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Relational Learning:

ACAD Ceramics Visiting Artists

The First 3 Decades

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Fig. 21
Emily Schroeder Willis demonstrating her glazing process in ACAD Ceramics studio during the 1000 Miles Apart Conference, 2009
photo by Greg Payce

Teaching by Example to Belong and to Encounter

Mireille Perron

How have we been teaching in the Ceramics area of Alberta College of Art + Design (ACAD)? This text focuses on the ACAD Ceramics Visiting Artist program, an important pedagogical component of the Ceramics area. The program's mandate is to invite potters, ceramists and their analogues to complement the teaching of the permanent faculty. The practice of approximately thirty participants who have joined the faculty cohort over the past years is recognized in this publication.

The Visiting Artists come for an academic year and are provided with an embedded studio. Perched on an ingenious architectural platform overseeing the main communal ceramics workspace, the Visiting Artist studio doubles as an observation tower. The Visiting Artists are acknowledged as “supplemental” to the continuing faculty. In *Thinking through Craft*, Glenn Adamson rearticulates the considerations of Theodor Adorno and Jacques Derrida on the supplement as opposed to autonomy. Adamson puts forward the supplement as a productive characteristic of craft.¹ I propose that the supplement is also an effective way to frame our pedagogical understanding of the function of the Visiting Artists for our Ceramics students. The visiting artists act as “gilt frames”; they make possible new vistas on the students' emerging practices, as well as the more advanced practices of the permanent faculty.



Fig. 22

Martina Lantin, *Iterative Imitation* (installation view), 2015

Constructed Cup (foreground): Tyvek, embroidery floss; *Wallpaper* (background): digital print, Gallery 371 ACAD, photo by Christina Hills

For Adorno, the purpose of craft is distinct from that of art, where art is to serve as a vehicle of self-doubt and rigorous internal analysis. In contrast, Adorno understands craft as a supplement in the sense of Derrida's proposition in *Grammatology* (1976). A supplement provides something necessary to another original entity but is nonetheless extraneous to it. The supplement points to a lack in the original. For Derrida, writing is the supplement par excellence, because it is supplemental to language itself. It is worth noting Derrida's passion for writing and the links he makes between writing, images, desire and enchantment. Without writing, there is no way to fix what is lacking in language, but we tend to view the written

word as a transcription of the spoken word. The supplement is likewise opposed to autonomy, as plurality is opposed to purity.² This interpretation leaves Modernist art as an autonomous field of practice that "speaks for itself," challenged by a more communal and societal approach to making in our Postmodern condition where craft is supplemental to "living." Craft serves to "fix" our living the way writing "fixes" our speech.

Aside from writing, Derrida's most important example of the supplemental is the gilt frame, explored in the *Truth in Painting* (1978). Here, Derrida argues that a painting needs a frame as much

as a frame needs a painting. The zone of the supplement is formal as well as institutional.³ To say that craft is supplemental is to say that it is always essential to the end in view, but in the process of achieving that end, it disappears in service of society.

Use of the supplement as a pedagogical model explicitly starts from the idea that a student as a researcher belongs to the world and not exclusively to a school environment. As explored by Jean-Luc Nancy, being in the world is the sense of our coexistence reconfirmed and questioned by the encounter with the “other.”⁴ Thus, there is a friction, a tension, not unlike the fitting of a glaze on a pot—between belonging and encountering—the present, past and future. To understand someone else’s practice, to comprehend somebody else’s mind, heart and hands is to start to imagine becoming the one we wish to be. Empathy thus consolidates and alters the discipline of ceramics and the self. Transforming and altering are commonplace ceramics gestures that contribute to disciplinary expansion. For example, one needs to be familiar with the discipline of ceramics as we know it, while also estranged from it, deliberately pursuing distance from the familiar to expand on the aforementioned. An exceptional archive of this ongoing disciplinary expansion is recorded in the *ACAD Ceramics Newsletters*, in itself another outstanding pedagogical tool. Katrina Chaytor, its dedicated editor for the last fourteen years (expanding it from

a photocopied/stapled document to a full-colour print publication), makes the case for the validity of a strong ceramics community with each issue. With its updates on the activities of students, alumni, permanent and sessional faculty, past Visiting Artists and all other ceramics contributors, the newsletter exemplifies how the ceramics community belongs to the world as one of its invaluable building blocks.⁵

