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Room to Play: Exploring Process in Contemporary Ceramics

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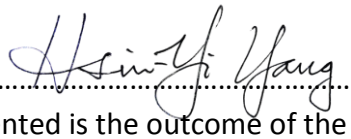
Declaration of Originality

I,  hereby declare that the thesis here presented is the outcome of the research project undertaken during my candidacy, that I am the sole author unless otherwise indicated, and that I have fully documented the source of ideas, references, quotations and paraphrases attributable to other authors.

Abstract

This practice-led research explores my changing relationship with process in developing contemporary ceramic artwork, where the development of artwork begins with *process* as a means of driving a fixed outcome, to becoming an outcome itself. The project is developed from studio practice which investigates various making methodologies, such as using plaster moulds, handbuilding, repetition in making, playing, and engaging with the viewer. My research argues that by focusing on an open-ended process-driven methodology in creating artwork, the experimental process can provide a broader platform for unexpected possibilities to emerge and mature. The research outcome has resulted in handbuilding three groups of artwork, each of which invite the viewer to engage and interact.

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Introduction

Process as art

My practice-led research investigates process in ceramics. It sets out to reverse the usual relationship between ceramics and process, where the development of the work depends on process as a means to arrive at a fixed outcome, and becomes a means in itself.

My research poses the question: How can different relationships with various ceramic processes shape the development and outcome of my practice? Through the exploration of different strategies in making, I altered my approach to making which resulted in the creation of a body of work that has been developed in an open-ended way, exploring relationships between objects, and allowing the viewer to interact with my work.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word 'process' when defined as a noun, refers to 'continuous action', a 'series of actions or events', a 'proceeding', a 'course or mode of action, a procedure.'[1] It is an action that involves development and progress in moving forward. In all forms of art, the process of making is the means to create an artwork.

Poet Joseph Brodsky emphasised the importance of process. He believes that "the process takes precedence over its result, if only because the latter is impossible without the former."[2] Finnish architect Juhani Pallasmaa expanded on Brodsky's perspective and argued that regardless of the perfect outcome, the end result "arises

[1] "process, n.". OED Online. March 2016. Oxford Univerisity Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/151794?rskey=6Kg4eB&result=1 (accessed 14 April).
[2] Joseph Brodsky, *On Grief and Reason: Essays*, 2nd vol. 1st ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995), 301.

from and is refined by the process, instead of being a mere preconception."[3] As for the craft field, Glenn Adamson argued that the relationship between craft and process is intertwined, and claimed that craft is a verb, it "is a way of doing things, not a classification of objects, institutions, or people. It involves a combination of corresponding principles which relate to the underlying ideas in craft, such as the status of craft in the modern art world, material experience, and skill."[4] For Adamson, craft is embedded within the process.

Process in art is often subordinated. It was only in the mid-1960s that an interest in emphasising the process in art was developed, and this was when the term 'process art' was first used. Process art originated as a reaction against minimalism,[5] and concerns how action can be defined as a means in itself. Therefore, rather than creating a work that is deliverable and fixed, the emphasis on the making process becomes the main focus of the artwork.

Artist and critic Kathleen Whitney identified process art as the "art of the difficult", which involves the combination of concept and process in a way that fetishises effort.[6] As my project progressed, I began to create objects that were more playful and open-ended. The focus on making was not to accomplish a preconceived goal, but to allow process to drive the development of the work. This type of process is what Whitney also claimed to be an obsession with effort and repetition engaged in the artistic process that can be carried on without an end point. Instead of process being a means to an end, it became the end itself. During the research, I came to focus on process as the central aspect of my work.

My first project involved a labour-intensive process to arrive at a fixed outcome, the making of which consumed several months during which I trialled a number of demanding casting and assemblage techniques.

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[3] Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Thinking Hand: Existential and Embodied Wisdom in Arthitecture* (Chichester: Wiley, 2009), 81.
[4] Glenn Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft* (New York: Berg, 2007), 4.
[5] Michael Archer, *Art Since 1960* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), 61-77.
[6] Cited in Paula Owen, "Fabrication and Encounter: When Content is a Verb," in *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art*, ed. Maria Elena Buszek (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 89.

However, the time taken to produce the first body of work was not justified in terms of the final outcome. Not only did the viewers fail to grasp the idea behind the work, but I was unsatisfied with the aesthetic outcome. The failure of my laborious project drove me to re-evaluate my approach to making.

I shifted my focus, abandoning the usual making methodology that used process to produce a preconceived idea, and instead harnessed an obsessive focus on the act of the making. I abandoned press-moulding and adopted a more straightforward approach by handbuilding objects. Working this way with minimal tools not only allowed me to work in a more spontaneous way, but also allowed me to focus on the repetitive actions of making by hand. The outcome was the production of a large number of clay objects based on the forms of toy blocks, which I arranged in a number of ways, deliberately avoiding one singular arrangement. The uneven surface quality of the handmade toy blocks involuntarily invited the viewers to touch and play, and the interactive process between the viewer and the objects, caused this project to include the participation of the audience.

Relinquishing control of the development process inevitably leads to uncertainty and ambiguity; if there is no clear designed goal, how will the outcome be determined? I found the work of Zenasni, Besançon and Lubart very helpful on the role of ambiguity in the creative process. They emphasised that ambiguity is an important part of the creative process, and the tolerance of this is necessary.[7]

Repetition was also an important part of my working process. The process to create work through the repetitive routines of making not only provided a sense of progress but also helped to keep my anxiety at bay. The repeated procedures that were carried out in the making created a sense of order that served to accommodate my emotions through the unsettling experience of uncertainty. Art historian, E.H. Gombrich argued that "... the sense of order may be said to serve us first and foremost to orient ourselves in space and time and to find our way in relation to the thing we seek or we

[7] Franck Zenasni, Maud Besançon, and Todd Lubart, "Creativity and Tolerance of Ambiguity: An Empirical Study," *The Journal of Creative Behavior* 42, no. 1 (2008).

avoid."[8] Therefore, the repetition of making acted as a buffer which set aside questions and fear of the outcome, and narrowed my focus in the production process. The contradiction in the repeated process of making not only provoked anxiety in working towards an unknown goal, but it also brought assurance to sooth my unease. In the end, the repetitive process which stimulated the conflictive state of mind, raised my tolerance for creating artwork in an uncomfortable situation. Redirecting my focus enabled me to realise the significance of the act of making in my work.

In choosing to make my objects by hand, and leave traces of the hand on the surfaces, I was aware that I was working within a specific set of histories. Socialist activist William Morris emphasised the value of the handmade as a means of detaching the workmen from the system of machines.[9] For the Arts and Crafts Movement, the traces of the maker's hand were therefore invested with specific aesthetic and ethical significance. The legacy of these ideas is still evident in ceramic practice, through the influence of writers like Bernard Leach.

Rose Slivka argued that the ways in which twentieth-century painting explores process and surface quality has also greatly influenced ceramics.[10] She claims that this influence emphasises timelessness and authenticity in the handmade object.[11]

Leslie Esther, on the other hand, suggested that through the writings of Walter Benjamin, the authentic touch of the hand possesses not only the skills of the craftsman, but the true experiences of life.[12] Despite the fact that leaving traces of the hand on my work was a methodology I employed to allow my process in making to rapidly develop, the investigation into the handmade informed me of the history in craft that is unconsciously reflected on when we engage with the marks of the hand.

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[8] E. H. Gombrich, *The Sense of Order: A Study in the Psychology of Decorative Art* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1979), 151.

[9] The William Morris Internet Archive, "William Morris - How We Live and How We Might Live," https://www.marxists.org/archive/morris/works/1884/hwl/hwl.htm (accessed 21 April).

[10] Rose Slivka, "The New Ceramic Presence," *Craft Horizons* 21/4, no. July/Aug. (1961): 33.

[11] Polly Ullrich, "Workmanship: The Hand and Body As Perceptual Tools," in *Objects and Meaning: New Perspectives on Art and Craft*, ed. M. Anna Fariello and Paula Owen (Lanham, Md: Scarecrow Press, 2004), 203.

[12] Esther Leslie, "Walter Benjamin: Traces of Craft," *Journal of Design History* 11, no. 1 (1998): 6.

My last project embraced an open-ended methodology that allowed the process of making to drive the project, enabling unexpected possibilities to emerge. Central to this last body of work is the concept of play, which developed from my observation of viewers interacting with the objects I had been making. The process of engaging with the notion of play was not only about the playful exploration that the viewer and I have separately embarked upon, but was more about inviting viewers to play *with* me. I began by making a series of playful objects in the studio. These objects led to discovering new object relationships, and incorporating motion into the work.

These works opened up various experimental possibilities in making, which were then evaluated and developed into two bodies of work presented for final examination. One is a set of monochrome objects that stimulates the audience to explore relationships between objects; the other is a set of objects and components that interlock, allowing the viewer to arrange the components in multiple ways.

In considering the role of play in these works, I have been influenced by the work of psychologist J. Nina Lieberman, who believed that the incubation period of play, imagination and creativity is highly significant when coming up with new or unique solutions to problems.[13] Although engaging with play in my project did not provide a specific solution to solving problems in the studio, it did allow new possibilities to emerge. The unexpected and ongoing features of play opened up the potential for the artwork to develop into an open-ended activity.

I consider my project falls within the category of what Gustaf Almenberg calls “participatory art”, which he defines as an approach that shifts the main focus away from the audience and the artwork and stresses the “act of creating”. It focuses on the "beholder in action", where the participants use their choice and intuition as primary tools.[14] Therefore, the audience who interacts with artwork creates their own interpretation of the work; the meaning of the work itself is then endlessly

[13] Josefa Nina Lieberman, *Playfulness: Its Relationship to Imagination and Creativity* (New York: Academic Press, 1977), 110.
[14] Cited in Kathryn Brown, *Interactive Contemporary Art: Participation in Practice* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014), 6.

reinterpreted by the viewer who engages with it.[15] The decision to invite the audience to participate in my work was derived from the concept of embracing an open-ended process-driven methodology to produce work. Therefore, the end result of having the viewer engage with an ongoing process of interaction and reinterpretation closes the circle of meaning in my project.

It was important to understand how the audience would actually respond to my new body of work. To this end, I tested the work in a small exhibition. The outcome of the show informed ideas around object arrangement, display, and participatory issues which all contributed to the final exhibition. I found that by engaging the objects with the viewers, it opened up a variety of possible ways for interaction and object arrangement. Nonetheless, to encourage the audience to play was an extraordinarily hard task; the details of display such as the gallery location, height of the plinth, signage, and the arrangement of the objects, all had a crucial influence on whether the viewer was fully aware that the work was intended for play.

Contextualising artists

Various artists have influenced this project at different stages in the research. In the initial stage, where I was interested in establishing relationships between objects, Dawn Youll's approach to exploring object arrangement allowed me to see how various groupings of objects could create narratives. Emily Floyd's up-scaled sculptures based on toys, demonstrated a new relationship between the audience and the toy. Instead of being able to easily manipulate the object by hand, Floyd's work interacts with the body which allows the viewers to physically explore the space that is created by them. Tony Cragg's *New Stones-Newton's Tones* employs colourful shards of found objects on the ground, and this way of forming a piece of work demonstrated another means of using individual objects. Michael Johansson also uses found objects, but unlike Cragg's work, he forms them into large geometric forms. His methodology to

[15] Ibid.

stack numerous components together compels the audience to rethink how we use everyday objects.

During the second stage of the project, Lily Zuckerman's handmade objects made me aware of how the making process itself can drive the outcome of the artwork. The thousands of figures in Antony Gormley's *Field* project provided me with an understanding of how the repetitive process of making can be expanded to a global collaborative project. Clare Twomey provided a conceptual perspective on the use of repetition. For Twomey, the repetitive process of making was not about the act of production, but the meaning that her process stimulates through references to ceramic history, the making process and role of the viewer in creating meaning.

In the final stage of my research, I examined Dawn Youll's colourful slip cast porcelain objects, which explore the possible tensions that objects can create through forms and arrangement. Her work introduced me to the way relationships between objects can change our perceptions and understanding of those objects, hence encouraging me to discover new relationships within and between objects. I also investigated Taiwanese artist Ming-Shun Cho and American artist Suzanne Stumpf, whose works demonstrated different ways for ceramic objects to interact with the viewer, providing me with an example for reflection on the methods and display of my own work.

Process in art is fundamental. However, the relationship between the maker and the process is never fixed. Through the various making methodologies that have been employed throughout this project, my research argues that by focusing on an open-ended process-driven methodology in creating artwork, the experimental process can provide a broader platform for unexpected possibilities to emerge and mature. The research outcome has resulted in three bodies of work that invite the viewer to explore and engage.

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In Chapter One, I explain the labour-intensive process in my early work which focused on achieving a preconceived idea. The approach to making was inspired by Weisberg's 'ordinary thinking' and Bill Brown's 'thing theory'. Chapter Two describes a critical

change of relationship with the making process, which redirected my research focus to the act of making. Ambiguity, repetitive making, and the marks of the hand are discussed during this stage. Chapter Three describes the shift in my making to embrace an open-ended process-driven project. Concepts such as play, object relationships, and participatory art are explored. This chapter also explains the final outcome of this research, which consists of two bodies of work, and invites the viewer to explore object relationships and to enter into a playful relationship with the work.

Chapter One: Refocusing Process

Introduction

Chapter One investigates my first research project, where the process of making was carried out according to a planned outcome. I describe how my project began and the process and methodologies I undertook in the studio. I also discuss the artists who influenced my work in the early stages of my process. Finally, I explain how this first project led me to change my working methodology.

Employing *process* as a means to achieving a preconceived goal was how my initial relationship with the process began. The first project investigated ideas around the creative process. The outcome was the creation of a body of work that attempted to visualise my insights into the creative process itself. A fundamental question that emerged at this early stage was whether a plan for making the body of work was possible, and if so, could the resultant objects enable the viewers to visually understand how the creative process is a result of accumulated experiences from the past? The fulfilment of my preconceived idea involved a large and laborious investment in material experiments, mould-making, the repetitive process of press-moulding, and the exploration of object arrangement. The year-long project ended in failure due to the fact that the viewers could not visually interpret my ideas through the resultant work, thus, instead of focusing on the idea of creativity, they were side-tracked by the object forms I employed in my work. Recognising this failure in my first project compelled me to refocus on how process would be able to successfully operate in my research.

Investigation into the creative process

Fig. 1. Hsin-Yi Yang, *Inspiration* (experiment)

My earliest project consisted of colourful forms of everyday objects which were assembled out of amalgamations of small clay toy blocks. The forms were created by using plaster moulds. The small clay components were first created by single-piece press moulds. After accumulating a sufficient number of components, the clay toy blocks were then pressed into larger moulds, creating the effect that the resulting forms were made up of toy blocks. In this work, I tried to share my perspective of the creative process by projecting my insights onto everyday objects. The aim was to visually display how the creative process can be inspired from a variety of things. The objects that were constructed with various toy blocks were an attempt to portray the notion of how the development of artworks is an accumulated process that integrates other existing things, such as knowledge, artworks, personal experiences, landscape, environment, technique and so on.

Fig. 2. Hsin-Yi Yang, *Revealing Truth*

The methodology of pressing small units into a larger mould originated from work I undertook prior to my candidature, as can be seen in *Revealing Truth* (see Fig. 2). This work was made of slip cast porcelain toy blocks that were squeezed into a larger toy-block-shaped mould. The work articulated how the creations we make are a combination of personal experience, knowledge and skill which we are continually acquiring. For the first project of this research, I intended to extend this idea and making methodology into a new body of work. I wanted to express the way that the inspiration to make things is accumulated through the experience of everyday life. To articulate this idea through employing object forms, I decided to create slightly up-scaled versions of the objects using forms of items that are used in everyday life. The reason to up-scale the objects was to visually take the objects out of their original context—to make them quite different. So by changing the scale of the object it enabled the viewers to re-analyse and rethink their previous encounters with these objects, stressing the existence of commonplace objects that viewers may have ignored. The disconnected and altered multiple components served to show the

viewers how the process of creating an object is developed though the accumulation of human intentions which imbue the object with meanings.

This extended idea led to a confrontation with the obstacles I had imposed on myself when creating. As a young undergraduate, creating art seemed to be a magical process. I believed it was necessary to make novel artworks that had to have "independence from tradition and precedents, structural or material constraints".[16] I thought that meaningful ideas should somehow appear out of thin air; for two years I waited for inspiration to somehow magically occur. I steered away from artistic references and avoided creating anything that resembled the work of another artist. However, in reality, the attempt to be innovative did not lead me to produce noteworthy work, but rather it limited my ability to be in any way original. In the end, for my undergraduate exhibition, I decided to take a different approach when developing artworks—I became focused on exploring my own personal experience in learning to make art. I created a series of work that explored the obstacles that I had encountered in the developmental process of my practice. By investigating my own experience, I discovered the inspiration that could continuously feed my practice. When I came to postgraduate studies, I drew from the experience of my previous making and expanded my research focus to further explore the creative process. My goal was to articulate how past experiences that builds up the incremental decisions we choose to make as artists, cumulatively influence the formation of the work.

