain lacks plasticity and is notoriously difficult to work with because of its unique chemical composition of china clay, feldspar, and quartz. Although porcelain's use for casting under highly controlled conditions is widespread in industrial production, it is not the material of choice for most individual artists and potters as it has a tendency to distort and collapse unpredictably. This occurs as up to thirty per cent of the material's volume can be lost when water in the slip evaporates as the work dries out. The distortion is greater than any other clay

⁵⁷⁴ Adams, S., Sèvres Porcelain and the Articulation of Imperial Identity in Napoleonic France, *Journal of Design History*, vol. 20, no.3, pp. 183-204, 2007.

and unacceptable to many artists and craftsmen. The majority of ceramic work is made of brown earthenware clay as it is less prone to shrinkage and distortion than porcelain but it must be covered up by multiple layers of colour and glaze to disguise its intrinsic colour. One of the most noticeable properties of porcelain is its whiteness; this becomes a key feature of the *Liminal* drawings as the natural colour of the material is visible in the final form of the work. For the few minutes before it solidifies, the runniness of porcelain slip is an immensely flexible substance enabling the fine lines of the drawings to be carried out by gestural acts of the hand and arm with the slip trailer, the drawing tool containing the porcelain. When fired at 1260 degrees centigrade, the material becomes inherently stronger than any other clay thus allowing the fragmented linear drawings to survive.

In this series of drawings, the material has been used in different ways to unravel three dimensional lines of varying thickness and thinness. The results are dependent both upon the qualities inherent in the material already described and external conditions such as the ambient air temperature which affects the drying time of the material; the more rapid the drying, the greater the distortion of the work. How the material dries is a key part of the process and affects the final outcome. In a warm ambient temperature, the moisture quickly evaporates from the material; the drawing dries more rapidly bringing extra distortion especially if the drawn lines are very thin. How the behaviour of the material changes under different conditions is of particular interest in order to allow the work to move in unexpected ways.

Finding a suitable drawing instrument that would be capable of exploring graphic line was clearly an important objective. A number of different containers from syringes to jugs were tried out to explore the thinness and thickness of the drawn line (figs. 22a/22b). Finally, a 'slip trailer', a rubber reservoir with plastic nozzle normally used for the decoration of pottery, was found to be the most suitable for making the drawings.



FIG. 22a and 22b. Wendy Tuxill, *Test pieces*, 2007

High fired liquid porcelain, varying thicknesses of line.

A number of experimental pieces were made which tested out the effects of various gestural movements of the arm and hand when squeezing the porcelain out of the slip trailer onto the working surfaces at different speeds and different heights to obtain different effects (fig. 22b). Different nozzles were used to vary the thickness of the graphic line. The viscosity of the liquid, the degree of pressure when squeezing the rubber ball, the speed and gestural movement of the hand and arm at various heights above the work surface became the main processes that determined the final form and outcome. Various surfaces were investigated to draw on. A plaster slab is the conventional method for working with liquid porcelain as the plaster absorbs water from the material as the work is drying; plaster is never kiln fired, however, owing to the risk of the material exploding.

The first attempt at drawing on plaster failed as the drawings were too weak to be removed to the kiln shelf for firing and so fell apart. I then drew directly onto a sheet of porcelain clay after it had been coated with a non-adherent wash. I had hoped that the drawing could be

separated from the porcelain sheet after firing. However, both sheet and drawing collapsed into each other and could not be separated (fig. 23).



FIG. 23 Wendy Tuxill, *Test Piece, drawing on porcelain sheet, 2007*



FIG. 24 Wendy Tuxill, *Test Piece drawing on kiln shelf, 2007*

As a last resort I took the risk of drawing directly onto the kiln shelves after spraying with a non-adherent wash. As kiln shelves are made of porous material I knew they could absorb water from the porcelain as the work was drying out (fig 24). The drawing would not need to be removed from the shelf until after firing when it would be inherently stronger, providing of course, that it had not become attached to the shelf at 1260 degrees centigrade. The shelf became the ground on which the work was made and fired; it therefore had an intrinsic role in the making of the drawings as they would not have existed without it.

When the drawing was removed from the kiln after firing, the results were surprising. Changes that the thin graphic lines had undergone at high temperature included fragmentation, distortion, warping and cracking. In addition, as the drawings were lifted from the shelves, minute shards of the drawing remained attached to the shelf surface resulting in unexpected gaps which gave further unforeseen form to the work (figs 25a and 25b).



FIG. 25a and 25b. Wendy Tuxill, *Test pieces, details*, 2007

High fired liquid porcelain.

The experience of making the test pieces and the process of removing them from the shelves marked a way of working in which process was investigated by responding to risk and chance and the intrinsic properties of the material rather than pre-determined methods of working.

For the *Liminal Series* of porcelain drawings the process of making begins with a sequence of gestural curvilinear movements of the hand and arm. The kiln shelves are positioned either on the studio floor or a low table, singly or in groups as part of a direct investigation of how the material behaves under conditions of gravity. Up to four drawings can be made from one continuous movement working from one surface to another before the porcelain slip or the shelf surface runs out. The nozzle of the slip trailer does not come into contact with the surface of the shelf in order to allow greater freedom of movement of the arm and hand above the drawing surface. The hand movement may begin on any part of the working surface within the circular diameter of the shelf. Sometimes it will begin on the left of the shelf near the edge and work in unpremeditated movements up and down, and across the entire surface until the space runs out. The work is approached directly with no preliminary sketches – the drawings are the first and final work.

Liquid porcelain takes only a few minutes to solidify, but the drying process continues for several days until all moisture has evaporated from the shelf. During this time, the material behaves in unpredictable ways. Some sections of the drawing separate entirely leaving large gaps and creating new forms and formations that could not have been anticipated as can be seen in fig 26. The nature of the materials, chance, contingency and indeterminacy are part of this investigative process; the evanescent nature of the work becomes more apparent due to the fragmentation that occurs during the drying and firing process. A tendency of liquid porcelain is to lose up to thirty per cent of its volume after drying and firing, therefore the final size of the drawings cannot be predicted. In addition, the material behaves differently in different ambient temperatures in the studio at different times of the year. The work dries out more quickly in warmer temperatures so more warping may occur before firing. When completely dry, the work is fired for twelve hours at 1260 degrees centigrade. The kiln is allowed to cool for a further twenty four hours before opening. The lines of the drawings separate in unpredictable ways, fissures and cracks appear where lines overlap, lines curl up, bow and open up to create new spaces; results are always unexpected.

