

Institution: Buckinghamshire New University
Unit of Assessment: Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory
<p>Title of case study: Exploring the Decline of British Ceramic Manufacture and its Associated Histories through Contemporary Art Practice</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Dr Neil Brownsword's research focuses on the associated histories of ceramic manufacture in North Staffordshire, and its recent decline. Through his artistic practice, this research has been disseminated beyond academia to enhance public awareness of the social, cultural and economic effects of this downturn, on people, place and heritage. The impact of this research culturally, has arguably positioned Brownsword 'at the forefront of current experimental and conceptual approaches to clay in Europe and Scandinavia' (Fielding 2008). In preparing programmes dealing with ceramic history, the BBC has presented Brownsword's expertise to communicate a broader public understanding of the region's post-industrial landscape.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Brownsword's history of family employment and his own apprenticeship in the ceramic industry remain seminal to the underpinning of this research. Personal insights have heightened Brownsword's in-depth analysis of the complex knowledge systems and traditional skills within specific divisions of labour, and their subsequent displacement. The articulation of the effects of industrial decline through his artistic practice developed following graduation from the RCA (1995), and gained recognition internationally following a prestigious residency in 1999 at the European Ceramic Work Centre in the Netherlands (EKWC). Exhibitions at the Gallery for New Ceramics, Copenhagen (2000), and the Craft Council, London (2000) were the first to publically disseminate his use of fragmentary installation as metaphor to negotiate new insights into Britain's contemporary post-industrial experience as well as its industrial past.</p> <p>Innovations within Brownsword's artistic research, involving the excavation and regeneration of ceramic industrial archaeology as ciphers of historic change and lost labour, were honed during his PhD, <i>Action Reflection: A Creative Response to Transition and Change in British Ceramic Manufacture</i> (2006) [1]. This involved eight months ethnographic fieldwork at the Wedgwood factory (2003/04), where he filmed and documented the oral histories of employees during an intense period of economic restructuring. The footage attracted the attention of NEVAC (National Electronic Video Archive of the Crafts - now 'Recording the Crafts' based at the University of the West of England, Bristol), who later collaborated with Brownsword to extend their archive of developments within British Craft (http://www.uwe.ac.uk/sca/research rtc/wedgwood.htm). Another unique contribution of this footage is its meticulous elucidation of industrial craft skills and material knowledge of factory artisans, whose expertise was being displaced by technological advances and global outsourcing. Brownsword's assembly of this footage together with his films of demolished ceramic factories in North Staffordshire, in his reworked <i>Salvage Series</i> installation (2005/2008), strengthened communication of the region's loss of traditional industry and skills to a broad public audience via high profile national/ international exhibitions, and artist talks (Output 4, <i>Possibilities and Losses</i> (2009), Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art). [2]</p> <p>Repeat invitations to the International Ceramics Research Centre, Denmark (ICRC) (2001- 2008) have played a significant role in developing Brownsword's innovative approach to ceramic material research and experimental wood firing. This was exemplified through artefacts created for his solo exhibition <i>Poet of Residue</i> at Galerie Besson (2008), which illuminated the histories of human endeavour involved in the standardisation of ceramic manufacture (Output 1) [3]. The ICRC was also fundamental in developing Brownsword's exploration of experimental mould</p>

making which he applied to create new work during his commission for Fu Le International Ceramic Museum, China (2008) [4]. Through these works Brownsword offered new artistic insights into the cyclical histories of skill and knowledge transference through cultural commodities, via his aesthetic appropriation of early 18th century British attempts to imitate Chinese porcelain (Output 2).

North Staffordshire's success as a centre for ceramic manufacture was re-examined through *Marl Hole*, (Output 3) a project curated by Brownsword which drew together four international artists to explore the region's naturally abundant clay deposits. *Marl Hole* [5] offered new insights into 'material-led' site specific interventions, and contributes to the discourse surrounding the expanded field of contemporary clay and ceramic practice (Output 3) [6].

3. References to the research

1. Book: Whiting, D., Goldmark, J., *Modern British Potters and their Studios*, A&C Black, 2009. ISBN-10: 0713687320, p. 128-133.