Psychologist Robert W. Weisberg has investigated the constraints regarding creative thinking in production. He raises the concept of 'ordinary thinking' in creativity. Weisberg argued that ordinary thinking "begins with the continuity with the past: we use the old to generate the new."[17] This conclusion was arrived at from Weisberg's examination of various types of creative thinking. He discovered that even though some creative products are extraordinary, the way of thinking in the developmental

[16] Pallasmaa, *The Thinking Hand: Existential and Embodied Wisdom in Arthitecture*, 112.
[17] Robert W. Weisberg, *Creativity: Beyond the Myth of Genius* (New York: W.H. Freeman, 1993), 10.

process is no different from the same cognitive processes that are involved in making dinner or driving to work.[18]

I wanted to demystify the creative process, so I began to use Friedrich Froebel's toy blocks as a base form. Frobel's system of geometric blocks were first invented for educational purposes. He believed that early education should be based on natural play, steering young children into the path of learning. Although his contribution in children's education was noted for development in progressive learning and creative play, he was also criticised by present-day educators for his religious approach towards education. As a Christian educator, he believed that teaching and learning were all attempts to extend God's intention to guide the human race.[19] Froebel's religious attitude towards his development in creating the toy blocks inspired me to employ these toy blocks not only to symbolise the structure of fundamental learning, but also as a traditional belief system in creation that reflected the obstacles in my learning process. As a result, I began to explore various aspects in the creative process through integrating toy blocks into my work to find new ideas in making.

Creating an artwork out of small components reflected on Weisberg and Frobel's theories. Weisberg's idea of creating the new from the old provided me with another perspective on the creative process, which grew out of my postgraduate work where I also used the block forms. Frobel's invention of the toy blocks was not only intended to educate young children, but also to cultivate creativity. This expanded the meaning of my use of the blocks.

Besides exploring how the creative process was full of constraints, my first project also investigated how the basic things we often neglect in life are also imbued with meaning. We all have things we enjoy possessing and collecting, but how do things relate to us? I was interested in Bill Brown's 'thing theory', especially his claims that we look through objects to reveal history, society, nature, culture and ourselves, but we often overlook the importance of objects in our everyday life. We ignore objects because we are so confident that they are invariable and unchanging. Emotions

[18] Ibid., 10-11.
[19] John P. Manning, "Re-discovering Froebel: A Call to Re-examine his Life & Gifts", *Early Childhood Education Journal* 32, no.6 (2005): 375.

towards an object are often diminished due to the normality of its existence through time, whether it is a cup used on a daily basis or a chair placed in the living room. However once an object stops working for us, the status of an object begins to change. For Brown, objects and things are different; objects are items we use but don't pay enough attention to, but once an object is interrupted or breaks away from our daily routine, it causes us to be attentive to the object itself. The object then becomes a 'thing', such as a broken glass, a memorable cup or a familiar object placed in an unexpected environment. What Brown's theory really emphasised was not the meaning of the object itself, but the significance of how we establish relationships with objects.[20] He further distinguished two approaches to how we interpret and connect to things. There is the usefulness aspect that we see in ordinary things, and there is the intention aspect where we value or fetishise the objects.[21] The two approaches towards our relationship with things helped me understand how the same object can be perceived objectively and/or subjectively by people. Unravelling the meanings of things enabled me to understand how my practice explores the subjectivity of 'things', where I attempt to convert everyday objects into somewhat unfamiliar things, stimulating the emotional aspect of the viewer.

Another explanation of object meaning that informed my early work was provided by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, who argued that objects are profoundly connected to the self. They contribute to cultivation of the self which stabilises our consciousness. They believed that "the material environment that surrounds us is rarely neutral; it either helps the forces of chaos that makes life random and disorganised or it helps to give purpose and direction to one's life".[22] In other words, the objects that are meaningful to us bring order to our lives. In seeing these things we remind ourselves of our personal goals, the reflection of oneself, memories or the social connections that bond others with us.

Things are so intimately related to us that it is impossible to live a day without touching things and the more we interact with them, the more meanings are created

[20] Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 1 (2001): 4.
[21] Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 1 (2001): 5.
[22] Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 17.

through the interactive process. From French philosopher Bruno Latour's perspective, technology or "nonhuman" things, have the ideas and morals of their makers; we are forced to learn how to manipulate and interact with technology to make our lives easier. For example, we must learn how to use a door knob to operate a door, so that the door can successfully function as a temporary wall. The object, in this context, becomes an intermediary between the engineer and the user. These design ideas, task performance that attempts to replace human labour, adapt the object to allow it to possess human characteristics so that we begin to see these objects as anthropomorphic. Things that possess human characteristics then gradually shape our minds and relationships with the world around us.[23] In other words, "Things do not exist without being full of people, and the more modern and complicated they are, the more people swarm through them".[24]

Whether we decide to take an initiative approach to connect with objects as Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton suggest, or prefer Latour's concept of rediscovering objects of technology that have subtly not only intertwined within our lives but have a life of their own, things are embedded with meanings that serve not only our physical but mental needs. Moreover, we are so used to interacting with objects that we unconsciously use them as a way to communicate, such as the gifts that we choose to give to another person which reveal our intentions—the gift can be a message of blessing, gratitude, warning, apology, a recall from the past or even to emphasise one's presence. Armed with the understanding of how we interact with objects, I decided to apply the forms of everyday objects into my work.

[23] Bruno Latour, "Where are the Missing Masses?," in *The Sociology of a Few Mundane Artifacts in Shaping Technology/Building Society: Studies in Sociotechnical Change,* ed. W.E. Bijker, J. Law (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 225-258.

[24] Bruno Latour, "The Berlin Key or How to Do Words with Things," in *Matter, Materiality, and Modern Culture*, ed. P.M. Graves-Brown (London: Routledge, 2000), 10.

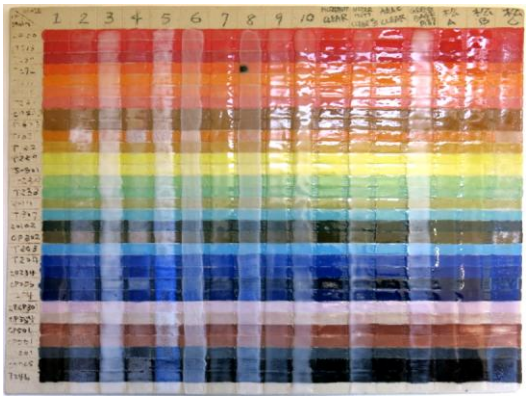

Fig. 3. Hsin-Yi Yang, colour slip and glaze tests

Fig. 4. Hsin-Yi Yang, casting slip tests

My attempt to create a group of things was not only to recall our experience and imagination, I also wanted to integrate my exploration regarding the creative thinking process into this work. The idea of building objects through small clay (toy) blocks was an attempt to visually explore the creating process of an object/artwork, to articulate the rough developmental process of creation that involves trials, errors, constraints, chance and other frustrating aspects that are not visible to the eye.

Before I began to make my work, I needed to acquire a full understanding of the materials I would be working with so I could decide which methodology to adopt. In my first work, I employed the same methodology of making I had worked with before, which was pressing slip cast toy blocks into a larger mould to form a solid shape. To take this technique and idea to another level, I assembled these smaller components into larger and more complicated forms. I reasoned that if I succeeded in creating a complex form and up-scaling the objects, this established methodology of making could be extensively applied to articulate other issues in the future.

As I experimented with various casting slips, colour slips and glazes, I also began to create a large apple-shaped press mould for the slip cast components to be extruded into. Because I wanted to upscale my objects, the enlarged apple-shaped mould was made to allow enough internal space to experiment with. Pressing smaller components into a larger mould was a crucial experimental process. I wanted to see if the small clay

toy blocks would still hold together when the scale of the everyday object was expanded.

Fig. 5. Hsin-Yi Yang, first attempt to press slip cast toy blocks into press mould

The process of slip casting the toy blocks should have been relatively quick but in reality turned out to be very time consuming. I not only had trouble working with the slip I had mixed, but also with the additional organic materials I added to the slip to reduce weight, rendering the slip difficult to use. The process of casting was slow due to the high ratio of organic material and water and the plasticity of the clay was weak, so it was difficult for the cast toy blocks to pick up the entire form of the press mould when pressed into the mould while still retaining their integrity.

Fig. 6. Hsin-Yi Yang, experimenting with various press-moulding methodologies and colour

The outcome of the experiments resulted in spaces and unfilled parts of the apple form which could not be considered a success. It was important to me that the contour of the object was obvious; I wanted the viewer to be able to recognise that the grouped objects were based on a recognisable thing from everyday life. To understand more of the structure of the material, I began to experiment with various press-moulding methodologies and colour as seen in Figure 6. The experiments involved how much pressure I exerted when pushing the components together. The results showed how some components were pressed together more closely and firmly than others. The dilemma with the slip cast components was if the clay toy blocks were not pushed hard enough together they did not pick up the complete form of the plaster mould, and often the structure would collapse. On the other hand, if I pressed the blocks more strongly into the mould, the shapes of the individual blocks were lost. I also abandoned the idea of employing various colours in one object as the variety of colours made the work too confusing for the viewer to process and they could not recognise the objects.

The frustrating issues that arose when using the casting slip made me realise I would need to choose a different making technique. I decided to use press-moulding to create the clay toy blocks. Although this required more labour and time to create a sufficient number of components for assembly, the use of press-moulding guaranteed that I would be able to progress in my project.

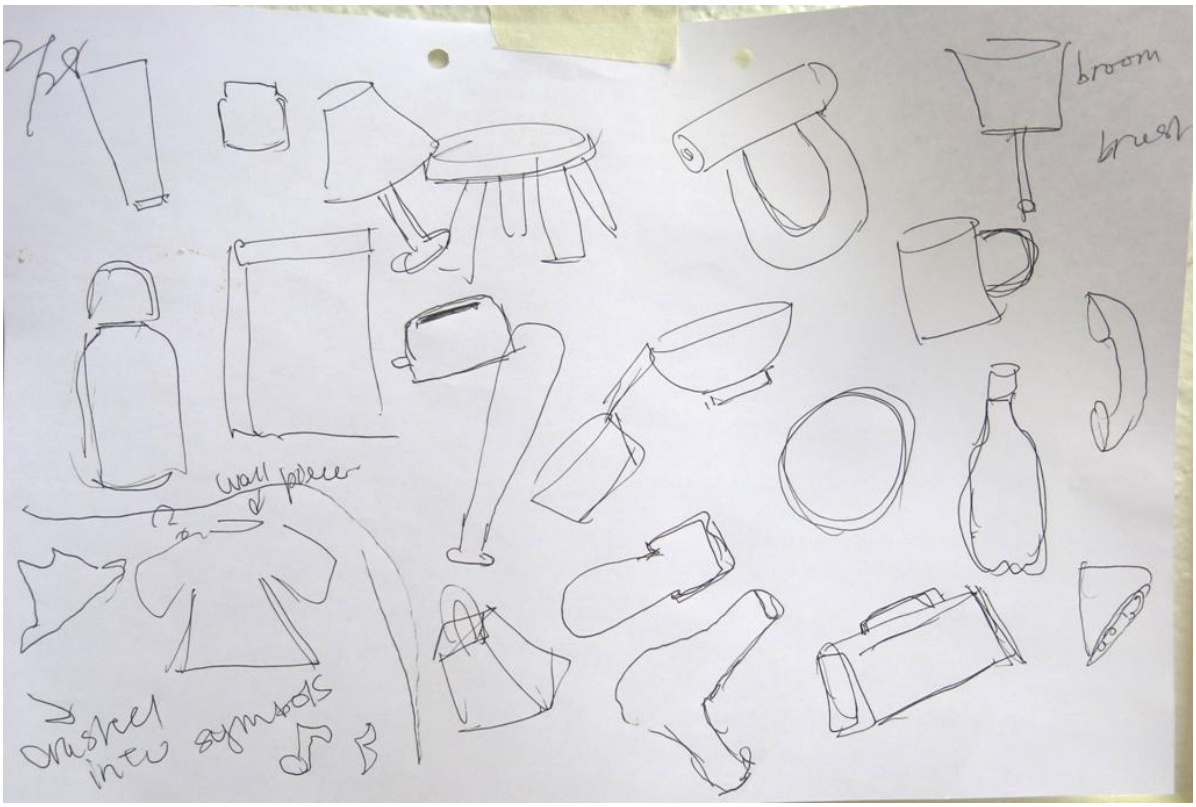

Fig. 7. Hsin-Yi Yang, sketch for making

In order to create objects that would disclose the process of creative development, the small clay toy block components must be randomly pressed together to form into an object. The shape of the clay toy blocks that were employed to form the objects are recognisable while distorted at the same time to visually cue a sense of a developmental process. This methodology in making is essential to enhance the idea of the building/learning process that an idea or an object must undergo.

With the moulds and making methodologies decided, I began to think about the type of objects I wanted to create—objects of simple form that were larger than their original real-life scale. To simplify and to enlarge objects was an attempt to make familiar objects unfamiliar. The objects had to be things that were used every day by most people and also needed to include various categories, such as things from the kitchen, living room, study room etc., so that the initial group of objects had a sense of diversity that could represent a vague idea of things. I wanted to see how the first set of objects would appeal to the audience before I continued to make more. I also had to consider forms that kept their integrity and were recognisable once the details were taken away. Moreover, I had to use shapes that were practical for mould-making.

Fig. 8. Hsin-Yi Yang, large press moulds

I resolved to use domestic objects such as a wine bottle, book, funnel, jar, water bottle, and a tube (i.e. toothpaste). Because I wanted my work to be scaled up, I had to make my own prototypes to create the plaster moulds.

Fig. 9. Hsin-Yi Yang, preparation for making larger moulds

Creating large moulds was extremely labour-intensive, but it was an essential process that would enable the efficient production of my future artwork. Making plaster moulds requires planning, precision, experience and technical skill. The difficulty of working with plaster is that the formation process work is in liquid form with strict time limitations. To form a plaster mould, you need to build a space with clay or other supporting material where the plaster will form into the shape of the mould. Figure 9 shows how the first top half of a mould was prepared. An orange board was located where the seam of the mould was planned to be. A clay wall that is higher than the object was then built around the orange board. After sealing all the seams that might have allowed the plaster to leak, the plaster was then poured into the top half. Plaster thickens as time passes, and once the plaster became solid, the mould was ready for carving and refinement. The creation of a plaster mould requires experience beyond the making; it is crucial to know when it is the right time to take the next step.

My process for mould-making began with handbuilding the objects out of clay to my desired scale. After I smoothed and lightly polished the surface, I then began my plaster moulds (see Fig. 13). Most of the moulds were designed to be a two-piece

mould which decreased the number of seams that would be left on the final object. Some moulds had to be designed in three pieces because the forms of some on the objects created a narrow tunnel in the mould, increasing the difficulty of pressing components into the space. To solve this problem, I created another mould part which would enable me to easily press components into these areas.

Fig. 10. Hsin-Yi Yang, one-piece moulds for making clay toy blocks

My next step was to create the moulds for the small components. For this purpose, I chose to make a one-piece mould instead of a two-piece mould. This was possible as the objects that were to be pressed into the larger moulds would only be viewed from three sides at the most. It was only the cylinder-shaped component which I had to make a two-piece mould so that the object could maintain its fundamental form while being pressed into the mould. The scale of the clay toy blocks was also refined during the making. I realised that not only did I need to have larger blocks to increase the diversity of the texture (compressed clay toy blocks) on the larger objects, but as the up-scaled objects became larger, the ratio of the toy blocks also needed to be amplified. As a result, I created two sets of plaster moulds for the toy blocks—one was the original size that I had planned, and the other was slightly larger.

Fig. 11. Hsin-Yi Yang, process for creating a clay toy block

The process for creating the clay toy blocks through a one-piece mould was easy. Firstly, I took a reasonable amount of clay and pressed it into the bottom of the mould. I also made sure to push harder into the corners to ensure the clay had picked up all the curves in the mould. Secondly, I made a coil to press into the walls to create the sides of the clay toy blocks. Finally, I created another coil to seal off the top. I left a hole in the centre for airflow, thus avoiding air being trapped in the object which may have resulted in the object blowing up in the kiln. It also allowed the block to be more flexible while being pressed into the larger moulds. After 10 to 15 minutes, the surface of the clay toy block was dry enough to be taken out of the plaster mould, and yet not too dry that it could not be manipulated into other forms.

Fig. 12. Hsin-Yi Yang, clay toy blocks

The shift to making the clay toy blocks by press-mould solved a variety of problems as I no longer had to wait for the mould to dry. I had more control of how I wanted the clay toy blocks to be pressed into the larger moulds without having to worry about losing the form of the objects. The press-mould components not only allowed me to progress greatly in my project, they also provided better structure when it came to creating the larger objects. The only problem was, in order to create a single larger object, a larger number of small components were required. It was at this stage that I began the laborious process of repetitive making. The number of components required to make an object ranged from 70 to 200. For some of the larger objects it could take anywhere from two to three working days just to make the components.

