

THE POTTER and HIS CLAY

*Fourteenth in a series
of seminars:
Issues in Communication*

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Elaine Levin
Harrison MacIntosh
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Norma Paley
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The Claremont Graduate School

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RUBENSTEIN: We are delighted to have Paul Soldner represent this area of plastic form for this, the 14th Issues in Communication symposium. He has at least 2-1/2 pages of single-typed vita. The video, *Paul Soldner, Thoughts on Creativity*, highlights this background.

During a two-day Soldner workshop I used my camcorder to take verbal and visual notes. Afterwards I began structuring a format from the video's 5-1/2 hours. Through the good offices of The American Ceramic Society Design Chapter, Leon Bush, and Norma Paley (each past presidents), the board assumed the postproduction costs. The National Endowment for the Humanities had subsidized the Long Beach Museum's video laboratory, and we were able reasonably to get this 28-minute video edited. As a result, 250 copies of this tape, *Paul Soldner, Thoughts on Creativity*, will be distributed nationally to colleges, universities, and people interested in the ceramic medium.

Elaine Levin recently completed a definitive history of American ceramics, published by Harry Abrams, in a magnificently printed edition, and is especially sympathetic to current creativity. Another book on American ceramics, written by a person of English origin, slighted by omission some of the contemporary ceramic artists. Therefore, I recommend Elaine Levin's book, if you are interested in a balanced viewpoint of American ceramics. A Paul Soldner ceramic plaque graces the opening page.

With us are practicing potters: Harrison MacIntosh, who creates pieces that are classic and beautiful; Norma Paley, a serious potter and gallery owner; Leon Bush, an engineer who has developed some exciting crystalline glazes. The ceramics produced by each of them have become self-portraits of the individual, a creative expression, reflecting their aesthetic sensitivity.

REGAN: Paul Soldner, the format of this series on alternative modes of human communication and creativity, invites you to speak on whatever pleases you.

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Of course, our discussion will be in the verbal medium. We are hoping you will talk about the nonverbal. We might divide the morning and the afternoon into two themes (you may respond to these themes, or you may just ignore them):

1. What we can do with clay. What you as a creator can do with this medium.
2. What that medium itself demands of you. In what way the medium has in some sense a life of its own.

The alumni, students, and associates here are, like me, interested in language, what we can do with that medium, and what it does to us; we may act as a kind of Greek chorus. We have been interested in each of the nonverbal forms presented by other speakers in this series. Now, however, we are with you, Paul Soldner, and with these distinguished discussants with a marvelous opportunity to probe a new theme, the tactile visual mode. Please speak as you wish, for we are interested in anything you say.

SOLDNER: I will begin with some comments on the first theme and the title topic, concerning the mode and its opportunities and options.

I had an interesting experience in Japan, where there was to be an exhibit of my work in Nagoya. I borrowed a kiln and studio from a friend, a former student, Doug Lawry, living outside Kyoto. I borrowed his studio for about a month. On the first day I asked him what kind of clay he had for me to work with.

He replied, "There is some Bizen, here is some Shigaraki, and this is from the Seto area. Take your pick."

Based possibly on my familiarity with the tea bowl and Shigaraki tea bowls, which have a wonderful, quiet, spiritual quality, I had some romantic ideas that the Shigaraki clay would be the most beautiful, so I elected to use the Shigaraki clay.

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I soon discovered why I had to go to Japan to learn! We Westerners approach our work from a totally different point of view than do the traditional Japanese. For example, when I threw the piece and set it to one side to harden, in about 15 minutes it unzipped itself and fell apart. The clay was what we call "short," which means it did not have enough plastic strength to withstand the stress put on it.

In that moment I realized the reason for the simplicity of the tea bowl: It had nothing to do with what I thought--which was everything from religious reasons to aesthetic. That really was the only way one could use that clay: to make it as a simple tea bowl. You could not pull any handles, you could not impose your idea on it; the ideas had to come from the clay.

In the United States we think in just the opposite way. We get our ideas first, then make drawings or sketches, then we make the clay do it. If the clay will not do it, then we send to the other side of the United States to find some clay ingredients that will. Or we will make a completely new body--a complex body that will, perhaps, withstand the shrinkage or the heating, and give us the strength we require. Without paying much attention to the material, we impose our own ideas, whereas traditionally the Koreans and the Japanese worked with what they had; the limitations of the material effected the final results.

Different ideas come to my mind about the clay as a medium, and what it can do for us, what we can do with it. But let me start from almost a technical position and point out that clay is the most abundant material that we have on earth. In some ways it is the cheapest material that we can work with. And one of the things we in my field like to say about clay is that it has absolutely no value itself. Unlike gold, silver, or diamonds, if it ever ends up having any value, it is because of what was done to it by the artist.

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It is a wonderful material in its versatility. You can do so many different things with it. For example, we call plastic cups, plastic. But they are not truly plastic unless we heat the material, at which point it becomes plastic enough to form into bowls and various objects. But clay is truly plastic in a cold sense, unlike any other material I can think of. In that form of plasticity, the clay can be simply glued together by itself. It is reclaimable. We can continue to work with it over and over and over again.

And we can work with it in many different ways. It can be poured into a mold as a liquid, or carved in a dry state. It can even be sanded. Today's high technology is using clay for making precision parts for rocketship motors, auto engines, electronic parts, and so on.

Expanding on other than non-art uses of clay, think about its scientific uses. By separating it into its basic components of alumina and silica, we can make fibers (of either alumina or silica). These fibers can be formed into a blanket or heat shield, which can be placed on the outside of a space shuttle to protect it coming back through the atmosphere--and keep the people inside from burning up.