2. Exhibition catalogue: Adamson, G., Vieteberg, J., *Possibilities and Losses*, Mima/Crafts Council Publication. 2010. ISBN (10) 19-0371-320-X. pp. 5-11, 15, 16, 25, 37-55. (Output 1)

3. Exhibition catalogue: Whiting, D., *Poet of Residue*, Galerie Besson, 2008. (Output 1)

4. Research grant: Residency at Fu Le International Ceramic Art Museums, Fuping Pottery Art Village, China awarded to Neil Brownsword. Funder: Grants for individuals Award (ref 9790414), Arts Council England. Value £4721.00. 23 June – 3 Aug 2008. (Output 2)

5. Exhibition catalogue: *Marl Hole*, Brownsword, N., Gustavsberg's Konsthall, Sweden, 2010. ISBN 978-91-978426-4-8. (Output 3)

6. Scholarly paper: Harrod, T., *Out Of The Studio*, 2009. Schein-Joseph International Museum of Ceramic Art at Alfred University. http://ceramicmuseum.alfred.edu/perkins_lect_series/ (Output 3)

4. Details of the impact

Dr Neil Brownsword's research has been disseminated beyond academia through exhibitions, lectures and publications associated with his artistic practice. A broad range of national /international institutions and esteemed cultural commentators have endorsed Brownsword's work for its ability to enhance public awareness of the social, cultural and economic effects of North Staffordshire's ceramic manufacturing downturn, on people, place and heritage (including Alun Graves, Senior Ceramics Curator, V&A; Glenn Adamson former head of research at the V&A, Director Designate, Museum of Art and Design, New York; David Whiting craft critic and writer; Dr Tanya Harrod, eminent craft historian and writer).

Critically acclaimed as 'one of the great monuments in contemporary British ceramics' (Adamson *Possibilities and Losses*, 2010, p. 11 [1]), *Salvage Series*' was exhibited in *Possibilities and Losses* (2009), at Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (mima) to challenge traditional perceptions about clay practice and its relationship to the historic model of craft. *Possibilities and Losses* attracted 39,000 visitors [2], and led to mima's acquisition of *Salvage Series* and *Transition* - an early work by Brownsword. mima selected *Transition* to represent their contemporary collection at *Interloqui*, an exhibition which attracted 4400 visitors during the 54th Venice Biennale (2011) [3].

The significance of Brownsword's contribution to the expanded field of ceramics is evidenced

through reviews and critical discourse offered by a broad range of cultural commentators. The impact of this research culturally, has positioned Brownsword as a '*leading figure*' (Adamson, 2010) [4], arguably '*at the forefront of current experimental and conceptual approaches to clay in Europe and Scandinavia*' (Fielding, 2008) [5]. His experimental material research has been endorsed by the ICRC and disseminated through its program of master classes, symposia and residencies - engaging graduates, practicing artists and members of the public worldwide. Brownsword's research expertise on industrial ceramic history led to his appointment as artist/curator by Shrewsbury Museum and Art Gallery to redisplay their nationally recognised collection of Shropshire ceramics (2011). Although the museum's original opening date for December 2013 has been delayed, Brownsword has publically disseminated his research surrounding 'hidden' knowledge and skills within ceramic production that underpin this commission via a ticketed lecture (29/11/2012) [6]. The Victoria and Albert Museum also sought Brownsword's expertise in the redevelopment of their Ceramic Galleries (2009) and in preparing programmes dealing with ceramic's post-industrial history for their *Hand Made in Britain* partnership with BBC4. For episode 2 of *Ceramic's a Fragile History* Brownsword elucidated his creative process as artist/archaeologist and sought ex-employees from the ceramic industry for interview (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0162yb1>). Screened on 17/10/2011 the episode was viewed by over 400,000 people (excludes i-player figures), repeated in April 2012 [7].

The exploration of North Staffordshire's pre-industrial ceramic origins through the *Marl Hole* project for the 2009 British Ceramics Biennial (BCB) continues to be influential on a global level. Johnny Magee's film output of this site specific articulation of raw clay has been screened to a worldwide audience through exhibitions, public lectures and symposia. *Marl Hole* has received a total of 11257 views (as of 24/11/13) since posted on YouTube by the British Crafts Council [8]. In 2009 Brownsword received the British Ceramic Biennial's one-off category award, nominated by a panel of eminent curators and critical commentators '*in recognition for his creativity and achievement across the breadth of contemporary ceramic practice*' [9]. Since this accolade the BCB invited Brownsword to create new site specific works, and to co-curate an international exhibition of works made at *sundaymorning@ekwc* (formally the EKWC) for their 2011 festival programme. The 2011 Biennial attracted 32,700 visitors, and generated £2.08m worth of economic activity in the city [10].

International collaboration continues to be an integral part of Brownsword's research, which has recently been exemplified in his initiation and co-leading of the project *Topographies of the Obsolete*. This collaboration between Bergen Academy of Art and Design and the BCB, invited interdisciplinary artists have been to explore the former Spode ceramic factory and its redundant infrastructure as raw material. The project questions, and offers new artistic insights into how ceramic and clay can be understood as both material and subject in contemporary art practice, through a range of research strands including the contemporary ruin, the artist as archaeologist and the globalized landscape of ceramics. The success of the project is due to its receipt of funding both from KHiB and the Norwegian Artistic Research Programme (totalling £217000.00) [11] which has enabled previously inaccessible parts of the site to be made safe for public access during the Biennial, and for future cultural activity.

