In Attendance:

Laura Van Duren, Sam Lucas, Holly Macdonald, Anne-Marie Dehon, Emma Sher, Fernanda Cortes, Jacqui Ramrayka, Ariel Gout, John Roloff, Sigrid Espelien, Vivianne Siqueiros, Melissa Aldrete, Neil Forrest, Sarah Christie, Ariel Brice, Patricia Yossen, Amanda, Chris, Kirstin Willders, Rosemary Hall, Jenn Law, Ilias Koen, Raffaella Zammit, Samantha Albert, Anie Toole, Neena Wang, Qwist Joseph, Ashwini Bhat, Takming Chuang, Henrik Soederstroem, Shereen Abbas, Danielle Callahan, Jean Paull, Hallie Off, Svenja Keune, Mark Goudy, Ceramics School, Sofia Donovan, Jessica Perelman, Anda Albu, Melanie Parke, Arely Amaut, Nicole Seisler

Questions from Stacy Jo Scott

Embodiment
- How do our soft bodies interact with the digital softwares that surround us?
- How are software's codes and norms embedded in the action of our bodies?
- How do we allow the idiosyncrasies of clay and the body to come through or subvert the logic of the software?
- How is software malleable and changeable? How does it change? Who changes it?

Agency
- How does software work upon us? How are we changed by it?
- How can we have creative freedom and remain active agents while using software written by others, whose aims may not conform to our own?
- Using digital fabrication technologies like 3D printing we confront the constraints of any machines we might use. What does the voice of the machine offer our making? What are we unwilling to give up to the machine?

Pathfinding
- What are the codes we follow in our lives?
- What are the hidden instructions and internal mechanisms we follow in our own practices?

- As we attempt to plot a practice or career path, what norms do we conform to that are written by others?
- How can we write our own codes to find authentic paths forward in our practices?

Magic and Conjuring
- Magic disrupts linear descriptions of the way the universe works. In what ways do we enact nonlinearity in our practices? How is linearity disrupted as clay and software intersect?
- As we make, how are we in turn made? What ~~new~~ deeper roles do we conjure and inhabit in the studio?
- How does our creative work bring us into relationship with the seen and unseen, the tangible and intangible?

Introduction / Context from Stacy Jo Scott (summarized by Rebecca Truscott-Elves)

Stacy Jo Scott joins the group from an unusually snowy Oregon, where she is Assistant Professor of Ceramics at the University of Oregon. She introduces her work as an expansive exploration of the meeting places of the digital and the embodied. Sometimes this means 3D printing in clay; sometimes building with her body. Holding reverence for both, Scott refuses to dichotomise, and it is this conceptualisation of the digital-bodily relationship that will be the session's theme.

Sharing an image of her body and the clay body meeting, Scott explores the devotional aspects of her relationship to clay, its intimacy in relation to the body, and our co-evolution. For Scott, the intertwined stories of clay and humankind create an innate, instinctual, pre-lingual knowing: we seem to have continual foreknowledge of how to create with it, just as it has knowledge of how to record our particular human instant in time. In this way, it also seems to hold the key to the relationship between our physical embodiment and the particular moment in human evolution we find ourselves in, in which we are both embodied and encountering one another, disembodied, through digital space. We think of the virtual as unfamiliar, but the movement from hand-built to thrown to 3D-printed vessels is not, for Scott, 'a historical evolution, but a continuously occurring event', undergirded by our continual, continuing, relationship with clay.

Clay, like our bodies, behaves unpredictably: it bends, it breaks, it warps. In this way, it can also disrupt the digital, asking questions of our digital fabrication processes by disrupting the perceived precision of their software. Indeed, for Scott, it not only disrupts the digital but also illuminates it: just as our relationship to clay is continuous, so is our relationship with the virtual. Here the virtual is not a new space: it is chance, it is trance, it is dream, and just as these spaces, at the borders of the imaginary realm, are essential to our embodiment, Scott makes the case that our digital – digitised – virtual space

functions in a similar way. Through digital fabrication with clay, this space can be made physical, tangible, graspable. We can ask questions of it, traversing the space of our unseen connections and entanglements with one another. Digital fabrication 'marr[ies] the seen and the unseen', both by bringing the imaginary to the physical realm and through bringing these new virtual connections, spelled out in binary code, to the realm of flesh, of clay.

For Scott, this harnessing of technology to make the invisible, visible, is also a longstanding feature of our humanity, from automata, through Ouija boards, to ghost meters. Even photography was used to this end: Muybridge's galloping horse exists on a continuum with attempts to photograph the ghosts that are sitting beside you. In this way, Scott feels moved to see machines bring her ideas to life: the technology, in this way, becomes an extension of her body, inviting us also to explore the ways in which we find agency in acts of choosing – of redefining – our bodies. Through the power of the unseen, humans define and then transcend the order of the universe. Such power also transcends the leaky finitudes of the self, taking us beyond mere bodily, individual desires of power and towards our relationship with the cosmos – towards understanding this greater power.