The scope of my contribution makes it impossible to offer a gilt frame large enough to encompass every Visiting Artist. Therefore, I offer a glimpse into the two participants who became permanent faculty members, and as a consequence, shaped the successful destiny of this program for many years—Greg Payce (1987–1988, retired 2015) and Katrina Chaytor (1994–1995, retiring in 2017). I also present Martina Lantin, appointed permanently in 2014 but “technically” taking the Visiting Artist position and its studio for her first year.

I focus on my colleagues’ most recent work, covering a period of a year or so. Fittingly, a year of work is the same amount of time a Visiting Artist usually has to leave his/her traces. Nevertheless, taking my lead from the *ACAD Ceramics Newsletters’* ethos, where anyone who has passed through the doors of the Ceramics area remains an active member of a never-ending communal ceramics discourse, I conclude with a glimpse at the year-end

exhibition of Emily Schroeder Willis, the Visiting Artist in 2009–2010.

Lantin’s year-end exhibition titled *Iterative Imitation* comprises a large-scale embroidered teacup model made from Tyvek (Fig. 22), a digital printed screen of the blue onion pattern and a sequence of pinched cups reflecting the prototype of the blue onion motif. The artist states: “Throughout the history of ceramic production, methodologies and patterns have moved around the globe through migration, war and conquest. Blue and white porcelain has carried particular social aspects of this history—including the aspirations and the statement of wealth.... The three iterations presented here demonstrate an exploration of the role of ornament, its relationship to the vessel and the continued industrial mutation of the ‘blue onion’ pattern.”⁶

In his 1971 book of essays, *Signature Event Context*, Derrida expands on the term iteration/iterability. He theorizes the paradox of the simultaneity of sameness and difference in the conceptualization of iterability. Derrida specifically examines iterability as the condition of writing, language and oral communication. In short, Lantin’s focus on studio craft’s propensity toward iterability makes a transdisciplinary claim, similar to Adamson when he repurposes Derrida’s “supplemental” for his analysis of craft. Derrida does with writing what Lantin does with ceramics, when she reminds

us that an iteration is not a reiteration—a simple repetition—but always an alteration or a modification of the same. To iterate is to engender new contexts and variety into the constitution of what looks the same while playing with the illusion of repetition.⁷

Blue onion (*Zwiebelmuster*) is a popular china pattern that was originally manufactured by Meissen porcelain from the eighteenth century; it has also been employed by numerous other companies. In Lantin’s installation, the motif makes apparent the difference between critical ceramic objects or iterations and ceramic market products or repetitions.

The large digital print that hangs as the background depicts the repetition of an onion/bulb pattern. However, it was first drawn (iterated) by the artist, granting the title *Iterative Imitation*. The oversized cup made of Tyvek paper, a material mainly used in construction to wrap houses, is carefully embroidered by hand and is floating in the space, suspended by invisible wires. Both occupy the space in front of a shelf that displays handmade earthenware cups, plunged into white slip, with painted versions of the onion pattern. Lantin dips dark earthenware in white slip with the same sensuous gusto with which an expert chocolatier enrobes dark chocolate in white. Both professionals make you bring the object of desire to your lips.