Fig. 13. Hsin-Yi Yang, process for creating an object

After finally producing these objects, I confronted the issue of applying colour slip. In the works I had made prior to my candidature, the colour slips had first been applied onto the casting moulds and then slip cast with porcelain slip. But because I had changed the use of clay and making methodology, the use of this technique was no longer successful. The applied colour skin on the clay toy blocks cracked severely when pushed into the larger moulds. As a result, I had to choose another method for applying colour to my objects.

My first attempt to colour the objects was to employ an air brush to paint them directly, however the colour slip was not able to reach into the gaps between the extruded clay toy blocks. Therefore, to distribute colour evenly over the entire object, I decided to paint the colour slip into the gaps first before spraying with an airbrush. My

final objects were finished with another layer of colour glaze to obtain a strong saturated colour.

Fig. 14. Hsin-Yi Yang, object display I (experiment)

By overcoming all of the technical obstacles, I finally acquired my first set of objects. These are objects that I believe can provide a general sense of everyday things while articulating the developmental process of creation. The outcome of the work was close to what I had anticipated, however I still felt that there was a need to create more objects for the work to successfully deliver my concept.

The next phase was to explore how the viewers would respond to my work, and so the challenge became how to display my group of objects. My initial intention was to put all the objects together, however the complexity and diversity of so much form and colour placed together made the objects difficult for the viewer to take in. As a result, I decided to arrange the objects in smaller groups to see how the effects could differ.

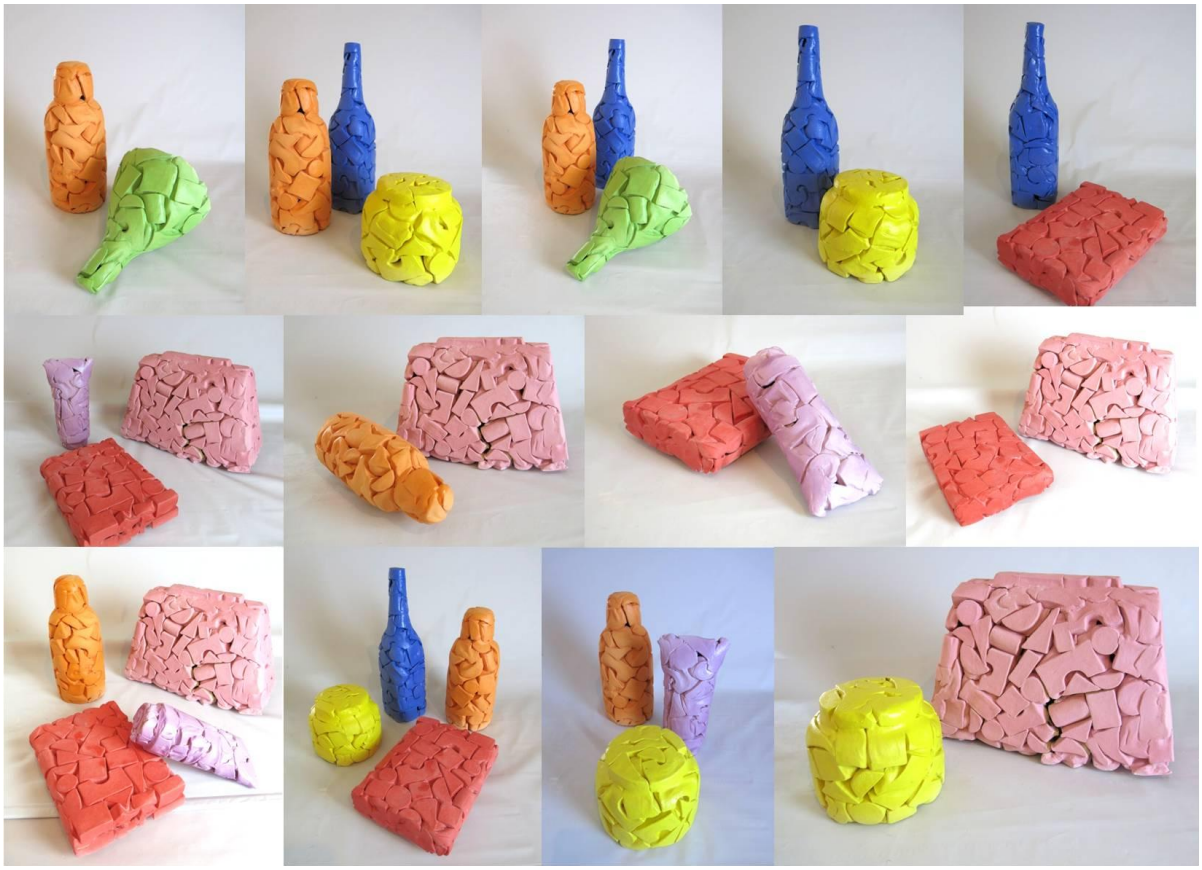

Fig. 15. Hsin-Yi Yang, object display II (experiment)

By exploring various possibilities in object arrangement, I found the groups that consisted of two or three objects had a clearer and crisper visual effect than the entire group together. I also realised by arranging fewer objects, the meaning of the set could alter due to the specific objects I chose to combine, and they were more visually satisfying (see Fig. 15).

Fig. 16. Dawn Youll's exhibition, *Beginning Approaches*

British ceramicist Dawn Youll has demonstrated the importance of object arrangement and how different groups of objects can create a different narrative. Youll creates colourful slip cast porcelain objects inspired from her everyday life. She begins with two-dimensional forms and develops them into a three-dimensional object. The details of the object are mostly stripped away, some even to its most basic shape, such as a cylinder or a rectangle. The largest object in the group would usually not exceed 30 cubic centimetres. The different objects are then grouped together to explore possible relationships between colour, scale and form.

In her exhibition at Cardiff Metropolitan University in 2008, she investigated the juxtaposition of objects in the exhibition space. The objects in the show included identifiable objects, such as a white house, a pile of logs, car sinking in a pool, a deer, and fire; and objects that were more ambiguous forms, such as flames and a hill. The objects were each placed separately on plinths to explore the narratives that are generated through the different alignment of objects.

Fig. 17. Dawn Youll's exhibition, *Beginning Approaches* (detail)

Fig. 18. Dawn Youll, *Within a Landscape*

I was interested in Youll's display of the objects in the exhibition space. Instead of placing all the objects together, she decided to place a neutral white house-shaped object centred behind the other displayed objects. Hence, the stark house is surrounded by other colourful objects. Her clever display invited viewers to not only appreciate the object alone, but also to see past the object and relate it to other objects sitting on nearby plinths. With different points of view depending on how the viewer approaches, the objects that are seen together create a very different narrative. As seen in Figure 17, when the viewer focuses from a particular viewing angle on the form shaped like a pile of logs, the house automatically becomes part of the picture. The arrangement of the objects then cues a different narrative. In this case, the juxtaposition might suggest a feeling such as warmth or domesticity. In my initial plan for creating a group of objects, I did not consider how objects might create certain narratives. Youll's approach to object arrangement inspired me to consider other possible displays, such as choosing fewer items to be grouped together or to make more everyday objects which when assembled might create a strong sense of familiarity. I did not reject the notion my work might suggest narratives, as all the objects I made reflect various aspects of everyday life. Grouping smaller numbers, for example a wine bottle placed next to a jar, might cue the idea for a certain scenario, emotion or experience in life. The other solution of making more everyday objects would then rule out the narrative of the objects and cause the viewer to see the group

of objects as a whole. However, assembling a large group of my objects would visually create an overload of information for the eye to process.

Fig. 19. Emily Floyd, *Steiner Rainbow*

The use of Frobel's toy blocks in my earlier work led me to investigate Australian contemporary artist Emily Floyd. The employment of toys for me was an attempt to engage with education, which I consider contributes greatly to the development of the creative process. Floyd engages toys from a different perspective; she not only employs toys as a means to cultivate creativity through education, moreover, she uses toys to explore a broad range of concerns, including feminism, local social history, literature, and typography.

Floyd's *Steiner Rainbow* (see Fig. 19) amplifies the scale of an actual toy. The work consists of nine wooden parts that can be stacked together to form a colourful rainbow. The work is inspired by Steiner's educational ideas and derives from a toy still

used today in Waldorf schools.[25] The forms of the toys were designed to be simple so that it was possible to stimulate the imagination of children.

Floyd's up-scaled toy demonstrates a different perspective when engaging with toys. Toys are usually made to a size that is comfortable for children to manipulate with their hands, but when the object becomes larger than the person, the relationship between the viewer and the object changes. In Floyd's case, the wooden arches can be moved by the viewer, however due to the size of the objects, the viewer cannot easily play with them. To move the object around in the space requires upper body strength to push, pull or lift. Due to the fact the experience of play in Floyd's work can only be carried out to a certain extent, the viewers engage with the work from a different perspective. Instead of constantly rearranging the objects to the desired position or function by holding the pieces in their hands, the viewers themselves move around to interact with the large objects, allowing a physical exploration of the space that is created when the work is rearranged. The idea of incorporating play and interaction with the viewer became significant in my final project, which is discussed in Chapter Three.

[25] Sue Cramer, "Emily Floyd: Far Rainbow," in *Emily Floyd: Far Rainbow*, ed. Sue Cramer (Melbourne: Heide Museum of Modern Art, 2014), 27.

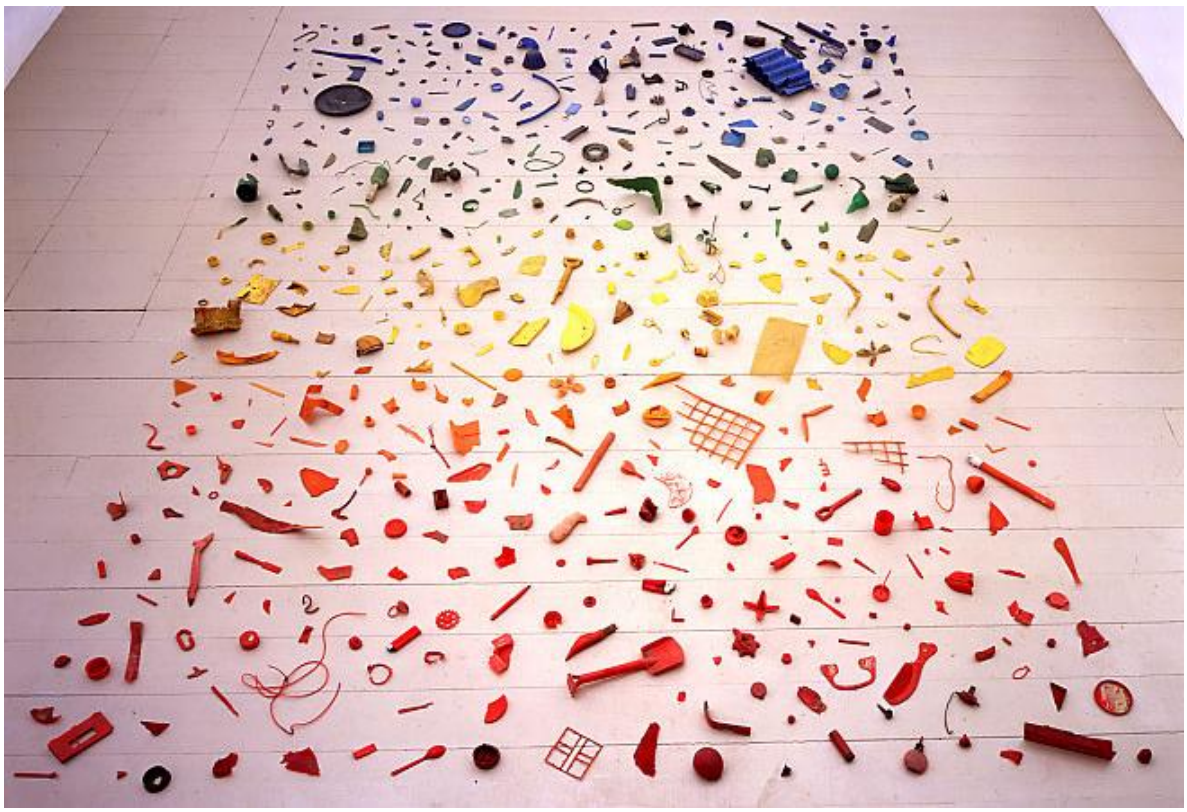

Fig. 20. Tony Cragg, *New Stones-Newton's Tones*

My interest in creating everyday objects drove me to investigate other artists who use everyday objects in their work. One of the artists I examined was British sculptor Tony Cragg, who provided an example of how multiple objects can be explored when creating artwork. Cragg is an artist who works with a wide range of materials, including wood, stone, cast bronze, glass, aluminum, cast iron, and found objects.[26]

The installation *New Stones-Newton's Tones* (see Fig. 20) was one of Cragg's works that involved the use of multiple objects—in this case discarded plastic fragments he had collected in Germany. The work was neatly distributed on the floor according to Newton's spectrum: dark red, red, orange, yellow, green, blue and violet.[27] Looking at Cragg's colourful found objects scattered across the floor made me not only want to search for familiar objects that I could connect to, but he displayed interesting object

[26] Robert Kudielka, "Working Things - Reflections on Tony Cragg's Sculptures," in *Tony Cragg: In and Out of Material*, ed. Stiftung Wilhelm Lehmbruck Museum (Köln: König, 2006).
[27] Arts Council Collection, "Tony Cragg's New Stones - Newton's Tones, 1978," http://www.artscouncilcollection.org.uk/artwork/new-stones-newtons-tones (accessed 6 March).

forms and compositions in such a way I had previously never considered. I was inspired by the vivid colours and related to how the work was created by the use of multiple pieces, stimulating me to think about the possibilities of how I could apply various colours to the toy block components in the one large piece. The work reflected on Bill Brown's thing theory, where every day insignificant items that we do not pay attention to became significant due to Cragg's attempt to de-familiarise the objects. The discarded objects so carefully placed in the gallery provided a different context for examining objects. Through Cragg's arrangement, the objects revealed aspects of themselves which were otherwise unnoticeable, such as form and composition as part of a larger more intentionally-recognisable entity.

Employing familiar object forms in my artwork would inevitably change the way the viewer would interpret the objects. However, the extrusion of toy blocks that formed the everyday object did not allow the viewer to interpret the work as I intended. The lost contour of the toy blocks directed the audience to focus more on the larger object forms than the toy blocks, and therefore my idea could not be successfully articulated. It became important for me to be aware of the degree of loss of form I would allow in my objects. I realised that Cragg's approach to have multiple fragments individually placed on to the ground provided a way for the viewer to identify each of the objects on its own, and as a whole. This approach encouraged me to think of the possibilities of making work that focused just on the components.

Fig. 21. Michael Johansson, *Rubik's Kitchen*

Another artist who uses found everyday objects is Swedish contemporary artist Michael Johansson. Johansson explores the relationship between objects and space. He creates sculptures out of found objects and then packs these objects in an orderly way into large geometric forms. The colour-coordinated sculptures sometimes sit on their own, but at other times are methodically organised to fill up a specific space located indoors or outdoors.[28]

Although I do see similarities between Johansson's work and mine, such as use of colour and applying multiple components to form a shape, Johansson's way of making work is very different to mine. His methodology is to search for objects that can perfectly fit together, like creating a three-dimensional puzzle from scratch. But the toy blocks I have created are soft clay objects that can be pressed into any space. Employing found objects in the making of work is very different from making by hand; the former involves selecting an existing object which limits its development and

[28] Engström P. Burström M., Jónasdóttir Ý., "Recollection: Michael Johansson," (Ystad2009).

potential. Making an object allows the artist to create pieces that have not existed before.

Johansson's way of organising found objects to form a sculpture stimulates the viewer to think about our relationship with these objects, which again reflects on thing theory. The integrity of the object serves as a means to directly link our connections with the components situated within Johansson's work. The neatly organised objects encouraged me to rethink the arrangements of everyday objects in a different context, such as methods of storage, mass production, and arranging things for consumption.

Viewer responses

The process of making my earliest work was about fulfilling a predetermined outcome, yet after receiving feedback on those works, I noticed that the viewers did not interpret the work as I had anticipated. My initial intention was to stimulate the viewer to think about the use of toy blocks and the meaning of the everyday objects, and how the forcefully pressed-together toy blocks to form an object signalled how the process of development may be unpleasant. However, some viewers regarded the work as a form of upcycling, because the toy block components were too distorted to be seen at first glance; some were distracted by identifying the object; and others had difficulty seeing the toy blocks. The audience response was surprising and was not a reflection of my intentions, which forced me to confront the fact that my project had failed.

This presented me with a dilemma on how I would approach my next project. I asked myself whether I should carry on with this laborious—and unsuccessful—project that had taken a year to develop, or find another approach to making. My initial decision was to stay in my comfort zone and attempt to create something else using a similar making methodology. However, the intense labour in making focused my perspective and opened my mind to consider other possibilities. I decided to trust my instinct, challenge myself and explore a radically different process in making.