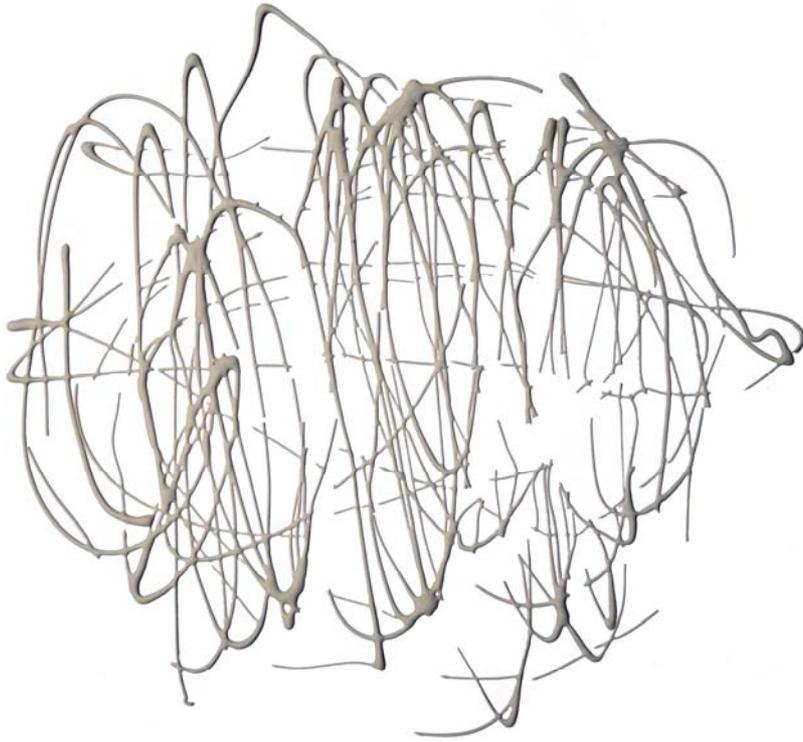


FIG. 26 Wendy Tuxill, *Liminal Series, Drawing 1*, 2007

High fired liquid porcelain, 31 x 28 cms

With *Drawing 1*, (fig. 26) the work was started from the lower left, twelve inches above the shelf, squeezing the rubber reservoir containing the slip, varying the pressure to vary the thickness and speed of the liquid as it fell by gravity onto the surface. I moved the trailer upwards in an arc towards the top of the circular shelf and continued, repeating the gestural movements from the top of the shelf to the bottom, and then working across the surface of the shelf. When I reached the right side, I traversed the horizontal centreline from right to left then back to the right until the end of the surface was reached. At this point, the slip was becoming difficult to squeeze out as the tip was beginning to block up on contact with air, so the line of porcelain was becoming thinner. In the drawing, there comes a point of transition from order, when the drawings are first made, to disorder when the fragmentation takes place and following which different kinds of ordering emerge, which allow the fluidity, solidity, fragility and fragmentation which have been part of the making process, to show through in the final forms

of the work. The kiln shelf is the only surface on which the drawings have so far been worked without significant adhesion, so the maximum size of each drawing is no more than the 36cms diameter of the shelf. Further elements of control and chance are introduced by using only parts of the shelf in different drawings, as for example, in *Drawing 12* (fig. 27) when only two thirds of the working surface was used. The drawing started at the centre left on the diagonal and ended when the shelf space ran out, also illustrating, as in many post-Minimalist approaches to process, the temporal nature of the work.



FIG. 27 Wendy Tuxill, *Liminal Series Drawing 12*, 2009

High fired liquid porcelain, 20 x 28 cms.

The dull natural white finish of porcelain is retained to allow all traces of the making process to show through in the final form of the work. No colour or glaze is used to cover the work.

There are obvious difficulties in the creation of objects which are potentially ephemeral. Chance, shrinkage, and fracturing are intrinsic to the entire process involving a high degree of risk that the work will be destroyed at different stages of making and handling. There is always a compromise to be made in the drawings. To explore the material in terms of the lightest, thinnest line takes the drawing to its limits and each drawing fragments and distorts in unforeseen and unpredictable ways (fig.28).



FIG. 28. Wendy Tuxill, *Liminal Series, Drawings 2, 3, 7, 2007, 2008*

High fired liquid porcelain. 33 x 25, 32 x 26, 25 x 33cms.

The drawings are most vulnerable when removed from the kiln as it is now that the work is handled for the first time. This is paradoxical as the drawings are made by hand but remain largely untouched by hand as to touch may be to destroy. With the use of a palette knife, it is possible to slide the drawings off the shelves directly onto a temporary surface prior to framing. Presentation of such susceptible work requires careful thought; the solution so far has been to frame the work in customized Perspex frames (figs 29/30), a method that has enabled the artworks to be transported, without damage, to exhibition venues as far afield as the United States.



FIG. 29a. Wendy Tuxill, *Liminal Series Drawings 1-9, 2009*

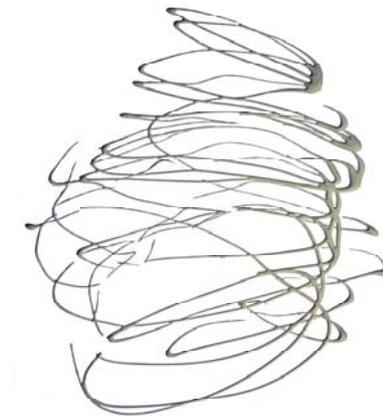
High fired liquid porcelain, Perspex box frames. Installation view.



FIG. 29b. Wendy Tuxill, *Liminal Series Drawings 1-3, 2009*

High fired liquid porcelain, Perspex box frames. Installation view.

Fig. 30a, *Drawing 8*, illustrates how light is cast on the work through the Perspex frame. There is an almost accidental quality of time projected by the shadows that point to questions about placement and site specificity. As much as the shadows suggest the passage of light across the drawing, they might also refer to the passage of time in the space in which the work is sited. Change of light on white work can create changes of form; light is important and key to the physicality of the drawing, especially changeable natural light.



FIGS. 30a and 30b. Wendy Tuxill, *Liminal Series Drawing 8*, 2008

Fig. 30a, liquid porcelain, Perspex frame, 53 x 38cms. Fig. 30b, unframed.

