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**The Space of Clay: an investigation of contemporary clay-based
art practice as a site of embodied viewer experience**

Roche, Catherine

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**The Space of Clay:
an investigation of contemporary clay-based art practice
as a site of embodied viewer experience.**

Catherine Louise Roche

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of
the requirements of the University of Westminster
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

This thesis interrogates the potential for clay and ceramic artworks to stimulate embodied perception. Numerous studies have examined the phenomenology of art experience, taking account of various forms of practice. Embodied maker experiences of working with clay have also been well documented, yet existing critiques from either standpoint neglect viewer responses to clay-based practices. Inspired by Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, particularly his later theory of reversibility, this research situates clay and ceramic art firmly within the lens of embodied spectatorship. It maps the profound ways that sculptures, installations and interactive objects made from raw and fired clay might impact audiences, focusing on the unique sensorial, imaginative and conceptual potentials arising from material specificity. Key to this is the social, cultural, temporal and anthropological significance of clay in human life: no other substance is so closely connected with human existence, spanning millennia. This rich material identity is shown to be phenomenologically compelling in distinct ways, thus necessitating the original approach to embodied thinking about clay-based art undertaken by this thesis.

The thesis centres around three research foci: sensorial affect, the agency of crafted identities, and the spatial potentials of ceramic and clay. Drawing on diverse fields of knowledge, each theme probes the philosophical, ontological and experiential resonances of clay-based making. Case studies of five contemporary artists working in ceramic and clay media are integral to the thesis: Sam Bakewell, Phoebe Cummings, Nao Matsunaga, Ingrid Murphy and Johannes Nagel offer crucial maker perspectives. Interviews and analyses of artworks provide vital experiential data whilst also demonstrating theoretical claims. The synthesis of theory with the experiential is fundamental to this interpretive discourse of embodied spectatorship, which places the distinctive qualities of ceramic and clay at the heart of an innovative critical framework—one that reveals the particular embodied character of clay-based art.

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Enormous thanks must also go to my parents for their never-ending support and belief in me. I am forever grateful for their unwavering love. Finally, my heartfelt gratitude goes to David Fitzjohn, for his superhuman support and endless patience with my all-consuming doctoral journey, and without whom I would never have accomplished this thesis.

Author's Declaration

I declare that all material contained within this thesis is my own work.

Catherine Roche, November 2023.

Contents

Introduction	8
Mapping Research origins	6
Research Focus	11
Critical Writing and Ceramics	12
Establishing Theoretical Positions	14
Clay-Based Practice and Phenomenological Critique	16
Defining Research Parameters	10
Differentiation: The Distinctive Qualities of Clay-based Artwork	26
Terminology	32
Methodology	35
Theoretical Framework	35
Conceptualising Data	37
Research Strategy	39
Textual Analysis	40
Case Studies	42
Experiential Writing	48
Ethical Considerations	50
Thesis Structure	52
Chapter One: Literature Review	55
Introduction	55
Understanding Embodiment	59
Sculpture Through Merleau-Ponty's Lens	61
Viewer and Artwork: Embodied Reciprocity	63
Research Theme 1: A Sensory Perspective of Aesthetic Experience	64
Research Theme 2: The Embodied Possibilities of Craft	75
Research Theme 3: Thinking About Space	87
Chapter Summary	95
Chapter Two: Sensory Entanglements	97
Introduction	97
Reversibility: The Relational Structure of Perception	98
Interactive Revelations	102
Material Presence: The Intertwining of Vision and Touch	106
Feeling Vision: A Haptic Approach to Looking	110
At the Sensuous Surface of Things	112
Intimate Art Encounters	114
Haptic Criticism: Writing the Body into Clay	116
Empathy and Aesthetic Experience	119
A Sensory Approach to Art	123
Sculpture and the Shifting Ground of Perception	128
Sensorial Immersion: Experiencing Clay-Based Installation	131

Moving through Time with Clay-based Art	134
Chapter Summary	137
Chapter Three: Crafting Embodiment	139
Introduction	139
Part One: Making A Case for Craft	140
Craft as Process and Practice	141
The Agency of Craft	143
Overlapping Practices: Possibilities of the In-Between	144
Part Two: Locating Embodied Narratives through Craft	150
The Sensory Realm of Making	150
Following the Sensory Journey of 'Material Flow'	153
Feeling <i>with</i> Clay	156
The Affordances of Crafted Materiality	159
Embodied Agency: Looking at Crafted Clay	161
Making as Instinct	163
Marking Time Through Making	166
Bodily Reciprocity with the Handmade	170
Making to Scale: Body and Object	173
Function, Familiarity, Embodiment	177
Chapter Summary	182
Chapter Four: The Space of Clay	184
Introduction	184
Placing Embodied Experience of Ceramic and Clay	186
Installation: Being (Dis)Oriented	188
From Miniscule to Immense: Accessing Imaginative Space	192
Clay: A Space of Endless Reverie	195
Creativity, Clay, Space	199
Making Space for Time	201
Returning to Place: the Spatio-Temporal Agency of Clay	204
Connecting Spaces: Clay in the Embodied Digital Realm	207
Collective Places, Social Spaces: Clay-Based Art as a Site of Gathering	213
Clay Shapes the Void	215
Clay as Continuum: The Shared Space of Touch	217
Chapter Summary	225
Conclusion	226
Addressing the Research Questions	227
Conceptual Threads: Time, Space, Imagination	234
Claims and Contribution to Knowledge	237
Significance of the Research	238
Implications for the Research	242

Appendices	244
Appendix A: Interview with Sam Bakewell, 2018	245
Appendix B: Interview with Phoebe Cummings, 2018	261
Appendix C: Interview with Phoebe Cummings, 2021	269
Appendix D: Interview with Nao Matsunaga, 2018	283
Appendix E: Interview with Ingrid Murphy, 2018	294
Appendix F: Interview with Ingrid Murphy, 2020	310
Appendix G: Interview with Johannes Nagel, 2019	326
Appendix H: BCB exhibition text by Sam Bakewell, 2015	340
List of Illustrations	341
Bibliography	347

Introduction

Mapping Research Origins

And every place, as a gathering of things, is a knot of stories. [...] Inhabitants, then, know as they go, as they journey *through* the world *along* paths of travel.¹
Tim Ingold

Anthropologist Tim Ingold adopts the term 'wayfaring to describe the embodied experience' of human journeying through the world.² As 'wayfarer', he suggests life 'unfolds not in places, but along paths', and in this way we lay trails in our wake with the stories of our movement a means of knowing as we go.³ According to Ingold, these trails become entwined as our paths cross with those of others, forming clusters of interconnecting existences, some more dense than others. 'Places, [for Ingold] then, are like knots, and the threads from which they are tied are lines of wayfaring.'⁴

Ingold's ideas are relevant later in the thesis in relation to the spatial perspectives of clay and ceramic art, yet they also effectively frame the personal narrative from which my doctoral research arises.⁵ In tracing back through the entangled threads of my own wayfaring, it is possible to map the accumulation of knowing and stories that have led to this current place of research. In doing so, I locate four significant 'knots' to which my academic focus is both directly and tangentially anchored. Two, I find in close proximity, formed from more recent academic activities. Through MA study I developed an interest in phenomenology and sensory perception and their relationship to ceramic artworks, whilst a paper I delivered in 2015 formed the kernel of my current research concerns regarding embodied viewing of clay and ceramic objects.⁶ Both experiences are intimately implicated within the evolution of my scholarly interests and the subsequent development of my research proposal and questions. The other two 'knots' are more distant and anecdotal rather than academic, shaped by childhood experience and my

¹ Ingold, T. (2011). Against Space: Place, Movement, Knowledge. In: *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*. Oxon; New York: Routledge, p.154, emphasis in original.

² Ibid., p.148.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., p.149.

⁵ See chapter four, p.206.

⁶ I delivered the paper 'Fragile? Relationships: Bodies, Objects, Spaces' at the National Museum of Wales *Fragile?* exhibition conference in 2015.

early career painting practice. On reflection, it seems to me these are equally significant if understood as part of an interwoven 'meshwork' from which my knowing evolves.⁷



Fig.1. Claire Curneen, group of figures from *To This I Put My Name*, 2013.

I hold a BA in Fine Art and for the majority of my professional life I have worked as an artist and lecturer in painting. In 2014 I completed an MA in Art History, undertaking an in-depth case study of ceramic artist Claire Curneen for my dissertation. Through an interpretive approach to her work, I developed a strong interest in the bodily sensorium and phenomenological body, underpinned by the writing of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Martin Heidegger. In *The Visible and The Invisible* (1968), Merleau-Ponty presents the concept of reversibility, which entails the 'interweaving', 'crossing' and folding-back between subject and object that creates a fully reciprocal account of embodiment.⁸ This led me to explore ideas of subject-object interchange that I found in Curneen's body of work *To This I Put My Name*, developed by the artist in response to the decorative artefacts of a museum collection, which culminated in figurative outcomes (fig.1). A series of interviews with Curneen, together with close examination of her working process and its outcomes, opened up opportunities for me to consider the potential for

⁷ Ingold (2011), p.84, adopts Lefebvre's concept of a 'meshwork' to describe wayfaring.

⁸ Dillon, M.C. (1997). *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*. 2nd ed. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, p.155.

ceramic artworks to stimulate a heightened awareness of self and bodily experience, instigated through encounters between artefact, artist, artwork and audiences.

Thus, Merleau-Ponty's notion of the sensory intertwining of vision and touch has come to form a key aspect of my theoretical framework. It is through his thinking that I began to consider the tactile qualities of clay and ceramic materiality arising through vision alone. My doctoral research develops ideas touched upon during my MA, but with far greater depth and reach. It aligns them with other theoretical positions from fields of neuroscience, sensory research and anthropology amongst others to support the thesis hypothesis of embodied spectatorship of clay-based art.

It was whilst engaging with Merleau-Ponty's texts during my MA that I also discovered one of the outlying 'knots' in the 'meshwork' of my knowing, formed in the early stages of my professional journey as an artist, but one that is clearly connected to my recent 'wayfaring' through academic territory.⁹ What emerged can only be described as coincidence, but it evidences my deeply held interest in phenomenological approaches to being, a concern that over the years has manifested in different ways, knowingly and unknowingly, though my practical and theoretical explorations of visual art.

In 1996, as a recent fine art graduate, I made a painting that I titled *Circle of the Touched and Touching*. My artistic practice at this time was driven by an interest in the intersection of landscape, anthropology, archaeology and time, and in particular the idea of human history as a tactile, sedimented aspect of place. My paintings operated as a form of archaeology in themselves, their multiple layers partially revealing landscape-derived motifs embedded in the history of their making through acts of scratching, wiping, and digging at the painting's surface. Via process and materiality, I sought to develop a temporal understanding of space, and in doing so, expose the interdependence of past, present and future, an idea I now find correlates with Merleau-Ponty's depth-oriented understanding of embodiment.¹⁰

Titling artworks is not always easy, but with this painting I remember its name arriving swiftly and unconsciously. At this point in time, I had not yet encountered the writings of

⁹ Ingold (2011), p.84 & p.149.

¹⁰ See: Fielding, H. (1999). Depth of Embodiment: Spatial and Temporal Bodies in Foucault and Merleau-Ponty. *Philosophy Today*, 43 (1), 73-85.

Merleau-Ponty; it was over twenty years later that I uncovered the significance of my intuitively selected title. Embedded within *The Visible and The Invisible*, I discovered a familiar phrase: 'There is a circle of the touched and the touching, the touched takes hold of the touching [...]', the philosopher states.¹¹ Unknowingly, I had directly quoted Merleau-Ponty's words when naming my painting.

Perhaps my unwitting borrowing of the philosopher's phrase some thirty years after its publication, followed by my subsequent discovery of this coincidence through academic enquiry, only serves to highlight Merleau-Ponty's argument for the interconnectedness of being, of its circular, haptic essence. As he writes: 'The body unites us directly with the things through its own ontogenesis, by welding to one another the two outlines of which it is made.'¹² For me, paint and landscape have now given way to a newfound interest in clay-based practice and writing, but in truth, not much has changed; ideas have only deepened, spreading beyond existing boundaries and resurfacing with new identities. As I now consider my doctoral research journey, I recognise the knot of long-ago practice-based knowing as a shadowy presence to which it is tangentially bound.

I can also place my doctoral research concerns by reaching further back into my history. Whilst developing a paper for the *Fragile?* Exhibition conference, I realised how deeply my childhood experiences had shaped my research interests.¹³ I grew up around clay. My father was a potter and during my formative years we lived above his pottery. My childhood was punctuated with the rhythmic sound of wedging, tense kiln openings, the comforting heat that radiated throughout our house in winter on firing days, holidaying at potters' camps, and family raku parties where the air would be thick with the acrid smell of smouldering sawdust. Ceramic and clay materiality were familiar presences, ones I associated with the shifting sensory entanglements of smell, heat, texture and sound. But while I had full access to my father's workshop and was always encouraged to explore clay, I contrarily resisted the opportunity throughout my early and teenage years. Instead, I fell in love with colour and paint. Yet clay has emerged stealth-like into the forefront of my life. I am aware of a gradual gravitational pull towards ceramic objects, from cluttering my home with them, to eventually reading, thinking and writing

¹¹ Merleau-Ponty, M. (1968). *The Visible and the Invisible*. Trans. by Alphonso Lingis. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, p.143.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.136.

¹³ *Fragile?* was held at The National Museum of Wales, Cardiff in 2015.

about them. I am intrigued by this circuitous re-engagement and its possible connection to my formative experiences.

Fragile? was a large-scale clay-focused exhibition drawn from The National Museum of Wales's impressive collection, and supplemented with institutional loans, newly commissioned artworks and temporary installations. Viewing the exhibition stimulated a surprisingly strong emotive reaction in me. I found myself connected to clay in an acutely experiential manner and realised that my history must be implicitly bound up within this response. Four documentary films accompanying the commissions were unexpectedly affecting. They revealed the seductive qualities of clay through close-up frames of makers' hands carrying out various production activities—wedging, rolling, pouring, pinching, scraping, pressing, smoothing, holding. They also evidenced the application of skill, knowledge, patience, time, labour and care. The physicality and intimacy of each artist's relationship with clay became a shared experience for the viewer, carrying the bodily activities of each maker out into the wider experience of the exhibition.

The concurrence of film, clay and ceramic artwork, together with personal memory, evoked an embodied response in me that reverberated throughout the whole exhibition. However, I believed its experiential character operated beyond my own relationship with ceramic and clay media. In the paper I gave at the accompanying conference, I considered the relationship between clay-based artworks and audiences, proposing the notion of a haptic space of display, with my personal sensorial experience of *Fragile?* providing context for the discourse. Importantly, I placed embodied viewer experience at the core of my thinking.

While film and personal remembrance operated as sensory stimuli for me, my experiential engagement with the exhibition prompted a refocusing of my theoretical interests towards wider perspectives of the relationship between embodied experience and clay-based artworks, and beyond the frame of *Fragile's?* curatorial strategies. In summary, while my doctoral research proposal arises directly from my involvement with the exhibition, embedded within its development, and attached to this particular doctoral 'knot' of knowing are my MA research activity, my early painting practice and my childhood memories. These threads of 'wayfaring' stretch back over fifty years, all of

which have shaped and coloured the ontological perspective of my research journey. As philosopher Helen Fielding notes, for ‘Merleau-Ponty [...] temporality is the present that gathers the past and the future together as ec-stasies [sic]. The present moment always “transcends itself towards a future and a past”.’¹⁴

Research Focus

This thesis constructs a theoretical framework that situates clay-based practice within the discourse of embodied perception in relation to audience experience. Whilst significant research into the phenomenological impact of sculptural practice exists, this thesis examines the unique qualities of clay and ceramic artworks, and the new phenomenological perspectives implied therein. To carry out such an investigation, this study refers to four research questions that form the focus of the ensuing discourse, asking:

- In what ways might interpretative phenomenological readings of clay and ceramic artworks extend understanding of clay-based practice; what are the characteristics and qualities of clay-based making, both material and conceptual, that differentiate its embodied potency from other forms of sculptural practice?
- What does a phenomenological focus bring to the discourse of perceiving clay and ceramic artworks, and in what ways might clay-based art impact the sensory system of viewers to provoke an embodied state of being?
- In what ways do theories of craft, making and skill contribute to developing a theoretical framework that exposes the potential for contemporary clay-based artworks to enable embodied spectatorship, and what are the implications of this for practices operating at the craft/art/design interface?
- How do theories of space and place contribute to a critical framework of embodied viewer responses to clay and ceramic art? What are the spatial qualities of clay-based works that stimulate embodied experience in beholders?

¹⁴ Merleau-Ponty cited by Fielding (1999), p.80.

This introductory chapter will now consider the relevance of such an enquiry and its contribution to knowledge, taking account of the limits of scholarly activity within the field of ceramics, theoretical precedents that contextualise the research focus, and the distinctive qualities of clay and ceramic artworks that validate such an enquiry.

Critical Writing and Ceramics

The lack of rigorous critical discourse surrounding the field of ceramics has been well documented over the past thirty years, with a growing number of practitioners and writers acknowledging the scarcity of scholarly literature to help foster debate and critical thinking about clay-based making.¹⁵ This situation is thrown into high relief when examined against the wealth of discursive texts emerging from the field of art criticism in the latter half of the twentieth century, transformed through the influence of critical theory.¹⁶ Bernard Leach's Anglo-Japanese aesthetic doctrine for studio ceramics seems to have been a stifling presence for the development of alternative perspectives in post-war Britain until his death in 1979.¹⁷ The self-defining insularity of the field itself also cultivated an attitude of critical 'silence.'¹⁸ Furthermore, 'influential critics' who focused on ceramics often held traditional and conservative views about the discipline, perpetuating ingrained attitudes towards clay-based making.¹⁹ The dissemination of knowledge from within the field through 'close-knit and intensely hierarchical' networks has also resulted in a 'closed loop' of discourse according to ceramic scholar Laura Breen.²⁰

In light of this, and with notable exceptions, writing on ceramics has historically centred on taxonomy, practical and technical issues, or artist monographs.²¹ In his 2000 essay

¹⁵ See: Barnard (1999), n.p.; Brown (2009), p.109; Tuxhill (2010), p.9; Dahn (2012), p.46; De Waal (2017), p.265; Greenhalgh (2021), p.13.

¹⁶ Brown, G. (2009). Contemporary Ceramics and Critical Theory: Prestige, Professionalism and Perspective. *Ceramics, Art and Perception*, 75, p.108.

¹⁷ See: Tuxhill, W. (2010). A Re-Conceptualisation of Contemporary Sculptural Ceramics Practice From A Post- Minimalist Perspective. PhD Thesis, University of Hertfordshire, p.10; Margetts, M. (2017). Metamorphosis: The Culture of Ceramics. In: Livingstone, A., Petrie, K. (eds.) *The Ceramics Reader*. London; New York: Bloomsbury, p.215.

¹⁸ See: Merback, M. (2000). Cooled Matter: Ceramic Sculpture in the Expanded Field. *Ceramics: Art and Perception*, 39, 6-15; De Waal, E. (2017). Speak for Yourself. In: Livingstone, A., Petrie, K. (eds.) *The Ceramics Reader*. London; New York: Bloomsbury, pp.264-265.

¹⁹ Margetts, (2017), p.216. See also Brown (2009), p.109.

²⁰ Breen L. (2016). Remodelling Clay: Ceramic Practice and the Museum in Britain. PhD thesis. University of Westminster, p.14.

²¹ For texts confirming the general limits of ceramic literature see: De Waal (2003; 2017), p.173 & p.265; Brown (2009), p.109; Breen (2016), p.14; Greenhalgh (2021), p.12. Garth Clark, Tanya Harrod, Martina

'Speak for Yourself', artist and writer Edmund de Waal asked: 'Where in ceramics is that synergy between criticism and making that has become so common in other arts?'²² He called upon his fellow ceramicists to address this situation by engaging in serious discourse about their work, and in doing so, overturn the pervading myth of the silent, authentic clay practitioner.²³ Yet, ten years later, critical writing with a ceramics-focus was still deemed limited. As part of her doctoral research, Wendy Tuxhill undertook an extensive examination of texts from archival material and publications dating from the 1940s onwards, concluding that 'in contrast to other art practices, it has become evident that a dearth of critical writing exists for all forms of ceramic work.'²⁴

However, there is evidence of a rise in scholarly activity.²⁵ In 2009, art historian Glen R. Brown observed that 'there are numerous signs that a solid groundwork is being laid for an academic discipline capable of treating contemporary ceramics in intellectually sound and sophisticated terms.'²⁶ More recently, writer, curator and researcher Laura Gray observes that the critical literature around ceramics has improved over the last ten years, particularly through 'highly engaged and informed essays analysing contemporary ceramics practice' found within exhibition catalogues that make a 'significant contribution to [...] scholarship.'²⁷ Gray does note, however, that there has been reluctance by many craft writers to employ existing theoretical positions and this has been damaging to the status of the current critical landscape.²⁸ It is clear then that there is still a need to position the ceramic field within the wider theoretical debates of visual culture and correlative fields of philosophy, anthropology, archaeology, and beyond. Paul Greenhalgh reinforces this view stating that 'well into the 21st century', the wealth of existing scholarly literature focused on ceramics, while highly valuable, is

Margetts, Jorunn Vieteberg and Glenn Adamson are amongst a small group of art and design historians/critics who have contributed incisive essays and criticism to the field of ceramics over the past forty years.

²² De Waal (2017), p.266.

²³ Ibid., pp.263-267.

²⁴ Tuxhill (2010), p.2.

²⁵ The publication of a small number of PhD theses focused on ceramics has contributed a much-needed critical perspective to the field. See: Tuxhill (2010); Breen (2016); Gray (2017). The three-year AHRC funded project *Ceramics in the Expanded Field*, undertaken by the Ceramics Research Centre at the University of Westminster, also generated an in-depth body of critical writing through print and online publication from a wide range of voices, examining the relationship between contemporary ceramics and curatorial practices within museum culture.

²⁶ Brown (2009), p.109.

²⁷ Gray, L. (2017). *Contemporary British Ceramics and the Influence of Sculpture: Monuments, Multiples, Destruction and Display*. London: Routledge, p.7.

²⁸ Ibid., p.7.

inconsistent and unconnected.²⁹ In short, he argues that '[t]he written history of art over the last century or so has denied cultural space to ceramic.'³⁰

Establishing Theoretical Positions

In 1999, curator and critic Janet Koplos proposed that recent ceramics criticism had co-opted a model from art criticism, but these theories were then misapplied.

Consequently, she argued a new 'framework [is needed] that adjusts to the specifics of the situation and responds to the particularities of ceramics.'³¹ Yet just as art criticism has gained much from appropriating philosophical, psychoanalytical, Marxist or feminist models of critical thought, for instance, there is much that is germane within critical and philosophical theory for thinking about ceramics also, particularly given the now blurred territories of post-disciplinary practices. The recent publication of several PhD theses from authors who have approached ceramic scholarship through existing theoretical strategies indicates these potentials.³² While new theoretical frameworks may be highly valuable for advancing scholarly research focused on the specificity of clay-based making, objects and artworks, this thesis acknowledges and supports the application of existing theoretical models as a useful and revelatory tool for considering art made from ceramic and clay.

Consequently, this discourse undertakes a phenomenologically inspired examination of contemporary clay-based art developed through implementation of existing theories from phenomenology, anthropology, craft, art history, film, sense perception, cultural geography and neuroscience. Through these lenses it establishes clear correlation between the unique qualities of clay and ceramics and embodied experiences of art viewing, thereby forging a new critical framework for considering clay-based art practice. There is evidence of a well-established relationship between visual art and phenomenology, with many notable phenomenologists using artworks and artists'

²⁹ Greenhalgh, P. (2021). *Ceramic, Art and Civilisation*. London: Bloomsbury, p.12.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.14.

³¹ Koplos, J. (2017). Ceramics and Art Criticism. In Livingstone, A., Petrie, K. (eds.) *The Ceramics Reader*. London; New York: Bloomsbury, p.40.

³² For example: Wendy Tuxhill (2010) employs post-Minimalist art theory to interrogate sculptural ceramic practice; Natasha Mayo (2004), Pippa Galpin (2016) and Bonnie Kemske (2009) engaged with different aspects of phenomenological theory through their practice-based research; Emmanuel Boos' (2011) practice-based research examined the aesthetic dimension of glaze through literary theory focused on poetry and psychoanalysis.

methodologies to think through their theoretical propositions.³³ Phenomenological approaches to art criticism are also prevalent throughout both twentieth century and contemporary accounts of art practice. A significant body of critical writing addressing the phenomenology of sculptural practice already exists, demonstrating the relevance for thinking about three-dimensional artworks through phenomenologically inspired approaches. These provide a valuable template for mapping convergences and distinctions when applying a similar methodology to clay-based artwork. Film theory also offers important phenomenological precedents for addressing the sensorial materiality of ceramic and clay.

Art historian Alex Potts delivers an overview of the influence of phenomenology on twentieth-century sculptural criticism, paying particular attention to the influence of Merleau-Ponty's texts on critics and artists such as Rosalind Krauss, David Sylvester, Michael Fried and Robert Morris.³⁴ It is through Rosalind Krauss's application of Merleau-Ponty's thinking that the greatest impact on sculptural discourses can be seen. Potts notes that unlike her contemporaries who were fixated on sculpture's phenomenological revelation of embodied sensation emerging through its primordial, non-binary subject/object dynamic, as early as 1966 Krauss employed Merleau-Pontyan phenomenology to processes of viewing, a departure that has important implications for this research.³⁵ Merleau-Ponty's influence can also be seen in later reflections on sculpture. Philosopher Helen Fielding demonstrates his continuing relevance for contemporary critical analyses of three-dimensional form in her critique of minimalist sculptor Anne Truitt's work. She establishes a phenomenological account of viewing and interpreting artwork that embraces a complex identity of difference and plurality through 'the shared space of the public realm.'³⁶ Potts' also offers an in-depth interpretation of the philosopher's ideas for sculpture. He notes Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological approach is particularly useful in this context, given the similarities

³³ See: Wrathall, M. (2011). The Phenomenological Relevance of Art. In: Parry, J. *Art and Phenomenology*. Oxon; New York: Routledge, p.30; and Crowther, P. (1993). *Art and Embodiment: from Aesthetics to Self-consciousness*. Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press, pp.4-10. Merleau-Ponty's 'Cezanne's Doubt' (1993a) and 'Eye and Mind' (1993c) examine perceptual experience through the study of painting, and Heidegger's essay 'Origin of the Work of Art' (2009) interrogates a Van Gogh painting to consider the nature of being itself.

³⁴ Potts, A. (2000). *The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist*. New Haven; London: Yale University Press.

³⁵ Krauss, R. (1966). Allusion and Illusion in Donald Judd. *Artforum*, 4 (9), 24-26, as discussed in Potts (2000), p.209,

³⁶ Fielding, H. (2011). Multiple Moving Perceptions of the Real: Arendt, Merleau-Ponty, and Truitt. *Hypatia*, 26 (3), 518-534.

between processes of viewing three-dimensional artworks and everyday situations of being in the world, as experienced through the moving body.³⁷

Clay-Based Practice and Phenomenological Critique.

As already established, sculptural endeavour within the broader sphere of art practice has been subject to substantial phenomenological attention over the past fifty years, reconceptualising the field and demonstrating the importance of this method of analysis and interpretation. It is clear that art practices situated within the discipline of ceramics have been omitted from this discourse, in part due to lack of critical attention from the wider fields of visual theory due to cultural hierarchies, but also through historical insularity of the field itself and its implicit lack of critical engagement. Various texts clearly advocate the sensorial and experiential qualities of clay and ceramic particularly their tactile values, signposting the suitability of positioning clay-based artworks within a phenomenological frame. Yet many of these references are found in exhibition catalogues, reviews or historical surveys of the field, and either do not have the scope or readership to be developed with depth and academic rigour, or the articles and papers serve other conceptual purposes.³⁸

Perhaps the most thorough examination of the sensorial character of ceramics can be found in art historian Philip Rawson's comprehensive 1971 publication *Ceramics*, where he proposes that ceramic artefacts awaken multiple fields of sensuous memory.³⁹ Rawson's book focuses on pottery. The contemporary clay-based practices encompassing site-specific, temporary installation, new technologies and assemblages that inform this study would have no place in Rawson's evaluations. While his text introduces an important sensorial focus for ceramic scholarship and touches upon phenomenological themes, it remains grounded in formal aesthetic appreciation rather than being situated within a philosophical enquiry. It is clear though, that ceramic

³⁷ Potts (2000), p.232.

³⁸ Donald Kuspit notes the intimate relationship between ceramic artworks and touch in two essays but does not pursue these ideas further. See: Kuspit, D. (1998). Directions and Issues in Ceramic Sculpture of the Nineties. *Studio Potter*, 26 (2), 20-25; Kuspit, D. (2010). Ceramics et al: Critical Consciousness of the Arts. Available from <http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/features/kuspit/critical-consciousness-of-the-arts-3-29-11.asp>. Mitchell Merback (2000), pp.6-15, recognises the phenomenological impulses of temporality and viewer experience as relevant to clay-based installation in his exhibition review of *Cooled Matter* (1999). Edmund de Waal employs Merleau-Ponty's ideas to discuss artists' experiential relationships with clay materiality in: De Waal, E. (2004). High Unseriousness: Artists and Clay. In: Groom, S. *A Secret History of Clay: from Gauguin to Gormley*. London: Tate, p.43.

³⁹ Rawson, P. (1984 [1971]). *Ceramics*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, p.18.

artworks are often associated with experiential and phenomenological modes of operation, and their character frequently understood through sensory values.

Art historian and critic James Elkins makes a case for positioning ceramic artworks and artefacts within either philosophical or sensory frames, arguing that 'ceramic practices can be central to current discussions of artistic material, hypostasis, and phenomenology.'⁴⁰ While Elkins does not conflate the sensory with the philosophical in any analyses of ceramics, his thoughts clearly reflect the apposite nature of both strands of enquiry within the field. This research looks to both, as phenomenological investigations by their very nature must take account of the sensory. Yet only a small number of UK ceramics-focused PhD theses published within the last twenty years refer to, or employ, phenomenological perspectives, in particular those of Merleau-Ponty. When such texts examining clay-based practices do employ phenomenological positions, they tend to focus on the maker's perspective rather than that of the audience, or they contain aspects of research pertinent to establishing phenomenological positions, but do not employ this as the primary focus of enquiry. For example, Bonnie Kemske's doctoral research offers a detailed examination of touch in relation to abstract ceramic sculpture to expose the benefits of haptic engagement with art.⁴¹ However, her research focuses on physical experiences of tactile encounters and does not take account of multi-sensory phenomenological perspectives, which also include vision. Kemske's study, therefore, operates in contrast to this research focus, which actively engages with notions of touch experienced through vision alone.

Like Kemske, both Babette Martini and Natasha Mayo engage with Merleau-Ponty's theories of perception to situate their doctoral practice-based ceramic research. Martini applies a phenomenological perspective to the relationship between ceramic materiality, processes of making and expression within figurative artwork, focusing on notions of labour and pain in relation to the impact of heavy industrial working conditions on the body over time.⁴² Her argument is positioned around an understanding of the artist as an intermediary in phenomenological viewer encounters

⁴⁰ Elkins, J. (2002). Two Ways of Looking at Ceramics. *James Elkins*, n.p. Available from https://www.academia.edu/3248608/Two_Ways_of_Looking_at_Ceramics

⁴¹ Kemske, B. (2007). *Evoking Intimacy: Touch and the Thoughtful Body in Sculptural Ceramics*. PhD thesis, Royal College of Art.

⁴² Martini, B. (2006). *Medium as a Process: the Role of the Medium in the Making Process and its Impact on the Development and Expression in Figurative Ceramic Artwork*. PhD thesis, University of Wales, Cardiff.

with artworks, drawing on Merleau-Ponty's earlier theory of aesthetic perception. This research, however, draws on his later work, where Merleau-Ponty radically shifts his emphasis of embodiment to the relationship between viewer and artwork.⁴³

Mayo also employs phenomenological thinking alongside aesthetic theory in order to develop a 'bodily frame of reference' for figurative ceramics.⁴⁴ Her proposition is that such artworks operate as a sensorial interface between ceramic materiality and viewer's bodies, stimulating a physically sympathetic audience response. Mayo's focus, however, is to elucidate the properties of expressive figurative ceramic surfaces in relation to sensory experiences of skin and flesh. Affinities with this study can be found in Pippa Galpin's practice-based research into phenomenological approaches to the experience of space through ceramic sculpture.⁴⁵ While parallels are found in Galpin's exploration of the haptic nature of space, her research is focused on maker rather than audience experience and is limited to the notion of sacred space.

As previously indicated, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theories of perception are key to this discourse of embodied spectatorship, in particular, his positioning of artworks as transformational entities activated via processes of viewing.⁴⁶ His theory of reversibility also forms a central tenet of this research, uniting the senses through the body, thereby developing an understanding of touch informed by vision.⁴⁷

Defining Research Parameters

One of the problems inherent within any study of ceramics is that the field encompasses such diversity, covering a range of approaches from industrial design, studio pottery and architectural applications, to contemporary art. All operate with individual methodologies, objectives and outcomes, often sharing closer affiliations with other fields of visual and material practice than those inside the discipline itself. Ceramics is

⁴³ Merleau-Ponty's essay 'Cezanne's Doubt' (1993a) examines perception as manifested through the artist's vision and experience of paint. This research draws on his later essay 'Eye and Mind' (1993c), which focuses on the viewer/artwork dynamic in embodied aesthetic experience. For both essays see: Johnson, G.A. (ed.) *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

⁴⁴ Mayo, N. (2004). *An Investigation into the Potential of Ceramics to Expressively Render Flesh and Skin on the Human Body*. PhD thesis, University of Wales, Cardiff, p.145.

⁴⁵ Galpin, P. (2016). *Ceramics and the Haptic: A Case Study Sited in Worcester Cathedral*. PhD thesis, Bath Spa University.

⁴⁶ See: Merleau-Ponty's *The Visible and The Invisible* (1968) and 'Eye and Mind' (1993c).

⁴⁷ Merleau-Ponty (1968), pp.130-155. Various writers help explicate Merleau-Ponty's concept of reversibility, see: Dillon (1997), p.160; Wylie (2006), pp.525-526; Hass (2008), pp.124-136; Morris (2010); Ng (2012).

also an art and design discipline categorised by a material, rather than an application or conceptual framework. It is therefore important to clarify the distinct focus of this research within the all-embracing term ceramics, as well as to clearly state what the study does not incorporate.

Artworks can be understood as phenomenologically potent entities offering the potential for generating embodied accounts of being through processes of viewing, and art-making as an interrogative attitude.⁴⁸ As philosophers Joseph Parry and Mark Wrathall note:

[A]rt can give us access to the world that we encounter in the primordial situation of our being: in our bodies in a particular time and place, and from within particular contexts and vantage points—in other words in the pre-reflective space we occupy before we begin to think the world and its meaning by means of concepts we've learned to apply to our experience.⁴⁹

Given this propensity, the research study limits its investigation to clay-based practices that operate within the context of contemporary art, and specifically to the work of five artists selected as case studies for this research: Sam Bakewell, Phoebe Cummings, Nao Matsunaga, Ingrid Murphy and Johannes Nagel. This focus encompasses artworks that operate through a range of approaches to include: traditional sculptural formats as adopted by Bakewell (fig.2), Nagel (fig.3) and Matsunaga (fig.5); the appropriation of found objects, casting techniques, and integration of new technologies as demonstrated in the work of Murphy (fig.6); installation, site-specific interventions and temporary structures as seen in the work of Bakewell (fig.7) and Cummings (fig.4).

While the study interrogates the notion of craft and functionality within clay-based practice as integral concepts of the research framework, these aspects are mobilised here through the conceptual orientation of art-based practices. At the same time, the investigation recognises and purposefully implements the proposition that certain clay-based artworks operate under hybrid identities, implicit with references to art, design,

⁴⁸ See: Wrathall (2011), p.10; Crowther (1993), p.10; Pallasmaa, J. (2011). *The Embodied Image*. Sussex: Wiley & Sons Ltd, p.11.

⁴⁹ Parry, J. and Wrathall, M. (2001). Introduction. In: Parry, J. D. (ed.) *Phenomenology and Art*. Oxon: Routledge, p.4.

and craft.⁵⁰ Ultimately, it understands all artwork under consideration here to operate within the structures of contemporary art practice. This study, therefore, does not incorporate ceramic objects and artefacts situated within the context of commercial production, the decorative crafts, studio pottery, ceramic design, nor industrial or architectural design and manufacturing. Crowther's assertion that embodied agency is activated through the synthesis of sensorial and conceptual qualities in an artwork clearly positions clay-based making, with its combination of palpable material presence and intellectual agendas, ripe for phenomenological interrogation.⁵¹ What is important to consider now, is how a study of clay and ceramic artworks might contribute to phenomenological enquiry in original ways?

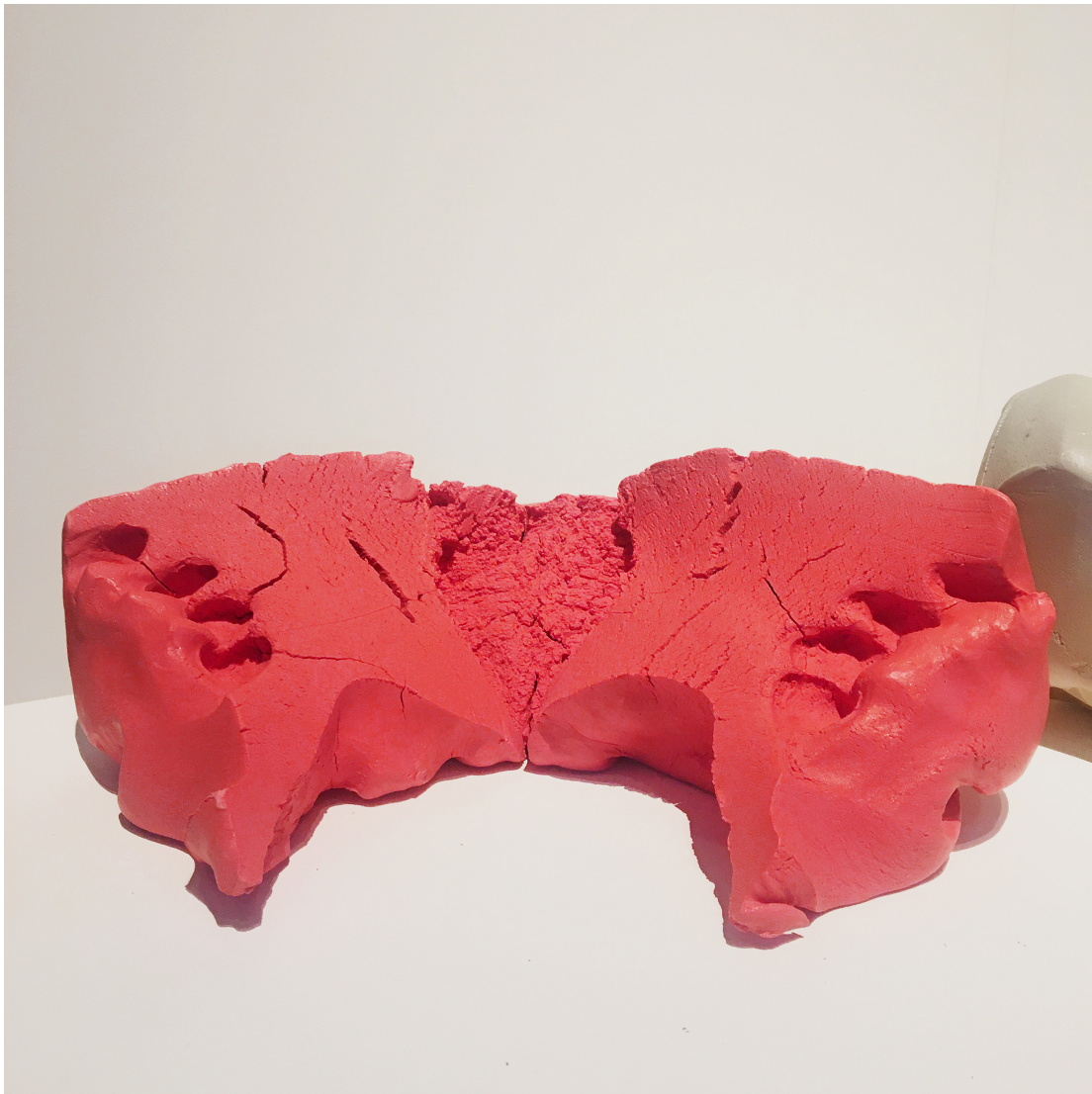


Fig.2. Sam Bakewell, detail from the *Reader* series, 2011- present, ceramic.

⁵⁰ See: Veiteberg, J. (2005). *Craft in Transition*. Bergen: Bergen National Academy of the Arts, p.33.

⁵¹ Crowther (1993), p.5.



Fig.3. Johannes Nagel, *Barock*, 2010, stoneware.



Fig.4. Phoebe Cummings, *This Was Now*, 2020, raw clay and mixed media.



Fig.5. Nao Matsunaga, *Big Animal or Everything is a Machine*, 2011, ceramic, wood, wax, ink.



Fig.6. Ingrid Murphy, *Campanologist's Tea Cup*, 2012, ceramic and mixed media.



Fig.7. Sam Bakewell, *Imagination Dead Imagine*, 2015, mixed media.

Differentiation: the distinctive qualities of clay-based artworks

Within modern and postmodern visual culture, there are many instances of artists engaging with sculptural practices through the medium of clay. This was made evident in Tate Liverpool's 2004 exhibition *A Secret History of Clay: from Gauguin to Gormley*, which sought to reveal the presence of clay and ceramic-focused sculptural activity within the wider context of contemporary art practice. The exhibition included historical works from artists such as Gauguin, Picasso, Fontana and Miró, plus contemporary pieces by artists Tony Cragg and Antony Gormley amongst others. All worked, or still work with clay in serious and innovative ways alongside other material practices, yet most of the exhibiting artists situated themselves outside the field of ceramics. While *A Secret History of Clay* received harsh criticism from some quarters for its selective curatorial narrative, the exhibition achieved its aim of making visible the abundance of clay and ceramic artworks within modern and postmodern sculptural activity across the discipline divide.⁵² This, therefore, begs the question: if clay-based artworks are situated within the context of modern and postmodern sculpture, and a strong

⁵² Wendy Tuxhill (2010), p.14, notes that criticism of the exhibition was directed towards its perceived white, cis male bias, conservative vessel-centric conceptual framing, and negation of the skilled identity and craft of ceramic making.

phenomenological critique of sculpture has already been constructed, why not locate such artworks within this existing theoretical space?

This research recognises that contemporary clay practice often shares sculptural concerns with works emerging from the wider field of art, in its acknowledgement of space, form, objecthood, conceptual positions, strategies of display and processes of viewing. However, there is a case to be made for differentiation. Additional qualities particular to clay and ceramic materiality, processes of making, and ontological presence validate the need to interrogate clay-based artworks within a unique theoretical framework in order to expose their distinctive phenomenological character.

Rosalind Krauss's 1979 ground-breaking essay 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field' pioneered a reconceptualization of sculpture that met the needs of the changing face of postmodern visual art practice to include more expansive approaches, such as installation, performance, earthworks and site-specific structures.⁵³ However, when Krauss introduced these ideas in an earlier article analysing John Mason's ceramic sculpture, she noted that the craft associations of ceramic materiality were problematic for artists working in the 1960s and 1970s as they disturbed 'the logic of the monument.'⁵⁴ Krauss states: 'in the semantic associations to pottery, ceramics speaks to that branch of culture, which is too homey, too functional, too archaic, for the name of "sculpture" to extend to it.'⁵⁵ Yet, in the past thirty years the field of ceramics has also evolved to incorporate broader definitions of practice, with artists working with installation, temporary structures, site-specific engagement, performance, new technologies, land-art and sculpture. Many argue that ceramics now occupies an expanded field itself, having extended beyond the abstract expressionist, autonomous ceramic sculptures that would have informed Krauss's writing in 1979.⁵⁶ It is interesting to speculate about Krauss's classification of ceramic artworks within the fluid, post-disciplinary space of contemporary art, where clay and ceramic materiality are

⁵³ Krauss, R. (1979b). Sculpture in the Expanded Field. *October*, 8, 31-44.

⁵⁴ Krauss, R. (1979a). John Mason and Post Modernist Sculpture: New Experiences, New Worlds. *Art in America*, 67 (3), p.121.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.124.

⁵⁶ Krauss' (1979a) understanding of avant-garde ceramic practice at this time will have been informed by the work of Peter Voulkos and the Otis School (see Glenn Adamson 2007, pp.43-49), who were working within an abstract expressionist discourse. Their work dismantled traditional notions of ceramic making through disruptive strategies such as piercing, ripping, slashing, deconstructing and re-assembling. With reference to the expanded field of ceramics see: Merback (2000); Graves, A. (2012); Brown (2016); Gray (2017).

embraced. However, her pejorative assessment of ceramic materiality over forty years ago is understood as constructive within the context of this research. The very attributes that Krauss finds untenable for sculpture—its relationship to the vernacular, to use value, and to the historic—are the self-same aspects that, in part, form a unique set of qualities that this research connects with embodied positions in ways that other forms of sculptural and performative practices do not.

Interestingly, Krauss acknowledges that the associative qualities of ceramic were conceptually useful to Mason, enabling him to think through alternative cultural contexts where these aspects are integrated into art without difficulty.⁵⁷ Krauss thus concedes that ‘problematizing’ ceramic materiality opens opportunities for more expansive thinking, leading to ‘the archaeological site, and from there into ritual space, and even the special beauty of the ruin.’⁵⁸ Consequently, she states, ‘[o]ne is at that point thinking the expanded field.’⁵⁹ Krauss’s words touch upon the powerful associative, imaginative and sensory capacities of clay and ceramic artworks, which begin to map the distinctive phenomenological territory that I argue clay-based practices claim.

In her insightful analysis of the relationship between ceramics and sculpture, art historian Laura Gray extends Krauss’ observations regarding the associative qualities of ceramic materiality. She highlights the significant underlying conceptual foundation shared across the diverse field of ceramic making that is embedded in the material itself, and which helps to construct a differential character for ceramics. Gray states:

These shared intellectual concerns include the history of clay, its industrial associations, the rarity and preciousness of porcelain, the emotional associations of domestic ware, the possibility that functional objects can cut across many kinds of practice, from studio pottery to grand-scale installations. [...] [T]hese historical and material associations create a set of references and touch-points that are used by ceramicists in many ways. These concerns, as much as skill and process, distinguish ceramics from other disciplines.⁶⁰

These idiosyncratic social, cultural, temporal and anthropological qualities that Gray identifies are content forming and conceptually rich; they also underpin the argument

⁵⁷ Krauss (1979a), p.124.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Gray (2017), p.2.

for developing a unique theoretical framework through which to consider clay and ceramic artworks. Whilst existing models of phenomenological art criticism can be applied to clay-based making, they neglect these key material aspects that contribute innovative perspectives. They do not take account of the sensory and experiential qualities of clay and ceramic material; their relationship to skill, craft and utility and therefore the human body; the unique transformative qualities bound up in ceramic processes; social and cultural potency; and importantly for phenomenological approaches, the relationship of ceramics to temporality.

The experiential and associative properties of clay and ceramic material are discernibly unique. Unlike many other sculptural materials, the plasticity of clay is enticingly tactile, invested with immediacy and bodily associations and traces. As de Waal notes, it is universal, connecting us with earth, land, territory and place, as well as our primordial past.⁶¹ Raw clay is visceral and immediate; when fired, ceramic material remains universally familiar, resonant with domesticity and tactile memory, fragile and enduring at once.⁶² Clay is also a powerful signifier within the various cultural myths of creation.⁶³ Furthermore, it is uniquely suited for thinking through the historically pervasive philosophical matter/form dialectic.⁶⁴ Artist Antony Gormley's description of working with clay affirms these ideas and offers a poetic image of clay's powerful material distinction that carries with it sensory, temporal and existential values so suited to phenomenological interrogation:

There is a feeling when you use [clay] that you are repeating some primal transformation of the unformed to the formed. When you return it to the fire it becomes like stone. That is a very primal alchemy, like commending experience to memory, a fossilisation or fixing of a moment and unlike any of the other techniques—such as 'lost wax'—it is totally direct. [...] [C]lay is a medium that can be an extension of the flesh in a way that no other material can.⁶⁵

⁶¹ De Waal (2004), p.43.

⁶² Ibid., p.38.

⁶³ See: Gormley, A. (2004). Antony Gormley in Conversation with James Putnam. In: *A Secret History of Clay: from Gauguin to Gormley*. London: Tate, p.85; Fenkl, H. I. (no date). Of Mud and Men. *The Journal of Mythic Arts*. Available from <https://endicottstudio.typepad.com/articleslist/of-mud-and-men-by-heinz-insu-fenkl>

⁶⁴ James Elkins (2002), n.p., proposes that ceramics is where this relationship seems experientially closest, for matter and form 'are confounded, or conflated, as in no other medium.' Tim Ingold argues against the passive, hylomorphic understanding of materiality where matter follows form. In: Ingold, T. (2013). *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*. Oxon; New York: Routledge, pp.20-29.

⁶⁵ Gormley (2004), p.85.

Clay and ceramic material also carry with them the powerful metaphor of metamorphosis, both shifting and fixing material states, as Gormley describes. Art critic Donald Kuspit notes that for Paul Valéry, the notion of risk, implicit within firing processes, is bound up in the appreciation of ceramic form.⁶⁶ Clay's transformative properties, from 'raw earth through fire into things of special permanence,' are one of its most remarkably distinctive qualities.⁶⁷

Whilst Gray cautions against limiting ceramics discourse to one of material specificity structured around notions of craft and utility, the crafted identities that clay and ceramic artworks may inhabit are also important characteristics of their unique phenomenological identity. This idea forms one of the core themes of this discourse and is considered in depth in chapter three. References to craft may manifest in various ways: through physical acknowledgement of subject-specialist processes and techniques; evidence of repetitive hand or tool gestures, and multiplicity of form suggesting effort, industry, and a scale of production that contrasts with the autonomy of the art object; or through direct traces of making processes embedded in clay material. Clay and ceramic artworks also carry a conceptual framework tied to the abundant tradition of ceramic craft heritage, opening possibilities to engage with broader themes. And the pervasive utilitarian presence of ceramics within domestic spheres not only imparts tacit material remembrances, but also connectivity to shared experience. Entangled in references to bodily activity, imbued with familiarity, spatially close and conceptually charged, crafted characteristics of clay-based artworks can be understood as uniquely potent signifiers within embodied accounts of being.

The sensory qualities of clay and ceramic materiality, particularly tactile sensation, also position it within a distinctive phenomenological space and differentiate it from other material practices. Numerous scholarly references bind clay and ceramics to the sense of touch: Paul Valéry, Philip Rawson, James Elkins and Donald Kuspit, amongst others, all write effusively on the sensory properties of clay and ceramic material.⁶⁸ As Elkins states: 'ceramics can be thought of as the visual art where sensual properties are at their most intense.'⁶⁹ Thus, clay and ceramic materiality invest their objects with a sense of

⁶⁶ Kuspit (2010), n.p.

⁶⁷ Margetts (2017), p.217.

⁶⁸ Valéry (1960); Rawson (1984), p.20; Elkins (2002); Kuspit (2010), n.p.

⁶⁹ Elkins (2002), p.8.

human immediacy through the trace of touch, whilst their diverse yet ubiquitous material states—rough, smooth, pliable, unyielding, delicate, robust—connect to habitual body memory.

Touch sense is implicated in the vessel through its utilitarian familiarity. While ties to this vernacular form can be seen as problematic for clay-based practices within hierarchical discourses around art/craft—often played out through curatorial strategies of display—Gray notes that ‘it is impossible to ignore the centrality of the vessel’ within ceramic art.⁷⁰ Its symbolism imparts echoes beyond the boundaries of utility, in works that operate within the ambiguity of the expanded field of contemporary ceramic practice. As Racz notes, the vessel is a ‘timeless and archetypal prop of civilisation.’⁷¹ It can thus be understood as a potent reference, providing a unique point of human connection resonating through sensory values, but also emotionally, conceptually and temporally.

Bound up with one another and impossible to separate, the social, cultural and temporal characteristics of ceramic artefacts and artworks are perhaps the most phenomenologically charged. Ceramic is tied to social and cultural identity unlike any other material. It is implicated in human survival, spiritual and ceremonial activity, domesticity, industrial and economic development, social class systems and cultural tendencies.⁷² Artist Stephen Dixon describes ceramic as ‘a uniquely important material for the historian and the archaeologist, for piecing together the narratives of civilisation.’⁷³ But above all, ceramic endures, reaching back millennia through history, offering evidence to support a phenomenological depth-oriented understanding of temporality.

⁷⁰ Gray (2017), p.111. Laura Breen (2016), p.159, notes that while the Serpentine Gallery’s 1987 exhibition *Vessel* was intended to be inclusive, the art/craft divide was highlighted through display: conceptually driven artists’ vessels were freed from plinth-based presentation, unlike works by ceramic practitioners.

⁷¹ Racz (2017), p.80, is paraphrasing John Houston’s thoughts from his catalogue essay for the exhibition *The Sculptural Vessel*.

⁷² Rawson (1984), p.6; Gormley (2004), p.85; Shaw (2016), p.90; Margetts (2017), p.217; Greenhalgh (2021), p.50.

⁷³ Dixon, S. (2014). Why Clay? *Interpreting Ceramics*, Issue 14. Available from: <http://www.interpretingceramics.com/issue014/articles/06.htm>

While art has traditionally been positioned around optical and conceptual experience, craft discourses have historically been dominated by materiality.⁷⁴ While such dualism is not the focus of this discussion, the convergence of conceptual artistic strategies with material presence—implicit with metaphoric, associative, experiential and existential resonance—is understood here as a productive state. Clay and ceramic materiality are conceptually complex and when applied within artistic frameworks they produce meaning in ways that distinguish them from other material practices. Importantly, these distinctive qualities offer valuable opportunities for phenomenological interpretation, are employed effectively in this study to support a hypothesis of embodied accounts of viewer experiences of clay and ceramic artworks.

Terminology

Terminology concerning artwork made from clay or ceramic materials lacks consensus. In discourses originating from the specialist field of ceramics numerous phrases are widely employed, yet also contested and disputed. ‘Ceramic sculpture’, ‘sculptural ceramics’, ‘art-oriented ceramics’, ‘clay-based artwork’, and ‘clay practice’ are the most common, yet all seem problematic in some way for different people. Ceramicist and writer Paul Mathieu vehemently argues that the terms ‘ceramic sculpture’ and ‘sculptural ceramics’ cannot be conflated.⁷⁵ He insists that the former simply registers the physical material through which sculpture comes into being, thus it can be connected to any field of practice. ‘Sculptural ceramics’, however, emerges from a subject-specialist disposition, and embodies a conceptually complex character embedded with associative qualities and meaning stemming from the richness of ceramic history and tradition to which it is attached. For Mathieu, the latter term ‘transcends mere materiality [...] to signify both the art and the material.’⁷⁶

Mathieu’s argument for differentiation resonates here. Yet whilst this research actively acknowledges the distinctive qualities of clay practices that emerge from a subject-specialist position as a critical aspect of the research discourse, the term ‘sculptural ceramics’ is found to be problematic. As previously noted, the field of ceramics has expanded to include practices that, whilst rooted in subject-specialist tradition, operate

⁷⁴ Adamson, G. (2007). *Thinking Through Craft*. Oxford and New York p.39; Kjørup, S. (2018). Art as the Other? Reflections on Craft’s and Fine Art’s Places in the Aesthetic Field. In: Bull, K.A. and Gali, A. (eds.) *Documents on Contemporary Crafts No.5: Material Perceptions*. Oslo, Norway: Norwegian Crafts, pp.22-24.

⁷⁵ Mathieu, P. (2011). In Response to a Review. *Ceramics: Art and Perception*, 84, p.96.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

beyond conventional sculptural contexts and are often more closely connected to Krauss's expanded field.⁷⁷ The artworks selected for discussion within this thesis do not all comfortably fit the designation 'sculptural ceramics.' Cummings' practice shifts between sculpture and immersive environment, and is almost exclusively constructed with raw clay (fig.4). Murphy's artworks vacillate between digitally enhanced vernacular objects, sculpture and interactive design (fig.6), and Bakewell's practice includes architecturally inspired installation as well as sculpture, at times juxtaposing raw clay with fired material (figs.2 & 7).

Gray challenges the term 'sculptural ceramics', finding the prefix *sculptural* a 'lazy' definition. She suggests that 'by adopting another discipline's objectifying label [...] there is a danger of creating self-doubt.'⁷⁸ Certainly, the language employed by such terminology seems implicit with hierarchical and pejorative overtones. Within the adjective 'sculptural' there is an inference that the artwork in question references sculpture, aspires to be sculpture even, but is not sculpture per se. And whilst the alternative term 'art-oriented ceramics' is more inclusive of the potential manifestations that artworks may take, it seems similarly problematic, offering a tendency towards art rather than claiming that status for itself. And by remaining rooted to ceramic materiality, both terms are limiting for this research, which examines practices that operate with clay in both fired and unfired states.

In her essay 'Contemporary Clay', artist Clare Twomey notes that the borrowing of terminology from other disciplines has played an important emancipatory role for practitioners operating within the diverse field of ceramics. Existing phrases offered critical contexts and identities for their work as they began to engage with discourses situated within the wider sphere of visual arts. However, in the contemporary landscape where art/craft dualisms have largely dissipated, terminology has necessarily become 'inclusive and transferable' according to Twomey.⁷⁹ She uses 'clay-based work' and 'clay practice', terms that seem apposite for this research.⁸⁰ They are open-ended and flexible enough to incorporate the diverse approaches to making inherent within the case study group, whilst retaining material specificity that acknowledges both raw substance and

⁷⁷ Krauss (1979b).

⁷⁸ Gray (2017), p.xi.

⁷⁹ Twomey, C. (2007). Contemporary Clay. In: Hanaor, Z. (ed.) *Breaking the Mould: New Approaches to Ceramics*. London: Black Dog, p.26.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.32-33.

fired/glazed ceramic form.

Glenn Adamson notes the significance of the shift to adopt non-specific terminology that occurred within art practice post 1960s. He identifies the contemporary terms 'work', 'practice' and 'site', as versatile and free from semantic meaning, unlike the evocative language attached to ceramics such as 'object', 'studio', and 'craft.'⁸¹ Victor Burgin's words, quoted by Adamson, demonstrate the impact of linguistic changes on a field as he reflects on the rejection of the descriptions *action* and *object* by Conceptualism. He states:

Art practice was no longer to be defined as an artisanal activity, a process of crafting fine objects in a given medium, it was rather to be seen as a set of operations performed in a *field* of signifying practices, perhaps centred on a medium but certainly not bounded by it.⁸²

Burgin's notion of 'a field of signifying practices' offers a useful frame of reference for current clay practices that gather under the umbrella term 'ceramics'; whilst rooted in material specificity, they are not limited by it. It is important to recognise this flexibility of contemporary approaches to clay in the terminology employed here. Following Twomey, the designations 'clay-based artwork', 'clay practice' and 'clay practitioner', or simply 'artist', will be used throughout this thesis, thus maintaining an open-ended approach to terminology that reflects the concerns of both the research and the case study participants, as well as the diversity of field itself. At times, the term 'ceramic artwork' will be included when referencing fired works; the umbrella term 'ceramic/s' will also appear, denoting the universally accepted description of the wider field of practice. As Laura Breen notes, the word ceramics, with its inherent ambiguity, was historically adopted as a means of accommodating 'divergent forms of clay practice' and it will be considered as such here.⁸³

Applying open-ended terminology acknowledges the diversity of contemporary practices operating from within the field of ceramics, whilst being inclusive of post-disciplinary approaches to art-making by dissolving dualistic art-craft categorizations. Clay is acknowledged as the primary material, but method, approach, outcome, material

⁸¹ Adamson (2007), p.167

⁸² Victor Burgin, cited by Adamson (2007), p.168, emphasis in original.

⁸³ Breen (2016), p.42.

state and field are fluid under this prefix. However, this does not mean that Mathieu's vociferous claim for the resonance of ceramic identity is lost—surely it is embedded in the materiality of artwork itself? As Twomey states, 'it is vital to acknowledge that the recognition of materials is intrinsic to the content and conceptual language of the piece, and by extension our reading of the piece as an audience.'⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Twomey (2007), p.26.

Methodology

Theoretical Framework

The research positions clay and ceramic artworks within the discourse of embodied audience perception. It considers their distinctive material and conceptual qualities that are differential from other forms of three-dimensional art practice to establish an innovative theoretical framework for clay-based making that applies new perspectives to existing phenomenological critique of art. The thesis thus proposes clay-based artworks as phenomenologically compelling, offering distinct characteristics that reveal and support embodied viewer experiences.

When considering the notion of embodiment in qualitative research, Laura Ellingson notes:

In resisting the mind-body split, researchers can understand embodiment not as actions and practices that our bodies do and that our minds subsequently make sense of, but rather as our whole body-selves making sense of the world and producing knowledge. Bodies are complex systems that *include* the brain and central nervous system but are not interpreted solely by them. Instead, knowing is a corporeal process that is tied up with our ontology, or way of being-in-the-world.⁸⁵

This research acknowledges the complex, holistic process of knowledge-making that Ellingson describes. It thus adopts a research strategy that incorporates a range of methods that are both cerebral and corporeal to support the development of a robust critical framework that situates clay-based practice within the discourse of embodiment. It takes an interpretive position that draws on both theoretical and experiential data gained from various fields of knowledge: phenomenology, anthropology, neuroscience, sensory research, and theories of space, art, film, technology and craft. Researcher and case study subjectivities are also important knowledge sources.

Whilst this study draws on a hermeneutic phenomenological framework, it does not ascribe to a phenomenological methodology per se. Leading writer on phenomenological research, Max Van Manen, identifies hermeneutic phenomenology as ‘a method of abstemious reflection on the basic structures of the lived experience of human existence.’⁸⁶ For him, and others, phenomenological practice is a method of

⁸⁵ Ellingson, L. (2017). *Embodiment in Qualitative Research*. New York; London: Routledge, p.16.

⁸⁶ Van Manen, M. (2014). *Phenomenology of Practice: Meaning-Giving Methods in Phenomenological Research and Writing*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, p.26.

questioning that engages with pre-reflective human experience in order to gain insight into everyday being.⁸⁷ Generally speaking, applied phenomenological research centres on social enquiry—although not always so—covering a range of human experiences or ‘modes’ of existence such as illness, disability, gender, age, homebirth, religious experience or exercise, to name but a few.⁸⁸ Research findings are generated through data arising from reflective experiences of research participants, captured through diverse methods via processes of description and interpretation rather than explanation.⁸⁹ Van Manen makes a crucial distinction between thinking philosophically *about* phenomenology through exegesis, and the act of *doing* phenomenology, which involves ‘reflecting in a phenomenological way on the living meanings of everyday experiences, phenomena and events.’⁹⁰ Rather than performing a phenomenological investigation focused on the lived experience of viewers of clay-based art that reveals their pre-reflective insights—or indeed those of the artist’s own lived experience of art making—the research instead adopts a philosophical position *influenced* by phenomenology.

For academic Linda Finlay, phenomenological research occurs when ‘the researcher has adopted a special, open phenomenological attitude which, at least initially, refrains from importing external frameworks and sets aside judgements about the realness of the phenomenon.’⁹¹ In contrast, this research adopts a strategy that actively embraces a range of external theoretical frameworks, which shape the development of an innovative critical hypothesis. Interpretive textual analysis is employed to expose the unique phenomenological *potentiality* of clay-based artworks for audiences. The research also integrates interpretive researcher responses to case study artworks, which, when synthesised with academic literature, offer empirical contexts. The research position is thus best described as what Finlay and others refer to as ‘phenomenologically inspired

⁸⁷ See also: Vagel, M. (2018). *Crafting Phenomenological Research*. 2nd ed. Oxon; New York: Routledge; Leavy, P. (2017). *Research Design: Quantitative, Qualitative, Mixed Methods, Arts-based, and Community-based Participatory Research Approaches*. New York and London: The Guilford Press; Gray, D.E., (2014). *Doing Research in the Real World*. 3rd ed. London; LA; Sage; Smith, J. A., Larkin, M., and Flowers, P. (2009). *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research*. 2nd ed. London: SAGE; Willis, J.W. (2007). *Foundations of Qualitative Research: Interpretive and Critical Approaches*. London: SAGE; Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA; London: Sage.

⁸⁸ Fernandez, A. V., (2017). The Subject Matter of Phenomenological Research: Existentials, Modes, and Prejudices. *Synthese*, 194 (9), pp.3554–3555.

⁸⁹ Van Manen (2014), p.43.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.23.

⁹¹ Finlay, L. (2009). Debating Phenomenological Research Methods. *Phenomenology of Practice*, 3 (1), p.8.

or phenomenologically orientated.⁹² Consequently, it operates within an interpretive paradigm that is sympathetic to, but not exclusively phenomenological in orientation, prioritising the multiplicity of meanings that are understood as culturally and historically situated, and arrived at through subjective interpretation.⁹³ Crucially, the interpretive research approach acknowledges 'the researcher's subjectivities and role in the interpretation of meaning [...]. Subsequently, data are interpreted by the researcher through their own alternative streams of consciousness, drawing on their valuable expert knowledge.'⁹⁴ As such, an interpretive approach is an appropriate ontological and epistemological orientation for this research.

Conceptualising Data

Given that this research strategy incorporates diverse findings that are theoretically and experientially derived, academic Noreen Garman offers a useful model for an interpretive approach that integrates these disparate positions whilst celebrating 'the authorial voice.'⁹⁵ Garman employs the term 'text' rather than 'data' to describe research results, which she breaks down into three types: experiential, theoretic and discursive texts. According to Garman, experiential texts are descriptive accounts of the 'author's version of reality', bringing the reader closer to the subject by creating a 'shared space where author and reader come together.'⁹⁶ Theoretic texts, for Garman, reflect a more distant, analytic and interpretive researcher response to the experiential texts, enabling persuasive, personal lines of discourse to develop. She notes: 'By probing the experiential text rhetorically and generating conceptual explanations, we hope that a provocative and convincing theoretic text will begin to emerge.'⁹⁷ Finally Garman offers the notion of 'discursive texts' as a means of employing theoretical literature to support the developing thesis arguments, preferring to think of these texts as on-going 'thoughtful conversation[s] with scholars, who influence [the] thinking' throughout the thesis.⁹⁸ Garman states:

⁹² Ibid., p.9.

⁹³ Leavy (2017), p.129; Gray (2014), p.23.

⁹⁴ Mayoh, J., and Onwuegbuzie, A.J. (2013). Toward a Conceptualization of Mixed Methods Phenomenological Research. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 9 (1), p.97.

⁹⁵ Garman, N. (2006). Imagining an Interpretive Dissertation: Voice, Text, and Representation. In: Garman, N. and Piantanida, M., (eds.) *The Authority to Imagine: The Struggle Towards Representation in Dissertation Writing*. New York: Peter Lang, p.3.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p.6.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p.7.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p.8.

The discursive text becomes part of the dissertation's intellectual map. As a result, the discursive text serves to enhance the author's persuasive ideas and to legitimize the insights of theoretic text. In addition, the discursive text provides the public space of intellectual dialogue and, as such, keeps the dangers of solipsism at bay.⁹⁹

The research thus implements Garman's conceptualisation of research findings as three distinct yet intersecting forms of text. This has enabled a robust study to be developed that recognises the subjective nature of an interpretive enquiry whilst ensuring rigorous criticality by analysing experiential subjectivity within a wider discursive theoretical frame.

Inspired by Garman's proposition, discursive texts are thus understood here as research findings that arise from textual analysis of scholarly writing from various fields of knowledge that shape the theoretical framework of the thesis. Experiential texts are generated through my subjective, descriptive responses to case study artworks, experienced either during studio visits or in exhibitions. The case study interview transcripts reveal the artists' personal reflections on their own practices and are also considered experiential texts. Garman's notion of the theoretic text is employed within the research to bring the experiential and discursive texts together through analytical processes. Theoretic texts critically navigate these contrasting positions, forging connectivity by finding synergies whilst maintaining an authorial voice. Theoretic texts have also emerged, in part, through dialogue between the artists and me during the interview process, whereby analytical resonances emerge. Ultimately, Garman understands the interpretive research process as an imaginative practice that moves through unknown territory towards authorial representation.¹⁰⁰ Conceptualising the research through Garman's intersecting yet distinct textual voices establishes a critically reflexive framework that results in a diverse but comprehensive body of research findings. Together, these texts shape a persuasive discourse that embodies intellectual rigour whilst retaining an imaginative and personal identity. As Garman notes:

It is in the process of writing that one faces the need to claim the right of authorship and that, in turn allows one to imagine the representation. Yet it is the need to imagine the representation that also pushes one claim to authority.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p.12.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

Garman's recognition of descriptive, first person, experiential texts as a core aspect of an interpretive research strategy is crucial to this discourse. Her methodological approach is formed from her wealth of academic experience working within the field of education. However, this perspective is also taken up by a number of contemporary art writers such as film and media theorists Vivian Sobchack and Laura U. Marks, sensory researcher Ellen Esrock, cultural geographer Harriet Hawkins and art historian Jenni Lauwrens.¹⁰² In discussing her hermeneutic method, Lauwrens argues that anecdotal researcher descriptions of artworks are important for understanding the 'experiential dimension' of the work.¹⁰³ As she explains:

My aim is not to discount semiotic, ideological, narrative and socio-cultural interpretation; rather, I want to show that the video's critical potential unfolds precisely from a rich somatic experiential encounter with the work. [...] I first closely describe the video. This guarantees—or at least commits to—the specificity and particularity of the argument thereby avoiding vagueness and generalizations. From this rich descriptive foundation, I explore how the video may affect a viewer viscerally [...] refer[ing] anecdotally to my own and other people's responses to this video. This kind of hermeneutic approach is often used by art historians writing about the experiential dimension of image encounters rather than analyzing an image's representational content.¹⁰⁴

Thus, Lauwrens demonstrates how Garman's methodological approach might operate within the context of art.

Research Strategy

Three interconnecting methods have been employed to develop a robust and interrogative enquiry resulting in a rich body of texts derived from a range of sources. These include textual analysis, which supports the development of theoretical positions applied to new contexts; case studies of selected clay-based practitioners that situate the

¹⁰² Marks, L.U. (2002). *Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press; Sobchack, V. (2004). *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press; Esrock, E. (2010). Embodying Art: The Spectator and the Inner Body. *Poetics Today*, 31 (2), 217-250; Esrock, E. (2003). Touching Art: Intimacy, Embodiment and the Somatosensory System. *The Italian Academy for Advanced Studies in America: Fellows' Seminar Working Papers*. New York: Columbia University, September 2003. Available from <https://doi.org/10.7916/D8PK0NG7>; Hawkins, H. (2010). 'The Argument of the Eye'? The Cultural Geographies of Installation Art. *Cultural Geographies*, 17 (3), 321-340; Lauwrens, J. (2019). Seeing Touch and Touching Sight: A Reflection on the Tactility of Vision. *The Senses and Society*, 14 (3), 297-312; Lauwrens, J. (2018a). More than Meets the Eye: Embodied Engagement with After the Last Supper. *Art Journal*, 77 (2), 8-23; Lauwrens, J. (2018b). Trust Your Gut: Fleshing Out an Embodied Encounter with Nicola Grobler's The Visitor Centre. *Critical Arts*, 32 (2), 83-99; Lauwrens, J. (2012). Welcome to the Revolution: The Sensory Turn in Art History. *Journal of Art Historiography*, 7, 1-17.

¹⁰³ Lauwrens (2019), p.300.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

theoretical research propositions within an empirical, experiential context, whilst also contributing knowledge gained through artists' voices; experiential researcher accounts of my own embodied responses to case study artworks. Each method is discussed in detail below.

Textual Analysis

Textual analysis is the primary research method used here. Originating from a range of academic fields, selected literature has been analysed and synthesised in relation to the research questions. The breadth of knowledge arising from these scholarly texts cultivates a rigorous critical framework supporting three research themes that have emerged from this process; these frame the main thesis chapters. Phenomenological theory develops an understanding of embodiment, its relationship to art, and the unique embodied perspectives of clay-based art practice. Texts focused on sensory perception develop a discourse of reciprocity between vision and touch, placing the viewing subject at the heart of this exchange. Theories of craft expose the social, cultural, temporal and anthropological qualities of clay material and ceramic artefacts that frame human experience and identify the art/craft/design interface as a productive space of critique. Attending to concepts of space and place enables interrogation of the relationship between bodies, artworks, and spaces of display, our relationship with imaginative immensity and the shared space of embodied being. The approach to analysing literature is informed by philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutic methodology.

The thesis interrogates embodied perception, thus the knowledge gained through text-based research intersects to create a theoretical framework that probes the potential for embodied spectatorship of clay-based art. According to Gadamer, hermeneutics bridges the gap between the familiar world of interpreter and that which is unfamiliar, or alien—the text.¹⁰⁵ This is highly significant: I assimilate my 'familiar horizons,' (my father's pottery practice/my own awareness of clay-based practice) with the alien, recognised here as theories of phenomenology, anthropology, embodiment, digital media, craft, film, sculpture, sensory perception, neuroscience and space. Crucially for Gadamer, 'the knower's own present situation is already constitutively involved in any

¹⁰⁵ Linge, D. (1977). Editors Introduction. In: Gadamer, H. *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Trans. by David E. Linge. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, xi-lviii.

process of understanding.’¹⁰⁶ This is clearly the case here; my history shapes my comprehension of that which is unknown. As academic David E. Linge states: ‘Our prejudices do not cut us off from the past, but initially open it up to us.’¹⁰⁷

According to Gadamer, understanding is thus rooted in the present situation, and is essentially a mediation or translation of past meaning into the present situation.¹⁰⁸ When examining texts, I am interpreting them with my own historicity as an integral aspect and, in this way, there is a mediation of past into present. I am also examining texts that are written from a particular perspective/tradition/history and am making them relevant for this particular moment and this particular discourse. Linge notes that for Gadamer, ‘[i]t is precisely in confronting the otherness of the text—in hearing its challenging viewpoint [...] that the reader’s own prejudices (i.e., his present horizons) are thrown into relief and thus come to critical self-consciousness.’¹⁰⁹ This is a valuable perspective when considering the ethical dimension of the research. By adopting a hermeneutical position, textual analysis remains critically robust. ‘Genuine questioning’ maintains the openness of the text, avoiding any sense of ‘presumed finality’ in meaning that could emerge through the text or the interpreter’s judgment.¹¹⁰ As Linge explains: ‘To locate the question of the text is not simply to leave it, but to put it again, so that we, the questioners, are ourselves questioned by the subject matter of the text.’¹¹¹ This open hermeneutical attitude has been applied to textual interpretation throughout the research.

In summary, a hermeneutic position is undertaken as part of the research framework that mediates between the historical otherness of the text, and the present situation of the researcher, taking account of their own history. Thus, I make the subject of the text (what motivates it) my own. Following Gadamer, the meaning of the text is found through interpretation, then re-imagined through the interpreter’s current situation.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p.xiv.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p.xxi.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

Case Studies

Case studies are integrated into the research strategy to support textual analysis. Five clay-based artists whose work, in various ways, reflects the concerns of this research, have been selected as case study participants. A thorough examination of their practices enabled experiential data to be generated and examined, and broader research themes identified, providing opportunities to test theoretical research findings within a practical context.

The primary research method for the case studies is qualitative. Case studies have been developed through in-depth interviews with each participant over the course of the research process, as well as through my own experiential responses to their artworks. The interview format was semi-structured, allowing subjective responses to emerge from interviewees' individual positions, approaches, and conceptual motivations for their work, a method supported by the interpretative perspective of the methodology. Interview questions were framed in relation to theoretical research findings that correlate with individual artist's practices, whilst also addressing core themes pertinent to all artists. This has resulted in a unique set of questions designed specifically for each interviewee. Analysis of case study data was inductive and hermeneutic: discursive and descriptive interpretation of oral interviews and visual experiences have been scrutinised and synthesised with the discursive texts to extrapolate a new hypothesis that situates clay-based art practices within the discourse of embodied spectatorship.

Case study interviews have offered opportunities to correlate interpretative researcher accounts of artworks with those of the artists'. Unforeseen insights relevant to the research were exposed through this approach, helping to establish a thorough and detailed account of their practices that address the research questions. As previously noted, phenomenological case studies are often conducted to examine lived experience of participants. In this case, the interviews are not phenomenologically driven, yet they provide a means of getting closer to the artworks themselves.

The case study group of five contemporary clay-based artists comprises: Sam Bakewell (UK), Phoebe Cummings (UK), Ingrid Murphy (UK), Nao Matsunaga (UK) and Johannes Nagel (D). All were trained within a subject-specialist ceramic tradition, and each has a well-established career within the field of ceramics and beyond, exhibiting both

nationally and internationally. Qualitative research scholar Patricia Leavy advocates 'strategic [...] sampling [of research participants] in order to find "information-rich cases" that best address the research purpose and questions.'¹¹² With this in mind, the selection process was informed by discursive research findings; these revealed relevant areas of focus that guided the development of a coherent and "information-rich" case study group.

Each of the selected artists' practices intersects with four core characteristics identified through this process which include:

- bodily association: encountered through scale, material presence, sensory qualities, associative form and immersive experiences.
- spatial performativity: both physical and conceptual.
- crafted identity: evidenced through skilled material knowledge, processes of making, traces or implication of manual labour, and references to ceramic heritage.
- sensory qualities: tactile, auditory and olfactory, activated through physical presence, imaginative processes or tacit bodily remembrance.

The case study group also incorporates a diverse range of clay-based artwork to test and apply the research findings in rigorous and meaningful ways, thus establishing the breadth of possible applications for the new critical framework developed here.

Variability of scale, material processes, qualities, technologies used and conceptual positions are evident across this data group. As demonstrated below, selected case study artworks manifest the research concerns via a range of strategies, evidenced through site-specific practices, raw clay installations, interactive technologies, found ceramic objects and abstract sculptural forms.

Phoebe Cummings works in raw material, with her temporary sculptures and installations recording the natural transitions of clay as it dries (fig.8-9). Cummings' work is ideally suited to the research concerns; her immersive environments are sensorially charged through their temporal and material characters, with deterioration often a key aspect. Drawing physically and conceptually upon decorative ceramic tradition, their crafted presence is clearly evident and provides valuable interpretive

¹¹² Leavy (2017), p.148.

opportunities to explore the relevance of craft references within the thesis discourse. Sam Bakewell also incorporates human-scale installation alongside intimate crafted detail. Yet his eclectic practice simultaneously explores visceral abstract form and the material ambiguities of ceramic and clay media (fig.10). The experiential qualities of gestural clay often contrast with highly skilled, carefully crafted outcomes, heightening awareness of these characteristics, whilst disturbing spatial understanding through shifts in scale and processes of viewing.

In his references to ancient cultural activity, Nao Matsunaga's work offers the opportunity to examine temporal notions of space, as well shared perspectives of embodiment, both important aspects of this investigation. His abstract sculptures shift between a knowingly irreverent use of materials, and a more primordial human connection to making and matter (fig.12). Their tactile surfaces practically demonstrate important theoretical research findings: Merleau-Ponty's correlation of vision and touch, and J.J. Gibson's theory of affordance, both implemented within this discourse of embodiment.

Ingrid Murphy's interactive practice also presents opportunities to practically test these theories through its interface of digital media and traditional ceramic technologies (fig.11). Integrating augmented reality, QR codes, touch capacitance technologies, and 3D scanning and printing with found ceramic artefacts, or slip-cast porcelain forms replicated from vernacular ceramic objects, her work engages audiences in multi-sensory, participatory encounters. Conceptually, Murphy explores notions of connectivity, as well as the social, cultural and sensory resonance of ceramic objects in human lives—key foci for positioning ceramics as powerful signifiers in accounts of embodied experience. The vernacular resonance of ceramic objects is also present in Johannes Nagel's ceramic sculptures, which occupy an intermediate ground found in the slippage between domestic vessel and sculptural form (fig.13). Nagel's practice introduces the important reference of the vessel into the research frame. His expressive works navigate relationships between vessel, body, material, gesture, ritual and imaginative space, with all their implicit historical, anthropological and sensory potency.



Figs.8-9. Phoebe Cummings, *An Ugly Aside*, 2019, clay, wood, polythene, steel, wire.



Fig.10. Sam Bakewell, *Things You Take, Things You Take Too Far*, 2021, ceramic.



Fig.11. Ingrid Murphy, *Plate Synth*, 2019, porcelain, glaze, lustre, wooden tray, PCB board.



Fig.12. Nao Matsunaga, *Palace of Coming and Going*, 2012, ceramic, wood, acrylic paint.



Fig.13. Johannes Nagel, (from left to right) *Gold Planes*, 2020, porcelain, glaze; *Lust for Lustre #3*, 2020, porcelain, pewter.

There are many academic instances of theoretical ideas being deliberated through detailed accounts of artists' practices that validate the inclusion of case studies as part of the strategic approach of this study.¹¹³ In particular, Rosalind Krauss' influential text *Passages of Modern Sculpture* clearly supports this method of enquiry. Here, she investigates both formal and expressive developments in sculpture of the twentieth century through interpretation of a small but select group of sculptural practitioners and their artworks.¹¹⁴ This enables her to construct a critical and theoretical argument that places temporality at the heart of modern sculptural discourse. Krauss acknowledges that the limited number of artistic representations align her text with the processes of case study, noting:

¹¹³ For instance, Merleau-Ponty's essays 'Cezanne's Doubt' (published 1945), 'Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence' (published 1952), and 'Eye and Mind,' (published 1961) are all philosophical studies of modern painting. For all of these essays see Galen Johnson's *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader* (1993). Helen Fielding (2011) offers a contemporary example of phenomenological ideas developed through sculptor Anne Truitt's practice.

¹¹⁴ Krauss, R. (1981). *Passages in Modern Sculpture*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

These case studies are intended to develop a group of concepts that is not only revealing of the sculptural issues involved in the particular works in question but can also be generalized to apply to the wider body of objects that form the history of sculpture in the past century.¹¹⁵

Rather than attempting an inclusive, historical survey, Krauss' guiding principle in her selection of artists and artworks for her text was their relevance to the core themes that she identified as differentiating modern sculpture from that which preceded it. Similarly, the case study method for this research is directed by core theoretical foci that distinguish the unique embodied qualities of clay-based artworks. Each of the selected artists offers diverse opportunities to engage with the research ideas in depth, whilst building a more universal frame of reference that can be implemented within the wider field of contemporary ceramics and beyond.

Experiential Writing

Film and media theorists Laura U. Marks and Vivian Sobchack validate the assimilation first-person narratives into theoretical writing and critical analyses of artwork.¹¹⁶ Crucially, they acknowledge the openly entangled involvement of the author within such accounts. As previously noted, the thesis methodology is based on Noreen Garman's model,¹¹⁷ which integrates experiential, analytical and discursive texts; it thus employs a subjective perspective as one form of data generation. Garman's interpretive approach recognises the significance of the subjective voice alongside more objective positions when developing a critically robust discourse. Marks' and Sobchack's writing illuminates the possibilities of an embodied, subjective writing style that remains both visible and visceral within an academic context and is meaningful for thinking, experiencing and writing about art. Close corporeal attention to case study artworks undertaken here through writing evokes Marks' and Sobchack's ideas in a tangible and direct way. Marks offers the notion of 'haptic criticism' as a mode of critical art encounter that presses close upon the object of its focus; it is a way of thinking developed through proximity rather than detached and distanced observation.¹¹⁸

Crucial to this research is Sobchack's argument that phenomenological description does not need to correspond with a reader's own experience for it to be meaningful to them.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p.6.

¹¹⁶ See: Marks (2002); Sobchack (2004).

¹¹⁷ Garman (2006).

¹¹⁸ Marks (2002), pp. xi-xvii. See chapter two, pp.116-119, for a detailed discussion of haptic criticism.

For Sobchack, the writing itself introduces the possibility that the reader may ‘inhabit’ the lived experience of an artwork through the author’s narrative.¹¹⁹ She also claims that employing ‘autobiographical and/ or anecdotal experience’ within critical analyses does not dilute their rigour and objectivity, ‘but purposefully provides the phenomenological—and embodied—premises for a more processual, expansive, and resonant materialist logic [...]’.¹²⁰ The idea that someone is able to ‘inhabit’ an art encounter without living it endorses the method of including experiential texts here.

Sobchack and Marks’ evocative first–person descriptions of film and media works have greatly influenced my research strategy and writing style. My own experiences of case study artworks are included throughout chapter two and underscore the whole discourse via theoretic texts that align my particular perspectives with theory. Other art writers confirm the relevance of this approach by embedding personal responses to artworks within their critical analyses. These essays offer valuable examples of how experiential narratives of painting, sculpture, performance and installation deepens understanding beyond the subjective frame of the writer.¹²¹ Sensory researcher Ellen Esrock (2010) explains the significance of this methodological approach, noting the roles these different lenses play:

To capture these dual perspectives, I write both in the first person as “I” to convey a concreteness and a direct apprehension of experience and also in the third person, referring to “the spectator” and to “he or she,” particularly when framing abstractions.¹²²

Sobchack discusses the connective quality that subjective, experiential writing introduces to art criticism. She argues that ‘these instances are used to open up (rather than close down) our understanding of our more general and always social entailments with others [...]’.¹²³ Given the tacit social and cultural resonances of clay and ceramic materiality, Sobchack’s thoughts are apposite when attempting to elucidate the shared space of clay in chapter four. Conveying my personal sense of collective encounter experienced through Ingrid Murphy’s interactive work *Things Men Have Made* heightens

¹¹⁹ Sobchack (2004), p.5.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p.6.

¹²¹ Ellen Esrock (2003; 2010); Harriet Hawkins (2010); Amelia Jones (2015); Jenni Lauwrens (2018a; 2018b; 2019).

¹²² Esrock (2010), p.233.

¹²³ Sobchack (2004), p.3.

the sense of human connection experienced through clay.¹²⁴ As Sobchack states, including personal narratives in writing ‘suggest[s] the intimate and materially consequential bonds we have (whether we deny or embrace them) with all others and all things.’¹²⁵

Ethical Considerations

Theorising about subjective encounters with phenomena is problematic. Viewer experience of artworks is varied, influenced by a range of personal, social, cultural and political contexts, whilst different sites and methods of display also impact interpretation. Encounters with art are therefore unique to each spectator. The thesis aims to construct an interpretive critical framework relevant for analysing the embodied potentials of a broad range of clay-based practices for any viewer. It is important therefore to take an ethical research position that avoids solipsism and embraces difference.

According to art historian Amanda Boetzkes, phenomenological interpretation of artwork operates through a complex process that involves both sensory experience and sense making; the meaning of an artwork is always implicated within any individual art encounter. Boetzkes notes that phenomenology not only ‘raises questions about the embodied experience of art, but that it calls both the body itself and the meaning of the artwork into question through one another.’¹²⁶ Yet if entangled reciprocity between artwork and viewer ensues as phenomenology suggests, Boetzkes asks whether ‘a different look [can] ever find its place in the chiasmic relation between the seer and the object?’¹²⁷ She thus argues for an ethical approach to phenomenological art analyses that resists pre-conceived meanings and assumptions that may occur if spectator and artwork merge. As discussed earlier, this research framework is inspired by phenomenology rather than ascribing to a phenomenological methodology. However, the research strategy adopted here addresses the concerns that Boetzkes raises. It counteracts researcher assumptions by assimilating a range of texts from a variety of voices, generated through different methods, thus maintaining openness for new meanings to arise. Boetzkes goes on to show how phenomenology can indeed assume an ethical attitude to art interpretation. Through Rosalind Krauss’ thinking, she explains

¹²⁴ See chapter four, pp.217-224.

¹²⁵ Sobchack (2004), p.3.