Clay can also be formed into one of the hardest materials known. Automobile snow tires have studs in them made of alumina, which is a product of clay. We are beginning to understand that some of the materials we have been using in glazes, such as copper, iron, and so forth, in proper combinations, are raising the temperature by which superconductivity can be achieved.

These are materials that are very familiar to us. Some of them are very exotic. I'm intrigued by the fact that the scientists are doing just about the same as we do in glaze class, that is, experimenting, trying different combinations to see what happens.

Unlike bronze, which rusts, clay is already oxidized in the fire, so it cannot rust, therefore, it is one of the most permanent materials. It can outlast other art media. And it can be refired centuries later.

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A friend of mine had a unique opportunity to refire some Japanese tea bowls that were dug up out of the ground and were probably 400 or 500 years old. They were found beside a kiln site and apparently had been thrown out by the potter because the glaze had not matured. Why the potter didn't refire it, we do not know--an interesting question. Perhaps because of the wind that day or the location of the kiln. My friend was given these incomplete bowls to finish. He literally put them into a 20th century kiln and brought them up to maturing temperature. They then came out as brand new tea bowls!

Just thinking about that gives me a great feeling, similar to what I feel when I hold the top part of a Greek amphora in my possession. The neck is broken off and the top gone. Only the neck and shoulder exists with the handle still connected. But by putting my hand on that handle, I can feel the knowledge, the skill, and the love that the potter put into its making many, many, many centuries before. And his thumb prints are still there.

MACINTOSH: Concerning this theme of semiotics of relationships across media, I have often thought that I might have expressed myself in some other medium as well, but it seems that the only one I can cover well is clay. I had often thought that if I were good with words, I would be a writer instead of a potter. So I work by myself, and maybe this is why I have not taught.

Probably most of us in this field became involved with clay because we could express ourselves with it. It offers endless varieties, from the beginning of time up to current times, that we can see in all the museums. What people are doing now with clay amazes me. What is available now is so much more technically versatile than what potters have ever had before. We can see all kinds of possibilities open to an individual's imagination. The wildest things are possible. Indeed, I am amazed at how some pieces even stay up. But they do so because of the technology we have now. It used to be that there was so much secrecy in how to use materials. Now these secrets are available to everyone.

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SOLDNER: Indeed. And to think that we almost lost the clay tradition in our rush toward industrial manufacturing. The potter was shoved to one side because a machine could do the same job and do it all much faster and cheaper. Of course, when plastics became popular, that was yet another reason to abandon the clay tradition. But we came back, and surprisingly only in the past 40 or 50 years.

The pottery tradition was revived in the university-for intellectual reasons, not because its products were necessary or needed on the table. Rather there was a reaction against the machine look, the hardness, the uniformity, and the fact that everybody could afford the same product. As a result, there was a reevaluation of the handmade and the uniqueness of the handmade, which was just the opposite of machine-made.

At the college level, particularly after World War II when GI's came back in droves, art departments expanded to include the idea that clay could be another art medium and added it to their programs.

Since then, there has been a big change, almost a revolution. Prior to the 1950s, clay was mostly thought of for its utilitarian function and beauty. After the 1950s this view of purpose was expanded, and clay became another medium for personal expression, such as marble or bronze. But although, as students, we drew the same model, took the same art history courses, studied basic design, and could paint, when we elected upon graduation to become clay people, we were a minority. Sculptors and painters were in the galleries, but the only place that MacIntosh and I could sell our work was through interior decorators, furniture stores, places like that.

Fortunately Fred Marer was interested in what we were doing, and came to the school almost every week, brought coffee beans almost every day. Marer was a real help, because our

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teacher really was non-verbal in many ways. What we learned was more by osmosis, by just being with him, with no assignments or projects. He was so skilled that it was not necessary to talk. You learned by observing. But Fred Marer would not let us off the hook that easily. He wanted to know verbally why. "What are you doing?" We had lively discussions.

MACINTOSH: The difference that Otis Art Institute made was that everybody who came into the shop either had acquired some works from Otis, or they already had the sense that clay could be an art form. There was not any question about it.

The energy that went into the development of each individual's ideas made clay a whole new way of expression. It did not mean that we were turning our backs on the traditional aspects of pottery. Indeed, we always respected, loved, and admired all the ways that pots were made, and used many of those techniques in the forming process. The fact was that we were concerned about art and bringing an art process into the ceramic process.

PARTICIPANT: My impression is that these "clay people" are truer to their medium than other artists. Do you agree with that?

SOLDNER: No, not necessarily. People take both sides, the purist and the non-purist. Some schools still believe there is a right way and there is a traditional way that ought to be learned and taught. Other schools completely bypass this topic. For example, traditionally the potter's wheel was important in teaching, and many schools still feel that it is absolute. But there are other schools that have thrown them out, rejected them. The same is true with how they approach the medium.

For example, in Japan Bizen pottery was made from a clay that was so fine and so dense that when it was fired it became almost glass-like and required no glaze. Furthermore, it began to

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self-glaze at a high temperature, because of the ash in the fire, from the flames, and from the chemistry of the Bizen clay. The variation of color and pattern came from how it was placed in the kiln. All that became respected and loved and admired of itself.

REGAN: What the unique characteristics of a form require is a theme of our work. I would like to expand this issue in relation to language.

Some languages are very resistant to having some things done to them in dialect and styles. Other languages and some writing systems have certain flexibilities. With medium, such as clay, you cannot do some things. You cannot impose, as you cannot say everything.

