

The Material Citation

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In this paper, I shall relate to the artistic citation in contemporary ceramics as a case study, which is an extreme form of reliance on the past. By means of citation, the cultural relation between the contemporary ceramic work and the cited work is reflected. This tool enables the history and tradition of the ceramic field to be clearly traced, as a field that is by essence and nature connected to its roots inextricably. Moreover, I shall make the case that the unbreakable bond between the citation and the cited work is, by nature, a cultural connection. In contrast to other visual citations, the ceramic medium places history and tradition at its center, which is rooted fundamentally in the ceramic production itself. Therefore, the contemporary ceramic work is essentially related to past cultures.

The artistic citation consists of a prominent and explicit reference to an existing work, or part of it, within a new work. As opposed to mere copying, citation detaches the cited work from its context and gives it new meaning. In order that the citation be understood and have significance, it must rely on the viewer's pre-existing knowledge.

Today, artists and ceramic craftspeople who incorporate citations from the history of ceramics in their works cannot dissociate the latter from the age-old meanings inherent to the history of ceramics. Therefore, dealing with artistic citation in ceramics is by necessity dealing with identity and affiliation.

In our postmodern age and in contemporary trends, the boundaries between the fields of art, craft and design are increasingly blurred, and similarly those between creators, craftsmen, makers, designers and artists. Craft, which is essentially connected to a local cultural heritage, is perceived today as defiance in the face of globalization and industrialization. Although many creators are not craftspeople in the traditional sense of passing a unique skill within the family or the Guild, the idiosyncratic, manual production includes the personal, human aspect, in contrast to anonymous mass manufacturing, and thus it preserves the cultural capital at its foundation. The craft work itself corresponds with tradition, and it is able to incorporate contemporary values as part of a renewed material culture (Zahavi, 2014; Cooper, 2008; Fiell, 2001).

Among the various movements of return to the traditional manual work, which are increasingly popular in the post-industrial age, the field of ceramics emerges as an active, vibrant arena that is inextricably linked with its glorious past, although it is oriented toward renewal and relevance (Bauman, 2016).

The field of ceramics is perhaps the craft field that is most deeply related to cultural identification. One of the key instruments in archaeological research is the classification and sorting of pottery to create a typology that characterizes culture. The typology serves to define

and identify a certain culture, as well as to describe it and understand it. Obviously, this fact is much related to the capacity of ceramics to be preserved, relative to other materials. However, thanks to the preservation and wide distribution of ceramics in almost every culture around the world and in every period, it maintains a continuous, stable relation with the culture that created it (Amiran, 1971). This relation survives over many years and it helps to trace the wider cultural contexts, because of the mutual material influences between cultures. These influences include the base-ring ware that were common in the Land of Israel during the Bronze Age – a family of high quality ware produced in Cypress, which indicate the existence of advanced trade relations in the region (Amiran, 1971); they also include the European rush to solve the problem of porcelain manufacturing that came from China in the form of the Willow pattern, as a classical example of the relation between European cultures and China (Meller Yamaguchi and Torbowitz, 2015). The relation between the ceramic object to culture is reciprocal; they bear and nourish one another.

It is important to stress the concept of field, as it is presented in Pierre Bourdieu's writings, considering the vast importance of the wide context of the work. The field of as a space of action in which structural power relations exist, produces and preserves various contexts within it and a consensus around it. That is to say, in order that a certain work have value within a certain field, the creator must be part of the game, must be familiar with the field and act according to its conventions. The only way to grow and to develop the field is from within it (Bourdieu, 1993).

Today, in the global age, cultures are intertwined and a myriad of visual and technological influences are increasingly more available and accessible. According to the art historian Charles Jencks (Cooper, 2008), the concept of history has tremendous significance in postmodern culture, so the importance of the cultural context is brought to the fore in the artwork's interpretation. Citation is one of the typical means of historical expressions within a contemporary work, and its usage has grown in recent decades. Many creators who work in the field of ceramics choose to incorporate in their contemporary works direct or indirect citations from the rich history of ceramics – with its many meanings – to create new values that are relevant to our time (Zahavi, 2014; Cooper, 2008). Creators who opt for combining a historical citation at the focus of their work, do it in different ways and for different ends, and nevertheless one can get the impression that when the ceramic material is concerned, the burden of the past is laid on it in such a way that the material itself almost becomes a citation. Contemporary ceramic creation is connected to the heart of traditional ceramic design; therefore, adding the citation as a central referent in a certain work is primarily an expression of the profound bond with history and the discussion of it.

