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# ~~My Your~~ Our Stories

A processual investigation of artistic interventions with everyday ceramic objects

CJ O'Neill

PhD 2018



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CJ O'Neill

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement of  
Manchester Metropolitan University for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Manchester School of Art  
2018



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I hope I can make you all proud.



## Abstract

People and objects are inherently intertwined, what this research does, through the process of working with *others* (people / place / object), is to surface the narratives that form the connections between people with objects, and in doing so, raises the social and cultural value of the everyday ceramic objects we encounter.

Through a practice-based approach, the research moves between social, object and craft theories, reflecting on context, collaboration, narrative and the nature of creativity. Working with everyday ceramic objects, a series of investigative experiments are undertaken, the results analysed and taken forward in a processual manner. The research builds on the ceramic objects and writings of Slotte (2011, 2012), Rylander (2012), Barford (2011) and Veiteberg (2004, 2005a, 2005b, 2008, 2011a, 2011b), in combination with social and object theories from Ingold (2007, 2013, 2017, 2018), Dissenayake (1992, 2003) and Leach (2004), bringing a more specific focus on the social impact of everyday ceramic objects. I make a significant contribution to the field of contemporary ceramic practice and theory through this thesis and the socially engaged practice highlighted within it, demonstrating the latent potential of everyday ceramic objects to make visible the connections to others when activated through narrative.

This research is not just about a model of creative practice. It questions the role of the everyday ceramic objects in our lives. Through the projects, objects and writings presented within this research, it is clear that by activating the agency of everyday ceramic objects through engagement, we can make visible our narrative connections with others, acknowledging the importance of others in our lives.

These narratives become not mine, not yours, but ours.

**My, Your, Our Stories**





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Note: The use of **orange to highlight** in this document is to draw attention to key moments, much as one would with a highlighter pen. Rather than a red thread as Ariadne gave to Theseus in Greek mythology, I am using an orange thread. I would prefer a fluorescent orange, but as that's not technically possible with standard printers at this time, I am working with orange as a substitute.

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## Preface: People | Stories | Objects

Working with readymades can be rewarding. It can also be tricky. Particularly domestic readymades. Loaded with significance, heavy with responsibility, these can be precious items, at times heirlooms passed down through generations of families. In contrast, readymades can also be cheap, ubiquitous objects given to charity shops to clear space. All can be containers of stories. In order to discover where the narrative resides, each step must be lightly trodden, each new mark on the surface careful. The gut instinct, the initial thought, the inner voice - they need to be listened to. In working with heirlooms the voice of the owner or keeper of the object is important, however, this voice is often absent in purchased objects and must somehow be found or acknowledged. Through experience, I recognize these readymades as a raw material, but am sensitive to their loaded histories. Each object is different, even if it is identical in its production, as each has its own story (or multiple stories) and can bring different challenges of material or process. This study is about the artistic notion of story-telling and story finding, which allows these narratives to emerge and formulate as contained within the objects and emerging from within them.

These objects have witnessed lives unfold, felt the hands of people. Although they often contain and hold in a physical sense, this can also extend beyond the physical and material form. Can they tell us the stories they have heard, and connect us to the people who have held them before? If we listen carefully and tell gently, **can these objects retell our combined stories for the people who follow us in the life of the object?**



Image 1: Chai teacup held by Cj O'Neill in Ahmedabad, India, 2010

# Introduction

This practice-based PhD builds upon ten years of experience as a maker in the area of ceramics; developing one off pieces, large scale, site-specific corporate commissions, and small, intimate, personal works. During this time, I was exploring the value of everyday ceramic objects and the connections between these and peoples' lives. The research I report upon in this written part of the thesis sets out to examine this practice more formally. Additive (eg. transfer decoration) and reductive (eg. waterjet cutting) processing of readymade ceramics had become central to my visual language. I discovered that this practice was able to cross boundaries between different contexts, including local communities in the UK and Denmark; mixed communities in India; galleries; collectors; commercial and domestic settings.

At the beginning of the research, the aim was to interrogate through artistic intervention, the process of transformation through which everyday ceramics become objects of increased value. I intended to explore the issue of value using artistic intervention and to establish the nature of my role in various forms of intervention. I planned to investigate a broader range of 'post production' (Bourriaud, 2002) processes that would allow me to transform everyday ceramic objects and to analyse the visual language resulting from this transformation. Overall, I wanted to produce a collection of objects and publications which would contribute to the area of research in ceramics practice and theory dealing with readymade ceramic objects.

I have produced artefacts, exhibitions, articles and conference presentations throughout the duration of the research, however, the writing of the thesis allows a clear insight into the workings behind the scene of this public facing activity, and gives a thread for other researchers to pick up and tie to their own. It makes the invisible, visible, and allows the tacit knowledge contained within the practice, and within myself, to become more explicit. The publication of this thesis however, is not a 'finished product', but an open source invitation for others to build on. In the spirit of Ingold's reflection on Weileder's *Cone*<sup>1</sup> '...a mode of sustainability that lies not in the final achievement of a steady state but in always building, unbuilding and rebuilding.' (Ingold, 2018) The title of the thesis itself 'My, Your, Our Stories' visually references this building, unbuilding and rebuilding, and the processual nature of the practice contained within – the scored through text is equally as

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<sup>1</sup> *Cone* is a 900 cm high site-specific installation made from recycled mixed plastic waste, situated on the Dunston Staiths, a landmark Scheduled Monument and Grade II structure on the South bank of the River Tyne in Newcastle Gateshead. *Cone* has been developed from the *Jetty Project: Art & Sustainability*, a collaborative research project led by Wolfgang Weileder. <http://www.wolfgangweileder.com/installation/cone.html>

important as the rest. It highlights and further responds to the making processes which continually constructs, adapts and refines. Thus the process, the journey of arriving at this point, is as important as the conclusions.

The textual part of the thesis has been written in a way that reflects the continually adaptive development of research in the context of a rapidly evolving world. It presents a reflection on the totality of the research. It documents and critiques the actions, consequences and decisions made along the way, underpinning these with both theoretical and practical examples and references to the broader field of ceramics – in particular the area of readymades.

This research project set out to interrogate through artistic practice, the connection between people and everyday ceramic objects. The main focus, as previously noted, has been on producing a collection of objects and writing this analytical commentary which together contribute to the current debates concerning craft, ceramics and the readymade.

The research sits in a territory of overlapping contexts, an in-between ground of material culture, social engagement, craft, applied art and design. The material context was the area of ceramic practice working with readymades including makers such as Caroline Slotte, Kjell Rylander, Barnaby Barford and Andrew Livingstone, who each develop aspects of the readymade from their perspective and experience – allowing viewers to experience the objects in a new way. The social engagement aspect of the practice became a growing focus throughout the research, and has moved the practice from being object-centred to people-centred – or *socially engaged practice*, defined by Tate Galleries to “...include any artform which involves people and communities in debate, collaboration or social interaction.” (Tate, online, no date). The objects, rather than being final points of connection or resolution, rather become points of access to others. Within the field of socially engaged practice (and specifically focusing on artists that are making objects) are artists such as Chris Keenan, Jason Cleverly and Heidi Hinder, and artists collectives such as the US based Socially Engaged Craft Collective (SECC)<sup>2</sup> and 60:40<sup>3</sup>. These demonstrate, through practice, evidence of the potential for object making to have a positive social impact, however, within this research I am focused particularly on the articulation of specific and personal narratives in response to interaction with everyday ceramic objects.

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<sup>2</sup> ‘SECC ... is an expanding network of artists who create a wide range of socially engaged art projects that are rooted in the history of craft objects and materials.’ <https://sociallyengagedcraftcollective.org/>

<sup>3</sup> ‘The leading craft collective 60|40 was founded in 2008 by bookbinder Tracey Rowledge, silversmith David Clarke and ceramist Clare Twomey.’ <https://www.axisweb.org/archive/news-and-views/in-focus/craft-collectives/> This collective does not currently have an active profile.

In this way, my research connects social engagement with the field of material culture, and ways of *materializing the self* (Tilley, 2006) through objects and narrative. Material culture as a field emphasizes and focuses on the connections between people and objects and provides a good (if partial) context through the work of Leach, Miller, Tilley, Keane and Ingold (discussed in more detail in *Materiality*, pg.82-85). It also highlights the importance of the interactions between people and objects, and our ability to create narrative through reading objects – that is asking questions, looking for clues, building a narrative. This process of engaging with objects can help us to make sense not only of our relationship to past events, but through this to make sense of our present (Pearce, 1994). Heirlooms for example can provide a direct and tangible connection to previous generations, reminding of us stories of others – created through both association and experience (and often embellished!). If we can be open to the idea that this combination of fact and fiction are equally valid in the construction of the narratives about our *selves*, and that we are continually developing and changing in response to our engagement with objects (*ibid*) then we can begin to focus on the importance of everyday ceramic objects in this context.

The research began with an overarching question - What are the connections between existing ceramic objects, their users and makers? Investigating this question with a practice-based focus was integral to the research as this allowed for a process of *thinking through making* (Ravetz, 2011; Ingold, 2013).

## Key Terms

In order to clearly articulate the research, it is useful to define the key terminology used, particularly where terms could be interpreted in multiple ways. These are broadly outlined at this point and will be returned to in the main body of the thesis and revisited in a refined version of Key Terms in *The conclusion has to be made* in line with the processual manner of the research.

1. **Everyday.** By everyday, I mean that the ceramic objects I work with are often commonplace in a domestic context, they are familiar. However, they are not necessarily all items that would have been functional or utility objects – they are not handled or ‘used’ everyday. Many could be seen as decorative and have been on display in domestic settings. This everyday is not always the obvious, visible and familiar objects, tasks or occurrences but rather, *everyday* as Ben Highmore (2002) states ‘is also the name for aspects of life that lie hidden’. Things that we may have grown not to notice through familiarity, but others may be aware of or may consider differently, as everyday is always relative to our own situation.
2. **Readymade.** Objects that have already had a life, that bring with them prior existence. One of the aims of the research period was to define the best terms to describe this practice, and the obvious starting point was the term *readymade*, used first by Duchamp in describing his work, *Urinal* (Duchamp, 1917). Other terms could be *found*, *used*, *second hand* – these will be considered in the section *Finding the right words*.
3. **With.** I connect people *with* objects by working *with* others. Communication and understanding are key to my process of working with others. This *other* may be person, place or material and has come to light through the analysis of my own practice. If we start from a place where we could think from *within* the making of a thing rather than impose our thinking *onto* material or place (Shotter, 2011), it may help to shift our focus of attention. It is often only in the process of developing a project that the specific outcome related to that project evolves and develops. It is in the process of working with that particular set of circumstances at that specific time, that results in that particular outcome. The process of materializing that outcome is valuable in itself - the people, place, material and circumstance that we work *with* all have impact on this outcome.
4. **Colour** has always been of interest and utilized within my practice, but through this research process it has become vital to the work. Particular colours – orange, green and gold - have become potent signifiers for specific cultural references, allowing a crossing of cultural contexts within projects. I recognize now that colour can denote



character, it plays an active role in the work and can visually connect objects within a collection or grouping as well as help to engage participants with the work by providing associations or references to collectively held viewpoints.

**Orange** draws upon the history of the colour to be seen as transformational within Confucianism and Buddhism, as well as the association of fluorescent orange with safety since early WW2 use on planes.

**Green** provides the ground or fundament through the obvious association with nature and also provides a sense of safety through the materiality of this colour being a cutting mat.

**Gold** connects to historical references of both value and magic, within Eastern contexts, it symbolizes *chi* the essential energy. Within the research, gold often lends its physicality to the opening of the doorway – in both a literal and metaphorical sense, and is also used in the representation of people who are valuable to their community.

5. **Silhouettes** are capable of communicating a number of possible interpretations and have been used within previous work<sup>4</sup>, where I have created silhouettes from everyday objects, people, events or stories, applying them to ceramic surfaces. As a tool, these can allow narratives to cross cultural and physical borders, capturing the essence of a moment in time.

6. **Place.** Where the objects are produced and where they are presented holds a huge significance in terms of their cultural value and validity - working across countries and generations within the research allowed some investigation of this area. The work often relates to a specific place – responding to objects sourced there, or the people in that place, and encompassing that within the work itself. Even when work becomes moveable, presented in multiple places – in each re-iteration, there is a grounding of the work to that specific place.

7. **Doorways** are fascinating objects. We never know what lies behind or within closed doors. C.S.Lewis<sup>5</sup> is not the only writer to harness the potent nature of the image of the doorway. Symbolically, they represent choice and notions of pathways, they offer routes of escape and are used in storytelling<sup>6</sup> often to demarcate moments of transition and transformation, of movement between worlds. Within the research, the doorway has become a potent activating agent for the narrative process.

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<sup>4</sup> See section *My Stories* for further details of previous work of this nature.

<sup>5</sup> *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*, has a specific reference to a doorway that seems to just be in the landscape, but lead somewhere else. 'Only a few yards away, clear to be seen in the sunlight, there stood up a rough wooden door, and round it, the framework of the doorway; nothing else, no walls, no roof.' (Lewis, 1950)

<sup>6</sup> Fantasy literature and traditional fairy tales are a common feature of children's stories, narrating portals to alternative realities. *Alice through the Looking glass* is the obvious reference, featuring many doors within the storyline.

## Structure

The thesis focuses on the three main projects that comprise the research period (*Project One, Two and Three*), these are preceded with a section detailing the work that happened pre PhD study (*My Stories*), and interspersed with sections dealing with the context informing the practice (*Their Stories*). The research is presented chronologically and each section has a reflection point comprising a listing of significant elements of the research at that point. **Key critical moments** are highlighted in orange. These often act as the catalyst for the next section of research, moving towards the conclusion at the end of the thesis.

- My Stories

This section sets the scene with an overview and analysis of my own past works 2007-2010 which framed the starting point for this research, and highlight the key reflections that inform the research undertaken.

- **Formulating Questions**

This section draws together the key questions that frame Project One.

- Their Stories: Take One: Subjective Objects

This section begins the process of establishing the context for the practice in terms of object related practice. It refers to the work of Caroline Slotte, Kjell Rylander, Barnaby Barford and Karen Ryan.

- Project One: The Pol Project

This section documents and evaluates a residency in India, where the importance of people and experience emerged as central to my practice. The theory of dispersed creativity as framed by James Leach is introduced as well as a motif that became significant in the research – the doorway. The section offers an insight into the nuances of practice and documents the development of new objects both in India and on return to the UK and the subsequent writing that resulted.

- Reflection Point One: **With, Dispersed Creativity, Doorways, Gold, Silhouettes and Doing**

The first reflection point draws out key points in the research that had begun to emerge – ideas of working with, within and into objects; the importance of James Leach's theory of dispersed creativity; The focal point of the doorway within narrative creation; Gold as *chi* the essential energy; Silhouettes as a visual language and the action of doing bringing with it a sense of movement to the practice. It begins to articulate the shifting questions that frame Project Two.

- Their Stories: Take Two: Materiality | Presentation | Storage

This section focuses on expanding the context for the practice, with references to material culture and anthropology including ideas from Louise Crewe, Daniel Miller, Webb Keane and Christopher Tilley. The latter present theories of *bundling* and *materializing the self* – these are introduced to build upon Leach's thinking and the practices of Michael Landy,

Clare Twomey, Barnaby Barford and Chris Keenan are examined in relation to presentation, authorship and context.

- Project Two: The Plate Experiment (and other stories): Happenings, Results & Analysis

This section documents and analyses a project which focused on developing a method of opening up and allowing *others* into my creative process. Working with everyday plates, hand cut figurines and doorways, I deconstructed my process and invited the passive observer to become active participant.

- Project Two: Reflection Point Two: Plates, Everyday, Cutting Mats, Fluorescent Orange

In this section I return to the key elements emerging as central to the practice, reflecting on what everyday means within the context of this practice and how material colour is important with particular reference to the cutting mat green and fluorescent orange.

- Project Two: The Plate Experiment: From the Girls Perspective & Project Two: Translation

This section presents a piece of writing which was one of the outcomes of The Plate Experiment results and goes on to consider how important translation is for the communication of practice.

- Project Two: Reflection Point Three: Allowing *Others* in, Fluorescent Orange (again), Doorways as portals, Translation, Everyday (again), Cutting, Grounding

This section returns again to the recurring points of focus - Fluorescent orange, Doorways, Everyday – and introduces some new aspects – Allowing others in, Translation, Cutting and Grounding.

- SIGNIFICANT SHIFT IN PRACTICE: A new way of Making

At this point in the research there was a significant shift with the realization that other more open ways of making may allow for a more direct way to connect participants and viewers to narrative creation.

- Their Stories: Take Three

This section revisits the work of Chris Keenan in Continuing Drama, analyzing the interaction with the help of interviewing Chris Keenan and goes on to reflect on what constitutes *making*.

- Finding the right words, things, objects, words

This section works through various terminology for the practice – resulting in the term *everyday ceramic objects* as the most appropriate words to describe the things involved in the research.

- Project Three: (y)Our Stories: Unpacking my suitcase

Through this section the reflective, personal narrative in present tense is used to explore the notion of unpacking experience in writing to reflect upon a residency period. This

method of writing is utilized to reveal knowledge creation in a different way. It details moments from intense making and curation periods to expose the process and further explore my role. Previous experience is utilized to illustrate connections and Dissenayake's theory of *Making Special* is introduced. Value and objecthood is discussed in relation to the objects selected.

- Conclusions: ~~My Your~~ Our Stories

In this section I summarise the process stages and findings, discussing how the research has addressed the key questions, discovering that in fact, **the conclusion has to be made**. This term is deliberately ambiguous, the point is that I had to physically make work in order to formulate a clear conclusion. Consequently, I document the making\*thinking process of creating a series of new works that can enable narrative creation for both myself and others.

- **Contribution to knowledge**

People and objects are inherently intertwined, what this research does, through the process of working with *others* (people / place / object), is to surface the narratives that form the connections between people with objects, and in doing so, develop a number of contributions to knowledge;

Artistic intervention can be utilized to enable the narratives within and connected to everyday ceramic objects to become more explicit to the viewer.

This combination of narrative and everyday ceramic object, allows our collective consciousness (Durkheim 1893) to emerge, thereby **connecting us to others with objects**. Everyday ceramic objects can be the means by which we negotiate context and place and broker connections between people.

The term **making\*thinking** is a development from *thinking through making* (Ravetz, 2011; Ingold, 2013), and acknowledges the continuous movement in making that allows for thinking with material, process, context and place, resulting in shifts forward in thinking through object, process and written word.

This research is not just about a model of creative practice. It questions the role of the everyday ceramic objects in our lives. Through the projects, objects and writings presented within this research, it is clear that **by activating the agency of everyday ceramic objects through engagement, we can make visible our narrative connections with others, acknowledging the importance of others in our lives.**

## Methods

The research utilises a 'researcher-as-bricoleur-theorist' approach (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p.7) in the gathering and re\*presentation<sup>7</sup> of disparate objects, artefacts, materials and theoretical perspectives. Within the research, I move 'between and within competing and overlapping perspectives and paradigms' (ibid) such as; reflective practice; material culture research; contemporary practice with readymade ceramics; the everyday and social theory. Denzin and Lincoln also emphasize the impact of personal experience on research, something which has become evident throughout the research.

The research is **practice based** (the new knowledge is embodied within creative artefacts and contextualized within a written thesis) as opposed to *practice led* (the new knowledge leads to new insights about practice) (Candy, 2006). The study is informed through the lens of the maker, myself, and my material knowledge and experience. In the studio, the hand and the eye, the haptic and the tacit, combine through making objects to activate a space and allow the *objecthood* (the condition of being an object) to emerge from objects that may otherwise be undiscovered.

**Reflective practice** (Schön 1987) is utilized throughout. This use of writing and action to reflect on the process of developing artefacts or events in line with the design process that Friedman describes (2000) has been useful in the development of the research.

'Reflective practice is not a form of silent meditation on work. In reflective practice, reflection takes the form of bringing unconscious patterns and tacit understandings to conscious understanding through articulation.' (FRIEDMAN, K., 2000)

This study supports Frayling (1993/4) and Friedman's proposition that the explication of tacit knowledge within a practice is not, on its own, research. Nor is tacit knowledge exclusive to art & design. However, the explication of a personal practice, as this study sets out to demonstrate, (including the associated tacit knowledge) will give a unique insight (in any field). This, in combination with a rigorous and well-refined theoretical underpinning, with constant interrogation and reflection in line with Friedman's thinking, *can* I argue constitute meaningful practice-based research, whereby new knowledge is presented through artefact, image, film, etc. in combination with supportive contextualizing text.

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<sup>7</sup> \* In liturgical music, an asterisk is often used to denote a deliberate pause. In storytelling, they are often used to break between sections. Drawing on my personal connections with liturgical music and storytelling from a very young age, I am using it to focus on the break between 're' and 'presentation' - as opposed to 'representation', which has a very different meaning.

In writing, I utilise different voices - personal narration, factual description and critical reflection – in order to accurately represent the multiplicity of the role of the maker and ‘the complexity of creativity’ (Slotte, 2010). In her text *‘Namare \ Closer’* Caroline Slotte demonstrates a similar approach to writing and one that she has developed in order to allow the viewer to inspect her work in more detail by illuminating the inner workings, thoughts, reflections and makings of her practice. Articulating this closeness, Slotte says, moves the work not only closer to the viewer, but also to herself, the maker (Slotte, 2010).

This increased ‘closeness’ to the work is also demonstrated in *‘A Hole in the Heart,’* the thesis of Justy Phillips (2014) and her processual approach to both the creation and the dissemination of her research. Phillips has organized the information in an unusual way – there are 5 ‘arcs’ that progressively introduce the different stages of research. The exegesis doesn’t adhere to the guidelines of how to structure methodology, literature review through formulaic chapter format, (although importantly, it does include all of the required elements of a doctoral study) rather by setting personal narrative in counterpoint to theoretical rigour she takes us on a journey to truly understand the process of research that has been undertaken.

These texts have had a significant impact on the writing of this thesis, and have encouraged me to present the research in a way that makes most sense of the complex path travelled. I have found my own way of getting closer to research that is based within practice, and in communicating the research I have found different voices through which to articulate the different processes that occur in combination to form new thinking, new insights and new knowledge.

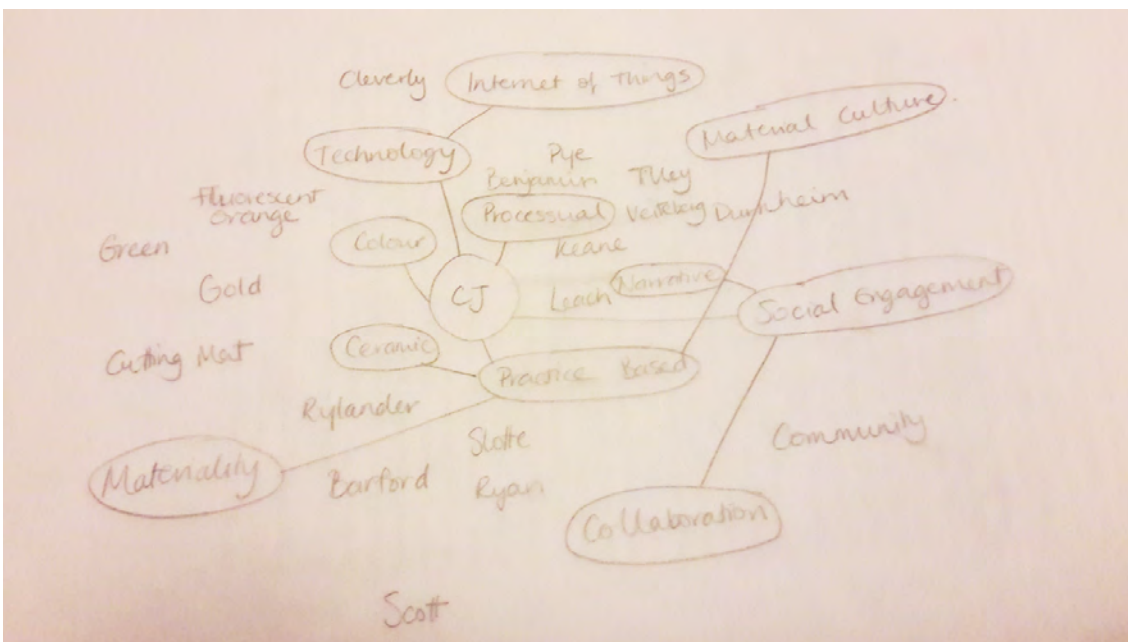
The overarching approach within the research then is **processual**, diachronic, cumulative. Following this approach, the methodology is project-based, with each project building on the learning from the last. Taking an experimental focus and applying it to materials, people and place, a plan is developed, actions occur, and a series of results are gathered, these results are reflected upon and plans for the next project incorporate this reflection. Often projects overlap, the reflection becomes the planning of the next project, and ideas develop simultaneously.

The practice is located in the **in-between ground** of a variety of areas and practice approaches. This term describes the space occupied by the research that falls between, on or into the boundaries of a number of areas. Equality is afforded to each area in terms of impact on the new contribution created through the research. It moves between these boundaries of material culture, social engagement, craft, applied art and design and in this movement draws on the research from each area, moving towards articulating fresh

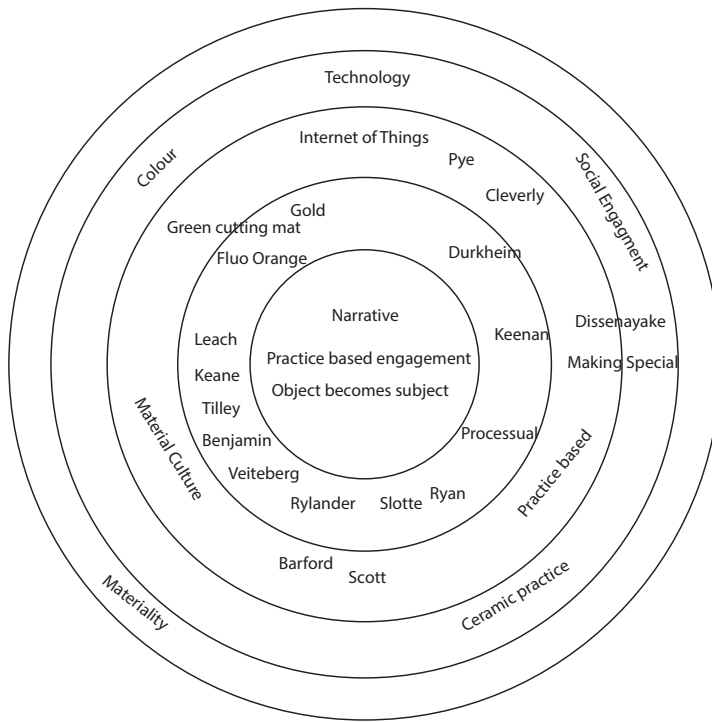
insight through combination. It is framed by the idea of our *collective consciousness* (Durkheim 1893) and a range of theories on object person relations - *bundling* (Keane 2010), *dispersed creativity* (Leach 2004), *materialising the self* (Tilley 2006) and *making special* (Dissenayake, 1992).

The research has elements of a **socially engaged practice** that relates to the work of Chris Keenan, Jason Cleverly and Heidi Hinder. It also connects closely with the ceramic practice of Caroline Slotte, Kjell Rylander as well as those makers utilizing readymade ceramics within their practice such as Barnaby Barford, Andrew Livingstone and Karen Ryan. The practice is not firmly placed in any one of these areas, but draws upon, moves between and is framed by the work in these areas and provides a new, material perspective on object person relations. Each project takes a slightly different emphasis, depending on the context – one may privilege the social aspect, another may work with a specific material or colour – and in this way the practice grows and evolves as a result of experience, bringing new insights from each area to the other as it moves.

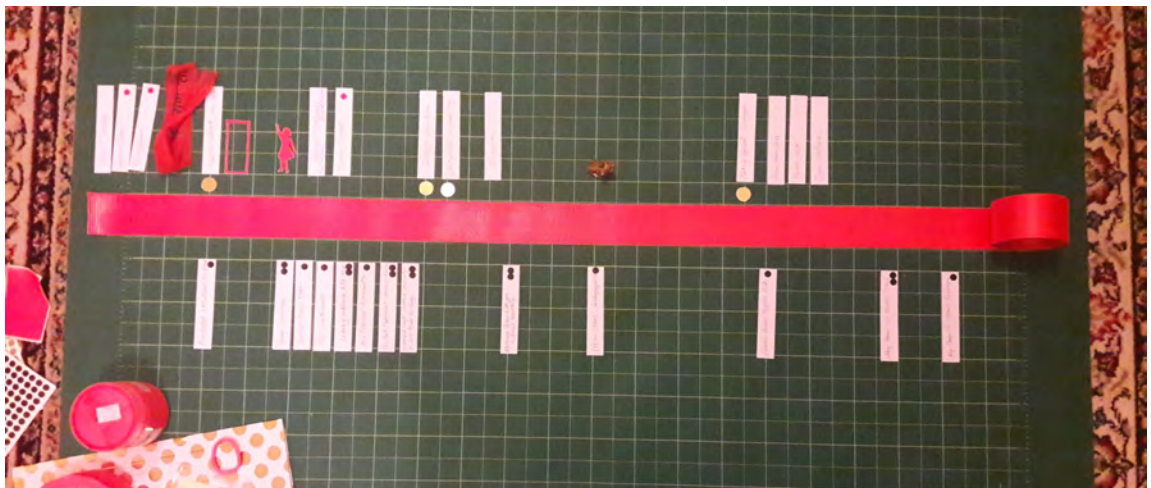
**Mapping** as an action is utilized to both plan and reflect, from simple pencil drawings to complex, material based temporary manifestations and digital renders. This approach allows me to have a sense of overview of projects, contexts and situations - to step outside the minutiae and see the connections and paths forwards. In essence, it is a method of working out the structure, order and content of what I am working on – it highlights connections and moments of transformation in a clear and direct manner.



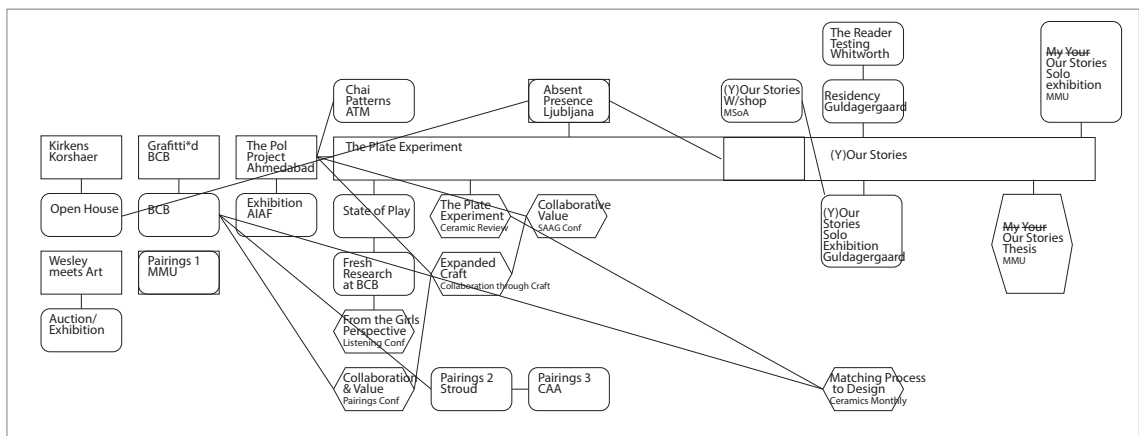
Map 1: Context mapping, 2014



Map 2: Context mapping, 2016



Map 3: Physical mapping of PhD research, 2017

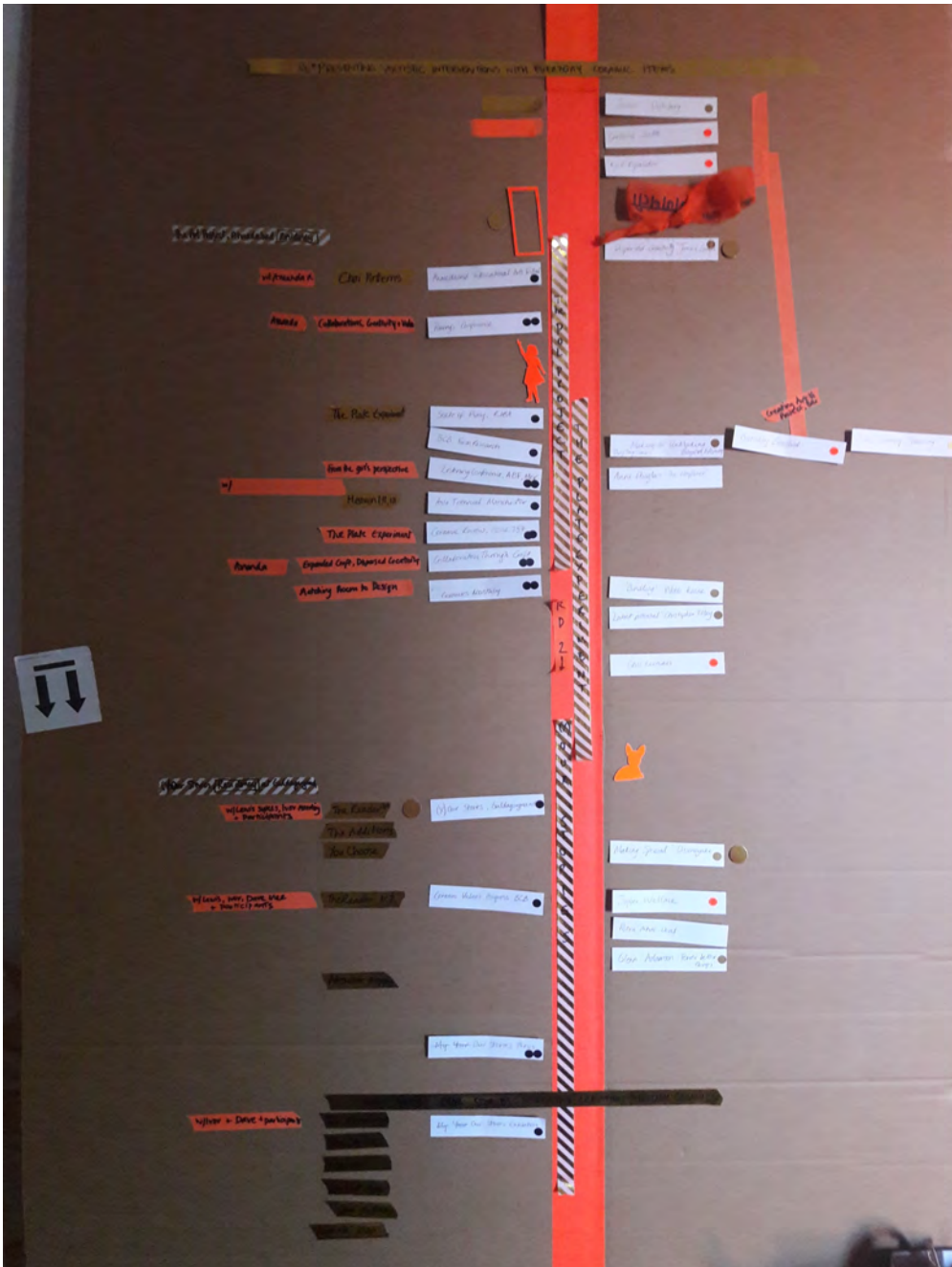


Map 4: Digital mapping of PhD research, 2017

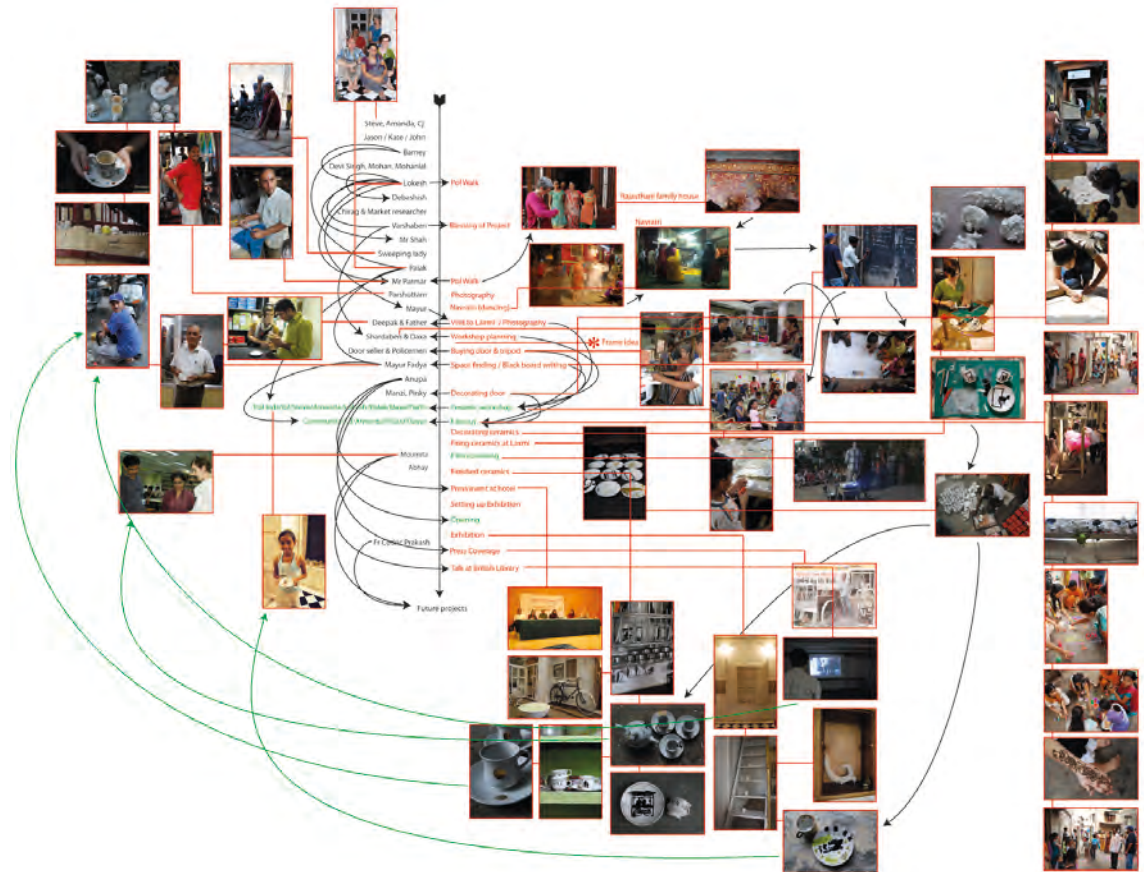
The temporary nature of many of the maps – using post it notes, scrap materials, hand drawn sketches – allow the maps to be processual in themselves, and be added to or



discarded as appropriate to the project. In using colour and material to map, in this example below, themes and threads are highlighted in a visual manner that would not be as easily possible in a digital format.



Map 5: Physical mapping of PhD research, 2018



Map 6: Mapping of *The Pol Project*, 2010 (see pg.74-5 for larger image)

**Narrative.** ‘We tell ourselves stories in order to live’ (Didion, 1979) Joan Didion begins in her *White Album* book, and surmises her thinking that we all search for threads, connections - a narrative to make sense of life. A love of storytelling has been inherent in my own upbringing, and for most children (and adults alike), stories are how we make sense of the world. Through the research, narrative has emerged as the tool to most readily connect people through objects, enabling sense making of experiences. Although it was not how I would have explained my practice prior to this research, the seed of narrative has been present in my practice before beginning this process. This research has allowed narrative to emerge as centrally important as a tool in building connections between people and objects. This has helped to progress my own practice – achieving more in terms of ways of engaging audiences than previously.

**Processes.** Prior to this research, I already worked with handcutting transfers, waterjet cutting, lasermarking and enamel application on readymade ceramic objects. One of the aims of the research was to develop a broader range of post-production (Bourriaud, 2002) processes which could be applied to readymade ceramics in order to extend my use of this material. Through the research I have experimented with paints, rubber, colour and texture as well as printing additional objects in clay to combine with the readymades. I have reduced my intervention to simple ties of plastic and paper notes, and have removed

the decoration entirely, using simple card cut outs placed on the surface to decorate. I have also continued my use of hand cut transfers applied to the surface of readymade ceramics. Each of these methods was experimented with and refined in the studio - tested to see how it could develop the narrative potential of these ceramic objects. Conclusively, there is no best process, instead it is important to have this extended palette to reference for future projects in order to bring the most appropriate for that particular context to the table.

It is important perhaps to articulate the process I had tended to follow to develop pieces at the beginning of the research period as this is one of the methods of knowledge creation distinct to my practice.

I follow a collage process, documenting everyday objects, pattern, people and translating these often through filters in photoshop to highlight certain areas. I then draw these on tracing paper, often replicating small areas before scaling up again once scanned digitally. I may piece together patterns in this way from multiple objects, or create patterns from simple outlines. In this way I think through making. I analyse pattern, form, shape and colour through experimentation and exploration until the piece makes visual sense of the connection between pattern, object and person.



Images 2-7: Collage process from object through pattern and person back to object, Bimpe, 2008

This process of collage has also been applied digitally through waterjet cutting or laser marking.



Image 8: *de Morgan 1*, waterjet cut plate from *Wesley meets Art*, 2008

**Unfinished and open.** As an academic researcher working within the UK REF<sup>8</sup> structure, my focus on finished objects and concrete outputs has sometimes clouded my thinking. I tended to think about what format the end result would take as it was necessary for funding bids. In this way, this PhD research has reinforced the importance of the *Unfinishing* of things (Ingold, 2017), whereby ‘the fashioning of things must also be their unfinishing, so as to allow every generation to begin afresh.’ (Ingold, 2018). This approach towards an openness in the things we produce is something I have increasingly aimed for as the research has progressed, and I hope have communicated through the objects and words presented in this thesis. My aim for future practice is to engage others in a process of storytelling, therefore an open or unfinished ‘end result’ is exactly what is necessary.

Although this may appear as a conflation of numerous methods and approaches, according to Denzin and Lincoln,

“the combination of multiple methodological practices, and empirical materials, perspectives, and observers in a single study is best understood, as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry” (Denzin and Lincoln 1999)

In this ethos, I aimed to draw the most appropriate methodologies at different points throughout the research (often combining two or more), enabling knowledge creation to be made evident, and revealing the inner workings of my practice in a more explicit and open manner - applying a deeper level of rigour to my research.

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<sup>8</sup> Research Excellence Framework: <http://www.ref.ac.uk/about/whatref/>



## My Stories

Before beginning this research project, I had created ceramic works using found objects since 2004. Everyday ceramic objects, which I added to (normally in the form of transfers) or removed from (in the form of waterjet cut patterns/text). Each of these drew influence from my experiences in the world; a series of pieces made in response to one event; or a series of pieces about individuals that are somehow connected, often through location, family or work. But it was my interpretation. Although I may have had discussions with others - the layout, the interpretation of the narrative, came from me. Through the commissioning process, I was starkly aware of the increase in emotional value of the final piece to an individual if they were somehow connected to or involved in this creative process - the story, the input - but I realised that this was an exclusive process, held solely for those that chose to commission a one-off piece of work.

In this section pre-PhD projects are documented and reflected upon, between 2007 and 2010, showing how connections between these became more aligned with time and experience. The processual nature of the practice becomes clear. For this reason, and in order to clearly articulate what has developed through the PhD research, it is crucial that work developed *prior* to the PhD is summarized. These projects are distinctively different from the PhD in that although they involved questioning and research through practice they were not situated in more explicitly theoretical and reflective ways. Nevertheless, in reflecting on this and analyzing the projects, I summarise the key areas from each project, and go on to explicate the process of formulating questions in response to this analysis.

The section begins with an early childhood memory of the experience of being in a second-hand shop.

*Shalom, Belfast, 1983*

*I don't recall the specific things in the shop at Shalom<sup>9</sup>, but I do remember the smell. The musty and distinct smell that clings to second hand clothes and bric-a-brac like a gentle cloud. I waited here for Dad on Saturdays whilst he went upstairs to the prayer room. It was a small shop. It wasn't very bright. There were grilles on the windows. The ladies working there were so kind. I swung my legs on a high stool, drinking milk from a china cup.*

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<sup>9</sup> Shalom House in Belfast, Northern Ireland, is run by the Lamb of God Community (LoGc) whose ethos is to 'look after the body, mind and spirit'. <http://www.shalomhouse.org.uk/> The original shop cited here was on Duncairn Gardens, adjacent to a 'peace wall' in Belfast. LoGc was established by my father, Aiden O'Neill and his friend Larry Kelly in response to the 'troubles' in Belfast to provide an interdenominational space for prayer and community – it is still going.

*Kirkens Korshær, 2008*

*Many years after that day in Belfast I found myself in Kirkens Korshær<sup>10</sup>, a charity shop in Skælskør, Denmark where another small girl with blonde hair sat on a high stool, drinking milk from a china cup and I was transported to 1983. My memories of that regular, everyday experience have emerged as fundamental to my way of being in the world.*

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<sup>10</sup> Kirkens Korshær is 'a relief organization that performs social work in Denmark based on people's values. Since 1912 we have helped socially vulnerable people in Denmark - homeless, abusers, mentally ill, lonely, poor families with children.' <https://kirkenskorshaer.dk/>



The following is a brief summary of projects key to the development of this research.

### **Arts Reverie Design Camp, Ahmedabad, India, 2007**



Images 9,10: Making window sections with Gamlish, and final installation at House of MG, Ahmedabad, 2007

This project comprised an intensive three-week residency working with local artisans to develop products for sale to a wider market, using traditional techniques and materials in a new way<sup>11</sup>. Traditional tiles produced locally, were decorated with gold transfers to introduce new markets. New materials were introduced to local bird cage makers (an illegal trade, with highly skilled producers), and lightweight, nesting bowls were produced for legal sale to tourists. Photographs I had taken of everyday objects and materials in and around the city focusing on colour were printed as postcards for sale at House of MG. Working with local mirror maker, Gamlish, contemporary aesthetic jali screens were designed and samples made as proposals for new build commercial and domestic properties. A series of the designs were installed at House of MG.

Reflection: This project began to establish the process of working with others as significant, and introduced me to working in the context of Ahmedabad. This cultural shift in context highlighted the potential for working with hand cut silhouettes as a visual language across contexts, using material and colour to transform objects.

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<sup>11</sup> The project was organised by *A Fine Line* consultancy, and sponsored by *House of Mangaldas* - a heritage hotel in Ahmedabad.

### **'Kirkens Collection', Guldagergård, Denmark, 2008**

As invited Artist in Residence I was able to spend further time in Guldagergård, Denmark<sup>12</sup> after my first residency there in 2004. Using pieces from the Skælskør Kirkens Korshær charity shop to develop a collection informed by the roles of individuals within the charity using iconic Scandinavian plates as canvas. Anastasia (the small girl on the stool) is the daughter of Anne who works in the shop alongside her own mother, Hanne – three generations. Through the careful interpretation of a friend, Birgitte<sup>13</sup>, I worked with the family on creating a series of pieces that celebrated them and their role within the community, using their favourite things from the shop, hand cutting transfers of silhouettes and applying them to plates, also from the shop. At the conclusion of that artist residency in Guldagergård, the local community were invited to come and view the work in the house in an informal setting. 20% of the money made from the sales of the work was given directly to the Kirkens Korshær charity by way of establishing some form of reciprocal cycle in the process.



Images 11,12: Cj with Anne & Hanne from Kirkens Korshaer at the Open House, Guldagergård + Anastacia, 2008

Reflection: It was not planned to work with these specific individuals, or that they would feature so prominently in the work, in a proposal for my invited residency at Guldagergård I stated I would work with the charity Kirkens Korshaer in some way through objects. What unfolded was a natural development of the interactions and responses of the people working in the shop, the objects found there, the environment of the shop and the house, and the physical location of the shop in relation to the house.

This project reinforced the importance of working *with* others – raising questions about how the value of others can be made visible through artistic practice. Working with staff to establish a visual narrative across the objects produced – highlighting the value of the

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<sup>12</sup> Guldagergård is an International Ceramics Research Centre in Skaelskor, Denmark. [ceramic.dk/](http://ceramic.dk/)

<sup>13</sup> Birgitte Mork Winther, a Danish ceramicist, was resident at Guldagergård during this time and translated conversations for me during this project.

people working in the charity shop. The use of silhouette and colour in transforming objects was emphasised, with cadmium red used as a cultural link to the Danish flag, with gold as a sign of value.

### 'Wesley Meets Art', 2008/9



**WESLEY  
MEETS ART**  
*Auction*



Images 13-15: cover of auction catalogue, 2009; *John*, Real gold and black handcut transfer detail on porcelain plate, 2008



Images 16-17: Cj de Morgan, after William de Morgan, 2008

This project happened around the same time as the Kirkens Collection (above) and further investigated the William de Morgan plate, Special Collections, Manchester; the role of charities within communities, working with Wesley Community Furniture Project (Wesley)<sup>14</sup>. I invited photographer Lee Garland<sup>15</sup> to collaborate, in response to the objects donated to/sold through their shops as well as the William de Morgan pieces held at Special Collections, MMU<sup>16</sup>. The focus was in developing a collection of ceramic pieces taking influence from the de Morgan peacock plates to draw attention to the importance of individuals in the charity. The volunteers and staff at Wesley are the centrifugal force of

<sup>14</sup> Wesley is a Furniture Reuse Organisation, a charity that supplies furniture, domestic appliances, household goods and clothing at the lowest possible prices to those in greatest need, from all over the City of Manchester and beyond. [thewesley.org.uk/](http://thewesley.org.uk/)

<sup>15</sup> Lee Garland is a photographer. [leegarland.co.uk/](http://leegarland.co.uk/)

<sup>16</sup> Special Collections is a public gallery housed within the library at Manchester Metropolitan University and comprises collections of objects, a reading room and exhibition space. [specialcollections.mmu.ac.uk/](http://specialcollections.mmu.ac.uk/)

the charity. Without them, the service to provide low cost furniture to families in need could not exist. Often in this situation it is the service that is celebrated and I wanted to highlight the individuals within that service, bringing them into the light as it were. By way of embedding myself within the community of staff, I became 'artist in residence' for the duration of the project, introducing staff to transfer application through weekly drop-in sessions. I encouraged the development of personal, narrative inspired pieces which included a map with three years of drawings completed in time for the show, as well as a series of plates and an installation. These staff artworks were included in the main show and auction, and subsequently went on to be exhibited at Urbis Community Space<sup>17</sup>. The plate works I produced were hand cut patterns taken from objects within the charity shop that staff selected and a hand cut profile in real gold of the various staff members. All the works were exhibited at Special Collections, with an auction of the ceramic and photographic work produced, raising £2700 for Wesley in February 2009.

Reflection: A self-initiated project, this built on the experience from the Kirkens Korshaer project and was another investigation of incorporating both the people and the objects of the charity – this time within a UK context. It further explored colour as a transformative material, working with hand cutting as a tool for creating unique patterns and layering of patterns to add depth both physically and metaphorically to the objects. Black was used as a strong shadow like presence, almost cutting through the plates in a visual sense, with gold representing worth and value once again. The time-consuming processes of cutting the silhouettes by hand also reflects the level of worth of the individuals involved in the charity, mirroring the time and effort invested in running the shop and maintaining the service.

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<sup>17</sup> Urbis, Manchester was between 2005-10 a centre for popular culture presenting changing exhibitions, and had a space for exhibiting local communities artworks. It is now the National Football Museum.



Image 18: Installation of plates and sprayed enamel in The Old Post Office, Burslem, 2009

This project was commissioned by the British Ceramics Biennial<sup>18</sup> and Unity<sup>19</sup> - a charity based in Burslem, Stoke-On-Trent, who support young people outside mainstream education. The project set out to challenge the participants' pre-conceptions of 'pottery' particularly given the context of Burslem, where the participants were based and the disintegration of the ceramic industry visible all around. I approached the creation of a public artwork from the perspective of a temporary intervention, a process-led project combining graffiti with everyday ceramic objects using the tool of storytelling.

I introduced the young people to a range of ways of working with everyday ceramic objects, with workshops in transfer design, print and application; pattern development; building structures and forms with discarded objects from Aynsley<sup>20</sup>; graffiti skills (supported by local graffiti artist, Nicholas Roach). This developed into a large-scale installation in 'The Old Post Office', Burslem, which comprised of everyday ceramics collected from a variety of charity shops in Stoke, painted and mounted on the wall, with a design inspired by Aynsley patterns, developed by and representative of the young people involved in the project, applied in spray paint on top of the plates over a series of sessions. The installation became part of the 'Wonderwall'<sup>21</sup> tour of BCB and the public were able to visit the space throughout the festival. The space was also used as the site for Unity's award ceremonies in 2009/10.

The plates within the installation were temporarily removed and photographed, these were then printed onto Wedgwood 'seconds', displayed within the Wedgwood Institute where the public voted for their favourite design to be printed as a set of 6 dinner plates. The next stage of the project was to develop this into a social enterprise project, putting the most voted for plates into production with profits from sales split between BCB and Unity. Unfortunately, further funding was not available to take the project forward.