The more we examine the media of human creativity and the products that result--not pots, but essays, plays, novels--the more fascinated I am with the similarities to the potter's clay, the painter's colors, the dancer's movements, the architect's visually manipulated structures, the composer's composition, the performer's performance. They have similarities despite apparent external differences. Of course, memory, insight, intelligence, perspective, sense of balance, and harmony, are not restricted to one form. Rather the marvelous integration of awareness that we see in Soldner or MacIntosh is a human semiotic capacity similar to Umberto Eco's creation of *The Name of the Rose*, or Celeste Holm in a dazzling performance, or Mozart creating music, or Saul Bass and Rubenstein creating graphics.

However, for our purposes in understanding and improving education, this fact is important: It is not only in the "aristocratic" possession of skills by such masters that we can find these similarities across different media, but also in the ordinary daily efforts of the most ordinary of us all--child and adult. By looking at the non verbal forms of thought and creativity of people at the

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apex of their skill with their medium, we learn something significant about what we all constantly use and could use to a higher degree of excellence. If we think of semiotic ability manifesting itself, in terms only of what great achievers do, we overlook some of the practical consequences of study of non-verbal semiotic creativity.

In which ways could language be like clay? There lies a mystery wrapped in a puzzle. A seed sprouted from experience into a writer's semiotic matrix can be a non-verbal seed. For instance, a mystery writer describes how she came across the idea for a novel as she walked on the coast of a southern English beach one weekend. She noticed ahead the overhanging bluff of sandy cliff wall, grass hanging over it like a tuft of hair. Looking at it, she imagined what a wheelchair would look like hurtling over the edge, imagined that grass as part of a huge green lawn leading to a great home in which there was a convalescent hospital. And so began a story, later turned into a successful film, of a so-called accident that was a murder. Some writers will tell how the sound and fury of a sonorous sentence can precipitate a novel.

We have notions that subvert our efforts to see similarities among media. How can painting, acting, dancing and writing a poem be alike? One such preconception is the seemingly impassable wall between verbal and non-verbal knowledge and creativity. It is, indeed, a fact that what we know non-verbally, what skilled individuals in any media know non-verbally, resists being known in other modes. But there are more connections than we would expect; for example, that visual constellation that may inspire a novel--a "seeing."

LEVIN: On the matter of the medium, the clay having a life of its own: Clays are really highly specialized material. While Paul Soldner has enumerated a few examples, actually all clays are formulations of quite specific characteristics. These characteristics either dictate to the potter what he does with it, or the potter chooses the clay he wants in order to get the desired results.

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SOLDNER: There is an interesting application of crystal glazes that we normally think of as being on a Chinese-shaped base. From time to time I wondered if there might be another way to use crystals that grow so nicely on flat surfaces. Then a ceramic friend of mine began making little containers about three or four inches across with very low sides, about a half-inch high with a cover, also flat on top that fitted over it. It gave her *two* surfaces on which to grow beautiful crystals, on the inside and the outside. I said that was very nice, it worked, a flat surface, and a beautiful container. But what would she put in it? She replied, "Oh, that is for my diaphragm."

PARTICIPANT: Do you feel there is a growing American tradition? Is there an American style, something that can be recognized 400 years from now? And if so, what are the characteristics of that style? What makes American pottery different?

SOLDNER: I think so. Variety is one feature. We do not have one traditional look. The variety of every aspect of pottery—from color to shape to design, would be one of the biggest differences. I answered yes, and I think others here would agree with me. Still, I am having a little difficulty defining it. I may need help from others.

MACINTOSH: When I was recently in London, I went to the Victoria and Albert Museum. I wanted to find my piece, but could not. (I suspect it is in storage somewhere.) But, nevertheless, there was one gallery, quite different from the rest in that it was dark and the pieces were displayed under glass; they were also lit rather dramatically. Outside this particular gallery there were

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galleries and galleries and galleries of ancient and other European pottery. Simply walking from these galleries into this room was a dramatic difference. There was no doubt that I was in the Western, contemporary, clay period. I am not quite sure what it was.

And in Paris recently I noticed many galleries have contemporary pottery. We are seeing pots that are looking more and more similar to the variety found in this country. Perhaps we will find it little more difficult to distinguish what contemporary potters are doing, because there are beginning to be similarities in other countries.

Until the present time we could see a definite character in American pottery, mostly because Americans have had, in general, a different type of education, one that encourages freedom of expression. Those educated in Europe or in the Orient have experienced an intellectual discipline different from that given here. We do have a discipline, but from kindergarten on up, there is much more freedom of expression. From that origin stems the result.

American work is more daring; it is also more likely to express the ideas about the culture that an artist feels or reacts to. I do not know as much about European work, but I have seen some of it. In Scandinavia I showed some slides and lectured in Oslo at the National Academy. The reaction of students there was, "I did not know you could have humor in working clay." That is one example indicating that some of the things we do and accept as normal are not part of what that culture, at least, expresses.

RUBENSTEIN: In 1984 a group visited the ancient pottery centers of China. One was Ching Te Chen, one of China's important porcelain centers, where the National Research Institute for Ceramics is situated, as well as the only college-level school of ceramic design.

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Students are carefully selected on a very competitive basis to attend this specialized college.

Harrison MacIntosh, Rick Petterson, and I gave a slide presentation for faculty, senior students, and plant operators. For this the audience jammed the auditorium. Their reaction was tremendous. Most had never seen personalized expressions in clay or examples of what is being done in the United States. The students were really enthusiastic.

Now, in fact, the objects that we were showing were not startling, not at all on the cutting-edge. They were typical as far as we were concerned of current work by individual American studio potters. After our visual presentation the director of the school was very cordial, very polite. After thanking us, he said, in effect, that while they appreciated seeing this material, they will continue with their own traditions.

