

04.

August 2008

09.

19.

41.

57.

Clay Economies

_____ Richard Fahey
_____ David Craig
_____ Moyra Elliott
_____ Christopher Thompson

Clay Economies

Contents

04. Foreword

Richard Fahey 09. Travels to the muddied provinces.

David Craig 19. Setting a table in the provinces:
domestic economies of ceramics in New Zealand.

Moyra Elliott 41. The mutable handmade.

Christopher Thompson 57. A brief genealogy of government policy
and ceramic production & consumption in New Zealand.

This publication has been produced on the occasion of the exhibition *Clay Economies* curated by Richard Fahey at Objectspace (1-30 August 2008). This publication stands to one side of the exhibition, it is not an exhibition catalogue, and has been conceived as an anthology of critical and discursive writing addressing an ‘expanded field’ of contemporary ceramic production in New Zealand. Our intention has been to produce a contemporary, multi-authored analysis of this historically significant form of local cultural production with the aim of opening up an inclusive definition of ceramic practice that goes beyond the narrow confines of ‘studio pottery’. In this way, what we term ‘ceramic production’, and the ways in which we may consider this production, are up for debate.

The territory for these essays is the consumption and reception of ceramic production rather than, “the theory and practice of celebrated individuals, with an emphasis on the celebration of aesthetic excellence.” As Jonathan Woodham has noted, “With the comparatively recent emergence of an interest in social anthropology and studies in material culture a significant number of scholars have sought to address the issues raised by wider patterns of design consumption and use”.¹

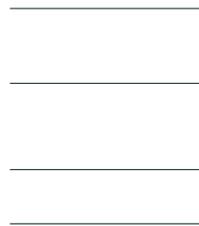
1. See Woodham’s “Modernism and the history of Design” in *Design and Modernism* — Oxford University Press, 1997.

Foreword

The editors would like to thank contributors; Dr David Craig, Moyra Elliott and Dr Christopher Thompson for their enthusiasm for such a project – one which we don't believe has been attempted before in New Zealand – and for their essays which marshal deep and specific knowledges, polemical points of view and a range of frameworks for considering ceramic production in New Zealand. The editors also gratefully acknowledge the contributions of Alan Deare and Arch MacDonnell of Inhouse Design, Mary Kisler, Louis Le Vaillant, Matt Blomeley, Anna Miles and Haru Sameshima in the preparation of this publication.

6.

The publication of Clay Economies would not have been possible without the generous financial support of a number of organisations and the editors wish to thank the following for their assistance;
Creative NZ, Unitec and Objectspace.



Richard Fahey, Editor,
Philip Clarke, Associate Editor

Essays

Travels to the _____ *Richard Fahey*
muddied provinces

09.

I
The fashioning of wet clay and its subsequent hardening through heat is a story synonymous with the notion of domestic civilisation. Less often noted are the historically contingent, partial and arbitrary histories that have flourished under the rubric of this universal story. The terrain of ceramic production has proved capable of carrying any number of accounts. The story of the rise of the New Zealand studio pottery movement is but one example.

By taking a long view of the social life of clay commodities, *Clay Economies* intends to open up different considerations of contemporary ceramic production. Implicit in this undertaking is the assumption that the potentiality for future ceramic production becomes apparent when we recognise the complex but specific mechanisms that regulate taste, trade and desire. This approach calls for considering the bespoke ceramic alongside the industrially mass-produced, as well as eschewing discussion of the relative status and merit of different ceramic practices. Traditionally judgements of quality based on material or technical considerations have privileged the role of the producer, while obscuring the role of the consumer in negotiating the value of objects. The meanings we attribute to objects necessarily derive from human transactions and motivations, which is to say how those objects are used and circulated.

The ceramic tradition that the consumer has negotiated most extensively — utilitarian, domestic ware — is that which has been accorded the least attention in the telling of ceramic history. Due to prolific use in everyday preparation and consumption of food, domestic ceramic wares have never been accorded the same cultural value as ceremonial objects. Ceramics deemed to have ritual value have been endowed with greater significance within traditional museum displays

10.

11.

because these objects offer expedient differentiation between cultures. Domestic ceramics, which are largely consistent in terms of form and function across many cultures, do not serve this story so well. Mortuary wares exemplify cultural differences, and in addition, by virtue of use within burial sites, are more readily excavated intact than domestic ceramics, which are often recovered as shards.

Ceramic material and process have tended not to be valued for themselves, so much as for the effectiveness with which they may emulate more esteemed materials and refined modes of manufacture. The majority of pre-seventeenth century Chinese ceramics for example, copied the forms of bronze-cast and jade-carved objects. Indeed, Chinese celadon glazes were primarily developed to imitate the subtle colouring of jade. Many of the design attributes of these ceramic objects, such as feet and handles, are indebted to the form and construction of much earlier cast bronze objects. The reified ceramics that we have become most familiar with via the museum context are ironically, those that look least like they are made from clay.

The cultural delineations called forth by the museum, are rendered somewhat shaky when the complex history of ceramic trade and exchange is examined in detail. From the 14th century, and arguably from a great deal earlier, China actively sought

contact and trade with the outside world.¹ Principle exports were tea, silk and porcelain. 'Porcelain' is in itself a product of cultural contact. The origin of the term has been credited to the 13th Century Venetian explorer, Marco Polo, who coined it to describe the blue and white ware of the Yuan Dynasty 1279-1368. From then on this ware was known throughout the world as porcelain, aside from China, where it

is still referred to as 'Ci'.²

Early trade in domestic goods, whether ceramic or textile, has occasioned many stories that defy the type of cultural classifications that have historically been promulgated by the museum. Today these classifications are subject to much revisionist scholarship, often premised on closer examinations of quotidian life and trade. Hugh Honour's account of the origination of the conglomerative design of a textile destined to lie on many European

1. For discussion of _____ incipient Chinese globalism long before the 14th century, see, James C. Y. Watt, *China: Dawn of a Golden Age 200-750AD*, Metropolitan Museum, New York and Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2004

2. John Carswell, *Blue & White: _____ Chinese Porcelain Around The World*, The British Museum, London, 2000, p. 53

beds, offers a parallel narrative to the emergence of Chinese porcelain as a global commodity. Honour writes, “Chinoiserie of this even more hybrid kind had become so far removed from genuine Chinese tradition that it was exported from India to China as a novelty to the Chinese themselves. In the 18th century, therefore, Chinese weavers were producing fabrics adorned with the now famous ‘Tree of Life’ design based on Indian patterns derived from English originals, which were an expression of the European vision of the Orient. There can have been few more bizarre incidents in the whole History of Taste.”³

The distinctive cobalt blue, emblematic of Chinese porcelain to a European eye, is the result of Sunima ore imported to China from Persia for the express purpose of creating export ware. The Ottoman court valued most highly domestic porcelains that emanated from the Chinese export market, however these particular designs bore little resemblance to the wares that were favoured by successive Chinese courts. Inevitably export ware from China proved formative in the subsequent development of the Islamic decorative canon. The first European manufactured porcelain, produced in the early part of the 18th century by the German factory, Meissen, replicated Chinese designs. By the 19th century the popularisation of Chinoiserie in Europe was guaranteed by the advent of Northern Hemisphere produced tea-wares, adorned by the ubiquitous ‘Willow’ pattern, that were intended for the lower end of the domestic market.

This cursory survey of the trade and exchange of Chinese blue and white porcelain reveals that strategies of appropriation, rearticulation and combination — widely presumed to characterise postmodern art practice — are fundamentally pre-modern. The relationship between the indigenous and foreign, innovative and traditional, authentic and fake is evidently more ambiguous and complex than is generally acknowledged.

II

For the most part, the story of New Zealand ceramics operates within the appropriative paradigms associated with the rise of European colonialism and global capitalism. In the absence of indigenous clay traditions, the first forms of local ceramic production were industrial. Subsequent ceramic developments had to hitch a ride on the back of industry and

12.

3. Hugh Honour, *Chinoiserie: The Vision of Cathay*, John Murray, London, 1961, quoted in Howard Davis, *Chinoiserie: Polychrome Decoration on Staffordshire Porcelain 1790-1850*, The Rubicon Press, London, 1991, p. 23

13.

4. Gail Henry provides extensive documentation of this in *New Zealand Pottery: Commercial and Collectible*, Reed, Auckland, 1985

5. Len Castle, *Len Castle Potter*, Sang Architects & Company, 2002, p. 11



Peter Lange, *Ampersand*, 2008

6. Janet Mansfield, *Contemporary Ceramic Art in Australia and New Zealand*, Craftsman House, NSW, 1995, p. 16

were consequences of the manufacture of such workaday objects as water pipes, bricks and ‘lavies’.⁴ Ceramic production is dependent on the incorporation of many skill sets and involves a range of expertises. Len Castle, whose position within the canon of studio pottery has been well enshrined, gained his early experience and knowledge of firing from expert industrial workers at Crum Brick, Tile and Pipe Works in New Lynn, Auckland. He reports that in the mid-1940s, his pots were fired alongside sewer pipes and gully traps.⁵ More recently, Peter Lange has made this traffic between the industrial and artisanal explicit in his series of works that utilise commercially manufactured bricks.

The application of an art-historically derived model to a tradition that was predominantly utilitarian and domestic is problematic. The formation of a status-conferring canon has been constructed to recognize and promote divergence from tradition. However, within a craft practice, it might be more useful to regard innovation as a perpetual accretion of small instances, constituted from any number of related but distinct factors. ‘Collective learning’ arguably describes this type of cultural development more accurately than individual flashes of disembodied inspiration. Countless examples of individuals working and learning alongside others in the local context can be cited. Marilyn Wiseman attests to the significance of the social networks that existed among practitioners in the mid-1970s. She recounts holding Bernard Leach’s *A Potters’ Book* in one hand and a telephone in the other during the formative days of her pottery career.⁶

It was the 1970s that witnessed the full-blown flowering of the studio ceramic movement in New Zealand, in which unprecedented numbers of individuals were able to make a full-time living as professional potters furnishing the domestic market. A lifestyle creed with underlying political imperatives of self-determinacy and self-sufficiency was characteristic of the pubescent nationalist culture of the period. Arguably it was this latent politicising of ‘lifestyle choice’ that caused the infectious popularisation of studio ceramics, rather than any universal desire on the part of consumers for artfully misshapen, dribbly brown, lumpen tableware. The burgeoning of this

studio ceramic movement owed as much to the social, political and economic context as to a handful of significant individuals. Likewise, the inability to sustain this movement does not reflect a lack of dedicated practitioners, so much as the collapse of the wider societal formations that were crucial to the emergence of the development.

The 1970s was characterised by consumer awareness of planned obsolescence, a perceived energy crisis (real or otherwise), import substitution and trade protectionism. Bucolic pastoralism encouraged economic self-sufficiency, homespun egalitarianism spawned neo-survivalist tendencies.⁷

In the absence of indigenous clay traditions, this necessarily meant co-opting the international in the form of the Anglo-Oriental tradition of Bernard Leach and Shoji Hamada. In a process of colonisation, transplanted constructs often take on a veracity more pervasive than in the place they originated. New Zealand's geo-political distance and diminutive demographics provided an occasion for a particular ethos to take persuasive hold over the cultural imagination. New Zealanders have a 'club mentality' that draws its members from a small gene pool. Nationhood is played out on a village scale, where town gossip becomes the main determinant of cultural worth. It is worthwhile acknowledging, however, the ways in which backyard activity has and does translate into world-leading performance. The flip-side of messianic adherence is the ability to be light on one's feet; remarkable performance arises when different arguments rub shoulders in tight proximity. In this microcosm of four million, social capital acquires an inordinate efficacy; the exemplary abuts the amateur and there is little room for the mediocre performance. The institutional inertia of larger populations mitigates against such volatility.

Twentieth-century modernism had by necessity taken a circuitous route to these cloudy isles. On its belated arrival it was commandeered by cultural commissars who repackaged it as a marriage of romanticism and nationalism. During the 50s, 60s and 70s, this nationalistic economic and cultural assemblage was pieced together. By the late 1970s, the socio-political culture had begun to unravel. Rob Muldoon's overly proprietorial hand was beginning to lose its grip. By the 1980s, the 1970s phenomena of the 'brown pot' had lost its allure as

14.

⁷ For extensive discussion of the economic context that prevailed during this high point in local studio ceramic production see *Michael Stevenson: 'This is the Trekka'*, Wellington: (Catalogue for NZ's 2003 Venice Biennale Exhibition) Creative New Zealand/Toi Aotearoa, and Frankfurt: Revolver Archiv für aktuelle Kunst, 2003.

15.

the country became a laboratory for new right, neo-liberal economic policy, and contemporaneously declared itself a nuclear-free zone. The generation who had ushered in the country's fourth Labour government had been numbed by the reverberating phrases, sounds and images of the mass media. Buffeted by post-feminist, post-modernist, post-colonial discourses, their collective understanding of 'self' was in a shambles, defacto-ed, decentred, multiple and mobile.

The accessibility and even inescapability of cultural exchange is palpably different within the twenty-first century transnational context. The once historic reliance upon the regional to supply value and meaning is possibly now supplanted by license and the imperative to engage in broader conversations. The infamous 'information explosion' that has accompanied an increasingly digitised world has profoundly altered the generation and subsequent reception of meaning.

III

In contemplating what might be regarded as contemporary ceramic production, we need to acknowledge how the semiotic landscape has undergone substantive changes. The narration of the story of New Zealand studio ceramics via an art historical approach has limited an understanding of the spaces where ceramics might operate and therefore what might be accorded merit. Undue emphasis was placed on the opposition between the humanising rhetoric of the handmade and the perceived homogeneity of industrial production. A similar schism was promoted between wares produced for utilitarian purposes and those produced for ornamental display. Invariably, the construction of a historical canon is as significant for what it renders invisible as what it celebrates.

Many of the ways ceramic technologies inhabit our lives remain barely visible. How many of us would be nominally aware that our toilets and white-wall bathrooms are made from cooked mud. It is true that we care less about what sanitary ware is comprised of, or looks like, than how we expect it to function. These pristine white non-porous vitreous surfaces, impervious to dirt and moisture, are press-ganged into psychically loaded regimes of hygiene, implicated in the protocols for evacuating bodily excrement, fluid and detritus.

There are further ways in which ceramic objects may become invisible. These relate to the shifting emotional, aesthetic and psychological vagaries of fashion as the cultural medium in which objects move. Early Crown Lynn of white mantelpiece vases, which were once proudly displayed as markers of refined sensibility, then relegated beneath the washtub as containers for soaps and scrubs, have now re-emerged through 'op' shops and auction houses. Reframed by nostalgia, these same objects are now recognized as chic adornment for minimalist apartments. The ever-shifting generational desire for 'authenticity' sees the traffic in ornamental objects orbit. Realms of vernacularised kitsch are inevitably linked to ideas of iconic value.