¹²⁶ Boetzkes, A. (2009). Phenomenology and Interpretation Beyond the Flesh. *Art History*, 32 (4), p.690.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.697.

that 'the artwork confronts the viewer/artist as something outside of her or himself', thus they differ 'from one another despite the intimacy of the corporeal bond.'¹²⁸ She notes that for Krauss, the viewer's moving body is crucial to their interpretation, with meaning 'determined by the friction between the artwork and the viewer's attempt to stabilize a perception of it.'¹²⁹

Boetzkes' argument for an ethical interpretive approach to art is reflected through various art writers who guide this discourse, all of whom look to Merleau-Ponty.¹³⁰ Helen Fielding, in particular, shows how movement around sculpture in a public space is a shared experience that institutes a sense of otherness for spectators, and that art viewing is a collective mode of encounter. Film and media theorists Jorella Andrews, Vivian Sobchack and Laura U. Marks establish the ethical nature of vision, countering problematic narratives that focus on the dominating role of the detached observer.¹³¹ As they argue, for Merleau-Ponty, vision always includes alterity, and by acknowledging this, vision takes an ethical position.¹³² Furthermore, Amelia Jones elucidates the ethical nature of interpreting art through a phenomenological lens. Again, through Merleau-Ponty, she exposes the complex web of interrelations inherent within any reading of an image or art-object, identifying those 'hovering' outside the frame as equally significant 'bodies' within this experience.¹³³ According to Jones, artwork, artist and viewer together shape meaning through their coinciding individual histories and perspectives; every act of interpretation is thus unique, offering new and shifting revelations. As Linge has already shown, for Gadamer, '[i]t is precisely in confronting the otherness of the text [...] that the reader's own prejudices [...] are thrown into relief and thus come to critical self-consciousness.'¹³⁴ By engaging with feminist readings of Merleau-Ponty's texts, Jones offers a more complex understanding of embodied spectatorship that allows for

¹²⁸ Boetzkes (2009), p.707.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ See: Krauss (1966); Hawkins (2010); Fielding (2011); Lauwrens (2019).

¹³¹ See: Marks (2002), p.xiii; Andrews, J. (2014). *Showing Off!: A Philosophy of Image*. London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, p.9-18. Martin Jay interrogates the dominant model of vision in Western culture from the Renaissance onwards. In: Jay, M. (1988). *Scopic Regimes of Modernity*. In: Foster, H. (ed.) *Vision and Visuality: Discussions in Contemporary Culture, Number 2*. Seattle; Washington: Bay Press, pp.4-9.

¹³² See chapter two, pp.106-109, for explication of Merleau-Ponty's theory of vision.

¹³³ Jones, A. (2003). Meaning, Identity, Embodiment: The Uses of Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology in Art History. In: Arnold, D. and Iverson, I. (eds.) *Art and Thought*. Oxford; Malden, USA: Blackwell, p.72.

¹³⁴ Linge (1977), p.xix.

'specific differences such as those relating to gender or sexuality', thereby illuminating the ethical potential of Merleau-Ponty's model of vision.¹³⁵

As previously noted, Noreen Garman advocates employing discursive texts from a range of theoretical sources to avoid solipsism when operating through an interpretive framework. This discourse thus develops out of a range of existing theoretical positions, testing them within new contexts through analytical approaches to experiential research findings, thus maintaining a robust and rigorous research strategy that takes an ethical position.

Alongside my interpretive responses to selected artworks, the case study interview transcripts operate as another form of experiential text within the research. They have been analysed and synthesised in relation to the discursive texts gathered from theoretical sources. The artists' voices add additional insights to the interpretive framework. Selected excerpts from the transcripts are included throughout the thesis to illustrate and illuminate the ideas in hand. Rather than anonymous citation within the discourse, the interview extracts are credited to the relevant case study participant. All of the artists gave permission for their words to be included in the published thesis at the start of the research. They were also offered the opportunity to check their individual interview transcripts to ensure an ethical research approach to using these conversations within the thesis. The interviewees were advised that any part of the transcript they felt did not present an accurate depiction of their thoughts or practice could be amended or deleted in consultation with me. This gave the case study participants a sense of confidence in the research process.

Thesis Structure

The thesis is divided into four chapters. The first chapter takes the form of a literature review. Initially, it establishes an understanding of embodiment relevant to the research based on the writings of Merleau-Ponty, thereby positioning the discourse within an existing theoretical frame. The relevance of Merleau-Ponty's theory of perception for analysis of sculptural practice is examined, as are theories that establish the embodied

¹³⁵ Jones (2003), p.74. Lawrence Hass points out that Merleau-Ponty's concept of a universal living body reveals his white, cis male, Western bias. He thus fails to recognise the political and cultural pressures that shape perception. Hass notes the important critical work that feminist thinkers such as Judith Butler, Elizabeth Grosz, Luce Irigaray, Gail Weiss and Marion Young have brought to bear on Merleau-Ponty's texts; their thinking crucially acknowledges the 'fluid and multiple (and not binary) forms of lived embodiment that exist.' See: Hass, L. (2008). *Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, p.95.

reciprocity that occurs between viewer and artwork. A summary of texts that inform the development of three significant research themes is then undertaken, evaluating the relevance of these foci in relation to the research questions. These themes inform the following thesis chapters as detailed below.

The remaining three chapters interrogate specific foci found crucial for addressing the research questions. Each chapter builds on knowledge gained in the preceding one, offering additional perspectives of ideas previously established, whilst also engaging with new ideas. Together they construct an innovative theoretical framework that takes account of the distinct material and conceptual qualities of clay and ceramic artworks to assess their embodied potentials in relation to viewer experience.

Chapter two, 'Sensory Entanglements', examines the unique sensory qualities of clay-based artworks through focus on the relational structure of perception and tactile experience of looking; material presence and the intertwining of vision and touch; experiencing sensuous surfaces through haptic visuality; a sensory perspective of empathy and aesthetic experience; perception and kinaesthesia—moving with clay; temporality as a crucial vehicle for accessing the embodied resonance of clay-based art.

Chapter three, 'Crafting Embodiment', explores craft as a productive concept for interrogating the embodied potentials of clay-based artworks. The chapter is divided into two parts. Part one establishes the dynamic agency of craft understood as a fluid concept that permeates all forms creative practice, linked to sensuous perception as well as production. The art/craft/design interface is then proposed as a compelling axis for heightening perceptual encounters. Part two offers in-depth examination of selected case study artworks demonstrating the manifold ways that craft visibility manifests embodied experience in viewers of clay-based art. Foci explored here are the sensory realm of making and skill; 'touchability' and the visual affordances of crafted materiality; the human instinct to make and its significance for viewers of clay-based art; the temporal quality of ceramic tradition and making with clay; craft and bodily reciprocity; the somatic pull of functional form.

Chapter four, 'The Space of Clay' considers the significance of space and place in relation to embodied spectatorship of clay-based art. It examines the spatio-temporal resonances of ceramic objects with reference to their archaeological, anthropological, social, cultural and historic qualities. Imaginative and tacit modes of spatial experience

through clay-based artworks are considered, as are the spatial shifts that manifest when interactive technologies are integrated into ceramic artefacts. Finally, the shared space of being is located at the core of clay-based art's embodied identity, illuminating the unique space of clay.

Chapter one: Literature Review

Introduction

'[Ceramic] moves through time and space. Virtually everything we know about some cultures comes down to us through their pots. [...] So it has a *simultaneity* of ubiquity that no other invented material has ever enjoyed, or probably can enjoy going forward: a presence at every economic level, in every social class, in all periods, and all places.'¹³⁶ Paul Greenhalgh

Clay is a uniquely compelling substance. It is powerfully experiential and in both raw and fired states holds immense social, cultural, temporal, mythic and anthropological significance in human life. As art historian Paul Greenhalgh asserts, no other material is so closely connected with human existence reaching back millennia. I argue that these conceptually rich material qualities are phenomenologically and ontologically compelling, thus clay-based artworks have the capacity to stimulate embodied perception when viewers consciously engage with them in ways that other visual practices cannot. Taking account of these idiosyncratic properties, this thesis maps the profound ways that clay-based sculptures, installations and interactive objects might impact audiences, situating clay and ceramic art firmly within the lens of embodied viewer experience. Inspired by Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, it employs a diverse range of literature to interrogate these distinct potentials. As described in the methodology, the research triangulates three different types of text—experiential, theoretic and discursive—to guarantee a rigorous and ethical approach. This literature review focuses on the latter, demonstrating the range of academic writing considered here, the rationale for its selection, and the ways these texts impact, develop and support the research hypothesis.

The discourse draws on scholarly books, journal articles and published essays, originating from a variety of academic fields, ensuring the research is built upon a foundation of theoretical excellence. This inter-disciplinary breadth of existing knowledge has revealed synergies and connections that test, confirm and amplify ideas in hand. Whilst this thesis aligns itself with the phenomenological writings of Merleau-Ponty, philosophical critiques of his work offer important disciplinary perspectives that

¹³⁶ Greenhalgh (2021), pp.50-51.

extend his thinking.¹³⁷ Texts selected from the fields of art history and theory, digital media, cultural geography, sensory research and film theory either interrogate their discipline from a phenomenological standpoint, or partially integrate phenomenology into their methodology.¹³⁸ All this establishes the wider relevance of Merleau-Ponty's ideas and demonstrates a variety of applications for his work within existing theoretical models.¹³⁹

Other knowledge sources do not directly employ a phenomenological position, however, their selection rests upon affinities that are nevertheless apparent. For instance, correspondences exist between Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and the sensory research of psychologist J.J. Gibson, whose theory of affordance is integral to this hypothesis.¹⁴⁰ Philosopher Hubert L. Dreyfus notes that affordances arise through three distinct forms of embodiment as described by Merleau-Ponty,¹⁴¹ while philosopher Komarine Romdenh-Romluc points out that, like Gibson, Merleau-Ponty's thinking acknowledges 'the world as offering us possibilities for action [...]'.¹⁴² Correspondences emerge with Gibson's theory of perception elsewhere and are noted later in the review.¹⁴³

Whilst evidencing a diversity of disciplines, fields and approaches, the conceptual thread of embodiment runs through the literature. At times this manifests overtly, particularly in critical analyses of specific artworks by various writers through Merleau-Ponty's thinking.¹⁴⁴ His concept of embodiment is also foregrounded by art historian Alex Potts

¹³⁷ Hass (2008), Dillon (1997), and Fielding (1999) have been particularly helpful in elucidating Merleau-Ponty's work.

¹³⁸ For instance, Merleau-Ponty is cultural geographer Harriet Hawkins' (2010) sole reference when examining the notion of site through personal 'embodied enquiry' of installation practice. For Juhani Pallasmaa, Merleau-Ponty's theory of perception is one of many sources he uses in *The Thinking Hand* (2009) to explore embodied forms of thinking.

¹³⁹ See: Potts (2000); Esrock (2001); Marks (2002); Sobchack (2004); Hansen (2000; 2006a); Paterson (2007); Hawkins (2010); Pallasmaa (2009; 2011); Lauwrens (2018a; 2018b; 2019).

¹⁴⁰ Gibson, J.J. (1986). *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. New York and Hove, East Sussex: Psychology Press.

¹⁴¹ Dreyfus, H. L. (1996). The Current Relevance of Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Embodiment. *The Electronic Journal of Analytic Philosophy*, (4), n.p.

¹⁴² Romdenh-Romluc, K. R. (2011). Maurice Merleau-Ponty. In: Luft, S., and Overgaard, S. (eds.) *The Routledge Companion to Phenomenology*. London: Taylor and Francis, p.107.

¹⁴³ See: chapter one, p.68 & p.84, and chapter three, pp.158-163.

¹⁴⁴ Rosalind Krauss (1966); Alex Potts (2000), (2001); Amelia Jones (2003); Laura U. Marks (2002); Vivian Sobchack (2004); Jorella Andrews (2014); Harriet Hawkins (2010); Helen Fielding (2011); Jenni Lauwrens (2018a; 2018b; 2019).

and philosopher F. David Martin in relation to sculptural practice.¹⁴⁵ Similarly, although in different ways, philosophers Jeff Malpas and Edward Casey examine the embodied quality of place, while much of architect Juhani Pallasmaa's writing examines architecture, the act of making and artistic imagery through the lens of embodiment.¹⁴⁶ Likewise, when probing the 'phenomenological dimension of technology's experiential impact', media theorist Mark B.N. Hansen 'correlat[es] the aesthetics of new media with a strong theory of embodiment.'¹⁴⁷

Other texts touch upon embodiment more opaquely, such as geographer Doreen Massey's argument for the 'liveliness' of space.¹⁴⁸ She does not employ phenomenology and mentions embodiment only twice in *For Space*, yet a sense of embodiment is rooted within the kernel of Massey's thinking.¹⁴⁹ For her, space manifests through spatio-temporal entanglements as 'an interconnected system', thus it is ultimately social.¹⁵⁰ Massey's correspondence with Merleau-Ponty becomes evident through philosopher Helen Fielding, who highlights the social quality of his theory of perception, which she describes as 'a web of contextual relations and meanings.'¹⁵¹ Fielding also reveals Merleau-Ponty's depth-oriented embodiment as the 'intertwining of the temporality and spatiality of the lived body', which has unmistakable synergy with Massey's correlation of space and time.¹⁵²

While much of the craft-focused literature examined here does not engage with embodiment per se, it documents the primordial, historical, cultural and social essence of craft. These key qualities situate the handmade within a phenomenological frame, connecting it with embodied experience. For Merleau-Ponty, past, present and future

¹⁴⁵ Potts (2000); Martin, F.D. (1981). *Sculpture and Enlivened Space*. Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky.

¹⁴⁶ See: Malpas, J.E. (1999). *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, p.12; Casey, E.S. (1998). *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp.272-288. See also: Pallasmaa (2011); Pallasmaa, J. (2009). *The Thinking Hand: Existential and Embodied Wisdom in Architecture*. Sussex: Wiley and Sons ltd; and Pallasmaa, J. (2005). *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*. 2nd ed. Sussex: Wiley & Sons Ltd.

¹⁴⁷ Hansen, M.B.N. (2000). *Embodying Technesis: Technology Beyond Writing*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press, p.28, and Hansen, M.B. N. (2006a). *New Philosophy for New Media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT, p.3. See also: Hansen, M.B.N. (2006b). *Media Theory. Theory, Culture & Society*, 23 (2-3), 297-306.

¹⁴⁸ Massey, D. (2005). *For Space*. London; Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, p.13.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.185 & p.192 for Massey's references to embodiment.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.130 & p.195.

¹⁵¹ Fielding (2011), p.520.

¹⁵² Fielding (1999), p.78. Massey's theory of space is discussed more fully in chapter four, pp.204-207.

cohere within perceptual experience.¹⁵³ Art historian Howard Risatti posits a similar sense of shifting temporality for craft when he states:

In craft objects this historical past is linked together [...] with our modern present, for embedded within the craft objects we use every day resides the memory of our evolutionary moment, a memory that transcends ethnic and racial, economic and class, cultural and national boundaries.¹⁵⁴

Philosopher Henry Staten shares this view, alongside Pallasmaa, artist and writer Sandra Corse and Paul Greenhalgh. Their texts highlight the potential for craft—understood as both object and action—to unite the primordial with the present and future, an idea employed here to elucidate the embodied resonance of ceramic and clay.¹⁵⁵ These synergies across the literatures offer a range of distinctive interpretations of embodiment framed by different fields of knowledge, expanding the interrogative reach of the research whilst deepening the specificity of this idea.

Initially, this review offers a general definition of embodiment as it relates to the research, noting the authors who have helped elucidate this understanding. The relationship between Merleau-Ponty's ideas and sculpture is then briefly considered, as is the potential for embodied reciprocity to arise between viewer and artwork. The remainder of this chapter examines books and essays that gave rise to three themes that address the research questions, namely the sensorial nature of art viewing, the agency of craft references in art, and the embodied spatiality of clay. These foci developed around scholarly resonances evident across the range of discursive texts; this review maps the ideas integral to each theme and the literature that shapes their identities. A brief overview of the content covered for each theme is offered at start of their corresponding section below.

Other thematic potentials were identified early on in the research but did not form stand-alone foci as the thesis developed. The material dynamism of clay and ceramic

¹⁵³ Merleau-Ponty, M. (2014). *Phenomenology of Perception*. Trans. by Donald A. Landes, 2012. Oxon; New York: Routledge, p.87 & p.249.

¹⁵⁴ Risatti, H. (2007a). *A Theory of Craft: Function and Aesthetic Expression*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, p.59.

¹⁵⁵ See: Greenhalgh, P. (2002). Introduction: Craft in a Changing World. In: Greenhalgh, P. (ed.) *The Persistence of Craft*. London: A & C Black; Pallasmaa (2009); Corse, S. (2009). *Craft Objects and Aesthetic Contexts: Kant, Heidegger and Adorno on Craft*. Maryland, USA: University Press of America; Staten, H. (2019). *Techné Theory: A New Language for Art*. London; New York: Bloomsbury.

media is a central concern, as is the phenomenology of the imagination. Both address significant ideas that contribute to this discourse, however, it became evident that these conceptual issues are interwoven through each theme. Sensory perception and the crafted identities of clay-based art cannot be considered without commenting on how the materiality of ceramic or clay might impact each. Clay-based practice is, by its very nature, a material-focused discipline; raw or fired clay materiality must therefore underscore any discussion. Similarly, while imaginative processes are considered integral to perceptual experience, philosopher Gaston Bachelard finds correlation between imagination and clay substance.¹⁵⁶ He also proposes expansion of our inner sense of space through imaginative dreaming. To interrogate these specific research strands separately was unfeasible; ideas concerning materiality and imagination run through each chapter and although merged with other thematic foci, they are just as vital.

Understanding Embodiment

Scholarly research focused on embodiment varies across subject areas and fields,¹⁵⁷ so it is important to establish an understanding of the concept as it is employed here. Texts by many writers on phenomenology provided an in-depth contextual overview of embodiment from which the thesis argument develops.¹⁵⁸ Merleau-Ponty's theories deliver the specific philosophical framework. Various texts and articles have helped explicate his writing: philosophers M.C. Dillon, Helen Fielding, Lawrence Hass and Kathleen Lennon offer particularly useful interpretations of Merleau-Ponty's thinking.¹⁵⁹ Anthropologists Thomas Csordas and Frances Mascia-Lees and media theorist Mark B.

¹⁵⁶ Bachelard, G. (1983). *Water and Dreams: An Essay in the Imagination of Matter*. Reprint. Trans. by Edith Farrel. Dallas, TX: Pegasus Foundation and Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, p.105.

¹⁵⁷ See: Heinämaa, S. (2012). The Body. In: Luft, S. and Overgaard, S. (eds.). *The Routledge Companion to Phenomenology*. London: Routledge, p.222; Ladkin, D. (2012). Perception, Reversibility, "Flesh": Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology and Leadership as Embodied Practice. *Integral Leadership Review*, n.p.; Levisohn, A., and Gromala, D. (2009). Taro(t)ception: Eliciting Embodied, Interoceptive Awareness through Interactive Art. UC Irvine: *Digital Arts and Culture Conference 2009*. Available from <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/083507h4>

¹⁵⁸ Vörös and Gaitsch (2016), p.6, provide a valuable summary of 'the phenomenology of embodiment.' See also: Heinämaa (2012); Mertens (2011); Legrand (2011); Carruthers (2008); Schusterman (2012); and Zahavi (ed.) (2013).

¹⁵⁹ See: Dillon (1997); Fielding (1999); Hass, L. (2008). *Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press; Lennon, K. (2015). *Imagination and the Imaginary*. Abingdon, Oxfordshire; New York: Routledge. A wider body of writers on Merleau-Ponty has informed the research, including Hubert Dreyfus (1996); James Steeves (2001); Taylor Carmen (2005); Kelly Oliver (2008); Greg Johnson (2008); David Morris (2010); Dermot Moran (2010); Shaun Gallagher (2010); Sean D. Kelly (2002; 2011); Komarine Romndenh-Romluc (2012); Chon-ip Ng (2012); Simona Erjavec (2012).

Hansen demonstrate significant cultural contexts for thinking through embodied being.¹⁶⁰

Hansen describes phenomenological embodiment as ‘the (human) process of living through the body’, which entails ‘making bodily experience primary.’¹⁶¹ Csordas adds that ‘embodiment is our fundamental existential condition, our corporeality or bodiliness in relation to the world and other people.’¹⁶² There is general agreement throughout the literature that a symbiotic relationship between body and world lies at the heart of phenomenological embodied discourses, and that the perceiving body is located at the centre of experience of any kind.¹⁶³ As philosopher James B. Steeves states: ‘Perception is the most basic contact of the body with the world and forms a medium through which meaning is discovered or intended.’¹⁶⁴ From this perspective the body is understood to be a form of consciousness itself.¹⁶⁵

Embodiment can thus be summarised as our pre-reflective, subjective, bodily source of understanding that emerges through our interactions with other bodies, objects and environments as we make our way through the world.¹⁶⁶ Via our sensory, perceiving bodily self, meaning arises. This is not restricted to the purely physiological though; perception also incorporates social, cultural, temporal and emotional states.¹⁶⁷ In essence, embodiment describes the complexity of our lived experience.

While other phenomenologists such as Husserl, Sartre and Heidegger offer varied interpretations of being-in-the-world, it is Merleau-Ponty’s theories that are considered the most focused and thorough account of perception as it is manifested through bodily

¹⁶⁰ See: Hansen (2000, 2006a, 2006b); Csordas, T. (2011). Embodiment: Agency, Sexual Difference and Illness, pp. 137-156, & Mascia-Lees, F.E. (2011). Introduction, pp.1-2, both in: Mascia-Lees, F.E. (ed.) *A Companion to the Anthropology of the Body and Embodiment*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

¹⁶¹ Hansen (2000), p.27.

¹⁶² Csordas (2011), p.137; See also Lennon (2015), p.41.

¹⁶³ Hass (2008), p.127; Levisohn and Gromala (2009), n.p; Moran (2010), p.183; Csordas (2011), p.137; Legrande (2011), p.209; Mertens (2011), p.168; Ladkin (2012), n.p.; Lennon (2015), p.41; Chamarette (2017), n.p. See also: SAGE Knowledge (no date). Embodied Perception. *Sage Reference: Encyclopaedia of Perception*. Available from: www.sagepub.com.

¹⁶⁴ Steeves, J. (2001). The Virtual Body: Merleau-Ponty's Early Philosophy of Imagination. *Philosophy Today* 45 (4), p.374.

¹⁶⁵ Legrande (2011), p.212; Mertens (2011), p.168; Romdenh-Romluc (2011), p.107.

¹⁶⁶ Lennon (2015), p.41.

¹⁶⁷ See: Gallagher, S. (2010). Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Perception. *Topoi*, 29 (2), p.184; Romdenh-Romluc (2012), p.108; and Mascia-Lees (2011), p.2.

being.¹⁶⁸ His *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) places the body at the heart of perceptual encounters. It establishes that perception is lived through the body, and is both relational and shared. In 'Eye and Mind' (1961), Merleau-Ponty considers the viewer of art as crucial to the realisation of meaning; this serves as a pivotal touchstone for this thesis.¹⁶⁹ Most importantly, *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968) presents his theory of reversibility, a hypothesis that reveals the essential mutuality of sensory experience and is vital for addressing the research questions.

There is much precedent for critical approaches to art experience interrogated through Merleau-Ponty's vision because of the essential role he assigns the body and the value of this when considering the making and viewing of art. Art historian Jenni Lauwrens confirms that corporeality is central to visual aesthetic encounters. She notes that Merleau-Ponty's theories of perception underscore many contemporary art analyses, given that he 'insists on the corporeal and engaged nature of human experience rather than the detached rationality of Cartesian subjectivity [...]'.¹⁷⁰ As philosopher Daniel Guentchev argues, 'far from explicating the work of art, [Merleau-Ponty] is able to deliver the reader to a position from which she can be attentive to the embodied sense-making of art [...]'.¹⁷¹

Sculpture Through Merleau-Ponty's Lens

The unique material and associative qualities of clay-based art invite particularly potent modes of bodily engagement, thus Merleau-Ponty offers crucial perspectives for this thesis of embodied viewing. He wrote extensively on art, predominantly focused on painting, and a broad body of literature has delivered a valuable overview for this context.¹⁷² Nevertheless, it has been essential to establish a body of knowledge that tests the very different three-dimensional qualities of clay-based practices. Alex Potts argues that Merleau-Ponty's ideas have 'a particular bearing on sculpture because viewing

¹⁶⁸ Carmen, T., and Hansen, B.N. (eds) (2005). *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, p.4. See also: Moran (2010), p.177; Heinämaa (2012), pp.222-223; Gill (2000), p.45.

¹⁶⁹ Potts (2000), p.225. See also: Merleau-Ponty, M. (1993c [1961]). Eye and Mind. In: Johnson, G.A. (ed.). *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 121-150.

¹⁷⁰ Lauwrens (2012), p.15.

¹⁷¹ Guentchev, D. (2010). The Role of Painting in the Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty. *ASAGE: American Society for Aesthetics Graduate E-journal* 2 (2), Spring/Summer, p.1.

¹⁷² Galen Johnson (1993) presents a valuable context for Merleau-Ponty's essays on art from a range of writers. See also: Robert Hobbs (2001); Jonathan Gilmore (2005); Daniel Guentchev (2010); Sean D. Kelly (2011); Crowther (2013), (2009); Nicolas de Warren (2019).

sculpture is more akin to everyday processes of viewing in the world than is viewing painting.¹⁷³ He highlights key aspects of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy that reveal the acute embodied qualities of sculpture. These include 'the kinaesthetic and tactile dimensions' of sight;¹⁷⁴ vision as originating from a bodily horizon point; that visual experience is formed through multiple, shifting perspectives of phenomena shaped by our moving body; and that we encounter the world and its objects as 'a sphere of possible action' via the 'internalised sense we have of our bodies.'¹⁷⁵ According to Potts, Merleau-Ponty's ideas reveal the tactile register of sculpture, our bodily reciprocity with it, as well as the durational character of encountering such artworks. All destabilise perception thus heightening embodied awareness. For Potts, sculpture presents a very distinct mode of viewing, as he notes:

[O]ur attention is sustained by an intensified visual and kinaesthetic engagement with [sculpture] which is continually changing and shifting register. This is what makes its fixed shape and substance seem to come alive. [...] [T]he work momentarily becomes a little strange and elusive as well as being insistently present, unlike the objects we encounter more casually in the course of our everyday lives.¹⁷⁶

Potts' refocusing of Merleau-Ponty's ideas for sculpture has provided a crucial foundation for this research; as such, his text serves as a primary reference. Through site, scale, surface, display and integration of interactive technologies, the case study artworks all inhabit the multiple characteristics Potts identifies that manipulate viewer orientation and responses, eliciting new perceptual experiences therein.

Various writers further demonstrate Merleau-Ponty's profound influence on criticism of art, offering valuable precedents for developing the research aims. Rosalind Krauss considers the destabilising experience of encountering three-dimensional form through Merleau-Ponty's theory of perception, which also shapes Helen Fielding's understanding of the shared reality of viewing sculpture.¹⁷⁷ Jenni Lauwrens, cultural geographer Harriet Hawkins and artist Maria Coleman interrogate installation and new media practice through Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, while the film and media theorists Vivian

¹⁷³ Potts (2000), p.213.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p.214.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., pp.220. Rosalind Krauss (1966), pp.24-26, was the first to acknowledge the significance of Merleau-Ponty's idea for sculpture in her essay 'Allusion and Illusion in Donald Judd' published in *Artforum*.

¹⁷⁶ Potts (2000), p.1

¹⁷⁷ Krauss (1966); Fielding (2011).

Sobchack and Laura U. Marks expose the material surface qualities of film as a critical lens for considering embodied spectatorship. Their writing directly informs the content of chapter two and is considered further later in this review.¹⁷⁸

Viewer and Artwork: Embodied Reciprocity

While Rosalind Krauss' critique of Donald Judd's sculpture exposed the multiple perspectives of perception through Merleau-Ponty's ideas, it also situated the viewer of art as a mutual constituent in meaning-making.¹⁷⁹ This idea is highly significant for the research; recognising the agency of the viewer/artwork dynamic establishes the embodied connection between audiences and art. Merleau-Ponty first posited this innovative perspective in his last essay 'Eye and Mind'. Here, artworks are understood as independent, transformational entities activated by processes of viewing. Rather than meaning arising from the appearance or concept of a work, for Merleau-Ponty, it develops via the way it structures a viewer's experience. Referring to 'Eye and Mind', Potts explains:

[Merleau-Ponty] began to take account of the phenomenological complexities of the viewer's encounter with the work of art as itself a material thing in the world and not just as the trace or representation of the artist's perception of something he or she had seen.¹⁸⁰

Texts by Helen Fielding, Juhani Pallasmaa, and Amelia Jones have confirmed and extended understanding of this relational dynamic between observer and artwork, offering relevant positions for thinking about clay-based art. As previously noted, Fielding establishes the capacity for material objects to expose 'embodied reality' by operating in a 'shared realm of the actual', a particularly potent idea for considering clay and ceramic materiality whose presence is deeply embedded within the social human sphere.¹⁸¹ Pallasmaa offers a slightly different perspective on the artwork/audience dynamic. He situates the observing body at the heart of the viewing process, with the artwork a confluence between artist and audience.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ Marks (2002); Sobchack (2004); Coleman, M. (2007). Reappraising the Disappearing Body and the Disembodied Eye through Multisensory Art. *Crossings: eJournal of Art and Technology*, 5 (1), n.p; Hawkins (2010); Lauwrens (2018a, 2018b; 2019).

¹⁷⁹ Krauss (1966).

¹⁸⁰ Potts (2000), p.225.

¹⁸¹ Fielding (2011), p.524.

¹⁸² Pallasmaa (2011), p.42.

Like Krauss, theorist and historian Amelia Jones also employs Merleau-Ponty's multiple viewpoints of perception to propose viewer, maker and artwork as intertwined in the act of interpretation and production of meaning.¹⁸³ Influenced by feminist interpretations of his texts, Jones develops a more nuanced understanding of Merleau-Ponty's relational structure of embodiment that allows for '*specific differences*.'¹⁸⁴ By acknowledging the unique cultural, political, social and gendered identities of all parties through phenomenological interpretation, a far more complex and fluid reading of any artwork can be reached.¹⁸⁵ Jones's essay was influential in the early stages of the research. While not directly discussed in the main thesis chapters, it helped to shape a fluid understanding of the viewer and artwork dynamic.

Krauss, Fielding Pallasmaa and Jones thus establish artworks as agential, phenomenological entities, foregrounding the critical role of the viewer in aesthetic experience, and the dynamic mutuality of audience and artwork through processes of viewing. These texts offer essential perspectives, placing Merleau-Ponty's thinking within contemporary dialogues of spectatorship.

Research theme 1: A Sensory Perspective on Aesthetic Experience.

Merleau-Ponty's texts situate the bodily sensorium at the heart of embodied experience. Thus, sense perception was the first theme identified as relevant for developing the research aims and is the focus for chapter two. The following section examines the literature that shaped this theme. Texts by writers that influence its content variously support, extend, reimagine, employ or share affinities with Merleau-Ponty's thinking, reflecting contemporary attitudes to his work as well as developments in science. Phenomenological enquiry, sensory research and neuroscience all establish the pre-reflective, empathetic sensory entanglement of bodies and objects. Selected critical art writing evidences a context for these ideas, while film theory and anthropological studies highlight the sensorial significance of surfaces for this research. Literature from a range of fields has been collated and synthesised, building a coherent and convincing sense of how clay-based artwork might impact the sensory system of viewers.

¹⁸³ Jones (2003) interrogates Gustave Courbet's provocative painting *The Origin of the World* (1866) through Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological lens.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.74, emphasis in original.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.78-79.

Initially, a broad examination of sense perception was carried out for context. Sensory anthropologist David Howes and cultural historian Constance Classen, alongside art historians Patrizia Di Bello and Gabriel Koureas document the relationship between art history and sense perception from a Western perspective. They observe the dominance of visuality and ‘disassociation with the senses’ in critiques of aesthetic experience that historically prevailed.¹⁸⁶ Di Bello and Koureas note various writers who challenge these assumptions, such as literary theorist Terry Eagleton who argues that the aesthetic is ‘a form of cognition that is achieved through the whole corporeal system [...]’, an idea taken up by this research.¹⁸⁷ Yet historian Martin Jay suggests that the overriding narrative of the detached, monocular observer associated with Cartesian perspectivalism may not be so straightforward. He argues that alternative ‘scopic regimes’ such as those found in Baroque and Dutch seventeenth-century painting ‘reveal different aspects of a complex [...] phenomenon.’¹⁸⁸ Dutch art’s ‘attention to many small things’,¹⁸⁹ and ‘the multiplicity of visual spaces’ found in Baroque painting override the rational, absolutism of disembodied observation.¹⁹⁰ Jay presents a more nuanced account of vision that aligns with other research findings. For instance, Marks’ mode of ‘haptic visuality’ similarly highlights the materiality of surface details, while Jay’s description of Baroque painting as ‘palimpsests of the unseeable’ resonates with Merleau-Ponty’s invisible depth of perception.¹⁹¹ Thus, Jay offers apposite perspectives for considering visual experience of clay-based art.

While sensory perception may seem like an individual concern, David Howes is amongst those who have highlighted the social context of perception for the research. He points out that ‘[h]umans are social beings, and just as human nature itself is a product of culture, so is the human sensorium.’¹⁹² Howes notes that gender, race and class are just some of the cultural ideologies that shape sense perception, a valuable perspective when considering the crafted identities of clay-based art that historically imply lower value

¹⁸⁶ Di Bello, P., and Koureas, G. (eds). (2010). *Art History and the Senses: 1830 to the Present*. Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, p.5. See also: Howes, D. and Classen, C. (2014). *Mixed Messages: Engaging the Senses in Art*. In: Howes, D. and Classen, C. *Ways of Sensing: Understanding the Senses in Society*. Oxon: Routledge, 17-36.

¹⁸⁷ Di Bello and Koureas (2010), p.5.

¹⁸⁸ Jay (1988), p.16.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.12,

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.17.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.19. See also: Marks (2002), pp.xvii-xviii.

¹⁹² Howes, D. (ed.). (2005). *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader*. Oxford: Berg, p.3.

and are associated with more marginalised social groups (women and lower classes).¹⁹³ Hawkins, Fielding, Brinck and Lauwrens reveal the social quality of aesthetic perception with reference to Merleau-Ponty, arguing that our sensory connectivity to others emerges through the shared nature of encountering art through our moving bodies in public spaces.¹⁹⁴ This perspective exposes the embodied qualities of clay-based art, whose ubiquitous material presence is embedded within the social and cultural sphere.

At the outset of the research, I identified the uniquely tactile qualities of clay and ceramic materiality as key to this discourse of embodied spectatorship, yet physical interaction with artworks is rare. It was therefore vital to establish how spectators might experience tactile surfaces through vision alone. Texts by Pallasmaa and sensory researcher Mark Paterson offer in-depth accounts of touch sense that highlight its embodied capacity. For Pallasmaa '[t]ouch is the sensory mode that integrates our experience of the world and of ourselves,'¹⁹⁵ whilst Paterson argues that '[t]ouch reaches beyond the immediacy of present cutaneous sensations, unfolding to encompass a range of affective, empathetic, metaphorical and other meanings.'¹⁹⁶ Merleau-Ponty's notion of sensory synthesis laid out in *Phenomenology of Perception* evidences the mutuality of vision and touch. However, it is the reversible structure of experience conceived in *The Visible and The Invisible* that fundamentally shapes this discourse. Here, vision incorporates touch sense within it; we register the tangible qualities of things without the need to physically engage.¹⁹⁷ This crucial concept positions the palpable materiality of clay-based artwork as equally compelling for viewers and artists/makers.

Merleau-Ponty's notion of tactile space is connected to material objects more clearly by Pallasmaa. Echoing the philosopher, he discusses the nature of oblique tactile experiences, stating:

As we look the eye touches, and before we see an object, we have already touched it and judged its weight and temperature and surface texture. The eye and the

¹⁹³ Howes, D. (2010). *The Craft of the Senses*. Available from: www.centreforsensorystudies.org. See also Classen, C. (2012). *The Deepest Sense: A Cultural History of Touch*. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, pp.133-134.

¹⁹⁴ Hawkins (2010); Fielding (2011); Brinck (2007; 2018); and Lauwrens (2018b).

¹⁹⁵ Pallasmaa (2009), p.101.

¹⁹⁶ Paterson, M. (2007). *The Senses of Touch: Haptics, Affects and Technologies*. Oxford: Berg, p.154.

¹⁹⁷ Merleau-Ponty (1968), p.134.

hand constantly collaborate; the eye carries the hand to great distances and the hand informs the eye at the intimate scale.¹⁹⁸

Given the tacit familiarity of clay matter and ceramic objects in human lives, Pallasmaa's words confirm the material resonance of clay-based artwork when considered through Merleau-Ponty's lens. Philosophers M.C Dillon, Lawrence Hass, David Morris, Chon-ip Ng and cultural geographer John Wylie provide compelling explications and analyses of Merleau-Ponty's theory of reversibility; their invaluable contribution is documented in chapter two.¹⁹⁹ Classen offers a further perspective by exposing the tactile dimension of colour; glaze, clay stains and gold lustre all feature in the case study works, inviting touch sense through vision.²⁰⁰

Literature from other academic fields demonstrates touch sense experienced through vision, strengthening the research claim for the haptic quality of viewing clay-based art. When interrogating the relationship between sculpture and touch, curator and art historian Francesca Bacci notes neuroscientist Richard Gregory's hypothesis that our visual data 'matches' with other sense data derived from past experiences.²⁰¹ Paterson concurs, citing art historian Bernhard Berenson's claim that 'when our eyes fall upon a shape or image, we are in fact "giving tactile value to retinal impressions".'²⁰² Neuroscientist Vittorio Gallese's research is particularly revelatory. He empirically evidences a neurological basis that aligns with Merleau-Ponty's ideas through the discovery of the body's mirror neuron system.²⁰³ His findings are highly significant; they substantiate the thesis hypothesis that clay-based art's unique tactile character possesses the ability to stimulate embodied spectatorship.²⁰⁴

¹⁹⁸ Pallasmaa (2009), p.102.

¹⁹⁹ See: Dillon (1997); Wylie, J. (2006). Depths and Folds: On landscape and the Gazing Subject. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 24 (4), 519-535; Hass (2008); Morris, D. (2010). The Enigma of Reversibility and the Genesis of Sense in Merleau-Ponty. *The Continental Philosophy Review*, 43 (2), 141-165; Ng, C. (2012). Reversibility and its Philosophical Implications: A Phenomenological Explication of a Late Concept of Merleau-Ponty. In: Yu, C. and Lau, K. (eds.) *Phenomenology and Human Experience*. Nordhausen, Germany: Traugott Bautz Verlag GmbH, 137-152.

²⁰⁰ Classen (2012), p.129.

²⁰¹ Bacci (2013), p.136.

²⁰² Berenson cited by Paterson (2007), p.86.

²⁰³ Gallese, V. (2009). Mirror Neurons, Embodied Simulation, and the Neural Basis of Social Identification. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 19 (5), 519-536. See also: Gallese (2017a; 2017b; 2019; 2020).

²⁰⁴ Freedberg, D. and Gallese, V. (2007). Motion, Emotion and Empathy in Esthetic experience. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 11 (5), 197-203; Gallese, V. (2017a). Visions of the Body: Embodied Simulation and Aesthetic Experience. *Aisthesis*, 1 (1), 41-50; See also: Gallese (2017b; 2019; 2020).

Using J.J. Gibson's theory of affordance, Bacci explores the implications of proximity to sculpture, stating that:

If one is to admit that a sculpture placed at arm's reach offers the affordance of 'touchability', it logically follows that the embodied knowledge that one can acquire through touch [...] constitutes a qualitatively new experience compared to looking from a distance—one in which the dichotomy of subjective-objective loses its meaning in favour of a new way of being-with-sculpture.²⁰⁵

Bacci's proposition establishes the embodied quality of closely encountering art that touch sense promotes. Paterson agrees, drawing on various theorists to demonstrate the tactile nature of sculptural space.²⁰⁶ Like Bacci, he argues that awareness of tactility activated through vision is more pronounced through sculpture, stating:

A sculpture, being [...] placed outside the realm of everyday perceptual experience, epitomizes 'withness' with things due to its enactive, crafted materiality, manifested through surfaces and textures without the need to physically reach out and touch the object itself.²⁰⁷

Given the tacit, often evidently crafted familiarity of clay and ceramic matter, Paterson's notion of 'withness' with sculpture is particularly persuasive when considering clay-based works, whose considerable everyday qualities become highlighted through the frame of art.

The idea of approaching artwork closely through the lens of touch is interrogated by film and media theorists Vivian Sobchack and Laura U. Marks whose texts profoundly shape this discourse. They have guided me to reimagine the viewer/artwork relationship as one of intense embodied reciprocity arising through one's intimate proximity to the surface details and material presence of clay-based art. Employing Merleau-Ponty's notion of sensory synthesis, Sobchack and Marks demonstrate how we sensorially register the physical qualities of images through pre-reflective, somatic understanding, and more importantly, that we *live* them as embodied beings rather than simply look at them.²⁰⁸ Marks notion of 'haptic visuality' resonates with ways viewers might apprehend the palpable exteriors of clay and ceramic objects, and is central to the

²⁰⁵ Bacci (2013), p.141. The implications of James Gibson's affordance theory are discussed in more depth in chapter three, pp.159-163.

²⁰⁶ Paterson (2007), pp.92-93.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., p.93-94.

²⁰⁸ Sobchack (2004), p.2. See also Marks (2002), pp.ix-xii.

argument undertaken in chapter two. Tim Ingold expands upon the criticality of surfaces when illuminating the potent depth of meanings alive in the facades of objects.²⁰⁹ Together, Sobchack, Marks and Ingold establish the embodied significance of ceramic and clay surfaces.

Through Marks and Sobchack, I realised my own body was a fundamental tool in the process of aesthetic analysis. The sensory focused literature had established a number of apposite foci to differentiate the embodied qualities of clay-based art. The thesis methodology also acknowledges researcher subjectivities as a valuable form of data. Yet it was not until reading Sobchack and Marks that I understood the way that my bodily experience of art could be integral to the critical interpretive research process, an approach that powerfully exposes the intimate, sensuous particularities of clay-based art and the embodied connection it invites. As such, chapter two integrates my subjective responses within critical accounts of case study works.

Various writers helpfully scrutinise the bond formed between viewer and artworks through aesthetic apperception. Philosopher Ingar Brinck shows how artworks incite empathy: spectatorship 'cause[s] the viewer to bodily and emotionally move with and be moved by individual works of art.'²¹⁰ This interaction prompts artwork and audience to 'mutually specify each other in a co-implicative relation.'²¹¹ For art historian Ellen Esrock, empathy 'involves a projection of some aspect of one's body or self into objects and others in the world [...].'²¹² Brinck and Esrock rely on a range of academic sources, including Merleau-Ponty, to develop their thinking. Their texts highlight the empathetic bonds that viewers might form with the sensorial qualities of clay and ceramic art and are employed to evidence this potential in the case study artworks.

Cognitive archaeologist Lambros Malafouris offers a more specific hypothesis that identifies the empathetic, relational material connectivity that can emerge between

²⁰⁹ Ingold, T. (2017). Surface Visions. *Theory, Culture and Society*, 34 (7-8), 99-108.

²¹⁰ Brinck, I. (2018). Empathy, Engagement, Entertainment: the Interaction Dynamics of Aesthetic Experience. *Cognitive Processing*, 19 (2), p.201.

²¹¹ Brinck, I. (2007). Situated Cognition, Dynamic Systems and Art. *Janus Head*, 9 (2), p.413.

²¹² Esrock (2010), p.223, and Esrock (2003), n.p.

potter and clay through creative endeavour.²¹³ Brinck and psychologist Vasudevi Reddy share this view when investigating the ‘dynamic relationship between maker and material through the lens of [wheel-thrown] pottery.’²¹⁴ They suggest that this creative ‘dialogue signals an emotional involvement with clay.’²¹⁵ Malafouris also argues that makers develop a close feeling for the material. While his focus is on skilled manipulation, his thinking opens a space to posit that through empathy and haptic visuality, art viewers can similarly connect with clay. Brinck and Reddy confirm this capacity when stating that ‘there is something about the embodied experience of making pottery that calls forth an archetypical, primordial manner of [...] [being] with-the-clay.’²¹⁶ Chapter two extends this perspective by showing how spectators might form equally strong emotional bonds with the somatic potency of clay matter and thus also experience being *with* it.

Jenni Lauwrens, Harriet Hawkins and Maria Coleman further evidence the embodied connectivity with art that audiences may experience through the lenses of sculpture, installation and interactive media.²¹⁷ Lauwrens and Hawkins present inspiring accounts of specific artworks that are deeply grounded in theory yet integrate personal phenomenological experience to demonstrate their claims; their essays guide the research approach to case study work. Both writers are heavily influenced by Merleau-Ponty’s theories. They thus offer valuable precedent for assimilating his thinking into the analyses of artwork undertaken within this thesis; Lauwrens’ reflection on reversibility is particularly relevant.²¹⁸ All three argue that apprehending sculpture and installation is a multi-sensorial, corporeal experience, noting the critical involvement of viewers in co-creating an installation.²¹⁹ Coleman and Lauwrens find interactive artworks particularly effective in stimulating embodiment. Coleman claims that given

²¹³ Malafouris, L. (2014). Creative Thinging: The Feeling of and For Clay. *Pragmatics & Cognition*, 22 (1), 140–158; Malafouris, L. (2019). Mind and Material Engagement. *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 18 (1), 1–17.

²¹⁴ Brinck, I. and Reddy, V. (2020). Dialogue in the Making: Emotional Engagement with Materials. *Phenomenology and the Sciences*, 19 (1), p.23.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.23.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.28.

²¹⁷ Coleman (2007); Hawkins (2010); Lauwrens (2018a; 2018b; 2019).

²¹⁸ Lauwrens (2019).

²¹⁹ Coleman (2007), n.p.; Hawkins (2010), p.327; Lauwrens (2018a), p.11.

their insistence on physical engagement they are ‘transformational’—through them ‘we gain a sense of ourselves [...] in relation to the world.’²²⁰

The interactive practice of Ingrid Murphy demonstrates the compelling relationship between digital technologies, ceramic objects and embodiment, thus literature examining digital media is another point of focus. Various theorists show how new media enhances sensory experience and facilitates embodiment in innovative and revealing ways. Hansen is an invaluable guide. His texts firmly connect the digital with embodiment, proving that ‘[t]echnology [...] provides a bridge between the material, physical world described by science and the domain of lived experience.’²²¹ Indeed, Hansen frames digitally mediated aesthetic experience as instigating ‘a properly bodily register of affectivity in which vision, losing its long-standing predominance, becomes a mere trigger for a nonvisual haptic apprehension.’²²² This idea is evidenced powerfully by Murphy’s work in chapters two and four.

Among other writers offering useful perspectives on the digital, Paterson examines the ‘spaces of possibility’ that emerge in artwork through technologies.²²³ He focuses on virtual reality, but his thinking is applicable to understanding the effects of augmented reality and touch capacitance sensing that Murphy employs. Pallasmaa, ceramicist Paul Mathieu and art historian F. David Martin worry about the disembodied nature of using digital technologies,²²⁴ although Lauwrens’ proposition that new media installation offers sensory immersion rather than detached looking refutes their concerns.²²⁵ Martin argues that technology deprives us of being *with* things, and that ‘sculpture relieves that ache by bringing us back into touch with the[ir] tangible individuality [...]’²²⁶ The palpable material character of clay-based artwork could certainly relieve the ache of which Martin speaks, but it is not clear if such an ache exists? Certainly, the global pervasiveness of technology and our relationship with it has massively shifted since Martin published his text in 1981. Hansen and others have clearly shown that the digital

²²⁰ Coleman (2007), n.p. See also: Lauwrens (2018a), p.19.

²²¹ Hansen (2000), p.60.

²²² Hansen (2006a), p.208.

²²³ Paterson (2007), p.104. See also: Moores (2014), p.205; Jacobs and Huck (2017); O’Brien (2017).

²²⁴ Martin (1981), pp.95-96; Mathieu, P. (2007b). Object Theory. In: Chambers, R. Gogarty, A, Perron, M. (eds.) *Utopic Impulses: Contemporary Ceramic Practice*. Vancouver: Rosendale Press, p.123; Pallasmaa (2009), p.51.

²²⁵ Lauwrens (2012), p.8.

²²⁶ Martin (1981), pp.95-96.

is particularly effective at returning us to our sensing bodies, thus confirming the importance of Murphy's inclusion within the case study group.²²⁷

The final body of literature concerning sensory perception examines the relationship between art, materiality and sensation itself. Art historian Petra Lange-Berndt provided an early overview of various theories focused on materiality. She notes that 'the term "material" describes not prime matter but substances that are always subject to change, be it through handling, interaction with their surroundings, or the dynamic life of their chemical reactions.'²²⁸ This idea clearly connects with the unique transmutational character of clay, which de Waal and many others acknowledge as a potent sensorial quality.²²⁹ As de Waal states: 'The image of metamorphosis is embedded in ceramics.'²³⁰ Various writers confirm the idea of clay and ceramic materiality as undeniably sensorial.²³¹

The tactile identity of ceramic and clay is crucial to establishing embodied spectatorship. Philip Rawson was the first to seriously interrogate the sensorial quality of ceramic artefacts, noting that 'in our visual experience of pots there may yet be a powerful ingredient of tactile memory transferred.'²³² Curator and art historian Glenn Adamson confirms the sensorial impact of raw clay's plasticity, stating that it 'leaves the artist's touch nakedly on inspection, and draws the viewer into the process by which the work was created.'²³³ Furthermore, Elkins claims touch sense to be implicit in clay-based art, stating that it imparts 'the idea or the thought of touching.'²³⁴

²²⁷ See also: Paterson (2007); Lauwrens (2018a); Gallese (2020).

²²⁸ Lange-Berndt, P. (2015). Introduction/How to be Complicit with Materials. In: *Materiality: Documents of Contemporary Art*. London and Massachusetts, Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press, p.12.

²²⁹ See: Merback (2000), n.p.; Gormley (2004), p.85; Kuspit (2010), n.p.; Shaw (2016), p.90.

²³⁰ De Waal (2004), p.45.

²³¹ See: Rawson (1984), pp.90-91; Merback, M. (2000). Cooled Matter: Ceramic Sculpture in the Expanded Field. *Ceramics: Art & Perception*, 39, 6-15; Elkins (2002), n.p.; Kuchta, R.A., (2002). Major Themes in Contemporary Ceramic Art. In: Greenhalgh, P. (ed.) *The Persistence of Craft*. London: A & C Black, p.92; Gormley (2004), p.85; Daintry, N. (2007). The Essential Vessel. In: Hanaor, Z. (ed.) *Breaking the Mould: New Approaches to Ceramics*. London: Black Dog, p.12; Kuspit (2010), n.p.

²³² Rawson (1984), p.90.

²³³ Adamson, G. (2008). Making a Mess: Ceramic Sculpture Now. *Tenth Annual Dorothy Wilson Perkins Lecture*, Schein International Museum of Ceramic Art, Alfred University, New York. 20 November 2008.

²³⁴ Elkins, J. (2002), p.24. Many other writers document the compelling tactile character of ceramic and clay. See: Rawson (1984), p.20 and pp.82-84; Gormley (2004), p.82; Daintry (2007), p.12; Adamson (2008; 2017).

In addition to palpability, art historian Imogen Racz acknowledges the social, cultural and temporal reverberations of clay-based materiality, thus connecting the tacit familiarity of ceramic objects to the sensorial realm. Racz identifies:

[...] the deep knowledge of the feel of ceramics that all humans have; the ability to empathetically trace the maker's finger marks on the surface, together with the long history of cultural resonances, [which] give the material a special place in understanding.²³⁵

Her words reinforce the thesis claim that clay-based art embodies social, cultural, anthropological and spatio-temporal qualities that arise through the dynamic character of clay itself. These material resonances are innately sensorial and phenomenological; to be aware of them is to become connected to space and time, and to a multiplicity of others. Furthermore, clay's social identity within aesthetic contexts is historically one of marginalisation, a useful position, according to Adamson, that produces 'a kind of friction', adding to the sensorial dynamism of clay-based art.²³⁶

Pallasmaa confirms that '[m]aterials and surfaces [...] have a language of their own' expressive of ontological qualities such as permanence, ephemerality and the passage of time.²³⁷ Art historian Mitchell Merback identifies these themes as common to much clay-based sculpture of the 1990s.²³⁸ He documents various artistic strategies grounded in the materiality of clay that demonstrate the 'evocative power of raw, unadorned substances' where 'the viewer cannot help but become conscious of the clay's drying process.'²³⁹ Merback also notes that artists contend with themes of bodily experience, impermanence, material changes, time and 'metaphorical associations with earth.'²⁴⁰ His thoughts resonate with the raw materiality that Phoebe Cummings' work inhabits, but they are equally relevant across the case study artworks, which all express these material themes in some way.

²³⁵ Racz, I. (2017). *Sculptural Vessels Across the Great Divide: Tony Cragg's Laibe and the Metaphors of Clay*. In: Livingstone, A., and Petrie, K. (eds.) *The Ceramics Reader*. London; New York: Bloomsbury, p.80.

²³⁶ Adamson (2007), p.6.

²³⁷ Pallasmaa (2011), p.48. See also: Groom (2004), p.15.

²³⁸ Merback (2000) discusses installations in the exhibition *Cooled Matter*, presented during the NCECA Conference in Columbus, Ohio, March 1999.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, n.p.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, n.p.

Literature interrogating ephemerality in art further establishes the sensorial character of clay. Academic Linda Sandino recognises that the ‘dematerialization [of matter] raises a certain psychic anxiety [...]’, and that ‘the transient also connotes a spatial and/or transformational passing-through or in-between stage.’²⁴¹ Curator and critic Nicole Burisch suggests that crafted objects could be understood as ‘embodied [...] forms of documentation’ that record the transient performance of process, although she is wary of exclusively depending on ‘craft-ephemera’ for this.²⁴² Curator Allyson Purpura defines ephemeral art as ‘inherently unstable’, noting that when confronted with material impermanence, ‘meanings and consequences take us well beyond the object itself’ and into the poetic realm.²⁴³ Significantly, Purpura claims that ephemeral art ‘amplifies the present by giving it a temporal frame. [...] [It] not only impl[ies] degradation or disappearance, but [...] it is also productive, transformative, and full of anticipation.’²⁴⁴ These ideas appeal directly to Cummings’ practice where ephemerality is a critical artistic strategy. But questions of permanence, transience and material dynamism are deeply embedded in all clay and ceramic objects and artworks: fragility, durability, longevity and transformation are vital embodied characteristics of both raw and fired clay.

Amelia Jones confirms the ‘phenomenological effects’ of witnessing traces of human action upon large quantities of clay when describing her own corporeal experience of artist Cassils’ performance *Becoming an Image* (2012-present). Her essay ‘interrogates the interrelation between action and materiality’ thus helping to connect case study artwork to the sensorial agency of clay and viewer experience.²⁴⁵ As Jones notes, clay ‘enacts and enlivens my own sense of embodiment’, a particularly apposite perspective when considering Nagel, Bakewell and Cummings’ practices.²⁴⁶ Bachelard also offers an important critique of the malleability of clay substance; its relevance is considered in relation to the spatial properties of clay-based art in chapter four.²⁴⁷

²⁴¹ Sandino, L. (2004). Here Today, Gone Tomorrow: Transient Materiality in Contemporary Cultural Artefacts. *Journal of Design History*, 17 (3), p.284.

²⁴² Burisch, N. (2016). From Objects to Actions and Back Again: The Politics of Dematerialized Craft and Performance Documentation, *TEXTILE*, 14 (1), p.66 & p.70.

²⁴³ Purpura, A. (2009). Framing the Ephemeral. *African Arts*, 43 (3), p.12.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., p.14.

²⁴⁵ Jones, A. (2015). Material Traces: Performativity, Artistic “Work”, and New Concepts of Agency. *The Drama Review*, 59 (4), p.20.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Bachelard (1983).

The body of literature examined in this section maps the ways in which clay and ceramic materiality might impact our sensory system. It establishes the multisensory nature of perception, whilst highlighting the embodied potentials of vision. The significance of the social nature of sensing clay-based artwork is revealed, as is the intertwining of vision and touch, and the haptic capacity of vision; these critical ideas underscore the thesis hypothesis. Empathy is identified as crucial to aesthetic sensing, with proximity to three-dimensional form seen to intensify sensorial experience. Paying close attention to the material surfaces of artwork is shown to instigate embodied relationships between viewer and artwork, a critical perspective when considering exterior qualities of ceramic and clay form. Various writers offer valuable precedents that describe the bonds occurring between audiences and art, with movement key to sensorial experience. The literature also evidences the significance of digital technologies for mediating embodied art experiences, and the highly sensorial nature of clay substance itself. Thus, a broad range of discursive texts support chapter two, which interrogates the sensory character of clay-based art through case study examples; the literature illuminates the specific ways selected artworks stimulate embodied awareness in viewers through aesthetic encounters.

Research Theme 2: The Embodied Possibilities of Craft

This section of the review examines the potent interface of art/craft/design through various writers who reveal its relevance within dialogues exploring the embodied currency of clay-based art. Critical ideas raised in the literature that support the research aims are: the significance of visible references to making processes in art; the relationship between hand and thought; the temporal resonance of craft; bodily reciprocity with craft and functional forms; and the compelling symbolism of the vessel.

The problematic identity of craft and its subjugation in aesthetic theory has been much debated. While this thesis does not aim to contribute to this discussion, it is useful to offer a brief overview here for context. Craft has typically been positioned as art's 'Other', either to justify art's superiority in cultural life, or to emancipate craft from its perceived oppression by art.²⁴⁸ This dichotomous relation emerges from the Modernist

²⁴⁸ This is perhaps most vehemently demonstrated by philosopher R.G. Collingwood, who sought to 'disentangle the notion of craft from art proper' and position it as a subservient model of visual culture. See: Collingwood, R.G. (1958). *The Principles of Art*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.15. See also: Corse (2009), pp.14-15; Gilbert, S. R. (2018). *A Widening Chromaticism: Learning Perception in the Collective Craftwork of*

presumption of the autonomous artwork, developed out of Kant's notion of aesthetic disinterest.²⁴⁹ In contrast, craft remains uniquely tied to human activity; it is aligned with human satisfaction, as opposed to disinterest, and use-value rather than intellectual contemplation. Whether confirming or contending this Modernist narrative, the theoretical explication of art and craft has typically been built around binary oppositions creating an antagonistic relational perspective that has proved difficult for craft to avoid.²⁵⁰

Craft's multifarious character further complicates the possibility of achieving a coherent sense of the term. It can be understood through the material specificity of isolated disciplines, or as a method of approach or process. Craft also inhabits a range of contexts from the highly skilled craft professional, to contemporary DIY and Maker cultures or amateur 'hobby' crafts.²⁵¹ And depending on the perspective from which craft is approached—political, economic, educational, scientific, or social—the meaning of craft is moulded to each given situation.²⁵² Art historian and curator Paul Greenhalgh acknowledges that, '[c]raft has always been a supremely messy word', arguing that the crafts 'have no intrinsic cohesion' having been brought together by 'complex forces' that continue to maintain this precarious relational proximity.²⁵³ Whilst the contemporary post-disciplinary environment has purportedly dismantled discipline boundaries, it is clear that debate on the issue of craft has remained fierce.²⁵⁴

Art historian Julia Bryan-Wilson also exposes the inconsistency of craft definitions, yet for her, its many contradictions are not disempowering or incoherent. She argues that contemporary craft can be both influential and regressive; be widely institutionalised,

the Encounter, & Kjølrup, S. (2018). Art as the Other? Reflection of Craft's and Fine Art's Places in the Aesthetic Field. In: *Material Perceptions*. Stuttgart: Arnoldsche, p.58 & pp.14-18.

²⁴⁹ In *Critique of Judgement* (1790), Kant argues that 'pleasure in the beautiful is "disinterested"', that is, it is 'not grounded in the satisfaction of desire.' In: Zangwill, N. (2003). *Aesthetic Judgment*. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. See also: Metcalf (1993), p.40; Jones et al. (2013), p.17; Kjølrup (2018), p.18; Staten (2019), p.7.

²⁵⁰ See: Boden (2000), p.289; Shiner, L. (2012). "Blurred Boundaries"? Rethinking the Concept of Craft and its Relation to Art and Design. *Philosophy Compass*, 7 (4), 230-244; Gilbert (2018), pp.53-54.

²⁵¹ See: Greenhalgh (2002), pp.1-5; Corse, S. (2009). *Craft Objects, Aesthetic Contexts: Kant, Heidegger, and Adorno on Craft*. Maryland: University Press of America, pp.9-10; Shiner (2012), n.p; Knott, S. (2015). *Amateur Craft: History and Theory*. London: Bloomsbury; Gilbert (2018) p.59.

²⁵² Christopher Frayling discusses the various ways in which craft is meaningful for different parties. See: Frayling, C. (2011). *On Craftsmanship: Towards a New Bauhaus*. London: Oberon, pp.8-19

²⁵³ Greenhalgh (2002), p.1, identifies these complex forces as artistic, political, economic and institutional.

²⁵⁴ See: Darwent, C. (2008). *NeoCraft*. *Crafts*, 210, p.68; Risatti, H. (2007b). Review of *NeoCraft: Modernity and the Crafts* by Sandra Alföldy (ed.). *Winterthur Portfolio*, 43 (1), 143-144.

yet still under-recognised; offer a radical counterpoint to capitalist ecologies, yet be tied to neoliberal, commercial attitudes; maintain bodily connectivity whilst also embracing the digital; and occupy both heterosexual, and queer positions.²⁵⁵ Through Bryan-Wilson's lens, craft is reframed as fluidly inclusive and implicit with potentiality.²⁵⁶

Yet if theoretical positions have collapsed as Bryan-Wilson suggests, what then can be said of craft? Glenn Adamson takes craft's fluid identity as a critical conceptual position. Rather than operating as an isolated category as it has historically been understood, Adamson likens craft to a 'free radical or a floating element' that pervades all creative contexts.²⁵⁷ For him, craft 'only exists in motion: it is a way of doing things, not a classification of objects, institutions, or people.'²⁵⁸ Both Greenhalgh and designer and academic Sarah Kettley confirm Adamson's thinking, which offers a critical model for considering craft in relation to the research aims.²⁵⁹ In dismantling existing rigid classifications, Adamson opens a space to focus instead on the *agency* of craft—as method, material manifestation, and conceptual concern—within embodied encounters with clay-based artworks. With craft conceptualised as an approach that permeates all forms of creativity, the crafted identities of clay-based art, rich with material, cultural, sociological, temporal, spatial and sensory qualities can be understood to possess dynamic potential.

Philosopher Larry Shiner and artist and educator Sarah Gilbert expand Adamson's concept of craft to include subject specialist tendencies. Both are wary of defining craft as a verb, described solely through process as Adamson does.²⁶⁰ They seek to secure an understanding that emphasises the intensities implicit in material-focused practices. While I hold that Adamson's flexible interpretation must incorporate subject-specialist approaches, their thinking validates the thesis argument that evidence of skill and craft processes in clay-based art reveals an independent, 'sensuous', experiential agency

²⁵⁵ Bryan-Wilson, J. (2013). Eleven Propositions in Response to the Question: "What Is Contemporary about Craft?" *Journal of Modern Craft*, 6 (1), p.10.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Adamson, G. (2012). Interview with Lamar Dodd School of Art on Recent Transformations of Craft. *YouTube*. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xiQFfGi0hNg>

²⁵⁸ Adamson (2007), p.4.

²⁵⁹ Greenhalgh (2002), p.1; Kettley, S. (2010). Fluidity in Craft and Authenticity. *Interactions*, 17 (5), p.14.

²⁶⁰ Shiner (2012), p.233; Gilbert (2018), p.50.

embedded in the material character of the work.²⁶¹ It also accurately reflects the insights of case study artists whose practices emerge out of specialist ceramic training and who position craft as a critical aspect of their artistic strategy and identity of their work. This is verified in the interview transcripts and discussed in chapter three.

Adamson was an early guide for the research. His enlightening perspectives place craft within the broader system of visual culture, as well as within its own historical, social and political contexts.²⁶² *Thinking Through Craft* offers a positive account of craft's marginal status within the hierarchies of visual culture. He posits that modern art cannot be conceived of without craft's presence (or lack of it), and it is through this peripheral context that craft engages a friction.²⁶³ Adamson acknowledges that the twenty-first century visual arts landscape embodies a proliferation of post-disciplinary practices adopting non-hierarchical, multi-modal methods of creative production.²⁶⁴ Yet whilst materiality and craft processes (particularly in relation to ceramic and clay) are enjoying a resurgence across all art forms, the legacy of craft's marginality still lingers, and with it a productive space of critique. Many of the case study artworks outwardly reference craft processes and skills, whilst simultaneously assuming characteristics fundamental to art and/or design. Adamson's thoughts thus highlight the potency inherent within the idea of craft for clay-based practices situated within the spheres of art or design.

Artist and author Sandra Corse offers an overview of craft theories, signposting future research directions.²⁶⁵ Referring to key theoreticians, she maps out a place for craft within aesthetic theory—a predominantly art-focused field—paying particular attention to practices that integrate both craft and art tendencies. Like Shiner and others, Corse engages craft's differential qualities to develop her argument, recognising its social familiarity as essential.²⁶⁶ While not phenomenologically oriented, her text identifies four characteristics that establish a basis for craft's embodied resonance. These include

²⁶¹ Gilbert (2018), p.52. See also: Mazanti, L. (2011). Super-Objects: Craft as an Aesthetic Position. In: Buszek, M.E. (ed.) *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 59-82.

²⁶² See: Adamson (2007); Adamson, G. (2013) *The Invention of Craft*. London; New York: Bloomsbury.

²⁶³ Adamson (2007), p.48.

²⁶⁴ Adamson (2013), p.xiv.

²⁶⁵ Corse, S. (2009). *Craft Objects, Aesthetic Contexts: Kant, Heidegger, and Adorno on Craft*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, pp.1-31.

²⁶⁶ Corse (2009), p.19 & p.27. See also: Metcalf (1993), p.40; Boden (2000), pp.297-298; Risatti (2007a), pp.87-98; Shiner (2012), pp.234-238.

craft's relationship with materiality and processes of making; craft's intimacy with the body; its association with function; and the fact that craft is deeply intertwined within the social, cultural and historical structures of society, in a way that art, in its autonomy, is not. While the selected case study works are not understood to be craftworks per se, Corse reveals the ways craft connects with phenomenological perspectives significant to this discourse of embodied art viewing. These ideas are deepened and extended through engagement with primary sources, such as Boden, Risatti and Greenhalgh.²⁶⁷

In different ways, Adamson, Shiner, Gilbert and Corse reveal the compelling dynamism of the craft/art interface. Given that all the case study artworks operate within the context of art yet intersect with the strategies and languages of craft and/or design, this intersection is highly relevant. Alongside Adamson, Louise Mazanti and Jorunn Veiteberg further elucidate the potential of this overlap, offering distinct but persuasive positions that reflect the productive conceptual possibilities manifest by the crafted identities of clay-based art. Adamson shows that craft's insistent physicality was historically problematic, removing any possibility of transcendence, which was the aim of art.²⁶⁸ While opticality is no longer the dominant art ideology, the juxtaposition of visceral materiality with conceptual content in many clay-based works produces a highly charged zone of convergence. Mazanti highlights the inadequacies of art and design dialogues that strive to 'bridge the gap' between art and life, something, she argues, that craft effortlessly accomplishes.²⁶⁹ Mazanti thus re-imagines craft as a performative, lively force situated on the boundary between art and design. Veiteberg borrows Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial notion of the third space. Through this lens of hybridity, Veitberg suggests crafted artworks can retain references to past discourses and identities, whilst forging something new.²⁷⁰ Each theorist imagines the axis of craft with art or design to be a space of vital potentiality, confirming the significance of this focus for the research.

²⁶⁷ See: Boden (2000); Greenhalgh, (2002); Ullrich (2005); Risatti (2007a); Pallsamaa (2009); Staten (2019).

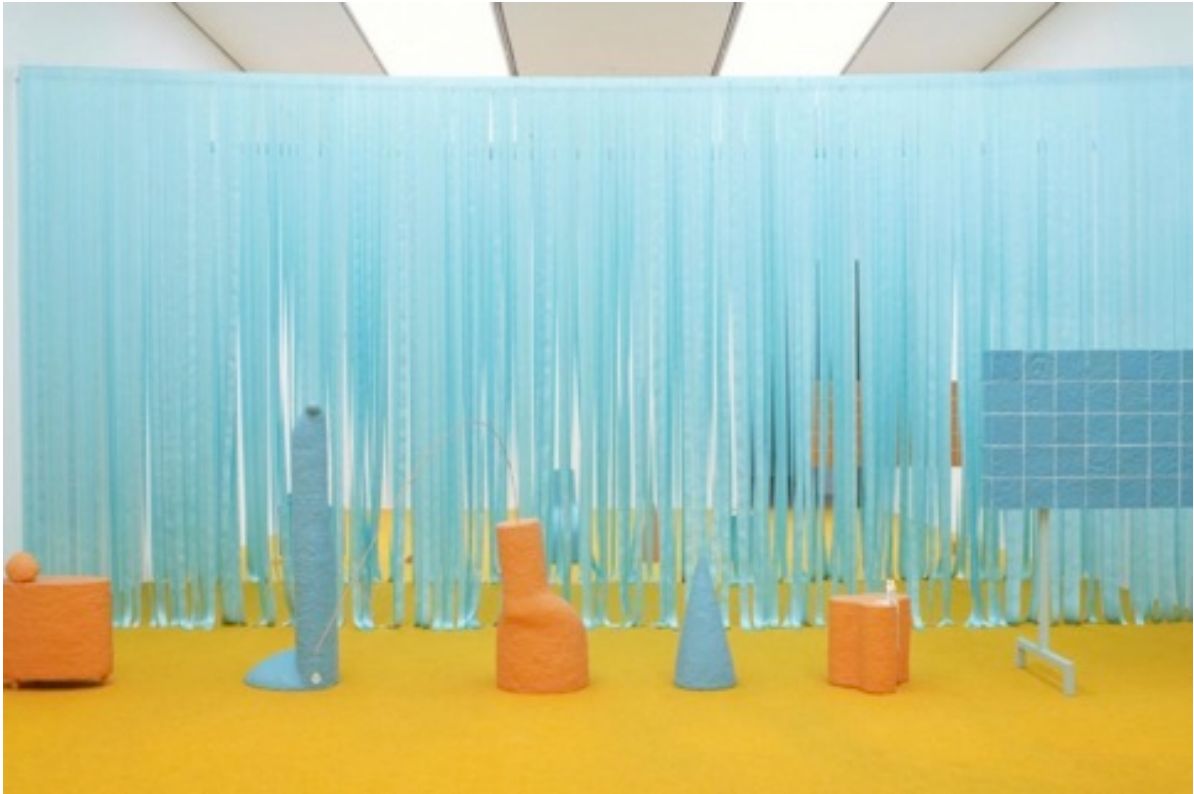
²⁶⁸ Adamson (2007), p.39; Risatti (2007a), pp.127-138, also examines the distinctions he finds between the physicality of craft and opticality of art.

²⁶⁹ Mazanti (2011), p.72-73. See also: Kettley (2010), p.14.

²⁷⁰ Veiteberg (2005), p.39.



Figs.14. Anders Ruhwald, *You in Between*, 2008, glazed ceramic (smooth surface).



Figs.15. Anders Ruhwald, *You in Between*, 2008, glazed ceramic (textured surface, opposing side).

Curator Knut Astrup Bull offers a tangible example of the conceptual agency that arises at the boundary where art and craft meet. Through close examination of ceramic artist Anders Ruhwald's installation *You In Between* (figs.14-15), he demonstrates the instability of definitions and potency that exists in equivocal artworks that illuminate this intersection.²⁷¹ As Bull describes, Ruhwald's installation operates through the mirroring of identical sets of floor-based ceramic objects within a given exhibition space: every piece has its double, albeit in opposing colours. The only variance is found in the contrasting physical surfaces of each set—one smooth, the other rough. The installation can neither be categorised as craft or art; it shifts between material and conceptual spaces.²⁷²

Bull argues that dualisms are dismantled in *You In Between*, as awareness of the physical presence and bodily experience of the objects is made apparent, alongside conceptual and aesthetic concerns. Bull makes his argument through a New Materialist framework; whilst this thesis differs epistemologically, his text offers a valuable model for considering the in-between spaces that the case study works occupy. Furthermore, Pallasmaa confirms Bull's recognition of art's agency manifested by the heightened presence of both material and conceptual states.²⁷³ In fact, he argues that this shifting identity is crucial to its embodied identity, an important perspective given the heightened material presence of much clay-based art.

The literature reveals craft processes and the act of making itself to be conceptually rich and sensorially charged foci. Ingold proposes that maker and material are united through creative endeavour as the artist/artisan responds intuitively to the nuances and idiosyncrasies of that with which they work.²⁷⁴ He implicates the viewer within this sensory field, illuminating the capacity for visible craft processes in clay-based art to impact viewers in profound ways.²⁷⁵ Ingold thus helps to map an approach to Matsunaga's work in chapter three.²⁷⁶ Furthermore, he notes that perceiving making processes is a haptic experience that encompasses both hand and eye.²⁷⁷ Whilst Ingold

²⁷¹ Bull, K.A. (2018). *You In Between: From Aesthetic Difference to Aesthetic Differing*. In: Bull, K.A. and Gali, A. (eds.) *Documents on Contemporary Crafts No.5: Material Perceptions*. Oslo, Norway: Norwegian Crafts, pp.29-46.

²⁷² Bull (2018), p.39.

²⁷³ Pallasmaa (2011), p.63.

²⁷⁴ Ingold (2013), pp.20-21. Ingold's texts (2001; 2011; 2017) have been particularly valuable for the research.

²⁷⁵ Ingold (2013), p.96.

²⁷⁶ See chapter three, pp.153-156.

²⁷⁷ Ingold (2013), p.20

makes no acknowledgement of Merleau-Ponty's influence, his correlation of vision and touch is comparable to the philosopher's thinking, as such it has critical implications for understanding the embodied resonances of craft.

Numerous scholars connect making by hand with thinking.²⁷⁸ Ingold claims making itself as an on-going source of knowledge and discovery, a concept that resonates with Adamson's understanding of craft as an active mode of conceptual engagement.²⁷⁹ While Ingold and Malfouris disagree in part, consensus is apparent in Malfouris' notion of 'creative *thinging*' as 'a saturated entanglement of thinking through and working with materials.'²⁸⁰ Howard Risatti discusses the compelling symbiotic relationship of the mind and hand in craft: through the hand, the mind 'prob[es] material,'²⁸¹ while art historian Henri Focillon offers a poetic vision of hands as instruments of creation and knowledge.²⁸² Pallasmaa's in-depth account of the hand also acknowledges its intelligence and sensory capacity.²⁸³ He notes that 'all the work of the hand is rooted in thinking [...].'²⁸⁴ All this is to recognise making by hand as an entanglement of sensorial and intellectual processes, allowing for a critical appraisal of technique, skill and material knowledge within embodied analyses of clay-based art.²⁸⁵

Craft's temporal quality is imperative to its embodied resonance. The literature provides a wealth of evidence to support this claim, connecting it to the act of making itself and the essential role of crafted objects through time. The tacit memory of skilled movement, and the histories and stories that are embedded in technical activity, Ingold names as 'the humanity of the hand.'²⁸⁶ Henry Staten expands this view, describing making as 'a practical knowledge that before it migrates to an individual mind-body has been

²⁷⁸ David Howes (2010), p.6, notes that '[n]eurologist Frank Wilson's *The Hand* has precipitated a complete rethinking of the connection between the senses and intelligence, shifting the focus from the visual to the manual. Brain is hand and hand is brain.'

²⁷⁹ Ingold (2013), p.6; Adamson (2007), p.7.

²⁸⁰ Malfouris (2014), p.145, emphasis in original. See also Malfouris (2019), p.3. See: Ingold (2013), pp.97-100 and Malfouris (2014), p.152, in relation to their disagreement.

²⁸¹ Risatti (2007), p.109.

²⁸² Focillon, H. (1989). *The Life of Forms in Art*. Trans. by Charles B. Hogan & George Kubler, 1948. New York: Zone Books, p.166.

²⁸³ Pallasmaa (2009), p.33.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.47.

²⁸⁵ For further explication of the hand/mind relationship in craft see: Ullrich, P. (2005). *Workmanship: The Hand and Body as Perceptual Tools*, and Fariello, M.A. (2005). "Reading" the Language of Objects. In: Fariello, M.A., and Owen, P. (eds.) *Objects and Meaning: New Perspectives on Art and Craft*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, pp.205-210 & p.149.

²⁸⁶ Ingold (2013), p.115.

accumulated within and across cultures over generations, centuries, millennia.²⁸⁷ His *Techne Theory* addresses the social essence of making as well as a viewer's relation to artwork, linking craft to an embodied, primal, collective sphere.²⁸⁸ In fact, Staten and Ingold claim making as a genetically inherited human instinct, a critical idea that suggests audiences can tacitly understand and connect to all things handmade.²⁸⁹

Ceramic objects and processes express a particularly acute sense of temporality evidenced by the literature. Ingold, art historian Polly Ullrich and others note the time invested in developing craft skills, an idea transferred to viewers of well-made crafted forms.²⁹⁰ Greenhalgh observes the implied historicity of ceramic pots connecting us to thousands of years of production and use; as such, he claims they possess 'archaic depth.'²⁹¹ Glen R. Brown also notes the 'deep historical associations [of ceramic objects] with function and the related concepts of time and process.'²⁹² Furthermore, Mathieu connects ceramic objects to memory and collective social consciousness, arguing that pots 'act as archives of time' given their 'extraordinary permanency and [temporal] resilience.'²⁹³

Temporality is also central to Risatti's theory of craft. For him, craft objects are embedded with the memory of our evolutionary struggle, where the historical past is indelibly linked to the present. He states:

Wherever human beings have lived for any length of time, craft objects or their remnants are to be found. They are virtually ubiquitous across the earth from the dawn of human time to the present [...]. Their widespread presence also suggests that purpose founded in physiological necessity is probably an essential, even innate human trait.²⁹⁴

²⁸⁷ Staten, H. (2019). *Techne Theory: A New Language for Art*. London; New York: Bloomsbury, p.6

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 36-40.

²⁸⁹ Ingold (2013), p.36; Staten (2019), p.9.

²⁹⁰ Ingold (2013), p.69; Ullrich (2005), p.207. Glenn Adamson (2007), p.74, discusses 'woodworker' David Pye's influential writing on skill and workmanship.

²⁹¹ Greenhalgh (2002), p.10. See also Shaw, M. (2016). Jung's Amphora: Ceramics, Collections and the Collective Unconscious. In: Brown, C., Stair, J. and Twomey, C. (eds.) *Contemporary Clay and Museum Culture: Ceramics in the Expanded Field*. London: Routledge, p.90.

²⁹² Brown, G. R. (2016). Ceramics Process in the Museum: Revolution or Recidivism? In: Brown, C., Stair, J. and Twomey, C. (eds.) *Contemporary Clay and Museum Culture: Ceramics in the Expanded Field*. London: Routledge, p.72.

²⁹³ Mathieu, P. (2007a). The Brown Pot and the White Cube. In: Chambers, R. Gogarty, A. and Perron, M. (eds.) *Utopic Impulses: Contemporary Ceramic Practice*. Vancouver: Rosendale Press, p.50 and p.54.

²⁹⁴ Risatti (2007a), pp. 56-57.

He compares craft's role in human life to that of art, arguing that it warrants a separate aesthetic framework that takes account of craft's own 'inherent features.'²⁹⁵ For Risatti, art's function is to communicate ideas, which may shift across time, whereas craft is purposeful and holds universal properties that remain stable. While the case study artworks operate through the frame of art, Risatti stakes out many core features of craft that are phenomenologically compelling: it is somatically oriented, founded on function, expresses a primordial dimension, possesses a material identity and exhibits social and cultural human tendencies. I argue that these properties are accessible to viewers of clay-based art where evidence of craft process, or allusion to function is made apparent.

Our bodily reciprocity with craft, which Risatti highlights, is an important chapter theme confirmed by many others.²⁹⁶ De Waal connects the body to the immersive quality of clay substance; sculptor Malcolm Martin notes craft's bodily scale; curators Stephen Horne and Anna Fariello separately posit that craft processes evidence ritualised bodily gestures; Rawson describes how pots are understood via the body image, and identifies touch experience as an implicit quality of pots.²⁹⁷ Cognitive scientist Margaret Boden elucidates how these bodily references may impact viewers when proposing that 'art and craft engage our minds in significantly different ways' by stimulating different perceptual registers.²⁹⁸ With reference to J.J. Gibson's theory of affordance, Boden posits that 'the crafts not only exploit the possibilities of the body, but can help us to see them more clearly and/or more imaginatively.'²⁹⁹ Gibson's theory of vision has been pivotal in connecting the crafted identities of case study artworks with embodied spectatorship.³⁰⁰ Risatti argues that while sculpture reflects a relational body image back at the viewer, craft objects, by contrast, 'give themselves over to the body'; they 'complement' it.³⁰¹ Boden expands Risatti's thinking, offering a valuable perspective for works that integrate both craft and art/design traits. Not wanting to distinguish between the

²⁹⁵ Ibid., p.15.

²⁹⁶ Risatti (2007a), p.109.

²⁹⁷ See: De Waal (2004), p.43; Martin, M. (2000). Scale and Making. In: Stair, J. (ed.) *The Body Politic: The Role of the Body in Contemporary Craft*. London: Crafts Council, pp.79-80; Horne, S. (1998). Embodying Subjectivity. In: Bachmann, I. and Scheuing, R. *Material Matters: The Art and Culture of Contemporary Textiles*. Toronto, Ontario: YYZ Books, p.40; Fariello (2005), pp.161-162; Rawson, P. (2006a). Analogy and Metaphor in Ceramic Art. In: Clark, G. (ed.) *Ceramic Millennium: Critical Writings on Ceramic History, Theory, and Art*. Nova Scotia: The Press of NSCAD, p.37; Rawson (1984), pp.19-21.

²⁹⁸ Boden, M.A. (2000). Crafts, Perception, and the Possibilities of the Body. *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 40 (3), p.291.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., p.298.

³⁰⁰ Gibson (1986).

³⁰¹ Risatti (2007a), p.126.

disciplines, she explains that ‘these two types of mental processes can be elicited by a single object, often simultaneously and sometimes even in roughly equal measure, mixed cases of art-craft will inevitably occur.’³⁰²

Boden’s hypothesis highlights the significance of functional form within this discourse, and in particular the embodied resonance of vessels, which are irrefutably associated with both ceramic and social spheres. Gray describes the ‘[a]ncient and universal’ vessel form as highly significant for contemporary artists working with clay,³⁰³ while Racz points to the conceptual ‘tensions’ produced in ‘the coming together of clay and vessel [...], not only within art dialogues, but also between art and craft [...].’³⁰⁴ For ceramicist Natasha Daintry, the vessel’s ‘persistence’ in human life ‘acts as a sort of pulse-taking’ in that it ‘reflect[s] us back to ourselves.’³⁰⁵ She exposes its quietly subversive, flexible character as opening up ‘different ways of thinking.’³⁰⁶ Other literature confirms and expands this vital focus that infuses much clay-based art with both aesthetic and conceptual attributes. Rawson shows that ‘our ceramic culture is filled with echoes’ of other pots and other times.³⁰⁷ Similarly, artist Clare Twomey notes that the ‘ghosts [of vessels] remain ever present’ in our lives.³⁰⁸ She also highlights the associative potentials of domestic objects for artists; their human scale alongside the ‘intimacy and warmth of the domestic environment, all become an intrinsic part of reading the object.’³⁰⁹ Phoebe Cummings’ reference to Baroque decorative objects demonstrates the relevance of Twomey’s words. Furthermore, vessels are shown to deliver a complex sense of spatiality extending beyond their physicality. Adamson describes the ‘implied space of a pot’ as a zone of interaction that ‘engages with the world of the everyday’,³¹⁰ while many other writers consider the evocative containing property of vessels—their capacity to hold and describe space, their ‘negotiation between inside and outside.’³¹¹

³⁰² Boden (2000), p.291. Boden uses the work of Andrew Lord to demonstrate this dual perceptual function.

³⁰³ Gray (2017), p.111

³⁰⁴ Racz (2017), p.73.

³⁰⁵ Daintry (2007), p.6.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Rawson, P. (2006b). Echoes: An Introduction. In: Clark, G. (ed.) *Ceramic Millennium: Critical Writings on Ceramic History, Theory, and Art*. Nova Scotia: The Press of NSCAD, p.209.

³⁰⁸ Twomey (2007), p.27.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., p.29.

³¹⁰ Adamson refers to ceramic writer and collector Garth Clark who wrote ‘of the implied space created by a pot’s profile [...]’ See: Adamson, G. (2017). Implications: The Modern Pot. In: Livingstone, A., Petrie, K. (eds.) *The Ceramics Reader*. London; New York: Bloomsbury, p.252.

³¹¹ Fariello (2005), pp.156-157; Daintry (2007), p.8. See also: Mathieu (2007b), p.117; Cooper (2009), p.59; Shaw (2016), p.90; Racz (2017), p.80; Adamson (2017), p.253.

Ceramicist and writer Mella Shaw establishes ‘the somatic resonance of the vessel [...] [and its] symbolic potency.’³¹² Through Emma Jung’s extensive research, she elucidates how it ‘is seen universally as life-giving and life-maintaining’, thus acknowledging the vessel’s fundamental role in supporting human life.³¹³ Ceramicist and writer Emmanuel Cooper examines the conceptual currency of relational meanings when comparing objects, vessels and pots. He identifies the ambiguous character of the vessel, an idea shared by Daintry and an important proposition for analysing the instability of Johannes Nagel’s vase sculptures.³¹⁴ Ceramicist Paul Mathieu considers the shift in meaning that occurs when domestic ceramic objects are placed in a gallery environment; he describes how ‘commonality’ and ‘transcendence’ converge, another crucial view for works such as Nagel’s and Murphy’s that possess or allude to function yet operate through the frame of art.³¹⁵ Elkins notes that ‘the thought of a vessel is fascinating in a different way than the experience of a vessel: neither one is simpler nor more sophisticated than the other [...]’.³¹⁶ Mathieu argues that to think about purposeful ceramic pots is ‘deeply phenomenological’—they function as a cultural archive ‘of time, of knowledge, and of experiences.’³¹⁷ In fact, Rawson, Mathieu, Greenhalgh and Racz all recognise vessels as ‘an external testimony’ to human life.³¹⁸

The literature thus reveals theories of craft and making as central to a theoretical framework that exposes the unique embodied qualities of clay-based art. It establishes the dynamic quality of craft and the conceptually productive interface of art/craft/design. Visible references to making and craft processes are connected to a sensory, temporal realm, while purposeful crafted objects, in particular vessels, are shown to possess somatic and symbolic embodied resonances. While specific texts are identified, a larger body of writing not directly referenced underpins the general sense here of what craft is and does, of what it could be and what it is not. This includes key writers on object theory, craft and the ceramic field who have all informed this research

³¹² Shaw (2016), p.90.

³¹³ Shaw (2016), p.88. Artist Anthony Gormley (2004), p.85, confirms Shaw’s view.

³¹⁴ See: Cooper, E. (2007). Pot, Vessel, Object. In: Cooper, E, (ed.) *The Pot, the Vessel, the Object: Fifty years of Change and Diversity in the Craft Potters Association*. London: Ceramic Review Publishing, p.53; Daintry (2007), p.12.

³¹⁵ Mathieu (2007a), p.46.

³¹⁶ Elkins (2002), p.18.

³¹⁷ Mathieu (2007a), pp.48-50.