The graphic lines of *Drawing 8* hover between two and three dimensions. Chance and accident presented a further opportunity to explore the transient states of two into three dimensional drawings. Whilst handling a drawing in which I had used the thinnest possible graphic porcelain line (fig 31a), it fractured into two parts. The two parts then were combined to form a new three dimensional sculptural form by elevating the two fractured pieces into a vertical position and balancing them against each other (fig. 31b).



Fig 31a Wendy Tuxill, *Porcelain Drawing*, 2008

High fired liquid porcelain. Before breakage 30 x 28cms

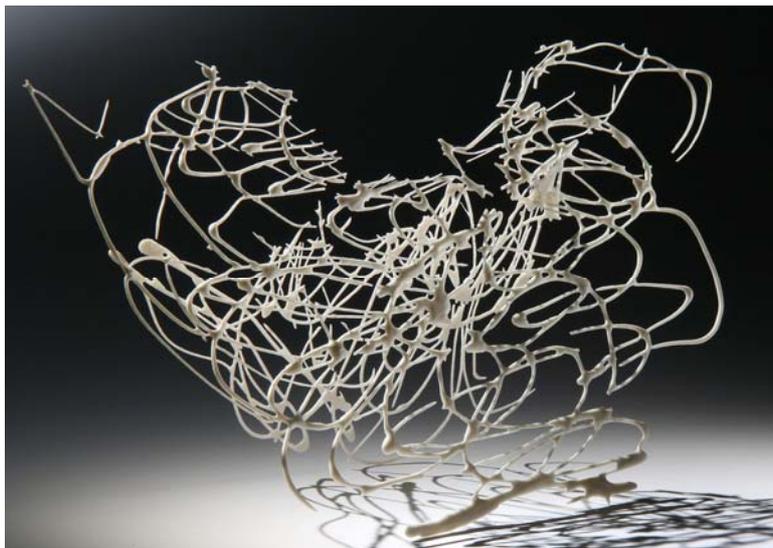


FIG. 31b Wendy Tuxill, *Lacuna Series, Sculptural Drawing 1*, 2008

After breakage. Two segments of fig. 31a combined to form one drawing.



FIG. 31c Alternative view of fig. 31b. 30 x 18 x 14cms

The act of balancing two forms against each other became the starting point for a series of drawings that could support each other and exist in three dimensional space. The title of the series, *Lacuna*, meaning unfilled spaces, gaps and missing parts, refers to the processes of making, the fragmentation of the work and the critical gaps in writing about ceramic work. The working methods for the *Lacuna* series are similar to the *Liminal Series* apart from the occasional use a thicker line of porcelain to give more support when attempting to balance the two drawings, as in *Lacuna Drawing 2* (fig.32).



Detail, fig. 32b.

FIG. 32a Wendy Tuxill, *Lacuna Series*, *Sculptural Drawing 2*, 2008

High fired liquid porcelain, 28 x 30 x 15cms

The idea of balancing two potentially ephemeral forms together is visually engrossing when the leaning elements gradually approach the vertical as in *Drawing 2*. In this work there is an oscillation between material, form, gesture, in which properties of gravity and balance and the points of tension in between are investigated. Leaning, propping and balancing reflect the transitive nature of the work. The drawing makes visual, as if suspended in a moment of time, the effects of gravity on the liquid to solid properties of the material (fig. 32b).

Unlike Serra's *One Ton Prop, House of Cards*, (fig. 4), what the porcelain drawings do not have are properties of weight to assist with balance. Their lack of weight and lightness mean that they depend upon each passing moment for their existence, emphasising the temporal nature of the work and the potential for collapse.



FIG. 33 Wendy Tuxill, *Lacuna Series Sculptural Drawing 3*, 2008

High fired liquid porcelain, 22 x 18 x 9 cms.

Drawing 3 investigates the lightest, most minimal linear forms that can be balanced against each other. The drawings autonomously support themselves with no artificial means, radically exposing the vulnerability of the work. Whilst the notion of two forms supporting each other is simple, finding the balancing point is less than easy. The weight of one element is aimed at counterbalancing the weight of the other to reach stabilisation. Each form can be re-arranged to find another balance point so it can be positioned differently.

So from the experience of making the *Liminal* drawings, the *Lacuna* series emerged leading to further developments in the work. As Pincus-Witten noted, the process of making and doing in process art led to interventions that altered and redirected the making and doing of subsequent work.⁵⁷⁵

⁵⁷⁵ Pincus-Witten, R., *Post-Minimalism*, New York: Out of London Press, 1977, p. 15.

The exploration of minimal linear forms to make the three dimensional drawings for the *Lacuna* series led to ‘doodling’ on the kiln shelf with the liquid porcelain then testing out the balancing possibilities of the ‘doodled’ forms in a variety of configurations such as in *Drawing 4* (fig. 34).

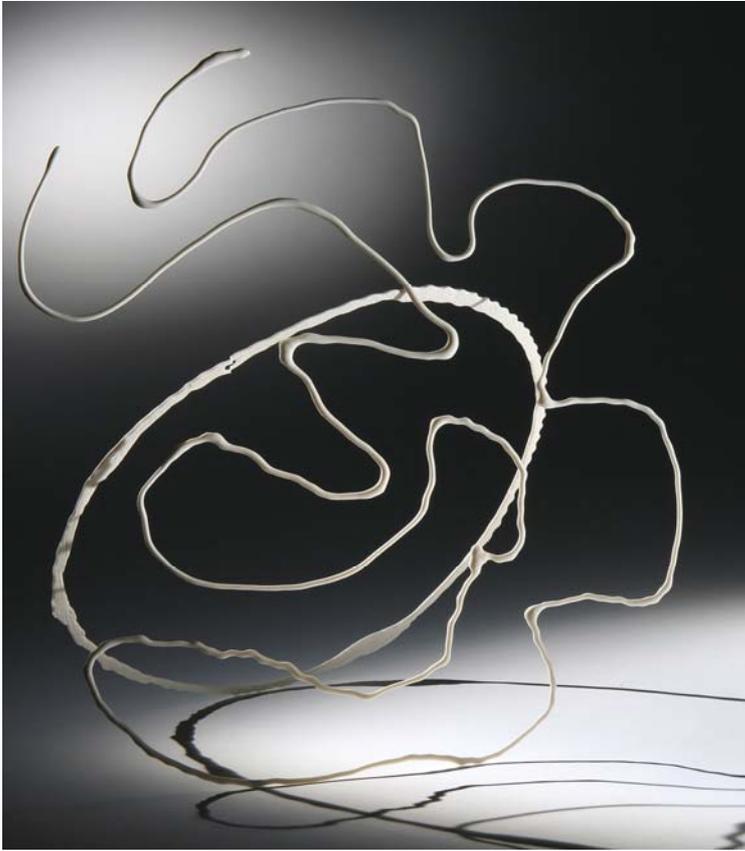


FIG. 34 Wendy Tuxill, *Lacuna Series, Sculptural Drawing 4, 2008*

High fired liquid porcelain, 30 x 26 x 20 cms.