The material composition of the everyday cup and the technologies necessary for its production are a focus for precision science and technology today. The intrinsic utilitarian properties of ceramics - their malleability, robustness, heat-resistance and corrosion-resistance - that humanity has pressed into service for many thousands of years, are still at the forefront of technological advancement. The scientific class of ceramic materials is differentiated from other materials by atomic bonds. Ceramics involve high-temperature sintering, or a refining process through which inorganic, non-metallic materials are formed by ionic or covalent bonding. This means that ceramic materials do not corrode in strong acid conditions, cannot melt under high temperatures and do not change shape under rapid or repeated friction. These attributes mean ceramic material is potentially a great deal more versatile than standardized metals. Ceramics have unique electronic properties allowing them to function as insulators, semi-conductors, conductors and superconductors, which offer a variety of applications in magnetics, thermodynamics, acoustics and mechanics. Ceramics are further utilised within the medical arena. Various components of ultrasonic diagnostic instruments utilise the electricity generating potential of certain ceramics (known as piezoelectric ceramics). Ceramics are also employed in the construction of teeth, bones, joints, pacemakers and hearing aids. Reputedly, the inert properties of a ceramic scalpel blade will enable a wound site to heal at a considerably faster rate than an incision made with a metal scalpel.

16.

17.

Within the various spheres of technologically advanced industry, ceramic material has found new applications; refractory bricks for metal foundries, yarn guides for textile industries, grinding wheels and abrasive metal lathes, insulation tiles on space shuttles, golf clubs, the valves of water taps, bullet-proof vests for law enforcement and transparent lenses used in advanced laser technologies. These examples testify to the utilitarian properties of contemporary ceramics that can in hindsight be seen in stark contrast to the wholesome utilitarian philosophy that sustained the local studio ceramic movement.

IV

Material production in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century has seen functionality, inspiration and circuits of exchange all undergo profound alteration. The historical coordinates that previously circumscribed ceramic production may no longer be useful in anticipating future developments, as delineations between what was handmade and that which was industrially produced, erode. That which we have previously deemed worthy of status or that which is hidden from view, may become freshly contested. The quest for 'distinctiveness' that prevailed over much of New Zealand's cultural aspirations of the twentieth century may no longer be a quest so much as an inevitability that arises by simple virtue of living here. The license and capacity for being adaptable, and conversely, susceptible, coupled with that endearing of attributes — the ability to get it entirely wrong and in so doing create something anew — will provide further sustenance to the muddled terrain, out of which new clay economies will be fashioned.

Richard Fahey is a senior lecturer in the School of Design, Unitec. He is the Programme Director of the Master of Design by Project

... a province [is] simply an occasion to accept art's invitation to observe a certain traffic of style, to commemorate social value, to celebrate human endeavour. The province will be anywhere we put the occasion. Anywhere the occasion puts us. All art is provincial in this sense. At least, all art with any social sense.¹

1. Wedde, I. (1992) Setting a Table in the Provinces. *In Distance Looks Our Way: Ten Artists from New Zealand*. Catalogue for Expo Seville Wellington: Distance Looks Our Way Trust

Introduction: Mt Roskill China in Wider Cultural Economies

My family, like many others in lower middle class, 60s and 70s suburbia, had at least three functioning sets of China: one made in England, another in Japan, and another New Lynn. The first two, still in use in 2008, were 1961 wedding presents: a Royal Albert tea set, used at Mum's morning and somewhat higher Sunday afternoon teas, and a Jyoto porcelain dinner service, used for Christmas and adult birthdays. The Crown Lynn Apollo dinner set was bought after much deliberation in the early 1970s from the Farmers' Trading Company, to replace an earlier English (Johnson Brothers) dinner set, also a wedding present.

Setting a table in the provinces: domestic economies _____ *David Craig* of ceramics in New Zealand

We owned nothing handmade in New Zealand: nothing from the extraordinary cultural importing of Anglo-Oriental artisan pottery that became “the most widely accepted expression of the arts in New Zealand”²

and gave us, in the form of heavily reduced, thick ‘mutton fat’ glazed stoneware, our first national/provincial three dimensional art form. The wedding gift bonanza over, it was utility and mortgage belt frugality that ruled. Mum’s roasts were done in wedding present enamel and Pyrex dishes, with the veges re-loaded into Denby stoneware for the table. Our domestic economy was tightly constrained around Dad’s schoolteacher pay and the Family Benefit, which Mum rarely used to buy kitchenware. Mum was ‘at home’ well into the mid 70s, using the domestic time to cook two-course dinners (meat and three boiled veg, custard and preserved fruit desserts) using aluminium pots, not ceramic (or even enamel) bakeware. On Fridays, Mum baked to service the tyrannical domestic economy of the ‘three cake tins’. It was this that fed three boys with Anzac biscuits and Weetbix cake, while also providing the basis for setting the table for the women who came to bone china midweek morning tea, and, on Sunday afternoon, to our low Mt Roskill version of high tea.³

2. Cape, P. (1980) *Please Touch: A Survey of the Three Dimensional Arts in New Zealand*. Collins: Auckland, p. 78

3. For an extended academic discussion of wedding present china in high and low contexts, see Purbrick, L. (2007) *The Wedding Present: Domestic Life Beyond Consumption*. London: Ashgate

20.

21.

Despite being deprived of handmade artisan ware, my family were very much a part of the sprawling expansion of the middle classes in the post war boom. Here, national production and import substitution of modern household commodities might underpin a strong domestic economy of demand management and full employment, state-supported home ownership, and a social wage supporting the nuclear family domestic economy of breadwinners and housewives. All this was bundled up into expansive suburbia, featuring simple, modern, utilitarian homes, all but mass produced, and filled with simple modern, mass produced design of the kind Formica and Crown Lynn made iconic. Modernity was highly prized in this suburbia, but it was a popular modernity largely unaware of its aesthetic links to Scandinavian and English modernism. My parents bought the rocket fluted Crown Lynn Apollo dinner set because it was the latest, because it linked us to American conquest of space, and because of the utilitarian/economic advantage that you could reliably buy replacement bits for it at Farmers’. When, as it did in the 70s, middle class sensibility briefly embraced Japanese aesthetics, and ensured the last great expansion of New Zealand’s domestic ceramic economy would be earth-toned and imitation primitivist, it did so largely under the naïve regionalist impression that these were our colours, our forms, our dinnerware.

The Parameters of Domestic Ceramic Economies

None of these cultural or productive dimensions represented anything very novel in ceramic history. Rather, domestic ware has thrown up all sorts of instructive markers of international commodity and cultural exchanges since earliest times. Its particular forms have usually taught us not to underestimate or simplify these exchanges: despite the recurrent historical dominance of Chinese ceramics in the marketplace, traffics in ceramic commodities and styles have often been two or even three-way exchanges, involving significant East-West appropriation, and throwing up diverse regional and subregional (eg New Zealand) hybridities. Not that we have always had much of what Ian Wedde calls a social, or even aesthetic ‘sense’ or awareness of this. With important exceptions, domestic ceramics have generally embodied these traffics in relatively inconspicuous (yet pervasive) ways.

To complicate things further, the traffic has been not just one of utilitarian commodity and aesthetic style: but has always involved social value, traffics of domestic and emotional value, realised both in everyday occasions of food preparation and serving, but also on higher social occasions. Here, whether in weddings or in suburban morning teas and coffee clubs, ceramics have occupied an important place in gift exchange and ceremonial food and drink. In between table settings, they have occupied various domestic positions, from the low kitchen cupboard to the high china cabinet, tea, or pride-of-place coffee table. So, alongside what Marx would have called use value, utilitarian ceramics always had particular and distinctive status as commodity signs, and markers of certain kinds of class, cultural and gender difference.

It's these dimensions – aesthetic, ceremonial, social, domestic – which place ceramics in the realm of what Kopytoff and Appadurai (1986)⁴ call *enclaved* commodities: objects whose commodity potential and practical consumption is consistently and significantly hedged around and shaped by other sets of concerns. Here, to explain, enclaving in the domestic-aesthetic is a constant or recurrent element in what the same authors call household clay commodities' *biography*: the narrative of how they move between production, sale, use, gifting, re-sale, garage sale, etc, over the course of what in their case can be a lifecycle of thousands of years. As enclaved, commodities, then, these everyday ceramics move across an object-lifecycle which may involve several exchanges, but largely within and between domains characterised by a blurring of aesthetic and domestic interests. Their biographies never take them, in other words, all that far from domestic-aesthetic contexts, whether they travel the globe, are traded East to West and back again, serve high tea or are claimed as 'my mug' for instant coffee, or sit awaiting domestic or aesthetic rehabilitation on an op-shop shelf.

If enclaving within the *domestic* has been something of a given, enclaving within *aesthetic* traditions has seen considerable flux, especially in relation to high aesthetic traditions. Commonly, ceramics have simultaneously embodied high (eg avant-garde modernist/rational or abstract-expressive romantic) and low (eg populist/sentimental/mass market) aesthetics. This combi-

22.

4. Kopytoff I. and A. Appadurai (1986) *The social life of things: commodities in cultural perspective*. Cambridge: CUP

23.

nation has, as we will see, made them susceptible to both radical aesthetic innovation and the throes of popular fashion. What we can also learn from ceramics, however, are the ways a traffic in objects can carry particular aesthetic traditions out of various spatial or cultural enclaves, and into international fashion, to revolutionary effect. Here, at various times (including, I will argue, New Zealand in the 1950s and 60s), ceramics have been at the forefront of aesthetic sensibility shifts. Alongside enclaving, then, we need to consider the opposite phenomenon: travelling aesthetics, cross cultural appropriations and borrowings.

Of equal economic and social significance are the ways ceramic commodities are *embedded* within wider market-society/culture relations. Political economist Karl Polanyi argued that while markets are a constant element in human exchange, they are never entirely unregulated. Rather, commodity exchanges occur variously embedded within social and institutional contexts and relations. These relations can involve, as was crucial in the case of New Zealand ceramics, market regulation and protection, where social goals like full employment are used to set the table for the market. Polanyi also recognised, however, the importance of everyday regulation of markets within a whole range of micro-social relations, wherein people bring their diverse concerns as 'neighbours, professional persons, consumers, pedestrians, commuters, sportsmen, hikers, gardeners patients, mothers or lovers'⁵ to the market.

5. Polanyi, K. (1947) *The Great Transformation*. New York: Beacon Books, p. 154

For this essay, both these dimensions of embedding are important: both, as further defined below, form parameters of what we might call the domestic market. As crucial, however, are the ways the scope and nature of these embeddings has shifted radically over time, as, for example, ceramic commodities have been embedded in import substitution tariff regimes, dis-embedded in market deregulation, and partially re-embedded in little niches of high art or lower own use production. Just as significant are the shifts in embedding that have taken place within regimes of gendered household food preparation, where ceramic purchase and use became embedded in post war norms of domesticity involving stay at home motherhood and cooking, or was dis-embedded by the rise of paid labour market participation, and market supplied and cooked fast foods.

It is this enclaved and embedded *domestic* economy of ceramics – and the various ‘senses’ or awarenesses surrounding it – that this essay wants to explore. Here, economy is used in the classical Greek sense of the *oiko-nomos*: literally the rules and resources of the household. In this context, the domestic involved both necessity and discretion: plates to eat off, variously expensive and high-aestheticised depending on class position; the necessity of a gendered someone putting food on the table and/or working longer hours, and the ‘discretion’ of buying and consuming in leisure, arts and gifting contexts. It is this sense of the economy that we can expand to include the domestic economy: everyday manufactures of both the mass produced and the artisan type, able to be produced *here*, given certain economic protections we should recognise as only partially and temporarily successful enclavings.

This essay will consider some aspects of travelling, enclaving and embedding of ceramics in commodity, aesthetic, ceremonial and domestic contexts in New Zealand in the last fifty years. This period, the essay will argue, represents a particular embedding phase within the New Zealand post war domestic and household economy, which powerfully but temporarily shaped ceramic production and use.

Where this history has been written up elsewhere, there has been a tendency to focus on higher aesthetics. This, in New Zealand, has tended to mean tracking the arrival and dissemination of Anglo-Orientalism (whether in imitation porcelain (bone china) or Bernard Leach-influenced studio pottery)⁶ or, to lesser extents, euro-modernism or romantic Mediterranean earthenware. These traffics, it will be clear, speak mostly of an upper middle class or bourgeois arts social context. At least as significant, however, is the experience of the wider middle class and upper working classes, which saw those same traditions arriving, though on muted, mediated and mass produced terms which, this essay will argue, meant they were scarcely recognised for their origins. In this context, handmade ceramics took on (and took over) quite particular enclaves within the domestic and household economy. Here, a small window of regional hybridity and distinction opened, as for a time producers and artisans supported themselves and their higher aesthetic ambitions by producing large numbers of

24.

25.

casseroles and coffee mugs, salt pigs and spice jars. At the same time, tariff-protected mass producers in the domestic market in turn moved production towards craft production’s forms, pallets and sensibilities. It is that window that this essay wants to frame.

The Domestic Economy in the Post War Period

At the outset, I described our family’s largely unconscious participation in a wider economy and traffic of modernist aesthetics. Even less did we grow up with any significant awareness of the wider domestic economy which gave us not just the Crown Lynn, but the whole golden weather of post war middle class suburban expansion. In retrospect it’s clear that this class expansion happened as an integral part of a national/class project, epitomised in 1950s permanent secretary of the Department of Industry and Commerce, Bill Sutch’s project of ‘Manufacturing in Depth’, itself a Trojan horse for a deeper project building self-sufficient socialism. In this vision, raw materials like iron sand from the West Coast or clay from Northland could provide a material basis for producing consumer commodities here. This diversified, do-it-yourself economy would be deeply embedded in systemically planned and developed local resource, industry, population and workforce bases. It would be free of the terms of trade shocks threatening agriculture’s grass economy, and provide a basis for economic independence, social security, and strategic links to other nations similarly released from international capitalist hegemony.