I talked with this director of the Ching Te Chen Institute because Bill Hunt, the editor of *Ceramics Monthly Magazine*, said if I could discover a studio potter, he would be interested in an article on him.

So I asked if there was a studio potter, a person like Paul Soldner, or Harrison MacIntosh, or Leon Bush, or Norma Paley and the rest of us who begin with a formless lump of clay and take it through every single stage to completion, so that when finished the piece has a highly personalized expression, and only one person has been involved in its creation.

Once again, in a polite but very firm way, he said the art of ceramics is so complex that it is impossible for one human being to absorb all the skills and achieve the quality that Chinese excellence demands. Therefore, he continued, they had their own scientists produce the glazes; the artists throw on the wheel; someone else decorates the forms. As a result, he proposed, they can maintain the standard that they believe has to be sustained. Obviously my search for a Chinese studio potter was abandoned.

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MACINTOSH: That is what the tradition has been in China. It is only the Americans who seem to have the idea that one person is going to do the whole job. This is unique.

PARTICIPANT: How is, generally speaking, American pottery accepted in Europe as an art form?

PALEY: I think it is. It is still a struggle, but more and more people there are beginning to recognize the value of artistic expression in clay. From the history of clay, we see that it has always been a medium in which things were made to be used in everyday life. Third World countries still produce utilitarian ceramics. I visited some potters in India last year. They dig their own clay, which is of poor quality. The potter is considered a very lowly person socially.

However, in the Western world and in Japan, the emphasis is changing. Schools are fostering a new approach and an appreciation of clay as an artistic medium. Many are beginning to realize that the basic material of the work does not matter; what the artist creates and communicates with it does.

PARTICIPANT: That is a good sign that American pottery is now getting into the museums and galleries. What were the reactions of the people who were viewing the Western pottery in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London?

SOLDNER: There were not any people there that day.

REGAN: We are, as you know, studying the potter, clay, and what people can do with it. In fact, what are the human capabilities with these and other media? Your interest in this concept, a semiotic concept, would be really stimulating.

Another question: can we use the same terms to talk about the characteristics of different media? Is it possible to talk about what we can do with a non-verbal medium, in the way that we talk about a plastic one such as clay?

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PALEY: Clay expression is very varied now. We have the classical, traditional; we have the individualized, the humorous; we have the experimental.

Language follows the same form. I do not see language as much different. I think all forms of expression--music, for example--follow the same pattern. My sister, who studied music, and I, when we were both in school, used to have long discussions about the similarities between music and visual art forms.

REGAN: Leon Bush, as a scientist and artist, can you address what we can do with the medium that art is made of?

BUSH: I will comment in this way. I saw a television production called "What is Music?" A professor in Australia had developed a system by which subjects pressed a button in a certain way to express some feeling they had in hearing specific music. If there was a feeling of anger, they pushed it perhaps hard and very quickly; or a feeling of joy with a sort of little lift; sorrow, melting it from high to low. These acts were graphed.

Then the researchers asked aborigines to represent their emotions by pressing the buttons as they listened to the same music.

Both groups seemed to express their feelings in the same way: the same kind of flow for a certain feeling occurred in their culture.

Perhaps, then, there is some common element to ceramics as well.

I discussed that program with a fellow engineer, who reported that when he sees anything jagged in the way of pottery, he feels a certain nervousness or energy. He gets a different feeling from smooth forms. It may or may not be different in other cultures.

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SOLDNER: I would like to come at it from a different angle. I am not quite sure what I want to say, but it has to do with the question of how to grade creativity. How can we evaluate a pot, for example? There are many different ways to do it.

I find it almost impossible to grade anybody's work on a judgmental basis. On one hand we encourage students to be responsible, self-directed, self-inventing. Then when they bring the piece to us, we say, "I do not like it." I get frustrated having to give a grade to a student, for I find it contradicts what I consider art to be all about. Art should be pure invention, and the responsibility of the student is to make all the moves.

So there is a conflict that I think has to be avoided. Reading *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, one understands what the problem is all about. The writer had great difficulty devising ways to encourage creativity on one hand and, on the other, to have self-motivation. I have solved the problem for myself by refusing to grade the quality of the work. I grade only by numbers and weights. That seems a little strange, and consequently most people ask, "What about the quality?" I reply, "That is their problem, not mine."

This method gives the student the opportunity to learn by failing, to learn from their own curiosity and by their own invention. On the basis of their own interest, they can make the decisions as to what direction, what shape, what color, what kind of glaze, what kind of heat, what kind of composition they want. And in the end I get off the hook, because all I have to do is weigh the pieces and count them. They know exactly what an *A* is going to be and a *B*.

Of course, graduates have slightly different pressures, since they are in an art department and headed toward becoming artists. I tell them that they can earn a *B* (which is the passing grade), if they make a one-person exhibit during the semester and leave it in their studio space. They can elevate it to an *A*, if they get it out of the studio space, find a little gallery someplace, have an

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opening, and invite friends. It does not need to be more than one day, but it is that effort to push them into the direction they want to go. If they do it, I do not have to use criticism or grade.

Pete Voulkos never really criticized our work, but we learned to tell what he thought by the way he was smoking a cigarette. If he did not like it, there was a kind of impatient inhale. If he really liked it, it was a nice long slow exhale.

MACNAUGHTON: The professor is oversimplifying a little here. I was one of his students before I followed a program in art history. As a beginning ceramist, I can report it is not so easy to produce a number of works. Anyone knows who has tried. There are many pitfalls along the way, in terms of making the object, getting it shaped without having it collapse, getting it through the bisque firing and into the glaze firing. Quite soundly and logically, we can agree that requiring the student to produce X number of pieces, and then evaluating on that basis, demands that the student has to learn a lot.