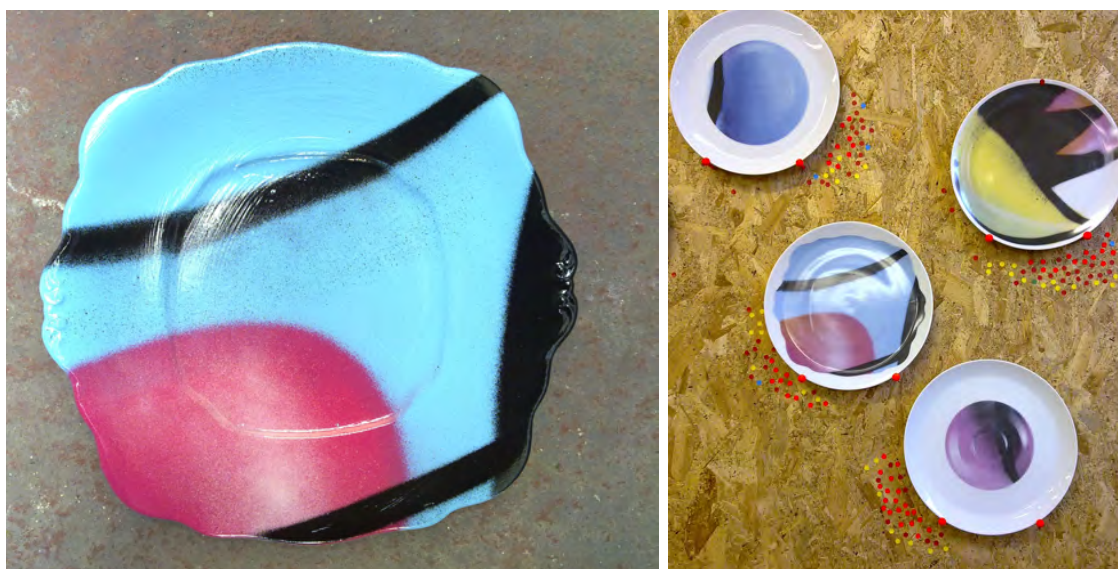
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<sup>18</sup> The British Ceramics Biennial (BCB) launched in 2009 with a festival celebrating and showcasing contemporary ceramics from across the world. [britishceramicsbiennial.com/](http://britishceramicsbiennial.com/)

<sup>19</sup> Since the project was undertaken, Unity have opened an independent school in Stoke-On-Trent [unitystoke.co.uk/](http://unitystoke.co.uk/)

<sup>20</sup> Aynsley was a ceramics manufacturer in S-O-T with an international reputation for bone china wares with detailed transfer decoration. The factory in S-O-T closed in Sept 2014.

<sup>21</sup> There were a series of Wonderwall installations across S-O-T with a bus tour organised by BCB for the festival.



Images 19,20: example plate from the installation, digital transfer decorated plates during 'voting' at BCB 2009.

All of the work in this project was produced on site in Stoke-On-Trent with the young people from Unity, over a nine-month period of meetings, workshops, site visits, material gathering exercises and installation periods.

Reflection: Enabling young people to voice their stories through pattern and installation was an incredibly rewarding process, and a growing interest and incorporation of public involvement began to emerge. The act of being social emerged as consistent within the practice throughout this and previous projects, the aim for a social enterprise was designed to be a legacy for the charity and BCB to retain, the idea of social relations was emerging as important to the practice. The objects ability to communicate beyond the confines of the gallery or exhibition was increased by working with others to develop the storytelling potential of objects. The objects began to become a tool to connect to others. Scale was developed through presenting multiple objects and this allowed the work to have a larger impact on visitors to the space. Again, colour was an important tool – however, this time it was a range of colours with black as the outline / detail.

### **Aynsley re\*presented 2009**

Two commissions for the launch of the British Ceramics Biennale 2009 in response to the disused Aynsley factory. I was granted access to the factory, gleaning a selection of transfers and found Aynsley pieces in a local charity shop to work with.

## Aynsley re\*fired

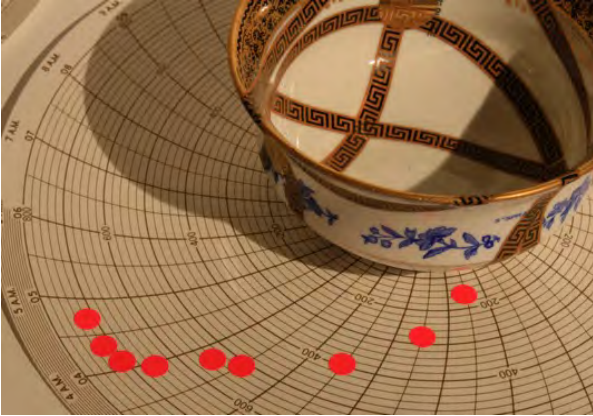


Image 21: Aynsley re\*fired, 2009

The pieces question the transition between functional and decorative, original and altered, drawing attention to form through surface pattern following the three dimensional forms on inner and outer surfaces.

The transfers were applied in overlapping layers during a seven-cycle firing sequence, with the firing cycles recorded on original firing charts from the factory. The process of wear on objects is visible in the surface scratches and the pieces began to show signs of damage through the multiple firings, representative of the toll that factory work often has on workers bodies over time. This lengthy process led to a series of pieces which betray their origins and provide a layered and detailed view of hand decoration.

## Aynsley graffiti\*d

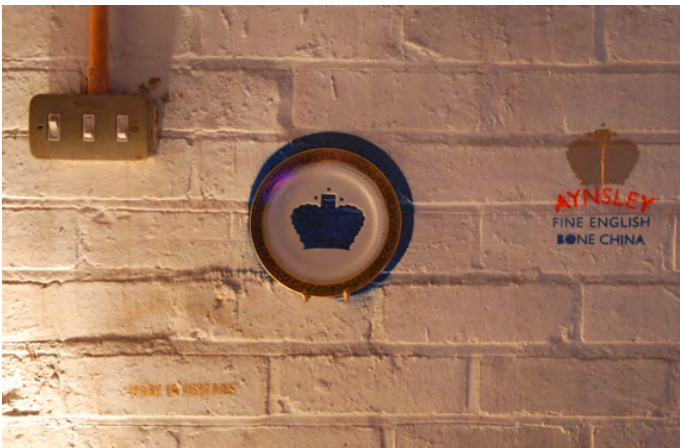


Image 22: Aynsley graffiti\*d, 2009

An installation using the graffiti process of tagging<sup>22</sup> - ceramic objects are used in the same way as card, cut and used as stencils. Plates found in local charity shops in Stoke were waterjet cut using abstracted, silhouette elements from the Aynsley logo as symbols, and the old Aynsley factory (the site of BCB 2009) was tagged with these symbols, utilising

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<sup>22</sup>THE ACT of performing simple graffiti using spray-paint (usually cheap) and stencils. Done quickly, usually in seconds. Usually during the day.' From <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Tagging> last accessed 20/12/2017

existing marks around the building for placement. Working with an external company (Control Waterjet) to cut the plates meant that this collection of objects developed in a very different way to the re\*fired objects. Development in CAD of details extracted from the logo were cut following my careful instructions. Eg. each piece was cut from the back to reduce damage to the front surface, and protected with tape; marks were applied to indicate placement and starting points. One plate was sprayed with fluorescent orange enamel and became something of a love/hate object for visitors.

Reflection: This was the first use of **Fluorescent Orange** within my practice – something which has become much more significant as part of my visual language. The selection of this colour at the time was my attempt at visualizing the impact of the demise of the production of Aynsley ware in Stoke-On-Trent. Its connection with warning and the inability to produce this colour in a traditional ceramic material were the two main reasons for selection. These Aynsley projects for BCB 2009 presented a very personal response to the objects and site, allowing for a very different and extended studio based form of material engagement than the concurrent participatory Graffiti\*d project. The transformation of objects utilized specialist processes to add narrative layers to each piece, these processes in themselves offered a contrast in working methods – one required hours of detailed work by hand, the other required digital processing remotely and careful following of instructions by a third party to achieve the desired outcome. The projects establish the desire for multiplicity within the practice. This **multiplicity of process and methods of engagement with material and people can allow for a range of outcomes that would not appear if one or other approach was taken.**



## Formulating questions

The work in these projects laid the ground for this research – in particular the residencies in Denmark and India meant I had begun to establish a network of people and places which I could later revisit within the confines of the PhD research. I had established an interest in the principles of working with others and with existing ceramic objects through a range of processes. I had tested different modes of practice - commissions, object responses and community projects, alongside an established teaching practice.

What I most valued about my practice at this point was the combination of different approaches. Firstly, the commissioning process. In this process, a client may approach me with an object and ask me to add narrative pattern in the form of silhouettes to the surface, thus imbuing it with a personal significance to the person / people involved. However, this process was only open to those who choose to commission a one-off piece of work. These individuals had to have the confidence, and knowledge to find my work, select it, contact me and ask me to make something for them, as well as pay for the extra costs associated with this form of working. That process in itself is not without its challenges and is open to a relatively small and niche market. What was most interesting about this process however, was the deep and personal connection that individuals had with the objects that resulted from this process. For example, one family contacted me to see if it was possible to buy a second set of *Solas* lights from me for their home as the lighting installation that I had produced for them had become the sticking point in their sale. The buyers wanted it in the house when they moved in, they enjoyed the aesthetic and ambient affect it had on the room. The sellers however, wanted to take the lights with them as they had a deeply personal and established relationship with the lights that made it very difficult (impossible) for them to leave them behind. The value of the objects had become personally significant, in a way that couldn't be entirely exchanged for money.

The second part of my practice as illustrated by some of the examples previously, was socially engaged projects, often community-based installation works whereby I worked with a group in workshop-based environments, developing skills and producing works in collaboration with others, or installing a series of works produced by others in a space as a result or end product. This workshop model provided me with a multitude of benefits – working with others, establishing reputation, encouraging and supporting others in the development of their own creative voice, working on larger scale pieces and projects as well as often sparking ideas for future projects or events.

The third part of my practice was focused on the development and production of individual pieces or installations that were my own personal response to the experiences

and people I encounter on my journey through life. These established a reputation and situated my own practice in the professional field, they retained my artistic control and identity. However, they often required an additional narrative to support their explanation.

The questions I posed at the beginning of the PhD period therefore were;

Question 1: **How do object, user and maker relate?** (When the objects are industrially produced ceramic objects and makers use this material as their starting point.)

Question 2: **What does it mean as a maker to take an object that is loaded with significance, respond to that and re\*present it?**

Question 3: Is it possible to establish a new method of practice that would allow for **deeper personal connections to objects I produce?**

Taking the research forward into PhD, the aim was to construct new knowledge about everyday ceramic objects through the creation of artefacts and text. The objectives were to delve more deeply into the methods, processes and approaches I had been utilizing to date, researching new and alternative ways of working whilst drawing from different sources to help articulate the complexities of practice.

To begin it was vital to survey the field of practice.

## Their Stories: Take One

Everyday ceramics are easily recognisable and have direct associations with family and national histories (Cecula, 2008). Beyond their intended decoration, these objects betray traces of people who have handled them through the wear evident on the surface. When given as gifts, they can become a means of communicating intimate histories from one generation to another (Hyde, 1983) particularly in the case of heirlooms<sup>23</sup>. Each year, thousands of ceramic items are discarded, thrown away – their history destroyed. Conversely, we keep hundreds of items during a lifetime, sometimes because they hold memories that can be highly personal. Research into the value of the everyday is already being addressed within fashion (Cwerner, 2001) and critical theory; more recently within ceramic practice<sup>24</sup> and craft theory, in particular by Jorunn Veiteberg. In her writing, Veiteberg deals with the complex area of value by contrasting the value of objects as it accrues in the artworld, to the lesser value placed on objects within the applied arts, whilst also reminding us of the value within objects that can be separated from the world of arts entirely and said to be the materializing of ‘fundamental cultural truths’ (McCracken via Veiteberg, 2004). Projects such as Think Tank’s *Gift* (Harrod and de Waal, 2007), and the individuals associated with this are part of a larger movement of writing about the crafts that has emerged combining the craft process of making with social theories of material culture. There is another perspective on the idea of *Gift* and the value of objects within society whereby Lewis Hyde (1983) refers to the Papua New Guinea island tradition where objects which are believed to be so endowed with value that they must be passed on, given away and in this gifting is the value – that the giver is the one who is benefitting from the process most. Hyde even cites the belief that someone holding on to a gift too long may die (1983). Jean Baudrillard (1981) too observes, “Objects never exhaust themselves in the functions they serve” giving further assurance that objects hold more value than commodity or function.

This led me to consider the following in development of my earlier questions –

Question 1: How do object, user and maker relate? (When objects are industrially produced ceramic objects and makers use this material as their starting point.)

- Can the process of making new works from existing artefacts reveal different relationships, function and perceived value according to their context?

Question 2: What does it mean as a maker to take an object that is loaded with significance, respond to that and re\*present it?

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<sup>23</sup> heirloom: noun, a valuable object that has belonged to a family for several generations. ORIGIN late Middle English: from heir + loom - which formerly had the senses ‘tool, heirloom’

<sup>24</sup> *Art Value: A research project on Trash and Readymades*, Art and Ceramics <http://www.k-verdi.no/english/projects.html> last accessed 1 September 2011

- Can silhouettes and pattern encode information within ceramic objects when moved across contexts?

There is a term that describes the work in this area – ‘*Manufactured* ...practitioners who have come to regard finished products (existing consumer goods) as their own unique raw materials.’ (Skov & Holt, 2008). One motivation for this may be the shift towards an ethos of sustainability – in using existing objects as raw materials, there is no draw on the worlds resources. However, many of the ceramic specific practitioners in this area are less focused on the sustainability of the material, but are using the material to examine the complex relationships between people and objects, these include Kjell Rylander<sup>25</sup>, Caroline Slotte<sup>26</sup> and Gesine Hackenberg<sup>27</sup>. PhD research has provided interesting models for combining theory and ceramic practice, such as theses published by Paul Scott (2010) and Neil Brownsword (2006). However, although all of these individuals deal with the concept of authorship in terms of working with readymades in some way (object or image), and encouraging a questioning of ownership, they are not directly dealing with the authorship of the final objects as such.



Image 23: Untitled, 2003 Irene Nordli (Norway)

In discussing the work of Irene Nordli<sup>28</sup>, Veiteberg underlines this important aspect, and gives us a reason for the shift which parallels a broader, social shift,

“To appropriate objects and images created by others, ... raises questions about concepts such as authorship and authenticity. ... As an artist’s role, it can be viewed as a response to the change from an industrial society to a consumer and knowledge-based society.” (Veiteberg, 2008).

Although this work is within a Scandinavian context, it is still relevant to my own practice within the wider European context. Within the more specific context of the current

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<sup>25</sup> <http://www.kjellrylander.com/>

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.carolineslotte.com/>

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.gesinehackenberg.com/>

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.magimix.net/>

economic environment and post-industrialisation in Britain, this genre can be seen to comment on the complex relationship between industry and craft makers. This demise of the ceramics industry in the UK and the subsequent effect on the people left in its wake inspired my previous projects *Aynsley re\*-fired* and *Graffiti\*d* (see section *My Stories*).

## Their Stories: Subjective Objects

The context for my practice at this point was most aptly described by Lesley Jackson as 'Subjective Objects: provocative, pro-active, ideas-led ceramics – objects which assert their identity, not merely through their aesthetic appeal but by forcing people to react and interact.' (Jackson cited in Veiteberg 2008).



Images 24-27 L to R: Kjell Rylander (Sweden/Norway), *Untitled* (Kontentum) 2009-11; Caroline Slotte (Finland/Norway), from the series *Gone Fishing* 2009; Image: Gesine Hackenberg (Germany), *Kitchen necklace* from *Ceramic Necklaces* 2006; Karen Ryan (UK), from the design exhibition *Cheap* 2013

My practice moves between craft, design and art; sitting comfortably alongside the work of Caroline Slotte, Kjell Rylander, Karen Ryan and Gesine Hackenberg. Above I have selected a key piece from each maker that I feel is an indication of their contribution to the field, as well as being most closely connected to my own practice. These makers belong to a growing group working at odds with the traditional studio ceramics ethos. Interested in ceramics as a material, the aims are not to produce beautiful functional vessels, instead to work with the language of domestic ceramics, with a Postmodern perspective, to produce work that questions the culture and industry surrounding this genre. These makers are working in the post-industrial landscape of ceramics, and choose the *industrial debris*

(Scott, 2011) as their source material. All could be said to be *upcycling* (Braungart, McDonough, 2002) this debris; that is, adding value.<sup>29</sup>

There are other makers working in this genre of course, but the main reason for selecting these four in particular is through their approach where each seems to be exploring, not simply producing artworks for exhibition and sale, but questioning notions of use and context, pushing the boundaries of media, material and genre.

Each of these makers have three similar methods within their practice;

- working with *used domestic ceramic forms* (amongst other materials)
- *removing* parts of the original form to reveal a new perspective
- particularly *specific about the presentation* of their work

For each of these connecting elements, there are disparities and unique perspectives that help to distinguish the makers and allow for this to be a rich and diverse territory, with room for growth. Each of the makers uses a different process to remove materials – grinding, cutting and sandblasting. Slotte and Rylander both concentrate on the journey of the maker with the material, on an individually focussed basis, producing exquisite artworks for exhibition and sale; firmly rooted in the genre of ceramic/craft *art*.

Incredibly high levels of skill and manipulation of material are contained within these two bodies of work, and although Rylanders' work is perhaps more brutalist in its processing of ceramic material, they are both poetic in their presentation and in the subtlety of detailing. Ryan, on the other hand is much more heavily engaged with the audience, presenting works at design festivals and in second hand shops, rather than art/craft galleries. Her processing of domestic ceramic forms is combined with her processing of furniture. Ceramic forms are emblazoned with words such as *fear, hate, lies* and *rage*. The work is confrontational in its very essence and purpose. Hackenberg creates jewellery from domestic ceramic and glass items, presenting jewellery with a unique and strong connection to the original objects. Her interest is in the value of the everyday items that we choose to use and keep. The work becomes wearable and has a different relationship to the body than objects we have in our homes.

'In "*Amazon* Kitchen Necklace" (2012) German artist Gesine Hackenberg repurposes an historic, pre-existing blue-and-white plate, punching out holes in it to form beads which are then formed into a necklace. She rethinks the functions of blue-and-white so that the original object is at once destroyed and transformed, given new meaning and new life.' (Spencer, 2013)

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<sup>29</sup> Where *upcycling* is seen to be adding value to existing objects, as opposed to recycling which is reprocessing objects to a base material that can then be re-formed into new objects. Eg. Plastic containers.

Hackenberg and Ryan appear to work *against* the decoration on the original forms, choosing to highlight the form, and use the visual connection of surface decoration to link aesthetically to the original piece. By *against* I mean that they cut through the pattern, chop it up, pay no reverence to it, whereas Slotte clearly works *with* the narrative of the piece, highlighting sections of pattern or detail through the removal of other sections, empathetic to the original, and appears to caress the surface gently. Rylander tends to work with plainer pieces, with simple bands of colour, backstamps and marks of use as the surface decoration.



Image 28: *Sorry* from *Damaged Goods Pieces*, Barnaby Barford, 2009

Another maker who works in this genre is Barnaby Barford, tending to work primarily with figurines. I have a strong affinity with the way in which he constructs and presents narrative as well as his use of materials that are not traditionally associated with traditional ceramic practice.

‘Components – both material and narrative – are borrowed and reconfigured. Britain does not manufacture, it acquires. Barford does much the same. The commentary that emerges is critical, but equally tongue-in-cheek and ultimately open-ended.’ (Hemmings, 2013)

I don’t mean the content of his narrative necessarily, as he deals confidently with overtly explicit themes using a humorous edge, but the way in which the narrative is drawn from and captured by the figures and presentation, particularly in his film from 2009, *Damaged Goods*.

Barford disassembles and reassembles figurines to create strong narratives from traditional forms, and in his talk at *Making or Unmaking*<sup>30</sup> in 2011, he described how he

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<sup>30</sup> *Making or Unmaking* The Contexts of Contemporary Ceramics, Conference 27 – 29 October 2011, Bergen, Norway



tried glazing some pieces and realised when they emerged from the kiln that he had created 'an ornament which was not what I wanted to do at all'. He has returned to painting the figurines, 'which works really well' (Barford, 2011). This multi material approach is not always appreciated within the world of ceramic makers and critics and there appears to be a fear of some sort of desecration of the ceramic material through its combination with other media, 'Many view this multi-media movement as a Trojan horse, ready to release its warriors in the dark of night and destroy the medium's material solidarity.' (Clark, Del Vecchio, 2006)



Image 29: Britannia, Andrew Livingstone, Bone china, readymade figurine, glass, QR code decals, 2010

Andrew Livingstone also works with found objects, combining these with raw clay, forcing the viewer to question their relationship with fired and raw clay, and placing sometimes delicate situations in our everyday lives under the microscope as in this piece '*Britannia*' using the vitrine to display a series of figurines in chaotic downfall, reflecting some of the societal issues faced across much of the UK. Livingstones work address these issues by combining traditional processes with new technologies such as QR codes, forcing us to move beyond our complacent acceptance of these and see the dischord in the everyday.

Many makers use domestic plates, bowls, cups and saucers as their preferred canvas for alteration and decoration as mentioned previously. Paul Scott is another example. These makers draw upon the everydayness imbued in domestic ceramic items, and utilise it to present a wide range of perspectives; strong political messages (Scott); gently altered viewpoints (Slotte); observational subversions (Rylander); together questioning the possibilities of the material itself as well as its production.



Images 30-32: Dawson, Robert, In Perspective Willow 1, 1996; Howard Kottler, *Like Father, Like Son from the Blue Boy Set*, 1969; Scott, Paul Scott's Cumbrian Blues, Stignæs No.2, 2007

As I work with applied transfers, I could be seen to sit on the edge of the field of altered images which includes Robert Dawson, Howard Kottler and Paul Scott. However, I feel that it is the very edge of this field, as the main focus of my interest and work with transfers is not focused on printed transfers, but very specifically with the addition of pattern, hand cut from coloured sheets of transfers, and the qualities of this process that encompasses edge and surface, more similar perhaps to traditional papercutting and collage. In some ways, all makers might identify with being on the edge of a field of practice, however, I feel strongly that my work does not easily fit within the gallery-based work of the practitioners I have looked at in this section, rather it encompasses elements of a social practice – meaning that Karen Ryan's ceramic practice is most closely connected to my own practice. This identification of closely related fields of practice helps to place my own practice – although further work will be undertaken in later sections to unpick the field further (see *Their Stories: Take Two*) at this point in the research it was important to develop my own methodologies within a project that would allow for interrogation of the questions I was asking.



## Project One: The Pol Project

*The Pol Project*<sup>31</sup> was the first project of the PhD period. Through a short, but intensive four-week residency project at Arts Reverie in Dhal ni Pol, a Jain community in the heart of the walled old city of Ahmedabad, India (undertaken with visual anthropologist and filmmaker Amanda Ravetz<sup>32</sup>, artist Steve Dixon and supported by locally based artist Lokesh Ghai and Palak Chitaliya<sup>33</sup>) I began my exploration of the key questions, interrogating my role as an artist / facilitator, the objects decorated by participants in workshops, and the works created during this project. The work that resulted was presented as part of Ahmedabad International Arts Festival, created by curator Anupha Mehta.

I had been interested for a number of years in what *upcycling* (McDonough, 2002) ceramic artefacts revealed about the relationships between different contexts in which things circulate and how these are valued. Within this project specifically - I wondered if one piece of work made in India was placed in a gallery in the UK, and another similar piece is given to a *chai walla* (tea seller) in India to use, is there a difference in the value of these objects? This relates to **Question 2**: What does it mean as a maker to take an object that is loaded with significance, respond to that and re\*present it? Can the process of making new works from existing artefacts reveal different relationships, function and perceived value according to their context?

If I divided my practice in two parts - the creation and exhibition of objects; and the role of facilitator of a workshop or community project, the value of my role appeared to be significantly different in each case. How could I negotiate these contradictory values in ways of working and resulting artworks? This relates to **Question 1**: How do object, user and maker relate? Can silhouettes and pattern encode information within ceramic objects when moved across contexts? And **Question 3**: Is it possible to establish a new method of practice that would allow for deeper personal connections to objects I produce?

This section gives a detailed account of what happened during the residency, in terms of activities, actions, decision making, interactions and making. It goes on to document the reflective period of research (making, thinking, reading and writing) that followed back in

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<sup>31</sup> The project was conceived by PAL as the pilot for a proposed 3 year project and aimed to combine the knowledge of UK and Indian craftspeople in an engagement with a communal urban space. [www.thepolproject.blogspot.com](http://www.thepolproject.blogspot.com)

<sup>32</sup> Amanda Ravetz is a Professor at MMU trained in visual anthropology with expertise in observational cinema and crossings and collaborations between anthropology and art. See e.g. Grimshaw and Ravetz (eds.) 2005. *Visualizing Anthropology*: Intellect Books, Bristol, UK and Oregon, USA; Ravetz 2007 *Connecting Art and Anthropology* (website and Cd-Rom); Grimshaw and Ravetz 2009. *Observational Cinema: Anthropology, Film and the Exploration of Social Life*. Indiana: Indiana University Press.

<sup>33</sup> Palak had consulted with local people about environmental conditions before and so already had good relationships with people living in Dhal ni Pol.

the UK and the subsequent shifts in practice. Throughout, it highlights the key moments in the research, where it answers the questions I began with and how the thinking in this project impacts future projects / thinking.

## The Pol Project: Happenings

In 2010, Arts Reverie was a venue for artist residencies in the old walled part of Ahmedabad, in Dhal ni Pol. This is one of nearly 600 pols which were once communities associated with different religious beliefs or castes, but today have mixed, and often decreasing populations. Modern Ahmedabad tempts residents to move across the river with newer homes and better infrastructure. To try and rectify this, Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation has instigated a series of plans to “inculcate community participation in supporting a programme to conserve and celebrate the heritage ‘urbanscape’ of this part of Ahmedabad”<sup>34</sup>. The ‘Pols’ have high walls and traditionally had gates on their sole entrance<sup>35</sup>, but when we were there in 2010, the main gate of Dhal ni Pol was removed and a new archway was being constructed to invite visitors. My response to the issues presented in this location was to engage the community in celebrating the beauty in their everyday within the walls of the pol.



Image 33: Arts Reverie and map of Ahmedabad's eastern walled city

Due to an intensive working period, it was important to establish the territory and start to get to know the community early through still photography, drawing and notemaking. I had already been to Dhal ni Pol (see *My Stories*), but things had subtly changed since my last visit and it was good to reinvestigate the area. I was interested in the social relations

<sup>34</sup> From *Ahmedabad: Becoming A World Heritage City* Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation 2010

<sup>35</sup> Ahmedabad had a recent history of violence and the pol gates kept communities safe, and separated. In a similar way to Belfast, where I grew up. This makes for interesting reading. <https://thewire.in/society/ahmedabad-heritage-city-violence-exclusion> (accessed 23/10/2017)

between the objects people had and how these were used in daily life. Identifying with an unfamiliar eye the beauty in the unseen everyday and re\*presenting this back to the community by way of celebration. My aim was to create a series of pieces that focused on the everyday ritual of *chai* drinking, translating my observations of everyday life onto the surface of ceramic objects associated with this ritual. Chai drinking of course relates to our own British (and Irish) tea drinking, although the two drinks could hardly be more different! British tea is a simple drink with black tea brewed in a pot or cup with or without milk, and chai is a heavily spiced drink made also with black tea, but with the addition of fresh ginger, black pepper, sugar and unpasteurised milk. This daily ritual is one of many that connect the two cultures and one that I felt was a good starting point for a short project such as this.



Image 34: Daily observations: water jars, containers, chai cups, formal poses on the *otla*

I became interested in the imagery of the social situations involving objects, and documented many of the individuals around the Pol during daily activities, but also more formally when asked to photograph a family posing in their doorway or sitting on the *otla*, the wide steps outside their homes. In parallel, Amanda was focused on the liminal space of the *otla*, and the doorway as threshold, and through recognition of the camera as activating agent in the capture of activity, a natural collaboration began to form between us. Ideas were exchanged about filming in the pol to document daily activities and celebrating that through our individual media of ceramic and film.



Image 35: Navratri dancing (Amanda included), Ahmedabad, 2010

On one of the nights of our stay, we had been for dinner outside the Pol and on returning 'home' saw dancing in the street. Intrigued, I stood to watch and suddenly, invited in, I was dancing too! The music was loud and I learned that we had arrived in the time of Navratri, nine nights of dancing. The celebratory time means that people go to work as usual in the day and at night, dance as long as they can before getting ready for work and returning afterwards for more dancing! Dancing for so long can allow the dancers to achieve a blurring of boundaries between dancer and the dance, captured in my image above, in part due to lack of sleep, the imposed daytime fasting and nighttime feasting, but in the main due to the repetitive nature of dancing *Garba* for hours. This noisy, beautiful and visually stunning experience within the Pol was one that allowed me to feel welcome, safe and included. Strong and important indicators of a good community spirit.

Thinking about how object, user and maker relate (Question 1), I was keen to work with local children in the pol to understand what it might be that they would want to communicate in an object. I planned a number of different activities in order to build trust and get to know them more. I ran workshops mapping the space within the pol and trying to enable them to communicate their understanding of the layout and functioning of the pol itself. Many were confused about how to place their home on a birds-eye view map that I had constructed on a large piece of paper using printed and digital maps as reference guides.





Image 36: Children marking their homes on the map of the pol, 2010

Thinking about the silhouette and simplification of image and how it could have potent use, I wanted to explore this idea with the children, however, the flatness and overhead view seemed confusing and I realized that as a child your perspective on the world is at a different level, both physically and metaphorically. As a child, you experience and understand in three dimensions as you go - your path from a friends' house to your own, from your own house to school and back, from your own house to the market/shop, and back, etc. It isn't until much later in life that you begin to widen that understanding of place in the world, and other peoples' perspectives, including flattened maps. The daily routines experienced in the Pol informed what the children learned, everyday rituals such as the journey to school, brushing hair, eating food, connect them to others and allow them to make sense of the world. This reminder of the immediacy of a child's experience helped to inform my own thinking in future projects (see *(y)Our Stories*).

It was a rich learning experience.

Following the drawing workshops, I had intended to run some ceramic decorating workshops using transfers from the Aynsley factory in Stoke-On-Trent on everyday teacups locally sourced. The idea was to allow the children to take part in the process I was undertaking within the objects I was making - decorating simple, everyday objects with pattern, and have their work exhibited alongside mine in the Ahmedabad International Arts Festival. I believed that using everyday ceramic objects would work well and if the objects I used were the same as the ones the children used, this would allow for an interesting exhibition where the visitor would see all the objects in the same way,

irrespective of who had decorated them. Steve, Amanda, Lokesh and Palak agreed to support me in running these workshops, as transfer application can be a tricky process that takes a while to get the knack of. I envisaged thirty or so children taking part, which I would not have been able to facilitate alone. Palak had negotiated for us to have the use of the Pol library space for a morning, and she (Palak) had invited local children to sign up. Forty two children signed up. Amazing. This immediate response from the local children was so positive, it was going to have a real impact on the exhibition and presentation of the work if there were forty two pieces in addition to my own to present.

On the morning, we arrived to the library and there was a queue of eighty four children (and a few adults keen to partake) outside the library!

Their enthusiasm and excitement was palpable, but we had to explain that it was just not possible to accommodate all of them in one session and that some would need to come back later.

We had established tables around the room with plastic bowls of water for soaking the transfers, and plastic plates for gathering transfers. The transfer sheets from Aynsley were on a table at the side with a stack of cups and saucers.

I suggested and showed a few ways of applying the transfers – to the outside surface, to the inside surface, and to the bottom, the foot and the handle of the teacups, to the top surface, and the bottom of the saucer – I encouraged them to add pattern wherever they wanted.



Image 37: Cj with Sakshi and a lady from the pol, decorating workshop, 2010

I showed the group how to physically work with the transfers, giving these instructions (ably translated by Palak);

1. Select a few transfers and cut out the ones you like. (You can always come back for more)
2. Soak one transfer in water.
3. When the transfer begins to separate, they are ready to remove from the water.
4. Carefully holding the transfer on the ceramic item, slide the image across the backing paper and onto the surface of the ceramic.
5. Try not to overlap the transfers as they won't fire through layers.
6. Once you are happy with where the transfer is placed, use a cloth to gently try and remove any big air bubbles and flatten the transfer out as much as possible.

What followed was an incredibly intensive day of aiding and supporting eighty four children between the ages of three and twelve, apply transfers to teacups and saucers. The care and attention each child took over which transfers to choose, cutting each one, and how they planned and executed the application, was incredible, and allowed me to see how this model of working could be taken forward with other groups of young people. Previously I had only undertaken workshops with adults – whereby the commissioner (eg. Crafts Council of England) would promote the event to a 'craft aware' audience and manage sign up to the event on my behalf. Or where I had run one to one sessions as artist in residence at Wesley Community Furniture project (see *My Stories*). The shortened timescale between invitation and event did not detract from the enthusiasm and effort evidenced in the objects produced. This immediacy of action and doing would continue to be a guiding influence on the practice moving forward.



Image 38: Gautam and the decorated cups, 2010

The children were told the pieces would be taken to a kiln for firing and they would then be exhibited in Arts Reverie as part of the AIAF. At the end of the session, a local boy, Gautam stood by the long line of elaborately decorated cups and saucers, bashfully proud of himself and his friends.

The cups were carefully packed up into boxes and transported back to Arts Reverie for safekeeping before firing.

These workshops confirmed my thoughts that the everyday nature of the teacups and saucers selected made them easily accessible as objects.

Meanwhile, our projects were taking shape – Amanda and I had continued to discuss ideas of how we could respond to the Pol and the people within it. We wanted to capture the beauty of the everyday activities happening in front of us on the wide *otla* steps each day as we walked and increasingly chatted to the community. I had been working in papercuts and collage to explore how I might approach this, and considered a series of silhouette portraits, focusing on key figures around the Pol.



Images 39, 40: Silhouettes, doorways and portraits in different versions, 2010

This individual approach seemed appropriate, I wanted to develop ceramic objects and Amanda had ideas of filming and documenting. But we continued to discuss and reflect, and act, and then decided to create an event. Amanda would film and I would capture stills and transfer these onto the surface of locally sourced teacups and saucers. Amanda suggested a swing – our neighbours had one in their living space that all generations used to alleviate the heat - a playful idea that brought a lightness to the event, and one that began to take shape. We wondered how to practically install this in an open space, thinking it would need a structure or frame.

**\*Then a doorway was suggested as the prop\***

This was key in recognizing the doorway as the place of congregation, of daily activities and conversations, and as central to the strong community bonds evidenced through the Navratri dancing.

Steve, Lokesh and Amanda went to source a doorway and came back with a beautiful yellow frame, complete with closing doors. The idea of acting out daily activities around a doorway was so logical, the *otla* steps and the doorways were so significant in the life of the pol, and allowed community links and connections to become strong through repeated shared experiences.



Image 41: ceramic flower testing with drilled holes.

Barney (Hare-Duke) found a carpenter to add supportive struts to the base to enable it to be freestanding. We drilled holes in the frame in order to add some of the Aynsley flowers (produced in the UK and brought over by Steve) into the frame of the doorway. We drew a cow lying across the closed doors and painted it white. We added tile patterns from a local home and painted these in gold. All this action was to make the doorway connected to the community, the location and the idea of beauty.

I say 'we'. 'We' included myself, Amanda, Manzi (a neighbour) and various children from around the Pol who were intrigued and wanted to help. 'We' shifted and changed over the course of the project. The sense of collaboration was incredibly strong. The work was emerging from a series of shared experiences and combined thoughts and actions.



Image 42: Community chalkboards

Mayur Fadya, the local moped mechanic offered the square outside his workshop as a space to film, which on a normal day housed anything up to 50 mopeds.

The day before the event, Palak wrote notices on the community chalkboards around the pol inviting everyone to the event. That evening we brought the door to the cleared space outside Mayurs' home and workshop and we crossed our fingers and hoped that someone might turn up! **Palak's strong existing links to the community of Dhal ni Pol significantly influenced our ability to make things happen in a short timespan and this was something I was aware of throughout the project.**

In the morning when we walked to the space at the end of the road, there were a few children sat along the raised space outside Mayur's home and workshop. Amanda set up the video camera and there was a definite air of curiosity. Palak handed out sheets in Gujarati which explained that we wished to invite people to act out their daily activities around the doorway. She talked gently and encouragingly to people about taking part. To begin with there was some embarrassed kids, a few women who were uncomfortable about being the centre of attention, and a few young boys who were laughing so much that it was making everyone else laugh. Significant figures in the local community came and stood in and around the doorway, providing beautiful poses for us to capture. More and more people joined us around the doorway.



Image 43: Door blessings

I took still photographs of the various poses gracefully held around the doorway, and observed as ceramic flowers were placed into the drilled holes by all ages, a lime and chilli blessing hung from the middle, and a blessing in the form of red powder applied as it would be to a person's forehead. Many, many daily activities unfurled in front of us, from the brushing of hair to the sieving of rice and it became obvious that my use of the stills camera helped to try and indicate timings to pose and come through the door.

We had inadvertently stumbled on the day of Dusshera<sup>36</sup> to host the event, an auspicious day in which new modes of transport are bought and blessed, so there were new bikes presented by being wheeled through the doorway. This enthusiastic response was fantastic, and we all began to relax – at least we had something!

Towards lunchtime there was a somewhat ceremonial closing of the doors by two older members of the community and we left for lunch.

We returned nervously to the space after a home cooked lunch (of cheese toasties made on white bread and served with a really interesting tomato ketchup style sauce made with real care by Mohan and Devi Singh). On return the doorway was a hive of activity, with a number of different people around. The doors were reopened and chalk was used to mark out a pattern a small distance in front of the doorway, which began to be filled with coloured powders.

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<sup>36</sup> The tenth day of the Navaratri festival is known as Dusshera. It's devoted to celebrating the defeat of the demon king Ravana by Lord Rama. <http://goindia.about.com/od/festivalinformation/p/dussehra.htm>





Image 44: Chalk drawings

A few taller boys began to light candles and place them on top of the doorway. The interaction clearly indicated the inside and outside of the doorway, and people took turns in being 'host' in the house, on the far side of the doorway from the video camera. I continued to document through still images, and began to notice the queues, the waiting, the patience on display amongst children and adults alike. The activities after lunch appeared to be more planned and preconceived than before lunch, not in a construed or falsified way, but that there seemed to be more organization and order to the sequencing of events. People had obviously thought about what they wanted to show us.



Image 45: Sweet seller during filming, 2010

The sweet seller presented his overladen bike behind the door as it couldn't fit through. This framing of an object by the door was of real interest to me, as it was the first image of the day that didn't include a person. Somehow this shifted my thinking and I began to think much more specifically about how I might develop some of the images into silhouette. The bright, bright pink of the sweets themselves shone in the shadowed area of filming.

A donkey passed behind the door. Next we were being invited into a home for *Diwali*, there were sparklers and candles, feet were touched and hugs given. There was dancing, clapping, music and singing. We were celebrating. Dancing and clapping began around two small girls sat on the step of the doorway watching intently as the adults danced *garba*, clapping and singing about the bird who flies up to heaven with your wishes.

The end of the day had another ceremonial closing of the doors, and slowly the crowd dispersed. 'The event – starting from nothing, ending in nothing – slowly reaches its end when the sun sets and it becomes dark. Something happened here.' (Van der Pol, 2007)

This incredible experience represented for me a summary of the experience of being accepted and welcomed into this new place.

This *event* marked a different way of working for me – although I have previously run workshops, this was the first time that I had attempted to capture something so specific in such a short space of time - with the portraits around the doorway. It allowed to me to see the possibilities of working in this event based manner, and opened a new way of approaching the formation of images.

An intense period of making followed the *event* translating the documented moments into ceramic, late nights of digital image manipulation, printing, drawing, redrawing, cutting up, assembling, and finally cutting transfers. I had already begun work on some papercuts, responding to photographs and drawings from around the Pol, but the ideas did not become fully established in my mind until after the filming. Often during this period of making, I would work through the night and sleep for a few hours once the rest of the Pol had woken up. Daytimes would be spent on practical doing tasks like sourcing materials, making arrangements and attending meetings. I thrived in the noise, music and buzz of the Pol during the day, but required stillness and quiet to respond to this. The intensity and focused attention allows ideas to emerge and become real in this instance, through surface decoration.

In selecting images to translate onto ceramic, I focused on ones which could be extracted and still visually understood when in a silhouette format.



Images 46, 47: neet (community) photo, digital image

This image (above) became a symbol of community (*neet* in Gujarati) – the strength of bonds (experienced as a visitor) between the members of this community. The translation into silhouette meant that each person could be identified if you knew them, although it wasn't the individuals that I was trying to capture, but the group. A moment from the day of interaction solidified somehow.



Image 48, 49: paper cutting from stills, cutting transfers for decoration, 2010

Some images were developed and tested, but didn't make it through to the final objects. The papercut on the left for example, was a strong image in paper, but wouldn't translate well to the three-dimensional surface of cup or even saucer with a large flat area. The donkey on the right was a strong visual image, but when Palak saw this piece there ensued an interesting conversation about the cultural connotations of calling someone a 'donkey' in Gujarati – in this context, this is an incredibly derogatory term. Cultural nuances are incredibly important, and are only gained through working with someone who knows the culture and people deeply like Palak. The sweet seller image went through a variety of options before deciding to exclude this image. It was more important to have key pieces that represented the community as a whole, and the experience I had had, living within it for a few weeks. The strong and supportive connections across generations, between ages, neighbours, friends and family.

By translating this event onto ceramics, I was aiming to celebrate the everyday *through* the everyday. By working with everyday objects commonly visible within the pol and adding the narrative of the everyday activities visible within the pol *into* the surface of the objects, perhaps the activities associated with these objects – tea drinking, chatting – might be highlighted as beautiful and important to the community. This was not about telling others outside of the community about how special this community was, it was about **allowing the community themselves to realise the beauty and value *already there*.**



Images 50, 51: work in progress, papercuts, transfer application

The process of making the work for exhibition also involved travelling across Ahmedabad (in a small tuktuk surrounded by boxes of fragile ceramics) to have the pieces fired at the *Laxmi ceramic works*<sup>37</sup>, as well as setting up the exhibition in Arts Reverie for the festival.



Images 52, 53: firing at Laxmi through the tunnel kiln

Working with Laxmi allowed for firing of all the work through a tunnel kiln – something I had not experienced previously. As Laxmi decorate ceramic items with transfers every day, this is an efficient and economical method. Items are introduced at the entrance to the kiln (flanked by images of gods to pray for good firing) and removed at the opposite end. Pieces are brought to circa 780 celcius in the centre point of the kiln and cool enough to handle by the end of the track. The whole process took around 20 minutes. Due to the open style kiln and related high oxygen level during firing, the gold transfers reacted well and provided a very rich and reflective surface post firing. The detailed transfers merged well with the glazes and retained the sharp, crisp edge that has become an important quality within the work to bear traces of hand production.

For me, the focus at the beginning of the project was on the creation of objects connected through the daily *chai* drinking, and using the objects associated with this as a canvas for storytelling. Whilst this initial aim carried through, how I formed the images shifted and changed, from being daily observations gathered over a period of time, to capturing moments specific to the day of filming. The community selected daily rituals to show

<sup>37</sup> Laxmi [www.laxmiceramicart.com](http://www.laxmiceramicart.com) Crockery Market, Saijpur Bogha Road, Naroda Road, Ahmedabad - 382330

during this day, and I selected some of these to materialize my own thoughts on the strength of the community bonds. Some of the objects reflected on the Navratri dancing of *garba* and the symbolic peacocks of India; and some objects were very simply embellished with gold as a sign of their worth to the building of connections in the community.

A summary of the physical outcomes of the project are as follows;



Images 54, 55: Mayur Chai, hand cut transfer decoration on ceramic, collection of British Library, Ahmedabad, 2010

**Mayur chai** A national emblem in India, the peacock is a symbol of beauty, the eternal soul, a perfect love, all things wonderful. Some believe that man was created from the eyes of peacock feathers, others have a different story, but each connects somehow to the beauty of the birds. An apt motif then, for creating beauty from the everyday. Serendipitously, the song that Palak sings in Amanda's film *Entry* (Ravetz, 2010 <https://vimeo.com/19328902>) calls for a beautiful bird to fly to heaven and ask the goddess to come down and dance *garba* - what a beautiful image - and one I hoped to create by making the words of this song fly up to heaven, via the teapot surface in gold and black, embellished with the long flowing tails of peacock birds.



Image 56: *chai walla* (tea seller), hand cut transfer decoration, 2010

**Portraits** I cut some portraits of individuals around the pol, beginning with Parshottam, the chai walla. Then, working with the stills taken during the event, I created a series of portraits of individuals and groups around the doorway, incorporating the Gujarati word for the image created – community, sisters, brothers, friends, family – on the cup or saucer as appropriate.



Image 57: *bhai* (brothers), hand cut transfer decoration on ceramic, 2010



Images 58, 59: *neet* (community) and *kids*, hand cut transfer decoration on ceramic, 2010

**Golden** I decorated a series of cups with a simple gold spot, imbuing an extra level of visible value into the pieces which are used to drink chai daily.



Image 60: *golden spot cups* hand cut transfer on ceramic, private collections, Ahmedabad, 2010

However, this summary of the physical outcomes of the project is one that focuses on the *things* resulting from our interactions with the community in Dhal ni Pol. What it does not focus on are the issues I encountered that provide insights into working methods.





Image 61: child with teacup and saucer, 2010

1. This child had decorated a cup and saucer during a workshop, and was invited to be included in a subsequent exhibition at the British Council library, something I saw as a valuable experience. Proudly, she informed me that it just wouldn't be possible as her Father only drank tea from that cup now and he didn't want to use something else, even for a few days, revealing that her Father's value was more important to her than that of taking part in an exhibition.

2. On leaving the pol, I gave a series of gifts to the individuals that supported us along the way.



Images 62, 63: Garba tea service, gifted to Ahmedabad British Library collection; Parshottam, pictured here with his ceramic portrait, 2010

I gave Parshottam (the chai walla who we came to know from daily visits during our stay in Dhal ni Pol) a series of cups. Mayur Fadiya, the moped mechanic who made it possible for us to set up the doorway and encouraged his friends and family to join in the filming was given a set of gold spot cups. The decorated tea service was gifted to the British Council Library in Ahmedabad. Every child who joined in the decorating workshop

received a cup and saucer. Devi Singh, Mohan and Mohanlil who worked at Arts Reverie each received a cup.

This gifting process allowed the ceramic objects to become physical representations of the connections made between myself and those people who had impacted on my experience in the pol. The objects developed a social value beyond that of their monetary value, one which celebrated the people and process involved through acknowledgement as opposed to the objects themselves.

But not everyone I worked with or met was given a cup and saucer - there just were not enough to go around as I had to keep enough of the objects as representations of the *output* of the project. When asked how much one of the cup and saucer sets would cost to buy, suddenly thoughts of authorship and ownership came into full view as I realized I did not feel in a position to sell the objects associated with this project. They were a result of a process that had occurred in that place, at that time, with that group of people, and it felt somehow, that the pieces belonged to the experience, not to me, and were therefore not really mine to sell.

#### Who then actually *made* this project?

I wondered was there a way to articulate or mark the contribution each person made to the project?

Amanda had introduced me to the thinking of anthropologist James Leach whilst in India, and his ideas of *dispersed creativity* allow for a different interpretation of the project from that of the standard outputs associated with academic working practice.

Leach isolates three elements that tend to rule what he calls 'dominant Euro-American' ways of thinking about creativity:

'We tend to recognize creativity where combinations of things or ideas are apparent. We expect that this process of combination has been directed by a will or intent. We deduce creativity using evidence of novelty of form or outcome.'  
(Leach, 2004)

In previous projects, I had always recognized my own creativity as a result of combining things and ideas. This process had come directly from my intent. And the objects I produce are unique and therefore novel. In this way of thinking creativity is concentrated within individuals, and attributed to them specifically – as with IPR (Intellectual property rights) which reinforces this way of thinking (Leach, 2004, p.171). However, Leach insists that not only is there another way of thinking about creativity, but that we are already aware of it, although we are much less likely to either present or acknowledge it.

In this alternative model;

‘Creativity is immanent in all moments. It is distributed through creation. It is not the preserve or property of a particular institution or deity’ (Leach, 2004, p.157)

This way of thinking allowed me to make sense of my feelings of uncertainty that had occurred at the end of the project – of not being able to sell the ‘things’ produced as they belonged to the project it seemed. This creativity consisted of more than the *things* and came from the combination of people, place and things that were there at that point – I simply helped to reveal what was there already. The community lent themselves ‘not only to our project, but as an effect of this, to the success that might come to register in us as persons – in our careers, our earning potential and so on.’ (O’Neill, Ravetz, 2013)

How might we make this visible? And how could we value it?

I began to map the network of connections

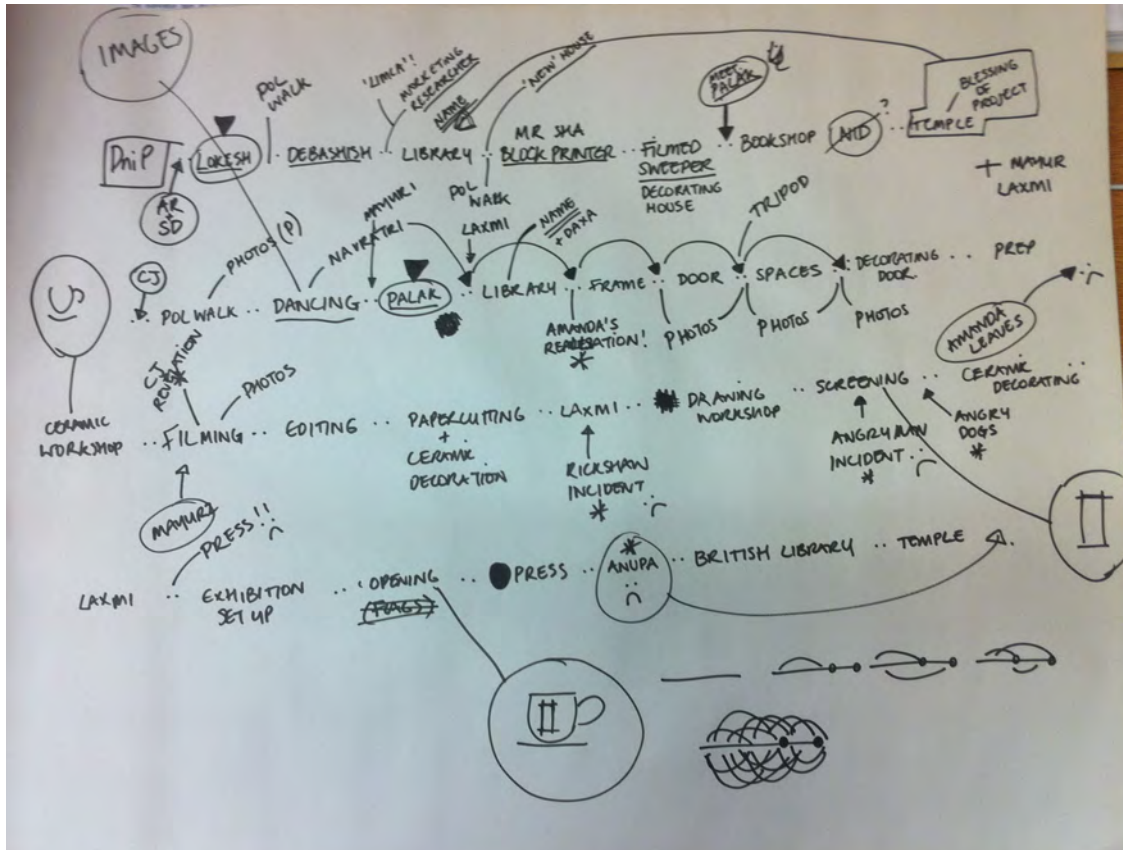


Image 64: drawings from initial mapping of the project.