Citation augments an artwork with values of a certain aesthetic, and sometimes with unique technical qualities, but the greatest significance is the cultural context. The connection between the creator, her or his biography, the place and time of her work, and a certain point in space and time to which she strives to relate her work – this connection is often distinguished by

complexities and contrasts and by concepts like interdisciplinarity, multiculturalism, relativism, hybridity or paradoxicality and it presents ironic stances alongside humor, playfulness and ludic spirit. Moreover, this connection undermines the traditional hierarchy between center and periphery, “high” culture and “low” culture and “high” material and “low” material (Fiell, 2001; Cooper, 2008).

An expression of such historical connections can be seen, for example, in the works of Michael Eden in the project *Wedgwoodn't Tureen* (2008).

Eden is a British maker, with education and experience in pottery. His familiar and more recent works touch upon a combination of the new and evolving world of digital technology and the traditional world of pottery and craft. He employs the method of computerized three-dimensional processing and he creates ware that present the technological aesthetic and examine its limitations. The form of the objects in this project is based on a catalog of the Wedgwood factory from 1817. The three-dimensional printing technology is seen as foreign and even menacing by certain people, and therefore the use of citation is for him an anchor or grip point that connects the two worlds and induces an identification of the viewer with the work. He is thus addressing the emotion and collective memory of members of his culture, first and foremost the British who know their tradition, and later he turns to a more extensive and elaborate European tradition and to Western culture in general (Eden, 2008). Many creators rely in their work on the aesthetic of the evolving technologies of computerized processing and three-dimensional printing. Eden focuses his work especially on the cultural and emotional context identified by the viewer in the cited models. However, his products preserve the “pottery” nature of the work since they fulfill the functions assigned to them; they are aesthetic and meticulously made and they project mainly impressive technical skill.



Michael Eden, "Wedgwoodn't Tureen", 2008, 3D printing, Courtesy of Adrian Sassoon, London

An additional example is the series *Deconstructed* (2013) by the artist Steven Young Lee, an American of Korean decent. Lee acquired his professional skill mostly in the U.S., and some of it in China. He works with porcelain on the wheel and uses traditional Korean techniques, and the

forms he creates are traditional, too, so much so that they sometimes seem as the actual vessels of some obscure Korean dynasty. The series presents those vases in a cracked and defective state, broken-intact, and thus encourages the discussion of the place of tradition at our time vis-à-vis the disintegration of geographical, cultural, ideational and visual borders. Lee's explicit goal in his works is to conduct a material and technical study (Ruble, 2010), but beyond the proclamations, his personal, biographical affiliation to a culture of which he is no longer part is evident. His great respect to that culture is discernible, and so are his attention to detail as well as his desire to approach it visually and technically. However, the distance and foreignness that he feels allow him to introduce modifications – to present a highly valued cultural symbol destroyed, deformed, defective and useless, but nevertheless to preserve the aesthetic, with its profound cultural meanings, with great precision and admiration.

The Dutch designer Hella Jongerius, in her work *Delft Blue B-Set* (2001), relates to her personal cultural connection with Dutch tradition and to the iconic Delft ceramic ware. The set was made especially for an exhibition on Delft, and it is based on a cooperation with the Dutch factory Royal Tichelaar. In the *B-Set* project, Jongerius used the forms from the factory's first porcelain production line – forms that are etched into Dutch collective memory. In the production line, Jongerius chose to emphasize the unique, crafty qualities, which, according to the factory's standards, are considered seconds. To the porcelain ware she added decoration in traditional patterns, Delft style, using various techniques (Dubinski, 2015; the designer's website).