I will add that the speaker's methods of teaching are excellently liberating, especially in conjunction with a kind of traditional approach, which is what I had. I had a semester of utilitarian work on the wheel and then encountered Paul Soldner. I will never forget his first demonstration. Everyone knew so much about him, and he was somewhat mysterious. We were all waiting to see him. He wedged up about 25 pounds of clay, and threw this massive piece of material. We were all in awe.

We noticed as he went along that it kept being off-center. It was very lopsided, and we thought that he must be aware of this. He certainly knows how to center, but it got worse and worse and worse.

Finally he said, "You know, I think there is something in here." And he reached in and pulled out six inches of rope.

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He had deliberately wedged this into the clay. The amazing thing was that it never came out, it was just this little ripple that he worked around all the way through forming this fabulous vase. This event broke the ice and put us at ease and made us realize that he, Paul, had no intention of being the master.

PARTICIPANT: Do you have a way, Paul Soldner, to evaluate your own work?

SOLDNER: I am never completely satisfied with my work. So, no. I try to pick out something at the moment I am working on it. It is a challenge and an interest. But after it is finished, I want to go on to the next piece. To that extent, I have not saved much of my own work. The only pieces that I really keep are the ones that were broken, that came back from an exhibit cracked or broken. After collecting the insurance claims, I glue them back together. My wife and I keep them. There is only one piece that I have kept for myself. I kept it for 15 years, because at the time that I made it, I did not understand a lot about it.

In fact, those are the ones in which I am most interested, the ones that I am not sure about, not sure what happened. From these I can learn. After living with the piece, I often turn a corner that I recognize. I recall an important piece, an accident done in a workshop situation. (That is not the most ideal place to be creative, because everybody is watching, and you are using strange equipment, strange clay, and so on.) As a matter of fact, the piece of which I am now speaking was fired by some students after some of us went dancing and had left others to tend to the kiln. When we came back the next morning, some magical things had happened that I responded to.

REGAN: There, Paul Soldner, is a similarity between our media worth exploring later. One writes fragments, one begins with the melody of a phrase, a semantically or sonorously compelling

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paragraph. But it does not come out right, or it is a surprise. What gets written we want to toss out, but we mull over it, and come back to it, trying to figure out what is attractive about it.

Then we also say of painting, "It's as though you can touch it." But you cannot touch language, print, unless it is in Braille. Your work in ceramics can really be touched. We do not touch a painting to discover its essence, we can touch yours. You also created it by touch--extraordinarily alien to my medium. I cannot imagine what it would be like to create by actual feel.

Does that sense itself ever take over and cause you to do something different to the work, something that you did not intend to produce?

RUBENSTEIN: In terms of aesthetic evaluation, I witnessed an incident that ties in here. It occurred in the old Guggenheim Museum, before Frank Lloyd Wright's building was completed. A Brancusi retrospective exhibition was on display. A French couple was standing about four or five feet away from me and holding the hand of a little girl, three or four years of age. She broke away from her parents and went over and caressed the beautiful blade shape of this polished marble form. This said everything: a child not even of school age recognizing the beauty with which Brancusi had endowed this piece.

HARRISON: My pots are basically classic in form, but their tactile quality has always been very important to me. In particular, the rather matte glaze that I use has a marvelous feeling when you touch it or caress it. I tend to make forms that will make it more interesting, so that people will really want to touch and caress the pot.

REGAN: You have just enhanced this topic of the tactility of your medium in a way that I had not considered before. The tactility of your medium lies not only in its being created by hand, but also

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in what it elicits. It includes the glaze, the surface. You have two levels of tactility. Then there is the tactility it elicits from others who view it.

SOLDNER: In Russia I used a very abrasive, gritty, grogged clay. In fact, I recently just lost a scab from a wound inflicted because of the tactility of the clay. It is called chammot, which is a fire clay. It is the same as they use to make fire bricks. I made the mistake of trying to throw it on a potter's wheel. The inside of my hand could take it, but the backside became bloody.

REGAN: The form was dictated by the coarse clay. If you were working with a very sensuous, fine-grained type of porcelain, you would have had a much different form in mind, or should I say "in hand?"

SOLDNER: I had to give up using the potter's wheel at that point. I was forced to go in another direction.

This is an interesting topic, too. The meeting I was attending was a symposium for sculptors. Most of the sculptors worked in hard rock--granite, marble, bronze. They had very little experience with clay, except as a transition material to bronze. But they were forced to use this same clay that I just spoke of.

They approached this plastic material, clay, as they would marble, that is, working from the outside. They started with a big block and then cut into it; instead of building up, subtracting, instead of adding. They were amazed to see me roll it out and make slabs for building.

PARTICIPANT: Certainly clay is exciting. It changes its form. At the start it is very pliable, very soft. As you work, it becomes stiffer, still wonderful because it is slippery. Then it becomes hard. One can do different things at each stage. As it feels different, it grows, it changes.

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REGAN: Maybe these features are unique to your field, and then maybe not. Could we say that something like that could happen while working with language?

PARTICIPANT: It does seem that there is a difference between the artist, the creator, who has that tactile sensation, and the observer who can imagine it. But for the mere observer and appreciator, better not try to get tactile in a museum or gallery--although in certain art galleries they encourage people to caress.

