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Abstract: *Filling the Gap: Ceramics and the Absence of Critical Literacy: a Post-Minimalist Solution.*

This paper discusses a practice based PhD research project, the aim of which is to make a contribution to visual literacy in the practice of sculptural ceramics.

A dearth of critical writing is an identified problem in the field of ceramics. In the past decade, frequent calls have been by practitioners, critics, curators and academics for a substantial body of critical writing to underpin contemporary practice (Johnson 1998, Jones 2005, Groom 2004, de Waal 2005). The privileged status of language associated with notions of authority, truth, and thought, have rarely been associated with writings about ceramics, critics in the past have acknowledged a hierarchical approach and snobbishness to a genre with no structured theory of art (Pincus-Witten 1977, Groom 2004).

Whilst the field of ceramics has traditionally been dominated by studio pottery and functional work, a new area of practice has emerged within the past decade in which ceramic materials are used to express ideas, pose questions, and challenge perceptions, and in which the process of making the work forms part of the investigation (Deacon 2005). This work has been described as difficult to critique and classify within conventional ceramics practice (Daniel-McElroy 2002, de Waal 2005). I suggest that it shares characteristics with the post-Minimalist strand of process art, around which there emerged a substantial body of writing in the 1970's by such critics as Rosalind Krauss, Robert Pincus-Witten, and Robert Morris. Ceramic work was excluded from this discourse.

An important question for this research project, therefore, is whether critical writings on post-Minimalism can provide an analytical template to fill the identified critical gap in contemporary process led ceramics. The methodological approach is based on Michel Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge* (Foucault 1969) in which Foucault maps out the notion of how discourses are formed, and suggests that a new critical language may occur by appropriating existing discourses in order to provide new interpretations for subject areas which are not yet theoretically 'mapped out' (Foucault 1969:227).

An increasing number of artists are undertaking practice based doctorates which include a written dissertation of around 40,000 words. The requirement of combining practice with a critical exegesis can empower artists to develop a critical literacy about their practice, especially in a field which lacks a strong body of critical writing. Through the dissemination of such research, other practitioners will be encouraged to explore new ways of approaching and presenting academic thought in practice. Responses to the outcomes of this project so far, through presentation and publication of conference papers in China, Scotland, England, and Hungary, indicate that the research is of significant interest to other practitioners, writers and academics in the field.

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