³¹⁸ Rawson (1984), p.6. See also: Mathieu (2007a; 2007b), p.50 & p.125; Greenhalgh (2002), p.10; Racz (2017), p.80.

theme, albeit to a lesser extent.³¹⁹ Ultimately, the literature clearly ascertains the significance of clay-based art's crafted identity when determining its distinct phenomenological potency from other forms of three-dimensional visual practice.

Research Theme 3: Thinking About Space

At the outset of the research I had an instinctive sense that clay and ceramic objects embody a very particular spatial quality beyond obvious manifestations of container or three-dimensional form occupying space. To me, the ceramic artefacts I lived with or admired in museums and galleries seemed like portals to remembered or imagined other spaces, times and people. Yet this personal perspective felt more prevalent. If so, I surmised that a core aspect of clay's embodied character must be its potential to expand our immediate awareness of space. Thus, the third research theme focused on the spatial experience (in its broadest sense) of clay. Literature from a range of fields, in particular spatial theory, has substantiated my subjective insight. It evidences the embodied quality of place, the immensity of imaginative thinking, the spatio-temporal resonance of artworks, and the shared space of being. These scholarly texts build a rigorous academic framework through which an understanding of clay-based art's embodied spatiality is reached, aligned to its unique temporal, social, cultural, anthropological, mythic and material values. The ideas gathered within this section build on the literature discussed previously, whilst offering new foci that powerfully elicit the spatial character of clay-based art.

Initially, a direct correlation between embodiment and spatial experience is revealed through the literature, confirming the relevance of this research focus. As cultural theorist Debra Benita Shaw notes, spatiality is implicit in any discussion of the body—in the way it occupies space, moves through space, and resides in space. She states that 'we cannot think through the implications of specific forms of embodiment without paying attention to the territoriality that is the condition of their existence.'³²⁰ Whilst Henri Lefebvre focuses on the social construction of space rather than its phenomenological

³¹⁹ Susan Stewart (1992); Bruce Metcalf (1993); Susan Pearce (1994); David Pye (1995); Peter Dormer (1997); Ezra Shales, (2000); Garth Clark (2003; 2006; 2017); Richard Sennett (2008); Bill Brown (2009); Daniel Miller (2009); Trevor Marchand (2010); Sherry Turkle (2011); Tanya Harrod (2018).

³²⁰ Shaw, D.B. (2008). *Technoculture: The Key Concepts*. Oxford, UK; New York: Berg, p.103.

character, he too unites body and space, proposing that 'each living body *is* space and *has* its space: it produces itself in space and it also produces that space.'³²¹

Body and space are necessarily intertwined in Merleau-Ponty's thinking; as previously noted, he imagines space as a shifting horizon from which individual perception occurs.³²² Both Hass and Casey observe that for Merleau-Ponty, space is thus a system of relations rather than an environment, with the lived body operating as a pivotal entity through which spatiality is organised.³²³ Our orientation—such as an awareness of up, down, above, below, left or right—derives 'meaning and intelligibility from [the] body lived as an organising whole.'³²⁴ Intentionality is central to Merleau-Ponty's notion of lived space, which he describes as 'a system of possible actions' structured around the physicality of the body, but always focused on the fulfilment of its goals.³²⁵ He states: 'My body is wherever it has something to do.'³²⁶ Yet intentionality is not a cognisant state; it describes a pre-reflective, unconscious mode of operation.³²⁷ As Hass explains, intentionality 'is about *aiming* or *directedness* [...] below the level of intellectual judgement.'³²⁸ Thus, movement is fundamental to intentionality; according to Dillon our potentiality becomes realised through motility—each 'there' becomes 'here.'³²⁹ Merleau-Ponty's concept of intentionality offers a critical framework for understanding how bodies inhabit space, as well as their interrelation with other bodies/artworks in that space. Whether immersed in Cummings' raw clay environments, connected to Murphy's spatially disorienting interactive pieces, or intimately engaged with Bakewell's tiny sculptures, the spatial affectivity of the case study artworks in relation to spectators in a given environment determines the viewing experience.

³²¹ Lefebvre, H. (1998). *The Production of Space*. Trans. by D. Nicholson-Smith, 1991. Oxford, UK: Blackwell, p.170, emphasis in original.

³²² Merleau-Ponty (2014), p.103. David Morris describes this as a 'crossing of body and world.' See: Morris, D. (2004). *The Sense of Space*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, pp.4-5.

³²³ Casey, E.S. (2000). *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study*. 2nd ed. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, p.196; Hass (2008), p.78.

³²⁴ Hass (2008) p.78. See also: Casey (2000), p.196; Viljoen, M. (2010) Embodiment and the Experience of Built Space: The Contributions of Merleau-Ponty and Don Ihde. *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 29 (3), pp.315-316.

³²⁵ Merleau-Ponty (2014), p.260. For further analysis of Merleau-Ponty's notion of intentionality, see: Dillon (1997), pp.135-137; Casey (1998), pp.229-230; Carmen (2005), pp. 69-70; Carmen and Hansen (2005), pp.5-10; Hass (2008), p.81-83; Viljoen (2010), pp.318-319.

³²⁶ Merleau-Ponty (2014), p.260.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.139-140.

³²⁸ Hass (2008), p.81-82, emphasis in original.

³²⁹ Dillon (1997), pp.136-137. See also: Merleau-Ponty (2014), p.105; Casey (1998), p.230.

As discussed earlier, various texts provide valuable phenomenological insights into spectatorship focused on movement around sculpture and installation in spaces of display.³³⁰ F. David Martin offered an additional perspective when arguing for the ‘enlivened space of sculpture.’³³¹ Relying heavily on Merleau-Pontyean theory, he argues that sculpture’s tactile qualities energise the spatial texture of its surrounding environment, eliciting corporeal sensation in viewers; we experience this ‘felt space’ as ‘literally pushing into our bodies.’³³² Martin’s hypothesis is criticised by some for only considering sculpture in terms of universal essences (thus ignoring the diversity of sculptural practice), of using over-enthusiastic hyperbole, and of claiming our primordial unity with sculpture.³³³ Nonetheless, his text was an early reference that presented the notion of ‘enlivened space’ as a mode of experiential possibility. In contrast to asserting essential unity with clay-based art, I argue for the *potentiality* of embodied viewer experience. Elsewhere I have noted literature examining the sensory spatial qualities of sculpture that directly inform this discourse.³³⁴

David Morris considers our relationship with things that illuminate the way spatial conditions impact body/object interactions. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy, he argues that to objectively comprehend things without ‘exhausting’ perception, we must encounter them through movement and, crucially, within a bigger environment. For Morris, a ‘*larger place*’ is imperative. It ‘holds the body and thing together, thus allowing’ their relational constitution, whilst simultaneously ‘grant[ing] the separation of the body from the thing’, which, in turn, maintains its ‘inexhaustibility.’³³⁵ This perpetual transition between detachment and unity Morris claims as ‘the truth of the tensed relation between the body and the world.’³³⁶ The various experiential analyses of moving around sculpture already discussed all reflect Morris’ explication, but perhaps Sobchack and Marks most accurately expose the embodied shifts that Morris describes when considering the fluctuating near and far space of film. As noted elsewhere, their

³³⁰ See: Krauss (1966), Potts (2000), (2001), Coleman (2007), Hawkins (2010), Fielding (2011) and Lauwrens (2018a; 2018b; 2019).

³³¹ Martin (1981).

³³² *Ibid.*, p.66.

³³³ Rudolph Arnheim (1982), and L.R. Rogers (1983) are both critical of Martin’s text. See: Rogers, L.R. (1983). *Sculpture, Space and Being Within Things*. *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 23 (2),164-168; Arnheim, R. (1982). *Sculpture and Enlivened Space: Aesthetics and History* by F. D. Martin, (book review). *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 40 (4), p.435.

³³⁴ See pp.61-63 of this review.

³³⁵ Morris (2004), p.122, emphasis in original.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.122-123.

thinking is particularly apposite for analyses of clay-based art and plays a central role within this discourse of embodied spectatorship.³³⁷

Spatial oscillation also arrives through the ambiguous quality of perception as defined by Merleau-Ponty;³³⁸ again, movement underscores this sensory state. Hass and academic Laura McMahon explain that perception is laden with multiple choices; as we move through the environment our focus automatically adjusts as awareness shifts between each possibility offered.³³⁹ Some things are thus momentarily perceived with clarity, while others seem uncertain. Merleau-Ponty's notion of perceptual ambiguity is particularly relevant for thinking about case study artworks that purposefully encourage perceptual instability for viewers.

Both Doreen Massey and Tim Ingold confirm the significance of movement in relation to space. Massey's thinking has been inspiring, with two critical ideas particularly impacting this research theme: that place embodies a spatio-temporal quality, and that space is an ever-changing, collective project.³⁴⁰ Both help to establish the potent shared space of clay. In contrast, space, for Ingold, implies a detached, abstract entity; he argues instead for a place-oriented concept of spatiality that incorporates human participation.³⁴¹ Yet correspondences between Massey and Ingold are apparent. Unlike those who compare places to containers within space,³⁴² Ingold argues that we move from place to place *through* space.³⁴³ He borrows Henri Lefebvre's notion of a 'meshwork' to describe the trails of movement and clustered points of interaction and settlement that occur through place, producing 'a knot of stories.'³⁴⁴ As such, he and Massey both conceive of places as dynamic, shifting points of human intersection. Considered alongside Fielding's analysis of Anne Truitt's sculpture, their thoughts help

³³⁷ See chapter two, pp.110-116.

³³⁸ Merleau-Ponty (2014), p.33 & p.59.

³³⁹ Hass (2008), p.63; McMahon, L. (2016). Thinking According to Others: Expression, Intimacy, and the Passage of Time in Merleau-Ponty and Woolf. In: Costello, P.R. and Carlson, L. (eds.) *Phenomenology and the Arts*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, p.195.

³⁴⁰ Massey (2005), p.30 & p.9.

³⁴¹ Ingold (2011), p.145.

³⁴² *Ibid.*, p.146. Ingold criticises Malpas (1999) for this comparison.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.148, my emphasis.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.84 and p.154.

to establish the spatio-temporal 'place' quality of clay-based art, as well as highlighting the embodied shared reality of navigating exhibition environments.³⁴⁵

Various other writers have helped shape a sense of embodied place relevant to the research. Anthropologist Setha Low describes embodied space as 'a model for understanding the creation of place through spatial orientation, movement, and language.'³⁴⁶ Casey confirms this, noting that for Merleau-Ponty, 'the lived body is itself a place. It's very movement [...] constitutes place, brings it into being.'³⁴⁷ In contrast to abstract theoretical concepts of space, Casey and Malpas highlight its human quality.³⁴⁸ For Casey, embodiment arises through our being 'situated' in place where 'we undergo experiences and remember them.'³⁴⁹ His notions of 'inter-place' and 'intra-place' are particularly valuable for understanding both the spatiality of the body and the body itself as place.³⁵⁰ Malpas claims that 'place [...] is an open and interconnected region within which other persons, things, spaces and abstract locations, and even one's self, can appear, be recognised, identified and interacted with.'³⁵¹ Place, then, is a significant idea. Clay and ceramic artworks are shown in chapter four to conjure a sense of place in varied ways: as earth, clay matter is undoubtedly place instituting, while ceramic objects are strongly associated with particular places (real and imagined) and place-making.

Importantly, place is found to embody an orienting capacity, an idea that artists might work to emphasise or destabilise. Casey describes how artworks invite viewers to *place* themselves within their experiential structure,³⁵² while James Elkins claims that disturbances in an artwork in relation to human scale could provoke displacement.³⁵³ Philosopher Paul Ricoeur points to the 'uneasiness' that accompanies displacement, which equally heightens the sense of embodiment.³⁵⁴ Many of the case study artworks

³⁴⁵ See: Fielding (2011).

³⁴⁶ Low, S.M. (2003). Embodied Space(s): Anthropological Theories of Body, Space, and Culture. *Space & Culture*, 6 (1), p.10.

³⁴⁷ Casey (1998), p.235.

³⁴⁸ See: Malpas (1999), p.8; Casey (1998; 2000), pp.202-242 & p.183

³⁴⁹ Casey (2000), p.182.

³⁵⁰ Ibid., p.196.

³⁵¹ Malpas (1999), p.36.

³⁵² Casey, E.S. (2002). *Representing Place: Landscape Painting and Maps*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, p.253.

³⁵³ Elkins, J. (1999). *Pictures of the Body: Pain and Metamorphosis*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, p.17.

³⁵⁴ Ricoeur, P. (2006). *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Trans. by K. Blamey and D. Pellauer. Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, p.149.

manipulate scale and activate viewer immersion via various means, thus through their (dis)orienting capacities a sense of embodied experience arises. Potts compares the sensory effects and staging of sculpture to those of immersive installation environments. Both 'can involve quite unstable oscillations', but Potts finds the experience of installation spatially more complex and thus disturbing.³⁵⁵ He explains: 'Often the viewer is positioned in such a way as to feel both inside and outside, drawn into, while also being a little excluded from, the interior space the work activates.'³⁵⁶ Each writer offers key insights into the spatial qualities of art viewing and more specifically sculpture/installation.

Place is further confirmed as a vital focus through three essays by philosopher Martin Heidegger. While his overall phenomenological standpoint has not influenced this thesis, his thoughts on the relationship between objects, artworks and space have shaped the ideas developed in chapter four. Heidegger's 'Art and Space' makes core claim for sculpture as 'the embodiment of places', establishing the possibility for thinking of clay-based art in this way.³⁵⁷ Both Crowther and philosopher Andrew J. Mitchell provide valuable perspectives on Heidegger's complex text, with Crowther situating his thinking within the context of contemporary art practice.³⁵⁸ He explains that for Heidegger:

Volume and emptiness in sculpture are transformed when understood in relation to sculpture's embodiment of elemental place. [...] [T]hey constellate a space of human dwelling around them and draw it into the work.³⁵⁹

'Art and Space' thus illuminates the human context of place in art. Philosopher Simon Glendinning develops this idea further with reference to Heidegger's earlier essay 'The Origin of the Work of Art.'³⁶⁰ He explains that for Heidegger, works of art do not merely

³⁵⁵ Potts, A. (2001) Installation and Sculpture. *Oxford Art Journal*, 24 (2), p.8.

³⁵⁶ Ibid., p.10.

³⁵⁷ Heidegger, M. (1969). Art and Space. Trans. by Charles E. Seibert, p.7. Available from <https://pdflibrary.files.wordpress.com/2008/02/art-and-space.pdf>.

³⁵⁸ Crowther, P. (2007). Space, Place and Sculpture: Working with Heidegger. *Continental Philosophy Review*, 40 (2), p.154; see also Mitchell, A.J. (2010). *Heidegger Among the Sculptors: Body, Space and the Art of Dwelling*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

³⁵⁹ Ibid., p.159.

³⁶⁰ Glendinning, S. (2014). Settled-There: Heidegger on the Work of Art as the Cultivation of Place. *Journal of Aesthetics and Phenomenology*, 1 (1), 7-31. See also: Heidegger, M. (2009). The Origin of the Work of Art. In: Preziosi, D. (ed.) 1998. *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 284-297.

represent things, they create a new context for the past.³⁶¹ Glendinning's interpretation guided me to imagine the temporally charged, collective space of clay and ceramic art. Finally, Heidegger's essay 'The Thing' offers a particularly potent vision of clay's collective sense of spatiality through functional ceramic artefacts. He argues that the potter shapes dynamic space through an object's void, which 'gathers' and 'unites.'³⁶² Adamson alerted me to Heidegger's pivotal concept, providing context and explication of his ideas.³⁶³

While the link between digital media and embodiment was considered earlier, the spatial impact of digital technologies is a core research concern.³⁶⁴ The literature shows that digital media institutes a simultaneity of various spaces, which I argue stimulates embodied being. Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin's space of remediation highlights the potent relationship between crafted artworks and new technologies. Their concept of hypermediacy is one where multiple forms of 'representation' coincide, as Murphy's work demonstrates.³⁶⁵ Gogarty usefully applies Bolter and Grusin's thinking to the ceramic field.³⁶⁶ Further texts highlight the compelling spatiality of the digital. In contrast to analogue media, Adamson notes that 'digitization [...] inaugurates a completely new spatial logic.'³⁶⁷ He likens digital interaction to 'teleportation' since 'digital space is haphazard, [and] structured around arbitrary leaps.'³⁶⁸ Sociologist Manuel Castells confirms the connective capacity of digital space. Describing the Internet as 'the space of flows', he explains that it 'links up distant locales [...] on the basis of electronic circuits and fast transportation corridors [...].'³⁶⁹ While Castells suggests that this 'subdue[s] the logic of experience embodied in the space of places', I argue that it illuminates the spatio-temporal intertwining of embodiment.

Finally, the connection between clay-based art and imaginative space is scrutinised.

³⁶¹ Glendinning (2014), p.23.

³⁶² Heidegger, M. (2001). *The Thing*. In: *Poetry, Language, Thought*. New York, NY: Perennial, Harper Collins, pp.169-171. 'The Thing' was originally a lecture given at the Bayerischen Akademie der Schön Künste in 1950.

³⁶³ Adamson (2017), pp.249-257.

³⁶⁴ The link between digital media and embodiment is discussed on pp.71-72 of this review.

³⁶⁵ Bolter, J. and Grusin, R. (2000). *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, p.33.

³⁶⁶ Gogarty, A. (2007). *Remediating Craft*. In: Chambers, R., Gogarty, A. and Perron, M. (eds.) *Utopic Impulses: Contemporary Ceramics Practice*. Vancouver: Ronsdale Press, 91-110.

³⁶⁷ Adamson (2013), p.165.

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

³⁶⁹ Manuel Castells cited in Bryant, A. and Pollock, G. (2010). Editors' Introduction. In: *Digital and Other Virtualities: Renegotiating the Image*. London; New York: I. B. Tauris, p.5.

Kathleen Lennon's influence has been significant. She explains that for Merleau-Ponty, imagination is an indispensable part of our perceptual system; it is how reality is formed.³⁷⁰ Our corporeal engagement with the world relies on bodily remembering through imaginative processes, which enables us to anticipate future perceptual encounters. These 'invisible' aspects of perception are always already implicit in the 'visible' structure present experience. Perception is thus a bodily synthesis of past, present and future.³⁷¹ This temporal character of lived experience accessed via imaginative processes that Lennon elucidates has significant implications for uncovering the embodied potentials of clay-based art, given the longevity and omnipresence of ceramic objects in human life.

Gaston Bachelard is also an inspiration, helping to define the very particular space of imaginative immensity that I argue is manifest by craft. Together with Henri Focillon, he acknowledges spatial expansion as arising when intently contemplating small details.³⁷² Furthermore, in *Water and Dreams*, Bachelard posits that the mutable malleability of raw clay invites a contemplative state.³⁷³ Additional literature supports the link between imaginative space and viewer experience of clay. Malpas notes that through place, mind and world are 'transformed one into the other as inner space is externalised and outerspace brought within.'³⁷⁴ Researcher Carlo Comanducci proposes that film viewing instigates a process of reverie, an idea that can flexibly apply to other art forms.³⁷⁵ For Pallasmaa, art unites material and imagined realms, an idea shared by Susan Stewart.³⁷⁶ Furthermore, philosopher Marga Viljoen posits that Merleau-Ponty's notion of primordial spatiality incorporates 'mythological space, ritual space, or space experiences of my dreams [...].'³⁷⁷

A broad range of literature delivers a comprehensive body of knowledge that enables the research to claim that clay-based art offers multiple points of access to a unique and

³⁷⁰ Lennon (2015), p.21.

³⁷¹ Ibid., p.45.

³⁷² Bachelard, G. (1994). *The Poetics of Space*. Trans. by Maria Jolas, Orion Press, 1964. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, p.184; Focillon (1989), p.182.

³⁷³ Bachelard (1983), p.105.

³⁷⁴ Malpas (1999), p.5, is referring to Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* (1994).

³⁷⁵ Comanducci, C. (2018). The Remembered Film: Embodied Experience and the Image. *The International Journal of the Image*, 9 (2), 22-35.

³⁷⁶ See: Stewart (2005), p.64; Pallasmaa (2011), p.63.

³⁷⁷ Viljoen (2010), p.317.

varied sense of embodied spatiality. These academic sources demonstrate that body and space are wholly intertwined, and that movement underscores spatial experience. Art viewing is found to be a spatio-temporal, mobile activity, and lived space considered intentional, ambiguous and shared. All these qualities are directly connected to embodiment. Place and displacement are recognised as fundamental aspects of spatial experience that also heighten embodied awareness when present in clay-based art. The 'enlivened' space of sculpture is described as a textural, 'felt' zone, while the correlation of ceramic objects and body-space are shown to inaugurate potent spatial shifts. The imaginative qualities of clay substance are also exposed, granting viewers access to a space of immensity. The question of space is foregrounded by the contemporary expanded ceramic field itself, which incorporates broader definitions of practice such as installation, performance and site-specific approaches. Each has the potential to elicit additional perceptual experiences for viewers centred on space, through more exaggerated changes in scale, orientation and mode of encounter. Thinking spatially through clay and ceramic materiality—both physically and conceptually—thus offers richness and depth to any meaningful encounter with clay-based art.

Chapter Summary

Drawing on a wide range of sources from various fields of knowledge, this review contextualises the research and highlights key ideas that influence the three main themes identified above. Initially, embodiment was defined as our pre-reflective bodily knowing arising from our sensorial interactions with the world. Merleau-Ponty's theories were then placed within a sculptural context to highlight its relevance for analysing three-dimensional art. Literature explicating the viewer/artwork dynamic exposed its reciprocal nature, with meaning fluid and arising through subjective particularities of both.

Texts documenting the primary features of sensorial experience that address the research questions were examined in theme one. The intertwining of vision and touch sense, the haptic nature of close looking and perceptual 'otherness' were shown to support embodied spectatorship of clay-based art. Empathy was connected to aesthetic experience through philosophical and scientific hypotheses. Multisensory installation environments and embodiment through digital technologies were considered. The

unique sensory qualities of clay and ceramic substance that elicit embodied potentials were established.

With reference to the second research theme, craft is revealed it to be a productive space of critique. Various texts explicated craft's historic problematic character, re-imagining it as a fluid and flexible concept tied to process, and highlighting the significance of subject specialist proclivities. Craft's familiarity and socially integrated character was found to be essential to its embodied character, and the craft/art/design interface shown to be a particularly potent space. Making was posited as a sensory activity that viewers could also experience. Our bodily reciprocity with craft and its primordial temporality was established, as was our innate human connection to functional form.

Literature supporting the final research theme reveals the significance of spatial theory for establishing the research aims. Various texts demonstrated the reciprocity of body and space, and that movement underscores all spatial experience. Space was considered to be a dynamic, shared entity wholly intertwined with temporality, and place and displacement considered phenomenologically compelling ideas. Imaginative space and clay substance were connected, while digital technologies were shown to conflate manifold spaces. Each research theme draws on a range of theoretical positions, texts and authors, cultivating a comprehensive body of knowledge applied in the following chapters. Key concepts that support the research aims have been identified, analysed and synthesised, and the implications of these theoretical propositions considered in relation to clay-based practices. The literature review thus builds a compelling theoretical foundation that establishes the embodied impact of clay-based art on viewers when they meaningfully engage.

Chapter Two: Sensory Entanglements

Introduction

'For there to be vision at all the body that sees must be part of the world.'³⁷⁸
John Wylie

It is impossible to consider embodiment without recognition of the senses and their fundamental role in helping us to navigate our existence. As philosopher Taylor Carmen suggests, '[p]erceiving means having a body, which in turn means *inhabiting* a world.'³⁷⁹ The introduction chapter set out the distinctive characteristics of ceramic and clay materiality that differentiate its embodied potentials from other forms of art practice. Imparting social, cultural, temporal and anthropological resonances, I argued that clay-based objects and artworks possess sensorial qualities that are richly associative, viscerally experiential, and conceptually profound. Yet as the chapter noted, the phenomenological impact of clay practice on viewers has been overlooked. The literature review emphasised the crucial role sense perception plays in aesthetic experience, highlighting the sensory mechanisms by which art viewers might access a deeper realm of embodied being. This chapter focuses on the particular experiential qualities of clay and ceramic materiality that give rise to embodied viewer experiences. It identifies and interrogates aspects of sense perception that form part of a critical framework addressing embodied spectatorship of clay-based art. Case study examples and interviews, alongside descriptive texts, are employed throughout the chapter to substantiate theoretical claims.

Sense perception is examined here through three lenses. Firstly, specific phenomenological concepts are presented that support the potential for embodied audience encounters with clay-based art, with Merleau-Ponty's groundbreaking work on human perception underscoring this chapter's argument. Diverse, contemporary perspectives of sense perception then inform lenses two and three, building on Merleau-Ponty's thinking to form a robust enquiry. The second lens examines empirical data from neuroscience to demonstrate the relevance of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological ideas within the physical domain. The third lens employs aesthetic theory and critical

³⁷⁸ Wylie (2006), p.526.

³⁷⁹ Carmen, T. (2012). Foreword. In: Merleau-Ponty, M. (2014). *Phenomenology of Perception*. Trans. by Donald A. Landes, 2012. Oxon; New York: Routledge, p.x, emphasis in original.

art writing to situate his philosophy within the context of current art practices. Combined, these perspectives demonstrate the complex sensory mechanisms at work that stimulate embodied viewer responses to ceramic and clay art.

Initially, the chapter establishes the body as the site of perception and cognition, and the senses as an integrated perceptual system. This is followed by close consideration of Merleau-Ponty's theory of reversibility, which establishes the tactile capacity of vision. Haptic approaches to looking are examined further through film and media theory, with specific attention paid to the intimate embodied relationships that arise between viewers of art and the clay-based surfaces that meet their gaze. The connection between aesthetic experience and empathy is then established, taking account of viewers' emotional and motor responses in relation to the plasticity and tacit familiarity of ceramic and clay. Finally, movement and temporality are recognised as vital concepts that help establish the unique embodied agency of clay-based art.

Alongside theoretical discourse, this chapter introduces a first-person perspective to fully explore the sensing, phenomenological body when encountering clay-based art. My descriptive responses to case study artworks are included, revealing the multi-sensory, somatic experiences that clay and ceramic objects, sculptures, installations, interactions and performances provoke. As Noreen Garman suggests, the experiential text 'requires a *standing close* language full of evocative and persuasive sensibilities.'³⁸⁰ Subjective viewpoints employed throughout the chapter demonstrate this position. A more in-depth discussion of haptic criticism that inspires this method is situated later in the chapter, offering a valuable context for this personal approach.

Reversibility: The Relational Structure of Perception

In *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), Merleau-Ponty proposes understanding to emerge through an integrated corporeal system, and perception to be 'neither brute sensation nor rational thought, but an aspect of the body's intentional grip on its physical and social environment.'³⁸¹ Given that sensorial encounters with the world

³⁸⁰ Garman (2006), p.6, emphasis in original.

³⁸¹ Carmen and Hansen (2005), p.12. See also Merleau-Ponty (2014), p.242. In contrast, various theoretical standpoints since Descartes have affected a separation of the senses, claiming perception to arise through discrete sensory states. The following literature documents this view: Leder (1990), p.3; Coleman (2007), n.p.; Pallasmaa (2009), p.11; Di Bello and Koureas (2010) p.1; Schusterman (2012), p.9; Lauwrens (2018b), pp.85-86.

occur through the body, Merleau-Ponty thus claims it as the site of perception. As he explains:

The theory of the body schema is implicitly a theory of perception. [...] [W]e have discovered, beneath objective and detached knowledge of the body, this other knowledge that we have of it because it is always with us and because we are bodies.³⁸²

Merleau-Ponty's thinking sits in stark contrast to the Cartesian mind/body dichotomy that dominated Western culture for centuries. Through a Cartesian lens, cognitive function is central to human knowledge production, with the body merely a vessel for carrying out cerebral commands or relaying perceptual information to the brain.³⁸³ In recent years, this perspective has been challenged. The body's crucial role in generating knowledge in unique, complex and independent ways, centred on its sensory and motor capabilities, is now widely recognised, particularly in the fields of cognitive studies and neuroscience.³⁸⁴ As researchers George Lakoff and Mark Johnson claim, reason and sense develop in an evolutionary manner from, and through, our bodies, therefore they are 'profoundly shaped by corporeality.'³⁸⁵ Henry Staten shares this view. He identifies the socially and culturally transcribed 'skill[s] and know-how', embedded in even the most conceptual of artworks, that reach back into pre-history.³⁸⁶ Cognition, perception and action are therefore relational and inter-dependent. Crucially, they occur through the sensory body—one that is responsive to a world within which it is situated.

This discourse acknowledges the centrality of the body in perceptual experience. More specifically, it assumes the sensing body plays a vital role within embodied experiences of art. The senses of vision and touch are integral to this argument, their relationship key to establishing embodied spectatorship. The uniquely tactile qualities of clay and ceramic help to manifest phenomenological material resonances, yet physical interaction with artwork is rare.³⁸⁷ How then might looking at artwork made from clay

³⁸² Merleau-Ponty (2014), p.213.

³⁸³ Sobchack (2004), p.58.

³⁸⁴ See: Polanyi (1961), p.15; Gill (2000), pp.7-8; Brinck (2007; 2018), p.411 & p. 201; Coleman (2007), n.p.; Staten (2019), p. 10; Zhenhua (2008), p.128.

³⁸⁵ Maria Coleman (2007), p.7, paraphrases Lakoff and Johnson (1999) here.

³⁸⁶ Staten (2019), pp.4-6.

³⁸⁷ One exception is the work of Bonnie Kemske, whose ceramic sculptures are made to be held. See: Kemske, B. (2009). Embracing Sculptural Ceramics: A Lived Experience of Touch in Art, *The Senses and Society*, 4 (3), 323-345.

and ceramic matter stimulate such sensory responses? Optical perception has an obvious role to play being the most traditional mode of encountering art; tactile perception is less connected with art viewing. It is thus imperative to establish touch as a relevant mode of sensorial contact with art where no physical engagement occurs. Merleau-Ponty's thinking provides a means to overcome this seemingly problematic conundrum.

Sensory synthesis underscores *Phenomenology of Perception*. While acknowledging the senses are distinct from one another, Merleau-Ponty claims they communicate and operate with unity, and in relation to the wider environment.³⁸⁸ Sensation here is not an independent state leading to subsequent perceptual revelation; instead it is complex and relational, both affecting and affected by perceptual encounter.³⁸⁹ As Lawrence Hass explains, for Merleau-Ponty, the act of perceiving 'emerges *between* my organizing, sensing body and the things of the world. It is a synergy.'³⁹⁰

In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty builds on this earlier analysis of the senses to present an innovative approach that introduces his theory of reversibility: a complex ontological perspective that enfolds within it the sensing, lived body, and that which remains outside of it.³⁹¹ While the concept of reversibility remains equivocal, its essence is generally accepted to be that of a perceptual ground through which an intertwining or 'crisscrossing' of self and world occurs.³⁹² Perception is thus understood as a 'reversible' condition of being, manifested through oscillating shifts implicit within sensory states. For example, he argues that touch holds within it the possibility of touching someone or something, *and* of being touched, either by oneself—right hand meeting left—or through the touch of another person or sensible entity. Quoting Merleau-Ponty, M.C Dillon explains:

The basic model of reversibility is that of one hand touching another. And it is clear in this model that between "my body touched and my body touching, there is overlapping or encroachment [...]".³⁹³

³⁸⁸ Merleau-Ponty (2014), p.234.

³⁸⁹ Hass (2008), pp.29-31.

³⁹⁰ Ibid., p.36, emphasis in original.

³⁹¹ Merleau-Ponty's *The Visible and the Invisible* is his final, posthumously published unfinished, text.

³⁹² Merleau-Ponty (1968), p.133. The ambiguous nature of Merleau-Ponty's theory of reversibility is noted by: Dillon (1997), p.155; Morris (2010), p.142; and Ng (2012), p.138.

³⁹³ Dillon (1997), pp.158-159, citing Merleau-Ponty from *The Visible and the Invisible*.

The same is true of vision in Merleau-Ponty's reversible structure. While we look upon something, we also become that which is viewed—we are both seer and seen.³⁹⁴

According to philosopher David Morris, Merleau-Ponty's model of reversibility:

[...] shifts the emphasis [...] of perception from the sphere of the perceiver, to being as a whole, for it is the perceiver and perceived, as the reverse of one another within being, that accomplishes perception.³⁹⁵

This sensory interchange should not be regarded as a fusion of experience though, or a swapping to and fro between identities.³⁹⁶ As Morris notes, it is not like the flip side of a coin, one thing or another.³⁹⁷ Instead, reversibility implies interrelation between humans, things and their environment; each is enfolded within the same 'fabric of the world' and so there exists mutuality.³⁹⁸ John Wylie offers a succinct distillation of this relational structure of reversibility, stating:

Reversibility refers to the fact that the body is always *both* subject and object. [...] [It] fundamentally alters the relationship between the "perceiving subject" and the "perceived world". [...] No longer 'in' the world [...] the body is now 'of' the world: body and world, subject and object, are conjoined as flesh. [...] The flesh is therefore not a thing, but an ongoing process—an *intertwining*.³⁹⁹

Yet individual identities are not dissolved through reversibility; alterity is always implicit. As Dillon explains, whilst being is interwoven with the things we touch, see, hear or smell, and perception is formed through this synergy, for Merleau-Ponty, '[p]erceiving something is different from being that thing.'⁴⁰⁰ Consequently, perception always maintains an aspect that is unknowable; it holds within it both familiarity and

³⁹⁴ Merleau-Ponty (1968; 1993c), p.134 & p.124.

³⁹⁵ Morris, D. (2010). The Enigma of Reversibility and the Genesis of Sense in Merleau-Ponty. *The Continental Philosophy Review*, 43 (2), p.144.

³⁹⁶ Morris (2010), p.144; Ng (2012), p.149.

³⁹⁷ Morris (2010), p.144.

³⁹⁸ Merleau-Ponty (1993c), p.125.

³⁹⁹ Wylie (2006), 525-526, emphasis in original. Hass (2008), p.138-140, explains that Merleau-Ponty's complex concept of 'flesh' is not literal, but refers to 'the carnality and physicality of ourselves and our relations in the world.' According to Hass, it describes an '*elemental ontology*' and is thus 'a basic element of being.'

⁴⁰⁰ Dillon (1997), p.159.

disparity, and is infused with manifold possibilities of encounter.⁴⁰¹ Reversibility, as Chon-ip Ng confirms, is ‘a unity of intertwining of differences.’⁴⁰²

Interactive Revelations

Perceptual differences are palpably revealed in the digitally enhanced ceramic practice of Ingrid Murphy. By integrating various digital technologies with found ceramic artefacts or slip cast copies, she orchestrates sensorial interactions for viewers. Through physical engagement with these works, a synthesis of visual, tactile and auditory faculties is brought to the fore of consciousness. Murphy’s *360° Teapot* (fig.16) most notably demonstrates the simultaneous manifestation of alterity and familiarity within our bodily intertwining of sensory states. When connecting with this work, self and other are revealed in a fascinating perceptual exchange.

360° Teapot is a slip cast, bone china teapot replicated from a late nineteenth-century model. It is an elegant yet unassuming object. The matt, unglazed, elliptical form remains unadorned except for two evenly spaced indents running down both sides of its body. Simple raised decorative motifs embellish the handle and spout, crisp definition slightly softened through the casting process. Murphy notes the significance of these details:

[P]icking an object that had these ridges was important. When I tried it with a completely spherical form there was not enough detail for people to make a connection between this orb-like form and an expanded 360° [live stream] view. Once you understood what the ridges were—which became just light and tone on the screen—you were able to navigate the object in a different way. I felt there had to be some degree of recognition in the object.⁴⁰³

The teapot sits on a plinth directly in front of a wall-mounted monitor screen. Text displayed close to the object invites the viewer to gently place their hands upon it. This small, physical gesture sets in motion a complex perceptual experience for the participant that draws attention to the intertwining of sensory states.

⁴⁰¹ See: Dillon (1997), pp.159-160; Hass (2008), p.134; Ng (2012), p.142.

⁴⁰² Ng, C. (2012). Reversibility and its Philosophical Implications: A Phenomenological Explication of a Late Concept of Merleau-Ponty. In: Yu, C. and Lau, K. (eds.) *Phenomenology and Human Experience*. Nordhausen, Germany: Traugott Bautz Verlag, p.142.

⁴⁰³ Appendix F, p.317.



Fig.16. Ingrid Murphy, *360° Teapot*, 2019, bone china, 180° digital cameras.

Shadowy hand forms moving through bright light towards me. Curved palm shapes magnified, distorting as they press against a sheer barrier that separates me from them. I glimpse other hands in my peripheral vision: knuckles protruding, veined skin, glint of metal. Familiar limbs—my own—closing around an elliptical form in a comforting gesture. A strange relay of sensation floods through me as I sense both pairs of hands carefully navigating their way around this ceramic object in unison: a mirrored, rhythmic slow dance. A split-second of incomprehension is followed by clarity and recognition. I see and feel myself doubled: two parts of a whole.

Two cameras with 180° lenses are housed within the internal structure of Murphy's teapot. Linked to live-stream technology, they are carefully set up to seamlessly project a 360° panoramic view of the inner space of this familiar domestic form. The materiality of the object is significant. Constructed of thin bone china, light penetrates its sheer walls allowing the cameras to register visual information beyond its interior boundary. As the participant runs their hands across the outer surface of the teapot, the camera

captures their blurred form and movement in real-time, relaying it live to the monitor. Murphy describes this moment of perceptual revelation:

[T]here will be a moment of realisation when people come to touch it and understand what they are looking at. It's actually quite beautiful to see the interior of a teapot as a long panoramic image. And when fingers or hands approach the object, the shadows of these fingertips or hands will appear. There are certain things that are actually just about realisation; the object itself does nothing, the object just sits and is still. And it's very much to do with the material characteristics of bone china. By exploiting its translucent nature, you see the duality of how an object exists in space and light, with touch becoming the mediator.⁴⁰⁴

The underlying intent of Murphy's practice is to stimulate 'acts of revelation through interaction', and in doing so, 'shift someone's perception of a "known" thing.'⁴⁰⁵ This is certainly the case with *360° Teapot*. Touch, such an intimate gesture, and one usually prohibited within exhibition spaces, becomes amplified through bodily engagement here. As the participant sees their own hands touching the external walls of the object, they feel the rough surface of unglazed bone china. Awareness of felt motor responses arises as the user's hands make contact with the pot; familiar and comforting bodily articulations—cupping, smoothing, clasping—normally unconscious, are revealed. This tactile activity simultaneously initiates an alternative somatic experience: that of being touched. Merleau-Ponty's complex reversible structure of perception is vividly exposed and expanded through Murphy's application of interactive technology. As the cameras record the shadowy shapes of the user's palms pressing against translucent surface, touch sense becomes visually embodied, as live-streaming technology projects it into the optical realm. Through the synchronicity of the participant's seen and felt hand movements, a sense of self is implicitly embedded within both perceptual fields—close range and on the monitor ahead. Yet so too is alterity, with their touch reflected back onto the screen image in a reverse reciprocal gesture. As Merleau-Ponty states: 'the "touching subject" passes over to the rank of the touched.'⁴⁰⁶ This perceptual encounter between object and user enacted through *360° Teapot* renders the philosopher's words with palpable veracity, with ceramic surface emphasising this perceptual exchange. He observes:

⁴⁰⁴ Appendix E, p.303.

⁴⁰⁵ Appendix F, p.310, & Appendix E, p.296.

⁴⁰⁶ Merleau-Ponty (1968), p.133.

Already in the touch we have found three distinct experiences that subtend one another, three dimensions which overlap but are distinct: a touching of the sleek and of the rough, a touching of the things—a passive sentiment of the body and of its space—and finally a veritable touching of the touch, when my right hand touches my left hand while it is palpating the things, where the “touching subject” passes over to the rank of the touched, descends into the things, such that the touch is formed in the midst of the world and as it were in the things.⁴⁰⁷

Touch is thus implicated in all that can be perceived; the possibility of touching and being touched is implicit within the essence of things, forming an asymmetric relational structure between self and world. Dillon explains that while our identities and experiences remain separate from our immediate environment, for Merleau-Ponty, ‘there is a continuity between my body and the things surrounding me in the world I inhabit’ through touch.⁴⁰⁸ Dillon names this state of being ‘identity-within-difference.’⁴⁰⁹ With this in mind, I posit vernacular ceramic artefacts to be potent signifiers within Merleau-Ponty’s reversible structure. They are very much ‘in the midst of [our] worlds’, their ordinariness and ubiquity in daily life imparting familiarity. Touching ceramic material is consequently a common occurrence; its various weights, textures and types are tacitly inscribed within our somatic vocabularies. I argue that this corporeal intimacy potently manifests Dillon’s notion of ‘identity-within-difference’ when experienced within the context of art.

Murphy’s digitally enhanced ceramic artefacts all belong to a familiar domestic landscape: teacups, teapot, dinner plates, chai cups, and Staffordshire flatback ornaments variously make an appearance. These vernacular identities serve a crucial purpose for the artist; at its core, her work focuses on ‘fundamentally changing [our] experience of a simple object.’⁴¹⁰ No attempt is needed on the viewer’s part to make sense of *360° Teapot*, it can be approached with prior understanding. Yet haptic engagement with this piece is unexpectedly surprising for participants. Through the triple perspectives of teapot, self and touch, the work re-calibrates what is pre-reflectively known, causing a perceptual shift, which in turn heightens awareness of embodied being. Murphy exploits this unassuming familiarity throughout her practice. By integrating cutting edge technology with vernacular ceramic artefacts, she facilitates

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁸ Dillon (1997), p159.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁴¹⁰ Appendix E, p.304.

transformative experiences for audiences through carefully designed interactions. As she explains: ‘that mundane interaction [...] can actually be quite phenomenal [...]. To experience an ordinary and recognisable object in an extraordinary and novel sensorial way is what drives [...] this work.’⁴¹¹

Material Presence: The Intertwining of Vision and Touch

360° Teapot evocatively reveals Merleau-Ponty’s logic of reversibility through its interactive focus on touch sense. But it is the sensory intertwining of vision and touch described by reversibility that most effectively illuminates the tactile resonances of clay-based art through optical means alone.⁴¹² According to Merleau-Ponty, reversibility institutes a perceptual ‘intercrossing’ of vision and touch where both senses operate through each other.⁴¹³ He explains:

[E]very visible is cut out in the tangible, every tactile being in some manner promised to visibility, and that there is encroachment, infringement, not only between the touched and the touching, but also between the tangible and the visible [...] Since the same body sees and touches, visible and tangible belong to the same world.⁴¹⁴

Vision and touch are not interchangeable in Merleau-Ponty’s thinking, however. Ng reminds us that ‘[w]hat Merleau-Ponty has in view is [...] an intertwining that keeps the necessary differences vital. Vision is to be distinguished from touch even though their worlds interweave each other.’⁴¹⁵ This correspondence between the optical and the palpable is crucial for establishing embodied spectatorship of clay-based art—the tactile register of things is not reduced to touch sense but is grasped as sight takes hold of phenomena. This more nuanced interpretation of touch embraces the haptic capacity of remote encounters with objects through vision alone. Thus, through Merleau-Ponty’s reversible structure of perception, the experiential material qualities of clay and ceramic media become embodied through the beholder’s gaze.

Murphy’s work inaugurates extra-ordinary perceptual registers that heighten awareness of embodiment. But how might similar sensory revelations occur for viewers

⁴¹¹ Ibid., p.88.

⁴¹² Hass (2008), p.133.

⁴¹³ Ng (2012), p.144.

⁴¹⁴ Merleau-Ponty (1968), p.134.

⁴¹⁵ Ng (2012), p.145. See also: Dillon (1997) p.160; and Hass (2008), p.134.

where clay-based sculptures, installations and performances are neither digitally enhanced nor available for physical interaction? The case study artworks under scrutiny each demonstrate the tactile resonance and somatic impact of clay material in some way. Many of Bakewell's, Cummings' and Matsunaga's sculptures and installations are heavily invested with traces of human touch. The material surfaces of Nagel's ceramic sculptures are also rich in haptic qualities. Through juxtaposition, their forms, textures and finishes clearly illuminate Merleau-Ponty's notion of sensory reciprocity when considering the tactile potency of artworks made from clay.



Fig.17. Johannes Nagel, *Cluster/Fragment*, 2015, porcelain, glaze.

The physical presence of Nagel's vessel objects is immediately striking (fig.17). Diverse material textures collide within his work, whether united in one piece, or through groupings of individual forms. Smooth, sharp-edged, wheel-thrown surfaces meet dry, gritty porcelain facades formed through sand-casting methods. Glassy veneers of glaze in gentle tones of turquoise, blue, green and brown partially soften the rough-walled forms at times, whilst sleek porcelain cavities can be glimpsed at the mouth of vessels. Consciously juxtaposing coarse with smooth, Nagel explains that at its core, his work is

'very much about the presence of these materials.'⁴¹⁶ The artist's eclectic and experimental approach to making combines throwing and sand-casting methods, as well as dismantling and reassembly of forms. It is his sand-cast pieces, however, that best demonstrate the haptic potency of these material manipulations, and where Merleau-Ponty's reversibility of vision and touch sense is most overt.

When sandcasting forms, Nagel excavates their negative volume from boxes filled with damp sand, digging it out with his hands, judging their shape through touch. This cavity is then filled with casting-porcelain. At a certain point when the outer edges of the volume have dried, Nagel drains the remaining liquid clay away. A porcelain shell remains—a positive cast of Nagel's 'felt' space. This innovative method determines the gnarled, rough, dry surfaces of many of his vessel forms. The grainy texture of the sand is imprinted onto their outer walls. So too are the indents of Nagel's fingers, capturing the traces of his sweeping movements and gestures that clawed the sand away. The artist's use of glaze emphasises these manual impressions. He notes that it 'acts differently across the changing surface [...], the glaze gets thicker and therefore darker in the trenches, and thus highlights the traces of sculpting.'⁴¹⁷ Unblemished by such surface markings, the internal walls of these sand-cast objects remain smooth, accentuating the contrasting physicality of the outside.

Merleau-Ponty's claim that there is 'encroachment between the visible and the tangible' is clearly evidenced in the textured surfaces of Nagel's sculptures.⁴¹⁸ In viewing his vessel group, *Cluster/Fragment* (fig.17), one does not simply recognise visual relationships between a gathering of given shapes, volumes and colours that occupy a certain space; the physicality of each form registers at a tangible, somatic level also. The residue of Nagel's touch awakens visceral connections. His visible gestures caught within the body of the clay relay felt expressions of movement, force, pressure and speed in viewers. A more emotional sensory value is also connected to these traces: determination, desperation, or fervour perhaps? Juxtaposing contradictory textures of roughness and smoothness intensifies their sensorial impact, offering an enticingly tactile experience that is corporeally, rather than cerebrally, sensed. The physicality of Nagel's work thus holds within it a doubled sense of touch for the viewer. The touch of

⁴¹⁶ Appendix G, p.333.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., p.334.

⁴¹⁸ Merleau-Ponty (1968), p.134.

another—that of the artist—and the viewer’s own sense of touch, arising from their tacit material understanding developed through everyday tactile encounters with the world. Crucially, this haptic potency is not reliant on either maker or beholder, but instead, as sensory researcher Mark Paterson points out, operates in that space described by Deleuze and Guattari ‘where material ends and sensation begins.’⁴¹⁹

Merleau-Ponty’s thoughts on painting in his late essay ‘Eye and Mind’ (1961) help elucidate the somatic pull of Nagel’s work. He again raises the notion of our mutuality with other entities, noting that ‘the world is made of the very stuff of the body’ and due to this ‘cohesion’, bodily correspondences present themselves perceptually.⁴²⁰ He argues that in painting, ‘[q]uality, light, colour, depth, which are there before us, are only there because they awaken an echo in our bodies and because the body welcomes them.’⁴²¹ Nagel’s sculptures similarly ‘awaken’ bodily responses. Their material being is already part of our familiar, shared universe, and so the coarse textures, ridged bodies, shiny surfaces and subtle colours are manifest corporeally through vision. The forms also resonate with sensory values. Their resemblance to vessel shapes—forms so tangibly embedded in human lives—connect us emotionally, conceptually and temporally to an imaginative sphere. Paterson notes that in “‘Eye and Mind”, Merleau-Ponty recognises that the intimate relation between sight and touch allows a sense of immersion in the world.’⁴²² Nagel reveals this reciprocity in his work, which presents opportunities for embodied modes of viewing. Striving to achieve what he describes as ‘an inexactness or “sculptural blurredness”’, Nagel’s sculptures hover ambiguously between abstract object, decorative vessel and organic growth.⁴²³ Their physical identity also shifts between nebulous states, with this equivocality only heightening their sensorial material register. Throughout his practice, Nagel convincingly illustrates Merleau-Ponty’s proposition that ‘every vision takes place somewhere in the tactile space.’⁴²⁴

⁴¹⁹ Paterson (2007), p.92.

⁴²⁰ Merleau-Ponty (1993c), p.125.

⁴²¹ Ibid.

⁴²² Paterson (2007), p.88.

⁴²³ Nagel, J. (2009). *Assertions (Excavation)*. In: *Johannes Nagel: Presented by Michael Freitag*. Dresden: Sandstein Verlag, p.19.

⁴²⁴ Merleau-Ponty (1968), p.134.

Feeling Vision: A Haptic Approach to Looking

The notion of a visual-tactile space instituted through Merleau-Ponty's intertwining of sensory states underscores this theoretical framework that privileges touch within viewer experience. Merleau-Ponty's writing on art centres on painting, and while his ideas transpose easily across all disciplines of art practice and theory, it is film theory that perhaps demonstrates the most fertile application of his phenomenological thinking in the past thirty years.⁴²⁵ By engaging with the haptic capacity of vision described by phenomenology, attention has been focused on the embodied quality of film viewing centred on a relational exchange between image and audience.⁴²⁶ Whilst theoretical correspondences between film and clay-based artwork may seem unlikely, the phenomenological lens of film theory opens up significant critical resonances and potentials for this clay-focused discourse.

Recent film theory highlights the significance of the body in any art encounter. Yet historically, discourses centred on vision—the most common means of engaging with art—reveal its problematic relationship with bodily being.⁴²⁷ Vivian Sobchack and Laura U. Marks are amongst those who have reclaimed a positive account of vision through recognition and celebration of the 'bodily relationship between the viewer and the image.'⁴²⁸ They establish the embodied significance of our perceptual proximity to images, recognising the implicit intimacy of this encounter a crucial feature. Alongside others, they evoke the deeply sensorial physicality of film and video through their words, and the affective embodiment that emerges through these experiences, reminding us that we are not just viewers of artworks, but also lived bodies.⁴²⁹ Their writings expose the insistent materiality of a medium often considered transient and intangible. Unlike film media, the field of ceramics has been dominated, and at times overwhelmed, by discourses centred on materiality; the plasticity of clay is enticingly tactile, with bodily traces and making processes often left visually apparent. While these sensorial qualities set up a somewhat obvious sense of physical connectivity between audience and clay-based work, Marks and Sobchack offer a more nuanced approach to

⁴²⁵ See: Sobchack (2004); Marks (2002); Barker 2009); and Andrews (2014).

⁴²⁶ Marks (2002), p.3.

⁴²⁷ See: Sobchack (2004), p.58; Howes and Classen (2014), p.17; Andrews (2014), p.10-11;

⁴²⁸ Marks (2002), p.3. See also: Sobchack (2004); Andrews (2014); and Lauwrens (2019).

⁴²⁹ Sobchack (2004), p.71. Jorella Andrews (2014) and Jenni Lauwrens (2018b) also employ Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological perspectives in their writings on video art and film.

embodied art viewing that emphasises the sensuousness of haptic experience that close looking affords.

Whilst the phenomenology of touch through sensory synthesis is well documented,⁴³⁰ Sobchack and Marks add an important perspective. For Sobchack, recognising the haptic quality of vision reveals that ‘embodiment is a radically material condition of human being.’⁴³¹ Watching films is not solely a visual activity, it is a pre-reflective, wholly corporeal experience. As she argues, ‘[w]e see and comprehend and feel films with our entire bodily being, informed by the full history and carnal knowledge of our human acculturated sensorium.’⁴³² In describing her ‘sensuous experience’ of watching Jane Campion’s film *The Piano* (1993), Sobchack recalls the textures and sensations arising from distorted close-up details of the opening sequence, that were accessed ‘*through my fingers*’ rather than ‘baffled vision.’⁴³³ She writes:

Despite [...] the “unrecognizable blur”, and resistance of the image to my eyes, *my fingers knew what I was looking at* [...]. What I was seeing was, [...] *not* an unrecognisable image, however blurred and indeterminate in my vision, however much my eyes could not “make it out”. From the first [...], my fingers *comprehended* that image, *grasped* it with a nearly imperceptible tingle of attention and anticipation and, offscreen, “felt themselves” as a potentiality in the subjective and fleshy situation figured on screen. [...] It seemed a pleasurable culmination and confirmation of what my fingers—and I, reflexively if not reflectively—already knew.⁴³⁴

Sobchack’s analysis incorporates the viewer into the physicality of the cinematic space through the intimacy of protagonist Ada’s restricted viewpoint, abstracted by the claustrophobic closeness of her hands that fill the screen. As sunlight filters through the widening gaps of Ada’s fingers, the distorted image re-focuses and, with spatial perspective now restored, visual ‘sense’ returns. Yet before understanding *what* she was looking at, Sobchack had made bodily contact with the scene via felt, tactile perception. Merleau-Ponty’s theory of sensory intertwining underscores this critical study of *The Piano*. Touch sense arrives through the materiality of Sobchack’s visual register, an

⁴³⁰ Mark Paterson (2007) provides an overview of touch sense including a history of researchers who examine haptic perception; see also Juhani Pallasmaa (2009).

⁴³¹ Sobchack (2004), p.4

⁴³² Ibid., pp.63-64.

⁴³³ Ibid., p.63, emphasis in original.

⁴³⁴ Ibid., emphasis in original.

understanding not reached by one sense translating information to another, but experienced at a pre-reflective, tacit level. According to Sobchack, ‘the cinesthetic subject both touches and is touched by the screen—able to communicate seeing to touch and back again *without a thought* and, through sensual and cross-modal activity’, just as Merleau-Ponty claims.⁴³⁵

Sobchack’s sensory experience of *The Piano* corresponds with those arising from interactions with Murphy’s *360° Teapot*. Both arouse felt bodily sensations at a pre-reflective level that oscillate between the sense of touching and being touched. Although this artwork demands haptic stimulation, touch sense is simultaneously instituted through vision; the shadow play of tactile interaction meets the user’s gaze when projected in real time on the screen ahead. Like *The Piano*’s opening scene, visual sense of the teapot’s live-streamed image is initially abstracted and unstable, inviting close attention. The object’s interior panoramic space reads as an architectural structure, with high tonal contrast emphasising form as light penetrates its translucent surface. Ambiguous shapes move tenderly towards, away and around its exterior, sometimes obliterating all light as they come to rest upon it. Their sense is grasped—akin to *The Piano*—as light escapes through what becomes realised to be splayed fingers. There is intimacy within this encounter; two sets of hands—actual and shadow—caress the surface of both object and self. Through the proximal materiality of both teapot and screen image, surfaces connect—the participants feel their way through vision to touch.

At the Sensuous Surface of Things

Inspired by Sobchack’s phenomenological approach, Laura U. Marks posits the notion of ‘haptic *visuality*’, a mode of looking where ‘the eyes themselves function like organs of touch’ by drawing upon tactile sense and kinaesthesia.⁴³⁶ According to Marks, haptic visuality implicates the body of the viewer more conspicuously within vision, in contrast to ‘optical visuality’, which invites distance and detachment.⁴³⁷ Marks’ concept introduces a manner of close visual contact that ‘tends to rest on the surface of its object rather than to plunge into depth.’⁴³⁸ By drawing attention to the surface quality of film and video, Marks and Sobchack instigate a form of embodied spectatorship that reveals

⁴³⁵ Ibid., p.71, emphasis in original.

⁴³⁶ Marks (2002), p.2, emphasis in original.

⁴³⁷ Ibid., p.3.

⁴³⁸ Ibid., p.8.

'the way we are in some carnal modality able to touch and be touched by the substance and texture of images.'⁴³⁹ By acknowledging the textures and 'material presence of the other' through acute focal proximity, intimacy becomes implicitly enfolded within any visual encounter.⁴⁴⁰

Marks' thinking is highly applicable to any analyses of clay-based art. Touch is synonymous with the physicality of all states and types of raw and fired clay; its surface qualities are key to accessing their unique material character. Similarly, Paterson notes the 'felt presence' of three-dimensional forms derived from haptic modes of close looking which convey the palpability of sculpture. He argues that '[t]he proximal nature of encountering sculpture, its tangible qualities and the promise of tactility, [...] negates the felt distance between perceiver and perceived.'⁴⁴¹ Both Marks and Paterson acknowledge the influence of early twentieth-century art historian Alois Riegl on their understanding of haptic visual experience.⁴⁴² Riegl observes that 'tactile modes of representation' are evident in artistic practices more commonly associated with craftwork such as textiles, medieval manuscripts, embroidery or eighteenth-century decorative Rococo artefacts.⁴⁴³ As Marks states, '[a]ll these traditions involve intimate, detailed images that invite a small, caressing gaze.'⁴⁴⁴ When their craft heritage is purposefully present, it is reasonable to assume that clay-based objects operate similarly. Whether through the lustrous sheen of a glazed façade, or the coarse texture of a heavily grogged stoneware body, clay and ceramic objects are commonly navigated through their exterior details. The drip, the pool, the incision, the scratch, the crack, the indentation, the crackle, or the slip-trailed protrusion: all map the microcosm of surface that draws viewers into intimate proximity with their material being.

Tim Ingold also interrogates the significance of material surfaces through the idea of haptic vision. His thoughts confirm the relevance of this focus when analysing the palpable qualities of clay-based objects. Rejecting the assumption that surface equals superficiality, Ingold asks whether they 'are the real sites for the generation of

⁴³⁹ Sobchack (2004), p.65.

⁴⁴⁰ Marks (2002), p.xviii.

⁴⁴¹ Paterson (2007), p.96.

⁴⁴² See: Marks (2002), pp.4-6; Paterson (2007), pp.85-86.

⁴⁴³ Marks (2002), p.4.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.6.

meaning?’⁴⁴⁵ He considers mundane, overlooked surfaces and the gestures that connect them to the human sphere such as wiping, sweeping, ironing, or polishing. He argues that each action affects surface transformations, generating a felt connection and sense of intimacy with that object through touch. According to Ingold, these gestures are also performed purely through haptic sight—in looking we wipe surfaces with our eyes. Unlike optical vision, he notes that haptic vision ‘abides with surfaces, and dwells in them’, tracing the subtle, shifting variations of surface textures, capturing their movements.⁴⁴⁶ Ingold thus suggests we follow Ruskin and consider ‘the surface of haptic perception as a veil [...]. Far from hiding the depths *behind* the surface’, he states, ‘it allows us to feel the depths *in* the surface.’⁴⁴⁷ Gestures can therefore be understood:

[...] as operations that bring one surface into contact with another: interfacial not in the sense of crossing a threshold between the exterior and interior of an object or a body, but in the sense of establishing a relation between faces [...].⁴⁴⁸

I argue that the surfaces of many clay-based artworks are alive with gestures that bring about a sense of relational connectivity between artist, material and viewer.

Intimate Art Encounters

Marks is clear that embodied looking does not favour the haptic above the optic. Vision necessarily needs both modes to operate optimally; moving between close, multi-sensorial attention and distal, optical focus, one’s gaze cannot remain locked at the surface of things indefinitely.⁴⁴⁹ Like audio-visual media, clay and ceramic artworks engage the viewer with this spatial alternation that Marks identifies. When watching film and video, context is grasped through continuous focal interchange between wide, perspectival views and close-up detail. Viewing clay and ceramic artworks also shifts between different modes of visual attention. Approaching a ceramic object, one is aware of an overall form, but focus is drawn to the edge, the lip, the drip. The whole is grasped through granular inspection of intimate qualities in combination with a more distant gaze that admires its entirety. Nagel’s sculptures, in particular, offer these extremes of visual experience. As noted earlier, their surfaces are alive with shifting planes and

⁴⁴⁵ Ingold (2017), p.99.

⁴⁴⁶ Ingold (2017), p.102.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., p.104, emphasis in original.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., p.105.

⁴⁴⁹ Marks (2002), p.p.xvi & p.3.

textures that call out for close inspection, but the uncertainty of the forms keeps pushing vision backwards, in an attempt to grasp a wider perspective of the whole.

Similar visual oscillations are prompted across the case-study group. Matsunaga's large sculptures (figs.33-39) evidence small repetitive surface markings and intricate incisions on their surfaces. Both Cummings' and Bakewell's installations integrate finely crafted, diminutive details within much larger structures that encompass the viewer within a mass of clay formed through gestural physicality. In *A Ripening Surveillance* (figs.21-22), Cummings juxtaposed areas of small floral ornamentations with larger plant structures that overwhelm the body. In *Scenes from a History of Ornament* (figs.58-64), she purposefully manipulated two modes of looking: miniature landscapes housed in boxes were viewed voyeuristically through small apertures, contrasting with a human-scale, walk-through clay chamber. Bakewell's installation *Imagination Dead Imagine* (figs.69-70) placed the viewer inside a claustrophobic, clay-clad hut; its walls were interspersed with small shrine-like spaces where tiny, detailed, totemic objects had been placed. Each of these installations required audiences to make bodily shifts between distance and proximity as they recalibrated their visual perspectives from haptic to optic modes of looking.

According to Marks, 'oscillation between the[se] two [focal states] creates an erotic relationship, shifting between distance and closeness.'⁴⁵⁰ Eroticism here is not related to image content, but describes the intense co-constitution of image and viewer that haptic visuality instigates. Marks likens it to an intimate encounter with a lover—to look closely is to '*caress*.'⁴⁵¹ Clay-based sculptures and installations similarly prompt this 'dialectical movement between the surface and the depth of the image' when exterior details invite an intimate approach.⁴⁵² Crucially, an aspect of difference always inhabits Marks' notion of the eroticised look; while proximity nurtures intimacy, it reveals the impossibility of grasping any sense of totality within such a specific close focus. This corresponds with Merleau-Ponty for whom perception must contain the unknowable, as noted earlier. Marks offers a poignant explanation of otherness instigated by haptic visuality where tenderness and openness arise:

⁴⁵⁰ Marks (2002), p.13.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid., p.18.

⁴⁵² Ibid., p.13.

Eroticism is an encounter with an other that delights in the fact of its alterity, rather than attempt to know it. Visual erotics allows the thing seen to maintain its unknowability, delighting in laying at the boundary of that knowability. [...] But it is not voyeurism, for in visual erotics the looker is also implicated. By engaging with an object in a haptic way, I come to the surface of myself [...], losing myself in the intensified relation with an other that cannot be known.⁴⁵³

Haptic Criticism: Writing the Body into Clay

While Marks' concept of haptic visuality exposes the embodied surface resonance of clay-based artwork, her notion of 'haptic criticism' presents an equally useful standpoint for critically appraising its sensory qualities. According to Marks, haptic criticism is a mode of art encounter that engages intimately with the object of its focus. It is 'mimetic', she states, 'it presses up to the object and takes its shape [...] brushing into pores and touching its varied textures.'⁴⁵⁴ Sobchack also advocates approaching art and media through a phenomenologically intimate position, a view that art historian Jenni Lauwrens and cultural geographer Harriet Hawkins both share and explore in their critical texts.⁴⁵⁵ Hawkins notes that 'such writings are "wordings of worlds" written through the body, and in the same gesture writing the body into and through the accounts.'⁴⁵⁶ For Sobchack, recognising her body as entangled within any critical account reveals 'the intimate and materially consequential bonds we have [...] with all others and all things.'⁴⁵⁷ These art writers offer compelling precedents for considering the evocative material lure of the case study artworks and their somatic impact on spectators.

At such close-range, surface and materiality are always implicated in haptic forms of criticism, enabling us to move beyond 'symbolic understanding' and, as Marks notes, 'toward a shared physical existence.'⁴⁵⁸ Despite the intimacy of this critical approach, she suggests it may never fully capture our experiences. As Marks recalls, 'the most evocative [...] best moments' have often occurred when 'my writing did not master the object but brushed it, *almost* touched it.'⁴⁵⁹ Such proximity to surface materiality through writing connects us more closely to the focus of our attention, but as Marks

⁴⁵³ Marks (2002), p.18.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid., p.xiii-xv.

⁴⁵⁵ Sobchack (2004); Hawkins (2010); Lauwrens (2018a; 2018b; 2019).

⁴⁵⁶ Hawkins (2010), p.324, cites Elizabeth Grosz from her text *Sexual Subversions* (1989).

⁴⁵⁷ Sobchack (2004), p.3.

⁴⁵⁸ Marks (2002), p.xii.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid., p.ix.

recognises, it also reveals inherent differences within this exchange. Learning to touch an image/artwork via haptic criticality means recognising and loving these differences—the elusiveness and ‘unknowability’ of artworks, their ‘strangeness’ and ‘particularity.’⁴⁶⁰ Hawkins points to the ethical nature of embodied writing such as this, noting that ‘within the critical intimacies of such accounts room is made for the play of differences, space carved out for a multiplicity of reading positions.’⁴⁶¹ Marks concurs; for her, haptic criticism does not dissolve relations into a unified essence, but instead enables differences to live together, to show up and exist within what Jorella Andrews names as the ‘vulnerabilities’ of vision.⁴⁶² So whilst instability is always embedded within any perceptual encounter through its given alterity as Merleau-Ponty has shown, this in itself initiates an embodied mode of experiencing the world.



Figs.18-19. Sam Bakewell, installation views of *Reader* shown at Messums West, Wiltshire, UK, 2018.

In following Marks and working towards perceptual revelation through an intimate style of critical writing, one moves in closer and *almost* touches an artwork—a tantalising intensity infuses such an encounter. When closely exploring clay-based objects, sculptures, installations, interactions and performances at their surface, one begins to lose foothold on visual ground that initially seems familiar, stimulating new and unique experiences where instances of embodied feeling can arise. An encounter with Sam Bakewell’s *Reader Series* (figs.18-19), when shown as part of the group exhibition *Beyond The Vessel* at Messums Wiltshire exhibition space, reveals such critical

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid., p.18 & p.xii.

⁴⁶¹ Hawkins (2010), p.325.

⁴⁶² Andrews (2014), pp.12-13.

intensities. Close corporeal attention undertaken through writing—of both my observing body and of Bakewell’s clay objects—has evoked Marks and Sobchack’s ideas in a tangible and direct way.

Ambiguous lump-like forms line up along narrow plinths. Set against blank white walls, the intensity of their colour—either saccharine-bright or earthy-rich—seduces me to move in closer and experience these curious objects more intimately. Touch, smell and taste senses are awakened, becoming alive with anticipation. I am also aware of my breath as my face nears the surface of each piece. My visual frame of reference becomes close-focused, with peripheral vision limited to nearby colours and textures, forming a vista of abstraction. Stepping back again, I take in this gathering of highly pigmented lumps of substance, each similarly sized, shaped and evenly spaced apart. My eyes dart between them, trying to mentally organise the colours, find resonances and rhythms, but my visual field cannot hold onto the dispersed grouping. In some I identify grooves where hands have roughly gouged their way through matter; elsewhere, deep recesses remain where fingers once plunged. My hands want to retrace these movements, to feel the pleasurable yield of this seemingly malleable physicality. I imagine the cold, damp, smooth clay texture pressing against my skin, and I have an overwhelming desire to squash it through the fingers of my clenched fist.

Bakewell’s *Reader* series is an on-going body of work consisting of numerous solid lumps of Parian clay. Variously manipulated and shaped, these intensely coloured forms are fairly uniform in size, each processed through Bakewell’s wedging actions upon a whole bag of clay. He chooses to work in Parian because of its softness, flexibility and self-glazing character, caused by high frit content.⁴⁶³ According to Bakewell, this means ‘you can fire it lower; it holds details incredibly well, but it also doesn’t really melt.’⁴⁶⁴ Yet, as he notes, if the temperature is taken high ‘it can flop on itself, it does really interesting things.’⁴⁶⁵ The forms are curious and disconcerting, initially seeming static and dense, as though inert geological specimens awaiting investigation. Unencumbered by representational baggage, they have no frame of reference beyond their material state, and yet they are more than just material body. The deceptive simplicity of these

⁴⁶³ A frit functions as the glass-forming element of a glaze, and is usually a fusion of silica, boron and soda. See: Finkelburg, D. (no date). Frits. *Ceramic Arts Network*. Available from <https://ceramicartsnetwork.org/ceramic-recipes/recipe/Frits#>

⁴⁶⁴ Appendix A, p.248.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

clay pieces reveals a more animated character. Their forms are witness to the traces and actions of other bodies; the immediacy of these raw and visceral entities also opens up a deeper awareness of the base matter of being.

Empathy and Aesthetic Experience

Encountering Bakewell's *Reader Series* is a full-bodied, visceral, kinaesthetic experience. Torn, shoved, wedged, squashed, folded, scraped, prodded and stretched—the heft and weight of human force is evident in the very substance of each *Reader* form, and this feeling is transferred to viewers' bodies through their haptic gaze. Professor of cognitive archaeology, Lambros Malafouris, also offers a useful lens through which to consider sensorial connections that occur between audiences and artworks made of ceramic and clay. His research identifies 'the fluid and relational *transactions* between people and things' by way of close examination of potters' skillful and experiential material engagement.⁴⁶⁶ Malafouris describes this as 'the *feeling of and for clay*.'⁴⁶⁷ His hypothesis is discussed more fully later in the thesis,⁴⁶⁸ here though, Malafouris' idea of *feeling* through clay identifies the relational, material connectivity that can occur when engaged with the substance. Viewer experience, however, is somewhat different to that of maker. Given this, and that the intimate, relational nature of embodied spectatorship has been established,⁴⁶⁹ I borrow Malafouris' phrase with slight adjustment. I propose that when observing clay-based art, viewers experience a 'feeling of' and, in this case, *with* clay, rather than 'for' it.⁴⁷⁰ Recent research reveals a correlation between empathetic bodily responses and aesthetic experience; the prospect of feeling *with* artworks therefore seems highly appropriate when considering the somatic potency of clay.

As previously noted, more recent philosophical thinking has (for some) moved beyond entrenched mind/body dualisms to reframe sensory perception as a bodily source of knowledge and the ultimate condition for engaging with and being in the world. Yet like all philosophical enquiry, these ideas are abstract in essence. Developments in neuroscience over the past thirty years, however, offer tangible hypotheses that both

⁴⁶⁶ Malafouris (2014), p.143, emphasis in original.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., p.149, emphasis in original.

⁴⁶⁸ See chapter three, pp.156-158.

⁴⁶⁹ See pp.112-113, of this chapter.

⁴⁷⁰ I have knowingly borrowed and adjusted Malafouris' original phrase for the purposes of my argument, using my own emphasis.

support and extend such sensory-focused debate.⁴⁷¹ Through brain imaging technologies, evidence has emerged that maps the social significance of neural mechanisms. As neuroscientist Vittorio Gallese explains, ‘action, sensations, affect, and emotions’ are ‘underpinned by the activation of shared neural circuits.’⁴⁷² These research findings demonstrate the neurological basis of aesthetic experience, and are highly valuable for explicating the distinctive, sensorial human relationship with clay-based art, as will be shown.

In the 1990s, researchers discovered what they later named ‘the mirror neuron system’ in the brain.⁴⁷³ This led them to propose that when humans observe the actions and emotions of other humans, ‘a meaningful embodied interpersonal link is automatically established.’⁴⁷⁴ Empirical studies revealed that a corresponding neural response is activated in subjects’ brains when perceiving the actions of others, though the subjects themselves remained static.⁴⁷⁵ As Gallese elucidates:

Mirror neurons are premotor neurons that fire both when an action is executed and when it is observed being performed by someone else [...]. Watching someone grasping a cup of coffee, biting an apple, or kicking a football activates the same neurons of our brain that would fire if we were doing the same.⁴⁷⁶

More significantly, seeing representations of such actions—through imagery for instance—stimulates mirror neuron responses connected to the same mode of activity. Furthermore, these neural responses also occur when the subject simply *imagines* intentional actions, an idea that clearly connects with any imaginative provocation implicit within art.⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁷¹ Gallese (2009; 2017a; 2017b; 2019); Freedberg and Gallese (2007); Anon (2006).

⁴⁷² Gallese, V. (2009). Mirror Neurons, Embodied Simulation, and the Neural Basis of Social Identification. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 19 (5), p.519.

⁴⁷³ In 1996, Vittorio Gallese, Giacomo Rizzolatti and Leonardo Fogassi discovered the mirror neuron system in monkeys, which they later also identified in humans. In: Anon. (2006). Awards; Rizzolatti, Gallese, and Fogassi Win Grawemeyer Prize for Study of Mirror Neurons. *Mental Health Weekly Digest*. Atlanta: NewsRX. 25 Dec 2006: 53.

⁴⁷⁴ Gallese (2009), p.520.

⁴⁷⁵ Freedberg and Gallese (2007); Gallese (2009; 2017).

⁴⁷⁶ Gallese (2009), p.521.

⁴⁷⁷ Gallese, V. (2017a). Visions of the Body: Embodied Simulation and Aesthetic Experience. *Aisthesis*, 1 (1), 41-50; Freedberg, D. and Gallese, V. (2007). Motion, Emotion and Empathy in Esthetic experience. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 11 (5), 197-203.

Also pertinent is the discovery that other neural mirroring mechanisms are stimulated by subjectively observing basic human emotions and sensations in others, such as witnessing someone's expression of disgust or pain.⁴⁷⁸ Gallese notes that while we don't experience an exact replication of observed emotional states, brain activity indicates that we 'experience others *as* experiencing emotions or sensations we know from the inside, as it were.'⁴⁷⁹ He names this bodily 'attunement' to others as 'embodied simulation', a state he argues gives rise to empathetic feelings in humans.⁴⁸⁰ According to Gallese, this 'capacity to empathize with others is mediated [...] by the activation of the same neural circuits underpinning our own emotional and sensory experiences.'⁴⁸¹ Our socially relational connectedness can therefore be said to have a neurological basis; as Gallese states, we inhabit a 'neurally instantiated we-centric space.'⁴⁸²

These findings are highly significant for critical accounts of aesthetic experience. Many philosophers and art theorists valuably demonstrate their application through art writing and academic texts, as will be discussed in due course.⁴⁸³ However, in partnership with art historian David Freedberg, Gallese himself went on to connect neural mirroring mechanisms and embodied simulation with aesthetic experience.⁴⁸⁴ Together, their hypothesis established 'the neural mechanisms underpinning the perceptual analysis of the formal features of art works and of the aesthetic feelings [that] their perception generate[s] in beholders.'⁴⁸⁵ While Gallese is clear that neuroscience cannot measure the social, historical and cultural significance of art for audiences, he argues that it does expose the 'bodily components of the complex manifold we designate as "aesthetic experience".'⁴⁸⁶ Crucially, empirical data reveals that 'visible traces' of making perceived in the body of an artwork, enacted through an artist's gesture, can stimulate corresponding motor responses in the brain of the observer—a key proposition when considering the plasticity of clay.⁴⁸⁷ A close reading of one of

⁴⁷⁸ Gallese (2017a), p.44, and (2009), p.523.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.44, emphasis in original. See also: Freedberg and Gallese (2007), p.198.

⁴⁸⁰ Gallese (2009; 2017a; 2017b)

⁴⁸¹ Gallese (2009), p.523.

⁴⁸² Gallese (2009), p.520.

⁴⁸³ See: Ingar Brinck (2007; 2018), Ellen Esrock (2010; 2001), and Jenni Lauwrens (2018b).

⁴⁸⁴ Much of Gallese's recent neurological research focuses on empathetic human responses to art and film. See: Gallese (2017a; 2017b; 2019; 2020).

⁴⁸⁵ Gallese (2017a), p.42.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.45.

Bakewell's *Reader Series* forms (fig.20) helps to connect this scientific hypothesis to the experiential realm.

These lumps are alive with traces of human impact. As I am moved to think about manipulating clay matter, I simultaneously experience internal, empathetic bodily sensations in response to the actions perceived. A pale-pink, wedged form evidences a forceful, upward, pulling gesture, disrupting the softer folds of its matter that lie against the plinth. My eyes follow the action of the gouged finger-furrows towards a torn, fist-shaped edge that abruptly halts the velocity implied in this gesture. My hands sense its physicality, the elasticity and give of the clay, the speed and violence of the movement. I become aware of my corresponding motor capabilities: the thrust of an arm, the tightening of a fist. As my body acknowledges these actions, I also note an internal response; my stomach clenches as it senses the upward pull of pliable substance stretching away from the main body of material. And my body seems to subconsciously resist the stretch that it comprehends.



Fig.20. Sam Bakewell, detail from *Reader series*, 2018, ceramic.

Bakewell's *Reader Series* lumps manifest acute gestural physicality within their material states, which impact forcefully at a neurological level, clearly demonstrating Gallese's hypothesis of aesthetic attunement. Less extreme material manipulations also hold possibilities for bodily simulation. The traces of digging evident in Nagel's vessel objects, the tooled markings that inhabit the surface of Matsunaga's sculptures, and the imprints

of Cummings' skin pressed into the petals and leaves of her floral forms—all capture gestures that are transferable through cognitive and motor capabilities. But experiential encounters with these case-study artworks hold more than mere gestural equivalences, one feels emotionally connected too. Murphy's *360° Teapot*, may fill the participant with feelings of nostalgic warmth and comfort, whereas Bakewell's *Reader* sculptures stimulate a sense of urgency, aggression, pain perhaps, as well as sensuality found through the intimacy of Marks' close look. Gallese's research is well illustrated by the case study artworks, which palpably elicit emotional and sensory reactions in viewers, thus 'allow[ing] beholders to *feel* the artwork in an embodied manner.'⁴⁸⁸

What arises from the neuroscientific data is an understanding of our relationship to both real and imaginary worlds as 'rooted in our brain-body system.'⁴⁸⁹ Human empathy is indelibly connected to the sensory system and proposed as a key aspect of aesthetic experience.⁴⁹⁰ These ideas are not original in essence. Freedberg and Gallese, amongst others, note an array of writers who have explored an empathetic bodily response to aesthetic experience since the eighteenth-century.⁴⁹¹ They also recognise Merleau-Ponty's important phenomenological contributions that establish the embodied nature of art viewing, a theoretical position taken up in art and film criticism since the 1960s, as previously seen.⁴⁹² While evidence points to on-going interest in embodied perspectives of art, the field of aesthetics has been slow to develop any form of serious engagement with somatic experience.⁴⁹³ However, the discovery of the brain's mirroring mechanisms has, in part, generated an upsurge in interest beyond the scientific community. Recent academic contributions from diverse fields further establish the significance of empathetic bodily responses in aesthetic experience, offering an important perspective for arguing that viewers feel *with* clay.

A Sensory Approach to Aesthetics

Ellen Esrock, Jenni Lauwrens and Ingar Brinck are amongst those contemporary writers who have paid significant attention to the embodied nature of aesthetic experience in

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid., p.45, emphasis in original.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁰ Di Bello and Koureas (2010), p.5.

⁴⁹¹ Freedberg and Gallese (2007), p.198. See also: Paterson (2007); Pallasma (2009; 2011); Di Bello and Koureas (2010); Esrock (2010); Brinck (2018).

⁴⁹² See: Krauss (1966); Fried (2002); Marks (2002); Esrock (2003; 2010); Sobchack (2004); Fielding (2011); Andrews (2014).

⁴⁹³ Freedberg and Gallese (2007), p.199; Esrock (2010), p.219; Schusterman (2012), p.9; Brinck (2018), p.202.

their work. Esrock uses the mirror neuron system to support her hypothesis of ‘*somatosensory reinterpretation*’, a process where spectators ‘use their somatosensory system to change the felt-sense of bodily boundary in order to bring themselves into an intimate relationship with art objects.’⁴⁹⁴ As she explains:

When visually engaged with the object, the background feel of the somatosensory system can be reinterpreted as the feel of certain qualities of the object viewed. Indeed, these sensations can be interpreted to feel like the very substance of the object—its weight, density, or movement, in which case our somatosensory system is being projected onto the object in the world. Our somatosensory system can also be interpreted as being touched by the object viewed—in which case the object is being introjected into one’s body. Whatever the location, subjective or objective, the experience retains both components.⁴⁹⁵

In proposing that the qualities of the object perceived are enfolded within ones sensory system, Esrock offers further weight to the claim here that viewers can somatically feel the insistent materiality of ceramics and clay.

Esrock clearly acknowledges Merleau-Ponty’s influence on her thinking. However, her concept of somatosensory reinterpretation is based foremost on neuroscientist Antonio Damasio’s notion of somatic markers. She describes these as bodily states connected to both positive and negative past experiences that we store as ‘memory images.’⁴⁹⁶ For example, in scalding oneself on a hot coffee cup, the visual image of that vessel could be identified at a somatic level with that specific negative sensory state.⁴⁹⁷ Esrock explains that ‘a somatosensory state marks an image in such a way that it imaginatively becomes it—or part of it.’⁴⁹⁸ This ‘fusion’ occurs as awareness of internal bodily sensation merges with consciousness of the external qualities of the artwork.⁴⁹⁹ She therefore concludes that ‘[a]t such moments viewers reinterpret their somatosensory sensations as a quality of the art work.’⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁴ Esrock (2003), p.2, defines the somatosensory system as ‘the visceral functions, those involving the regulation of muscles in the heart and lungs, the intestines, the blood vessels, the stomach, and the skin. The [...] tactile sensations on the body’s surface, and, from deeper inside, our proprioceptive sensations, those detecting vibration and spatial position, as well as the kinesthetic senses of bodily movement and balance.’

⁴⁹⁵ Esrock (2003), p.8

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid., p.6.

⁴⁹⁷ My example.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid., p.6.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., p.2.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.

Experience of clay and ceramic materiality is common within social and cultural life. We make physical contact with functional domestic objects and visual contact with decorative china ornaments; we may experience it working with industrial ceramic components, or even when digging earth in the garden. Visual, tactile or auditory, these past encounters with clay-based matter are reinterpreted through the somatosensory system and infused into our sensorial register of an artwork's qualities, as Esrock suggests. For instance, the sound of a ceramic object smashing is familiar to most people. When looking at a fragile ceramic artwork then, corresponding auditory somatic markers within the viewer's somatosensory system may be engaged. Murphy's teapot may evoke sensations of heat in the hands for some, linked to past experiences of holding a similar object and feeling its warmth. And Bakewell's wedging actions upon clay matter must surely connect with somatic markers linked to our own experiences of hands plunged into dough or mud. 'When inside and outside are reinterpreted', states Esrock, 'viewers cross the conventional boundary between self and object.'⁵⁰¹ She is clear, however, that, somatosensory reinterpretation occurs through desire or curiosity to engage with the artwork, rather than as a matter of course—viewers must first attend to it through their own volition.

Ingar Brinck similarly recognises the empathetic nature of aesthetic engagement as 'based in the recognition of others' experiences as distinct from one's own [...] [in] the reciprocal interaction between viewer and artwork.'⁵⁰² Informed by phenomenology and neuroscience, she grounds her thinking in dynamic systems theory, which claims individuals and their environments bond through a mutually influencing relationship.⁵⁰³ The moving body is a vital aspect of this interaction. Brinck suggests that a process of phenomenological 'coupling' occurs between audience and art piece. This prompts a physical mode of exploration—or 'active probing'—that 'structures and organizes visual experience by way of perceptual feedback from body movements made in response to the artwork.'⁵⁰⁴

⁵⁰¹ Esrock (2003), p.2.

⁵⁰² Brinck, I. (2018). Empathy, Engagement, Entertainment: the interaction dynamics of aesthetic experience. *Cognitive Processing*, 19 (2), p.201.

⁵⁰³ Brinck (2018), p.205.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., p.201.

Viewers are also empathetically connected to art at a somatic level through movement. Brinck argues that witnessing the traces of an artist's actions in a work 'results in the observe[r] being bodily moved through somebody else', as Gallese's research has shown.⁵⁰⁵ These features impart additional experiential qualities beyond a neurological frame. According to Brinck, they:

[...] give insights into the dynamics of the creative process and reveal the artist's web of intentions, sensations, and feelings through their spatial, material, and physical properties [...]. Embodied engagement with an artwork prepares for a phenomenologically richer understanding than the detached, observational perspective that informs the viewer about mainly her own reactions to the artwork.⁵⁰⁶

Thus, art arouses a complex fusion of emotional and motor responses enacted through its material register, connecting spectator and artist within a subjective, sensory realm. Through this process, access to the shared perspectives of being is opened up for the viewing subject. For Brinck, movement is therefore a 'sense-making' emotional adjustment, as well as a bodily one. It establishes 'understanding that the world can be experienced in different ways and conversely, meaning can be known together.'⁵⁰⁷

Given the propensity of clay to retain physical impressions, I argue that an artist's sensory realm of creative production is readily accessible for viewers of many clay-based forms. The ornamental floral details found in Cummings' plant structures (fig.22) certainly offer such empathetic connections, as the artist's own reflections on viewer experience of her work demonstrates:

[T]he process [of making petals] will pick up the lines of my hand and it's interesting to see how people react to it. At first, they don't see that it's the lines from my hand, and then at a certain point they realise. [...] [I]t takes a little time when viewers are in the work to attune to it, and then they are more aware of the traces of my body [...].⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid., p.208.

⁵⁰⁶ Brinck (2018), p.205.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid., p.208.

⁵⁰⁸ Appendix B, p.264.



Figs.21-22. Phoebe Cummings, *A Ripening Surveillance* (details), 2018, raw clay, mixed media.

These traces of another's body formed through the pressure of clay substance against skin are an emotionally charged presence in Cummings' work. Awareness of the intense focus, care and time invested in building her flower forms is also transferred to the viewer's consciousness through the evident precision and delicacy of their construction. Cummings describes the physical shifts of attention that occur through her making process, noting that with 'very detailed work [...] [the focus] is in my hands, whereas when I'm working on a big area of an installation, that becomes much more about my whole body.'⁵⁰⁹ These sensory extremes of bodily engagement undertaken by the artist when developing large-scale, site-specific works must also register for the viewer. They not only connect to different modes of the artist's physicality when making but also reveal her shifts in concentration and the accompanying 'web of intentions, sensations and feelings' needed to perform such diverse manipulations in clay.⁵¹⁰ Cummings' work evidences Brinck's hypothesis that aesthetic experience has the capacity to *move* viewers at both a neurological level and an emotional one, forming connections between audiences and artists that offer new perspectives for experiencing the world.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁵¹⁰ Brinck (2018), p.208.