REGAN: Again two different meanings are observed by the words feel or touch. You, the potter, articulate feel in your hands. By reading or monitoring changes in that substance between your hands, around your fingers, you know what to do in order to direct the shape and complete the item. The uniqueness of your semiotic activity seems to lie in recalling a tactility. There is more here worth our investigating.

While there have always been, even in historic times, figurines, as well as bowls and so on, it is important, in order for many of us to appreciate a work, to be able to touch it, to sense its weight, texture, and so on.

This must be checked. As the movement that I sense towards the artness of it, from the craftiness, the made-to-be-used, it seems to me that it is changing perhaps not so much for the artist who goes through the tactile quality, but for the people using or not using the object.

If the work is in an art gallery, one can only look at it, as we appreciate music at a concert, but we are not allowed to hum along with it.

It would be interesting to compare this with poetry. We can never absolutely get a translation from one language to another; there is always a wall on which we stand, where we see what we cannot fully know. So, too, it may be that nothing remains exactly the same when you cross media.

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PARTICIPANT: There are a number of potters who feel very strongly that their works are made to be used. And if they break, fine. Then they can come back and get some more, but meanwhile they are using the piece and appreciating it in a full range of ways, rather than just looking at it.

REGAN: What are the critical differences between the media? The mode of clay and language, either spoken or written, and music? Although we say we "feel" paintings or music, we know we do not feel music in the same way that a Soldner, Macintosh, or Rubinstein feels his medium. As they mold their clay, there is a different feel from Mozart's molding music, or Picasso's molding, or a poet's molding.

Mr. Macintosh, in your comments earlier you spoke of at least two ways of feeling. You mentioned the feel, the bouyancy of the products. We could actually touch the glaze and touch the form in our roles as observer. But you, the producer, are feeling in a different way; and you have a movable feel.

MACINTOSH: Yes. Compare music, for example, with ceramics. Music can express the extremes of joy and sorrow and everything in between. In ceramics much of the expression comes not only from the visual quality, but also from the tactile quality, from extremely refined to extremely rough textures. And the shapes can be very aggressive or very quiet and contemplative. There is a comparison between music and ceramics. Of course, literature does the same.

REGAN: But have you not used other meanings? Is it a different "feel" we are talking about? You, as a potter, actually feel in your fingers; you have mud on your hand. That is a different feel.

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MARGARITE MACINTOSH: Then, too, you can almost have this tactility even without touching. When we look at the form, we admire it for the tactile quality, without even touching it. This is really what Harrison was talking about. One cannot only express an emotion with visual or tactile means, but also one can appreciate a sense of color by means of sound, or hear a sound through color. There are communications between the different synesthetic experiences that exist in music, ceramics, or in any of the artistic expressions. When we become somewhat more sensitive to the different arts, we can somehow sense the connection among them and appreciate better each different art expression.

REGAN: There is now a third meaning. If we speak metaphorically, we can say that there is a feeling, a memory of feeling, that comes in music. But, on the other hand, with ceramics, this feel is also an actual tactile touch, not simply a metaphorical touch.

SOLDNER: There is something I envy in the other fields, in terms of communicating feelings that frustrates me. While I think it is correct, what Margarite MacIntosh has said, at the same time I am envious of musicians who are able to move the audience, in an emotional sense, in a way that I do not feel that I can do with my work. For example, a Bach chorale can bring me to tears. I wish to hell I could figure out how to do that with my work.

REGAN: As you create, thinking of yourself in the act of doing, do you ever feel those emotions? I, on rereading something that aptly captures the mood of a time, have felt something of that emotion. Have you ever in the act of working with clay felt that emotion?

SOLDNER: Not so much in that sense. Again not much in the sense that I refer to occurring in music, lively, quiet, or whatever.

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It is subliminal, almost like picking potatoes. After the first hour your back stops hurting, and your mind is free to float on to other things as you continue to pick. Very often while I am working on a piece, intense judgments are not always being made. Much is intuitive, and my mind wanders to other things, maybe to trips in the mountains, to streams flowing down, beautiful women, whatever.

REGAN: Is it the case that you find, as a result of your actions, that you have something else in your hand other than that which you were intending to produce?

SOLDNER: Correct, I very seldom know exactly what it will be that I will finally hold in my hand. I believe there is a value in randomness and creating, which I call "creative problems." In making problems for myself, I do not know what is going to happen, but I want to find out.

PARTICIPANT: Looking at your work is a visual experience, as well as spatial. In basic terms, music is an auditory experience. So, perhaps what you need is to compose music to go along with your pottery, and then there would be more modes involved. Semiotics and Howard Gardner's multiple intelligence theories propose that there are various forms of intelligence and awareness. Which ones are involved in your particular kind of work? You use the "visual-spacial," the "bodily kinesis." What would you use that is different in music?

SOLDNER: In music there is a performance, and then there is the composition. In our field it is mostly just the composition.

REGAN: A nice distinction. We should explore that theme in relation to other media.

PARTICIPANT: So the performance is the interaction with the audience? In compositions one will hear solo, and then you will hear the same theme come in in a full circle.

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SOLDNER: I said I was envious, and I am.

PARTICIPANT: To make a distinction: we are talking about the act of creating a piece of art and also about an audience looking at and reacting to it. Those two activities should be separated, and we are mixing them here.

I concur with what has been said about the great emotional feeling of creativity that occurs when we make a pot, or when, for example, Bach creates his results. Ceramics has been the most utilitarian thing that has ever happened to mankind. I remember as a child seeing a picture of Moses smashing the tablets. Those Ten Commandments were written on ceramic tablets. There is a whole world of utility, there is a whole area of ceramics that is related to every human activity since man first learned how to use his hands to create. And, hence, the history of ceramics can tell more about civilization than can most books.