The significance of Brownsword's impact is further evidenced by the acquisition of his artefacts for permanent collection in museum displays internationally. He has four artefacts on permanent public display in the Fu Le International Ceramic Museum China (2008). In 2009 the National Public Art Council, Sweden purchased *Stilt*, from his solo exhibition *Elegy* in Stockholm. In 2011 Brownsword seminal work *Transition* (1999) was auctioned alongside the works of the Chapman, brothers, Grayson Perry and Gavin Turk at *Material Worlds* - the Contemporary Art Society's (CAS) annual fundraising event in support of new purchases of contemporary art for audiences across the UK. *Transition* raised £20,000 (9/03/2011) purchased for Middlesbrough Museum of Modern Art's permanent collection [12]. In 2011 the V&A Museum purchased *Elegy* (2009) to represent Brownsword's '*ground-breaking practice*' [13], and Brighton and Hove Museum

purchased *Waster* (2011) for their internationally renowned collection of contemporary ceramics. As well as extensive lectures in academic institutions internationally, Brownsword has been invited to present public lectures and gallery talks, including: *Ceramic Art London*, Royal College of Art (2008); *Ceramic City*, British Ceramics Biennial Platform Conference, (2009); The Museum of Decorative Arts and Design, Oslo (2010); *European Ceramic Context 2010*, Bornholm, and *Contemporary British Studio Ceramics*, at The Mint Museum of Craft, North Carolina (2011).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. Exhibition catalogue: Adamson, G., Vieteberg, J., *Possibilities and Losses*, Mima/ Crafts Council Publication, 2010, ISBN (10) 19-0371-320-X. pp. 10-11.

2. Crafts Council Annual Review 2001-2010:

http://www.craftscouncil.org.uk/files/download_iterator/5881d107f2a8c9cc/crafts-council-annual-review-2009-10.pdf p. 26.

3. Interloqui Evaluation Report for Arts Council England, Susan Priestley, 2012

Interloqui, Caterina Tognon Arte Contemporanea, an exhibition coinciding with the 54th Venice Biennale of Art, Italy, 2 June – 26 November 2011, p.12.

4. Exhibition catalogue. Adamson, G., Harrod, T., Mickey, M., *Contemporary British Studio Ceramics: The Grainer Collection*, Yale University Press, 2010 ISBN 978-0-300-16719-1, p.200.

5. Exhibition catalogue. Fielding, A., *Neil Brownsword: New Work*, SOFA New York, 2008, ISBN 978-0-9789206-0-9. p.18-19.

6. Email correspondence: Adrian Plant curator Shrewsbury Museum and Art Gallery.

7. Ceramics a Fragile History: The Age of Wedgwood viewing figures

Email correspondence from series producer David Vincent 25/06/2012.

8. Marl Hole film YOUTUBE viewing figures total 11257, 24/11/13.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iyaZtJdUzBs> viewing figures 24/11/13 - 6282

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ZGrNe8_wsM viewing figures 24/11/13 - 1115

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kzytvxi4Dzw> viewing figures 24/11/13 - 1522

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q6TlBlqK_el viewing figures 24/11/13 – 2338

9. British Ceramic Biennial Archives 2009 Awards— Excellence, breaking new ground p.54

<http://www.britishceramicsbiennial.com/downloads/archives/british-ceramics-biennial-2009.pdf>

10. British Ceramic Biennial 2011 evaluation:

http://www.britishceramicsbiennial.com/downloads/news/BCB2011_Evaluation_Press_Release_6_Mar_2012.pdf

11. Research grant: Topographies of the Obsolete, co-led by Professor Neil Brownsword at Bergen Academy of Art and Design and Senior lecturer at Bucks New University. Funder: The Project Programme, The Norwegian Artistic Research Programme. Value: 1922000.00 NOK (approx. £217,000.00) from Jan 2013 to Sept 2014. http://artistic-research.no/?page_id=2057 and http://artistic-research.no/?page_id=1997&lang=en

12. Material Worlds, Contemporary Art Society fundraising event for Contemporary Art

<http://www.contemporaryartsociety.org/news/the-contemporary-art-society-annual-fundraiser-generates-240-000-in-support-of-new-purchase-of-contemporary-art-for-museums-across-the-uk/>

13. Justification for Acquisition, Alun Graves, Senior Curator Ceramics, V&A London.