The presentation of *Drawing 4* had a performative aspect as it was found that the balancing point could vary each time the two forms were elevated to lean against each other. Owing to its fragile nature, the handling of such a potentially ephemeral work means the risk of destruction is always a possibility. Unfortunately this drawing was inadvertently handled and destroyed by a viewer at an exhibition in the United States during the launch of a book in which an image of the work appeared.⁵⁷⁶ The photographic image remains as the only documentary record of the work’s existence. Early post-Minimalist work of a transient or ephemeral nature that no longer

⁵⁷⁶ *Her Mark, Year Book of Women’s Art and Poetry*, Chicago: WMG Press, USA, 2009.

exists is often represented by photography; Butler describes this as a surrogate for the original.

⁵⁷⁷ Morris saw the future existence of process art that was of a temporal or situational nature as ‘strictly photographic’. ⁵⁷⁸



FIG. 35 Wendy Tuxill, *Lacuna Series Sculptural Drawing 5*, 2008

High fired liquid porcelain, 14 x 23 x 12 cm



FIG. 36. Wendy Tuxill, *Art Below*, London, 2009

Trackside poster, 126 x 72 cms, Euston Underground Station.

Photography may also provide new situational possibilities for ephemeral work such as *Lacuna Drawing 5* (fig. 35). The paradox of *Lacuna 5* is that a photographic image of this very small

⁵⁷⁷ Butler, C., ‘Ends and Means’, in *Afterimage, Drawing through Process*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1999, p. 101.

⁵⁷⁸ Morris, R., *Continuous Project Altered Daily*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1995, p. 202.

sculptural work was reproduced on a large scale poster on the London Underground, a space that would not have been able to show the three dimensional drawing in its original form. The *Liminal* and *Lacuna* drawings, however, have proved difficult to photograph. So far, no photography has come close to depicting the visceralness of the work and what it looks like in real terms. Whether the photography has taken place in a professional photographer's studio, in a gallery setting with appropriate lighting or in the artist's studio where the work has been photographed for documentary purposes, results have not been wholly satisfactory. A CD compilation of artificially lit images taken by a professional photographer from the *Liminal* and *Lacuna* series accompanies this submission but the above mentioned difficulties should be borne in mind when viewing the images. How the drawings are photographed, both as art works and as a documentary record continues to merit consideration.

In this section I have taken a post-Minimalist perspective to show how process is a conscious, investigative act, drawing attention to the way in which a work is made, revealing rather than hiding the construction. Notions of process have been articulated in my personal practice in order to open up a 'discursive space' in a field in which there is a dearth of critical writing. In the making of an art work, a relationship is set up between the artist and the work in which the work conceptualises the experience of making and the writing then documents this. Making and writing are both objects of knowledge which under the scrutiny of the writer/artist, become a powerful tool to interrogate assumptions about history, theory and practice, thus empowering the artist to make and write their own history.

Summary

In this chapter I have examined an area of ceramics practice that shows evidence of new working methods in which the inherent physical properties of the material have been used to create the work. This process-led area of practice has been described by critics, curators and ceramic practitioners as difficult to classify and write about.

In the first section of the chapter, the earthwork intervention by Alexandra Engelfriet, a ceramic artist who took part in the *Marl Hole Project* in 2009, was discussed. Engelfriet used the action of her body, a digger, and the effects of the weather to create an artwork on the side of a slope at the Marl Hole clay quarry in Staffordshire. Comments from critical reviews of the event indicate that the intentions of the artists were not understood. Garth Gibson, editor of *Crafts* saw the project as one in which the artists had been given permission to play in a clay pit which resembled a *Dr Who* set. A closer look at Engelfriet's work, however, reveals that a link can be found with post-Minimalism. If Morris' reading of post-minimalism, that the activity of making was used to test the possibilities of the artist's actions and the materials of the environment, is applied to Engelfriet's work, we begin to understand her intentions at the Marl Hole clay pit. The use of her body, of chance, gravity and the weather to form craters on the slope, find parallels with the earthworks of the 1960s, such as Robert Smithson's *Asphalt Rundown*. Full documentation of artworks, often by artists themselves, was intrinsic to post-Minimalism through film, photography and numerous texts. Whilst the *Marl Hole Project* was filmed as it was in progress, there was no substantial textual analysis for any of the work in the first British Ceramics Biennial including the *Marl Hole Project*. This was a major criticism of the event, holding back full appreciation of the work.

In the second section of the chapter I examined the ceramic work of Richard Deacon and Kosho Ito. Deacon and Ito are amongst the growing number of fine and applied artists who have developed an interest in the properties of ceramic material for an investigation of process to

make artwork. This interest was evident in two major solo ceramic exhibitions by both artists at Tate St.Ives, Richard Deacon's *Out of Order* and Kosho Ito's *Virus*. Deacon's use of the inherent physical properties of material to form his work is a key feature of post-Minimalism as I explained in chapter three. The potter Edmund de Waal, however, takes a different approach to Deacon's work. As the essayist for *Out of Order* he claimed that there was no appropriate critical language for Deacon's body of ceramic work. Nevertheless, he did quote a reference from John Dewey's *Art as Experience* (1934) to speak about his response to Deacon's work. I argue that it is contradictory to link Dewey's spiritual and idealistic ideas about artmaking with the heterogeneous methods and process-led use of risk and chance that are central to Deacon's work. As Morris pointed out in a recent essay, Dewey's ideological totalising approach to artmaking was called into question as far back as the 1960s with the arrival of post-Minimalism. The use of a text considered outmoded five decades ago as a context for avant-garde ceramic work demonstrates the inadequacy of the contemporary critical debate. Critical writing to support new areas of ceramic work have not kept pace with the shifts in practice.