‘Manufacturing in depth’ was a provincial version of then internationally dominant Fordist arrangements, which sought to embed stable, national scale economic growth through large scale corporatism. Here, (domestic) mass production for a (domestic) mass consumption market was the model, and the state’s role was to create and tilt the playing field, nurture the elect industries, and stimulate demand to make sure everyone got a job. Our ‘manufacturing in depth’ version was somewhat modified in that Sutch and others were well aware that mass production was not really possible in many situations in New Zealand. Import substitution, then, would need to be managed on a case-by-case basis, in each case maximising the use of local resources and labour. Like much of the macro strategy of the

⁶ Leach, B. (1940)
A Potter’s Book. London: Faber

period, the further you were away from the Atlantic core of post war capitalism, the more Fordism got implemented in part. In automobile manufacture, we certainly weren't Henry Ford: we assembled knocked-down kits from elsewhere, and added locally produced glass and tyres.⁷

In ceramics, however, we did mass produce: Crown Lynn at the peak produced 15 million pieces in a single year. The artisan production of pots was not, however, simply a passenger: Sutch's vision of the role of the arts was in some ways quaintly utilitarian, but again here non-mass produced products demonstrating aesthetic virtue were absolutely welcome:

'The need is here for many more people highly qualified in the arts—to help the balance of payments, to provide a cultural climate for New Zealand industries to meet overseas markets, to provide for urban living, to cater for the tourist trade, and to help balance our economy'⁸

Within this wider context, it was Arnold Nordmeyer's famous 'black budget' of 1959 which ultimately set the table for artisan domestic ware production in the 1960s and 70s. Now, import license restrictions across domestic and decorative ceramics meant the NZ market would be effectively divided between artisan producers and big domestic players like Crown Lynn.⁹

It was in this oiko-nomy that Leach-inspired Anglo-Oriental artisan pottery was domesticated in the 1960s, and began its march down through class taste into mass fashion. Basically, for all its Mingei craftsman myth, studio pottery was always a powerfully modern and somewhat bourgeois phenomenon. Both in Japan and in New Zealand, it grew in reaction to modernised, national mass production, a largely unexpected beneficiary the shade and protection it offered. Like William Morris, it reinvented the folk tradition of artisan craftsmen producing everyday domestic wares in fairly large numbers, and sold its wares to a somewhat romantic middle and upper class, itself enriched by the greater economies of mass

26.

7. Craig, D. (2003) (Post) Fordism, (Neo) Trekkism. In *Michael Stevenson: This is the Trekka*, Wellington: (Catalogue for NZ's 2003 Venice Biennale Exhibition) Creative New Zealand/Toi Aotearoa, and Frankfurt: Revolver Archiv für aktuelle Kunst, 2003.

8. Sutch, WB. (1960) *The Importance of the Arts Today*. Address to Annual Meeting of New Zealand Federation of Chamber Music Societies, Wellington, 23 April 1960

9. Leov-Leyland, C. (1996) *Barry Brickell: A Head of Steam*. Auckland: Exisle, p.45

27.

production. This highly aware, tradition-informed enclaving gave studio pottery its internationally hegemonic aesthetic distinction, especially for early New Zealand adapters, among whom prominently featured architects and other well rewarded aesthetic agents of the bourgeois, and early environmental regionalists.

Both productively and aesthetically, studio pottery found an initial niche as the perfect decorative/featural counterpart for a spare, provincial, do-it-yourself modernism. Nothing better

10. Boyd, R. (1963) *The Australian Ugliness*. Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin

in the way of a rich *feature*¹⁰ to break up the fairly austere/minimal modernism of The Group houses than a big empty crock sitting on the coffee table, or a piece of tortured fired clay from some dripping wet, build-your-own-bush kiln site a long way from suburbia. While studio domestic ware production began to burgeon, it was this heavier, larger, featural production, bought not out of everyday household budgets but from high end surplus, that took domestic ceramics beyond their primarily female gendered economies, and into a larger scaled aesthetic economy of interior architecture and design, wherein purchase decisions were somewhat more weighted to the masculine.

The 70s: Anglo-Orientalism goes Mass Culture

It was a highly enclaved, earnestly self-conscious, and somewhat masculine Anglo-Oriental practice that 'our' craftsman potters took off into the bush with and became 'world class' at, even as they shifted, elaborated and forgot it in unexpected ways. But stoneware's extraordinary emergence as our most popular national art form also needs to be seen against wider cultural shifts which swept the middle classes. Crucial here was the romantic movement, now popularly remembered for its spectacle elements: beat—and hippydom, and the kinds of earth and community—based aesthetic and productive enterprise this romanticism generated: new fusions of art, human craft, locality, natural form, process, material and pallet. It was in relation to this wider class-cultural movement that studio and 'country' potters emerged as respected and even iconic cultural producers, and privileged artisans enabled by the wider conditions of the time to operate at far edge of urban-based cultural and productive economies. At the same time, it was these same individuals' more mundane production

for middle class domestic markets which underpinned pottery's 'popularity explosion',¹¹ and provided the material basis for its higher national aesthetic success.

It is hard in retrospect not to be a little too cynical about the aspirations-and the simple fashion-involved in countercultural, going-up-country utopianism. Certainly studio/country pottery presented a surrogate, take-home-able romanticism for the urban/rural town/day-trippers who bought their work in volume, driving to countryside on a Sunday, stopping in at semirural, 7 day a week locations like Peter Sinclair's Country Arts in Muriwai, the Warkworth Craft Room, or the Albany Co-op (all open in defiance of Sunday trading rules). Or, using generous disposable domestic resource to Hoover up the cultural capital at Alicat, Art of the Potter, 12 Potters, New Vision or Brown's Mill. These avant-garde consumers were, however, only the first wave a widening cultural romanticism which would be popularised into mass production.

On the production side, leading potters were hailed as resilient and energetic material innovators, producing gifts of earth, craft and kiln immediately importable into national aesthetics and identity. They were also successful aesthetic compradors and interpreters, pushing a largely borrowed provincial and regionalist aesthetics into the forefront of national consciousness in a way almost unimaginable today. In doing so, they created a scene with attractive, sophisticated trimmings of lifestyle, culture and counterculture akin to aspects of New Zealand filmmaking or fashion now, but with deeper personal, aesthetic and institutional relationships with other contemporary arts (especially painting) and art galleries.

If this was a provincial aesthetic movement (and it was), it was arguably the one that we went furthest in vernacularising. This, both in its modes of production and popular depth of consumption, but also in the extent of our acquiescence in and identification with its native primitivism and naturalism, its fluid and expressive materiality, and its direct, implicit referential valorisation of essential aspects of land and place. Kiwi-Anglo-Orientalism may have been considered provincial by Japanese puzzled by its proud presentation at Expo 70 as New Zealand

28.

11. Cape, P. (1980) *Please Touch: A Survey of the Three Dimensional Arts in New Zealand*. Collins: Auckland, p. 78

29.

Pottery, but we consciously and subconsciously considered ourselves a centre, not a periphery, of this world. And that was the first time anything like that had happened in New Zealand domestic culture, beyond Rugby, Racing and Beer.

Rather, however, than further evaluating the overall social, political or aesthetic significance of the cultural movement, I want here to delve into its more mundane productive and economic and aesthetic dimensions. In this process I will come to the potters again via the low road of the domestic economy.

In 1972, my father built a house on the edge of Mount Roskill, overlooking the muddy Manukau. It was a house, though, that would have been right at home in any of the fast growing motorway subdivisions from Pakuranga to Browns Bay, being pioneered by aspirant managerial classes wanting extensive domestic space, including double (his and hers) garages. Whether these classes were aware of it or not, they took Anglo-Orientalism to new domestic heights. Our place had Japanese gables and vertical cedar external walls, expansive pebble gardens, ornamental conifers and landscape-curved concrete pathways. Our neighbours' versions featured internal screens of pressed yellow glass (ersatz shoji?) screens and feature fireplaces of rough-fired brick, wood grain feature walls, mahogany veneer flush doors, a curved feature 'moon gate' between kitchen and dining room, and wood stained pergolas for (Japanese hot bath) spa pools and saunas. The palette conformed too, though the orientalism was more eclectic; the wall to wall carpet, the furniture, the wallpaper, the Formica, the lino were autumn variegated, earthy brown, fiery orange, extravagantly patterned via modern, near Eastern, or Morris-revival formalism. What was definitely out, however, was Victorian decorative, and its enshrining of bone china tea-and-cake ware at the centre of lounge hieratics.

Across the home ownership belt, stand-alone china cabinets were driven out by Scandinavian modular wall units; the Coffee Table and the extended kitchen bench now competed as the privileged site for featuring domestic giftware. In 1973, I brought home a coffee mug tree, made in woodwork class, in what I now recognise as a Japanese minimalist tree style. This we furnished with two Japanese factory-made coffee mugs

bought as Mum and Dad Christmas presents, and later with Crown Lynn mugs, earthy two-toned or honey brown. The tree sat on the bench alongside a salubriously glazed salt pig and a nude-but-scorched pine rack holding a set of spice jars that looked like they might have been handmade (but weren't). Passing regularly from the kitchen or oven-to-setting-the-table were mass produced brown and yellow casserole dishes, bake ware, soup tureens, milk jugs and sugar bowls.

Through the decade, the numbers of craft and related shops selling stoneware for domestic/gift markets multiplied. Many inner suburbs, a few of the leafier outer ones, and several banlieu locations had pottery shops, many open on Sundays. Matamata had one; Te Awamutu had two. The staple of this economy was the coffee mug and casserole, but at its peak it occupied a considerable chunk of the kitchen and tableware market. There were ingredients containers: salt pigs, oil jugs, and spice sets, these still largely for an Anglo palate (nutmeg for the junket, cinnamon for the muffins, mixed herbs for the casserole). Larger items, or sets of soup plates or mugs were hugely popular wedding or Christmas presents.¹²

At a time when getting married and setting up with domestic ware coincided, receiving three or four casseroles became a wedding hazard. Then there was that in between world of gift-come-table ware, sometimes souvenirised as day-tripper or holiday ware: coffee jugs, pitchers and ceramic wine bottles, sold with a set of little goblets, many living out their ceremonial biographies doing permanent sculptural aesthetic duty on the coffee table, or a feature shelf of the wall unit.

Pottery co-operators from the period estimate between 70 and 90% of customers were women. Obviously this is partly explained by the domestic/giftware orientation of the product; but the place of the handmade in the gendered domestic economy has several dimensions worth further exploration. The stark utilitarianism which might characterise kitchenware was under assault, as my (mother's) generation rebelled against the Crown Lynn-or-nothing ethos of fortress import substitution. Countercultural romanticism invaded the domestic, and the kitchen in particular. From *The Enchanted Broccoli Forest Cookbook*, to magazines like *Eve* and *Thursday*, to *The Whole Earth Catalogue* of domestic accoutrements, a whole new

30.

12. Purbrick, L. (2007) *The Wedding Present: Domestic Life Beyond Consumption*. London: Ashgate

31.

13. Hewitt, J. (1971) *The New York Times Natural Foods Cookbook*. Reprinted by Hutchinson New Zealand, 1979, np

14. Elliott, M. (2005) *The Greatest Show: Warren Tippett's pots from a life less ordinary*. Auckland: Rim Books

15. Scotts, N. and P. Mounsey (1983) *A Study of the Craft Industry, Craftspeople and their Training Needs*. Wellington: Craft New Zealand, p. 10

gendered ideal of do-it-yourself domestication characterised by earth-and-playcentre mother chic was pushing Aunt Daisy aside. *The New York Times Natural Foods Cookbook*, published in the US in 1971, was reproduced unexpurgated here by Hutchinson New Zealand in 1979. While harking back to grandmother's pot-based cooking for coping with nasty cuts of meat, it also boosted for 'the Chinese who had mastered the glories of soybeans... and seaweeds standard in the traditional Japanese diet'.¹³

This new diet and lifestyle was liberating and engaging, and wonderfully aesthetic, both in the full sensual scope of its ingredients, and in its vesselry. The whole experience, however, still assumed a domestic economy where whoever cooked had two-three hours prep time before dinner. It was not, in other words, a tradition compatible with the pressures and opportunities women were finding around paid work. Hence, as we'll see, some of its vulnerability to the alternative economies of the microwave and dishwasher kitchen, and the two-car-two-job household.

But despite, or perhaps because of the romance, this domestic pot economy was an expansive, for some lucrative place through the 1970s. By (Sally Vinson's) best estimates,¹⁴ at the peak around 400 potters worked what counted as 'fulltime' producing for this economy, with many more no doubt forming a substantial group among the less than 2,000 New Zealanders who earned more than \$2,000 a year (1/5 of a 983 average wage) from all craftwork.¹⁵

Potters, especially male potters, figured almost as strongly as jewellers among those earning more than \$10,000 a year. Aspirant professional potters, often with what they themselves thought was minimal preparation, gave up professions including teaching and even medicine and went 'fulltime'. All this was directly enabled by the material basis of the clay economy. Successful potters found they could sell everything they made, in bulk to craft shop owners, often sight unseen. Pottery became integral to mass market selling cycles around Mothers' Day and Christmas, with potters going into full-scale production for pre-Christmas open days, often on the studio front steps or lawn. The co-operative arrangements meant a cash economy, one at increasingly difficult odds with taxation, and rewarding

a somewhat masculinist performance-in-production focus, but brutally effective at putting money in pockets. Taking their turn on the 'co-op' counter gave potters a daily finger on the market, directly reinforcing the ethos of 'if people would buy, you would make it'. Overhead was low: just 6.5% at the start of the Albany Village co-op in 1975.¹⁶ When the Potters' Arms co-op was set up in Mt Eden in 1979, selling two casseroles a week paid the rent.

Peter Lange, a principal in both Potters' Arms (1979-88) and Albany Village (1975-98) co-operatives, was a particularly happy participant in the burgeoning artisan economy. From a professional family on the edge of working class Otahuhu, Peter had done hard graft in freezing works and labouring. Returning to New Zealand in 1973, and learning quickly, he was able to go fulltime potting within 6 months. Lange certainly loved making pots, but was at the time in love with neither the clay nor the traditions. Getting the odd barb from potters he saw as better craftsmen making less money, however, did little to diminish his 'amazing delight' at being able to make a living (indeed, twice the average wage) throwing up to 150 mugs one day, attaching handles the next, and having a day off on the third.

In the 1988 *Profiles* publication, Lange (undoubtedly trying not to wink) identified his main influences as 'the marketplace, Crown Lynn, function. Probably I derived more satisfaction out of making a living, running a business, producing repetitive functional ware, than out of any particular pot'.¹⁷ Anglo-Oriental awareness, then, was left aside, in a pre-occupation with practical, then virtuoso witty and iconic appropriation and invention. Whatever contextual elements Lange fluently recombined, and however much he felt like he'd entered the art via the back door, these were pots people wanted to buy. There was never any need to market: shop owners would turn up to help unload the warm kiln straight into their boot. At Albany, and in Mt Eden, the customers were overwhelmingly middle class women, buying for domestic use. Lange became more aware of this enclaving when a whole different class of ('Remuera') women first turned up at Albany for a Len Castle sale, preferring pieces clearly not for everyday use.