Sculpture and the Shifting Ground of Perception

When examining the minimalist sculptures of Anne Truitt, philosopher Helen Fielding similarly argues that spectators are able to access the subjective, creative realm of the artist through the 'material existence' of her work.⁵¹¹ For Fielding, the physicality of Truitt's sculptures (fig.23) demonstrates 'a reifying of her emotions and experiences', which are then 'perceptually shared by others in a public space.'⁵¹² Like Brinck, movement is key to Fielding's thinking, given the varied perspectives of reality experienced through a moving body. Exhibition viewing necessarily generates a multiplicity of perceptual accounts as people negotiate artwork and space, each in unique ways. Through the mutability of this interaction, Fielding proposes that new meanings arise. For her, Truitt's sculptures:

[...] show up the variation, the multiple perceptions in moving because they move when my body moves. They reveal that the world is not a static ontic materiality and that I create a certain reality through the ways I move and the perspectives I take.⁵¹³

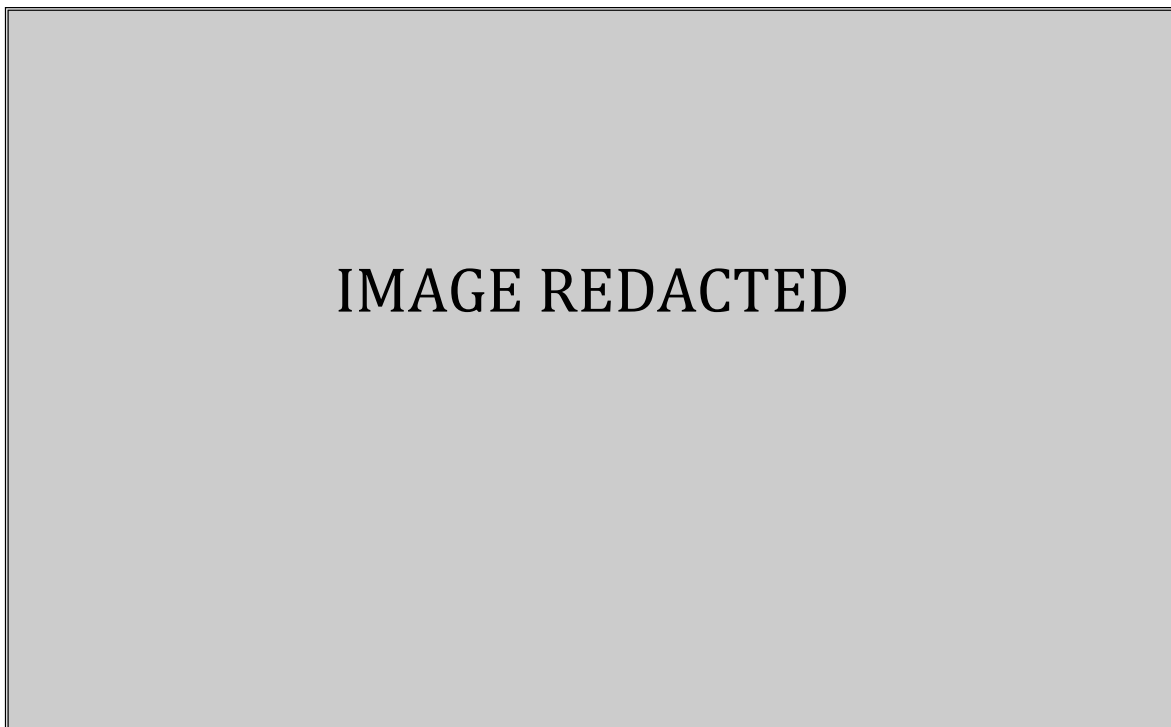


Fig.23. Anne Truitt, *Perception and Reflection*, 2009, acrylic on wood.

⁵¹¹ Fielding (2011), p.524.

⁵¹² Ibid.

⁵¹³ Ibid., p.527.

Fielding's thinking is grounded in Merleau-Ponty's claim that viewing phenomena occurs through the whole body, and is formed through the multiple, yet 'partial aspects' implicit within any visual encounter.⁵¹⁴ These incomplete views do not combine to create a holistic perceptual experience—one never sees an object in its entirety with one look. Alex Potts concurs.⁵¹⁵ Even though Merleau-Ponty mainly focused on painting when interrogating art, Potts argues that his ideas are particularly relevant for sculpture, due to the way audiences naturally move around three-dimensional forms. He explains:

Our sense of the work as a whole shape literally gets displaced by the spectacle of continually shifting partial aspects it presents. This destabilising effect is particularly insistent in the case of a sculpture because of the distinctive kinds of visual and spatial awareness that now come into operation. [...] [T]aking in a sculpture is manifestly not just a matter of looking and scanning but also [...] of taking time to walk around it too.⁵¹⁶

Nagel's body of wheel-thrown vessel-forms (fig.24) purposefully plays on the multiple viewpoints implicit within our perceptual register. Once made, he disassembles his large vase-like objects to create new entities, combining disparate and often jarring sections through stacking, building and collaging techniques.⁵¹⁷ These sculptures are anchored in the well-known genre of decorative arts, and it is precisely this familiarity that confounds expectations, as Nagel's description of his process suggests:

[Initially] they are very classic vase shapes, or parts of vases; they are volumes that [...] have rotational symmetry and are unspoiled, so have a certain dynamic that is familiar. So it starts with the pure craft process of throwing these objects, then afterwards I take them apart. Then I try to reassemble them and add things, and try to find a way to move them on and get this friction back in.⁵¹⁸

Unlike the uniform silhouettes of standard thrown objects that look the same from any angle due to their 'rotational symmetry', Nagel's thrown vessel forms propel the viewer around the artworks to make sense of them. Thus, his reimagined vases clearly evidence

⁵¹⁴ Potts (2000), p.8.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid., p.8 & p.218.

⁵¹⁶ Potts (2000), pp.8-9.

⁵¹⁷ Freitag, M. (2009). Spinning—but Not Centred: The Ceramicist Johannes Nagel. In: *Johannes Nagel*. Trans. by Christopher Hayley Simpson. Dresden: Sandstein Verlag, p.10.

⁵¹⁸ Appendix G, p.331.

Potts and Fielding's claim that sculpture heightens awareness of Merleau-Ponty's shifting perceptual perspectives.



Fig.24. Johannes Nagel, *Improvisorium*, 2011, porcelain, glaze.

While various writers have employed phenomenological approaches to art criticism since the 1960s, Rosalind Krauss was the first to apply Merleau-Ponty's multiple perspectives of perception to sculpture.⁵¹⁹ Her 1966 review of Donald Judd's new sculptures is framed around her ability to grasp their sense only by approaching the work from various viewpoints, with each look undermining the preceding one.⁵²⁰ As Krauss states, 'the work itself exploits and at the same time confounds previous knowledge to project its own meaning.'⁵²¹ Moving around artworks, and in particular three-dimensional forms, is integral to understanding them fully. For Fielding, Merleau-Ponty's theory also serves an ethical purpose. As she explains, '[p]erception and movement lead us into relationships with other beings that are united under the "intersensory unity of a 'world"'.⁵²² Crucially, the plural perspectives we experience within the 'public realm', such as the shared space of an exhibition, serve as a stabilising

⁵¹⁹ Potts (2000), p.209.

⁵²⁰ Krauss (1966).

⁵²¹ Ibid., p.212.

⁵²² Fielding (2011), p.526, citing Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (2014).

force for reality.⁵²³ Thus, sculpture exposes ‘how we relationally encounter the world.’⁵²⁴ As Fielding notes, ‘[a]n ethics [...] that allows for only one perspective—ultimately loses its capacity for flexibility, and for being part of a common and shared reality.’⁵²⁵

Sensorial Immersion: Experiencing Clay-Based Installation

Focusing on installation practice, cultural geographer Harriet Hawkins similarly considers the ethical nature of encountering art in a public space. Due to its immersive structure, she believes that installation ‘affirms an ethical insistence on a symbiotic relation between self and world: the mutual permeability and the mutual creation of self and other.’⁵²⁶ Influenced by Merleau-Ponty’s theory of reversibility, where self and other commingle within the perceptual ground, Hawkins argues that the experience of moving through an installation merges the sense of seeing and of being seen. Viewers necessarily become aware of their crucial involvement in co-creating an installation, given their very being is situated at the heart of such an encounter. The exhibitionary nature of their presence assimilates a spectator into the work; they are both viewed by and with others. When immersed in such an environment, Hawkins argues that the viewer is no longer:

[...] detached from the world. Instead the terms of viewing can only be understood to be embodied and relational. I am part of the art work/world and co-existent with it: constituting but also constituted.⁵²⁷

Both Hawkins and Maria Coleman offer valuable embodied accounts of moving through installations and the perceptual revelations that occur. They note that artists orchestrate experiences that stimulate multiple sensory fields, which might include smell, sound, light and temperature.⁵²⁸ Installations also manipulate bodily modes of encounter by attending to scale, spatiality and directional progress, all discovered by a viewer’s movement through the space. Hawkins and Coleman concur that installation thus requires active bodily participation on the part of the participant. ‘Visuals no longer

⁵²³ Ibid., pp.523-524. Fielding employs Hannah Arendt’s understanding of the term ‘public realm’, which signifies a reality where, ‘everything that appears in public can be seen and heard by everybody [...]’

⁵²⁴ Fielding (2011), p.527.

⁵²⁵ Ibid., p.518.

⁵²⁶ Hawkins (2010), p.327.

⁵²⁷ Hawkins (2010), p.328.

⁵²⁸ See: Coleman (2007), n.p.; Hawkins (2010), pp.331-333.

have to be the seat of meaning in such art', instead, multisensory experience prevails, 'with the body of the viewer being the essential component.'⁵²⁹



Fig.25. Phoebe Cummings, *A Ripening Surveillance*, 2018, raw clay and mixed media.

Cummings demonstrates the particular embodied potency of installation developed through clay practice. Combining references to landscape, botanical plant life, science fiction and decorative ceramic tradition, her work explores the ephemeral nature of existence. Upon entering Cummings' immersive environments, olfactory perception is immediately engaged as the odour of raw clay matter pervades the space. Marks claims smell to be 'the most immediate of sense perceptions', connecting its power and value to 'its materiality.'⁵³⁰ While Marks explores the smell sense in relation to film, her thoughts are apt for thinking through clay. She notes that it 'has a privileged connection to emotion and memory that the other senses do not.'⁵³¹ Olfactory stimulation thus conjures images and remembrances that take on a very material presence in our imagination. Marks explains that while the 'associations we have with [odour] are strongly individualized and context-dependent', these are rich in the 'embodied

⁵²⁹ Coleman (2007), n.p.

⁵³⁰ Marks (2002), p.114.

⁵³¹ Ibid., p.120.

memories that smell evokes.⁵³² Raw clay has a potent and distinctive odour. Being a natural mineral compound that forms part of the earth's crust, its smell is 'earthy', and one most people will recognise whether they have intimate experience of the substance or not. The smell of clay, therefore, offers multiple associative opportunities.

The smell of damp clay permeated the polythene-walled environment of Cummings' temporary installation, *A Ripening Surveillance* (figs.21, 22, 25). Pools of drying slip oozed and cracked around giant plant structures, while larger masses of clay matter bore imprints of gouged finger marks or fist-pummelled surfaces. Shifting between antediluvian swamp and decorative fantasy, the installation imagined futuristic plant life adapted to listen and gather information, whilst also alluding to decorative ceramic tradition. Cummings' purposeful manipulation of smell sensation is made clear by her description of the installation at the time:

[T]here are forms that are like satellite dishes or antennae, but it is also a bit like a swamp and there are areas that are highly decorative as well. Water is being sprayed [daily] into the installation so the humidity is quite high. There is a natural cycle of evaporation and condensation because of these windows; it's almost like a double greenhouse. It must be at least five degrees or more warmer inside than the outside of the tent, so you can really smell the clay, that earthy smell.⁵³³

The odour of wet clay not only set up the potential for viewers to access associative memories but also enhanced Cummings' reference to the primordial nature of being. Time is an underlying concern in her practice. Labour-intensive floral motifs contest the raw immediacy of her work, while questions regarding the stability and endurance of matter are ever-present. Over the course of an installation's lifespan, the unfired clay from which it is made gradually dries out, initiating a slow process of disintegration. Conversely, time is also manifest through the artist's references to historical, decorative ceramic objects, whose characters are implicit with durability and purpose. *A Ripening Surveillance* re-imagined botanical motifs as a fictionalised landscape that looked to both past and future, creating further opportunities for this artwork to inhabit an ever-shifting temporal identity. The smell of raw clay added to the complex sense of time; its

⁵³² Marks (2002), pp.121-123.

⁵³³ Appendix B, p.265.

connection to earth imparted a sense of stability and constancy, whilst keying into a distant primal past.

Moving through Time with Clay-Based Art

The temporal quality of experience is vital to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, where perception enfolds past, present and future together.⁵³⁴ When we perceive something we carry memories of those past perceptions within us. These inform our understanding of the present, so previously experienced phenomena do not have to be encountered afresh each time.⁵³⁵ Perception is thus intentional for Merleau-Ponty. It operates with anticipative capabilities, enabling us to skillfully navigate our future actions in the world. Alex Potts elucidates, stating that:

[Merleau-Ponty] envisages perceptual awareness as located in an ever shifting present, but at the same time made possible because what we presently perceive develops out of what we have perceived in the immediate past, and also anticipates what we are about to perceive in the immediate future.⁵³⁶

Potts contends that the kinaesthetic mode through which we engage with three-dimensional artwork increases our 'sense of temporality.'⁵³⁷ Kinaesthesia is an awareness of the muscular movement of the body, and the body's weight, situation and coordination in relation to this. Through it we become conscious of our body in the world, and how we are situated in space.⁵³⁸ Paterson notes that kinaesthesia 'is key to anticipative action and stands behind our interaction with things.'⁵³⁹ It is also a vital part of aesthetic experience, given that we do not see things in isolation, but within a wider context.⁵⁴⁰ Viewers of art sympathetically adjust their physicality in relation to an artwork's presence in space. In doing so, bodily sensation incorporates future possibilities through kinaesthesia, thereby heightening awareness of temporality. Potts argues that in contrast to our quotidian visual encounters, engaging with artworks elicits closer scrutiny and focus from viewers so that 'we linger and become so conscious of viewing as a process unfolding over time.'⁵⁴¹

⁵³⁴ Merleau-Ponty (2014), p.249.

⁵³⁵ Casey (2000), p.149, examines the notion of habitual body memory that describes this process.

⁵³⁶ Potts (2000), p.218.

⁵³⁷ Ibid., p.9.

⁵³⁸ Paterson (2007), p.21.

⁵³⁹ Ibid., p.28.

⁵⁴⁰ See: Potts (2000), p.214; Paterson (2007), pp.91-101, discusses the haptic quality of experiencing sculpture.

⁵⁴¹ Potts (2000), p.9. See also Hawkins (2010), p.327.

Installations generally engage viewers in more acute modes of bodily conduct as they move around the purposefully orchestrated environments. Kinaesthetic awareness increases as the mobile, viewing body anticipates, and undergoes, more varied and exaggerated forms of movement and spatiality. As Coleman suggests, installation is a 'physical space that demands corporeal presence to be activated [...].'⁵⁴² When immersed in an installation, experiences unfold for audiences as they progress through it. A sequential layering of moments occurs—a narration of each person's individual involvement. Given that an 'installation continually assembles information in unique combinations', Coleman argues that 'the focus no longer resides on discrete art objects but rather on the sensations induced.'⁵⁴³

Cummings' immersive clay environments operate in such a way. By juxtaposing areas of intensely crafted, diminutive detail with larger structures expressing a more gestural sense of physicality, *A Ripening Surveillance* invited extreme shifts of physical engagement.⁵⁴⁴ Experiencing the installation required close inspection of the intricate floral forms, while physical distance was necessary to make sense of the larger, body-sized plant structures and their relational placement. Acute bodily orientations were necessarily acted out through space. Operating at different scales is an important aspect of Cummings' approach, as she explains:

I have always had that interest in larger work, but also working on a miniature scale, and moving back and forth. The way I think about it is similar to fiction, particularly when I read Virginia Wolf's *The Waves*: that moving in and out of a narrative structure, from a wider story to passages where it is really intense and the focus is on minute details.⁵⁴⁵

As previously discussed, Marks' notion of 'haptic visuality' acknowledges the perceptual focal shifts that occur in film and video media where viewers generally respond through a stationary body. Cummings' installation similarly inaugurated both haptic and optical modes of vision. However, to gain a fuller sense of the environment, viewers had to move 360° around it, taking in the various perspectives and experiential responses formed through the kinaesthetic body as they did. Moving between the forms was a

⁵⁴² Coleman (2007), n.p.

⁵⁴³ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁴ Lauwrens (2018a), p.21, concurs with Potts, Hawkins and Coleman that scale contributes to an installation's sensorial qualities.

⁵⁴⁵ Appendix B, p.263.

multisensory 'experience of an experience', as the materiality of clay substance stimulated a synthesis of visual, tactile, olfactory and kinaesthetic sensations.⁵⁴⁶

Coleman notes that for curator Robert Storr, the immersive quality of an installation environment blurs the boundary between audience and artwork. He states:

The installation artist is in effect setting the stage for discourse between the viewer and artwork, providing unexpected scenarios where our visual and intellectual routines are confronted or disturbed, and we are entreated to engage with, or act upon, the new stage.⁵⁴⁷

Cummings' installations certainly offer such a platform. '[I]n some ways it's theatrical; there is a staging', she explains.⁵⁴⁸ 'I am always thinking about what you see from a distance, what you see when you are near and what you see when you are in the middle of it.'⁵⁴⁹ *A Ripening Surveillance* illustrates this approach, confronting the viewer with a disorienting mix of scale, materiality and sensory stimulation. She additionally notes the performative quality of her work.⁵⁵⁰ It is not only viewers that play a part in Cummings' installations, raw clay also presents its own performance through slow disintegration, as drying substance cracks and crumbles to the floor.

Using unfired clay means that Cummings' built environments are always in transition: incrementally shifting as pliable, raw substance dries out and changes state. She understands this gradual process as a form of enactment, although she stresses that it is clay alone, and not her actions, that influences these material changes over the lifespan of each piece. 'Often when the work gets talked about, it's in relation to performance, but I think sometimes there is a misreading of my being there, and my making as being the performance', she explains.⁵⁵¹ For Cummings, it is 'the work itself, and the changes that it goes through over time' that are relevant here.⁵⁵² Sometimes she introduces elements that 'extend that phase when the work is active', such as the controlled humidity of A

⁵⁴⁶ Hawkins (2010), p.324.

⁵⁴⁷ Robert Storr cited in Coleman (2007), n.p.

⁵⁴⁸ Appendix B, p.264.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁵¹ Appendix C, p.270.

⁵⁵² Ibid.

Ripening Surveillance, kept moist by a timed water-sprinkling system.⁵⁵³ Or those that speed up the process of disintegration, as in the slow dripping of water down the body of her sculpture *Triumph of the Immaterial* (fig.28).⁵⁵⁴ Yet as Cummings notes, other works ‘naturally become more still within a week, or two weeks,’ as the clay settles into a more fixed state.⁵⁵⁵ Whatever the rate of transformational activity in the clay, it is clear that while Cummings instigates quiet drama in her work by various means, her immersive environments inaugurate a spectacle of their own making—one of sensorial intensity where time is always implicit.

Chapter Summary

By focusing on sensory perception, this chapter has demonstrated the unique ways in which clay and ceramic artworks impact the sensory system of viewers to provoke an embodied state of being. Through Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, the body of the spectator was identified as the site of perception, with artwork and viewer sensorially entwined through physiological, empathetic and conceptual means. Merleau-Ponty’s theory of reversibility crucially exposed the relational nature of perception, with the tactile quality of vision and alterity key concepts here. I argued that the heightened tangible register of clay-based art can thus be sensorially grasped through observation alone, while the social and cultural ubiquity of clay and ceramic materiality—somatically familiar and often imbued with human traces—implicitly invites connection to a shared, embodied realm. Haptic modes of art viewing were also considered significant. The intimacy of proximal encounters between viewer and surface were found to engage an embodied attitude in observers when encountering the rich facades of much clay-based art. Case study artworks and interviews, plus descriptive researcher texts confirmed, and potently illustrated, these theoretical propositions.

Empathetic responses to art were shown to have a neurological basis through a complex fusion of emotional and motor responses, empirically evidencing Merleau-Ponty’s thinking. Aesthetic theory and critical art writing demonstrated the value of these ideas. I argued that an empathetic connection to clay-based artworks is particularly acute given its visceral material identity, and social, cultural and temporal character. The temporal quality of perception accomplished through the intentional moving body was

⁵⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁴ See chapter three, p.137, for a description of *Triumph of the Immaterial*.

⁵⁵⁵ Appendix C, p.270.

revealed as highly significant when analysing embodied spectatorship of ceramic and clay art. Moving between haptic and optic modes of vision discloses the shifting ground of perception, while materiality and movement sensorially converge through immersive clay-based installation environments. I proposed that as viewers negotiate artworks, the innate sense of endurance and longevity invested in clay provokes Merleau-Ponty's sense of depth-oriented embodiment. I have thus shown that when framed by art, the unique experiential and associative sensory qualities of clay-based materiality elicit a distinctive phenomenological character, drawing upon social, cultural, material, anthropological and temporal values to provoke embodied viewer experience.

Chapter Three: Crafting Embodiment

Introduction

'Craftsmanship is the pulse of human time. [...] Craftwork teaches us to die, and by doing so teaches us to live.'⁵⁵⁶ Octavia Paz

The previous chapter exposed the distinctive sensorial qualities of clay and ceramic materiality that facilitate embodied being through aesthetic contemplation. The findings revealed that clay-based matter is imbued with social, cultural, temporal and mythic associations connected to its craft-based heritage. Conjuring notions of making, skill, the handmade and vernacular pottery tradition, these properties were found to stimulate empathetic responses in viewers via the tacit familiarity of ceramics and clay and its anthropological significance in human life. Temporal, social and emotional connectivity to others were also seen to be accessible through clay's propensity to preserve gestures and traces of human making across space and time.

Craft therefore emerges as an important research focus for determining the embodied agency of ceramic and clay artworks. While this discourse does not presume all clay-based art practices to be aligned with craft—indeed many have no affiliation whatsoever—it does recognise that others arise from specialist ceramic training, and often purposefully acknowledge/subvert craft tradition in practical and/or conceptual ways. It is important then to consider how craft might perform when evident in such cases, and the role it plays in facilitating embodied spectatorship. The focus of this chapter is to determine this. As previously noted, Krauss wrote in 1979 that the craft associations of ceramic materiality negated the possibility for it to be considered sculpture.⁵⁵⁷ Here, I subvert Krauss's pejorative perspective, claiming it as a productive space of enquiry. The chapter will thus examine sculptural activity that is rooted in craft tradition, yet also assumes characteristics associated with contemporary art and/or design. Rather than negating the efficacy of clay and ceramic art, this interface will instead show that overt craft references offer potent opportunities for viewers to experience embodied being.

⁵⁵⁶ Paz, O. (1987). Seeing and Using: Art and Craftsmanship. In: Paz, O. *Convergences: Essays on Art and Literature*. Trans. by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. London: Bloomsbury, p.67.

⁵⁵⁷ Krauss (1979a).

The chapter is divided into two parts. Part one acknowledges the problematic issues that permeate craft theory,⁵⁵⁸ before proceeding to develop an understanding of craft as it is employed within the context of this research. This conceptualisation draws upon recent theoretical re-evaluations that mobilise craft-thinking beyond the problematic landscape of traditional discourses, concentrating instead on craft's agency. Rather than asking what craft is, this chapter asks what craft *does*. It then considers the significance of categorical instability in practices where craft overlaps with strategies aligned with art and design, finding this a valuable perspective for critically interpreting the crafted identities of clay-based art.

Part two situates the theoretical discussion within a practical context. Using case study examples and artists' interviews, it demonstrates the varied ways that craft—understood as both concept and practice—reveals its embodied agency. The sensory realm of making is initially interrogated, paying particular attention to the experiential relationships occurring between clay matter, artist and viewer through honed material engagement. Affordance theory is then examined to demonstrate our embodied connectivity with crafted clay forms; consideration is given to overt references to process, social and cultural associations, as well as a biological basis. A discussion regarding craft's correlation with temporality follows, acknowledging skill, labour and the legacy of ceramic tradition as compelling phenomenological traits. Bodily reciprocity with crafted clay forms is then implicated in embodied spectatorship, with scale, corporeal imprints and repetitive making gestures key aspects here. Finally, given the ancient, global ubiquity of the vessel form, the embodied significance of functional references in clay-based art is considered.

Part One: Making a Case for Craft

When determining a clear definition for craft, the literature review demonstrated a lack of consistency across fields of thought and practice. Various texts highlighted the manifold positions taken where material specificity, object classification or method/approach might inform thinking. Other literature evidenced craft's historically subordinate relationship to art and design, where binary positions—manual/conceptual or optical/material, for instance—reflecting this hierarchy were standardly applied. The

⁵⁵⁸ This chapter does not examine the much-contested theoretical debates surrounding craft, in particular, its subjugation within the hierarchies of visual culture. This is well documented from within and beyond of the field of craft. See: Metcalf (1993); Adamson (2007); Risatti (2007a); Shiner (2012); Kjørup (2018).

review demonstrated that without consensus, craft-focused discussions can be problematic and limiting. Nevertheless, Julia Bryan-Wilson presented a positive reframing of this inconsistency by proposing craft as a fluidly inclusive concept.⁵⁵⁹ Glenn Adamson's persuasive and influential argument for craft as an approach that pervades all contexts was then shown to dismantle ingrained assumptions, allowing focus to attend to the agency of craft, a highly relevant position adopted by this research.⁵⁶⁰

Craft as Process *and* Practice

Adamson's ideas correspond with a growing number of contemporary theorists who similarly identify with this fluid concept of craft that is rooted in approach and process rather than material or discipline specificity.⁵⁶¹ However, Larry Shiner and Sarah Gilbert take issue with Adamson's reconceptualization. Shiner argues that through Adamson's lens, craft becomes limited to a generic concept that misses any sense of 'specificity.'⁵⁶² For Shiner, craft embodies a variety of attitudes and objects, each embedded with individual histories stemming from diverse areas of production such as studio, trade, or amateur crafts. Adamson's redefinition of craft as a pervasive, fluid approach omits these important idiosyncrasies. Gilbert's concern takes a somewhat different emphasis. For her, craft defined through the notion of process orients it towards maker endeavour and intent, thereby 'foreclosing in advance distributed and relational approaches to agency and affect.'⁵⁶³ Alternatively, she proposes craft as independent and agential in nature, operating beyond the boundaries of physical making. She is wary too that Adamson's sole focus on craft's relation to action, or 'motion', risks its inevitable subsumption into art and design practices.

This research recognises and implements the immensely valuable contribution Adamson's ideas bring to theories of craft, however, Shiner and Gilbert offer an interesting counterpart to his thinking. Both advocate the notion of 'practice' as a crucial addition to craft understood as process. For Shiner, the idea of practice is 'constituted by a set of shared assumptions that inform a way of doing.'⁵⁶⁴ Without reverting to any

⁵⁵⁹ Bryan-Wilson, J. (2013). Eleven Propositions in Response to the Question: "What Is Contemporary about Craft?" *Journal of Modern Craft*, 6 (1), 7-10.

⁵⁶⁰ See chapter one, pp.77-78.

⁵⁶¹ See: Greenhalgh (2002), p.1; Kettle, S. (2010). Fluidity in Craft and Authenticity. *Interactions*, 17 (5), p.14.

⁵⁶² Shiner (2012), p.233.

⁵⁶³ Gilbert (2018), p.50.

⁵⁶⁴ Shiner (2012), p.233.

sense of rigidity, or closing craft-thinking back down, it allows for subject-specialist proclivities and ‘intensive engagement[s]’ to remain a vital aspect of craft.⁵⁶⁵ Gilbert also argues that studio practices ‘offer uniquely subtle openings for perceiving material intensities that would never otherwise be possible.’⁵⁶⁶ Phoebe Cummings confirms the relevance of their ideas when stating that:

[B]eing involved in a material-specific discipline [...] allows me to open up all those ideas like science fiction, the botanical, Baroque design. It’s a way of putting the world together; it gives you a way into something. [...] Had I studied sculpture, I would perhaps have thought less about decorative arts; I probably would have looked less at those things as a starting point.⁵⁶⁷

Gilbert and Shiner are not alone in recognising the importance of focused material practices as critical to the concept of craft. In attempting to establish a contemporary meaning for craft, Jorunn Veiteberg concludes that ‘rather than the material itself, I believe it is the craft maker’s close bond to one specific material that creates distance between craft and large sections of contemporary art.’⁵⁶⁸ Rather than assuming such a gap between fields of practice, this research considers the close interface where craft’s specificity is pursued alongside, or incorporated into, art and/or design strategies. Veiteberg goes on to explore the potentials of practices that inhabit the boundary between art and craft, a strategy adopted through case studies here. Her thinking confirms the relevance of considering the crafted identities of clay-based art for the research.

Shiner and Gilbert’s call to include the notion of practice into Adamson’s fluid perspective of craft is certainly valuable. Yet it seems reasonable to assume that by identifying craft as ‘a way of doing things’, Adamson does allow for specialist approaches, albeit through a very open interpretation. Nevertheless, for Gilbert, acknowledging the intensive material encounters of a specific craft practice reveals ‘the lively flow of matter which is always present in the world, but typically hidden from perception by our tendency to focus only on static forms.’⁵⁶⁹ Her argument centres on

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid., p.235.

⁵⁶⁶ Gilbert (2018), p.61.

⁵⁶⁷ Appendix B, p.266.

⁵⁶⁸ Veiteberg (2005), p.34.

⁵⁶⁹ Gilbert (2018), p.65

what she terms the ‘collective craftwork of encounter.’⁵⁷⁰ This shifts focus from individualistic human creation to ‘craft’s potential for generating novel *experiences*—as much in perception as in production—through the skilful material practice of sensuous curiosity and collective care.’⁵⁷¹ Gilbert clearly situates craft within a sensory, experiential, inclusive frame: a critical position that supports the perceptual significance of craft within embodied audience encounters.

The Agency of Craft



From left to right:

Fig. 26. Nao Matsunaga, 2014, *Real Vagabonds*, ceramic.

Fig. 27. Nao Matsunaga, 2011, *Small Axe or Good Morning Civilisation*, glazed ceramic, wood.

Louise Mazanti (2011) asks for a further shift in thinking that repurposes craft’s fluidity towards ‘the role that it performs in the world of objects.’⁵⁷² She proposes that ‘we move from the “making” to the “being” of craft, from the “process” to the “doing”, to the role it performs in contemporary culture.’⁵⁷³ These subtle linguistic adjustments offer a more radical conceptual recalibration that affords craft an active, agential role beyond materiality and human endeavour. Mazanti’s ideas can be evidenced in the work of the case study artists under scrutiny here. The sculptures of Nao Matsunaga, for instance, operate beyond their physical presence as records of his material interactions. Often reminiscent of tool-forms and explicitly bearing evidence of craft processes, Matsunaga’s artworks seem invested with a primordial character heavy with cultural significance (figs.26-27). Their seemingly chiselled clay surfaces evoke a universal essence of human making that transcends time and space, while his ambiguous forms reverberate with

⁵⁷⁰ Gilbert (2018), p.61. Gilbert refers to Deleuze and Guattari’s (1980) notion of ‘matter-flow’ used to describe the craft of blacksmithing. The idea of ‘matter-flow’ is discussed later in this chapter, pp.153-156.

⁵⁷¹ Gilbert (2018), p.61, emphasis in original.

⁵⁷² Mazanti (2011), p.60.

⁵⁷³ Ibid., p.61.

echoes of ancient human cultural participation. As Mazanti proposes, the crafted identities of Matsunaga's artworks can truly be understood as performative here. They operate independently of Matsunaga, as socially, culturally and historically resonant objects in their own right, revealing the innate human-object bond situated at the centre of our embodied being.

Taking Adamson, Gilbert, Mazanti and Shiner's perspectives into account, craft is understood here as an active agent, involved in the world and alive with 'vibrant potentiality.'⁵⁷⁴ Rather than being perceived as a means to an end—a process or material manipulation that achieves an intended goal—it is a fluid entity permeating all contexts. Recognised as both production and perception, craft is a 'way of doing things', complicit in the sensuous intertwining of human and world through intensive material encounters.⁵⁷⁵ Most importantly, craft is positioned here as performative: a state ripe with potentiality for generating human experience.

Overlapping Practices: Possibilities of the In-between

Clearly, the notion of craft has been radically transformed during the last twenty years. Released from discipline silos and material specificity, craft is now integrated into the broader system of visual culture, operating within its own historical, economic, social and political contexts. The visual arts landscape has also radically shifted in the last twenty-five years, perhaps pre-empting the recent changes evidenced in craft theory and practice. Discipline boundaries have been dismantled across all fields of visual art, with artists now adopting non-hierarchical, multi-modal methods of production. A flexible, post-disciplinary space now exists where craft, and in particular clay and ceramic materiality, are embraced.⁵⁷⁶

Given this, it is useful to consider why the 'crafted identity' of artwork is an appropriate lens for considering the phenomenological potency of clay-based making. In the past thirty years the field of ceramics has also evolved to incorporate broader definitions of practice, with clay-based artists engaging with installation, performance, time-based and site-specific approaches, new technologies and sculpture, amongst others. If craft permeates all creative contexts, as Adamson claims, and a significant overlap between

⁵⁷⁴ Gilbert (2018), p.65.

⁵⁷⁵ Adamson (2012), n.p.

⁵⁷⁶ See: Veiteberg (2005), p.12; Adamson (2007), p.6; Shiner (2012), p.240.

clay-based practice and art or design practice is undoubtedly present, what differential perspectives can the idea of craft now offer for interpreting clay-based artwork?

Shiner argues that while craft materials and techniques are often celebrated in post-disciplinary practices, and discipline boundaries are mostly dissolved, differences between art and craft still exist at ‘the level of *process* and *practice*’ and these should be acknowledged.⁵⁷⁷ Common characteristics often understood as limiting, such as relation to the scale of hand and body, materiality, skill and function, are not a disadvantage in Shiner’s opinion. For him, such restrictions serve to reinforce the everyday ontological relevance of craft.⁵⁷⁸ In order to accommodate these differences, he suggests we acknowledge the fields of craft, art and design as ‘overlapping practices’ where philosophically distinct features intersect with shared tendencies. Shiner therefore proposes situating artworks on a ‘non-hierarchical continuum between pure craft and pure art’, or indeed pure design.⁵⁷⁹ This model, he believes, offers a realistic method to help gauge the identity of an artwork that accounts for craft’s specialist idiosyncrasies—a method appropriate for the contemporary art environment where overlaps are clearly evident.

The assertive visibility of a subject specialist ‘way of doing things’ in clay-based making is integral to this research. However, this chapter does not seek to reinforce a binary understanding of art and craft that is out of step with current thinking and practice. Since the 1990s the field of ceramics has engaged with the postmodernist potentials of an ‘expanded field’ that include more art-focused methods of working.⁵⁸⁰ Yet the distinctive qualities of craft that differentiate it from other art or design practices play a critical role within embodied discourses of clay-based art. Implicit with skill, labour, material knowledge and tacit understanding, and charged with unique cultural, sociological, anthropological, sensory, spatial and temporal values, I argue—contrary to Krauss—that the crafted identities of clay-based artworks offer additional content forming qualities when placed within a phenomenological frame. The very interface

⁵⁷⁷ Shiner (2012), p.241, emphasis in original.

⁵⁷⁸ For texts that confirm the ontological relevance of craft see: Paz (1987), p.59; Boden (2000), p. 294; Greenhalgh (2002), p.10; Risatti (2007a), p.57; Corse (2009), pp.18-19.

⁵⁷⁹ Shiner (2012), p.240.

⁵⁸⁰ Merback (2000), n.p.

where craft meets art or design is recognised here as a potent axis where material and philosophical proclivities converge.⁵⁸¹



Fig.28. Phoebe Cummings, *Triumph of the Immaterial* (detail), 2017, raw clay, fountain, water.

The artists in the case study group expose this potent space of overlap. Craft's idiosyncrasies are patently visible in their work, yet it is invested with aesthetic, conceptual and technical concerns shared with the fields of art and design. As already discussed, the carefully constructed, elaborate ornamentation in Cummings' work draws on methods and aesthetic strategies from the decorative arts, whilst her use of unfired material and site-specific display is allied with installation and time-based art practices. Her temporary, raw-clay fountain *Triumph of the Immaterial* (fig.28) was an intricately modelled, floral sculpture that slowly dissolved as water dripped down its labour-intensive, hand-modelled form.⁵⁸² The skill, technique, design and extravagant ornamentation present in the artwork was confounded by its raw materiality and ephemeral qualities associated with the realm of contemporary art, and the shifting experience of overlapping methodologies.

⁵⁸¹ See chapter one, pp.79-81, for a fuller discussion regarding the conceptual potentials of the art/craft interface.

⁵⁸² Phoebe Cummings' temporary sculpture *Triumph of the Immaterial* (2017) won the inaugural V&A Woman's Hour Craft prize, 2017.



Fig.29. Johannes Nagel, (from left to right) *Small Circle Cross*, 2016, porcelain; *Ausbgrabung*, 2016, porcelain and pewter.

Nagel's work also escapes categorisation (fig.29). Sharing craft and art-focused identities, his often large-scale artworks continually shift register, a condition the artist knowingly fosters. Skilled ceramic techniques such as throwing, firing and glazing are evident in his vessels that also operate as autonomous sculptures. Striving to create friction, he consciously subverts the culturally resonant vase-image through spontaneous approaches to making and disrupting form. By confounding material expectations, Nagel further destabilises perception. The rough textures of his sand-cast sculptures contradict their porcelain identity, while uneven surfaces disrupt the smooth glassy finish of a celadon glaze. Dismantling and reassembling the vase form never fully obliterates its identity though. It operates as an important referent for the artist, anchoring the sculptures to the sphere of craft. In speaking of his varied approach to making Nagel states:

I am two or three things in one day when working in my studio. There is very much a craft side to some parts of the process, and other parts are completely

non-craft, they are non-technology. [...] [I]t's a very imaginative sculptural process.⁵⁸³

Nagel points out that where the work is exhibited can also contribute to its shifting status. He exhibits in various environments, some are ceramics or craft focused spaces, others contemporary art galleries. For him, each exhibition space changes how the work is approached, and ultimately perceived and categorised.

Murphy also acknowledges that context influences the framing of her interactive practice, explaining:

I'm designing interactions, but when you [...] apply it to an object that I've made, suddenly it's ceramics or its craft. You take the same interaction and put it in a materials library, and it's interaction design. To me, it's the same concept and it's the same process. It's overlaying digital content onto physical objects: the same idea applied in two different ways, in completely different fields.⁵⁸⁴

Murphy's work fluctuates between categorical spaces through sensorial, material and conceptual means.⁵⁸⁵ The material texture of her pieces, both ceramic and digital, is key to perceptual encounters with them: they are tactile, auditory, spatial, and visual.

I.O.Touch (figs.30-31) evidences the richness of experience formed through this interface of divergent fields. Using capacitive sensing technology, this semi-transparent, slip cast hand-form illuminates in response to tactile stimulation.⁵⁸⁶ The participant's palm makes contact with a sensor embedded in the palm of Murphy's object—this seemingly simple and intimate interaction is far-reaching. The bone china hand is digitally linked via Wi-Fi to other identical ceramic hands variously located around the globe. To touch this object is to provoke a reaction elsewhere; each hand simultaneously illuminates wherever it is situated.⁵⁸⁷ These distant manifestations of touch are not visualised for the participant, instead, the work relies on the power of imaginative speculation. Crucially, *I.O.Touch* integrates the physical immediacy and sensuous

⁵⁸³ Appendix G, p.330.

⁵⁸⁴ Appendix H, p.299.

⁵⁸⁵ See chapter two, pp.102-106, and chapter four, pp.207-212, and pp.217-224, for in-depth analyses of Murphy's work.

⁵⁸⁶ Touch capacitive sensing technology detects the body's electrical charge through touch, creating an electrical circuit between two fields. See: GTK (no date). Capacitive Touch Screens for Display. *GTK*. Available from <https://www.gtk.co.uk/products/displays/display-customisation-and-accessories/capacitive-touchscreens>

⁵⁸⁷ *I.O.Touch* was exhibited in the 2019 *Indian Ceramics Triennial*, Jaipur. A bone china hand situated in the gallery in Jaipur was digitally linked to two corresponding hands placed in Murphy's homes in Cardiff, Wales and the Dordogne, France.

material qualities of crafted objects with the conceptual potentials usually associated with art, alongside cutting-edge, technological design capabilities. Murphy has created an outwardly modest artefact that unfolds to reveal a conceptually complex character. It perpetually shifts register between material and cerebral, physical and virtual states. The ceramic artefacts are both enhanced and disrupted through digital augmentation; an overlapping of craft, design and art occurs, heightening awareness of body, object and space.



Figs.30-31. Ingrid Murphy, *I.O.Touch*, 2018, bone china and mixed media.

Murphy, Nagel and Cummings each recognise the crafted identity of their work as significant to their practice, as do the other case study artists. All received ceramics-focused training and approach making through Shiner's notion of subject-specialist 'intensive engagements', whilst simultaneously integrating shared approaches associated with other fields of making into their work. As Phoebe Cummings states:

The way I feel about what I make is that the outcome is sculpture, but I get to that through craft [...]. Usually, the endpoint is either a sculpture or temporary artwork, and there may even be elements of performance in there. But in terms of the technical side of my work, it's very traditional in some ways and quite often I am borrowing the language of decorative arts.⁵⁸⁸

The case study artists clearly operate within Shiner's notion of a non-hierarchical continuum, where the interface of craft with art or design is a mutable yet productive position that shifts balance depending on the needs or wants of the artist or artwork, or indeed the contextual framing of the works. The categorical instability of each artist's

⁵⁸⁸ Appendix B, pp.262-263.

work should not be read as indecision or vacillation between territories. It represents a compelling, purposeful condition that destabilises viewer expectations, inviting closer scrutiny, thereby opening possibilities for deeper connection. I argue that when craft—conceptualised as an agential, performative, and ontologically resonant presence—intersects with differing artistic approaches in clay-based artworks, this liminal interface becomes a productive space of encounter, eliciting a heightened perceptual register in audiences where body and mind are simultaneously provoked.

Part 2: Locating Embodied Narratives through Crafted Identities

The remainder of this chapter examines craft visibility and its relationship to embodied spectatorship within contemporary clay-based artworks where overlapping practices reside. Works by Cummings, Matsunaga and Nagel are analysed to demonstrate the varied ways in which the crafted identity of clay and ceramic artworks can be phenomenologically meaningful to audiences. Each artist's work makes conspicuous reference to craft whilst also operating through other visual strategies commonly associated with art and/or design practices. The following text will examine what craft 'does' in each case. Through a synthesis of interpretive accounts of selected case study artworks, the artists' voices and a range of apposite theoretical positions, the relevance of a craft focus within embodied narratives of clay-based practice is revealed.

The Sensory Realm of Making

Above all, the hand touches the world itself, feels it, lays hold of it and transforms it. The hand contrives astonishing adventures in matter. It not only grasps what exists, but it has to work in what does not exist; it adds yet another realm to the realms of nature.⁵⁸⁹ Henri Focillon

For Henri Focillon, the act of making, of producing things by hand, is not simply a passive means to an end, but a far more dynamic process. Granting the hand quasi-magical status, Focillon's words illuminate the transformational character of making, whilst simultaneously conjuring the imaginative scope and potentiality embedded within the making process itself. The hand, for him, is an explorative organ whose activities are not only knowledge forming, but also world-forming. Focillon's hand 'grasps', taking hold of both physical matter and conceptual understanding.⁵⁹⁰ He is not alone in crediting the human hand with special facility—Heidegger, in particular,

⁵⁸⁹ Focillon (1989), p.168.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid., p.158

attributes the human capacity for thinking and language with the hand and its relationship to making.⁵⁹¹ Focillon's poetic depiction, however, succinctly captures the complex nature of human making, which synthesises cerebral, bodily, primordial, pioneering, intimate and expansive states of being.⁵⁹² His words construct a potent vision of hands connecting with matter through which the embodied character of making can be traced. It is interesting to consider how this dynamic sense of making manifests in the case study artworks, where evidence of human production is knowingly made apparent.



From left to right:

Fig.32. Nao Matsunaga, *Standing Back Up*, 2012, ceramic & wood.

Fig.33. Nao Matsunaga, *Pull Up, Pull Down, Take Me Away*, 2012, ceramic and wood.

The act of making lies at the heart of Matsunaga's practice, serving as both conceptual tool and practical methodology. Working predominately with clay, although wood is often integrated into his abstract ceramic forms, his practice certainly demonstrates Shiner's notion of intensive material engagement. Clay functions as a construction

⁵⁹¹ Both Ingold (2013), p.113, and Pallasmaa (2009), p.116, draw on Heidegger to examine the relationship between making things by hand and knowledge production.

⁵⁹² Focillon (1989), pp.164-165.

material for Matsunaga—a means of ‘using earth’ that ‘relates more to architecture, dwelling, or habitats of people [...] rather than something to eat or drink off.’⁵⁹³ He approaches making as an intuitive act, allowing the materials to direct his progress, emphasising how important it is to ‘try and let the work make itself.’⁵⁹⁴ Rhythms of working are recorded in the forms; rapid hand-building methods often meet time-consuming, repetitively textured surfaces. Monolithic structures juxtapose with more diminutive, ambiguous forms—tool, totemic creature or prehistoric ceremonial object perhaps? Smaller component pieces often create a larger whole through unconventional methods of tying, screwing or fixing with glue (fig.32). Glaze is dried out into thick slabs and draped like fabric onto forms, resulting in uncontrolled effects during firing (fig.33).⁵⁹⁵

Orientation of his artworks is also frequently destabilised by glaze; surface drips falling in opposing directions on individual pieces offer contradictory perceptual accounts. Matsunaga explains that this:

[...] started [...] to make obvious the gravity aspect of sculpture and capture it. So this interest in gravity, of controlling it and playing with the drips [...] and having that sense of gravity frozen was a big thing for me.⁵⁹⁶

By suspending these liminal states of glaze body, he subtly subverts understanding through their multiple perspectives of gravitational force. Throughout Matsunaga’s wider body of work, material contradictions, such as the juxtaposition of gestural spontaneity with more concentrated areas of activity, instigate further perceptual shifts. In this way, he undermines familiar modes of perceptual encounter for viewers; his sculptures invite closer scrutiny in an attempt to re-establish some sense of familiar ground.

Process is everything. Matsunaga’s spontaneous methods are not self-indulgent or without consideration; they are purposefully strategic. Above all, he aims for the final outcomes of his sculptures to remain unfixed for as long as possible during production to prevent any possibility of pre-determining the form. ‘[E]very step of the process you

⁵⁹³ Appendix D, p.284.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁵ Matsunaga names this original method ‘slab glazing’ or ‘mattress glazing.’ Ibid., p.287.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid.

take, to me, feels like you are closing opportunities', he states. 'The options of it being anything are limited every time the process goes around. So what I'm trying to do [...] is keep the options open.'⁵⁹⁷ Working to music helps him generate a trance-like state where decision-making becomes less conscious. Employing multiple elements as part of the making process also helps to maintain flexibility as each piece moves towards its final identity. Puncturing these component parts with holes for fixings offers Matsunaga later opportunities for assembly within a larger structure. Alternatively, these apertures, at times, may simply perform as gestural marks. Each decision within a sculpture's development is consequential: 'I am making parts of something', he explains, 'and that might trigger something else to become part of something that is totally of itself.'⁵⁹⁸

Matsunaga's many-layered creative process is at all times fluid and reflexively responsive. His working method corresponds with Tim Ingold's concept of making that the anthropologist terms 'an art of inquiry.'⁵⁹⁹ Like Focillon, Heidegger and others, Ingold equates human production with thinking.⁶⁰⁰ However, he places the substance of making—matter itself—at the heart of this activity. According to Ingold, making things by hand is an experimental and experiential mode of material-led knowledge creation. Thinking is inextricably bound up with the substance and flux of the making process. As he explains, '[t]hese materials think in us, as we think through them.'⁶⁰¹ Matsunaga's approach ably demonstrates Ingold's premise here. Making is a fully immersive experience for him; material engagement is an interrogative journey with outcomes only realised through and by his physical interactions. This intuitive approach enables discoveries to arise along the way, with the impact of each revelation shifting and shaping the route that his sculptures take.

Following the Sensory Journey of 'Matter Flow'

While the experiential qualities of making are clearly demonstrated by Matsunaga, according to Ingold, the process by which artefacts and artworks come into being often goes unnoticed.⁶⁰² Instead, a common assumption prevails that form is simply imposed

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid., pp.285-286.

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid., p.286.

⁵⁹⁹ Ingold (2013), p.6.

⁶⁰⁰ See also: Adamson (2007), p.7; Pallasmaa (2009), p.47; Staten (2019), p.23.

⁶⁰¹ Ingold (2013), p.6.

⁶⁰² Ingold (2013), p.7, argues that material and visual culture ignore creative production, fixating instead on products and interpretations.

on inert matter through intellectual means.⁶⁰³ From this perspective, the embodied, experiential character of making is lost. To circumvent this model of creativity, Ingold employs Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'matter-flow' through which he situates the maker as a dynamic agent in 'the world of active materials.'⁶⁰⁴ For Deleuze and Guattari, matter is not something fixed or passive; instead, they argue that we experience matter 'in movement, in flux, in variation.'⁶⁰⁵ Ingold therefore proposes we adjust our attention and follow 'the material flows and currents of sensory awareness in which images and objects reciprocally take shape.'⁶⁰⁶ Creative activity offers perceptual revelation for Ingold: thinking through making 'is not to describe the world, or to represent it, but to open up perception to what is going on there so that we, in turn, can respond to it.'⁶⁰⁷ Crucially, his words suggest that this state of perceptual awareness is not limited to the maker, but also includes beholders of things made. The responses of spectators/users to handmade entities are a continuation of this revelatory process. He states:

[T]he role of the artist is not to give effect to a preconceived idea but to follow the forces and flows of material that bring the work into being. To view the work is to join the artist as a fellow traveller, to look *with* it as it unfolds in the world, rather than *behind* it to an originating intention of which it is the final product [...]. The vitality of the work of art, then, lives in its materials, and it is precisely because no work is ever truly finished [...] that it remains alive.⁶⁰⁸

Materials are in constant flux and flow in Matsunaga's practice, and so his sculptures remain alive in the way that Ingold describes. Each piece reveals its methods of production. As spectators, we join the artist's creative journey of sensory material engagement as our visual experience connects with bodily understanding of how their material presence comes to be.⁶⁰⁹

Standing on The Verge (fig.33) clearly demonstrates the sensorial connectivity of artist and material through processes of making. Matsunaga's physical manipulation of raw clay is evident across the body of this monolithic form. Fist-sized indentations ripple

⁶⁰³ According to Ingold (2013), p.3, this commonly held idea originated from Aristotle's theory of hylomorphism. See also Malfouris (2014), p.152.

⁶⁰⁴ Ingold (2013) p.25 and p.21. See also Sarah Gilbert's application of Deleuze & Guattari's notion of 'matter-flow' on pp.142-143 of this chapter.

⁶⁰⁵ Deleuze and Guattari cited in Ingold (2013), p.25.

⁶⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p.20.

⁶⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p.7.

⁶⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p.96.

⁶⁰⁹ See chapter two, pp.119-123, for the discussion on empathy and aesthetic experience.

across the surface of the terracotta, expressing the weight, force and energy of the artist's gestures as he shaped the upward trajectory of the sculpture. His presence is keenly felt in the pull and push of its materiality—Ingold's notion of 'correspondence' between maker and material is certainly manifest here. On closer inspection, brute physicality gives way to a slower, more methodical and rhythmic sense of material engagement, as gestures become condensed and controlled. This intimate perspective reveals multiple traces of small, repetitive tool-markings that cover the surface of the structure. Systematically organised clusters of patterning are also visible at close range. Tiny, linear marks are scored into bright white daubs of paint, the warmth of exposed terracotta so distinct against the brilliance of the pigment through which it emerges (fig.34).



Fig.34. Nao Matsunaga with *Standing on the Verge*, 2015, raw clay and paint.
Fig.35. Detail of *Standing on the Verge*.

Each mark or material manipulation evident in this artwork carries its own sense of power, speed and scale of bodily gesture; they are testament to Matsunaga's intuitive, yet focused, response to the clay. He is interested in the perceptual contradictions inherent within that slow sense of a crafted object invested with painstaking, careful labour, and what he calls 'fast craft' emerging from an Eastern perspective, where decades of concentrated material training can manifest in the speed of a five-second brush stroke.⁶¹⁰ Matsunaga aims to manipulate the viewer's awareness of bodily control in each mark or gesture, stating:

⁶¹⁰ Appendix D, p.288.

With all materials and all processes, I [...] can roughly guess how long something takes to make, whether something takes a very long time or a short time. And I think that is really connected to the way some people judge art [...]: the way value is placed upon labour. I'm interested in how our eyes do that, how they make those judgements, and what happens if I try to control some aspects of that within one piece, or within a body of work.⁶¹¹

In purposefully juxtaposing different tempos and intensities of material engagement, Matsunaga's sculptures draw attention to his bodily impacts upon clay. He creates friction between what we see and what we know—of what a craft process is or can be. Chapter two established the neurological and empathetic basis of aesthetic experience, connecting artwork, artist and audience through physical gestures or artist's trace.⁶¹² It is reasonable to assume, then, that a spectator's body could connect with Matsunaga's as they visually apprehend the material complexity of his striking sculpture. Ultimately, Matsunaga prompts viewers to connect with their own physicality, as the gestures witnessed are empathetically acknowledged through their tacit, bodily knowing. As Ingold argues, an artist's journey of discovery through material engagement is one that can be shared. Matsunaga's work is testament to that possibility.

Feeling *with* Clay

Matsunaga's approach offers compelling insight into processes of making that counter the notion of imposing pre-conceived form on passive matter. Instead, he works *with* the materials, responding to their particularities, always remaining open to unforeseen potentials and avoiding fixed conclusions. Lambros Malafouris shares Ingold's desire to move away from such a 'hylomorphic' view of creative production, but he is critical of Ingold's call to simply 'follow the forces and flows of material.'⁶¹³ For Malafouris, matter and form are not straightforwardly distinct. As he notes, 'what is material for one thing is form for another', so focusing on matter alone can be problematic.⁶¹⁴ Instead, he proposes human thinking as indelibly intertwined with our bodily and material interactions with the world. Creativity, for him, is 'a process of enactive discovery and material engagement [where] [m]ind and matter are one', each informing the other.⁶¹⁵ He terms this activity 'creative *thinging*', explaining that 'thinking is usually understood

⁶¹¹ Ibid.

⁶¹² See chapter two, pp.119-128.

⁶¹³ Ingold (2013), p.96.

⁶¹⁴ Malafouris (2014), p.152.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid.

as something we do *about* things in the absence of things. On the contrary *thinging* denotes the kind of thinking we do primarily *with* and *through* things.’⁶¹⁶

Malafouris makes his case by examining the potter’s relationship with clay, which, for him, represents a heightened sense of ‘material consciousness’, or what he calls ‘the *feeling of and for clay*.’⁶¹⁷ This uniquely tactile, malleable substance invites a give-and-take approach according to Malafouris, as previously noted, so it is not simply a case of surrendering to its properties as Ingold suggests. ‘There is an element of submission in the way the potter follows the material’, he states, ‘but there is also dominance in that the potter’s movement entails a directed response to the material, that is, intentions-in-action.’⁶¹⁸ It is not surprising that the animate quality of clay matter is found to be an important aspect within this performative correspondence between maker and material. As Malafouris notes, ‘descriptions of clay as a warm, living, ensouled or psychoactive material are common among potters simply because they seem to provide a comprehensive, intuitive account of the cognitive ecology involved’—one that is receptive, responsive and dynamic.⁶¹⁹ Also embedded within this reciprocal relationship between potter and clay is the acknowledgment of time, effort and skill acquired through a long-standing, determined acquisition of material proficiency and understanding.

Whilst Matsunaga’s practice is far removed from that of the potter, the experiential realm of creative *thinging* corresponds closely with the artist’s sculptural approach, which profoundly demonstrates Malafouris’s *feeling of and for clay*. Although he subverts traditional ceramic techniques, Matsunaga does so from a place of knowledge and deep material connection, acquired through specialist training and a long-standing commitment to working with clay media. Employing intuition, improvisation and meditative absorption in all his undertakings, this artist’s performative, dialogic approach to making aligns with Csikszentmihalyi’s concept of ‘flow’, an idea Malafouris explains as an ‘almost automatic, effortless, yet highly focused state of consciousness’, and one which underscores his hypothesis of creative *thinging*.⁶²⁰

⁶¹⁶ Malafouris (2019), p.7, emphasis in original.

⁶¹⁷ Malafouris (2014), p.151, emphasis in original.

⁶¹⁸ Ibid., p.151.

⁶¹⁹ Ibid., p.149. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi cited by Malafouris.

⁶²⁰ Malafouris (2014), p.151.

Working with this kind of material specificity enables all the case study artists to develop an intimate relationship with clay matter, such as Malafouris describes. Each maker demonstrates Shiner and Gilbert's notion of practice through their 'intensive material engagement' and Adamson's 'way of doing things.'⁶²¹ For instance, Nagel applies his skill and knowledge of casting and throwing to move beyond the usual precision associated with these processes. Instead, he works instinctively, and often in an improvisatory manner. Well-honed understanding of ceramic techniques is harnessed and then subverted as Nagel responds to the momentary 'feel'—both literal and metaphoric—of sand and clay.

While Malafouris' thinking might seem limited to artists' experiences, the capacity for empathetic spectator responses to clay objects and artworks through haptic visuality has been previously established.⁶²² As Gallese argues, looking at art impacts mind and body on emotional and physical levels through inter-subjective experiences. By engaging with artworks, we come into contact with ourselves, and others, via an artist's gesture, imagination and memory.⁶²³ We can assume, then, that traces of interactions between maker and material, alongside often-evident material plasticity, allow viewers to share in the compelling dynamism of clay matter that Malafouris claims. His proposition of material consciousness is therefore highly applicable within the context of audience experience. If potters/makers/artists experience a *feeling of and for clay* through their work, as I have argued, visual encounters with clay-based artwork can be said to stimulate similar opportunities to feel *with clay*.⁶²⁴ In other words, conspicuous references to processes of making in an artwork can engage a heightened connection for viewers. James Gibson's theory of affordances, developed as part of his influential work on visual perception, offers an important perspective here.⁶²⁵ While his thinking intersects in part with recent cognitive research findings, Gibson's work helps to expose the more specific haptic resonance of craft visibility for viewers of clay-based art.

⁶²¹ Shiner (2012), p.235, and Adamson (2007), p.4.

⁶²² See chapter two, pp.112-116.

⁶²³ Gallese (2017a), pp.45-47.

⁶²⁴ See also chapter two, pp.119-120.

⁶²⁵ Gibson (1986).

The Affordances of Crafted Materiality

According to Gibson, the notion of affordance ‘implies the complementarity of the animal and the environment.’⁶²⁶ He argues that our habitat is imbued with affordances that offer various possibilities for interactions and behaviours.⁶²⁷ For instance, a tree might offer shelter from rain, a door handle affords turning, and a button invites a pushing action. Importantly, affordances are unique to individuals (human or animal), depending on their physical being and capabilities, as well as practical, emotional, social or cultural needs. A chair suggests the possibility of sitting, yet it also affords (amongst other things) extending one’s reach, but only if a makeshift ladder is needed at a given moment in time. In fact, a chair might not afford the possibility of sitting in the case of a small child. Affordances are therefore not tied to things, but are fluid, and are relative to specific situations.⁶²⁸ Importantly, it is through visual apperception that awareness of affordances becomes known; for Gibson, perception guides action.

If all entities are imbued with affordance opportunities, then artworks must also share this potentiality, manifest via an artwork’s occupation of space and the different types of engagement this provokes. An installation invites immersion into, and movement around itself, for instance, while a painting suggests a more static mode of observation. Other types of affordance interactions seem less obvious for art though, which generally instigates a more cerebral attitude in viewers. However, Francesca Bacci reveals a more dynamic potentiality inscribed within the physicality of artworks. Drawing on Gibson’s thinking, she proposes that the material presence of sculpture, in particular, ‘provides the affordance of “touchability”’.⁶²⁹ Bacci notes scientific research that finds our visual recognition of objects may rely on ‘matching’ their optical attributes with other sensory data, particularly that of touch.⁶³⁰ Memories of our past sensorial interactions with the world—tactile, olfactory, auditory, gustatory—inform our readings of visual information. The materiality of sculpture, for Bacci, then, awakens tactile memories in the observer through its material affordances, and so invites a knowing look. This idea corresponds with Merleau-Ponty’s theory of reversibility, discussed in chapter two, where reciprocity between tactile and visual senses establishes the haptic nature of

⁶²⁶ Ibid., p.127.

⁶²⁷ Ibid., p.128.

⁶²⁸ Ibid., p.129.

⁶²⁹ Bacci (2013), p.140.

⁶³⁰ Ibid., p.135.

vision.⁶³¹ Given that audiences are rarely permitted to physically engage with art objects, Bacci's proposal enables us to consider the heightened sense of 'touchability' available to audiences through sensorial familiarity that manifests when apprehending the material presence of clay-based art.

It is useful to consider how explicit reference to processes of making in artworks might further enhance its 'touchability.' Adamson and others draw attention to the tendency for crafted objects to be considered in terms of material specificity, with their physicality and means of production a core aspect of their identity.⁶³² Yet while this can be limiting, the material presence of craft not only affords 'touchability', but often also reveals the maker's actions by which it came about. Traces of human creativity are universally understood: a chiselled mark in wood, a stitched piece of fabric, or the pinched surface of a clay vessel all form part of a common visual lexicon of making. Being rooted in the everyday, actions such as these are either sedimented within a viewer's bodily experience, or inscribed through their social and cultural ubiquity. As Margaret A. Boden explains: 'The relevant bodily actions [of craftwork] have their roots far back in human history, and some in human biology too.'⁶³³ She notes that in contrast to art, the 'bodily skills' of an artist that are implicit within a 'craft-aesthetic' such as 'wielding a paintbrush or needle, or in controlling the potter's wheel', are widely accessible to viewers, regardless of how culturally aware they happen to be.⁶³⁴

Craft visibility can therefore be said to promote heightened embodied connectivity through gestures of making implicit within their material state. Henry Staten suggests that overt references to skilled making evoke a 'spectator's sense of her own agency',⁶³⁵ while Polly Ullrich finds embodied perception arising from the material qualities of aesthetic experience. She states:

Art that employs embodied perception finds meaning not by opposing the materiality of the world, but by working through it [...]. Embodied art constructs a sensual reality as we might encounter it in perception itself, through the marks,

⁶³¹ See chapter two, pp.98-102.

⁶³² Veiteberg (2005), p.33; Adamson (2007), p.39; Corse (2009), p.2; Owen (2011), p.92; Shiner (2012), p.235.

⁶³³ Boden (2000), p.297.

⁶³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.301.

⁶³⁵ Staten (2019), p.5.

the erasures, and the physical processes left by the artist's hand in the work. In this regard, art reflects our own insertion in the world.⁶³⁶

For Ullrich, the traces of creative endeavour both confirm and intensify our own sense of bodily being. This form of awareness surely reaches beyond a physical manifestation of material consciousness, as the sensual material reality of which Ullrich speaks also incorporates social, cultural and temporal realms of embodied potentiality, as will be shown in due course.

Embodied Agency: Craft Visibility



Figs.36-37. Nao Matsunaga, *Deep Expert*, 2019, glazed porcelain, wood, acrylic paint.

Given the plasticity of clay matter, there is a propensity for clay-based forms to reveal both process and gesture in their material being. I argue that in such cases, clay and ceramic artwork assumes an embodied vibrancy through which a viewer's own sense of agency may become aroused. As already mentioned, material potency is also heightened through familiarity. The pervasive nature of both fired and raw clay within everyday human interactions means that clay-based artworks offer significant opportunities for

⁶³⁶ Ullrich (2005), p.208.

audiences to connect with them through sensorial material remembrance, depending on the prior experience of the perceiver. Gibson's thinking offers a valuable focus when considering intentional actions and their connection to the craft processes embedded in clay forms. His notion of 'action possibilities' supports the possibility that feeling *with* clay (as adapted from Malafouris) can occur, and indeed be amplified, when crafted gestures are overtly present in the body of clay-based artwork.



Figs.38-39. Nao Matsunaga, *The Many Eyed*, 2015, ceramic, glaze, acrylic paint.

Matsunaga's totemic structure *Standing on the Verge* (fig.34.), and the ceramic exteriors of works such as *Deep Expert* (fig.36-37) and *The Many Eyed* (figs.38-39) are embedded with visual references to tool activity. Small, regular, tool-scraped indents cover the surfaces of these sculptures, creating an undulating roughness across the forms. Their material presence invites contact, or, as Bacci suggests, affords 'touchability.' Yet these textures are more than enticingly tactile, they represent traces of human interaction. As brain-imaging technologies have shown, neural circuits are stimulated in humans during aesthetic encounters that correspond with actions either witnessed or imagined in an artwork.⁶³⁷ Matsunaga's repetitive gestures call attention to our own physicality

⁶³⁷ See: Freedberg and Gallese (2007); Gallese (2009; 2017a; 2017b; 2019).

through empathetic bodily responses, their multiplicity perhaps amplifying the potency of these traces of action therein. The grasping of a tool, the rhythmic, forward thrust of an arm, and the impact of implement meeting raw material are just some of the physical potentials that his sculptures inspire, drawing attention to the sensory realm of making. Unlike raw terracotta, however, when caught in the pale ochre tones of unglazed, fired stoneware, evidence of such tool activity causes their surface to vacillate between ceramic body and chiselled sandstone or wood, whilst the brilliance of porcelain suggests carved marble. In both cases material assumptions are destabilised, prompting a haptic mode of close looking in viewers, thereby highlighting the primal sense of making invested in these forms.⁶³⁸

Through the relational lens of maker and material, Malafouris' creative *thinging* refocuses attention from 'what things are (as entities)' towards 'how things come to be.'⁶³⁹ While creative production underpins his hypothesis, Matsunaga's sculptures independently manifest Malafouris's thinking. With making processes an evident aspect of each work's physical identity, Matsunaga invites viewers to share his artistic journey of material engagement. The sculptures do not operate as mere things in the world; they reveal and emphasise the dynamic process that brought them into existence. Awareness of tool use, repetitive gestures and the artist's labour-intensive methods not only inspire a keenly felt connection with our own bodies and their functionality, but also to the social sphere in which they are situated. This correlation embodies a temporal character, reaching beyond our immediate present to a distant, ingrained evolutionary urge for survival, which perhaps is key to the phenomenological significance of human making.⁶⁴⁰ Inspired by Gibson, but modifying his ideas through Bacci, Malafouris and empirical neuroscientific data, it is possible to understand our innate embodied reciprocity with crafted form, which the gestures, traces and material presence of creative production inspire.

Making as Instinct

Ingold offers a valuable anthropological perspective that confirms, and perhaps locates, the deep-seated significance of human making. Based on research data from various sources, he proposes that the human urge to create is instinctual, genetically coded into

⁶³⁸ See chapter two, for a discussion on haptic approaches to vision, pp.110-116.

⁶³⁹ Malafouris (2014), p.143.

⁶⁴⁰ Risatti (2007a), pp.56-59 and Staten (2019), pp.10-13 confirm craft's connection to evolutionary survival.

our DNA.⁶⁴¹ He bases his hypothesis on the unchanging design of a generic handaxe from the *Homo Erectus* era. Its constancy of form, spanning continents and millennia, suggests its production may be an ‘expression of instinct’ similar to birds’ nest building activity or beavers’ dam construction.⁶⁴² Ingold proposes that the axe template may therefore be inscribed into the hands and bodies of its makers. If human making is understood as a universal, tacitly held, instinctive form of bodily knowledge rather than the skilled aptitude of creative people, I suggest visual traces of making must connect viewers to this primal urge. Matsunaga’s sculptures help substantiate this view. In a quest to create ‘objects that transcend the everyday’, he references archetypal forms that pervade cultural and geographic boundaries.⁶⁴³ Through the material interactions, traditions and practices of early human cultures, he reaches into the primordial past, finding there ‘a thread that would connect [...] all of humanity’, and, like Ingold, this connective tissue is presented as Neolithic axes and tools (fig.40).⁶⁴⁴



Fig.40. Nao Matsunaga, *Just Like That*, 2014, ceramic.

Matsunaga’s sculptures thereby establish temporal connections between past and future cultural activity through tacit concepts of making invested in the forms themselves (figs.31-38). Staten argues that the ‘techne’ or ‘know-how’ of human making is ‘socially inscribed’, passed on through the practical discoveries and endeavours of countless generations.⁶⁴⁵ He understands the human capacity to make things as ‘a system of institutionalised traces of the grooves of effectuality that have been worn into the real

⁶⁴¹ Ingold (2013), pp.33-45, looks to archaeological, anthropological and scientific data to establish his hypothesis.

⁶⁴² *Ibid.*, p.36. See also: Howard Risatti (2007a), p.57.

⁶⁴³ Matsunaga, N. (no date). *Nao Matsunaga*. Available from <http://www.naomatsunaga.com/about>

⁶⁴⁴ Appendix D, p.289.

⁶⁴⁵ Staten (2019), p.4 & p.10.

by untold previous actors.’⁶⁴⁶ Some of Matsunaga’s smaller-scale pieces are suggestive of primitive tools or hand-crafted totemic objects, inhabiting a primal quality that speaks to the universality of human making that Staten identifies. Some are strangely shaped, ambiguous entities that cannot be classified (figs.41-42). Their identities hover between functional implement, ceremonial object and primordial creature—they seem from and of the earth. Works that take more identifiable tool forms (figs.40 & 43) also undermine expectations, their impractical material states or decorative detailing often negating use value. All carry a peculiar, unknowable logic that seems ancient and raw, yet they curiously possess deep-seated familiarity too. These objects are clearly formed by human hand, made for human hands to hold and use, even though at times that purpose may be unclear.



From left to right:

Fig.41. Nao Matsunaga, *Real Vagabonds*, 2014, ceramic.

Fig.42. Nao Matsunaga, *Never Gonna Tell It*, 2014, ceramic, wood, acrylic paint.

Fig.43. Nao Matsunaga, *Beam*, 2014, ceramic, plaster, wood, acrylic paint.

Howard Risatti’s thoughts help to make sense of the familiarity that Matsunaga’s equivocal forms inspire. He argues that craft objects are ‘grounded in physiological necessity and in our struggle for survival.’⁶⁴⁷ Like Staten, Risatti claims that purposeful forms inhabit ‘a primordial dimension that goes beyond culture’, connecting past and present.⁶⁴⁸ While Matsunaga’s sculptures operate as autonomous art objects, some clearly allude to function and purpose and so retain that primordial dimension which

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid., p.11.

⁶⁴⁷ Risatti (2007a), p.56

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid.

Risatti discusses. Similarly, Pallasmaa acknowledges the temporal resonance of things made by hand. He shares Ingold's view of making as an innate human capacity, stating that 'the knowledge and skills of traditional societies reside directly in the senses and muscles, in the knowing and intelligent hands.'⁶⁴⁹ Crucially, Pallasmaa argues that art 'maintains [these] vital connections with our biological and cultural past.'⁶⁵⁰ Through explicit reference to primitive tools and hand-crafted cultural artefacts, and to making processes embedded in their sensorial materiality, Matsunaga's sculptures illuminate this possibility.

Marking Time through Making

Chapter two revealed time a vital aspect of perceptual experience for Merleau-Ponty.⁶⁵¹ The temporal character of making identified by Staten, Risatti, Ingold and Pallasmaa corresponds with the philosopher's theory of perception, which uncovers the spatio-temporal nature of embodiment. As previously established, Merleau-Ponty conceives phenomenological depth to be the intertwining of levels representing past, present and future, the convergence of which accords time a spatial quality.⁶⁵² If making is considered by many a basic human capacity intrinsic to evolutionary survival and our continued being-in-the-world, I argue that the crafted identity of objects similarly interweaves past, present and future through their temporal resonances. As Paul Mathieu notes, handmade objects are 'timeless' and 'trans-historical' due to their capacity to unite temporal dimensions.⁶⁵³

Staten states that crafted objects represent 'the skilled labour that made them, the index or record of a struggle with the medium involved, [and] a series of techne-guided decisions made by the artist, that remain on view in the result.'⁶⁵⁴ Each material 'struggle' in Matsunaga's work can also be said to embody the long lineage of making tradition to which they are indelibly attached, and so past, present and future collide. To encounter human making, then, is not simply to witness creative activity as a passive means to an end. Instead, these traces of material interaction offer access to a sensory

⁶⁴⁹ Pallasmaa (2009) p.15. See also: Risatti (2007a), pp. 56-57.

⁶⁵⁰ Pallasmaa (2009), p.20.

⁶⁵¹ See chapter two, p.172.

⁶⁵² Fielding (1999) offers an in-depth analysis of Merleau-Ponty's thinking.

⁶⁵³ Mathieu (2007b), p.125.

⁶⁵⁴ Staten (2019), p.20.

realm, one where both makers and viewers *feel with* the ‘matter flow’ of body working with substance, and in doing so, become alive to their own sense of being-in-the-world.



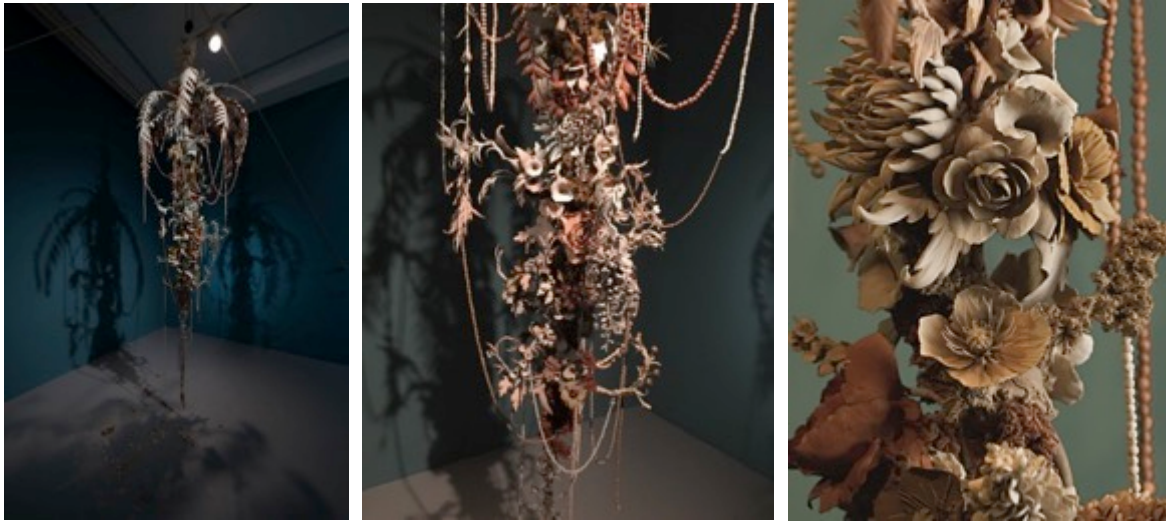
Fig.44. Phoebe Cummings, *Antediluvian Swag*, 2016, raw clay.

As noted in chapter two, a shifting sense of time also pervades Cummings’ practice.⁶⁵⁵ Through her re-imagined landscape environments, Cummings, like Matsunaga, exploits the primordial character of clay matter to connect present experience with that of an ancient past. From the performative instability of raw material itself, to conceptual strategies that interweave the primeval with the futuristic, her work operates through a complex and many-layered temporal identity. As she states:

[T]ime is always a big part of my work [...] in the way it is brief as an object, or [...] referred to through thinking about the landscape of other times. In other pieces it may be looking more towards the future, for example, to plants that may no longer exist [...]. There is that reference in my work to periods in time in terms of objects, but also other periods of time in nature as well. Sometimes the two come together and sometimes it may be more focused on one than the other.⁶⁵⁶

⁶⁵⁵ See chapter two, pp.134-137.

⁶⁵⁶ Appendix B, pp.261-262.



Figs.45-47. Phoebe Cummings, *Ornamental Chronology*, 2019, raw clay.

Time is perhaps most immediately conspicuous for the onlooker through the ornately detailed construction of Cummings' large-scale botanical structures, composed of multiple, small-scale, vegetal motifs that are rolled, pressed and shaped by the artist's hands. These individually formed clay components represent time invested in labour-intensive, repetitive production methods that Cummings employs—a reality that is not lost on audiences. One is immediately awed by the abundance of such intricately crafted ornamentation on first encountering her ephemeral artworks such as *Antediluvian Swag* (fig.44) or *Ornamental Chronology* (figs.45-47). Even to the untrained eye, the industry, effort and skill inherent within such endeavours is palpable. An awareness of time is intensified by the slow decay of unfired clay in all of Cummings' work, as it dries and cracks, or dissolves over the course of its display. More purposeful destruction, such as that experienced in *Ornamental Chronology*, only increases consciousness of painstaking effort and skill. Having quietly disintegrated in part over its temporary lifespan, this suspended chandelier-like structure took its final performance when released to drop unceremoniously, shattering abruptly on the floor. This shocking end highlighted the precariousness of time and instability of material life. The demise of such time-consuming work, whether through slow or sudden means, engages viewers empathetically as they comprehend the lost hours of industry signified in the deterioration or demolition of brittle, dried-out, raw clay.

Time also manifests beyond the production hours that Cummings' invests in her work, reaching back to years spent developing the skills and material know-how embedded in such outcomes. And further still, to the vast sphere of historic ceramic production,

gathering into itself the trail of science, alchemy, invention and ‘creative *thinging*’ that has informed all that follows. As Ingold notes: ‘Concentrated in skilled hands are capacities of movement and feeling that have been developed through life histories of past practice.’⁶⁵⁷ For Staten too, ‘[t]echné is the accretion or sedimentation of myriad acts of trial and error and micro-discovery that come together over generations.’⁶⁵⁸ Each act of making in clay, no matter how small, holds within it thousands of years of material technology, understanding and invention. And while viewers of clay and ceramic objects may not have the professional expertise or awareness of this creative lineage, for many, such heritage is tacitly understood.

The legacy of decorative ceramic tradition is an important reference point for Cummings, not just visually, but in terms of technological innovation too. The excessive ornamentation of the Baroque period holds particular interest. She notes that in these absurdly ornate objects, ‘elaborate decorative fantasies push at improbable combinations of nature and design’, and so for Cummings they operate as a form of science fiction.⁶⁵⁹ She insists that these creations should not be dismissed as the lavish style of a bygone era. For her, they signify a moment in ceramic history when fantasy, science and desire converge. She explains:

[Baroque design] is something that interests me in terms of science fiction [...]. [Y]ou have all this investment by Meissen or Wedgwood in quite advanced material development and technical problem solving, but then all of that goes into a quite ridiculous object, something completely over the top. That interests me in terms of the decorative. [...] I find it fascinating that human desire for decorative objects is so strong that you would invest in a whole factory to produce them.⁶⁶⁰

Working from material specificity provides Cummings with a rich conceptual framework, opening up possibilities to engage with broader themes. Examining the ‘mutability between nature and ornamental fiction’ allows her to ‘open up all those ideas like science fiction, the botanical and Baroque design. It’s a way of putting the world together,’ she states, ‘it gives you a way into something.’⁶⁶¹ By acknowledging this

⁶⁵⁷ Ingold (2011), p.58.

⁶⁵⁸ Staten (2019), p.10. See also Brinck (2007), p.422.

⁶⁵⁹ Cummings, P. (2021). *Humid Being*. Essay as yet unpublished.

⁶⁶⁰ Appendix B, p.266.

⁶⁶¹ *Ibid.*

remarkable period of industrial ceramic technical discovery, her artworks find anchorage amongst past realms of skill, labour, and construction in clay. Yet simultaneously, her pieces oscillate between other temporal nodes, interweaving a primeval sense of making and matter with the prospect of imagined clay futures. Importantly, the act of making also grounds each encounter with Cummings' sculptures and installations in the present, as the sensing bodies of viewers connect with the immediacy of human contact with wet clay.

Bodily Reciprocity with the Handmade

The directness of interaction with such a malleable substance is both a fascinating and physically immersive experience for Cummings. Despite her longstanding, exclusive relationship with raw clay, she enjoys the unpredictability of its behaviour, the surprises that often emerge during and after production. Echoing both Ingold and Malafouris' notions of material consciousness, Cummings observes that when making with clay there is 'always an element of it that is quite instinctive, like you just trust things will find the right way.'⁶⁶² While much of her work is pre-planned, this intuitive connection between body and substance lies at the heart of her approach.



Figs.48-50. Phoebe Cummings' hands working with clay/the imprint of her hand in clay.

The late Emmanuel Cooper suggested that '[t]he handmade pot is conceived as carrying the potter's thumbprint, a romantic but evocative association that transmits a powerful

⁶⁶² Appendix C, p.270.

sense of the maker's life.'⁶⁶³ While Cummings' sculptures are far removed from functional objects, as previously discussed, each of her hand-built artworks bears the impression of her touch, with the notion of the handmade embedded into the surface of her work (figs.48-50). Skin prints are a reminder not only of the artist's own body, but also a universal concept of body: the body as maker, embedded in a reciprocal relationship between self and material. The body as viewer also becomes implicated in her works, reconnected to their own corporeal being as witness to the traces of another. Antony Gormley argues that clay offers 'the shortest possible bridge between life and the record of life' due to its plasticity. Given this trace-retaining proclivity, he contends that 'clay is a medium that can be an extension of the flesh in a way that no other material can.'⁶⁶⁴ Whether punching, stamping, pressing or wiping clay, Cummings' work clearly manifests Gormley's thinking, and it is the process of fabrication that tells this tale.



Fig.51. Phoebe Cummings, detail from installation *Production Line*, 2015, clay, rope, wire, pulley.

The interweaving of subject and object lies at the heart of phenomenological encounters, a highly applicable notion for Cummings' practice where body and material converge through making. While Ingold does not acknowledge a phenomenological basis for his thinking, his proposition of maker and material as dynamically intertwined through the act of creative production connects with Merleau-Ponty's understanding that the 'body

⁶⁶³ Cooper, E. (2009). *Contemporary Ceramics*. London: Thames & Hudson, p.13.

⁶⁶⁴ Gormley (2004), p.85.

is a thing amongst things [...] caught in the fabric of the world.’⁶⁶⁵ Ingold’s call to ‘follow the materials’ dissolves the barrier between artist/artisan and material. Body and matter are united through the act of making; in doing so, the body becomes a thing itself, part of Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘matter flow.’

De Waal eloquently elucidates this compelling relationship between body and clay substance when he considers Gormley’s installation series *Field* (1989-2003).⁶⁶⁶ He notes that in the thousands of hand-sized, roughly formed, terracotta figures that make up the artwork, human and clay body are united through the pliability of matter, which captures every impact rendered by the makers’ movements and gestures. De Waal recognises Gormley’s installation as an ‘immersive moment, a loss of self and materiality’, one that corresponds with Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of perception as ‘a communion and a coition of our body with things.’⁶⁶⁷ According to de Waal, it thus ‘reveals what can be described as a phenomenological approach to clay.’⁶⁶⁸ He goes on to argue that for many artists, the sense of relational embodiment experienced through making with clay is unique to the material, in part, due to its expressive qualities and visceral identity as primal earth. He ultimately suggests that using clay overcomes that sense of separation, which signifies much of contemporary life. For de Waal, ‘[c]lay allow[s] for a return to self, return to the body, return to the earth.’⁶⁶⁹

While de Waal was alluding to many of the contemporary artists represented in the exhibition *A Secret History of Clay* (2004) at Tate Liverpool, Matsunaga and Bakewell offer equally phenomenological manifestations. And although Nagel draws inspiration from the archetypal vase form, his sculptures still retain a sense of being of, and from, the earth; they clearly reference domestic artefacts, yet also suggest organic root growth or archaeological specimen freshly unearthed. In Cummings’ work, the physical connection of body meeting clay arises predominantly through its crafted identity, where self, earth, plants and artefacts, as well as time and space, are condensed into raw substance. Clay offers much more than a certain manipulable or performative

⁶⁶⁵ Merleau-Ponty (1993c), p.125.

⁶⁶⁶ Participants of Gormley’s installation *Field* made thousands of hand-sized figures from brick clay. Once fired these were placed within gallery environments to form an ‘endless mass’ of figures. Tate (no date). Anthony Gormley: *Field*. *Tate*. Available from: <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-liverpool/exhibition/antony-gormley-field>

⁶⁶⁷ Merleau-Ponty cited by de Waal (2004), p.43.

⁶⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

physicality. It's connection to the ground, to landscape and to human history is also conceptually significant. Cummings notes that in its raw state, clay is of the land; it is part of a landscape and through her making it becomes transposed into an alternative landscape reality.⁶⁷⁰ That clay is formed of decomposed plant matter is also a powerful signifier for her. With such complexity of interwoven connections, she explains that working with clay matter 'often feels like waves of things emerging and submerging.'⁶⁷¹ Constancy is found in her repetitive gestures and actions of making that maintain a rhythmic accumulation and distribution of matter, whilst uniting body and clay in synchronous intimacy.

Making to Scale: Body and Object

Stephen Horne likens habitual, rhythmic, craft-based methods to Buddhist mudras—meditative, ritual gestures mostly performed with hands and fingers to create a flow of energy in the body.⁶⁷² He argues that the intensity of repetitive material fabrication processes generates a form of embodiment akin to spiritual practices such as these that are based in small, repeated movements. Ingold also recognises the sensory, rhythmic capacity of making by hand. For him:

The rhythmic repetitions of gesture entailed in handling tools and materials are not, however, of a mechanical kind, like the oscillations of the pendulum or metronome. For they are set up through the continual sensory attunement of the practitioner's movements to the inherent rhythmicity of those components of the environment with which he or she is engaged.⁶⁷³

Horne and Ingold's thinking creates space to consider the embodied resonance of repetitive making methods found in some case study artworks: the recurring tool markings that cover many of Matsunaga's surfaces, for instance, or the painstaking carving found in Bakewell's tiny porcelain objects, at times executed with a pin. The obsessive precision and exquisite detail he achieves in his miniature sculpture *Of Beauty Reminiscing* (fig.52) is breathtaking, yet there is still a sense of the hand, of the tiny, repetitive gestures that brought it to life.⁶⁷⁴ Cummings' working process closely aligns body, hands and substance through the small, recurring gestures that produce multiple

⁶⁷⁰ Appendix C, p.269.

⁶⁷¹ Ibid.

⁶⁷² Horne, S. (1998). *Embodying Subjectivity*. In: Bachmann, I. and Scheuing, R. (eds.) *Material Matters: The Art and Culture of Contemporary Textiles*. Toronto, Ontario: YYZ Books, p.40.

⁶⁷³ Ingold (2013), p.115.

⁶⁷⁴ *Of Beauty Reminiscing* took two years to carve with a pin.

flower, leaf, scroll and bead forms that populate her structures. These rhythms, accumulations and intensities are also available to viewers. Awareness is heightened as the intricacy of form entices the viewing body closer and narrows visual focus. One becomes lost in the proximal nature of observing such crafted detail; it is absorbing, and, as Horne suggests, almost meditative.



Fig.52. Sam Bakewell, *Of Beauty Reminiscing*, 2015, carved porcelain.

Encounters with the handmade are frequently formed through such closeness of approach. Adamson argues that '[c]raft demands proximity—the material to the maker, the work to the tool—and this spatial consideration applies its own sort of friction.'⁶⁷⁵ His thinking centres on the realm of the creator, yet the spatial friction that he observes is also relevant for viewers of craft. Rather than a certain kind of resistance or abrasion, friction is understood here in the generative sense, as a form of productive energy or stimulus. The diminutive scale of individual forms found in Cummings' and some of Bakewell's pieces certainly elicit such intensity. As previously demonstrated, crafted details invite a mode of close looking that instigates an 'intersubjective relationship between beholder and image' through 'close bodily contact.'⁶⁷⁶ Attending intimately to handmade works in this way reveals the phenomenological potency of scale, as bodily equivalences are relationally established.

The dimensions of handmade objects also offer opportunities for heightened bodily awareness. Sculptor Malcolm Martin recognises the 'associative chains' set up by their

⁶⁷⁵ Adamson (2013), p.165.

⁶⁷⁶ Marks (2002), p.13. See also: chapter two, p.149-153.

various scales and physicality.⁶⁷⁷ Designed for handling, he believes the proportions of domestic artefacts generate familiarity, knowledge and control—our bodies understand, and are tuned to their ratio. Murphy exploits this human connection with vernacular ceramic objects by using found pottery items, such as jugs and cups, in her work. While Cummings' large sculptures and immersive installations bear little comparison to the scale, purpose or touchability of functional domestic items, they overtly reference decorative ceramic pieces that populate homes and public interiors. The often-considerable size of her work becomes recalibrated through association to similarly elaborate compositions found on many a mantelpiece, shelf or windowsill display. And in the detailed passages of ornate modelling familiarity also lies—made by hand, the scale of individual components find corporeal echoes in the body that beholds them.



From left to right:
 Fig.53. Johannes Nagel, *Growing Vessel*, 2015, porcelain, glaze.
 Fig.54. Johannes Nagel, *Untitled 5*, 2019, porcelain, oxide.

