

# Northumbria Research Link

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*The* \_\_\_\_\_  
**CRAFT**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
*edition*  
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**CRAFT**  
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Editing - Babitha George, Jon Rogers, Michelle Thorne and Romit Raj

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## Thinking through making

Justin Marshall & Jayne Wallace

We visited Thomas, a craftsperson/potter/maker/artist/ceramic designer based not far from the Quicksand Studio in Goa. His practice, although firmly rooted in clay, is multi-faceted. He plays multiple roles and has managed to evolve a practice that suits his aspirations, interests and markets. Within his eclectic home, which also serves as a studio and workshop, he is surrounded by functional tableware, studio pottery, ceramic installations, individual sculptural pieces, all mixed together alongside paintings by other artists. There was no sign of the carefully curated and manicured 'brand' image that so often accompanies artists, designers and craftspeople in the UK. That was refreshing. The overall sense was of someone with an urge and ability to make.



One of the many works we saw were the ceramic drums and passive speakers. These speakers, working like a traditional gramophone horn, have docks in which a mobile can be inserted so that its internal speakers are amplified with no additional power. This may not be an entirely new concept, and there are examples of contemporary pre-existing designs produced by both individual makers and sold as products. However, Thomas' approach and the narrative he gave us when describing the creation of these pieces provides a useful example of a particular crafty way of engaging with the material world.



It is about learning what materials will do and experimenting with what happens when an informed and intelligent playfulness is allowed to flourish.

As Thomas explained to Jayne, he didn't set out to make ceramic speakers. He just put his phone in a bowl one day and noticed how much louder the sound from it was. He thought it would be amusing to make a weird musical instrument object for his phone to amplify the sound. He laughed a lot when showing it to us. He realised it was a 'silly' object in some ways with a peculiar anti-digital tech aesthetic.

Jayne, who bought one, reflected that, "I don't think they are very beautiful objects. In fact I think they are quite an ugly object. But to me, it's about play and playfulness."

For Jayne this was a beautiful story of a craft practitioner re-inventing something through really knowing his material, living with and through his objects. His bowls are everywhere in his home, and it's a natural place for him to put his phone, finding amusement in how much louder the phone's ring was in the bowl and seeing this as a playful opportunity. It was 'a bit bonkers' and not driven by a desire to innovate in a market, but about amusing himself and making something for his personal use and ending up with something that really exploits the material properties of ceramics brilliantly and is created through well established ceramic production processes, i.e. thrown and extruded forms joined together by hand.





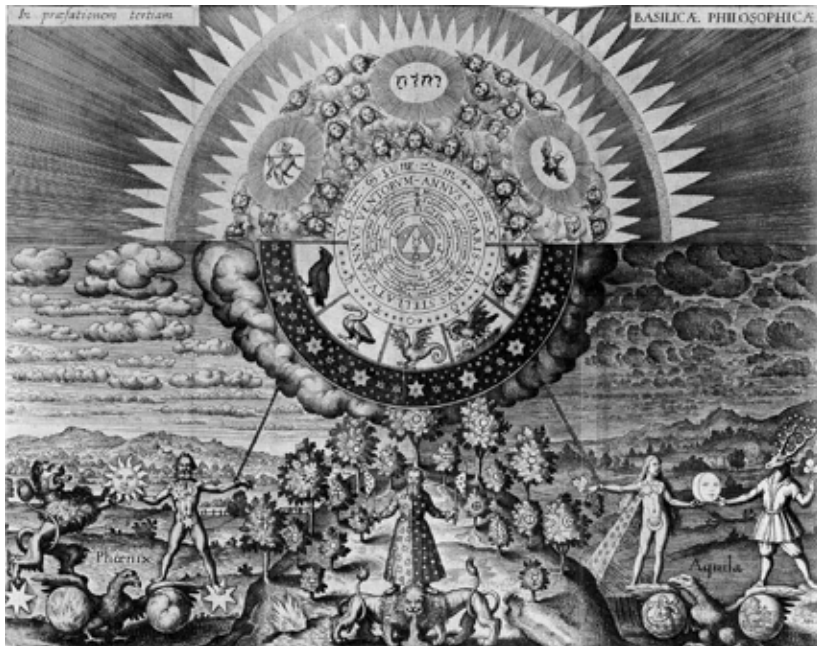
Justin recognised that both the speakers and the drums are relatively simple in their makeup, but the variables are huge: form, dimension, clay body, fired temperature, glaze, wall thickness. All these variables play a part in the differing tone and amplification achieved. Thomas had made a wide variety of drums and speakers, changing and augmenting them, seemingly not to achieve sonic perfection, but to playfully see what would happen.

We would argue that his approach to this body of work is inherently crafty, rather than designerly. He is not looking at this as a problem space in which parameters are separated out and external quantitative knowledge of acoustics is used to develop optimal solutions to transmitting sound. But he is engaging with the material and processes at hand, improvising (knowing in action), thinking through making to produce new outcomes. It is about learning what materials will do and experimenting with what happens when an informed and intelligent playfulness is allowed to flourish. He is perhaps more responsive than critically reflective in his approach to designing and making; the concept of the passive speaker was born out of a response to an acoustic phenomenon, not a reflection on a problem space and the designs were developed through responding to material and process capacities, not a systematic reflection on optimal production strategies.



This could be considered as an alchemical rather than a rationalist scientific approach to materiality, developing things and gaining understanding through the characteristics exhibited by the outcomes (i.e. tonality, volume, timbre etc.). It is more about understanding the whole and less about fragmentary analysis of the parts. This may not be such a controversial or potentially disruptive assertion to the community of craft makers, but what about IoT, which has its foundations firmly rooted within techno-science?

What is, or is there, an Alchemy for IoT and would it bring any benefits?



Alchemical Cosmos, retrieved from [http://www.hermetik-international.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Alchemical\\_Cosmos\\_Great\\_Work.jpg](http://www.hermetik-international.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Alchemical_Cosmos_Great_Work.jpg) 29/4/17.

# SALVAGE :

## Exploring decentralisation