Hella Jongerius, "Delft Blue B-Set", 2001

In this set of examples, despite its limited scope, one fact stands out – the creator's decision to relate to a certain point in space and time by means of the citation cannot be random or unrelated to the creator's own being. The creators mentioned here relate in their work to the historical citation that is taken from a source close to them personally. Intercultural influences and inspirations have always existed, of course, and no creator is limited to draw inspiration from her or his culture, but nevertheless the element of locality has an important role here. Perhaps the use of a cultural-historical citation reinforces the contemporary cultural affiliation of the creator. In turning to the past, with everything this entails, continuity has a crucial role, as if the creator wishes to validate his work by dint of past creations. Like academic citation, the artistic citations provide legitimacy and affirmation. The citation of craft is also a linchpin of legitimacy and affirmation, but based on the essence of the field that is deeply connected to a

cultural belonging and continuity, that affirmation acts to connect the creator himself, as well as his creations, to a cultural continuum. When craft is concerned, especially the old and established field of ceramics, citation enables the legitimacy of a specific cultural affiliation, not only the validation of artistic affiliation to the field. The difference lies in the aspect of creation itself. This stands in contrast to other visual citations, which are not obligated to the technique and practice of the cited object's creation. Ceramic citation refers to the past, but also sustains the same practices of the cited object, thus dually existing as the citing object and as part of the cited one.

The validation given here is bidirectional, since the creator and the cultural continuity represented by the ceramic material preserve and validate one another. Past tradition empowers the creation and its validity, whereas the creator maintains the continuity and preserves the cultural assets embodied in the object, which functions as a culture agent.

The value of craft as a cultural asset that stores unique attributes of a certain culture with the material tradition assume an important role here. Although the values of craft have changed in the post-industrial world, contemporary ceramic artists and craft people still uphold the importance of cultural tradition and the continuity and endurance of those values. Within the field of ceramics, the work itself is the upholding of tradition since it preserves material qualities immanent to the most fundamental values and cultural practices (Bauman, 2016). Moreover, it preserves the continuity of cultural work while the object embodies the culture's values.

Up to this point, the bidirectional and necessary relation between the ceramic work and local culture has been discussed, focusing on the value of the ceramic field as consisting of cultural continuity and profound affiliation. This relation exists in contemporary creation since it is part of the field, and more extremely when a direct and deliberate citation is involved. What happens, however, when the cultural continuity is broken? The Israeli case is an excellent example of the dependence of the local ceramic field on the wider historical field, and of the former's need to belong to the latter.

The region of Israel has had rich ceramic traditions, some of them among the earliest in history (Amiran, 1971). Perhaps this continuity was never broken and its natural bearers are the Palestinian potters (Bauman, 2010). In the 1930s, with the arrival from Germany to Israel of the three "mothers" – the pioneers of Israeli ceramics, Eva Samuel, Hedwig Grossman and Hanna Harag Zunz – and with the beginning of the Israeli ceramic industry, many of whose founders were German born, a veritable Israeli ceramic style emerged (Bauman, 2010; Ofrat, 1991).

In order to understand the cultural and social significance of the formation of the Israeli ceramic style, I shall discuss the formation of this field within the socio-cultural context in which it was formed – the creation of a Hebrew culture, a native-Jewish culture in the Land of Israel before the state's foundation. The nascence of Israeli ceramics and the local, archaeological and

diasporic influences on it since its very beginning were extensively studied, with an emphasis on the personal style of the genre's said pioneers. I propose to present the ceramic field as a cultural foundation, which, similarly to other fields, began to reemerge, as if *ex nihilo*, in the young culture. However, my intention is not to detract from the great importance of the founding generation, but to contemplate the field of ceramics as part of the general repertoire of the new Hebrew culture (Manor, 2005; Bauman, 2010; Even Zohar, 1980).

Starting from the first Aliyah (immigration wave) in 1882, until the foundation of the state in 1948, a new Hebrew culture evolved gradually, which was separate from the Jewry in the diaspora as well as from the local existing culture in the land, both Jewish and Arab. An examination of the changes occurring in the country at that time, by means of the semiotic interpretation according to the theories of Even Zohar (Even Zohar, 1980), can provide a synoptic grasp of the formation of the Hebrew culture, with its different layers, and, among other things, of the desire to forge a unique ceramic style.

That period saw great demographic changes, especially the massive arrival of many immigrants that changed the makeup of society. Ordinarily, immigrant groups attempt to strike a balance between the desire to assimilate and the wish to preserve their personal identity and their cultural attributes. In a situation such as this, certain attributes of the original culture are exchanged for new properties from the cultural arsenal of their adopting society (Even Zohar, 1980).