Nagel's production methods prompt a different, although equally potent, sense of corporeal reciprocity through scale. His sandcasting approach is based purely on the dimensions of his own limbs. Each mould cannot exceed the depth of his arm given that he must reach down through its interior to remove the base plug, allowing slip to drain out. This limb measurement is particularly apparent in his *Cluster* series (figs.53-54), where groups of hollow, tubular forms are interconnected, each a similar height as though forcefully cropped. For Nagel:

⁶⁷⁷ Martin, M. (2000). Scale and Making. In: Stair, J. (ed.) *The Body Politic: The Role of the Body in Contemporary Craft*. London: Crafts Council, p.80.

There is something awkward about them all having the same height. [...] [I]t takes them away from being a composed still life. [...] From a sculptural perspective, that is the most interesting thing: looking across the openings at the way these gestures that were once tunnels are now cast, looking at the way they are now transferred into an object and how they meet.⁶⁷⁸

The identity of these curious sculptures is ambiguous and unstable, suggesting grouped objects, buckled pipework, gnarled root structure or truncated arboreal form. Yet they invite bodily equivalences and connection. The dimensions of the sleeve-like structures are alluring, their apertures enticing spectators' arms to slip within.



Fig.55. Johannes Nagel, *Vessels Perhaps I*, 2015, porcelain, glaze.

Nagel's more typically recognisable vase forms also draw bodily correlations, with some conforming to domestic vase dimensions, while much larger iterations subvert assumptions. For instance, with the grouping *Vessels, Perhaps I* (fig.55), the largest of the sculptures is human-sized at 160cms tall, and all possess measurements incompatible with conventional homes. Encountering these generous vases inevitably draws human comparisons. Are they shoulder, neck or head height? Could outstretched arms encircle their girth? Yet in their reference to a common household object, the viewer is also

⁶⁷⁸ Appendix G, p.328.

drawn back to a more intimate physical sphere. One's grasp of scale shifts between what is directly sensed and what is tacitly known, intensifying the relationship between body and object, thus heightening corporeality in viewers.

Function, Familiarity, Embodiment

The human body is an important reference for Nagel, either through making processes, or, as he believes, a relational presence that pervades all sculptures.⁶⁷⁹ Being tied to bodily activity, the cultural and social connotations of objects also carry a sense of human association for him through scale, albeit less conspicuously. The vase form therefore serves as an important compass in his work, a connective symbol always returning us to the body, physically or conceptually. As Nagel explains, they are:

[...] objects that are related in a different way to the body that has more to do with ritual: daily rituals, but also cultural rituals. [...] [They] are more than just tools, they are charged with that history. [...] [S]o the vase scale, in its different sizes, always made sense to me in this way; [...] [it] is the link to get there.⁶⁸⁰

Nagel's words highlight the socially connected bodily correspondences that arise when functional attributes are present in an artwork. The potent relationship between use value, ceramic artefact and embodiment has been briefly stated elsewhere. Chapter two acknowledged the ubiquitous familiarity of domestic ceramic pots as sensorially compelling, intertwined with human lives through tacit knowing and somatic markers.⁶⁸¹ Earlier, Gibson's theory of affordance exposed our corporeal reciprocity with functional pottery by way of innate 'action possibilities.' I posited that the primordial qualities and historical legacy of purposeful clay-based objects enhance their embodied resonances. The perceptual impact of craft and function on viewers is worth pursuing further to firmly establish their causal link with embodiment.

Margaret Boden demonstrates the cognitive significance of functionality in a work, arguing that art and craft stimulate different modes of engagement in audiences.⁶⁸² Conscious of making problematic distinctions, her flexible account of perception allows

⁶⁷⁹ Appendix G, p.327-328.

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁸¹ See: chapter two, pp.123-125.

⁶⁸² Boden (2000), p.291.

for ambiguities and indeterminacy.⁶⁸³ Boden claims that art engages the senses to probe ‘real or imagined’ worlds, drawing on ‘visual processes’ as well as memory and cultural/social knowledge to do so.⁶⁸⁴ This she names ‘indicative’ perception: the senses here are not simply ‘passive recording instruments’, but an ‘intelligent [interpretive] system.’⁶⁸⁵ Through their association with use, crafted objects conversely stimulate ‘enactive’ perception, meaning they invite an ‘impulse to action’ *prior* to interpretation.⁶⁸⁶ Rather than being intellectually alert to any affordances an entity might possess, we are first bodily cognisant of these potentials, or lack of them.⁶⁸⁷ Thus, for Boden, craftworks ‘are integrated with a wide range of bodily actions. Such actions are grounded [...] in our specifically human embodiment [...].’⁶⁸⁸

Boden acknowledges that such distinctions in a work are often not ‘clear-cut.’⁶⁸⁹ Whatever its designation, one piece can simultaneously provoke both indicative and enactive modes of perception to varying degrees.⁶⁹⁰ This recognition of the cognitive and biological basis by which functional attributes in art impact viewer perception in embodied ways is highly significant. Use value, or allusion to use, does not negate the status of clay and ceramic artwork as Krauss argued, but instead enhances perceptual experience by intensifying bodily connections.

All the case study artworks operate through this duality. They stimulate enactive perception in spectators through functional references, whilst synchronously engaging indicative responses via conceptual content. Bakewell’s totems suggest objects for devotional practice, many of Matsunaga’s forms are tool-like or witness to human creative activity, and Cummings’ work re-imagines domestic decoration. The most consciously overt employment of functionality, however, is found in Nagel and Murphy’s practices. As discussed elsewhere, Murphy digitally augments purposeful ceramic objects. Closely mirroring their everyday counterparts, her pieces amplify the tacit

⁶⁸³ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid., p.291-292.

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid., p.292.

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid., p.293, my emphasis.

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid., p.295.

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid., p.294.

⁶⁸⁹ Ibid., p.290.

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid., p.301. Boden uses Andrew Lord’s ceramic sculptures to illustrate this point.

familiarity of vernacular pottery to bring about sensorial revelations for users.⁶⁹¹ Nagel's work also remains tied to function, yet unlike Murphy whose work exploits tacit recognition, Nagel destabilises perception by subverting such a well-known household artefact.

Collaged together from multiple wheel-thrown forms, the smooth surfaces of Nagel's *Vessels, Perhaps I* (fig.54) already possess Bacci's proposition of 'touchability.' Associative bodily gestures tied to vessels are also invested into their being. The vase reference remains apparent despite the awkward *mélange* of parts in each piece challenging use-value. These physical interventions to such a classic form jolt the viewing experience out of complacency, generating tension as identity slips between artefact and sculpture, an outcome Nagel consciously seeks. For him, the vase shape:

[...] comes out of the world, out of the unformed or the amorphous [...]. But there is something about this volume, moving with some liquidity within this pattern of the silhouette, of the symmetrical, that is an important quality of these pieces. It puts them on the edge of sculpture actually, which is far more difficult with pieces thrown on the wheel. With their rotational symmetry, [...] I have to interrupt it in different ways to question the volume.⁶⁹²

Expressively applied decorative motifs add to their categorical instability. Dripped glaze and roughly stencilled, graphic patterning suggest strategies connected with abstract painting, and so heighten this friction further. Boden's dual perceptual modes are clearly evident in Nagel's work.

This tension between function and sculptural object is located in the 'vesselness' of Nagel's sculptures, an idea supported by Emmanuel Cooper's differentiation of the terms object, vessel and pot.⁶⁹³ Cooper argues that an object is unhindered by physical 'limits' or essential characteristics—it can be anything—while pots and vessels exist fundamentally as containers, so are tied to function by varying degrees.⁶⁹⁴ However, unlike pots, he observes that:

[...] vessels are usually seen to have a distant, sometimes faint, relationship to use. [...] [W]hile retaining references to the container, [they] may take on more

⁶⁹¹ See: chapter two, pp.102-106; and chapter four, pp.207-212 and pp.217-224.

⁶⁹² Appendix G, p.337-338.

⁶⁹³ Gray (2017), p.3.

⁶⁹⁴ Cooper (2007), pp.53-54.

metaphorical or symbolic qualities. In some ways, they occupy the ground between object and pot, asserting their independence and authority with expressive work that has freed itself from any explicit function.⁶⁹⁵

The physical processes by which Nagel's vase forms come about remove them from the sphere of utility, yet they remain recognisably vessels. The shapes of the wheel thrown vases still conform to standard silhouettes, albeit exaggerated and distorted through collaging methods. The rough textures and warped structures of their sand-cast counterparts push identity even further beyond the standard vase character. These vessel sculptures feel like ancient, unearthed objects, yet each offers newly navigated experiences of something innately familiar (fig.56). However far removed from function, all allude to the capacity to hold and contain, and as Boden maintains, viewers are drawn to the idea of use regardless of any real capacity.⁶⁹⁶



Fig.56. Johannes Nagel, *Untitled*, 2017, porcelain and glaze.

Among others, Mathieu argues that even if crafted objects are 'useless in a practical sense, they nonetheless remain socially essential, as receptacle for the imagination and memory of humankind [...].'⁶⁹⁷ The container/vessel is therefore a particularly potent

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid., p.53.

⁶⁹⁶ Boden (2000), p.290.

⁶⁹⁷ Mathieu (2007b), p.125. See also: Rawson (1984; 2006b), p.6. & p.209; Greenhalgh (2002), p.10; Gormley (2004), p.85; Daintry (2007), p.13; Risatti (2007a), p.56; Corse (2009), p.68; Kettleby (2010), p.14; Shaw (2016), pp.88-92; Racz (2017), p.80.

cultural symbol in Nagel's work, one that transcends functionality. As Racz proposes, it is 'rich in the ability to suggest the experience of the world.'⁶⁹⁸ She quotes metalworker Michael Rowe who confirms the vessel's centrality within human life, stating: 'We live and move in a world of containers, we put things into containers, we contain things and we ourselves are contained [...] forms within forms.'⁶⁹⁹ Significantly, the notion of containment establishes 'a transition between interior and exterior', highlighting the capacity of vessels to both hold and inhabit space.⁷⁰⁰ Racz argues that this fluctuating spatiality 'defines emptiness as presence', a quality Nagel knowingly exploits.⁷⁰¹ He states:

[T]his openness also introduces the subject of the space inside the work. Not the space in-between, but the idea of inside and outside space, which [...] [is] present in any cup or mug [...]. Even with these very sculptural pieces, if I have these openings at the top, it's extending that inner space a little towards the surrounding space.⁷⁰²

The compelling spatiality of Nagel's vase sculptures arrives through texture and surface. Often leaving the porcelain exteriors unglazed, his sandcast vessel-objects appear outwardly dry. In contrast, interior spaces are often highly glazed, enticing viewers to contemplate the glossy smoothness of their inner depths. By accentuating the internal structure of the vase, our understanding of space is inverted and so becomes a dynamic property, as Nagel describes:

[T]he glaze is where the brilliance comes out. [...] [T]he inside is softer because it has not met with the sand, so it can look like perfect, glassy porcelain and the outside can be rough. [...] I focus on the inside and the outside, on these two parts: on this cultural reference of the clean, glazed porcelain, and of this dry sculptural material on the outside.⁷⁰³

Nagel's persistent engagement with the vase motif emphasises the symbolic significance of the container in human life, a form indelibly entwined with ceramic identity and tradition. Clay's correlation with 'vesselness' is a primal, and therefore potent value for

⁶⁹⁸ Racz (2017), p.80.

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid. The significance of ceramic vessels is noted elsewhere, see: Rawson (1984), p.6; Shaw (2016), p.90; Laura Gray (2017), p.3.

⁷⁰⁰ Paul Mathieu (2007b), p.116. See also: Fariello (2005), pp.156-157; Daintry (2007), p.8; Shaw (2016), p.90; Adamson (2017), p.253; Racz (2017), p.80.

⁷⁰¹ Racz (2017), p.80.

⁷⁰² Appendix G, p.339.

⁷⁰³ Appendix G, p.333.

many, sedimented into our subconscious through pervasive representations, whether as primitive clay utensil, functional artisanal object or highly manufactured tableware.⁷⁰⁴ Given its longevity, the ceramic vessel embodies human time; it operates as an emblem of continuity, clearly manifesting Merleau-Ponty's notion of depth-oriented temporal intertwining. Racz claims vessels connect makers 'to the roots of humanity.'⁷⁰⁵ I contend that when employed within clay-based art, viewers may also access this deep-seated human connection through a potent combination of primordial matter and ancient form. Allusion to functionality in clay and ceramic artwork taps into this tacit knowing; through the figure of the functional vessel, the embodied spatiality of clay is revealed. This idea emerges as a crucial research concern. It threads through, and anchors this discussion, leading into the final chapter which focuses on the particular ways that space is meaningful for considering the embodied potentials of ceramics and clay.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has exposed the phenomenological significance of craft references in clay-based art, demonstrating its embodied impact on viewers. A theoretical perspective of craft first established the relevance of this focus. Craft was positioned as a fluid, pervasive concept aligned with processes of making, whilst the 'intensive engagements' of material-led practices were found crucial for manifesting the dynamic agency of craft.⁷⁰⁶ The overlap of craft characteristics in a work with those of art and/or design was identified as a potent, liminal interface where embodied audience experiences can arise. Ultimately, craft was conceived of as performative: its experiential and associative qualities, together with its ontological significance, reveal what craft, in fact, does.

Through case study examples, part two examined the specific ways embodied spectatorship of clay-based art might occur through the lens of craft. Making was posited as a revelatory process, heightening perceptual awareness through subject-specialist 'material intensities' and synergy of maker and clay.⁷⁰⁷ Viewers join artists on the sensory journey of making, connecting them with bodily being and material consciousness as they witness gestures of making through the animate quality of clay. Overt reference to craft processes were shown to elicit 'touchability' and action

⁷⁰⁴ Gray (2107), p.3.

⁷⁰⁵ Racz (2017), p.80.

⁷⁰⁶ Shiner (2012), p.235.

⁷⁰⁷ Gilbert (2018), p.61.

possibilities, given the universal significance of ceramic objects in everyday life.⁷⁰⁸ Human making was considered a socially inscribed, instinctual form of bodily knowledge; case study artwork demonstrated the power of clay media to unite spectators with this primal urge. The temporal resonance of craft references in clay was also situated within a phenomenological frame. Awareness of labour, skill and specialist knowledge acquisition were shown to connect viewers to an intertwining, embodied temporal realm, as did references to the long legacy of ceramic tradition and making in clay. It was argued that the relational scale of handmade ceramic objects manifests bodily reciprocity in audiences, with case study examples shown to exploit and destabilise viewer expectations. Finally, allusions to function were shown to heighten the embodied potency of clay-based art. Symbolising humanity, functional ceramic vessels are a reminder of our ongoing interconnectedness within the experiential human sphere. This chapter's focus on craft has exposed its crucial phenomenological agency. Craft references in a work emphasise the distinctive social, cultural, anthropological and temporal qualities of clay and ceramic art, inviting an embodied attitude in viewers.

⁷⁰⁸ Bacci (2013), p.140.

Chapter Four: The Space of Clay

Introduction

‘[T]he potter’s medium is not clay, but space itself.’⁷⁰⁹ Glenn Adamson

At first glance, clay does not seem a particularly spacious medium. It has a relatively dense material body, one that is either pliable when wet or rigid when dry. Despite being made up of microscopic mineral particles, clay substance is usually considered in terms of a solid mass—an inert, earthy lump.⁷¹⁰ Yet in the hands of makers, clay’s capacity to conjure a certain sense of space becomes a potent property. As Adamson notes, Martin Heidegger described the potter’s process as an intrinsically spatial activity. In his essay ‘The Thing’, Heidegger asserts that rather than executing material transformations on the wheel, the potter, in fact, ‘shapes the void.’⁷¹¹ While this discourse encompasses a far greater breadth of clay and ceramic making than pottery, Heidegger’s concept highlights the critical significance of spatial thinking for clay practice. This focus drives this chapter and underscores the whole thesis. While spatial dynamics are a central characteristic of many forms of art, I argue that clay and ceramic artworks offer unique opportunities for audiences to connect with the notion of space in diverse and embodied ways.

Chapters two and three examined the ways in which sensorial qualities and crafted identities of clay-based art can stimulate embodied experience in viewers. This chapter builds on these findings, extending their scope by situating some previously considered ideas within the context of space. However, it becomes apparent that drawing clear-cut thematic divisions is impossible. For instance, the embodied resonance of crafted characteristics may involve a sensorial encounter with intimate detail, which necessarily engages a spatial dimension. Each aspect is critical in stimulating a phenomenological attitude, yet their correlation is key. As interwoven identities, a fluid yet holistic sense emerges of the core thesis ideas. Nevertheless, by focusing on the spatial qualities of embodiment that transpire, new potentials are revealed.

⁷⁰⁹ Adamson (2017), p.253.

⁷¹⁰ Science Learning Hub. (2010). What is Clay? *The Science Learning Hub - Pokapū Akoranga Pūtaiao*. Available from <https://www.sciencelearn.org.nz/resources/1771-what-is-clay>

⁷¹¹ Heidegger (2001), p.171.

The body and space are integrally connected in phenomenological thinking. As Merleau-Ponty states, ‘far from my body being for me merely a fragment of space, there would be no such thing as space if I did not have a body.’⁷¹² Encounters between bodies, artworks and spaces of display underpin this discourse and so space emerges as a critical concept. Various theoretical perspectives help establish the unique spatio-temporal resonances of clay here: bodily, temporal, collective, imaginative and place-making qualities of viewer experience are all considered. Andrew J. Mitchell notes that for Heidegger, ‘[s]culpture changes the texture of the space around it as each work eddies forth turbulences into the smoothness of the world.’⁷¹³ Through detailed examination of thesis case studies, this chapter explores the remarkable and distinctive ‘textures’ of space elicited by clay-based art, and the specific forms of embodiment that emerge for viewers therein.

Unless otherwise stated, I use the term space throughout in its widest sense to denote an active, ongoing sphere of interrelations that manifests diversely to include everything from ‘the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny’, as well as the here and elsewhere.⁷¹⁴ Space is not considered a distinct entity, surface or container, but a unifying system through which experience occurs, coalescing body space and external space by way of movement.⁷¹⁵ It may therefore refer to the near sphere, but can equally designate a collection of places, imaginative realms, even world. By contrast, places have a greater sense of specificity and character; they describe particular constellations of people, things and projects, which, like space, are in a constant state of transformation.⁷¹⁶ A more detailed discussion of the phenomenology of place follows shortly.

Initially, the concept of place is considered in relation to embodiment and to clay and ceramic materiality. The disorienting capacity of immersive installation environments is then examined, and the intricate crafted details of clay-based artwork shown to inaugurate an intimate space of immensity. Following this, clay’s viscous qualities and ontologically charged material character are connected to imaginative space—a potent

⁷¹² Merleau-Ponty (2014), p.104.

⁷¹³ Mitchell (2010), p.56.

⁷¹⁴ Massey (2005), p.9. See also: Martin (1981), p.54; Dillon (1997), p.136; Hass (2008), p.79; Merleau-Ponty (2014), pp.261-264.

⁷¹⁵ See: Casey (1998), pp.229-230; Malpas (1999), pp.22-26; Merleau-Ponty (2014), p.143.

⁷¹⁶ Massey (2005), p.130-142.

phenomenological value of clay-based art. Thinking through making processes, together with material hierarchies, accumulations and uncertainties, then delivers a complex meditation on the spatio-temporal realm of clay. Given the social character of ceramic and clay materiality, manifold spatio-temporal trajectories are shown to converge within clay-based art. They are thus presented as dynamic sites, situating viewers within an embodied 'place' of being. Further spatial revelations arise through the integration of interactive technologies with ceramic artefacts, where sensory experience intensifies for users whilst recalibrating their understanding of space. The body's role as a place between places is exposed here. Finally, the collective nature of space is revealed; clay-based artworks are proposed as a place of gathering, with their material character connecting us to a wider, ontological, shared sphere of being.

Placing Embodied Experiences of Ceramics and Clay

The concept of place is significant within theories of embodiment; it exposes the human quality of spatial experience, the essential unity of body and world.⁷¹⁷ As Edward Casey explains, the character of place is 'known to us only in and by the body that enters and occupies a given place.'⁷¹⁸ Furthermore, Jeff Malpas claims that place is not 'something encountered "in" experience, but rather that place *is integral to the very structure and possibility of experience.*'⁷¹⁹ Ideas of place and place making are implicitly tied to clay and ceramic materiality. Clay is synonymous with earth, land, locations and terrains, while ceramic objects, in their utilitarian and decorative capacities, signify social and cultural places, such as those of worship or home.

Phenomenological implications of place are significant across the case study group. Cummings' detailed plant structures recall interior and exterior places that allude to controlled domestic domains and wild, slightly alien landscapes. Murphy's work juxtaposes disparate locations, familiar and strange places, near and far. Bakewell conjures an awkward yet hypnotic devotional installation space, while his *Reader* sculptures record the momentary place of contact between material and body. Cummings, Matsunaga and Murphy's practices also *place* the viewer in a shared

⁷¹⁷ Jeff Malpas (1999), pp.22-23, notes that, in contrast, many theorists from various fields consider space in terms of an abstract, quantifiable domain. See also Dillon (1997), p.134.

⁷¹⁸ Casey (1998), p.204, emphasis in original.

⁷¹⁹ Malpas (1999), p.31, emphasis in original.

temporal realm, an idea examined in depth later in this chapter. Thinking through place then, is key to establishing the embodied potency of clay-based artworks for audiences.



Fig.57. Phoebe Cummings, *After the Death of the Bear*, 2013, clay and mixed media.

It is interesting to consider the relationship between clay and place through Cummings landscape installations. For instance, *After the Death of the Bear* (fig.57) was a human scale, tropical micro-landscape enclosed in polythene walls and situated within the disused industrial architecture of the Spode Factory at the British Ceramics Biennial in 2013. Inspired by a plate design produced by Spode, this vitrine-like environment of exotic plant life seemed at odds with the vast, disused industrial site, yet the damp smell of unfired clay comfortably mingled with this once vibrant space of British ceramic production. With the original plate on display nearby, viewers experienced sensory extremes as landscape and domestic interior, familiar and extraordinary, near and far, vast and intimate all coincided through the frame of place. Casey (2002) notes that unlike imaginary domains, artistic ‘presentations’ of place are made specifically for others to engage in. Viewers ‘feel included [...] [and] may even come to experience themselves as placing themselves in the picture, entering actively into it [...]’.⁷²⁰ While Casey discusses landscape painting, his thinking is also applicable for three-dimensional

⁷²⁰ Casey (2002), p.254.

artworks. Cummings' landscape inspired installations certainly invite such immersion, and through this spatial flux embodied awareness may readily arise.

Installation: Being (Dis)Oriented

If the structure of place invokes an embodied mode of being in the world,⁷²¹ then being out of place must similarly heighten awareness of self, albeit differently. Paul Ricoeur offers a useful insight, stating that:

[...] placing and displacing oneself are primordial activities that make place something to be sought out. And it would be frightening not to ever find it. The feeling of uneasiness [...] joined to the feeling of not being in one's place, of not feeling at home, haunts us and this would be the realm of emptiness.⁷²²

Feeling in place is a necessary attitude then, something we inherently seek to establish wherever we may be. As Ricoeur points out, our equilibrium is disturbed when we feel dislocated. In different ways, the case study artists disturb any concrete sense of place in their work. The unstable identities of Nagel's vessels refuse to clearly establish the 'place' they inhabit. Murphy's interactive objects simultaneously conjure disparate places for viewers: a disconcerting sensorial revelation. Matsunaga's sculptures repeatedly transition between contemporary and primordial space, and Bakewell's *Reader* sculptures confront viewers with bodily absence and its relation to their own physical place. This inability to pin place down is unsettling as Ricoeur suggests, with clay a crucial signifier within this fluctuating experiential field.

Disorienting experiences with art-places may thus occur through any scale of artwork, however, as Potts notes, installation 'purports to be envelopingly immediate and then induces unexpected sensations of disturbance and displacement.'⁷²³ He argues that the immersion into, and mode of close looking which installation invites, combined with its evident staging and framing within the wider context of gallery or museum, unsettles viewers as they transition between extreme states of awareness. This fluctuation between feeling displaced and being *in* place is keenly felt in Cummings' installations, which imagine Baroque-inspired worlds where time and place collide in a profusion of plant life, opulent decoration, and decay. Viewers are simultaneously transported to

⁷²¹ See: Casey (1998; 2000), p.204 & p.182; Malpas (1999), p.35; Ingold (2011), p.148.

⁷²² Ricoeur, P. (2006). *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Trans. by K. Blamey and D. Pellauer. Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, p.149.

⁷²³ Potts (2001), p.20.

primordial swamps, lavishly decorated 17th century drawing rooms and futuristic landscapes overwhelmed by technologically adapted vegetation. Clay materiality is a fundamental presence connecting all; viewers become engulfed by the space and by clay, both physically and imaginatively. Harriet Hawkins states that ‘installations create spaces to which you take your whole body.’⁷²⁴ The viewing body is clearly situated in a particular place by Cummings, but it is not an easily identifiable domain.

Cummings often uses polythene walls to enclose her raw clay worlds, as in *After the Death of the Bear* (fig.57), *An Ugly Aside* (figs.8-9) and *A Ripening Surveillance* (figs.21-22, 25). When inside, the polythene diffuses visual apperception of the wider exhibition spaces, yet the broader context is not entirely eliminated. Awareness of light, shadows, forms and activity, while softened by the translucent sheeting, still flicker at the edges of perception, drawing viewers away from total immersion and thus inducing the spatial disturbances of which Potts speaks.



Figs.58-59. Phoebe Cummings, *Scenes from a Future History of Ornament*, 2015, timber, archival storage boxes, polythene, raw clay.

Other installations by Cummings acknowledge their situation more obviously, and so a sense of displacement is further pronounced. Rather than immerse the viewer in a self-contained environment, *Scenes from a Future History of Ornament* (figs.58-59) incorporated the wider museum space as an integral aspect of the viewing experience.⁷²⁵ An octagonal walkthrough chamber constructed from timber and

⁷²⁴ Hawkins (2010), p.324.

⁷²⁵ *Scenes from a Future History of Ornament* was a site-specific installation commissioned by the National Museum of Wales as part of their exhibition *Fragile?*

polythene sheeting confronted exhibition-goers as they entered the gallery; stacked cardboard archival boxes surrounded its outer perimeter. This makeshift materiality created an immediate air of uncertainty, suggesting something unfinished or under construction, yet simultaneously imparting a knowing sense of theatricality. Cummings explains that she, 'was thinking about how you were immersed in this kind of stage.'⁷²⁶ Her choice of materials acknowledged the artifice of the installation environment, but like theatre, once inside, viewers could suspend their disbelief and become part of the unfolding drama.

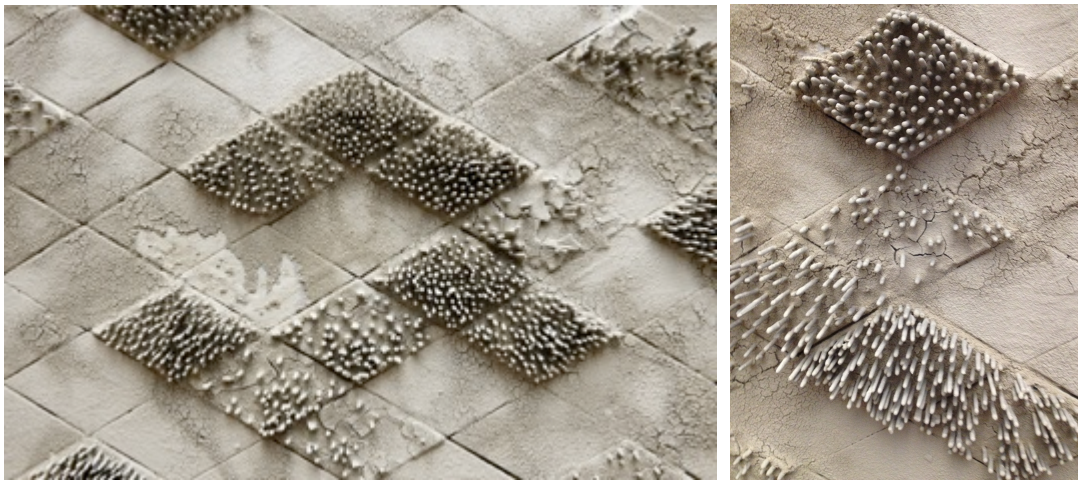


Fig.60-61. Phoebe Cummings, *Scenes for a Future History of Ornament* (details), 2015.

Like much of her work, Cummings was interested in the blurring of boundaries between the natural world and decorative design in *Scenes for a Future History of Ornament*.⁷²⁷ As she notes: 'The tile-like walls had grown out of looking at fossils, and the patterns and decorative designs [on ceramic objects] that had emerged from fossils.'⁷²⁸ Landscape turned ornament, then reimagined as landscape once more. Cummings recognises a strong correlation between installation and decorative interiors. For her, the latter 'create these immersive spaces that are almost like extreme works of fiction [...]. [T]hey are these other worlds [...] but at the same time they can be lived in, and are part of a reality.'⁷²⁹ The interior walls of the installation were clad with diamond-shaped tiles covered in a thin coating of unfired slip that began to craze and disintegrate as it slowly dried out (figs.60-61). This crumbling veneer carried a sense of melancholy—a forgotten

⁷²⁶ Appendix C, p.281.

⁷²⁷ Cummings' installation was inspired by archival objects from the extensive natural history and ceramic collections of the National Museum of Wales.

⁷²⁸ Appendix C, p.281.

⁷²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.273.

place fallen into disrepair. Yet densely clustered, small protrusions of clay sprouted from these rhomboid forms like strange growths—a glimmer of life appearing amongst the cracks and dusty decay. An incremental transformation, or mutation perhaps, seemed to be occurring as natural world and interior domain slowly exchanged place.



Figs.62-64. Phoebe Cummings, details from *Scenes for a Future History of Ornament* 2015, cardboard archive boxes, raw clay.

Whilst viewers moved through this human-scale, clay chamber with full-bodied awareness, the cardboard boxes surrounding the outer structure of the installation offered a very different perceptual experience. Some housed miniature clay landscapes only visible by peering through the elliptical gap of each box's handle (figs.62-64). Lit from within, the faint glow from their apertures lured viewers to investigate. Tiny realms melded decorative pattern with organic form, resulting in fantastical places where interior and exterior worlds yet again became blurred. Cummings describes the different spatial modes she employed throughout installation:

[W]hat you see from a distance isn't necessarily what you uncover as you get closer to the work. [...] I didn't want it to be something that could be seen in two seconds. It requires you to go through and around the work; it requires that

movement of the viewer to fully engage with it. And it also shifts that experience of something. [...] [Y]ou are quite likely to be in a [gallery] room with other people, and then suddenly to walk into that central space where you may then be seen by other people from the outside. Or you might be in there with someone else. That was combined with these moments of looking into the boxes where you reduced the size of your eye in a way.⁷³⁰

Encouraged to both physically enter and conversely glimpse these in-between places, viewers were positioned as both voyeur and protagonist, 'seer and seen.'⁷³¹ Both approaches were equally immersive, yet they were experientially different. Entering the central clay room was sensorially corporeal and engulfing, while looking into the boxes became a more intimate affair. Cummings describes the latter as a solitary activity akin to reading a text; the restricted aperture of the boxes invited 'you [to] immerse yourself in those sorts of fictions and at that moment you [we]re alone.'⁷³² Crucially for the artist, peering in to these miniature places 'pulled [the viewer] towards an imaginative encounter, because it revealed the world without letting you fully in.'⁷³³ By instigating such experiential shifts of scale, proxemics, sensorial awareness and conceptual possibilities, Cummings offered a layered viewing experience that truly challenged the spatial coherence of place through physical and imaginative means.

From Miniscule to Immense: Accessing Imaginative Space

The literature review evidenced that perception requires imagination.⁷³⁴ As Kathleen Lennon tells us, our imagination doesn't just create fictional realms, it is that which enables us to experience reality.⁷³⁵ Yet for Gaston Bachelard, our ability to conjure fantastical other worlds through imaginative thinking is a meaningful and enriching aspect of human being. He is particularly concerned with the powerful spatial interplay that occurs between the miniscule and the immense through imaginative processes. Bachelard claims that 'values become condensed and enriched in miniature', an idea that resonates with the intricate fabrication of Cummings' work.⁷³⁶ While Cummings creates large-scale environments, most of her raw clay plant structures are constructed from multiple tiny elements such as petals, stamens and leaves. Her artworks thus instigate

⁷³⁰ Appendix C, p.280.

⁷³¹ See discussion of Merleau-Ponty's reversibility in chapter two, pp.98-109.

⁷³² Appendix C, p.280.

⁷³³ Ibid., p.281.

⁷³⁴ See chapter one, p.94.

⁷³⁵ Lennon (2015), p.2

⁷³⁶ Bachelard (1994), p.150.

comparable viewing experiences; spectators must closely observe the diminutive details they find. The embodied quality of intimately encountering clay-based artwork has already been discussed,⁷³⁷ however, Bachelard's spatial lens reveals further embodied potentials.

For Bachelard, smallness represents a concentration of qualities; this potency opens up limitless space by transporting the perceiving subject into their imagining consciousness. 'We discover that immensity in the intimate domain is intensity', he states, 'the intensity of a being evolving in a vast perspective of intimate intensity.'⁷³⁸ Through Bachelard's thinking, the tiny details in Cummings' work must offer access to these dynamically spatial extremes. He likens focusing attention on the miniature to looking through a magnifying glass;⁷³⁹ it reveals novel perspectives and things seem fresh and new, 'allow[ing] us to be world conscious at slight risk.'⁷⁴⁰ Close inspection of our proximal environment dissipates understanding, thereby heightening awareness of our immediate perceptual ground, which becomes transformed through this process. We are then faced with something unknown and surprising—this is the risk of which Bachelard speaks.⁷⁴¹

Similarly, when observing Cummings' installations it is impossible to maintain a purview. One becomes engulfed in a magnified mass of textures and forms that constitute a strange and imaginatively expansive land. Bachelard notes that in its abundance of tiny parts and 'its attachment to miniaturized forces, the vegetal world is great in smallness [...].'⁷⁴² Cummings' work stimulates Marks' embodied mode of haptic visuality, yet, as Bachelard suggests, it also expands space for the viewer: 'The miniscule, a narrow gate, opens up an entire world.'⁷⁴³

While Bachelard focuses on the miniature evoked through poetic form, Henri Focillon considers intimate immensity activated in the material realm, highlighting the specific

⁷³⁷ See chapter two, pp.112-116.

⁷³⁸ Bachelard (1994), p.193.

⁷³⁹ Ibid., p.155.

⁷⁴⁰ Ibid., p.161.

⁷⁴¹ Andrews (2014) and Marks (2002) also discuss the idea of risk in relation to intimate visual encounters through film. See chapter two, p.116.

⁷⁴² Bachelard (1994), p.162.

⁷⁴³ Bachelard (1994), p.155.

role that crafted detail plays. He asks: 'Is it not the marvel of this handmade thing that everything is understood and ordered within the limits of a stage that is not only diminutive but immense?'⁷⁴⁴ For Focillon, artisans 'working in the smallest scope' are not merely performing a mindless exercise in 'mechanical skill.'⁷⁴⁵ Their hands render something far more magical: a transformation from 'the enormous scale of man and of the world to the dimensions of the microcosm.'⁷⁴⁶ He speaks of engravers, goldsmiths, illuminators and lacquerers, but the same concentrated attention is found in the tiny details of Cummings' work.



Fig.65. Sam Bakewell, quasi devotional objects from *Imagination Dead Imagine*, 2015.

The totems (fig.65) from Sam Bakewell's installation *Imagination Dead Imagine* also demonstrate the intensity of the handmade at small scale.⁷⁴⁷ These exquisitely rendered miniatures in porcelain and Parian are testament to Bakewell's outstanding material knowledge and skilful making, but they are more than that. The quiet intensity of these objects commands a powerful presence. Amongst them are an intricately modelled, feathered bird's head, open-beaked and alert; a hollow pink tunic, each crease and fold of its fabric so carefully observed as though a body still breathed within; and a hairball carved from porcelain with a pin, whose delicate, swirling tendrils transition between hirsute intimacy and the colossal waves of a turbulent sea. These forms seem invested with a magnified life force, arising from the synergy of hand, material and eye—maker's and viewer's—when concentrated on such a small scale. They surely embody Focillon's view that:

⁷⁴⁴ Focillon (1989), p.182.

⁷⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁷ *Imagination Dead Imagine* won the AWARD prize at The British Ceramics Biennial in Stoke-on-Trent, 2015.

The most delicate harmonies, evoking the secret springs of our imagination and sensibility, take form by the hand's action as it works with matter; they become inscribed in space, and they take possession of us.⁷⁴⁸

Focillon reveals the potent spatiality that small form and crafted detail imaginatively inspire in us. Yet it is interesting to consider how larger-scaled works might similarly represent his thoughts. The varied surfaces of Matsunaga's sculptures, for instance, offer multiple opportunities to engage with intimate crafted intensity, whether through intricately inscribed patterning, randomly dripped globules of glaze or the textured carving of clay facades. Given their insistent materiality and emphasis on exterior qualities, interacting with clay-based objects, large or small, surely increases potential for experiencing the vast depths of imaginative spatiality. In fact, Pallasmaa argues that art unites material and imagined realms, no matter what scale. For him, artworks themselves are embodied entities, connecting the experiential complexities of human existence through imaginative processes. He describes this spatial shift, stating:

All artistic images simultaneously take place in two realities and their suggestive power derives from this very tension between the real and the suggested, the perceived and imagined. In the act of experiencing a work, the artistic image shifts from the physical and material existence into a mental and imaginary reality.⁷⁴⁹

Thus the potent material quality of clay and ceramic matter, when applied within the frame of art, acutely reveals the spatial transitioning that Pallasmaa identifies as being so physically present, whilst opening up imaginative worlds for viewers to encounter.

Clay: A Space of Endless Reverie

Bachelard confirms the contemplative quality of clay when exploring the material nature of imagination through the elements of air, fire, water and earth, and particularly the combination of the latter two.⁷⁵⁰ Water alters the character of earth when mixed with it: thinning, enhancing pliability or even dissolving it. Through the transformational nature of this synthesis, Bachelard argues that matter is released from any subservience to form so it comes to the fore.⁷⁵¹ In Cummings' disintegrating fountain sculpture *Triumph of the Immaterial* (figs.66-67) and Bakewell's kneaded *Reader* lumps (fig.68),

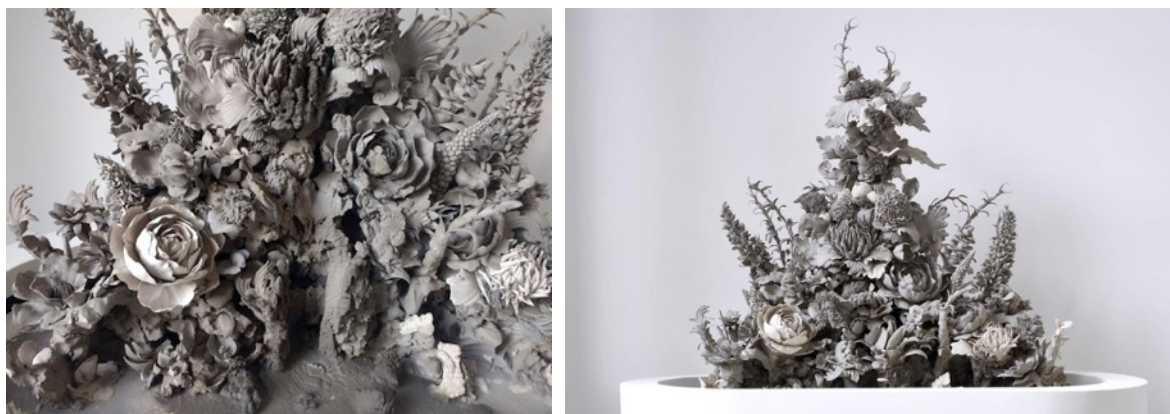
⁷⁴⁸ Focillon (1989), p.172.

⁷⁴⁹ Pallasmaa (2011), p.63.

⁷⁵⁰ Bachelard (1983), p.95.

⁷⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.104.

the transformation of clay substance plays a central role, demonstrating Bachelard's idea. For him, matter thus becomes invested with a malleable potency affording those who work with it space to daydream. He states that '[e]xperience with the viscous is connected with numerous oneiric images: they occupy the worker endlessly in his long patient task of moulding'—a fitting notion for those who work with clay.⁷⁵²



Figs.66-67. Phoebe Cummings, *Triumph of the Immaterial*, 2017, raw clay and water.

Bakewell's *Reader* series (fig.68) documents the artist's fascination with the experience of wedging clay.⁷⁵³ Working exclusively in Parian, each *Reader* sculpture is a solid mass formed from one whole bag of material with stains kneaded in. Bakewell explains that a 'full bag of [...] porcelain, is really hard to wedge, but [Parian] is more like dough. It's softer, thixotropic; the more energy you give it the softer it gets.'⁷⁵⁴ He noticed that the repetitive, time-consuming act of wedging these pieces brought about a contemplative state where focus shifted away from hand and substance. He describes the imaginative quality of this experience:

Wedging [the clay] [...] you get exhausted and your mind starts to wander [...]. [Y]ou think about all kinds of other things while not really focusing on what is going on in your hand. I guess your intention towards [the clay] disappears and it starts to talk to itself, which is what I am interested in [...].⁷⁵⁵

The *Reader* Series induces what Bachelard describes as a state of 'intimate reverie.'⁷⁵⁶ These curious pieces embody what the artist believes to be the essence of his practice—a release from technical focus allowing for greater 'communion with the material'

⁷⁵² Bachelard (1983), p.105.

⁷⁵³ See chapter two for a separate discussion of Bakewell's *Reader* series, pp.117-122.

⁷⁵⁴ Appendix A, p.249.

⁷⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁶ Bachelard (1983), p.107.

itself.⁷⁵⁷ Given its 'ambivalent' character, both Bakewell and Bachelard consider clay to be a particularly potent substance.⁷⁵⁸ As Bakewell states, 'clay can mirror the subconscious more easily. [...] [Y]ou can daydream with it and these [*Reader* sculptures] are definitely about that.'⁷⁵⁹



Fig.68. Sam Bakewell, *Reader*, 2016, ceramic, china clay, coconut oil.

This material potency extends beyond the union of maker and material. Clay matter is alive with potentiality and so inaugurates opportunities for viewers to engage with imaginative space. As earth, clay connects with ideas of growth, fertility and sustenance.⁷⁶⁰ It is also situated at the heart of multiple humankind creation stories across religions and folklores of the world, and so holds global mythic significance.⁷⁶¹ Clay materiality can therefore be considered to possess a sense of life and fecundity that infiltrates our subconscious psyche. It is not surprising that Bachelard recognises the universal significance of clay matter for humans and the imaginative potentials therein. As he claims: 'Clay too, for many people will become a theme of endless reveries. Man

⁷⁵⁷ Appendix A, p.248.

⁷⁵⁸ Bachelard (1983), p.105.

⁷⁵⁹ Appendix A, p.248.

⁷⁶⁰ Fendl (no date), n.p.

⁷⁶¹ Ibid.

will wonder endlessly from what mud, from what clay he is made.⁷⁶² Given this deep human connection, I argue that clay substance has the potential to provoke ontologically profound dream spaces through observation alone.

Carlo Comanducci helps to establish the possibility that viewers of clay-based art might access a similar mode of reverie as experienced by those working with the material. Taking Jacques Rancière's notion of the pensive image, and Victor Burgin's tri-partite approach to spectatorship, Comanducci acknowledges the significance of undirected thought when encountering images.⁷⁶³ He explains that for Burgin, spectatorship involves 'a process of rêverie' that instigates an in-between space where practice, theory and the experiential co-exist.⁷⁶⁴ Likewise, Rancière's notion of pensive spectatorship also involves an 'indeterminate state in-between production and reception, activity and passivity, material object and subjective experience [...]'.⁷⁶⁵ Comanducci discusses these ideas in relation to film experience, yet his thinking translates across media. He states:

Like the worker interrupts her work and lets her gaze and thoughts drift away, [...] the spectator may interrupt the task of decoding the image and rather concentrate on the flux of her own personal associations and trains of ideas that accompanies the flux of the moving images on screen—two fluxes that, arguably, contribute to their mutual formation. What is opened up in this way is a space of reflection that is not limited within the boundaries of the text and the screen, but exists as a relation and a tension between the screen and the spectator, the projected and the embodied image.⁷⁶⁶

As Pallasmaa has shown, images are embodied through the duality of their mental and physical realities. I have argued that this is even more pronounced in clay-based art given its material identity is implicit with primordial resonances and social and cultural familiarity. The imaginative possibilities generated by looking at clay and ceramic matter are therefore many and varied, and when combined with such visceral immediacy embodied responses occur via a space of reflection, as Comanducci describes.

⁷⁶² Bachelard (1983), p.111.

⁷⁶³ Comanducci (2018).

⁷⁶⁴ Ibid., p.27.

⁷⁶⁵ Ibid., p.25.

⁷⁶⁶ Ibid., p.27.

Creativity, Clay, Space

Bakewell's installation *Imagination Dead Imagine* (figs.69-70) inaugurated a reflective space for viewers. As contemplation on the imaginative process itself, this work took inspiration from Samuel Beckett's prose piece of the same name. According to Bakewell, Beckett's text imagines the inside of a skull as a creative wasteland, yet through the simple act of describing it this empty space becomes transformed. Bakewell explains that in 'the very act of imagining the death of [imagination], you are imagining something, so there is no death point.'⁷⁶⁷ This installation was an exploration of creative legitimacy and the generative nature of imagination in the face of artistic doubt and creative void. For Bakewell, it was a questioning of the boundary in his practice between what he considered to be 'real or fake work: where things begin again [...].'⁷⁶⁸



IMAGE REDACTED

Figs.69-70. Sam Bakewell, (from left to right) *Imagination Dead Imagine*, 2015, mixed media; interior view of *Imagination Dead Imagine*.

The installation presented a compact, walk-through, architectural structure that Bakewell describes as an 'anti-shaman's mud hut.'⁷⁶⁹ Designed to spatially impact the viewing experience, he recalls that the 'height was specific, [...] you needed to crouch down [...] to fit in. I didn't want to stop people going in there', he states, 'but it had to have that sensation and at the same time be open.'⁷⁷⁰ Bakewell covered its surfaces in a swirling, gestural mix of coconut oil and china clay, and placed miniature handmade objects (discussed earlier) into recesses around the walls of the restricted hut-space.

⁷⁶⁷ Appendix A, p.257.

⁷⁶⁸ Ibid., p.251.

⁷⁶⁹ Appendix H, p.340.

⁷⁷⁰ Appendix A, p.258.

Each alcove was positioned within a mesmerising clay vortex, framing the tiny sculptures with the rhythmic residue of hands manipulating matter.

The totems (fig.65) were made by Bakewell as test pieces over a period of twelve years, 'in times when there were big life changes or upheavals' for him.⁷⁷¹ Never intended to be shown, he sees them as 'faith objects' and 'personal talismans to keep making in the face of a desire not to.'⁷⁷² By focusing on technical tasks, as Beckett describes, creativity is stimulated for Bakewell. These objects also represent the artist's desire to imagine the unknown, or create something he can't fully observe. 'If I can't see it all in the museum, then I want to make it because I want to imagine the back of it', he states.⁷⁷³ The placement of the tiny objects behind wire mesh is also significant. Whilst viewing was made awkward and somewhat frustrating, their removal from direct observation afforded them a sense of reverence and distinction. As Bakewell explains, 'there is something about things being [spatially] removed [...] that's [...] to do with access and specialness: when things are kept away, and your intrigue being exacerbated by that.'⁷⁷⁴ For audiences, this further promotes imaginative possibilities.

Imagination Dead Imagine stimulated divergent perceptual and conceptual experiences, interweaving macro and micro space and expressive materiality with exquisitely crafted detail, whilst also posing interesting questions about the nature and validity of creative endeavour. In referencing Beckett's prose, Bakewell placed imaginative processes at the heart of this exchange. Clay also played a crucial role. The swirling pattern of substance created flow and softened the space, seducing viewers to become immersed in this hypnotically earthy experience.⁷⁷⁵ Once inside the confined interior, a sense of reverence took hold as the intimate ceramic objects quietly demonstrated the preciousness and intensity found within the handmade. With this 'anti-shaman's hut', Bakewell questioned the social veneration of time-consuming, highly crafted objects, signalling the possible artifice of it all. Yet as superbly carved and modelled entities, these curious totems are also a meditation upon the transcendent quality of making. As such, they operate as intimate and honest offerings to creativity itself. Bachelard

⁷⁷¹ Ibid., p.251.

⁷⁷² Appendix H, p.340.

⁷⁷³ Appendix A, p.259. For instance, an object in a cabinet, or the reverse side of a painting.

⁷⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁵ Ibid., p.257.

proposes that '[a] material reverie inlays its objects. It carves them. [...] It descends, continuing the dreams of the worker, right down to the depths of its substances.'⁷⁷⁶ His thoughts are made tangible by Bakewell's installation, which celebrates the resilience and persistence of imagination through clay and ceramic matter, and the spaces that transpire for viewers therein.

Making Space for Time

Phenomenological theory demonstrates that the temporal is wholly entangled with the spatial, and so embodied experience necessarily arises through amalgamation of these domains.⁷⁷⁷ Bakewell's body of work *Time to Waste* delivers a complex meditation on the notion of time through the lenses of making and matter, leading the viewer onward to slowly explore the immense potential of imaginative space.

Time to Waste physically manifests time through its careful accumulation of overlooked moments invested into matter. It pays homage to the process of making itself by settling its gaze on the material residue of creative actions. All the sculptures are formed from the by-products of Bakewell's work in clay, gradually amassed in his studio over many years: buckets, bags and waste bins all contain matter in a liminal state. Coloured dust from sanding back dry clay bodies has been collected and stored; offcuts of forms have been carefully saved. Bakewell explains:

I try to keep all my waste products from everything I have ever made, thinking I have to use them again. There are always bits of clay in bags, and as long as they are labelled and numbered they just sit. And if you are in-between things then there is time to get things out. You sand it and spend a couple of days doing it, then fire it, and then re-sand it. Then you get this series of things, and each has a life beyond itself as an individual thing, and that's kind of a time for wasting [...].⁷⁷⁸

The title of this series offers multiple points of engagement. As well as celebrating the overlooked, *Time for Waste* references Bakewell's inner struggle to identify the purpose of making art and his place within that structure. His position fluctuates between certainty of art's critical role in society, with his work a meaningful reflection of this, yet conversely, it also points to his fundamental doubts as to the point of art, which begs the

⁷⁷⁶ Bachelard (1983), p.113.

⁷⁷⁷ See: Fielding (1999), p.78; Merleau-Ponty (2014), pp.70-72; Lennon (2015), p.42.

⁷⁷⁸ Appendix A, p.253.

question whether it is all a 'waste of time'? As he states, 'a lot of these things, [...] are about fraudulence and futility and wasting time: where waste products stop and real work begins.'⁷⁷⁹



Figs.71-72. Sam Bakewell (from left to right) *Leavings, II* & *Leavings, I (Time for Waste)*, 2018, ceramic.

Beyond Bakewell's conceptual motivation, time manifests physically in various ways through this body of work. In its most literal sense, the time invested in the construction of these surprisingly complex objects is not always apparent. For instance, *Leavings* (figs.71-72) are a group of small, modular works constructed from rectangular pieces of Parian in varying colours and sizes. Resembling building blocks or 3D plans of cityscapes, each component is made from remnant clay, sanded until a pristine finish is achieved. It is unclear whether the sculptures are industrially produced or handmade, or what material they are made from; the forms offer no clear confirmation, suggesting plastic, rubber or wax. Their simplicity is also deceiving; highly adept technical skills and time-consuming making processes are masked in modest sculptures that defy categorisation. For viewers more conversant with ceramic making, the material knowledge and painstaking labour implicit in these objects is clearly evident. *Leavings* both deny and quietly celebrate the time invested in their making.

The dust residue collected from sanding the *Leavings* sculptures gave rise to a second series of works. In each of the *Dust* pieces (figs.73-76), small heaps of powdered Parian sit on rectangular bases of varying depths, dimensions and hue. Colour is important. Bakewell carefully selects exquisite pigment combinations, seeing these pieces as still lifes in their own right. They are 'part colour study, part ode to certain artists that I love',

⁷⁷⁹ Ibid., p.250.

he states, and so the *Dust* sculptures also manifest as a lifetime of looking.⁷⁸⁰ Bakewell explains that once collected, ‘I sieve [the dust] and bisque it separately in a pile so that it shrinks.’⁷⁸¹ Unstable dust particles become solid through firing, yet for viewers, this transformation is unclear. Seemingly still powdered pigment, these piles of substance appear precarious, as though the slightest breeze or breath could disperse the particles far and wide. Tension develops for viewers caught between the need for clarity through close observation, and any potential disturbance to the artwork this proximity may cause. Disruption is already evident in some pieces; dust indicates an absence, a negative space of a form now gone. The bases claim a sense of permanence and stability; they are uncomplicated and concretely present. Yet like *Leavings*, their material qualities refuse classification. The *Dust* pieces thus evoke an insistent spatio-temporal quality through the imaginative gap that occurs between what is seen and what is known.



Figs.73-75. Sam Bakewell (from left to right), *Dust XIII*, *Dust V* & *Dust X (Time for Waste)*, 2018, ceramic.

In contrast, Bakewell’s *Offal* sculptures (fig.77) are more visceral. Oozing, gooey lumps of substance ostensibly record more spontaneous and direct gestures of making: a fleeting moment capturing the swipe of a palette knife or finger to discard viscous daubs of vibrant matter. Graphic annotation on some of the forms implies their function as colour/glaze test pieces. Again, identities and hierarchies are destabilised: rigid ceramic masquerades as pliable substance; testing body becomes artwork; the gestural physicality of the now belies the labour, care, material proficiency and skills sedimented into these forms.

⁷⁸⁰ V&A (2019). Time for Waste by Sam Bakewell. *YouTube*. Available from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hLC9TcLAvt4>

⁷⁸¹ Appendix A, p.253.



Figs.76-77. Sam Bakewell (from left to right) *Dust, XII* & *Offal, I (Time for Waste)*, 2018, ceramic.

Time for Waste explores temporality through material uncertainty, its focus on the residue of making, and its questioning of hierarchies—what, in art, is worthy of our time? Yet these sculptures also offer the viewer time (and space) to imagine, as their multi-layered meanings gradually unfold. They quietly secrete their possibilities into our consciousness; ideas manifest slowly but linger long after the gallery space is far behind. Embedded in the very substance of these unassuming objects, time manifests spatially as an imaginative dimension, carrying viewers towards an embodied realm of material reverie. As Bachelard states: ‘Forms reach completion. Matter, never. Matter is the rough sketch for unrestricted dreams.’⁷⁸² Bakewell’s works palpably validate Bachelard’s claim.

Returning to Place: The Spatio-Temporal Agency of Clay

Clay-based artworks have a compelling temporal identity, and as each chapter demonstrates, time manifests across the case study artworks in multifarious ways. It arrives through making processes—fast or slow—and references to ceramic tradition, spanning history and cultures. It is evident in the primordial quality of clay material itself, and the endurance of ceramic matter across millennia, as well as its tenuous fragility. Whilst ephemerality and transience are signified in some of the raw clay works, conceptually, time connects us with imaginative realms and dream space.

⁷⁸² Bachelard (1983), p.113.

Lennon (2015) succinctly explains how the temporal quality of our subconscious imaginary activity directly impacts our involvement within the spatial realm. For her, the imagination:

[...] is the domain of images, [...] [that] provide the shape of the spatio-temporal world. Images, in this sense, weave together the sensory present with what is past, the projected future, and the spatial elsewhere. Thus imagination is that by which there is a world for us.⁷⁸³

This spatio-temporal symbiosis is not always immediately apparent. While time is associated with the dynamism of change, space is more often granted a passive character—a surface to be conquered or crossed, rendered by a singular, animating, temporal trajectory.⁷⁸⁴ According to Doreen Massey, this far from ‘innocent’ view misses the vibrant, ‘relational’ and ‘heterogeneous’ qualities of space.⁷⁸⁵ Thinkers such as Casey, Malpas and Ingold champion the expressive lived quality of place, which contrasts with their notion of ‘empty’, ‘detached’, uninhabited space.⁷⁸⁶ Yet Massey argues that ‘space is equally lively and equally challenging.’⁷⁸⁷ For her, it sustains a multitude of coexistent, interconnecting yet diverse narratives, or, as she puts it, ‘the contemporaneous existence of a plurality of trajectories; a simultaneity of stories-so-far.’⁷⁸⁸ This means that space is neither fixed nor static, but continuously transforming. Thus, for Massey space ‘is always in the process of being made. It is never finished; never closed.’⁷⁸⁹

Massey’s persuasive reimagining of space reveals its mutuality with time and grants it a similarly dynamic role. She clarifies that:

[...] thinking of time and space together does not mean they are identical [...], rather it means that the imagination of one will have repercussions [...] for the imagination of the other and that space and time are implicated in each other.⁷⁹⁰

Massey notes that our sense of present space is imbued with multiple past resonances. An encounter with historical architecture, for instance, materialises bygone times and

⁷⁸³ Lennon (2015), p.2.

⁷⁸⁴ Massey (2005), pp.4-7, argues that space has long been subordinated by time in theory.

⁷⁸⁵ Ibid., pp.9-14.

⁷⁸⁶ Ingold (2011), p.145.

⁷⁸⁷ Massey (2005), p.14.

⁷⁸⁸ Ibid., p.12.

⁷⁸⁹ Massey (2005), p.9.

⁷⁹⁰ Ibid., p.18.

spaces, yet these reverberations often go unnoticed. She draws attention to certain writers and artists whose works attempt to expose this spatio-temporal reciprocity by ‘puncture[ing] that smooth surface’ so commonly assumed for space.⁷⁹¹ In each of her examples linear time is disordered, as past, present and future spaces shift, reorganise and cohere.⁷⁹²

Like Massey’s illustrations, chronological shifts are particularly evident in the case study artworks, enabling the spatial character of clay to manifest. Matsunaga’s sculptures, for example, ‘puncture’ viewers’ contemporary exhibition experience by evoking the social and bodily spaces of ancient ritual and tool making. Similarly, Cummings’ work draws together multiple spaces and times. The Baroque age is entwined with primeval landscapes and imagined futures, whilst the simultaneity of transience and durability, negotiated through overtly contrasting materiality, demands awareness of the spatio-temporal complexity within which viewers are situated. Nagel’s work inaugurates domestic, landscape and modernist spaces, and Bakewell opens up far away dream spaces whilst anchoring attention upon the potent presence of the material realm. Murphy’s interactive practice is particularly effective in exposing this spatio-temporal symbiosis with attention drawn to the social aspect of space that Massey claims and is discussed in more detail below. Each artist reveals the geographer’s notion of space as a diverse multitude of intersecting trajectories. In each case, it is clay materiality that reveals such potent spatial opportunities.

Past, present and future are always attached to a sense of somewhere, and so place once again rises to the fore. With her concept of space founded on ‘heterogeneity, relationality and coevalness’, Massey claims places to be dynamic sites where these ongoing spatial interactions occur.⁷⁹³ While Ingold dismisses the notion of space in favour of place, he concurs with Massey’s premise that places are formed from intersecting paths.⁷⁹⁴ Given that movement and transition underscore place-forming possibilities for Massey and Ingold, places, like space, can never be considered unchanging. Massey explains that people, animals, things, or environments are in a constant state of flux—

⁷⁹¹ Massey refers to the work of writer Iain Sinclair, artist Clive van den Berg and the interdisciplinary practice of writer, photographer and activist Anne McClintock. *Ibid.*, p.117.

⁷⁹² *Ibid.*

⁷⁹³ Massey (2005), p.13.

⁷⁹⁴ Ingold (2011), p.148. See also Massey (2005), p.130.

some fast, some exceptionally gradual—so time is highly significant within the concept of place.⁷⁹⁵ In fact, Massey describes '[p]laces not as points or areas on maps, but as integrations of space and time, as *spatio-temporal events*.'⁷⁹⁶ This idea is particularly valuable. It reveals a space/time oscillation within a concentrated locus: a potent happening produced through the melding of intersecting narratives. As we have seen, similar confluences may occur through the unique spatio-temporal qualities activated by clay and ceramic materiality. I argue that the case study artworks should similarly be conceived as animated nodes, or sites where manifold space/time trajectories become entwined in vibrant intensity. In Murphy's practice, interactive technology renders this dynamism particularly apparent, as the subsequent close examination of one piece will show. However, all of the case study sculptures, performances, and installations operate as Massey's 'spatio-temporal events', situating viewers within the shifting 'place' of their embodied being.

Connecting Spaces: Clay in the Embodied Digital Realm

Mark B.N. Hansen argues that 'our interactions with technologies operate a shift in the "economy" of experience, a shift from representation to embodiment [...].'⁷⁹⁷ Murphy's acoustically focused work *Sounds of the Pink City* (fig.78) draws attention to a powerful and complex sense of spatiality for users through the combination of digital media and ceramic artefacts.⁷⁹⁸ By expanding sensory experience beyond the boundaries of visibility, embodied being is accomplished through the activation of place. The work is inspired by Murphy's sensorial experience of Jaipur, India, which she translates into ceramic form through touch and sound. A map of the historic city centre is laser etched into the surface of an old oak table. Discarded earthenware chai cups and their fragments are placed on its surface at specific map locations. Each clay form is modified by the addition of gold lustre, confusing object hierarchies.⁷⁹⁹ Gathered by the artist from the city streets and considered rubbish by locals, these small, disposable, utilitarian vessels are now adorned with precious metal.⁸⁰⁰

⁷⁹⁵ Massey (2005), p.133, gives geological shifts as examples of gradual landscape transformations.

⁷⁹⁶ Ibid., p.130, emphasis in original.

⁷⁹⁷ Hansen (2000), p.60.

⁷⁹⁸ *Sounds of the Pink City* was made for the Indian Ceramics Triennale in Jaipur, 2018.

⁷⁹⁹ See: Appendix F, p.324, for Murphy's account of the complex process of adding gold lustre to existing low-fired earthenware pots.

⁸⁰⁰ Low-fired clay chai cups have been reinstated across India to combat plastic pollution. Thrown to the ground after a single use, passers-by tread them into the earth where they break down quickly, enacting a natural form of recycling. See: Appendix F, p.325.



Fig.78. Ingrid Murphy, *Sounds of the Pink City*, 2019, found chai cups, gold lustre and mixed media.

Gold lustre is a highly conductive material and viewers are invited to touch the gilded areas of these found objects. This skin-to-lustre contact triggers touch capacitance sensing technology; a digital interface like that used in smartphones, it detects the body's electrical charge through tactile means.⁸⁰¹ Hidden copper wires attached to their bases connect each cup or fragment to individual nodes on the capacitance sensing board located under the oak table. Each node is programmed with different audio recordings taken by the artist from various places around Jaipur. When touched, the chai cups trigger these ambient urban sounds, which are played through discretely positioned speakers situated beneath the work. Each sound corresponds with an area on the map where the recording was taken, and where the particular touched vessel is placed. Site and sound converge once more, but this time through clay. As Murphy explains:

⁸⁰¹ Ibid.

[T]he pots are from the very streets that the sounds are from [...]. So it's not a facsimile, it's a revelation. It's about those pots revealing the sounds of the streets they came from.⁸⁰²

It is a highly affecting experience for users, one that coalesces auditory and tactile senses to bring about extraordinary spatio-temporal revelations, whilst intensifying awareness of the body's intermediary role situated at the heart of this perceptual event.

Casey argues that the body operates as both 'intra-place' and 'inter-place', an idea pertinent to all case study artists, but particularly valuable for interrogating the heightened embodied spatiality that Murphy's interactive work inaugurates. As *intra*-place, the body is the dynamic structure around which things or people within its orbit are spatially organised. It becomes a place in itself 'through which whatever is occurring in a given setting can take place.'⁸⁰³ According to Casey, this function supplies us with a sense of anchorage in the world, given that place memory always arises from the perspective of our own bodily horizon. In addition to becoming an *intra*-place, Casey posits that the body simultaneously operates as an *inter*-place, owing to our physical movement through the world.⁸⁰⁴ In this context, the body functions as 'a place *between* places', which he recognises 'is itself a special kind of place.'⁸⁰⁵ For humans, this is not necessarily an obviously felt state, however, through Murphy's interactive ceramic vessels it becomes sensorially present for users.

Place is a core value of *Sounds of the Pink City*. A 3D scanned, printed, then slip cast figure of the artist (fig.79) positioned upon the map shifts the viewer's consciousness of its iconography from diagrammatic plan to that of a lived, human space. Murphy utilises the evocative nature of sound to not only signify a particular place, but also as a means of connecting disparate spaces and times. She notes the dynamic spatial shift she experienced through sound in the early stages of making the work, which inspired further development. Casey's notion of bodily 'inter-place' is clearly in operation here. Murphy states:

What has become interesting for me about the idea of space is the relationship it has with sound. I was listening to the recordings I made in India [...] of the call to

⁸⁰² Appendix E, p.298.

⁸⁰³ Casey (2000), p.196, emphasis in original.

⁸⁰⁴ Ibid. See also: Dillon (1997), pp.136-137; Hass (2008), p.78; Merleau-Ponty (2014), pp.139-140.

⁸⁰⁵ Casey (2000), p.196, emphasis in original.

prayer from the garden where I was staying. But it's not the call to prayer that is interesting, it's the sound of the space. [...] [I]n listening to it I was in that garden; the sound immediately brought me to that space.⁸⁰⁶



Fig.79. Ingrid Murphy, self-portrait from *Sounds of the Pink City*, 2019.

Murphy has translated the transcendent power of this personal auditory experience for wider audiences. On hearing the recordings, participants are transported out into the world, beyond the confines of the exhibition environment. Simultaneously, the bustling streets of Jaipur acoustically penetrate the rarefied atmosphere and neutrality of the gallery space. The touching, hearing body instantaneously becomes an axis between near, far, then and now, as spatial and temporal extremes become connected.

Participants form a close bodily connection with the work through touch, yet the city soundscapes bring about a perceived shift of bodily awareness as users adjust both imaginatively and physically to the sensory data that connects them with the global domain. Temporal spaces are also conjured acoustically as past sounds connect with the present, as well as future possibilities, through haptic contact with clay. Massey's notion of space 'as the product of interrelations' is overtly evidenced, with Murphy's piece *placing* the user within this manifestation of a 'spatio-temporal event.'⁸⁰⁷ This is a powerfully affecting artwork that mobilises embodiment on many levels through multiple forms of spatiality.

⁸⁰⁶ Appendix E, p.305.

⁸⁰⁷ Massey (2005), p.9.

It is important to consider the augmental role of technology here. Hansen explains that in many cases digital media enables a move away from a visually dominant mode of experience, to be replaced by one that draws upon alternative sensory processes. He argues that through this shift, 'space becomes tactile' because:

[...] it ceases being visual or mappable through vision (whether as distance or near viewing, i.e., optical or haptical modes). It is tactile because it catalyses a nonvisual mode of experience that takes place in the body of the spectator, and indeed, as the production of place within the body.⁸⁰⁸

Through touch and hearing senses, space is felt in *Sounds of the Pink City*. Visual information completes the multi-sensory experience, but technological augmentation heightens awareness of Casey's notion of bodily inter-place and Massey's spatio-temporal intertwining. While many have warned against digital technology's displacement of sensorial experience by an abstract, mechanistic regime, for Hansen, new media is 'poised on the cusp between phenomenology and materiality', and so, in fact, brokers a greater sense of human embodiment.⁸⁰⁹ This explains the potency of Murphy's work, where the relationship between digital technologies and clay's palpable materiality serves to deepen experiential consciousness.

Such particularity of place does not limit accessibility for audiences of *Sounds of the Pink City*; on hearing the noises of Jaipur, the participant travels sensorially with the artist. However, geographic and cultural contexts significantly determine the type of affectivity the piece issues. Murphy explains that when installed in Jaipur Museum, the site-specificity of the work connected residents with their lived experience of the local environment. Users:

[...] interacted with the work because they knew the space and they recognised the map [...] because it's a cultural icon for the people of Jaipur. So the audience had two icons to play with really. They had the cup and the map, and they moved around [the work] with a sense of recognition.⁸¹⁰

⁸⁰⁸ Hansen (2006a), p.211

⁸⁰⁹ Hansen (2006b), p.297. Tim Lenoir provides an overview of the academic concern that technology poses for humanity. Lenoir, T. (2006). Forward. In: Hansen (2006a), p. xiv. See also: Martin (1981), pp.95-96; Mathieu (2007b), p.123; Pallasmaa (2009), p.51.

⁸¹⁰ Appendix F, p.323.

When the work was shown at various venues across Wales, user response diverged considerably from its reception in Jaipur. Murphy notes that on a grey, wet, winter's day in Wales, when participants 'touched those objects and the sound of this hot, crazy city came into the space, it was completely different; it was transformative, it was like a portal to another place.'⁸¹¹ She recalls that for some, the sounds of Jaipur evoked memories of past travel to India, whereas those unfamiliar with the country, 'were just fascinated by the sounds, so it was giving them an experience of something they did not know [...].'⁸¹² In all cases, a sense of place is conjured. Depending on the audience and the location of the work, this might be a space of recognition, of memory, or of escapism—a place for one to dream. What is clear is that, as Casey suggests, the lived body of the user bridges the here, there and elsewhere, and in doing so becomes a place itself.⁸¹³

It is important to note that when viewers encounter any artwork they actively 'use' it regardless of whether physical interaction takes place. According to Elizabeth Fowler, '[a]rt invites us, by means of real and virtual sensory experience, into emotional or intellectual states and attitudes [...].'⁸¹⁴ Its purposeful value therefore lies in its performative capacity to lead users through an experience, thereby orientating them within physical and imaginative space. Fowler thus describes 'the process of aesthetic experience [...] as profoundly spatial.'⁸¹⁵ While the other case study artists do not explicitly invite tactile connection with their work as Murphy does, the formal properties and virtual dimensions of their art enables audiences to navigate physical, emotional and conceptual spaces. Whether Cummings' immersive environment or Nagel's curious vase forms, viewers purposefully 'use' these artworks to undergo an experience of some kind. Matsunaga confirms Fowler's proposition, stating that he thinks of his sculptures 'as access points really. Or like markers on the way to somewhere, but the viewer has the actual path of walking.'⁸¹⁶ Thus, visual contact with clay and ceramic materiality similarly orients spectators without digital intervention, mediating access to an equally potent experiential domain.

⁸¹¹ Ibid.

⁸¹² Ibid.

⁸¹³ Casey (2000), p.196.

⁸¹⁴ Fowler (2013), p.597. See also Brinck (2018), p.205. It is important to note Esrock's opinion that a viewer's 'desire' to engage with art is crucial to how the work is experienced. See Esrock (2003), p.8,

⁸¹⁵ Fowler (2013), p.598.

⁸¹⁶ Appendix D, p.293.

Collective Places, Social Spaces: Clay as a Site of Gathering

Philosophical precedent focused specifically on the place-making spatiality of art is found in the texts of Martin Heidegger.⁸¹⁷ His later writing offers enlightening, if highly complex, phenomenological perspectives of the spatial quality of three-dimensional form, and will be briefly discussed in due course.⁸¹⁸ However, Simon Glendinning demonstrates that in 'The Origin of the Work of Art' (1935), Heidegger's earlier essay, art is found to actively cultivate place.⁸¹⁹ Through Glendinning's interpretation the particular material qualities of ceramic and clay are considered significant agents within this process. Crucially, he reveals the collective nature of this art place, an idea central to this thesis hypothesis.

In 'Origin', Heidegger claims that an artwork is more than its material qualities, more than mere tool for representation.⁸²⁰ Rather, the work of art has *work* to do; it performs the vital task of opening up an ontological space of being.⁸²¹ As Glendinning explains, for Heidegger, 'a work of art [inaugurates] not only a new thing present in the world, but first and foremost something like a new world in which things presence.'⁸²² To develop this idea, Heidegger famously critiques Van Gogh's painting of a well-worn pair of work boots.⁸²³ These ostensibly humble objects conjure the challenging, bygone world of peasant life for him, revealing our entwined co-existence with nature. He argues that the painting 'clears' a 'region' for the boots to be contemporaneously present, meaning art creates a new context for what has gone before.⁸²⁴ Heidegger's nostalgic interpretation evokes a former way of life that is highly problematic for many, and seemingly holds no currency today.⁸²⁵ Yet for Glendinning, it exposes the temporal place-instituting capacity

⁸¹⁷ Heidegger refers to art specifically, rather than the broader classification of artefacts.

⁸¹⁸ 'The Thing' (1950) is discussed later in this chapter, pp.216-217. 'Art and Space' (1969), is mentioned in chapter one, pp.92-93.

⁸¹⁹ Glendinning (2014).

⁸²⁰ Heidegger, M. (2009 [1935]). The Origin of the Work of Art. In: Preziosi, D. (ed.) *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 284-295.

⁸²¹ Heidegger (2009), p.295.

⁸²² Glendinning (2014), p.13.

⁸²³ Heidegger (2009), pp.293-295.

⁸²⁴ Glendinning (2014), p.20. Merleau-Ponty (1993c), p.139, also acknowledges the relevance that art holds for future generations.

⁸²⁵ For George Pattison, Heidegger's description of the boots is lazy given that the boots actually belonged to Van Gogh, and is tinged with nationalist idealism and Nazi ideologies. See: Pattison, G. (2000). *The Later Heidegger*. London: Routledge. p.96.

of art. He contends that Heidegger's claim for art's capacity to 'remain-there' in fact 'connects us to worlds before and after us.'⁸²⁶ Glendinning therefore proposes:

'If one comes to see that the past does not belong to the dead but remains-there "in me" then the work of the work of art, even when its work is the remembrance of things past, can still contribute to the cultivation of place [...].'⁸²⁷

Glendinning's essay helps to position clay-based artworks as potent places that navigate their culturally and temporally charged ontological character, connecting us to a wider sphere of being. The past surely inhabits clay and ceramic materiality, manifested through these unique material qualities, as well as tacit, habitual bodily remembrances. Through Heidegger, Glendinning proposes that an artwork's sedimented historicity also carries us forward by cultivating a place that 'gathers together an intergenerational "us".'⁸²⁸ This idea is highly significant; it assumes the shared nature of these spatio-temporal art sites. The 'work' of an artwork connects us to others, past, present and future, opening up a new domain that reveals the collective nature of being. The case study artworks powerfully demonstrate this capacity. Matsunaga's work recalls ancient spaces imbued with early human existence, carrying this potent presence into the here and now. The primordial materiality of raw clay used by Cummings speaks to the unifying persistence of matter as a connective force, while through Bakewell and Nagel, the ubiquitous familiarity of ceramic tradition keys viewers into a collective psychic space. And through interactive technologies, Murphy's work connects users to a deep sense of communal consciousness, and so manifests as Heidegger's space of gathering.

To think of art as a place of gathering exposes our embedded entanglement within the social realm. For Massey, space is, in fact, 'the *social* dimension', a shared reality shaped by manifold intersecting human trajectories.⁸²⁹ She argues that we '*alter* space' through our innate participation in the social sphere.⁸³⁰ In travelling from place to place, our interactions underpin 'the constant process of [...] making and breaking links' by which

⁸²⁶ Glendinning (2014), p.20. The phrase 'remain-there' is taken from Derrida's text *The Truth in Painting*. Glendinning cites philosopher Roger Scruton when claiming that art 'connects us to worlds before and after us.'

⁸²⁷ Glendinning (2014), p.21.

⁸²⁸ Ibid.

⁸²⁹ Massey (2005), p.61. See also Malpas (1999), p.12.

⁸³⁰ Massey (2005), p.118, emphasis in original.

places and we ourselves are formed.⁸³¹ Massey suggests that ‘arriving in a new place means joining up with [...] the collection of interwoven stories of which that place is made.’⁸³² I argue that if the past remains in artwork, as Glendinning suggests, then a multitude of narratives are implicitly sedimented into the familiar material being of ceramic and clay. As viewers contemplate clay-based art, its social, cultural, anthropological, mythic and spatio-temporal qualities are particularly effective at placing them within this socially resonant, collective sphere through physical, sensorial and imaginative means. Fowler suggests that when using an artwork ‘readers can position themselves in (even against) resonant spatial and temporal patterns of meaning, connecting themselves to places and people, even those foreign and far away.’⁸³³ Art’s orienting capacity seems highly accessible when considering the spatio-temporal character of ceramic and clay.

That art is (usually) experienced in public areas also influences its spatial impact. Following Massey, exhibition-goers transform the space of display as they move bodily around it; in turn, they will be modified themselves by this perceptual event.⁸³⁴ With space now recognised as ‘the product of interrelations’, and places as dynamic constellations of ongoing narratives within the wider relational sphere, our sense of spatiality must always arise from an intrinsic consciousness of the shared nature of being.⁸³⁵

Clay Shapes the Void

One of clay’s most potent spatial qualities connecting it to this sense of shared space arises from its inherent association with domestic functionality, regardless of whether this core value remains outwardly evident in artwork. Glenn Adamson explores some key ideas that reveal the profound spatial potency of functional, vernacular objects, in particular those made of clay.⁸³⁶ He discusses Garth Clark’s notion of the ‘implied space’ of ceramic vessels, explaining this area of functional pottery extends beyond its veritable boundaries.⁸³⁷ It encompasses spaces of past and future activity, whilst also indicating

⁸³¹ Ibid.

⁸³² Ibid., p.119.

⁸³³ Fowler (2013), p.607.

⁸³⁴ Coleman (2007), Hawkins (2010), Fielding (2011), and Lauwrens (2018b) discuss the social quality of exhibition experience. See also chapter two, pp.128-131.

⁸³⁵ Massey (2005), p.9. Fielding (2011), pp.524-525, shares Massey’s view.

⁸³⁶ Adamson (2017), pp.249-257.

⁸³⁷ Adamson notes that Clark is influenced by Philip Rawson. Ibid., p.252-253.

zones of ‘actual’ contact with the everyday sphere, such as tabletops and human lips. However, the unifying characteristic of all pots, functional or otherwise, is perhaps the most spatially compelling; they are formed in relation to a void. This idea leads the chapter’s discussion back to its starting point—Heidegger’s proposition that the potter works with space, not clay.

Heidegger declares that the ‘thing’ quality of a jug ‘does not lie in the material of which it consists, but in the void that holds.’⁸³⁸ While the jug stands as a universal symbol of thingness for Heidegger, its particular functionality frames his argument. The jug’s void holds what is placed within it; it also has the capacity to pour from itself whatever it contains. The character of the jug thus emerges in relation to its ‘giving’ nature.⁸³⁹ Through the figure of the jug, Heidegger argues for the thing as being more than its physical properties and intended use value. As Graham Harman explains, the jug ‘inhabits a much deeper level than what we can see of it’; its essence here is that of gift.⁸⁴⁰ This précis offers only a condensed snapshot of Heidegger’s complex and often opaque line of reasoning, yet it reveals an important core idea: ‘The thing stays—gathers and unites [...].’⁸⁴¹

Rather than a negative value, Heidegger’s ‘thingly’ void becomes a unifying space of potentiality. He later develops this idea more deeply in relation to sculpture, but in this earlier iteration, the image of clay shaping space is a powerful one.⁸⁴² It evokes the sense that through clay substance dynamic space evolves. And while the jug stands purely as ubiquitous symbol for Heidegger, it is impossible to ignore its significance as a functional ceramic object embedded in systems of social interaction throughout history, ingrained into our habitual body memories through use.⁸⁴³ The gathering quality implicit in the void of the jug is thus a reminder of the shared nature of existence: a collective, connecting force that clay and ceramic objects so ably express.

⁸³⁸ Ibid., p.253.

⁸³⁹ Heidegger (2001), pp.169-171.

⁸⁴⁰ Harman, G. (2007) *Heidegger Explained: From Phenomenon to Thing*. Chicago and La Salle, IL: Open Court, p.131

⁸⁴¹ Heidegger (1975), p.178. For further explication of Heidegger’s thinking here, see: Harman (2007), pp.132-134, and Young, J. (2001). *Heidegger’s Philosophy of Art*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.24.

⁸⁴² See Heidegger, M. (1969). Art and Space. Trans. by Charles E. Seibert. Available from <https://pdflibrary.files.wordpress.com/2008/02/art-and-space.pdf>

⁸⁴³ Habit is ‘not a form of knowledge or an automatic reflex’ for Merleau-Ponty but a bodily sedimentation of experience that is independently renewed for each new situation. See: Merleau-Ponty (2014), pp.143-148; Casey (2000) pp.146-180.

The notion of the void as a space of holding, gathering and uniting is relevant for thinking through the case study works, offering opportunities for viewers to engage with Massey's proposed realm of multiplicity. Cummings and Bakewell construct installation spaces where viewers are immersed in a void formed of raw clay in various states. These are spaces alive with emergent collective possibility, intertwining past, present and future through viscous matter and familiarity of crafted detail. Moving within these environments also fosters a sense of shared reality as audiences adapt their bodies to the shifting perspectives of the installations, heightening awareness of others and self, aided by their evocative earthy smell. Matsunaga's sculptures often combine multiple pre-prepared fragments to form a larger whole where the void is ever present through process and material structure. Whilst abstract in nature, these hollow forms often suggest ritualistic or ceremonial purpose and so transcend the present, connecting viewers imaginatively to a vast and ancient communal space.

Meanwhile, Nagel's sculptures openly reference the archetypal domestic vase and so Heidegger's thingly void overtly claims its place. Many forms emerge through the negative spaces of hand-excavations in sand, their outer walls retaining impressions of this grasping, 'felt' pursuit of emptiness. These fervent digging imprints evoke a lively human presence, as do the domestic associations of the vase form; both imply otherness and connection to the shared realm of which we are a part. By embedding interactive technologies within domestic ceramic objects such as cups, teapots and jugs, Murphy's practice is where Heidegger's space of gathering is most clearly expressed. Through touch and sound, individual users are engaged in collective experiences that unite them globally within the public sphere. To reiterate Glendinning's germane phrase: each artist, in different ways, 'gathers together an intergenerational "us"' through clay.⁸⁴⁴

Clay as Continuum: The Shared Space of Touch

Murphy's *Things Men Have Made with Wakened Hands* was produced by 3D scanning and printing an old stoneware jug from which a slip cast, porcelain, gold lusted replica was created (fig.80). Form is mirrored in both, yet importantly, rough and smooth textures are diametrically opposed. Users engage with one artefact through direct physical contact, the other they experience via digital media; haptic interaction unites participants with both objects through space. By integrating the handmade with

⁸⁴⁴ Glendinning (2014), p.21.

interactive technology, this artwork offers a complex sensory experience for the user, disrupting tactile, spatial and cognitive perceptions of body and self, whilst opening up wider discourses of difference, continuity and collective identity.⁸⁴⁵



Fig.80. Ingrid Murphy, *Things Men Have Made with Wakened Hands* (detail), 2012. Found stoneware jug with 3D printed, slip cast, gold-lustred, porcelain replica jug.

It is the gold-lustred jug that is physically present for participants. Its wood-fired, stoneware counterpart appears via a previously made film that documents the hands of various ceramic makers manually exploring the vernacular pot (fig.81). Augmented reality (AR) technology connects these physical and digital domains. The character of the stoneware jug is central to the work. Its roughly thrown ceramic body bears the scars of time as well as processes of making; the familiar vessel form 'both invites physical contact and serves as a repository for it.'⁸⁴⁶ As Murphy explains:

There was something about that object: because of its shape, because of the top, because of the way its body sits in the hand, it's very, very comfortable to handle. I realised that I'd found an object that speaks all of these languages to people through its materiality. It's a kind of palimpsest of its own making, a very sensorial object that seems to evoke empathy in people who come upon it.⁸⁴⁷

⁸⁴⁵ See chapter two, pp.98-102, for a discussion of perceptual difference.

⁸⁴⁶ Roche, C. (2013). Ingrid Murphy: Augmented Reality and the Resonance of Ceramic Objects. *Ceramics: Art and Perception*. (94), 80-83.

⁸⁴⁷ Appendix F, p.312.

Attention is brought to the notion of touch in the film footage through chiaroscuro lighting and close focus on multiple sets of hands as they intently feel the material qualities of the hand-thrown jug, presenting an evocative record of the haptic human bond with fired clay.



Fig.81. Ingrid Murphy, *Things Men Have Made with Wakened Hands*, 2012, sequence of still frames taken from embedded AR film.



Fig.82. Ingrid Murphy, *Things Men Have Made with Wakened Hands*, 2012, found stoneware jug, porcelain gold-lustred replica jug, Flash Media AR technology.

The augmented reality process is activated when users take hold of the lustred jug and expose the digital code printed on its base to an AR software sensor (fig.82). A live digital feed focused on the porcelain replica captures anyone who engages with this object (an experience akin to seeing oneself through Zoom, Skype or FaceTime technology). Participants witness their interactions with the vessel mirrored in real time through the streamed image positioned in front of them. Immediately, a sensorial spatial shift occurs; users *feel* their body operating in near space, yet *see* these felt bodily actions projected at a remove. Further sensory destabilisations occur as the augmented reality process begins.



Fig.83. Ingrid Murphy, *Things Men Have Made with Wakened Hands*, 2012. Detail of live-stream image of user with embedded film AR overlay.

Unlike virtual reality, which replaces the real with the simulated, AR enhances and modifies the real. In this instance, the live-stream footage of the participant is overlaid with Murphy's film of the rough-bodied jug (fig.83). Here, information from the actual environment (the live digital feed) combines with that previously captured (Murphy's film), with the user becoming an active intermediary within this collaged digital space. The embedded film does not fully obscure the live-streamed imagery, however, so awareness of both real and virtual fields is maintained. Crucially, the footage of the stoneware jug falls approximately where the hands of the participant appear in the real-time feed.⁸⁴⁸ This means that while users hold the smooth, lustred surface of the slip cast object, in the live-stream they are shown to be grasping something altogether

⁸⁴⁸ The AR software judges the scale of the user's hands holding the gold jug. It then embeds the film to scale over the user's hands in the live stream accordingly. The user must stand in a particular spot near the plinth where the jug is placed for this sensory recognition of the technology to work. See Appendix F, p.313.

different—the brown glazed body of a rapidly hand-thrown vessel. It is obvious that the many hands seen touching the found jug in the film belong to others; they do not seamlessly conjoin with the body of the participant in the live feed. In fact, this purposeful, awkward mixing of domains intensifies user experience. In transitioning between multiple fields of awareness a reversibility of experience occurs; the self and others, the gold replica jug, the live projection and the film mingle to transform an everyday ceramic object into a site of expanded perception.

Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin's theory of remediation, with its 'double logic' of Immediacy and Hypermediacy reveals the affective potency of Murphy's use of technology here.⁸⁴⁹ They define Immediacy as a mode of perception that bypasses any awareness of a medium. Trompe l'oeil painting, photography and virtual reality all operate under the principle of Immediacy, positioning audience and artwork within the same spatial frame. Through Hypermediacy, the medium becomes apparent, with numerous forms of representation simultaneously made visible when 'detached from their original contexts and then recombined.'⁸⁵⁰ According to Bolter and Grusin, Hypermediacy therefore:

[...] suggests a definition of self whose key quality is not so much "being immersed" as being "inter-related or connected." The hypermediated self is a network of affiliations, which are constantly shifting.⁸⁵¹

Hypermediacy is clearly at work in *Things Men Have Made*. By simultaneously offering multiple representations of the real through a range of media, it reveals the interconnectedness of being that Bolter and Grusin describe. Digital and material worlds both jar and entwine in Murphy's augmented space; each accentuates the other whilst inaugurating the body of the user into a shifting, embodied collective place through heightened awareness of touch. Amy Gogarty's essay 'Remediating Craft' expands Bolter and Grusin's thinking beyond the digital.⁸⁵² When they define remediation as 'the representation of one medium in another', this usually refers to the modification or

⁸⁴⁹ Bolter, J. and Grusin, R. (2000), p.5.