Conclusion

Process in my earliest making stage was engaged in a very traditional way; it served as a vehicle to help my work progress and to achieve the preconceived outcomes I had planned. I began with investigating theories such as Robert Weisberg's concept on creative thinking and Bill Brown's thing theory. I found Brown's concept significant in my early stage of research, his argument helped me to understand my unconscious choices in employing objects in my work. Employing objects is a metaphoric way to investigate the issues of people through objects, however Brown made me aware of the profound relationship between object and people. Moreover, the object, as Bruno Latour claimed, is not only embedded with human intentions but returns to continuously affect our behaviour. The intertwined human-object relationship is evidently impossible to separate one from the other. The result of my project to create a range of various objects that were formed by clay toy blocks, providing a platform for viewers to involuntarily explore their relationships with the objects, was not successful. The exploration of the viewers' deep connections with things resulted in me overlooking the purpose of the toy blocks, and as a result this caused a mismatch between my expectation and the audience interpretation.

The works created in my first project were the result of my earlier ideas of the creative process. The plan to create everyday objects with plaster moulds led to a more laborious process of making than I had anticipated. In the end, the visual outcome of the objects failed because it did not allow the audience to interpret and interact the way I expected. I realised the various processes I had explored in the studio had taken over the project, therefore I needed to re-evaluate my research focus.

Chapter Two: A Transitional Stage

Introduction

In Chapter One, I described my early attempts to create a group of objects that attempted to fulfil a preconceived idea. The unsuccessful outcome resulted in a radical change of focus in the development of my work. This chapter describes how the failure of my first project opened up a new exploration process.

Exposing myself to new possibilities was the main focus of this stage, however I was sceptical about developing work with an unclear goal in mind. I questioned the significance in this shift of process which I forced myself to take on, and the uncertainty involved in this exploration period made me extremely anxious. Difficulties in finding a new mode of making, required because of the need to make components more efficiently, led to a making-by-hand approach. This end result drove my practice into a repetitive process of handbuilding toy blocks. The system of repetitive production reflected in Kathleen Whitney's definition of process art, in which the process of making itself becomes the focus of the work, leading to an obsessive approach that fetishizes effort.[29] Her argument inspired me to incorporate the idea of process into my work.

In this chapter, I describe the change in my working methods, which led to my exploration of hand making, and my use of the process of repetitive making to calm my anxiety. I discuss artists who influenced me at this stage, such as Lily Zuckerman, Antony Gormley, and Clare Twomey. Lastly, I discuss how this transitional stage redirected my methodologies and led the way to process-driven practice which allowed me to embrace open-ended outcomes.

[29] Cited in Owen, "Fabrication and Encounter: When Content is a Verb," 89-90.

My first project was driven by a preconceived concept in which process was subordinated. However, the forms I created misled viewers, leading them to interpret my idea in ways I had not intended. The second project in my candidature involved a phenomenal change in making; I moved away from press-moulding and engaged with handbuilding. The engagement with the technical mould-making process narrowed my focus on how to successfully create a complicated form and caused me to neglect other possibilities. To support my new approach, I changed techniques. This new experimental process enabled me to take on a more spontaneous way of working with clay. It also shifted the focus of my project from a relatively preconceived outcome to the act of making itself. I abandoned the time-consuming process of planning the objects I wanted to make and indulged the experimental process of making, where forms were quickly made and ideas were constantly changing. This was a new experience for me—which was both liberating and frightening.

New encounters in making

Fig. 22. Hsin-Yi Yang, *Play blocks*

I have discussed how, in my first project, my earliest undertakings came to an end, causing me to realise that despite the high investment of time and labour in my work, it was not progressing in the direction I had anticipated. My project could not be further advanced; I had to make new decisions to ensure future success. Deciding what to make and how much to shift my focus became my main struggle. I believed all the effort I put into my past work had been fruitless and I needed to find a fresh new framework to work within. The sense of losing control over the project provoked a high level of anxiety, but I knew I had to move on, and keep making.

Zenasni, Besançon and Lubart provided a psychological perspective regarding the general attitude towards ambiguity in creative thinking. They claimed that ambiguity is actually a significant part of the creative thinking process, therefore the more tolerance of ambiguity that an individual has, the more creative energy can be invested in exploring new ideas.[30] I learned that the uncertain experience I had encountered was actually a natural process which is inevitable when new ideas are being developed.

It is clear that tolerating ambiguity in the process of creative thinking is important; it can not only cultivate new ideas and encourage them to emerge, but simultaneously accompanies the investigation of new making methodologies and forms to evolve in practice. The ambiguity of the thinking and making process will eventually challenge the other to unearth potential possibilities. Theoretically, the more opened I am to inviting new ideas to emerge, the higher the possibility for me to find a valuable idea that I can use as an anchor in my future exploration. However, to invite ambiguity into practice can suggest failure because the nature of uncertainty and creative ideation do not always work well together. Many times an uncertain attempt in practice can be easily discarded due to its lack of concept, content or visual effect. Therefore, I was concerned at this stage that the ambiguous developmental process may lead to nowhere.

Engaging with unfamiliar ideas in an uncomfortable situation, more often than not can result in rejecting new and innovative possibilities. To explore new possibilities in my

[30] Zenasni, Besançon, and Lubart, "Creativity and Tolerance of Ambiguity: An Empirical Study."

research was painful; it opened up risks and evoked my fear of failure. My reluctance to approach a new path reflected the experimental results of Mueller, Melwani and Goncalo, who indicated that when it comes to engaging with creative ideas, most people reject those ideas in spite of their desire for creative outcomes. This is because new ideas at any time have not yet been fully acknowledged by the public—because they are new.[31] However, to work in the art field means exploring unique paths and bringing value to things that seem to have less significance to other people. Therefore, it was crucial to remind myself that I should welcome and explore the new possibilities that have surfaced on my artistic journey.

The contradictory situation of wanting to develop ideas and yet resisting change is actually quite common among practicing artists. Artist and educator, Jean Carabine, argues this matter from her own personal experience in making and teaching. She claims that "to tolerate high levels of excitability, experiencing periods of nothingness, chaos, uncertainty, and not knowing",[32] plays a crucial role in becoming an artist, but we only know a little about this developmental process.[33] On the other hand, for an artist to learn from experience, it is essential to "wait for meanings to emerge and then to be able to think about the experience".[34] Yet, to make this type of thinking possible relies on the containment of experience, which is an ability that "bears difficult and overwhelming feelings such as helplessness, panic, confusion, failure, uncertainty, 'letting go', fear, loss, nothingness and despair".[35]

Carabine's articulation of the negative feelings entailed in making work was true for me, but to overcome this barrier it was important to suppress my anxiety and carry on. I needed to be more open about experiencing things I had not experienced before. As a result, I decided to set a time frame of three months to explore other making possibilities, but to continue using the toy blocks as the form. I thought about using the little press-moulded toy blocks I had repetitively used during my earlier project. I

[31] Jennifer S Mueller, Shimul Melwani, and Jack A Goncalo, "The Bias Against Creativity: Why People Desire but Reject Creative Ideas," *Psychological Science* (2011).
[32] Jean Carabine, "Creativity, Art and Learning: A Psycho-Social Exploration of Uncertainty," *International Journal of Art & Design Education* 32, no. 1 (2013): 37.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid., 38.
[35] Ibid.

considered stacking the components together, building an architectural form out of them or using different larger forms to compress the blocks within.

These experimental ideas revolved around the use of the press mould. However to enable myself to explore more freely with these small clay toy blocks, it was important to decrease the amount of labour I had to put into the making. If I could not decrease the time in planning and making the works, I would not have enough time to explore all the ideas I had in mind, and I would be slowed down by the tedious process of press-moulding. For the sake of my experimental exploration, I decided to change my methodology for producing the clay toy blocks. Instead of creating hollow blocks through press-moulding, I considered making solid clay toy blocks through extruding them in long bars and slicing them into 10 or more components at one time. The plan to produce the blocks required customised dies for the extruder. For financial reasons, I had the dies made in Taiwan.

Fig. 23. Hsin-Yi Yang, handbuilt ceramic toy blocks (experiment)

The planning, design, manufacture and shipping of the dies took approximately two months. The long waiting period worried me as my three-month experimental phase set for exploration was almost at an end and I had yet to make any blocks. The need to

keep working in the meantime spurred me to pick up clay and just make something. The result was a handbuilt set of toy blocks (see Fig. 23).

I began with a more traditional way of making, forming an object from the bottom to the top, like a cup. I started by taking a lump of clay that was a little bit more than a handful and pinched the lump of clay into a slab. I then cut out the intended shape with a sharp tool to form the bottom piece of the work. Once the bottom was made, I took another lump of clay and rolled it into a thick coil, extending its length by continuous pinching from palms and fingers until the coil was even. As I attached the coil to the bottom slab, I pressed down from the sides of the coil to the slab, pinching the coil itself to form a clay wall around the slab. Finally, I sealed off the top by attaching coils to the rim and gradually pinching the coil to create an area that would seal off the object. The process of making this group of work started out with a rough idea of the shape. The resulting surface finish of the object showed traces of how the hand interacted with the material in a fluid, loose manner.

At first, the spontaneous attempt at handbuilding the toy blocks did not appeal to me at all. I thought the toy blocks were not meaningful because I had no intention of creating them as a body of work and I was inclined to think of them as a stop gap measure, or a failure. However, they received positive feedback in reviews for their handmade qualities. I asked myself how these clumsy looking toy blocks that were created in less than one night could be more appealing than those from the previous project where I had invested over a year. Although I was happy with the positive response, I was also confused by it. What did the viewers see that I did not pick up? Why did the marks of the hand attract attention?

The quality of the handmaking in my experimental objects revealed the process of the making; their dimpled surfaces invited the viewers to pick up the objects and touch the surface. This is because the distinctive texture of the surface was something the audience could not fully experience through seeing alone. The simple forms of the clay blocks integrating with the uneven surface stimulated the audience to associate the object with other things. Some people thought the objects were unfinished, like a sketch. Others thought the soft texture, which the marks of hand created, resembled

food, such as candy and cheese (like cottage/brie). The viewers experienced the ambiguity of the objects, which made me realise that the uncertain interpretation of the artwork correlates to the exploration process that occurs in my making. This style of making may lead to potential development of the work that is shared by the audience and the maker.

To understand more about the idea of engagement with the hand in practice, I investigated the history of the idea of handmade artwork. The emphasis on making by hand began in the mid-nineteenth century through the Arts and Crafts Movement. This was a movement that responded to the ideas of Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin, John Ruskin and William Morris about the impact of accelerated industrialisation and urbanisation that changed the traditional manual production method of producing items in England. Pugin, Ruskin and Morris stressed the importance of making by hand and how design is inevitably associated with social conditions.[36]

William Morris's lecture, 'The Lesser Arts of Life', promoted the significance of making by hand in factories. He indicated that for workmen to rescue craft from producing tons of meaningless commercial products when they are supposed to be recognised as works of art, the workmen should follow certain making principles to achieve this. Employing pottery as an example, Morris set out five steps that were necessary to create good pottery products. I thought the most interesting explanation was his advice for workmen to directly work with the material to avoid the use of moulds and lathes that removed nuanced variations from the material's surface. He argued, "How can you expect to have good workmen when they know that whatever surface their hands may put on the work will be taken off by a machine?"[37] Morris recognised the new aesthetic that machines had created and claimed that the use of machines indicated a decrease in object value, where the workman is debased because he has been integrated into the industrial production system. Morris believed that enabling factory workmen to make objects by hand could not only build positive conditions for

[36] Janet Koplos and Bruce Metcalf, *Makers: A History of American Studio Craft* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 2.
[37] Morris, William. 'Lesser Arts of Life'. London, GB: ElecBook, 2000. ProQuest ebrary. Web. 23 May 2016. 18.

the workman, but it also had ethical value, meaning the worker who participated in the entire process of making became a better person.

In the middle of the twentieth century, the Arts and Crafts Movement continued to influence potters through the writings of Bernard Leach.[38] At the same time, in 1961, Rose Slivka argued that the new direction of American pottery was not to solve functional problems but to satisfy our aesthetic and psychological necessities.[39] Slivka elaborated on the historical relationship between painting and pottery and argued that the painting methodology of contemporary art has greatly affected ceramics to emphasise and explore the "excitement of surface qualities" and the "artistic validity of spontaneous creative events during the actual working process".[40] In contrast to the nineteenth century generally, makers in the twentieth century shifted from being anonymous craftsman to emphasising the individual.[41] As a result, the traces of the hand on the object were then re-discovered and promoted as a signature, hence the person who made the work became significant.

A closer examination of the marks of the hand can be found in Esther Leslie's essay, 'Walter Benjamin: Traces of Craft', where she explored the way Benjamin repetitively employs artisan metaphors to his various subjects. Via Benjamin's essay 'Story Teller', Leslie links the concepts of craft skills with storytelling, as storytelling reflects a means to recreate experience, and it imitates how experience is processed through memory. The storyteller takes his experience to tell a tale that can be built into the experience of the listeners. Leslie further emphasised how Benjamin's concept of experience revolves around the tactile hand, where the "traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprint of the potter clings to the clay vessel".[42] According to Benjamin,

[38] Ullrich, "Workmanship: The Hand and Body As Perceptual Tools," 203.
[39] Slivka, "The New Ceramic Presence," 36.
[40] The "excitement of surface qualities" refers to texture, colour and form. The "artistic validity of spontaneous creative events during the actual working process" means "to everything that happens to the clay while the pot is being made" ibid., 33.
[41] Ibid., 35.
[42] Walter Benjamin, Harry Zohn, and Hannah Arendt, *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken, 1969), 92.

the authentic touches of the hand are not only traces of the skills of the craftsman, but the true experiences of life.[43]

Leaving hand marks on artwork was not a new thing for me. I had previously worked for a Taiwanese artist who engages with the marks of the hand in a very meticulous way. What I did not realise at the time, was the marks of the hand left behind on the artworks were not an aesthetic choice or a sign of laziness, but symbolised an authentic experience which articulates the life experience of the maker. The embodied knowledge and experience of the handbuilding process, which I acquired over the previous years, did not make me recognise what effect it actually has on the viewers. However, through a newly acquired awareness of how making by the hand had become important and how the marks of the hand were recognised as a form of artistic expression, I came to understand and appreciate the significance of the handmade process.

The new objects displayed the trace of the hand which were left on the object as a result of the handbuilding process. The tactile texture attracted viewers to touch the toy blocks, and I realised that the marks made by the hand made the toy blocks look unfamiliar, which opened up a space for the viewer to explore. Despite the positive effects this had on the viewers, I was uncomfortable with this open-ended process of making. The uncertainty of this developmental stage demonstrated to me my resistance to letting go in the creative process. I realised that to give this process more time, I decided to simply hand make more of these toy blocks and gauge the response. I also allowed myself to step back from taking full control of the process and open up to how others respond to my work.

[43] Leslie, "Walter Benjamin: Traces of Craft," 6.

Fig. 24. Hsin-Yi Yang, colour glaze tests

Although I did not have a clear direction for the work, I did establish clear aesthetic parameters. Developing a new series of work meant making a whole new set of decisions regarding colour, form, scale and display. I noticed that the saturated and bold colours which were used in my earliest work were not suitable in this set of works. The dimpled surfaces of the toy blocks demanded a new choice of colour. The unevenness of the surface created shadows that had more contrast than smooth surfaces, therefore I thought the new objects required a lighter colour to highlight the marks of the hand. To find the most appropriate hue, I carried out a series of glaze and colour slip tests to adapt to my new work (Fig.24).

Fig. 25. Hsin-Yi Yang, handbuilding process

I also refined my approach in making the toy blocks. The form of the toy blocks became more rounded and irregular. Aside from exploring the forms in my work, I also experimented with scale. I realised that creating a similar scale of toy blocks was not playful enough, hence I created objects that ranged from 5cm to 30cm tall. The differing sizes seemed to stimulate the viewer to interact with the objects. While I was interested in this development, I decided to continue to make the objects, deliberately compelling myself to remain in an uncomfortable frame of mind about the eventual outcome.

Fig. 26. Hsin-Yi Yang, repetitive making process

This uncomfortable transitional stage of making resulted in a repetitive experimental process where I made a large number of toy blocks. Dealing with a high level of uncertainty in the creative process, I found that the process of repetitively making in the studio not only made me feel more comfortable in handbuilding objects in a more spontaneous way, but it was also an unconscious way to develop a sense of familiarity

to control my fears and gain strength to explore the unknown of the creative process. Through the unsettling process of making I began to accept the unfamiliarity of the development process and adapted to the state of unknowing which inevitably led to a sense of control over the unexpected exploration.

Creating a large number of toy blocks required a system for their production. I made many objects simultaneously so as to not waste time waiting for the objects to be dry enough to process to the next stage. The repetitive process of making resulted in a different type of labour investment. It was not like press-moulding the clay toy blocks where it was crucial to acquire a certain number of components for making. The process of handbuilding toy blocks was more spontaneous; I could randomly decide the scale and shape of each object, which made the process of making more enjoyable.