My point is not only is there an emotional experience, but also there is a functional experience that we must link with ceramics. The role of man creating functional things to reflect his needs and his life and his history is an enormous field that cannot be ignored.

Yes, there are people who create at times in ceramics, clay, paint, oils, and music. But every single day clay has been used to express man's struggles to survive, to live, and to work. And even in those things of utility that were the results of that, there was great beauty.

REGAN: And what is more utilitarian than language, the statement, "Give me a drink?" But on the other hand, Shakespeare with the same raw material, language, produces sonnets and rare drama.

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BUSH: The opening of a glaze kiln gives me that sense of which Paul spoke, of emotion and excitement about what I am going to find in there. You open it up, and here is something that you never thought would be as good.

REGAN: Leon Bush, as a physics-engineering professional, have you experienced some similar response, for instance, anticipation in engineering?

BUSH: Rarely, rarely. When I worked on the space program, when I was in the blockhouse and we had a successful launch, when we saw this thing lift off and go up into space, when there was success or knowledge that something that you did helped to produce this wonderful thing, these I expect are responses similar to the opening of a kiln in which you principally did all yourself, and you find something there that is emotionally very exciting.

SOLDNER: What is unique to ceramics in the art world? Well, painters never stick their paintings in a fire.

Another difference might be in the problem I have with galleries that have previously shown paintings and sculptures. When I bring my work (and let us for a moment say that I am able to make a small tea bowl on the same level as Arakowa, which incidentally would be priced around \$45,000 to \$50,000, the gallery owners will not understand. They are used to thinking in terms of a painting, where larger sizes are going to be more expensive than smaller ones. If I offer a big piece, but it is cheaper than a little one, then there will be all kinds of confusion. What they do not understand is that the kiln gave me something better than I planned. Whereas with a painting or sculpture, the last brush mark is it, it is never going to change.

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PARTICIPANT: Returning to the topic of creativity and, in part, the second main question of our symposium: When you are throwing the clay, do you visualize what you want the end product to be?

SOLDNER: There are two schools of thought on that. One school advocates making sketches, drawings, prototypes, working it all out ahead of time, and then finally, when you have the perfect answer, making it. The other, the one with which I am more closely aligned, involves the idea of discovery: preferring not to know, not knowing ahead of time, but relying on the subconscious and all the information that I have stored in my computer through the years. I get feedback at the right moment.

It reminds me of the time when I was studying to be a painter. One day the instructor had us paint the model. About three weeks later he said, "Now I want you to paint, over the model, a cityscape." The point was that in some subtle way the image was going to be part of the city.

He then went further, and I have observed this in my own experience. He proposed that someday when we are working, we should not be surprised to see a daisy pop up in our work. You may not know where it comes from, but it comes from some observation, maybe at a picnic on a nice day out in the woods. It is from some observation you made at another time in your life. It is imprinted in your computer. Do not be surprised if you use it without knowing why.

MACINTOSH: When I am making what I call my "classic forms," the round forms, I never make drawings of what I am going to do. I may have a definite idea of what kind of piece I am going to make. But I always leave it open to change, because very often the clay or the wheel might suggest something different from what I started out to do. Very often it is better than what I started with. So I try at least to pursue that.

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Many of us listen to classical music while working. A Bach piece may elevate. You are working along on the wheel, and it just feels great. Consequently you wonder when you are all through, that when the pot comes out, it does not have this almost ethereal kind of quality that the music has. But you just cannot do that with clay. It is too much of a concrete object. There are certain things that only music can give--that is what makes it great. One is one thing, and another is another. And I expect the study of these differences in modes and results is, in part, what semiotics and this discussion is all about.

SOLDNER: Artists learn very early that there is no perfect solution to whatever they are doing. There is always an alternative way out. Knowing that, you do not have fear. Many people starting in art have a fear of what they are doing. Some feel that they have not gotten the knowledge, experience, or skill to develop, so they are afraid. Most artwork is done as a decision-making process, based on everything connected with the painting, or the drawing, which can actually spill over into one's personal life. I assume that most artists in their personal lives are not as uptight about things working in a specific way. There is always an alternative solution.

PARTICIPANT: Some people write by strength of a whole and some write by synthesis. I, for instance, have to write by synthesis, but other people I know say that they see, or hear, or think, of a whole poem at once. We know that from many reports of significant writers we get a glimpse of something--as Einstein did--and then create their product in the verbal mode.

PARTICIPANT: Paul Soldner has mentioned the difference between the potter and the painter. He studied to be a painter, but he is a potter. I had never thought of making a distinction between artists.

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Apparently I group people who are artistic as "artists." However, I do not group writers as writers. A poet I see as one who writes poetry, and is different from the person who writes essays, and different from a person who writes stage plays. I can see the difference between a poet, who is trying to express an emotion and uses the most beautiful words he can find, and the novelist, who is also trying to convey the same kind of emotion, but uses a different style or form. But what is the difference?

Can you define or give us some insights about the differences between the potter and the painter and the sculptor of marble?

SOLDNER: Just the fire. We have the same thinking process, and we make the same aesthetic judgments. We have the same problems, but the difference is the fire that clay people use. If you do not use a fire, then there is no difference. If you make unfired clay, then there is no difference.

PARTICIPANT: You mentioned before the person with the background of chipping-type sculpture taking the clay and taking away parts of it rather than shaping it into something.

SOLDNER: That was based on his experience working from the outside towards the middle. I would think that that was temporary, and that after he worked with the clay a little longer, he would begin to change.