⁸⁵⁰ Ibid., p.39. Examples of hypermediated space include the 'heterogeneous "windowed style"' interface of the internet, or the 'frenetic graphic design of cyberculture magazines like *Wired*, [...] and earlier "multimediated" spaces of Dutch painting, medieval cathedrals, and illuminated manuscripts.' Ibid., p.31

⁸⁵¹ Ibid., p.232.

⁸⁵² Gogarty (2007), pp.91-110.

enhancement of an older technology.⁸⁵³ Instead, Gogarty focuses on the ways in which traditional craft media, in particular ceramic objects, might ‘refashion the reality of a media saturated virtual world.’⁸⁵⁴ She argues that due to its imitative tendencies—either through material plasticity or casting technologies—‘clay has long remediated other materials and objects.’⁸⁵⁵ With examples, Gogarty demonstrates that contemporary makers reveal the social, historical and cultural ‘richness’ of clay-based objects through purposeful remediation strategies, realigning the handmade as a powerful force in our digitally saturated modern world.⁸⁵⁶

Murphy’s appropriation of the humble stoneware jug highlights the resonances and reverberations that Gogarty finds implicit within handmade, ceramic forms. Yet rather than subvert the digital, it is the combination of traditional and new technologies that elicits such a powerful sense of these qualities. Paul Greenhalgh’s words support Gogarty’s thinking when he so poignantly describes the richness of perceptual revelation bound up in the material qualities of domestic pots. He states:

To engage with many of the craft practices directly is literally to be touching history. [...] [W]hen a piece of ceramic is held, it conveys through the inherent symbolism of its materiality, ten thousand years of activity, of things being made [...]. The act of human hands clasping a clay body, of skin and clay lips meeting, is automatically and unavoidably endowed with the archaic depth of an act endlessly repeated back into antiquity. The clay vessels that survive imbue contemporary clay vessels with the concept of age.⁸⁵⁷

To hold a ceramic vessel, as one does in *Things Men Have Made*, physically and imaginatively connects the bearer to a long lineage of clay pots that have populated domestic environments across the globe for millennia. Ceramic artefacts possess a tacit materiality emerging from this inherent familiarity and inclusivity within social networks. They form a backdrop to human lives, embodying a framework of past and present human interactions that bind their essence to a wider sphere of being. A history of human contact penetrates their unique material presence and so, to borrow de Waal’s

⁸⁵³ Bolter and Grusin (2000), p.45.

⁸⁵⁴ Gogarty (2007), pp.94-96.

⁸⁵⁵ Ibid., p.96.

⁸⁵⁶ Ibid., p.97. Gogarty’s examples of remediation include Penelope Stewart’s fabric installations that reference architecture, Marc Courtmanche’s ceramic chairs that simulate wooden equivalents, and Anne Ramsden’s installations of broken, and carefully repaired ‘commercial crockery.’

⁸⁵⁷ Greenhalgh (2002), p.10.

description of a Meissen teapot, each ceramic object ‘hums with stories.’⁸⁵⁸ The hypermediated space instituted by Murphy heightens this propensity, presenting an evocative opportunity for alternative haptic experiences that access the collective nature of ceramic identities; through touch the individual becomes part of a shared continuum of contact with clay. As Philip Rawson reminds us:

[P]ots also refer not only to our immediate experiences, but also to other pots and other art. They [...] embody a living culture. The echoes they can send back to us refer not only to our sensuous world, but also to a cultural world of similarities and contexts, which pots themselves inhabit. Pots thus echo the echoes of pots.⁸⁵⁹

Touch is rich with associative narratives and embodied resonances in *Things Men Have Made*. The piece takes its title from the eponymous D.H Lawrence poem, animating the sentiment of his verse, which conjures evocative images of handmade objects, ‘awake through years with transferred touch, [...] warm still with the life of forgotten men who made them.’⁸⁶⁰ As discussed in chapter three, material expertise and understanding are embedded within ceramic objects and artworks through the act of making, the residue of human interaction often visibly present in their physical body. In Murphy’s film, knowing hands of ceramicists explore the physical nuances of such a familiar fired clay form, connecting participants (imaginatively and literally) to those ‘forgotten’ makers’ sense of felt kinship with clay. For Murphy, this emphasis on ‘thinking hands’ serves to highlight alternative sensory routes to understanding.⁸⁶¹ As she explains:

By putting the augmented overlay of the makers handling the original object, I wanted people to understand that you can perceive things differently through touch and particularly through a knowing touch [...]. It’s acknowledging a level of connoisseurship, a level of assertive, thinking hands or skilled, seeing hands. We’re so reliant on visual input to make aesthetic judgments that actually an awful lot of the qualities of form and surface that are possibly better experienced through touch are literally overlooked for the all-pervasive visual. The film overlay is intended to bring emphasis to touch.⁸⁶²

⁸⁵⁸ De Waal, E. (2005). *Arcanum: Mapping 18th-century European Porcelain*. National Museum of Wales Exhibition Guide, p.4

⁸⁵⁹ Rawson, P. (2006b), p.209.

⁸⁶⁰ Lawrence, D.H. (1929). *Things Men Have Made With Wakened Hands*. In: Pinto, V.S., and Roberts, W. (eds.) (1954). *The Complete Works of D.H Lawrence Vol.2*. Portsmouth, NH, USA: Heinemann.

⁸⁶¹ Appendix F, p.312.

⁸⁶² Ibid.

Tactile experience is implicitly connected to vision through Merleau-Ponty's theory of reversibility.⁸⁶³ His ideas offer an inclusive and wider interpretation of touch through vision alone that embraces the tactile capacity of remote encounters with objects. *Things Men Have Made* amplifies this phenomenological experience. Heightened awareness of connectivity between touch and vision occurs here through AR technologies, destabilising familiar sensory patterns and explicitly introducing the notion of otherness within its perceptual frame. As Merleau-Ponty states:

As soon as I see, it is necessary that the vision [...] be doubled with a complimentary vision or with another vision: myself seen from without, such as another would see me, installed in the midst of the visible, occupied in considering it from a certain spot.⁸⁶⁴

Merleau-Ponty is referring to the experiential doubling that occurs through phenomenological approaches to being, which involves both first and third person modes of experience in order to attain a fully rounded state of awareness. *Things Men Have Made* supports and develops this phenomenological position by presenting an actual 'complementary vision [...] [of the participant] seen from without' through the live digital feed, which offers a mirror image of themselves.⁸⁶⁵ Spatial awareness is destabilised through an on-going shift between near-space and distance; touch not only describes surface, but also offers access to a deeper cultural and communal consciousness as hands across space become sensorially entwined.

*My hands become another's. My body extends across space and I register a new awareness of my own physicality. My fingers gently examine the smooth, lustred form that I hold, but my gaze is located elsewhere, ahead, on other hands that have become mine: touching, holding, exploring. And yet it is the coarse sensation of a stoneware body, mediated by my eyes, that meets my touch. I am suddenly connected to both myself and to every person, to this space and another, aware that I am part of something bigger, a shared human continuum.*⁸⁶⁶

⁸⁶³ See chapter two, pp.98-102.

⁸⁶⁴ Merleau-Ponty (1968), p.134.

⁸⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁶ Roche, C. (2013). Ingrid Murphy: Augmented Reality and the Resonance of Ceramic Objects. *Ceramics: Art and Perception*, 94, p.83.

Chapter Summary

Thinking spatially through clay and ceramic artwork via physical and conceptual means has revealed the sensorial, imaginative and spatio-temporal resonance of its materiality. I have argued that as these spatial qualities unfold for viewers/users of clay-based art, their interconnectedness within an embodied realm of multiplicity is revealed. Spatial ambiguity, place and displacement, the intimate intensity of crafted space and vast imaginative domains are all conjured through raw and fired clay. A consideration of a range of theoretical perspectives has supported the contention that artworks themselves are embodied presences as perceptual focus oscillates between physical immediacy and imaginative space. This potential has been ably demonstrated through close examination of the case study examples.

The unique spatio-temporal agency of clay has been identified as critical to its phenomenological character. Social, cultural, mythic, primal and anthropological qualities permeate clay-based forms, sedimented into their bodies through the long legacy of humans working with, and using, ceramics and clay. The case study artworks have revealed this relational intertwining of past, present and future. All cohere through their material being, saturating viewers' present experience with echoes of other spaces and times. Given this, and with space itself found to be lively and relational, I propose clay-based artworks to be eventful, place-instituting sites that mediate experience between self and world. The union of digital technologies with ceramic objects intensifies participants' embodied spatiality by expanding and disrupting usual modes of spatial understanding. To varying degrees, the case study artworks become axes for near, far, global and local, here and elsewhere, with embodiment emerging as viewers' innate immersion within a shared realm of being is revealed. Crucially, if the past is carried meaningfully into the present by artworks, and remains there as Heidegger suggests, I argue that the unique spatio-temporal reverberations of clay-based art persuasively manifest this potential, further connecting audiences to the wider social sphere. The space of clay, then, is understood here as one of gathering, fostering a sense of collective consciousness as intersecting trajectories of space and time unite.

Conclusion

This thesis builds on the field of critical art writing focused on embodied viewer experiences of art. The literature has established the relevance of the research focus. Crowther and Wrathall demonstrate art's long-standing relationship with phenomenological theory through an array of writers and theorists that have employed this perspective.⁸⁶⁷ From this standpoint, art is recognised as a mediating entity through which individual encounters with the world are re-processed and evaluated via sensory, pre-rational means.⁸⁶⁸ Rather than issuing introspective subjectivity, phenomenology reveals art's capacity to disclose the world through plurality and inclusivity, with our sense of self emerging from the diverse perspectives through which one perceives.⁸⁶⁹ Whilst all forms of art practice have the capacity to engage viewers in embodied ways, I have demonstrated that the unique material qualities of ceramic and clay offer particularly potent opportunities to access embodied being that are distinct from other fields of art. As such, this thesis has mapped the profound ways in which clay-based art impacts the viewing subject, revealing its sensorial, imaginative and conceptual potentials.

It is important to restate that the scope of the research is confined to clay-based art practice. The umbrella term 'ceramics' denotes multiple fields of creative endeavour encompassing a wide range of approaches with disparate methodologies, objectives and outcomes.⁸⁷⁰ Limiting attention to clay-based art-making focuses the discussion on the area of the field most relevant to the thesis aims, thereby facilitating effective application of the research findings.

Clay-based art practice itself is extremely diverse. Five case study artists have demonstrated the breadth and depth of ways in which clay and ceramic artwork might manifest embodied experience. The selection of the group was strategic. Working with a small number of artists has enabled in-depth analysis of a range of their artworks; a larger group would have offered less opportunity to expand on the ideas in hand. The reach of the cohort was limited to UK based artists, with the addition of one European artist. This was a logistical decision; I acknowledge this limitation and accept that a

⁸⁶⁷ Crowther (1993), pp.4-10; Wrathall (2011), pp.9-27.

⁸⁶⁸ See: Crowther (1993), p.5; Parry, and Wrathall (2011), p.4.

⁸⁶⁹ Crowther (1993), p.7; Wrathall (2011), p.11.

⁸⁷⁰ Margetts (2017), p.217.

wider global reach within the case study group would have offered a valuable international perspective. However, both the case study research findings and the theoretical framework established by the thesis are transferable beyond the scope of the case study group. Artists were carefully chosen to reflect a diverse range of artistic approaches, outcomes and motivations, and crucially, as examples have shown, their practices intersect in varied ways with the research foci that arose from the literature. The case study group thus operates effectively to uphold the research claims.

The case studies formed a crucial aspect of the interpretive research strategy. They enabled my descriptive responses to selected artworks, in addition to artists' personal reflections on their practices as documented through interview transcripts. The triangulation of these subjective research findings with those emerging from theoretical positions has resulted in a robust interpretive enquiry that has analysed and synthesised the experiential within a wider theoretical frame. Adopting case studies as part of the research strategy also facilitated scrutiny and testing of hypothetical ideas within the tangible realm. Critical examination of selected case study artworks throughout the discourse evidenced the manifold ways in which clay-based art impacts viewers experientially and conceptually in embodied ways. These examples concretely demonstrate potentials for practical application of the research findings beyond the thesis discourse to the wider sphere of clay-based art, and, where applicable, to the field of ceramics more generally.

Addressing the Research Questions

Proceeding from the first research question, which asks how phenomenologically inspired interpretations of ceramic and clay artworks might extend understanding of clay-based practice, I have shown that this epistemological position has enabled rigorous probing of the philosophical, ontological and experiential resonances of ceramic and clay media in the context of art. The phenomenology of art experience *per se* has been considered by numerous scholars,⁸⁷¹ and embodied artist/maker experiences of clay from within the ceramic field have been examined from a range of positions,⁸⁷² yet the perceptual effects of observing ceramic and clay media have not

⁸⁷¹ For example: Merleau-Ponty (1993a;1993c); Martin Heidegger (1969;2009); Rosalind Krauss (1966;1979a); Helen Fielding (2011); Laura U. Marks (2002); Vivienne Sobchack (2004); Jenni Lauwrens (2018a; 2018b; 2019).

⁸⁷² See: Mayo (2004); Martini (2006); Kemske (2007); Galpin (2016).

been considered from a theoretical position until now. Phenomenologically inspired interpretations undertaken here extend critical understanding of clay-based art forms by addressing the unique sensorial, conceptual and material qualities that differentiate their embodied impact on audiences—physically, imaginatively and emotionally—from other forms of three-dimensional art. Approaching clay through this methodological lens has revealed our empathetic, sensorial reciprocity with ceramic and clay media, the embodied potency of crafted clay identities, and clay-based art’s spatio-temporal resonances that reveal the shared realm of embodied being.

The second part of the question asked which material and conceptual characteristics of clay-based art differentiate its embodied potency from other forms of sculptural practice. In consideration of this, I argued that clay and ceramic materiality is imbued with a distinct set of sensory, associative and imaginative potentials key to manifesting the embodied character of clay-based works. These unique qualities arise from the social, cultural, temporal, anthropological and mythic significance of clay in human life, and are what distinguish its embodied value from other forms of sculptural practice, or, indeed, creative practices of any kind. No other substance has such a close connection with human existence over such an extended timespan.⁸⁷³ It has been used for evolutionary survival, spiritual and ceremonial activity, domestic purposes, industrial and economic development, and as part of social class systems and cultural tendencies.⁸⁷⁴ As Laura Gray asserts, ‘the historical and material associations [of clay] create a set of references and touch points that’ set it apart from any other material.⁸⁷⁵

Through case study examples I have evidenced the tacitly familiar experiential qualities of clay and ceramic materiality. Clay’s visceral plasticity and potentially fragile fired state are commonly experienced and understood. Its quasi-magical transmutation from viscous substance to solid form through firing processes adds to its charged material presence. I have shown how imaginative potentials arise through the pliability of raw clay matter, and that the intimate intensity of exterior details in clay and ceramic surfaces invite haptic relationships, as well as awakening touch sense through visual means. The research found that a crafted clay presence heightens awareness of a viewer’s own sense of corporeality, and that ceramic artworks carry a complex

⁸⁷³ See: Greenhalgh (2002), p.10; Elkins (2002), p.27; Dixon (2014), n.p.

⁸⁷⁴ See: Rawson (1984), p.6; Dixon (2014), n.p.; Margetts (2017), p.217; Greenhalgh (2021), p.50.

⁸⁷⁵ Gray (2017), p.2.

conceptual identity tied to ceramic tradition and craft heritage that ultimately connect viewers to the collective sphere. This, in part, shapes the innate spatio-temporal identity identified here for ceramic and clay matter. These material characteristics are uniquely potent, conjuring the sensory and the conceptual in heightened ways that other materials do not. Di Bello and Koureas state that ‘the sensual effects and affects of the material qualities and properties of [...] [artworks] [...] are that which engages us as embodied participants in a process of creating meaning.’⁸⁷⁶ I have argued that clay-based art overtly manifests their thinking. Its embodied potentials are bound up in clay’s material being that so powerfully expresses its implicit connection to human life.

Three key research foci crucial to establishing embodied viewer experience were identified through the literature: sensory perception, crafted identities and spatial resonances of clay. Separate chapters assigned to these foci formed the main body of the thesis discussion. Each has mapped a distinct set of research findings, yet synergies are evident across the chapters as each builds on the previous research theme. Every thematic lens has established new perspectives, deepening understanding of the ideas in hand.

Sensory perception was the first research theme interrogated in chapter two, which examined the ways in which art viewers and artworks become entwined in embodied ways through perception. This addressed the first part of research question two, which asked: What does a phenomenologically inspired focus bring to the discourse of perceiving clay and ceramic artworks? Through Merleau-Ponty’s thinking, I showed that perception is accomplished through our bodily interactions with the world and its phenomena.⁸⁷⁷ This exposed our bodily reciprocity with the distinct sensorial qualities of clay-based art. A phenomenological lens also uncovered the social and cultural resonances of perceptual experience, an important perspective for considering the central role that ceramic objects play in human life. Through Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, the melding of subjective and objective research positions supported a robust enquiry that validates the individualistic nature of embodied spectatorship whilst avoiding solipsism.⁸⁷⁸ Most significantly, Merleau-Ponty acknowledges the active

⁸⁷⁶ Di Bello and Koureas (2010), p.8.

⁸⁷⁷ Dillon (1997), p.90; chapter one, pp.59-61.

⁸⁷⁸ Crowther (1993), p.2; Dillon (1997), p.155; Morris (2010), p.142; Ng (2012), p.138.

role of the observer in art experience.⁸⁷⁹ For him, meaning arises at the interface of viewer and artwork independent of the artist's intentions or embodied maker experiences.⁸⁸⁰ This phenomenologically inspired focus thus enabled the research to position clay-based artworks as transformational entities issuing new perceptual perspectives with each encounter.

In chapter two, case study examples were employed to address the research question of how clay and ceramic artworks might impact the sensory system of viewers to provoke an embodied state of being. With difference established as a vital aspect of embodied perception, the chapter demonstrated clay's potent ability to conjure otherness via its trace-retaining proclivity and ubiquity across the social sphere.⁸⁸¹ Merleau-Ponty's structure of reversibility revealed that the tangible register of clay-based art could be sensorially grasped through vision alone, while Marks' notion of haptic visuality established the intimate lure of clay and ceramic surfaces where artwork and spectator become mutually entwined. Alterity was implicit within this proximal exchange, as was perceptual disturbance as viewers shift between close focus and distal observation to gain awareness of the whole. The surfaces of ceramic and clay artwork were thus considered to be sensuous, haptic sites that draw viewers into intimate embodied relationships. When combined with ceramic objects, interactive technologies were shown to further enhance embodied revelations.

Neuroscience supported the claim that our tacit familiarity of ceramic matter and the often-gestural presence of clay-based materiality arouse empathy in viewers through a complex fusion of motor and emotional responses, opening new embodied perspectives for sensorially experiencing the world.⁸⁸² The literature also revealed that the plural perspectives of art viewing experienced through movement and kinaesthesia disclose the shared nature of reality.⁸⁸³ I argued that the social and cultural legacy of clay-based media heighten viewers' awareness of the collective sphere. Clay-based installations were shown to orchestrate further perceptual revelations by stimulating multiple

⁸⁷⁹ Merleau-Ponty (1993c). See also: Potts (2000); Marks (2002); Jones (2003); Sobchack (2004); Fielding (2011).

⁸⁸⁰ Potts (2000), p.225; Jones (2003), p.78.

⁸⁸¹ Dillon (1997), p.155; Morris (2010), p.142, and Chon-Ip Ng (2012), p.138, confirm difference as an inherent aspect of embodied being.

⁸⁸² Gallese (2017). See also: Esrock (2001); Freedberg and Gallese (2007); Brinck (2018).

⁸⁸³ Hawkins (2010), pp.327; Fielding (2011), pp.526; Brinck (2018), p.208.

sensory fields. I posited that encountering clay-based works in an exhibition environment amplifies their temporal resonances. Awareness of spectatorship as a process that ‘unfold[s] over time’ merges with the innate sense of longevity and permanence invested in clay, revealing Merleau-Ponty’s intertwining, spatio-temporal perceptual field.⁸⁸⁴

The third research question asked how theories of craft, making and skill contribute to a theoretical framework that exposes the potential for clay-based artworks to stimulate embodied spectatorship. It also asked what the implications of a craft focus might be for practices operating at the art/craft/design interface? Through the literature, chapter three conceptualised craft as a fluid and inclusive approach to making that pervades all artistic contexts.⁸⁸⁵ Embodied material intensities were found to emerge from subject-specialist proclivities, and a shift from an individualistic sense of craft to one of collective encounter was identified.⁸⁸⁶ No longer confined to materiality or human influence, yet invested with social, cultural and ontological significance, contemporary perspectives reveal craft’s role in actively shaping people’s experience of the world.⁸⁸⁷ I acknowledged that art made from ceramics or clay does not necessarily employ a crafted character. However, case study examples demonstrated its embodied potency when craft is visibly deployed as part of a creative strategy. The interface where craft meets art or design in a work was identified as a potent space of overlap, one that highlights the ontological relevance, material presence and temporal resonances of many clay-based practices. Ultimately, this categorical instability was shown to destabilise viewer expectations, heightening the perceptual register of clay-based art through material and conceptual means.

The literature confirmed that evidence of labour intensive processes, repetitive material manipulation and skilled artist’s trace all constitute a sensory realm of making with clay.⁸⁸⁸ I proposed that viewers join makers on their journey of creative discovery by

⁸⁸⁴ Potts (2000), p.9. See also Fielding (1999), p.78.

⁸⁸⁵ Greenhalgh (2002), p.1; Kettley (2010), p.14; Adamson (2012); Bryan-Wilson (2013), p.10.

⁸⁸⁶ Shiner (2012), p.235; Gilbert (2018), p.61.

⁸⁸⁷ Ullrich (2004), p.210; Risatti (2007a), pp.55-59; Kettley (2010), p.15; Mazanti (2011), p.60; Owen (2011), p.84.

⁸⁸⁸ Horne (1998), p.40; Fariello (2004), pp.161-162; Ingold (2013), p.31; Gilbert (2018), p.65; Staten (2019), p.20.

connecting with the 'sensory currents' of this embodied materiality.⁸⁸⁹ Adapting Malafouris' thinking, I also claimed that through observation viewers feel *with* the clay.⁸⁹⁰ Overt gestures and diverse tempos of making caught in the body of clay-based artworks were shown to afford a sense of touchability and tacit familiarity given the ubiquity of ceramics in everyday life. Corporeal equivalences with craft were also established: the scale of making by hand directly links to bodily being, a characteristic both exploited and disrupted by the case study works.⁸⁹¹ The literature exposed making as rooted in humankind's urge for survival, and the crafted identity of clay-based objects connecting viewers to this primal impulse.⁸⁹² With the handmade thus deemed 'trans-historical', the temporal quality of craft was deemed central to its embodied significance.⁸⁹³ Various writers showed that pots are grounded in bodily actions and thus offer human connection.⁸⁹⁴ I therefore claimed allusions to function in clay-based art stimulate a powerful sense of human embodiment. Through case study examples I have shown that clay and ceramic works may inhabit a complex conceptual framework tied to ceramic tradition and craft heritage through evidence of process and gesture, as well as functional or decorative form. Yet as artworks, they also transcend material being to occupy imaginative and conceptual realms. With reference to Pallasmaa, I claim this fluctuating presence firmly establishes their embodied nature.⁸⁹⁵

The fourth thesis chapter directly addresses research question four: How do theories of space and place contribute to a critical framework that interrogates embodied viewer responses to clay and ceramic art? It also asked what qualities of clay-based works might provoke embodied spatial experience for beholders. Firstly, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology revealed our bodily entanglement within the spatial realm through movement and intentionality.⁸⁹⁶ The literature also established the embodied significance of place and displacement. Case-study examples demonstrated the place-instituting capacity of clay materiality and ceramic tradition. Raw clay is a reminder of

⁸⁸⁹ Ingold (2013), p.20.

⁸⁹⁰ Malafouris (2014).

⁸⁹¹ Rawson (1984), p.20 & p.100; Martin (2000), p.80; Risatti (2007a), p.109; Daintry (2007), p.12.

⁸⁹² Rawson (1984), p.6; Greenhalgh (2002), p.10; Risatti (2007a), pp.55-59; Corse (2009), p.19; Ingold (2013), pp.36-37; Staten (2019), p.23.

⁸⁹³ Mathieu (2007b), p.125. For writers who recognise the temporal quality of craft, see: Rawson (1984), p.20; Boden (2000), p.294; Daintry (2007), p.12; Adamson (2017), p.253.

⁸⁹⁴ Octavio Paz (1987), p.59; Rawson (2006b), p.209.

⁸⁹⁵ Pallasmaa (2011), p.63.

⁸⁹⁶ See chapter one, p.88.

earth, landscape and primordial terrain, while allusions to function and decorative form are suggestive of the social milieu.⁸⁹⁷ With body and place recognised as always entwined, I thus argued that the place quality of clay-based art invites an embodied attitude in viewers, one equally accessible when artists disrupt perceptions of place. Through Massey, space was conceived as a lively, ongoing, multitudinous realm of interconnecting narratives imbued with past resonances.⁸⁹⁸ Case study artworks exposed this dynamism, evidencing a multiplicity of temporal spaces via the social, cultural and anthropological resonances of ceramic and clay.

Following Bachelard and Focillon, I connected clay's malleable character and the detailed surfaces of clay-based art with the immensity of imaginative spatiality.⁸⁹⁹ Interactive ceramic artworks evidenced Hansen's proposition that new media conjures multiple forms of embodied spatiality.⁹⁰⁰ The union of digital technologies with functional ceramic objects also exposed their associative material richness, as well as Casey's notion of the body as inter-place, with each issuing powerfully affecting embodied experiences for viewers.⁹⁰¹ Through the literature, I then posited art as a space of gathering, connecting viewers to 'worlds before and after' them.⁹⁰² Given their shifting spatio-temporal resonances, I claimed clay-based sculptures, installations, performances, objects and interactive experiences are sites of collective encounter for viewers. Clay's association with function offered further evidence of its spatial potency, given Heidegger's assertion that the potter works with space not clay.⁹⁰³ Through their uniquely complex material presence I have shown that the case study artists shape an equally compelling sense of space in diverse ways—one that gathers, unites and connects viewers to an immense, dynamic realm of embodied consciousness.

In different ways, chapters two, three and four have established the embodied character of clay-based art and its potential to experientially impact viewers in heightened ways. While each chapter deals with a specific theme, it is important to note that these foci do

⁸⁹⁷ Rawson (1984), p.20; De Waal (2004), p.43; Gormley (2004), p.85; Daintry (2007), p.13; Twomey (2007), p.29.

⁸⁹⁸ Massey (2005), pp.12-14.

⁸⁹⁹ Bachelard (1994), p.193; Focillon (1989), p.172.

⁹⁰⁰ Hansen (2000), p.60.

⁹⁰¹ See Bolter and Grusin (2012), p.59 and Gogarty (2007), p.97, in relation to the union of digital and ceramic technologies. Casey (2000), p.196, considers the body as inter-place.

⁹⁰² Glendinning (2014), p.21.

⁹⁰³ Heidegger (2001), p.167; Adamson (2017), p.253.

not inhabit artworks separately. In fact, it is impossible to untangle the sensorial impact from the crafted or the spatial; they bring about embodied experience in unison, each implicated in and through the other. However, directing attention towards individual lenses has enabled the thesis to highlight their specific phenomenological proclivities and affectivity upon audiences. A sense of cumulative knowledge thus develops through the thesis structure. In addressing the sensorial potentials of clay-based art, chapter two outlines the underlying perceptual structure of embodiment relevant to all three themes. It also raises key characteristics of aesthetic experience pertinent to the thesis aims that are built upon in subsequent chapters. For instance, having previously established empathy and haptic visuality as readily arising through sensorial encounters with clay and ceramic artworks, chapter three establishes the significance of crafted identities in fostering such attitudes. Haptic visuality re-emerges as a key concern in chapter four where the intensity of crafted detail and haptic surfaces of clay-based art are shown to cultivate an imaginative space of immensity through close observation. Each chapter informs the next whilst issuing new perspectives of embodiment relevant to its particular focus. As such, a coherent sense of the unique embodied potentials of clay-based art is delivered, culminating in a hypothesis that interweaves these separate lenses to establish the potent phenomenological space produced by artworks made from ceramic and clay.

Connective Threads: Time, Shared Space, Imagination.

Certain pivotal concepts reappear throughout the discourse, albeit with different emphases. These ideas run through each chapter like connective threads; their reiteration serves to pinpoint three highly significant themes that ultimately come to define the distinctive embodied space of clay-based art. They include the embodied significance of temporal awareness, how clay and ceramic materiality reveals our involvement in a shared realm of being, and how imagination lies at the heart of understanding the embodied space of clay.

The concept of time is integral to perceptual experience manifest through the intentional moving body as it projects itself towards future goals and projects; past experiences inform present and future ones, with embodiment realised through these intertwining temporal levels as Merleau-Ponty describes.⁹⁰⁴ Chapter two reveals the

⁹⁰⁴ Merleau-Ponty (2014), pp.23, 87, 249 & 347. See also: Fielding (1999), p.78; Lennon (2015), p.45.

multiple temporal resonances of clay-based materiality: raw clay inhabits a primordial identity; its transformative properties evidence ephemerality and the passing of time; ceramic body suggests endurance and longevity; and clay's trace-capturing plasticity records past maker interactions whilst retaining the gestural immediacy of the now.⁹⁰⁵ The crafted identities of clay-based art also offer a potent sense of time. Chapter three demonstrates the ways in which visibility of skill, material processes and allusions to function tie ceramic and clay artwork to an intertwining temporal sphere of social and cultural activity, as well as evolutionary survival. Additionally, time materialises in a variety of working tempos and production methods. The legacy of ceramic tradition is also a powerful temporal signifier, representing thousands of years of technological innovation and domestic application. Chapter four further embeds the critical significance of time. Destabilising chronological shifts occur through clay-based art as manifold spatio-temporal resonances converge through their potent sensory qualities and crafted identities. As such, they are conceived of here as 'spatio-temporal events'—animated sites through which embodied experience may arise.

The second connective thread weaving through each chapter is the idea that clay connects us to a communal realm of being. As discussed above, space is inseparable from time, but ceramic and clay's particular spatial resonances expose our involvement in an ongoing sphere of multiplicity. With alterity considered an innate quality of perceptual experience, in chapter two I argue that visible traces of making held in the body of clay sensorially unite audiences with artists through the spaces of past interactions. The multiplicity of perspectives experienced moving when through a public exhibition environment equally exposes our shared reality. Chapter three builds on this idea, finding that the crafted identities of clay-based artworks express the social and cultural milieu of ceramic tradition, as well as primitive spaces of early human being. Finally, chapter four posits artworks as places where the past remains and is contemporaneously present. Given the historical and anthropological significance of clay-based materiality, alongside its tacit social familiarity, the past and future gather in the present experience of clay and ceramic artwork, connecting viewers to an embodied, collective sphere through sensorial and imaginative means. As Fielding and others have shown, embodied reality is situated in the 'potentiality of our being with others.'⁹⁰⁶ Clay-

⁹⁰⁵ Greenhalgh (2002), p.10; De Waal (2004), p.43; Gormley (2004), p.85; Daintry (2007), p.13.

⁹⁰⁶ Fielding (2011), p.532.

based art truly demonstrates this idea.

Imagination is another conceptual strand appearing across the discourse. Imaginative processes are seen to be fundamental to perceptual experience. Present perception is 'alive' with past and future perceptions through imagination, providing the invisible, depth-oriented dimension of experience.⁹⁰⁷ Chapter two shows that through somatic reinterpretation, memory and empathy, viewers imaginatively respond to the tacit familiarity of ceramic and clay. Guided by imagination, anticipative kinaesthetic sensing also informs the haptic embodied quality of closely observing clay-based art. Chapter three argues that crafted identities of clay-based art evoke tactile memories for viewers. Its evident 'touchability' is heightened by our innate bodily reciprocity with traces of process and gestures of making known through pre-reflective means. Given the anthropological resonance of crafted clay objects, allusions to use also imaginatively connect audiences to our primal past and the human urge to make. Chapter four finds space at the heart of imaginative thinking. Powerful spatial interplay occurs between intimate surface detail and vast conceptual realms through imaginative processes, while the malleable potency of clay manifests a space of reverie. Clay's potent materiality is seen to conjure multiple imaginative possibilities of other spaces and other times. Furthermore, when combined with clay, interactive technologies palpably manifest clay's imaginative potentials.

I claim that these three interwoven conceptual threads—temporality/shared space/imaginative processes—that flow through the thesis are fundamental to understanding the embodied agency of clay-based art. The case study artworks have demonstrated how they manifest in varied ways through a range of artistic strategies and motivations. These ideas are not unique to clay and ceramic media, but I argue they are more potent and readily available to viewers of clay-based art because of the distinctive associative material qualities arising from clay's longevity and omnipresence within the human sphere. Ultimately, I maintain that the main chapter themes of sense perception, craft and space form an important theoretical framework for interrogating clay-based art making, bringing ideas of temporality, shared space and imagination to the fore. Together, and to varying degrees, they produce the embodied potentials that I

⁹⁰⁷ Fielding (1999), pp.78-79; Lennon (2015), p.21.

claim are implicitly sedimented within the unique materiality of clay-based art and are what constitute the very distinctive space of clay.

In summary, I have found that a phenomenologically inspired interpretive approach to analysing clay-based artwork exposes its social, cultural, anthropological, ontological, spatial and mythic resonances. No other material is so intrinsically implicated in human existence. As Mella Shaw notes, '[a]t the level of what Jung called the 'collective unconscious', ceramics plays an important role in the human mythology of who we are and where we come from.'⁹⁰⁸ Fowler and Pallasmaa propose that art leads one through an experience, orienting viewers in physical and imaginative space, and that artworks themselves are embodied entities given their propensity to shift between material and mental states. In view of clay's highly charged material presence, complex conceptual identity and tacit familiarity, I have shown that clay-based art is particularly effective at placing viewers at the heart of aesthetic encounters.

Claims and Contribution to Knowledge

This thesis thus creates new knowledge by explicitly connecting visual contact with clay and ceramic artwork to embodied viewer experience, a position that has not been interrogated until now. As such, it presents an innovative theoretical framework that highlights the unique embodied material qualities of ceramic and clay to support phenomenologically inspired, interpretive analyses of clay-based art. Martina Margetts emphasises the distinctive character of clay when claiming it embodies 'a non-verbal, worldwide evocation of spiritual, ceremonial, sculptural and utilitarian functions.'⁹⁰⁹ She also observes that 'the unique versatility of the material, which [...] retain[s] its own intimate identity, imbue ceramic works with a particular resonance through time.'⁹¹⁰ Her words reflect the significance of the material-led focus that this research has pursued, resulting in a framework that offers a differential perspective from existing phenomenological evaluations of three-dimensional art.

I make four further claims to new knowledge that have arisen through the research process. Firstly, I posit that the sensorial nature of clay-based artworks arouse empathy in viewers, opening new embodied perspectives for experiencing the world. As such, I

⁹⁰⁸ Shaw (2016), p.87.

⁹⁰⁹ Margetts (2017), p.217.

⁹¹⁰ Ibid.

claim them to be sensorial sites of encounter whose surfaces draw viewers into embodied relationships. Secondly, I assert that the crafted identities of clay-based art hold significant embodied potentials. I thus claim that the interface where craft meets art or design in an artwork be understood as a potent space of overlap where embodied meaning arises. Thirdly, I claim that through their material presence, clay and ceramic artworks operate as 'spatio-temporal events' by stimulating imaginative processes in viewers.⁹¹¹ I thus frame them as sites of collective encounter that reveal our situatedness in a shared realm of embodied being.

Finally, I have created a body of new knowledge through the case study interviews and analyses of selected artworks. Rather than speaking for the artists, I have worked with them and the case study material, connecting the subjective and experiential to an objective, discursive, scholarly frame. As such, I have presented numerous carefully considered interpretive responses to selected works based on the synthesis of theoretic research findings, first-person researcher experiences and artists' perspectives. These analyses are unique to this thesis. I have also produced a body of interview transcripts documenting the case study artists' responses to questions framed by the research aims. Their voices are intentionally prominent throughout the thesis text, adding a crucial and distinct viewpoint to the discourse. These enlightening conversations contribute new knowledge in themselves, given their specific research-oriented focus and the fact that they do not exist in any form elsewhere.

Significance of the Research

In *Ceramic, Art and Civilisation*, Paul Greenhalgh explores the history of ceramic objects and production, emphasising their central role in shaping human civilization over the past two and a half thousand years. He states that:

In trying to describe this magnificent cultural legacy I have tried to show that ceramic is *a thing in itself*: a many-headed but nevertheless singular entity, with an ongoing intellectual discourse. [...] My point [...] is to identify the singularity, the consistent character at the heart of the practice. Let's call this the *ceramic continuum*.⁹¹²

Greenhalgh's words confirm the significance of this research in two ways. Firstly, in recognising the distinctiveness of objects and artworks emerging from the ceramic field,

⁹¹¹ Massey (2005), p.130.

⁹¹² Greenhalgh (2021), p.15, emphasis in original.

he substantiates the remit of the thesis. If, as he argues, artistic/artisanal production in ceramic and clay is considered '*a thing in itself*', then analysis of embodied viewer experience of clay-based art undoubtedly requires a specific theoretical framework that not only distinguishes its 'singularity', but also speaks to its *thingness*.⁹¹³ This is not to separate or ghettoise clay-based art from other forms of visual practice, but to consider additional characteristics that open up novel, enlightening perspectives of embodied art viewing. This thesis thus adds to the ongoing intellectual ceramic discourse by exploring the unique sensorial, spatial and temporal material qualities tied up in the 'magnificent cultural legacy' of ceramic and clay presence in human life that Greenhalgh's extensive research so ably shows.⁹¹⁴ Secondly, Greenhalgh's notion of a 'ceramic continuum' lies at the heart of this research. It is precisely the persistence of clay in human life—its longevity, or spatio-temporal depth as Merleau-Ponty would have it—that underscores and differentiates the embodied qualities of much clay-based artwork from other forms of art. Clay-based sculptures, installations, performances, objects and interactions reveal our primordial insertion in, and ongoing, intertwining trajectories through the world via their material character. As the case study examples have shown, no other substance so palpably manifests Merleau-Ponty's spatio-temporal theory of perception. If, as I argue, past, present and future are tacit material qualities of clay, then this thesis hypothesis supports and extends Greenhalgh's thinking. Through the frame of clay-based art, our embodied entanglement within that shared ceramic continuum is emotionally, sensorially and imaginatively revealed.

When Rosalind Krauss posited in 1979 that ceramic materiality defied any sense of sculptural neutrality through its 'intolerable' association with craft, and its implicit references to landscape (earth/time) and 'architectonic' sensibilities (space/place), she opened a conceptual crack that this research has stepped through and expanded upon.⁹¹⁵ At the time of writing her review of John Mason's work, analytical ceramic discourse was very limited. When it received critical attention, ceramic art was justified through the formalist concerns of another (more valued) discipline—abstract expressionist painting.⁹¹⁶ Thus, for Krauss, there was no theoretical precedent of how

⁹¹³ Ibid., emphasis in original.

⁹¹⁴ Ibid.

⁹¹⁵ Krauss (1979a), p.124.

⁹¹⁶ Slivka, R. (2017). The New Ceramic Presence. In: *The Ceramics Reader*. London; New York: Bloomsbury, 209-214. Glenn Adamson (2007), pp.43-44, discusses Slivka's essay.

clay and ceramic substance might operate as an artistic medium within Western art discourses beyond Modernist opticality, process-driven agendas or craft related themes. As Krauss herself admits, 'to be a ceramicist-sculptor in the 1950s and 60s was in some essential way to be marginal to "sculpture".'⁹¹⁷ Yet Krauss does not exclude clay-based practice entirely from her new 'complex schema' designed for thinking about postmodern art practices.⁹¹⁸ She recognises that when approached through other cultural contexts, ceramic and clay material open conceptual realms such as the archaeological site or ritual space—precisely the attributes that lend clay-based artwork its spatio-temporal, embodied material resonance.⁹¹⁹ Krauss thus touched upon the thought-provoking phenomenological richness of clay substance; while she did not identify it as such or pursue these ideas further, she opened a small, but significant theoretical space. This thesis has travelled back to this point and picked up the intellectual strand inadvertently offered by Krauss, one that highlighted clay-based art's connection to craft, time and space, and led this research to envisage the very distinctive space of clay. Glen R. Brown confirms the relevance of Krauss' thinking for the ceramic sphere. Yet rather than belatedly adopting postmodern tendencies, he argues that given its association with function, time and process, 'ceramics has always inhabited an expansive field.'⁹²⁰

Despite Brown's argument that ceramics operated through Krauss' sculptural complex long before she imagined it, there have clearly been developments in ceramic practice since the 1990s; much contemporary clay-based work now fits easily into her categorical framework such as time-based, performance and installation art.⁹²¹ Brown notes that one benefit of adopting Krauss' notion of an expanded field was that it opened 'a new avenue of access for [ceramic practitioners] to the museum's galleries.'⁹²² This relatively new and exciting relationship between clay-based art practice and museum institutions was the subject of a three-year AHRC funded research project, 'Ceramics in the Expanded Field', undertaken by the Ceramics Research Centre, UK.⁹²³ Through

⁹¹⁷ Krauss (1979a), p.124.

⁹¹⁸ Krauss' (1979b).

⁹¹⁹ Krauss (1979a), p.124.

⁹²⁰ Brown (2016), p.72. See also De Waal (2003), pp.183-184.

⁹²¹ Graves (2012).

⁹²² Brown (2016), p.71.

⁹²³ The Ceramics Research Centre is part of University of Westminster, London. For further information about the 'Ceramics in the Expanded Field' project see: <https://cream.ac.uk/ceramics-research-centre-uk/behind-the-scenes-at-the-museum/>

various means, the project generated a wealth of critical thinking by international writers and practitioners focused on the ways ceramic practices intersect with museum collections and strategies.⁹²⁴ While this thesis does not engage with museum-focused themes, the research can be said to further the work of the Ceramics in the Expanded Field project by adding to that critical discourse probing more expansive ways of thinking about clay.

In the past thirty years, numerous writers have touched upon themes concerning the material and conceptual identity of ceramic and clay that I have identified as crucial to this discourse of embodied viewing. With different emphases and for various purposes, Glenn Adamson, Glen R. Brown, James Elkins, Laura Gray, Paul Greenhalgh, Donald Kuspit, Martina Margetts and Philip Rawson are amongst those who have highlighted the distinct material presence of clay-based art, its temporal qualities and particular ontological significance for humans, as well as its social, cultural and anthropological resonances across space and time.⁹²⁵ Yet these ideas have never been pursued more fully. To an extent, this thesis expands on these insightful observations; by framing the seeds of other writers' thinking within the new context of embodiment, it opens up innovative ways of discussing ceramic and clay. As such, it builds on existing scholarly knowledge to create a new framework for analysing clay's potent experiential properties: what they might issue and what they might mean for viewers of art.

The research has shown that phenomenological interpretations of art have previously been carried out across a range of practices, and that the embodied experience of sculpture and film in particular has been given much theoretical attention. However, despite the well-documented sensorial and associative qualities of ceramic and clay noted above, artists working within the field of ceramics are more often discussed in terms of thematic concerns rather than experiential ones. Embodied maker perspectives of working with clay already exist, as do philosophical observations on the mutuality of potter and clay, but embodied *viewer* experience of clay-based artwork has remained

⁹²⁴ Brown, C., Stair, J. and Twomey, C. (eds.) *Contemporary Clay and Museum Culture: Ceramics in the Expanded Field*. London: Routledge.

⁹²⁵ Rawson (1984), p.6; Merback (2000), n.p.; Elkins (2002); Greenhalgh (2002), p.10; Adamson (2007), pp.39-58, & (2017), n.p; Daintry (2007), p.13; Kuspit (2010), n.p; Brown (2016), p.71; Gray (2017); Margetts (2017), p.217; Greenhalgh (2021), p.50.

undocumented until now.⁹²⁶ This thesis fills this gap in ceramic theory, situating clay-based art firmly within the discourse of embodied spectatorship by identifying the unique phenomenological potency of raw and fired clay substance and its impact on audiences. It thus offers a unique philosophical and ontological framework that probes the particular embodied ways viewers might feel when observing clay-based art: tactile, haptic experience is foregrounded, but typically through visual experience alone. This is a significant addition to ceramic scholarship.

Alva Nöe argues that that art 'enables us to catch ourselves in the act of perceiving and can allow us thus to catch hold of the fact that experience is not a passive interior state, but a mode of active engagement with the world.'⁹²⁷ Through their sensorial materiality and spatio-temporal resonances, the case study artworks demonstrate Nöe's claim. He states: 'To reflect on the character of experience, one must direct one's attention to the temporally extended, fully embodied, environmentally situated activity of exploration of the environment. Experiential art enables us to do this.'⁹²⁸ This thesis evidences the ways in which clay-based art provokes this mode of embodied exploration in highly compelling, distinctive ways, and presents a unique theoretical framework for analysing the embodied potentials of other forms of clay and ceramic art.

Implications for the Research

Clare Twomey states in her introduction to *Contemporary Clay and Museum Culture*, that 'clay has a history that runs so deeply in our culture that to reread this requires new tools, new words.'⁹²⁹ The legacy of this thesis is that it offers some of those new tools and words that Twomey declares necessary for addressing historical and contemporary clay-based practices in the twenty-first century. It is precisely what I have shown to be its archaeological, anthropological, social, cultural, historical and mythic significance for humans that clay and ceramic art differentiates its embodied potentials from other forms of practice. By focusing on the experiential qualities of raw and fired clay and

⁹²⁶ For embodied maker perspectives see: Mayo (2004); Martini (2006); Kemske (2007); Galpin (2016). For observations on the mutuality of potter and clay see: Malafouris (2014); Brinck and Reddy (2020).

⁹²⁷ Noë, A. (2000). Experience and Experiment in Art. *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 7 (8-9), 123-135, p.128.

⁹²⁸ Ibid., p.134.

⁹²⁹ Twomey, C. (2016). Introduction: Ceramics in a Place of Cultural Discourse. In: Brown, C., Stair, J. and Twomey, C. (eds.) *Contemporary Clay and Museum Culture: Ceramics in the Expanded Field*. London: Routledge, p.1.

their impact on viewers, this research offers important new perspectives for thinking and writing about clay-based works. Merleau-Ponty's texts underscore this thesis, but it is not a philosophical exegesis of his work and its relationship to clay. Through a broad range of intersecting theories, I have instead developed an interpretive critical framework inspired by his phenomenology that philosophically and experientially interrogates what it might mean for viewers to purposefully engage with clay-based art.

While the thesis describes the varied ways clay's potent character might manifest through selected case study examples, I argue that clay's embodied potentials extend beyond the case studies to inhabit the wider sphere of clay and ceramic art. Thesis interpretations of case study works offer important precedent for analysing the embodied potentials of clay-based art. The case study transcripts also provide in-depth resources valuable beyond the frame of this research: students, educators, practitioners, writers, theorists, art historians and curators will have access to the expert bodies of knowledge they hold. The research can thus be applied to a variety of practices and will inform a wide range of students and professionals working across the ceramic field. Given that Wrathall and Crowther have documented the important role art plays in both exposing phenomenological experience and satisfying philosophical questions, the research will also be pertinent to the wider academic sphere of embodied discourses and philosophical interrogation of art experiences per se. The unique theoretical framework laid out by the thesis, inspired by clay and ceramic materiality, opens new opportunities for approaching existential, ontological and phenomenological questions of human experience through art. Jenni Lauwrens argues for 'a body-centred theoretical approach' to art history that addresses the formal material qualities of artworks, but also includes 'the social and culturally contingent meanings that unfold in the direct embodied encounter with images.'⁹³⁰ This thesis addresses Lauwrens call and adds an innovative perspective to this theoretical space. Her thinking further substantiates the significance of clay-based art for addressing social, cultural and philosophical questions of being. Ultimately, the thesis describes an embodied space of imaginative immensity, a shared space that 'connects us to worlds before and after us.'⁹³¹ This, I claim, is the embodied space of clay.

⁹³⁰ Lauwrens (2018b), p.94.

⁹³¹ Roger Scruton quoted by Glendinning (2014), p.20.

Appendices

Interview Transcripts	Page
Appendix A: Interview with Sam Bakewell, 2018	245
Appendix B: Interview with Phoebe Cummings, 2018	261
Appendix C: Interview with Phoebe Cummings, 2021	269
Appendix D: Interview with Nao Matsunaga, 2018	283
Appendix E: Interview with Ingrid Murphy, 2018	294
Appendix F: Interview with Ingrid Murphy, 2020	310
Appendix G: Interview with Johannes Nagel, 2019	326
Appendix H: BCB exhibition text by Sam Bakewell, 2015	340

Abbreviations used in the transcripts:

SB	Sam Bakewell
PC	Phoebe Cummings
NM	Nao Matsunaga
IM	Ingrid Murphy
JN	Johannes Nagel
CR	Catherine Roche

Appendix A: Bakewell, S. (2018). Interview Transcript. Sam Bakewell interviewed by Catherine Roche at Studio Manifold, Haggerston, London. Audio Recording. 5th June 2018.

CR Could you start by telling me a bit about your career up to this point—how you find yourself doing what you are doing? It would be useful to hear about your education, training, key moments or influences; anything that has brought you to this point.

SB The things I've done the longest, or maybe my longest-standing memories, are working with clay and ceramics. I was lucky enough to have it in the garden in Somerset where we could dig out the clay, and my friend had a kiln over the other side of the field; I lived in a very rural part of Somerset. I guess my dad saw that it was something I was interested in, and I think he was interested in it too. There was a point where we started doing evening classes together; he got me onto an adult evening class when I was about eight, and it was amazing. I had a nice teacher and there were a lot of basic glazes made up. My dad would make functional things and I would make gargoyles.

I also had a great primary school where they had clay facilities, which was lucky because there is nothing like that now, and I carried on with ceramics throughout my art A levels and GCSEs. Then I did the art foundation course and had an amazing ceramics teacher—I had the whole room to myself, which was an incredible facility. He was super broad-minded and helped me to change how I thought about ceramics. I was into casting negative space at the time, and I got loads of sheep lungs and filled them full of porcelain slip. We let them rot and dry out then put them in the kiln, but it set fire to the kiln. We burned it to the ground and the fire brigade had to come out, but my teacher's main concern was my work. As he was coming across to me, he said: 'Don't worry, I've saved your lungs!' So I've still got these amazing porcelain tree things in my father's shed; my parents still have this shed in their garden full of everything that I have made but not sold. The roof is falling in, but it's just all there.

Then I did my BA in Cardiff. Claire [Curneen] was my personal tutor and I guess she was a big influence at that point. She helped me articulate the link between my father being a lay preacher, religion and why I had a fascination with iconography and trying to realise that in my work. At that point, my work was very 'say what you see.' I don't think I thought too much about it and took it in a very literal sense. I wasn't thinking about faith systems or how clay fitted into that, it was just that that was the means I loved, and I was trying to get my head around it. I was frustrated because I didn't really think about what ceramics meant to other people. I got frustrated with studio pottery and the history that was being forced down my throat; I think what I wanted to learn about was philosophy; I wanted to learn about the bigger picture and how this material might fit into it. And I still struggled with that on the Masters course.

I then got a studio in Cardiff for four years, in 'Fireworks' with Claire and everyone else. I made a lot of work that was more saleable. It was slip-cast, life castings of feet and hands, and bits and bobs. It was very literal and about intimacy and the way that, particularly in Christian texts, they talk about feet and hands and extremities in terms of intimacy. Mary Magdalene wiping the feet with tears and things like that, and I was quite into that. But I got bored with the work, so I got an Arts Council grant to go to Sevres in France to look at 18th-century table centrepieces. I'd been in a show the first year out of the BA in Sevres, Limoges at the Bernardaud Foundation, and they still run this programme of exhibitions. Clare Twomey was in that show and some other amazing people, but I didn't really know anything about ceramics at that point still. They showed our work alongside the original table centrepieces. I don't know if you know anything about that whole thing?

CR No, I don't.

SB Well the centrepieces were porcelain figurines, and Sevres, the porcelain factory outside Paris, is the finest porcelain factory in the world, or one of them. In the 1800s they used to get sculptors from the Louvre who carved marbles to make miniatures in plaster. They would make these into small tableau-type things that would run down the centre of Versailles period dinner services. It was always at dessert: they put mirrors down the centre, and then you'd have these figurines on them as conversation pieces. More often than not they were super dark. They were of Dionysus, and Bacchanalian scenes, rape scenes and beheadings: all quite violent. Or hunting scenes, but explicitly things being disembowelled and all kinds of stuff, which seemed amazing to me.

CR And over dessert.

SB Yes, and over dessert because that's what you want. That whole thing, for me, was about morbid fascination and trying to pick apart the roots of that. It's something I tried to do with Claire [Curneen] during the BA, how that totally fits into religious iconography, but I was still ignoring the specific place that clay had in that picture. So I made this scene of a deer caught in a porcelain fence.

CR Was that the piece I saw in the Messums Gallery exhibition? [Beyond the Vessel: Narratives in Contemporary European Ceramics, 2020]

SB Yes, that was at Messums. I had only shown it at the first Ceramics Biennial in 2009 and then it's been in my parents' shed ever since. So that was the first time it had come out, which was amazing because I flogged it, so it paid for a couple more months here in the studio. Amongst other things, there were three pieces I made from that research in Sevres. I went to the factory and looked at the mould archive, which is completely off-limits and in a tower, but it's full of beautiful masterpieces—they really are. I made a tiny wreath with a bee in it, which was

about me letting go of the countryside. Before that, it was being obsessed with leaving the countryside and having to get over it. It was a little homespun religion I guess—cathartic—but I don't want to say that. I made it for me. I've sold it since, and I want it back, but that's just how it goes.

Another piece I made was a death mask. I don't really know what to do with it, but it's more to do with a conversation I had with Claire [Curneen] when her mum died. We were talking about when she went to see her lying in state. Death masks are historically taken in the first couple of hours after someone dies because the face is the most relaxed it will ever be before rigour mortis sets in. So we had this very specific, explicit conversation, and Claire said it was the happiest her mother had ever looked and so she couldn't really be sad. I was thinking about capturing that moment to represent oneself during life. Obviously, that doesn't really work, but I think it was an exercise in using different materials, and for me, it was a different way of working as well.

Before that, I'd done editions and so this was me deciding I was never really going to do that again, it was just going to be one-offs.

Then I did my MA at the Royal College. That was to escape Cardiff in a way. It was hard and wasn't really what I thought it would be, but that's probably me more than the course. Again, the critical history side of things was broader and delivered amongst the fine art department, and everything was a bit better, but you also felt out of your league because you'd had no prep on your BA. Everyone was talking way above your head. There is a huge disparity with ceramics courses discussing the material in a much more educated way—it's dumbed down. So, I struggled, and with the work side of things too. But then I chose Alison [Britton] as a mentor because I could see that was where I wanted to be, and her headspace is amazing. I spent most of my time in the library and testing, so I didn't really make 'work' work. I just spent all my time on colour tests, glaze tests, and material tests. I ended up with weird stuff that were the first lumps of *Reader*, which seemed huge at the point I made them. It was a slow learning curve trying to unpick the doctrine you have taken on but hadn't really realised. I spent a lot of time being angry, but I shouldn't really have been, it wasn't helpful.

CR But maybe things come out of that? Was it productive in a way, in hindsight?

SB Yes, but the whole thing was not an enjoyable experience. We were jammed in like sardines and everyone was vying for attention. It's even more of a boiling point than a sculpture degree because everyone is using the same material so everyone is competitive; it gets weird. But in hindsight, I would never have got where I am now if I hadn't done that, so all these things are good. You never realise at the time, and I try to remind myself of that now. It's like the Jerwood show was a nightmare, but actually, loads of positives have come out of it. I think

it might be me. I'm not easy to deal with, or maybe I'm complacent, or I expect a lot from people, because I really do give a lot.

Then I've been working for Edmund [de Waal] for four years and loads of other stuff. I'll talk about anything.

CR Thank you, that's great. Hearing about your childhood and your first interest in clay is really interesting to me. My dad was a potter, and I spent my whole upbringing around clay, but I ignored it, I just wasn't interested. And it's fascinating that I'm now really interested in it—what's it about that? I wonder is there an innate connection that comes from early experiences?

SB Now, especially with the V&A application, I am trying to go full circle and unpick all of that. I knew that after the MA, part of me wished I hadn't got any education in this material because I felt I'd taken all of the joy out of it. Sometimes ceramics is just like a massive technical wank, and it's about the person trying to look crafty. That's not what I'm about. So now it's about trying to unpick that, and go back to being the kid; really, it's about communion with the material. The V&A application I just put in was to do with mental health and making, and why I make things now, and why they are weird and difficult. But it was also about this relationship with galleries and why that's weird and difficult; the difficulty thing is what gets you somewhere. But specifically, I'm interested in how clay can mirror the subconscious more easily. It's way more pliable; you can daydream with it and these things are definitely about that. Or about trying to exhaust myself, because I feel like I've got a decent amount of technical knowledge, so I can do anything like that if I want to, so if I try and unlearn that perhaps?

CR Can you share some technical insights relating to these *Reader* pieces, for someone like me who doesn't have a technical understanding?

SB This one's a solid bag of Parian, so that's the biggest amount I could comfortably wedge through. At the RCA I studied alongside potters, and part of the process before you throw clay on the wheel is that you wedge it to get the air bubbles out, but also to line up the particles so that it is nice and strong. That's the most interesting bit to me before you get on the wheel; I like throwing but there was something about this huge amount of Parian. Parian is porcelain, but with more frit in it, so it's a self-glazing body. It was made by Staffordshire to replicate Paros, the Greek marble, which is particularly white. Everything I make is in Parian. Because it is self-glazing you can fire it lower; it holds details incredibly well, but it also doesn't really melt. If you take it up high it can flop on itself, it does really interesting things. And when you add oxides and colour stains to it, it does all kinds of weird shit that maybe other things don't do, so you get brighter colours for example.

Going back to this thing then [a *Reader* lump], I was always experimenting at the RCA, and one thing I did was to wedge through clay sometimes. Parian is super soft compared to other clays. A full bag of clay, especially porcelain, is really hard to wedge, but this is more like dough. It's softer, thixotropic; the more energy you give it the softer it gets.

CR So it is like dough where the gluten stretches when it's kneaded?

SB Yes, but there is still resistance so it's fairly exhausting. I've tried bigger things, but there is something about the particular size of the *Reader* lumps that works quite well with getting the results I am interested in. So, wedging it through in different ways and with different techniques, flipping it around, then you daydream—you get exhausted, and your mind starts to wander because it's probably bored. Then you think about all kinds of other things while not really focusing on what is going on in your hand. I guess your intention towards it disappears and it starts to talk to itself, which is what I am interested in—don't know if it's true or not. It's this chthonic thing: the way that clay potentially has all this dead life in it, and whether you [as a maker] act as a medium and can channel things? Or even just in a material sense, it has its own resistance to you when you are working with it, and it does weird things. So, if you aren't impressing your desire upon it, it does start to do what it wants. You get forms you wouldn't be able to get any other way, which is what all of these [*Reader* lumps] are. And then there is a crossover point when you zone back in, and if you like something you can encourage it or add to it. So, it is a compromise between it and me. And they are solid, and the first thing you are told in ceramics is never to make anything solid because it will blow up in the kiln. But you can do anything in ceramics if you can figure it out. It's time and trying not to get any air bubbles in it, and firing them really slowly. Some of them completely blow up, but then I stick them all back together, so some have fallen apart.

CR One of the things that I wanted to ask you was about the relationship between maker and material, and how this might manifest in your practice? But maybe you have just answered that question?

SB You can refine ceramics down to being something very un-ceramic that has nothing to do with the material at all, and it's just a means to get to a depiction or something like that. And I've done that, like the hairball [*Beauty Reminiscing*] from the biennial and things like that—those are done for a different reason. It seems easier to do that, but that's mostly to do with the way that ceramics is viewed, and luxury and craft are viewed, over expressiveness and things like that, which are expected in all other mediums. So, I am definitely trying to find a more abstract way of listening to the material more and not forcing it.

CR Do these have a title? Are they part of a body of work?

SB Just *Reader Series* because it's reading me and I'm reading it. It's a kind of compromise. The other thing is that I change the names of things all the time because I figure they are my work and I want to change it.

CR Ok, so I'll call them *Reader*, but I'll check with you before anything goes to print! These pieces have quite strong bodily references for me.

SB Yes, some of them are quite vaginal, some of them are all kinds of things.

CR They are quite visceral, but they also signify bodily contact perhaps through actions of pressing, ripping, tearing, and slicing. Is that a conscious thing?

SB I think whether I wanted them to seem bodily or not, some of them are way more than others. With the first ones, I tried hard not to show my handprints on them, and it would drive me nuts that I couldn't not do that because Parian is so soft. But it's practicality-led also. If I am wedging on this melamine surface, I know that with the melamine board, once I've sprayed it and it is wet, if I roll the clay over it a few times it's going to pull it out into a really nice texture. But you can't leave it on the melamine as it won't dry, because one side isn't porous, but the outside side will be dry. So, I need to get it onto a board that's all porous so it will dry out evenly. And in moving it to that board I have to use my hands. But instead of trying to ignore that, I'm making it a thing. And sometimes it works and sometimes I'm really cross with it. And then sometimes I try to obliterate it, but then that's not true, and the big thing is supposed truth and the bullshit of that. Actually, this is a whole other thing, and another conversation that's more about my practice as a whole, and trying to decide if I am convinced by art. A lot of these things, like these dust pieces, are about fraudulence and futility and wasting time: where waste products stop and real work begins, and whether it's all just a load of shit, and that's where I'm at. But I'm trying to make that as an honest conceptual framework to make new work from as well, instead of it being something to hinder myself with and tie myself in knots. I'm still going to make things because I've dug this hole, so I've got to do it now.

Some of them I've probably tried to make look more bodily. I knew that I had this one and I wanted to tear it open [pointing to a red *Reader* lump which is cut and torn down the centre]. I probably knew that it was going to tear in such a way that I was creating a space that definitely had a bodily reference, but I didn't know what it was going to do. I mean they also completely change in the firing, so a lot of them don't have any cracks or tears at the point they go in. And the Parian just tears in a way that no other clay does.

CR I'm interested in how this close relationship with clay might translate for viewers. The plasticity of clay certainly expresses the immediacy of contact, but I'm also interested in the more time-consuming aspects of your practice, and how viewers might respond to that.

- SB The fiddly stuff?
- CR Yes! It's interesting that you have these extremes of making in your work, but both have a sense of the hand and energy invested through the making process that is read in totally different ways. Are those extremes interesting to you, because they came together in the British Ceramics Biennial piece didn't they? Is this duality, this shift in materiality an important aspect of your work?
- SB I think it's a lot to do with hang-ups with me; I'm trying to unlearn things I think. The BCB piece [*Imagination Dead Imagine*] was about real or fake work:⁹³² where things begin again, or things I had already made and not considered to be real work. This hairball piece [*Of Beauty Reminiscing*, 2015] was the last one in a series, and by the point I was making this I knew it was a thing and not just a test. These small objects from *Imagination Dead Imagine* are some of the older things that were generally made in times when there were big life changes or upheavals. This hairball was after the MA. So I was super depressed and I didn't want to make or be in the studio I was at. I could make this from home; I could just sit there, and it was definitely an obsessional thing. But then I could have pulled my head out of my arse and just got on with it. But that was a way forward, and I was happy to give the time it was going to take; I knew that was the only way I was going to make that thing. There was something nice about sitting there with pins for two years and just carving something. That's just a weird thing to do, and when it broke, I wasn't upset, and I could fix it. When I put it in the kiln people asked: 'Aren't you really stressed?' And I was like: 'No, not as much as I would have thought, it will do its thing.'
- CR So can you explain the process to me?
- SB It's a bit of Edmund's old porcelain. So, after he's thrown them all away, I keep some of his old porcelain as reclaim. It's just a torn-off old bit I wanted. Like the Jerwood thing, hair and things like that are a side obsession, and I just wanted a test module for a really transparent glaze to make a very glossy, hairy thing. So, I just started to carve this thing, which was only supposed to take ten minutes in my studio, and then I just kept doing that for two years. Then I was: 'Ok, this is going to be a fully formed thing.' I'd obviously seen the Netsuke; I'd handled them at Edmund's. It's almost like that was a validation for tiny things, by holding those things. It was just a very different way of making and that interested me. It's a thing to do with time, and the modern construct of an artist is that you make loads of work every year, and you sell it—your worth is validated by your productivity. These makers excelled in things, but I'm assuming they probably only made twenty things in their lives because they take so long to carve. I wanted to prove something to myself, I think.

⁹³² Sam Bakewell's *Imagination Dead Imagine* was the AWARD winner at The British Ceramics Biennial, 2015.

Yes, so I've done those things, the bigger clay things, and I think this was the opposite. I can do one thing and expand it further if I can go with the reverse of that and rein it in again. It felt like, ok, if I'm expressive, and that's the stuff that no one wanted or was interested in when I first left uni because it was too unskilled for them probably, maybe I need to check that I can do other stuff too. Or do something that people are like, 'Oh I'm really excited about that', and then I can go further into something weirder. But it feels the same. When it did tear in the firing, because there are tiny little fractures in it, and it's still porcelain so it tears open, I was quite pleased with that.

CR It is amazing.

SB But I over-fired it as well. It's not perfect; it should have gone lower, but I wanted the colour. I knew it would flop, it's not exactly the same shape as when it went in. Yes, so I'm going to show that in the European Ceramic Context in Bornholm, Denmark. Phoebe [Cummings] and I have been selected to represent the UK.

CR When is that?

SB September [2018]. I've got to ship the stuff soon, but I'm just sending the hairball with nothing else. I'll make it a plinth-like one of these, but not in that material. And make it a thicker version with a small indent that it can just sit on, but probably a much bigger block to give it some space.

CR I'm quite interested in these little pieces. In Bachelard's *Poetics of Space*, he talks about intensity found in intricate detail, and that immensity exists in the miniature and the micro. I think this resonates in the context of these pieces.

SB Well I hope so. But I think that is true, it was immense for me.

CR It is a beautiful idea: small things that open up massive spaces, imaginative spaces.

SB Time is a huge thing: time, space and money. One day, I want to make these *Reader* lumps for the rest of my life, and I want that to be a series. You wake up in the morning, you do your lump, you leave it for six months and it would be way more casual. But some of them have got a hundred pounds worth of stain in them and the firings cost a lot of money. And you have to plan things because this is the only space I have in the whole world, so I can't make much more than I have at the moment. So, then you have to go back to working small. And the really good ones take years, and people are like: 'what are you doing all that time? We have a show, can you put something in for a show?' Sometimes it pushes you into feeling slightly marginalised, but I chose that myself in a way. I just don't know how else to do it. And then some people might resort to technology. There might be ways

to rapidly prototype things and get that done, but I've never had someone make something for me and I can't imagine that.

CR The process of making is wholly part of your thinking and doing?

SB Yes. I love the random shit, the bits in-between. If someone is doing that for you—a lot of people I know get someone to do their testing—but I can't take things forward if I am not doing the testing because that's when I will learn.

And then there are all of these; these are the torn-off bits of the *Reader* lumps. Whenever I make there are bits flinging around all over the place, and I try to keep all my waste products from everything I have ever made, thinking I have to use them again. There are always bits of clay in bags, and as long as they are labelled and numbered, they just sit. And if you are in-between things then there is time to get things out. You sand it and spend a couple of days doing it, then fire it and re-sand it. Then you get this series of things, and each has a life beyond itself as an individual thing, and that's kind of a time for wasting, and then this is a time for wasting. And I started from these things actually [*Leavings* from *Time to Waste*]. This was one waste product. I'd sanded it, and then I was like, 'Ok, I've got all this dust, I'm not going to throw the dust away', so I kept it in bags. And then there were all these bags of dust, and for each type, I sieve it and bisque it separately in a pile so that it shrinks. So, it started with *Time for Waste 1*, which is up there. Then this piece [*Offal*] is when I was trying to think about painting.

CR As I came in, I was instantly drawn to these, probably because I'm a painter.

SB Well yes, and that's me trying to reconcile myself with the fact that I've not done a fine art course and never will be able to. I'm about to try and ask Corvi Mora Gallery to come down and see these new things while they are out because I've never shown any of this, and some of it is ten years old. I want to try and have a *Time for Waste* show, a solo show with him, which I'm hoping he'll be into.

There's another thing that is totally just these things, then there's the blocks which is three, the dust, which is four, and then this weirder one [one of the *Offal* works from *Time For Waste*—this was a pair—which is all leftovers again, but this one fell over in the kiln. This one, I haven't fired yet; it will go black, it's all going that colour. This is oxidised; they are the same, so oxidised and reduced. See that's what I mean, it just flops, which I love. So that might be the fifth one depending on what happens.

CR It is so interesting for me that these so clearly reference paint and painting. What is it about that shift in how a material references another material that interests you?

SB So this came from Fireworks [studio]. All of these are from conversations that I had years ago, and then you start to think about the content of that conversation in a different way. So, in Fireworks the rats used to eat the rims of Sara Moorhouse's bowls, so she'd mix PVA glue with the clay to make a kind of filler. At that point, I was slip casting feet and hands, and sometimes there would be air bubbles, which I'd go through, and I think I'd ruined the whole thing. Then I'd try to fill it with this PVA mix. And from that, I developed a material that is much more like oil paint. And the thing about Parian, because it self-fuses like this, you can do a lot of things that maybe you couldn't with other stuff. And it's not something I've taken far enough because I always get distracted with something else.

So yes, I could make it look like oil paint. It could probably have that vibrancy with some of the colours. These are more muted than some of the colours in other things I've done. I don't know, I'm still trying to work it out. I think it was because I wasn't sure if painting and sculpture were different at that point. So that was a whole section at the RCA I did a project on, the question of whether painting can be sculpture and sculpture can be painting, the difference between any of these things. Some were just lumps, and in fact, this was how I got on to these lumps. So, I made bigger versions of the same thing, to the point that they were really big and solid, and then they turned into something else. I got carried away with that and never really came back to this, but I'm trying to now. I guess that's the beginning of it but I haven't given it enough time.

CR So these are much earlier? [colour and paint type sample from the RCA]

SB Yes, 2009. That's in the first year, and that's this year.

CR It seems that your technical relationship with clay drives a lot of what you do but becomes something much more cerebral perhaps. Would you agree?

SB I don't know if that's just me sometimes trying to validate it. You know I loved the job for Edmund, I spent two years glaze testing, and it was fucking cool. I loved testing; I loved the science aspect of finding things out. But I know that you dupe yourself—it's not real—so it's good to try and figure out how to incorporate that into other things. And I think that's a craft hang-up, or rather the education system I've been through. The way you test to get to an endpoint, but you're not meant to consider those tests really. I think if you did the same kind of tests on a sculpture course, they would automatically think they were amazing, and ask what are they doing? Whereas ceramics is like: 'Well, ok, but what are you going to do with it?' They don't exist.

CR It's interesting talking about craft because I do want to think about that.

- SB Well, I was going to ask you, because you have chosen six people, but they are all from the craft side of things.
- CR I am interested in artists who have come from subject-specific training, and thinking about whether that brings something particular to the work.
- SB Even if it's a hang-up? I think it brings something specific, but whether it's good or bad, I don't know.
- CR I know we are now in a post-disciplinary landscape, but I'm interested in trying to find out if there is something that an intense material engagement with clay through subject-specific training brings to the work. I don't want to set up any sort of binary division between craft and art though, because I think all the artists I'm working with approach their practice through a more fluid context and consider themselves artists, makers, or designers; most wouldn't define themselves as craftspeople.
- SB But we are on this side of the fence looking out.
- CR Well, you have a set of skills, unlike artists who have not had a ceramic education and perhaps work with clay as only a part of their practice. That doesn't mean that their work isn't phenomenological in any way. I'm not making judgments about how a work operates, or whether craft or art is more suited to phenomenological enquiry. Part of what I'm interested in is whether there are additional qualities in works that demonstrate a specific, intense material engagement. So, I'm interested in thinking about craft in a wider sense.
- SB I don't have any hang-ups with either outside of the craft network, the governing body as such. I have a problem with the way it restrains itself and links itself back to current fads and gets obsessed with luxury and price and things like that. I mean, the art world does that, but it seems so strange that the craft world does that now, because it was almost a little bit outside I think, back when Alison [Britton] first started. Maybe it wasn't, I don't know. Yes, so I don't mind being either, it's just the body I hate, the people who regulate it.
- CR And how do you identify your position as a maker, where do you see yourself situated?
- SB Neither, because neither pays much attention, to be honest. But I am both.
- CR I am pursuing the idea that visible references to craft are quite productive in the context of embodiment. I am interested in work that perhaps shifts between art and craft, where there is a duality, and what might occur through that interface.

Glenn Adamson argues that this duality creates a productive 'friction.'⁹³³ Do you recognise this in your work at all, and if so in what way?

SB Yes, you can't not, but for me that's a point of aggravation. But it is also why I make the stuff. And I'm getting more stubborn about that, being happy with being in the weird zone. The stuff I see that is clay in the fine art world is not my type of thing in general: current stuff, not historic stuff, the new batch. And what is going on in the craft world, half of that doesn't interest me; there are a few things. Yes, it's sat somewhere in between, so yes, it's there, but it's a point of aggravation.

CR There is a huge amount of technical knowledge invested in all of your work isn't there? Even elements, which for the non-initiated may not be evident, like in the *Reader* lumps; these are also highly crafted aren't they?

SB Do you think that matters?

CR In terms of my research it's a point of interest.

SB You've no way of knowing how people might interact with your work because you only ever view it through your own lens. Mine is caught up with all my hang-ups, and I hope no one comes to it with anything like what I've got. I hope there is something of interest to them, like when I view anyone else's artwork. A lot of the time I'm not trying to guess why they made it, it's more what they are projecting onto it. And I love that feedback; I take that on board, and I can take something forward.

CR Your work demonstrates an extraordinarily expansive approach to making and production, from your pin-carved hairball to something so physical like these *Reader* pieces; also, these 'paint' pieces, which have a different sense of physicality.

SB There are some other pieces I haven't shown that are in my parents' shed that I made at the RCA. Do you know Imi Knoebel the painter? He did twenty-one canvases for Blinky Palermo. They are very minimalist school kind of things, very *Dia Beacon* outside of New York. They are twenty-one, amazing, simple geometric shapes that are beautiful colours; each is just one colour, kind of like bodies and self-contained. It's iconography in some sense; it feels like it's an icon, but to what you're not really sure. And it is so simple that it's basic. But the shape is so interesting, it's like there's intent there. I was thinking about that in terms of all of this, so I made a 3D sculpture of one of his shapes; I did a couple of them. But they were twenty-five bags of clay thick, so they were going to do a lot of crazy shit in the drying. I made a former for them to be precise, and then I packed the clay and covered it to dry. When I took the former away, it gave in under itself a

⁹³³ See: Adamson, G. (2007). *Thinking Through Craft*. Oxford; New York: Berg, p.6.

little bit; I took it off after a couple of days so it could hold its edges and be precise like a block, and they were. But then it gave in on itself, and when I fired it, it blew up. Then I fired it in big, huge chunks and it blew up again, and I spent ages sticking it all back together. It was very much trying to be a body, but it pushed me in some respect and was a compromise between it and me. And again, I would have loved those to be a much bigger series. So, there are things to pick up.

So, all of this is the oil clay from the hut I made for *Imagination Dead Imagine*; it's coconut oil and china clay mixed. I've reused it a couple of times now. I heat a bowl full in the microwave and then you can smear it onto something, which is what lumps for the biennial piece [*Reader*] this year sat on top of. That sets quite fast to room temperature, and then it's hard. Coconut oil is the only oil that does that, which is why I used it. But I want to use that as a sculptural material in itself because it makes these amazing shards; I mean you can make stalagmites and all kinds of crazy shit. It's very sticky, and it has this smeary capacity, you know, this adobe hut kind of finish. I've applied for residencies where I haven't wanted to do any kind of fired work; I want to take all this clay and give myself time to experiment with it. You could almost use it for lost-wax casting as well. I've been thinking about trying to get something as expressive as you get with clay that has the permanence and weight of metal.

CR Just going back to the BCB piece and the wax, I read that the swirls on that piece were quite significant. Can you expand on this?

SB Yes, so it was trying to be a version of why the hairball was interesting to me in the first place. Why hair and folds and fabric, linking back to icons and different types of paintings, why they are interesting spaces psychologically? The kind of psychology of the fold, the bit you can see and you can't see, the theory bit and the pleasant bit. It felt like an appropriate way to make that space. The poem, *Imagination Dead Imagine* by [Samuel] Beckett, is told from inside a skull looking out, coming backwards and forwards inside the skull describing the white space. So, there are no ideas to start with; there is an empty figure in a space, and by describing the space, it's creating an imagination from the death of the imagination. So, from a creative wasteland, you can find something just by describing it, or by imagining it. And in the very act of imagining the death of it, you are imagining something, so there is no death point. So, I was trying to make that into the space, and that's what all those little objects were; they were faith objects. The spiral or wave format was a way for it to flow around itself, so it didn't feel like a stagnant space. The framework was also very rigid, so I needed to somehow smooth it off. I mean, it's half Isamu Noguchi's studio—have you ever seen his studio? It's amazing. It's somewhere between an African mud hut and a religious space. Homemade religious spaces and really small Greek churches and things like that—I love those spaces. I was trying to replicate one of those for these little objects. For me, it was a super egotistical thing to do, but I

was also trying to be honest about that, and the text [for the exhibition] was specifically trying to call bullshit on myself.

CR But in terms of a viewer coming into the space, how do you hope they responded?

SB I don't think I think of the viewer as much as I ought to, and I think that's probably a ceramic thing as well. My friends who did sculpture at the same point would always talk about that; and they thought about that from its creation, from day one. Whereas craft is something you put on a plinth and then you consider it. But maybe I did for that piece. The height was specific, there was supposed to be a threshold, and you needed to crouch down and fight hard to fit in. I didn't want to stop people from going in there, but it had to have that sensation and at the same time be open. It could have had a roof, but I didn't want that because that made it more ambiguous. So, I was really trying to think about it.

But when I put those lumps on the clay thing [*Reader*] I think that was for myself.⁹³⁴ I just thought this takes away from the feeling that this is just on the floor and makes a plane that you could project more easily. So that was thinking about the viewer, but less prescribed. I'm not sure what people make of that material though. I think they are quite confused by it because it's kind of plasticine really, and it smells funny.

CR Is that not an interesting thing?

SB Yes, of course. I'd be very happy making loads more spaces like that, but whilst doing it I was less interested in the objects. Suddenly there was this architectural thing where immediately I'd found something my scale. With ceramics that holds you back loads, and that was partly what the wood thing was about for the Jerwood exhibition, it was trying to escape that trap of scale.⁹³⁵

CR As a viewer of *Imagination Dead Imagine*, that flip between macro and micro made a very powerful relationship. You had this immersion of yourself within a space, you were surrounded and having an immersive experience, but then you also had these small objects behind barriers in little recesses. So, you had to flip between different modes of perception when you were in that space.

SB Yeah, it wasn't easy, was it? I mean some of them you couldn't see; it was annoying!

CR Well, yes it was a bit annoying, but I took that as an important aspect of it. I needed to see these little things and I couldn't quite see them.

⁹³⁴ Bakewell is referring to an iteration his *Reader* series that was exhibited at The British Ceramics Biennial, Stoke-on-Trent, UK, in 2017.

⁹³⁵ Jerwood Makers Open, 2017, Jerwood Space, London.

SB Well that's how I feel in those Greek places. No one is manning those religious spaces and they need to stop people nicking things, or the pigeons shitting all over them, so they have those guards up. But yes, there is something about things being [spatially] removed. And that's also connected to loads of conversations I've had with Edmund, to do with access and specialness: when things are kept away and your intrigue is exacerbated by that.

The hairball and some of these other things are also about trying to make something that is one-dimensional in three dimensions if I can't get access to it. So if I can't see it all in the museum then I want to make it, because I want to imagine the back of it. And that's the same. The Goya etching of the hung peasant: that's a flat image and I wanted to imagine it in the round. And from that, you get something else, which is another one from the *Imagination Dead* things, the pink tunic, *Here Neither*. So yes, that's a big thing for me. One of my earlier applications for the V&A was specifically about trying to liberate things from cabinets by remodelling them. And I've always done that. When I was on my BA I modelled loads of Egon Schiele self-portraits in the round, because no one sees that. I was obsessed with that and spent years trying to reimagine them because the fronts are so amazing. Especially the one with his legs wide open and he's got truncated strange limbs. I thought: 'The front is so amazing, I wonder what the back looks like?' And that in itself is probably enough to keep me occupied.

CR That's very interesting that you are thinking about the idea of the unseen.

SB Well, I think its megalomania. I mean, being obsessed with religion and iconography, I've spent my whole life thinking about God, and this is an ego boost. Creating things is always about that. And yes, it's why can't I have everything? I should be able to do everything; I can make everything. If I want to see something, I'll just make it. And that's megalomania, isn't it really? Because I'm not doing it for anyone else, I'm not. With the biennial piece I was thinking about the public, but a lot of it I haven't been at all. And then with the hairball, I now have to think about how they are not going to break it; I'm not thinking about how they are going to view it, well I guess I am. Should I try and frame and change the sensation for them, draw attention to something, and give it prominence in space?

CR But isn't it always, in the end, just about you thinking about the world, and then allowing us to engage in some way with that, but not necessarily in every way that you have thought about it? Unless you are a socially engaged artist, surely it is about what you are interested in, and how you are thinking about it, and then you put it out there?

SB I do think about that a lot. My application that's just gone in to the V&A was thinking about social engagement and what the use of what I do is, you know, if

it's like certain types of art that are very much about social conscience.⁹³⁶ This isn't of a time period; this is about me being here and doing it in this time period. But it's not representative so much; it's not going to change people. Well, I don't know. I mean I say that, but I do believe in tiny little things doing that. Is it doable to say I believe that? Maybe I do believe it, but I just say something separate to cover myself, which is probably true. Yes, that's probably true.

⁹³⁶ Bakewell was awarded a studio residency at the V&A Museum, London in 2019.

Appendix B: Cummings, P. (2018). Interview Transcript. Phoebe Cummings interviewed by Catherine Roche at University of Westminster, Regent Street Campus. Audio Recording. 15th May 2018.

- CR I thought to begin with, it might be useful if you could say a little bit about how you arrived at where you currently are in your practice, in terms of education, training, role models and inspirations, for instance.
- PC For my BA, I studied craft at the University of Brighton. At that time the course was called 'Three Dimensional Crafts' and it covered wood, metal, ceramics and plastics, and you could specialise in two materials. I chose ceramics as my major and metalwork was my minor. I think by that point I knew that it was clay that I was interested in. So then I had a year in between that and doing the MA in Ceramics at the RCA [Royal College of Art]. At that time I was already clear that I wasn't really interested in contained objects, but rather how what I made sat within a real environment. I did a body of work in the building where I was living, and I would set it up and photograph it. So I started by documenting temporary projects, but at that point, the work was still fired. I finished my MA in July 2005 and did a project quite soon after where I used unfired clay that I had kept from my work at college. That was in the crypt of St. Pancras church; it was just on for a week, then I bagged it straight back up because it was damp and ready to go again. It was about February/March time that I then declared myself bankrupt and moved back to my parent's home about a month later, as I was still in London at the time. That was the definite point where I decided to work more in this raw material, and take it to a particular place where I could cut out a studio and not rely on any equipment. That seemed like the best solution in terms of being able to make what I wanted to make.
- CR Do you think that your use of raw material was developed, in part, through a needs-must strategy then, or did it fit with ideas that you were already testing?
- PC It was partly practical, but I arrived at that by it also being a means of trying to strip things down to what I wasn't willing to compromise, and I think at the heart of that was the clay itself. I realised that most of what I made wasn't really benefitting from being fired, other than technically, it is more permanent so you could potentially sell it, but that wasn't really necessary. So it was practical, but it also helped me clarify what was important in terms of what I wanted to make. What was left was then very much a part of what the work is as well.
- CR What would you say are the themes and issues that are at stake for you in your work? What is the conceptual framework that underpins your practice?
- PC The material is always a constant, and that raw state and the particular changes that are enabled by that. So, the transitions and the way that the material changes itself in an environment are important. And then time is always a big part of my

work in different ways, either in the way it is brief as an object, or sometimes it might be referred to through thinking about the landscape of other times. In other pieces it may be looking more towards the future, for example, to plants that may no longer exist in the future. So time and material are always important, and then there is usually some link to nature, and that probably started off more to do with landscape but has gone in different directions. It's usually nature as it really is, or quite often how nature has been represented, particularly through ornament and decorative arts, so that fictionalised view of nature.

CR That's interesting. I was going to ask you about time because it felt, to me, like an important theme running through your work. I suppose the site-specific nature of many of your pieces supports the theme further because time is embedded in the duration of the pieces, but I want to ask you about your reference to historic ceramic objects and their relationship to time?

PC There is that reference in my work to periods in time, in terms of objects, but also other periods of time in nature as well. Sometimes the two come together and sometimes it may be more focused on one than the other.

CR I'm very interested in how past, present and future interweave in your work—how you reference different timeframes that all coincide. Could you speak about that some more?

PC Yes, and I think the residency I did at the V&A made me think a lot about that because of the way that they are monitoring objects; that made me think of how things are changing but on very different timescales.⁹³⁷ It felt like it was still happening even in the things that looked so static and monumental, but maybe on a microscopic level they are also changing.

CR And do you think viewers grasp the multiple time shifts happening within one piece?

PC Well I hope people sense that, but I don't know how much people are aware of that. Or maybe it is more obvious in certain pieces?

CR Talking of the V&A brings me to ask about the idea of craft and whether it connects with your work and approach to practice in any way. I'm very interested in the duality of craft and art strategies apparent in your work, and the fluid trans-disciplinary character your work inhabits. How do you identify your position as a maker, where do you situate your work?

PC The way I feel about what I make is that the outcome is sculpture, but I get to that through craft. But I think historically craft outcomes tended to be some sort of

⁹³⁷ Cummings was artist in residence at the V&A, London, in 2010.

commodity in a way, an object that you can sell, and that is traditionally where the craft is applied, which I don't think is what I do. Usually, the endpoint is either sculpture or temporary artwork, and there may even be elements of performance in there. But in terms of the technical side of my work, it's very traditional in some ways and quite often I am borrowing the language of decorative arts.

CR I am interested that you come from a subject specialist position and training, and therefore have that inherent understanding of your material from a specialist perspective.

PC I am thinking as well, like in the V&A you have ceramic sculpture in a historic sense that is separate from the ceramic collection.

CR Yes. You produce large-scale environments, yet simultaneously work at an intimate scale and with intricate detail. So I wondered how working in this way, from micro to macro, shapes your relationship with clay, with making, with your own body, and with your own perceptual experience of your work? But also how your work might operate for viewers?

PC Looking back to works I have made since I was at the RCA, probably even before that, I have always had that interest in larger work, but also working on a miniature scale, and moving back and forth. The way I think about it is similar to fiction, particularly when I read Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*: that moving in and out of a narrative structure, from a wider story to passages where it is really intense and the focus is on minute details. That is definitely something that I have always been interested in and tried to make in a three-dimensional way, where I am zooming in and out. The piece I have just made in Leeds [*A Ripening Surveillance*, 2018] has areas of intense detail, but then it will move out into areas where it is a mess of raw material, and then it might zoom back in again.⁹³⁸

CR Bachelard talks about the idea of intensity found in intricate detail, and the idea that immensity exists within the micro because it transports us into imaginative spaces. That seems to fit nicely with what you are saying perhaps?

PC Yes, and thinking about the body as well, there is usually an element of trying to play with how I pull the viewer into the work also. There have been several pieces where the work hasn't been completely revealed at a distance, you might have a glimpse of something, and then as you get closer it might reveal something smaller. The piece in Leeds at the moment, [*A Ripening Surveillance*], is sort of veiled [by polythene walls] so you have a sense of something inside, but you can't see it until you step inside, and then as you move around you can start to see the very smaller areas.