32.

¹⁶. See NZ Potter Vol 20/1, Autumn 1978, pps 12-14 for an account of 'Cooperative Selling at Albany Village Pottery'

¹⁷. Parkinson, C. and J. Parker (1988) *Profiles: 24 New Zealand Potters*. Auckland: Bateman, p. 56

33.

¹⁸. Lex Dawson adopted a similar approach: for his and others' accounts of daily pottery economics, see NZ Potter Vol 24/1, Autumn 1982, pps 18-19

Through the 70s, his production moved to longer, monthly cycles. At the start of the month, he would decide roughly 'how much to earn', with a target in the mid 70s of around \$1000, or twice the average wage. By rule of thumb calculation this meant making (and presumptively selling) around \$2000 of pots, or, in even more concrete terms, 150 mugs, 20 casseroles,

so many teapots, so many wine goblets.¹⁸ This economy also provided a basis for wider, portfolio production, involving large and small batches of mug ware for particular events and clients. For a coffee company ('yes, we serve Faggs coffee') Lange produced 300 cups before Christmas, green celadon reduction glazed, showing earthy spots of iron oxide, and inconspicuous marks of the handmade under the Fagg's sprig: a neat, clean and by now all but subconscious fusion of Anglo, Oriental, modern and market. And, crucially, a fusion that, with other market led production, enabled its practitioner to pay off a house, travel, and participate in a wider regional cultural, social and aesthetic shift.

Producing in numbers represented a new mode of practice, repetitive, innovative largely within market incentives, but not as much at odds with higher practice as might be imagined. Potters' Arms partner, Lex Dawson, who at the late 70s peak sold 400 casseroles in a single year, recalls that a long day throwing invoked a Zen-like, aware-unaware ease which produced some of the best pots. Then, the sense of achievement and the practised ease 'set you up' for further playing around, wherein you 'didn't have to [consciously] think about the clay'. Just as, then, the material basis of the craft market underpinned wider artistic experimentation, so to an intriguing extent did the bodily and mental disposition of actual craft production.

Inevitably, there was reaction, not least from those who sought to keep pottery in stricter relation to an avant-garde, haute bourgeois enclave, and to break it out of what they saw as its drift into provincial disrepute during 'humourless handmade years of parodying naturalism and primitivism'. John Parker's 1978 'Eat your Heart out Betty Crocker' article in *NZ Potter* (Vol 20 No. 2) was a direct assault on commercial/domestic potters he jawed for 'proliferating their previous successes and retaining [a] high standard of mediocrity', and producing

‘tired glaze clichés’ wherein ‘the mystique of the Orient’ and its ‘truth to materials philosophy’ had been ‘misinterpreted and misunderstood by all but the very few’.¹⁹

Whatever the high brow thought, the establishment of the artisan economy sent both aesthetic and commercial ripples back to the realm of mass production. It was the Crown Lynn reaction to this economy, and their moves to capture the middle class brown ware economy, that gave my family its honey brown mugs and rutile cascade-glazed milk jug. But even these were poor cousins to the attempt to produce studio-like craft / designer domestic ware realised by Temuka. Jack Laird, principal actor in Waimea Pottery’s considerable, St-Ives inspired artisan enterprise, abetted appropriation of the craft tradition in the most direct way. Following a Temuka-funded study tour of Europe, and an encounter with the Scandinavian muddy modernism of Arabia and Bing & Grondhal, Laird returned to design the Waihi and Opihi ranges, which debuted in 1971-2.²⁰

It’s a mark of Laird’s success in his task that so many of us were so willing to acquiescence in a mass produced version of the handcrafted.

Lloyd-Jenkins suggests that ‘however popular it might have been, Temuka ware made only a small dent in the income of local potters’.²¹

It’s not something there are hard numbers for, and certainly many potters were doing well, but it is clear that Temuka provided a strong surrogate for the handmade, at least in the kitchens and on the tables of the un-muddied masses of the middle classes. At friends’ weddings in the late 70s, guests had been pre-advised which range of Temuka brown ware to buy at Farmers’ Trading Company: Driftwood, Riverstone, or Sandstone. Gift tables bowed with the weight of three and four casseroles, a carafe and goblet set or two, two or three laden coffee mug trees and at least one big coffee jug. Temuka, then, certainly moved further than Crown Lynn into the middle class brown giftware and oven-to-table ware domains, as well as the further reaches of the kitchenware market that craft potters had bush-crashed: oil bottles, gravy boats, mustard pots, butter and jam dishes, cruet sets, salt and pepper shakers, corked spice jars, soup bowls.

19. Parker, J. (1978) Eat you heart out Betty Crocker. *NZ Potter*, 1978 Vol 20/2, p. 20

20. Lloyd-Jenkins, D. (2004) *At Home: A Century of New Zealand Design*. Auckland: Random House

21. Lloyd-Jenkins, D. (2004) *At Home: A Century of New Zealand Design*. Auckland: Random House, p. 243

34.

35.

It also more naturally occupied core space in the clay economy, a space craft potters never really claimed: Everyday dinnerware, especially dinner plates, had for studio potters long been a weak suit, mainly for practical, kiln-stacking reasons. Temuka produced three sizes of round plate, and an extensive variety of steak, soup, and side plates, all of them complementary players in the gift and tableware market. And, perhaps more significantly, Crown Lynn followed on, expanding earthy ware to give us not just an abject brown Apollo range (rockets, mud and modernism in full commodity fusion), but the more deliberate and upmarket regionalist stone ceramics of the Earthstone range (Landscape, Polynesia, Sandown), the Stoneware series (Rusticana, Sahara, Tosca), Chateau Craftware, Country Fair rustic ware, Ceramica Greenstone vases, and the ‘golden hues of dusk captured in [the] Sundowner’ [range].²²

22. Monk, VR. (2006) *Crown Lynn: A New Zealand Icon*. Auckland: Penguin, p. 128, quoting original promotional material

For all their competitors’ efforts, setting the table with Temuka, with its superior aesthetic and legendary indestructibility, represented a peak of class aspiration in late 70s Mt Roskill. We didn’t know that the golden brown world all this signified was about to change absolutely, assailed by new technology, a shift in fashion, and above all, neoliberal industrial policy.

The 80s: Stone-ware to Underwear via Slipware

It’s hard, even in retrospect, to know which factors were more important: the fashion and palette shift from deep regionalist brown stoneware to sunny, flowery, fruity Mediterranean earthenware swept the domestic aesthetic enclave, almost as quickly as Muldoon’s grimly regionalist version of Fordism was violently disembedded by Rogernomics. Both felt to many – especially consumers – like a breath of fresh air. For the potters, as for the bigger import substitutors, they were also an incitement to near panic.

The re-tilting of the economic table had begun with the identification of larger craft producers like Waimea Potteries as beneficiaries of industry protection, and therefore as targets for sales tax.²³

When tableware protections were phased out in seven years starting in 1985,²⁴ they exposed both artisan and mass produces alike. While the NZ Society of Potters had lobbied for special treatment of craft production on the basis of

23. Laird, P. (1981) Waimea Potters: the Post-sales-tax Dynasty. *NZ Potter* 23/1 p.33

24. *NZ Potter* Vol 26/1 1984 pp 36-7 presents the debate from both sides.

small runs and time intensive production, Trade and Industry reviewers in 1982 had recognised artisans as operating in direct and successful competition with larger operators, and therefore as necessarily to be subject to the same rules. The scramble for survival was on.

Those with little love for Flowers, Fruit, or Fish may have referred disparagingly to '3 Fs' pottery (also known as the 4 Fs school, once disparagers added f***ing to the start); but many prominent practitioners moved to adopt it, or something like it. They needed to be quick: the fashion shift within the enclave happened almost overnight, as within a fortnight long standing styles sold in the 'co-op' shops ceased to sell. For some, the shifts aesthetic and economic, produced by the late 80s a simple desperation: desperation to hang onto lifestyle, to keep selling pots, to avoid too heavily depending on earning spouses. Deep Anglo-Oriental, fluid expressionists, utilitarian and market purveyors alike (Van der Putten, Scholes, Lange, Tippett) began producing ware which had few visible marks of previous aesthetic commitments. For some, this was a journey up aesthetic cul de sacs and long haul sectors (monumental, decorative, 'funk', minimalist, neoexpressionist, post modern), and into new technical problems in making earthenware. For others, arguably most importantly for Warren Tippett, it was an occasion to colonise a whole new sensibility, melded to a re-gendered, urban based lifestyle. Yet for all his undiminished standing as a great formal and decorative potter, Tippett suffered in economic terms.²⁵

In the domestic enclave of the kitchen, the mood was more liberatory. The new brighter colours represented a new romantic tradition of urban class aspiration, not about going up your own muddy country, but of access to Greek Isles, Provence, and Tuscany. It was a kitchenware mood that would sustain, against horrendous odds, right through the worst of structural adjustment. Here, while some 3 F importers did well, others, as Kerr Inkson's (1987) ²⁶ survey details, struggled, worried, and made various compromises. Producers seem to have given up the outer reaches of kitchenware: the salt and pepper shakers and other vesselry. Others upscaled, moving to broad-brush painted serving platters and large slipware for antipasto, pasta and salads,

25. Elliott, M. (2005) *The Greatest Show: Warren Tippett's pots from a life less ordinary*. Auckland: Rim Books

26. Inkson, K. (1987) *The Craft Ideal: A study of Potters. Human Relations* 40: pp 163-176

36.

37.

or big florid cups for café au lait. The casserole was still important, but it was under pressure from the pressure cooker, the microwave and the crock pot, which sped up or slowed down cooking to fit new working and domestic routines. Mum still did the cooking, but she wasn't at home three hours before dinner. The cookware shift was also reflected by the popularisation of microwaves and dishwashers, liberators, and, it turned out, technical and aesthetic drivers of change. Today, it is clear that the iron present in glazes and clay was not an insurmountable obstacle to using earthy cookware in microwaves. Labelling in the period, however, whether by potters or industrial producers, stressed that this ware was microwave or dishwasher *safe*; implying that previous or unmarked ware wasn't.

There were, however opportunities. Earthenware, which women had dominated pre-stoneware, required a different production. New, urban and electric fired studio-workshop production arrangements emerged, with unskilled female working class labour employed to hand paint slipware and up production. Nevertheless, things were precarious: this tradition made handmade slipware work indistinguishable from mass produced versions, decorating it with brushwork which is hard to differentiate without seeing the made in Italy/New Zealand/China stamp.

The story of mass ceramic production in the period is well known,²⁷

and won't be rehearsed here. Suffice to say that producers in these economies tried many similar moves, imitating art ware, using foreign labour, producing cheap imitations of cheap ceramics, such as Crown Lynn's pastel ware of the mid 80s. Most profoundly important, however, was the fact that the table the corporate owners of Crown Lynn were setting was no longer a ceramic, aesthetic or domestic one. Rather, it was a level playing field for neoliberalised, financialised capital. Here, what mattered was not the plates you made, but the short term rate of return on capital, and the ways this could be realised by making commodities, selling off landholdings, or using assets to finance moves from slipware into underwear. That may be, in Alan Gibbs' words, 'what business men do'²⁸: but it isn't what ceramics makers do.

27. Monk, VR. (2006) *Crown Lynn: A New Zealand Icon*. Auckland: Penguin

28. Monk, VR. (2006) *Crown Lynn: A New Zealand Icon*. Auckland: Penguin, p. 140

Conclusions / Now:

New Zealand ceramic commodity production and global capital, then, parted ways, and have not joined forces seriously since. At the same time, regionalist (brown) and nationalist aesthetics split from popular ceramics, again permanently. These shifts have left domestic ceramics high and dry, enclaved not in the domestic, utilitarian and regional, but back in disembodied niches frequented by the high art cultures and discretionary incomes in search of sculptural, figurative, and other conspicuously non-domestic objects that fear the suffix 'ware'.

Now, ironically, we now have the coffee to match the mugs: yet the microscopic number of cafes or other high end food venues using artisan ware simply and directly restates the almost complete divorce between not just capital and New Zealand domestic ceramics, but between domestic ceramic production and its most likely ally, the niche-like, high value local economies of domestic discretionary consumption (wherein a trip to a café is perhaps the current equivalent of high tea, or the Sunday drive). Albeit with some partial exceptions, such as the high end souvenir / holiday ware market. Here, on a trip to Nelson in the 1990s, my parents finally bought (though guiltily) two handmade coffee mugs.

In the end, however, longer term trends in ceramic traffic reasserted themselves: now, New Zealand table settings demonstrate for the first time the direct dominance of China again, with China-ware (whether designed here or there) now indistinguishably designed by Euro manufacturers or oriental imitators. As a trip to a giftware shop will show, it widens, as Chinese producers prove themselves able to appropriate, produce and market any style at all, producing ware that can be sold into the prime \$1-200 range, yet providing huge mark-ups at each point in the supply chain.

In the upper reaches of domestic artisan production, however, the Anglo-Oriental, especially in its loose, expressionist is experiencing some kind of revival. Here, it is happening via a sinewy tradition which, in the course of transmission through Driving Creek, Chester Nealie, Ross Mitchell-Anyon, Duncan Shearer, and Chris Southern to a new generation including

38.

39.

Alan Wheldale, has lost some of its explicit Orientalism. This is now, a domesticated, New Zealand tradition, fusing disparate elements with an international romance for salt glazing, anagama and wood firing. Whether, of course, this relative unconsciousness makes the current practice more or less provincial is something to debate. So too is the provenance of the current popular revival of interest in both collecting 70s regionalist pots, and in making your own, seemingly largely for domestic use. Now, with Auckland Studio Potters bursting at the seams with people making things in their own discretionary time, we are firmly back in the enclave of domestic aesthetics, wherein people are setting their own tables as far from the market as domestic ceramics has ever been.

David Craig is a Senior Lecturer
in the Department of Sociology
at the University of Auckland.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Lex Dawson, Moyra Elliot, Gaynor Craig, Stuart Newby, Duncan Shearer, Alan Wheldale, and especially Peter Lange and Richard Fahey for patient fielding many poorly thrown and underfired questions.