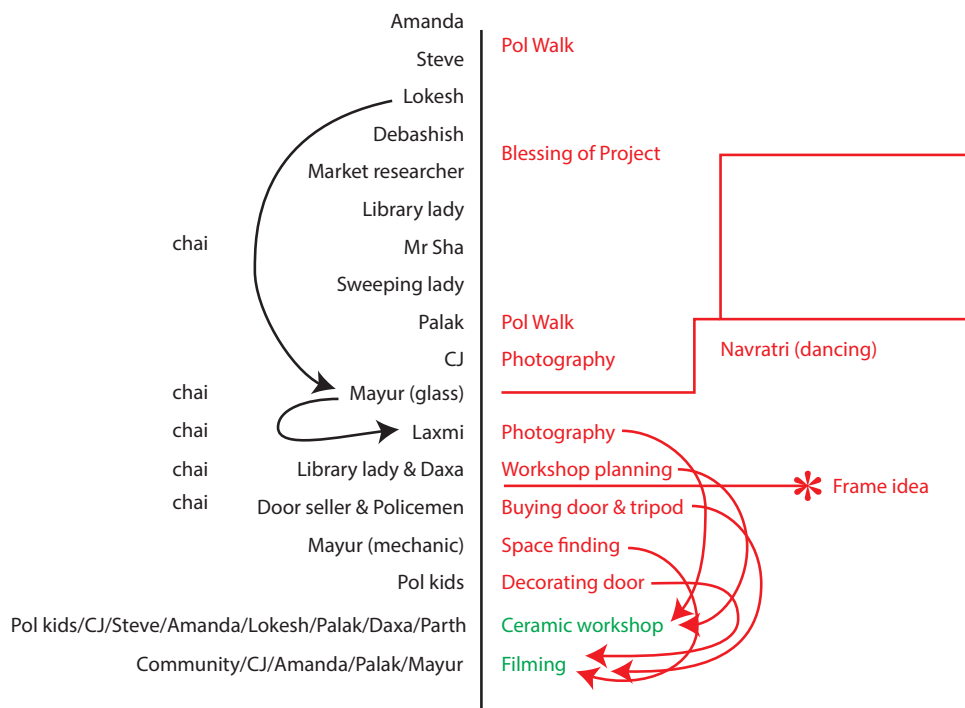


Image 65: beginning to digitise the mapping

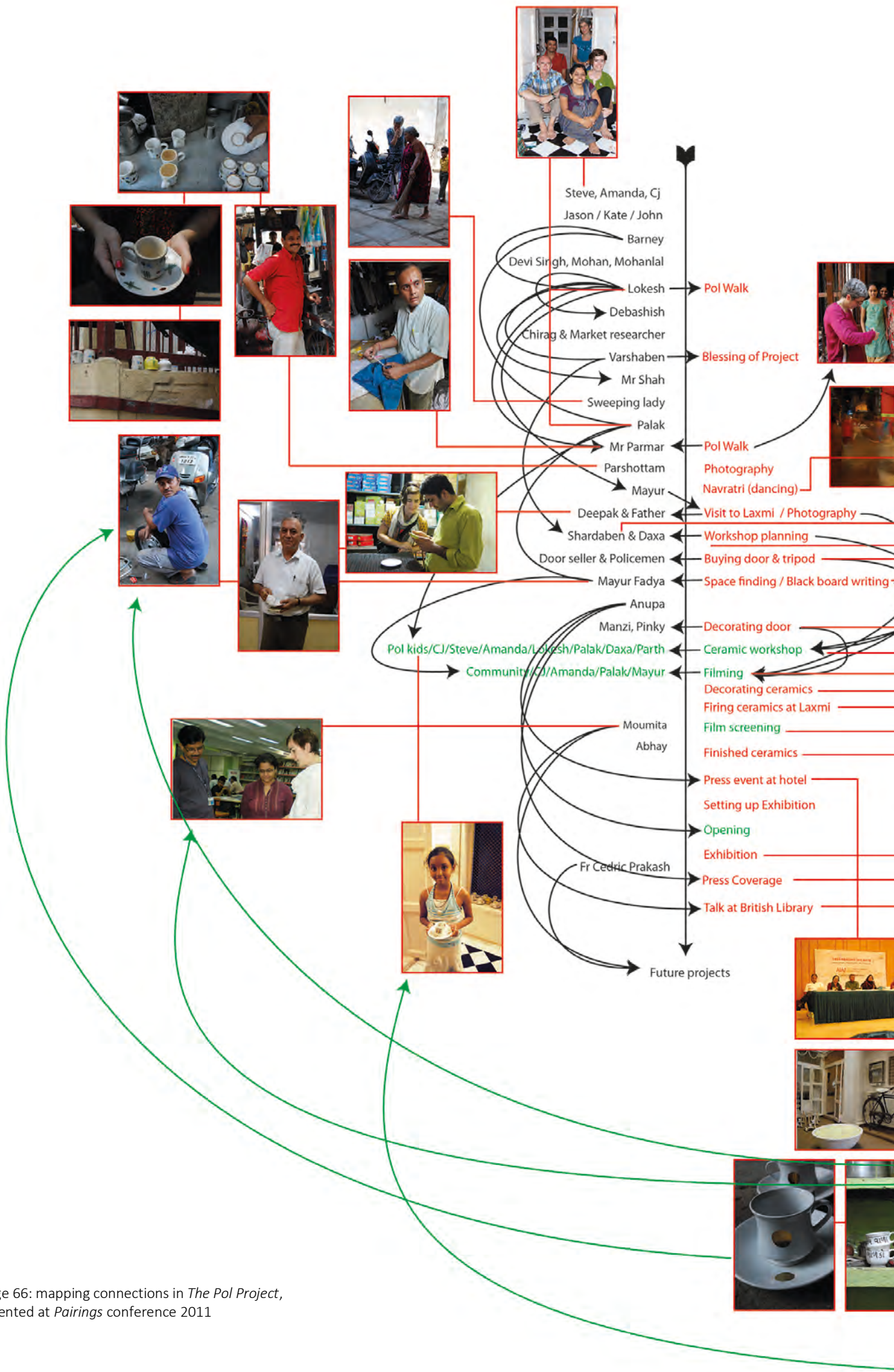


Image 66: mapping connections in *The Pol Project*, presented at *Pairings* conference 2011



Mapping the complex system that underpinned what happened while I was in Dhal ni Pol, proved impossible - it is hard to know where to stop – this map could be extended further from each person that directly supported us and does not include the names of each person present at the workshops. What happened in the first version of events of the project above is that the line was drawn around the *things* produced in the project, in line with what is expected within a Western (and academic perspective). This drawing as an alternative, allows the network to extend beyond this perspective, and recognize the contributions of others. In order to articulate this, we must take on board different ways of thinking about creativity - more in line with Leach's theory of *distributed creativity*. Value becomes 'about the work each of us does in others' (O'Neill, Ravetz, 2013) rather than the tangible things we produce individually, thus allowing us to understand the longer social networks that connect people, places and things.

'Returning to the UK, the objects – removed from the context of relationships, and presented in an academic institution (complete with the impending REF) – become mine/ours; viewed as an output, what this obscures is the 'otherness' in the pieces. The subjects, objects, origin of the cups; the firing of the transfer; the translation, advice, conversation, filming, placement and testing; the sounds, smells and sights of the Pol that contributed. Can we place a monetary value on this, could Cj sell these ceramic pieces? ... How can value be articulated within the academic world, gain monetary value in the economic reality of making a living, and still contain the value of dispersed creativity? ... as interesting, and we hope aesthetically pleasing, as the things are, so too are the social relations that engendered them. Moving into a social context other than our own gave a new urgency to questions about collaboration – and especially about creativity and value.' (O'Neill, Ravetz 2013)

Within my practice, I knew that the social and emotional value of the objects I produced – particularly through the commissioning process and through workshops or community based work such as *Graffiti\*d* – had a direct relationship to the people, places and objects I experienced. My two principle ways of working – workshop and commissioning overlapped in this way – and using *dispersed creativity* as a tool aided the communication of this to the wider world. However, the objects produced through *The Pol Project* still follow the model of workshops with related objects produced by participants, and artworks produced in response to an event. The dissemination of the project highlighted the deeper values within the work, but the work itself does not visually acknowledge this.

'The point is that design is no longer about the spectacular object, but about the experience of it, and about the co-operation it can bring about.' (Evans, Larson, 2011)

This co-operation can be seen amongst the emergences of design (and craft) collectives across the UK and internationally, the benefits of working with others are impacting on the commercial design world, and are clearly acknowledged and valued in this context.

This same co-operation happens within academic contexts, where it is beginning to be acknowledged, but how this is actually valued within this context is still not clear.

I wanted to continue working in this manner, between established systems, working on projects that could be valued in a number of different ways.

Highlighting the value of individuals within communities had already happened within *Wesley*, *Kirkens* and *Graffiti\*d* projects, and the Pol Project had developed this further, in a new context.

The idea of *dispersed creativity* had given me the critical framework to describe what I was already doing within my practice, and by using this framework I could focus more on this way of working and articulate its value to a broader audience.



## The Pol Project: Silhouettes

On returning to the UK, I was invited to contribute a piece of work to a fundraising exhibition organized by a gallery in Paris. *Un Soutien pour Japan* (2011) was an exhibition of postcards auctioned to raise money for victims of the 2010 Japanese tsunami – I immediately thought of the young children affected by the disaster and how difficult it must be for those left without parents or family members. The image of two small children sat on the doorstep during the filming of *Entry* sprang to mind. I had a sticky pad on my desk, in fluorescent orange, (the colour for me went some way toward acknowledging the ‘man made’ element of the impact of the disaster on the people of Japan) and cut from that as a test, placing it on a simple white postcard. I began to see how the doorway was no longer just related to that day of filming in India.

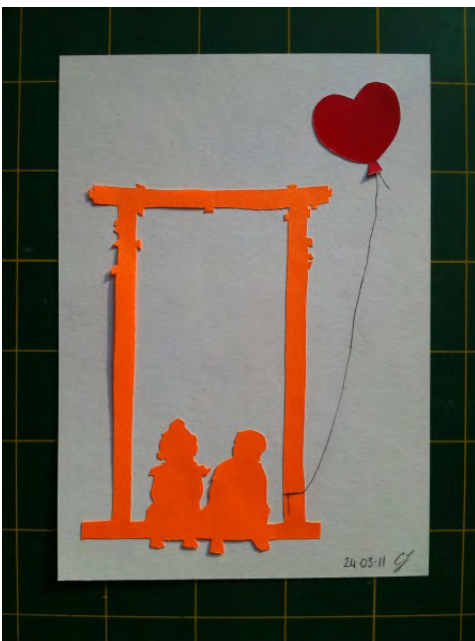


Image 67: *Kids*, *Un Soutien pour Japan*, papercut on card, 2011

**This image was more universal than one cultural context.** I wondered - was it the whole image or just the doorway element? Is this due to the use of silhouettes?

Silhouettes have been used for many years and have a long tradition within portraiture reaching as far back as Pliny the Elder ‘some say that it [painting] was invented at Sicyon, others at Corinth; but they all agree that it originated in tracing lines round the human shadow’ (Pliny, circa 77-79 AD) and the first silhouettes at this time were also said to be in ceramic form made by Butades, a potter in Sicayon. The silhouette (or papercut) was popular as a portraiture style through the 19<sup>th</sup> century and was one of the methods used by Hans Christian Andersen in telling his stories - he would cut while telling the story and give the papercuts to the children at the end (Wagner Brust, 2003). Silhouettes and

papercutting maintain a presence in contemporary culture with artists such as Rob Ryan<sup>38</sup> and Kara Walker<sup>39</sup> being the best known. The name itself came from a French politician who was unpopular for his stringent approach to taxes in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, and it is thought that it developed due to the lack of money (following his tax reforms) for painted portraits and thus 'silhouette' was given to the cheaper process of papercut portraits. As a method of capturing people and objects I find it incredibly useful in its ability to communicate both specific detail and anonymity simultaneously.

Around this time, my Mum's sister passed away in Canada, and as such significant points in life tend to leave a lasting trace, this death had a profound effect on my thinking about life and death and in responding to this event through making, I saw the potential in the doorway to act as a symbol that refers to the passing down of objects through generations, allowing a portal, and access point to these earlier generations. What had begun as a simple frame for a representation of daily life in *The Pol Project*, was already becoming a more universal symbol within my thinking (demonstrated through the simple papercut above). This symbol began to take on another level of meaning. I realized that the images could be read as representations of a threshold, and in this context, connect to ideas of death, of heaven and 'crossing over'. As a personal reflection on my aunt's passing, I made a series of 3 plates, entitled *Heaven*<sup>40</sup>.



Images 68, 69: Heaven I & II, hand cut transfer decoration in black and gold, on Wedgwood seconds, 2011

I was exploring a deeply personal and meaningful visual exploration of my aunt's passing, but also a wider preoccupation with the threshold between life and death. My father's influence on this was huge, as he talked throughout my life of death as 'the next life' as simply the opening of another door, an obvious step, one to be relished and anticipated

<sup>38</sup> <https://robryanstudio.com/>

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.karawalkerstudio.com/>

<sup>40</sup> This series of plates was exhibited at the Asia Triennial Manchester in 2011

with joy, not fear. Perhaps this had a stronger impact on me than I had realized.



Image 70: Heaven III, hand cut transfer decoration in black and gold, on Wedgwood seconds, 2011

This was a key point of *thinking through making* (Ravetz, 2011; Ingold, 2013), where thoughts and theories were not connected until I began to make, manifesting new thinking and new conclusions through the making of new objects.

The doorway then, could be symbolic and iconic - something I had not initially realized. Through the titling of the works, these pieces became sorrowful or joyful depending what experiences the viewer brought to bear on their own thoughts of Heaven. This series was exhibited at the *Asia Triennial Manchester*<sup>41</sup> in late 2011, and reactions were mixed. Some visitors, on seeing the titles were intrigued and recounted their own experience of death, talking about specific people and places; thoughts about who they might think could be waiting for them on 'the other side' of the doorway. Others saw Amanda's film *Entry* and perhaps missed the titles, commenting instead on the strength of the connection to the film, and the capturing of the essence of the spirit of the film through the plates and embedded images. Each could bring their own interpretation to the plates. As opposed to being simply an observer of the work, I wanted to engage viewers in developing their own version of the narrative.

I wondered – *could the doorway invite people in to the work?*

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<sup>41</sup> The work was exhibition at Manchester Craft and Design Centre, as part of the Made in Manchester exhibition <https://www.craftanddesign.com/events/made-for-manchester-craft-objects-of-exchange/>

In exploring this notion, I developed a series of plates that entered *in* to the pre-existing narrative of the plates in a physical and narrative sense. These already had stories printed on the surface, but using the additive method of transfer decoration, I reinvented the story somewhat – adding my own imagined reality by finding a new story within the object. This was a significant change as I had begun to work with narrative patterned objects, rather than simple or abstractly decorated objects.



Images 71, 72: Work in progress, 2011

In the first plate is a hunting scene. One rider seems to be frowning in the direction of a dog. I speculated that this dog may want to escape from his life of chasing foxes, and experience something new. A doorway that would lead somewhere new, unknown, could be a risk – is he willing to jump through? I began with drawing on the objects themselves in marker to explore visual interventions.

Connecting plates through narrative, allowing the *chi*<sup>42</sup> of the character to flow through each piece and using gold to highlight this. I wondered –

How can I best represent this sense of flow?

How can I enable different ways of reading the *story* of the plate?

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<sup>42</sup> Chi is defined as *vital energy believed to circulate round the body in currents (in Oriental medicine, martial arts, etc)* in the Collins Dictionary accessed online <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/chi> 11/07/2018



Image 73: detail of *The travelling dog*, handcut transfer decoration in gold and black on porcelain plates, 2011

Highlighting the dog in each plate with gold transfer (it is tricky to see the dog in the second plate, he is standing in the water) and the subsequent crackling of the gold as it reacted with the painted enamels underneath allowed for a transparency of both material and process – adding, but not obscuring. Using the doorway as an exit or entry point utilized its functional and physical properties. How it ‘floats’ in air at the edge of the plate felt somehow clumsy – this aspect needed further development.

The narrative of the dog ‘escaping’ from the hunters was one way of reading the piece, but was it the only one? How could I take this idea forward in the next phase? Was there a way to invite the audience into the work further? **How could I encourage and facilitate others to tell stories within my own process and practice?**

## Reflection Point One

By this point in the research, a number of key observations and thematic links had emerged. Collating them before embarking on the next stage provided an important point of reflection and analysis. This is a central part of the methodology of the reflective practitioner.

**With | Within | Into** Through *The Pol Project* I had discovered the importance of working with others to inform my practice – and that this can occur in a wide range of ways that vary from established norms with a combination of people, place, object or material. Each brings its own set of challenges and rewards. Working *with*, *within* or *into* others allows more than the sum of the parts to be revealed. Working *in* to objects (such as the plates cited in the previous section) by adding doorways or other symbols myself can open up the objects' potential for narrative to the viewer.

**Dispersed Creativity** I was introduced to an anthropological approach to research and the theories of James Leach through working with Amanda (Ravetz), and experienced the intimacy of working within a small community in a different culture and country and discovered the impact this change in context has on the work. Leach suggests that value is assigned by celebrating the outcomes, the combinations that led to them *and* the forms of creativity dispersed between participants. This challenges us to shift our perspective on what is valued within creativity and to value in addition to the *things* or events that may be seen as creative, but also the way in which creativity is seen in the development of one person as a result of the work done by another. I discovered that the work that others *do* in us – that is the impact of others actions on our own thinking and doing - can be more important than the *things* we produce – but also that the articulation of this is complex and difficult! Each person we meet has an impact on us, creating a thread of a connection and these build up over time, creating something Ingold refers to as meshworks (Ingold, 2007). These meshworks can and do become incredibly complex over our lives, (envisage a spiders' web with multiple levels rather than one plane) and articulating each and every *others'* impact upon our own thinking and doing is impossible. However, there are ways of acknowledging this work that others do in us within our creative practice, and this has become significant within this research – how this might develop was unclear at this point in the research, but I will return to it at a later point in the thesis.

**Doorways** The doorway is a conceptual motif that is emerging as a useful tool in provoking narrative. Around the doorway in *The Pol Project* participants felt comfortable in acting out daily occurrences that would happen around their own doorway. The motif

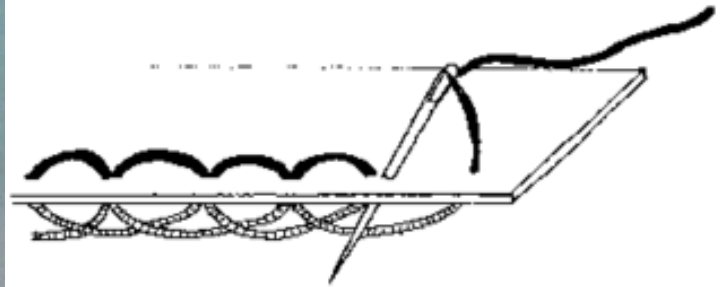
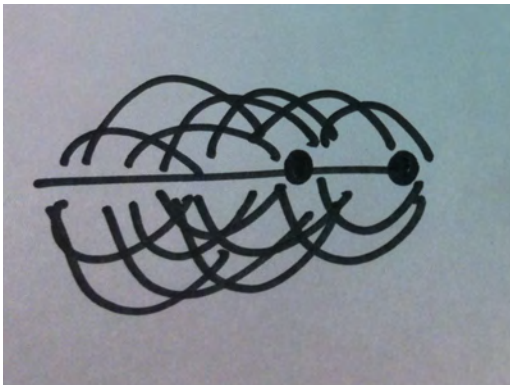
is familiar, everyday but also very personal. The process of crossing through the doorway, the threshold of a person's home is a deeply intimate experience. Closed doors can conjure up all sorts of narratives of what is contained or happens within.

**Gold as *chi*, the essential energy** I have used gold for a long time in my ceramic work and I have a strong spiritual belief in the longevity of the soul, and the connectedness between all things in the world. Gold doesn't tarnish or rust, and within spirituality, gold is seen as a pure and magical material. Ancient Egyptians buried their dead with it as they believed it would help their beloved pay for goods in the next world. Gold is used within many spiritual places as a sign of reverence and respect. Gold can be seen as an alchemically transformative material, being used in well-known stories such as The Golden goose, Rumpelstiltskin, etc. and with Chinese porcelain referred to as 'white gold' the two materials have a long tradition of being linked. Gold is symbolic across many cultures being seen as the 'traditional measure of value' (Clark, 2009), and as such is a useful tool in provoking thoughts on worth and significance.

**Silhouettes** These form an essential part of my visual language – their ability to be interpreted in a number of ways allows the viewer to bring their own experience to bear on the understanding or connection made with the object.

**Doing** I realized at this point that it is in the *doing* of my practice that the value of my practice is contained. My focus is on this process of doing, of action, and with this comes a sense of movement from a static idea into finding, exchanging, collecting, working with and re\*presenting an object - thus making is a kind of thinking.

These reflection points may appear to be short at this stage. As the thesis develops, these key points are repeated, reconsidered, added to and developed further. Much like this drawing from the initial mapping of the Pol Project as a way of illustrating the connections made with people, place and object, and the diagram of a backstitch, there is a process of firming up, strengthening my position and ideas before moving forward again. The nodes within the drawing on the left indicate people met in a chronological order, and the lines illustrate the multiple connections that can be made from that person to other people, places or objects within the project, and the process being repeated above and below the line allows for the visible and invisible connections to both be acknowledged. The illustration of backstitch develops this notion by allowing a visible image of the reinforcement of these connections through what is shown outwardly and what is hidden within.



Images 74. 75: drawing from mapping *The Pol Project* drawing of backstitch from needle set

To aid this process of strengthening my position and ideas, I returned to see if the theoretical approach that I had found so useful through Leach could be further developed in the next phase.



## Their Stories: Take Two: Materiality

'Objects of daily use often become intimately important and indispensable to people. What one keeps and owns, often contains an emotional value next to its practical function or worth. It even can be seen as a representation of its owner.' (Hackenberg, 2013)

The everyday objects that I choose to work with are imbued with such a wealth of opportunity, historical, factual, personal and ritual associations that I turned to material culture for some guidance on how to 'read' the meanings of objects I work with and the work I do with them and people. In the introduction to a series of papers *Migratory Practices*, Amanda Ravetz and Jane Webb contend that there are two key historical moments we might want to look at when trying to understand the connections between the fields of art, craft, design and anthropology (as I am considering relationships between object, user and maker, it was important to include anthropology as well as the other areas). The development of craft through the Arts and Crafts movement in response to industrialisation in the 19th century paralleled an anthropological view of objects as key representations of social culture, but by the early 20th century, this anthropological focus shifted to 'an engagement with 'underlying' structures of lived experience.' (Ravetz, Webb, 2009, p.9) and moved away from a vision of the isolated and decontextualised object, presented in the first moment. In the second moment in the 1960s, there was a return to object-centred theories in the areas of craft & design as well as anthropology, but now the object was recognised as a site for activity, rather than being simply a static visual as it had been viewed previously (Ravetz, Webb, 2009, p.10). In the design field this activity concentrated on the relationship between designer and the user, with the object simply enabling the everyday activity that connected both. In craft, the concentration was more on the relationship between maker and material. Reflecting on this today we can see these areas now cross, merge and combine their skills and practice with those of art to create a much more fluid idea of what might constitute a craft/design/art practice, and where the boundaries between craft, design, art and anthropology (if they exist) might lie.

Despite this fluidity though, there are still discussions within material culture studies about how to understand the nature of material things - for example via their social contexts, their processual nature and the movement between these. Some think that the distinction of material culture from other areas of research is in its *thingness*. That researchers in this field are concerned with things rather than texts. Auslander, a social historian, supports this distinction with the factual perspective that things have a lifespan, whereas texts are immortal and transferable (Auslander, 2009, p.1356-7). Material Culture emphasises the connection between persons and things, 'that persons make and

use things and the things make persons.’ (Tilley et al, 2006, p.4). Louise Crewe agrees with this connection between persons and things, and reinforces this image of inseparability. ‘Things come to matter through our intimate relations with them, object and subject combined and entwined, inseparable in mind and body.’ (Crewe, 2011). Although Daniel Miller agrees with this – ‘things make us just as much as we make things’ – throughout his writings he compounds the view that objects do work in people to influence their behaviours (Miller, 2010), elevating the status of people over objects somewhat. In the Handbook of Material Culture, the assertion is made that ‘Subjects and objects are indelibly linked.’ (Tilley et al, 2006, p.4). The use of indelible by Tilley to describe the link between subjects and objects conjures up a strongly material image of indelible ink, permanent marker, drawn on skin; ink embedded under the skin; tattoos, permanently connected to the body, indelible in their intention and materiality; a bond so great that it becomes impossible to separate one from the other. This connects further to my use of surface decoration as a key tool, this application of permanent pattern is actually reminiscent of the tattoo process. It helps me to grasp some of the deeper meaning of my experience as a maker in wanting to fuse object and pattern – as a way of enacting a fusion of my own self with the socially-active object. Permanent. Indelible. I am moving around between the body and surface and as such am moving between this two-dimensional level relating closely to the text, and that of the three-dimensional body or thing.

When I talk about things I do not mean the traditional objects of consumption (by which I mean the purchase and prior supply chain of goods) that Miller concentrates on, but I am more interested in the things we own already, our reasons for keeping them, and how we use them. Although it is difficult to separate the two, I am using a pluralistic approach to investigate the in-between ground, examining the ways in which I can open up my practice to new ways of working with, and connecting, objects and people.

My aim of building connections between people through objects already happens of course; ‘we talk and think about ourselves through things’, (Tilley, 2006, p.7) and Layton and Levi-Strauss both present a way of decoding the things around us, presenting us with a way to decode this language of things. One of my particular aims in working with everyday objects however, is to engage people materially in that language of things, and to deepen reflection upon it, without having to decode it, in part by acknowledging the inextricable link to their social context. In essence, bringing the social and emotional ‘truth’ of the connections between people and objects to a conscious rather than unconscious level.

The relationship we have with objects is so universal that it is impossible to create something entirely new but according to Barthes (1967) there is much potential for novel interpretations. What is created has reference of course to the past and the present but it also bears an invitation to the future society within which it is placed. Beginning in *The Pol Project*, I became aware of three distinct theories – *bundling* (Keane 2003), *dispersed creativity* (Leach 2004) and *materialising the self* (Tilley 2006) - that all resonate with my practice, where I found myself was in the connecting, *in between* ground and these theories began to help my articulation of this research.

Webb Keane, an anthropologist, speaks of the ‘unpredictable range of latent possibilities’ (Keane, 2006) contained within material things. They contain much beyond what one person can interpret or make use of. Material things in their very nature have a combination of elements that co-exist in order to create the whole. A banana, for example, is yellow, but that yellow cannot exist without the form of the banana, without the skin, which contains the edible fruit. Keane calls this **co-presence** of things *bundling* (2003). In relation to my practice, this term expresses well the idea of material, context, process, history and people being present within an object; these elements, to me appear inseparable, and it is this bundle of valuable content that I would like to make visible through the interventions I make with objects.

Although the term *bundling* invokes an image of gathering together, it actually sits quite comfortably alongside anthropologist James Leach’s mode of creativity he calls *dispersed* (2004) (explained in more detail in the earlier section *The Pol Project*) whereby creativity is latent in things and persons, and by **combination**, revealed. It is not the individual that forms the creative act, but the combination of persons and things that reveals what is already there.

A very different way of approaching the multitude of opportunity within things is to instead consider objects as **containers** of memories and experiences, which for each person coming across the object will be entirely different. Tilley tells us that ‘Things provide a powerful medium for materializing and objectifying the self, containing and preserving memories and embodying personal and social experiences.’ (2006). We bring our own thoughts, experiences and memories to bear on the objects we encounter. This train of thought however, forms a distinct separation between object and person; the object is simply a material, and the person becomes creator - projecting their own values onto the object. This is very distinct from Leach’s dispersed creativity theory, in that the individual is seen as creator, although, it does connect to Keane’s thoughts on ‘latent

possibilities' and bundling as it relies on the combinations of specific elements to create a unique thing.

Each of these theories bears relevance to my own practice, each develops my thinking further and introduces new ways of articulating what it is that constitutes my practice. My thoughts on presentation reflect all three – *bundling*, *dispersed creativity* and *materialising the self*. Each of the theories allows for a questioning of established understandings of authorship and collaboration, however, none of these accurately pinpoints what it is I am trying to articulate within my own practice, it is in the *in between* ground of these that I am working, trying to find the best way to present my findings.

The best way to present my findings may be through the objects themselves and in order to explore this more fully I examined the work of other practitioners to understand how they have approached presentation.

## Their Stories: Presentation | Storage

Michael Landy's *Breakdown* event<sup>43</sup>, a complex installation in which the artist meticulously itemised, listed and then destroyed every personal possession belonging to him, revealed 'the way in which objects come alive and accrue meaning through their interactions and transactions with people.' (Komter, 2001). As an event, the public were allowed access to an old C&A Department Store building, and without interpretative materials, were faced with a production line seemingly in full swing. Except this production line was not building things, it was dismantling them. It appeared like a negative process. Some viewers were outraged that valuable items were being destroyed. However, it was in the very dismantling of these things that the value was made visible. Personal items stored in boxes, photos, clothes belonging to parents, bed, car, everything was dismantled. But as Louise Crewe says in her analysis of the event; 'Value lingers and endures. ... Consumption is not always productive. Destruction can unwittingly reveal value.' (Crewe, 2011)

I have already experienced negative responses to my own work in the past from viewers angered that I had 'destroyed perfectly usable plates'<sup>44</sup>. Altering everyday things in this way appears to touch a nerve in a collective psyche – viewers appear to feel a sense of ownership of the original thing through familiarity. Cups, plates and bowls are used on a daily basis in the western world, and are so common in the landscape of domestic objects that they could be said to be part of our collective consciousness (Durkheim, 1893).

But is this in part due to their *displacement*?

Does the context of a white gallery somehow accentuate the everydayness of these things?

Does removing them from a domestic environment affect their bundled contents?

Is it in fact this change of context that alters these contents or does this simply add to the existing bundle?

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<sup>43</sup> <https://www.artangel.org.uk/project/break-down/>

<sup>44</sup> conversation with visitor to *Embracing Technology* exhibition, National Craft Gallery, Kilkenny, Ireland, August 2010



Image 76: glass and ceramic objects stored in a wall cabinet, Dhal ni Pol, India, 2010

In the article *Closet and cabinet: clutter as cosmology* by anthropologist Nicolette Makovicky, the value of ceramic, glass and textile items as genealogical records in Slovakian post socialist homes is revealed. The weight and importance of how these items are stored and displayed is highlighted through a number of case studies in which tales are recounted of the prized position of these within family life; cabinets full of ceramic and glass are chosen as the only items to take to a new home at short notice; closets full of linen were the only remaining things after a home was destroyed by fire; trousseaux of linens are highly valued when girls marry, having been handmade by parents and grandparents for years; and cabinets of china and glass are reconstructed through gifts after a marriage breaks down, reaffirming kinship ties through *things*. Tradition and ritual play a leading role in these narratives, but the ability of things to activate long forgotten stories and provide security through presence alone is invaluable. (Makovicky, 2007) Heirlooms from older generations are seen as the initial building blocks, the foundation from which to *grow* homes, adding different parts as life develops. This is not always visible, or said, it is in the process of *doing* - of starching and stacking linens, of arranging crystal and china - that the memories are unlocked and revealed. It is in this process of *doing* that connections are made, things are not simply displayed, they are active. A collection of glasses may be bought piece by piece, bedding may be made from spun cotton, woven and constructed over time, each element adding its own part of the genealogical record. Is this stuff really *clutter* as set out in the title? And how can we learn from this process within the home to inform the public exhibition of work?

A universal issue, presenting craft within a contemporary art context has its difficulties and is not always widely accepted. The idea of the white cube as an exhibition space, and the *do not touch* aura that accompanies it, is one which many of my contemporaries are currently fighting/playing with. Two examples are presented here of individuals moving away from the standard *display* scenario – one invites interaction from the visitor, the other presents the work in a backstage, storage setting – both allow the work to be viewed differently than if it were simply in a white cube on a plinth.



Image 77: *Continuing Drama*, 2011, Chris Keenan

Chris Keenan in *Continuing Drama* (2011) challenges our preconceptions of this *look but don't touch* attitude. '*Continuing Drama* is an interactive piece where the viewer is invited to create their own display using as many, or as few, of the objects as they like. See one person's very bold choice of display' (Keenan 2011) There is also a video of the installation<sup>45</sup> which shows the changing landscape over a period of days.

In this work, Keenan wanted the viewer to interact with the pieces, altering the layout, creating their own landscape. The box beneath can be used to store pieces that are considered superfluous to the selected, displayed pieces. On viewing this at Collect in 2011, however, I was actually too nervous to move the pieces. There was no sign to tell me it was ok, and staff on the (Adrian Sassoon) stand were busy with clients. I simply viewed the last person's arrangement, enjoyed the colours, forms and shadows and moved on. How successful then was this piece as an active encouragement to connect to the viewer? Did others feel similarly and not touch? Or was I the only one? This led me to speculate how I could encourage interaction within my own work? Ways of moving

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<sup>45</sup> <http://vimeo.com/13622147> last accessed 30/08/13

beyond the display aesthetic are challenging, but, handled in the right way, can be powerful in connecting people and objects.

In the exhibition, *Kontentum*, (2011) Kjell Rylander presents his work within the framework of mdf shelving units, as if in storage. Rylanders work is presented in a *backstage* (Adamson, 2012) manner. The visitor to the exhibition feels as though perhaps they have walked in before it is ready, during the unpacking perhaps, or entered a studio. This is the exhibition. Pieces of work are positioned carefully, just so, inviting touch, but the sense of such considered positioning stops the hand from making contact. The pieces are *at rest*, in a similar way to how I may leave pieces for contemplation in the studio. Tests, samples, failures and successes I place on shelves or tables to allow them visual space. Objects contain so much latent potential (Keane 2006) that it takes time to allow it to be seen. Here, in the light and shadow of shelves that aren't quite storage shelves, but yet not quite display shelves, the pieces give a glimpse of the artist and some of his thoughts.

Rylander doesn't give many talks, nor does he publish many writings about his work, and although there is much critical commentary (Veiteberg, 2012; Slotte, 2012; Brown, 2012; Adamson, 2012; Dewald, 2012 within Rylander, 2012) we must look to the work to do the talking directly from the maker.



Images 78. 79: Kjell Rylander *Kontentum*<sup>46</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Images: Cj O'Neill, taken at Rom 8, Vaskerelven no. 8, Bergen 11/2011



Quiet contemplation of material, method, alignment and viewpoints begin to unlock the work, but the format of the exhibition helps to put the visitor on the back foot as it were. Taken by surprise, we bring to the exhibition our existing thoughts on art and exhibiting, and these are challenged by what we see. We are pushed into formulating our own interpretation of the work, given fragments of insight, and what appears to be intimate access to the behind the scenes workings of this personal practice. We the visitors, must engage with this exhibition in order to see the work, both physically and metaphorically – it is not a white plinth presentation. We must move and investigate different heights, perspectives, seeing through open shelves we can see development of thought and layering of ideas in a physical sense. We get much more than we would if the work was presented in a more commercial manner – on display. In curating the work in this way, Rylander invites us in to view the workings of his own practice, and is breaking new ground within Ceramics and Craft, forming new perspectives not only on his own work, but on the work of others.

How could I allow others *in* to my practice?

How could I engage others more within my practice?

There are so many ways to communicate practice. Some invite interaction in a physical outward sense, others invite inward contemplation. Having investigated these alternative ways of displaying and presenting work, I returned to my own making process and the recurring questions I had been formulating about inviting others into the process.



## Project Two: The Plate Experiment (and other stories)

The extensive contextual research, making and reflection during the period following The Pol Project informed this next project. As a result, the focus was on the opening up of my creative process to others.

The concept for the project developed from the way of making explicit the making of a piece of finished ceramic work that I would normally exhibit. Initially, the thought was to allow the visitor to understand my creative process - the drawing, papercutting, changes, transfer cutting, application, firing, more layers, more firing, etc. - in a systematic and open manner, however, the initial planning of this approach resulted in more of an observational process for the visitor and did not provide the opportunity for others to get *in* to the process themselves. The project evolved more firmly towards working *with* others (as articulated in the previous section on *The Pol Project*) and in the role others have in the formation of our 'self'. This idea of the impact others can have on our own path through life had been explored by Leach (the work others *do* in us) (2004), through an ethnographic lens, however, to my knowledge it had not yet been explored in relation to artistic practice. This project therefore, aimed to establish a way of allowing others into my process and considered the questions that had developed through reflection on The Pol Project;

- How could I encourage and facilitate others to tell stories within my own process and practice?
- Could the doorway invite others *in* to the work?

This refers to each of the original questions; **Question 1:** How do object, user and maker relate? **Question 2:** What does it mean as a maker to take an object that is loaded with significance, respond to that and re\*present it? **Question 3:** Is it possible to establish a new method of practice that would allow for deeper personal connections to objects I produce?

Through opening up, exposing my process, I wondered, is there a way to incorporate other stories, other perspectives, into my work in a more direct manner?

- Could observer become participant?
- What diversity of outcomes can be achieved using everyday ceramic objects as the starting point?
- Is there a way to acknowledge this shared authorship?

This final question draws heavily on the mapping of the Pol Project and dispersed creativity, and although it falls within the remit of Question 2, it became clear that this

acknowledgement of the *other* was an important aspect of the work and became an additional focus at this point.

The resulting piece *The Plate Experiment* explored notions of authorship and collaboration by involving the visitor in the combination of everyday ceramic plates with hand cut paper characters in the creation of a narrative, thereby becoming participants in the work itself. It exposed stages in the process of creating collage type work, and drew to the surface narratives and associations with second hand plates.



Image 80: *The Plate Experiment (installation)* at *State of Play*, RIBA Hub, Manchester, July 2011

This piece was presented over a series of 5 days, in a *work in progress* exposition<sup>47</sup> at the RIBA Hub<sup>48</sup> in Manchester, UK, during which the public could enter the space.<sup>49</sup>

The viewer encounters the work much in the way of an experiment, following a series of written instructions, but unsure of the purpose or outcome.

A set of instructions was presented along with a clock and a pen.

1. choose a plate
2. choose a character and a doorway
3. press the button on the camera
4. Please take a picture of the image and continue to take more photos to capture the assembling of the image
5. please fill in the details of your story

A simple plinth has a camera fixed above it on an armature.

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<sup>47</sup> State of Play was organised by a group of PhD students at MMU, and the decision was made to call this an exposition rather than exhibition as it was work in progress rather than final finished pieces.

<sup>48</sup> RIBA Hub was opened in May 2011 as a space to allow architects and students to 'collaborate and learn'

<sup>49</sup> There were also structured critique panels, and the official opening preview evening on Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> July from 4-8pm was promoted as part of PARC NW – a postgraduate conference at MMU.

A green cutting mat is placed in the middle of the plinth.

A group of 12 plates were selected from Berlin, bought at a flea market in May 2011.

There were 12 characters to choose from, each a tracing of a character from one of the plates (except 11&12) and hand cut from fluorescent orange card.

There were 12 doorways to choose from in a range of sizes and formats linking back to the doorway from *The Pol Project*.

	Description	Material	Manufacturer	Price euro	figure
1	Dutch landscape	Ston	Hand Decorated "Delft's" 379	2.50	
2	Danish postman plate	Por	B&G Copenhagen Porcelain, Made in Denmark 4881/619 Hafnia 76 Danmark (Henry Thelander '75)	8	6 & 7
3	Horse and cart racing	Por	Vincer af dansk travderby 1983. V/Fine Show – Venus Hedegard DPP. Platte Nr. 252 Rose, Copenhagen, Denmark	2	10
4	Statue and kids	Por	Royal Copenhagen, Denmark, Fajance 48-2010 H.C. Andersen Vongens Have (K.L)	1	8 & 9
5	Ribbon plate	Por	Anon	1	
6	Thumbelina plate	Por	Plate No.1247 B. B&G Copenhagen Porcelain, Bing & Grondahl, Denmark, Thumbelina, 2 <sup>nd</sup> motif in the series HC Andersen the storyteller	8	5
7	Girl and donkey	Por	Anon	4	4
8	Danish cycling	Por	Weidinger Glas 01-914555	1.50	2
9	Cows in field	Por	Denmark, 64   2010 Dansk Landskab(KL)	1	
10	Birds and plants	Por	Japanese	3	
11	Beggar boys	Por	Anon, Fine Bone China, Made in England	5	1
12	Berlin scene	Por	Hennsberg Porzellan 1777 Made in German Democratic Republic	4	3

Table 1: Details of the plates used in *The Plate Experiment 2011*

Key: Ston: Stoneware, Por: Porcelain



Image 90: The Plates for *The Plate Experiment*, 2011



Image 91: The characters for *The Plate Experiment*, 2011

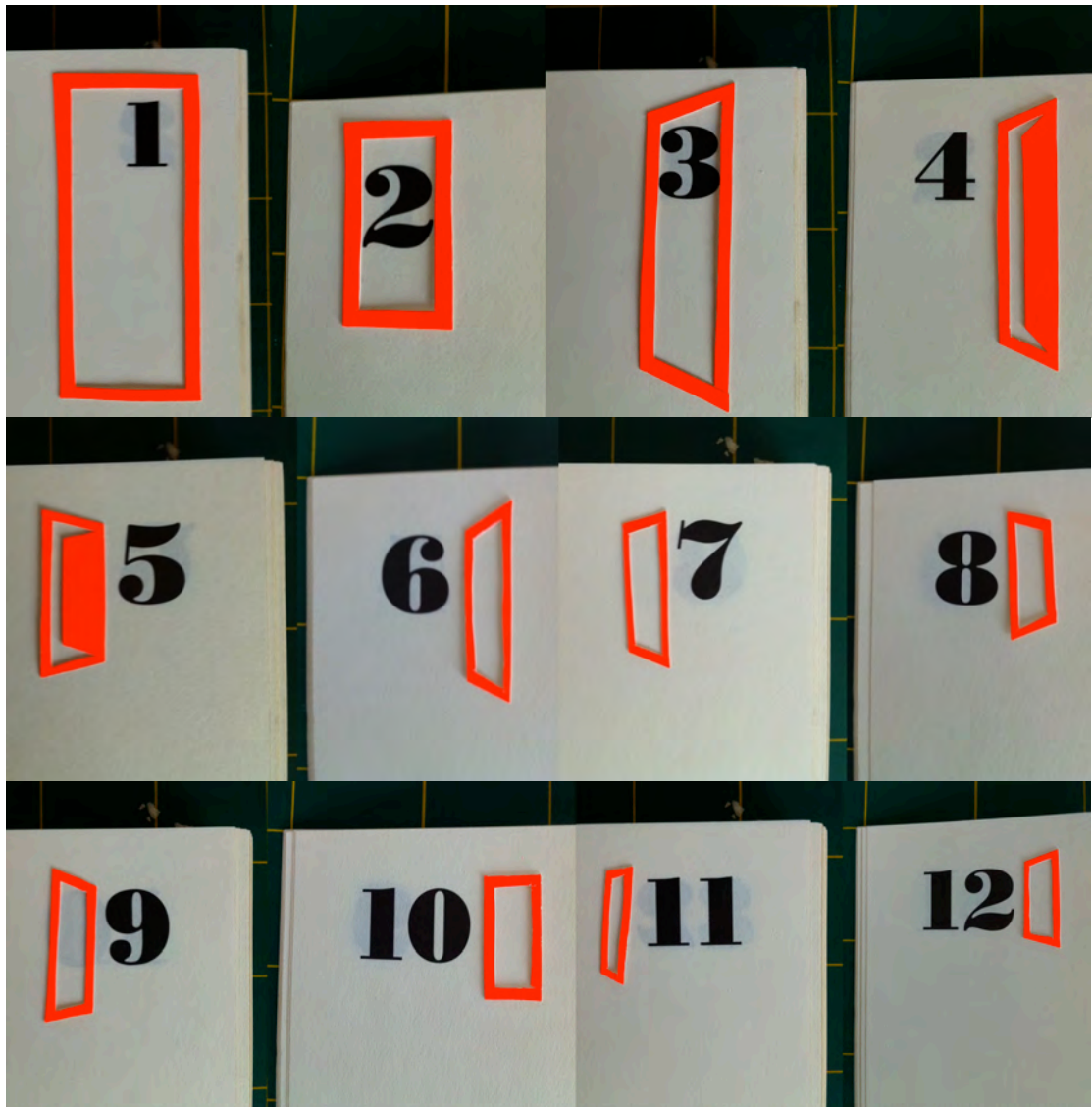


Image 92: The doorways for *The Plate Experiment*, 2011

With a set of fixed tools, visitors could interact with the work, creating an assemblage on the mat in the middle, take a photo of that assemblage, and write down the *story* that they had just created. It was expected that some people may not want to participate in the experiment, others may simply view the set up, and others might engage on a range of levels. It was hoped that a range of responses would be collected and a number of possibilities were open as options for development – create a film / animation of the still images; present the still images as an exhibition, with participants cited as authors; a new series of works produced capturing the stories; these works could then be used as illustrations for a book of short stories.

The use of fluorescent orange as the colour for the characters denotes the ‘otherness’ in the intervention of ‘new’ over ‘old’ and builds on earlier thinking. The temporary intervention into the surface of the plate created using the paper cut outs is captured by a series of images.





Image 93: Louise Hindsgavl, Thursday July 7<sup>th</sup> 2011

The main aim was to gather a range of inputs, in the form of photos of the assemblages, the written stories from the participants (including contact details, time of photo, name) and images of the piece *in use*.

## The Plate Experiment: Happenings and Results

The exposition was officially opened on Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> July 2011 in RIBA hub, a public café, bookshop, seminar and exhibition space.

Results were gathered through a series of notated sheets and photos of the participants' contributions as well as some of the participants taking part. The following is a record of some of the 'results' of the experiment to demonstrate the variety of responses to the piece. I have grouped results according to themes and ways of thinking.

Some participants built on what was already on the mat.

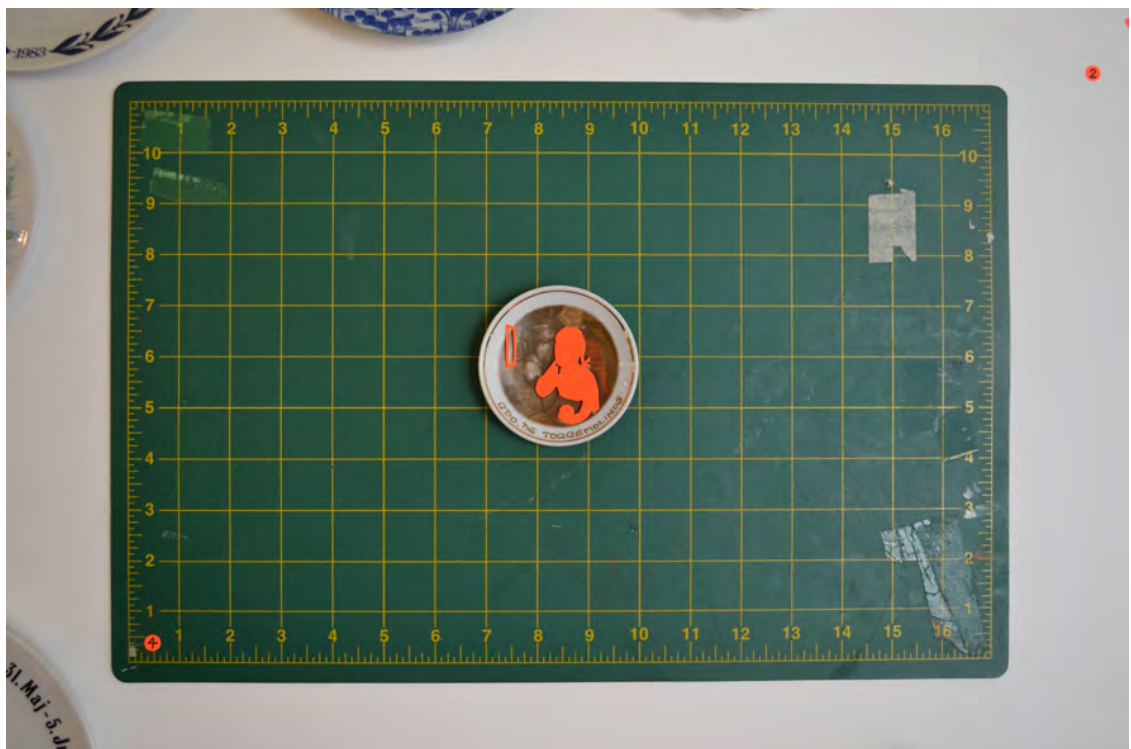


Image 94: No. 1. Cj O'Neill: 09.57

A little girl ponders how she might get through the tiny door. The donkey is sad to think she might leave him in this multicoloured world and go to the neon orange world alone. He knows that she just has to *want* to get through the door, to *believe* that she can get through the door, and it will be possible, but he doesn't want to tell her that just yet...

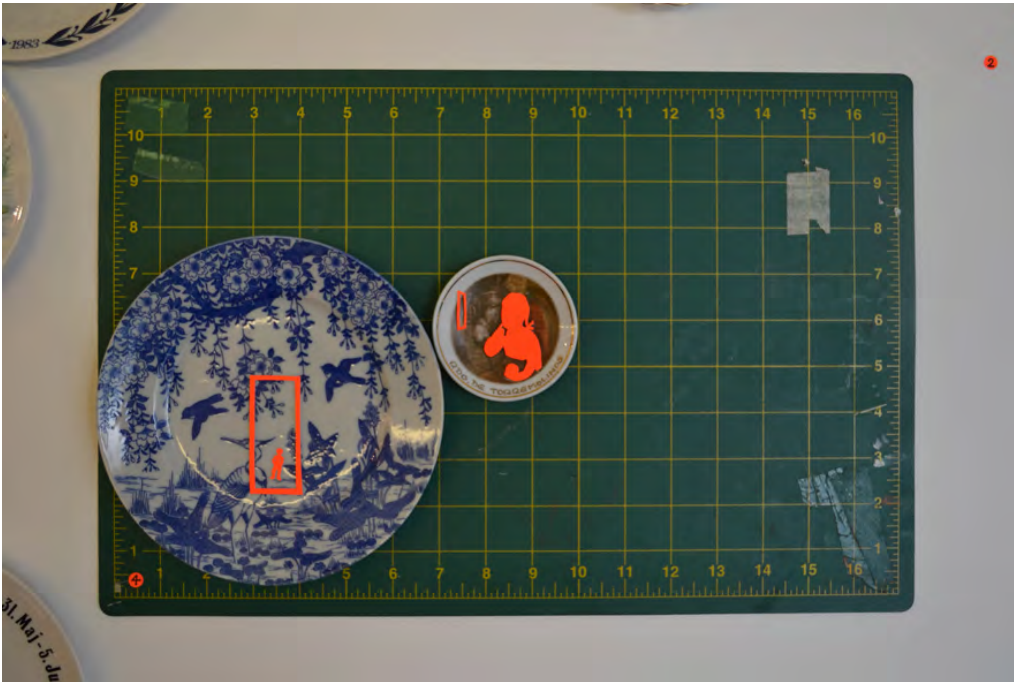


Image 95: No. 2. Amanda Ravetz: 2.20pm

A boy on the other side of the lake, the far shore, looking towards the heron and other birds. Normal picture perspective is reversed. He is the viewer, he is beyond the object world, we are the plate.

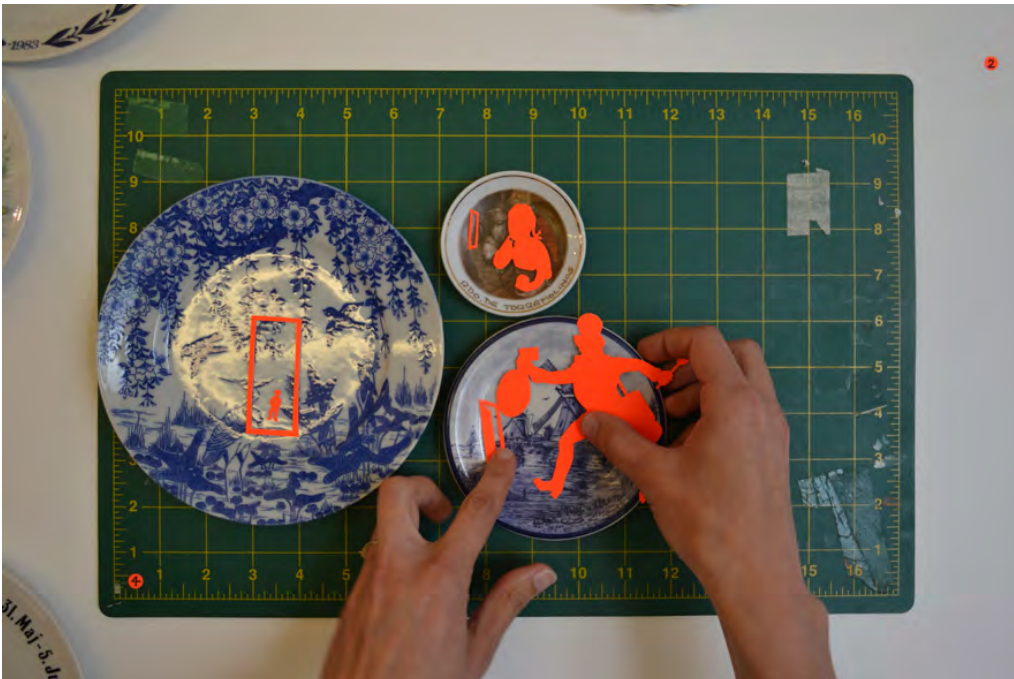


Image 96: No. 3. Jane Webb: 2.25pm

When you steal something, you need a quick getaway, this man has invented a portable door that can be thrown up whenever he needs to escape quickly... the stolen thing was the miller's spoon which is crucial to the milling process. What other crucial tools has he stolen is him (sic) taking people's skill away... he is the worst type of thief.