⁹³⁸ *A Ripening Surveillance* was a raw clay and mixed media temporary installation at The Tetley, Leeds as part of the 'Material Environments' exhibition in 2019.

- CR So you are purposefully manipulating perceptual encounters?
- PC Yes, in some ways it's theatrical; there is a staging. I am always thinking about what you see from a distance, what you see when you are near and what you see when you are in the middle of it. And this is maybe more part of working in a way where you are placing things in an environment, rather than saying, 'This is my sculpture, it's this wide, it could go anywhere'. I am very aware of the viewer as a whole body coming into contact with the work.
- CR And what about your body, do you feel any kind of sensory connectivity to making? I suppose making at different scales has different sensory experiences?
- PC Yes, so with the very detailed work, quite often I will do it in the morning when I am fresher, and I think it is quite calming. If I am in a rush, then I just break stuff so it forces you to slow down and think. And I feel a lot of that kind of work is in my hands, whereas when I'm working on a big area of an installation, that becomes much more about my whole body. I am thinking of last week when I was covering a large area, it was almost like Alexandra Engelfriet's work, where I might be pinching or kneading.
- CR And those traces are left for the viewer to pick up on as well. So that bodily physicality must be transferred through the experience of looking?
- PC I quite enjoy it when I make things like flowers; the process will pick up the lines of my hand and it's interesting to see how people react to it. At first, they don't see that it's the lines from my hand, and then at a certain point, they realise. When they read them initially it's just as the lines on a leaf or something. It's interesting how it takes a little time when viewers are in the work to attune to it, and then they are more aware of the traces of my body within it as well.
- CR What is your relationship with clay and the process of making? Tim Ingold argues that maker and material are united on the sensory journey of making. Does that fit with your experience of making, of being part of the materiality of the piece itself?
- PC I think I am, and then there are other points when it is purely the material as well. Certainly when I am making it's very much me and the material, but then when I step back from that there is quite often a stage where I think of the material as enacting its own performance. It does things completely independent of me, which is something I find interesting about working with raw material. I can guess what might happen, but there is still a lot of uncertainty in how things might react.
- CR The idea of change, of matter not being fixed feels like an important aspect of your work. Would you agree?

- PC Yes, both ends of the process are very much part of the piece, so if it's dissolving then that is as much a part of the work. Then at other times, it is stable until I break it down.
- CR Your work has a strong material presence being made from raw clay, yet you create immersive spaces that explore/enact the idea of fiction. Can you say a bit more about these dual realities—the material and the imaginary—that seem to exist in your work?
- PC I think there is always that back and forth between the two. Visually, things look realistic, but actually, when you look closely it's often completely imagined as well. I'm thinking in terms of plants, that they are believable, but actually, they are fictional. Yes, I would definitely say that is true. You know obviously what's there is very physical in terms of the stuff, but imaginary realities are present also.
- CR And in terms of that physicality, there is often a smell from the raw clay, isn't there, which you wouldn't expect, or don't get with fired ceramic?
- PC Yes it's much more sensory. Especially the most recent piece at the Tetley, because the tent I have made has skylights above it, and although I did the same thing in Stoke it wasn't as humid.
- CR Could you talk a little about that piece?
- PC That all started with this ongoing idea I have had since I was at the V&A, of thinking about ceramics as a form of science fiction, in particular Baroque and Rococo design. It's about that mutability between nature and ornamental fiction. In *A Ripening Surveillance*, the installation imagines plants that are adapted to listen and gather information. So there are forms that are like satellite dishes or antennae, but it is also a bit like a swamp and there are areas that are highly decorative as well. Water is being sprayed into the installation so the humidity is quite high. There is a natural cycle of evaporation and condensation because of these windows; it's almost like a double greenhouse. It must be at least five degrees or more warmer inside than outside of the tent, so you can really smell the clay, that earthy smell.
- CR So is the swamp section referencing a sort of primordial quality?
- PC Yes, and I suppose in some way I feel that clay belongs to that place anyway. It's part of the landscape; it's where it has come from so it is always there for me. In a way, it's the bringing together of that very primordial side of clay with that kind of Baroque fantasy, which is quite often how clay has been used in terms of making objects: that it is very decorative. And that is something that interests me in terms of science fiction as well. For example, you have all this investment by

Meissen or Wedgwood in quite advanced material development and technical problem solving, but then all of that goes into a quite ridiculous object, something completely over the top. That interests me in terms of the decorative. I think we are quite quick to dismiss it; it's not really in taste any more, or we see it as a historic period, but I think it's actually very connected to human desire. I find it fascinating that human desire for decorative objects is so strong that you would invest in a whole factory to produce them. I know that's obviously a very complicated list of reasons.

- CR Heidegger talks about artworks in terms of gathering points, and he sees them as spaces for truth. But I'm just thinking of your idea of surveillance in relation to that idea of gathering points, and your idea of collecting plants, and that they are gathering information. It seems to correspond?
- PC Yes. And going back to materiality, it's why being involved in a material-specific discipline is really interesting, because it allows me to open up all those ideas like science fiction, the botanical and Baroque design. It's a way of putting the world together; it gives you a way into something. Coming from a craft-based training as opposed to sculpture has been significant. Had I studied sculpture, I would perhaps have thought less about decorative arts; I probably would have looked less at those things as a starting point. I think coming from the other route there is more of an appreciation of those kinds of objects, rather than dismissing them.
- CR You have used polythene to surround some of your installations: *A Ripening Surveillance* for instance, and also the installation you showed at the British Ceramics Biennial in 2013, *After the Death of the Bear*. I was wondering if it operates as a barrier, or can audiences walk into the spaces?
- PC With both of them it's like a factory curtain, you know, with those flaps that you walk through? And actually in Leeds, the plastic of these flaps was really clear, so we ended up putting a second layer of polythene on the inside because I didn't want that view of the work to occur until you stepped inside.
- CR But you can experience that humidity and sensory smell, and you also have this initial obscuring of vision as well through the plastic, which is quite interesting?
- PC With *A Ripening Surveillance*, its configuration in the gallery means you almost have to walk all the way around to get to the doorway. And a little bit with the one in Stoke [*After the Death of the Bear*]*—*the doorway was to the side as well. In both cases, you have to walk past that obscured view through the work to get inside it.
- CR Your work is always site-specific isn't it? Although, maybe not *Triumph of the Immaterial* (2017-2018), the piece you made for the Women's Craft Prize exhibition at the V&A?

- PC Yes, I think some pieces are more so than others. You know, certain things could be recreated in a different setting.
- CR Which pieces, in particular, do you feel are attached to the sites that they are produced in?
- PC The installation in Stoke, *After the Death of the Bear*, came from a plate design that was produced in the same factory, so it made sense there in a way that it wouldn't anywhere else. And I think *Antediluvian Swag* (2016), the piece that I made for the New Art Centre at Roche Court, which was completely framed by the architectural structure that was already there. But then there are other pieces, like one I made for a gallery that I sometimes work with in St. Ives [*Anima Mundi*], that was all endangered plants, and I think in some ways that was more of a sculpture that it could have sat in different places.
- CR And what was the title of that piece?
- PC It was called *Arrangement for the Anthropocene* and it was more about thinking in terms of the future. There are probably more works that relate to specifically where they are made. I can't think of that many that could go elsewhere actually.
- CR I am wondering whether the idea of place, rather than space, is significant for you?
- PC I think more often than not my work is more concerned with place, particularly when the work isn't in a white gallery setting, which a lot of the works haven't been. In that case, it is much more specific and there is usually some other history that is linked to that particular place. And then maybe when it is more of a traditional gallery space, then it tends to become more about space—maybe the light or the physical architecture of the room. But yes, usually when it's in less of a neutral space, then place is an important consideration.
- CR I'm thinking of the piece you made for Cardiff Museum's *Fragile?* exhibition [*Scenes for a Future History of Ornament*, 2015], and that it placed the viewer in different spaces—interior/exterior, micro/macro—and as a viewer you were taken into landscapes as well as interior spaces.
- PC Yes. I was also interested in the gallery where it was situated because the gallery itself was very neutral, but then it was within the wider museum and all the collections.
- CR Yes, and you were referencing the museum space with the archive boxes, is that right?

- PC Yes, they placed you back within the museum somehow, it wasn't totally separate from what was outside of the galleries.
- CR We've talked a bit about imaginative space, and you've discussed the importance of fiction for your practice. Could you talk a little about the connection between imaginative space and fiction and the significance of this in your work?
- PC I think probably more so than anything else, fiction tends to be what informs the work. Written fiction has probably been a starting point for more things than anything else. Or maybe that and historic objects as well. And I'll write certain words that I'm interested in, I don't really start by drawing.
- CR You mentioned Virginia Wolf's *The Waves*, but are there any other key texts that have provided ways into making?
- PC Yes. *The Drowned World* and other J.G. Ballard books as well. But that was very connected to my interest in prehistoric landscapes, and also that idea of being somewhere between a realistic familiar world and a kind of other imaginative possibility. That maybe goes back to my interest in science fiction as well. In general, I find it interesting that you can conjure up a really sensory world through words that, for me, seems very similar to clay. Words are very black and white and you've got this grey material that's very consistent, and perhaps dull in some ways, but from that you can open up an entire world. I feel it is very close somehow.
- CR I'd like to ask you about the relationship between your work and audiences. I'm wondering what your ambitions are for your pieces, how they move beyond yourself and into the viewer's frame of experience or existence?
- PC It is not fixed in an object, it's a very time-based thing, and really, my focus is always on that being an experience. In a way, it's the most important thing. It's not very often that I make an object that then belongs to only one person, or is seen by very few people; it is generally in a much more public setting. For example, a lot of children might see the work. That's one of the things that I like about it being ephemeral, as it's tended to shape where it exists. And it tends to be more in public spaces, which I actually enjoy. The piece doesn't become a luxury object then, it puts everyone on an even footing. A lady wrote to say how much her children had enjoyed *A Ripening Surveillance*, and that's really nice. I always think of the work as having lots of layers, maybe before you can pick up on all the thinking that's gone into the piece, a child might still have a very direct reaction to it, that maybe is that kind of embodied experience. They can respond to it in a different way.

Appendix C: Cummings, P. (2021). Interview Transcript. Phoebe Cummings interviewed by Catherine Roche via Zoom. Audio Recording. 24th March 2021.

CR I wanted to start by talking about your relationship with clay and your sense of material consciousness. What are your experiences of working with it, thinking about it, and thinking through it? And I'm also wondering what working with clay means for you in terms of its social, imaginative, and technological character?

PC In some ways it still surprises me sometimes. Even though I've been working with clay for a long time it still it does things that I don't expect, which is probably part of what I really love about it. You think you know how it will behave, but sometimes it doesn't necessarily do that. I think, as well, it's that complexity of how it links with our lives in so many ways; that's also part of its appeal. The immediacy of it has always been important, the ability to manipulate it directly; it's almost like I can't be bothered with all the tools. So that hands-on experience is a big part of it.

And all those other connections that are there are important too, like that clay is from the ground, and the fact that it's been formed within a landscape, so is part of a landscape in that initial state of its being. That feels important to what I then make with it. There is this conversation between what it's been in its raw state and what I'm then doing to it, which takes it to another landscape. Or maybe at times even thinking about what is contained within clay matter, that there is plant material that has decomposed into it, and that often feels like waves of things emerging and submerging. There is definitely that there.

I was doing a talk last night, and I went back to these images of the clay bison sculptures in caves in France. I was thinking that in some ways this is quite an instinctive way of working, to deal with the material in its place rather than removing it and then placing it back into some sort of reality: that it's maybe eliminating that separation. And this idea of different kinds of function is also interesting. It's hard to understand those kinds of Neolithic objects; you have a sense of the significance of those kinds of things that have been made without fully being able to understand them. But there is some kind of recognition that it obviously did have significance—maybe spiritual or whatever—so I'm thinking about that now as well: about what the work can do in terms of creating a space to think, or be immersed in something as well. I hope I haven't rambled too much?

CR Not at all! I'm really interested in thinking about what clay does differently to other sculptural materials, what might be significant about clay. So all of your thoughts are welcome.

PC That is part of what is significant about this raw state in particular, especially when thinking about those connections to landscape. The pieces are much more

exposed than perhaps if they went into a kiln, and I added a layer of glaze on top. It's still direct and that feels very important to me

- CR I wanted to ask you about working in raw clay and the instability of it as a material. You previously talked about clay in terms of it enacting its own performance, and I just wondered if you could expand on that a little bit, what is the relevance of that for you?
- PC Often when the work gets talked about, it's in relation to performance, but I think sometimes there is a misreading of my being there and my making as being the performance. I never really see that part as the performance, I see it more as the work itself, and the changes it goes through over time is more the performance. I guess certain things push that a little bit more to try and extend that phase when the work is active. Whereas other works, they naturally become more still within a week or two.
- CR Which works would you identify as being more active, and which more still?
- PC Well, I guess with things like the fountain [*Triumph of the Immaterial*], I directly think of the whole thing as a kind of performance; it's continually changing.⁹³⁹ Or maybe the pieces within polythene environments where I'm putting a bit more work into affecting that environment and the reactions that that will produce. I don't necessarily always know how they will react, but I know that by having that moisture inside the polythene, then it will continue to react. But I think even with things that are completely dry, like this scone on the wall behind me, there's a very subtle oxidation that happens as well. I don't fully understand why certain areas oxidise a lot, maybe it's partly to do with how much I've touched it. For example, the beads are very discoloured, whereas other areas have stayed as they were. So, I think there is also this subtle, very slow performance that's almost imperceptible, and that takes a much longer time to notice.
- CR I was thinking about the piece you made in Istanbul [*Ornamental Chronology*] where the performance is quite dramatic, it is quite shocking in a way, in terms of its abrupt end. I wanted to ask you about your sensory experience of working with clay as a maker, and also about the sensory experiences that you hope viewers might engage with through your work?
- PC Clay is such a physical material, and even with the more planned things there is always an element of it that is quite instinctive, like you just trust things will find the right way. It's never completely designed, like if you are casting something, for example, that's part of it. Part of the attraction is not necessarily knowing

⁹³⁹ *Triumph of the Immaterial*, 2017, was a temporary raw clay sculpture with a concealed fountain, which dripped down its body for one hour each day. The sculpture was the winning artwork from the Woman's Hour Craft Prize exhibition at the V&A, London in 2017.

where you will end up. I think, as well, the actions and movements involved in making are important. I'm obviously using my hands a lot, and quite often then it becomes about the wrist or the arm, and sometimes even the jaw. I've become very aware of it in the past year, as I've been forced down to working on a much smaller scale, of almost feeling this frustration, because part of what I really love about the larger areas is the chance to work with your whole body. It becomes less about just your hands then. Sometimes, it's punching out the base clay, or stamping on it, and I really enjoy that. I mean, I do really enjoy the small things, but I like that the larger work begins to involve your whole body; it's a very different way of making.

And then, in terms of the audience perception, that's something I've been thinking about a lot in the past couple of years. Probably more so than since we first talked. I'm becoming much more focused on recording my work, and a lot of that is to do with how you record that sensory experience. It's particularly noticeable with works in polythene environments where there is a very defined atmosphere that is separate from the outside atmosphere. But I think it's never just a visual experience; you're always within an environment sensing yourself in relation to the work. I'm thinking of things with water, like the sound, or with the big, suspended piece in Istanbul [*Ornamental Chronology*], there was often slight movement.⁹⁴⁰ When people walked past you got that very slight breeze, and you felt that tension from the suspended material. But the way things are lit is also important. In that case, it occupied a much larger area because of the shadows, which you also walk through. I'm interested in all this invisible stuff that surrounds the sculpture as well, and that's what makes it so complex to try to record because there are so many different things happening at the same time. A photograph gives you one sense of things, but it's certainly not everything; it's missing a lot of information.

CR I was interested in your essay 'Humid Being' for *Hyphen Journal* where you talked about the reading room you created for a show in the States—I forget which gallery—and you talked about the idea of corporeal sensing in the absence of the work. I thought that was an interesting idea: that the sensory experience of an artwork is still available to people through other means.

PC For me, it was interesting trying to test out the idea that maybe documentation is easier without the work, or maybe a partial work. Sometimes the photograph can give too much visual information that blocks your ability to engage with the other senses, but it's all very much guesswork at the moment. I haven't got much to back it up. Partly, it's working to give someone a memory of something they haven't experienced. In terms of memory, bodily sensing is important, like smell

⁹⁴⁰ *Ornamental Chronology*, 2019, was exhibited at Mesher, Istanbul as part of the exhibition 'Beyond the Vessel: Myths, Legends and Fables in Contemporary Ceramics Around Europe' in 2019.

is so powerful in memory, or sound. Those are powerful tools in generating a sense of experience.

CR I was going to ask you about smell because it seems to be quite a powerful aspect of your work, whether it's the smell of wet clay or that dusty, dried out sort of smell. In terms of your conceptual concerns, does that feed into your thinking?

PC Yes, but it's maybe a harder thing to reproduce. With the reading room I made, there was a fairly similar smell, even without the clay, just because the polythene and the moisture became quite a prominent smell. But in terms of the real installation, that probably would have had much more of an earthy smell. I'm not sure whether that's something that I need to add if I was re-presenting that work? Maybe there needs to be wet clay in some tanks just to give it that smell even though the clay might not be formed into anything. I've been thinking a lot about smell at the moment with a project I'm hopefully working towards that will have different plants. Maybe I will begin to introduce some of those scents in the work, I don't know; it's not something I've tested yet.

CR When you talked about *Ornamental Chronology* just now, you mentioned movement and that's something I wanted to discuss with you. Movement is integral to perceptual experience; the moving body is how we experience the world. A lot of your works require the viewer to move in and around them, so I was wondering what might be significant for you in terms of the relationship between clay, sculpture, the moving body and space. You have touched upon that, but I wondered if there is anything else that you might want to add?

PC There have only been a few works that have had movement in them themselves, and that's interesting to think about because ceramic objects are much more fixed. But yes, moving in and around the work goes back to that idea of being immersed in a work, and at that moment the work and the body of the viewer belong to one space. It breaks down that distinction between the two in a way; you are not viewing the work, but you hopefully feel part of it.

CR I hadn't thought about the fact that with certain pieces your movement can affect how you experience it, that you are creating movement within the piece as you walk past hanging sculptures. And then with the shadows in a piece like *Ornamental Chronology*, your movement around the space builds that.

PC Yes, that makes me think about the piece I made in Wolverhampton, *This Was Now* [2020]; that was also built onto rope, but horizontally.⁹⁴¹ With that work I allowed all the stuff that I dropped and broke to stay underneath the work. Often there is a bit of that, that I will allow things to drop after I've made it, but with that one, I left everything. And because it was such an unstable armature it

⁹⁴¹ *This Was Now*, was exhibited at Wolverhampton Art Gallery in 2020.

dropped way more than I've had with other pieces. It almost became as much about material on the floor as on the work. It raised the status of it; it felt as much of a significant thing as what I'd made, and there was this battle of my movement with the movement of the work. And, by the end of that, I became way more interested in the floor and this mat [of shards] that had built up below the work. It got to the point where I felt that maybe this was the work, not the hanging structure.

CR That's so interesting. The other thing I wanted to talk about, and we have discussed this before, is the significance of decorative ceramic objects in your work. I wanted to pick up that idea a bit more, particularly your interests in the relationship between landscape, plant life and decorative ceramic objects. And then also maybe the cultural and social significance of decorative objects, and what that might mean for you in your work?

PC I'm still really interested in that back-and-forth between real plants and the way they are stylised into design. Sometimes you find things that have grown that almost look like a ready-made ornament. I'm really interested in the desire for the decorative. On the one hand, it recognises the beauty of nature, but there is also this desire to make it more-than, to try and perfect it even more or to extend it. I think it says a lot about human desire, and this need to hold onto nature, or capture it at its most beautiful. Then that gets translated to the point where it becomes much more abstract and pattern-like: where you can almost see the root of a leaf or something in a design, but it's become so stylised it becomes something else. For me, it's interesting to take that back into becoming a plant again.

And I'm still really interested in the decorative interior and its objects, which feel a lot like a form of installation to me. They create these immersive spaces that are almost like extreme works of fiction, especially if you think of these really elaborate Meissen objects. It's almost like they are these other worlds; they are pushing this form of fiction, but at the same time they can be lived in and are part of a reality. It's this very odd thing that we do, and it's amazing as well. I often feel that for something to be described as decorative is a negative thing. But I think it is so historically connected, in terms of who we are, in terms of human desires, or power and displays of power and cultures. There's so much tied up in the decorative. It still feels very overlooked within disciplines that are studying that. I think, from the outside, it is still dismissed a lot.

CR In our last conversation, you talked a little bit about the relevance of science fiction for *A Ripening Surveillance*. You touched upon your interest in the relationship between ceramic technologies, science fiction and decorative objects. I wondered if you could talk about that a bit more?

- PC I've mostly only thought about it in a historic way, in terms of thinking about advances in technology, and particularly the development of porcelain: the idea of trying to get to a point where they had this workable material. It took so much work to do that. What is invested in that is really fascinating to me: that they would go to this extent to develop the material and ways of producing objects with stable results, and everything that that requires. For that to end up in this decorative crescendo, it shows the significance of the decorative for various reasons, partly for pleasure, partly for power. It's a curious human thing that we would go to such length to make these kinds of objects. I haven't really thought about it so much in a contemporary way. But it would be interesting to think about it in terms of how people are using digital skills to make decorative objects.
- CR It's also interesting that you are thinking about these ceramic technologies that were about trying to create these most stable materials, then you are translating it back into something so unstable. That's quite a fascinating relationship.
- PC Yes, and also it's that significance of fiction that never goes away. Particularly with science fiction, and that ability to speak about hard realities. There is often that undercurrent there that connects with this time when there are all these different sorts of crises occurring. Yes, maybe fiction is still a really useful tool for talking about all those things.
- CR That brings me on to talking about the idea of making itself, and thinking about your processes of fabrication. Is the way you make significant to the conceptual content of your work? Could talk about some of the practical methods you employ: their connection to traditional techniques, why that's important to you, and what moves beyond that in terms of how you digest and refigure those traditional connections.
- PC Whether small or large, to some extent it always begins with roughing out the overall structure or form, particularly with a large installation; it's like building up a base layer of clay that I can then add details onto. If it's a very small object, it still begins, to an extent, with a lump of clay and a stem with a wire in it that I need to cover over before I apply the petals or leaf forms. So that's a very rough, physical process, then usually there is a building up of floral parts. Often, a lot of that is done by hand: pressing or almost wiping the clay on my hands and adding those in multiples. Depending on the work, I might also make a series of sprig moulds that connect to particular plants or patterns, especially where I am working from particular decorative designs and need to translate those. So, in that case, I might arrive at the beginning of an installation at least knowing a series of shapes that I'll use you, even if I don't necessarily know how I will put them together. And then, I guess, a lot of it is just a process of accumulation, of being in a space with a material long enough for things to form.

- CR I'm guessing there is a lot of repetition in that kind of work: a lot of repetitive gestures and labour-intensive methods of building things up? What is your experience of that?
- PC Yes, I guess it always requires that labour. Partly it involves planning the day in terms of energy. Often, I will do the really concentrated details in the morning when it's quiet and you have this energy. As the day goes on, it can become more like production work when I am pressing things out, or if I am building up the base. That is rough, physical work that you can still do if you are tired and maybe a bit clumsy. And, if I am working in a public place where people are talking, then I have to allow for less concentrated work when it's busy; it's much easier to do very detailed things when it's quiet and uninterrupted.
- CR As a viewer, there is certainly that sense of time invested in the production of it. Is that important to you, in terms of how viewers connect with the work?
- PC Yes, for me, it's about building up this weight within the work, so sensing the time that has accumulated within its making. I think that's partly why it's important for me to leave the marks of the hand or the body, in terms of understanding it is handmade. To me, that feels obvious, but I think sometimes people think I've dipped flowers in clay or something. And it's partly that I enjoy leaving those raw areas where you can see that it is just clay. I also think, often, there is this battle with time. I've never got enough time to make what I want to make, so the battle is to get enough there to communicate what I want it to. The work needs areas of intense detail, and then there are gaps that are much more roughly worked, but your brain fills in those gaps; you can imagine what could be there. It's about making sure there is enough detail to tell the story.
- CR I was going to ask you about the lifespan of your work, its temporary duration, but I think you have touched on that already. Maybe we could come back to that if we have enough time. I did want to talk about the idea of space in relation to your work and thinking. I'm wondering about the relationship between clay or ceramic objects and space: how they occupy space and what that opens up conceptually. I'm thinking about imagination and how it informs our understanding of space and whether this holds any significance for you?
- PC Yes, it's maybe about this idea that the work doesn't stop at its surface. It feels important to me that it is in the air, that something this small could occupy a whole room in terms of its presence. I think that is determined partly by the environment that you are in, but also by the relationship of your body to what is in that space as well. Maybe sometimes it's about how it forces you to move or behave in relation to it. Without whatever has been made being within that space, you would probably walk through it, or encounter the space in a very different way. So, I do think the work has the potential to change the reading of a space.

But it's also a very hard thing to define. I think we often think of sculpture in too solid terms. That's only a part of it; its presence is way bigger than its material.

CR I'm wondering how clay material itself plays into that, in terms of how it opens up an imaginative space? What is the relationship between clay substance and imagination? Is there a mutuality there that is productive?

PC Certainly in terms of it being raw material: that contributes a particular feeling within a space, in a different way to if it was fired or coloured clay. But I think regardless of what it is—even if it was a highly glazed, glossy piece—clay still gives you a very particular experience. You know, like knowing how the material might behave, that it is breakable, or that it is still moving. I guess all those things come into play.

CR I'm interested in the relationship between some of your pieces and the sites in which they are situated. I'm thinking of works like *After the Death of the Bear*, *Scenes from a Future History of Ornament*, and *Antediluvian Swag*.⁹⁴² How much does context inform your approach to making these pieces? And how do they function within those specific sites, as opposed to works that are situated within a gallery environment?

PC Certainly, I often find it easier to have a place that gives that kind of information. There are lots of threads that run through everything, but usually, the site gives things a focus for a particular place. Maybe it makes me think more particularly about one aspect, but it works in other ways as well. There are often certain histories connected to the site, particularly if it's a museum or an object in a collection. But often, there are the physical possibilities of a site, especially in a place like Roche Court; it gave a very definite frame to the work. It's something to play on and react against. And recently, that's become very interesting thinking about that piece [*Antediluvian Swag*] in terms of me making it elsewhere. I'm also aware that it can be like a kind of crutch at times because you are borrowing so much from what already exists when it's a non-white cube kind of space. Maybe that really tests what the work is doing when you have to translate it elsewhere? I've not really done that much, but I'm quite interested in that in some ways.

With *Antediluvian Swag*, I started thinking about the word antediluvian and this sense of before the flood. It was built from pre-historic plants, and I was thinking of the climate of that landscape, and then thinking of the climate of now, of perhaps this moment before another flood. That was a lot to do with where I started that work, but it became much more blended with where it was situated, something you expected to find there. The plants were slightly different, but I

⁹⁴² *After the Death of the Bear* was made for The British Ceramics Biennial, Stoke-on-Trent in 2013. *Scenes from a Future History of Ornament* was made for the ceramics exhibition *Fragile?* curated by The National Museum of Wales, Cardiff in 2015. *Antediluvian Swag* was made and situated in the grounds of the Roche Court Sculpture Park, Wiltshire, UK as part of the 'Material Language' exhibition in 2016.

don't know how many people made the connection to it being antediluvian. I feel with the new version that I might make, maybe that's a chance to push that aspect of it further. It certainly won't be an identical piece though.

CR Is *Antediluvian Swag* the only piece of your work that has been situated within an actual landscape? And did you feel something interesting occurred through that exchange between decorative, handmade plant structures and the real?

PC Yes, it is one of the few things I have made outside, and it was almost like this hybrid space; it was outside, but also architectural. Usually, I struggle to put anything completely outside. Partly, it's difficult in a practical way, but there is almost a sense of competition too. A garden or landscape is so complex in terms of textures and colours, and all these elements that are going on. To then place something within that, it very easily becomes lost; it usually feels tiny. So, I find it quite a difficult thing to do. I did make a few test pieces at Camden Arts Centre when I was there in the garden, but, again, they were mostly worked over the paths, which are built. Certainly, the records I have of those pieces are photographs, and I edited a lot of the other stuff out. Maybe seeing them through photographs gives you a much different sense than within the garden, where they probably felt much more lost than comes across in the images. But I did enjoy that chance with Roche Court for viewers to experience it in that environment with the breeze and the sounds. It was amazing to have that alongside the work. That space allowed me to do that in a way; had it been completely in nature, it would have been difficult.

CR It was interesting to have them so closely connected. Although it was framed by the architecture, you could still experience those two different types of spaces simultaneously.

PC The only other thing I can think of that had that, to some extent, was *Source*, a piece I made at the museum in Bornholm. It was on the wall and made in ochre-coloured clay. But then there is this very small channel of water running through the museum; it's built on the top of the cliff and there is a spring that runs down. It's a beautiful building; this channel goes down the stairs and through the museum, and they allow it to run with water, so there was that sound. And it's a sky-lit space in that area of the museum; it's a bit like a greenhouse, and it had this sound of the water. I guess it brought some of the atmosphere of the outside to that work, even though it was in this visually very clean space.

CR I was wondering if we could talk about certain works that might be useful for developing my ideas? I'm interested in *Ornamental Chronology* and I would love to hear about the concept behind it. What led you to make that work, in that space, as part of that group exhibition?

PC Well, I thought about the whole object as a form of timeline because I was working onto the rope. I'd done a couple of other pieces on a pulley before, but not floral or more decorative things. I was looking partly at pattern, so there's quite a lot of pattern—there were flowers, but then it would move into scrolling, and there were quite a lot of beads on it as well. I was looking at traditional European and Turkish designs, and blurring those together, which often happens in objects anyway. It was botanical, but more towards the decorative side than plants. I was also working with, I think, five different clay bodies that were from different areas in Turkey. There were some strong red clays and an ochre one, and then more grey, lighter clays. It felt important to have that, because some of the colours were very different from any clay we could get here. Some of the reds looked almost as if they had paprika in them or something. So it gave me that chance to connect with the ground of the place where it was. The exhibition was thinking about contemporary ceramics and different forms of practice that are part of that, so I wanted to highlight the ephemerality of it. You could see, looking at it, that there was only one way that it was going to come down, which would be to break it. That also felt important. I'd tied the rope off at a height that was accessible, so you were aware of how easy it would be to go up and untie it; you were aware of its fate in a way. That was important.

CR And the lighting, was that an important factor in the development of the piece?

PC Well that was partly dictated by the work around it needing lighting in a certain way, so it was darker. But it was interesting to have the shadows. Certainly, that made you aware of where you were in relation to the work as you walked around it. It was hung only a few feet off the ground, so there was a tense point between the tip of the material and its shadow. Lighting accentuates those things that are already there, it gives you another way of looking at them.

CR Am I right that you are participating in a show somewhere in Europe this September?

PC Yes, but they want me to install the work in July and it's in Milan. I'm still trying to figure out if that will be doable. It is for this competition [European Ceramic Context, 2018], and that's where I will try and remake *Swag*, but a different version of it. That's partly forced because you had to apply with a work that already existed, so I thought it be interesting to test out another version of it. I don't know if I will ever get there; it seems less likely by the day.

CR I also wondered if you could tell me a bit about *Production Line*, which I know is a much earlier work, but I was interested in the idea of time and material that seemed implicit within it. I just wanted to know a bit more about what prompted you to make that work, and what it's about?

PC The first version I made was at Siobhan Davies Studio; it was the exhibition that Clare [Twomey] curated with 60/40. In some ways, it came about by going to the building, which is an amazing space, but at the same time it was quite complicated to work in because it's a functioning building with a lot of people coming and going every day. That led me to this stairwell. The stairs pulled around the space and it felt like somewhere I could work within without getting in anyone's way, yet it was still present within the building. It grew out of thinking about the choreography of making because obviously it was in this dance studio. I first went to the building, and then went to see a performance of a piece at Whitechapel that Siobhan Davies had worked on with another dancer—I forget his name. It was this performance where he moved through the space on, I think, ten plastic cups. He would balance his body and then move these cups, and it was the only way he moved through the room. That really made me think about what movements are produced to fulfil a single task. So, I set up the rope, and then I was there for three days just involved in the same process, but it was this idea of hoisting the work as it was made. Again, it was a form of timeline in some ways, but it was just covered with extruded clay, so it wasn't botanical or anything. It had a sense of being organic, but not a definite thing.

I made that in 2011, and then I began this commission with the Contemporary Art Society to work with four museums that wanted to acquire a piece of work. The conversations went on for about two years—what it would be, and how to negotiate the fact that it was a joint acquisition between various museums. Had it just been one museum then I probably would have done something more similar to how I normally work. Eventually we agreed that I would make the work in Southampton, and then the other museums would collect the documentation from the project. For a while, I didn't know what I would make, and then I ended up going back to this idea of re-performing the work that I had made at Siobhan Davies, just because it felt very strange to be inventing a work specifically for the collection. To figure out how to collect something that had already existed felt like a more important process otherwise it would have felt too self-conscious. You know, what do you make when you know it's going to go to a museum? So, it gave me a way of working through what needed to be recorded and drawing up the long contract that was written by the Contemporary Art Society in terms of how they all had shared access to the archive material. It was an interesting process to go through.

CR Can you describe the physical work itself for me? I couldn't quite work out how the work functioned from the film on your website. Did it have water dripping down it or was it situated in a container of water and then gradually dissolved? I wasn't quite sure.

PC No, so the piece itself was just built onto the rope, and then beneath that there was a black plinth, which was partly about creating a barrier that would stop people touching it. The plinth also had a gloss black acrylic on the top, so you got

this reflection off the work, and it also made things very visible as they dropped or shed throughout the exhibition. I de-installed the piece directly into a bin of water, so that film you saw on the website was of me taking it down and then dissolving it. It felt that that should be a part of what the work they collected was. So it was documented right from the process of making the piece itself and then this final dissolving. They each had three films and then there was a selection of images taken at various points.

- CR In the piece you made in Cardiff Museum, *Scenes from a Future History of Ornament*, I was interested in the extreme relationships of scale present in that work, and the different processes of looking that that forced. Those tiny landscapes in the boxes, I was so intrigued, as a viewer, to be glimpsing something in an almost voyeuristic manner. Could you talk a little about that?
- PC I'm interested in the sense that what you see from a distance isn't necessarily what you uncover as you get closer to the work. That felt important. I didn't want it to be something that could be seen in two seconds. It requires you to go through and around the work; it requires that movement of the viewer to fully engage with it. And it also shifts that experience of something. You know, you are quite likely to be in a room with other people, and then suddenly to walk into that central space where you may then be seen by other people from the outside. Or you might be in there with someone else. That was combined with these moments of looking into the boxes where you reduced the size of your eye in a way. So, in a different way, it did still immerse you. It created that one to one experience I'm interested in, which was similar to reading the text in the humid reading room that I talked about earlier. In a way, it's very much like reading. It's this experience you have alone; you immerse yourself in those sorts of fictions and at that moment you are alone. Even if you have both read the same book and maybe talked about it, it's certainly a one-to-one experience. Lighting the boxes from the inside, I tried to use that to pull the viewer in and realise there was something inside. That's interesting in terms of how important light is. You do it as you go along, but thinking about how much that changed the work, either in Istanbul or with this piece, lighting certainly elaborates on the idea that you already have.
- CR I'm thinking about the relationship between the space you walked into with *Scenes from a Future History of Ornament*, and the spaces you peered into. What was pulling them together or perhaps creating a separation, apart from the obvious physicality?
- PC Well the enlarged space was on our scale, and it did physically immerse you, you know you had to look up. You were surrounded by it and had that bodily experience.
- CR What were your reference points for that larger space?

- PC The tile-like walls had grown out of looking at fossils, and the patterns and decorative designs that had emerged from fossils. And then again there was this hanging thing in the centre that was almost like a chandelier, but then again not. It was almost an accumulation of natural ornament. And I suppose it was significant that the space itself was built out of scenery, you know, like old theatre scenery. I was thinking about how you were immersed in this kind of stage. But then with the boxes on the outside of the piece, although there was that physical encounter, it was more pulled towards an imaginative encounter, because it revealed the world without letting you fully in. It felt more like the centre was physical and the outer was more imaginative.
- CR You have already mentioned your piece *This Was Now*, at Wolverhampton, but could you expand on this? You mentioned the structure of the piece, and that what had fallen off it and lay underneath the sculpture was just as important, but I wondered if there was anything else that might be important to know about this work? What was the starting point for the piece, and am I right that the documentation of the work was connected to the viewers as well?
- PC That was the first time I involved the audience in recording the work. I was also consciously thinking about how that captures the work in the collection in a new way. I was interested in the way this book of drawings and writing [by the gallery visitors] will leave a physical trace in the collection without the need for the work to remain in any way. When they contacted me to discuss it, it certainly affected my thinking about the project. It perhaps wasn't so obvious from visiting, but the exhibition was parallel to one of Victoria and Albert's albums of watercolours; it was a touring exhibition from the Royal collection. It was a hobby for them to commission watercolours of particular events, or sometimes they were family-themed. And there were a few that Victoria had done herself; they were of partly public and partly private moments. After Albert's death, the watercolours were significant to Victoria as a way of reconnecting with his memory. So it felt that there was so much there in terms of recording these ephemeral moments, but also thinking about painting or drawing and how that maybe compresses time in a different way to photographs. I remember there was one watercolour of a theatre; there was a crowd and the typical red and gold theatre architecture, but you almost had a sense of the atmosphere of that moment—the sound, and the clapping, and all these people. It's like that sense of compressing an hour into an image in a different way to a photograph, which captures that single moment. That was something I was interested in; it just seemed to make sense. I do think that drawing makes people look in a much slower way. Even if you only spend five minutes drawing, it's probably much longer than you might otherwise sit with an artwork. Most people just walk past or take a photo even, rather than looking with their own eyes.
- CR *This Was Now* is an interesting title, how does that connect to the ideas behind the work?

PC I suppose it was so much to do with the recording of the moment of this thing that was constantly shifting. It was like simultaneously dealing with the ever-changing present, but also the memory of it, and how that would exist in the future. I guess there was so much of that kind of time-play going on in terms of what I was doing, what I was asking the public to do, and how that eventually ends up. And then slap bang in the middle there was this huge lockdown period. I think it was open for about three weeks before the gallery closed. I haven't designed the books [of audience drawings] yet, but I am thinking of trying to reflect that in the design of the book, so there might be drawings and then a period of emptiness and then continuation. It ended up being such a weird 'now' that it seemed that should be recorded as well.

CR Yes, a suspended now. And what informed the actual physical shape that it took?

PC They had a lot of pattern books in the museum collection, and particularly a lot for Japanned ware, which was the decorative industry of the area, so, it was partly looking at those. And again, I'm always fascinated by the industrial production of decorative things, that people want it so much that it is worth mass-producing. I still find that interesting. So it started from that. And then, weirdly, it ended up being quite swag-like because of one of the designs I was looking at. On reflection, if I did it again, maybe I would do that differently, but I did enjoy working with the rope as an armature. It increased that sense of instability as I was working over a longer period in quite a public way. It felt interesting to be working in that more unpredictable way, than, say, with a steel armature where it's much more fixed.

Appendix D: Matsunaga, N. (2018). Interview Transcript. Nao Matsunaga interviewed by Catherine Roche at the artist's studio in Tottenham Hale, London. Audio Recording. 6th June, 2018.

CR I thought it might be helpful if you could begin by talking a little about how you arrived at your current practice, in terms of education, training, or any key moments, experiences or inspirations perhaps?

NM Maybe I can start from the beginning? I'm from Osaka, Japan originally, but I moved here when I was twelve to go to this alternative school called Summerhill, and that is why I came to England. If the school had been in Germany I would probably have gone there. My parents are bakers. They were one of the first organic bakers in Japan, and it was when I was at uni I realised how similar to ceramics that is. And I thought I was doing something totally different to my parents.

CR That's interesting. Sam [Bakewell] was talking about the close relationship between dough and clay when I interviewed him yesterday.

NM Yes, so I guess subconsciously there must be a big connection there, but I wasn't really thinking about it so much.

I went to Brighton University to do a wood, metal, plastics and ceramics course—a design crafts course—mainly because I wanted to learn how to make things. It was a three-year course. In the first year, you learnt all about those materials, and in the second year, you got to choose two of them. Initially, I was going to choose wood and metal because that's what all the cool kids were doing, all the cool boys, and I like wood and I like metal. But my tutors at the time—John Colbeck and Alma Boyes—pulled me aside and said I should do ceramics. So I dropped metal and did wood and ceramics, and I still work with those materials predominantly in my practice.

After Brighton University I got a job through my friend making architectural ceramics, or reproductions of it. So often in smaller churches and town halls, what we think of as stone is actually made of clay. In Victorian buildings—not the original Georgian ones—when the Industrial Revolution happened and lots of traditional-style houses were being built, many clay recipes were developed to mimic a certain type of stone. So, you would get a sandstone recipe or a limestone recipe for example. And that is where I learned to make lots of big things in clay. I was in that job for two years. It was part of a hundred and fifty-year-old brick company and they did an offshoot in Brighton. We started painting the floors and making in the workshops, and that was kind of my way to ceramics really.

Even from the days of Brighton Uni, I liked clay material because when it's fired it looks like stone; I really like the permanence of it, the unchangeable quality to it

once it's fired. So really, I only encountered the traditional, formal world of pottery and that kind of thing at the Royal College. It was a real surprise, I was like: 'Of course!' That would have been a big thing for me. In my mind, I mostly treat it, then and now, as a building material. So a material that relates more to architecture, dwelling, or habitats of people: that way of using earth, rather than something to eat off or drink off. So that's where I come from.

CR The knowledge you gained in your job with the architectural ceramic company, mixing these different clay recipes, is that something that feeds into the work now?

NM Not so much the technical aspect, not the chemical compound part of it, but there was a big technical influence in terms of scale. Making something handheld into human scaled size is a big challenge; it still is a big challenge in ceramics. And it's not just about buying bigger equipment or pressing a button to quickly enlarge something like when scaling things up digitally. It is a physically demanding thing and you use a different methodology to achieve scale in ceramics.

CR That's an interesting as there are huge shifts of scale in your work; you make small, hand-sized objects as well and quite monolithic structures, and sculptures in-between those sizes. Can you talk a little about your relationship between the processes of making and your body in terms of those shifts in scale?

NM I guess now I'm slowly working out what I do, and what happens in my studio in the process of making. While it's quite a cliché, I do try and make the work make itself. I try to not have much conscious mark-making, and I don't have a preconceived idea when I start. And there are so many layers of processes. For example, this piece [*Pull Up, Pull Down, Take Me Away 1*], which is a hollow, round dome, would be made with a lot of sausages of clay, coiled around. I would probably start here [pointing to the middle section of the structure], and at this point, I wouldn't know which way up it goes, or whether the circles might be on the wall. I would probably only build fifteen or twenty-centimetre sections at a time because it flops; it's too soft for it to hold its shape so it needs to dry a little bit. I would have two, three or four of those on the go at a time. Each one would start doing things to each other, or some of them might flop. I would be sad for about five seconds, and then I would say: 'Ok now I have something else to work with.' That's just one of the processes. Then there is the process of smoothing or texturing and also mark making on top, and then glazing and firing, and after firing, attaching different parts to it to make it a whole. So, what I do with my practice a lot now is to be involved with every process that comes along, and to either have conscious decision-making and be involved with that part of the process, or to be standing back from it.

A lot of how I work in ceramics is based around what I studied at the Royal College, and how to fight it really. The basis of the ceramics education I had—

although it wasn't a conscious thing by the teachers—was generally all centred on making industrial-scale plates and cups and so on. So all of the mechanisms that go into studying firing and drying and all of that was rooted in that focus. Whereas if you are making sculpture, loads of those things don't concern you, but other elements do. And I'm not saying it's bad that I know this; I think it's really important to have learned it. But to know what I need from a material, and to know what it is that I'm doing at a given moment, and whether I do something about it or not, is really important to me. When I'm here making things, I'm always listening to music and I'm kind of half dancing, and I'm trying to get into this trance zone of just letting things happen. When I'm building, and things are happening, all decisions are really obvious to me. You know, I'm not doing anything super difficult or super thoughtful when I am making. I just want things to be so obvious that it seems natural that that piece goes this way. And of course, it's about this height instead of that height. So often, in a funny, jokey way, I always say my loose, freer pieces are like if a caveman made music videos, but they didn't have the equipment. If they just had clay and the chanting and the music, then that [pointing to work] would be what it would look like, because I do consider ceramics and clay a fantastic recorder of movement. It's like freezing time, or a moment in time. So, if what I'm doing is a lot of dance-type movement and mark-making comes through that, then that's what it's recording. So that's how I approach it.

- CR Tim Ingold talks about the maker as part of the 'material flow' that occurs during the making process. This seems relevant in terms of your approach of letting the work make itself? He also talks of the viewer as going on a journey with the maker through the process of viewing. How might this relate to what you do?
- NM Well, another big thing that I've noticed in my practice is that I am the first viewer in a way. What I try to do—although it's very hard—but if I'm trying to let the work make itself then I need to know exactly what the work is doing. I need to know what is in front of me, not filtered by my idea of what I was intending to make, or what kind of artist that I think I am, or what sort of thing should happen with this particular material.
- CR So how do you manage that shift?
- NM I do a lot of simple things, like turning a piece upside down. There are ways of tripping myself up, because if I am making things and I'm on a roll, then I'll just keep going. Lots of pieces I've made are upside down or on their side, and I don't quite know what this has done until the end. And lots of things are also fired upside down or on their sides, so the glazes are not sitting in the way you might expect, and the gravity, it seems, is pulling it one way and another. But with a material like ceramics, what often ends up happening is that from it being a lump of clay, every step of the process you take, to me, feels like you are closing

opportunities. The options of it being anything are limited every time the process goes around. So what I'm trying to do with my process is keep the options open.

So a big part of why I work with wood is that I don't want the process to end when the pieces come out of the kiln. The traditional, unspoken rule seems to be that when things come out of the kiln they are finished and nice and shiny. If things are not glazed then they are not seen as finished; no one says it, but it's unspoken within ceramics education. So I was kind of reacting against that. Making holes like this, or even drilling holes like in this piece, [*Something That Means Something*, 2018], is partly mark-making and working with the composition of the pieces, but it also leaves options open to attach wooden things, like those on the wall, and these small clay pieces. This is white porcelain ceramic, screwed onto painted plywood, so it could still go anywhere. It could be a wall hanging piece, or it could end up being massive, because this is quite a small bit of ceramic, the same as this, but when put together, this is now a human-scale piece rather than a tabletop piece.

CR And that also fits in with the idea that materials are always in process, that there is never an endpoint, doesn't it? It can always move beyond the state that is in at any given time.

NM Yes, and that's part of my way of working. So these are finished pieces because these have been shown [pointing to *As Long As We Are Together* (2016)]. But I have so many pieces that are ninety-nine percent finished, or perhaps only twenty per cent finished. I like seeing things laid out when I am working because I'm waiting for that obvious click in my head that tells me, that has to go with this. Often when I am working with the clay part, it's the same process as when I am carving a bit of wood. I am making parts of something, and that might trigger something else to become part of something that is totally of itself. It's also about taking pressure off the process and not being precious about anything; if things break then I can use parts of it. So, these are fallen-off pieces of glaze that I can use in the future, and that bucket over there is full of broken shards of clay that will definitely be part of something.

CR There seems to be irreverence—and I don't mean this in a negative way—to material hierarchies in your work? Porcelain meets plywood for instance?

NM Yes, and glue. This is homemade paint, which is a relatively new thing for me. I was interested in what glazes were doing for me. I was always quite scared of glazing, or using glaze, when I was a student, and I fought it because I was against things having to be glazed for it to be considered worthy or a finished product. But also, it was such a big unknown, such a daunting world of chemicals and temperatures. That's when I started making a lot of texturing of surfaces so that I didn't have to glaze. I could create some kind of texture or visual markers where glaze didn't have to exist. But about four or five years ago I was on a residency at

KHiO, the National Academy of Art, Oslo, Norway, and they had fantastic glaze facilities. I was there for three months so I thought I would try out glazing and if it didn't work, or if I couldn't get something out of it, then that was fine, I wouldn't do it. But I couldn't keep ignoring glaze, because fifty percent, maybe even seventy percent of the time when people talk about ceramics and clay, they actually mean glaze. And what we mostly encounter in the world of objects, as in products, cups, tiles etc., we are talking about glaze and the tactility of ceramics. So I had to deal with it because that is what makes it special as well. There is no other surface like it in terms of its permanence and stability. So I came up with this way of glazing in order to make the glaze 'do something.' Glaze is normally liquid, so it's a bit like paint. But I made it into a 'thing' by drying it out and making chunks of it, a bit like a Cadbury chocolate bar or that kind of thing, and then just placing it on top of the form. That surface on *Pull Up, Pull Down, Take Me Away 1*, was just a big sheet that I dried on a plaster bat and then placed on the top of the sculpture and fired at a different temperature.

CR So the glazes aren't shiny. Does that mean that they are fired less high?

NM No, they are fired higher. The glassy glaze on this piece is fired at a lower temperature, otherwise the glassy quality burns out. Nobody has done this really, so I came up with a name: either 'slab glazing' or 'mattress glazing.' I was thinking of mattresses, and of the point when solid things become soft, which I find quite interesting. People throw mattresses away on the street, and for the first couple of days they are still erect, but then they start sagging. I quite liked that, where it's still hard, but it's also soft. And what that started to capture and do for me, which was really exciting, was to make obvious the gravity aspect of the sculpture and capture it. So this interest in gravity, of controlling it and playing with the drips—well I say control, but it's really hard to control—and having that sense of gravity frozen was a big thing for me. And in a way, I'm always dealing with gravity in terms of making things upright that stand and balance.

CR And also turning and twisting the pieces during the glazing process destabilises our perception of gravity?

NM Yes, exactly. So, this is what I call 'room temperature glaze', which is PVA and pigment with bits of clay and sand and all sorts. I had two ceramic pieces like that, of that size, and I thought, I just want to do what glaze does but on wood. So it was that idea of the drips making the piece a whole, you know, disparate parts coming together by one uniting force. A lot of my recent work has been a mixture of wood and clay, like this one [*Kind of White 1*]. That's porcelain there, with different holes, and I didn't know which way it was going to go. And then different wooden sections are screwed on, for example, and the paint is poured on the porcelain and the wood, partly to disguise the screws, but also as mark-making.

- CR While we are still talking about materiality, one of the things that strikes me about your sculptures are the surfaces. I'm interested in the perceptual shift of how I understand the surfaces, knowing that they are ceramic, but often perceiving something different, like chiselled wood. Is that intentional? I'm also interested that the surfaces reference the traces of you and your actions upon the pieces. Can you talk about that?
- NM Yes, and time is implicated in the surfaces as well, whether I work really quickly or very slowly.
- CR I'm interested in thinking about craft, and how visible craft processes in ceramic sculpture might operate for viewers. The process of making is very evident in much of your work. Are you purposefully playing with how audiences engage with the idea of making by creating ceramic surfaces that mimic other materials and craft processes, such as carved wood and stone? Can you talk about that?
- NM Well every time I work with wood, I am thinking what would I do if it was clay, and vice versa. So I do a lot of woodcarving to make it look more like wood. I am consciously trying not to know what I am going to make visually, and so the things one can control become quite limited. One thing that I can control is speed: the time spent on a particular piece and the speed of mark-making. The other is distance, so working with a stick from far away is very different to the marks I make if I am close up. It's mixing up these two things; both things I find important. That slow, time-consuming, traditional craft way of working: the more time you spend with it the more value it has, or it is assumed to have. But I also think that the other aspect of craft is 'fast craft', which is very big in Japan actually: you train for fifty years just to have this five-second brushstroke. That is as important as whoever does the most amazing gold leafing. I want to work with both of those things. Sometimes they happen in one piece and other times not, but I think they are equally interesting. I'm not just using those methods because I find them interesting. I think there is something there that relates to other parts of my practice; there is something interesting in the way we look at things. With all materials and all processes, I feel my eyes can roughly guess how long something takes to make: whether something takes a very long time or a short time. And I think that is connected to the way some people judge art when they say: 'Oh my son could do that,' the way value is placed upon labour. I'm interested in how our eyes do that, how they make those judgements, and what happens if I try to control some aspects of that within one piece, or within a body of work. Some things are much quicker than others, some are absolutely accidental, and some are controlled accidents. I would have sawn these pieces with a wood saw when it was a bit dry, and I then built up with textured pieces, so it is really using ceramics as wood.
- CR I think that's fascinating.

- NM When it comes to wood, I don't try to think of what to make. For example, with that red and yellow sprayed piece over there, I was carving a piece of B&Q 2x2 wood, mindlessly hacking away with a machete that I bought in Japan—I also have a handaxe that I use for carving wood—thinking what should I make? What happened was really interesting. Because there are knots in the wood and they are different grades—some parts are harder and they don't carve as well as the softer parts—what I was doing totally unintentionally, but I was letting it happen, was that I was starting to reveal that particular piece of wood's characteristics, the structural visual element of it. Now I'm saying that I was giving that particular industrial wood material its 'woodness' back by going through this process. And that is quite similar to how I work with ceramic. Things are allowed to happen and it's how I react to what is happening at that point.
- CR I'm interested in the relationship between visual perception and tactile perception and the idea that just by looking at something you can feel as though you have had a tactile experience. Do you consider the relationship between different sensory potentials in your work, and if so, in what way?
- NM Yes, I think that visual trickery is in all of our art, and is what joins us. I recently took a trip to Scotland and there was a series of mountains called *The Sleeping Beauty*. I like it when local people say, 'Oh that's the giant's shoulder', or, 'the troll's foot is there', or 'that cloud looks like a spitfire.' Our eyes are keen to see pretty much anything. Especially if it is an anthropomorphic form, you just need that little trigger. And for me, masks and faces have been that trigger, so now you are starting to see this bend in the branch as a leg crossing perhaps. So this fact that our eyes can do that is connected to a broader thing that I am interested in.
- CR You have talked a lot about process and making and that it's very much an intuitive act for you where you are in conversation with the materials, exploring what they will offer. I am interested to also hear about your conceptual motivations beyond the physicality of the making process, what are the ideas that drive your work?
- NM I am a product of my era, which is this globalised world that is about celebrating diversity. But throughout my teenage years and adult life, I've always been different. I look, and I am, from somewhere else, both here and when I go back to Japan. So that has a massive impact on someone's formative development, both in practice and in life. As much as possible, I try to bring my practice and my life closer together, so what I do with my son, or in my life, would feed back into my practice and vice versa. I started to become a little suspicious of this idea of celebrating diversity. I always think we should celebrate similarities that we are essentially the same; we eat and think and do similar things given the same circumstances. I was looking through history books and art history books, and wondering if I could find a thread that would connect not one nation, or two nations, but all of humanity. I went deeper and deeper, and further and further

back in time until I reached prehistoric and Neolithic axes and tools that were made five thousand years ago in France. What interested me was that they are almost identical to the ones made five thousand years ago in China, so there was something there.

In my practice, I have been coming back from that point of archetypal things. Whenever I am looking for certain kinds of research material or inspiration, it's always something that is profoundly human and universal. Everything that I have talked about—like gravity, or this eye/labour mechanism that we have—is about the universal. I don't think I would be interested in any research material if it was restricted to a particular place, people, gender or age. I want my work to come from somewhere that is much more universal. And I think within sculpture and object making that has been neglected in the last thirty or forty years. So, in a sense, I am reviving certain elements of classical sculpture, modernist sculpture; ideas about mass, weight, balance and physicality are important. I'm not trying to deal with images of things and the idea of images. I'm not against that, but I think that it is a very crowded field, with people doing a lot of great work, and I don't know if I can add anything particularly new. I decided very early on in my university days that I didn't want to use ready-mades. I wanted to create a language of my own that had potential meanings, or a potential hook into the visual world we live in, rather than mixing bits together to make a new one. And again, similarly, it was a busy field with ready-mades. I also wanted to see if I could make things that were powerful and energetic enough to be able to stand by themselves without the need for the history of visual culture. I know that is quite naive because everything is connected to other things, and you can't be completely cut off from visual culture, but I still try not to overtly reference a certain style or period or even borrow from it.

CR One of the things that drew me to your work is that it seemed to connect with themes that I am exploring such as collective consciousness and the possibility of shared perspectives of reality. It is very interesting that you mentioned the hand-axe. Tim Ingold poses the idea that because the form of the prehistoric handaxe stayed unchanged for millennia, then maybe its making was instinctual, a genetically coded activity, like beavers making a damn, or birds making a nest.

NM The whole idea of progress, of things changing to make things better, is a myth that we live. Every little disappointment I have in life I connect to this. I was told that the world is becoming a better place, but it is completely the opposite. This idea of progress, it's such a well-oiled machine in a capitalist society that it's hard to separate the two. Perhaps the idea of progress didn't always exist, and people thought they were living in the best period. Or maybe it used to be better in the past, or maybe no one even thought about it. I think looking at it from our perspective is a particular thing. But some people argue that it's happening again, because you go to loads of cities around the world and they look the same; towns in England, Wales and Scotland, they all have the same shops. So many things are

the same, but the perceived differences are political, I think. I'm looking at it from that point of view really.

CR I'm interested in the idea of tacit knowledge in relation to viewers who perhaps have no understanding of, or familiarity, with making ceramics. Is there something that ceramic materiality or clay offers more than other materials do you think? Maybe because it is such a base material—everyone has stuck their fingers in mud—perhaps there is a tacit sensibility there?

NM Yes, but I think the same is true of wood as well. And certain types of fabric as well: maybe cotton or linen? Yes, I think ceramics is one of perhaps only a handful of materials that has this special quality for humans. Absolutely.

CR And does your work engage with that, do you think?

NM Yes, I want to make things that ideally can both be new and old, so you feel a sense of longing or sense of something you've seen or felt before, but you have never seen or felt before. That sort of in-between space is what I am aiming for really. And I think people are doing it, it's just what the media picks up on is mainly based on the idea of image. There are lots of people doing interesting, quite aggressive works and I think we are going through that phase perhaps, and that's maybe where the interest in ceramics comes from. Because when we were studying ceramics in the late 90s, just after the YBA [Young British Artists], it was not fashionable and I think quite a few of us were potentially resentful. I don't think I really had a choice—and even if I did have a choice, it was a choice I made at sixteen—whether to go on to a certain type of art course. It is interesting how the world revolves that way, but I just concentrate on trying to get better and think about how I can be a good artist and make things that are powerful.

CR In addition to thinking about their sensory qualities and the potential of craft visibility, I am also thinking about the space of clay and ceramic artwork in my research and wondered if you think about your work in relation to space at all?

NM Physical space?

CR Yes, physical space in relation to the body, and in relation to the space that the artworks inhabit when they are shown, but also conceptual, or imaginative space.

NM People react so strongly to the sound of ceramic breaking and glass actually. Even if you are sitting in a café with a railway going right above it, when somebody drops a glass everybody reacts. It is the senses picking up additional things from the material, rather than the decimal level of noise. I always found that to be interesting.

- CR I wanted to ask you about the idea of imaginative space. I'm just thinking about your interest in ceremonial objects, and wondering if you consider work to transition between material and imaginative space?
- NM Yes, definitely. Originally, I wanted to work with ceremonial objects and those kinds of religious artefacts as a reaction against the everyday; I wasn't interested in the everyday. I wanted to work out what makes certain spaces and objects special compared to others. If you break down the mechanism of what it does, and what it means for something to be special, where does that touch in terms of how we think about things? So yes, I was, and still am, not really into the word spiritual, but I do think that when we talk about power and energy in terms of objects, I am very aware of the word and the connotations. It is about trying to get somewhere else, and I do that in my practice when I say I'm trying to let the work make itself; I'm trying to get the work to take me somewhere that I wouldn't have gone to through logical thinking. So that is sort of like mediation in some ways, that way of thinking around things and letting things happen. I am doing stuff, but I'm not necessarily being productive in a planned, linear way, I'm going around things, or underneath them.
- CR Various theorists have explored the idea of artworks operating as gathering points, and I'm thinking of your sculptures in relation to this idea of drawing or gathering things together, through the intimate space of the body perhaps, but also through time—past and present, bodies now, bodies then. I wondered if you feel that this idea of gathering seems a relevant thing to think about in terms of your work?
- NM Do you mean like grouping things?
- CR Well, more that they seem to connect to different times. There is a sense of something primordial, but they are also very present in their materiality, so you could say that there seems to be a gathering of different spaces in terms of time perhaps?
- NM Well, I think not just in my work, but everything exists for multiple reasons. Nothing happens because of one reason. I want my work to be doing at least two or three things. And there are probably four, five or six things that I haven't even noticed yet: things that I'm open to, and that I haven't realised, and that I'm grateful to find out. All of the things we talked about, in terms of my childhood and how I look at the world, all of that I want to be distilled in my practice. But at the same time, I am very conscious of not having to do everything in one piece, because that then becomes very difficult and stifling, and precious. I'm happy for my work to be about two or three things, not ten. I have these vague ideas that I can add to. The kind of making I do, or the material I use, and the way I use it could talk about primitive cultures. But if I use it in another way, it could talk more about being a ceremonial thing, or they could sort of merge. Those things I

have talked about today are my go-to bookshelf in my head, but I don't feel I have to use all of them at all times. But if you see the breadth of the stuff that I do, then it should resonate in that way. I guess they are the marker points of my practice, but I'm not necessarily sending out a big message—well maybe I am, but I don't feel like it. So I'm not saying go and live in a cave.

CR Of course! But when I think about space, I'm not thinking of the actual physical space, I'm thinking about the space that maybe they project, and all these things gather together for viewers, and we are able to access that.

NM Yes, I think of them as access points really. Or like markers on the way to somewhere, but the viewer has the actual path of walking.

Appendix E: Murphy, I. (2018). Interview transcript. Ingrid Murphy interviewed by Catherine Roche at the artist's studio, St. Martin de Ribérac, Dordogne, France. Audio Recording. 31st July 2018.

CR The thing that seems to have shifted most since we last talked in 2014 is your full engagement with digital technologies within your practice now. Can you pinpoint when your practice shifted, or was it a gradual transition? How did this shift manifest in your work?

IM It was probably in 2010/2011 when I was working on the VLE [Virtual Learning Environment] for teaching ceramics. This was when things like YouTube and what they called 'Crowd Accumulation Innovation' happened, where people were beginning to use the Internet as a teaching tool. That was fascinating for me because it was all about open-source philosophy, which led me to start looking at open-source technology and, in greater detail, at the maker movement. At that time 3D scanning was quite nascent. I found the idea of capturing objects digitally and then 3D printing them fascinating. That transition to atoms and bits, and bits to atoms was the first thing that really intrigued me technologically—what that would enable us to do. If you are scanning and working digitally you don't deal with gravity and you have instant scalability, which is fascinating, especially when you are constantly dealing with heavy moulds and moving objects around. The fact that you can transform, mutate or edit an object without physically doing anything to the thing itself gives you a whole host of variability. So, it was the potential of these technologies that I was attracted to in the first instance.

That got me interested in looking at other technologies, and more recently at the QR code, which is a very simple link I started using in 2011. I think I started using QR codes and image recognition markers for augmented reality probably a year or two later. The interesting thing was how we bridge that gap between physical and digital. The most important shift for me in my practice, in terms of new technology, has been trying to move away from the use of the screen so that the objects themselves become the interface; this has become one of the most significant features of my work. That is where physical computing comes in so that the objects themselves become sensors or actuators, as opposed to the user needing another device. That changes the level of engagement. For me, it's all about how technology can help us have a different type of perception of an object or a maybe more enhanced perception of an object.

CR That introduces the idea of materiality. In a previous discussion you mentioned that augmented reality provides an alternative means of exploring materiality, so could you talk a little more about materiality in relation to new technologies within your work, and maybe also more generally? How do you understand materiality in terms of the digital? And the idea of the ceramic/technology interface, how does this impact the idea of materiality?

IM The thing about augmented reality specifically, is that even though it is a digital mechanism—a digital overlay onto a physical artefact—it can reveal elements of facture, or provenance, or data, or something else. This also leads to a societal shift from one of material acquisition to one of experiential engagement. How can a crafted object provide this? It is quite a simple overlay, and therefore almost mechanistic in that approach. As I have gone on, what fascinates me is not so much that you can use technology to reveal the materials that you are making with, but the materiality of the technology itself. That's very apposite when you work with physical computing because you are building elements and dealing with base materials like copper and rare precious metals that make up the microprocessors. That grasp of materiality is significant for understanding these things like you would craft skills such as soldering, or the fact that we can produce our own PCB boards [printed circuit boards] so you can design something from scratch. Making the electronics is similar to making a piece of ceramics. You can get to that base *prima materia* of electronics as easily as you can get to the *prima materia* of clay; the commonality between technology and ceramics is much more meshed than you think. Even if I am working with a technologist—say, for example, we are making an optical stylus to read dinner plates on a gramophone—then we are inventing something. Yes, it might exist in the same way a plate exists, but you are actually sitting there with wires, LEDs, a soldering iron and a speaker and you're hacking or building something for the first time, and it's changing an iterative process. It's not something you can buy off the shelf, and it's not black box electronics. So, the materiality of physical computing, and physical making with clay are incredibly similar, and that's been a huge change in my understanding of my practice.

The idea of digital materiality also becomes interesting if you are asking people to have interactions. For example, with this IOT [Internet of Things] hand that you touch, every time contact is made with it, it sends a message to a Raspberry Pi currently sitting in a garage in Newport, Wales.⁹⁴³ A message will appear on that screen—nobody will necessarily see it—and it will bounce a message back to the receiving IOT hand and turn the light on there. For every interaction, there is a record, or a trace of code that will have a time and date stamp on it. I'll be able to know how many people have touched it and to understand things from that data such as the frequency of museum visitors. Those kinds of interactions, where you are asking people to do something, capture traces and that in itself has its own sense of materiality. We are now in a really interesting time where people own a lot of digital content; they own it and yet, it is, in a sense, ephemera.

⁹⁴³ According to Charles Whitmore, 'Originally created in 2012, [...] the Raspberry Pi is a [credit card sized] single-board computer with every processing component of the computer located on a single circuit board. [...] [It] also has IoT technology, allowing it to communicate with other devices connected to the same network. Despite the simplicity of the Raspberry Pi, it's an incredibly versatile computer that can create simple input/output commands, allowing a surprising level of automation.' See: Whitmore, C. (2022). What Is A Raspberry Pi And How Does It Work? *NordVPN*. Available from <https://nordvpn.com/blog/what-is-raspberry-pi/> [Accessed 5 November 2023].

- CR What do you mean by 'own'? Could you give an example?
- IM Your iTunes account. You've bought a lot of music, but who owns it? And I think your images also. We have a huge amount of digital content that pre-digital would have been stored in precious artefacts like photo albums and things like that. Digital content and the Cloud have done away with that. That is fascinating, because having been a pre-internet child, teenager and young adult—only having the internet since my thirties—it has replaced so much of what we had as physical things, and they've all gone. I have a suitcase full of old cameras and recorders and camcorders, and all of it is rendered useless by one small device that I carry in my pocket. So, I think the digital world has changed our relationship with physical artefacts hugely, and that sense of materiality—the materiality of tech—has changed completely. Nowadays, you don't see how anything works. There really is no sense of it. People can't fix their car; if something is broken, then it's broken. You might say it's built-in obsolescence. You can't get in there and repair it nine times out of ten, especially if it's electronics and that changes our understanding of objects. They either work for us or they don't work for us, and our relationship with them has altered because of that, and it hugely affects our relationship with physical things as well.
- CR Does that somehow inform, or is it present within your explorations of the sensory qualities of your work?
- IM Yes, so take technologies that are mostly used in smart devices for the home, like IOT for example. To use it for a crafted object is almost perverse, why would you? But it's interesting to connect people through an object. Augmented reality is usually used for entertainment, advertising or marketing, so it's using the very tools that in a sense remove us from our physical world. It's that perversion that I like. I like that juxtaposition of taking the most ridiculously cutting-edge technology and applying it to the basest of arts, as ceramics is. It's also about it being mundane; it's about that mundane interaction that can actually be quite phenomenal. The ability to shift someone's perception of a 'known' thing can be fundamental. To experience an ordinary and recognisable object in an extraordinary and novel sensorial way is what drives a lot of this work.
- CR That leads me to ask you about the underlying themes or issues in your work?
- IM Since I was a teenager, it's all been about saying the same thing. It's all about stopping us from scanning and making us look: anything that asks us for a moment to engage with an object and understand it slightly differently, or understand somebody's interpretation of that object. I think that is what it is all about for me. It's getting people to stop and engage with things. Before, I used trompe l'oeil, now I use other methods.

Also, getting people to think about the value of objects is critical: to think about mundane things in a different way. I suppose it's almost anti-connoisseurship. Ceramics and collecting is very much about the knowledge you have in that subject area and the knowledge you might have about techniques or processes. As I've gone on, I've really reduced my techniques and palette down to very simple things in ceramics. It's not about trying to put emphasis on making and skill, which a lot of ceramicists do; it's not about that at all. It's about getting people to engage with the object a little bit differently, and maybe then they will see the potential of objects around them.

CR It's interesting that you mentioned skill again. I'm interested that your work does reference craft and ceramic making, and it employs techniques and processes that require a certain level of skill and knowledge, but you have moved beyond any traditional understanding of a crafted object by integrating technology. You started to talk about how you are moving away from craft skill, but there is an implicit reference to it still isn't there?

IM Yes. Obviously, I have to work within the metier that I know, so I use the skills that I know, but I don't think I am skilful, and I don't think that anything I do is about skill. I have a huge knowledge of process, so there is not much I can't do. Many people will hone their skills so that they are incredibly fluent at the end of a process, and I'm not like that. The objects I use frequently pre-exist my intervention or bring other's making to the fore, as in *A Short Conversation About Making*. In this piece the makers' hands illuminate on lithophane dinner plates once the diner sits to use them, demonstrating the hand processes used to make those specific plates.

CR But the idea of making is there, and the physical interactions and skills that are inherent within that?

IM For many people the whole thrill lies in making, whereas for me it lies in how the viewer interacts with the finished artefact; that's where the thrill lies. Everything in between is labour. A lot of decision-making happens through the making for sure; it's not like it's completely conceived beforehand and then executed. But the enjoyment of making is very different in my work now than it used to be. Before I used to be very much *with* the work as I made it, and now I find I'm executing as much as I can to get to an idea that I have fully formed in my head. And because of the nature of this type of work, you don't have the same lengthy periods where you are working so closely with the material. The work is completed in several separate and distinct stages, so you don't have that state of psychological flow that you might have if you were just sitting there doing an iterative process again and again and again. Because all the processes are so bitty and take you in so many different directions: you're scanning, you're 3D printing, then you're taking a cast, or you're finding an artefact, then you're slip-casting. And then you are

making the digital content, and then you're firing, and then you're glazing and then you are meshing the two together somehow.

The use of found ceramic objects, which you might think negates skill, is actually quite the opposite because sometimes working with found objects comes with technical parameters that you have to deal with. For example, because I want to keep the original colour of the little 'found' chai cups that I'm working with, I can't re-fire them as leaving anything exposed re-oxidises in the smoke from the kiln. Or there are certain things I can't do to them because they will shrink or not completely vitrify. So I've made a right headache for myself by using certain found objects. To use those cups taken from the streets of Jaipur as opposed to making my own—which I think would have no degree of authenticity whatsoever—still requires me to have a greater material understanding. If I'd made my own, I wouldn't have to meet all these different technical requirements.

CR So all of those chai cups placed on the map of Jaipur in *Sounds of the Pink City* (2018) are from Jaipur itself?

IM Yes.

CR And they would be vernacular cups used in everyday life?

IM Yes, I took some out of a kiln in Jaipur myself; they were leftover, broken bits. The guy was quite surprised I selected them because he wanted to give me his best pots, and I just wanted those. It was a scorching hot day, and the kiln was on the roof of his house, so I had to go up this terrifying ladder to retrieve these pots. But I knew what I was looking for, having searched high and low for them. I also used found cups from all over the city, with different forms, scales and clays. The pots are from the very streets that the sounds are from; they weren't made here. So it's not a facsimile, it's a revelation. It's about those pots revealing the sounds of the streets they came from. I did a recording outside the potter's house and it's one of the sounds you can hear when you touch a pot. But to make the pots conductive I had to do all sorts of interventions. I either glaze them or gild them in their entirety, otherwise, they are bright orange and don't fit with the others, or they are fractured and segments have to be gilded. In this case, I have to reduce the glaze so I can fire them without them shrinking or a segment won't fit back in. Using found objects looks easier than it is—people say, 'Oh you didn't even make those', and I think there is a real issue with that, that it somehow has less value. That's the struggle I always have.⁹⁴⁴

⁹⁴⁴ This interview took place whilst the artist was still in the process of making work for her 2019 solo touring exhibition *Seen and Unseen*, as part of the *Language of Clay* series of exhibitions. Since completing this body of work, Murphy is now able to reflect on the experience of it functioning within an exhibition environment. She notes that in this instance, 'this was not really a struggle once the work was complete. Viewers enjoyed the authenticity. Karen Barad's notion of 'Material Historicity' and Bruce Sterling's ideas about objects as meta history generators are key references here.'

CR Do you think that this struggle you have maybe comes from within the ceramic community, whereas if you show within the context of art, it isn't such an issue?

IM Yes, but also when you work within a technological context it's no issue at all.

CR That leads me to ask you about the different strategies you work with—craft, technology and art. Your work includes all these approaches; it has a trans-disciplinary character and shifts between those frames. So how do you identify yourself as a maker and where do you position practice?

IM I try not to be pigeonholed I suppose. I deliberately don't use the term craft in my work, and I never use the term fine art. I don't ever remember writing a statement where I say this is fine art. I talk about the relationship between technology and a crafted object, as in it is 'crafted' rather than 'craft'. Generally, the objects are crafted, and that's a distinction I make because I am using it as an adjective rather than a noun. I try and avoid all of that as best I can. It's interesting because the shows my work goes into are generally craft shows or ceramic shows—although not always—so I suppose I am benefitting from being an outlier in the practice of ceramics. I'm not in *Kinetica* and exhibitions like that—that's a technology and interactive art show—but I am doing the EASTNDC Project, which is pure technology and interactive arts. It's a European project of mostly sound artists—no ceramicists and no material artists other than me in the whole group. I think when we start talking about disciplines it implies divisions and dualities that don't exist for me, and they never have.

I'd happily use 'design'. I'm designing interactions, but when you take what I do and apply it to an object I've made, suddenly it's ceramics or its craft. You take the same interaction and put it in a materials library, and it's interaction design. To me, it's the same concept and it's the same process. It's overlaying digital content onto physical objects: the same idea applied in two different ways, in completely different fields. But if you are talking specifically about my practice as opposed to other research projects, then it will always be object-oriented because that's what it is for me—that love of objects. But I do have a bit of an issue with making a lot of new objects when there are so many out there. I'm casting up loads of Staffordshire dogs right now, but do I need loads of dogs when the world is already full of them? Could I just fill the gallery full of found dogs and do the interventions I want to on people's pre-owned objects? Does it make a huge difference that I've made them?

CR And you haven't worked that out yet?

IM No I haven't worked that out; that's always the dilemma for me. I did make a piece [Syn-Tea-Sizer] for the *Touchstone* exhibition in Ireland, which used a Wade gold tea service with an integrated synthesiser, so I didn't make any of the

objects.⁹⁴⁵ I was happy with the piece and it went off into a ceramic exhibition, but when I saw it in that exhibition I felt really uncomfortable about it being there because I hadn't made the pieces.

CR And did that surprise you?

IM Yes, and I felt a bit as though I was being judged. But making the pieces wouldn't have changed the piece in the slightest.

CR But these are the invisible boundaries that we operate within.

IM If I had made a mould of the existing pieces and cast them all, I wouldn't have changed them—they were exactly what I wanted. But that probably would have increased its sense of market value for a lot of people.

CR But how your work operates for audiences, that's a different thing isn't it? And that's something that I'm keen to discuss. I'd love to hear how you think your interactions operate outside of your own experience? Once your works are in the world, what do you want or hope for them?

IM Everything I do is either telling a story or trying to teach somebody something. As I've got older, the objects have become more narrative, less abstract. I used to want to create timeless objects, and now I'm quite the opposite. I want to make objects that are very much of the time they are in. What I thought would be a real failing of work made from digital technologies, due to the fast pace of Moore's law, has actually become what I like about it.⁹⁴⁶ You take a piece of ceramics: it's existed for millennia and it can continue to do so, and the technologies that have made it have also existed for millennia. But you make a QR-coded piece linked to match.com say, and that site might not exist next year. Or you make a scanned piece using 123D Catch technology, which I have done, and that is now gone. There is a huge risk in making work with a technology that quickly becomes obsolete: a particularly perilous activity when working with open-source technology. What I have ended up doing is capturing the history of emerging technologies through this engagement, and that becomes interesting. I'm less interested in the timeless endurance; that kind of change doesn't happen in ceramics.

CR Do you find that interface of timeless technology with the shifting, continual development of new technologies of interest at all?

⁹⁴⁵ *Touchstone* was a ceramics focused exhibition held at Farmleigh Gallery, Dublin in 2017. The exhibition featured thirty-six Irish makers working in clay.

⁹⁴⁶ Moore's Law relates to continual incremental advances in computing technology. See: Roser, M., Ritchie, H., and Mathieu, E. (2023). What is Moore's Law? *Our World In Data*. Available from <https://ourworldindata.org/moores-law> [Accessed 5 November 2023].

IM Oh, hugely. I think it is a fantastic juxtaposition, and by bringing those two things together you begin to realise that the similarities are also there, just the timelines are just different. I was reading just this morning about ceramic nozzles that make nano-bubbles that were invented by accident by a tiny Japanese company. They think it will revolutionise marine life. Again, it's just a piece of ceramic with jet air going through it. This is a new application for something purely material-based in traditional ceramics, and it's taken us till 2018 to figure out. Apparently, it's extraordinary what it can do. So, I think material science is fascinating.

I've been mixing glaze up all morning and putting it on a piece of ceramic to fire it up and vitrify it into glass—that's still amazing to me. It's extraordinary technology. Just this morning I've cast up that three-thousand-year-old pot—the first replica of it is sitting outside in its mould. I took that pot, and I've scanned it and handled it; I know that pot upside down and inside out now because I've made an accurate replica of it. I'm not harming the original, I'm keeping that safe, but I feel that I now fully understand how it was made from the amount of handling I've done. It's three thousand years old and I'm connected with that. And by replicating it I'm getting a different understanding of it than I would have from just looking at it, or maybe modelling it or drawing it. What I do with it will reveal other interesting things, because I'm going to break it and record it, and do all sorts of different things with it. And that timeline is quite interesting, isn't it? The person who made that used some sort of wheel and that was the technology of their time.

CR I'm interested in whether a culturally, socially, or temporarily charged essence is implicit within ceramic objects. Your work seems to talk about that, particularly *Things Men Have Made*, one of the first works that stimulated my current research. The kind of objects that you are reusing and re-engaging with, whether they are three thousand years old or two hundred years old, carry that sense of time don't they?

IM New technology is very fast-paced; all of these things are very instantaneous, and objects are still. One of the issues I've always struggled with is the attractive quality that is the stillness of ceramics. All my earlier work had a lot to do with still life: the dynamism that is potent within an object and how that can be revealed. By using the material understanding that I have—knowing that bone china is translucent, or certain qualities of ceramics will make certain sounds, or that gold is highly conductive and can therefore be used as a sensor—by understanding these things I can make a still object more dynamic. Using the language of technology also reveals a lot, like when I filmed people handling the jug for *Things Men Have Made*. I'm currently filming people handling the three-thousand-year-old pot, and I'm telling them it's three thousand years old as I film them. Suddenly they are holding a thing of value, and they either believe you or they don't believe you, because we have very little authenticity in our lives at the moment, we don't trust anything. You give somebody a pot and tell them it's

three thousand years old, and they'll either want you to take it away because they don't trust themselves not to break it, or they completely disbelieve you and start throwing it around to see your reaction.

CR What will happen with those filmed reactions? How will you use them?

IM I think I'm going to show that object alongside a screen and have these snippets of many people's reactions with the pot. The pot then becomes a key piece. I'm also going to be making many different copies of it across the ceramic range, then breaking them and recording the sound: slowing the sound right down and then repairing them,⁹⁴⁷ so when you touch the repairs you hear the sound. The very thing we fear will happen to that pot—dropping it and breaking it—is the thing that I will do to make something beautiful. Doing this will help us understand that when it hits the ground, terracotta sounds like a base orchestra tuning up, whereas when bone china hits the ground, it is completely different. And they are amazing sounds. I'm doing nothing to the replica pots except the slow-motion filming of the break. I just extract the sound; it is not altered in any way other than being slowed down. It's interesting to access the potency of an object through sound. I've been working on the table piece [*Sounds of the Pink City*] and I was just not happy with it. Then the first bit of sound went on it, and I thought: 'Yes I can hone that down now.' It can be as simple as four objects because it's actually working on that other level as well.

CR Going back to the stillness of objects, that reminded me of Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*, which I know you have read. He talks about stillness and motion, and that motionlessness is a very expansive space. That is an interesting idea in relation to your work, have you considered it in that way at all?

IM That's why it's important to me, say with *Things Men Have Made* and this new piece with the three-thousand-year-old pot, that the original artefact is present to get people to look at how I deal with an object, and perhaps go back and look at that object a bit differently.

CR Do you see that in terms of an imaginary space?

IM Yes, absolutely. But I don't think that any of them are that still. It's physics, isn't it? It's full of energy, so none of it is really still, but it's about capturing and exploring something of its wavelength. That's why I've got a bit hooked, at the moment, on using these domestic objects to reveal different things about themselves. The emphasis of the solo show that I'm working on now, [*Seen and Unseen: The Language of Clay, 2018-2019*] is very much about using clay. But if I

⁹⁴⁷ At the time of this interview this work was still in process. It was subsequently titled *Ceramasonic Shatter* and finalised for Murphy's touring exhibition *Seen and Unseen* (2019) as part of the *Language of Clay* series. This piece was also shown at the V&A Digital Design Weekend, 2019. However, the films of people interacting with the work are yet to be used. Further details are discussed in Appendix F, pp.320-322.

wasn't commissioned to do that body of work, I don't know how much clay I would be using. I had to have a serious conversation with Ceri [Jones] about the fact that there wouldn't be a lot of clay.⁹⁴⁸ There will be a lot of singular objects like *360° Teapot* (2018), which will have a 360° interior view live-streamed on the internet. It will be very funny to have the inside of a teapot live streamed twenty-four/seven, but importantly, there will also be a moment of realisation when people come to touch it and understand what they are looking at. It's actually quite beautiful to see the interior of a teapot as a long panoramic image. And when fingers or hands approach the object, the shadows of these fingertips or hands will appear. There are certain things that are actually just about realisation; the object itself does nothing, the object just sits and is still. And it's very much to do with the material characteristics of bone china. By exploiting its translucent nature, you see the duality of how an object exists in space and light, with touch becoming the mediator.

- CR Everything that you are dealing with is very consciously concerned with perception and engaging with heightened sensory experience through objects. Would you say that is at the core of everything you are talking about and dealing with?
- IM It is, and technology is just another tool. It's not about the technology at all, in the sense that I want the technology to be completely subsumed. I don't want people to ask how I achieved something; I want people to feel agency through objects. So, the IOT hand that lights up in India currently from a touch received here in France: yes that's great, but it's about that person contacting an object, and the idea that by touching it they are making contact around the world, which is what they want to achieve. Will audiences touch it if they don't think an object is doing something? I don't think so. Whereas, if you say, 'touch this object and another object will light up somewhere else', they engage, yet they can't actually see it happening—it's all on blind trust.
- CR And that also engages with the idea of another kind of space: an imaginary space as well as a physical space?
- IM Yes. This idea of object-to-object communication that is not technologically apparent, for example, from a screen, is fascinating. There is this idea that you've created an almost intelligent object.
- CR I think you've probably already answered this question in a roundabout way, but I was thinking about the sensorial register of your work in relation to meaning-making for viewers—whether it be tactile, auditory or visual—and I wondered what role sensory perception plays in your work for you?

⁹⁴⁸ Ceri Jones, curator of *The Language of Clay*.

IM Yes, meaning is definitely being made and altered through the process. One of the important things for me is that it allows for reiterative experiences. For example, in *The Campanologist's Teacup*, the melody played when you touch that cup is never the same, they are set to random sequences. You can keep going back and using it, it's not doing something formulaic. I really like that I can change the sounds on the table for India quite easily, that I can change the commands on the object that gets touched. And what I really like—say with *Grumpy Dog*, which is a very simple piece—is this idea that with a QR code, you get a different response each time you visit it. You have an object that sits in your house that is passive in one sense, but then it isn't because it's connected to something that is dynamic and ever-changing. So, you have a reiterative relationship with an object, and technology enables you to do that more easily. But it is also about how you change and therefore your relationships with objects changes, and that is phenomenal as well. The gramophone piece that I'm working on, *Ceramaphone* (2018), is still in its embryonic stages, but the idea is that people can bring their own dinner plates to play. You know, what would your favourite dinner plate sound like? It's about fundamentally changing your experience of a simple object. And that's why the objects are not flamboyant in any way, shape or form, why they have to be really mundane.

CR Because that becomes part of our everyday vocabulary of objects?

IM Exactly. They must be within our ordinary, vernacular experience of objects. It's about being able to make those perceptual shifts through what we know so well, as opposed to transforming what we know into something new. It's about using what we are familiar with to give a new experience.

CR We touched on the idea of space earlier, and I was wondering how you think about space in relation to your work, and how new technologies might shift this understanding? Do you consider the idea of space at all?

IM I do think about space, but I have to say that it's more about thinking about worlds. It's not just about a space, it's about domains, and it's about switching between the physical, the cerebral and the digital. The objects allow you to bridge that gap and to experience it sensorially; that affects you cerebrally in some way. I feel there is this physical world, and then there is this digital world, and to me, the metaphor is the body and the brain. There is this very evident, real thing, and then there is this highly complex, potentially misunderstood connectivity going on. It is a very interesting thing to consider: the domains of the physical, the cerebral and the digital and how they combine. Rather than seeing the physical world as we know it, represented in the domain of the Internet, it's more that I begin to see the physical world as a system of networks. And that corresponds with my reading on technology. It's that inversion of the physical/digital, digital/physical. That inversion of space and the question of where we physically exist when we are connected to the Internet, which I find very interesting: this

spatial-temporal world that we go through, and how interacting with an object might give you that? Does it take you somewhere else? And what happens cognitively when you are engaged in that process?

CR The idea of imaginative space is an important one for my research, but in terms of your work, I find the perceptual shifts or realignments of bodily space fascinating, particularly in *Things Men Have Made*. Can you talk about this?

IM What has become interesting for me about the idea of space is the relationship it has with sound. I was listening to the recordings I made in India the other day; I have recordings of the call to prayer from the garden where I was staying, but it's not the call to prayer that is interesting, it's the sound of the space. So, it's not what is happening that is important. What got me excited wasn't that I had a good recording of the call to prayer, it was that in listening to it I was in that garden; the sound immediately brought me to that space.

CR And for audiences who haven't been in that particular space or that situation, or even in that country, what is in it for them? How do you hope they engage with those sounds?

IM I have to be really honest about that. I have made *Sounds of the Pink City* specifically for an audience that will recognise it, because it's going to be shown in that context. It's a very site-specific piece and my intention for it was that it would be shown where people would have a level of familiarity. So, I'm not sure if it would work outside of that context.⁹⁴⁹

CR But many pieces of work are made for a specific site and that's where they function.

IM At the same time I might be wrong. I might get the piece there and feel that it doesn't work in the very context I envisaged for it. It might be too familiar, whereas you listen to the sounds and objects in Wales, and it might be incredibly evocative.