Scott repeats a question from Legacy Russell (Glitch Feminism, 2020), "*Who defines the material of the body?*", and she turns the conversation over to the group by asking her own question, "How does the digital add poetics to your lives or practices?"

Summary of Discussion (written by Rebecca Truscott-Elves)

The discussion begins with a dialogue about the relationship between chance and the digital. A participant contributes the tale of a pot fired in every firing of the village kiln: it records the unfolding of time, deformed again and again by the firings. In this way, the introduction of chance helps to overcome this potentially distracting awe of mechanics alone by [re]introducing poetics. This leads to a brief conversation about emergence, and the emergent forms of the clay wresting control from both artist and machine.

A question is posed about the potential conflict between the computer and the clay; between the intimacy of hands in clay, conveyed in the first image Scott shared (see Image 1, above)), and incorporating the machine into oneself. For Scott, this is a key question facing us at the moment, and for her, there is no divide between embodied and digital selves: we "exist ephemerally, digitally and materially all at once and we always have." The ability to be present in these spaces at once invites us to think of this central conflict or contradiction, as its own wholeness, rather than necessarily a dualism. With that said, for some participants, there is somehow a failure to translate inhabitants of the virtual space into the physical realm. Something about the printing process introduces stasis in a way that differs from a form built by our human hands. The forms are, however, animated in the software – how can this be translated through the hardware? It is suggested that one solution is for these 3D printed ceramics need to remain in their contingent, unfired state to retain this air of animation. Another might be to find ways to share the intimacy and poetics of the printing process itself, in which the machines must be watched over – with love, care, *time.*

It is suggested that perhaps this tension arises from the distinction between fabrication and artmaking, and as artists, trying to make fabrication software into an artistic tool is akin to making the software speak a language it doesn't know how to grapple with. For Scott, this is analogous to our existence within systems we also did not create, and how we can use these – use this very incongruence – to our own benefit. Scott suggests approaching software as we would subvert a city by jaywalking, rather than following its gridlines. This draws the discussion from gridlines and their deviations, towards ceramic artefacts' movement through time: changing hands, changing uses, becoming entangled with our human community through time. A participant remarks that the 3D printed lines sitting alongside the 3D model of an ancient artefact (see Image 2, above) can be understood to encapsulate these entanglements, with their low-resolution translation of the model solving the too-perfect problem by embracing chance. This low-resolution translation becomes a scaffold within which the machine can fail, producing more enticing, enchanted results than the perfect model on the screen. This prompts us to question ways in which we can consider the software to be an extension of our humanness through time, and, importantly, enquire:

> *'Are there moments where failure of hardware is more beautiful than when it's actually working?'*

At this juncture, the discussion returns to poetics and the ways in which every "aspect of what we do complicates every other aspect of what we do." Virtual space acts as a multiplier of these complications of physical space, activating our entanglements between body, heart, clay body and the machine. Similarly, ceramics capture a moment while also recording the inevitability of change and the impossibility of capturing a single moment, bringing up questions of translation, transmutation, and transition.

With these themes in mind, a participant asks Scott how she decides what to render, and how rendering imperfectly impacts our understanding of canonical artworks. Scott explains that for her, the realm of the ideal, encapsulated in ancient and Renaissance art, is analogous to the space of number, of code. By reactivating these works, extending her body with the machine, she questions how this is translated through culture and through time, as well as who controls the ideal. With that said, this engagement with expressions of the ideal in the Western canon can also be used to disrupt the relentless efficiency of digital technology. The process of reactivation is particularly revelatory for Scott through engagement with masks, because they remain in some way animated in a way that, for her, marble sculpture does not. This returns the participants to the question of an object's aliveness, including the ways in which the opening images that Scott shared featured pairs of images, which seemed to have created a sense of movement and spirit through their developing connections.

With the role of digital technology in reanimating artworks, and Scott's extension of the body using 3D printing hardware in mind, a participant asks how the role of the artist will change with AI. It is proposed that for a machine to make artworks it must feel empathy, and for a machine to actually feel empathy, it has to be human: it must be *embodied*. With this, Nicole Seisler, director of A-B Projects, returns the participants to a conceptualisation of the digital and the embodied beyond a binary distinction, asking how we can find glitches, find porosity, in the boundaries between the touch of a machine and the touch of the human, that allow us to move beyond this distinction in some way: to touch as one.

Touching clay reaches directly into primal spaces, and for Scott, seeing the inner workings of the machine through its code reaches into a similarly primal space. The beauty of the human experience can be found here, in its entanglements, and for Scott, this is why AI will never supplant artists because we are part of the same, continually existing, thing. The body contains everything and everyone: it does not end at the skin (as Donna Haraway suggests). Drawing from ancient philosophies across the world, we can recognise that none of these connections are new, while at the same time, each moment is always new.