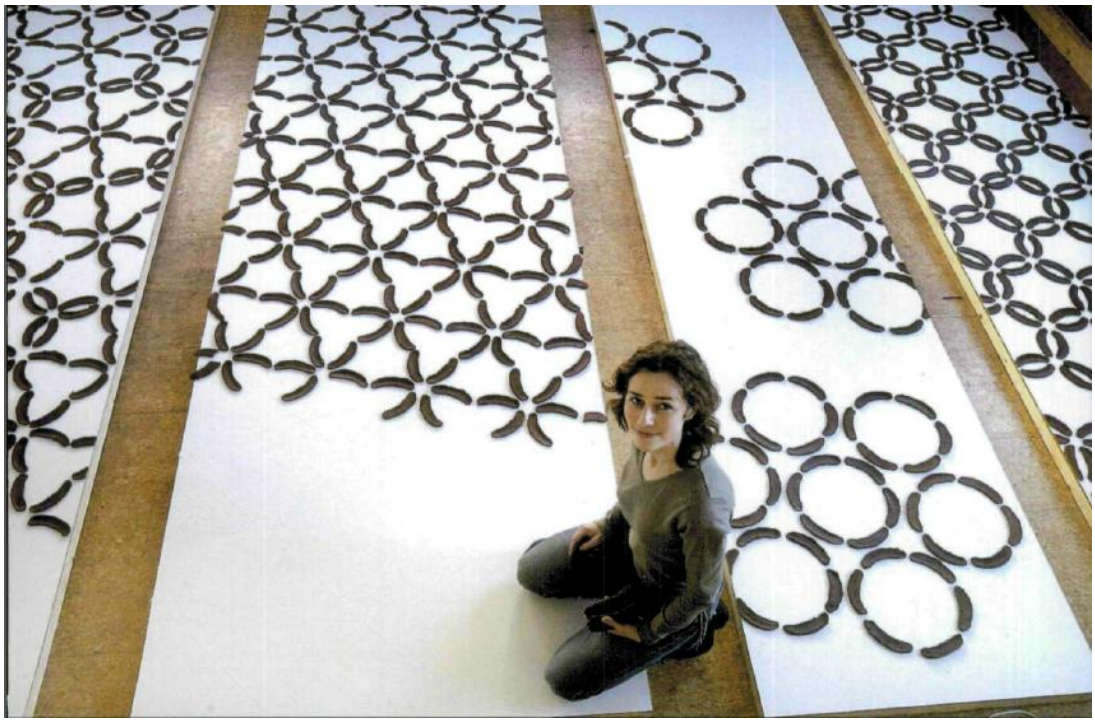

Fig. 27. Helle Hove in the studio preparing for the exhibition: *There's joy in Repetition*

Danish ceramist Helle Hove uses thousands of identical ceramics shells and arranges them into kaleidoscope patterns to create her work. In her article, 'The Magic of

Repetition', she closely examines the idea of repetition. For Hove, "repetition is debasing. It empties things of meaning".[44] An object or an action that is repeated hundreds of times automatically loses its unique meaning and values. Despite the fact that Hove's perspective on repetition contradicts with the values of my repetitive making process as well as the hand marks, I became aware of what repetition may also lead to. Painter and sculptor Lee Ufan recognised the repeated action with the body in making art as a methodology that can bring transformation and variation to his ideas and increased the intensity and richness of his work.[45] The transformation that Ufan underwent indicates that the act of repetition is not a process that ceases to allow growth, but a stepping stone to evolution. Hove and Ufan both provided me with an insight into how the accumulation of repetitive action can grow into something significant.

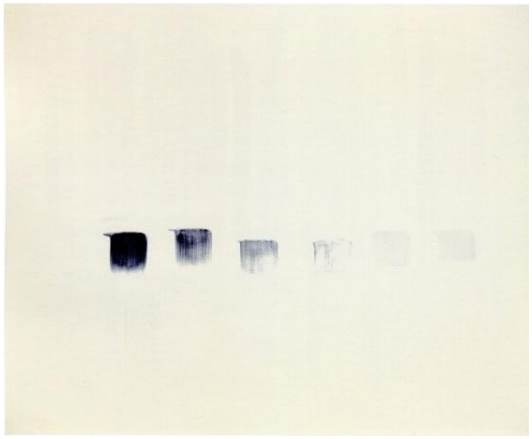

Fig. 28. Lee Ufan, *From Paint*

Fig. 29. Lee Ufan, *Relatum-Dissonance*

Although Hove and Ufan argued that repetition can charge things with a new energy, the repeated process of coiling and pinching for me was not intended to create something extraordinary, but simply to obtain a sense of order that served to accommodate myself through an unsettling period of uncertainty. Art historian, Ernst

[44] Helle Hove, "The Magic of Repetition," *Ceramics: Art & Perception*, no. 80 (2010): 103.
[45] Lee Ufan, "Art and the Body," in *The Craft Reader*, ed. Glenn Adamson (Oxford: Berg 2010), 551.

Gombrich stated that "... the sense of order may be said to serve us first and foremost to orient ourselves in space and time and to find our way in relation to the thing we seek or we avoid".[46] In other words, repetition provides comfort, by sticking to certain routines that guarantee no failure, repetitive action results in forestalling instability to regulate one's mind. This concept to stabilise oneself can reflect Maldonado and Cullars' idea of comfort, which proposed the concept that comfort was used as a regulatory framework for social control through the progression of modernisation, stabilising daily life in a capitalist society. They believed that comfort is equipped with a compensatory function that restored the physical and mental state of a person that has been consumed through the exterior work place. For Maldonado and Cullars, "comfort serves to structure daily life, to ritualize conduct, especially the attitudes and posture of the body in relation to furniture and objects intended for domestic use".[47] I found this explanation regarding comfort valuable because it suggests that repeated interaction with objects or repetitive behaviour plays an important part in providing comfort that is essential to the healthy mental state of man. Hence, the repetition of making pushed aside the fear of the future outcome, and narrowed my focus to the production process. The comfort of repetitive making is a self-regulation process that helped to negotiate the unfamiliar situation.[48]

[46] Gombrich, *The Sense of Order: A Study in the Psychology of Decorative Art*, 151.
[47] Maldonado & Cullars, "The Idea of Comfort," *Design Issues* 8, no.1, (1991): 36.
[48] Frederick H. Kanfer, "Self-Management Methods," in *Helping people change: a textbook of methods*, ed. Frederick H. Kanfer and Arnold P. Goldstein (New York: Pergamon Press, 1980), 338.

Fig. 30. Hsin-Yi Yang, Toy block display I (experiment)

Fig. 31. Hsin-Yi Yang, Toy block display II (experiment)

After creating a large set of handbuilt toy blocks, I explored the possible display options for the work. I made temporary arrangements on tables and plinths, which were not very helpful in providing ideal arrangements, nevertheless due to the colour, scale and texture of the toy blocks, the objects were very appealing to the audience. Viewers would spontaneously pick up the blocks and arrange them in various ways.

Observing how the people interacted with the work stimulated me to consider how it might be possible for the forms to interrelate in a variety of ways. I began to consider the possibilities of how people might interact with my work and how this might shape my process.

Fig. 32. Lily Zuckerman, *Untitled*

During this stage, I studied artists whose work related to aspects of my practice. In the earlier stages, and I was very much inspired by ceramic artist Lily Zuckerman's exploration of the marks of the hand. Her vessels highlight the marks of the hand, and she argues that a surface marked with fingerprints not only records the process of making, but also embraces the constant tension of the form. The dimpled surface of Zuckerman's work was a straightforward trace of touch. Zuckerman claimed that these traces are a way of conveying her experience to the viewer in the future.[49] For Zuckerman, the marks of the hand was a way for the maker's experience to be legible to others. Her examination of the marks of the hand informed me that by leaving traces of the hand on the object, the object can visually convey a connection with the

[49] Lily Zuckerman, "Lily Zuckerman - Artist Statement," http://www.lillyzuckerman.com/statement.html (accessed 16 September).

maker.

Fig. 33. Lily Zuckerman, *Vessel #8*

Zuckerman explores contour and space in her vessels using a very simple way of making. In her interview with Jeffery Spahn, she stated that the making process is simple, it is the clay in her hands that does most of the work.[50] Her process of making begins with a solid block of clay. She gradually pinches the clay methodically to form the vessel, the process of repetitive pinching and coiling leads the artist to surprising moments. Moreover, the process that she participates in consciously and unconsciously leads the development of her creation.[51] Zuckerman's use of basic handbuilding skills demonstrates how focusing on the simple process of making can help the work to evolve. This was especially true when her artwork took a major turn in 2014, when all her vessel forms transformed into a pure exploration of relationships between her work and space.

[50] Jeffrey Spahn, "Candid Integrity: The Art of Lilly Zuckerman," *Ceramics Art and Perception*, no. 98 (2014): 16-17.
[51] Ibid., 19.

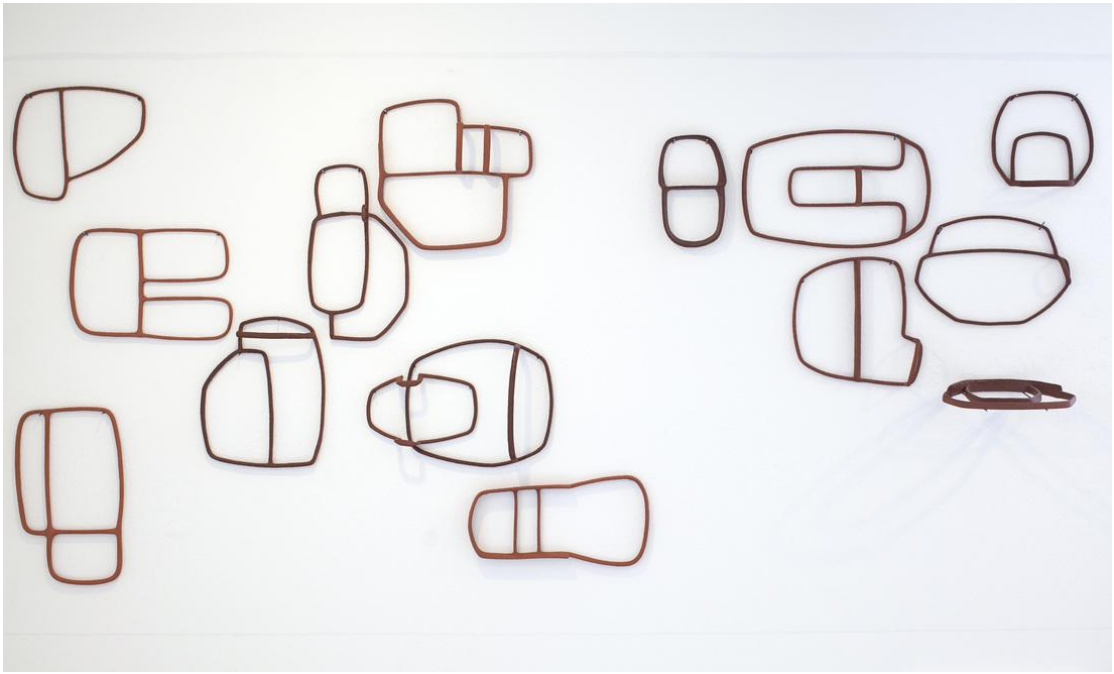

Fig. 34. Lily Zuckerman's residence exit show at the Clay Studio of Missoula: *Closer to Fine*

In the residence exit exhibition, *Closer to Fine*, at the Clay Studio of Missoula in 2014, Zuckerman created a new series of work that did not investigate vessel forms. In one of her sets of work, she formed clay coils that had been shaped into organic frames and hung on the wall in various ways. The work employed the clay as if it were lines drawn on to the wall. The other sets of work from the exhibition were also investigations of clay drawings, but these explored the positive and negative space that is created through different object arrangement. At this stage of making, the complex forms and wall displays indicated that Zuckerman had left the idea of functionality in her work aside. Thus, instead of pursuing a preconceived outcome of a vessel, the coiling and pinching process became the focus of Zuckerman's work. The exploration through the simple process of making resulted in a change to the artist's work. As a result, I became more aware of the possibilities embedded within the process of development in my making.

Fig. 35. Lily Zuckerman's residence exit show at the Clay Studio of Missoula: *Closer to Fine*

For me, one of the significant influences of Zuckerman's work was how she considered the imperfect surfaces of her work. She believes when things are symmetrical they are easy to understand, however the "imperfect moments urge the eye to be more attentive, so much so that the hand is reflexively inspired to verify".[52] Therefore, the desire to touch can be seen as a means to assist our understanding of things that we cannot visually comprehend. This made me realise that the trace of the hand served as a bridge that reaches out to the viewers to invite them to explore the object.

Between 2011 and 2014, the redirection of Zuckerman's focus in making indicated to me how she let process drive her work. She began by exploring the space within the vessel, creating usual forms. Later on in her investigation, Zuckerman became more experimental with the vessel forms, where she decided to open up the enclosed forms of a vessel. As mentioned previously, by 2014 Zuckerman's work had become sculptural; her work no longer discussed the unconventionality of the vessel but rather the positive and negative space in her work. Zuckerman's development of ambiguity in

[52] Zuckerman, "Lily Zuckerman - Artist Statement".

her functional ware was very valuable experience that related to my own making, it not only encouraged me to experiment more with the handbuilding technique as well as playing with the grouping effects of ambiguous objects, but also suggested that through haptic verification, the ambiguity of her work could be further understood.

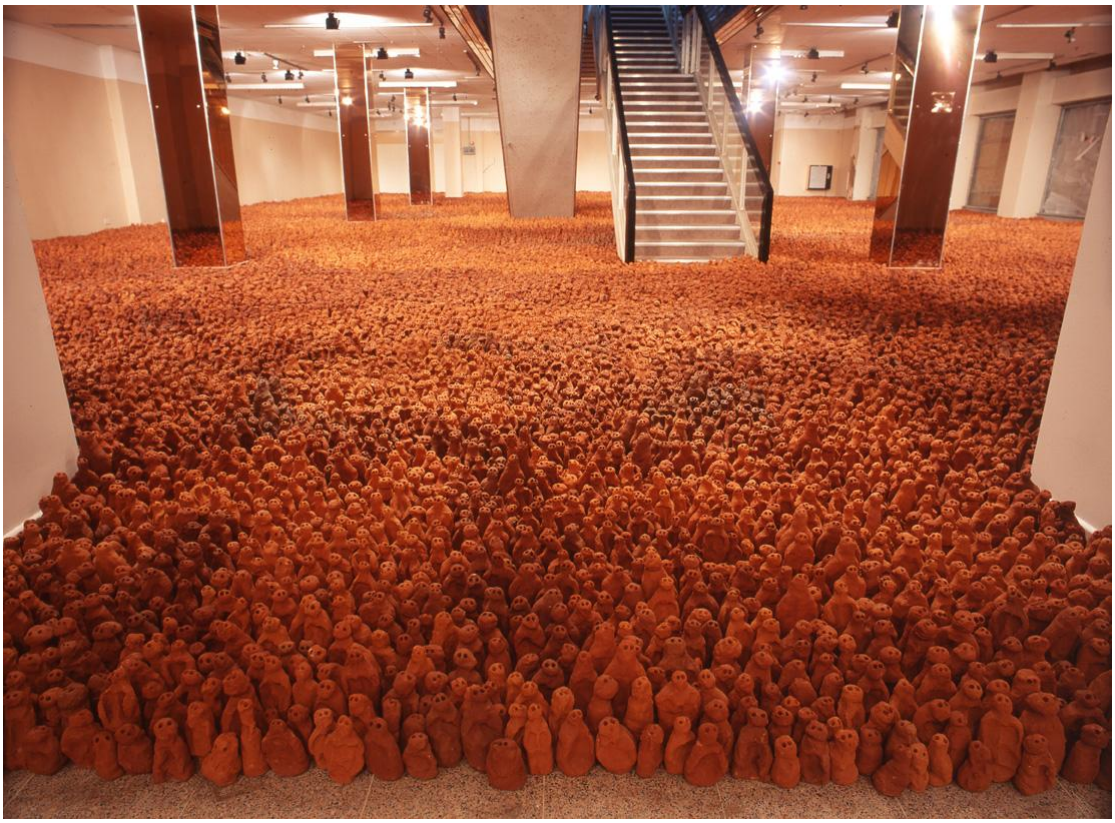

Fig. 36. Antony Gormley, *European Field*

British artist Antony Gormley also explores repetitive making. His notable project *Field*, 1989-2003, provided me with a different understanding of repetitive making. Gormley is a sculptor who explores the relationship between man and the world through human figures. *Field* is a collaborative project that consists of thousands of handmade red clay figures that articulate the artist's concern for the future of human kind. The

project invites communities from around the world to participate in creating a large installation of clay figures, which are then placed into various spaces for display.[53]

Gormley's collaborative work invited people to use local clay to create figures, which were made under the guidance of the artist. The principle for making the figure was simple—the makers were instructed to create a figure that was a rough portrayal of the maker but in a scale that is comfortable for the hand to hold. Once the simple figure is formed, the eyes are pressed into the clay using a wooden stick.[54] The semi-representational figures had no further enhancement other than to display the natural colours of earth. The mass of figures were then installed into various exhibiting spaces.

The artist's approach to repetition in this work greatly differs from mine. I have retained control of the making of the objects, whereas Gormley's figures were not made by the artist but by a group of people who followed Gormley's instructions. The fact that the figures were made by the participants demonstrated how Gormley relinquished his power in the process of making, but still held onto the clear outcome of the work.

The process was for participants to create the figures following the instructions that Gormley provided. The instructions did not include a precise system of how the makers should create, therefore the makers could work in any way they liked. This simple guideline of making resulted in hundreds of figures that looked the same at a distance, yet the close-up details of the figures showed that they are individually very different.