I The handmade and how it has been constructed, critiqued and consumed over the past six decades in this country has been in a constant state of transition. The handmade has been, and will continue to be, an unstable dynamic dependent upon framing structures, both conceptual and physical. Until the industrial revolution all ceramics were necessarily handmade, usually by those from an artisan class who occupied a lowly position within social hierarchies. It was towards the end of the 19th Century that the Arts and Crafts movement in England and France introduced the concept of the studio potter. In New Zealand this genteel avocation was taken up by a small number of individuals in the first half of the 20th century. A sustained local studio pottery movement did not emerge until post-war, when an explosion of interest paralleled similar developments elsewhere. The enthusiasm was fuelled in part by a desire for simpler times, underscored by a philosophy that promoted aesthetics from our English roots and reflected our proximity to Asia. The movement burgeoned for twenty plus years and despite the ways post-modernism has challenged old meanings of the handmade and offered new ways to express it, the handmade still functions to remind us of the history of ceramics and the haptic processes the tradition invokes.

The mutable handmade

Moyra Elliott

II

Peter Stichbury's hand-thrown pots made at night classes at Avondale High School offer one way of understanding the handmade in the 1950s. Now highly collectable, these pots are modest in ambition. There is a confidence in the verticality of their alignment. Clear sturdy throwing lines, evenly spaced, indicate a steady speed and rise during throwing. Rivulets and speckles of salt layer the gleaming surface. There is little indication of two key formal elements of what later became identified as New Zealand style; the characteristic 45 degree angle undercuts at the foot that give a baseline shadow that visually lightens the pot; and the thickening of rim that gives an emphatic end to its making. Stichbury's throwing is controlled, the swell of the belly is bridled and the function is explicit. The references to English country pots suggested by titles such as *Cider Jar with Tap* (1951), are somewhat more bemusing given the beer drinking culture of mid-twentieth century New Zealand.¹

Handmade vessels such as these were forcefully framed by a context that included a philosophy, history and culture. Bernard Leach's, *A Potter's Book* (1940), was both manual and polemic, seamlessly melding discussion of ideals and criteria with workshop practice and the promise of a spiritually fulfilling life. By the late 1950s, Leach's canonical selection of historical English and Asian pots, and the model prescribed by him and his Japanese colleague, Shoji Hamada, was accepted as appropriate for New Zealand practice. The lynch-pin of the discourse was 'truth to materials' as originally derived from Ruskin's writings. The ethos was interpreted as useful pots, made with emphasis on continuity rather than innovation, utilising materials obtained locally and registering the overt sign of the potter's hand. There were some protests against the dominance of stoneware and 'types deriving ultimately from Chinese or Japanese models'.² One commentator cautioned against 'any acceptance of the forms of other periods for today's artistic expression'.³ However, the new potters saw themselves with few traditions of their own and the Anglo-Oriental embodied a congenial set of ideas from which to develop a discipline. Qualities such as simplicity, strength, materials which in themselves provided a richness of texture, a restricted range of subdued colours,



Peter Stichbury, *Cider Jar with tap*, 1951, Collection of the artist. Image courtesy Auckland War Memorial Museum. Photo credit Studio La Gonda.

¹ See #8, and others from the time, pages 36-37 in *Peter Stichbury: A Survey of a Pioneer New Zealand Studio Potter*, 2007, Auckland Museum Tamaki Paenga Hira, Auckland.

² Roy Cowan, *Schools of Thought*, NZ Potter, Vol. 1/2, December 1958, p.33.

³ E.A. Plischke, *Thoughts from an Architect on the Studio Potter Today*, NZ Potter, Vol.1/2, December 1958, p.7.

42.

43.

abandonment of figurative decoration and a robustness that did not exclude subtleties, provided a baseline for the next quarter century.

Audiences were initially small but led by an art and design-aware coterie who viewed the new activity with interest. In contrast to unsatisfying local industrial ware, hand-made pots joined hand-printed fabrics, woven rugs and other accoutrements of the smart contemporary home offered by design-conscious retailers around the country. Handmade tableware featured in the modern-style fashionable home interiors pictured in contemporary magazines and consumed by a cultural avant-garde. Subtly glazed coffee pots and bowls sat well on the new Scandinavian-style furniture. Modest dishes and mugs offered a link with simpler, pre-industrial production methods that were newly desirable in the increasingly mechanised post-war world. As interest grew, specialist craft boutiques opened. This growth in infrastructure was firmly underpinned by the imposition of Governmental restrictions on imported tableware, designed to protect expanding local industries.

In 1957, the first national pottery exhibition was organised, signalling the rising interest and participation. Fifteen potters from the four main centres, gathered together via personal connections, exhibited. Olive Jones was listed as being from Onehunga rather than Auckland. A magazine, *New Zealand Potter*, followed in 1958, and disseminated Leachean lore and admiration for the pots and potters of the Orient, particularly Japan, with every early issue. It was soon followed by a Society that began structuring some connections between centres. The concept of community grew as these agencies practiced and encouraged the sharing of hard-won knowledge. Information about making and firing was critical in the 1950s and 1960s to supplement that provided by Leach's book. Learning was informal, and incrementally garnered snippets of knowledge, treasured then generously shared, became a foundation of the culture.

Further growth came from an efflorescence of Adult Education weekend and summer schools nurtured on the 'art for all' philosophies of Gordon Tovey and Clarence Beeby. Applied

arts were at that time sanctioned inside the white cube. Notable support arrived from the Auckland City Art Gallery which, under Director Eric Westbrook, staged exhibitions that included potters alongside architects, designers and weavers. Westbrook ran the first summer school in painting and crafts within the Gallery's exhibition halls – a practice that would make today's conservators faint with anxiety.

The New Zealand Society of Potters provided leadership and undertook the organisation of annual exhibitions in different centres around the country that were considered a high point of the year. Membership of the Society was predicated on acceptance into this juried show.

The nascent culture achieved an early apotheosis in 1960 when the New Zealand Society of Potters was invited to hold their fourth annual exhibition at the Auckland City Art Gallery. This was a shift that reflected changing relationships between art disciplines, but the desirable, discriminating criticism, which might have attracted serious attention to the genre of ceramics, was missing. Art-world critics, after an initial flurry of positive interest in the 1950s, became dismissive, writing about 'therapy', the 'generally mediocre' quality and 'well used themes usually poorly and uselessly reworked'.⁴

But these were art values looking for individuality and originality when potters were largely adhering to Leach's belief in ceramics as a practice of continuity rather than innovation. The *New Zealand Potter*, alongside its valuable technical advice, returned to publishing critiques from commentators more firmly embedded within the mores of pottery.

III

Participation expanded through the 1960s as increasing numbers of evening classes offered pottery instruction. By decade's end, the inclusion of pottery, within adult education classes offered at high schools, was almost standard. Classes were regularly over-subscribed and those most highly regarded attracted waiting lists. Some classes were basic, with ready made clays and glazes, but others offered access to large individually-designed kilns, and sophisticated means for student's own glaze and clay formulations. Well-equipped schools usually offered more experienced teachers;

44.

4. See two articles in NZ Potter Vol. 3/2 Dec, 1960, pp 32-36 and pp 24-25 for criticism of the Fourth NZ Potters Annual exhibition. By Hamish Keith and Colin McCahon they are excoriating but also constructive with suggestions for remedies. They contrast two, more generally positive reviews, by architect Vernon Brown and 'Art of the Potter' retailer, Dan Pierce.

45.

those who had started earlier and sometimes those who had been off-shore to study with Leach himself or to observe in Japan. More often however, teachers were those who had exhibited somewhere a few times, or learned fundamentals while at Teachers' Training College. During the period, art was a core subject for schools and pottery was included in the art curriculum.

In the 1960s, alongside pots that emulated English and Asian models, appeared the pot as self-expression, interpreted through signs of landscape. In early issues of *New Zealand Potter*, Barry Brickell called for potters to respond to 'this country' with its 'warmth, richness, soft yet rugged grandeur'. He argued that it was 'our natural heritage' that 'pervades our whole feeling' and from this source our own style might emerge, 'a New Zealand style instead of a

5. Barry Brickell, *Smisek* _____ colonial adaptation'.⁵
Returns, NZ Potter, Vol. 7/1, p4.

Reiterated regularly in *New Zealand Potter* articles and editorials, this tenet was perhaps best interpreted by Len Castle, who by playfully manipulating the clay body, developed a series of unique forms often considered among his finest works. His wall-hung, *Hanging Forms*, record a sophisticated layering, folding, slicing, opening and compressing of the richly inclusioned grainy body, washed with ferruginous oxides to emphasise character and structure before final vitrification. Nominally containers, these pieces were, by virtue of small apertures, able to hold a few grasses but really served to evoke the natural environment, its fissured, ruptured rocks, gravel riverbeds and crackled, organic surfaces.

Ceramics that engage with an identity / nature discourse by displaying overt signs of natural textures and surfaces, became prevalent in the 1960s. They represent an indigenisation of the Anglo-Oriental philosophy and are some of the earliest self-consciously individual ceramics, departing from the compliance of style promoted by Leach. As discrete pieces that had aspirations to 'art', they inhabited dedicated exhibition spaces that had been newly incorporated into specialist craft galleries such as New Vision in Auckland. Purchasers displayed the work as trophies of style in the communal areas of domestic interiors that featured open kauri display shelves and feature walls of Japanese grass-paper.

In addition to the regular evaluations in *New Zealand Potter*, ceramic critiques began to appear in newspaper columns, penned by a new breed of craft reviewers. *New Zealand Potter* praised Castle's work, as 'in harmony with the rhythms of natural forms',⁶ while countering with criticism of potters that they regarded as, 'over-reaching themselves . . . trying too hard to produce exhibition pots'⁷ that displayed a 'lack of proper concern for the primacy of function'.⁸ Such calls for a return to the comfortable and approved, however, carried little effect, as exhibitions often sold out at crowded openings.

In the 1960s, the growth in pottery activity was signalled by the presence of craft shops in small towns and urban suburbs. Potters began joining together to sell their own wares in co-operative ventures that guaranteed them a greater slice of the retail cake. Handmade pottery had entered the mainstream.

Formal teaching of ceramics was introduced at Otago Polytechnic School of Fine and Applied Art in 1970. Initially ceramics was offered as a subject within the three-year Diploma curriculum. Students could opt to specialise solely in clay in their final year. The institution also introduced a one-year dedicated ceramics course, promoted as tailor-made for individual students. In 1969, *New Zealand Potter* magazine had devoted an issue to formal education in ceramics. This included recommendations to research the needs of the country, in economic and cultural terms, by Kenneth Clark, the expatriate New Zealander, ceramicist and teacher at London's Central School of Art. Clark suggested, "The world has plenty of examples of educational and political white elephants whose existence can be traced to inadequate research and planning."⁹ He advised looking at what had been set up in similarly sized countries facing similar challenges, and offered Czechoslovakia as an interesting case-study. He questioned the current viable market for hand-made pots, asking whether it was due to import restrictions, and speculated on what might happen should these not exist. He challenged the reader to consider issues such as changing tastes, needs and attitudes. Clark was that temperate voice from outside asking questions that were paid little heed in the local context, where a ravenous retail sector absorbed everything with alacrity.

6. Terry Barrow, *Len Castle*, NZ Potter, Vol. 8/1, Autumn, 1976, p.35.

7. Helen Mason, *The National Exhibitions, Ten Years of Pottery in New Zealand*, 1968, p.5

8. John Simpson, *ibid*, p.8.

9. Ken Clark, *Education in ceramics: Where are we going?*, NZ Potter, Vol.11/1, Autumn, 1969, p.2.

46.

47.

Tutor in charge at Otago was Lyall Hallam, who, came to ceramics, as many others had, via Teachers' Training College. He had experience teaching art at high schools and making his own pots. Hallam was assisted by practicing potters acting as specialist visiting tutors who supplemented the on-campus teachers of art history, basic design, sculpture, chemistry. Rejecting Clark's call for research into what might be needed, Hallam claimed, 'aesthetic education was part of a larger thing – it is for life' . . . 'I take it as my general objective to foster in students an enthusiasm for creative expression and self-realisation in the ceramics medium and providing them with the means, in terms of understanding the materials and techniques...' ¹⁰ 'That some of these students will become potters cannot be doubted but this is not the important thing because . . . they cannot be restricted by our concepts as to what they will achieve.'¹¹

10. Lyall Hallam, *Full-time Courses in ceramics at Otago Polytechnic*, NZ Potter, Vol. 15/2, Summer 1972, p. 2.

11. Hallam, p.4.

12. Chris Weaver and Cheryl Lucas are two early graduates from the Dip. F.A.A. course with specialty in ceramics.

IV

The Otago course produced new practitioners whose education was broadly based.¹² The majority of practitioners, however, continued to emerge from the art specialist training offered at Teachers' Training Colleges and adult night classes supplemented by summer schools. Jack Laird and Harry Davis ran the only accredited apprenticeships available that could only accommodate very limited numbers. On a more informal level, experienced practicing potters accepted helpers who learnt while assisting with production.

How difficult and demanding it was to learn to produce pots of any reasonable standard, in a context where precedent and tradition barely existed, cannot be overstated. There was a feeling that nobody knew quite enough. However by insight and experiment, progress was made. The amount of material knowledge required and the capacity to apply what was discovered was individual. The sense of achievement at steadily overcoming innumerable obstacles was enormous. There was joy and satisfaction in being able to make a living from production, and the enthusiastic market absorbed all.

The 1970s witnessed significant change regarding what was produced in the name of the vessel. The new generation, while aware of Leach, had no need to read his book, since his

precepts were part of the zeitgeist in pottery circles and effortlessly assimilated in the learning and socialising around kiln firings. The younger men could overlook his descriptions of workshop practice as model; these emerging potters already had workshops and were producing many pots. They respected Leach and Hamada, because their predecessors did, but unlike them, they had not closely experienced the celebrated visits by either of the founders of the Anglo-Oriental movement. Leach had come in 1962 as a seventy-five year-old 'Edwardian gentleman' delivering lectures. Following in 1965, Hamada was an engaging personality who gave a legendary series of workshops, about which anecdotes still circulate. His nonchalant style of clay handling and disregard for accurate centring became part of pottery folklore. There evolved a cluster of younger men who established a robust, spontaneous way of working clay that responded to Brickell's recurrent calls for 'animation'. In doing so, they referenced forms of Japanese historical styles such as Bizen, Karatsu and Iga, that bore the genesis of their making.