This series showed how a processual approach to the creation of narrative can develop a changing interpretation. By adding your own elements, a completely new perspective is brought to an existing narrative connected to a series of objects.

Some participants used the figurines to visualize thoughts on how life could be different – some of these were light hearted and fanciful, others brought up deeply personal reflections.

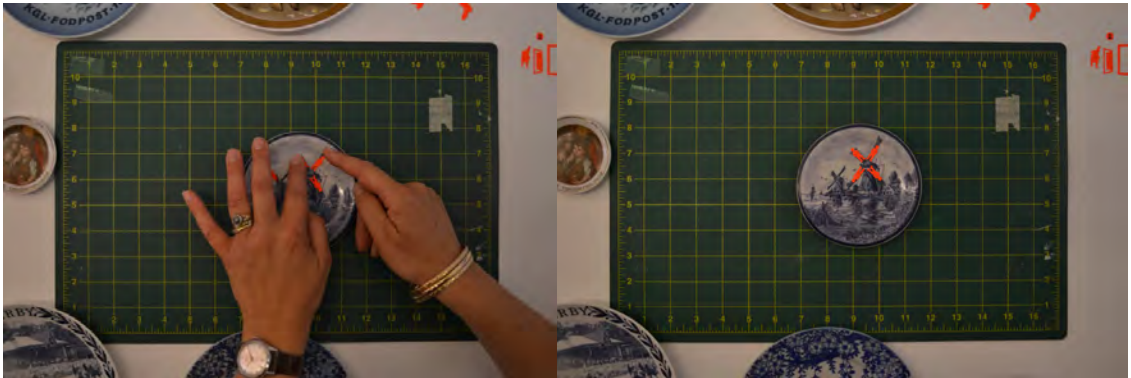


Image 97: No. 28. Louise Hindsgavl

Title: who wants to go next

A little wondering about how it feels to be up side down on a mill wing. Hopefully it changes! Maybe life is living on a mill wing.

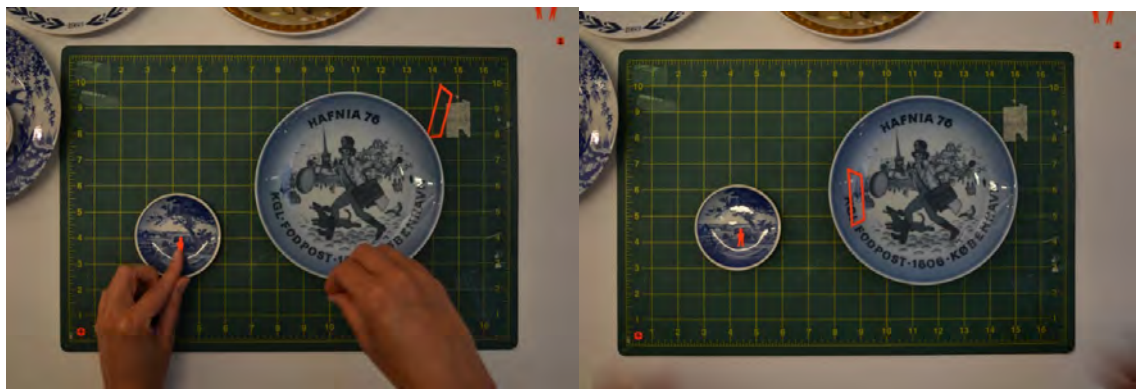


Image 98: No. 23. Lina Olsson: 18.47

Child happy with cows in field. Postman on a mission to collect a suitable child for a client... Thought came from a conversation about wanting children and how to without having a partner.

Some participants did not want to include a written narrative with their responses, some were completely anonymous with just the photos as a record.

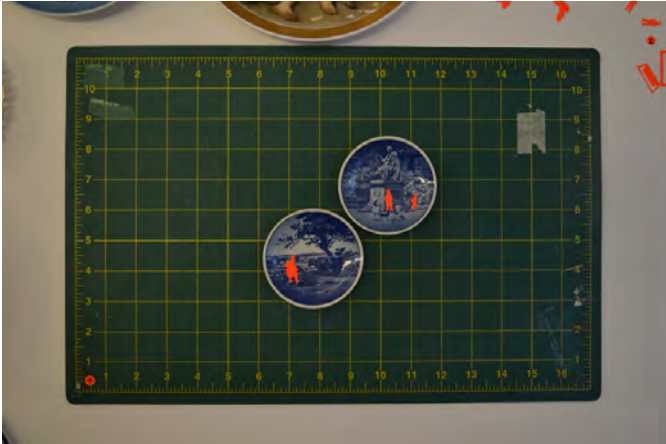


Image 99: No. 29. Sabina Andron: 16.51

I don't have one. (this was in response to the prompt – *please write your narrative*)

Multiple participants focused on one figurine – the little girl – together creating a complex journey for this character.



Image 100: No. 6. Sonia Sanchez-Lopez: 10.50

She is dreaming, desiring, achieving it!



Image 101: No. 8. Pui Lee: 15.02

The girl has just arrived and is trying to capture the man's attention, but they are from different worlds.

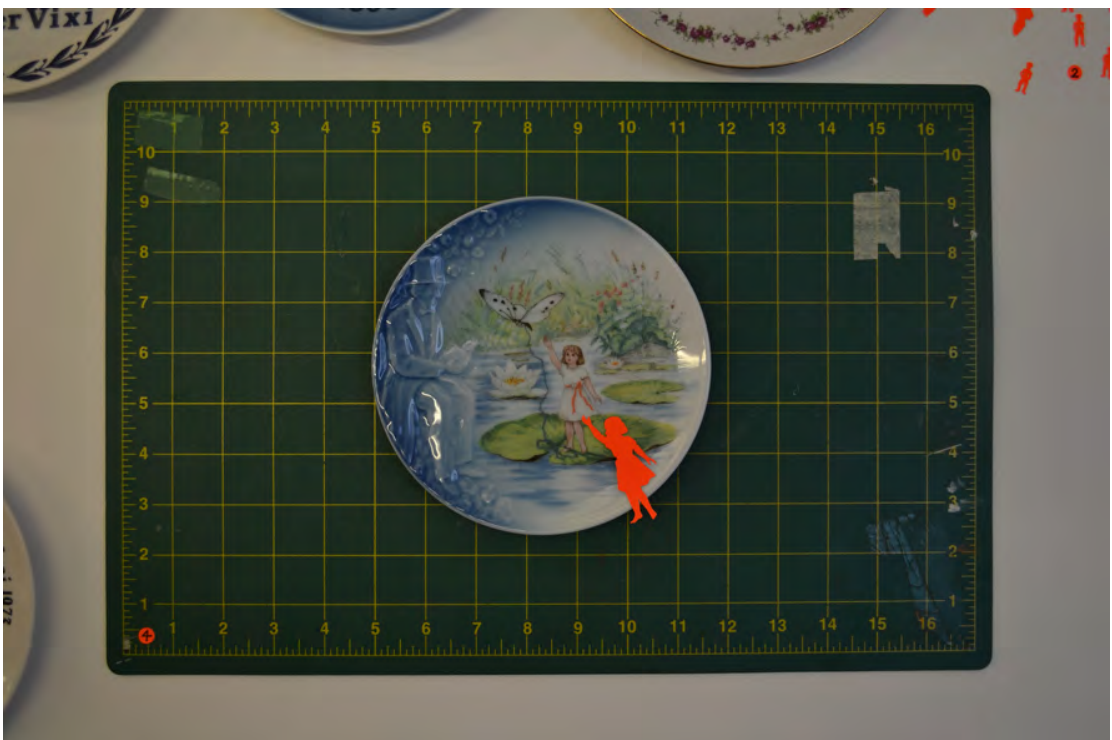


Image 102: No. 19. Helen Felcey: 17.44

Girl on plate – fantastical. Visual. Orange girl – it is also her – another version – she is grabbing at her skirt – perhaps to hold onto her, perhaps to pull her down to earth, perhaps to lift it up. Both are magical. Other thoughts: neither are real. Both are nothing, 'non-existence' in a sense. No name, No place, No-where.

One of the most popular foci for the duration of the exposition was the doorway as a means of travel – entry or exit to the narrative. This element recurred most frequently, and reinforced my thinking on the potency of the doorway as portal.

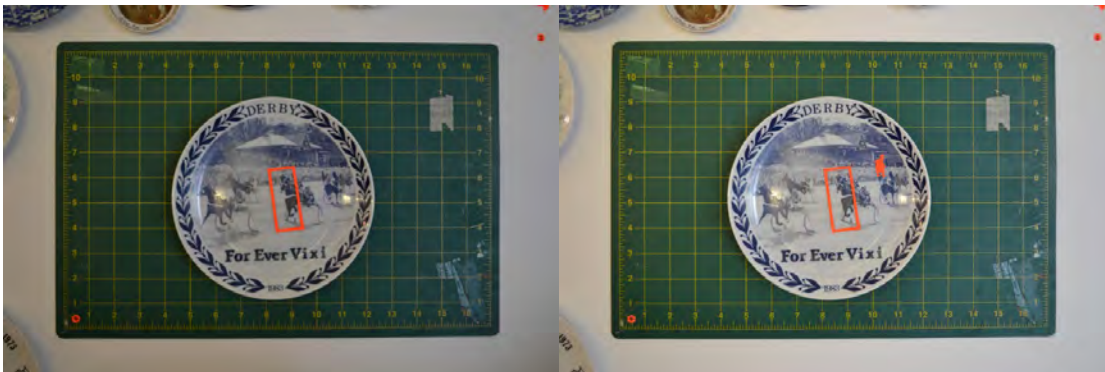


Image 103: No. 4.Emily Strange: 15.03

The horse and cart is racing towards another landscape – a portal but the cart won't fit through the door – the wizard guy is trying to ride a horse head because he's never encountered a horse before – doesn't know what to do with it.



Image 104: No. 7.Gass: 13.20.20

During the tour de france a door, a magic door to the finish line appeared. And turned a man orange for trying to cheat. French justice. 2049.



Image 105: No. 21. Mike Chavez-Dawson: 17.52

The disappearing drummer boy, is shocked to find himself 'Neon', the door in perspective was the transforming device.



Image 106: No. 24. Nina Rudnick: 18.49

- it is 1938, the German Olympics. A young mother is escaping via the horse and cart race and is pushing her child through a portal; but the door is closing.....





Image 107: No. 25. Sylvianne Sykes: 17.02.40

In England – The child is confused looking for an escape. Afraid of the man & dog running across her path wishing to escape through the doorway.

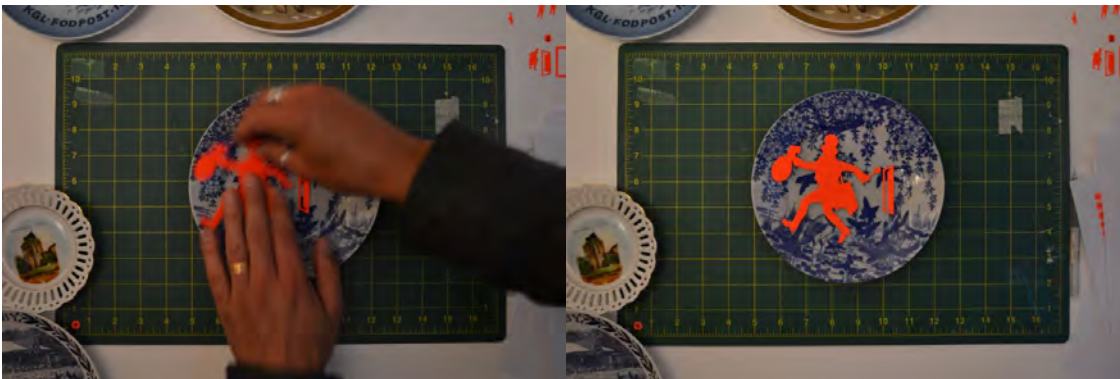


Image 108: No. 27. Ivor Harding: 19.48

Hi everyone, finally arrived, who was it that requested the balloon and the wooden spoon. You won't believe how difficult it was to obtain these in the land that lies on the other side of that door.

Some participants added several plates, emphasizing the journey element and the power of the doorway to add this aspect.



Image 109: No. 15.Branka Steiner-Ivancevic: 17:15

A busy stock-broker is running to make more money, suddenly a window opens to his childhood, a little fairy shows him a way to find the real tower of wisdom.

Some participants used several figurines and doorways within one plate to illustrate their narrative – adding complexity and detail.

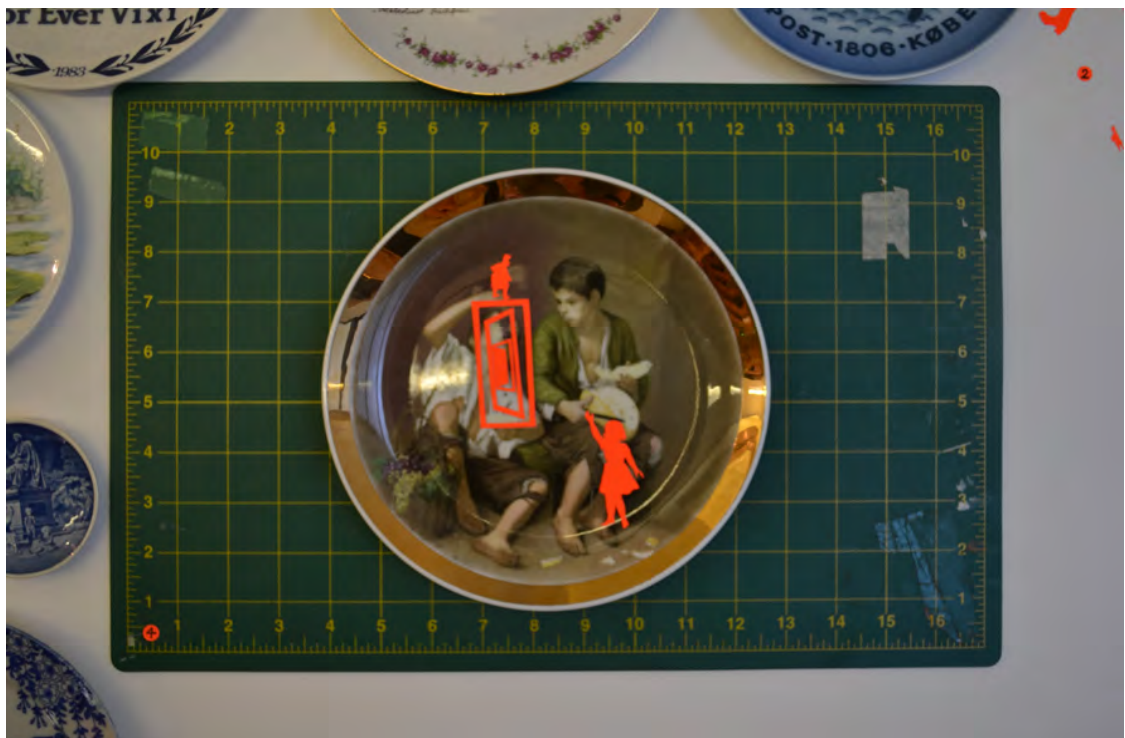


Image 110: No. 10.Dani Abulhawa: 16.40

A girl is asking for the fruit, or the knife (we're not sure which). A man is guarding the doorway, which leads through numerous doors into the next place. The boys are unaware of all this!



Image 111: No. 11. Lee Miller: 17.44 (actually 16.44)

A see through man crawled through a door embedded in the chest/midriff (sic) of a man who was sitting on a lily pad with a small scary girl.

People bring their own stories and obsessions to the experiment also, as can be seen throughout the results. **Many participants connected to others within the narrative – often utilizing the doorway as well as figurines to enable this connection.** Sometimes the people were alive, and sometimes they had passed away.



Image 112: No. 13. Kate Bevan: 17:00

My aunt is waving at windmills – her father (my grandfather) had a windmill which they grew up around as children. She collected anything to do with windmills and frequently visited them all over the world. The doorway is the path she travels through seeking windmills and memories.

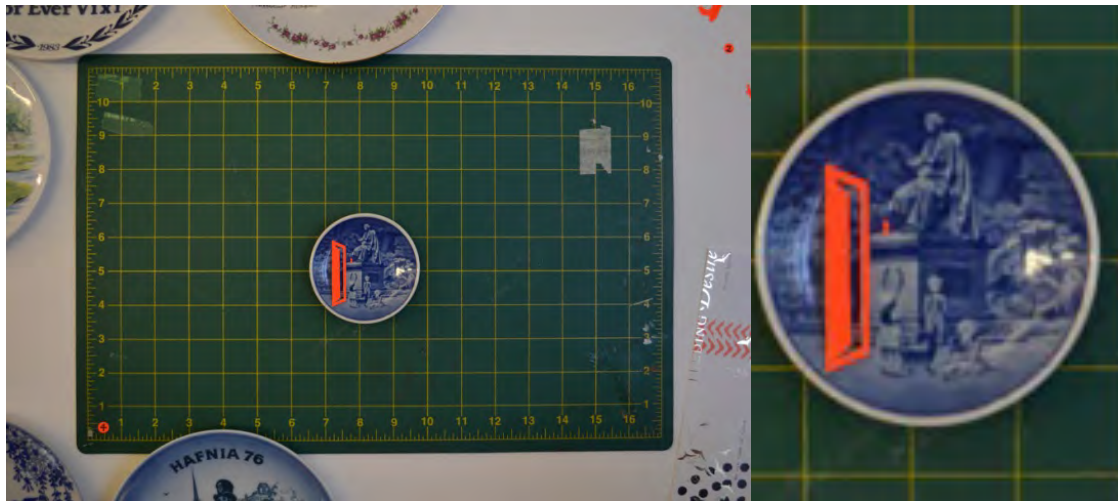


Image113: No. 9. Joanne 'Bob' Whalley: 16.40

I followed the lines of the image. I know it does not make sense but I am happy for it to be like this. I was drawn to the smallest figure, as the smallest figure in the landscape is often the most interesting one. My granny Mabel would be happy in this place – maybe she is already there. Thank you!



Image 114: No. 32. Joe McCullagh: 13.35

New characters join the picnic scene. They look in and try to intervene like little borrowers but do not want to be seen.

The plate reminds me of my childhood so the story is a little bit of childish fun. My mother (recently deceased) owned a plate by Mourillo and she purchased it when I was small.

## The Plate Experiment: Analysis

No.	Plate		Character		Doorway	
	On mat	Around mat	On	Around	On	Around
<i>none</i>	0	0	6	7	15	17
1	6	0	1	0	7	4
2	5	19	4	2	1	6
3	2	26	3	8	6	4
4	1	15	2	2	6	3
5	4	7	9	6	3	6
6	5	11	5	14	0	0
7	2	6	4	1	1	0
8	2	11	13*	15	3	0
9	3	5	0	2	1	0
10	4 (1 r)	18	0	0	0	1
11	4	9	2	0	1	1
12	3	15	0	0	0	1

Table 2: Table of frequency of items in *The Plate Experiment* results from May 2011

Looking at the participants and their choices - no plate really stands out as *most popular* even though no.1 - the windmill plate - was used most often, it was only used once more than no.2 - the postman plate and no.6 - Thumbelina plate. Each of the 12 plates was used at least once - with no.4 - the floral plate - being used upside down as well as the 'normal' way up. No.3 - the horse and cart race plate - shows up as being captured most around the edge of the mat. With no.1 never being photographed around the mat - this is likely due to it being replaced in its original position - out of shot of the camera. This record reflects the diversity of visitors choices, as the plates were the elements which offered the most option of choice in their range of size pattern, colour and style. Everyone chose to use a plate without exception, whereas 6 of the plates were photographed without characters on them, however, this was only when they were in combination with other plates with characters. There were 15 plates without doorways included, but only 5 participants chose to exclude doorways out of the total of 32.

No.8 - the small boy from plate no.4 - was most frequently used, with a significant difference between this being chosen 13 times and the next most popular - no.5, Thumbelina character from plate no. 6 - being chosen 9 times. No.9, 10 and 12 - the characters that had parts missing or sections cut off were never selected, and only no.9 - the boy with half a leg - was ever captured around the mat. No.8 and No.6 are perhaps the most recognizable and transferable characters as they offer a simple standing pose, and

could bring a participants own narrative most readily. The choice between characters was reduced to silhouette as they were all the same colour and material. The doorways No. 1, No.3 and No.4 were most often selected, again, being most often selected these were placed in close proximity to the plates. These 3 forms also offered a front perspective, side perspective and door half opened option, which could also account for their being most often selected.

Quite often the characters were used on the plates they were *taken* from. When this happened, mainly participants chose to re\*place them over the original character. No.1, 2, 4, 5, 6 & 8 were all used in this way. This could have a relationship to simple games of matching shapes from childhood, or be the most straightforward starting point for participants to engage with the experiment.

<i>Hands</i>	6
<i>Paper</i>	2
<i>Pen</i>	3
<i>Arm</i>	1

Hands were only captured in 6 photographs. I had hoped that with the instructions to press the button and then assemble the piece, more hands in motion would be captured, as this for me connects to the people involved, and provides a record of the physicality of the experiment. I didn't predict the way in which most people withdrew their hands quickly at the sound of the shutter going on the camera. This gesture was only noticed as I was present most of the time; I have no video or photographic evidence of this. As I realised this towards the end, I began to either press the button whilst people were assembling pieces, or encourage them to take more than one image. In hindsight, a timed continuous picture taking would have captured more of the *in between-ness*.

Paper, pen and arm were captured only a few times, and don't seem to have much impact on the overall experiment.

<b>Frequency of participants</b>	
<i>Tues 10-5</i>	5
<i>Wed 10-4</i>	3
<i>Wed 4-8</i>	17
<i>Thurs 10-5</i>	4
<i>Fri 10-5</i>	2
<i>Sat 10-4</i>	0

The times for participants to take part in the process was most popular during the opening of the show, from 4-8pm on Wed 6<sup>th</sup> July when the exposition was most populated due to the invited PARC Northwest delegates and other invited guests. There were a few participants who had visited the space earlier in the day to have coffee or browse books and returned for the opening, waiting to participate until I was there to discuss the work with them further. In hindsight a one or two day event may have been sufficient as it coincided with a larger invited population through PARC Northwest. The number of visitors to the show was not recorded, therefore it is impossible to measure the percentage of visitors that chose not to take part. Although I was told afterwards of one visitor who participated, but chose not to take a photo.

The most interesting *results* for me were of course the stories and images created by the participants. People seemed genuinely excited to participate; there was a queue waiting at one stage during the opening of the exposition at RIBA NW. I wish I had photographed this as on reflection it connected to the image from *The Pol Project* of a queue waiting to pass through the door.



Image 115: *Neet* from *The Pol Project*, and *Heaven*, 2010/11

Many of the stories seem to be very personal, poignant and many refer to people who have passed away. The reference to *other worlds* comes up frequently, and many are running away from something (or trying to) in one world, trying to escape to another, so the doorways have acted as portals, thresholds, entry and exit points as anticipated.

However, many people couldn't remember the story they wrote afterwards. It was a fleeting, spontaneous, heartfelt response to the items presented at the event. The everydayness of the ceramic plate gave permission through familiarity (eg. No.32) to handle the objects. The informality of the exposition, and the encouragement to take part visible at times by the queue of people encouraged participation also.

The girl character is used often, and referred to in a range of ways; small girl, aunt, mother and fairy. The silhouetting of these characters opened up the details of exactly who they are to further interpretation. The man carrying the postbag, with 2 objects in his hands

has been branded a thief and a stockbroker, but also a rescuer of sorts, bringing a balloon and wooden spoon (with difficulty) to a new world. This simplification of the character, the removal of detail and drawn features allows the participant to develop their own identity for these characters.

I was encouraged at this point by the enthusiasm and interest shown by the visitors, that I was working with something of value. There was *something* in this process, something intangible at that moment, perhaps *unsayable*, that allowed people to open up, to become storytellers. The plates certainly provided a starting point and prompted much of the narrative. I wanted to repeat the experiment and saw the *Fresh* Research exhibition at the upcoming British Ceramics Biennial as a good opportunity to do this. Reflecting on the State of Play event, and the realisation that much useful information has been gathered from just one short event, as well as issues of invigilation raised by BCB staff, I planned to restrict the documentation of this event to the press preview and the opening event. In this way I would have a good but limited amount of information to analyse and work with. The remainder of the exhibition would show the piece presented as a static and non-interactive piece to communicate about research methods.

Returning to my original question, I realised that this experiment was one way of incorporating other stories and other perspectives within the work that I produce, and acknowledges the multi-authored nature of the work at the same time. What needed further investigation was the intangible nature of the process that allows people to become storytellers through everyday ceramic objects, and to fully explore the potential for these stories.

At this point plans for using the information gathered were in flux. Some ideas were around publication of a blog, a book or zine of short stories with illustrations.

I wondered if a further development of these *results* would allow me to produce new ceramic work. A series of co-authored pieces by people who have never met? The interest for me in this was the element of authorship, not collaboration in itself; I become curator; drawing together disparate stories into one piece, tying elements together, perhaps through aesthetic – plate, character, doorway – or story – a group of plates about mother figures or girls... Together, the stories become more, gathering together threads and elements to create a multi layered, multi authored piece that connects on many levels to both contributors and new viewers.

The documented information of images and narratives gathered through *The Plate Experiment* then informed a period of thinking through making, in much the same way as



*The Pol Project* was followed by a period of thinking through making. Was this thinking *through* making? Or was it thinking and making concurrently? I wondered if this was the right term, or if there were other terms that would accurately describe this process.

A new series of plates used the image of the original plate re\*printed onto the surface of a 'second' plate (a plate rejected from mainstream commercial production) and the combination of narratives collected from the exposition were applied onto this new surface, creating a series of deeply layered and multi-authored pieces.



Image 116: Digital mock up of a *new* plate. Authors: CJ O'Neill, Louise Hindsgavl & Dr Joanne 'Bob' Whalley, 2011

Although I have misplaced the final piece during a number of studio moves since this point, the orange was replaced with gold in the ceramic application, thus transforming the *otherness* of the fluorescent orange into a representation of *chi* (essential energy). This process provided some interesting results – and this plate was exhibited at Fresh Research alongside the experiment itself to demonstrate research methods. A number of different potential plates were mocked up in photoshop, transfers of each of the plates from the collection were printed in digital format and a series of pieces were created. The resulting pieces for me lacked the immediacy of the experiment itself and on contacting one of the participants to reconfirm that they were happy for me to use their work in this way I was faced with a series of questions about how much they would receive if I was to sell the piece. Although this presented a really valid and interesting aspect of the research, it made me acknowledge directly that rather than the monetary value of the work, I wanted to focus on the social value of the work, the networks and people that these objects connected, and as with the results of *The Pol Project*, to refrain from selling pieces at this point.

## Reflection Point Two

In order to reflect on the project at this point, I looked back at the elements that comprised the installation.

**Plates.** The plates for the Plate Experiment were selected for their illustrative qualities. I wanted to give participants something to start with to create a new story – in the most part, participants did use this *background* narrative as a starting point for their own narrative. As discussed above, the stories ranged from light hearted musings to deeply personal reflections on life.



Image 117: Back of plate no.4

I view these plates as everyday, however, although they are not all plates that would have been used as functional plates to eat from - many of them have obvious marks or signs that they are display plates – holes for string or wire, leftover adhesive from hanging mechanisms, etc. And although 2 of the small blue and white plates were designed as ash trays, it is clear that these were also displayed rather than used, as one of them has a string still attached to the back of it (see above) while the other has the traces of a hanging mechanism having been stuck to the back. Does this mean they are not *everyday*? I believe not as they are still within the realms of our everyday object language. Things that we encounter daily become the background for our lives and in that way, are everyday.

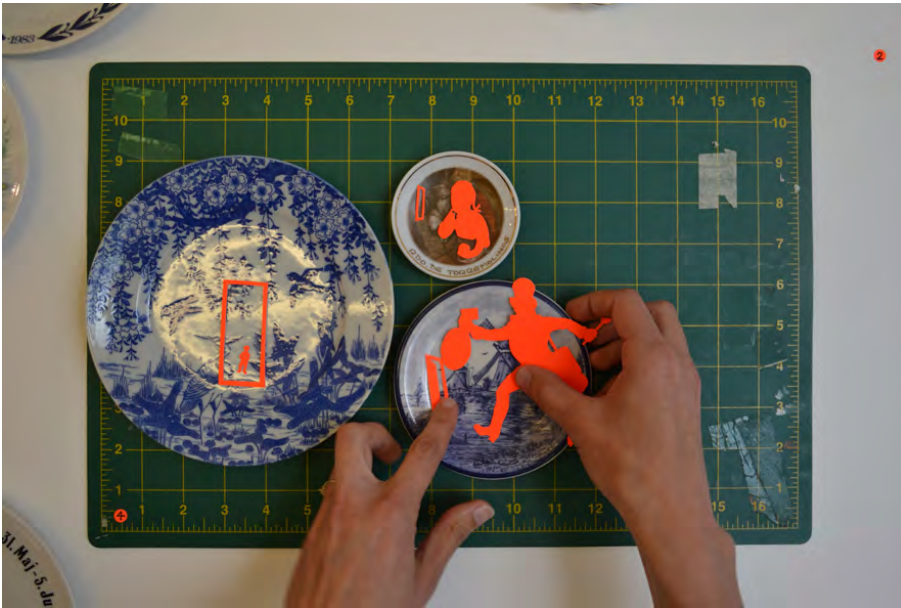


Image 118: No. 3: Jane Webb, Amanda Ravetz, Cj O'Neill, 2011

**Cutting Mats.** The green cutting mat that provides the backdrop to the images, lays the ground for the work. It is a functional, everyday item from my studio, and I have more. I realized in the breaking down of my process that this background or ground, for the work takes the work away from the white plinth, and brings it into a more informal place. It provides useful reference for scale, and it connects physically to the process of making that I undertake when handcutting transfer or paper.



Image 119: Today plate, 2009, with fluorescent, rubber coated fixings

**Fluorescent Orange.** The choice of fluorescent orange is again, a very deliberate choice relating to the rest of my practice. I tried using other shades of orange, but found that they just lacked the same punch, that sense of *otherness* to the intervention. Prior to this research, I used this colour to spray plates (see Aysnely re\*presented in *My Stories*), and in a rubber solution to dip fixings in to present work. These dots have become something of a signature, and I use them as an *everyday* material (to trace firing temperatures, mark

work as sold at shows, and label boxes). To use this colour in the characters was a natural step, and although it was difficult to find the right material, and master the right weight and pressure for cutting the final card, it was worth it. It is incredibly frustrating for me that this colour is not reproducible in ceramic transfer material. Although it is also this fact that ironically appeals to me – this colour is NOT a ceramic colour.

## The Plate Experiment: From the girls' perspective

As part of a group of PhD researchers at MIRIAD<sup>50</sup>, we had organized a series of events, beginning with *A State of Play* in July 2011 and culminating in *The Listening Symposium* in November 2011. At this symposium, I presented a piece of text that had emerged from the results of *The Plate Experiment* through editing multiple texts into one, that began to connect my thoughts on co-authoring, working *with* others and communication. It had begun as a response to the stories gathered – in actual fact, even though I set out to invite responses from others, I had not set out with a fixed idea of what to do with these responses.

The following was presented at *The Listening Symposium, 2011*

'The little girl ponders how she might get through that tiny door, she really wants to go, but is sad at the thought of leaving her friend the donkey behind. The donkey is sad to think she might leave him in this multicoloured world and go to the neon orange world alone. He thinks that the world on the other side will be better, that she might find someone who is so wonderful they make her want to stay and never come back. But he knows that all she has to do is to *want* to get through the door, to *believe* that she can get through the door, and it will be possible, but he's not ready to tell her that just yet...<sup>1</sup>

She begins to dream, desiring what may lie on the *other side*, and in that world of dreams, through the doorway, she is beginning to achieve it, but not quite in the way she expected...<sup>6</sup>

She is in England – confused and looking for an escape. Afraid of the man and dog running across her path she wishes to escape through the doorway. Wanting it enough enables her to pass through and suddenly, she is through the door, but not in a new place, it is the same, but different. She is no longer fearful and thinks she may be in Denmark.<sup>25</sup>

She is trying to capture the man's attention, but they are from different worlds. He doesn't see or hear her. She doesn't speak his language. Having enough of this she goes back through the door again and finds herself in a land of giants.<sup>8</sup>

She begins to ask for the fruit, but actually wants the knife to protect herself as she is quite scared of these giants. A man is guarding the doorway, which leads through numerous doors into the next place. The boys around her are unaware of all this! They too are unable to see or hear her, the man or the doorways.<sup>10</sup>

Escaping back through the doorway, she doesn't return home, but instead finds herself waving at windmills – her father had a windmill which they grew up around as children. She collected anything to do with windmills and frequently visited them all over the world. The doorway has become the path she travels through seeking memories.<sup>13</sup>

Back she goes through the door, and this time, she sees another girl, but wait - it is also her, another version? She grabs at her skirt; tries to hold onto her; to pull her down to earth; to lift her skirt up; anything to get her attention. Is she magical? Is she real? Is she nothing? 'Non-existent' in a sense. Suddenly she feels very scared. Where exactly is she? Who is this girl with no name?

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<sup>50</sup> MIRIAD was the Manchester Institute for Research in Art & Design at MMU, which is now part of the Manchester School of Art.

There is no doorway, no way to get home. "Is this my life?" she worries...' <sup>19</sup>

1. Cj O'Neill
6. Sonia Sanchez-Lopez
25. Sylvianne Sykes
8. Pui Lee
10. Dani Abulhawa
13. Kate Bevan
19. Helen Felcey

The numbers refer to the authors reference numbers from The Plate Experiment, 2012

This piece was read aloud and accompanied by the images contributed by the authors cited in the text. The text contributed by participants was edited whilst aiming to retain the essence of the content. This process of collaging text was similar to the process of creating a visual piece of work. I began with separate elements of text - through a process of combination, trimming and reassembling the text, a new narrative emerged. A co-authored piece - I became editor, curator, assembler.

This allowed others into my process in a different way again – at this point it was not clear if this written outcome was a 'final' piece or simply a reflection on the process. How did this way of working with words, this writing, connect to my making process? In this case it was a constructed narrative rather than the writing alongside that was allowing me to illuminate elements of practice that had previously gone unseen or unrecognized.

## The Plate Experiment: Translation

This process of writing alongside making for me is a process of translation. However, sometimes translations can be inaccurate, or lose the potency of the original language. Translators are tasked with the unenviable job of successfully communicating the essence of a text from one language to another. This relies on a true understanding of the context and value of what was originally formed. The following account of an experience demonstrates more clearly what I mean by this.

At the *Listening* symposium Anne Douglas<sup>51</sup> asked me to read a translation of a Spanish poem, *Proverbios y cantares XXIX*<sup>52</sup>, as part of her presentation (Douglas, 2011). When I closely examined the original Spanish, it was clear that the words interpreted as *wanderer* and *road* in the 1979 translation, were in fact much more closely linked in the original Spanish language. *Camino* and *caminante* come from the same origin of the verb *caminar* to walk, and seemed to connect more clearly for me to the words *way* and *wayfarer*, the way being part of the wayfarer and vice versa. For me, this small detail had a huge impact on the meaning of the poem in its translated form, and helped me to realise the significance in true translation between written languages. It helped me to understand the careful task of translating (and also connecting) between ceramic, image and text.

The idea of translation can also be illustrated by a group of items I came across in a display case in the Jewish Museum, Berlin. The objects themselves were interesting to me simply through the fact I hadn't previously come across a series of sweet dishes in ceramic. But on closer reading of the card below, and inspection of the photograph placed next to them, the poignancy and potency of the objects came to life.



Image 120: Candy Bowls, Gift of Marlies Knopf, Jewish Museum, Berlin

<sup>51</sup> Anne Douglas is an Emeritus Professor at Robert Gordon University. <https://www3.rgu.ac.uk/dmstaff/douglas-anne?>

<sup>52</sup> Campos de Castilla, 1912 originally translated by Betty Jean Craige in *Selected Poems of Antonio Machado* Louisiana State University Press, 1979

Text: Breite Strasse 1

'The Jacobsohn family lived outside the town of Delitzsch, near Leipzig, for 450 years. Edith and Ealter Jacobsohn had a cloth store on the ground floor of Breite Strasse 1 and lived in the apartment directly above it. Having decided to emigrate after the November pogrom, the couple first moved to Berlin. But their emigration plans failed: Edith and Walter were deported to Lodz on October 18, 1941, and murdered. The photograph shows the rooms of the family store with Swastika flags hung in the windows. The photo was taken from the living room of the Knopfs, a neighbouring family, between 1939 and 1941. Before the Jacobsens moved to Berlin they sold their set of candy bowls to their neighbours.

Gift of Marlies Knopf<sup>53</sup>

This combination of image, text and object communicated infinitely more than each separate element was capable of alone. However, the context of the exhibition, the museum and the city, all added to the impact of these simple objects, giving them emotional agency.

If we are to think about translating between image, text and object, it is helpful to come from the perspective that each (image, text and object) is a type of language. During a workshop I participated in, we (as a group) distilled our reasons for making to – 'develop(ing) a material language to communicate our individual perspective through objects that create discourse.'<sup>54</sup> If I begin with this thought, then it would follow that media (craft, ceramic, word, image) could be thought of as a selection of languages. 'Craft is used as the language to listen with and speak through, to articulate the polarity of differing geographical positions and of cultural attitudes.' (Felcey, Kettle, Ravetz, 2013).

In the context of this PhD, the combination of physical object, image and word (either written or spoken) in collaboration with a contextual connection allows a sense of the practice as a whole, and allows the viewer a more in depth understanding beyond the language of things.

Invited to write an article on *The Plate Experiment* for publication in Ceramic Review, this sense of accuracy in translation was compounded further. I had sent the article (which contained *The Plate Experiment: From the Girls Perspective* as a large portion) along with the images that illustrated this content. The editor had requested that the cutting mat be removed from the images of close ups, but had agreed to include a pulled back shot to show the set up with the cutting mat (personal communication, 16 Feb 2012) to provide context.

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<sup>53</sup> Jewish Museum, Berlin, visited 21/05/11 Photo: Cj O'Neill

<sup>54</sup> Notes made during *From Experience*, Belfast, 02-04/03/11 <http://craftni-from-experience.eventbrite.co.uk/> last accessed 30/08/13





CERAMIC REVIEW

CERAMIC REVIEW

Image 121: Ceramic Review article, 2012 see appendix for larger image.

On publication, however, the article had been edited (of course), with sections of the content moved around visually, so that the reader may read parts in different orders. The major edit was that all trace of the cutting mat had been excluded. I realized that this meant the ground, the base, the context, had been removed. In my eyes, the article no longer made sense. I understand this process of editing is important in order to provide connecting links visually and in terms of content across the magazine, and recognize that this is a crucial job in the publication of a magazine such as Ceramic Review and that the editor is in control of this process. However, for me it cemented the importance of the cutting mat going forward as an important tool to connect with the reader.

## Reflection Point Three

**Allowing others into the process.** Reflecting back at this point, I realized that the lengthening networks connected to *The Pol Project* had continued to grow. The impact of this project on my practice was still visible. I had produced more objects and developed new ideas which explored the moving and changing ground of working with others in relation to practice. Through *The Plate Experiment* I wanted to gather contributions to allow others into the process of making narrative in ceramic, this in itself challenged my own preconceptions on how those contributions could develop and be used. I experimented with constructed narrative, piecing together these contributed words to create new perspectives.

I had shown work at Cube, Manchester, the Asia Triennial Manchester and the British Ceramics Biennial, all in 2011, these exhibitions displayed pieces that explored authorship and were a combination of contributions, pieced together through the language that I am most comfortable with – ceramic, silhouette and transfer. The objects themselves were becoming less of a focus, it was the connections to people that were emerging as more important.

“Things come to matter through our intimate relations with them, object and subject combined and entwined, inseparable in mind and memory.” (Crewe, 2011)

**Fluorescent orange** is the particular tone of orange most used within my practice, for its clear and distinctive man-made-ness. Fluorescent, day glo colours have the capacity to appear brighter than other colours because of their ability to convert or transform light energy (Smith, no date). It represents the industrial, the *other*. It clashes with the sense of a traditional ceramic perspective and brings the work somewhere new. As Garth Clark said in his description of the use of fluorescent colour in Selletti Design’s *Versailles Fluo* ‘The latter [fluorescent color] screams “modern” ...’ (Clark, 2009) It helps to remind the viewer that an intervention has been made – it provides a break in the visual narrative. A point of attention. I work with this colour in varying materials – Tape, ink, fabric, plastic, rubber, etc. with a punctured armband being one of the most recent and useful versions!

**Doorways as portals.** Through this project, doorways have been confirmed as integral to my process in terms of engaging participants in storytelling, and this helps particularly with journey related stories. It has encouraged participants to really explore the movement between plates and characters within this project, and enabled complex stories to be readily understood.

**Translation.** *Accurate* translation – not copying, but translation - is vital to our understanding of the world. This idea of accuracy could be seen to clash with the

engagement I aim for, reducing the ability of the viewer to bring their own meaning to the object in some ways, but let me clarify - I don't mean that I have to articulate every element of what is contained in each piece, but I do have to be accurate in my translation of what I *do* want to communicate from one medium to the other.

**Everyday.** The importance of the everyday has been confirmed again through this project and this has broadened across the practice, from the ceramic objects and the cutting mats, to the presentation methods and materials.

**Cutting.** The process of hand cutting transfers has been a constant within my pre-research and current research practice – but until this point I hadn't really acknowledged the importance of the process. This account of an experience in 2005 connects the everydayness with my process.

'On a bike ride to the beach I stopped to photograph a flower that looked familiar and I had seen each day on my way to the beach. I was intrigued by the beauty of the form together with the awful smell. Cow parsley. Lots of it. The everyday. What we overlook. I collated what I saw. Photographed. Drew. Re drew. Digitised. Printed. Redrew. Scanned. Reprinted.

And then I cut.

I had no way of printing transfers so I cut them instead. This process of cutting connects me to a time when I was 15 and had to have some time off school. I was working on some repeat pattern prints for my GCSE art exam and my teachers thought it would be a good distraction for me to concentrate on this. They loaned me a cutting mat and a scalpel. These became my tools for escape and allowed me to develop the pattern into a 5 colour print and hand cut each stencil ready for printing. Incredibly intricate, the process of cutting these allowed me to become fully immersed in this activity and escape from reality.'

(Extract from notes 2005)

**Grounding.** The green cutting mat had become invisible to me in a way before this research period, but through analyzing my own process, I discovered the importance of the particular colour and texture they bring to both image and my working practice. Although a strong colour, the green gives a sense of grounding. The mats are a tool in much the same way as Kjell Rylander described his use of A4 paper. 'The paper is a base... A storage place. A fundament.' (Rylander, 2012). The green mat provides safety too. Both a safe ground for hand-cutting material in a practical and physical sense – but also in a visual and emotional sense they provide a safe ground for interaction. This had also been invisible to me until analysis of the project. This space into which I am inviting others I intended to make less formal through the use of the cutting mat, but with that informality came this sense of safety.

## SIGNIFICANT SHIFT IN PRACTICE: A new way of Making

At this point I realized that I had reached a turning point in the research. That there had been a significant shift in my practice.

Through *The Plate Experiment* I discovered that **I don't actually need to make ceramic artefacts in the way that I thought** in order to connect viewers to everyday ceramic objects. Rather by enabling interaction with everyday ceramic objects I am bringing this experience to a new kind of consciousness, and allowing participants to acknowledge what is already there within their own thinking and the objects they already own.

I discovered that co-constructed realities can be much more interesting than singular experiences (for me, for participants and for passive audiences).

In addition, I discovered that I can enable others to create narratives through interacting with everyday ceramic objects.

Beginning with The Pol Project where I discovered the importance of the doorway, the threshold, then moving through The Plate Experiment where the focus shifted to the internal pictorial space within the plate, the work had become a place of social interaction between everyday ceramic objects, people and narratives.

Although these could appear to be small steps forward, even obvious possibilities in hindsight, at this point these were significant shifts forward in how I approached and could articulate my own practice. The next steps were to establish further ways of doing this.

## Their Stories: Take Three

'...I have to keep questioning the discipline and daring to take steps that follow logically from those questions.' (Jongerius, 2010)

A few years after beginning *The Plate Experiment* and seeing Chris Keenan's work *Continuing Drama* at Collect 2011, I asked Chris if he would be happy to talk to me about the work. Graciously, he agreed and we discussed *Continuing Drama* – the reactions to this piece and how it came about, and how it influenced other work. It was interesting to me that I didn't know until this point about the lengthy presentation of this work at Siobhan Davies Studios<sup>55</sup> (SDS). Invited to make work by the 60|40 group<sup>56</sup> Chris wanted to engage the audience in the work in a physical manner, and initially had ideas about leaving a large piece at the bottom of the stairs with a note to say, 'if you are going upstairs could you take this with you?' (Keenan, 2014) – in the way he would do at home. 'because I think, you know, you make a pot, and then it's only when someone holds it that they get the full story.' (ibid) This final element of engagement with the work is so important. Without it, has the work achieved its purpose?

This initial idea gradually developed into the piece I encountered at Collect, but gained a multitude of participants during its time at SDS. The film below (digital copy) is made up of still images taken over 4 months, and narrates developments in layout that Chris admits he would never have anticipated, or been brave enough to try!



Video 1: Chris Keenan, *Continuing Drama*, SDS, 2010 <https://www.chriskeenan.co.uk/extra-curricular>

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<sup>55</sup> Siobhan Davies Dance is an artist-led organisation that advances the art forms of dance and choreography as well as working with craft artists such as 60|40 and Helen Carnac. <http://www.siobhandavies.com/>

<sup>56</sup> 60|40 is an independent artist collective, founded by Clare Twomey, David Clarke and Tracey Rowledge. This project was part of the Starting Point Series <http://www.siobhandavies.com/whats-on/exhibitions/sps-2010/>



Image 122: Continuing Drama, still from Siobhan Davies Studios, 2010

Amazingly, over 4 months, there was not a single breakage, something Keenan had expected and thus provided a box of extras. What he could not have anticipated was how people would interact with it – ‘...it was only when it was running, because I couldn’t have an idea about what it would be until it was there. So I learnt through it.’ (ibid). It was as much in the ‘running’ of the exhibition as it was in the making that Keenan learned how it would work. Learning through doing, understanding through action. As an actor in a previous career, the title of the work *Continuing Drama* comes from the name BAFTA gives to a soap opera. ‘... I had 25 characters and then ... episodes so... it lightened my work I think’ (ibid).

Keenan used this invitation from 60|40 as a way of shifting his practice – much in the way that I use projects or residencies to shift things – ‘I wanted play back in the work’ (ibid) and he made the work site specific by using colours of materials from the studios themselves to inform the colours in the glazes he produced. The work also informed his gallery-based series of work, and he talked about a freedom in the placement of objects when laying things out in a gallery in Scarborough<sup>57</sup>.

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<sup>57</sup> *Make it Slow*: An exhibition, featuring six exhibitors, on the theme of ‘Slow’ developed by curator Grace Whowell for Chrysalis Arts Development Ltd and was at Studio 6 Gallery, Pately Bridge, Scarborough 15 November 2013 – Friday 24 October 2014



Image 123: Continuing Drama still from Siobhan Davies Studios, 2010

There are parallels and connections between this work and my own practice – the aim for a sense of play is something that I have been moving towards, but perhaps not articulated since The Pol Project. The invitation to others into my process has not only opened up the possibilities for the pieces at the time, it has enabled me to move forwards in a different direction.

Somewhere between objects and people, using narrative as a *way in* there is a territory that is waiting to be explored. It is here that I wanted to stay for a while, listening, exploring and **making**.

## Making

What is *making* anyway? At the 2011 conference, *Making or Unmaking*, Clare Twomey presented on ‘The skills I use from other people to make things.’ Through various examples from her practice<sup>58</sup>, the presentation discussed the role of skills in the creation of Twomey’s work; she talked of ‘commission[ing] craft skills from industry’ and of her perceived role as a craftsperson being a translator ‘It’s been through me as the translation, but Pat has grappled with the skill’ (Twomey, 2011). The terms that Twomey used throughout her presentation of the *artisans within industry* and of herself as the *craftsperson* call to question these roles. What is it that differentiates these people? How is an artisan different to a craftsperson? Is it simply a matter of skill? Perhaps my practice is not dissimilar to that of Twomey – today I am commissioning an individual within a large company to cut some plates in exactly the way I imagine. I am expecting him to have the tacit knowledge of the waterjet machinery to place the plates in the correct position, to use the correct amount of pressure to cut the plates, and not break them, to pack them carefully and return them to me in one piece. This is not an everyday process for the company, most materials that go through the workshop are heavy metals and parts for engineering. My everyday objects have just become very, very special, but have I made them?

It is not an isolated process, this making; it is not a solo activity - none of us exist in a vacuum. We are the products of our society, and the context in which we choose to live and work. Everything we experience collates to form our perspective on the world. In this way we collaborate, we work *with* others, things, in the ways that Leach calls *dispersed creativity* (Leach, 2004), where the value we apply to creativity is apportioned to each and every person or thing involved. No one person takes ownership, and authorship is attributed to the whole, but this doesn’t fit the traditional model of academia, with its necessary *outputs* and required individualistic focus. **Working with others - with persons, things, the world - is key.** How we go about it and how we articulate its value is the difficult part (O’Neill, Ravetz 2012).

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<sup>58</sup> including the work presented in the accompanying exhibition *Ting Tang Trash*, entitled *Made in China*



## Finding the right words, forms, things, objects, words

In her essay *Objects in Transition: The Ceramic Art of Kjell Rylander*, Jorunn Veiteberg discusses the subtle details of Rylander's work as seen in his installation in *Stuff*<sup>59</sup> and highlights the connections to the work of Nicolas Bourriaud. Bourriaud sees the role of the artist as one of a *post producer* (Bourriaud, 2002), to assimilate things from other contexts and recycle, reproduce, re\*present these, which is what both Rylander and I do within our practices. Widely recognised as the instigator of object art, Duchamp's initial application to the New York Society of Independent Artists exhibition in 1917 with *Fountain* was famously unsuccessful, and prompted a posting in *The Blind Man* which is assumed to be written by Duchamp himself marking the beginning of the use of the readymade within artistic practice,

'Whether Mr Mutt with his own hands made the fountain has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view - created a new thought for that object.' (Duchamp 1917)

Although *readymade aided* is the term most used by Duchamp (Brown, 2011) in the description of his own work, the *Making Art Value* group chose to move away from this reference '... we avoid using the term readymade in order to distance the work from Duchamp.' (Veiteberg, 2011). Instead the group chose to use the terms *second hand*, *upcycled*, *found object* or *everyday* to describe the ceramic materials used within their practice, defining *upcycling*:

'...by moving them [objects as raw materials] out of an everyday context and into an artistic one, they have all contributed to raising the value and status of these objects. It is this process that we have called upcycling.' (Veiteberg, 2011)

The group also use the definition developed by WJT Mitchell of *found object*;

'(1) It must be ordinary, unimportant, neglected, and (until it's finding) overlooked; it cannot be beautiful, sublime, wonderful, astonishing or remarkable in any obvious way, or it would have already been singled out, and therefore would not be a good candidate for "finding"; and (2) its' finding must be accidental, not deliberate or planned' (Mitchell, 2005 via Veiteberg, 2011)

Although I do plan to find objects (these objects are often purchased, so not accidental), and feel that sometimes they are beautiful or remarkable objects (many of the pieces I find are unusual, and stand out to me), I do believe they are still *found*. This definition therefore was unhelpful for my own definition of practice.

Louise Crewe finds other *doing* words to describe materials used by artist Michael Landy, 'consumed objects, those that are used up, discarded, spent, forgotten, lost, or destroyed...'

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<sup>59</sup> shown at the Roger Bjorkholmen Gallery in Stockholm, Sweden, Spring 2005

(Crewe, 2011) is this perhaps a better term for the primary material that I use? But then not every piece actually been *consumed* completely, partially maybe. Clare Twomey talked about *commonly made objects* in her presentation at *Making or Unmaking* (2011), which gives an idea that these are readily available, although it doesn't acknowledge the *used* nature common in many objects I select, she is of course referring to her own practice of newly made objects that often draw upon common or familiar forms. According to Skov and Holt '*manufacturing*' is 'the active and thoughtful accumulation, organisation, and transformation of materials through a novel combination of hand, tool, machine, and production processes.' (Skov Holt, 2008). Although this associates directly with manufacture, and is a useful term for describing process, it doesn't help with the terminology of my ceramic material.

