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The Isle of Harris Fish Slice

This paper appraises the adaptation of injection moulding, a process quintessentially associated with mass production, as a craft process, with ocean plastic as the raw material.
This process arose following a visit to the small island of Scarp, just off the west coast of Harris, in the Outer Hebrides in 2015. The last permanent residents left in 1971, but historically this treeless island had had a reliable source of timber provided by the sea when washed ashore. Today, the most abundant material by far is ocean plastic. There are conservative estimates of 8million tons of plastic being deposited in the sea every year (Jambeck et al, 2015). Although it is difficult to calculate this accurately, from the image below taken on Scarp's south west coast, for the creative practitioner it is suffice to say that there is a plentiful source of material (see image 1)

Inspired by Max Lamb's location specific process of casting pewter stools on the beach, and, and Studio Swine's Sea Chair, made aboard a fishing boat with the plastic retrieved from fishing nets, I have devised an off-grid injection moulding process that utilises washed-up polypropylene melted over a fire of drift wood to make a utility object (a fish slice) bearing the name of the location where the plastic has been retrieved. This utility souvenir highlights the distribution of a hugely abundant waste material in the world's oceans as in parallel with sea-faring trade routes.
In a recent interview, Alex Groves (one half of Studio Swine) describes the final object as just one part of the project (Groves 2016). The Sea Chair is not a solution to the problem of ocean plastic, but the video raises awareness in a non-depressing way. Groves goes on to say, that having been told that we cannot mix plastics, they do so all the same and process becomes a series of "empirical truths" in that we have to test things for ourselves, "It's good to approach a project with a certain amount of research and knowledge, but also an element of naivety." (Groves 2016, in Lambert & Speed 2017).

With the fish slice, an industrial material and industrial process are adapted as crafted design. The making of the injection moulding tool utilised digital technologies available to all, and a sealant gun has been adapted as the means to inject the plastic (see images 2 & 3). This is practice-led research through making.