Fig. 23
Martina Lantin, *Iterative Imitation* (cup row installation detail), 2015
earthenware with slip and glaze, approx. 9.0 x 7.5 cm, Gallery 371, ACAD
photo by Christina Hills

Lantin's *Iterative Imitation* skilfully considers the authenticity of handmade objects. Her sequence of ceramic cups (Fig. 23) presents clearly different interpretations of the motif, and in doing so, supports the inherent iterability of handmade objects. First appropriated similarly to a found object, the nature of the blue onion/bulb motif is further complicated by being embroidered on a giant Tyvek, paper cup. The industrial architectural paper is an unusual site for such delicate, labour-intensive embroidery stitches. The overall installation defies singular categorization, and as such, embodies criticality by serving as a convincing iteration of how critical, contemporary ceramics can function. As such, *Iterative Imitation* is a brilliant conceptual and material move. The exhibition operates as an introduction to Lantin's work as a new permanent faculty member while doubling as a convincing pedagogical model of how critical ceramic objects make meaning by embracing iterability.

Chaytor also embraces criticality by mining sets of patterns and decorations. She makes the following assertion about the functional works in her last exhibition, *Come Home*, 2015: "Decoration is integral in its capacity to be both performative and informative. I acknowledge the tradition and plurality of decoration, which performs in delighting the eye and informs as a cultural carrier of meaning. I 'mine' our digital culture, embedding computer icons into decorative surface compositions; synthesizing the digital with a decorative intent. Computer iconography (i.e. circuitry, audio waves, the binary), is an abundant source for motifs and gives currency to my decorative surfaces."⁸

From a feminist standpoint, Christina Hughes and Celia Lury propose an ecological methodology that reconfigures the feminist perspective on being "situated" to include the nonhuman realm. Feminist epistemology supports the significance of always understanding knowledge as

situated to validate difference and diversity. Moreover, the authors offer “patterning” as a practice that fosters dynamic and multiple relations that cross the boundaries between the human and nonhuman. Situated knowledge like patterning needs repetition and differentiation to create alternative relations between the two realms. The authors return to Donna Haraway’s suggestion of the need to think diffractively, encouraging diffraction as a type of patterning.

Diffraction does not reproduce “the same” displaced, as reflection and refraction do. Rather, it is a mapping of interference, not a replication, reflection or reproduction. A diffractive pattern does not map where differences appear but rather where the effects of difference appear.⁹

Hughes and Lury favour complex, ecological thinking that reunites the social and natural world by seeing the material world as “vibrant” or an “actant” in co-



Fig. 24
Katrina Chaytor, *Floral Binary Platter*, 2015
press-moulded earthenware with slip, glazes and
iron transfers, 45.0 x 22.0 cm
private collection, photo by Katrina Chaytor

fabrication. They also prefer to think that inventiveness does not always need to be new; instead, they favour reconfigurations. They argue for a return to a reordering of the sociomaterial world without humans as its apex; agency in lieu of discourse in practices; politics of knowledge rather than identity; and retooling relationality and change.¹⁰ I contend that their methodology is fully embraced by Chaytor’s practice. For example, her *Floral Binary Serving Platters* look like perfectly balanced aerial garden maps with elegant curvilinear areas reserved for specific plants and binary motifs (Fig. 24). The outer rims of the platters successfully integrate ubiquitous computer pointers as if they were secret agents with multiple identities. On other plates and cups, looped squares vacillate between flowers and command key icons, not to mention their more ancient past as heraldic Bowen knots.

Chaytor maps interferences between the human and nonhuman realms with amazing aplomb. Her command of ceramics and patterns is her key to new conceptual shortcuts. Her pottery cleverly collapses the authenticity of handmade objects with the imagery of the natural and artificial worlds. Or, to paraphrase Hughes and Lury, her plates, teapots, cups and other wares are a reunion of the social world—through her usage of computer icons—with the natural world—through her usage of landscape and botanical motifs. Not to mention that as a medium, ceramics is already a reunion of earth, air, water and fire, as well as a celebration of



Fig. 25
 Greg Payce, *Albedo Lux Seraglio*, 2009
 stills from a video of an image projection on
 rotating template-thrown porcelain forms
 collection of the artist, videography by Rod Stuart

everyday life. Moreover, *Come Home* is emphatically moving. Chaytor's utilitarian pottery pieces are pilgrims; they acquire meaning through their journey. *Come Home* operates as a place-making practice in everyday living in a profound personal way. It predates and announces the artist's return home to Newfoundland after living away for more than thirty-five years. Chaytor, like an Olympian runner, is passing on the baton to Lantin to take care of the ACAD Ceramics area.