Such style can be seen in Chester Nealie's series of *Poison Bottles* featuring loose fluid throwing, asymmetry, siliceous, gritty, broken-bready textures and consciously gestural applications of lips, handles and lugs. This is amplified by wood-firing, producing apparently serendipitous kiln-flashing and shoulders dusted with an ash-laden gleam. Nealie and others who work in this style, rehearse these characteristics in various individual ways but seek to maintain a sense of the plasticity and freshness evident in wet clay after vitrification while pursuing surface qualities manifestly derived from process - the nourishable accident. These mannerisms of the handmade that testify to the quality Leach called 'inner life' have remained relevant; a response to that repeated cry for some true 'clay feeling'. Such pots still associate with function through titles such as *Jar* or *Flask*, but because of their undomesticated surfaces and forms, they often move beyond utility. These objects became signifiers of taste, intended for the connoisseur rather than the wide spectrum of the public who had formed the audience for earlier ceramics. The handmade was becoming 'collectable'. The pottery community approvingly recognised the genesis of this development, and *New Zealand Potter* paid liberal attention to various of its practitioners.

48.

49.

In the 1970s New Zealand Society of Potters annual exhibitions were still significant, but new perspectives were introduced by individual exhibitions at specialist craft galleries. With increasing numbers of practitioners producing, the more established potters began reserving their work for these solo rather than group exhibitions. This shift was noted in both articles and editorials published in *New Zealand Potter*. There were warnings that the fourteenth national exhibition was 'thin and disappointing', that such shows, 'no longer represented potters as a whole or supplied a cross-section of work

13. Margaret Harris, _____ produced in a current year'.¹³
NZ Potter, Vol. 13/2, Spring, 1971, p.2.

There were protests that pots had 'no clay feeling', that they simply demonstrated technical excellence rather than the signs

14. Wilf Wright quoted _____ of the handmade that had come to signify a good pot.¹⁴
in Amy Brown, *Pottery is in but...*
Thursday, 17.9.70, p.30.

_____ of the handmade that had come to signify a good pot.¹⁴

The following year *New Zealand Potter* featured an article criticising what had happened to the movement and the handmade. It was a litany of laments: 'little original experimentation on which to base continued development'; standards were 'conservative and restrictive'; public taste 'bigoted' with a 'big effect on the pots made'; 'stagnation in quality of both work and the buyer', whose 'purchase is dictated most of all by their rigid idea of what a pot should be'. The conclusion was that pottery was corrupted by its own acceptability and 'must eventually die'.¹⁵

15. Paul Melser, _____ 'must eventually die'.¹⁵
Roll On Revolution, NZ Potter,
Vol. 14/2, Spring, 1972, pp.13-16.

The polemic drew both affirmation and rebuttal, but little could change while sell-out shows were supported by Government agencies who found pottery 'a relatively safe way to

16. Ibid. p14. _____ make gifts overseas'.¹⁶

During the 1970s, the Department of Foreign Affairs was regularly buying at major exhibitions, gifting handmade pots to visiting dignitaries, and featuring them in New Zealand embassies around the world as testament to government support for local arts. By the 1980s however, interior design had moved on from the colonial and rustic and muted colours that had perfectly backgrounded the rugged pot of exposed construction. Italy replaced Scandinavia and Victoriana as a source for interior design. The hand-made was devalued against the work of industrial design teams where product aesthetics are analysed for manufacturing efficiencies. An individual studio teapot became less desirable, than one

designed for Alessi by Michael Graves or Philippe Starck. Memphis style with its polychromatic eclecticism offered no framework for the handmade that now had to find new contexts.

V

The 1980 *Five by Five* exhibition at Auckland's Denis Cohn Gallery was a visit by ceramics to the white cube. Those exhibiting were Bronwynne Cornish, Warren Tippett, John Parker, Denis O'Connor and Peter Hawkesby. All had at least one foot in the broader art-world and acknowledged an awareness of international developments in clay. The ceramicists in *Five by Five* signalled the increasing accessibility of specialist literature on the subject, some had travelled to meet the artists and absorb first hand what had driven these new expressions. Banding together to create a manifesto for change, the five had no ambitions to join lifestyle production potters but to implement alternatives by which clay might enunciate a more complex and expanded field. The exhibition was urban and light-hearted rather than rural and earnest, and reflected West Coast American, folk-art revivalist and industrial values. Each work in the show was given a title that extended meaning toward the viewer rather than the usual descriptive label.

Among the most radical were the works by Hawkesby, who while still making vessels, eschewed any notions of utility, seriality or dexterity. He took more interest in chronicling his articulation of the plastic, unctuous, iron and magnesium-rich clay extracted at low tide from Te Matuku Bay and its subsequent metamorphosis through fire. His eloquent cylindrical works were like double-height drums with the upper portion tilted, akin to a trilby hat over one eye. The surfaces were seared by heat, encrusted, blistered and sclerotic with salt. Hawkesby's *Incinerators (burnt hollow men)*, (1980) were less cerebral than intuitive and haptic and communicated the energy invested in their making with a rakish, uncompromising glare from beneath that tilt. The resultant pieces might relate somatically to the loose expression begun some years earlier, in the manipulative responses to the medium, but they were informed by completely different histories and values. While Nealie's work was perhaps the ultimate articulation of the Anglo-Oriental movement, Hawkesby's initiative was derived more from the ceramic ferment begun in the late 1950s in



Peter Hawkesby, *Teapot*, Late 1970s, Private Collection. Photo credit Studio La Gonda.

50.

51.

California, where radical approaches fuelled by Abstract Expressionism encouraged spontaneous interaction with art-making materials and altered the course of post-war ceramics.

The newspaper critics were generous. 'One of the more significant group shows for quite some time, dealing with

17. Dugald Page, _____ sculptural ideas imaginatively'.¹⁷ *Five by Five*, NZ Herald, 11.6.80.

“Unlike most pottery shows, yet the appeal lies precisely in this new-look style of ceramics interested in using clay more

18. Terry Snow, _____ expressively'.¹⁸ *Art New Zealand* took

notice of contemporary ceramics for the first time, saying the work, “confuses the time-honoured and assumed distinctions

19. Alistair Patterson, _____ between art and craft”.¹⁹ *Clay Poets: the Art of Denis O'Connor and Peter Hawkesby*, Art New Zealand, Vol. 20, Winter, 1981, p.31.

Modest sales were achieved. Cohn did not repeat the exercise, although by giving some of the exhibitors subsequent shows, he demonstrated willingness to progress this new manifestation of clay. Some from the pottery community who saw the show were puzzled, and the *New Zealand Potter* did not mention it at all. But the work was recognised as new, and the following year, Hawkesby and O'Connor were guest exhibitors at the Auckland Studio Potters annual show at Auckland Museum. Work such as this never found a large public as it was outside received expectations and in a sense mocked the high-minded seriousness of the studio pottery movement. What did develop was a fervent band of collectors, many new to clay, which suggested the audience was progressing in new directions. The wider art world was alerted to the potential of a medium hitherto unconsidered. The hybridity and dissolution of categories involved in postmodernism changed concerns from 'how', necessary for the development of skills to 'why', needed for admission to a context where the idea is paramount.

One notable development of the late 1980s was the establishment of Craft Design courses, that included ceramics, at eleven polytechnics. This initiative was the result of an agreement between the Education Department, the QEII Arts Council and the Crafts Council. On one hand it was a positive development that polytechnics were now offering courses in craft media. On another, it was perplexing that in a changing and steadily shrinking sector, more than one or two, well resourced, courses should be offered.

Students were taught by potters who had learned their craft at Teachers' Training Colleges, night classes or working with a senior practitioner and socialising around the kiln. How they taught was how they had learned. Well qualified to teach a range of subjects from kiln building to glaze making and small scale production methods, none were fully tertiary trained in ceramics or versed in the academic discourses of the medium. Some had absorbed the Leach prejudices against industry or anything to do with the United States of America. Few had more than a passing knowledge of important new movements started in late 1940s Japan and 1950s California, and their critical relationships with other art forms.

Within these polytechnic courses, history and supporting subjects were taught by fine art and art history graduates, who had little cognisance of ceramics' particular histories and instead instructed within a more generalised field. Student potters learned about Renaissance frescoes but not Luca della Robbia's majolica of the same period, they discovered Picasso's painting but not his explorations in clay over two decades in Vallauris. One by one the courses steadily closed. They were seen as expensive to run in the face of reduced applications. The halcyon days were gone, the economic viability of a career as a self-employed potter became increasingly insecure. The long-standing course in Otago, which had the experience and depth to continue, still offers a B.Vis.Arts degree majoring in ceramics from which interesting and promising practitioners have emerged.

Off-shore, over recent years, new dialogues specific to crafts/ objects, some particular to ceramics, have been initiated. A range of tertiary institutions, from those encompassing the breadth of cultural studies through to specialty ceramics research centres such as ICRC plus private organisations such as the Ceramic Arts Foundation, have instituted conferences, produced publications and launched websites. This academic focus and body of writing is accruing information that proclaims new energy in the field, from formulating craft-specific language to explicating histories and developing theory on many fronts. Craft media have avoided colonisation by the fine arts, despite the hybridity evident in contemporary work, by generating discourse on their own terms. Herein lies hope for the future.

52.

53.

VI

New York ceramic gallerist and writer, Garth Clark, visited New Zealand in 2006, and talked of ceramics separating into two spheres in the USA. Clark was proposing that the principal markets, carrying roughly equal economic activity, were in the rarefied arena of the white cube on the one hand and the large market circuit of the craft fair in the other. What had been between was gone. Change is taking place here also. *New Zealand Potter* magazine has disappeared. In its last years it avoided potentially offending in the hope that remaining positive would maintain sales in a shrinking market and community. This lack of insightful articulation and critique limited ability to assess significant changes. After earlier offering standards and criteria alongside the necessary technical information, the magazine failed to reflect the paradigm shifts taking place internationally within ceramics, including its increasing integration within the wider world of art. The magazine ceased publication in the new century, propelled by the improved availability of more eclectic international ceramic publications and later the advent of websites as the new primary source of information. The other early lynchpin, the New Zealand Society of Potters, is also debilitated. Where once it supplied direction and governance via leaders of the community, the helm has now passed to the recreational sector which caters for its peers and operates in a niche market. Ceramicists/ceramic artists, as they are often called today, can exhibit via the few remaining specialist craft galleries, public spaces like Objectspace, or private art galleries where careers are professionally fostered and managed. This latter venue, now slowly being infiltrated by craft-media based art, also offers opportunity for critique, but only for a few. The alternative is that potters stay in a shrinking hermetic world that increasingly reflects a leisure economy.

Ceramicists now derive from a wide range of backgrounds. Some have transited from foundations within studio pottery. These are long-established practitioners with accomplished work and loyal collectors and interested observers. Others are graduates of art schools or specialist ceramic courses. No matter the basic discipline, they grapple with personal, cultural, social and political issues while sharing a belief in expression embodied in process. Hand making is fundamental,

whether it is denied, as in John Parker's aesthetic representations of industrial histories, or celebrated, as in Jimmy Cooper's vigorously modelled odd-ball celebrities and picaroons.

Then there is work such as that by Richard Stratton, a ceramics specialty course graduate, who as part of the younger generation reared on post-modern hybridity, conflates visual seduction with formal subversion to drive home political commentary. Before ceramics branched into either streamlined functional ware or the more expressive non-functional pot, there was an earlier tradition where this split did not exist – Meissen, Ming or Nabeshima wares exemplify where function and the expression of subjects quite outside the function were still intimately tied together. Researching widely, Stratton builds his forms combining some ancient Chinese techniques with others excavated from old industrial manuals. His teapots, such as *Little Boy Blue* (2007), display addenda appropriated from other, frequently vintage and metal forms, and politically informed, computer altered imagery lifted from recent history. The practical concern for function is what provides a grounding, the familiar point from which a journey begins and can be traced on the detailed surfaces. Stratton's eclectic vessels can only be laboriously, entirely handmade despite their polished delivery.

VII

In mid 20th century the handmade pot embodied an ideal, part of an international movement, it offered an alternative to the mechanised post-war world. It was made to function as something beautiful to behold and use but it also proposed a better world, critical of the one it occupied. Repetition or seriality moderated originality and curtailed monetary value. Affordability was an intrinsic part of the ideal. It could be found in almost every home and used daily for all it had to offer. The handmade became an expression of identity. What was seen as our unique landscape and natural heritage was exemplified in the character and structure of a work in clay and became an assertion of nationhood through a celebration of place, at a time when we were exploring this concept across a range of disciplines. Then overt evidence of the handmade, betraying a sense of the plasticity and freshness of the raw clay surface, came to mean spontaneity or inner creativity.

54.



Richard Stratton, *Little Boy Blue Teapot*, 2007, Image courtesy Anna Miles Gallery

55.

The gestural sensibility along with a refusal of polished finish was interpreted as an extemporaneous response to clay. All of these approaches to the handmade survive. A few makers of quality represent each type exceptionally and have done so for some time.

Today the handmade is the sign of the studio ceramic made by an individual potter/ceramicist, a marginal member of an artist class – someone regarded as a breed apart, but not lowly. Ceramicists no longer believe that the sign of the handmade is about spontaneity or inner creativity, identity or the 'ethical' pot. Such signs can be entirely faked (and are). Clay can imitate or reproduce anything. Ceramicists are free to invoke these signs at will, or not, as part of a personal style. The handmade ceramic is an art statement that references pre-industrial traditions, even if only by virtue of the forms, techniques or materials employed. It can be viewed as subversive, by being rendered in a medium as loaded with pre-conceptions as clay.

On another level, the wider culture still responds to notions of the handmade, it tenders associations with tactile experiences – you often know its feel and heft just by looking. The scale insists you move in close and enjoy a haptic intimacy of growing importance in an increasingly digitised environment. With it comes cultural value in the cachet of the one-off, a variety and individuality that can be elusive in today's globalised world of mass-produced goods. The handmade has moved and continues.

Moyra Elliott is an independent curator and writer in the field of ceramics based in Auckland, New Zealand.

All efforts have been made to contact copyright holders and owners of illustrated works.

Genealogy does not oppose itself to history [...] on the contrary, it rejects the metahistorical deployment of ideal significations and indefinite teleologies. It opposes itself to the search for 'origins'.¹

1. Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, genealogy, history'

56.

It is an undisputable fact that the consumption of ceramic commodities in New Zealand has had little to do with their production: the great majority of ceramics found in the country – from porcelain figures to stoneware sewerage pipes – originate elsewhere. From before 1840 until the mid-1960s, these objects came primarily from the Staffordshire potteries of industrial Britain. Against this trend, for a short period between the 1960s and the 1980s, the majority of wares consumed were made locally. Local industrial production collapsed at the end of the 1980s and the ceramics consumed in New Zealand, once again, were made elsewhere: quality tableware from continental Europe and everyday wares from newly established potteries in south east Asia. In the early twenty-first century an increasing percentage of ceramics consumed here emanate from the world's first significant exporter of ceramics, China. A survey of the published literature on the subject of ceramics in New Zealand would favour a conclusion that the political and administrative wings

57.