I would argue then that '*everyday ceramic objects*' as a term represents most accurately the material I source to work with. 'Everyday' refers to the objects' common availability, and alludes to the idea these may be used or overlooked items that have a lived experience. 'Ceramic objects' in this context encompass both functional and decorative items, most frequently plates and figurines. These 'everyday ceramic objects' don't have to be used to hold this lived experience, their production and storage can sometimes be part of the narrative that is surfaced through engagement and interaction. This narrative could be seen as value, that is social, cultural, personal value, and can be accrued in numerous ways including use (or non-use), heritage, place, context and ownership.

## Project Three: (Y)Our Stories

To explore the thinking and questions developed since the Plate Experiment, I undertook a four-week residency at the International Ceramic Research Centre in Denmark – Guldagergård. The aim was to spend a focused period of 4 weeks making, refining and curating an exhibition of work in the context of Guldagergård – which was the location of my starting point of working with everyday ceramic objects.

Exploring three methods of engagement with everyday ceramic objects:

- physical interaction and selection in order to surface personal narratives – resulting in *The Reader*.
- transfer decoration of doorways on to plates to facilitate narrative response - resulting in *You Choose*.
- 3d printing clay to formulate a physical response to everyday ceramic objects – resulting in *The Additions*

Within all three methods I used ceramic figurines, either as a starting point, an activating agent, or as a narrative tool. This was a direct development of the characters from *The Plate Experiment* but I aimed that giving them a more obvious physical presence would encourage tactile interaction with the work and allow the work to lift from the flatness of the plate surface more into three dimensions.

The result was a solo exhibition of a collection of works in the Apple House gallery alongside a series of 'sketches' incorporating everyday ceramic objects. In this section I will give a brief introduction to the start of the residency, followed by a reflective narrative that follows the writing of Walter Benjamin in the unpacking of objects from the residency. The aim with writing in this manner, on reflection, is to attempt to unlock the knowledge gained through the residency through a different manner than previous sections – through objects. In doing this, I hope to connect to the *others* – the people, places and objects - within this project and reflect on the paths of movement that connect them together.



Image 124: Ivor (my husband) and Cerys (my daughter) waiting to board the ferry from Hull, 2016

Travelling to Denmark with my family leant an extra layer of excitement to the journey. We had packed ourselves and the things we would need into our van and set off on an adventure. The whole process of getting there was incredibly exciting for my children, travelling by van, boat, ferry across bridges, sea and islands, and after a week of travel, adventure and Legoland birthday celebrations, we finally arrived into Skælskør, a familiar place for me, but not for my family. We quickly settled in to life in a small fishing village, in a summer house near the beach, and while my husband and children had daily adventures in the local area, I set off to the studio at Guldagergård. It was significantly different to my previous residency - not living in the house next to the studio but travelling there instead each day by bike. There was a clear distinction between the studio / making space and the family space in the summer house. It was also distinctly different to my working space at home. At home my studio is in an upstairs room, so I can often hear family life whilst I work. Sometimes this is distracting, sometimes it helps to keep me focused. In Denmark, the opportunity to have full days of focused time making (often returning after bed-time to continue working) without the demands of teaching or distraction of family life, allowed for a concentrated development of work. I also had a significant focus – a solo exhibition at the end of the four week period. Previously I had been part of a group show, or presented work in a very informal Open House event – this focus meant the pressure from an external deadline that I respond well to was there from the beginning and helped to push me forwards.



## (y)Our Stories: *Unpacking my suitcase*: A reflection on a residency (after Walter Benjamin)

By way of reflecting on the residency period and revealing the knowledge created, I have followed the path of Walter Benjamin in *Unpacking my Library* (1931), and have documented the process of unpacking a suitcase from this period. The aim of this writing was to capture thinking *in the moment*, and to be able to communicate the sense of movement within the practice - moving backwards and forwards in time to gather thoughts and connections in the work, activated by the objects being unpacked. Boué articulates this sense of movement as being activated by objects, recognising that interaction with her grandmother's handbag as the turning point in her realization that objects can 'bodily transport us' (Boué, 2017) and realising how she could develop her practice as an object art practitioner around this notion.

In *Unpacking My Library*, Walter Benjamin presents a wry insight into the mind of a collector of books through the unpacking of his library after moving. His passion for the acquiring of these books comes through in the breathless description of the events surrounding the acquisition of certain items. The role of the collector is theoretically unpacked during the writing, and we are drawn into the vast and multifaceted history of the books he owns, and given snapshots of their stories. His decision to exclude certain parts of the story while still mentioning them, 'The following morning at the pawnshop is no longer part of this story, and I prefer to speak about another incident...' (Benjamin, 1931) creates such intrigue that you are urged to read on. Perhaps it is my own sense of anticipation, and enjoyment of sourcing plates that I find so interesting/amusing about Benjamin's writing. The acquisition of a ceramic object, the process of finding one, varies greatly. I come across things every day. Some are given, some are bought, in shops, in markets, in homes. All are *found* in their own way. The actual finding of these is a huge part of the process – the excitement of potential is overwhelming at times. Is this the enchantment with acquisition that Benjamin speaks of?

'The most profound enchantment for the collector is the locking of individual items within a magic circle in which they are fixed as the final thrill, the thrill of acquisition, passes over them.' ... 'for a collector... ownership is the most intimate relationship that one can have to objects.' (Benjamin, 1931)

The key here is that this is *for a collector*. What am I? What is my role? Maker? Craftsperson? Curator? Editor? Perhaps all of these are correct – at various points in the creative process. Whichever role I am in, for me, the acquisition is not a *final* thrill, but the start of another journey. Yes, I do take on 'the period, the region, the craftsmanship, the former ownership...' (Benjamin, 1931) but for me that is just part of the story. These

objects then provide a canvas, a landscape, an opportunity to tangibly add more before passing it on again. I don't want to possess these items for myself. As a bricoleur, (see Methods) I see their potential to be used as a tool for communication and want to work *with* things to reveal value. The found has been discarded, rediscovered, and can be recast within a narrative made by others.

Is this *making*?

Making as unpacking. Unpacking as making.

I am unpacking my suitcase. Yes, I am.



Image 125: The suitcase

It's hot today with a cool breeze through the open window. I am nervous and excited about unpacking the suitcase. It's taken many months for me to open it. Over a year since making the work in Denmark I am finally going to see it again. Closed, it contains memories that are combined, intertwined - connections to people, place and object. These

memories are precious and I worry that they will change, or alter when the work is unpacked. Have I remembered the experience 'correctly'? How will these objects enable me to construct a narrative experiential reflection?

The suitcase itself is a family heirloom of sorts. A crown case, purple in colour, made from a coated and textured cardboard material, it is stitched together along the seams with plastic piping. My Mum first carefully packed it with her things for her honeymoon on 19 July 1958, the day they were married, and Mum had made her own amazing wedding dress and going away outfit, packing enough for their two-week trip around Ireland in this little case.



Image 126: Mum and Dad heading off on honeymoon, suitcase in the boot, wedding album, 1958

Used many times since, it was given to me when I moved to Manchester in 1996 – the perfect size for hand luggage on the plane - and I loved that it was sort of fragile, requiring care in use and storage. It also connected me to my Mum when I was away in a new country at the age of 17. It became a physical representation of our relationship.





Image 127: detail shots of suitcase

There are marks where the sun has faded some of the surface, the stitching is coming undone in a few places – most likely due to my over enthusiastic packing skills - and been repaired in others to extend its useful life. The metal parts are showing signs of rust, but the clasp is brighter, more silver than the other bits. Even the crown label is still on - only just! The key however, was lost before I owned it.

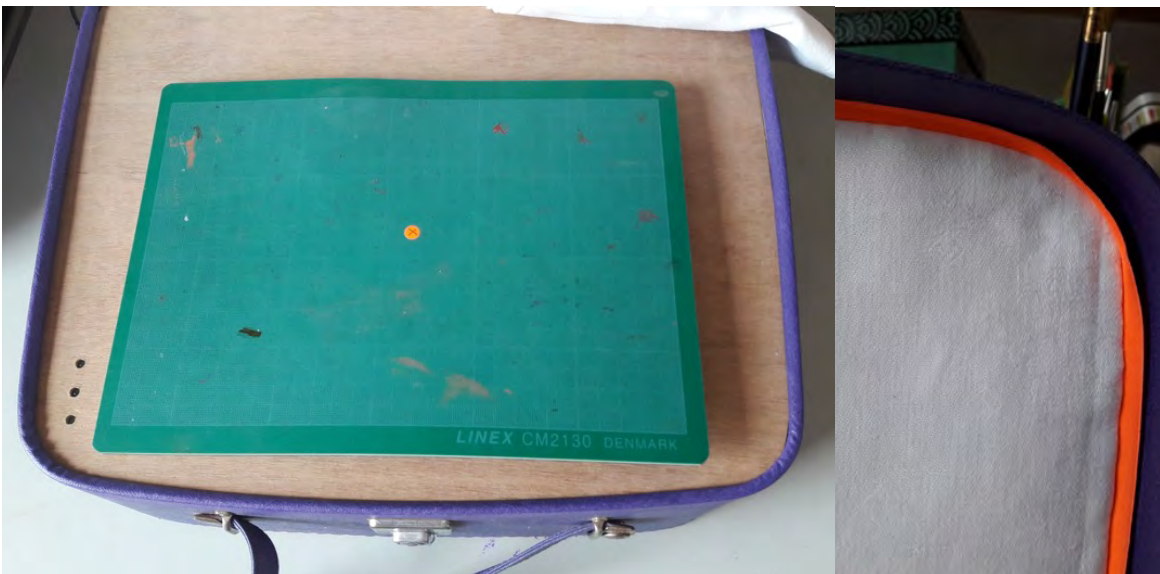


Image 128: Suitcase details, cutting mat, lining and fluorescent piping.

Opening the suitcase reveals a green cutting mat, the colour of which has become the ground for my work to sit upon. It has a fluorescent dot in the centre, with an x. The mat is a Danish one that I bought the first time I visited Guldagergård<sup>60</sup> in 2004 for a residency and began to explore the narrative potential for existing ceramic artefacts. The surface of

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<sup>60</sup> Guldagergård is the International Ceramic Research Centre in Denmark – [www.ceramic.dk](http://www.ceramic.dk)

the mat reveals much of its history, the marks, scores, smudges - and the slight kink from when it got wet that day.

I replaced the lining of the suitcase with linen woven with an art deco style pattern and edged it in fluorescent orange elastic. There is an extra piece of linen folded up which was used to lay on the boards in the exhibition. The fabric is from a tablecloth purchased in a charity shop near Skælskør, where I also found a beautiful red hand-knitted hat for my daughter.



Image 129: The Reader inner workings

Removing the mat allows a view of the inner workings of the case, a hole is cut through a piece of unfinished plywood revealing a series of wires and circuit boards alongside some bubble wrapped parcels.

The first artefact is a small dog, from *The Reader*. Seeing it through the bubblewrap is like seeing a ghost image of it. Each piece has been carefully wrapped by Rhiannon<sup>61</sup>, at the end of the exhibition in June 2016 - just before she left the centre. I am very lucky to have had her help in getting these precious items back in such good condition. The second item is a much larger deer figurine - it's one of my object sketches - with a fluorescent orange

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<sup>61</sup> Rhiannon Ewing-James was studio and programmes co-ordinator at Guldagergård during my residency in 2016.

tie around his neck. These two animals have their noses pressed against the bubblewrap as if trying to smell the outside world...



Images 130, 131: Dog / Wolf Wade Whimsy in packaging and Deer in packaging

The dog was frequently selected in his role in *The Reader*. Perhaps being the smallest figurine made him the most accessible.



Image 132: The dog from *The Reader*



Images 133-5: Small girl porcelain figurine, Yellow hare

The next piece is a little girl with fluorescent orange tie around her head and ears like a hairband. One of my favourites, it is a sketch<sup>62</sup> about a conversation I had with my daughter about a storm during the night. She said to me, 'I didn't hear the thunder last night. I was asleep, my ears were closed.' The little girl figurine is decorated with blue and gold, and is carrying a pair of bells. She has a large skirt and there is a hole in the base.

Next comes out a yellow hare. This hare was found in a charity shop near Skælskør as part of a pair, and became representative of all the hares we kept seeing during our time in Denmark.

In the exhibition it was presented in a container made from 3d printed clay<sup>63</sup>, and the colour of the matt yellow glaze against the textured and very dark brown clay contrasted and enhanced the sense of enclosure of the hares.

Images on following pages;

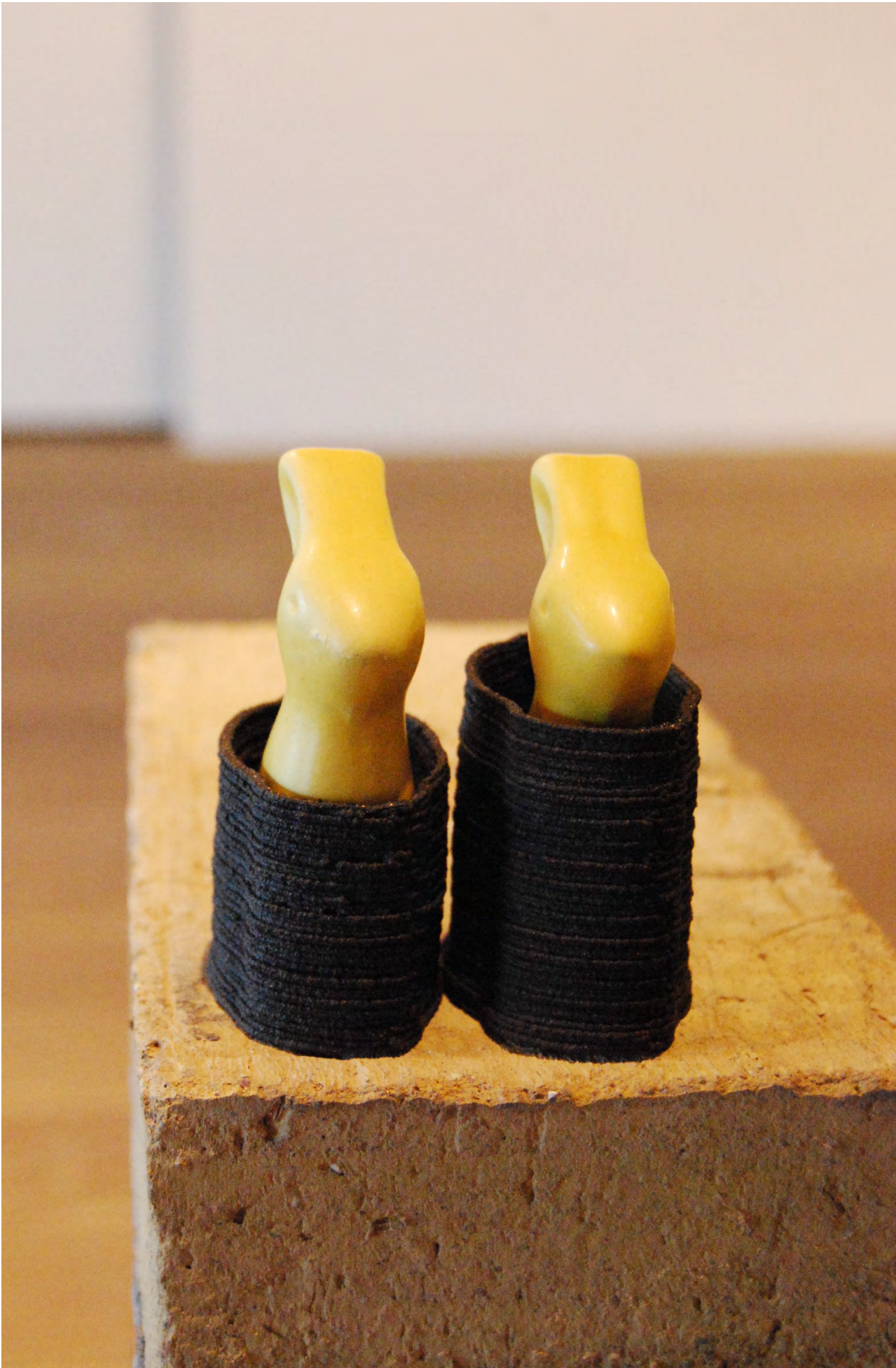
Image 136: *I didn't hear the rain last night*, sketch in (y)Our Stories exhibition, Guldagergaard, Denmark, 2016

Image 137: *Hiding hares*, from (y)Our Stories exhibition, Guldagergård, 2016

<sup>62</sup> As a starting point on arrival in Denmark, I made sketches using figurines I had sourced in Berlin, Budapest, the UK and Skaelskor, drawing on daily conversations and overheard chats. Materialising the words I heard through objects and colour, highlighting the ways in which figures could be added to without fixing.

<sup>63</sup> By 3D printing in clay I mean the process of printing raw clay through an electronically controlled extruder, which is delivered information via digital files drawn in Rhino and translated through software such as Slicer or Cura.





One of the aims of the residency had been to learn the techniques associated with 3d printing of raw clay, and apply these to a new series of works in relation to existing ceramic figurine objects. This new method of making, I thought, may allow the connection between object and audience to become stronger. Making additions for figurines in the form of containers would visually question the role of the object, and maker, in their subsequent interpretation by the audience. Initially I undertook a week of learning more about software - Rhino, CURA - and printing raw clay in three dimensions. I had the privilege of learning from Henrik Troelsen<sup>64</sup>, a sculptor, on a printer built by Jonathon Keep<sup>65</sup>. I then experimented with a series of different clay bodies, learning how to fill the tubes for extrusion, how to build my files in the correct way in Rhino as well as programme the printer using Cura. The most intriguing part of the process was the actual printing – the management of the material as it printed – using hair dryers, hot air guns, forks and water at various points to get the results that I wanted from the kit. The most time-consuming part, however, was the filling of the tubes ready to print, which involved mashing the clay with a fork, until the ‘right’ consistency is achieved.

Even Jonathon Keep (the designer of the printer used in Guldagergård) admits,

‘The extrusion rate is around 1mm per second. Excuse being vague with this information but, I am not methodical about each setting as there are so many variables I am relying on my tacit knowledge of working with clay and the general feel to get it right – not helpful I know.’ (Keep, no date)

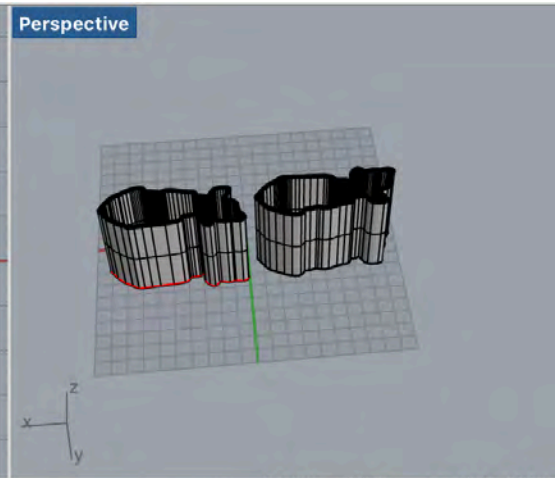
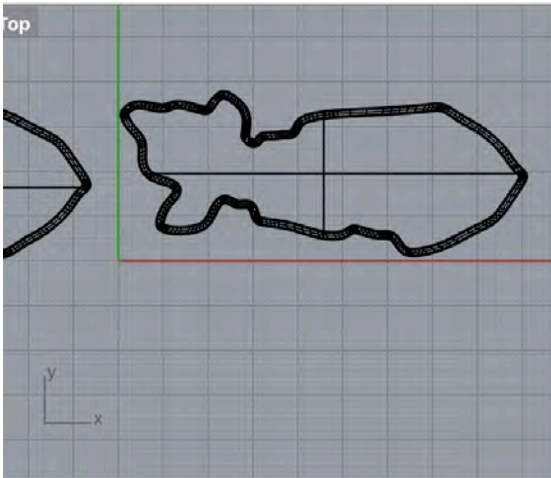
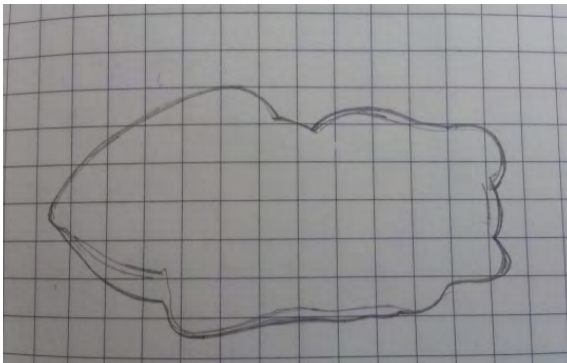
The following is an extract from workshop notes;

‘I have chosen to work with a figurine of a deer - a Hungarian piece sourced in Budapest – to begin as we have deer passing through our garden each day. They sometimes stop to look in the window at us, a fascinating experience of reversed roles for us.’ (from workshop notes 2016)

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<sup>64</sup> <http://ceramic.dk/workshops/workshops/3d-printing-and-design-workshop/>

<sup>65</sup> [http://www.keep-art.co.uk/Self\\_build.html](http://www.keep-art.co.uk/Self_build.html)



Images 138-40: Deer figurine, sketch of footprint, rhino drawings exploring extrusions and openings



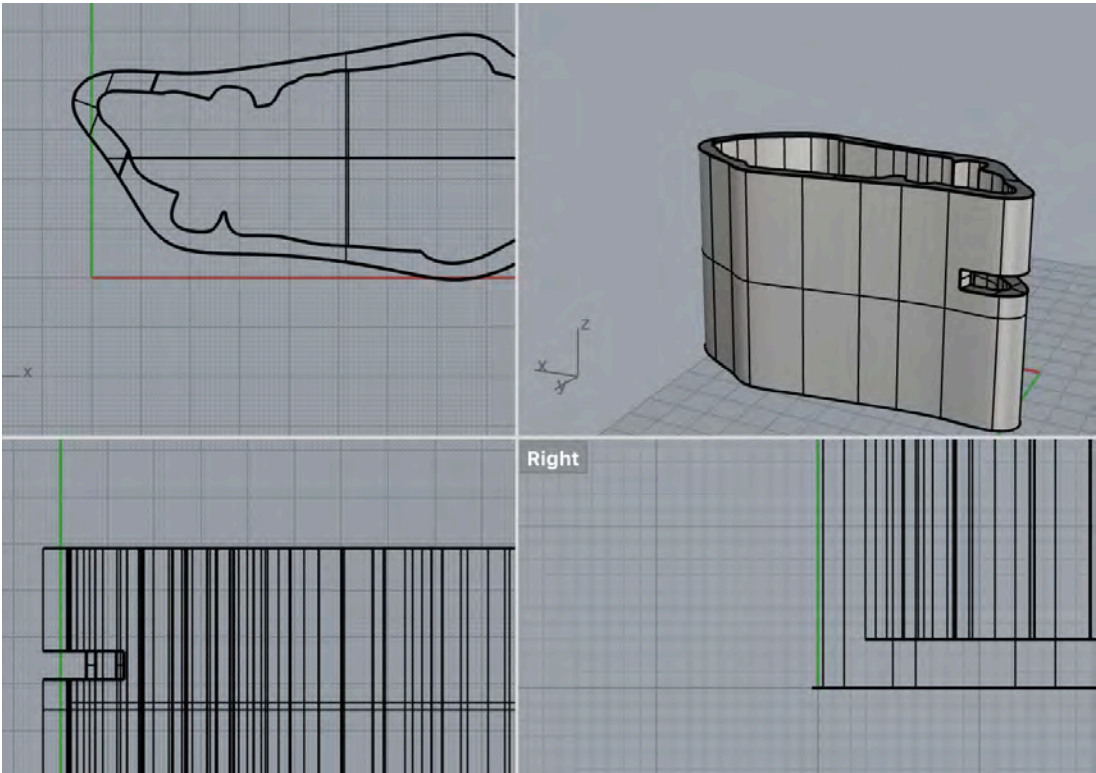
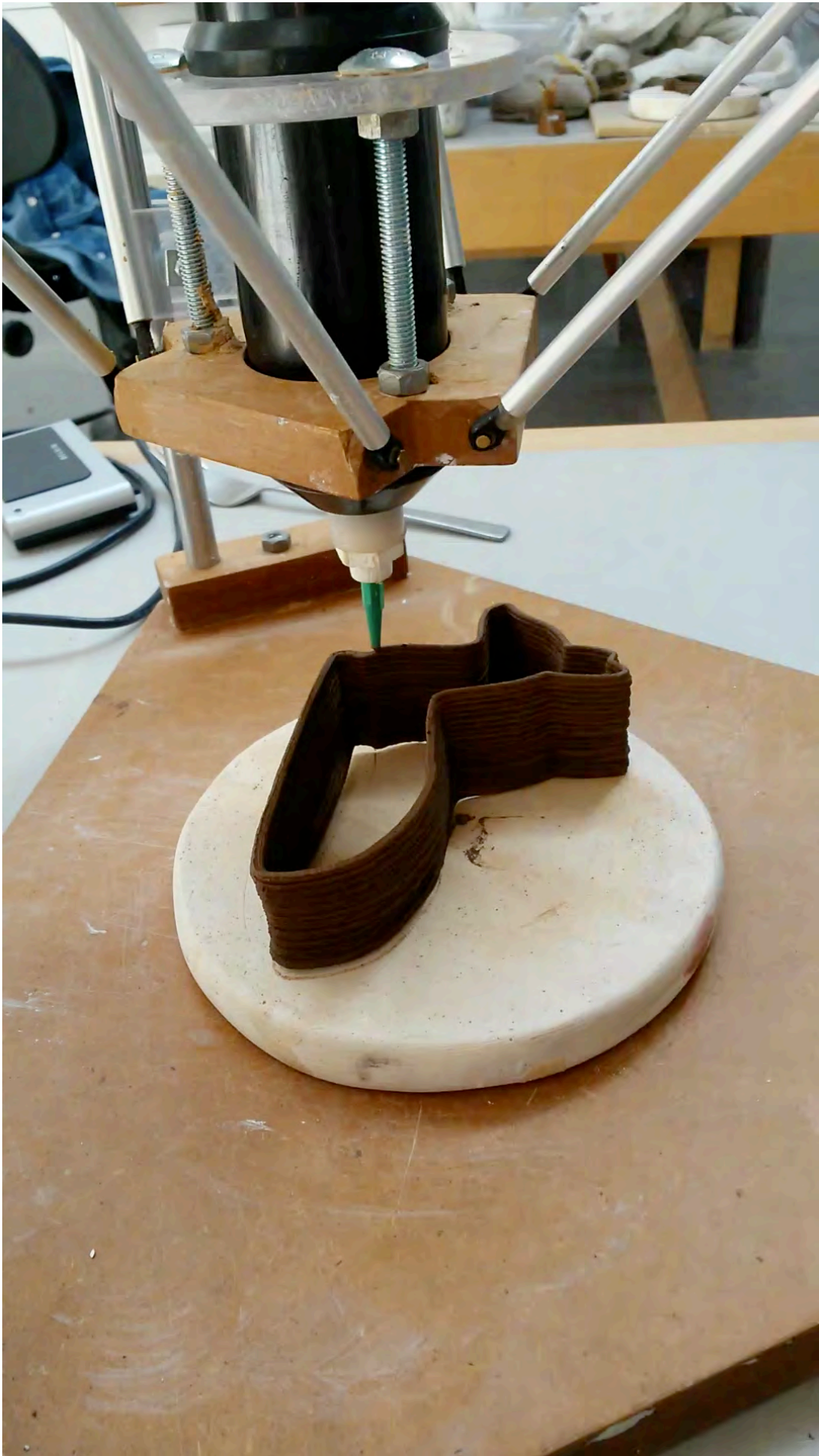


Image 141: Rhino drawings of bambi objects – exploring variations in wall thickness, base thickness, height.  
Images 142-3 (below): early prints exploring the process and form development.





Images 144: exploring combination of object and print.



Video 2: printing a deer container (digital copy)  
152



Image 145: exploring the finish quality and colour.

*'Initial tests with the printer are giving promising results - the materiality of the objects being printed appears to have a good visual dialogue with the found objects. Working with silhouettes in a different way allows an exploration of form as well as pattern. Extrusions and layering are the ways in which a three dimensionality is introduced to the forms. The qualities within the printed clay offer a new method of making for my practice.*

*On firing, the colour of the clay has turned to dark black / brown similar to the fired examples in the studio. Working with this colour I tried the addition of gold through transfer, lustre and paint. None of which gave the right finish on the rough ceramic body. The addition of fluorescent orange elastic however, adds a layer of depth and utilising this as a joining technique allows for the creation of lidded container forms.'*

(extract from workshop notes 2016)



Image 146: Deer in packaging

Back to unpacking. The Hungarian deer that was used to explore 3D printing comes next, with an ear pressed against the bubblewrap, as if listening for snippets of chat. Masking tape has been used to close the parcels. It is yellow in colour and is an unusual width – approx. 3.5cm. Perhaps this is not unusual in Denmark. Each piece is placed carefully on the green mat, a pile of objects, each in its own shrouded wrapping. Distinguishable but protected.

Perhaps this is how it is with memories. Each one stored, carefully wrapped, fragile and protected. It does seem as though each object is a memory, that the *'unpredictable range of latent possibilities'* (Keane, 2004) are contained within the wrapping somehow. Objects can be *'keepers of memories'* - as Caroline Slotte (2010) poetically phrased it - containers for us to store moments, thoughts... When we present them to the light those memories come too. For us. But someone else will have an entirely different reading of that same object. By presenting the words used to make the sketches in figurines, I give more clues, or prompts, for the reading of the object. Perhaps it is too much information and doesn't allow the personal interpretation of the object.

The goal is to inspire others to read objects differently, to reconnect with the people who are associated with the object. Perhaps it is the person who gave them the object, who had a similar object, the person who was in the shop at the time of finding the object and convinced you of its purchase, perhaps it's someone you never met, or something you found - maybe you've forgotten where it came from but remember an event or something that happened around it.

*'Everything remembered and thought, everything conscious, becomes the pedestal, the frame, the case, the lock of his property.'* (Benjamin, 1931)

This *experience* of the object is key, how all conscious thought around the object becomes indelibly, but invisibly linked to the object. The deer that my mother in law sent me in Denmark which she found in a charity shop allows me to remember when I accompanied her to the same charity shop in her local town with my daughter, and we debated the value of a toy laptop which we left in the end. It is the time spent together, the conversations and connections instigated by the interaction with the objects that is valuable.

The person/object relations.

That's the valuable bit.

\*

Returning to the suitcase some days later it is now dark and the house is quiet. I can hear that the road outside is wet when the cars drive past. Chaos has returned to my studio space in the interim and I must clear the suitcase of the things gathered on top. Opening it again I am immediately transported to setting up the exhibition in the gallery space in Denmark.

*'The smell of the Apple House has some sort of calming effect on me.*

*I am alone in the space having climbed the steps and entered through the side door.*

*I am surrounded by things.*

*Small, fragile objects balance on ware boards atop bricks from the kiln yard made here in the centre and built into the new workshop building. Each item in the exhibition has purpose and meaning. In the same way as Rylander emphasises the importance of the pedestal, the relevance of the shelf, in his exhibition Kontentum (2011), I find the same importance here.*

*A plinth caked in white paint has no relevance to this collection of objects.'*

(Extract from notes 2016)





Images 148, 149: pieces from (Y)Our Stories exhibition during set up, Guldagergård, DK, 2016

*'My children influence the height of the pieces. Seeing things from their (lower) viewpoints reminds me that things change depending on how you look at them. The simple act of bending your knees and crouching removes any formality in the gallery and encourages a more active engagement with the work. Coming down to a low level to observe objects - it reminds us of being children. Perhaps it inspires a childlike approach to the objects; an openness to the stories they might reveal.'*

*I want people to enjoy the experience – and to remember it!' (Extract from notes 2016)*

The relationship between object and audience in *The Additions* was less about physical interaction with the ceramic object, and more about the physical interaction with the display of the object. This work, on reflection, was more of a journey in material investigation and curatorial approach than about the storytelling through the objects. Active participation was encouraged through the physical viewing of the objects. Having to crouch or kneel to view the objects enforces a connection amongst the audience – a shared experience of oddness perhaps. Shared smiles with strangers on viewing the work on bended knee. Help from a stranger to get back up from bending to view the work at a low level. Does this then also provide evidence of the ability of the objects to connect people?

The materiality of each object within the display is also important, and must be purposeful, considered. In Guldagergård, these were site specific, created from the physical visual language of the place itself. The chair, acid yellow in colour, was there in



the gallery space. The ware boards were borrowed from the kiln yard. The A frames borrowed from the studio and the cloth, gently laid on top provided a careful base for the work. A considered and curated space to allow the audience members to sit, contemplative in their selection of three objects, made to feel special in the allocation of a seat. For the BCB<sup>66</sup>, I want to somehow capture this site specific-ness, but wonder how this might be possible. How can I make this experience *special* again?

*'I'm not quite sure why this place has such a profound effect on me, why it holds such domain for me. When anyone asks about Guldagergård I say it is a special place – with particularly special people.'*  
(Extract from notes 2016)

*Special*. It's a tricky word. It could be seen as a naïve way to describe something, but what I mean is the 'making special' as described by Ellen Dissenyake in her chapter *The Core of Art: Making Special* (1992). In this chapter Dissenayake articulates her deep and thorough understanding of tribal rituals surrounding objects within Sri Lankan culture. She cogently articulates the process by which community bonds are formed more deeply through the 'making special' of tools for everyday use. So too are the daily rituals that are performed with these tools such as cooking and eating, as well as less regular ritual ceremonies - the result of which is stronger, deeper bonds within the community.

The *making special* that happens with clay, objects, food, wine, music and presentations at Guldagergård has the same effect. The community bonds are strong and lasting. Each night during my first residencies there, one or two from the group would plan, shop for, prepare, serve and clear up after dinner. For me, this made dinner entirely special and ritualistic, just as Dissenayake (2003, pg.21) describes the connections between art and ritual – dinner was made *extra*-ordinary. The plates were made by artists who had been at the centre, the food was often from the chefs' (for the night) country, and the ritual of dinner times became central to the experience of the centre. The dinner bell ringing meant we had time to chat, to laugh, to connect with others. It also became ambitious and celebratory – each person seemed to add more to each meal and in this way our community became more connected and unified.

*'Movable white walls slide open to reveal the Guldagergård collection stored on shelves in date order. What an incredible visual feast. The space is silent when the walls are white and oh so noisy when the walls slide back. I find some of my first experiments with found objects from the Storytelling & Poetry residency in 2004 and the project I undertook with the staff at Kirkens Korshær in 2008. My pieces are conversing with pieces made by others here at the same time – Louise Hindsgavl, Justin Novak and Katie Jacobs from 2004 – Birgitte Mørk Winther, Julie York, Ann Bartges and Ingrid Skarprud from 2008 – each of these talented and unique people left a lasting impression on me and have each contributed towards my current thinking.'*  
(extract from notes 2016)

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<sup>66</sup> The British Ceramics Biennial, Stoke-On-Trent [www.britishceramicsbiennial.com/](http://www.britishceramicsbiennial.com/)

This revisiting of objects automatically connected me to the people I shared experiences and time with at GG previously. Ceramic objects *do* have the agency to connect us to others. Dissenayake (2003, p.25) asserts that a community *making special* survives better than those who do not. In referencing personal experience in Sri Lanka and the everyday rituals that were performed during her time there, Dissenayake draws out the vital importance of the effort, the care and time invested in the objects associated with these rituals. She believes that if individuals within a community take care when making the tools, the people who use the tools to, for example, cook a meal, will also take care, this will come through in the taste of the food, and the community enjoying the food, using tools made with care, will enjoy the food, the ritual of eating, more, and as such will develop stronger bonds within that experience. If this is applied to all aspects of community life, this taking care approach, or *making special* will pervade all areas and build stronger community bonds, thereby allowing the community to survive longer than one where this *making special* does not take place.

Perhaps this is what happens at Guldagergård – we are all *making special*.

This idea had actually been in my head much earlier, in the first *Pol Project* in fact – where I recognised the importance of the doorway as a central object in the life of the Pol community. ‘...the *otla* steps and the doorways were so significant in the life of the pol, and allowed community links and connections to become strong through repeated shared experiences.’ (from *Project One: The Pol Project*) but it had taken an encounter with Dissenayake’s theory to help me recognize this as *making special*.

A conversation from the exhibition opening comes to mind. Annie, who had rented us her summer home to live in whilst we were in Skælskør, had come to the exhibition from Copenhagen. Annie is a school teacher, and had come expecting to see new ceramic objects made at Guldagergård, instead she encountered objects that she found familiar, and realised through the exhibition, that these everyday ceramic objects offered a way of creating narratives. She told me that she would return to school with a series of everyday ceramic objects and invite her students to tell stories using them. She was genuinely excited about the translation of the exhibition into the classroom and could see the potential for the children to explore and articulate their own narratives by doing so.

This, in its essence, is Annie *making special* her lesson for those children. By taking care, spending time, thinking and applying that thinking, she is *making special*. Those children will benefit from that process, and in turn, perhaps they will bring the thought home with

them after school and bring the idea into their own family, thereby *making special* within their own home, strengthening bonds - developing their own ways of *making special*.



Image 149: Exhibition set up in progress, The Apple House Gallery, 2016

*'It is now dark outside and I sit on the floor and look around.*

*Is it ready? The exhibition. Is it ready?*

*It is a large space.*

*Particularly for such small-scale work.*

*I am concerned that the work will be lost.*

*Too quiet in the open space.*

*The ware boards and bricks help to ground the printed work. Stacks of brick raise certain pieces up from the floor, allowing these pieces to have a different view of the room. Two yellow hares peep above their printed confines and look over at the suitcase from their precarious position on top of a wonky yellow brick. Lower stacks of different bricks in the window house my sketches with figurines, fluorescent plastic, card and pencil. Some looking in. Some looking out into the night. Each figure has its own line of gaze. Fixed. The table created from A frames topped with ware boards houses the suitcase and there is a yellow chair for participants. The plates on the wall house a multitude of potential stories, journeys. Each plate presents a very different world to the travellers who may visit the exhibition.*

*Is it ready? The exhibition. Is it ready?*

*The wire to the suitcase is an issue – I wish it was wireless.*

*The angle of the ware boards in relation to the table are not quite right.*

*There are plates to be mounted.*

*Nothing is quite right.*

*Adjustments still to be made.*

*The iPad sits silently next to the suitcase awaiting its next entry.'*

(Extract from notes 2016)

The plates. The plates are not in the suitcase – so far.

Within the residency I had planned to produce a series of plates, building further on *The Plate Experiment* in combination with hand cutting transfers and the undoubtable relevance of the doorway to narrative building. I intended to take the earlier pair of plates with the escapee dog as a starting point (see Project One: Silhouettes) and simplify the visual addition of the doorway. The aim was to allow the objects to have an openness – and allow for open interpretation by an engaged *or* passive audience. The collection of plates was to be sourced from Danish second-hand shops, and each one embellished with a hand cut doorway.



Image 150: *You Choose*, Guldagergård, Denmark, 2016



Images 151-2: *You Choose*, Guldagergård, Denmark, 2016

The plates provided an open narrative but I was unsure as to how the visitors would engage, or if there was a need for a prompt or indication. Through testing and development, I incorporated figurines into this piece – by way of journey-makers. The

figurines would act as physical representations of the participant through their journey across or within the plates.



Image 153: Journeymakers for *You Choose*, 2016

These were a series of figures – a large hare, a small girl and a tiny deer – awaiting selection. In front of them a large white plate with a shiny golden filled doorway. The audience would select a figure, placing it on the large plate by way of activating the start of the journey. The printed information sheet contained a drawing of the layout of the plates, and invited the audience to mark out their journey using the stickers provided.

‘This piece invites you to participate by selecting a figurine and taking it on a journey through the lands contained within the rims of these plates. Please mark this journey on the back of this sheet, using the coloured dots provided. If you wish, you can also write a little of the journey you have taken!  
Many thanks for your contribution!

All contributions will be used within my research. If you would like to be kept updated on this project, please leave your email address.’  
(from information sheet in the exhibition. Danish translation was also included)

Returning to unpacking the suitcase, this next one chinks. Is it broken? I panic.

Oh no, phew, it is not broken, it’s Belle...

I think I will have this name in my head forever.

Image 154 on following page: Belle



This figurine first came to the fore during a workshop I ran with Alice Kettle<sup>67</sup> in 2015, participants were asked to create a story that connected three objects. They were given a variety of starting points to help instigate the narrative -

Activity 1: Find a table in your group and select 3 objects. From these you must construct a narrative.

Think about who the characters may be, where they might live, who the king of the land may be, what century the story is set in, etc.

Activity 2: Swop to a different table and repeat.

Can you allow material qualities to inform your narrative?

Are you drawing on the production methods of the objects to inform your narrative?

Are there marks of use that can help to initiate narrative?

Activity 3: Swop to the final table and repeat.

Who may have used, owned or made these objects – can you allow this to influence your narrative?

One of these stories was entitled *Belle*.



Image 155: Belle, pig and rabbit, photographed during a workshop in 2015

***Belle***: Abbie, Hattie, Frankie<sup>68</sup>

*Belle, the figurine maker was lonely and abandoned due to her annoying ringing sound. So she decided to make herself two friends, in ceramics, who had to be as delicate as she was. She made each one from bone china to reflect her own vulnerability. She created them both with an imperfection, meaning they could never fulfil their purpose as money boxes, and so they didn't ever want to leave her because they would never fit in anywhere else.*

<sup>67</sup> 'Alice Kettle is a contemporary textile/fibre artist based in the UK. She has established a unique area of practice by her use of a craft medium, consistently and on an unparalleled scale.' Sara Roberts from <http://alicekettle.co.uk/>. The workshop was run at Manchester School of Art for textile and three dimensional design students.

<sup>68</sup> Harriet, Abigail Douglas, Frankie Lobb – co-authors of the story.

*Both India and Sweden (as they were named) spent their entire existence wanting what the other one had. Belle consequently has created two bitter figurines, resulting in three lonely, soulless, ceramic pieces.*

(extract from workshop notes 2015)

This workshop confirmed my idea that everyday ceramic objects could help others to construct narrative. Other tasks within the workshop included selecting a precious item that another participant had contributed and fabricating a narrative around this object. This narrative along with the true narrative were revealed to the group. As so many of these true narratives were deeply personal, participants did not feel comfortable in sharing them for research, but for me, seeing the effect on the others in the group of learning the narrative of an object - particularly when it was tragic or sentimental - really pushed me forwards in confirming the importance of these narratives being revealed and shared.

Returning to packing once more, I discover that the rabbit is last. Brown packing tape obscures his identity in full on one side, but the rich pattern edged in gold comes through the bubblewrap clearly on the other side. A bit of a squeeze to get him out from beneath the wooden insert, he emerges unharmed from his journey and storage. He has a twin of sorts, a figurine that looks much like a hedgehog without spikes. It has Piacentini and Japan on the base, but I'm not sure that hedgehogs exist in Japan. 'Literally, "piacentini" denotes the people from the city of Piacenza.' (Gambini, 2017) So there is an Italian sticker on a Japanese pattern covered rabbit and hedgehog. These objects have more stories to tell!

Left within the fabric lined space are the electronics that enable the capturing of stories. I plug the suitcase in and lights begin to flash.

*The Reader*, as an idea, had developed from *The Plate Experiment*, and, considering these elements - the selecting of three items and contributing a narrative - I wondered would it be possible to simplify the process somehow? Rather than asking individuals to physically write down their story, if they could record a narrative digitally? Could this become part of a database to allow the figurines to tell stories themselves further down the line? In essence, could I allow the figures to capture and re\*tell stories to an audience? I had no idea where to start! How could I activate a ceramic figurine to enable a webpage to show a question? Ivor (my husband) asked me some questions from his perspective as a web developer - How did I want the audience to interact? How did I want to receive the information from them? These questions were invaluable in helping me understand and articulate clearly what it was I wanted. Through further discussion, I enlisted the help of



Lewis Sykes<sup>69</sup>, a technologist (Lewis had been in the group of PhD students I showed work with in *State of Play* in 2011).

I selected a series of figurines from my collection as characters that had a diverse colour, scale and character reference.



Image 156: Initial figurines for *The Reader*

This initial set of figurines were tested at The Whitworth Gallery, Manchester during an informal presentation of *The Reader*, and the ones which were most used in telling stories were selected for use in the final work.

Selecting three figurines and recording the related story seemed like a simple thing to do, and I wanted the process to be straightforward for any participant, but as is generally the case, simple is never straightforward. After describing the process I wanted to Lewis, he felt that recording speech would be complex, and suggested starting off with text based information. In order to facilitate this I would need a series of electronic components (Arduino based) that would need coding to accept the information in a particular way. This would then need to be communicated to a website database, and this information then presented back to the participant in a simple manner through a website. In real time. I had hoped that introducing technology would simplify things, and make the piece less onerous than the hand-written option for *The Plate Experiment*. What resulted was a series of exchanges between Lewis, myself and Ivor, where we developed an electronic and digital solution to my design.

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<sup>69</sup> <http://lewissykes.info/>

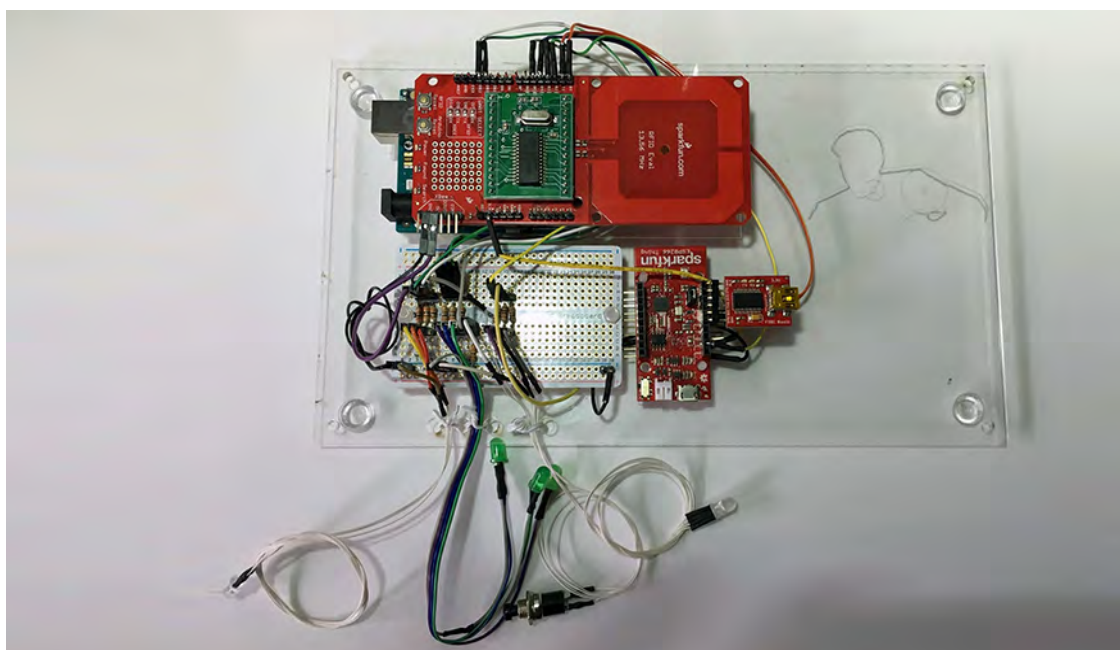


Image 157: Arduino hardware for *The Reader*, built by Lewis Sykes, 2016

The technology aspect of the piece took many hours of development and tweaking to function as needed, working on the simple basis of RFID readers, each figurine was tagged and a reader was placed under the mat. The hardware detected which of the three figurines had been selected by participants, and sent their unique IDs to a data stream via wifi. The project website (built by my husband) displayed on an iPad, monitored the data stream, and used the information to guide the participant through the process and capture the narrative as well as their details. The scale of the hardware, and the transportation of the piece whilst we travelled around Europe pushed me to explore options for housing. After deliberation and testing, I decided that the technology was there to facilitate an easy interaction and to gather information in an unobtrusive way, and therefore it made sense for the technology to be contained within something rather than on display. I wanted the piece to have a sense of the movement of objects, of people and of stories, so a suitcase became the obvious choice. This is where Mum's suitcase came in handy, and provided an opportunity for storage, transportation and display if the electronics could be fitted within the body.

There were some issues that contributed to a relatively low level of engagement with the piece however;

1. The functionality relied on an internet connection, but the wifi signal in the exhibition location was not strong, and relied on electronics being placed in a box outside the studio – the signal was still intermittent, leading to loss of functionality of the piece at times.
2. Forwarding of information to the database was intermittent as there were issues (unknown at the time) with the server so although stories were being inputted,

these were not always captured. (Later iterations of the piece would have a more reliable server and methods of sending information to the database.) This resulted in the database being only partially populated, hence not being included here.



Image 158: The Reader, work in progress

Working out the relationship between the suitcase and figurines was largely driven by the dimensions of the suitcase, the figurines and the cutting mat ground that had become a constant within the work, and provided the safety and accessibility that I was aiming for. Housing the electronics for the Arduino element of the work was resolved by cutting a wooden section to fit inside the lip of the suitcase, embedding the LED's within this and wiring the mains plug through the side.



Image 159: The Reader, at (y)Our Stories exhibition, Guldagergård, Denmark, 2016

Although I long to reconnect it all and check it still works, I return to Benjamin and the process of unpacking as a method of reflection and am reminded of the starting point for this section,

Making as unpacking. Unpacking as making.

Unpacking the experiences associated with the objects I worked with has connected me to the people I encountered during the residency in a way that would be otherwise difficult – or simply would not happen. ~~This method of revisiting experience in a reflective manner through interaction with everyday ceramic objects confirms the importance of physically handling of these objects in the creation of narratives.~~ This method of revisiting experience in a reflective manner through interaction with everyday ceramic objects differs significantly from the previous projects as it allows the knowledge to unfold through and with the handling of ceramic objects. This reinforces the central part of the research findings - that narratives develop through interaction with ceramics objects. Developments and moments of meaningful insight that happened during the making of the work are extracted from notebooks and critically reflected upon, and the writing shifts between present moment and past events to allow this to happen in a fluid manner. My thinking on how object, user and maker relate (Question 1) has shifted once again to allow a varied and expanded approach to how I can work with everyday ceramic objects to facilitate these relations. It has reminded me that re\*presenting objects (Question 2) can be a powerful way to allow people to see objects differently, and that this can be through

very subtle shifts, additions or changes. It has also confirmed that by broadening my approach to practice, I can encourage personal connections not only to objects I produce, but to objects that already exist in homes and collections, allowing these objects to be seen from a new perspective, and in doing so, building connections to others through this fresh viewpoint.

## Reflection Point Four

The process of unpacking these objects refreshed and re\*focused some of the thinking and decision making that occurred during the residency period in Denmark, and how the experience - the making of the objects, curation of the exhibition – in that place at that time, led to a series of pieces that encouraged participation. This project was the synthesis of the learning that had taken place through all of the research to date. Managing three projects within one was similar to how I had worked on *The Pol Project*, as well as developing the multiple interpretations of the results from *The Plate Experiment*. This method of working clearly helps my creative process. Pressure and external deadlines, I have found, are incredibly useful in increasing my productivity levels, and public presentation always helps me to resolve issues in final details as the involvement of *others* in the work is so fundamentally important that these external opportunities help to focus my thinking and articulate my thinking more clearly.

**Making Special (Dissenayake).** The application of this theory has brought a new lightness to my practice. Seeing through Dissenayake's looking glass, allows the work to connect to our innate ways of being in the world and establishes a way of thinking about person object relations that encompasses a wider field of experience beyond the immediate or near future or past. By making each element of practice special, the work can impact positively on those who interact. This sense of special can come through care, time taken, skill, detail, numerous ways. A fundamentally positive way of seeing the world, as well as the others (objects and people) within it.

**Place** and context are significant to the work. This was already established in *The Pol Project*, but has been cemented through this project, returning to familiar but culturally different places allows a shift in perspective that may not happen so readily staying in the UK. This shift and change allows a recognition of the importance of place. The use of site specific ware boards, bricks made at the centre, each element carefully selected for its relevance and particular narrative.

**Networks and movement** Networks and the connections between people and objects have a profound effect on our lives. This idea of a network, a community, is something that underpins much of my practice and is deeply connected to the sense of movement that I know surrounds everything that I do. Moving within the practice allows the making to cross boundaries of practice, to at one moment be focused on working with groups of people, and at other times be working alone in a self-reflective manner, drawing on personal experience, then working with a different group. The movement between these places / methods allows each to inform the other, and connects parts of the network to

others otherwise not accessible, thereby enhancing the network of which I am part. The acknowledgement of this network can sometimes be tricky and problematic as discovered within the Pol Project, but the use of non-linear methods such as open exhibitions, including the objects worked on by participants alongside objects I work on, the inclusion of names of all co-authors, allows for an open model of practice which encompasses the sense of movement. An understanding of the work *others do in us* (Leach 2004) and acknowledging this within models of practice becomes more relevant with each project.