The collaborative project connected the artist with the global community, allowing him to achieve a large number of figures, which when massed together created a sense that the gallery had been invaded by unknown creatures. The handmade figures have

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[53] Antony Gormley, "Antony Gormley - Archive," http://www.antonygormley.com/projects/item-view/id/245 (accessed 13 April).

[54] Lewis Biggs, "Learning to See: An Introduction," in *Antony Gormley*, ed. Konsthall Malmö, et al. (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1993), 32.

not only been vitalised through the large numbers of them, but moreover are the result of an open-ended approach of inviting participants to participate in the making.

Through an understanding of how Gormley creates his work, I was inspired by how the imperfection of the marks of the hand, made by people who had never been trained in ceramics, could give so much life to the clay figures. The clay texture and the organic form of the figures were mysteriously seductive to me; there was something about the texture of Gormley's work that is very haptic, which can be further explored in my work.

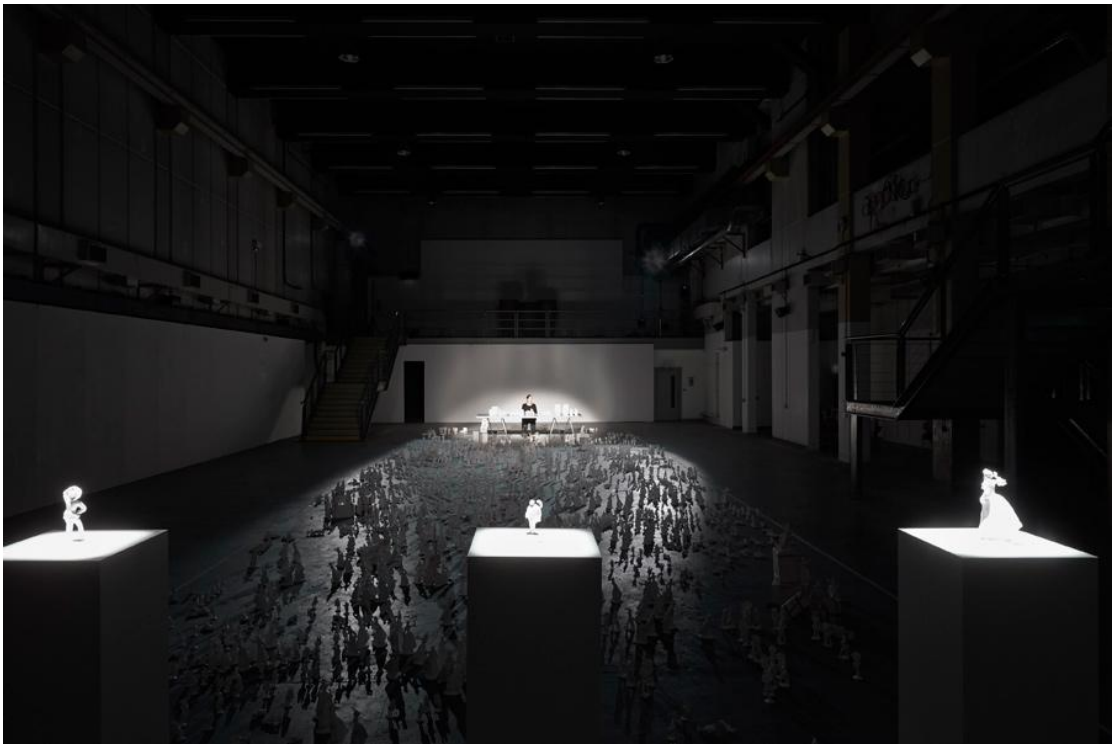

Fig. 37. Clare Twomey, *Piece by Piece*

Ceramicist Clare Twomey is another artist who employs repetition in her practice, but she embraces the idea of repetition in very different way. The basis of Twomey's work is not about how she handles the repetition in creating a group of work, but how she takes the repetitive process as a conceptual and performative idea to work with. Her works are often displayed as an installation consisting of a large number of repetitive

components, most of the works involving performance or participation by the audience. Twomey's repetitive making is often engaged with the qualities of mass production, interaction and performance. *Piece by Piece* (2014), was a performative installation commissioned by the Gardiner Museum in Toronto, Canada. The installation was inspired by the three commedia dell'arte porcelain figurines in the Gardiner's permanent collection.[55]

Fig. 38. Clare Twomey, *Piece by Piece*

[55] Clare Twomey, "Clare Twomey - Archive," http://www.claretwomey.com/piece_by_piece_-info.html (accessed 2 May).

Fig. 39. Clare Twomey, *Piece by Piece*

The performative installation consisted of three figurines from the Museum's collection, two thousand unfired porcelain figurines, and a working bench. The three precious figurines, which sit on three separate plinths, are placed focusing the audience. Behind the plinths are the reproduced figurines which sit on the floor, and finally at the back of the gallery is the working bench where Twomey brings the repetitive process of making to the viewers. She employed skilled slip cast makers to come into the gallery to cast the porcelain figurines to add to the group. At the end of the exhibition, the installation included a further one thousand unfired figurines. The sequence of three different displays in the gallery provoked a discussion between the replicating making process and the prominent figurines which were placed on the plinths.[56] At the end of the exhibition, the reproduced figurines were given away to the audience. Although the making of the unfired porcelain figurines required a laborious process to create, the repetition of making for Twomey is not about the

[56] Gardiner Museum, "Clare Twomey: Piece by Piece, 4 October 2014 - 3 January 2015," http://www.gardinermuseum.on.ca/exhibition/clare-twomey (accessed 5 May).

actual process of making by hand, but the conceptual perspective of the meanings of repetitive making.

Fig. 40. Clare Twomey, *Consciousness/Conscience*

Another work of Twomey's relevant to my research was the installation, *Consciousness/Conscience*. The components for this work, unlike *Piece by Piece*, were made in a factory in China. The installation process required thousands of unfired bone china tiles to be laid on the floor, and set up in a pathway, through which the audience was forced to walk on in order to get to the gallery located on the other side. The act of walking through the pathway immediately destroyed the floor, creating a dramatic impact on both the medium and the participant. The repeated action of destroying the tiles by walking on them reflects on the process of destruction and risk-taking. The interactive process of the installation can be seen as an analogy for the risks that need to be taken when interaction occurs with the audience.[57]

[57] Cigalle Hanaor, *Breaking the Mould: New Approaches to Ceramics* (London: Black Dog, 2007), 132.

Making for Twomey is not essential; it is the process of how viewers interact with her repetitive components and performance that is at the core of her practice. The idea of having the viewers take a risk in walking over Twomey's work was also very intriguing. It allowed the viewers to intimately experience the work through direct contact with the material. This stimulated me to think about the possibilities for including viewers as a part of my work in some way. The artist demonstrated how the repetitive process and interactive art could otherwise be explored.

The different aspects in the practice of the three discussed artists informed my work at this stage. Lily Zuckerman's process of making and development in her body of work gave an example of how the simple process of making evolved into an exploration of space. Antony Gormley's *Field* project made me aware of relinquishing power in making, where he invited viewers to be a part of the repetitive making process. Clare Twomey took a very different direction of process in her work—instead of focusing on the process of making, she discussed conceptual ideas through the various types of ceramic processes that invited the viewer to not only participate, but became the core spirit of her artwork . The analysis of these artists has broadened my perspectives in practice regarding the different use of ceramic processes to create work.

Conclusion

At the beginning of my second project, I began to plan and prepare various making methodologies that involved exploring the possibilities of the perfectly shaped clay toy blocks. The project did not evolve as planned due to time limitations, so I decided to engage with a different manner of making—I began to create handbuilt toy blocks. The positive response from the viewer encouraged me to continue making in this way, yet the anxiety and uncertainty in the process shifted my strategy in developing artwork. I stepped back from taking control of the project and opened up to response and possibilities.

The creation of a large group of handbuilt toy blocks originated from my initial reaction to repetitively making. The production of these numerous toy blocks was not an attempt to simply get the work made, but was actually a very important strategy to orient myself through the struggle of the change in making. Through my research in understanding the marks of the hand and the repetitive action in regulating anxiety and creating comfort, I began to adapt and settle in to my new work.

However, getting used to the system of production that I established at this point also made me think of how to evolve from this transitional stage. How is my art going to develop from handbuilding toy blocks? I found the development of Lily Zuckerman's unconventional vessels quite helpful, not only because she also employs similar handbuilding techniques in her work, but how her work evolves through the exploration of repetition in making and engages with a more ambiguous aspect in her work. Her later work, where she explores the positive and negative spaces in her clay drawings, inspired me to have my objects evolve into more abstract forms.

The work of both Antony Gormley and Clare Twomey emphasised the viewer as an important part in their work, either engaging with the audience through the making process or engaging the viewers through display, and has indicated how participation in art is significant. Twomey's *Consciousness/Conscience* influenced me with regard to having the participants engaging with material or the artwork itself. The process of destruction in stepping on, and in fact through, the bone dried china tiles recalls the concept of Bill Brown's thing theory, for it is through this process of destruction and risking-taking that the viewers begin to see the materiality of the objects in a whole new context. The work of these two artists has provided various possibilities for how the next stage of my art may evolve. As I became more familiar with the playful objects and with the making methodologies, I began to consider these potential possibilities for my work, which will be further explained in Chapter Three.

Chapter Three: Play in Action

> This is that in playing, and perhaps only playing, the child or adult is free to be creative.[58]

Introduction

The journey through my PhD began by exploring a preconceived idea that involved a laborious process of making everyday objects out of little clay toy blocks using plaster moulds. The intention was an attempt to present how the creative thinking process could be articulated in my work through objects—the result was not successfully received by the viewers due to the clash of object meanings between everyday objects and toy blocks. As a result, the second stage of this process explored other making methodologies with the toy block forms to free my mind from the restrictions of the previous project. This was a transitional process where I allowed myself to open up to other possibilities in making. As I began to hand build toy blocks in a more spontaneous way, the making methodology dramatically altered my original intention in making. I closely examined my production process, and explored the areas regarding marks of the hand and repetition in making. Towards the end of this transitional stage I realised that my art process needed to open up and embrace the viewers.

In this last chapter, I describe how my project has not only adapted to a more open-ended methodology, but also allowed process to drive the project. The final outcome of my research has resulted in two bodies of work which were developed based on an investigation of play. I have developed a series of artworks that grew out of the toy blocks, focusing on notions of play and exploring the interactive process between the work and the audience.

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[58] Donald Woods Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (1971), 53.

Embracing a more open-ended way of making at this stage elicited a new question in my research: How can the project evolve to incorporate the idea of play? To answer this question I carried out various experimental approaches to developing objects in the studio. Building on the exploration of the handbuilt toy block in my previous project, I developed elaborate objects that had a sense of playfulness. This redirection of focus was stimulated by the viewer's desire to touch and play with my ceramic toy blocks. To maximise the intention for the audience to engage with my work, I created objects that could be played with in a more complex manner. The exploration of developing new objects resulted in a range of ways to incorporate play into my work, such as investigating object forms that cued connection to each other, discovering new relationships between objects, and developing objects that incorporate movement. The incorporation of motion into the objects was then further developed into an invitation for viewers to interact with my work. The interactive process that the audience has undertaken is considered 'participatory art'. This approach allows the viewer to directly participate in the creative process—the participant themselves becomes the co-creator of the work.

This chapter describes the way in which I expanded a process-driven methodology to create work. I discuss various issues that arose during my development process when creating new forms of objects, and explore the concerns I encountered during the process such as play, relationships between objects, and participatory art. I also refer to relevant artists and analyse their work with regard to these issues.

Approaching play

Halfway through my PhD candidature, I was forced to adapt to a different methodology for making artwork which offered a way to develop a new type of work. My goal was not only to understand the creative process but to establish a methodology that could help me to continuously generate successful work. Psychologist J. Nina Lieberman argued that developing a creative product involves

combinatorial play, aided by the powers of imagination. The incubation period of play, imagination and creativity is highly significant when coming up with new or unique solutions to problems.[59]

Play is often referred to as an unserious activity; however play can actually contribute to our social and cognitive development. Psychologist Joseph Chilton Pearce argued that the role of play is significant in the developmental process of children. He investigated two types of play which child psychologist Piaget believed established the development of a child's ability to understand the world. In Pearce's view, play itself not only creates pleasure, but it erases the line between play and work which was a way to help children learn how to survive, and provides a child with a safe opportunity to imitate the adult.[60]

Contemporary art curators, Muka and Edblom, also claimed that play is an "impulse towards freedom and connection that makes transformation possible", moreover, "the agency of play gains an important role in shaping artistic engagements with reality".[61] With these ideas in mind, it was essential to explore the possibility of what play might introduce to me in my creative process.

Towards the end of my exploration process, I not only created a range of open-ended playful objects, but also developed objects that incorporate interlocking mechanisms. The outcome of this experimental process redirected my understanding of the creative process. Instead of focusing my work from a theoretical point of view, such as Robert Weisberg's theory on 'ordinary thinking' in developing creative ideas where creative thinking is the same cognitive process used in our daily life, this current stage encountered the creative process from a process-thinking perspective. This approach in making enabled me to physically experience the process-driven exploration in the studio, therefore I paid more attention to the development of the objects instead of attempting to visualise these theoretical concepts that I had previous investigated.

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[59] Lieberman, *Playfulness: Its Relationship to Imagination and Creativity*, 110.
[60] Joseph Chilton Pearce, Dolphin Tapes, and Big Sur Tapes, *Magical Child* (Plume New York, 1992), 170.
[61] Stina Edblom and Edi Muka, *Play! Recapturing the Radical Imagination* (Stockholm,: GIBCA, Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art, 2013), 12.

Fig. 41. Hsin-Yi Yang, *Trajectory* (experiment)

During my candidature, my creative process shifted from creating mould-made objects to making by hand. In this transitional stage, I explored possibilities through repetitively making a series of toy blocks. The repetition involved in making toy blocks by hand generated familiarity with the aesthetics of imperfection as well as providing me with a making methodology. The outcome of the repetitive process was not about what I actually made, but rather about opening myself up to a more open-ended way to allow development of my work.

I shifted my focus from using process to accomplish a preconceived idea to concentrating on the physical actions and interactions of play through actually using the objects. Exploration in play began with my investigation in the studio, with the focus on play later redirected to the viewers who were encouraged to interact with my practice outcome. By focusing on the idea of play, I created objects that took a step

away from the moulded toy blocks, and began to develop objects that took their form from toys and other objects that invited greater interaction.

Fig. 42. Hsin-Yi Yang, *Nesting* (experiment)

Fig. 43. Hsin-Yi Yang, *Seesaw* (experiment)

The exploration of forms led to the development of new types. Some forms were a handbuilt version of types of toys, some explored the toys' playful mechanisms, and some were objects built from imagination that were inspired by the previous objects I had made. More importantly, I started to create objects that could fit together to engage movement, such as a seesaw. This attention to movement also led me to

create pieces that could actually interlock. Some objects worked better than others, while some did not work at all. Despite the large number of objects that were not included in my final work, the process itself engaged me so that I revisited the experience of play as a child, as well as triggering my imagination which led to many other possibilities in creating.

I then began to create objects that were inspired by toys and analysed what made toys playful. I observed that a set of playful toys would often include multiples of the same form, but were varied in size so that they could either nest or connect together. Other types of playful objects might not always interlock with each other, but they all have common features that suggest possible connection, such as similar concave and convex forms that cue a sense of connection. The most interesting type of playful objects that I explored were pieces that might incorporate simple movements, therefore I began to look for objects that included movement. These objects ranged from toys to things from my daily life and included (but were not limited to) mechanisms such as door knobs, hinges, blinds, locks, and rubbish can lids.

Fig. 44. Hsin-Yi Yang, *New Arrangement* (experiment)

The range of objects I made through a variety of explorations enabled me to accumulate single objects that had no similarities, and also groups of objects that had a connection to each other. This creative process not only helped me to develop interesting object forms, but caused me to recall childhood memories of toys I had played with as a child, or images of different toys from my memory.

The making process at this stage began with handbuilding objects with no direct outcome intention. Despite a desire to create something new, I began by making objects from simple forms (similar to the forms of the toy blocks) and gradually let the objects spontaneously evolve in the process of making. The result was an experimental development of objects that had no preconceived form.

Besides incorporating the notion of play into my work, the objects created at this stage were very experimental and did not have a clear goal for their use on completion, which again led me to focus on the repetitive process when engaging in a system of making. I examined various types of toys and from that, reproduced the important features that could increase a sense of playfulness in my work. As a result, I created sets of objects, some based on the perception that they had connections to each other, and others that physically nested together.

While I was not quite sure what the final display of these new objects would be, I was satisfied with the outcome of the playful objects themselves. However, as these objects began to occupy my studio, their random placement led me to become aware of another approach that might allow new relationships between the objects to emerge.