What I try to convey to students using the wheel is that it is just a process of moving clay from one place to another. Unlike a lathe, where you cut away and end up with a pile of waste material, on the potter's wheel there should not be any waste. With the force of one's hand and the rotation of the wheel, it is possible to move the clay from a solid to a hollow. It goes up and it goes out. So there is a little difference. Sculptors could take advantage of that.

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MARGARITE MACINTOSH: We could consider that the important part of the creative process is the element of choice at every step, whatever the medium is, whether it is a poem or music. Along with the making of the work of art, we have to make choices. We have to make important decisions. What creates a choice? What type or quality of choice is important to create a great work of art?

SOLDNER: There is a saying, "Wipe the slate clean," which, in terms of creativity, means the importance of being able to let go of the known solution. In order to write a new message, you have to wipe the old message off. I think in the creative world that is very important. The creative act is invention, similar to scientific inventions. In order to discover a new design or principle, sometimes you have to let go of the way it has always been done before. I have personally experienced several examples of how (until I was able to let go), I had a blockage that I could not break through.

For example, at one time I was trying to develop a clay mixer. Initially I had the idea that it should be like a Mix-master, wherein the paddles would go around inside of a tub. But every time I tried to engineer it, I ran into problems. The silica ran into the bearings of the revolving blades, whacking them out because it was very abrasive. I could not solve it. I was blocked because I keep seeing that damn Mix-master.

I forgot all about this for almost three or four months, and almost magically, in one moment, I woke up and said, "Oh, just reverse it, rotate the tub and have the arms fixed on the outsides. Now the bearings were outside, and there should never be any problem. But it required experimenting over and over.

PARTICIPANT: Someone mentioned some research from Eastman Kodak, in which they had taken a certain number of shapes, let us say a very blurred shape, and asked everyone to form a

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hypothesis of what this was. Then they increased its distinctiveness (say, two degrees) and asked them again. At the end, when the actual image was shown, let us say a cat climbing a tree, the people who had thought of it as something entirely different, say a ship, kept on thinking it was a ship, even though it was obviously a cat.

BUSH: I finally reduced what you can do with clay to three things: You can color it, you can shape it, and you can fire it. Then I talked to Norma Paley and found the fourth, you can sell it. And with that I will turn it over to her.

PALEY: I want to take a different tack. We are talking about how we react visually to a ceramic object. It is what the viewer brings with him that colors his reaction. The unexposed and unknowledgeable viewer may look and remark, "Ugh, a kid could do that. It's dreadful. I do not like it." His mind and eyes are closed to the experience.

When I create a piece, I want people to see it and react to it. That reaction cannot be controlled. If it is positive, terrific; and if not, well, there was a response, albeit negative.

REGAN: John Ruskin says that every artist should create so that no one coming to his art could possibly miss its total impact.

PARTICIPANT: Concerning the developmental aspects of creativity, David Feldman talked about the kind of creativity that children engage in, when they create in a variety of media. Not all of us become very creative adults. Around the fourth or fifth grade, when children are conforming to the values of their peers, they start losing this ability to create. Feldman says that the creativity exhibited by adults is, therefore, different from the kind of creativity exhibited by children. Do you see your experience as a creative child a continuum that follows into adulthood?

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SOLDNER: My relatives say that, as a kid, I was always fussing around, building something, working with my hands, but not necessarily artistically. I had a crushing experience at the seventh-grade level by an art teacher, who one day came to class unprepared. He said, "OK, this is a free day, you can do anything you want." I thought, Good, I will paint a sunset--a kind of romantic idea. Later he came around the class looking at our work and picked mine up and said, "Oh, look, Paul made a fried egg." So I nose-dived under the table and would not go near an art department until I was in college, when I could approach it from the very secure, safe position of being a photographer. People did not laugh at my photographs, because they were real. And it was only after gaining some security that I then took a few courses, cautiously, in drawing and basic design, because I thought it might help my photography. Then very slowly my internal need to make something with my hands emerged. When I discovered that I could do this with clay and get a master's degree, it was wonderful.

RUBENSTEIN: If a person is an artist in the full sense of the word, regardless of which medium is employed, he or she will show an aesthetic sensitivity.

Most of us have been going to numerous galleries and seeing exhibits by contemporary painters. In a number of avant-garde shows, some of us feel as if we are victims of fraud or conspiracy by the dealer and artist.

The clay artist has one advantage over the painter. Clay, using the elementary entities (I know it is a cliché) water, air, fire, and earth, gives one a rather humble feeling about things. A painter with something to communicate, if he is truly sensitive, can express the feeling with the brush or the palette knife or the pigment he uses. With his own subjective impressions he can create

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something memorable. However, a number of the works that many of us are seeing today in respected galleries, I personally think are superficial and fraudulent. I think the clay artists, even the mediocre ones, are a little more honest in what they do, because of the very nature of the material and the "trial by fire."

SOLDNER: It does not matter; history sorts it all out anyhow.

PARTICIPANT: In Professor Soldner's opening comments, he talked about the durability of clay. Both he and John Regan talked about that special feeling that comes when one holds an ancient clay object in one's hands, especially if there is something about it that will conform to the contours of their own hands.

I brought these things out of my office, some tablets that come from ancient Iraq. They are about 4,000 years old. On another theme Regan talked about the verbal mode, and how it was like the tactile mode. In these clay tablets we have a mixture of modes. They are very durable, they were fired. These particular ones were fired quite recently in this century. You can hold them. One side will be more rounded. That is the side that is written on first, and the other side will fit in the palm of your hand very nicely. They were fired recently by a museum to make them more durable. I do not think you will hurt them if you drop them, but let us not test that!

REGAN: A nice point here to conclude today's discussion.