A brief *genealogy* of government policy _____ *Christopher Thompson* and ceramic production and consumption in New Zealand

57.

of government have been involved rarely, if ever, in its production and consumption.

Nonetheless, it would be incorrect to draw such a view; to the contrary, the industrial production of ceramics – as opposed to its craft production – has, at times, prompted significant levels of government interest, most apparent during moments of political and economic anxiety. And control over the distribution and consumption of ceramics has, since 1840, provided revenue through duties and tariffs; production too has added to the general wealth of the country by creating employment and through its contribution to the internal and export trades.

I

Traditionally Maori neither produced nor used ceramics, opting instead to use more readily available vessels such as gourds. Like guns, ceramics were an artefact of colonisation and, initially, everything from bricks – used in the construction of chimneys – to tea services – used to assert genteel status – was imported; either from Sydney or, directly, from Britain. Local production of these commodities did not begin until after European settlement was assured with the British assertion of sovereignty over the country in 1840. Brickworks were associated with the first waves of urban settlement by Pakeha at Te Whanganui-a-Tara (Wellington, 1839) and Tamaki-makaurau (Auckland, 1841). The local production of useful wares seems to have begun some time between 1852 and 1855 when a small pottery was established on land abutting the Whau creek in west Auckland that belonged to Dr Daniel Pollen, chief clerk in the office of the superintendent of the Auckland Province and a member of the Auckland Provincial Council. In 1863 a Staffordshire potter, James Wright was employed at the works and in 1865 examples of its 'common



Earthenware plate made by Josiah Wedgwood & Sons for the London retailers William P & George Phillips and probably exhibited at the 1865 New Zealand Exhibition in Dunedin. Private collection

58.

59.

2. C Thompson, 'Confronting _____ wars with Maori.² By ensuring the participation of British ceramic manufacturers and distributors, among others, at the exhibition, the Otago provincial authorities sought to convey the impression, albeit misleading, that Dunedin was a cosmopolitan, sophisticated settlement notwithstanding its distance from the imperial capital.

2. C Thompson, 'Confronting _____ wars with Maori.² By ensuring the participation of British ceramic manufacturers and distributors, among others, at the exhibition, the Otago provincial authorities sought to convey the impression, albeit misleading, that Dunedin was a cosmopolitan, sophisticated settlement notwithstanding its distance from the imperial capital.

design: case studies in the design of ceramics in New Zealand', (Unpublished MA thesis, Auckland University of Technology, 2003) Available < <http://hdl.handle.net/10292/235> > [accessed 1 June 2008], p. 72.

pottery' were shown at the New Zealand Exhibition in Dunedin although not to universal acclaim. Such plaudits were reserved for a display of Wedgwood earthenware shown by the china dealers William P & George Phillips of 43-44 New Bond Street, London, along with other ceramic exhibits from Doulton & Watts (sewerage pipes) and three local agents representing either British manufacturers or retailers. Underwritten and subsidised by the Otago provincial government, the exhibition aimed at differentiating the wealthy and peaceful territory from those northern provinces embroiled in land

participation of British ceramic manufacturers and distributors, among others, at the exhibition, the Otago provincial authorities sought to convey the impression, albeit misleading, that Dunedin was a cosmopolitan, sophisticated settlement notwithstanding its distance from the imperial capital.

The colonial government was also involved in influencing the taste of New Zealand consumers through its imposition of duties on commodities of non-British origin. As early as 1841 a duty of ten per cent was applied to all goods other than those produced in the United Kingdom, New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania). Under pressure from Auckland businessmen, the duty was rescinded by the second governor, Charles Fitzroy, in 1843 and the subsequent diminishment of government income led to financial turmoil and Fitzroy's removal in 1845. The duty was re-imposed and, between 1851 and 1879 it fluctuated between five and nineteen per cent. By the end of the nineteenth century with a population of 815,862 persons, ceramic imports to the value of £50,000 (approximately equivalent to \$10 million in today's terms) accounted for five per cent of all imported commodities annually: all emanated from Britain. The decision to privilege British trade was not so much a matter of sentiment or loyalty to empire but rather a concern to protect an emerging market for New Zealand sourced proteins. In order to protect this trade, New Zealand governments of both conservative and liberal persuasions actively discouraged the emergence of secondary producers: a joint parliamentary committee on colonial industry reporting in 1870 denied the need for anything other than primary and extractive industries while a colonial industries commission, reporting in 1880, alleged that establishing manufacturing

industry would damage 'the great staple industries of the country [through] capricious alteration of the fiscal laws'.³ Ignoring this active discouragement by government, enterprises such as the Newton Pottery in Auckland, established as a brick works in 1861, began the production of simple utilitarian wares using limited and obsolescent technologies; there was no great demand for locally-produced refinement. As Richard Winter observed in 1885, 'there are few large cities [in New Zealand] which do not possess earthenware and pottery works – and although the industry has apparently checked the importation from other countries and given employment to a large number of hands, it is still beset with difficulties.'⁴ Nonetheless Winter made sunny prognostications for the industry although these were based on dubious grounds; his comment as to a check on the importation of ceramics was more a reflection of a general drop in imported commodities – the consequence of economic depression – than an indication of the emergence of a viable ceramics industry. By 1933, local production was valued at a mere £1982 while imports had risen to £152,528. It was not so much a matter of the state stifling enterprise as the apparatuses of state being deployed to protect the interests of the politically dominant agricultural sector.

II

For over a century or so, the ceramic preferences of New Zealand consumers were determined by a cartel of British manufacturers, London buyers and the compliant New Zealand agents of British companies. Their products were traditional in appearance and, for members of the cartel at least, highly profitable: production costs were low and shipping costs were, in effect, cross-subsidised by New Zealand agricultural exports. New Zealand retailers collaborated with British interests at least until the mid 1930s when large department stores, such as Farmer's in Auckland, began importing ceramics from Japan. Despite an *ad valorem* duty of 45 per cent and a surtax of 9/40ths of landed value, the Japanese wares could be imported more cheaply and, appropriately, they were produced in imitation of British designs. By 1938 Japanese imports, worth £21,578 accounted for nearly ten per cent of total ceramic imports.

The election of the first Labour administration in late 1935 augured the end of British hegemony over the New Zealand

60.

3. New Zealand. Parliament. House of Representatives, 'Report of the Colonial Industries Commission', *Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives*, (1880), 2, H-22, 1-90, p. 81.

4. R Winter, 'New Zealand industries: the past, the present and the future', in *New Zealand Industrial Exhibition 1885: prize essays on the industries of New Zealand* (Wellington: Government Printer, 1886), 3-36, pp. 20-21.

61.

ceramic trade. Labour introduced an Industrial Efficiency Act in 1936, which sought 'to promote the economic welfare of New Zealand by providing for the promotion of industries in the most economic form'. While the National party declared this to be a first step on the road to Bolshevism, little industry resulted; ceramics continued to be imported at record levels. A more significant intervention occurred with the introduction of import licensing in 1938, the result of a run on New Zealand's foreign currency holdings. Licensing had an adverse impact on the activities of the importers of British ceramics who in reaction organised themselves as a lobby group, the English Pottery and Glassware Agents Association. In Britain manufacturers and exporters and, ultimately, the Conservative-dominated national government reacted vociferously to the decision. In an effort to resolve matters, the minister of finance, Walter Nash, travelled to the United Kingdom where he toured the Staffordshire potteries and declared that 'it was not the intention of the New Zealand Government to employ export licensing in order to give protection to New Zealand industry against imports of United Kingdom goods'. More ominously, he was compelled into signing an agreement with the president of the [British] Board of Trade, Oliver Stanley, in which the New Zealand government undertook to relax import restrictions wherever possible and contracted 'to consult with the appropriate United Kingdom trade associations wherever a proposal is under consideration for the establishment or extension of New Zealand manufacturing'.⁵ This humiliating arrangement was barely implemented before the Second World War made the establishment of a New Zealand tableware industry a necessity.

5. Thompson (2003), p. 109.

In early 1942 the Department of Industries and Commerce together with the newly formed Ministry of Supply acting on behalf of the New Zealand Supply Council and, later, the United States Joint Purchasing Board approached a West Auckland company, the Amalgamated Brick and Pipe Manufacturing Co Ltd (Ambrico) with a proposal that it should start producing tableware. Although focussed on the production of building materials, the company had recently established a small division to produce electrical components. Declared an essential industrial undertaking and with the assistance of the Department of Scientific and Industrial

Research, the company began to manufacture crude substitutes for the now unobtainable British vitrified earthenware which hitherto been used by the catering arms of organisations such as the military and the New Zealand Railways. Up to the end of 1949 – when the National party returned to the Treasury benches with a promise to abolish import licensing – Ambrico, despite its sub-standard production values, continued to be accorded preferential treatment. It obtained concessions allowing it to import machinery and raw materials – locally-produced ceramics contained over 20 per cent of imported raw materials – as well as benefiting from a captive market brought about by import licensing restrictions and an exchange rate kept deliberately low to both discourage inflation and encourage trade. Nonetheless, Ambrico failed to convince consumers that its products were satisfactory substitutes for imported wares; despite import licensing and the severely disrupted production conditions prevailing in Europe, New Zealand imported nearly £1 million worth of ceramics in 1947 although local production, including sanitary ware, accounted for a remarkable £200,000. In an effort to break this consumer resistance the company began pirating traditional British designs and adopted an identity redolent of British producers, Crown Lynn Potteries Ltd. In 1959, ostensibly to commemorate the production of its 100 millionth article, the company produced an imitation eighteenth century Wedgwood vase for presentation to Walter Nash, by then prime minister in the second Labour administration.

III

It was Nash's decision, soon after the 1957 general election, to appoint Dr William Sutch permanent secretary of the Department of Industries and Commerce (DoIC), an act that, *inter alia*, prompted a sea change in the way that ceramics were produced and consumed in New Zealand. Sutch was an economist and historian whose work was underpinned by an adherence to the progressive creeds of English religious nonconformists (Quakers, Methodists and Unitarians) and their intellectual successors, the Fabians. As well, he was a discerning collector; from craft ceramics and Navajo rugs to Indian bronzes and contemporary propaganda posters. During the course of thirty years service in the New Zealand public service he acquired a formidable range of friends and enemies

62.



Earthenware vase modelled by David Jenkin and made by Crown Lynn Potteries Ltd. Presented to Walter Nash in 1959 to commemorate the company's production of 100 million articles. Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (CG002471) Neg F.003677/07

63.

on both sides of the political divide. From the time Sutch returned to New Zealand in 1951 (he had been posted overseas in 1945) he argued a need for the country to not only protect expanding local industry but also expand and diversify its production. This proselytising culminated in a paper 'The next two decades of manufacturing in New Zealand', delivered to the 1957 ANZAAS conference in Dunedin, in which he summarised the main thrust of his argument that New Zealand needed to develop its intellectual capital as much as it needed to expand production and grow trade:

As the country grows, New Zealand's main assets can only be the skill, experience and intelligence of her people. Small countries like Finland, Denmark or Switzerland have even fewer natural resources than we have. Yet because of the skill of their people they are important manufacturing countries. Highly paid labour should connote highly skilled labour. New Zealand's present pre-occupation with the tariff may be too negative. Should we not be more concerned with producing goods which have as their main ingredient not raw materials but brains and skills?⁶

6. W Sutch, *The next two decades of manufacturing in New Zealand* (Wellington: Department of Industries and Commerce, 1957), p. 21. The paper was republished as a pamphlet by the Department of Industries and Commerce, reproduced in *New Zealand Manufacturer* and widely reported in the press.

Under the auspices of a sympathetic minister, Philip Holloway, the DoIC began implementing a 'manufacturing in depth' strategy. In Sutch's view, this was not just an import substitution scheme, as a number of commentators have asserted, but rather an attempt to sophisticate and develop the local skills base. One initiative was the establishment of an industrial design council: in 1958 a study team within the department began an investigation into design promotion bodies around

7. Another initiative under this strategy was the formation in 1959 of the New Zealand Consumers' Institute.

the world.⁷ Predictably, early proposals for a local version were based on the Council of Industrial Design, a semi-autonomous body established by the British Board of Trade in 1944. But, by 1963, Sutch seems to have

concluded that such a template would ill-suit New Zealand conditions and there are indications he was considering a model that was, in part, based around the idea of a permanent exhibition space such as *Den Permanente* in Copenhagen which placed emphasis on the creative tension between craft and industrial production. Given there was some craft and little industrial design being practiced in New Zealand, such a proposal would draw on and develop existing skills and resources but, as Sutch admitted, 'There is little deep public understanding of the real objectives towards which a design [promotion] organisation should direct its efforts'.⁸

The display space would be supported by a dedicated administration operating from within the Department of Industries and Commerce that would support a wide range of educational, trade promotion and other design propaganda activities.

As Sutch saw it:

In the design field we are in a state of near stagnation. What design is carried out in New Zealand is almost wholly derivative, and at that, of seldom suitable derivation. [...] In effect, we are becoming a nation of copyists, with an alarming lack of originality, initiative and sophistication that are the pre-requisites of real independence as a manufacturing country.⁹

The country's leading ceramic copyists, Crown Lynn Potteries Ltd, seemed keen to engage with this new approach to industry. In 1959 it announced a design competition with the company's general manager, Tom Clark, declaring that 'if New Zealand industry is to progress beyond the humdrum, artists and designers will have to play a full part in the development'.¹⁰

It was a cost-effective way of obtaining designs and it kept government happy: in an instance of political overkill, Sutch was invited to deliver a speech, Nash was invited to award the prizes and the leader of the opposition, Keith Holyoake, was also invited, presumably to applaud; all accepted.¹¹ Such gestures were effective: not only had Labour re-intro-

64.

⁸ C Thompson, 'Governmentality and design: inventing the industrial design councils in Great Britain and New Zealand', (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Brighton, 2008), p. 300.

⁹ Memorandum from W Sutch to J Marshall, cited in Thompson (2008), p. 283.

¹⁰ 'Nationwide search for local designs: over 600 artists in big ceramics contest', *New Zealand Herald*, 18 July 1959, p. 22. Despite being declared 'unethical' by the Association of New Zealand Arts Societies, the competition attracted over 100 entries.

¹¹ W Sutch, *Education for industry* (Wellington: Department of Industries and Commerce, 1960).

65.

duced import licensing in 1958 but also, seemingly serendipitously, in its last budget before the 1960 election it ushered in a 'Crown Lynn tariff', which imposed an *ad valorem* duty of 7½ pence in the pound (3.25 per cent) on British ceramics.