The immigrant groups at that period essentially did not conform to this rule, since their declared purpose was the creation of a new, Israeli and Hebrew culture. They came in order to leave behind the repertoires of their original cultures, especially those of Eastern Europe, but they did not find an alternative cultural system, so they had to invent it. In effect, the result was a mixture and re-encoding of existing ideas and values, from which the new values were formed. The culture of the diaspora was regarded as negative, even illegitimate, and its central elements were replaced with a romantic yearning to the authentic existence of the Hebrew nation in its ancestral land. As part of this exchange of values, negative stereotypes of diaspora Jews, such as weakness and rootlessness, were adopted, juxtaposed with new values such as hard manual labor and farming (Even Zohar, 1980). The fields of arts and crafts were not spared from these pervasive conceptions.

Although the Jews in Europe did engage in different crafts, which were part of the styles typical of their surroundings, the artistic conception that gained currency in those years was in fact the very European 19th-century conception according to which the Jews lack any artistic capacities and aesthetic sensitivity (Manor, 2005). That conception became entrenched and assumed a truth value of its own, later to become the basis of the concept of "Want of Matter" (Manor, 2005). As opposed to the artistic "nothingness", adopted as the supposed fate of the diaspora Jews, new values were promoted, which return to the ancient roots of the ancestral land, in an attempt to bridge the gap (Manor, 2005; Ofrat, 1992; Bauman 2010).

The starting point of Israeli ceramics, then, like the beginnings of the Hebrew culture in general, was the rejection of the past. On the one hand, the rejection of the Arab ceramic artists who have formed an artistic continuity from old times, and, on the other hand, the renunciation of the collective Jewish past in Europe. In such a field, however, which is essentially modeled on the past, the empty foundation is impossible, and therefore beyond this rejection there existed a dialog of constant searching for connection and continuity.

Despite the differences between the creators and the various projects, an Israeli style with new, local value and context was nevertheless sought after. This includes use of local raw materials, earth tones and archaeological contexts aiming to create a historic continuity of settlement (Ofrat, 1991). These attempts continued into the 1990s. From the 1980s, however, foreign influences from various sources began to be felt among the local ceramic creators. These were formal, technological and conceptual influences, including some more profound influences through historical citations of foreign cultures. Through these, the values of those cultures are introduced into the local discourse (Bauman, 2010).

Examples of this process can be found in the works of Efrat Eyal, in the series *Greek Tragedy* (2012-2013). Eyal presents a series of objects whose appearance is classical Greek. They consist of daily, contemporary objects; the decorations, which preserve the Greek compositions, have contemporary content, and some of them cite the experimental sequence photographs by Eadweard Muybridge from the late 19th century. Through these objects, the artist engages in a complex dialog with social and cultural positions. In comparison with the values of ancient Greek culture, which was extensively cited and gave rise to many artistic traditions in all the Western cultures, she employs modern elements to present humorously and critically the contemporary, social and gender context (Samira, 2013; Gatenyo, 2013). Unlike previous examples, the citation in Eyal's works does not aspire to create a continuity between her and the cited culture, but rather to create discreet juxtapositions between certain values from that culture and local contemporary values, while consciously and cleverly using the deep historical meanings of the cited culture, as well as the distance and detachment from it.



Efrat Eyal, "A Greek Tragedy" Second Series, 2013; Leonid Padrul © Eretz Israel Museum, Tel Aviv

In the work of Noam Dover and Michal Cederbaum, *Forget Me Not* (2014), a set of fine, 19th century, Russian porcelain dishes in familiar traditional pattern is displayed, next to wafer-thin

concrete cast models, fragile and dull grey, of the same set. The transformation is an encounter of the high and distant culture with the coarse materiality of concrete and with the rough, militant local society (Tamir, 2016). Here we are also dealing with a citation that does not associate the creators with a sustained cultural continuity, but rather connects to a certain point on that continuum and borrows ideas and values from a foreign culture, and that, precisely due to the strangeness and personal distance, produces a contemporary statement on local being.

Moriah Adar Plaskin's work, *Mythologies* (2010), relies, like the work of Michael Eden, on canonical models of the British Wedgwood factory, and combines the Wedgwoodian classic design and computerized design, which she transforms to create a contemporary message. However, the remoteness of the origin from the locus of creation is too great, unlike in Eden's work, and therefore her work cannot be perceived as sustaining the continuity of the origin and is seen as foreign to it.

Through these examples, it is possible to examine how creators treat a culture that is impersonal and that does not claim to represent cultural continuity. On the contrary, the use of citation recalls, of course, a certain point in space and time, but the cultural link is loose and noncommittal, as befitting the postmodern citation. Nevertheless, the gap between the free lightness of postmodern artistic citation, on the one hand, and the heavy weight preserved in the ceramic material, as having traditional and historic qualities and a deep commitment to material practice, on the other hand, creates an interesting discussion and raises from the cultural context the question of the identity and connection between cultures.