I realised that relationships between objects can be created in various ways. Instead of being fixated on the objects I designated to become a set (see Fig. 42 and 43), I began to play with the possible arrangements between the various sets of objects. Once I began to group objects that were not designed to be together, the relationship between the objects became more interesting (see Fig. 44). The relationships between various sets of objects created a more complex idea of play. This elaborated arrangement of objects opened up more room for exploration, and so I began to

investigate how the viewer could engage with them. The earlier idea of creating an adult version of toy blocks provided me with more freedom to create objects that were more open-ended and created endless possibilities of how objects might go together.

During the exploration of the arrangement of various objects, I found it challenging to understand the relationships between objects that did not seem to have a very clear connection. Every time I acquired a fresh view from a different arrangement of the objects, I was amazed at how taking the objects away from their original situation and placing them in a new context with a new angle could create such an impact. The selection process, creating the new from the old, reflected on Robert Weisberg's 'ordinary thinking', which I was trying to visually deliver in the earlier stage of my PhD program. Thus, instead of simply articulating a preconceived idea, it was through the idea and physicality of playing with things, that I created new possibilities for exploration.

Fig. 45. Dawn Youll, *Primed*

Fig. 46. Dawn Youll, *Under Construction*

This exploration into object arrangement led me to further investigate Dawn Youll's work. In 2011, Youll made a series of objects that related to construction—introducing construction cones, architecture, ropes, etc.—and explored the possible tensions that objects can create through form and arrangement. For example, in the work *Primed*, the composition between the blue barrel and the orange wedge cues movement against stillness. It also creates tension especially when the small orange wedge is placed underneath the large cylinder, as though it were trying to stop the cylinder from rolling. *Under Construction* is another piece from Youll's 2011 series, which plays with the tension between the pointed yellow construction cone which supports the black triangular joist. In this case the relationship is balanced through the support of the construction cone.

Fig. 47. Dawn Youll, *Regular Arrangement*

Fig. 48. Dawn Youll, *Civil Unrest*

According to Youll, her exploration with objects evolved during her twelve-month Masters of Art in Cardiff. She came to the realisation that the composition of her objects could become more open-ended, and it became more interesting for her when she could make work that could be ambiguous and did not need to reveal every detail

of the object.[62] The open-endedness in Youll's work could be seen in the series she made in 2013, especially in the two groups of work, *Regular Arrangement* and *Civil Unrest*. The component objects in the group are identical—a rectangle, a wheelie bin-shaped object, and a cylinder—yet with the change of composition, the object relationship in *Civil Unrest* dramatically alters.

The two pieces of work play on a pun that addresses social conditions. *Regular Arrangement* is a toy-like wheelie bin that has not only been created to imitate an actual wheelie bin, but also symbolises the stable routine of the wheelie bin that is embedded within our social system. *Civil Unrest* on the other hand, has been reassembled into a more abstract composition that can be seen as a knocked-over wheelie bin, suggesting an unsettled society.

Youll's approach to play with the reproduced components of *Regular Arrangement* to form the work *Civil Unrest,* demonstrated how object relationships can be explored. Due to the change in composition of the components, *Regular Arrangement* and *Civil Unrest* can be seen as two separate works when they are individually engaged. It is only through placing the two works together that their connection can be identified.

The arrangements of objects in Dawn Youll's work influenced my approach when grouping objects together. They provided an example of how placing objects together can create tension and meaning. What was interesting for me to see was how relationships between objects can change our perception and understandings, encouraging me to discover new possible relationships between objects.

Youll's way of creating work is very different to mine—she makes slip cast units which enable the objects to be repeatedly recreated. The slip cast technique allows her to use the same objects to create various sets of work. This rearrangement of objects is similar to the experience with playing with toy blocks which influenced my later works. This gave her more room to explore the object relationship in her development process. Although Youll's way of creating work through slip cast limits her from

[62] Ellie Herring, "Sign language," *Crafts*, no. 229 (2011): 40.

creating spontaneous forms, her exploration with the objects she has made informed my decision to play with the objects at hand.

As I allowed play to take the lead in my project, the border between play and work became vague for me. The playful exploration with objects in the studio evolved into the creation of a more elaborate version of the toy blocks. Considering how to create more complicated ceramic toys stimulated me to think about how audience interaction may contribute to my project. The idea of having other people explore and play with my handbuilt objects emerged when I began making the clay toy blocks by hand. Traces of the hand were left on the objects which involuntarily invited people to touch and play with my ceramic toy blocks. This observation led me to a realisation of the opportunity to include the interactive process of the viewers into my final work. A more complex version of toy blocks became my next target for investigation.

Fig. 49. Hsin-Yi Yang, *Chain* (experiment)

After exploring the development of making playful objects and examining the various relationships that are created through arrangement, my next developmental process involved carrying out a series of explorations to develop playful objects that incorporated movement.

The creation of a set of ceramic rings contributed to the development of the interlocking pieces. The rings could remain separated, or they could be hooked together which allowed the objects to function as a chain. This made me realise that I was able to make ceramic objects that created movement.

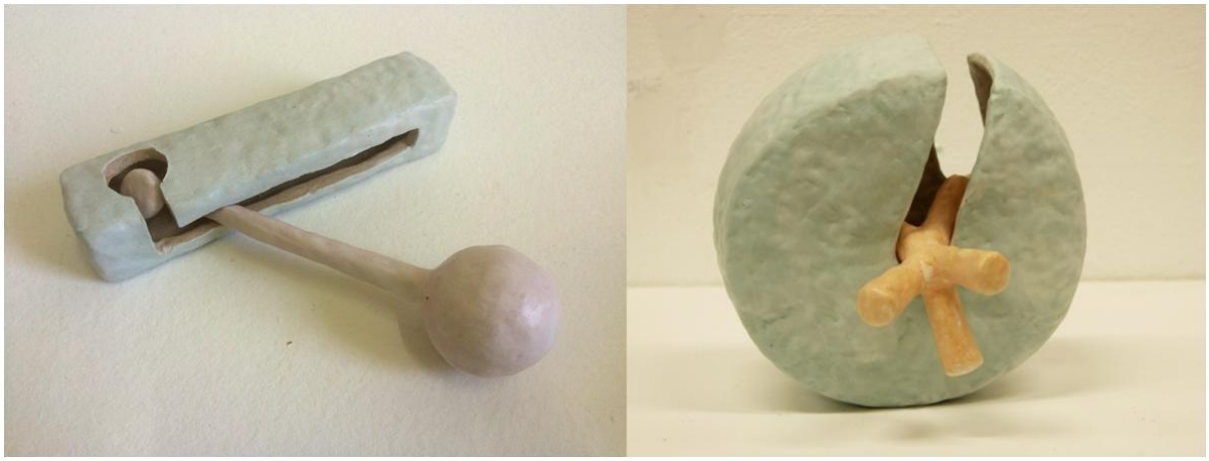

Fig. 50. Hsin-Yi Yang, experimental interlocking pieces

My second experimental stage was to explore interlocking mechanisms. The idea was to design a more sophisticated object that allowed the movement of the smaller object to be moved from one side to the opposite side on a larger form. Meanwhile, the smaller object could rotate by itself. Due to the different appearance of the objects, the viewer could not readily identify the two pieces as belonging together, therefore they needed to explore how the objects could be interlocked. I thought of these works as a three dimensional puzzle.

Fig. 51. Hsin-Yi Yang, *Windmill* (experiment)

A significant development in my project was the creation of a rotating windmill-like object (see Fig. 51). This was an attempt to create an object that could be assembled and taken apart by employing various mechanisms. The process of developing this particular object was intriguing for me; I not only had to estimate the shrinkage of the clay but also to improvise the interlocking mechanism as I progressed. This making process enabled me to explore a variety of interlocking mechanisms in different structures to see how the separate pieces fitted together.

The difficulty of creating multi-interlocking components was in being able to create pieces that fitted perfectly together. Not only was it a challenge to make various pieces that locked together, but to make sure the fan-shaped object would rotate after firing was especially complex. Although the windmill did not function smoothly, and the base of the windmill could not carry the weight of the fan, the project provided important information on how to further explore rotating and the sliding mechanisms.

Fig. 52. Hsin-Yi Yang, *Interlocking objects* (experiment)

The sophisticated interlocking mechanism of the windmill-shaped object indicated a direction which I was keen to further investigate. However, I thought the mechanisms developed through the windmill-shaped object could be explored separately. My final approach to developing objects that incorporated movement explored sliding mechanisms and small components that could interlock with a larger piece. The little objects that were made to slide into a larger object were designed randomly, with some forms made to specifically fit the slots, while others were created from the imagination which no real end purpose in mind.

Ultimately, I developed multiple abstract objects that could combine as one (see Fig. 52), so that through interaction between the viewer and the art work, the final display of the work was always changing.

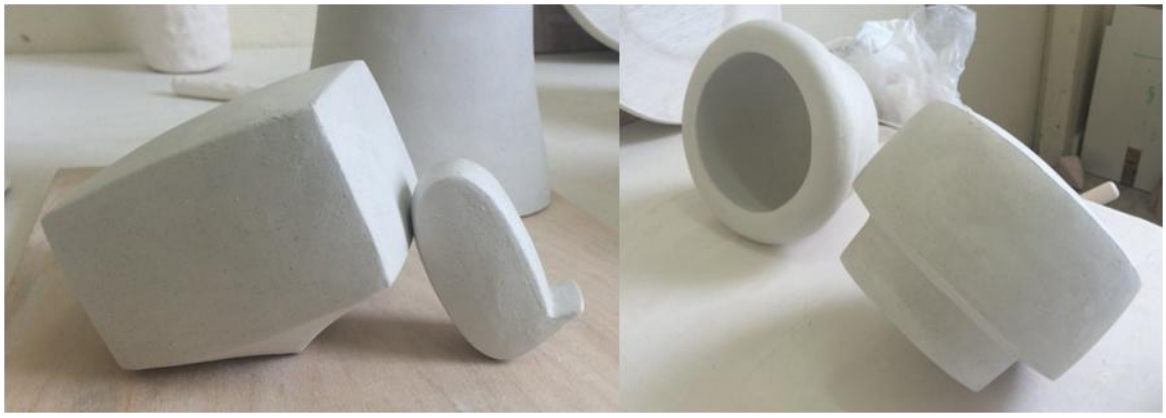

Fig. 53. Hsin-Yi Yang, Monochrome objects (unfired)

A parallel project that was developed at the same time as the other interlocking pieces was a group of monochrome objects (see Fig. 53). This experimental project extended from the early stages of my final project, and was part of my attempt to create complex objects that had a sense of playfulness. I wanted to explore the possibility that various texture could contribute to the playful objects I had made.

The monochrome objects revisited handmaking. This series of work involved the more labour-intensive and time-consuming process of refining the surfaces and the contours of the objects. However, the making process was much more intriguing than my earlier work using moulds. The spontaneous process of building the objects brought out more unexpected possibilities, which made the labour-intensive experience much more enjoyable and exciting than the repetitive process of creating the same objects over and over again with the moulds.

The overall effect of the greyish monochrome objects was very different from the works I made before; they were not colourful, they were not glazed, and neither did they display the marks of the hand on the objects. Nonetheless, I found the neat dull forms enabled the viewer to visually focus more on the exploration of the relationships between objects. I think this is because once the surfaces and contours of the objects were neat and clean, there was no colour or texture to detract from the shapes so the forms of the objects were emphasised, which increased the visual desire to look for relationships between the objects. This series not only emerged from my early

investigation of playful objects and relationships between objects, but it elevated the exploration of objects by employing a different aesthetic.

This diverse exploration of making and thinking opened doors to possibilities that I had never anticipated. This was a phase where I actually felt comfortable not rushing to put anything together and was open to any possible combination of objects and surfaces. The open-ended outcomes of my experiments resulted in increased room for play.

At this point it became clear to me that embracing a process-driven methodology could allow unexpected possibilities to emerge. The purpose of my construction was not only to create playful objects that could provide the viewer with the opportunity to explore, but also to stimulate the imagination when they encountered my unfamiliar objects for the first time. I wanted the viewer to engage with the experience of discovery, such as learning how to interlock the objects, or to explore the relationships between objects. The abstract objects created in my last project increased the level of imagination and fantasy which enabled the viewer to return to a moment when they were free to simply enjoy exploration of the unknown.

Psychologist Catherine Garvey stated "an unfamiliar object tends to set up a chain of exploration, familiarization and eventual understanding", which relates to helping the child to acquire a more mature conception to deal with the physical world.[63] An unfamiliar object for an adult is much more complex; it not only deals with exploring the physicality and functionality of the object, but engages with the intellectual and imaginative aspects of objects from a more complicated perspective.

Redirecting my focus towards the idea of play not only broadened the scope of my creative process, but also accumulated new experiences for me in the making process. Allowing the process to direct my focus, I was able to develop a combination of interactive objects with multiple possibilities for display.

[63] Catherine Garvey, *Play* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1990), 44.

Engaging with viewers

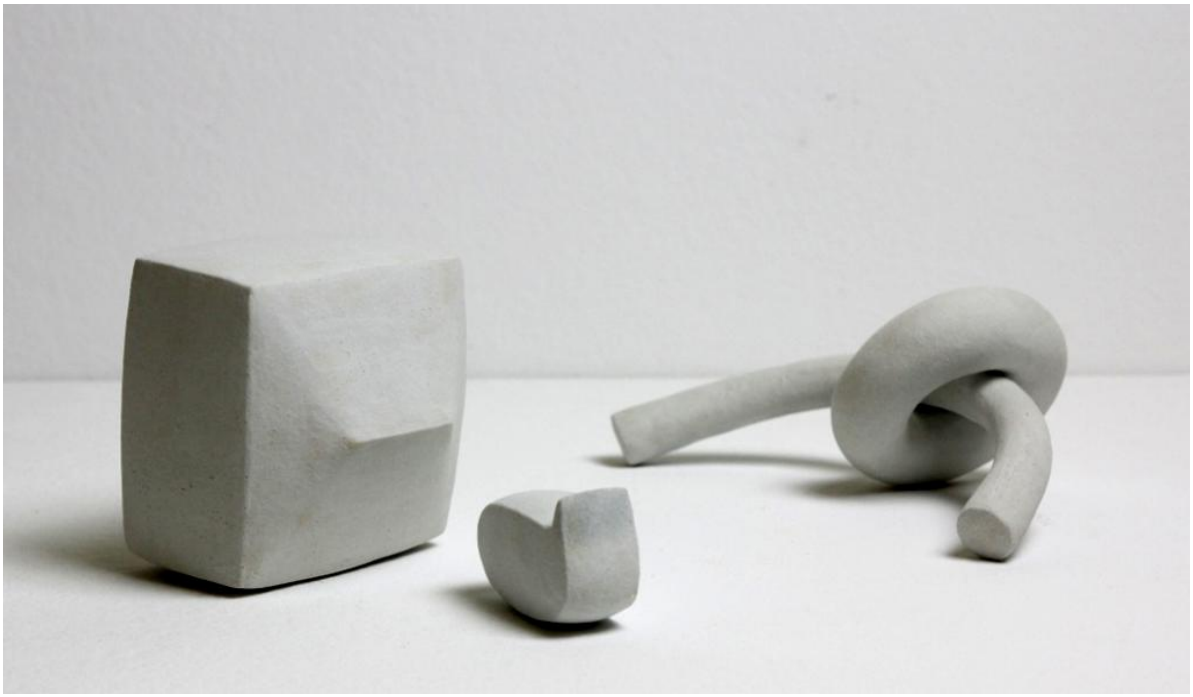

Fig. 54. Hsin-Yi Yang, *Objects*

The exploration of my previous projects has always been in the studio, therefore to design interactive work for people to play with was always based on assumptions and feedback from a small audience group. I realised I needed to provide a context for people to play with my work and decided to test my pieces in a public space.

Inviting viewers to engage with my work was an idea that originated from participatory art. Artist Gustaf Almenberg defined this form of art as an approach that stresses the "act of creating", in which the participant uses their choice and intuition as primary tools to interact with the work.[64] Participatory art stresses the importance of the participant, highlighting the creative capacity which the individual has. This provides the spectator with the opportunity to create their own meanings through the interactive process.[65] Therefore, the audience who interacts with the work creates

[64] Brown, *Interactive Contemporary Art: Participation in Practice*, 6.
[65] Gustaf Almenberg, *Notes on Participatory Art: Toward a Manifesto Differentiating it from Open Work,*

their own interpretation of the work. The meaning of the work itself is then endlessly reinterpreted.

Almenberg argued that the "act of creating" by the viewer may not affect the appearance of the work but engages with the viewer's state of mind and presence when they interact with the work.[66] Although my work does not provide a broad platform for the viewer to reveal their unique creative energies, such as having the viewer be a part of the actual making process, it allows the viewer to create their own interpretation through their exploration of interacting with the objects.

Fig. 55. Hsin-Yi Yang, *Mix and Match I*

The experimental show, *Room to Play*, was installed in the Foyer Gallery at The Australian National University (ANU) for one week, and focused on two bodies of work—the monochrome objects (see Fig. 53) and the interlocking objects (see Fig. 52).

Interactive Art and Relational Art (AuthorHouse, 2010).

[66] Cited in Brown, *Interactive Contemporary Art: Participation in Practice*, 6.

The location at ANU was chosen to expand the numbers and types of viewers. The audience included staff, students, visitors—both adults and children.