**The digital printing of raw clay** This has been recognized as having significant potential for development in future practice, both in terms of developing the process to create a more extensive collection of objects, as well as the potential for the process to articulate the narrative of networks. The process and creation of these early pieces has had an influence on my thinking about my role within making, as well as the relationship between digital and physical thinking, specifically with relation to Pye's thinking on certainty and risk within making. I look forward to developing these ideas beyond this thesis by returning to Guldagergård for a research period to investigate the process further.

**Digital technologies and interfaces** Working with others using Arduino programming and a web based interface, enables a simplification of interaction between participant and object. Eg. The Arduino is programmed to scan a tag in the selected ceramic object in *The Reader*, sending a signal to the website that this or that figurine has been selected. The website is coded to then ask for another figurine until all 3 are selected. This interface removes the need for the participant to know or write down a name for each figurine and ensures accurate records are held of the interactions, along with timings of selection periods and the elapsed time between participants. This level of detail would be difficult and unreliable if taken by hand. I will continue to work with similar technologies in future projects where they have the expressed purpose of simplifying the interaction or collating information otherwise difficult or impossible to track. However, I will also readily use analogous methods where preferable, as technology-based solutions are not always straightforward!

**The doorway is a significant symbol and activating element in my work.**

Metaphorically open, it allows the viewer to bring their own version of what lies within or beyond the doorway.



Image 160: Doorway plate III, hand cut black and gold transfer decoration on porcelain plate, 2011

The doorway decorating a small plate that sits on my shelf is hand cut in black transfer detailing the flowers that were placed carefully around the frame in *The Pol Project*. Filled with gold - the symbol of chi, the essence of our energy, and in its very essence a transformative material<sup>70</sup> – what is revealed to us is **the magical potential of the doorway to transport us into the other worlds of our imaginations.**

Reflecting back to *The Pol Project* there is a significant literary reference that has gone unnoticed in my thinking previously – as a young girl I was very absorbed by the *Narnia* book series by C.S. Lewis and it has taken until this point to connect the doorways I use in my practice to the one in these books.

‘Only a few yards away, clear to be seen in the sunlight, there stood up a rough wooden door, and round it, the framework of the doorway; nothing else, no walls, no roof.’ (Lewis, 1950)<sup>71</sup>

<sup>70</sup> See earlier discussions of gold in Reflection Point One

<sup>71</sup> Fantasy literature and traditional fairy tales are a common feature of children’s stories, narrating portals to alternative realities. *Alice through the Looking glass* is the obvious reference, featuring many doors within the storyline.





Image 161: 'Heights of David' by Michael Lyons Yorkshire Sculpture Park, 2018

Perhaps the influence of our collective consciousness was stronger than initially realised in bringing this doorway into reality in Ahmedabad.

## (y)Our Stories: Ceramic Values: Shifting Context

*The Reader* was accepted to be shown during the *Ceramic Values* congress at the British Ceramics Biennial 2017<sup>72</sup>. The location and presentation was developed over a series of site visits, and resulted in the work being located on a standing table which was already in the space, with the linen square from the Danish iteration and the iPad laid next to the suitcase. This allowed for a very different interaction with the work, as it removed the seat, (and the subsequent focused individual space that provided during the (Y)Our Stories iteration) and placed the work at standing height, the combination of which resulted in a few groups creating multi-authored narratives.



Image 162: *The Reader* at *Ceramic Values* congress, BCB, 2017

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<sup>72</sup> <http://ceramicsanditsdimensions.eu/>



Image 163: *The Reader* at Ceramics and its Dimensions congress, BCB, 2017

The nature of the congress meant that visitors expected me to explain the work, rather than coming to it alone, however, this additional interaction allowed for a variety of methods of interaction with the work. Some visitors worked in groups, standing back from the suitcase, asking me to type their story as one member selected objects under direction from the rest of the group. Others did work alone, but asked multiple questions about the work, what came before, why it had this particular aesthetic – before spending up to 30 minutes writing their own story.

The process of getting the piece working at the congress was a complex and very difficult journey. As the original method of posting data had become obsolete between the first showing and this one, the piece required a rebuild of the code enabling the information to be recorded. This process was supported heavily by Dave Mee and my husband Ivor. Between us we managed to get it running for the congress, but it really brought home the difficulties in working with open source technology such as Arduino, but also of how important it is to have reliable and generous support! It made me wonder about other makers working with similar technology in their work, and during the congress I was reminded of the work of Jane Wallace (UK) and her approach to interactive and narrative based objects. She too draws on Arduino and other simple programming technology to assist the interaction element of her work which ‘...explores the potential of jewellery,

digital technologies and the act of making to support sense of self across a range of human contexts.' (Wallace, no date).



Image 164: *Remember*, Jane Wallace, 2010/11

'*Remember* houses a large number of images, moving from one to the next each time the locket is opened. It was made as a way for a person with dementia to be able to carry a host of images of personal significance with them, on their bodies, in the hope that the locket and the showing of the images to others could form a bridge between who the owner of the locket is and has been over a life-course and family and caregivers in the present.' (Wallace, 2011)

Wallace works with everyday objects (and has worked with ceramics in *Connected Craft*<sup>73</sup>) and encourages the physicality of the handling and making of objects to help us construct a sense of our 'selves'. In this way, Wallace's practice is perhaps most relevant to my own in terms of context, and as I have revisited her work (from a fleeting view pre PhD) only during the writing up period, I hope to make connections with her beyond the thesis.

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<sup>73</sup> <https://www.jaynewallace.com/connected-craft>



Image 165: figurine from *The Reader*

One of the stories contained a line that stood out – ‘Just a hint of gold makes her all the more special.’ (O’Leary 2017). The participant was discussing the small baby figurine (above) and this acknowledgement of the impact of the gold reflects my own use of gold when adding to objects, but also the sense of making special.

Observing the process of interaction, and reflecting on the photographs I took during the congress through drawing and collage (a process of thinking through making) it appeared that the piece itself, and the iPad in particular, had become the doorway through which participants activated their narrative. The physical handling of the objects triggered memories and thoughts which were then captured through the iPad.

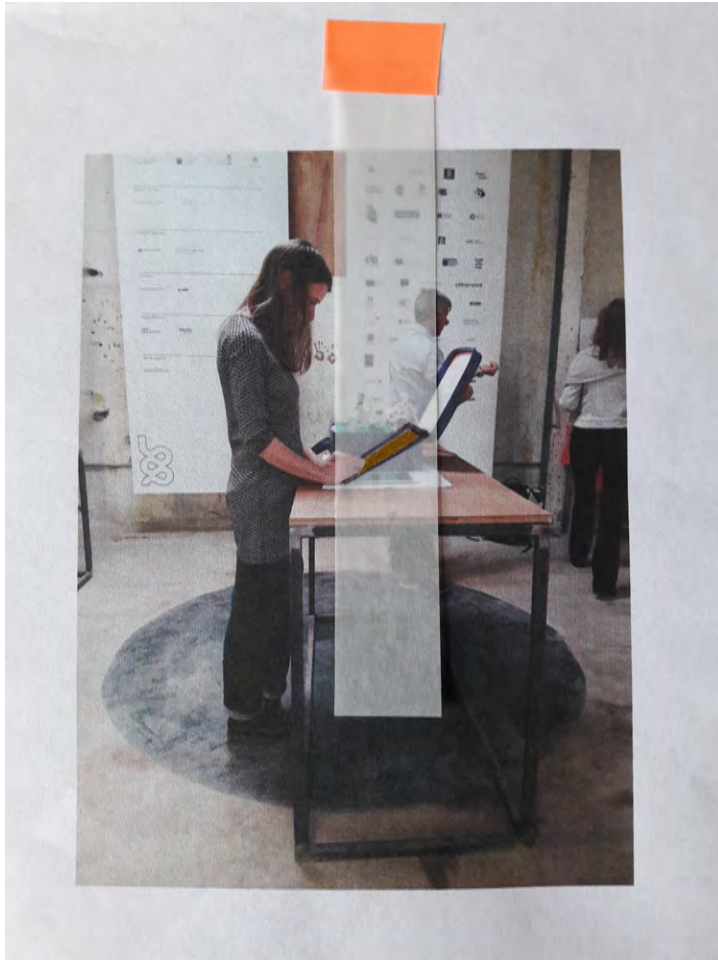


Image 166: *Activating Doorways*, altered image, 2018

Although the stories captured in this iteration were really interesting, what became apparent was the difference in how participants engaged with the work. I had chosen to be situated next to the *Clay Pit* an interactive area developed by Helen Felcey, Dena Bagi and Priska Falin<sup>74</sup>. This positioning allowed visitors to see action and interaction happening in the space directly next to the piece, and encouraged confidence in handling work, as these were the only interactive areas within the BCB. The standing height of the piece encouraged a more informal level of interaction, and my own availability during the congress meant that all participants got to ask questions and discuss the work before or after participating. Many participants mentioned ceramic objects they already had or that they remembered and the people that were connected to those objects – grandparents, aunts, friends and partners all came up in conversation. The process of engaging with the work had opened up a connection to others – both people and objects.

Although this piece was at the point of presentation, a conclusive object, on reflection I can see that it is just one way of engaging the audience in the process of narrative building with everyday ceramic objects. There are other methods established within the research –

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<sup>74</sup> <https://www.britishceramicsbiennial.com/content/clay-pit>

transfer application on plates, paper cut outs laid on ceramic surfaces - that can elicit equally compelling narrative responses in different ways. No particular method is better than another it has been established, each may have relevance in different contexts. What is important is that visitors to a space, an exhibition, are encouraged to engage with everyday ceramic objects to develop a narrative response that may connect them to another person or object.

## Conclusions: ~~My Your~~ Our Stories

*'We re-present stories told by subjugated Others, stories that would otherwise be discarded. And we get a hearing.'* (Fine, 1998: 150). In this quote Fine is discussing the re-presenting of stories of *others* where others are people. What the research presented within the thesis (and the projects within it) do, is to allow the stories of *others* in terms of both objects and people to emerge and contribute to the world through artistic intervention. Stories that may otherwise be discarded, forgotten or lost.

At this point, however, a congruent conclusive position was not entirely evident to me. Yes, there were points of reflection and subtle shifts in emphasis that allowed me to more clearly articulate what the work was about, but I realized that the crux of my research lies in **thinking\*making: a process of thinking and making that acknowledges the fluid movement between and amongst these actions.** Attempting to *think* out the conclusion without making simply would not work. There needed to be some movement in making, and an acknowledgement that nothing is ever really fixed, we are always caught in a cycle of reinvention, remaking narrative constructs. A conclusive making period ensued, drawing on the totality of the research undergone previously, it benefitted from hindsight in looking back over what had come before and tied together the various threads of research. The central purpose was to synthesise the different elements that were co-existing through a period of making.



## The conclusion has to be *made*

My father had recently passed away, and I began to work on some pieces – in part as a way of processing his passing. It felt a natural and instinctive reaction. This was a way of momentarily pausing the movement of memories<sup>75</sup> of my father. Utilising the doorway motif, I began to build scenarios around the doorway of different combinations, conversations and memories of my father with various members of the family. There was no fixed ‘outcome’ in mind, the process of making was the focus. I wanted to create a silhouette-based object that captured something of the memories I was recalling. Capturing a moment in time somehow. But more than one moment. By carefully layering images, I wanted the object to allow others both within and beyond my own family into the objects – to create their own narratives.

The first was a test, working with an image of my mother and my daughter – the ship on the horizon is within the boundaries of the door –

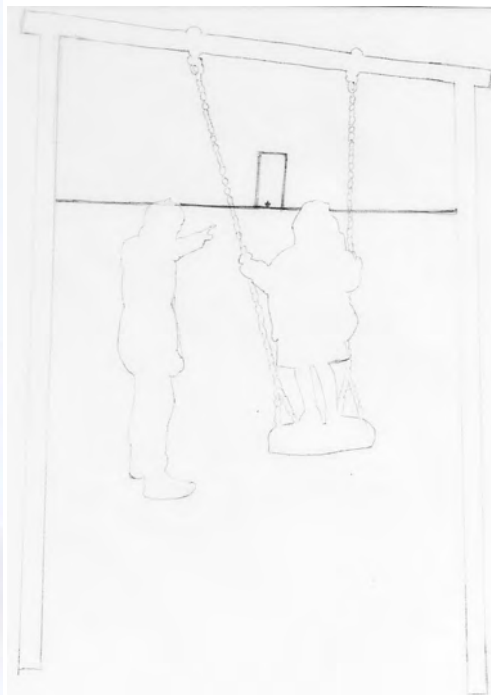
Is it here? Or there?

Where does the doorway lead?

Is he aboard?

Is it coming this way or going that way?

Who else is on board and what are the people in the foreground talking about?



Images 167 - 8: layered drawing working out layout.

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<sup>75</sup> This term ‘movement of memories’ accurately describes my experience of the memories I have of my father. They do continually move around within my consciousness, and appear at different times in relation to the lived experience I am having at that time. Working in this manner allowed me to, as I state, momentarily pause and capture the memory at that point in time.

By removing the detail from the image, the colours, ground, etc. the image becomes less literal in its nature, and more symbolic, more open. I noticed on reflection the doorway shape marked out on the ground surrounding my mother and daughter as well as the doorway like form created by the outline of the swing structure.

This process of layering builds depth to an otherwise single plane image – subtle detailing within the cut transfer allow the everyday nature of the situation to be made special.



Image 169 - 170: Detail of transfer after hand cutting. Test plate before firing

The addition of gold acts as the transition or transformation point, whereby the viewer could connect to another plate, another narrative, building a journey. Making the everyday plate special.

The form of this test, a simple mass production side plate, was a blank canvas – a useful and functional way to communicate the essence of the work, however, the scale seemed a little small when compared to the large dinner plates I had made back in 2011 *Heaven* series (see Project One: Silhouettes) and I returned to analyse previous objects and scale. Looking at the teacups and saucers from The Pol Project I realized how intimate the scale of the saucer was, allowing the object to be held easily. It was easily transportable and stackable, taking up small amounts of room. Rather than the side plate being too small as I first thought, in fact it was in some ways too big. As an object, the saucer has lost some of its cultural status with the increase in the use of mugs and glasses for coffee and tea – and although the huge revival in vintage tea sets being used in cafes and at weddings has

increased their visibility as objects once again, these are still objects that, without the partner objects - a cup - have lost their clear purpose. Charity shops, on investigation, receive few saucers without cups, as it is assumed they won't be able to sell them and spare saucers that are in sets are kept to replace broken ones<sup>76</sup>. In its very essence however, the objecthood of the saucer calls on our collective consciousness to allow us to recognise that there is an absence present – or an absent presence – the cup. This inherent absence more readily connects us to people who are absent from our lives. As an object then, the saucer has a range of possibilities in terms of narrative development.



Image 171: exploring the placement of doorways

A series of saucers were decorated, with images selected for their ability to translate well into silhouette, as well as having a range of formats, group, individual, large, small. Some were constructed from several pictures, working hard to keep the scale of each person correct.

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<sup>76</sup> Discovered through conversations with staff at Wesley Community Furniture Project, Age Concern and Red Cross Manchester as well as Kirkens Korshaer, Skaelskor, Denmark 2018



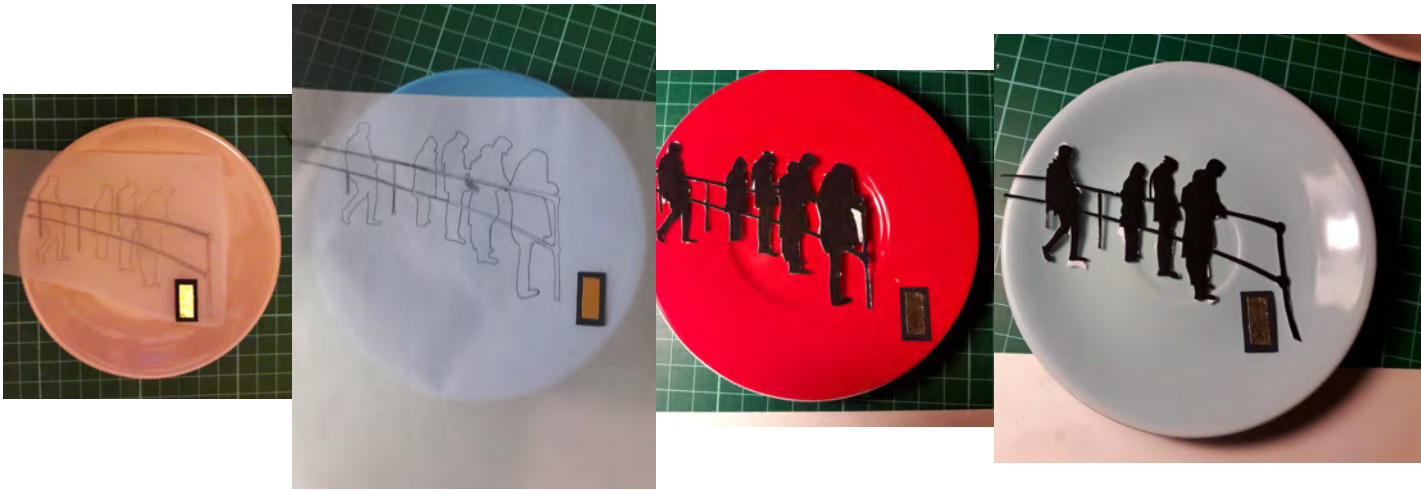
Image 172: tests and first pieces for *Dads Doorways* 2018

With details that relate the images directly to my own family, but could also allow others to make their own interpretation.

Developing the pieces meant detailed testing, sometimes cutting transfers 3 or 4 times to arrive at a conclusion for layout and positioning, altering scale, saucer colour, figures, placement, doorway size, etc. as in the piece on the following pages. And sometimes only cutting once as in this piece which is based on a photo taken by my dad of my mum on honeymoon in 1958.



Images 173-4: *Mums Doorway*, 2018



Images 175 - 82: Development of *Our Doorway*, 2018



This series of plates includes *Heaven III*, 2011 made just after *The Pol Project*, as well as the plate that has sat over my desk since I made it in 2011. Included are different images of family, everyday in nature which, through the process of making - including the addition of a golden filled doorway - a magical portal has been created, through which the viewer can travel to other places, other people, other times.

The simple plain colours of many of these pieces allow the added narrative to be more visible, and allows the form to impact upon the added lines more definitely. These pieces are laid on a large cutting mat, not fixed. They are moveable, informal and domestically familiar. There are blank saucers here, that offer an openness for the narratives to develop. The work is unfinished, open, providing a way in for others.

Everyday

Ceramic

Objects

Open

Gold

Doorways

Unfinished

Movement

*A way in for others*



Image 183: *Dad's doorways*, 2018, everyday ceramic saucers / plates with hand cut transfer decoration.



At the beginning of the PhD I posed the following questions and I begin to answer these here;

**Question 1: How do object, user and maker relate? (When the objects are industrially produced ceramic objects and makers use this material as their starting point.)**

At first, I saw the relationship between objects, users and makers as key to identify and pin down, developing some form of set methodology to apply to the making of objects. What I realized however, is that these relationships we have between object, user and maker are so different according to context and experience, that what would be more useful would be to enable others to articulate their own personal relationship with others through interacting with everyday ceramic objects. Acknowledging the value in each different narrative that emerged.

**Question 2: What does it mean as a maker to take an object that is loaded with significance, respond to that and re\*present it?**

As a maker, I have discovered that this process provides intensely rich opportunity for work to develop in infinite ways if I work with others and not in isolation, devoid of connection with context, place and person. This study has used my practice to create work that allows others in. To present works – objects, pieces, artefacts, images, text – that are open to others to work with, to connect with. These works recognize the impact, the contribution and the value of other voices. These works could encourage active participation, but should also exist in relation to a more passive audience. The objects are part of the cycle of active participation. Although not everyone wants to engage in a hands-on manner, the audience can still gain as passive observers since the objects can be active through being seen as *special* containers of content, and thus the audience are active participants simply through looking, remembering and investing in seeing. This multi-level experience is important and emphasizes the role of the maker as both maker and curator – the re\*presenting of objects and how participants engage with the work is crucial to the impact they have on others.

**Question 3: Is it possible to establish a new method of practice that would allow for deeper personal connections to objects I produce?**

Initially, I wanted to connect everyday objects to people and focus on the objects themselves. However, this focus has shifted beyond the objects themselves, beyond connecting people *to* objects and instead connecting people *with* objects. An important shift in emphasis. Through establishing this connection, the value of the object is made visible as connecting *with* an object implies a co-operative relationship whereby the object

is acknowledged and able to contribute to the relationship. Whereas connecting *to* an object implies more of a direct and linear relationship.

Symbols and motifs have become central to the practice in developing personal connections to and through objects. The symbol of the doorway is a recurrent motif in the research, providing a literal portal, an opening that can provide a magical threshold to others. The doorway first emerged in *The Pol Project*, became cemented within *the Plate Experiment*, and found its own way to encourage open dialogue with the audience in *You Choose*. The doorway signifies movement and journey through the narrative and making of the work and reinforces the notion of the processual, the passing through, thresholds crossing and passing on through various hands towards something else, something more, something or someone *other*. Similarly, the recurrence of characters through the research can provide strong connection to self or others. Characters were present within *The Pol Project*, emerging further in *The Plate Experiment* by physically coming off the plates. Characters became more three dimensional as figurines which were central to *The Reader* and featured in *You Choose*, in both cases providing a physical interaction through selection and placement - in each instance these characters became instrumental in the creation of narratives by participants. Within *The Additions* figurines also played a central role, offering a form around which to build. A character to protect. A series of senses to accentuate. Characters – two dimensional or three dimensional – provide an obvious hook or way in for the audience and another way of encouraging connection, and open narrative creation.

The most significant development in response to this question however, is the recognition that this research is not only about methods of practice – it questions the position and the role of everyday ceramic objects in our lives, and in doing so, connects us to others through narrative.



## Contribution to Knowledge

'The future is about working together or it is about nothing' (Larson & Evans, 2011).

In 2011, Æsir, a Danish company brought together a range of writers, curators and thinkers to talk about values and creativity. There was no set agenda and the outcome was a publication *Tænker 001*<sup>77</sup>, a Wallpaper publication that discusses, amongst other things, the importance of making, expertise and co-operation as fundamental to our development in 2011, with this quote above as the ultimate line. Nearly 8 years on, this has not changed. If anything, the importance of working together, working with others, has become even more important and relevant, but it is not always obvious how to enable working with others in a meaningful way. As a result of my research, I know how I can apply this thinking to making objects, to community projects and to my teaching practice. A wider acknowledgement and greater emphasis on the contribution of others to the making of ourselves is central to my shift in perspective. Glenn Adamson in his book, *Fewer, Better Things*, acknowledges the importance of our direct interaction with physical objects, with people and with a developed sense of materiality as we move forward in this digital age (Adamson, 2018). Adamson is clear that the relationship we have with objects and our interaction with them teaches us about the world we live in, in a way that screen based interaction does not. I agree that in order to become more socially responsible, we must utilize the digital to enhance and improve our everyday experiences with physical objects and real people, not replace them.

Working within the post-industrial genre of contemporary ceramics, through a practice-based approach, the research moves between social, object and craft theories, reflecting on context, collaboration, narrative and the nature of creativity. The research builds on the ceramic objects and writings of Slotte (2011, 2012), Rylander (2012), Barford (2011) and Veiteberg (2004, 2005a, 2005b, 2008, 2011a, 2011b), in combination with social and object theories from Ingold (2007, 2013, 2017, 2018), Dissenayake (1992, 2003) and Leach (2004), bringing a more specific focus on the social impact of everyday ceramic objects. I make a significant contribution to the field of contemporary ceramic practice and theory through this thesis and the creative practice highlighted within it, demonstrating the latent potential of everyday ceramic objects to make visible the connections to others when activated through narrative - what they reveal or the work they *do* in others, rather than this artefact or another having a value on its own. The value is in the combination of an object/group of objects and the people that interact with them in a particular space or place at that time – and what that combination reveals.

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<sup>77</sup> <https://www.wallpaper.com/art/tnker-001-by-sir>

People and objects are inherently intertwined, what this research does, through the process of working with *others* (people / place / object), is to surface the narratives that form the connections between people with objects, and in doing so, develop a number of contributions to knowledge;

- The body of work – projects, happenings, events, artefacts and installations - highlighted within the thesis forms a substantial contribution to knowledge in the area of post-industrial ceramics.
- Artistic intervention can be utilized to enable the narratives within and connected to everyday ceramic objects to become more explicit to the viewer. This combination of narrative and everyday ceramic object, allows our collective consciousness (Durkheim 1893) to emerge, thereby connecting us to and acknowledging others with objects.
- Everyday ceramic objects can be the means by which we negotiate context and place and broker connections between people.
- The term *making\*thinking* is a development from *thinking through making* (Ravetz, 2011; Ingold, 2013), and acknowledges the continuous movement in making that allows for thinking with material, process, context and place, resulting in shifts forward in thinking through object, process and written word.
- The term *in-between ground* clearly identifies an area that falls between existing fields of research, that draws upon overlapping sources of knowledge and formulates a new contribution.
- The most valuable contribution of this research is not simply to engage people with the objects I present, allowing these to be recognized as active objects, but beyond that it is also to encourage engagement with the everyday ceramic objects that are already within our daily lives, raising their social and cultural value.

This research is not just about a model of creative practice. It questions the role of the everyday ceramic objects in our lives. Through the projects, objects and writings presented within this research, it is clear that **by activating the agency of everyday ceramic objects through engagement, we can make visible our narrative connections with others, acknowledging the importance of others in our lives.**

These narratives become not mine, not yours, but ours.

~~My, Your~~, Our Stories



## Dissemination of associated research

2017	§*	<i>(Y)our stories: The Reader</i> , British Ceramics Biennial, Stoke-On-Trent, UK Evidence: congress publication included in Appendix 7
2016	§*	<i>(Y)our stories</i> solo exhibition, Apple House Gallery, Guldagergaard, Denmark Evidence: images in main thesis pages 135-166
2016	*	<i>(Y)our stories event</i> Whitworth Art Gallery Manchester, UK
2016	^	<i>Matching Process to Design</i> Ceramics Monthly February issue Evidence: PDF of article in Appendix 6
2015	*	<i>(Y)our stories</i> workshop, Manchester School of Art, UK Evidence: image in main thesis page 159
2014	^	<i>Collaborative Value</i> Paper at South Asian Arts Group conference, Manchester School of Art Evidence: presentation in Appendix 5
2013	§	<i>Seamless</i> , Museum of Art & Design, Ljubljana, Slovenia
2013	^	<i>Expanded Craft, Dispersed Creativity: A South Asian Residency</i> co-authored chapter with Dr Amanda Ravetz, <i>Collaboration Through Craft</i> published by Bloomsbury Academic, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc. Evidence: PDF of chapter in Appendix 4
2012	^	<i>The Plate Experiment</i> article in Crafts Magazine Issue 257 Evidence: PDF of article in Appendix 3
2011	§*	<i>The Plate Experiment</i> , at <i>Fresh Research</i> British Ceramics Biennial, Stoke, UK
2011	§	<i>Chai Patterns</i> , in <i>Made for Manchester: Craft Objects of Exchange</i> , 17 September – 12 November, Manchester Craft & Design Centre, part of the Asia Triennial Manchester, UK
2011	^	<i>The Plate Experiment: from the girls' perspective</i> paper at Listening Symposium, Manchester Evidence: symposium paper content within main thesis pages: 118-119
2011	§*	<i>The Plate Experiment</i> , part of <i>State of Play</i> exposition, Cube Gallery, Manchester, UK Evidence: images in main thesis pages 92-117
2011	^	<i>Collaboration and Value</i> co-authored paper with Amanda Ravetz at Pairings Conference, Manchester Evidence: Appendix 2
2010	§*	<i>The Pol Project</i> , part of Ahmedabad International Arts Festival, India Evidence: images in main body of thesis, pages 45-74
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Dimensions: 60x120x120cm plus camera attachment Materials: Second hand ceramic plates, cutting mat, clock, papercut characters/doorways and a set of instruction sheets to be completed by viewers.  
Image 90: The Plates for *The Plate Experiment*, 2011  
Image 91: The characters for *The Plate Experiment*, 2011  
Image 92: The doorways for *The Plate Experiment*, 2011  
Image 93: Louise Hindsgavl, Thursday July 7<sup>th</sup> 2011

### **Project Two: Happenings and Results**

Image 94: No. 1. Cj O'Neill: 09.57  
Image 95: No. 2. Amanda Ravetz: 2.20pm  
Image 96: No. 3. Jane Webb: 2.25pm  
Image 97: No. 28. Louise Hindsgavl  
Image 98: No. 23. Lina Olsson: 18.47  
Image 99: No. 29. Sabina Andron: 16.51  
Image 100: No. 6. Sonia Sanchez-Lopez: 10.50  
Image 101: No. 8. Pui Lee: 15.02  
Image 102: No. 19. Helen Felcey: 17.44  
Image 103: No. 4. Emily Strange: 15.03  
Image 104: No. 7. Gass: 13.20.20  
Image 105: No. 21. Mike Chavez-Dawson: 17.52  
Image 106: No. 24. Nina Rudnick: 18.49  
Image 107: No. 25. Sylvianne Sykes: 17.02.40  
Image 108: No. 27. Ivor Harding: 19.48  
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Appendix 1: *Solas Gold*, production bone china lighting  
produced prior to PhD study



## Appendix 1

### **Solas collection, 2000-present**



Image: Solas Gold installation, slipcast bone china lights with real gold transfer

The *Solas* collection of bone china lighting exploited the translucent materiality of bone china within an interior setting, playing with traditional pattern in a contemporary manner, contrasting inside and outside surfaces and celebrating the transformative power of light on this beautiful material. Projects undertaken were primarily commissioned through architects and interior designers for commercial or domestic clients in various international locations. I was often disconnected from the work and producing work for locations I had never visited and for people I would never meet. Although financially successful, what I felt was most valuable was when the connection was with clients directly. Understanding what it was they wanted from the lights, and being able to provide them with something that had a connection to their home and family, often achieving more than they expected, was much more valuable than



impersonal commercial projects. The lighting, produced since 2000 was halted in 2007 due to the closure of English Elegance<sup>1</sup>, the family business casting the ceramic forms for me.

This closure was a reflection of the ceramic industry at that time in the UK in general. It was difficult for the small studio to continue to produce short runs of products on a fluctuating basis. Their quality of material and attention to detail was fantastic, but they also had to be competitive in their pricing - in the end they just couldn't keep going in this way. My feeling was that *producing* ceramics, that is, creating new ceramic products from clay, was not something I wanted to continue with. Although I still have a few lights in the studio, at this time, the instability of the supply, combined with the increasing desire to work directly with people beyond the factory - whether clients, collaborators, etc - led to the introduction of a new way of working into my practice.

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<sup>1</sup> English Elegance was a small, family run studio in Congleton, Staffordshire, producing bone china slipcast ware for a range of makers, designers and shops.

Appendix 2: *Pairings: Collaboration and Value*,  
collaborative conference paper with Amanda Ravetz, 2011



## **Collaboration, creativity and value**

Pairings Conference May 2011

Cj O'Neill and Amanda Ravetz

### **Abstract**

This paper reflects on a collaboration in 2010 in India that involved artist Cj O'Neill and anthropologist Amanda Ravetz. As a cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural exchange, our project fits the academic interest in collaboration that emerged strongly in the 1990s and continues to grow. But given the difficulties as well as the successes of working across different knowledges and practices, what is it we actually value about collaborations of this kind? Anthropologist James Leach suggests that the value we give to collaboration rests on the power we give to combination, which in turn invokes a mode of creativity he calls 'dispersed'. Taking up Leach's idea of 'dispersed creativity', we focus in this paper on two different ways of assigning value to our work in India. The first depends on highlighting and celebrating the combinations that led to the outcomes and the outcomes themselves. The second involves assigning value to forms of creativity that remain dispersed between agents. Attempting this, as Leach reminds us, challenges our tendencies to detach creativity from its generative conditions in order to register its effects in external objects. It means valuing modes of creativity seen, for example, in the way work done by one person registers in the changes and growth of another.

### **Introduction and organisation of the paper**

Collaboration has been part of craft, design and art environments for a long time, whether implicitly or explicitly. Mark Dunhill & Tamiko O'Brien have argued that from the mid 1990s onwards, collaboration became a mainstream activity - one of the numerous ways that artists could choose to operate (1). Yet they suggest that artistic collaboration

“still raises some interesting and crucial questions about the nature of authorship, authenticity and the artists' relationships to their works & audiences that inevitably disrupts the persistent and popular image of the artist as a 'heroic' solitary figure.”

Dunhill's and O'Brien's evocation of the solitary 'artist as hero' prompts us to question whether authorship and relationships to audiences have in fact worked in the same way in craft and design environments as they have in fine art. As areas renowned for working with materials and/or in teams (2), craft's and design's historical emphasis on collaboration may even explain their demotion relative to areas wedded to notions of autonomy, as well as their recent rise as cooperation has found favour again. Viewed in this way, we suggest there is much to learn from the way makers draw on their experiences of working with materials, with publics and with other makers, especially when they move into social contexts beyond their own.

It is against this backdrop we wish to set our experience of a project in Ahmedabad, India in October 2010, involving a collaboration between ourselves - anthropologist and filmmaker Amanda Ravetz and artist maker and designer Cj O'Neill - and artists Steven Dixon and Lokesh Ghai, environmentalist/communications expert Palak Chitalya and residents from Fadiya Chok, Dhal ni Pol. It may be that it was our reliance on each other that orientated us towards what anthropologist James Leach calls 'dispersed creativity' (3), also challenging our conceptualisation of materials as inanimate/inert and of creativity as contingent - available only sometimes and to some people; and that being open to this mode of creativity made certain ethical and political dilemmas more visible to us than they might otherwise have been, raising questions about how and where we should assign value to the project (4).

### **The circumstances of our collaboration**

Our month-long residency was based at Arts Reverie, an artist's house in Ahmedabad that for five years has been bringing Indian makers and international artists together in various exchange programmes. The brief we were working to originate in a PAL lab at Arts Reverie in February 2010 where representatives from different agencies met to discuss ways for artists, environmentalists and residents of Dhal ni Pol to tackle a number of local environmental issues (5). A few weeks before the project was due to start the environmental partners pulled out due to a clash with another project and we decided, in their absence, to take the topic 'Making Beauty' - the theme of the Ahmedabad International Arts festival (AIAF) in which the completed work would be shown - as a touchstone for our enquiry into the environment of the pol.

Arts Reverie is located in one of approximately 600 'pols' found on the east side of the city of Ahmedabad. Pols are high density neighbourhoods that were once homogeneous communities associated with different castes but are today increasingly heterogeneous. Historically pols comprised 'a labyrinth of high wooden houses, streets too narrow for wheeled traffic, and cul-de-sacs.' A pol would have had 'only one, or at the most two entrances (apart from secret ones), one main street with crooked lanes branching off either side, and walls and gates (now removed) which were barred at night' (6). Today the narrow streets, the out-dated services and the dilapidated state of many buildings are

contributing to the migration from the east to the west side of city - 'modern' Ahmedabad - which boasts newer dwellings and infrastructure. In response Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation have developed a revitalisation programme whose purpose is to "inculcate community participation in supporting a programme to conserve and celebrate the heritage 'urbanscape' of this part of Ahmedabad" (7).

Given this emphasis on community participation both from the original lab and the AMC, our priority was to engage with people living near Arts Reverie to develop our work in ways that would be congruent with their existing concerns. The project team consisted of three UK researchers - Cj, Amanda and the artist Steven Dixon (principal investigator); and two Indian researchers - the artist Lokesh Ghai, who took the role of project manager (and who was also collaborating with Steve on a separate project for the AIAF), and Palak Chitaliya who had consulted with local people about environmental conditions on previous occasions and had good relationships with people living in Dhal ni Pol. Our attempts to get to know people were helped not only by Palak and Lokesh, but by the timing of our visit which coincided with Navratri (8), a festival of nine nights, which is celebrated in part through dancing each night, something we enjoyed joining in with and that also greatly eased our entry into the Dhal ni Pol community!

Although we had envisaged supporting one another as a team, for us (Cj and Amanda) this cooperation went beyond discussing ideas or sharing resources. While tracking how our collaboration developed it has sometimes been difficult to remember who came up with an idea or who did what. Part of the explanation for our close collaboration relates to affinities between what we each brought to the project - the fact we are both committed to working with people and interested in the relationship people have to materials, while also each having *different* skills, media and ways of theorising. In our first week in Dhal ni Pol we focused on social relationships, the objects people use and the built environment (9). These foci depended both on what we were seeing and experiencing, and also on the preoccupations we brought with us (10). We noticed for example the social importance of the liminal spaces of the otlas – wide steps outside houses where people socialise; and how people asked us to take photographic portraits of them posing formally in their doorways. Our research crystallised into ideas for work when we began to see how we could use the camera to provoke and document things we were on the one hand bringing to the situation, and on the other hand noticing were already there.

The work we eventually made came about through Cj wanting to find visual stories with which to decorate chai ceramics and Amanda wanting to find a way to further previous work she had been doing on reverie and play. Through various discussions and permutations, we arrived at an idea for an event which would take place over one day – a doorway, reflecting the space of the otlas, would be set up in a public space and people would be invited to interact with it while Amanda recorded material from a fixed point and Cj took photographic portraits.

We negotiated with Mayur Fadiya, a moped mechanic in Dhal ni Pol, to set up the doorway outside his house, in the street, on the auspicious day of Dussehra (11), the festival that ends Navratri. The event consisted of a DVD camera at a fixed point recording people's interactions with the doorway, with Cj taking still shots, an invitation to people to pose and be photographed in the doorway. The recording was edited into a 15 minute film called Entry and shown to a large crowd in the same space where it had been filmed one week later, and then at the British Council Library and at Arts Reverie as part of the AIAF (12). For Cj the event provided a narrative around which to build a series of ceramic pieces using hand cut transfers - these pieces were then shown at Arts Reverie and British Council Library (13). All in all, what each of us could have done separately was enhanced and extended by working together, pooling ideas and resources to the extent that we eventually instigated an entire event that served both our needs, while also allowing us to produce two quite distinctive outcomes and objects. The press were complimentary about the project and many people in the pol seemed very happy with the outcomes. During the project the team ran three workshops which over a hundred children attended. We gave people copies of their portraits and of the film and we were invited by several people to come back to India to work in a school in the pol and take part in the kite festival.

### **Dilemmas and difficulties**

However, the account we've just given suggesting a successful project based on affinities between our two fields and on our positive relationships with local people, leaves out several crucial things. These can be summed up in three short scenarios:

1. On Amanda's last night when having screened the film, someone who had taken a large part in the filming was angry that Amanda had not given him a dvd with everything she had filmed on it, rather than just giving him the edited film. In fact, Amanda had been unable to fit all the material onto one dvd in time and the material has since been supplied, but what this moment of high tension revealed was how at this point of leaving, we were or seemed to be appropriating something that up until this moment there had not been any obvious dispute about.

2. A child who had decorated a cup and saucer during a workshop was asked if she would like them to be included in an exhibition at the British Council library. A prestigious event in some ways, proudly, she told Cj that it just wouldn't be possible as her Father drank tea only from that cup now and he wouldn't be very happy if he had to use something else, even for a few days and so her work was not included in this exhibition.

3. Parshottam, the chai walla who we came to know during our stay in Dhal ni Pol and who sold tea at the three day AIAF event, was given by Cj a series of gold spot cups to use on his stall, or at home, as was Mayur Fadiya, the moped mechanic who did a lot to make it possible for us to set up the doorway and who encouraged his friends and family to join in the filming; a tea service was gifted to the British Council Library in Ahmedabad to have on display; each child that decorated a cup in the workshop received a cup (perhaps not always the one they decorated, but a cup!); Devi Singh, Mohan and Mohanlil who work at Arts Reverie each received a cup. But not everyone we worked with or met was given a cup and saucer - there were simply not enough to go around.

Each of these stories highlights issues obscured in our first account of the collaboration, notably the contributions and roles of people living in Dhal ni Pol, in allowing us to film and photograph them, and also, their reactions to the objects and their feelings about the ownership of the objects. Thinking about the reactions noted here – and others too numerous to mention – makes us wonder who the authors of the film and ceramics were, who should have rights over the film, ceramics etc and what else, apart from the objects, might be at stake.

### Assigning value in collaborations

Explaining what makes cross disciplinary collaborations such as ours a success often involves pointing out both the differences and the affinities between the collaborating agents, the understanding being that it is through *cross fertilisation* that new things – innovation, novelty - occur. The growing cross fertilisation between our two areas, art and anthropology, has been explained using concepts such as the 'ethnographic turn' in artistic practice, and more recently, the 'artistic turn' in research. (14) As anthropology has moved towards more performative understandings of both the world and itself, so art has become increasingly intent upon making its knowledge and the contexts for its operation explicit, whether through social contextualisation of its practices, or by engaging with social and critical theory to confront its own 'ways of knowing'. (15).

But as has been pointed out in the past, evaluating the success of collaborations by invoking notions of cross fertilisation can be problematic. Writing in 1991, Rogoff was concerned that artistic collaborations were being justified in terms of 'cross fertilisation' when in fact they were quickly reverting back to tropes of heroic individualism so that singular figures rather than collective forms of authorship were being recognised (16). Given our suggestion that part of the value of our collaboration lies in cross fertilisation, how might this critique be pertinent to us?

Two things jump out. One that we too, having invoked cross cultural and cross disciplinary potential, have quickly obscured all the other elements that went into the creativity we were involved in thus restricting our descriptions of the resulting success to ourselves, . Two, that in order to verify our creativity and success we have pointed to the objects, as if it were only in the objects we might register the effects of our creative efforts. Given the tight boundary we are drawing around collaboration in this example, are there other ways of thinking about the cross fertilisation involved in collaboration? Can we only point to the objects and the changes made to our understanding – or is there another way of valuing – and feeling excited, enlightened, aesthetically moved – by what happened?

We turn for help to anthropologist James Leach. Working in Papua New Guinea (PNG), he has long been concerned with questions of ownership. PNG is recognised by anthropologists as exemplifying different understandings of ownership and personhood to our own and as an anthropologist comparing PNG and Euro-American ways of conceiving of the world Leach suggests that underpinning questions about authorship, ownership, intellectual property rights and collaboration are some fundamental assumptions we tend to make about creativity which link to our ways of assigning ownership and authorship in e.g. IPR (17). Leach identifies three elements that permeate what he calls dominant Euro-American ways of thinking about creativity:

- We tend to recognize creativity where **combinations** of things or ideas are apparent.
- We expect that this process of combination has been **directed by a will or intent**.
- We deduce creativity using evidence of **novelty of form or outcome**.

Purposeful, intended collaborations seem to evoke all three of these elements – thus in our presentation of our collaboration in India we emphasised a **combination** of skills, people, subject areas, cultures; **will and intent** in that we deliberately set out to use our creativity to make something; and **novelty**, both how the film and ceramics were

unique to our cross fertilisation rather than e.g. traditional renderings, and in how each of our practices was changed/reformed by the experience.

But Leach insists that although this is a dominant model of creativity, there is another mode we are also aware of, although we are less likely to articulate it or to assign value to it. In this mode

- creativity is **immanent** in all moments,
- it is **distributed** through creation.
- It is **not the preserve or property** of a particular institution or deity.

Leach describes distributive creativity using the example of people of Reite in Papua New Guinea with whom he did his fieldwork, who also like Euro-Americans “appropriate from nature, produce objects, and own them, *but they understand this as the creation of persons.*” (our emphasis). For Reite people:

- Models of ownership are not based on an appropriative creativity, but on a distributed creativity.
- Humanity is defined by the necessity of embodying and acting creatively.
- People themselves are valuable rather than the emphasis being put on objects.
- Reite people let ritual objects such as *Torr* posts (18) in the bush rot away and the effect of this ‘demotion’ of objects is to see ‘creativity’ as distributed throughout existence.

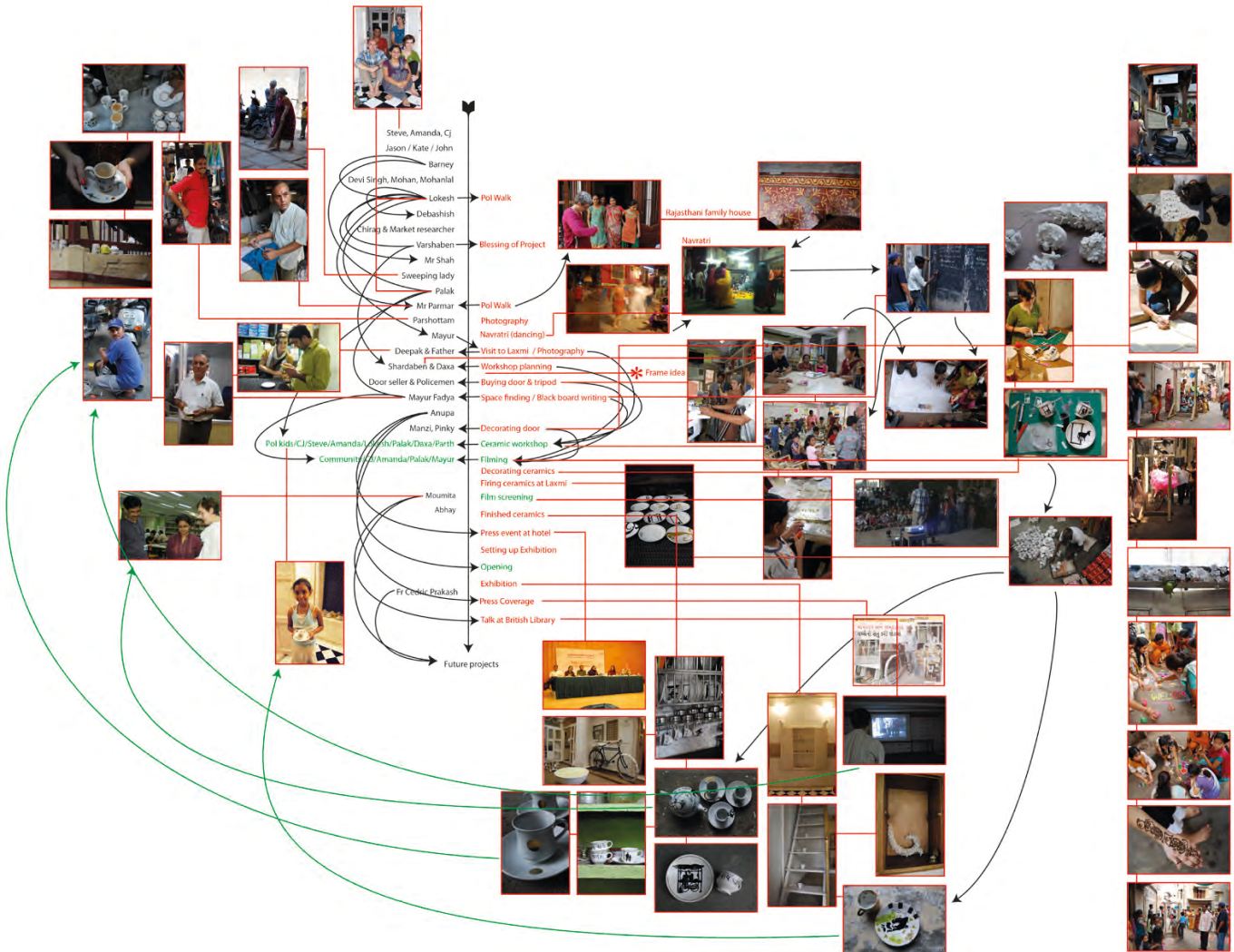
By contrast in dominant Euro-American ways of thinking about creativity, “IPR has the effect of concentrating creativity in particular individuals, and then in individual kinds of mental operation which amount to forms of appropriation by the subject.” As Wagner points out, ‘Westerners’ value the objects, the outcomes of creativity: ‘we keep the ideas, the quotations, the memoirs, the creations and let the people go. Our attics ...[and] museums are full of this kind of culture’ (Wagner 1975: 26).

In the first account we gave of our collaboration we emphasized working together as an artist and anthropologist and coming away with outputs in the form of a film and some ceramic pieces. Next we talked about the flip side of this, where these things came to be the focus of different claims, and in the case of the film, of disputes about who owned these things. Similar disputes in socially engaged or participatory projects are often dealt with by levelling out these claims around objects – films might be made by participants with the help of artists and anthropologists and exhibited alongside work made by them –or work might be produced by collectives. But in these cases what stays more or less the same, is the idea that the ‘results’ or the ‘effects’ of creativity are registered in objects, rather than in people. Thinking about our collaboration in India we realise that for us much of the value lies in the work that others have ‘done in us’ – they lent themselves not only to our project but as an effect of this, to the success that would register in us as persons – in our careers, our earning potential, and so on. To this extent, and in as much as we are able to keep this in view, we could be said to be operating through a dispersed rather than an appropriative mode.

## Visible networks

How then might we find ways to make this kind of creativity visible – and assign value to it? And what would the problems with this be? Trying to determine whose creativity has registered its effects in us, one of the problems turns out to be drawing a line around the long network of people who helped us. We began to map out some of the many connections – the complex system – that underpinned what we were able to do while we were in Dhal ni Pol.

In this drawing we can trace the way



Barney introduced us to Lokesh, who took us on a walk round the Pol and from this we developed a practice of walking most days and meeting people. We met a Rajasthani family, who had beautiful floor tiles, they also told us about Navratri, the dancing festival. That night, walking home in the Pol, we arrived to a scene of dancing in the street, and were invited to join in! Whilst looking for spaces in the Pol, we met Mayur Fadiya, the local moped mechanic, who said we could use the square where he mended the mopeds. He then was able to help us get notices put up on the blackboards in the Pol. There was more dancing, this time in a slightly different area, with Mayur's family and friends. Manzi used the patterns that CJ had drawn from the Rajasthani house tiles to decorate the door we bought. We ran some ceramics workshops with local children, including Manzi's brother. Amanda filmed through the doorway in the middle of the Pol on the Dusehra festival. CJ used images from the filming to decorate a series of cups and saucers. There was a film screening in the Pol – everyone was invited through the blackboards again. There was a lot of press interest, and we gave a talk at the British Council library, where we screened Entry and showed some of CJ's ceramics alongside some of Daksha and Parth's.

Our uncertainty about where to draw the line relates to what another anthropologist of Papua New Guinea, Stuart Kirsch, has talked of in relation to disputes over compensation claims on the Island of Lihir, east of Papua New Guinea, where the death of a number of pigs – an important part of the economic and ritual systems in PNG - was the subject



of compensation claims made to the Lihir Management Corporation who run the gold mine. Kirsch points out that in making these claims, Papuans brought long networks of social relations into view – they argued that a series of events linked the mine to the death of the pigs, including construction of the mine which forced people to relocate, the way the new land lacked resources to support the number of pigs, the way this then caused malnutrition with many pigs dying as a result. (19) By contrast the Euro-American counter-claims operated by attempting to cut the networks short – arguing it was beyond the scope of their (social and ethical) responsibility that the pigs had died, and that this could not be proved to be a direct result of their actions in taking over the land. The Euro-American approach, like our own, worked to obscure the social relations between the people, the pigs and the mine.

## Conclusions

The assigning of value to collaboration depends on more than one understanding of creativity. Novelty can be registered outside the relationships that produced it; but creation can also be seen as immanent, always available, so that value is about the work each of us does in others – or, from the PNG perspective on the mining company does *not do* when they should. Pivotal to these perspectives are ways of understanding people, places and things as either relations formed between ourselves and separate things in which we make individual ownership claims, or as longer social networks in which there may be many claims made around the work done in other people. Leach is careful to point out that distributed creativity is not just the preserve of Papua New Guineans. He suggests that an artist like William Blake was also talking about distributed creativity in his poetry. We wonder, might it be that makers are *also* accustomed to creativity in a distributed mode, because of their relationship with materiality which involves a dissolution of person/object boundaries? (until, that is, the thing is “finished” and the appropriative mode takes over!)

Returning to the UK, the objects - removed from the context of relationships, and presented in the context of an academic institution (complete with the impending REF) - become *mine/ours*; viewed as an *output*, and we describe them as such. But what this of course obscures is the ‘otherness’ in the pieces. The subjects, objects, origin of the cups; the firing of the transfer; the translation, advice, conversation, filming, placement and testing; the sounds, smells and sights of the Pol that contributed. Can Cj place a monetary value on this, could she sell these ceramic pieces? The titles of the film acknowledge others but the authorship is Amanda’s – but might there be an aesthetic that would allow the ongoing reciprocities to be registered as creative? How can value be articulated within the academic world, gain monetary value in the economic reality of making a living, and still contain the value of dispersed creativity? We suggest that as interesting, and we hope aesthetically pleasing, as the *things* are, so too are the social relations that engendered them - complex meshworks that the anthropologist Ingold imagines as mycelium.