Kosho Ito's work raises similar issues. In the exhibition essays that accompanied *Virus*, Ito was described as unclassifiable in ceramic terms. The unconventional processes used for the *Virus* installations included grasping, folding, twisting and squeezing fifteen hundred pieces of clay by hand. Whilst the exhibition essayists acknowledged the importance of process in realising Ito's work, they declared that he was so unlike other ceramic artists that his work should be measured on an entirely different scale; however, no-one suggested what that scale might be. The transitive nature of Ito's practice has identifiable links with post-Minimalism, for example as with Serra's use of his transitive *Verb List* as a way of applying various activities to unspecified materials: to roll, to bend, to tear etc. But the essayists on Ito's work, after acknowledging the difficulty of writing about it, chose to use the more ill-defined and nebulous links with the cosmos, the universe and nature, rather than, as I have suggested, a more apt context of process art.

The third section of this chapter has examined ways in which my own practice might articulate a post-Minimalist approach to ceramic process through a series of two and three dimensional sculptural drawings in porcelain. The *Liminal* and *Lacuna* drawings bear no relationship to traditional ceramic practices, but instead use process-led methods to generate work from the qualities inherent in the materials used, such as the cracking, warping and distortion that is a natural characteristic of porcelain slip as it dries, but which in normative ceramic work is avoided as an undesirable trait. The *Liminal* and *Lacuna* Drawings are worked in unpremeditated movements on a circular shelf until the space runs out. Process drawings, argues Butler, are works in which the making of the drawing becomes the drawing itself and in which the parameters of its physical conditions determine its eventual form. Similarly, Krauss highlights the physicality of process drawings in which part of the effort is to generate the work from the properties inherent to the materials used, even to restrictions of the size of working surface. A dearth of critical writing to substantiate my practice became part of the rationale for this research project and the writings that have been of most use in addressing critical issues related to my practice have come from key texts on post-Minimalism. Notions of process within my personal practice have been articulated to open up a discursive space in a field that is reticent about debating an intellectual approach to process.

The diverse practices discussed in this chapter are all linked to post-Minimalist process art and can be seen to have a connection through the artist's use of process to form the outcome of the work. So, Engelfriet's earthwork intervention, Deacon's sculptural ceramics, Ito's ceramic installations and the *Liminal* and *Lacuna* process drawings are diverse practices, but just as Pincus-Witten maintained that the diverse practices of post-Minimalism were linked by the same conceptual congruities rather than by stylistic similarities, I also argue that the process-led areas of practice identified in this chapter are similarly linked and are part of the same discourse on process.

Conclusion

To conclude, there will be a summary of key aspects of the review of the existing literature and an evaluation of the contribution to knowledge that is central to this thesis. Finally, ways in which this research may be taken forward in order to advance knowledge in the subject will be suggested.

Within this thesis I have investigated ways in which the dearth of critical discourse surrounding all forms of ceramic practice has been affected by a number of complex factors. A methodological approach based on Michel Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge* has been used to explore the circumstances surrounding the formation of what has constituted a discourse for the field of ceramics from 1940 to 2010. Foucault's philosophical approach to discourse examines what constitutes knowledge in a field and how the discourse of that field can be controlled and influenced by relationships of power and institutional hierarchies. A further key element of Foucault's approach proposes that a new critical language may emerge from the appropriation of discourses from different fields in order to provide new interpretations for subject areas that are not yet theoretically mapped out. This has been used as a methodological approach to investigate how process-led sculptural ceramics may be re-conceptualised from a post-Minimalist perspective.

An important aspect of this research has therefore been to examine critical texts on post-Minimalist process-led art of the 1960's as a means of developing a new critical approach for process-led contemporary ceramic art, frequently described as unclassifiable and difficult to write about. I have examined the ceramic work of Richard Deacon and Kosho Ito in order to demonstrate how the ideas presented above might be applied to contemporary process-led ceramic work. Finally, I have shown ways in which my personal practice, through a series of two and three dimensional sculptural porcelain drawings, specifically addresses process-led methods to form the outcome of the work.

It is worth tracking the critical trajectory taken by this research project. The argument began by considering the dearth of substantial critical discourse in the field of ceramics practice from the post-war years to the present day. Ceramic work for most of this period has been written about in an untheorised way, as a single practice informed by Bernard Leach's *A Potter's Book*, with the vessel as the crux of understanding. Radically different ceramic practices have emerged within the past two decades that cannot be contextualised within the normative terms of the vessel. The paucity of critical writing to inform departures from traditional practice has become more evident.

Michel Foucault's ideas on the origins of discourse from *The Archaeology of Knowledge* have proven a useful tool in this thesis. Foucault's methods shed light on how the rules of the formation of discourse are established and define the conditions under which they are brought into existence. He shows how ways of speaking are invested in a system of exclusions and values in which certain types of knowledge are marginalised, and ways in which unwritten rules often associated with institutions or sites of power can have an effect on individuals and their thinking. Foucault's methods bring awareness that at any given time there are constraints that control the production of discourse in the way that it is formed, organised and re-distributed according to certain procedures that follow internal rules and access to knowledge. Just as Foucault argues, it can be seen in the small field of ceramics that discourse establishes networks of power-knowledge relationships that benefit certain sections of the field that have been able to establish their own particular discursive positions that function to maintain their privileged status.

I do have a point of disagreement with Foucault in his assertion that individual authors and texts have less relevance in the formation of discourse than the organisations and institutions from which the discourses emerge. As I have shown, for more than half a century, ceramics practice was dominated by the ideological approach set out by Bernard Leach in *A Potter's Book*, a text which dictated the standards of production for ceramic work throughout the second

half of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, Foucault's methodology has been of use in providing a way of understanding how knowledge is produced and maintained in circulation through different institutions and practices. Furthermore, a key element of Foucault's methodology that has been most helpful to this thesis is his proposal that previously formulated statements may be re-written and re-interpreted to form new criticism and commentary for an under-theorised area of practice which is without its own discourse.

In this way, post-Minimalist texts by Krauss, Morris and Pincus-Witten have been taken up and used as a critical template for a new discursive approach to process-led contemporary sculptural ceramics.