Fig. 56. Hsin-Yi Yang's exhibition, *Room to Play*

The aim of the exhibition was to observe how people responded to the work and display, so I sat in the gallery for the week to monitor the event. To maximise the possibility for people to play with my work, I first set up conditions to indicate the work was designed to be interactive, such as creating signs and labels. Secondly, I chose varying heights of plinths which I thought was not only appropriate for the different bodies of work, but a suitable height that made it easier for the viewer to play with the work. Lastly, I recorded the interactive process during the opening, which gave me a better idea of what it was like when the objects were in action.

Fig. 57. Hsin-Yi Yang, *Room to Play* exhibition opening I

The overall experience of the show clearly revealed how the audience received my work. As I observed how people interacted with my pieces, there was immediate feedback on how labelling the work affected the perception of the viewer. I created labels with a red circle around a hand to signal the viewers that the object was available for hands-on interaction, however, a viewer suggested that the colour red was too alarming for people to be aware of the difference and that I should switch to the colour green to enable the labels to become more friendly to the viewers. Despite my effort to indicate the work was for interaction, most people's initial reaction was not to touch the objects on the plinth. Others would touch the objects while not realising that this was permitted. Some people who did understand that the objects were allowed to be touched had fun playing with the objects, while others were puzzled by the unconventional forms and did not know what to do with them. The viewers were more comfortable to interact with the work once I had introduced my 'playing' concept. On several occasions when I arrived at the gallery in the morning, I

realised that the objects had been rearranged into very different groupings, for example all the rectangular-shaped toy blocks stacked into one very high pile, or the creation of a new group of objects.

Despite the viewers' enjoyment at interacting with my work, the majority had trouble understanding that the objects were allowed to be touched and played with. To combat this reluctance, I had to reconsider the base to place the objects on. The pristine gallery plinths clearly told the viewer to look and not touch. I realised that placing the artwork on a large table or on the ground would be more likely to encourage interaction. As for the group of viewers who did become aware that the work was interactive, they were drawn to the interlocking pieces. From this I realised that the colour, texture, and the simple slotting mechanisms were the main items that caught the viewers' attention. Many viewers felt the simple design which allowed them to slot the small components into the larger piece made them feel comfortable playing with ceramic objects.

Fig. 58. Hsin-Yi Yang, *Room to Play* exhibition opening II

The monochrome objects on the other hand were not inviting for the viewers and did not encourage them to play. However quite a few people thought they were visually pleasing and that the various forms stimulated the viewer to establish relationships between the objects. The response of the viewer told me that the colour, texture, and scale of the monochrome objects were the reasons they did not physically engage with the work as much. The colour of the monochrome objects was light grey and the surface texture was smooth, the works were more calm and peaceful, and they did not have the vivid energy the interactive coloured pieces had. The scale of the monochrome objects varied, but most were larger than the components of the interactive pieces, which made the objects a bit more difficult to manipulate by hand. But the most important reason why the viewers did not interact with that group as much was that the objects were all made as separate pieces, not indicating to the audience an obvious way to interact with the works.

The outcomes from the show pointed the way for my final show. The two bodies of work focused on different ways to engage with the viewers. The interlocking pieces were about the physical manipulation of objects, where the participants enjoyed the process of arranging and rearranging the various components into the slots. This series of work brought out the child within the adult viewers. As for the monochrome objects, the surface texture was not as appealing to the audience for a hands-on exploration. The sophistication in the making did not invite the viewer to physically want to touch the work, because most people felt the objects were too fragile to touch, let alone to play with. Although the monochrome objects weren't as inviting to the audience, I nevertheless plan to further develop this series in my final show because I believe this set of objects will provide further possibilities for object relationships to emerge. The monochrome objects were visually very different from the interlocking pieces, and also they had no designated or obvious goal to perform. Thus by grouping any of these objects together, the viewer is able to create endless outcomes just by moving one simple object on the table. The difficult task for me when presenting this series will be how to encourage the viewers to engage with the work. In the end, the focus of the monochrome pieces will be on the exploration of object arrangement.

Towards the conclusion of the exhibition, I came to realise that how the work was installed greatly affected how the viewers responded. For my final installation I have decided to provide large tables to place my work on as I noticed that the plinths not only provided limited space for the audience to interact, but also discouraged the viewer from playing with my work. In the end it became obvious that I had to create a more comfortable and inviting base for my work to sit on.

Fig. 59. Ming-Shun Cho, *Treasure Hunt*

Several artists working in the ceramics field have explored interaction. In 2014, ceramist Ming-Shun Cho attempted to recapture the pleasure of children's games for his daughter by creating a series of interactive sculptures. The sixteen houses that Cho created were made as part of a treasure hunt. Each dark red house-shaped ceramic object holds a unique key to the next house. The participant needs to learn how to use the unconventional key to activate the object's hidden interactive mechanism. Once the key is correctly placed and used, another white ceramic key to the next house is

revealed. The journey began by inserting a 10 Taiwanese dollar coin into the house and ended with retrieving the coin from the same object.[67]

In Cho's approximately 15-minute-long video, a young girl demonstrates how the sixteen objects work together. Some objects employed a simple key mechanism, where the hidden key revealed itself when the current key is placed in the correct position, creating a weight to activate the leverage. Other mechanisms were more sophisticated, such as involving the movement of the house. Cho's calculation and mastery of the material is incredible, the artist obviously so skilled as a ceramic artist, it was as if he could use clay in the way a carpenter might employ wood.

[67] "尋寶遊戲 (Treasure Hunt)," YouTube Video, 14:48, posted by Cho Ming-Shun ceramics, October 29, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XpHrW6oo4M0.

Fig. 60. Ming-Shun Cho, *Treasure Hunt* (detail)

Cho's creation demonstrated how crafting a sophisticated interactive ceramic artwork can be achieved. What he provided was a process of discovery which evoked a sense of surprise and satisfaction when the audience unlocked the keys from the object. The unusual design of the ceramic key stimulated the viewers to engage with the work. Because the key was unconventional, the viewer had to learn how to operate each

object with the ceramic key. Cho's unique key reflected the way viewers engaged with unfamiliar objects.

Despite my admiration for Cho's skill and input in creating these complex mechanisms, I found that his interactive ceramics gave the participant no room to contribute their own imagination. This is because most of the mechanisms can only be triggered once and cannot be played with again without resetting the work. The interactive process of Cho's work was about experiencing the discovery process which the artist had planned. For Cho, the limited interaction of the audience can be described as an unconventional key employed to unlock each of the objects.

Cho's way of creating work reminded me of my first project, where I set out with a preconceived idea which was to be brought to fruition. The examination of Cho's work made me aware of how open-ended and engaging my work had become. I realised that if I had not engaged with a process-driven methodology, I would not have developed the interlocking pieces. But even if I had engaged with employing the interlocking mechanism, I would have striven to perfect it as well as achieving a designated outcome, just as Cho had. This doesn't mean that Cho's work is not significant, but the working methodology towards achieving a preconceived outcome I think contributes less to allowing new possibilities to emerge—for the artist and the viewer.

Fig. 61. Suzanne Stumpf, *Changeable views* (front view)

Fig. 62. Suzanne Stumpf, *Changeable views* (back view)

Another artist who engages with interactive sculptural work is American ceramic artist Suzanne Stumpf. Stumpf's work employs multi-components to create interactive sculptures. Her work is often composed of a static structural base with small units of ceramic pieces that give the viewer the opportunity to put together their own combination of patterns. Stumpf invites the viewer to interact or explore the possibilities in her sculptures. The way she invites viewers to complete her work is a similar methodology which I have employed with my interlocking pieces.

Changeable views is an example of Stumpf's interactive sculpture. The work contains two main white porcelain bases and a set of decorative thin slabs. One of the bases is designed to hold the ceramic slabs and the other provides opened slots for the participant to place their choice of slab in, creating a pattern of their own.

The display of Stumpf's work made me aware of how the artist applies an extra ceramic container to separate the interactive components from the main body. This approach for display was an important cue for the audience to understand how the pieces work together. Her methodology for arrangement of objects prompted me to rethink the display for my interlocking pieces, so that instead of leaving the components for the interlocking pieces scattered across the table, I should make a base for the small components to sit in.

Stumpf's approach to creating interactive ceramic sculpture did provide the viewer with a more open-ended way of interacting with her work, but I noticed that she gave minimal power to the audience as to how to interpret her work. Despite the viewers being able to contribute a different combination of patterned slabs to her arrangement, they were only given four slots and porcelain slabs decorated with similar abstract patterns. The end result was that the design of the interactive sculpture restrained the viewers from developing of a more distinctive combination of patterns.

Through examining the works of Cho and Stumpf, I found it very interesting to see the various ways their works interact with the viewers. I realised both of their works provided little room for the viewers to meaningfully contribute to their work, and I

became aware that to relinquish power to the audience is relative. This then provoked me to re-evaluate the level of open-endedness that my work provides for the viewers, stimulating me to consider embracing a more open-ended methodology, such as inviting the viewers to become a part of making process.

Installation strategies

How to encourage viewers to willingly interact with the still life objects that sit on a table became the critical task of my final offering. Through the exhibition that I had previously shown, I realised that the area that I provide to display my objects on needed to be quite large, so that the objects have sufficient space to enable the viewer to move them safely around. I believe that with the extra space provided for the participants to manipulate the pieces, it would increase the feeling that moving the items between groups was allowed, and in fact encouraged. Ideally, I would like to create four large tables of work—one for the handbuilt toy blocks made in the earlier stage of my candidature, another table allocated to the monochrome objects, and the last two tables to display the interactive pieces. The two tables showing the interactive pieces will focus on two different displays, one will show individual pieces that explore various base forms for interaction, while the other will investigate the base forms as a group, attempting to create relationships with each other.

Another important installation strategy will be to incorporate a video into the show. Although the texture of the objects' surface is very tactile, the goal to ensure the audience understands that they can freely arrange the objects needed further development. Therefore, for my final exhibition, I have decided to present a video that not only informs about the various grouped objects that I have explored, but also shows the process of interacting with the objects. I anticipate the video will indicate to the viewers the possibilities that can emerge from the objects scattered on the table, and serve as a cue to inviting the viewers to interact with objects in front of them. These installation strategies are attempts to modify the exhibition environment

thereby creating a more participatory atmosphere which I hope will enhance the possibilities of interaction between the work and the audience.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have described the development of a series of new work which progressed through exploring play in the studio, and play in the gallery. The ambiguity and experimental features of play that include trial, error, chance, randomness, accident, failure, fun, curiosity, etc., established a very open-ended and process-driven methodology in making that enabled me to experiment with various possibilities to a point where there were many objects simultaneously progressing on my bench.

The concept of play in my last project served as a vehicle for the development of my final work, therefore the role of play varied from stage to stage. The idea of play began with playing in the studio, where 'play' was a strategy employed to develop playful objects. However, as the project progressed, the incorporation of movement into the objects shifted the focus of play from the behaviour of the maker to integrating action into the object itself. The role of play then significantly changed when I took into consideration the observed interactions of the viewers. In the end, I realised that by engaging the viewers with the playful objects I had developed, I was not only inviting the viewers to play with the objects, but also to play with me.

Conclusion

> The dilemma every artist confronts, again and again, is when to stick with familiar tools and materials, and when to reach out and embrace those that offer new possibilities.[68]

My practice-led research focuses on the idea of process and its relationship with handmaking, uncertainty, repetitive making, play, and participatory art. At the beginning of my research, my approach was to design for a preconceived outcome that involved the manufacture of multiple press-moulded components compressed together to make larger forms. This was a highly laborious process and a technically demanding project, which despite an enormous investment of time, failed both aesthetically and conceptually. This failure shifted the focus of my working methodology, compelling me to re-evaluate the role of making in my practice.

While I was still interested in the aspect of the project that involved repetitive making, I discarded the press-moulding processes I had used previously. I began to make the components of my work by hand, allowing the components themselves to become the focus of the project. I was seeking a more direct way of working with materials and through handmaking and repetition, I began to redirect my project towards process itself as the main focus of my research.

Repetition in the making process presented an interesting contradiction. On the one hand I was working with the repetitive process of handmaking objects which is embedded within traditional craft practices. However, through focusing on the making process itself, my work also bore a relationship to avant garde strategies of making such as process art. I found Kathleen Whitney's definition of process art very helpful in terms of identifying labour-intensive processes and the fetishism of effort as the key

[68] David Bayles and Ted Orland, *Art & Fear: Observations on the Perils (and Rewards) of Artmaking* (Santa Cruz, CA: Image Continuum Press, 1993), 59.

idea in my work. This understanding led my practice to develop beyond traditional craft practices to allow the act of making to be further emphasised.

The exploration process of handbuilding objects not only redirected the focus of my project, but also opened up new areas of interest where I was reintroduced to the meanings of the handmade and the marks of the hand. Through investigating the Arts and Crafts Movement and the development of studio craft, I learned that the value of the handmade and the marks of the hand lay in the history of the struggle between mass production and the authenticity of the maker. In leaving the marks of handmaking on the objects I made, I wanted to create a link between myself and the viewer.

My research has employed repetitive making as one of the processes to develop artwork. However, my intention has not been to achieve the kind of transformation in the work of artists such as Helle Hove and Lee Ufan, but rather to act as a buffer to shield me from anxiety when encountering a state of uncertainty in my making. E.H. Gombrich's writing on repetition and order was important to my project; he explained how the sense of order can act as a self-regulation process. The repeated action of making forced me to narrow my focus on to the act of making itself rather than worrying about the possible outcome, thus pushing away the unwanted chaos by providing a sense of progress that soothed my unsettled state of mind.

The open-ended process-driven methodology in making created a high level of uncertainty in making. Nevertheless, allowing uncertainty to be a part of the development process provided an avenue for new and fresh possibilities to emerge—the experimental approach led to diverse attempts in making, resulting in unexpected outcomes. The large group of handmade objects created during the process of repetition and in a state of uncertainty opened up space for viewers to interact with my work. The ambiguous development process propelled me to allow the process to drive the work, where the interaction between the viewers and my work became a significant part of my practice.

In my final work, I produced a body of objects that can be arranged in multiple ways, and I leave this arrangement to the viewer. This work brings together the various strands of investigation in my project. Letting go of a preconceived outcome for the work, emphasising the role of repetitive handmaking, and opening up the arrangement of the final work to the viewer have all contributed to the introduction of the concept of play in my practice.

The role of play performed a part in my project in various ways. As I employed play as a method of exploration in the studio, the project focus expanded by including viewers who interacted with my work. However, I realised that the interaction between the objects and the viewers was not about providing information to design objects that were suitable for play, but suggested the relationship between the viewers and me. In short, my intention was to invite the audience to play with me.

Developing open-ended objects led me to explore various relationships that might emerge between the objects. Dawn Youll's work made me aware of how objects could create relationships through various approaches to display. It became essential to me that the exploration of the final objects was as important as the making of the forms. This alteration of my relationship with process has greatly expanded my focus in research.

The development of interlocking objects was the most unexpected outcome of my final stage. It was at this stage that I began to integrate motion into my playful objects. The simple moving mechanisms, colours and textures created a sense of playfulness that invited the viewer to interact. Investigation into Ming-Shun Cho and Suzanne Stumpf's work became a very important source of information for me in understanding that the open-endedness of the artwork can be engaged in a more opened manner, creating even more possibilities for audience participation. Cho's sophisticated interactive ceramic objects demonstrated how complex mechanisms could be integrated with ceramics. In spite of his extraordinary skill in making, I realised Cho only allowed the interactive process to proceed in a fixed order, which left no room for the participant to contribute to his work. On the other hand, the multi-component interactive sculptures of Stumpf provided more of an interactive space for the viewers,

yet still limited the interactive process to the change of decorative patterns in her work. The investigation into Cho and Stumpf's work made me aware of how I could relinquish more power to the audience, such as involving the audience in becoming part of the making process. This idea of giving more space to allow participants to engage with my work will be the focus of the next project after my candidature.

To step out of my comfort zone in making was the most difficult decision and experience I have undertaken in my practice-led research. Towards the end of my exploration, I realised that trials, errors, randomness and accidents that occur in the open-ended experimental making process were crucial for the development of my creative thinking and art practice. Historian Rudolph Arnheim argues that the accidents which occur in making become a significant device for assisting art practice.[69] Arnheim claims that the happy accidents in the process of artistic development are often believed to be an opportunity of pure chance or the work of the unconscious mind, however to create true art, one must employ all the essential layers of the mind. He further states that, "Art is not occupation for relaxed people; because the resources of the mind must be forged into organized shape by conscious and unconscious discipline, which requires the effort of concentration".[70] Arnheim's explanation emphasises how we should never underestimate the potential of what accidents may contribute to practice. The research allowed me to understand how process itself can not only be a means to create an artwork, but can also drive the project's focus.

This research investigated how differences in the relationship with process can result in diverse outcomes in the field of contemporary ceramics. I found that engaging with an open-ended process-driven methodology in making could increase the potential for discovering new and unexpected possibilities in the creative process.

[69] Rudolf Arnheim, "Accident and the Necessity of Art," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 16, no. 1 (1957).
[70] Ibid., 29.

Fig. 63. Hsin-Yi Yang, *Mix and Match I* (detail)

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