In contrast to these examples, some citations by Israeli creators today refer to the very early Israeli ceramic history. For example, in the work of Eleanora Orly Edlavitch, *New Gazelles* (2016), which simulates the workflow at the Lapid factory and presents an imagined design development in Lapid's stylistic language. In this work, Edlavitch wishes to reinforce the link to Israeli ceramic tradition and local identity (Ben David and Hop, 2016). A similar treatment can be seen in the three-dimensionally printed oil lamp of Studio Under, *Digital Archaeology* (2013), which simulates the distinct shapes of Roman-era oil lamps found in several archaeological sites in Israel, and attempts to create a link and bridge over history. This type of citations strives to reinforce the local Israeli ceramic field as a local base on a continuous line of artistic and cultural development. Whether it is about the creation of continuity from a relatively short-lived foundation, like Lapid's typical style, and whether it is about a completion of a much earlier continuity that does not actually constitute an ongoing cultural lineage – what is common to all those is locality and the relation to the cultural continuity represented by the artistic sequence.



Eleanora Orly Edlavitch, "New Gazelles", 2016, Readymade and decals on cobalt base; photo: Shahar Tamir

These two types of citation are the endpoints of the ongoing discussion between the universal and the local. Naturally, the existence of external influences must be attributed to social, economic, environmental and political changes that occurred in Israel and in the rest of the world from the 1980s. Israeli creators turn to intercultural trends for inspiration and for a sense of belonging, and distance themselves from the local. It is worth noting that this is not a sweeping trend, and many creators are still preoccupied with questions of locality, in the context of craft and belonging. In spite of worldwide processes of globalization and cultural hybridity, the search for external ideas outside of the local sources seems to be stemming not only from the desire to adapt to global trends and to reject locality, but also from the historical vacuum of the Israeli field of ceramics.

In the ceramic field, because it is a field of craft whose past involves elaborate histories, it is possible that creators who seek to tap into the core of the field not find what they are looking for in the local repertoire. The young "Israeli style" has not yet attained adequate maturity to be considered a solid cultural base, while the historic artistic continuity is broken.

That same void, or historical discontinuity, in the Israeli ceramic field allows great freedom of action, relieved from the commitment to maintain a rich a burdensome tradition. Nevertheless, the weight of the ceramic material itself does not allow this discontinuity to exist fully. We have seen this, for example, in Efrat Eyal's work mentioned above, which connects between a citation free of the burden of meaning attached to the cited culture, touched with lightness and humor, and the idea of the ceramic material as harboring profound, historical and local meanings. Like Eyal, many creators attempt to fill the void with a past tradition, even a borrowed one, thus creating a continuity that is necessarily fragmented, and they trigger a discussion of the greater wish, perhaps, of Israeli society today for continuity, endurance and rootedness. In this context, one may tap into additional cultural trends in Israeli society that strive to return to the "diasporic" roots and criticize the forced rejection of the early Jewish settlement in this country. This also gives rise to wider questions regarding Israeli material culture and identity.

I now wish to repeat my first argument, that contemporary ceramic production, because it is part of the old, established ceramic field that essentially is based on the traditions of craft and

cultural affiliation, cannot exist separately from the historical context and past traditions that are embodied in the material. Therefore, in a certain way it draws from an earlier cultural creation. The connection between contemporary creation and the field's historical sources is mostly delicate, obscure and indirect. The ceramic material itself is the context and it is the bearer of traditional values. Citation in contemporary ceramic work constitutes an explicit, direct indicator of the same context, and thus it serves as an extreme case that brings out the unbreakable bond. The artistic citation in various media corresponds with a certain point in time, and with certain values that are embodied in the cited work. The citation of an earlier ceramic work implemented in the ceramic material fulfills the same parameters, and it produces cultural and artistic continuity.

The ceramic citation utilizes the history of ceramics in many ways. The emotional and cultural repository inherent to the material affect our ability to read the work, and we cannot perceive it as baseless. Citation is, as mentioned above, the expression of the endpoint. Different creators find different, personal expressions and different inspirations in the range between local and global, between historical and contemporary and between universal and personal. All this, within the ideational repository allowed by the field, in the aspects of culture, society and affiliation.

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