The thesis first considered how Leach's ideology was able to dominate the ceramics field for five decades and successfully repress dissenters through a well connected network of influential patrons who supported his idealistic views on the spiritual and therapeutic value of craft. We saw how the Elmhirsts, who funded *A Potter's Book*, used their financial backing in the 1950s and 1960s to espouse Leach's views at a series of high profile international events that boosted his reputation and enabled him to acquire a position of unprecedented authority in the field. We also saw how practitioners with a style that Leach disapproved of were singled out for criticism. He disliked any work by art school trained potters; he thought art school training encouraged a loss of craft tradition, promoted too much individuality, was over intellectualised and had insufficient respect for the common standards he thought every potter should work to. Such was Leach's power that his disapproval was detrimental to any work that resisted his orthodoxy. However, by the 1990s, a decade after his death, avant-garde ceramics were coming to prominence in a wide range of exhibitions.

During the rise of critical theory in the 1970s and 1980s, ceramics, unlike other visual art practices, did not develop a canon of critical writing. Leach's dismissal of art school education sent out a powerful message that an intellectual approach to pottery was unnecessary and unwelcome. Paradoxically, we see that even within art schools, critical and contextual studies

on ceramics courses were not included in the curriculum. As Poncelet reflects on her own experience on both undergraduate and postgraduate ceramic courses in the 1960s and 1970s, including at the Royal College of Art, techniques were taught without reference to a philosophical or theoretical structure.

As ceramic work began to change and develop in the 1980s and 1990s, the absence of a critical context for new attitudes to practice became a concern. Whilst practitioners and writers were calling for the development of a critical approach, there was hostility from traditionalist elements in the field for whom critical discourse was an alien concept in what had always been a 'silent' practice. Dormer argued that critical theory had seriously damaged art and would do the same for craft. He proposed that there were only two ways of considering ceramic work: either as functional or decorative craft, neither of which needed a critical approach. He rejected the notion of any form of conceptual, artistic or sculptural work. Dormer, the author of a number of well known books on craft in the 1980s and 1990s was a highly influential critic who regularly wrote reviews in *Crafts*. His outright rejection of fine art ceramics and unsympathetic attitude towards the notion of critical theory undermined confidence and inhibited avant-garde approaches to ceramic work for many years. His conservative views dominated the field until his death in 1996 after which time the debate became less polemical and the need for a critical approach to practice became the mainstream rather than the minority view.

Difficulties arise for a field that is built on habitual patterns, that is so used to the same habits and behaviours that it is not possible to shift into a mode that allows the solving of problems that habitual structures cannot address. After Leach's prolonged domination, many potters found it difficult to think in terms other than those underpinned by the certainties of *A Potter's Book*. Dormer's contribution to the debate reinforced the resistance of traditionalists towards change. The catalogue essays for the exhibitions *The Raw and the Cooked* reveal the opposing standpoints of the co-curators, Margetts and Britton, and the extent of their

disagreement over Leach's contribution to twentieth century ceramics. For Britton, Leach was the prime craft philosopher. She argued that even in the early 1990s, most ceramic work continued to be informed by *A Potter's Book*. For Margetts, however, the work in *The Raw and the Cooked* brought recognition to non vessel-based ceramics that finally came out of the black hole to which they had been relegated by decades of dominant Orientalist pottery. The views of Margetts and Britton neatly epitomise the polemical debates of the time.

Critical reviews of the *Raw and the Cooked* drew attention to what were described by Vaizey as flaws in the exhibition. The main criticism was that the premise on which the exhibition was based was confused and that the show should have gone beyond the medium and its use to what was being done with it. Vaizey complained about the lack of critical vocabulary to describe the work. This point is germane; the expectation is that once ceramic work is presented as sculpture or fine art, a critical context is expected. Vaizey's criticism occurred in 1993, just as practices in the field were beginning to change. As I show in this thesis, complaints about a lack of critical discourse, which begin during this period, continue to the present day with depressing regularity. The same complaint occurred most recently at the British Ceramics Biennial (2009) for which no contextual writing was provided for any of the works in the exhibition. The problem is deep-seated; in 2008, Kessler, an examiner, wrote a letter to Ceramic Review expressing concern at the growing seriousness of the increasingly poor quality of the theoretical work presented to him by ceramics and glass students. There has been little significant progress in critical writing of a high standard for any area of ceramics practice since the debate began in the 1990s. Furthermore, Kessler's comments indicate that institutions that teach ceramics courses are not adequately addressing the issue in critical and contextual studies modules.

Robinson's comments in the essay for *Pandora's Box* provide another perspective of the debate. Whilst calling for ceramic objects to be classified as art rather than craft, he nevertheless wanted to distance ceramic work from fine art which he described as being weighed down by a

baggage train of theories. Whilst Robinson was adamant that the work in *Pandora's Box* could only be considered as art, he said that this work was different from fine art because of the craft skills needed; a theoretical context was therefore definitely not necessary. In contrast, Dormer's reasons for rejecting critical theory were different. He argued that ceramics could never be anything other than decorative or functional craft and that was why a critical context was not needed. The different perspectives of Dormer and Robinson illustrate the complexity of the debate.

It is apparent that since the end of the 1990s, the relationship between theory and practice has been debated more earnestly. A conference at the University of East Anglia in 1998 addressed the issue in a more focussed way and the publication of the conference proceedings, *Ideas in the Making, Practice in Theory*, took the debate to a wider audience. There were increasing calls for practitioners to become involved in developing a critical context for their own practice, with Stair warning that if they did not control their own critical agenda they would become further marginalised. The siting of the conference at an academic institution reflected a significant departure from the Leachean years of hostility to academia.

The year 2000 saw the launch of the first online academic peer reviewed ceramics journal, *Interpreting Ceramics*. Supported by four universities, the editorial board's objective was to develop a research-led critical context for all types of ceramics practice. Whilst this was an innovative step in a field traditionally thought of as 'theory-free', the structure of the thirty-member editorial board and six-member editorial team indicated a strongly hierarchical nature to the journal. Furthermore, the board's written criteria for the acceptance of articles for publication showed a highly regulated system with complex rules that authors would need to fulfil before acceptance. Such tightly defined rules show the controls that regulate the voices that are heard in the journal and they carry the potential for silencing those voices that may be in conflict with the editorial board's agenda.