With this in mind let us return to the question of what we can learn by drawing on experiences of working with materials, with publics and with other makers, in social contexts beyond our own. If we bring together anthropological readings of collaboration that tie questions of authorship into different modes of creativity – appropriative and dispersed - with maker’s relationships to materials where the contribution of the material to the working relationship remains visible, can we arrive at an alternative possibility for collaboration in which the relationship between things and networks, and the choices about how to work with them becomes not only more visible, but more aesthetically pleasing and valued? Not that dispersed creativity is any guarantee of utopia! Recent anthropological work on moral economies and the effects money is having on reciprocal networks suggests increasing problems caused by these different understandings of creativity where those who keep networks long are under increasing monetary obligations to their relations.

To conclude, moving into a social context other than our own gave a new urgency to questions about collaboration - and especially about creativity and value. As an artist maker and designer Cj always knew that the value of the objects she produced was directly related to the people, places and/or objects she experienced. But using this new language introduced by Amanda, and looking through the dispersed creativity lens at projects allows her to explore new ways of presenting these objects, articulating their value and exploring fully the potential to connect people through objects.

For Amanda seeing collaboration, something frequently discussed in anthropology, mediated through objects, made the movements between dispersed and appropriative forms of creativity much clearer. The contribution to her understanding by Cj and others gave her a new understanding of possibilities to create in a way that is about people-in-the-making- and more specifically, new work that would take these longer and shorter networks and their visibility or invisibility, as its theme.

For both of us, applying this will always be complex, particularly within the academic environment, but we hope there may be ways to exist on the boundary between established systems, working on projects that can be valued in a number of different ways.

## Notes

For further information on the project carried out in India, please visit [www.thepolproject.blogspot.com](http://www.thepolproject.blogspot.com)

1. See the home page of [www.collabarts.org](http://www.collabarts.org) (last accessed May 5<sup>th</sup> 2011)
2. Jorunn Veiteberg *Craft in Transition*, Bergen National Academy of the Arts, 2005:33
3. James Leach 2004 "Modes of creativity" in *Transactions and Creations: Property Debates and The Stimulus of Melanesia* Eds. Eric Hirsch and Marilyn Strathern. pp 151-175
4. We were very aware of our reliance on Palak and Lokesh for linguistic and cultural guidance, and on the hospitality of people in Dhal ni Pol. Had we ever entertained the idea that we could create in isolation or that creativity originates in one person's mind, this would have been hard to sustain in this project where our reliance on others was so great.
5. The Pol Project artslab see [http://www.pallabs.org/portfolio/timeline/here\\_and\\_there\\_lab\\_10\\_02/](http://www.pallabs.org/portfolio/timeline/here_and_there_lab_10_02/)
6. From *Ahmedabad: A Study in Indian Urban History* by Kenneth L. Gillion. University of California Press 1968 p25
7. From *Ahmedabad: Becoming A World Heritage City* Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation 2010
8. Sharana Navaratri: This is the most important of the Navratris. It is simply called *Maha Navratri* (the Great Navratri) and is celebrated in the month of Ashvina. Also known as Sharad Navaratri, as it is celebrated during *Sharad* (beginning of winter, September–October). <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Navratri>
9. Experienced through e.g. dancing; visiting neighbours; interviewing professionals; visiting the children's library; running workshops for children; photographing people when requested to; chai ceramics; flowers; bicycles; noting e.g. the khadkis ( house-groups); framed and/or liminal spaces of e.g the opla – wide steps outside houses; the public squares and the chubutaras (bird feeders)
10. Cj is an artist trained in design who teaches on the craft route of MA Design at MMU and is a PhD student at MIRIAD. Her previous work has included a number of projects with people, an example being the Wesley Project. Wesley Community Furniture Project, Manchester UK is an organisation that supplies furniture, domestic appliances, household goods and clothing at the lowest possible prices to those in greatest need from all over the City of Manchester. They collect donations of most household items citywide. These are then sorted, stored and sold from their shops and delivered for a nominal charge. During the Wesley Project Cj worked with Lee Garland and the staff and volunteers of Wesley to document the activities, objects and people who work with the charity through documentary photography and interviews, interpreting and developing this in a various ways, in order to create works that could be later sold to raise money and awareness for the charity. See Cj's website: [www.cjoneill.co.uk/weblog](http://www.cjoneill.co.uk/weblog)

Amanda is a Research Fellow at MMU trained in visual anthropology with expertise in observational cinema and crossings and collaborations between anthropology and art (9). Her approach is to examine the way social relations and material goings-on are imbricated together – rather than 'culture' and 'meaning' being laid on top of or projected on to environments and material worlds. Amanda's current research is about play and reverie, a theme that emerged from her studies of observational cinema. A film she made at the end of 2009 about the disabled artist Ian Partridge, shows how the space of the painting and the working area around it act as a framing of a liminal, dreamlike space in which Partridge is free to play and improvise, giving him a measure of autonomy that is difficult for him to achieve in other areas of his life. See e.g. Grimshaw and Ravetz (eds.) 2005. *Visualizing Anthropology*: Intellect Books, Bristol, UK and Oregon, USA; Ravetz 2007 *Connecting Art and Anthropology* (website and Cd-Rom); Grimshaw and Ravetz 2009. *Observational Cinema: Anthropology, Film and the Exploration of Social Life*. Indiana: Indiana University Press.

11. The tenth day of the [Navaratri festival](http://goindia.about.com/od/festivalinformation/p/dussehra.htm) is known as Dussehra and is devoted to celebrating the defeat of the demon king Ravana by Lord Rama. <http://goindia.about.com/od/festivalinformation/p/dussehra.htm>
12. Entry was selected for screening at the SIEF Ethnographic Film Screening 2011 Lisbon 18<sup>th</sup> 20<sup>th</sup> April FCSH-UNL
13. Cj produced 3 different groups of objects; A series of portraits based on photos from the filming of Entry; A series of portraits of individuals from within the pol community was begun; A tea service taking inspiration from Navratri, and the song sung during the dancing of this festival. Some of these pieces will be exhibited as part of the Asia Triennial Manchester in September 2011.
14. See for example Hal Foster's essay "The Artist as Ethnographer" in *Return of the Real* and Kathleen Coessens et al in their book *The Artistic Turn: A manifesto*
15. In many ways the discipline of anthropology rests on revealing or making explicit the assumptions on which seemingly commonsense actions, beliefs and social structures rest. While once this was something ideally achieved through cultural *dislocation*, from the 1960s onwards there was a shift to a position where anthropological study happened in contexts familiar to the researcher, albeit retaining the ability to reveal structures normally unseen and unexamined. This brought anthropology closer to contemporary art in the latter's purpose, according to Kester in his book *Conversation Pieces* to effect conceptual /perceptual shifts in the audience, whether these be slow burn, relational or dialogic or more immediate, Zen-like or shocking. This

purpose has resonances with what anthropologist Elisabeth Colson in her 1985 Malinowski Lecture called anthropology's dedication to 'uncomfortable knowledge' "It is a common charge that social sciences including anthropology, are unable to produce results in the form of generalizable principles that can be applied to particular cases. In fact, this has not been our primary problem... Our problem arises rather from the fact that our research challenges what others want to believe; our problem is in obtaining an audience that will listen when the information is unpalatable (193)... what we have is uncomfortable knowledge, the kind of knowledge that challenges established clichés and puts in question accepted solutions, and so those who champion them".

16. Irit Rogoff 1991 *Lines of Production*
17. James Leach 2004 "Modes of creativity" in *Transactions and Creations: Property Debates and The Stimulus of Melanesia* Eds. Eric Hirsch and Marilyn Strathern. pp 151-175
18. *Torr* posts are decorated head posts, up to three metres high, carried by men on their heads during dances with spirit voices called *sare*, see Leach *Creative Land* 2003 Berghahn pp178-179
19. See Stuart Kirsch 2004 "Keeping the Network in View: Compensation Claims, Property and Social relations in Melanesia" in *Rationales of Ownership* eds. Kalinoe and Leach Sean Kingston Publishing, p82

Appendix 3: Ceramic Review, *The Plate Experiment*,  
Issue 257, 2012



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# The Plate Experiment

CJ O'Neill tells us about her PhD project that evokes stories in participants.

Over the last seven years I have been researching ideas of community, collaboration, authorship, and developing methods of working into or onto existing ceramic items. Where once I had been obsessed with decorating pieces with intricate layers of pattern, or strong, cut, punctuations in text, since beginning my PhD I have wanted to involve others in the creation of the narrative, to use my work to listen to their perspective on the world. By 'others' I refer to an-other person; this can be wide and varying in nature. It is a deliberately open term that allows for an exploration of the possibilities this may bring.

**READYMADES AND FLUORESCENT FIGURES** In order to do this I devised a piece called *The Plate Experiment* to show in an exposition, *State of Play*, a PhD work in progress show at RIBA Hub, Manchester, July 2011, and again as part of the British Ceramics Biennial at



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**1** *The Plate Experiment 2*, found plate, hand-cut paper character and doorway, Ø170cm **2** *The Plate Experiment 3*, found plate, hand-cut paper character and doorway, Ø170cm **3** *The Plate Experiment 4*, found plate, hand-cut paper character and doorway, Ø160cm  
**Photography** Ade Hunter



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Spode, Stoke-on-Trent. For *The Plate Experiment* I selected a range of plates gathered from charity shops and flea markets that already contained a high level of surface narrative. I began to play with highlighting characters from within the surface pattern, producing silhouettes of these in hand-cut fluorescent orange card. I enjoy the combination of industrial, man-made materials with processes of the hand; the juxtaposition of two elements sets up a counterpoint. Silhouettes of doorways had emerged during my involvement in *The Pol Project* – a month long collaborative project in Dhal ni Pol, Ahmedabad, India, in 2010 – acting in most instances as a visual portal, entry point, or escape route.

The basic premise of *The Plate Experiment* was a simple set up of camera over a cutting mat with a range of plates and hand-cut characters/doorways laid out for participants to use. Visitors were invited to interact by selecting their own combination of a plate, a character, and a doorway, to encourage responsive storytelling. Participants were invited to create a scene with the materials and then write a short statement about the story they imagined; each story was separate and people didn't see the others' stories.

**AUTHORSHIP** My subsequent processing of this information unexpectedly highlighted issues around authorship. Whose work is this? How are the others I invited to be involved in this process actually acknowledged? The case study presented below cites a

**Further research** *The Pol Project*, [www.thepolproject.blogspot.com](http://www.thepolproject.blogspot.com); *Pairings: Conversations, Collaborations, Materials*, [www.miriad.mmu.ac.uk/pairings](http://www.miriad.mmu.ac.uk/pairings)  
**Email** [cj@cjoneill.co.uk](mailto:cj@cjoneill.co.uk)  
**Web** [www.cjoneill.co.uk/weblog](http://www.cjoneill.co.uk/weblog)  
**CJ O'Neill** is a second year part-time PhD candidate at Manchester Institute for Research and Innovation in Art and Design

(MIRIAD), Manchester Metropolitan University, with a working thesis title 'Re-presenting Heirlooms: Artistic interventions exploring the value of everyday ceramic items'. Alongside this she teaches MA Design and Contemporary Craft Practice at MMU, as well as exhibiting her work internationally. She is currently on maternity leave until March 2013

number of authors, and is one way of addressing this issue. It is crafted by me from the combined contributions made during *The Plate Experiment* at *State of Play* by Helen Felcey, Pui Lee, Sonia Sanchez-Lopez, and Sylvianne Sykes.

**SHARED TECHNIQUES** On reflection, I see that the process of creating this narrative is the same process that I use when constructing a ceramic piece, working with layers and symbols to create a thread, a connection, between disparate parts. Inviting others into this process has been enlightening, liberating, and challenging. I didn't know what to expect – perhaps no one would interact, there would be no dialogue to develop; if they did interact, what would I do with the contributed stories? Instead of too little, I was slightly overwhelmed by the response and the enthusiasm of others to engage with the work in a highly personal way.

It is now recognised that collaboration is key to creative practice, in all its shapes and forms, as highlighted by the recent *Pairings* project and conference (see 'A Lull in the Conversation', CR249 May/June, pp50–53). And it follows from this that new explorations of collaboration will require the issue of authorship to be further probed. I am intrigued by everyday ceramic items and the stories of people; I hope to begin to draw out these stories through objects and interventions. Perhaps my role is changing – am I becoming curator or editor, drawing together my own interpretation of the world, along with other people's contributions and views to create new ways of seeing, and valuing, objects? Perhaps not. Only the future will tell. **CR**

## Visitors were encouraged into responsive storytelling

**CASE STUDY – FROM THE GIRL'S PERSPECTIVE** The girl begins to dream, desiring what may lie on the other side, and in that world of dreams, through the doorway, she is beginning to achieve it, but not quite in the way she expected...

She is in England now – confused and looking for an escape. Afraid of the man and dog running across her path she wishes to escape through the doorway. Wanting it enough enables her to pass through and suddenly...

...she is through the door, but not in a new place, it is the same, but different. She is no longer fearful and thinks she may be in Denmark. She is trying to capture the man's attention, but they are from different worlds. He doesn't see or hear her. She doesn't speak his language. Having enough of this she goes back through the door again...

...and this time, she sees another girl, but wait – it is also her, another version? She grabs at her skirt; tries to hold onto her; to pull her down to earth; to lift her skirt up; anything to get her attention. Is she magical? Is she real? Is she nothing? 'Non-existent' in a sense. Suddenly she feels very scared. Where exactly is she? Who is this girl with no name? There is no doorway, no way to get home. 'Is this my life?' she worries...



Appendix 4: *Expanded Craft, Dispersed Creativity. A South Asian Residency*, chapter in *Collaboration Through Craft*, published by Berg, 2016





## **Expanded Craft, Dispersed Creativity: A South Asian Residency**

*Cj O’Neill and Amanda Ravetz*

### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter discusses a collaboration that emerged during a month-long residency at Arts Reverie, an artist’s house in the old city of Ahmedabad, India, in 2010.<sup>1</sup> The residency brought together three UK researchers (including the authors of this chapter), two Indian partners and a number of local people in a cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural project.<sup>2</sup> The outputs from the collaboration included workshops, an event, a film and a number of ceramic pieces. But there were also less tangible outcomes—working relationships between collaborators and questions about what collaboration through craft requires or demands of researchers, producers, makers and participants.

The word ‘collaboration’ evokes the difficulties, as well as the pleasures, of working with others. The extremes of experience common to collaboration are often explained through reference to the differences between the knowledge and practices being combined. It is not easy, we tell ourselves, to bring difference together without friction, without sometimes falling out. The urge towards collaboration in spite of its well-rehearsed pitfalls, provokes the first of two questions we address in this chapter: what is it about collaboration that we and others value so much?

The second question grows out of the value we give collaboration and our argument that it may rest on the power we find in combination, which in turn invokes a mode of creativity that the anthropologist James Leach has called ‘dispersed’ (2004). Dispersed creativity links in important ways to understandings of craft that suggest we approach it as an *activity*, a way of thinking and being in the world (Adamson 2007: 167). How do expanded ideas of craft and dispersed ideas of creativity challenge the established practices of makers and anthropologists and those who become involved in their work?

## THE COLLABORATION

The residency was based at Arts Reverie, an artist's house in Dhal ni Pol, one of approximately 600 'pols' found on the east side of Ahmedabad. Pols are high-density neighbourhoods that were once homogeneous communities associated with different castes but are today increasingly heterogeneous. Historically, pols would have had 'only one, or at the most two entrances (apart from secret ones), one main street with crooked lanes branching off either side, and walls and gates (now removed) which were barred at night' (Gillion 1968). Today, the narrow streets, the outdated services and the dilapidated state of many buildings are contributing to out-migration from the east to the west side of the city—'modern' Ahmedabad—which boasts newer dwellings and infrastructure.

Our residency was the result of a PAL lab held at Arts Reverie in February 2010 where representatives from different agencies had come together to discuss ways for artists, environmentalists and residents of Dhal ni Pol to tackle a number of local environmental issues.<sup>3</sup> Our initial ambition was to pilot this vision of artists collaborating with environmentalists. However, a few weeks before the project was due to start, the environmental partners were forced to pull out due to a clash with another project. In their absence, we decided to take as our brief the topic of the festival where our work was due to be shown. Making Beauty the title of the Ahmedabad International Arts Festival (AIAF), became the theme of our work.

Given that the original emphasis of the lab had been on community participation we wanted to engage with people living near Arts Reverie. We were joined by two Indian researchers to help us with this. The artist Lokesh Ghai took the role of project manager and communications graduate Palak Chitaliya who had consulted with local people about environmental conditions on previous occasions became our translator and helped run several community workshops. Something that allowed us to develop relationships with local residents in Dhal ni Pol was the timing of our visit, which coincided with Navratri, a festival of dancing lasting nine nights. Each night we were invited by neighbours to join in the dancing in the streets around the house.

Although all of those involved in the residency had envisaged supporting one another as a team, for us, the authors, this cooperation went beyond discussing ideas or sharing resources. As we traced how our collaboration developed, it was difficult to remember who came up with an idea or did what. Part of the explanation for our close collaboration has to do with shared interests, for example we are both intrigued by the relationship of people to materials. But there are differences too, since we have different skills, media and ways of theorizing.

In our first week in Dhal ni Pol, we focused on developing relationships with people, thinking about the objects people were using and observing the

built environment.<sup>4</sup> What we noticed depended on what we were surrounded by as well as the preoccupations we brought with us—with Cj thinking as a ceramicist and designer and Amanda, as a filmmaker and visual anthropologist. We noticed for example the everyday ceramics, the architectural details and the social importance of the liminal spaces of the *otlas*—wide steps outside houses where people socialize and how people were very insistent that we take photographic portraits of them posing formally in their doorways. Our ideas for work began to crystallize when we saw that the camera was a powerful way to create introductions to people as well as to document things we wanted to think about more. The work we eventually made came about through Cj's wanting to find visual stories with which to decorate chai ceramics and Amanda's wanting to develop links with her current preoccupations with reverie and play. Through various discussions and permutations, we arrived at an idea for an event which would take place over one day—a doorway, reflecting the liminal space of the *otlas*, would be set up in a public space and people would be invited to interact with it while Amanda recorded video from a fixed point and Cj took photographic portraits (Figure 16.1).

On the auspicious day of Dushera, the festival that ends Navratri, after negotiating with Mayur Fadiya, a moped mechanic in Dhal ni Pol, we set up the doorway in the courtyard-cum-street outside his house and video recorded people's interactions with it, each other and ourselves. Cj took still shots,



**Fig. 16.1.** *Neet/Community*, 2010. A still photograph made during the filming of *Entry* in Dhal ni Pol, Ahmedabad, India. Photographer: Cj O'Neill



**Fig. 16.2.** The Pol Project, 2010. Neet/Community. Ceramic cup and saucer with hand-cut silhouette decoration in black. A still photograph made during the filming of *Entry* in Dhal ni Pol, Ahmedabad, India. Photographer: Cj O'Neill

inviting people to pose in the doorway. The video recording was edited into a fifteen-minute film *Entry*<sup>5</sup> and shown one week later to a large crowd in the same space where it had been filmed. For Cj the event provided a narrative around which to build a series of ceramic pieces using hand-cut transfers. These pieces were then shown at Arts Reverie and the British Council Library<sup>6</sup> (Figure 16.2).

All in all what each of us could have done separately was enhanced and extended by working together, pooling ideas and resources so that we eventually made an event that served both our needs and changed our understanding in the process, while also allowing us to produce two quite distinctive outcomes and objects.

## DILEMMAS AND DIFFICULTIES

The collaboration was not without its difficulties, and these can be summed up using three brief examples. On Amanda's last night, after screening the film, someone who had taken a large part in the filming was angry that he had not been given a DVD with everything she had filmed on it—all the rushes. Instead, she had given him a copy of the finished film. What this moment of tension suggested was that, at the point of finishing and leaving, we seemed

to be appropriating something that had not until this moment been a matter of dispute.<sup>7</sup>

A child who had decorated a cup and saucer during a workshop was asked if she would like these to be included in an exhibition at the British Council Library. A prestigious event in some people's eyes, she told Cj that it wouldn't be possible to lend the ceramics as her father drank tea from that cup every day now. He wouldn't be very happy if he had to use something else, even for a few days, so it was not possible to include her work in the exhibition.

Parshottam, the chai walla who we came to know during our stay in Dhal ni Pol and who sold tea at the three-day event in which the ceramics and film were shown, was given a series of gold spot cups by Cj to use on his stall, or at home, as was Mayur Fadiya, who allowed us to set up the doorway outside his house and who encouraged his friends and family to join in the filming; a tea service was gifted to the British Council Library in Ahmedabad to have on display; each child who decorated a cup in the workshop took a cup home; and Devi Singh, Mohan and Mohanlil who work at Arts Reverie each received a cup. But not everyone we worked with or met were given a cup and saucer—there were not enough to go around.

Each of these stories highlights issues obscured in the account of the collaboration we gave above, notably the contributions and roles of people living in Dhal ni Pol, their reactions to the objects and their feelings about the ownership of the objects. Thinking about these and other reactions we wonder who the authors of the film and ceramics are and what else, apart from the objects and questions of authorship, might be at stake here?

## ASSIGNING VALUE IN COLLABORATIONS

Explaining what makes cross-disciplinary collaborations such as ours a success often involves pointing out the differences and the affinities between the collaborating agents, the understanding being that it is through *cross-fertilization* that innovation and novelty occur. Indeed, the growing dialogue between our two fields, craft and anthropology, referred to as the 'ethnographic turn' in the arts and the 'artistic turn' in academic research, is underpinned by ideas of cross-fertilization through which comes new knowledge.<sup>8</sup>

But evaluating the success of collaborations using notions of cross-fertilization in the arts is not without its critics. Writing in 1991, Rogoff was concerned with the way artistic collaborations that were justified through 'cross fertilization' quickly reverted to tropes of heroic individualism with singular figures being celebrated, rather than more collective forms of authorship being acknowledged. There are two ways this critique is pertinent to the account we have given of our collaboration so far. Having invoked cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary potential, we also restricted our descriptions of novelty to

ourselves, failing to mention other elements that went into the creativity we were involved in. To verify this creativity, we pointed to the objects—the outputs—as if it were only in them that we might find the proof of our creative efforts.

Is it possible then to think about collaboration differently? Are there other ways of valuing what happened? Or can we only point to the objects made and the changes made to our understanding?

Working in Papua New Guinea (PNG), anthropologist James Leach has long been concerned with questions of ownership.<sup>9</sup> PNG is recognized by anthropologists as exemplifying different understandings of ownership and personhood from our own. As an anthropologist comparing PNG and Euro-American ways of thinking, Leach suggests that questions about authorship, ownership, intellectual property rights and collaboration are underpinned by some fundamental assumptions we tend to make about creativity which link to our ways of assigning ownership and authorship in for example intellectual property rights (IPR). Leach identifies three elements that permeate what he calls dominant Euro-American ways of thinking about creativity. First, we tend to recognize creativity where combinations of things or ideas are apparent. Second, we expect that this process of combination has been directed by a will or an intent. Third, we deduce creativity using evidence of novelty of form or outcome.

Leach explains that purposeful, intended collaborations seem to evoke all three of these elements. In describing our collaboration, we emphasized combination of skills, people, subject areas and cultures. We highlighted will and intent through a narrative about deliberately setting out to use our creativity to make something happen; and we drew attention to novelty, arguing that the film and ceramics were unique to our cross-fertilization, with the bonus being that each of our practices was changed/reformed by the experience.

But Leach insists that, although this is a dominant model of creativity in Euro-American thinking, there is another mode we are also aware of, although we are less likely to articulate it or to assign value to it. In this mode, creativity is immanent in all moments; it is distributed through creation, and it is not the preserve or property of a particular institution or deity.

Leach's observations about distributive creativity are illustrated through his fieldwork with people of Reite in PNG. He tells us that Reite people do 'appropriate from nature, produce objects, and own them, *but they understand this as the creation of persons*' (2004: 170; our emphasis).

He goes on to describe how for Reite people models of ownership are not based on an appropriative creativity but on a distributed creativity. Humanity is defined by the necessity of embodying and acting creatively, and it is people themselves who are valuable rather than the emphasis put on objects. Accordingly, Reite people let ritual objects (such as *Torr* posts used in rituals) rot away in the bush. This 'demotion' of objects is reflected, says Leach, in 'creativity' being understood as something distributed throughout existence.

By contrast, in dominant Euro-American ways of thinking about creativity, 'IPR has the effect of concentrating creativity in particular individuals, and then in individual kinds of mental operation which amount to forms of appropriation by the subject' (Leach 2004: 171).

Roy Wagner another anthropologist of PNG has remarked on the degree to which Westerners value the objects, the outcomes of creativity. 'We keep the ideas, the quotations, the memoirs, the creations and let the people go. Our attics . . . [and] museums are full of this kind of culture' (Wagner 1975: 26, quoted in Leach 2004). A common solution to tensions in collaborations around objects has been the instigation of a more democratic and participatory approach to the production and subsequent ownership of the objects. In a project like ours this could involve films being made by participants, exhibited alongside artists' work—or work being produced by a collective. But while this may well be desirable for a number of reasons, it would not necessarily get to the more fundamental issues that seem to be at stake in what Leach and Wagner tell us about the 'effects' of creativity being registered in objects, rather than in persons.

Thinking about the demotion of objects Leach speaks of in PNG, we wonder now about the value of the work others did 'in us' in Ahmedabad—how people lent themselves not only to our project but also as an effect of this, to the success that would register in us as persons—in our careers, our earning potential and so on. This consideration of whose creativity has registered its effects in us, raises a further question too; how to demarcate who did work in us and who did not. Should we include the people we danced with each night but whose names we did not know? Or those we saw more often and knew by name? Or was the valuable work only properly registered by those who we are still in touch with?

## OBSCURING CONNECTIONS

This uncertainty relates to what another anthropologist of Papua New Guinea, Stuart Kirsch, has talked of as short and long networks. Kirsch argues that Papuans who claimed the Lihir Mining Corporation about the death of some pigs on the Island of Lihir, east of Papua New Guinea, brought "long networks" of social relations into view. The Papuans argued that a series of events linked the mine to the death of the pigs, including the original construction of the mine which had forced people to relocate (Kirsch 2004: 82). By contrast the counter-claims of the corporation attempted to cut the networks short—arguing it was not their (social and ethical) responsibility that the pigs had died, and this could not be proved to be a direct result of their actions in taking over the land. The Euro-American approach, Kirsch suggests, tried to obscure the social relations between the people, the pigs and the mine.



Kirsch's contrast of long and short networks helps us understand the difficulties we had in working out where to draw the line around our collaboration in Ahmedabad. Put bluntly, we recognize in Kirsch's description a tendency to avoid too many entanglements that might result in obligations beyond those we were prepared to meet. The word entanglement gives us an additional clue to how long and short networks might tie into the idea that we tend to register creativity through objects. Anthropologist Tim Ingold makes the point that, whereas networks are created by drawing straight lines between objects—which are then referred to as material culture—meshworks suggest something deceptively similar but actually very different:

The meshwork consists not of interconnected points but of interwoven lines. Every line is a relation, but the relation is not *between* one thing and another—between, say, an artefact here and a person there, or between one person or artefact and another. Rather, the relation is a line *along* which materials flow, mix and mutate. Persons and things, then, are formed in the meshwork as knots or bundles of such relations. It is not, then, that things are entangled in relations; rather every thing is itself an entanglement, and is thus linked to other things by way of the flows of materials that make it up. So while the material world might be depicted as it is in the weblog logo, as a network of interconnected objects, the world of materials would be better described as a meshwork of interwoven substances. (Ingold 2007: 35)

Ingold's preference for meshworks over networks and materials over materialities suggests two things in relation to what we have been talking about. First, that the idea of demarcating who is inside and outside a collaboration seems to belong to the idea of networks rather than of meshworks. Such demarcation suggests distance—either conceptual or spatial or temporal—and possibly after the fact. But in our experience decisions about how to work with others and what reciprocities and ethical questions mattered were taken in the midst of life's entanglements. These decisions were worked through with varying degrees of success. But they were made not from blue print but by feel and practice. As long as we were immersed in the meshwork of the pol we managed this tolerably well. It was only once we were about to leave and ours and other people's foci moved from our unfolding relationships to objects that we encountered problems. Cutting things short, we suggest, is connected to the distancing of (our)selves from experience and is made possible in part through talk of networks. Second, what appears to be happening when we focus on objects and on what is now routinely called material culture is that we are in danger of ignoring the materials themselves (Bunn 1999). Discussions about skill, technology and so forth can easily lose sense of the maker's feel for materials, the push and pull, frictions, properties and so on. With this development comes an impoverishment in our understanding of what Ingold simply calls 'being alive' (2011).

We want to suggest that, as it is for the maker and materials, feeling their way, becoming more practiced the more hours they put in, so it is for collaborators more widely—practice, materials, tension and friction all figure, and the successful collaborator like the successful maker is attuned to the materials, whether working with or against their properties—for it would be naïve to suggest there could be all flow and no resistance. Fariello, quoting Richards (2011: 25), talks of the way materials tell us how they have been worked. The clay that cracks in the kiln is articulating its story. People also change, are changed, by whom and by what they work with, where and how.

## CONCLUSION

To return to the first question with which we began this chapter—what is it about collaboration that we and others value so much? We have argued, following Leach, that the assigning of value to collaboration depends on more than one understanding of creativity. Novelty can be registered outside the relationships that produced it, but creation can also be seen as immanent, always available, so that value is about the work each of us does in others. Pivotal to these two perspectives are ways of understanding people, places and things as either relations formed between ourselves and separate objects in which we make individual ownership claims, or as meshworks in which claims are made around the work done in others. The first perspective depends on highlighting and celebrating the combinations that led to the outcomes and the outcomes themselves. The second involves assigning value to forms of creativity that remain dispersed between agents. Attempting this, as Leach reminds us, challenges our tendencies to detach creativity from its generative conditions in order to register its effects in external objects. It means valuing modes of creativity seen for example in the way work done by one person registers in the changes and growth of another.

Having established this we then questioned the consequences for makers and those who work with them, when what is valued about craft shifts from a concern with the object and the studio to action and site. We want to conclude this chapter by suggesting a tentative answer to this second question: rethinking craft as something that leaves the studio and goes out into the world also requires rethinking the way we understand ‘materials’—what can be included within the category of material and what working with materials therefore means. Instead of seeing the makers’ materials as substances with certain discrete attributes to be worked in studio conditions—wood, glass, clay—we might think about materials-in-the-world. Following Ingold’s view of materials as having (his)stories, this would mean keeping in view the huge range of different states materials assume. At certain points in the making process, though not necessarily all, our relationship with materials gives us

clear glimpses of a border zone where boundaries between self and other, medium and substance dissolve. To think of materials-in-the-world we suggest, is to include people as part of the world in which and with which makers collaborate. Collaboration through craft then allows for an alignment of human and nonhuman materials, so that craft knowledge incorporates the material movements of human life—the practiced flow between substance and medium.

This is not to deny that objects presented in the context of for example an academic institution appear as *mine/ours*. Bringing the film and the ceramic pieces back to the United Kingdom they were viewed as *outputs*, and we described them as such. But this language, while it helps us to explain some things, also obscures others, the long view of materials—human and nonhuman—their stories. The subjects, objects, origin of the cups; the clay, the glazes, the firing of the transfer; the translation, advice, conversation, filming, placement and testing; the sounds, smells and sights of the Pol that contributed.

Keeping this in view is complex, especially in academic environments. But we believe there are further explorations to be carried out around ways to make and unmake the boundaries between different modes of creativity and different understandings of materials, and to craft collaborations with materials-in-the-world that might then be valued in plural ways.

## NOTES

We gratefully acknowledge financial and other support we received from A Fine Line, The British Council and MIRIAD. Steve Dixon, Palak Chitaliya, Lokesh Ghai, Mayur Fadiya and residents of Dhal ni Pol, Barney Hare Duke, John Hyatt, Anupa Mehta and many other people helped us and contributed to the success of the project.

1. For information about Arts Reverie, see <<http://www.artsreverie.com/>> accessed December 2011; and Chapter 14, this volume.
2. The researchers and participants were Cj O'Neill, Amanda Ravetz, Steve Dixon, Lokesh Ghai, Palak Chitaliya, Mayur Fadiya and residents of Dhal ni Pol.
3. For more information about the PAL lab, see <[http://www.pallabs.org/portfolio/timeline/here\\_and\\_there\\_lab\\_10\\_02/](http://www.pallabs.org/portfolio/timeline/here_and_there_lab_10_02/)> accessed December 2011.
4. Observations and experiences undertaken as part of the research included dancing, visiting neighbours, interviewing professionals, visiting the children's library, photographing people when requested to, noting chai ceramics, flowers, bicycles,; khadkis (house groups), framed and/or liminal spaces of the otlá—wide steps outside houses; the public squares and the chubutaras (bird feeders). During the project the team ran three workshops which more than 100 children attended. We gave people copies of

- their portraits and of the film, and we were invited by several people to come back and work in a school in the Pol and take part in the kite festival.
5. *Entry* can be seen at <<https://vimeo.com/19328902>> accessed 16 August 2012.
  6. The work was shown at the British Council Library and at Arts Reverie as part of the Ahmedabad International Arts Festival 2010.
  7. On a return visit in April 2012, Amanda discussed this with Naitik Fadiya who told her that the man who became angry had thought the aim was to make a box office hit.
  8. As a result of cross-fertilization, we might argue, anthropology, has moved towards more performative understandings of both the world and itself and art has begun to make its knowledge and the contexts for its operation explicit, whether through social contextualization of its practices, or by engaging with social and critical theory to confront its own 'ways of knowing'.
  9. The ideas about dispersed creativity we use in this chapter come from James Leach's essay, *Modes of Creativity*, 2004.

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Appendix 5: *Collaborative Value* Paper at South Asian  
Arts Group conference, Manchester School of Art, 2014



This presentation reflects on a collaboration that took place in 2010 in Northwest India.

We focused on two different ways of assigning value to our work.

Mark Dunhill & Tamiko O'Brien have argued that artistic collaboration “still raises some interesting and crucial questions about the nature of authorship, authenticity and the artists’ relationships to their works & audiences that inevitably disrupts the persistent and popular image of the artist as a ‘heroic’ solitary figure.”

It prompted us to question whether authorship and relationships to audiences have in fact worked in the same way in craft and design environments as they have in fine art.

“As areas renowned for working with materials and/or in teams” We suggest there is much to learn from the way makers draw on their experiences of working with materials, with publics and with other makers, especially when they move into social contexts beyond their own.



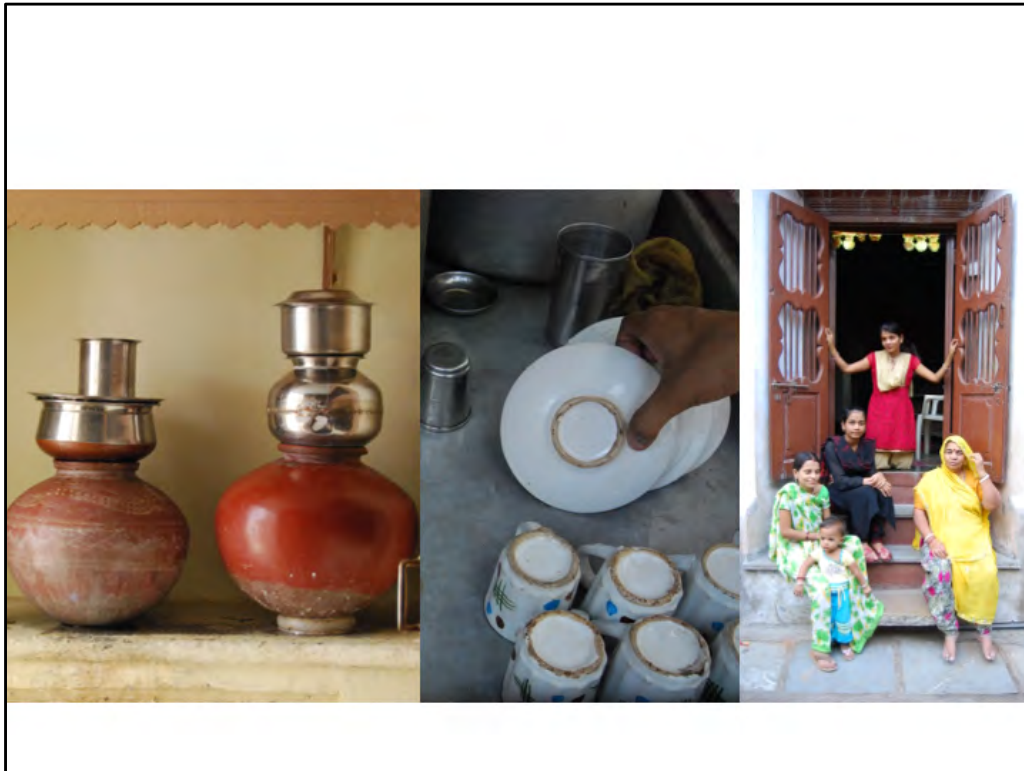
The brief we were working to originate in a PAL lab at Arts Reverie in February 2010 where representatives from different agencies met to discuss ways for artists, environmentalists and residents of Dhal ni Pol to tackle a number of local environmental issues (5). Before the project was due to start however, the environmental partners pulled out and we decided, in their absence, to take the topic 'Making Beauty' – the theme of the Ahmedabad International Arts Festival 2010 (AIAF) in which the completed work would be shown – as the basis for our project.

Our month-long residency was based at Arts Reverie, which as Barney mentioned, is located in one of approximately 600 'pols' found on the east side of the city of Ahmedabad. Pols are high density neighbourhoods that were once homogeneous communities associated with different castes but are today increasingly diverse. Historically pols formed tightly knit and therefore very safe, communities. Today the narrow streets, the out-dated services and the dilapidated state of many buildings are contributing to the migration from the east to the west side of city. In response, Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation have developed a revitalisation programme whose purpose is to "inculcate community participation in supporting a programme to conserve and celebrate the heritage 'urbanscape' of this part of Ahmedabad" (7).





Given this emphasis on community participation, our priority was to engage with people living near Arts Reverie to develop our work in ways that would fit in with their existing concerns. The project team in India consisted of three UK researchers - myself, Amanda and Stephen Dixon; and two Indian researchers - artist Lokesh Ghai, who took the role of project manager, and Palak Chitaliya who had consulted with local people about environmental conditions before and so already had good relationships with people living in Dhal ni Pol. In the UK, we were also collaborating with John Hyatt, Kate Egan and Jason Singh on various projects for the festival. Our attempts to get to know people were helped by the timing of our visit which happily coincided with Navratri (8), a festival of nine nights, which is celebrated in part through dancing each night, something we enjoyed joining in with – however badly – and really did help us feel part of the Dhal ni Pol community!



Although we had always thought we would support each other as a team, for us this cooperation went beyond discussing ideas or sharing resources. Part of the explanation for this close collaboration relates to affinities between what we each brought to the project – the fact we are both committed to working with people and interested in the relationship people have to materials, while also each having *different* skills, media and ways of theorising. In our first week in Dhal ni Pol we focused on social relationships, the objects people use and the built environment. These foci depended both on what we were seeing and experiencing, and also on the preoccupations we brought with us. We noticed for example the social importance of the liminal spaces of the otlas – wide steps outside houses where people socialise; and how people asked us to take photographic portraits of them posing formally in their doorways. Our research crystallised into ideas for work when we began to see how we could use the camera to provoke and document things we were on the one hand bringing to the situation, and on the other hand noticing were already there.

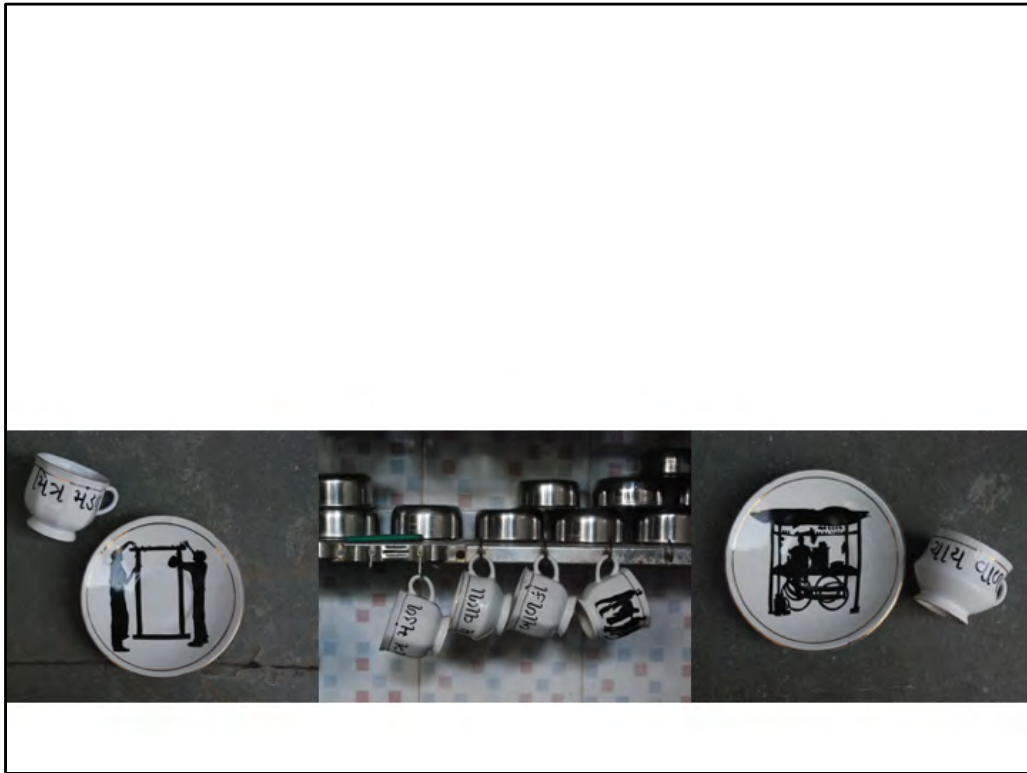
The work we eventually made came about through me wanting to find visual stories to decorate chai ceramics with and Amanda wanting to find a way to further previous work she had been doing on reverie and play. Through various discussions and permutations, we arrived at an idea for an event which would take place over one day – a doorway, reflecting the space of the otlas, would be set up in a public space and people would be invited to interact with it while Amanda recorded material from a fixed point and I took photographic portraits.



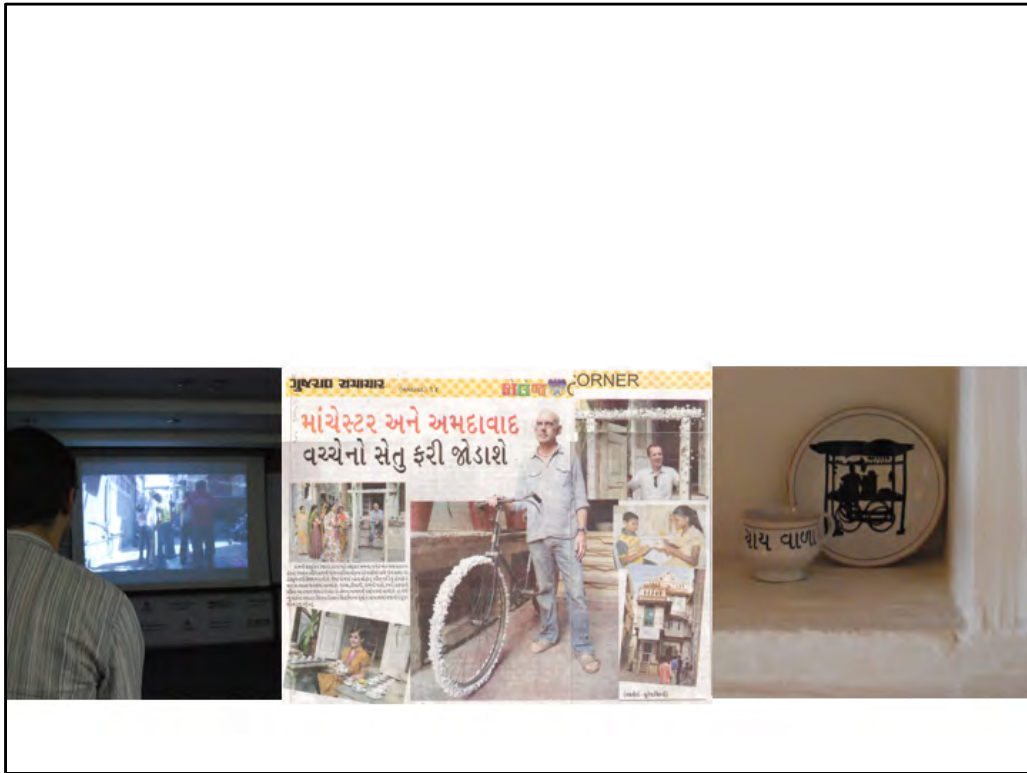
We set up a doorway in the street, on the auspicious day of Dussehra, the festival that ends Navratri. The event consisted of a DVD camera at a fixed point recording people's interactions with the doorway, with me taking still shots, which provided a visual invitation to people to pose and be photographed in the doorway. Amanda then edited the recording into a 15 minute film called Entry which was shown to a large crowd of the Dhal ni Pol community in the same space where it had been filmed, one week later.

I'm going to show you a brief clip from the film now.

<http://vimeo.com/19328902>



For me the event provided a narrative around which I could build a series of ceramic pieces using hand cut transfers - these pieces were then shown at Arts Reverie and British Council Library as part of the festival.

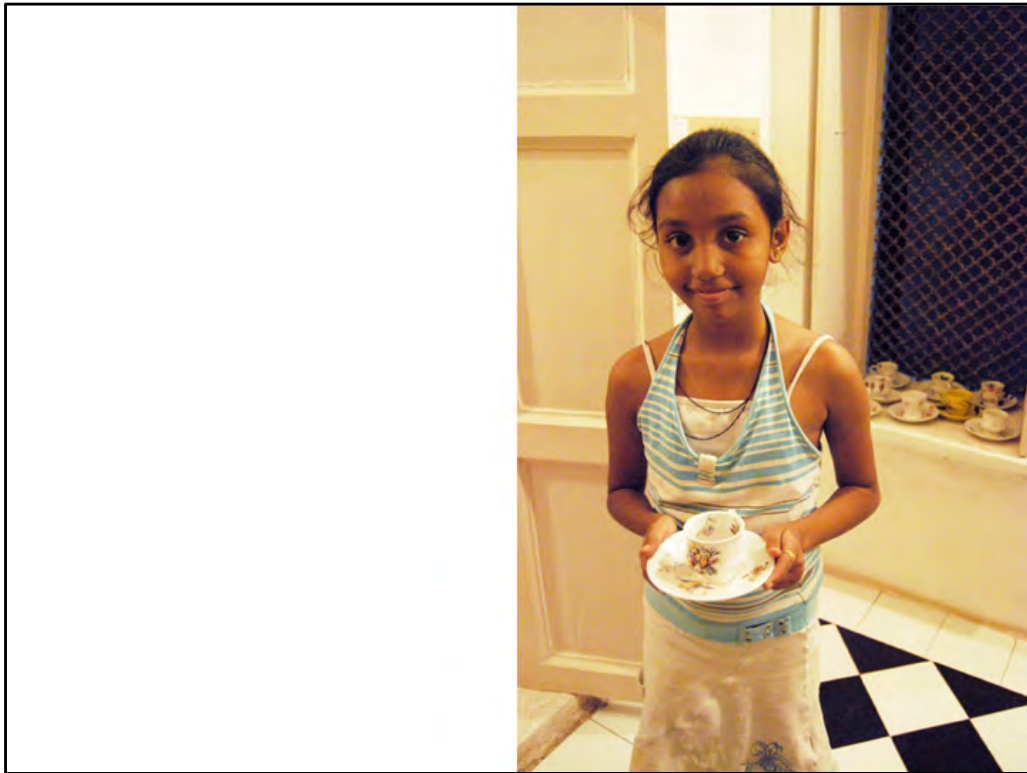


All in all, what each of us could have done separately was enhanced and extended by working together, pooling ideas and resources to the extent that we eventually instigated an entire event that served both our needs, while also allowing us to produce two quite distinctive outcomes and objects. The press were really interested in the project, and we were featured in numerous English and Gujarati articles in local and national papers.

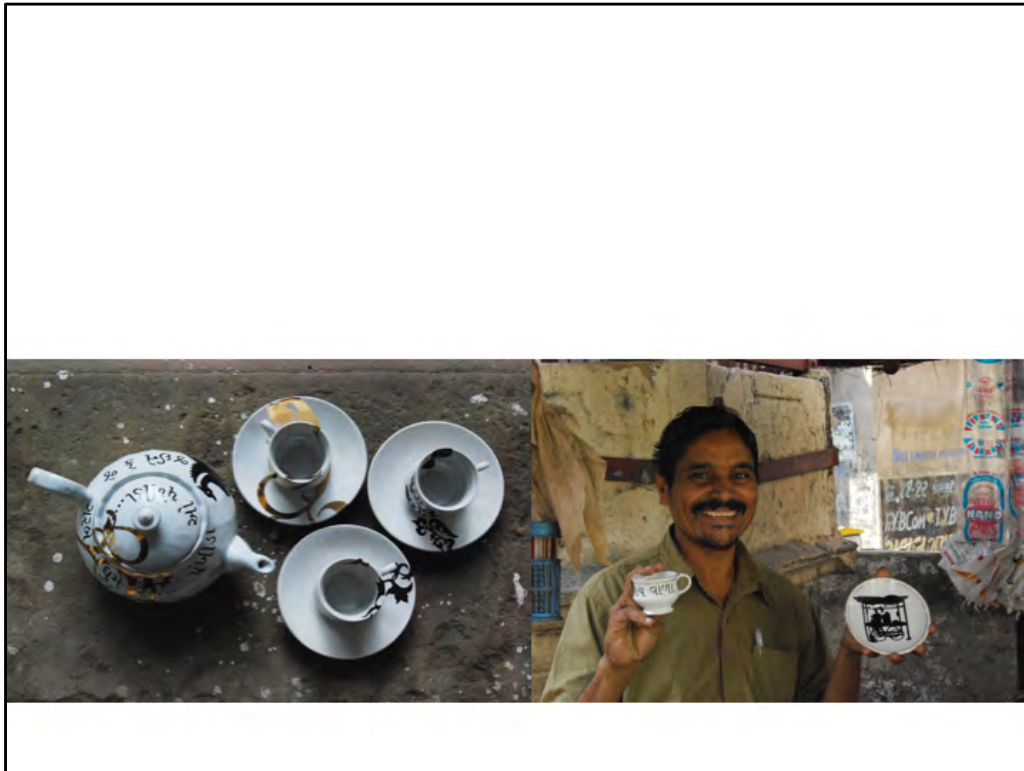


However, the account we've just given suggesting a successful project based on affinities between us and positive relationships with local people, leaves out some crucial questions. These can be summed up in three short scenarios:

1. On Amanda's last night when having screened the film, someone who had taken a large part in the filming was angry that she had not given him a dvd with everything she had filmed on it, rather than just giving him the edited film. She had been unable to fit all the material onto one dvd in time and although the material has since been supplied, this moment of high tension revealed how at this point of leaving, we were, or seemed to be, appropriating something that up until then there had been no obvious dispute about.



2. A child who had decorated a cup and saucer during a workshop was asked if she would like them to be included in an exhibition at the British Council library. A prestigious event in some ways, proudly, she told me that it just wouldn't be possible as her Father drank tea only from that cup now and he wouldn't be very happy if he had to use something else, even for a few days and so although her work was not included in this exhibition, for her this was not important – her Father's value was worth more to her than an exhibition.



3. A series of gifts were presented to the key figures that supported and helped the project grow.

Parshottam, the chai walla who we came to know during our stay in Dhal ni Pol and who sold tea at the festival, was given a series of gold spot cups to use on his stall, or at home.

Mayur Fadiya, the moped mechanic who did a lot to make it possible for us to set up the doorway and encouraged his friends and family to join in the filming was given a set of cups to use with his family.

A tea service was gifted to the British Council Library in Ahmedabad.

Each child who decorated a cup in the workshop received a cup and saucer.

Devi Singh, Mohan and Mohanlil who work at Arts Reverie each received a cup.

But not everyone we worked with or met was given a cup and saucer - there were simply not enough to go around.

Each of these stories highlights the involvement and contributions of people living in Dhal ni Pol and human feelings about objects as a crucial part of relationships. Yet while we have invoked the creative potential of cross cultural and cross disciplinary collaboration in the first part of our talk, we have also quickly obscured all the other elements that went into the creativity we were involved in, restricting our claims to the creativity and therefore success of the project mostly to ourselves. In order to verify our creativity and success we pointed to the objects, as if it were only in them that we might register our creative efforts.





it is partly a question of intellectual property rights we are discussing here. Anthropologist James Leach who works in Papua New Guinea (PNG) has long been concerned with questions of ownership. But he suggests that underlying questions of authorship, ownership, intellectual property rights and collaboration are some fundamental assumptions we tend to make about *creativity*.