Payce retired from ACAD in 2015 and made sure to share his last year with

both Lantin and Chaytor. He was the recipient of the 2012 Governor General's Award in fine crafts. His oeuvre comes full circle with the remediation enacted in *Orrery*, 2015 (see page 73). An orrery is a clockwork model of the solar system; the term is derived from the name of the Fourth Earl of Orrery, for whom a model was made in the early eighteenth century. *Orrery* remediates Payce's previous work in *Albedo Lux*, 2006–2009, and *Transit of Venus*, 2013. An albedo is the light that is reflected in space from a planet's surface. *Albedo Lux* refashions ceramics into video in a series of five videos produced between 2007 and 2009 (Fig. 25). These videos, which mainly use imagery from Asian, European and Mexican ceramics, are projected onto the slowly rotating forms of the previous *Albedo Lux*, 2006, a ceramics installation consisting of thirty-four porcelain vessels arranged on a semicircular base.

In their well-known book *Remediation*, Richard Grusin and Jay Bolter define the title term as signifying how new media refashion old media (e.g., ceramics to video) to give them currency.¹¹ With *Orrery*, Payce defiantly changes the direction of currency by refashioning video into ceramics. Payce's oeuvre is a clear homage to the richness of ceramics history and how ceramics production is constructed through its numerous migration patterns, displaying it as an enabler of cultural renewal in itself. For the artist, to be relevant is to perform the ability to move back and forth between



Fig. 26
Emily Schroeder Willis, *In Search of Something Ordinary* (installation view), 2010, Gallery 371 ACAD
photo by Jordan Tate

old and new media without prejudice, something Payce does with the facility of a certified time traveller. Payce, like Chaytor and Lantin, unites the digital and physical realms; he offers both as components of the same everyday space.

As stated previously, I conclude with a few words on Schroeder Willis' exhibition titled *In Search of Something Ordinary* (Fig. 26), which was held at the end of her Visiting Artist residency in April 2010. Like those of Lantin, Chaytor and Payce, Schroeder Willis' practice clarifies the dynamics of processes. In doing so, the artist makes a case for how critical ceramic objects operate. Each of Schroeder Willis' pots minutely records every touch of her fingertips, while the added imagery maps how the individual pot was conceived.

Together, the construction and imagery become an archive of her methods. Her series of jars, vases, pitchers, bowls, plates, sauceboats and cream and sugar sets are all covered in an opaque white glaze that emphasizes the texture left by the fingers pinching the clay. Schroeder Willis' practice investigates and makes apparent the relationships between labour, tactility and the consumption of time—or what British fibre artist and craft theorist Mole Leigh refers to as chronomanuality.¹²

These relationships are also of interest to cultural historian Constance Classen; in *The Color of Angels*, she traces the history of the aesthetics of the senses, focusing on the relationship between gender and sensory orders as a way of better understanding the concept of a “female touch.” The primary critique of touch, she explains, consists in the postulation that tactile exploration is a laborious, time-consuming activity done in stages, in contrast to the visual reward of seeing something all at once. To see a work of art based on vision, one needs to distance oneself from it; in contrast, to experience something by touch, one needs a physical bond, an intimacy with the object. Moreover, intimacy only develops gradually over time. In short, intimacy repudiates the Western attitude that favours a more detached and immediate contemplation of autonomous works of art. Classen demonstrates that the aesthetic experience is more than the result of a sensorial experience; it is an active site of production. The aesthetic experience



Fig. 27
Emily Schroeder Willis, *Yellow Jar*, 2010
hand-built porcelain with glaze, 22.9 x 10.2 cm
collection of Philip Waldner, photo by Emily Schroeder Willis

produces a social hierarchy of the senses with a specific embodied and gendered history.¹³