A review of the papers from the journal's first decade reveals that the content has been dominated by aspects of historical and vessel based pottery; critical papers on contemporary topics make up only a small minority of the overall content. Whilst an individual issue of the journal was devoted to a writing competition for contemporary practitioners, such an event has never been repeated. A closer examination of the journal's content shows a significant number of papers written by members of the editorial team or board compared to authors with no institutional connection; there appears a preponderance for the journal to circulate its own writing. At the end of the first decade, *Interpreting Ceramics* is, pre-dominantly, an archive for historical aspects of pottery, rather than a forum for informed research-led contemporary critical debate. It represents, therefore, a missed opportunity.

Chapter two looked at organisational approaches to the development of ceramic discourse from 1979 onwards. Two international organisations, The Ceramic Art Foundation and Think Tank, specifically set up to develop a body of critical writing for ceramic work, were examined. The Ceramic Art Foundation, (CAF), founded in the United States by Garth Clark, held eight international symposia from 1979 to 1999. Clark established a powerful role for himself within an organisation in which his own preferences determined whose voices were heard and whose were silenced. At the final symposium in Amsterdam in 1999, Clark concluded that there remained a missing core to ceramic scholarship dealing with language that the organisation had been unable to address. This is the crux of an issue that has dominated the period examined in this thesis. I suggest that one of the reasons for the failure to progress this issue is the hierarchical nature of the field alongside the network of power structures that continue to control the debate. Foucault provides a reminder that the origins of knowledge are always tied to power structures. The CAF was an organisation that operated on the personal preferences of the founder as a way of protecting his own ideological stance. Similar issues arise with the organisational structure of Think Tank, the second organisation examined in chapter two. At its commencement in 2005, Think Tank's founder, Gabi Dewald, selected all nine members of the

group. The membership has remained largely static since then with new members admitted by invitation only. It is apparent from a recent paper by Dewald, published on Think Tank's website, that she has attempted to restrict areas of debate within the group. Expressing strong disapproval of the negative influences of fine art on contemporary craft, she proposes that any work with fine art influences should be excluded from Think Tank's future debates and exhibitions. Foucault makes the point that the protocols and procedures of private organisations are less transparent than public institutions; they are also more dependent on the particular preferences of the individuals who set them up. This is apparent with Clark and the Ceramic Art Foundation, and Dewald and Think Tank; ideas that do not fit in with the dominant views of the institutional hierarchy are silenced.

As I have shown in this thesis, ceramics is a field of exclusions, rejections and controls, starting with Leach and his exclusion of art school potters, Dormer and his rejection of non-craft ceramics, Robinson and his dismissal of fine art theory, the tightly defined rules and hierarchical structure of *Interpreting Ceramics*, the exclusions and controls of the CAF, and the elite coterie of Think Tank. It is possible to add to this list the influential post-Minimalist critic Robert Pincus-Witten who refused to write about ceramic work because he considered it 'arty-craft' and without a structured theory of art. Foucault argues that the production of discourse is controlled, selected, organized and re-distributed according to a certain number of procedures which follow external controls and internal rules which regulate access to knowledge. The rules which classify discourse strategically maintain borders between different disciplines as we see in Pincus-Witten's exclusion of ceramic work.

The Tate Liverpool exhibition *A Secret History of Clay* in 2004 showed further evidence of exclusions in the field. The exhibition presented a hundred year survey of the use of clay by both fine and applied artists. Whilst the curators underlined past exclusions of ceramic work from the canon of modern art, this seemed ironical as the major criticism of the exhibition itself focussed on the curators' own exclusions from within the ceramics field, including the paucity

of women artists represented in the exhibition. The other major criticism related to the dominant role of vessel based ceramics on show, to the exclusion of many other forms of work. Speakers at the exhibition's symposium challenged the single history of ceramics presented by the curators, accusing them of nuanced selectivity. Lucie-Smith and Margetts pointed out that *A Secret History of Clay* was only one of the possible histories of twentieth century ceramics. Nevertheless, it is the one that emerged with the institutional authority of the Tate. The curators presented a selective narrative which edited out areas that did not fit in with their own version of ceramic history. The adviser to the exhibition, Edmund de Waal, is one of the most influential figures in the field; his prominent role in the exhibition draws attention to the network of influential figures whose names crop up on a regular basis in the small field of ceramics. For example, de Waal is a member of the editorial board of *Interpreting Ceramics*, he is also a member of *Think Tank* and a catalogue essayist for Tate St.Ives; Garth Clark is a member of the editorial board of *Interpreting Ceramics* and founder of the CAF; Gabi Dewald is a member of the editorial board of *Interpreting Ceramics* and founder of Think Tank; Tanya Harrod is a member of the editorial board of *Interpreting Ceramics* and Think Tank. Dewald, Harrod and de Waal have each been invited by Clark to speak at past CAF symposia. It is another reminder of Foucault's argument that discourses establish networks of power-knowledge relationships that benefit certain sections of the field whilst reinforcing their own privileged positions.

If the critical perspective set out in the literature review is acknowledged, it is possible to identify a set of critical and conceptual gaps filled by this research. This thesis represents an attempt to address a dearth of critical discourse in the area of process-led ceramics by means of a re-conceptualisation of contemporary sculptural ceramics from a post-Minimalist perspective. I have identified similarities between the process-led explorations of post-Minimalist artists of the 1960s, around which a substantial body of critical writing emerged, and the process-led investigations of ceramic materials by the artists Richard Deacon and Kosho Ito, both of whom have been described as unclassifiable and difficult to write about.

Whilst Pincus-Witten argued that post-Minimalism could theoretically include any medium not conventionally associated with artistic practices, he nevertheless specifically excluded ceramic material because of the medium's craft associations and lack of critical theory. Paradoxically, I now suggest that the post-Minimalist writings of Pincus-Witten, Krauss and Morris can provide an analytical template for a new critical approach to process-led ceramic work. Pincus-Witten pointed out that when post-Minimalist artists were working with materials, the actual doing could give rise to numerous variations and such encounters could constantly alter and re-direct the act of making. Morris proposed that there were forms to be found in the activity of making as much as within the end products. Such forms of behaviour, he said, were aimed at testing the limits and interactions between one's actions and the materials. Morris argued that through the exploration of process, artists were doing the most irrational things in the most reasonable way. Krauss drew attention Richard Serra's *Verb List*, an inventory of action verbs which could be used as linguistic equivalents to tasks and therefore generators of art forms.

de Waal has described Deacon's work as a difficult body of work to critique as it is not overtly referential to the vessel. However, if instead the focus is on Deacon's engagement with the properties of his materials, his interest in what materials can do and his use of chance, contingency and the transitive nature of language to inform his work, these are key features of post-Minimalism that can provide a new perspective for Deacon's work. Similarly, whilst Ito's work has been described as unlike any other in the ceramics field, it is apparent from the installations *Seafolds* and *Earthfolds* that there is a transitive nature to his practice. His process-led approach to twisting, crushing, folding, and pressing over a thousand clay squares as well as the digging up of lumps of frozen earth and firing them in cardboard boxes demonstrates an avant-garde approach to materials that can be linked to post-Minimalism. Just as post-Minimalist artists departed from traditional practices to incorporate chance and accident into their art making, Ito and Deacon have done the same, bringing elements of chaos and surprise to their work. Their uncraftsmanlike approach to the use of ceramic materials has more to do with post-Minimalist attitudes than to traditional ceramic practices.