This enthusiasm for expanding the country's intellectual capital was short-lived. Even the New Zealand Society of Industrial Designers (established formally in 1961 with, reputedly, no more than 25 interested members) objected vociferously to the DoIC's proposal for a design council, declaiming it as unwarranted 'state interference', without understanding that design promotion organisations are not fundamentally about the marketing of designers but about institutional change. The return of the National party to Treasury benches at the 1960 general election led to Sutch's dismissal, largely the result of personal and ideological animosity on the part of the new minister for industries and commerce, John Marshall. Nonetheless, Marshall sensing cheap political capital, hijacked the idea of a design council but what emerged was based on the British model, inadequately resourced and highly politicised. As Sutch had anticipated, the New Zealand Industrial Design Council (NZIDC) as established in 1968, was inappropriate for local conditions; after twenty years of desultory performance as an ignored adjunct of the export industry it was abolished by the fourth Labour government in 1988. Crown Lynn's interest in design survived until the mid 1970s; its production expanded to the point that its exports increased from £294 (\$588) in 1963 to \$3 million by 1975. Similarly, by 1975, the company's share of the domestic market was valued at \$9 million by contrast with imported wares which now accounted for a mere \$3.5 million (of which just over half emanated from Britain). But while profits rose Crown Lynn's interest in the fostering of local design fluctuated: in 1964, and at some expense, the company commissioned an American 'celebrity designer' Dorothy Thorpe to produce designs suitable for a nascent United States market. Thorpe's understanding of ceramic design was limited and her 'sketches' had to be developed by locally-trained designers, themselves the products of an earlier design initiative taken by, among others, Sutch: the establishment of an industrial design course at Wellington Polytechnic. The 1970s also saw Crown Lynn initiate a frenzied run of takeovers of ceramics-related

companies in both New Zealand and overseas. But, by the mid 1980s, the company, under the guise of its new modish identity, Ceramco Corporation Ltd, could see no future in the local production of ceramics: the number of employees was cut from some seven hundred to two hundred and twenty; design staff were dismissed; the highly-successful retail arm was disbanded; and no new investment was made into plant or the development of new products. The company's focus now lay in expanding into new, supposedly more profitable, enterprises: coach lines, electrical white goods retailing, food processing and catering and the manufacture of undergarments; design was applied primarily to the company's lavish new premises in downtown Auckland. In 1989 the pottery was abandoned, its plant sold to Malaysian investors and its land to property developers; shortly after, following a swingeing run on its shares, the company was placed under administration and the remaining assets sold off.

A myth promulgated by the Ambrico/Crown Lynn/Ceramco management over the company's fifty year existence argued that the protectionist policies of the first Labour government had frustrated the establishment of a table ware industry; that the interventionist policies of the second Labour government had stifled free enterprise; and that the macroeconomic reforms of the fourth Labour government led to the company's demise. The reality is that the company depended on the existence of a protected domestic market both for its survival and its success. Had the first Labour administration, in the face of concerted metropolitan antagonism, not sought a full employment policy, established an administrative framework for industrial development, introduced fiscal measures that ensured a weaker New Zealand pound, adopted an import licensing regime, granted Ambrico protected status and ensured a captive market during the Second World War, it is unlikely that the company would have entered the tableware industry. Equally, had the second Labour administration not re-introduced its import licensing scheme, introduced a tariff on British-made ceramics and initiated programmes that focussed on developing the country's skills and research capacities, laying the foundations for a diversified export trade, it is unlikely that Crown Lynn would have achieved the spectacular success it enjoyed in the 1960s. The fourth Labour government's flawed attempts to remedy

66.

67.

the economic ills bequeathed by its National party predecessor saw it liberalise the economy to the satisfaction and prosperity of the entrepreneurs controlling Ceramco. Yet these same beneficiaries complained bitterly that Labour's tokenist labour market policies affected adversely the profitability of the concern whilst awarding themselves dividends equal to fifty per cent of the value of those profits. If global issues are momentarily set to one side, it would be entirely plausible to suggest that the collapse of the country's leading ceramics manufacturer was the result of incompetent direction, frustrated middle-management, a lack of investment in plant and skills, a failure to respond to changing market conditions and, finally, untrammelled corporate greed thriving in a newly de-regulated market.

IV

The origins of the corporate evisceration of the New Zealand ceramics industry in the 1980s seem to lie in the activities of the administrative and political wings of government in the decade preceding the election of the fourth Labour government in 1984. In 1975, in the aftermath of the disastrous drop in export income brought about by the 1973 oil crisis, a trade association, the New Zealand Ceramic Industries Association (NZCIA) initiated a campaign to obtain greater economic support from the newly elected National party

administration.¹² A part of that campaign included the commissioning of an economic analysis of the industry from two economists, Ian McAllister and Professor Bryan Philpott. Their report argued that:

Major investment should be made in the near future if the industry is to realise its potential in both volume and range of products [moreover] a stable domestic market is essential to provide a base for growth in local and export production. This will require effective import regulation.¹³

While the NZCIA's submissions garnered considerable political support, notably from the minister of trade and industry, Lance

12. *Ceramics industry development plan* ([Wellington: New Zealand Ceramic Industries Association; Department of Trade and Industry, 1975]).

13. I McAllister and B Philpott, *A study of the New Zealand ceramics industry* (Wellington: New Zealand Ceramics Industry Association, 1978), pp. 91-92.

Adams-Schneider, the conclusions they reached and the levels of assistance they sought and were given were rejected by the Economics Division of the Department of Trade and Industry in a 1976 report which argued that the NZCIA's preliminary report 'was adversely affected by a lack of good data' and asserted that 'It is expected that by 1985/86 local producers could be supplying 99% of tableware demanded on the local market.'¹⁴

The Economics Division averred that protection was increasingly redundant but its findings were as flawed as the NZCIA's calls for increased subsidies and grants: between 1975 and 1980 ceramic imports increased by some 48 per cent in value even with protection while domestic production grew by a mere 10.2 per cent in value. Taking into account the inflationary effect of the consumer price index these figures suggest a notable diminishment of local output. Yet, during this period, the industry was in receipt of considerable government largesse: as the NZCIA noted in a 1978 document: 'There already exists the export investment allowance and export suspensory loans [schemes] to assist with capital projects. Also the recently introduced high priorities scheme could benefit producers.'¹⁵

In July 1984 this generous political support disappeared as recommendations to de-regulate drawn up from 1982 by economists in the Treasury and the Departments of Trade and Industry and Customs were implemented by the incoming Labour government; producers were allowed a seven year grace period before all threshold tariffs were removed and import licensing abolished.¹⁶

What is evident in this dialogue between the two arms of government and the ceramics industry is the near total absence of design as a factor in the debate. It is referred to, briefly and confusedly, in the McAllister/Philpott report: 'The production of attractive, well-executed designs in New Zealand motifs has a social significance not only in New Zealand, but also in the picture of New Zealand industrial skills presented to importing countries'.¹⁷

Entirely absent from the discourse was the New Zealand Industrial Design Council. Yet, just as the industrial production of ceramics began to collapse under the weight of directorial self-importance, craft production of ceramics began to expand at a phenomenal rate. This proved to be somewhat of a headache not only for government but also for industrial producers.

68.

14. New Zealand. Department of Trade and Industry. Economics Division, *An econometric analysis of the future demand for the products of the ceramics industry*. Econometric report 76/1 (Wellington: Dept of Trade and Industry, [1976]).

15. *The New Zealand ceramics industry: a plan for future development* (Wellington: New Zealand Ceramic Industries Association, 1978), p. 5.

16. *Ceramics industry study review: a report prepared by Customs, Trade & Industry, Treasury* ([Wellington: Department of Trade and Industry], 1983).

17. McAllister (1975), p. 7.

69.

18. *New Zealand parliamentary debates*, 423 (1978), pp. 834-835.

Most ceramics produced by craft potters were made for the domestic rather than export markets and, because their trade generally avoided statistical scrutiny, their impact on industrial production could not be properly assessed. In 1978 the National government imposed a ten per cent sales tax on tableware applicable not just to the output of industrial concerns but also to that of craft potters. Justifying the measure, the minister for customs, Hugh Templeton, stated somewhat ingenuously that 'because [craft] potters have a very large share of the commercial tableware market [...] I believe it would be unfair to exempt them on that ground'.¹⁸

The tax was not only an attempt to counter rampant inflation by checking consumer spending but it also supplied government with information as to the output of craft potters. It was alleged, with probable cause, that Clark, now managing director of Ceramco, had lobbied for the inclusion of craft potters under the tax, presumably in an effort to justify the falling production of industrial potteries. A well-orchestrated campaign by craft potters prompted an embarrassed government into introducing a \$50,000 tax-free threshold on sales. Ceramco responded hubristically by terminating the annual Crown Lynn design award and withdrawing its sponsorship of the country's premier prize for studio ceramics.

By 1990 all threshold duties and import licensing controls on ceramics had been phased out. Similarly, the government grants and subsidies that had underpinned the rapid expansion of Ceramco during the 1970s and early 80s had evaporated. As had the greater part of New Zealand industrial ceramics industry. The remaining industrial producer of tableware in the country, the Temuka Pottery in South Canterbury, had avoided ensnarement during Ceramco's acquisition spree during the 1970s primarily due to it being a part of the Cable Price Downer Group. During the stock market boom of the late 1980s it was acquired and sold by the corporate raider Brierley Investments Ltd and subsequently by a number of owners. Temuka's continued survival – it now operates under the 'Temuka Homewares' brand – is probably due to its relatively small output, directed principally at the domestic market. It is able to compete against imported tableware through lower transport costs, the use of electric batch firing kilns with a control system which allows firing to be tailored to the product and an ability to respond



The Temuka Homewares 'design' web page, 1 June 2008. See: <http://www.temukahomeware.co.nz>

to specific customer requirements. Design no longer plays a factor in New Zealand ceramic production: the forms used at Temuka are universally ubiquitous and the patterns are basic; even the current appearance of the Temuka website suggests that design has been eschewed.¹⁹

V

In 2003 New Zealand imported ceramic commodities (including sanitary ware and tiles) to the value of \$168,685,000; exports (including studio ceramics, sanitary ware and re-exported goods) amounted to \$4,236,000.²⁰

Notwithstanding the availability of alternative materials including plastics, silicones and resins, New Zealand consumption of ceramics remains high. But, if the production of industrial ceramics can be seen as one of the success stories of the controlled economy of the post-war period, it seems that the industrial production of ceramics has no place in that export-driven, de-regulated, design-enhanced world envisaged under the government's Growth and Innovation Framework.

In May 2002 renewed government interest in design was flagged when the minister for economic development, Jim Anderton, announced the formation of a taskforce to address design issues. Formed of 'leaders in the design industry', the taskforce immediately commissioned a number of reports from local economic consultants, initiated surveys of business interests and sought copies of design-related reports from overseas sources. In May 2003 it released a report entitled *Success by design*. It claimed that design had played been a major contributor in the growth of a number of western economies and cited a range of impressive overseas precedents with the Finnish mobile telephone manufacturer Nokia taking centre stage as an example of design-led growth. It suggested that 'New Zealand design' had several advantages: cultural diversity, a 'can do' attitude, cost effectiveness, environmental awareness, and, not least, 'a fresh perspective unencumbered by tradition (remote yet internationally aware)'. The taskforce proposed 'two areas for focus to maximise an increase in design utilisation: product design and communications design' and recommended the establishment of a 'design reference group' to oversee the implementation and further development of [these] initiatives.' Following cabinet approval, in 2004

70.

19. See: <http://www.temukahomeware.co.nz> [accessed 1 June 2008].

20. Statistics New Zealand no longer provides detailed trade data freely.

71.

21. The existence of the NZIDC was not acknowledged in *Success by design*; the deliberations of the taskforce were characterised by the absence of a historical perspective.

22. F Trentmann, '4½ lessons about consumption: a short overview of the Cultures of Consumption research programme', 2007, p. 1. Available <<http://www.consume.bbk.ac.uk/researchfindings/overview.pdf>> [accessed 1 June 2008].

this 'design reference group' transmogrified into Better by Design, a 'specialist group' located within New Zealand Trade and Enterprise, New Zealand's national economic development agency, and the successor body to the long defunct Department of Industries and Commerce. This new design promotion organisation's work is overseen by an advisory board comprising 'seven of New Zealand's foremost design practitioners and business leaders'. In an ironic twist of history, the administrative location and function of this specialist group and its advisory board mirrors that proposed initially by Sutch for the NZIDC and rejected in 1961 by an uneasy alliance of conservative politicians and nascent design societies.²¹ However, Sutch's view on where design should most profitably be located was within the existing industrial order; the ceramics industry was a beneficiary of this thinking. Given the physical and intellectual resources available in the country it would have been inconceivable to Sutch that New Zealand, as it does today, should expend significant sums on imported commodities. But such issues appear not to be the concern of the 'design-enabled' entrepreneurs of the Better by Design advisory board. The last industrial producer of ceramics in New Zealand operates without the benefit of advice from the wannabees of contemporary design promotion.

A primary aspect of the thinking that has underpinned the rationales of both taskforce and 'specialist group' is a production-driven ethos. Rather than accepting design as a nuanced equation of producer, distributor and consumer, they assert a brutal calculation that design equals profit, the result of a privileged collaboration between business and design practitioners. In this model, consumers are identified as passive recipients of the actions of designers and businesses and, notwithstanding its investment in design promotion, the state is viewed as a mere enabler. By ignoring both the actuality of the local consumer market and its activist nature, design condemns itself to irrelevance. This stance contrasts generally with the outcomes of the recently completed 'Cultures of consumption' research programme undertaken in the United Kingdom which cautioned that 'globalisation does not mean global convergence [and] local values and habits remain important'.²²

The approach to design and its promotion mooted by the design taskforce and Better by Design also differs from that

disseminated by Bill Sutch whose desire to improve New Zealand's export potential was underwritten by a belief that design should benefit the whole of New Zealand society not just an elite. As a history of the political economy of ceramics in New Zealand might suggest, the privileging of production by government is no new thing: colonial administrations favoured the manufacturers of Staffordshire; those of what could be described as the 'dominion' period (1907-1975) oversaw a gradual shift from British to local producers; and, in an increasingly globalised world, contemporary governments allow the marketplace to determine the location of production. The effectiveness of these strategic preferences is arguable: it would seem that in favouring the producer, these policies have diminished the role of the consumer and ultimately denied the emergence of an indigenous culture of production, whether it is of ceramics or design.

72.

Christopher Thompson is a former curator of international decorative arts and design at the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney and more recently has been a visiting curator at the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, Sydney.