CR It is certainly fascinating thinking about the possibilities of space either condensing or opening up: that you are standing here and listening to the call to prayer in the Dordogne, and that space in Jaipur is brought to you.

IM I was shocked by my visceral reaction when I first listened to the sound, having fought with that piece all week. When I stood in the studio, and I touched it and heard the sound, I felt butterflies.

⁹⁴⁹ At the time of this interview, *Sounds of the Pink City* was still in development and had not yet been exhibited. In a later interview, Murphy discusses the differences in audience reaction to the work when shown in galleries in both Jaipur and Wales. See: Appendix F, pp.322-324.

- CR And is touch that the important thing here? If you simply played the recording back, that seems as if it might be a different experience?
- IM What is very important is that you move through the space of the piece. I don't layer the sound; I could, but I choose not to so that when you activate one sound, the other one stops. Otherwise, you would have a cacophony and I'm not so interested in that. By touching an object, you get rewarded back with that sound. You are connecting physically with the object, and you are accessing something temporal by physically connecting with it.
- CR So there is an evocative relationship between touch and sound?
- IM It's a bit like a photograph; that sound has now gone, it's a moment in time. That tuk-tuk went by at a certain point in India. Those sounds will never happen again, but they have been captured and they are linked to that object. I stood there, and when I touched it, I felt the potency of my touch. I didn't listen to the sound in its duration, I just kept touching it again and again and again. You feel potency in your touch because you've activated something. And there is potency to the gold too—it's amazing. I never get tired of touching gold, or looking at gold, because it's the most extraordinary material in the world. And you don't get to touch objects in museums, so to make a piece that I get people to touch is important.
- CR I remember you describing the gold of the cast jug in your piece *Things Men Have Made*; you said that gold lustre tarnishes on touch, so that the trace of touch becomes part of its layered content. Could you say a bit more about this?
- IM I fire the gold lustre quite soft to ensure that it will come off on you. I'm amazed though that the piece in Ireland [*Syn-Tea-Sizer*] that I thought would be more tarnished or worn away isn't.⁹⁵⁰ The people interacting with it obviously aren't touching it at the same points. But the hands [in *I.O.Touch*] only have small areas of gold lustre to make contact with, so I will be interested to see how far the gold will wear down by people rubbing it on those pieces. I'm also interested in thinking about how many people get to touch, or high-five, bone china? And how many people realise how translucent it is? When I showed some friends yesterday, they were amazed. They never thought it would be that see-through. And yes, it is, because there is bone in it. It was interesting to show them how bone changes china, that was nice.
- CR Glenn Adamson says: 'digitisation inaugurates a completely new spatial logic. Digital space is haphazard, structured around arbitrary leaps. Analogue is like

⁹⁵⁰ Murphy is referring to *Syn-Tea-Sizer*, 2017, a gold lustered tea set shown at *Touchstone* exhibition, Farmleigh Gallery, Dublin in 2017.

walking while digital is like teleportation.⁹⁵¹ Do his ideas connect with your thinking at all, and if so, how?

IM Yes, I guess what I do is very much what he is talking about. He says teleportation, but I'd rather say trampolining. Yes, it's the potency of that. The use of VR and haptic technology allows us to have an increasingly embodied experience of digital domains.⁹⁵²

I've been talking to many different researchers lately and they're all concerned with similar things—how do we get people to look again, how do we bring people to something and get them to engage with it, maybe with no sense of reward? I would like to think that there might be some reward here though. I've actually made a piece where there is no interaction—*Portrait of an Artist*. It's the one with me sitting on the horse. I wanted it to be in this show because it contextualises my practice, and it puts me in it. It's also about physically hacking historical artefacts and showing the potential of the technology that was used to do it. But it speaks less to me than all the other things I have made. I find now that objects that don't happen to have another layer of interaction seem to be half-formed things, and that's not good. I wonder about what an object does, if it does something else. Of course, it doesn't have to, but I feel pressure to. I have had good feedback about that object though; people really enjoy it; they find it intriguing.

CR Glenn Adamson also discusses casting processes in *The Invention of Craft*. He says that it 'allows the artist to reclaim an existing piece of the world without yielding fully to its productive reality.'⁹⁵³ He goes on to argue that through imitation, a space for invention is created. Are you talking about something like that perhaps?

IM Absolutely. But in scanning the object, I can work with scalability, like the piece I'm currently making, *IOT Jesus*. By scanning the head, I can create it in any dimension, but then you get a different aesthetic; you get a different sense of the object. Seeing that three-thousand-year-old pot digitally depicted on a screen as a see-through wire mesh, it's almost like an x-ray; it's really beautiful. You get to see through the form; you remove the materiality, and you see it in every dimension you can imagine, and that's quite thrilling. Through scanning alone, you can get to access things or see things quite differently. And by scanning those objects I can also take them into a VR [Virtual Reality] environment, which means that I can bring my objects into a virtual world and transform them there, or move them, or do anything with them. If you want to talk about space in terms of what that VR environment does, now that is fascinating. To be able to scan an

⁹⁵¹ See: Adamson, G. (2013). *The Invention of Craft*. London: Bloomsbury, p.165.

⁹⁵² These ideas are explored by Murphy in works made since this interview: *UTAH Mutations'* (2018) and *She Danced Him into a Flat Spin* (2019), where gestural modelling in a VR environment was used to create digital forms through movement. These then became physical ceramic forms.

⁹⁵³ See: Adamson, G. (2013). *The Invention of Craft*. London: Bloomsbury, p.163.

object and bring it into that VR space, it's not like working on a digital screen, it's completely corporeal; you are completely immersed in it.

CR I experienced a VR artwork recently in an exhibition I saw in York Art Gallery, so I now fully understand what you mean.

IM Yes, so you understand that to use this technology you are using your body—your arms, your eyes, your skill—to create something, and that is really immersive. Then you just export it back into the physical world, and an hour later it is printed and sitting there as a physical artefact.

CR So in terms of your casting process now, you scan the objects and then 3D-print them?

IM If they are precious objects, I scan them and then 3D-print them.

CR And if they are not, then you just cast them in the traditional sense straight from the original artefact?

IM Yes, so *Grumpy Dog* is just a traditional cast. But if they are precious objects, or if I wanted to re-scale the objects, or transform the objects, then I scan them and then I digitally transform them.

CR And then print and then cast them?

IM Yes. So, I can cast *Grumpy Dog*, or I can scan then print it, and then cast from that. And I will know *Grumpy Dog* a lot better from doing it the second way around, so Glenn Adamson is right on that one. And these are laborious processes. What I think is important to understand is that the technology I use is not 'push and play' technology. The amount I have to understand is incredible. It's the same as using a kiln where you have to understand the temperature, the setting, and the material; every technology comes with its material understanding; there isn't one that doesn't. And they all come with their nuances too. Anyone can roll out a slab of clay, anyone can take a photograph, but being able to do it well, and being able to do something interesting beyond the standard takes a lot of time. The time I have spent learning digital skills equates to the same as any physical skills I have developed.

CR I think that to be a ceramicist takes a particular kind of headset or a particular kind of approach to being. It involves a diverse skillset that engages with motor skills, three-dimensional awareness, problem solving, an understanding of technology, a disposition towards science, maths, design and construction, and I'm wondering if those skills are also actually quite useful when you come to using digital technologies?

IM What I have realised about myself—and this is perhaps the reason why I am attracted to ceramics—is that there is baseness to everything I do; there is the ability to do everything from scratch. You can literally go down to the ground under your feet and build it from there. And that's my approach to technology also. That's why the maker movement became very critical for me in technology because that's where that starts as well. When we were in China, I was watching somebody silk-screening their PCB boards with a tiny silkscreen and silver ink, as if they were silk-screening a scarf. To me that is very exciting because that's just making. And when you democratise making, you remove the hierarchies, as well as the barriers of knowledge and the barriers of access. That's a lot to do with access to kit and resources, as well as knowledge itself. So, in that sense, if you are going to ask how I identify myself, then I suppose it would be maker—not craftsperson and not fine artist, maybe artist, but I probably see myself more of a maker. The term maker does tend to encompass technology as well as the making process, and it doesn't currently indicate the application of that making in our society now, so it is more open.

Appendix F: Murphy, I. (2020). Interview Transcript. Ingrid Murphy interviewed by Catherine Roche. Conversation via Zoom. Audio recording, 25th August 2020.

CR Our first interview for this research project was in 2018 when you were working towards two forthcoming exhibitions. At the time of our discussion, some of the work for these shows was still in production and yet to be finalised, and none had been exhibited. So, I'm really keen to hear about your experience of the pieces as finished works operating within public spaces.

IM Yes, when we discussed it back in 2018 the work had been trialled, but it hadn't been used; it hadn't been finalised or experienced. The interactions had been designed, but they hadn't been executed a lot of the time. It has been interesting going back and rereading that original transcript. One critical thing is that there was a lot of talk in the transcript about the technologies—the interaction between craft and technology because I was in that stage of facture of it all. A lot of what we discussed was about how all those things were coming into being, rather than what they did. Looking back, the transcript is very much a pinpoint on a timeline of work in process. What's interesting now, having seen the work exhibited in multiple locations, with very different audiences at times, and in very different venues from the V&A to Ruthin Craft Centre and India—I hadn't even been to the Indian triennial at that time we talked—is how that has informed my understanding. When you are producing something interactive, a huge amount of the information that feeds on from that is about how people interact with it. So yes, I have a better skill set now, but the skills aren't necessarily the key point; it's about the object as an interface. And that's what's become much more prevalent in what I'm doing: how the object can describe something through its interaction, something that might be innate to that object. It's about these acts of revelation through interaction, revelation through provenance, or materials. That's where the emphasis lies now really.

CR We talked a little bit about *Things Men Have Made* in our last interview, but it was more a conversation about process rather than experience of the work, what technically happens when you interact with the piece. I wanted to talk about the experiential side, and I also wanted to get a bit more background information about your inspiration for the piece. But before we talk about those issues, I first wanted to check that I have understood the process of making the porcelain replica jug correctly. Am I right that it was 3D-scanned, then 3D-printed, then a traditional plaster mould taken and a porcelain cast taken from that?

IM Yes, that's right, and just so you're aware, the size of the 3D-print was increased so that when it was cast, it would be the same size as the original.

CR Because of the shrinkage during firing?

IM Yes, that's right.

CR Ok, great. Could you start by talking about the found stoneware jug? Did you have an idea for what you wanted to make and then searched for an object that fulfilled your needs? Or was it an object already in your possession that inspired you to create the work?

IM I found the jug at a brocante in Saint-Vincent-de-Connezac [Dordogne, France]. There's a guy who sells old pieces of ceramics amongst tools and everything else, all laid out on a rug at the end of the road. I was drawn to the jug because it looked lovely. There was a lot of crap around it, but I could see from a distance that it had been wood-fired and was in a beautiful form. So, I picked it up and it had €8 written in pencil on it, which it still has. I asked him how much he wanted for it, and he gave it to me for four euros, I think, so, it was a bargain.

I just loved the weight and the shape of how it fits in the hand. It really stood out to me because it was such a loaded object. You could tell how it was fired, and that it had been very rapidly, but skilfully thrown. It was obviously just wired off the bed and not turned or anything like that, so it was somebody who was probably doing a production run. It also must have fallen over at some point during its making process because there were impressions on its side like it had fallen when wet onto sawdust or gravel, which hadn't been fixed. So the plasticity of the clay had captured all of its making process. And then because it was wood-fired, it was fired to a really high temperature and so had this lovely flame marking; it was almost like a fire painted around the object. So the making process and the firing process were very well represented in the jug; they were in the materiality of the object itself. And that's why it was a really attractive object.

But I didn't buy the jug with the intention of doing anything with it. I just thought it was a beautiful object, came home and put it on the mantelpiece, and it sat there for a couple of years probably. I looked at it all the time because I had it on show; it was in my living space, so I was very familiar with it. And I assumed it had come from the locality because of its domestic or vernacular nature. It wasn't a precious object, so I assumed it had been made and used within that part of the Dordogne and I thought it spoke of its local heritage. Anyway, I brought it back to Cardiff, and it sat on the mantelpiece when I was living in Wyndham Crescent.

At the time, I was trying to make objects that people would handle for this piece because I wanted to make it about touch. I was throwing bowls, and I was doing a lot of different things such as casting objects to try and get to a universal form that people would want to touch. What I noticed was that everybody coming into my house picked up that jug on the mantelpiece. The house was full of other objects that were just dismissed. Everybody was picking up the same object from the brocante and I put that down to some absolute attractive touchability in the jug, like some sort of haptic or tacit qualities that it was exuding, but also the lack of preciousness it evoked. The mantelpiece was by the dinner table, so people would pick it up and I could watch them handling it. Obviously, I had a lot of

people staying with me who were ceramicists, and I would notice how they would handle it differently, how the throwers would handle it differently to the non-throwers. I was amazed that it was the one object everybody seemed to pick up. And when people had it in their hands, they would turn it and turn it, and they would feel the weight of it. There was something about that object: because of its shape, because of the top, because of the way its body sits in the hand, it's very, very comfortable to handle. I realised that I'd found an object that speaks all of these languages to people through its materiality. It's a kind of palimpsest of its own making, a very sensorial object that seems to evoke empathy in people who come upon it. I asked myself why I was trying to reinvent the wheel when I'd already found what I needed. Would I be able to reproduce that in an object that I've made with my own hands? I didn't think I could layer up that amount of history, and definitely not that sense of imbued materiality that the object had got through having lived its life. There is such a strong sense of historicity embedded in its own objectness. I don't know what you'd even call that, but there was no way I was going to be able to recreate that. So, the idea of making a copy was to draw a different parallel, in the same shape and form.

CR What parallel do you think you have drawn?

IM There was much consideration about why I didn't use the real object for people to handle in the work itself; that has a lot to do with the notion of preciousness and that it became a mediated response. By putting it into a cast object, I lost some of the weight quality; I would say certain physical characteristics were lost because the cast was a glossy object. This [original jug] is a drier, matter object, so it's harder to the touch, and it was fired differently, so they have different ceramic qualities. That's probably where it doesn't succeed quite so well in what I wanted to do. But I was very keen on the fact that through touch the gold got tarnished, and that high level of gloss gold allowed you to know value. I wanted a sense of value around this object, and I wanted to be able to record the touch. So, it was a bit of a compromise really; I had to sacrifice some physical characteristics to gain the others that I wanted.

CR Can you talk a little bit about the idea of touch and its significance in the piece once you introduce reality into the equation?

IM By putting the augmented overlay of the makers handling the original object, I wanted people to understand that you can perceive things differently through touch and particularly through a knowing touch: through the hands of people who know form or make form. It's acknowledging a level of connoisseurship, a level of assertive, thinking hands or skilled, seeing hands. We're so reliant on visual input to make aesthetic judgments that an awful lot of the qualities of form and surface that are possibly better experienced through touch are overlooked for the all-pervasive visual. The film overlay is intended to bring emphasis to touch and to show people that you can explore things differently through touch. I

noticed that sometimes people would change their hands to reflect the film; their hands would mimic the hands of the experienced makers.

CR Oh, that's interesting.

IM Yes, they would end up mimicking the film, whether they were aware of that or not, I'm not sure; I never did enough analysis or captured data on that. I know some people that I asked anecdotally said they weren't aware that they were following it. But that's because you're not looking at your hands, you're looking at the screen so you might lose the sense of what your hands are doing and it did change people's perception of the object.

CR I briefly want to ask about the augmented reality technology; did you set it up so that the overlay of the film connects to where the hands of the user are situated in the digital live feed, or is that just a coincidence?

IM It's set up so the film is scaled to the size of the user's hands. If you are standing at the plinth holding the object and have the AR marker in focus and in view of the sensor, the film becomes scaled; the scale of the hands in the film is adjusted to the size of the hands of the person [user] holding the object. If they moved further away, the marker would stop working so they wouldn't be scaled to the same size. There is a sweet spot and that is where the hands match up approximately in scale, not absolutely accurately because it was very basic AR software—it uses Flash Media. I made it in 2012 and there'd be more sophisticated ways of doing it now. But it worked for what I needed, and it was very much what I wanted it to be. It is evidently an overlay. Your own hands have become something else; I didn't want it to become a seamless join.

CR What do you think that delivers experientially? I'm quite interested in the awkwardness of how the overlay and live stream sit together. I'm wondering what you think about how that might affect users.

IM I wanted it to be clear that it is an embedded film rather than some sort of visual trickery. I wanted your hands to become that of another, but it's not something that you feel. The focus is on the handling of the pot, and I think if you went a bit too green screen on it, and you felt as if somebody's body was changing or something like that, then you're putting the emphasis in the wrong place. So that awkwardness or that kind of stiltedness of the projected image was important. And it was also what I had within my technical capabilities at the time. But it was also deliberately not blurred at the edges, so it very clearly represented that it was a film embedded in the live stream; it was important that you were looking at an embedded film as opposed to a digital manipulation overlaid upon your body.

- CR The awkwardness of the join between live stream and overlay seems crucial to the work. Because of the obvious 'join' there is a sense of bodily shift, but you're always aware of yourself in the space that you're in. This brings me to ask about the idea of space in this work. What happens to one's sense of space when using it? How might space be experienced?
- IM That's interesting because by using an object as interface, I'd like to think it's bridging that gap between the real and the virtual. And because it's live-stream and simultaneous, it conflates space I suppose. Perceptual space and visual space and digital space: I'd like to think it conflates and changes them, and to sound very fanciful, it's a bit metaphysical in terms of what it can do to space. I find that interesting in terms of the digital/physical. We're so used to that interface, we're doing it right now, aren't we? We're in a physical/digital space simultaneously, and we're all really accustomed to that now. What is that doing to our sense of space, and how do we flip so easily between the two, because they are almost two different realities, aren't they? When you have something happening between the screen and an object, especially when it's an augmented reaction, you're using a technological device to trigger the response. You are manipulating a crafted object as opposed to something that's wired or in the guise of black box technology, and for that to be the trigger or the switch, or the conduit, or whatever you want to call it, I think that becomes a very interesting use of space and our understanding of it. The ability to access that virtual world simultaneously as we do our physical world, and to be in both at the same time through a mechanism we're not used to, when we are just used to just staring at a screen and responding to that screen.
- CR Do you think about the relationship between space and time? You talked about the historicity of the jug so is that important in any way?
- IM I'd like to think that as people handle the replica, and then they see the original, some of the very qualities of its time and timelessness come across to the viewer. I'm not sure they do, but I'd like to think it's some of the same values that I experienced when I first saw it: that we're in a continuum, and this pot is part of a continuum, and the jug offers a moment of reflection on that continuum. That is why having this old object is so important.
- CR The flip between the old and the replica is really interesting: that sensorial experience that occurs through augmented reality when these two spaces, the old and the new, become merged.
- IM It's interesting, if I had access to some of the technologies I access now, and the knowledge I have about them, I don't think I'd have made it the way I have.
- CR What could you do now if you remade the piece, and would it be as effective?

- IM It's an interesting one, because sometimes as the technology moves through levels of sophistication, we lose an awful lot of the rawness and potential of it. And because it's never really designed to be applied to the things I try and apply it to, you get these sweet spots, and then they're gone.
- CR You've talked about touch and what you hope users experience, but what do you think the physical/sensorial experience of the user might be when they witness these hands that aren't their own overlaid on their body and from a distance?
- IM Some people did say that they found it unnerving. There was one person who said it made them feel quite dizzy, like an out-of-body experience. But there was fracture, I think, between what their brain was seeing and what their hands were doing. So, there was that, and that person wanted to go back and do it again and again and again to see if that experience continued as they got more adjusted to it. That was an interesting bit of feedback. And some people did comment on how they loved seeing their hands as somebody else's hands, particularly when they knew they were expert hands. I used hands that people might recognize, like Claire's [Curneen], and people were like "oh! I loved the idea that I became Claire's hands, like one of her wonderful sculptures, those hands handling this object." But there is strangeness, uncanniness when something happens like that, when you know it's not your body. There's a strange response, I suppose, when you feel almost as though you've mutated a bit.
- CR Yes, the piece does heighten awareness of bodily self. You have a really strong sense of embodiment when interacting with it because you are reminded of your body.
- IM Yes, you are made more conscious of it because you see yourself holding something smooth, yet you see what looks like yourself holding something rough. You see other people's hands connected to where your hands are. So, there are layers.
- CR Yes, there are so many layers to the piece; it's very complex.
- IM One of the later works that I think comes closest to that complexity is *360° Teapot* and people's understanding of that. Some people were transfixed by that and found the experience extraordinary. They spent a lot of time with it, and yet other people were quite mechanistic about it. It's really interesting how each work triggers different responses.
- CR This is another of the works that I wanted to discuss further. It would be useful if you could talk about the sensory qualities of interacting with this piece, from the perspective of your own physical experience, but also how you hope it operates for others, and how this is reflected in your design? Have you received any feedback about audience experience?

IM With *360° Teapot*, in one sense, it's incredibly simple in how it's conceived and executed, but what it does do is really play on its sense of materiality. By using its material characteristics—the translucency of the bone china—you experience the opacity of the material from one viewpoint, and then by using light, or space and light, through this translucency of the object you're able also to experience the object simultaneously from another viewpoint. That shift becomes aware to viewers through the notion of touch because obviously, the image remains static until you are invited to touch it. I got the opportunity to show it in four different venues, so four different iterations of scale from these installation opportunities, and that had a massive impact on the experience of the piece. Those curatorial aspects become quite significant in terms of people's levels of engagement. For example, in Ruthin it was on a screen against the wall, but the piece had no space around it. I felt it didn't have the gravitas that it had in Aberystwyth when it was in a room on its own, which people entered, and the screen was much bigger. In hindsight I would not have used a screen; I would have used projection. But that was something at the time that was technologically difficult to do at the venue.

CR What do you feel a projection would have offered that a screen didn't?

IM I've done mock-ups of it with projection, and to my mind, it worked a lot better because when you have projection, it is just light. When you have a screen, you've got this large artefact staring back at you, and you're always going to have some degree of reflection off the glass; it's a different mediated experience. There's a harsh light shining on the object for the 360° camera to pick up the hands and the sense of touch, so to be in a lit space with no other artefacts would have been a more powerful curatorial approach. And scale was interesting: that difference between the object and the screen. It needed to be corporeal, you needed to feel that sense of bodily space so when you moved it too far away it became dislocated, you lost something. And field of vision: if you went too big it became something else because it was about the notion of domesticity and the intimacy of an object. When the screen was too big it didn't work either, because it became almost panoramic. It became Lilliputian I suppose, and that wasn't what it was about. The shadowed hands weren't supposed to be monsters, they were meant to be very close to the scale of your hands.

So there were a lot of interesting observations about how the work was presented in terms of interaction, and in terms of people being in that space. I spent a lot of time in the gallery so I saw a lot of interactions, and I don't know why, but women spent a lot more time with *360° Teapot* than men. Men would come and they would touch it, but women would spend a significantly longer period with it. And I noticed that people would be looking at the screen while touching the object, rather than looking at the object itself. So it was important that both things—object and screen—could be within their field of vision, which is why I didn't want to have it huge or off-scale. What became interesting was how their hands traversed the object: where they would cup the object, where

they would touch its extremities to the extent where it would have to be frequently sanitised because it was unglazed. The teapot was high-fired, but unglazed, so it would get quite grubby from touch. We had to frequently clean it, but because of that, you could see the places where people touched it most. So picking an object that had these ridges was important. When I tried it with a completely spherical form there was not enough detail for people to make a connection between this orb-like form and an expanded 360° view. Once you understood what the ridges were—which became just light and tone on the screen—you were able to navigate the object in a different way. I felt there had to be some degree of recognition in the object.

Also, the cast of the object became very significant. I had to make sure it was a really clean cast, because if you had any differences in thickness that would affect the light. The areas where the slip pooled created tonality in the static image, but there was less translucency when you were touching it. They were the areas that were obviously touched a little less, as opposed to the more translucent areas where people began to play with their fingers across the object. So, there were some really key observations about how people interacted with it. The fact that the interaction was live streamed was of no significance. In the end I didn't even live stream it from the venues. I set it up to live stream because at the outset I thought that simultaneous digital connectivity was important, but it became of no significance. I thought to state that—even on the wall of an exhibition space—would have made people think of an audience that was out there, that in reality wouldn't have been there because who would have been logged in? We don't know. So, it wasn't about communicating with anything else, it was just about you and that object at that given moment. It's an interesting one, as that's a piece that had connectivity that I removed in the end, for that reason.

CR Yes, I can see why you made that decision because the piece for me, when I experienced it, was about an intimate moment connecting with yourself—that was what seemed important. I wonder what your own sensorial experience of it was? How did you experience the revelation of that relationship between two perspectives of yourself?

IM I found it fascinating because I have made that object many times; I'm very intimate with that form having cast it and made it multiple, multiple times. When you do that, you know an object—you know its seams, you know it upside down and inside out. So, with this object that I knew so intimately, I was thrilled, I was transposed by what I was experiencing. When I first did it, when I set it up at home on a large screen to see if it would work, just in sunlight, I was transfixed because it was a new perspective of the object, a new revelation. I would spend ages shifting the object and the camera to ensure the positioning was such that you would get the maximum reveal for your touch. There are two 180° lenses so there's always going to be a seam. I was positioning the object in relation to those lenses in such a way that the seam did not interrupt the play of the hands; I tried

to make sure that that seam fell out towards the end. And because it was an elliptical teapot, the two broader faces of the teapot needed to be clearly in focus on the screen. It would really change if you shifted the angle of the object in relation to the lenses; you got a very different experience. So it wasn't just a standard view, you could manipulate it. Similarly, the height of those lenses within the object would give you a very different perspective. Even though you are working in this very small volumetric space, by shifting things millimetres, the potential of the world within that space was quite extraordinary. That gives you a very different sense of space, of expanding that space outwards. It's something you can't see any other way; it's not a space that is easily revealed to us, although we know it's there. We make projections when we see an exterior form, especially if it's a simple type of form. We have an understanding of what that interior form is, but to see it in that flattened perspective is completely different to what we might have imagined. It has something else, it has an other-worldliness about it that you don't know. It becomes a panoramic landscape of light almost and people will see all sorts of different things within it.

Sometimes—although very rarely—people did not make the connection. People would be looking, and then it's the moment of touch when they see this interaction. They would look, and they would see a screen and an object, but it was only through that revelation of touch that it was apparent to them that they were influencing it in some way. They didn't understand that sometimes at the beginning. Then by exploring the object, they began to see their hands, and as their hands became very clear it would become more focused, and as they moved away, the image would become a dark shadow. So sometimes people didn't touch, they just played in the proximity of space where they could see their hands moulding the light around the object. It's almost as if that object, for them, had some form of force field or potency around it.

CR Yes, I had a very strong corporeal sensation. Through looking you become aware of your own internal structures, by feeling what your hands are doing and looking at the screen ahead, you become more aware of your motor response through the movement of your hands, and the then mirroring and the rhythms. In a way, your motor responses become revealed to you. You are feeling both what you are doing and looking at, and that correlation somehow exposes those subconscious internal bodily responses.

IM Absolutely. It's almost a bit like the dead arm trick. In a sense, you are immediate and removed from your own physical being.

CR Yes, and that is true also of *Things Men Have Made*, but I think different conceptual revelations occur through the physicality of that experience. But it is the same kind of simultaneous, mirrored bodily performance that transports you into a whole other experiential realm or space.

We have already touched upon the idea of the mundane object, but is the use of a teapot significant, or could it be any vernacular object?

IM It is very important that the object is a teapot. The teapot is a seminal ceramic object; it's an archetypal ceramic object. It's the kind of skills test for a thrower and we all recognise them—they are so recognisable. That teapot itself, its significance was not its history or things like that. But what it did afford me, because of its undulating surface, was an interesting interior form. So, as opposed to using your Betty Brown teapot, for instance, it afforded me more spatial information. And it's a beautiful object. The scale of the teapot is quite small because obviously it was not a large teapot to begin with, and then cast in bone china it becomes quite an intimate teapot; it's not a big family teapot. The language of the teapot itself is important; it's something you would probably find on your granny's shelf as opposed to your coffee shop or teahouse, or your own dining table. So it's important that it's historical rather than contemporary.

CR What age is the teapot, when would it have been made?

IM It's probably late nineteenth century.

CR I was thinking about how, over the years, all the times I have spent holding teapots. I have always enjoyed cupping my hands around the body of a warm teapot whilst making tea, either to warm them, or simply for the comfort of the experience. I have often sat or stood chatting to someone with my hands around a teapot. They seem to naturally inspire touch.

IM Yes, it's an object of comfort isn't it?

CR Yes, and I also felt that when I was interacting with *360° Teapot*. There was something very comforting about the experience, and a very odd sense of comforting yourself. These looming hands were very powerfully comforting and caressing.

IM The idea of the sense of scale, for me, was important: that an adult-sized pair of hands could practically cup it, that somebody coming to it could almost occlude all the light. You could bring the whole screen to darkness by the use of your own hands; if you had a larger-scale object you would have these pinpoints of darkness. This idea that you could control the environment through your own hands, and just your hands, was important in terms of the scale and I think there was a sweet spot with that. Had I gone any smaller it wouldn't have had the domestic scale to it; had I gone bigger it wouldn't have worked. The other significant thing is that it had a flat base, which meant it was very stable. It's actually a teapot from a ship; it has a flat base so it doesn't wobble in any way, shape or form. So, there were formal characteristics that made it a good choice, but the fact that it was purely a vernacular object was really important. And by

taking something mundane, by taking that rhopographic object, it lowers peoples' expectations. There's nothing to read in it in an initial viewing, it's just a teapot so we go to it openly. If you use more complex objects or less familiar objects then people bring a priori knowledge to the experience, and that isn't as useful for my ends.

CR Can we talk about your piece using the three-thousand-year-old pot and how this functioned in your show, as when we discussed it in 2018 it was still in process.

IM So *Ceramasonic Shatter* is allegedly a 3000-year-old pot from Mesopotamia. I have the certificates, but whether they are authentic or not is another thing. It was a honey pot from the desert. I scanned it, then cast it in loads of different clay types and fired it to different temperatures. At one point, I would have approximated the actual clay type and firing temperatures of the original pot, or as close as possible, within that range or spectrum anyway. And then I dropped all the replicas, loads of them, and I recorded the sounds of them smashing on impact. All I did then was slow down that sound, I didn't do any digital enhancement; I literally just slowed down the sound. It was basically done by taking slow-motion capture then removing the audio file from the film; it was quite a simple process. I also took some high-definition film, which doesn't have sound because it's shot at such a speed. The piece was presented with a high-definition film of the point of impact. Then I reconstructed one of the bone china replica pots that had been smashed for the sound, using the copper pins to hold the object together. Each copper pin worked as a touch capacitor sensor, and then it would play the recorded sound of the objects smashing.

That piece went off to the V&A for the digital design weekend.⁹⁵⁴ When I think about it, from an experiential perspective, it's probably one of my top pieces because the sounds are extraordinary. It was presented alongside the original artefact, so there is this moment of impact I suppose that then is lengthened experientially. This moment, that in ceramics, is a lot to do with a kind of authenticity and fragility, and that this object survived three thousand years; its value is that it is intact.

CR So when we talked in 2018, you were still making this piece and you were filming people's reactions to learning the age of the pot whilst handling it.

IM Yes, at the time I very interested in people's reactions to the three-thousand-year-old pot, so I was filming those reactions. Again, that was something that I completely jettisoned because it was bringing relevance to an aspect of the original that was not sensorial. It was about people's perception of material objects and history, and I thought, I don't need any of that; I wanted to focus on

⁹⁵⁴ Digital Design Weekend is an annual event hosted by the V&A, London, exploring the intersection of technology and design. Murphy exhibited her piece *Ceramic Sonic Shatter* at the 2019 event.

the sound. What was important about that object and the interaction was the range of sound it produced. Watching people interact with it as they moved around the piece, they could not believe that the sounds were all made by the same form, same scale, same material, but tiny nuances of that material through different firings. It didn't matter that they didn't understand the technicalities or anything like that. What was extraordinary within that range of sounds, was the sound that object would have made when it was breaking. For them to access the aural quality of that object, or the sonic qualities of that object as it became nothing, was powerful—its impact was its value.

I was standing next to the piece when it was shown at the V&A, so I got to see a lot of interactions with it. There were two different ways of it being shown. One was with headphones, which I had to have when it was a really crowded space. But I didn't want the sound to fill or disturb the space; I wanted the sound to be intimate. So my decision was to have a speaker hand, rather than somebody putting on some piece of hardware; as soon as you put on a bit of hardware there is an expectation that you are going to experience sound. I wanted that when you touched something you were brought closer to the object by the sound. A smashing object is not generally something we like to hear in a museum, and they are quite dramatic noises, so the idea of playing the sound quite low meant you had to put your head very close to the actual object, and then you navigated around that object. So people were very physically close; this was not a stand back, press and listen to this orchestral sound interaction, it was exploring the nuances of the sound through the object. The ear had to be quite close to the speaker hand, and that brought the head quite close to the object.

Again, when it wasn't in its own space—in Aberystwyth it had its own space so I turned the volume up a little—when I had it in a more crowded space, I had it so it wouldn't interrupt or distract from the other pieces. I'm still amazed at the range of sounds; it's completely orchestral. Sometimes it sounds like bone china, sometimes it sounds like a synthesised, electronic sound, like a completely digital sound. Then something like the unfired, thickly cast objects, because they didn't have the tensile strength, rather than shatter when they hit the ground they would break into bigger chunks, and they would rock. So rather than a sharp crash, the sound would be low and prolonged. That was amazing, because I started learning how the materials would react. Something that is over in an instant, through studying the films and listening to the sounds repeatedly, I was beginning to have a bit of control over the sounds I could produce just by knowing which objects to smash. They were all smashed from the same height and onto the same surface. The only thing that was different was the fired state, the kiln temperature or the clay of the object, as it was all the same volume. Also, the shape of the pot was significant. It had an opening and it also had another orifice, this spout on the side. That meant it had great sound because you had this almost enclosed form. I dropped a lot of other objects and they didn't give me quite the same range of sound that I was looking for. And in terms of feedback,

when I was at the V&A I met somebody who worked in sound recording, and they could not believe that those sounds were just analogue sounds. They couldn't believe that there was no post-production on the sounds because some of them are quite enveloping, like cello sounds. That was fascinating for me, and something I'm going to carry on doing because there is something lovely about the material authenticity of those sounds. And they are incredible; I couldn't produce them any other way.

- CR Going back to the conceptual starting point for this piece, the three-thousand-year-old pot, does that remain important? Or is that aural sense of materiality now more significant?
- IM The three-thousand-year-old pot was very much just a vehicle for that piece. It's not necessarily about working with old objects anymore. It was about notions of value that we have around intactness, I suppose. When you are talking about notions of objects as interface, one of the interesting things is how in museums people don't want things to be touched for fear of breakage. To make something that was about breakage was interesting. To have that moment of horror in an exhibition space captured and replayed and replayed, it's like vertigo. It's not actually about the fear of falling, it's the fear of throwing yourself off the precipice, throwing yourself into the void, and I think that objects have that sense of vertigo in relation to breaking. There is kinetic energy around an object that is old and intact because anytime it can fall off the table. It's about playing with that potency, of it having value because it's intact. If I had a brand-new Ikea bowl there, for example, that was worth three pounds, it wouldn't have any of that nervous energy about it to my mind.
- CR The other work I would like to discuss briefly is *Sounds of the Pink City*. We did talk about the sounds and your sensorial experience of it when we discussed it back in 2018, but at that point, you had only just got the interaction working and the piece hadn't been shown anywhere. We discussed your uncertainty about its relevance for audiences outside of Jaipur: how people unfamiliar with the city would connect with it, and what those resonances might be for those audiences in terms of its relation to site-specificity. Now that it has been to India, and travelled to various gallery locations around Wales, how was the piece received? How did it operate for those familiar with the city, and for those who were not?
- IM It was fascinating! When I showed it in India, my concerns were that people would struggle to understand that it was interactive. And because these were broken objects or shattered and restored objects—very few were intact—and it was displayed in a contemporary art environment, I worried that people would not touch the objects. Well, that was blown out of the water! People touched them incessantly. There was a queue to touch them. We had to have a security guard there to stop people crowding the work. On the opening night it was a largely local audience, and because of the ubiquity of the object to those local

people's sensibilities, and because they were broken chai cups and they couldn't do any more damage, to them, they were detritus. They interacted with the work because they knew the space and they recognised the map; most people recognised it very quickly because it's a cultural icon for the people of Jaipur. So the audience had two icons to play with really. They had the cup and the map, and they moved around it with a sense of recognition. For example, on the corner where the Rajmander Cinema is, I had a recording of the Bollywood film that I had seen there, and there was great laughter because there was recognition. The audience used it as a way finder around their environment.

And the audience response couldn't have been more different in Wales because there was no sense of recognition; the cultural icons were not recognisable. They still saw cups, but they didn't see detritus. They thought they were quite precious; they saw them with a very different sense of value. What I hadn't anticipated was that when you are showing an object that is site-specific, and you walked out of the museum in Jaipur where it was located, and had those sounds replicated around you—that was quite interesting. But when you experienced the same work in Mission gallery in Wales on a wet day in January, and you touched those objects and the sound of this hot, crazy city came into the space, it was completely different; it was transformative, it was like a portal to another place. So, in one site, with one audience, it became very much a way of self-recognition, and with another audience and in another environment, it was transformative.

I remember meeting a woman in Swansea, in Mission Gallery, who came every week to touch those objects. She said: "I live across the road and I'm looking after my sick husband, but I come here because I once went to India and this work takes me back to India on a wet day in January, and I couldn't think of anything nicer." She would come back regularly and the piece would evoke memories for her. For other people, they were just fascinated by the sounds, so it was giving them an experience of something they did not know, whereas for others it was complete recognition. I suppose, to that end, I felt it was a more powerful work in Wales than it was in India. What's become more relevant to me is that the material's own historicity is being explored: the idea that those objects had experienced those sounds from those streets and we were able to access that through a sense of their own materiality, through the connectivity of those objects via those recordings. Ok, I added lustre and a wire, but you are still touching, in essence, the same object. That became much more significant as a means not of recognition, but of accessing something about an object that you might not know. So, contrary to the other things where recognisability makes them stronger, with this it was the opposite. Not having that familiarity allowed a kind of different transcendence. In India, people would touch it and say, "I know that's City Palace", and they were not really listening to the sensorial qualities because that tacit knowledge wasn't enabling them to have that more sensorial experience, which I found was the case.

CR That's so interesting. At the time of our last conversation, I remember you worrying that the piece wouldn't work in Wales.

IM Yes, and I think having that little figure of me was quite a critical decision. It was actually very important that I was there, wearing my little knapsack. A lot of people thought I was going around collecting these things, and they saw it almost as an anthropological study of a city through its objects as opposed to just having this still life. Having that figure changed the whole dimension of it. And when it was shown in India it was on a rectangular tabletop that I had made up because of transport issues, whereas when I showed it in Wales, it was the same map, but I had it laser etched onto a Victorian tilt top table. This made it a much stronger piece in terms of how you approached it; you could approach it from all around, from any side, so there was no beginning, middle and end. You could come at it from all directions, but it also helped reinforce the domestic nature of it, because you could come across it and it just looked like cups spilt across a table. So that was also important—that figure of me was there to transcend it beyond that accidental still life.

CR Could you also just say a little bit about the digital technology used in *Sounds of the Pink City*: its relationship to the gold lustre, and the ceramic technology needed to add the lustre onto existing pots?

IM As you know, I found the chai cups in and around the city [Jaipur]. They are wood fired on rooftops and the clay becomes carbonised in the process from the smoke and a lack of oxygen; carbon becomes trapped in the clay body. If they were then re-fired in an electric kiln, the carbon would burn off and the colour of the original would change to a bright orange. This was obviously a problem for me. Anything I wanted gold on needed to be totally covered in glaze and lustre so a change in colour didn't show through. And I had to glaze everything first so the gold would adhere to the body of the pots. It was also important that the gold formed a continuous surface over the cup, or fragment of cup that it was applied to, for it to create a circuit and become conductive. This was very tricky when placing them in the kiln, and I had to make bespoke props from ceramic paper to achieve this. So, the whole thing was a long-winded process. Once the fragments were lustred, I re-inserted them into the smoke-fired cups; I put them back together with copper pins, which are also conductive.

The technology used in this piece is 'touch capacitance sensing', which can detect anything that has an electric charge. We carry enough of a charge in our body to activate this technology through the conductivity of the gold lustre on the chai cups. The body's charge connects to a touch capacitance board situated under the table. The board has several nodes and each one is programmed to link to a different recorded sound, which it then plays through two speakers mounted on custom-made plexiglass holders under the table. The base of each pot, or fragment, is connected to a specific node by a 1mm copper wire running through

the table. When a person touches a lusted object, their electrical charge activates the node that the object is attached to, and a particular sound is played.

CR Do the gold spill shapes hold particular significance?

IM The gold spill forms coming out of the chia cups capture a moment in time; something fluid that becomes solid. They are very evocative, presenting something lost or spilt as precious. The chai cups themselves are disposable objects in India. They are never reused, so the spills here are coming out of things that are essentially seen as rubbish. Ceramic chia cups have now replaced plastic in India, and they are thrown away after one use. When you finish drinking your tea, they are thrown on the ground and smashed. And because they are so low fired, they break down more quickly. People walk on them and crush them, and they turn to dust. It's a form of recycling.

CR And finally, you talked previously about the gold lustre on the *IOT Touch* hand, and I remember that you wondered if it would get worn down through the audience's touch. Did this, in fact, happen?

IM No. The hand got filthy though.

There were quite a few pieces that I have made subsequently that I hadn't even thought of in 2018 when we were talking, like the plate synthesiser. Also, *Conversations About Making and Skill*, I don't know if you remember the table with the dinner plates on it in the show? When you sat down to use the plates, they illuminated with the hands of the maker actually making those plates. That piece hadn't even been conceived when we were first chatting. And there was a lot of talk in the transcript about AR and QR, and they are not relevant anymore, I suppose. My practice has moved more to object as interface in itself: it's moved more to physical computing or using objects like lithovanes and stuff like that, so there is no screen involved.

APPENDIX G: Nagel, J. (2019). Interview Transcript. Johannes Nagel interviewed by Catherine Roche at the artist's studio in Halle, Germany. Audio Recording. 6th April 2019.

CR I wondered if you could begin by briefly describing how you arrived at your current practice? It would be really to hear about anything that has brought you to this point—your education, training, key moments in your career, role models, influences perhaps?

JN I was doing social service in Canada in a place for disabled people. Before that I was doing a lot of drawing and painting. When I was growing up as a teenager that was a strong focus, but there was not enough time to do that in Canada. There was a Japanese potter on site in the next village. He had a small studio for doing workshops with these kids, so I asked him to show me some throwing on the wheel. I really practised there and it was something to do for myself, besides all this energy going into spending good days with the kids. I needed to do something for myself, so that was the start.

Then I had a small apprenticeship for eight or nine months with him. After that, I went to Germany to study, and found out about this university and came here to Halle to study. In Halle it's still a diploma degree; it's not a bachelor or masters programme, it is a five or six-year study programme. In between, I went to Japan for nine months to the Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Park. My Japanese master in Canada said that only the Japanese and Germans can do proper ceramics, which is a little bit on the edge, but I was curious to go there and it was really beautiful. I wasn't really interested in looking at a lot of ceramics once I was there because it was a bit overwhelming. Shigaraki is a town full of pots and after one or two weeks it was enough. It was more interesting to look at kimonos and their timelessness, and the architecture, and Kyoto was close by so that was really inspiring.

Then I went on an exchange to the US, to Athens in Ohio. I finished my thesis in 2008 and had four years working on my own, then I got a part-time assistant teaching position here at the Burg Giebichenstein, where some of the same people who had been my professors still worked.⁹⁵⁵ I had to work out how to deal with them accepting me as a colleague; it worked well, but there was a shift. I did that for five years, and then two years ago I stopped. For a while, after you finish studying you are a newcomer to the field, and then at some point, you notice that you are not there anymore, you are somewhere else, you are in the middle of that profession and you have a different standing.

CR I'm interested in what it was about clay—physically and conceptually—that made you want to specialise in this one material. What draws you to clay? Why clay and not any other material?

⁹⁵⁵ Burg Giebichenstein is the University of Art and Design in Halle, Saxony-Anhalt, Germany.

JN I think it was not a strong intellectual process, it was more of an experiential process. When I first started in Canada, the first part of learning was making a teacup like this one. That was the first part of learning to throw in porcelain, and in the beginning, it was just beautiful to make these simple tea bowls. At this point, being twenty, it was satisfying and I really got into it. At the end of the training, there was a big pottery event in Canada, which all these potters attended and they just accepted me as a colleague. That was the first time I felt such a strong professional identification with a group of people. So it wasn't an intellectual decision to do pottery at the beginning, it was just something that happened. And throughout studying at art school there was always a line of vases and vessels that were the imagery that I drew inspiration from; they were the red line through the process. I went away, and I experimented more with detached, abstract forms, but there was always something going back to that. I didn't make vases for flowers, it was really just about this cultural image of the vase, this reference of form and structure, and even pattern if you look at decoration. So this imagery became my foundation.

I work very intuitively. The whole intellectual process happens afterwards. I have a half-finished, or finished piece and then I try to get a feeling of its 'gegenwart', or the resonance of this being a piece of clay today. So on this level, the whole—I wouldn't even say conceptual—the whole intellectual part of digesting it, of finding reasons why I did something, that always happens afterwards. Throughout my studies it did, and it still does.

CR What are the things that shift the work into being resonant today for you? You talk about shifting the vase as a cultural form into something resonant now.

JN Throughout my work I am always looking for a way of making a form where there is resonance. This is one of the reasons why there are these rough vase shapes because they give the pieces a place. It also allows me to explore the difference between how you might understand that vase to be, and how I made it. And how I made it is really the focus of my work: the shift between what we are familiar with, and how this object is made.

CR So the vase is important because it links it to a cultural history, and to a domestic space, but also has a human connection? And are you trying to create friction between these elements?

JN Definitely. The first time I engaged with more in-depth thinking about why I was doing that, was through writing my thesis. One of the ideas I considered was that for a lot of sculpture, even abstract sculpture, the figure is a central reference, either as a figurine or in abstract work through scale relating to human size. Then there is a different level that you find in cultural history. You have objects that are related in a different way to the body that has more to do with ritual: daily

rituals, but also cultural rituals. This vase subject falls into that group of objects that are more than just tools, they are charged with that history. A lot of the making I do depends on the size of my arm, and so the vase scale, in its different sizes, always made sense to me in this way; this kind of object puts that in place, is the link to get there.

CR Can you talk about your bodily relationship with your work and your processes of making, and how this might translate for people viewing your work? Is thinking about the scale of your body and the physicality of making a very conscious thing for you?

JN Afterwards. It is something that I feel is right, and then of course I notice things, but it is really through a very intuitive workflow that I suggest things to myself. For example, with these sand-cast pieces, these clusters of vases, the size is dependent on how far I can get down into that sandbox. And the size always starts as a tunnel, with my hand making a hole. This is the minimum volume that I can make. From this tunnel, I can then hollow out more volume, so its dimension is formed in this way, and I think this is part of the resonance. I have to make sure that there are no fingertips poking out in the sand because then it gets spooky, and I don't want that at all, but you can feel that there is this movement of hands. To some degree there is coincidence, but they are not works of chance because the hand and the mind learn very quickly. With the first volumes I tried to cast in sand, there was some degree of innocence in digging that hole. But very quickly I learned that even though I can't see it, with a certain movement my hand is creating volume, is creating an edge, is creating a soft, more dynamic movement. Of course, there is some degree of chance in that, but the form is decided on and there are a lot of things that are there virtually in my brain, and are based on its predecessors. Then I do the next piece and the thinking from the piece before it goes into that next piece. Sometimes it's not worked on in one piece, but it's usually worked on in the next piece.

CR Your process is fascinating. I am interested in these cluster pieces; what is your thinking behind their physical linkage, this connectivity between the tubes in each piece?

JN After getting it out of the sandbox, all the elements of the cluster, or all the vases within the cluster, have the same height. The German physics term is 'kommunizierende röhren', meaning communicating pipes, so if you put water to this level here, it goes up to that level there. This gives the clusters a stiffness that you have in some of Morandi's paintings where the finish of the pot is exactly where the background ends. There is something awkward about them all having the same height. I like that about these groups because it takes them away from being a composed still life. And you have all the space between these pieces that is defined by putting them together. From a sculptural perspective that is the most interesting thing: looking across the openings at the way these gestures that

were once tunnels are now cast, looking at the way they are now transferred into an object and how they meet. It becomes much more sculptural than an object that has some rotational symmetry, and it has this vase character.

CR So all of this cluster form is excavated as one piece?

JN Yes, that's why they meet in the way that they meet. Sometimes if two of these tunnels, the volume of these voids, get close and the sand breaks away, there is a way to control that. But sometimes it's just one big volume, and then there's just the top part coming out because a lot of it was breaking in. So this provokes a bit more coincidence maybe, while keeping some degree of control.

CR It is interesting when that relationship between individual objects that you might expect to be in a still life, and that idea of a singular unit, or singular identity occurs within the same form as it does in these cluster pieces. They somehow suggest connectivity.

JN I'm still thinking about these pieces. This intellectual process is on going even though I have been doing it for a number of years now. This kind of work is more like an organic abstraction, and it's still developing; I'm quite slow with that sometimes. Where the work is all tunnels, forming some kind of network, I'm always struggling to make sure that it is not just becoming an organic experience, that it's not becoming some kind of underwater, coral-type image. I'm not interested in that at all. But it is a strong stimulation to have this happen, and then at the same time fight against it, or struggle with that organic appearance. This is one of the kinds of friction that makes it possible for me to work with that form over a long period. Before, with other work strategies, I always had to skip or take breaks and wait for the next impulse. But with these pieces, because of that friction, it continues to be interesting all of the time. Sometimes planes appear, and I include plasterboards in the sand so that it meets a hard, straight surface and you feel the wall of the box. So there is a counterpart, which provides an edge to that.

CR Talking of friction, this might be a good moment to discuss your relationship with the idea of craft and art. The exciting thing for me about your work is that it talks about both, that there is a connection with craft in terms of the vase form, and the historical legacy of ceramics. Also your making process it is very evident, but your work also operates within the context of sculpture. I wondered how you identify yourself as a maker?

JN I'm not trying to take a position. There are different levels. There is the level of showing work, its perception; with different kinds of galleries, it's perceived in a different way. Fumi Gallery shows unique design, so there is a certain environment there. There are some ceramic-focused galleries, so there it is in a ceramic context. Then there are art galleries like The New Art Centre where you

have the work facing large outdoor sculptures.⁹⁵⁶ So I show in a lot of different environments, and I am two or three things in one day working in my studio. There is very much a craft side to some parts of the process, and other parts are completely non-craft, they are non-technology. Once I have the sandbox filled with sand, digging out the sand is a non-technology. It is not something you need training for; there is no particular skill involved. It's really just a process of creating form, so it's a very imaginative sculptural process. Then, over a week, there is a very careful process of taking the sand away, of moving this fragile porcelain piece, of firing it, and supporting it in the kiln; all of this has a very strong craft side.

Then I sit in front of these and I think about what kind of colour, what kind of glaze will go on it. And it's not just colour; all glazes have a reference, because they are glass, or they might have a historic reference. For instance, light green has a celadon history, so there are always these cultural reference points. There was a period of brown in the 1970s, so brown is always linked to that; there are all these links. So I sit there with a palette of colour and I try to decide what they will become. I am a painter at this moment because it is a process between my own likes and dislikes, my perception of the world, and my perception of the contemporary, and of brushing glaze on the piece, or the spraying on the piece, or of the dipping of the piece. All these are references as well. If I put something on with a brush, I must decide if I should paint it straight and clean, or if I should let all these drips run down; so there I am a painter. Then there is another level with these vase-like single objects. As a single object, I don't like to over-charge them as a major artwork. I think that it isn't good with these pieces for me to claim that they contain all the questions, or all the answers, or all the awkward questions. So they can be sculptural, but it also depends on the context they are in. The more complex pieces create their own environment in a stronger way if you have this cluster. It has its own space, it gives dimension to itself through these relations, and it has these very strong dynamic movements that you can feel. You can get all the references, and all the framing within the piece, so it's a very individual sculpture.

Maybe I would say I am a ceramicist, but then a lot of people think it's a technical job that I am doing. If I say I am a sculptor I always feel a little bit like I am trying, I don't know—part of it is sculpting though. I'm definitely not a designer-maker. For example, I am working with *1882 Limited*, a small company in Stoke-on-Trent making a small series of works for me. Creating an object for them for reproduction was a very long process because it's very different designing an object for somebody else to produce. So I would say, to sum that up, I am an artist in how I think and act, but I would not claim each piece to be an absolutely independent piece of art. And I think it is important to make a distinction because otherwise, you spoil the precision of language.

⁹⁵⁶ The New Art Centre at Roche Court Sculpture Park, Wiltshire, UK.

CR Could you talk about where you see craft coming into your work, or explain the parts of your process that you feel are attached to the idea of craft? How does craft function and what does it do in/for the work?

JN Maybe I should start with a different body of work where you have some fragments, some big, wheel-thrown volumes. These start with a pure craft process. I have a potter's wheel with a bat on it and I throw a bunch of these big volumes in sections over a week. In the beginning, they are very classic vase shapes or parts of vases; they are volumes that are rotational. They have rotational symmetry and are unspoiled, so have a certain dynamic that is familiar. So it starts with the pure craft process of throwing these objects, then afterwards I take them apart. I try to reassemble them and add things, and find a way to move them on and get this friction back in. I enjoy sitting in between these giant, gentle volumes once they are thrown, then afterwards looking at them and trying to make them into a piece because I can't stand this perfection. So maybe that's also part of the psychology of it. Being a contemporary artist and working with that *gegenwart*⁹⁵⁷, not just in terms of looking at what is up to date, but also my own feeling of what resonates with that *gegenwart*, it just needs some level of destruction. So we are not really past that: that it needs something else other than perfection. There have been periods where a piece was supposed to be perfect, and it resonated with the spirit of the time, but it doesn't work now, it wouldn't really fit with today. So it starts with a craft process and then it ends with a process of deconstruction.

Then with the sand cast work, for example, there is a lot of work around it. There is filling the sandbox and preparing all of that, and that's not artistic thinking. Then I have this moment of just digging the hole. Sometimes it's half an hour and sometimes it's two hours, but it's quite a short process in the making. I would say that's not a craft process, because if you take it away from this box, I am just creating volumes in space through movement. Then there is everything else afterwards which is craft: the careful handling and skill of moving the porcelain, the experience that I have accumulated of how to handle that, and how I have to support it into the kiln because once the sand is taken away and it's melting in the kiln, it's subject to gravity. All of that is a craft experience; it's an experience of skill. Then there is the painting, where I look at it as an object. That's very much an art experience again because even though I sometimes repeat successful ways of painting, they are all individual pieces. I don't work in series that much. I've done maybe ten of these clusters now; I may do another ten, but they are all another step of thinking about how these spaces in between can be. Then, of course, the firing has some kind of craft aspect, but it's also very automatic, so it all goes back and forth.

⁹⁵⁷ Nagel explains: 'I have used *gegenwart* here as a noun so the translation is 'present.' English language has adopted the German word *zeitgeist*, meaning the spirit of the time, but there is not an exact equivalent for it. I use *gegenwart* in reference to this question of *zeitgeist*.'

- CR But that knowledge you have that comes from years of training, and which comes very easily to you now, isn't it embedded in the idea of skill, material understanding and technique?
- JN I think that plays an important role. The quality of plaster, for instance: it is first a liquid, which means you can cast it and you can pour it and you can smear it. Then it solidifies and you have it as a solid volume that you can take out, and you can do something with it. With porcelain initially being a liquid, or clay being this completely ambiguous, grey matter with no character of its own, you can do anything you want. Then it gets harder as it dries and it shrinks. So I am working with all these states and I think they form part of the universe that I work in. The sand needs to be moist; if it's too dry I couldn't make these pipe shapes, so it needs to be moist. It's all an experience of how materials act, and that's very much a craft skill I think.
- CR Glenn Adamson talks about craft having a very fluid identity that permeates all contexts, but importantly, it is about an intense material engagement, whatever that material might be. Does this idea resonate with you?
- JN I'm definitely not on the conceptual side of that, but I am fully on the material side of it.
- CR You have already talked about your excavation process, but for the purposes of this recording, could you just talk me through the physicality of what you do and how you set it up?
- JN The idea behind it is that I have wet sand as a material, and with my hand, I can make tunnels that take a certain shape, and either meet or don't meet—the possibilities are limitless. So I have a sandbox, which is a square box of a certain size that relates to my body. I need to be able to dig to the bottom of it because the whole process only works if I can reach the base of the box, which must have a plug. The sand is fine and powdery, and it's moist so it's sculptable. So I dig a tunnel with a shape, I create a volume in sand and I fill it up with liquid casting porcelain, then it sits for a couple of hours. The sand absorbs some of the water so a layer of porcelain forms on the outside and copies the outer edge of the cavity. After a couple of hours, I pull the plug at the base; this is a very important technical detail. I worked with plaster for a number of years; I liked this form but I had no idea how to produce it because I couldn't turn it around, and it didn't work with porcelain. It just happened by chance that I found out that powdery sand is able to take up enough moisture to form a solid layer of porcelain.
- CR And then the rest of the liquid porcelain that hasn't set is drained out through the plug?

JN Yes, so I dig a hole towards the plug, and all the tunnels have to meet at that plug. That is another rule that I have to follow within my sculptural thinking, it's another thing that is not detached from the technology because I have to dig to the plug to pull it. Then the tunnels drain and the form sits in the sand, and over the course of the week it solidifies, shrinks and dries. So it's a slow process before I can take it out of the sand.

CR I had imagined that you had to take a mould, to make a mould out of plaster and then cast the forms.

JN That's the whole beauty of the process. I couldn't do all of these clusters in plaster, it would be impossible to make a plaster mould of that. A plaster mould is massive effort to make for a larger piece, and the sandbox is really easy. I just shovel it back in and it becomes the next mould. It is very non-technology.

CR The material quality of your work seems to be very important. All your pieces have a very physical presence, which seems to shift in state, particularly where you juxtapose the rough surface textures of the clay body with the sheer, beautiful, glassy qualities of the glazes. Is the visual relationship between those material surfaces important?

JN Very much. Porcelain is usually thought of as a shiny white material that has been glazed; the glaze is where the brilliance comes out. To have a lot of these surfaces unglazed, that's a big field to play with, as this white material is not something that you immediately link to porcelain. Also, the inside is softer because it has not met with the sand, so it can look like perfect, glassy porcelain and the outside can be rough. With a piece like that I focus on the inside and the outside, on these two parts: on this cultural reference of the clean, glazed porcelain, and this dry sculptural material on the outside.

Often with the coloured glazes that I use, I stop and leave it open towards the bottom so you can feel that dry porcelain underneath. So it is very much about the presence of these materials; it's not about stopping in the middle in order to show the process. I sometimes do that, but I don't think that is so interesting. To feel that it is like a painterly process on this dry material, on this sculptural material, is one of the reasons for working in this way, for leaving areas blank. And sometimes, in contrast, it is a real pleasure to cover an entire piece in celadon and have this liquidity of the porcelain when it is glazed all over, of it being glossy and having all one colour: being a coloured volume.

CR But underneath there is that reference to the roughness of the texture that comes through.

JN Celadon has a history of being used to highlight ornament. I think it is in the Song dynasty where you have all these incised patterns with dark green celadon on

them. The glaze works by getting darker where it is thicker, and this happens where the pattern has been carved. So it is the colour of the celadon that reveals the image. The traces of digging on these vases act in a similar way. They create trenches, valleys and hills, and so the glaze acts differently across the changing surface. You can see how the glaze gets thicker and therefore darker in the trenches, and thus highlights the traces of sculpting.

CR Do you think about the sensory qualities of your work outside of your relationship with it, in terms of viewers perhaps?

JN Yes, I do. I think that's part of deciding if a piece is ready, or if the direction of a piece is working. I confront each piece with my own perception of it to ask myself if it's too rough, for example, or if there is enough material beauty. There are always limits and I am always making pieces that go beyond these limits. Then I try to decide if that is what I want to represent? Is it rough in a way that it will just put people off? Or is it too clean, or too neat so that people won't be distracted at all? Sometimes the provocation can be so big that you don't get to that point of friction that I am trying to achieve. As a sculptor, I think you don't have to worry about this friction; the confrontation can be enormous, it can be at its maximum, it can be repulsive. But as a craftsman, you don't want to create this friction, because you want people to be comfortable with the piece, particularly if a craftsman is doing functional work. So being in-between these approaches, I have to judge how people will perceive my work. My perception is just one example of how they would physically perceive this dryness of material in relation to the shininess of the glaze.

CR I wanted to thank you for sending all those wonderful catalogues of your work. In one, you referred to the idea of jazz as an important aspect in some of your sculptures. Could talk a little bit about how that idea materialises in a three-dimensional way?

JN I met a Japanese artist, Kaji Nanako, in Japan, and she had a routine of listening to particular music for certain parts of her working process. She created a lot of objects that were very ambiguous; they could be lumps of clay or they could possibly represent something. She listened to very intense, free jazz, creating spontaneous gestures in clay and porcelain to get her work started. Then she worked on composing sculptures from those loose spontaneous objects. She listened to classical music—composed rather than improvised—for this part of the process. She introduced me to some extreme free jazz, like Cecil Taylor, who has created pieces that are more like an audio play than music; it's more like sound and noise forming some kind of pattern. I started to think about it, and became very intrigued with how, in a folk song, you have a melody and you can repeat it and remember it; you know the structure you are in. But with free jazz, you are thrown out of that because you can't understand the structure. I think even the people playing can't follow it because it isn't composed. With free jazz,

you are very much in the moment, and you can't get out of that moment because you can't remember what you've listened to before, something just remains in your gut or your belly, some atmosphere that lingers.

So then I made a group of works that were pipe-like, with rims sticking out, kind of like plates. With these pieces, it was all about having a larger structure that wasn't just hand-size or vase-size, it was moving away from that; it was about having a larger structure that I could work on with different moods. So all the plate forms in these pieces have been thrown on the wheel in different sections, and then assembled. I had the opportunity to deform these rims while they were soft, and I could break them off once they dried. I could be very violent with each piece, but it would still keep some structure and remain standing. I could interfere with that rhythm in a gentle way, or in a violent way, or in an absolute way by taking everything off and then it looks naked, and very rough and stripped bare. Then organising them as a group in five or more pieces, it became all about rhythm and different moods of working, and how these meet. That's where jazz comes from as a title for these pieces; they are to do with thinking about that rhythm, of being thrown into looking at that very acute moment.

CR You mentioned display and I was going to ask you about how you approach the display of your work? You talked about not wanting the smaller pieces to be considered as 'art'. Is display a critical aspect here?

JN If I have the smaller pieces as a group, they can be on a plinth and they can be an artwork because they create a group, which is more than the sum of its parts. If you have several pieces together you see the difference in the treatment of glaze, or non-glaze, so they become more talkative like that. Of course, the plinth is a very important contemporary feature. I don't usually present my work as a fixed installation, which includes complex thinking about the kind of plinth, for example. And sometimes I'm not very happy with just a classic representation. So I'm a little bit in-between there. Sometimes I take enough time to come up with a solution. Some pieces need to be presented at a certain height. I don't want to make them less important by putting them on the floor just to avoid the pedestal, for example. This is not as important as taking them down from a comfortable height would be—let's say for a small piece like that, a height of one meter—to look at it if you are in a smaller space. If you are in a giant space, you can have an area on the floor that is separated from the surrounding area that you put them on, and you have built up a relation between these pieces.

CR So the relationship to the viewer's body is important?

JN Yes, it's more important than the material of the plinth, and of being very articulate about refusing the traditional plinth. It's more about how you can perceive it. With some of these bigger tunnel pieces, they can sometimes be on the floor; they can be very interesting on the floor because you can look down on

it and you can look into it. They are also different, or not as clearly placed as a vase, for example; a vase on a floor has a very different connotation, it becomes a narrative of why it is on the floor, and this narrative is usually not that important to me.

CR And the groupings, you mention that they talk to each other, so this idea of the group is an important aspect of the work?

JN Yes, because in a group, if two or three pieces are situated together, it is very obvious that they are all treated in a different way. There is an emphasis on how each piece is treated, that it's not just decorated, there is a reason why it is treated like that. I think it works better if you have more than one piece, and also I just like to form these groups. They are not still lifes, but they are a little bit like still lifes because they have this framing.

CR I'm also interested in how time might be implicated in your work. Is it something that you think about? Is it relevant to you in any way?

JN I do think it is quite relevant. You could go through the history of art, from centuries ago to the most abstract and contemporary works, and look at it from this perspective. With any sculpture, I think time is always there in different layers. With these sand cast pieces, for example, you feel that there is spontaneity, even though they are quite prepared; there is this explosion of time in the spontaneous gesture that you can feel. But I think this spontaneity is confronted with the fired porcelain. I don't know if it's because it's cultural or if it comes from the material, but porcelain has a sense of something that has settled through time, it has solidified; it will be there in centuries. I think you feel some of that, in contrast to a sculptural material that you know will disintegrate like wax. You know, if the sun is hitting wax it is like Icarus, it will melt away. But I think you can feel this spontaneity, this explosion of time caught in something that will be forever. This is what is interesting about having porcelain formed in such a spontaneous way, and to have it solidified. I think that's a quality in a lot of good contemporary work, that you have these two aspects of time colliding. And with other works that are maybe more sophisticated and detailed with a high-end finish, I always feel time in that quality of precision; it is another layer of time as well.

CR This is very relevant to what I'm thinking about, it really connects to phenomenological theory, this idea of different layers of interweaving time, that time isn't linear—past, present and future all connect. I think ceramics is one of the best materials to talk about this idea, particularly for the reasons you have just mentioned.

JN This phenomenological aspect of philosophy was the first bit of theory that I could directly relate to. In my thesis, the phenomenology of gestures and how to

read them was an important source of inspiration, particularly that beautiful essay by Roland Barthes about Cy Twombly and the gesture of the artist in relation to his work. This was a part of theory that I could connect with. It was good for somebody like me being so physically involved in the work. It is also something that is quite close to me, starting from this point.

Our conversation is useful for me to try to sum my practice up for myself. Making work is always a stream of thinking and observing, and with each decision I make with a piece, there is this whole world of thoughts about that process, and about the appearance and physicality of these pieces and of how people might feel towards them. But if I have to write a statement or a text, I also have to get this into words. I'm not a big writer, although I enjoy it very much, so it forces me to sit down and write. And I write like I work; I write down that stream of thinking and then I have to take a lot of that away because it is not very directed writing. It's putting down possible ways of writing, and sometimes I get trapped by the beauty of a sentence, and of two nouns meeting, and then I have to go through that and be more analytical.

CR I think of writing a bit like drawing. It feels like a physical activity to me. You have to put marks—or words—down on the page, and then you shape the ideas. You take stuff away, and you add stuff, and move thoughts around. It definitely feels like a physical process.

JN For me, there is always a very strong barrier between writing and myself. With three-dimensional work, I can physically act on it, so it's more accessible; it's easier to get to. With writing, I always have to force myself to get over this barrier, and I always try to imagine how this is for a writer, who is more fluent in acting within this world.

CR The ideas you write about in your catalogues are very interesting. In one, you talked about the relationship between the silhouette of the form and its volume, and I was very intrigued by that because it relates to the idea of space. Could you expand on this a little? Would this relate to your more geometric pieces?

JN That's more the focus of these wheel-thrown vase pieces and the silhouette of the vase. It's not so true for pieces made through the digging process. With the pattern of the silhouette you have this symmetry and the symmetry is so strong. It's like the idea of the Rorschach test where you can take any lump of colour, and if you copy it by folding the paper, you will have symmetry and structure, and you will immediately think of something purposeful. The characteristic of the silhouette is that it's symmetrical, so you feel there must be a reason that it's there; there must be some cultural value attached to that. It comes out of the world, out of the unformed or the amorphous, or something. Sculpture can't be blurry, because it has an outline that meets with the physical world. But there is something about this volume, moving with some liquidity within this pattern of

the silhouette, of the symmetrical, that is an important quality of these pieces. It puts them on the edge of sculpture actually, which is far more difficult with pieces thrown on the wheel. With their rotational symmetry, you don't question this volume as much, so I have to interrupt it in different ways to question the volume. With the sand-cast work, it's just done through the process. With these other pieces sometimes I have to put holes into the volume to question that volume. It's not just a wheel-thrown volume, in that I try to alter the wheel-thrown object to make you question how it's made, and why it's made.

CR Yes, I read that you want your pieces to have multiple perspectives so that from each angle that you look at it, it is unlike a rotational form. You are disrupting the symmetry; the viewer approaches it differently from wherever they are positioned?

JN With the vase-like pieces it is really subtle I think. Maybe on one side, it is pleasing where the volume is moving up, and on the other side, perhaps it is hanging down a little bit. This is the point it gets to without the piece becoming figurative and you immediately start adding anthropomorphic ideas. I try to avoid the pieces becoming figurative. The suggested dynamic of the form goes beyond the vase's characteristics without the piece becoming figurative at all. It's just a gesture that's in there, maybe of it hanging down, or moving up, or getting wider.

CR Am I right that in some of your works, parts or fragments of the mould are also included? I think I read this in one of your catalogue texts.

JN Yes, it's in this little catalogue with white work on a grey background; they are all from a body of work I made at Cove Park [residency in Scotland]. I used these moulds but I cast them leaving sections of the mould out. Some of that got boring, but some things became very interesting to me. One piece was like a vase, but seemed like it was lying down on something that formed kind of a plinth. By taking one part of the mould away and casting that element, if you didn't know the process you wouldn't look at it and think, 'he cast a plinth.' It shows a part that was not made as a sculpture, it was made for functional reasons as part of the mould-making process, but it presents a different attitude; it meets this piece in the mould in a different way. I only did a few experiments with that because I think there's a limit to it. There are always workshops in porcelain factories and everybody is experimenting with that, so it's wearing thin quite quickly. But what I enjoyed, and what I also started to copy, were single pieces of a mould—some of them were very beautiful. A mould is like a shell around the prototype and in making the mould you are deciding on the best layout of sections of the shell so you can take the shell apart. So when you take a mould of something, it's not something you do for aesthetic reasons, you do it for functional reasons. But sometimes, out of that, there are really beautiful compositions. I had very organic, plaster, sand cast pieces, and there was a very square straight section

from building the mould that's all about clean craft; it's all about simple tools making very clean surfaces. And then in the middle, there was always this weird section of something very soft. So I loved some of them, but it's nothing that I really explored further. It was just one body of work.

CR The idea of space is an important aspect of my research and your work relies very much on thinking about this, for example, the excavation of space. We've talked your work and its physical relationship to space and to spaces of display, but I wondered if the idea of space holds any imaginative potential for you beyond the physical character of your work?

JN We've talked about the physical part definitely, of its interaction, but maybe there is another level of space that lies on the edge of that question. This piece here, this system of tunnels that forms this half-organic, half-made structure, it's sitting on these tubes that look like legs or something, and it's not open at the top like the others are. I think these pieces interact in a very different way with the space around them because the open mouth of the vase is a major feature that links to pottery history. Figurative sculpture is not usually open; if it's open it's because it's talking about some kind of conflict between its body and something else. So this openness introduces the subject of the space inside the work. Not the space in-between, but the idea of inside and outside space, which, of course, is a subject present in any cup or mug where you have an inside and you have an outside. Usually, the outside is decorated for purposes of aesthetic pleasure and the inside is glazed for functional purposes. Even with these very sculptural pieces, if I have these openings at the top, it's extending that inner space a little towards the surrounding space. So it is definitely a relevant subject in relation to these openings. Whereas this piece, where I cut into that structure, it creates a different kind of opening. Cutting with the saw is more of an intellectual tool for me because the cut is like a line that I draw through this structure. So it's an act of will; it is a willing act of deconstruction, or an interaction, a means of thinking about this piece. But the opening that comes from the casting process is really the opening of the vase as well.

Appendix H: Bakewell, S. (2015). Exhibition text accompanying the installation 'Imagination Dead Imagine.' At: AWARD, *The British Ceramics Biennial 2015*, Stoke-on-Trent. Reproduced with kind permission of the artist.

AWARD

Sam Bakewell

Imagination Dead Imagine

I.D.I expands and consolidates over ten years' worth of occasional objects never before shown, from a zone of quasi-creativity. These things were never meant as 'real' work; they were started as tests, hand-eye thinkers, leftovers or complete copies made for the sake of making alone. Personal talismans to keep making in the face of the desire not to, they posit the death of creativity as day 0.

Made as the need arose, the whole series changes depending on each object's tussle with legitimacy. Some were made fast and without thought. Others, laboured over for years, became obsessional meditative devices—exercises in the potentially futile, a conquest in the useless. Removed from historical context they seem to become emblems to the unknown and totemic, the explicitly figurative becoming an abstract.

Housed in an anti-shaman's mud hut, this liminal space aims to invite a reconsidering of clay as chthonic conduit to an other.

List of Illustrations

- Fig.1. Claire Curneen, (from left to right) *Strange Fire*; *Mary Magdalene*; *Cut to the Quick*; *Bird Figure*. Porcelain figures in Curneen's studio from the body of work *To This I Put My Name*, 2013. Image: Dewi Tannatt Lloyd, courtesy of the artist. p.9.
- Fig.2. Sam Bakewell, detail from the *Reader* series, 2011- present, ceramic. Image: Catherine Roche. p.22.
- Fig.3. Johannes Nagel, *Barock*, 2010, stoneware. Image: Klaus Goeltz, courtesy of the artist. p.23.
- Fig.4. Phoebe Cummings, *This Was Now*, 2020, raw clay and mixed media. Site-specific, temporary sculpture produced at Wolverhampton Art Gallery. Image: Phoebe Cummings, courtesy of the artist. p.23.
- Fig.5. Nao Matsunaga, *Big Animal or Everything is a Machine*, 2011, ceramic, wood, wax, ink. Image: Phil Sayer, courtesy of the artist. p.24.
- Fig.6. Ingrid Murphy, *Campanologist's Tea Cup*, 2012, earthenware, lustre, rubber, arduino nano, steel, speakers, sequencer. Image: Ceri Jones, at Brewery Arts Centre, 2020, courtesy of Ceri Jones. p.24.
- Fig.7. Sam Bakewell, *Imagination Dead Imagine*, 2015, mixed media. Winner of the Award prize at the *British Ceramics Biennial*, Stoke-on-Trent, UK, 2015. Image: Sylvain Deleu, courtesy of the artist. p.25.
- Figs. 8-9. Phoebe Cummings, *An Ugly Aside*, 2019, raw clay, wood, polythene, steel, wire. Site-specific, temporary sculpture made for the exhibition *A Tea Journey: From the Mountains to the Table* at Compton Verney, Warwickshire. Image: Phoebe Cummings, courtesy of the artist. p.45.
- Fig.10. Sam Bakewell, installation view of *Things You Take, Things You Take Too Far* at Corvi-Mora, London, 2021, ceramic. Image: Marcus Leith, courtesy of the artist, Corvi-Mora, London. p.45.
- Fig.11. Ingrid Murphy, *Plate Synth*, 2019, porcelain, glaze, lustre, wooden tray, PCB board. Image: Dewi Tannatt Lloyd, courtesy of the artist. p.46.
- Fig.12. Nao Matsunaga, *Palace of Coming and Going*, 2012, ceramic, wood, acrylic paint. Image: Thomas Rydin, courtesy of the artist. p.46.
- Fig.13. Johannes Nagel, (from left to right) *Gold Planes*, 2020, porcelain, glaze; *Lust for Lustre #3*, 2020, porcelain, pewter. Image: Thomas Dachs, courtesy of the artist. p.47.

- Figs. 14-15. Anders Ruhwald, *You in Between*, 2008, glazed ceramic. Installed at Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art in 2008/09. The piece was later shown at Kunstnerforbundet i Oslo, Norway and is now part of the collection of the National Museum in Oslo. Images: Gilmar Ribeiro/G2 Photography, courtesy of the artist. p.80.
- Fig.16. Ingrid Murphy, *360° Teapot*, 2019, bone china, two 180° digital cameras. Image Dewi Tannatt Lloyd, courtesy of the artist. p.103.
- Fig.17. Johannes Nagel, *Cluster/Fragment*, 2015, porcelain, glaze. Image: Hans-Wulf Kunze, courtesy of the artist. p.107.
- Figs. 18-19. Sam Bakewell, installation views of *Reader* shown at Messums West, Wiltshire, UK, 2018 as part of the exhibition *Beyond the Vessel: Narratives in Contemporary European Ceramics*. Images: Catherine Roche p.117.
- Fig.20. Sam Bakewell, detail from *Reader* series, 2018, ceramic. Image: Catherine Roche. p.122.
- Figs. 21-22. Phoebe Cummings, details of *A Ripening Surveillance*, 2018, raw clay and mixed media. Temporary installation at The Tetley, Leeds, UK as part of the *Material Environments* exhibition. Images: Phoebe Cummings, courtesy of the artist. p.127.
- Fig.23. Anne Truitt, *Perception and Reflection*, acrylic on wood. Installed at the Hirshhorn Museum, Washington DC, 2009-2010. Image redacted. p.128.
- Fig.24. Johannes Nagel, *Improvisorium*, 2011, porcelain, glaze. Image: René Schaeffer, courtesy of the artist. p.130.
- Fig.25. Phoebe Cummings, *A Ripening Surveillance*, 2018, raw clay and mixed media. Temporary installation at The Tetley, Leeds, UK, as part of *Material Environments* group exhibition. Image: Jules Lister, courtesy of the artist. p.132.
- Fig.26. Nao Matsunaga, 2014, *Real Vagabonds*, ceramic. Image: Phil Sayer, courtesy of the artist. p.143.
- Fig.27. Nao Matsunaga, 2011, *Small Axe or Good Morning Civilisation*, glazed ceramic, wood. Image: Phil Sayer, courtesy of the artist. p.143.
- Fig.28. Phoebe Cummings, *Triumph of the Immaterial* (detail), 2017, raw clay, fountain, water. Winning artwork exhibited as part of the Woman's Hour Craft Prize exhibition at the V&A, London, 2017. Image: Sylvain Deleu, courtesy of the artist. p.146.
- Fig.29. Johannes Nagel, (from left to right) *Small Circle Cross*, 2016, porcelain; *Ausbgrabung*, 2016, porcelain and pewter. Image: Hans-Wulf Kunze, courtesy of the artist. p.147.

- Figs. 30-31. Ingrid Murphy, (from left to right) demonstrating *I.O.Touch* & *I.O.Touch*, 2018. Bone china, glaze, lustre, WiFi enabled Arduino Maker, 1000 microprocessor. Images: Johnny Segers, courtesy of the artist. p.149.
- Fig.32. Nao Matsunaga, *Standing Back Up*, 2012, ceramic and wood. Image: Phil Sayer, courtesy of the artist. p.151.
- Fig.33. Nao Matsunaga, *Pull Up, Pull Down, Take Me Away*, 2012, ceramic and wood. Image: Jon Stokes, courtesy of the artist. p.151.
- Fig.34. Nao Matsunaga with *Standing on the Verge*, 2015, raw clay, acrylic paint. Image: Joel Fildes, courtesy of the artist. p.155.
- Fig.35. Nao Matsunaga, surface detail of *Standing on the Verge*, 2015, raw clay, acrylic paint. Image: Joel Fildes, courtesy of the artist. p.155.
- Figs. 36-37. Nao Matsunaga, (from left to right) *Deep Expert* and *Deep Expert* (detail), 2019, glazed porcelain, wood, acrylic paint. Images: Daniele Iodice, courtesy of the artist. p.161.
- Figs. 38-39. Nao Matsunaga, (from left to right) *The Many Eyed* & *The Many Eyed* (detail), 2015, ceramic, glaze, acrylic paint. Images: Nao Matsunaga, courtesy of the artist. p.162.
- Fig.40. Nao Matsunaga, *Just Like That*, 2014, ceramic. Image: Phil Sayer, courtesy of the artist. p.164.
- Fig.41. Nao Matsunaga, *Real Vagabonds*, 2014, ceramic. Image: Lauren Mclean, courtesy of the artist. p.165.
- Fig.42. Nao Matsunaga, *Never Gonna Tell It*, 2014, ceramic, wood acrylic paint. Image: Lauren Mclean, courtesy of the artist. p.165.
- Fig.43. Nao Matsunaga, *Beam*, 2014, ceramic, plaster, wood acrylic paint. Image: Lauren Mclean, courtesy of the artist. p.165.
- Fig.44. Phoebe Cummings, *Antediluvian Swag*, 2016, raw clay. Temporary sculpture installed at New Art Centre, Roche Court Sculpture Park, Wiltshire, UK, as part of the group exhibition *Material Language: New Work in Clay*. Image: Sylvain Deleu, courtesy of the artist. p.167.
- Figs. 45-47. Phoebe Cummings, (from left to right) *Ornamental Chronology*, 2019, raw clay; details from *Ornamental Chronology*. Exhibited at Mesher, Istanbul as part of the exhibition *Beyond the Vessel: Myths, Legends and Fables in Contemporary Ceramics Around Europe* in 2019. Images: Hadiye Cangokce, courtesy of the artist. p.168.

- Figs. 48-50. Phoebe Cummings' hands working with clay/imprint of the artist's hand in clay. (From left to right) Image 47: Roo Lewis/Image 48: Sylvain Deleu/Image 49: Phoebe Cummings, all courtesy of the artist. p.170.
- Fig.51. Phoebe Cummings, still from archive film documenting the making of temporary installation *Production Line*, 2015, clay, rope, wire, pulley. Made directly in the space at Southampton City Art Gallery, the work is held in the permanent collections of York Art Gallery, Southampton City Art Gallery and Shipley Art Gallery in the form of an archive of films and photographs. Image: Sylvain Deleu, courtesy of the artist. p.171.
- Fig.52. Sam Bakewell, *Of Beauty Reminiscing*, 2015, carved porcelain. Image: Ian Skelton, courtesy of the artist. p.174.
- Fig.53. Johannes Nagel, *Growing Vessel*, 2015, porcelain, glaze. Image: Hans-Wulf Kunze, courtesy of the artist. p.175.
- Fig.54. Johannes Nagel, *Untitled 5*, 2019, porcelain, oxide. Image: Hans-Wulf Kunze, courtesy of the artist. p.175.
- Fig.55. Johannes Nagel, *Vessels Perhaps I*, 2015, porcelain. Heights of vases range from 56-160cm. Image: René Schaeffer, courtesy of the artist. p.176.
- Fig.56. Johannes Nagel, *Untitled*, 2017, porcelain and glaze. Image: Tom Dachs, courtesy of the artist. p.180.
- Fig.57. Phoebe Cummings, *After the Death of the Bear*, 2013, clay and mixed media. Temporary installation at *British Ceramics Biennial*, Stoke-on-Trent, UK, 2013. Image: Sylvain Deleu, courtesy of the artist. p.187.
- Figs. 58-59. Phoebe Cummings, *Scenes from a Future History of Ornament*, 2015, timber, archival storage boxes, polythene, raw clay. Temporary installation commissioned for *Fragile?* exhibition at National Museum Wales, Cardiff, 2015. Image courtesy of Amgueddfa Cymru. p.189.
- Figs. 60-61. Phoebe Cummings, surface details of the interior walls from *Scenes for a Future History of Ornament*, 2015, raw clay. Images courtesy of Amgueddfa Cymru. p.190.
- Figs. 62-64. Phoebe Cummings, details of archival box interiors from *Scenes for a Future History of Ornament*, 2015. Cardboard box, raw clay. Images courtesy of Amgueddfa Cymru. p.191.
- Fig.65. Sam Bakewell, quasi devotional objects from installation *Imagination Dead Imagine*, 2015, mixed media. Images: Sam Bakewell/Ian Skelton respectively, both courtesy of the artist. p.194.

- Fig.66. Phoebe Cummings, *Triumph of the Immaterial* (detail), 2017, raw clay, fountain, water. Image: Sylvain Deleu, courtesy of the artist. p.196.
- Fig.67. Phoebe Cummings, *Triumph of the Immaterial*, 2017, clay and water. Shown as part of the Woman's Hour Craft Prize exhibition at the V&A, London, 2017-2018. Image: Sylvain Deleu, courtesy of the artist. p.196.
- Fig.68. Sam Bakewell, *Reader*, 2016, ceramic, china clay, coconut oil, installed at Corvi-Mora, London. Image: Sam Bakewell, courtesy of the artist, Corvi-Mora, London. p.197.
- Fig.69. Sam Bakewell, *Imagination Dead Imagine*, 2015, mixed media. Winner of the Award prize at the *British Ceramics Biennial*, Stoke-on-Trent, UK, 2015. Image: Sylvain Deleu, courtesy of the artist. p.199.
- Fig. 70. Sam Bakewell, interior view of the installation *Imagination Dead Imagine*, 2015, mixed media. Image redacted. p.199.
- Fig.71. Sam Bakewell, *Leavings, II (Time for Waste)* 2018, ceramic. Shown in Bakewell's solo exhibition *Time to Waste* at Corvi-Mora, London, 2019. Image: Catherine Roche. p.202.
- Fig.72. Sam Bakewell, *Leavings, I (Time for Waste)* 2018, ceramic. Shown in Bakewell's solo exhibition *Time to Waste* at Corvi-Mora, London, 2019. Image: Catherine Roche. p.202.
- Figs. 73-75. Sam Bakewell, (from left to right) *Dust, XIII & Dust, V (Time to Waste)*, 2018, ceramic. Images: Catherine Roche. *Dust X (Time to Waste)*, 2018, ceramic. Image: Sylvain Deleu, courtesy of the artist, Corvi-Mora, London. All shown in Bakewell's solo exhibition *Time to Waste* at Corvi-Mora, London, 2019. p.203.
- Fig.76. Sam Bakewell, *Dust, XII (Time to Waste)*, 2018, Parian. Shown in Bakewell's solo exhibition *Time to Waste* at Corvi-Mora, London, 2019. Image: Sylvain Deleu, courtesy of the artist, Corvi-Mora, London. p.204
- Fig.77. Sam Bakewell, *Offal I*, ceramic. Shown in Bakewell's solo exhibition *Time to Waste* at Corvi-Mora, London, 2019. Image courtesy of the artist, Corvi-Mora, London. p.204.
- Fig.78. Ingrid Murphy, *Sounds of the Pink City*, 2019, found chai cups, gold lustre, copper staples, 3D scanned and slip-cast self-portrait figure, laser-etched oak table, capacitive sensing technology. Installed at Mission Gallery, Swansea in Murphy's solo exhibition *Seen and Unseen*, part of the *Language of Clay* series curated by Ceri Jones. Image: Catherine Roche. p.208.

- Fig.79. Ingrid Murphy, self-portrait from *Sounds of the Pink City*, 3D scanned, printed and slip-cast figure, found chai cups, gold lustre. Studio view of work in progress, 2018. Image: Matthew Otten, courtesy of the artist. p.210.
- Fig.80. Ingrid Murphy, detail from *Things Men Have Made with Wakened Hands*, 2012. Found stoneware jug (right) beside 3D printed, slip cast, gold-lustred, porcelain replica. Image: Ingrid Murphy, courtesy of the artist. p.218.
- Fig.81. Ingrid Murphy, sequence of still frames taken from embedded AR film as part of *Things Men Have Made With Wakened Hands*, 2012. Film: Ingrid Murphy/Stills montage: Catherine Roche. p.219.
- Fig.82. Ingrid Murphy, *Things Men Have Made with Wakened Hands*, 2012. Found stoneware jug, porcelain slip-cast, gold-lustred replica jug, Flash Media AR technology. Image documents a participant interacting with the work. Image: Ingrid Murphy, courtesy of the artist. p.219.
- Fig.83. Ingrid Murphy, *Things Men Have Made with Wakened Hands*, 2012. Detail of live-stream image of user with embedded film AR overlay. Image: Ingrid Murphy, courtesy of the artist. p.220.

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