My own art practice has been made in line with the critical agenda set out in this thesis. In the *Liminal* series of liquid porcelain drawings, the inherent properties of porcelain slip, such as a tendency to warp, crack and distort during the drying and firing process, are allowed to occur in ways which, in standard ceramic practices, would mean rejection of the work. The unpredictable behaviour of the material together with chance, contingency and indeterminacy are a key part of my conscious investigative exploration of process and which draw attention to the ways in which the work has been made. Porcelain, a value laden material, has a matrix of assumptions in which historical associations traditionally concentrate on status, economic significance, preciousness and perfection. The lines of the *Liminal* drawings separate in unpredictable ways; fissures and cracks appear where lines overlap, curl up or bow to open up and create new formations, moving the work from order to disorder and a new form of ordering which brings unexpected results. In the *Lacuna Series*, two dimensional drawings are balanced against each other to form three dimensional sculptural drawings. The work oscillates between material, form and gesture allowing balance and the points of tension in between to be explored, reflecting the transitive and potentially ephemeral nature of the work. Early post-Minimalist work of a transient or ephemeral nature is often represented by photography. Paradoxically, whilst photography has provided new situational possibilities for the *Lacuna* sculptural drawings, the visceralness of the work has proved difficult to depict photographically; this continues to be a subject of investigation.

The works of Deacon and Ito, the earthworks of Engelfriet and my *Lacuna* and *Liminal* porcelain drawings are stylistically diverse but linked, I suggest, by the same conceptual congruities of post-Minimalist process art. They form part of a process-led uncraftsmanlike approach to the use of ceramic materials for which no critical framework currently exists. The dissemination of elements of this research through journal articles and conference proceedings over the past two years has demonstrated that the project is of potential interest to a number of groups including writers, students, artists, academics and curators of ceramic work

who are currently searching for critical contexts for a range of diverse contemporary ceramic practices. It is hoped that the research project will encourage other artists to explore new approaches to presenting critical thoughts about their own practice and thus empower individual artists to write their own artistic history. This research makes a contribution to knowledge by providing a starting point for addressing the dearth of critical writing in this theoretically unmapped area of practice.

The groups to whom this research is of potential interest include the following:

1. Artists, curators, critics and students of ceramics who are searching for ways of writing critically about process in ceramic work.
2. Artists with an interest in the use of industrial porcelain slip for non-craft, non-functional artistic purposes.
3. Artists and curators with a critical interest in all forms of process including process drawings, regardless of material.
4. Artists and academics with an interest in the underlying systems of power and knowledge and the ways that discourse in small fields of practice can be controlled through powerful individuals and institutional hierarchies.
5. Artists and academics with an interest in practice-based research in under theorised and under researched areas of art practice.

In this thesis, I have shown how process-led ceramics practice can be reconsidered from a post-Minimalist perspective. Process is proposed as a mode of thinking, of theorising with, in and through the process of the artwork in order to enable the artist to write his or her own artistic history and in which discourse is a way of talking and writing about what one does. I have demonstrated how the leading theorists of post-Minimalism provided a strong critical framework for the avant-garde process art of the 1960s and how this may now open up a new way of articulating avant-garde ceramic process art. It is worth noting that Morris, Hesse and

Serra functioned in the capacity of theorists and essayists, writing and interpreting their own history. This contrasts with practitioners in the ceramics field, for example, whose papers were rejected by Clark for his CAF Symposia because he believed that they lacked ‘expert’ knowledge and therefore the audience would not be interested in what they had to say.

In my own practice, I will develop my work using an industrial kiln to increase the scale of work and continue testing the properties of the material. The highly ephemeral nature of the three dimensional drawings which exist by balancing two fragile pieces against each other will continue to be explored in relation to issues of presentation. The two dimensional drawings have successfully been displayed in a number of exhibitions as wall mounted pieces in Perspex frames.⁵⁷⁹ Feedback from audiences to both exhibitions and conference papers has demonstrated that this is an area of interest to artists, curators, writers and academics in the UK and abroad.⁵⁸⁰ My intention is to continue to research and write papers on aspects of critical of practice. A hoped for outcome is that other artists will be encouraged to use this research as an analytical template for writing about their own areas of practice and thus contribute to the development of a strong critical discourse for the field.

⁵⁷⁹ *Wish You Were Here*, Exhibition, Bath Spa University Gallery, Weston-Super Mare, 13 October – 02 November 2010.

Drawn In, Sidcot Arts Centre, Exhibition, Winscombe, Somerset, 04 September – 22 October 2009.

Drawing On Experience, Exhibition, Woman Made Gallery, Chicago, Illinois, 27 June – 24 July 2008.

⁵⁸¹ ‘Ceramics and the Absence of Critical Literacy: A Post-Minimalist Solution’, Conference Paper, University of North Texas, Dallas, Texas, 06 – 07 June 2008.

‘A Critical Approach to Process in Practice’, Conference Paper, Fuping Art Village, Xian, China, 05 – 09 November 2007.

‘A Re-Conceptualisation of Contemporary Sculptural Ceramics from a Post-Minimalist Perspective’, Conference Paper, Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design, University of Dundee, Scotland, 04 – 06 July 2007.

‘A Critical Re-Conceptualisation of Ceramic Art from a Post-Minimalist Perspective’, Conference Paper, Social Sciences Arts and Humanities Institute, University of Hertfordshire, U.K., 25 April 2007.

‘Process Art: Towards a Critical Discourse for Contemporary Sculptural Ceramics’, Conference Paper, International Ceramics Studio, Kecskemet, Hungary, 07 - 10 November 2006.

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