I am holding one of Emily's small pinch pots (Fig. 27), a white jar, and the bottom of the pot is resting in the palm of my left hand. I carefully lift the cover with my right hand. To my enchantment, the inside of the cover is convex; I am holding a sphere. The interior of the lid and the jar are covered with a shiny, translucent, fleshy pink-orange glaze that is reminiscent of the color of my hands. My right index finger caresses the top of the cover where delicate sgraffito lines offer a rougher texture; at the same time, my opposite thumb caresses the inside cover, with its shiny, smooth, fleshy, glazed surface. The thumb of my left hand explores the dimpled surface of the jar.

I propose that every pinch pot made by Schroeder Willis celebrates excessive, tactile and laborious craft processes to come to the rescue in our collective tactile rehabilitation. This exhibition establishes the female touch as an intimate and specific dynamic that is of equal value to the detached contemplation of art. In doing so, Schroeder Willis' *In Search of Something Ordinary* achieves is an extraordinary quest.

Your theoretical mind deduced along the way that both Chaytor and Lantin, like Payce, equally remediate, while all four artists discussed in this essay iterate

and use pattern as their methodology. Moreover, you conjectured that all four artists' works offer a reflection on the dynamics of their processes. I agree with you and simply offer that the richness of mature, critical craft practices covers a vast theoretical terrain.

Notes

I have seen the exhibitions and works mentioned in this text and discussed them with the artists, except for Chaytor's *Come Home*, which was presented at the Newfoundland Craft Council Annex Gallery, (August 22–September 26, 2015) and can be viewed at <http://www.craftcouncil.nl.ca/gallery/exhibitions/come-home/>. I had a studio visit with Chaytor to see the finished works before they were shipped. Payce's *Orrery* was part of his solo exhibition titled *Palimpsest*, Esplanade Gallery, Medicine Hat (August 22–October 10, 2015). Lantin's and Schroeder Willis' exhibitions were held at ACAD 371 Gallery in April 2015 and April 2010.

1 Glenn Adamson, *Thinking through Craft* (Oxford: Berg, 2007).

2 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

3 Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

4 Jean-Luc Nancy, "Of Being-in-Common," in *Community at Loose Ends*, ed. Miami Theory Collective (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 1–12.

5 *ACAD Ceramics Newsletters*, ACAD's Luke Lindoe Library, <https://goo.gl/zuixmi>.

6 Martina Lantin, "Iterative Imitation: Artist Statement," 2015.

7 Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context," in *Limited Inc*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman and Samuel Weber (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1971), 1–24.

8 Katrina Chaytor, "Come Home: Artist Statement," 2015..

9 Christina Hughes and Celia Lury, "Re-turning Feminist Methodologies: From a Social to an Ecological Epistemology," *Material Feminisms: New Directions for Education* 25, no. 6 (2013): 792.

10 Hughes and Lury, "Re-turning Feminist Methodologies," 792.

11 J. David Bolter and Richard A. Grusin,

Remediation: Understanding New Media (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999).

12 Mole Leigh, "Chronomanual Craft: Time Investment as a Value in Contemporary Western Craft," *Journal of Design History* 15, no. 1 (2002): 33–45. Leigh states that chronomanuality exists as an inherent but misunderstood value of many craft objects and is in need of better conceptualization. She would like to see our more readily shared understanding of other concepts related to time, such as memory, decay, lifecycles, temporal authenticity or live streaming in time-based media, as willingly applied to our comprehension of chronomanuality in craft objects.

13 Constance Classen, *The Color of Angels: Cosmology, Gender and the Aesthetic Imagination* (London: Routledge, 1998).

Relational Learning: **ACAD** Ceramics Visiting Artists—The First 3 Decades

This book explores the influence of the Alberta College of Art + Design (ACAD) Ceramics Visiting Artist program as it passes its thirty-year milestone. The project was organized by the ACAD Ceramics program and made possible in part through a contribution from ACAD's Creative Research Fund.

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