We tend to recognize creativity where **combinations** of things or ideas are apparent.

We expect that this process of combination has been **directed by a will or intent**.

We deduce creativity using evidence of **novelty of form or outcome**.

He identifies three elements that permeate what he calls dominant Euro-American ways of thinking about creativity:

We tend to recognize creativity where **combinations** of things or ideas are apparent.

We expect that this process of combination has been **directed by a will or intent**.

We deduce creativity using evidence of **novelty of form or outcome**.

Purposeful, intended collaborations seem to evoke all three of these elements –and it is exactly these that we emphasised in the earlier part of our presentation. We showed how our work in India involved a **combination** of skills, people, subject areas, cultures; there was **will and intent** in *deliberately* setting out to use our creativity to make something; and there was **novelty**, in that the film and ceramics were unique to our cross fertilisation rather than being for example ‘traditional’ renderings, and, as we could have added, in the way our practices were changed/reformed by the experience.

Creativity is **immanent** in all moments,  
It is **distributed** through creation.  
It is **not the preserve or property** of a particular institution or deity.

But Leach insists that although this is a *dominant* model of creativity, there is another mode we are also aware of, although we are less likely to articulate it or to explicitly value it. In this mode

creativity is **immanent** in all moments,  
it is **distributed** through creation.  
It is **not the preserve or property** of a particular institution or deity.

Leach describes distributive creativity using the example of people of Reite in Papua New Guinea with whom he did his fieldwork, who also like Euro-Americans “appropriate from nature, produce objects, and own them, *but they understand this as the creation of persons.*” (our emphasis).

For Reite people:

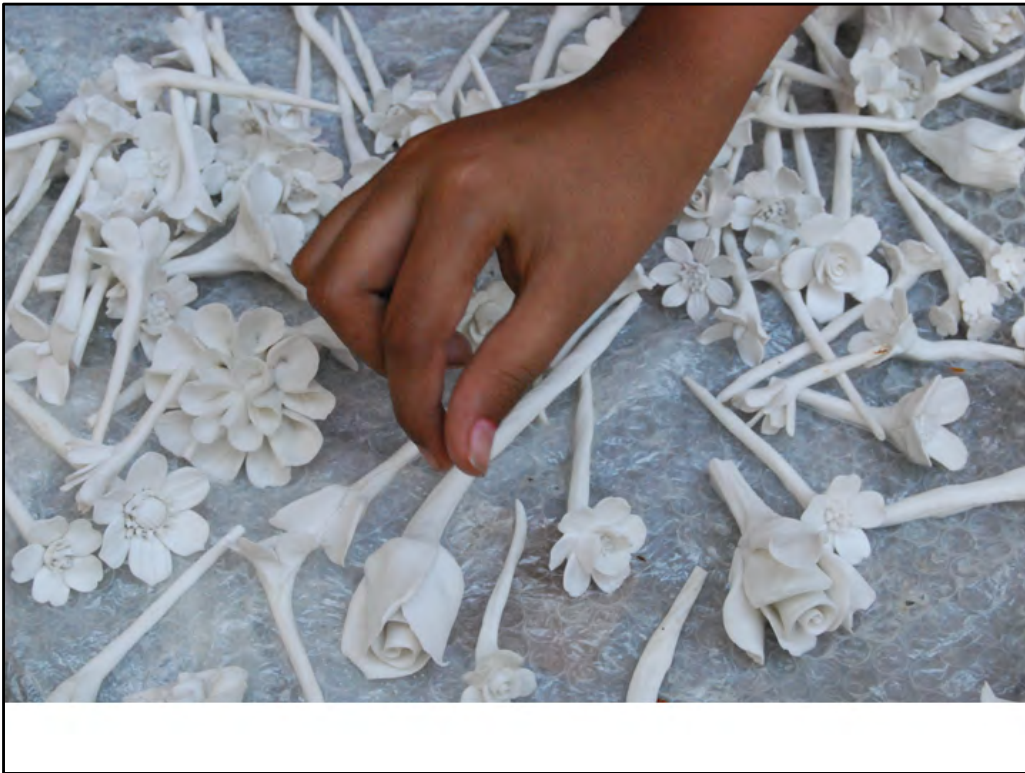
Ownership is not based on an appropriative creativity, but on a distributed creativity. To be human is by necessity to embody creativity and to act creatively.

It is people themselves who are valuable, rather than objects.

- for example, Reite people let *Torr* posts which are highly carved and decorated ritual forms used in spirit dances, rot away in the bush after rituals -- and Leach tells us that it is partly this ‘demotion’ of objects that enables Reite people to see ‘creativity’ as distributed throughout existence.

By contrast in dominant Euro-American ways of thinking about creativity, “IPR is connected to the way we understand creativity as something that is concentrated in

particular individuals, and individual kinds of mental operation which means creativity is something appropriated by the subject.”



So in the first account we gave of our collaboration we emphasized working together as an artist and anthropologist and coming away with outputs in the form of a film and some ceramic pieces. Next we talked about the way these things became the focus of different claims, and in the case of the film, of disputes about who owned them.

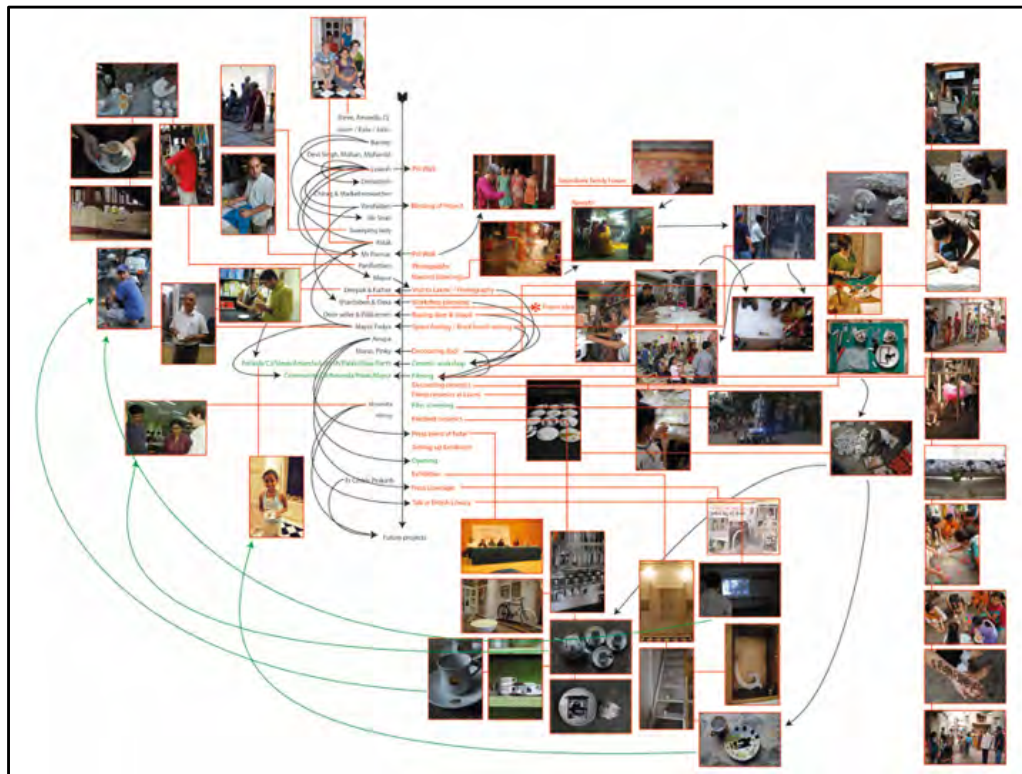
Similar disputes in socially engaged or participatory projects are often dealt with by levelling out claims around objects –work might be made by participants with the help of artists and exhibited alongside work made by them – or produced collectively. But the idea that the ‘results’ or the ‘effects’ of creativity are registered in objects, rather than in people – in which case claims on people might also result - is not much changed.

Thinking about this we realise that for us much of the value of our time in India lies in the work that others ‘did in us’ – they lent themselves not only to our project but as an effect of this, to the success that might come to register in us as persons – in our careers, our earning potential, and so on. If we were in Papua New Guinea this would be likely to lead to claims on us or our kin. For example, when a young man is initiated, an uncle who perhaps taught the young man to be a skilled hunter, might claim compensation for the creativity has brought to fruition in the young man. To the extent that we keep work by others in us in view, we might be said to be operating through a dispersed rather than an appropriative mode.



How then might we find ways of making this visible – and of valuing it? And what would the problems with this be?

Trying to determine whose work has registered its effects in us, one of the problems turns out to be determining the length of the network of people who helped us.



Mapping some of the many connections – the complex system – that underpinned what we were able to do while we were in Dhal ni Pol, it is hard to know where they stop – this is just a fraction of the help we received in under a month.

*Length of network* relates to what Stuart Kirsch, another Melanesianist, underlines in his account of disputes on the Island of Lihir, east of Papua New Guinea, where the death of a number of pigs – an important part of the economic and ritual systems there - was the subject of compensation claims made to the Corporation who run the gold mine.

Kirsch points out that in making these claims, Papuans brought long networks of social relations into view – they argued that a complex series of events linked the mine to the death of the pigs. (19) The Euro-American counter-claims by contrast operated by attempting to cut the networks short – they argued that the pigs deaths were beyond their (social and ethical) responsibility.



How to value collaboration depends on more than one understanding of creativity. Novelty *can be* registered outside the relationships that produced it; but creation can also be seen as immanent, always available, **so that value is about the work each of us does in others** – or, from the PNG perspective on what those in our network sometimes fail to do.

Pivotal to these perspectives are ways of understanding people, places and things as either relations formed between ourselves and separate things in which we make individual ownership claims,

or as longer social networks in which there may be many claims made around the work done in other people.

This is not so foreign to us. Leach suggests that an artist like William Blake was talking about distributed creativity when he evoked through his poem Milton the way one perception can contain a miniature of the whole. We wonder if makers, through their relationship with materiality which involves a dissolution of person/object boundaries, might *also be* accustomed to creativity in a distributed mode?





Returning to the UK, the objects - removed from the context of relationships, and presented in an academic institution (complete with the impending REF) - become *mine/ours*; viewed as an *output*, what this obscures is the 'otherness' in the pieces. The subjects, objects, origin of the cups; the firing of the transfer; the translation, advice, conversation, filming, placement and testing; the sounds, smells and sights of the Pol that contributed. Can I place a monetary value on this, could I sell these ceramic pieces? The titles of the film acknowledge others but the authorship is Amanda's – but might there be an aesthetic that would allow the ongoing reciprocities to be registered as creative? How can value be articulated within the academic world, gain monetary value in the economic reality of making a living, and still contain the value of dispersed creativity? We suggest that as interesting, and we hope aesthetically pleasing, as the *things* are, so too are the social relations that engendered them. Moving into a social context other than our own gave a new urgency to questions about collaboration - and especially about creativity and value. As an artist maker and designer I always knew that the value of the objects I produced was directly related to the people, places and objects I experienced. But using this new language introduced by Amanda, and looking through the dispersed creativity lens at projects allows me to explore new ways of presenting these objects, articulating their value and exploring fully the potential to connect people through objects.

For Amanda seeing collaboration, something frequently discussed in anthropology, mediated through objects, made the movements between dispersed and appropriative forms of creativity much clearer. The contribution to her understanding by myself and others gave her a new understanding of possibilities to create in a way that is about people-in-the-making - and more specifically, new work that would take these longer and shorter networks and their visibility or invisibility, as a theme.

Applying this will always be complex, particularly within the academic environment, but we hope there may be ways to exist on the boundary between established systems, working on projects that can be valued in a number of different ways.



From the series *Heaven* exhibited at Asia Triennial Manchester 2011

Reflecting on the project nearly 4 years later, the lengthening networks connected to this project are continuing to grow. The impact on my practice is still visible. I have produced more *objects* and developed new ideas which explore the moving and changing ground of collaboration in relation to practice. I have shown objects at Cube, Manchester, ATM 2011 and the British Ceramics Biennial in 2011, these exhibitions displayed pieces that explored authorship and were a combination of contributions, pieced together through the language that I am most comfortable with – ceramic, silhouette and transfer.

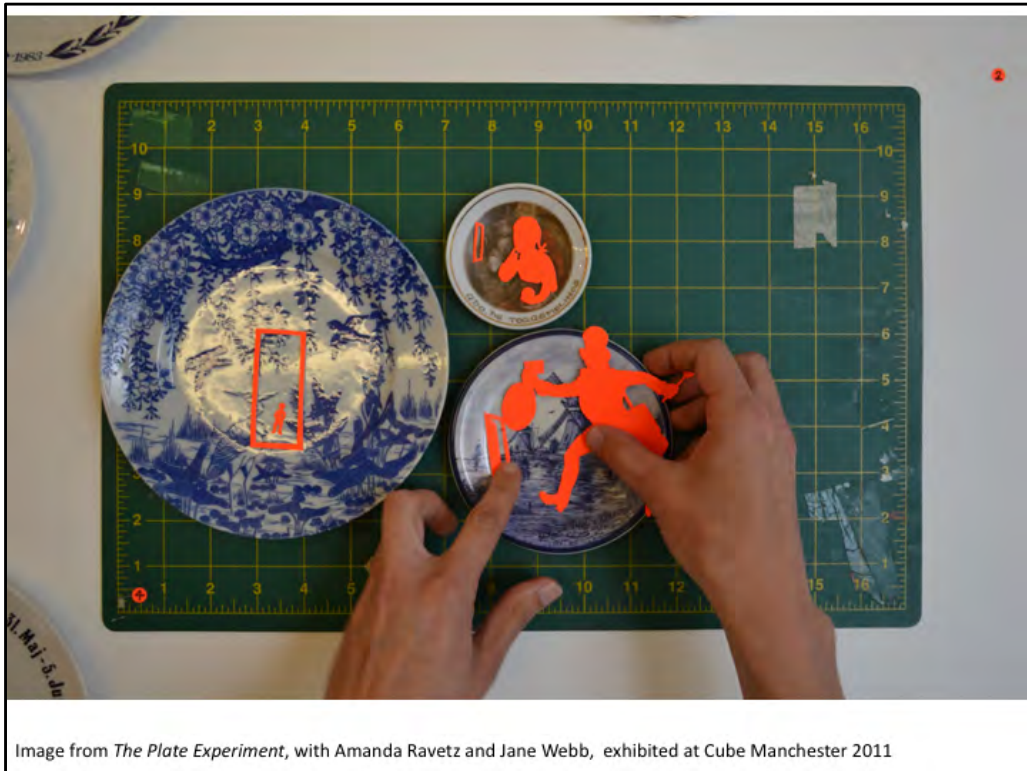


Image from *The Plate Experiment*, with Amanda Ravetz and Jane Webb, exhibited at Cube Manchester 2011

Through this plate experiment I wanted to gather contributions to allow others in to the process of making narrative in ceramic, this in itself challenged my own preconceptions on how those contributions could develop and be used. I experimented with constructed narrative, piecing together this contributed words to create new perspectives. The work becomes less of a focus, it is the connections to people that become visible through the objects or words presented. However, I still continue to search for a suitable acknowledgement of the contribution of others to the work I produce.

"Things come to matter through our intimate relations with them, object and subject combined and entwined, inseparable in mind and memory."  
Crewe, Louise, *Life Itemized: lists, loss, unexpected significance and the enduring geographies of discard*. Environment and Planning D: Society and Space 2011, volume 29



*Absent Presence* with Fabrizio Cocchiallera and Ian MacPherson, exhibited at Museum of Architecture and Design, Ljubljana, Slovenia, 2013

I would like to finish with the statement from the latest work I have made for an exhibition in Slovenia where I was unable to visit the site or exhibition – the pieces are on display downstairs in the café area if you'd like to see them.

I am absent. I am present.

Things come to matter through our intimate relations with them, object and subject combined and entwined, inseparable in mind and memory.

Through this installation I continue my explorations with the domestic plate, absent from the place of exhibition. Using given fragments of pattern from the space itself in combination with used plates (sourced in Ljubljana), reductive and additive processing reveals some of the latent possibilities resting here. The viewer, present, may unpack more.



Appendix 6: Ceramics Monthly, *Matching process to design*, Issue February 2016



# Matching

## PROCESS to DESIGN

by Cj O'Neill

*“Things come to matter through our intimate relations with them, object and subject combined and entwined, inseparable in mind and memory.”—Louise Crewe, 2011<sup>1</sup>*

Industrially produced ceramics, everyday ceramics perhaps, can be a useful tool to engage communities. Within our daily lives we encounter a variety of objects, from our cup full of hot tea in the morning, to a table laden with Sunday dinner delights, all presented on the humble plate; these objects are within our collective, (if perhaps Western) consciousness. Ceramic objects in this format contain many associations and can be intrinsic in forming and recalling memories of people, place, or experience. They can enable us to create our own narrative of the world around us. As a somewhat common language, I have used their accessibility to establish conversations and connections with different parts of the UK community, enabling individuals to create personal and group narratives on a public level (in particular through Graffiti\*d 2009 and Wesley Meets Art 2008).

### Craft and Industry Collaborations

Craft and industry have a plethora of overlaps, and working together can provide insights and shifts of perspective that can resolve issues or simply move production into a new area—for either party. Successful partnerships are those which are clear in their goals—ones in which both parties gain. They are also not always straightforward collabora-

tions—there are many ways to work with others. Programs such as the British Ceramics Biennial—which combines exhibitions with conferences, symposia, and special projects—provide such opportunities for partnerships and collaborations to form between individual makers and industry.

One example is the artist-into-industry type of residency. This allows both ceramic artists and artists from other media to complete specific projects in the factory setting, often with resources and technical expertise made available. Through BCB, the artist Andrea Walsh, having trained in fine art and glass, undertook a residency at Wedgwood in 2009 for six months at the Barlaston factory. Based with the model makers of the factory, she explored themes of the Minton brand of Wedgwood—experimentation, opulence and luxury—responding to this within a new body of work that continues to be central to her practice to date. Key to her experience was the idea of working with others—learning from the hugely experienced and talented people working within Wedgwood has inspired her practice in many ways. “The project . . . enabled a freedom to explore and investigate the many aspects of the ceramics industry in relation to my own work. . . . I felt privileged to spend time with individuals who were eager to share their wealth of experience and skill,” Walsh explains (1).

The experience of having an artist in residence can also benefit the company in many ways. The artist has time to investigate in a way that staff on a commercial deadline just don't have the time for. New

<sup>1</sup> Andrea Walsh, collection of faceted boxes, 14 in. (35 cm) in length, fine bone china and kiln-cast glass, 2009–13. Photo: Shannon Tofts.  
<sup>2</sup> Waterjet cut sample, 2005.





### Tips for Finding industrial Partners

**Searching:** Internet searches are always a good place to start your search. For example, searching “Water jet cutting services US” (or UK) or narrowing it to your city or region will provide some leads. Other keywords to try for highly specialized services would be “plaster block and case molds,” “CNC milling ceramics services” (for laser marking), “rapid prototyping services” (for model making), rapid prototyping services, 3D printing, ceramic digital printing (prototypes, sampling, experimentation), transfer printing, slip-cast ceramics, slip-cast earthenware, etc.

Be open in your search—don’t dismiss partners because they currently produce a very different style of work. If they use the processes you need and produce high quality work then it’s worth a conversation—your approach and working with you on a different style may move their own product range forward!

If searching for a residency in a ceramics factory or a studio with high-tech tools, try contacting local or smaller companies in addition to researching established programs like the Arts/Industry program at Kohler in the US, and the various programs in the Stoke-On-Trent area (check [www.britishceramicsbiennial.com](http://www.britishceramicsbiennial.com)) in the UK, Sevrés in France, Kahla in Germany, the European Ceramic Work Center in the Netherlands, the International Ceramics Research Centre in Denmark, and the Pottery Workshop in Jingdezhen, China.

**Communicating:** Phone calls and emails are a good start—but I cannot stress enough the importance of person-to-person conversations, even if it’s just in those initial first visits—establishing a working relationship with the people within the company is vital to any successful project. Therefore finding a partner that is within driving or commuting distance is also important.

**Patience:** You may have to locate and visit a few possible partners before you find the right one for you—it is a two-way thing and it has to be right for both partners. This can take time! I worked with two different casting companies before I found English Elegance (EE). Each one was a viable option, but had different priorities or methods of working to my own, and it wasn’t until I started working with EE that I found the quality, lead times, and prices that suited my products. It took four years (and a few disasters!) to find them.

**Samples:** Always ask for samples before committing to a run of pieces. Having existing molds for casters helps—otherwise you will need to get some made to have samples. Some good old objectivity is always useful when reviewing this first set of samples. Being honest and open is important at this point, but also realizing that the switch from making things yourself to someone else producing them can result in a real change in material qualities. I had never considered glazing my work until I asked one company for samples—they automatically glazed them, and initially I was shocked; it wasn’t what I expected. But I soon learned to appreciate this new surface, and how it could be a vehicle for surface pattern. This actually led to a complete shift in my designs and practice. Small imperfections that you would reject straight out in your own studio are often not noticed by clients, and can be embraced within how you decorate the surface, or how you use the forms.

**Networks:** One partner may be able to introduce you to their network—for example I was introduced to a caster through the moldmaker I used. I in turn introduced a range of makers to the mold maker and caster—but I only introduced people who I could recommend highly. It’s important to really consider who you are passing on as their attitude and ways of working can reflect on you. Once you have found a partner that works well with your products, it’s important to continue to build on your working relationship—keeping on top of quality issues, and discussing any issues that arise face to face. Collecting work in person helps—as you can check before leaving and discuss any problems there and then, but more importantly, you build relationships with the people who are making or working with your pieces.

insights can be made visible into existing archives, or with materials and techniques, which can allow the company to revalue their own products. It can also open up new product lines, techniques, materials, and processes; sometimes an external perspective is all that is needed to see the small shifts that can be made to existing processes to improve efficiency or alter the product outcome.

Residencies are one way of exploring this common ground, but there are others—developing new products, research projects, and archive exploration can provide insight and new future paths. Perhaps small-scale production houses have an opportunity here too, both in working with individual makers in a similar way, but also to work with large-scale industry to evaluate, among other things, scales of production and the associated benefits and pitfalls. Sharing of experience and passing on knowledge is something that ceramic makers have always been good at.

### Industrial Water-Jet Cutting

Waterjet cutting existing ceramic objects was something I had been keen to explore for a while, and initially I had a few samples cut at Sunderland University in the ceramics department while at a conference there (2).

Following the success of these samples I worked with Control Waterjet in Chesterfield, UK, through a scheme developed by the then Design Initiative in Manchester, whereby individual makers were paired with an industrial partner to explore the potential for developing new pieces. I have also accessed the waterjet machine within Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), where I teach, but this is housed within the engineering department and heavily used by students and researchers there so is not always available. The advantage to working with Control Waterjet is that after an initial period of conversation, investigation, and testing, we





3

developed a language of both written descriptions, vector drawings, and objects that enabled me to mail them a set of plates and receive a set of cut plates a week later (3–4). The plates that I send to them are marked up in such a way as to be understood by the staff on the shop floor operating the machine, and the digital files are sent to the office staff to verify for cutting. Between us we have tested things that we thought might fail, which have led to surprising results, and some things that we all expected to work that have not. Much of the loss rate is related to the fact that I work with used objects, which can contain unseen fractures or internal damage that, once exposed to the pressure of the waterjet, simply crack.

#### Custom and Hand-cut Decals

Working with solid color decals gives me the freedom to cut patterns however I choose, and create one off detailed pieces for individuals or projects. These decal sheets can be purchased online through Held of Harrogate ([www.held.co.uk](http://www.held.co.uk)) and The Ceramic Shop ([www.theceramicshop.com](http://www.theceramicshop.com)) in the US. I work with Heraldic Pottery in Stoke-On-Trent which produces custom transfers of an exceptionally high quality, particularly the prints in gold. They are the only company I've worked with for transfers and wouldn't use anyone else as their quality is so consistent (5–6).

When working on a large-scale project, I can produce one off colorways or patterns. For example, The Four Seasons Hotel, Mauritius, approached me through an interior design agency in London. This agency had met me and seen my work at 100% Design in London two years previously. (Patience is always necessary when working with interior designers and architects—their lead times are long and they need to find the right project to utilize your work.) The hotel wanted to purchase some of my *Solas* lights with the leaf pattern, but in a custom purple to coordinate with the interior. Thanks to Heraldic, I was able to produce a run of limited edition purple prints matched to a Pantone reference so the client knew exactly what color they were getting. I also use digital prints at times to test ideas before production.



4



5



6

3 *Floral Lumo*: Vintage Aynsley bone china, waterjet cut, fluorescent enamel, 2009. 4 Flower plate, waterjet cut china, 2009. 5 *Scherzer* (detail), hand-cut transfer on vintage porcelain plate with real gold decoration, 2005. 6 Kahla porcelain cup and saucer with added custom decals, 2005.



7 *Solas* installation, Andor Technology, Belfast, Northern Ireland, 2005. 8 *Feeding Desire* lighting installation, slip-cast porcelain, custom and hand-cut decals, 2006.

## resources

Although there are less companies around of the medium sized studio of English Elegance, there are more and more individual studio artists that are producing work for other artists as part of their practice.

### Model, Moldmaking, and Slip Casting

- Kiss Me Kate ceramics in London produces molds, batch, and one off commissions. <http://kissmekateceramics.co.uk>
- Helen Johannessen of Yoyo Ceramics in London is a trained ceramist with expertise in modelling and mold making. She produces molds, models, batch, and one-off casts. [www.yoyoceramics.co.uk](http://www.yoyoceramics.co.uk)
- Mudshark Studios in Portland, Oregon makes both models and molds, [mudsharkstudios.com](http://mudsharkstudios.com)
- Petro Mold Company offers sculpting, moldmaking and high-volume mold manufacturing. [www.petromolds.com](http://www.petromolds.com)
- An exceptional resource for ceramics is Anthony Quinn's *Ceramic Design Course* which has a list of useful references.

### Decals

- Art Decal Corp. (US) [www.artdecalcorp.com](http://www.artdecalcorp.com) (custom decals)
- Bel Decal (US) [www.beldecal.com](http://www.beldecal.com) (custom decals)
- Ceramic Decal Printing (US) [ceramicdecalprinting.com](http://ceramicdecalprinting.com) (custom decals)
- The Ceramic Shop (US) [www.theceramicshop.com](http://www.theceramicshop.com) (custom and solid-color, full-sheet decals)
- Chinese Clay Art (US) [www.chineseclayart.com](http://www.chineseclayart.com) (solid-color, full-sheet decals)
- Decal Craft (Canada) [decalcraft.com](http://decalcraft.com) custom decals
- Heraldic Pottery (UK) [www.heraldicpottery.co.uk](http://www.heraldicpottery.co.uk) (custom decals)
- Held of Harrogate (UK) [www.held.co.uk](http://www.held.co.uk) (custom and solid-color, full-sheet decals)
- Trinity Decals (US) [instardecal.com](http://instardecal.com) (custom decals)

Given the choice however, I always opt for screen-printed transfers over digital prints for quality. My first love though is hand cutting transfers—I find the process infinitely satisfying.

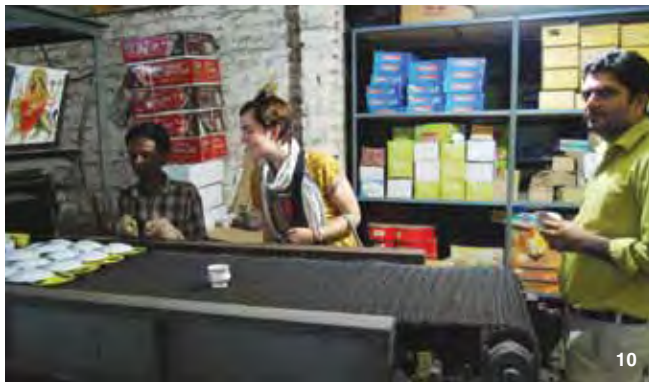
### Larger-scale production

The *Solas* lighting range (7–8) was produced by English Elegance in Congleton, UK. This was an amazing family studio, producing a range of wares for individual designers, shops, and larger distributors. They were expert at resolving issues and were incredibly supportive to me during the seven years of production. Again, the relationship we established was so important to the quality of the end product—their understanding of my market helped to form clear quality control levels and establish a good working basis. Each piece was pierced by hand both before and after glazing in an incredibly time consuming process, yet each was done with such care and attention. When I was working on a large-scale commission for Andor Technology in Belfast, Northern Ireland, I needed to pierce individual star constellations into 14 of the 52 lights, and, once they were cast for me, I was allowed to come into the workshop and pierce each one—taking up half of

a casting bench for 3 days. The owner, Mike Wood, was incredibly accommodating, and due to the good relationship we had, it worked! The space in the studio was very well organized and although small, incredibly efficient—I was in the corner so as not to get in anyone's way.

### Managing Obstacles and Expectations

We expect an industrial partner to be able to produce things quickly and cheaply. Often this is the case, but only after the initial testing, quality control, and mold set-up period has been established. It's important to bear this in mind—expecting a batch of 20 pieces from an initial sketch within two weeks is entirely unrealistic. Particularly with slip casting, the mold is the most important part, the quality of this will determine the quality of the final piece so getting this right is vital. Investing in these models, molds, and initial batches is a real financial outlay, but it is so worth it in the long run. It's also important to take this into account when pricing. Your individual unit cost may be \$10 but once you add on the cost of the model, block, case, and molds, as well as loss rate and VAT/sales tax, this may end up more like \$20 over a run of 200 units. Again, bear this in mind when working with



9 Work in progress, Dhal ni Pol, 2010. 10 Examining results at Deepak Tahilani's Laxmi tunnel kiln, 2010. 11 Cj O'Neill placing hand-cut decals on found ceramic plates from *The Plate Experiment* 2011–13. 12 *Heaven No.3*, found ceramic plate, hand-cut decals, 2012.

a partner; it's not always the right path. If you want a batch of 20, then it's probably better if you can work up to this yourself, if it's 50 then investing in professionally produced molds is well worth it. If it's 100 or more then working with an industrial partner is the right decision.

Alterations can be necessary to get your product onto the casting bench. If possible, it's useful to discuss issues of efficiency with both the caster and the mold maker before the model, block, and case are made.

Don't be impatient—calling a studio one day and not hearing back for a couple of days is common—they are just busy. I've heard some horror stories over the years of makers who are demanding and threatening when it comes to payment of invoices, holding the studio hostage to an unrealistic deadline in order to get paid. This does not bode well for your reputation. The ceramics world is a small one with tight networks, and word gets around.

If you do run into problems though, don't be afraid to walk away and find a new partner. If you can't resolve issues, or communication breaks down, then it is obviously not working. Keep everything on a good level from your perspective—simply write a letter to say you are going to be moving your business elsewhere and ask them to call to arrange for you to collect your molds and any remaining pieces. If there is no reply to this then visit in person.

My recommendation to students is always, "If you don't ask, you don't get," but that also comes with a good dose of artist and graphic designer Anthony Burrill's motto, "Work hard and be nice to people." It goes a long way. The value is in the relationships you establish with

the people you work with. If these aren't well formed you may not be able to maintain a business—however successful your product is.

#### Finding Partners On Location: The Dhal ni Pol Project

Working with Deepak Tahilani, the Laxmi ceramics factory, and the children of the neighborhood to produce teacups with customized narrative decals were integral parts of my project there during a 2010 residency (together with Stephen Dixon and anthropologist and filmmaker Amanda Ravetz) at Arts Reverie (9). The tunnel kiln at Laxmi was fascinating to work with as it was just so fast (10). Loading pieces at one end and collecting them not long after at the other end was just incredible. Unfortunately, given the physical distance I can't see how this relationship can move forward unless I were to revisit India.

On the whole, these experiences have helped me to realize that what I am actually most interested in is the connections we build with other people through the ceramic objects that we encounter or own and how these objects can establish narrative connections much beyond the perceived value of the objects themselves (11, 12).

<sup>1</sup> Crewe, Louise, "Life Itemised," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 2011, volume 29 pp. 27–46.

**the author** Cj O'Neill is an artist and educator living in Manchester, UK. She currently teaches at Manchester School of Art and is pursuing a PhD entitled *Re\*presenting: exploring everyday ceramic items through artistic intervention* at MIRIAD Research Centre, MMU. To learn more about her work visit [www.cjoneill.co.uk](http://www.cjoneill.co.uk).



Appendix 7: Publication *Ceramics and its Dimensions*  
congress, British Ceramics Biennial, 2017



# CERAMIC VALUES

Can ceramics make a difference?

Ceramics and its Dimensions Congress

5 - 6 October 2017

Stoke on Trent







Co-funded by the  
Creative Europe Programme  
of the European Union



British  
Ceramics  
Biennial



ambiente

BRÖHAN-MUSEUM



The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts,  
Schools of Architecture, Design and Conservation  
School of Design



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# CERAMIC VALUES:

Can Ceramics make a difference? (5-6 October 2017) is the culmination of Ceramics and its Dimensions, an innovate project involving 18 European partners. The Congress, led by Ulster University in association with

the British Ceramics Biennial, the Potteries Museum & Art Gallery, Staffordshire University and Stoke City Council, aims to add to the debate about the value and role of ceramics in society and will present the full range of findings from the project's 10 module teams.

Focusing on the three key themes of skills, values and place, the Congress will examine the relationship between historic centres of manufacture and contemporary centres of learning, production and consumption. Representatives from the Ceramics and its Dimensions partners, as well as a range of other practitioners and scholars from Europe and further afield, will be present and contribute to Congress proceedings. The Congress takes place on the occasion of the 5th British Ceramics Biennial in Stoke-on-Trent, the centre of the British ceramics industry, and sessions will be held at both the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery and the BCB's former Spode factory site.

We warmly welcome you to Stoke on Trent and look forward to an exciting programme of lectures, workshops and displays.

Prof Karen Fleming  
Head of Belfast School of Art

Mr Michael Moore  
Reader in Ceramics

Ceramic Values Team, Ulster University  
[ceramicvalues@ulster.ac.uk](mailto:ceramicvalues@ulster.ac.uk)  
<https://www.ulster.ac.uk/conference/ceramic-values>

## **Can Ceramics make a difference? – The Ceramics and its Dimensions Congress**

Ceramics have always played a prominent role in the life of people, in every European country and around the whole globe. Even if ceramics are increasingly taken for granted,

products made from these materials are still used for decoration, representation, and are present in private homes as well as in public areas. The Ceramics and its Dimensions (CaiD) project, funded by the EU Creative Europe programme, focuses on the past, present and, above all, the future of ceramics. It started with a symposium in Beograd, discussing not only the history of ceramics, but also how the discipline is ideally suited to address the unfolding and wide-ranging needs in today's European society.

The congress, Ceramic Values: Can Ceramics make a difference?, is consequently following this idea. Now the audience is even broader because it is linked to the 2017 British Ceramics Biennial in Stoke-on-Trent. This linkage provides the opportunity to address a highly interested community which visits the British capital of ceramics every two years. Those responsible for planning the congress, which is an important module of the CaiD project, are Ulster University in Northern Ireland, and the British Ceramics Biennial, Staffordshire University, and the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery all from Stoke-on-Trent, the city which is hosting the event. And of course, all partners of the project contributed their knowledge, their ideas and their relations to developing the congress. This made a vision come true: the vision to invite speakers from all over Europe and from around the globe, to contribute their input to the ceramics world and to share their knowledge.

The mission of the congress is even bigger: to open the mind of the decision makers to give ceramics its place as an innovative, solution making material; a material which does far more than cover every day needs; a material which is sustainably preserving nature and making our life richer in every kind of living situation; a solution maker which it has always been in the past and will continue to be in the future in art and design.

This congress is a statement of the efforts made by the CaiD team and the results which have been achieved. It places the special contribution of the European ceramics community to culture and society within wider global developments. And finally, it celebrates and nurtures the new generation of ceramists in art and design through the Future Lights of Ceramics award.

Can ceramics make a difference? We, the project-partners, from the museums, the universities, the creative sector, the research institutes and industry are convinced that the answer is: Yes!

Wilhelm Siemen  
Director, Porzellanikon  
Staatliches Museum für Porzellan

# Congress Programme

Notes: PMAG – Potteries Museum and Art Gallery,  
BCB – British Ceramics Biennial Spode Factory site

## Thursday 5th October

09.00	PMAG	Registration Tea, coffee
09.30	Lecture Theatre	<b>Welcome to Congress</b> Mr Wilhelm Siemen and representatives from PMAG/BCB/ Ulster/Stoke City Council
10.00	Lecture Theatre	<b>Keynote 1 – Can ceramics make a difference?</b> Chair: Christopher McHugh, Ulster University  <b>Claudia Casali</b> , International Museum of Ceramics, Faenza <i>When ceramics make a difference</i>  <b>Neil Brownsword</b> , Bucks New University and University of Bergen <i>Neil Brownsword Factory</i>
	PMAG	<b>Désirée Neeb</b> , Porzellanikon – Staatliches Museum für Porzellan <i>Prop Ceramics and their Relevance in movies and commercials.</i> (This interactive touchscreen will be available throughout the Congress).
12.00	PMAG	Lunch break
13.00	Lecture Theatre	<b>Session 1: Ceramics and its Dimensions Module Round Table Discussion</b> Chair: Wilhelm Siemen, Porzellanikon - Staatliches Museum für Porzellan  Each CAID Module will report back on their activities.
15.00	PMAG	Tea/coffee

## Parallel sessions at PMAG (Presentations 20 mins each, plus 10 min Q/A)

15.30	Lecture Theatre	<b>Session 2 – Ceramics and education</b> Chair: Maarit Mäkelä, Aalto University  <b>Barbara Schmidt</b> , Art Academy Berlin Weißensee <i>Detours to Ceramic Futures - Experimental approaches to ceramic materials from a product design view</i>
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## Thursday 5th October

### Parallel sessions at PMAG, contd.

15.30	Lecture Theatre	<p><b>Ayşe Güler</b>, Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University <b>Şirin Koçak Özeskici</b>, Usak University <i>Educational Values in the Ceramic Arts and Literacy for Life</i></p> <p><b>David Sanderson</b>, Staffordshire University <i>Teaching principles and methodologies</i></p> <p><b>Emma Lacey</b>, Central Saint Martins <i>What Can Ceramics Do?</i></p> <hr/>
15.30	Learning Suite	<p><b>Session 3 – Ceramics, tradition and heritage</b> Chair: Martin Brown, Staffordshire University</p> <p><b>Biljana Djordjević</b>, National Museum in Belgrade <i>Pottery Technology – The Value of Intangible Cultural Heritage</i></p> <p><b>Valentin Petjko</b>, Daugavpils Clay Art Centre <i>Significance of Place in Ceramics: Latvian experience</i></p> <p><b>Mateja Kos and Saša Rudolf</b>, National Museum of Slovenia <i>Ceramics and Tradition</i></p> <p><b>Anna Francis</b>, Staffordshire University <i>Community Maker and the Portland Inn Project</i></p> <hr/>
15.30	Board Room	<p><b>Session 4 – Analogue and digital craft</b> Chair: Dan Lewis, Staffordshire University</p> <p><b>Tavs Jorgensen</b>, University of West England <i>Jugstrusions: Technological (in) determinism and the value of material knowledge</i></p> <p><b>Babette Wiezorek</b>, Art Academy Berlin Weißensee <i>Technology, Material and the Emergence of Form</i></p> <p><b>Yihui Wang</b>, National Taipei University of Technology <i>The Development of Contemporary Taiwanese Ceramic Ware: Craft, Design and Industry</i></p> <hr/>
18.00 - 20.00		<p><b>AWARD Exhibition Event at BCB Spode site</b></p>

## Thursday 5th October

### BCB Sessions – Shuttle Bus from PMAG

15.30 - 17.30 BCB

#### BCB Session 1 – Exploring place through clay

Chair: BCB

**Ian McIntyre**, Independent artist

*Brown Betty: The archetypal teapot* (gallery talk, 20 mins)

**Peter Jones**, Independent artist

*Contained Process* (gallery talk, 20 mins)

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**Dena Bagi**, BCB  
**Priska Falin**, Aalto University

*Material Place: how do the qualities of clay help (individuals/groups) explore (their) place?*  
(workshop, 60 mins)

**Jo Ayre**, BCB

*Can Ceramics make a difference to the idea of Place?*

(workshop, 60 mins)

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**Cj O'Neill**, Manchester Metropolitan University

*The Reader* (interactive artwork)

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## Friday 6th October

### Potteries Museum and Art Gallery

09.00

PMAG

Registration  
Tea, coffee

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09.30

Lecture Theatre

#### Keynote 2 – Can ceramics make a difference?

Chair: Jelena Popović, Museum of Applied Art Belgrade

**Keith Harrison**, Bath Spa University

*Interactive & performative ceramics in the public realm*

**Franz Chen**, Franz Collection Inc

*Modern China: building a career in ceramics*

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10.50

Short break

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11.00

Learning Suite

#### Keynote 3 – Can ceramics make a difference?

Chair: Pamela Topping, Ulster University

**Jay Thakkar**, Head of Research of Design Innovation and Craft Resource Centre at CEPT University

*A synergistic creative approach in warli craft practices through the Heart:Beat project*

**Laura Breen**, Independent researcher

*Re-locating ceramics*

## Friday 6th October

12.00 PMAG Lunch

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### Parallel sessions at PMAG (Presentations 20 mins each, plus 10 min Q/A)

13.00	Lecture Theatre	<p><b>Session 5 – Ceramics, place and materiality</b> Chair: Barbara Schmidt, Art Academy Berlin Weißensee</p> <p><b>Maarit Mäkelä</b>, Aalto University <i>In dialogue with the earth: creativity, materiality and place</i></p> <p><b>Natasha Mayo</b>, Cardiff Metropolitan University <i>Civic Ceramics</i></p> <p><b>Tuuli Saarelainen, Saija Halko and Hanna-Kaarina Heikkilä</b>, Aalto University <i>Spirit of the place</i></p> <p><b>Mandy Parslow</b>, Limerick School of Art and Design <i>A sense of place: the expressive vessel in contemporary ceramic practice</i></p>
13.00	Learning Suite	<p><b>Session 6 – Ceramics, wellbeing and museum engagement</b> Chair: Laura Breen, Independent researcher</p> <p><b>Fiona Green</b>, York Museums Trust <i>How public ceramic collections can be used for the education, enjoyment and wellbeing of the 21st century visitor and why using ceramics in this way contributes to a happier, healthier society</i></p> <p><b>Ann Van Hoey</b>, Independent artist <i>Changing social dynamics with ceramics</i></p> <p><b>Rachel Conroy</b>, Leeds Museums and Galleries <i>Emotional responses to ceramics in a museum environment: 'Fragile?' and 'Quietus'</i></p> <p><b>Bret Shah</b>, Independent artist <i>Accessible Aesthetics</i></p>
13.00	Board Room	<p><b>Session 7 – Ceramic collections and object biographies</b> Chair: Biljana Djordjević, National Museum in Belgrade</p> <p><b>Biljana Crvenković</b>, Museum of Applied Art, Belgrade <i>Porcelain as Heritage: The Belgrade Buffon service</i></p>



## Friday 6th October

13.00	Board Room	<p><b>Ian Jackson</b>, Staffordshire University <i>A tale of the old pioneer: evidence of Josiah Wedgwood's Entrepreneurial Spirit and Commercial Exploitation from the Wedgwood Collection</i></p> <p><b>Ulrika Schaefer and Marika Bogren</b>, Nationalmuseum, Sweden <i>Anchoring a Ceramic Treasure</i></p> <p><b>Sue Blatherwick</b>, Independent researcher <i>The materiality and narratives within a bread crock</i></p> <hr/>
15.00	PMAG	Tea, coffee
15.30	Lecture Theatre	<p><b>Session 8 – Professionalism: Building a career in Ceramics</b> Chair: Franz Chen, Franz Collection Inc. <b>Sabrina Vasulka, Rhiannon Ewing-James, Wendy Ward, Karolina Bednorz, Monika Müller and Maria Juchnowska</b>, former FUTURE LIGHTS contestants</p> <hr/>
16.30 - 17.30	Lecture Theatre	<p><b>Session 9 – Plenary</b> Chair: Wilhelm Siemen, Porzellanikon - Staatliches Museum für Porzellan</p> <hr/>
<b>BCB Sessions – Shuttle Bus from and to PMAG</b>		
14.00	BCB	<p><b>BCB Session 2 – Shaping the Future</b> Chair: BCB</p> <p><b>Nathalie Lautenbacher</b>, Aalto University <i>Thoughts on The Tabletop – Food Related Design</i> (gallery talk, 20 mins)</p> <p><b>Anna van der Lei and Kristos Mavrostomos</b>, CHIL-DISH / Studio Hån <i>CHIL-DISH project</i> (gallery talk, 20 mins)</p> <p><b>Alison Howell</b>, Burgess and Leigh Ltd <i>(Burleigh x CFPR) + KTP: How an academic-industry partnership can work to both innovate and preserve traditional ceramic processes</i> (gallery talk, 20 mins)</p> <hr/>
		<p><b>Cj O'Neill</b>, Manchester Metropolitan University <i>The Reader</i> (interactive artwork)</p> <hr/>
16.00		Return to PMAG for Plenary

## **Cj O'Neill**

### **The Reader**

Through artistic intervention, my current practice explores how connections can be established between people through everyday ceramic objects. (Y)our Stories is an ongoing research project (initiated in 2015) that considers the narrative potential of ceramic figurines gathered from charity shops and flea markets from various locations in the UK and across Europe. Through this project, I am investigating the in-between ground of three theories – bundling (Keane 2003), dispersed creativity (Leach 2004), and materialising the self (Tilley 2006). The notions of storytelling and collaborative authorship in conjunction with ceramic objects and their value are being explored – resulting in a number of installation pieces that encourage storytelling and interaction as well as building connections between participants, through everyday ceramic objects. Through this piece, I aim to establish the value of physical interaction with everyday ceramic objects in the creation of a personal narrative. The Reader comprises a group of everyday figurines placed around a cutting mat, within a suitcase, awaiting selection. When a figurine is selected and placed in the centre of the mat, a light comes on. Via an iPad, the participant is invited to repeat the process with two more figurines. Once all three lights are glowing, the participant is then invited to tell a story connecting the figurines, as well as leaving details of their name, country, age and email if they choose. As the stories collate, participants will be able to read other stories about the same three figurines. The objects begin to tell their own stories and build connections between the participants, creating a multi layered collection of stories.

Through artistic intervention, my current practice explores how connections can be established between people through

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**MMU Manchester School of Art**



Co-funded by the  
Creative Europe Programme  
of the European Union



Appendix 8: *(y)Our Stories*, solo exhibition, The Apple  
House Gallery, Guldagergaard, Denmark, May 2016



## (y)Our Stories

This solo exhibition at Guldagergaard, Denmark in 2016, was the culmination of a month-long residency at the research centre.

This documentation records some of the work in progress and exhibited works.

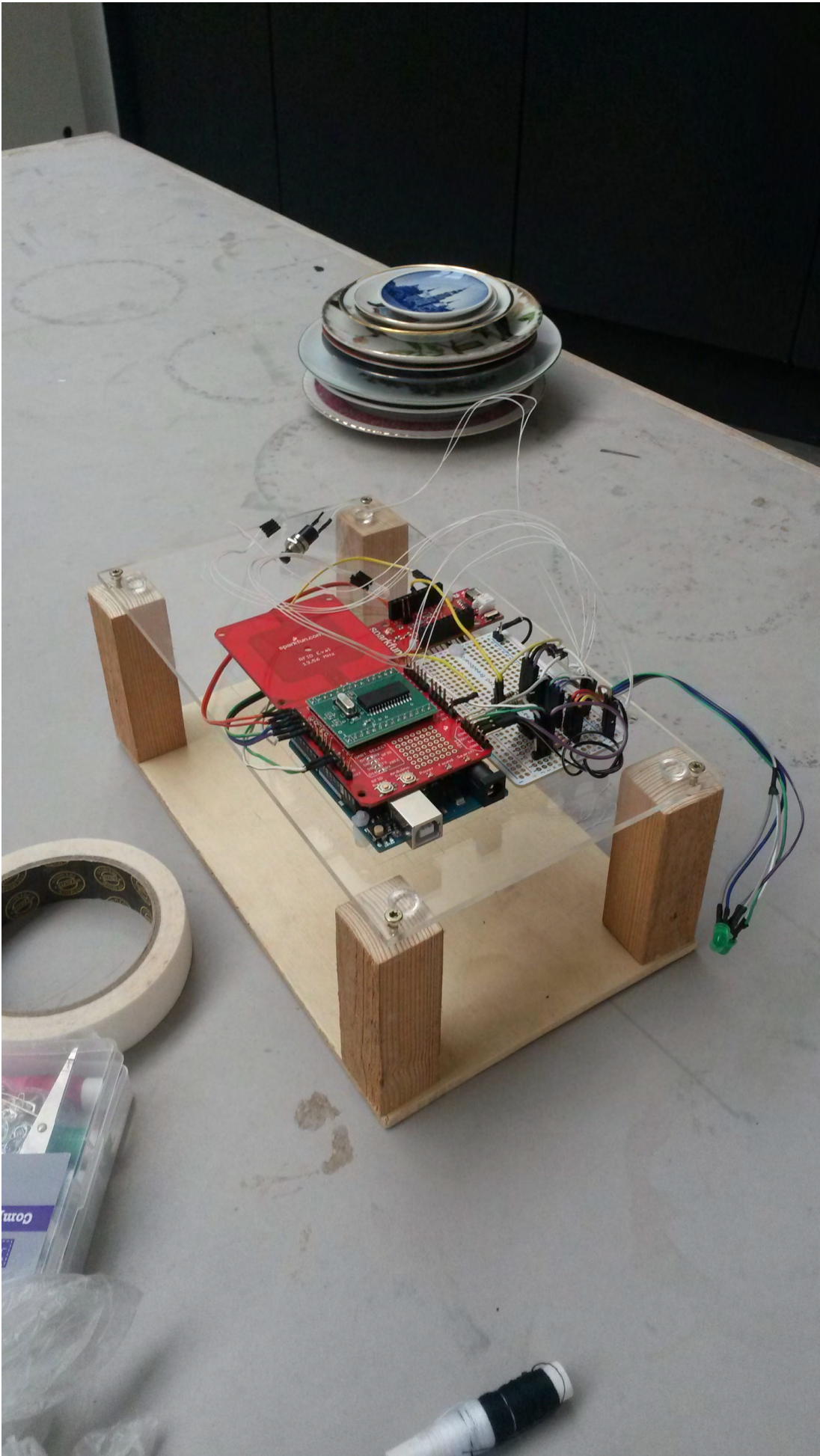


The Reader in progress, found objects, cutting mat.



The Reader, wooden section fitting





The Reader, Arduino unit mounting



Sketches, found objects and armband material.



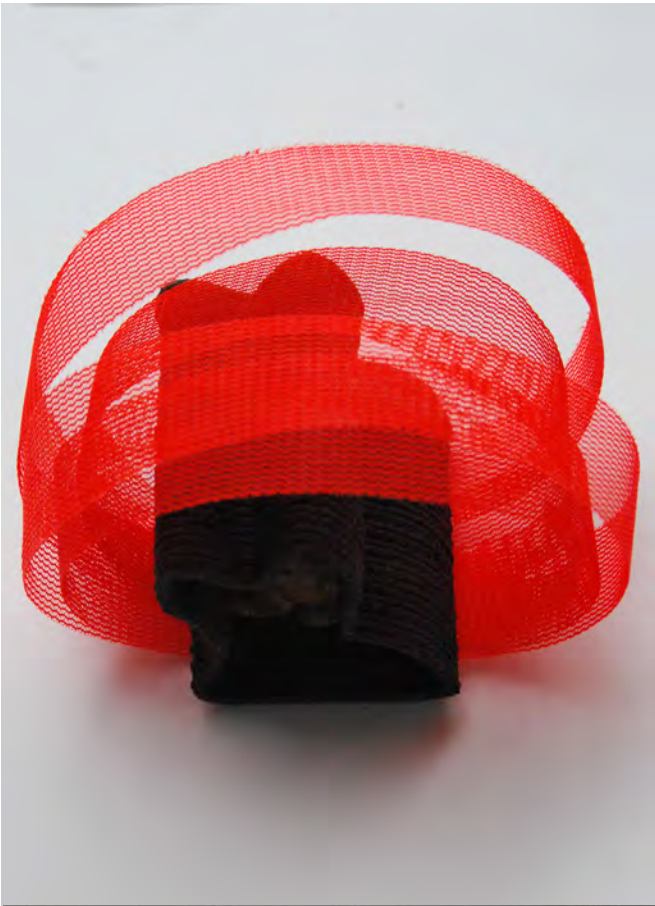
Clay printing tests



Bambi's perch, clay printed container, found object.







Bambi tunnel, found object, clay printed tunnel, netting.











