

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

What's this do?

A graduate project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Master of Arts in Art, Visual Arts

By

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## Dedication

For my family, friends, and mentors, absolutely.

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## Abstract

### What's This Do?

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In my work I seek to cultivate multisensory and participatory spaces that incite a visceral awareness of the exchanges between objects that insist on interaction and their audience. Historically designed and crafted to complement practical gestures, and as unfired objects in their malleable state, clay provokes bodily awareness. The experience of the ceramic machines I craft draw on a tactile sensibility defined by crusty, weathered surfaces, and their noisy function borders on the absurd.

Informed by ancient handheld artifacts and monolithic stone monuments as records of mythos and utility, I imbue ceramic forms with my own mythologies, merging familiar functionalities of contemporary life with kinetic objects of dubious futility and provenance. These obscure and interactive objects arouse self-awareness through their animation, connecting lives past and present.

## Process

Clay speaks of damp earth, sincerity. It is raw. Clay operates within a natural science opposed to artificial, man-made materials like acrylics or plastic, a process that provides a brief divergence from the largely synthetic and technologically driven reality that encompasses our daily lives. For me, this tie to the natural world was a big draw to working with clay. When I first started working in ceramics and was stressed out to meet the deadline of throwing five perfect cylinders, our lab tech would remind us that it was just dirt. That perspective helped. I felt like clay's humble origins and its malleability made it charged with potential; I could push the material, I could play. It was the tech's way of saying don't get stuck on the serious stuff, because hell, we could recycle the clay and start again. Clay gives so much. Fancy dirt, might be more accurate.

Yet, there was also something sacred about shaping the earth with my hands. I was bringing something into existence. Working with clay I felt purpose, as a maker, drawing material into three dimensions. There was a power to the resulting object as well, its own individuality born through the marks of the maker. I discovered working with and connecting to clay necessitates a present-ness, the complete participation of mind, body, and spirit. Its tactility engrossing and meditative, the ceramic craft became a joyous outlet for creative expression and a practice that graciously reinforced work ethics applicable to life lessons: patience, acceptance, and an openness to revising perspective. Similar tenants can be drawn to Wabi Sabi, a dense Japanese aesthetic often boiled down within American ceramic studios to describe any ceramic vessels that are asymmetric, rough, or simple. From my experience the term was used in a way of commiserating a shared experience with fellow potters, when thrown work that got bumped or knocked in that final moment before reaching the perfectly thrown pot we intended, resulting in a serendipitous beauty mark. Or if we were in better spirits it was it was a quiet lesson of acceptance. I appreciate novelist Richard Powell's definition, who takes into account Buddhist

teachings that make up part of the larger idea of Wabi Sabi, to say its effect and beauty come from “acknowledging three simple realities: nothing lasts, nothing is finished, and nothing is perfect,” a perspective I try to remember in difficult times (Powell).

There is an intimacy with the material; the history of ceramics is entangled with that of humanity. Clay pots were among the pivotal tools during the development of early human civilization, testaments of our shift from nomadic travelers to agricultural settlers and our domestication of plants, animals, and earth. Fostering the development of megaliths of stone or clay pots, settling allowed further manipulation of earth and proliferation of culture, over the course of which the vessel has since diversified in form and function within all cultures throughout human history. When I mention “pottery,” our minds go to that which is handled, that which serves a function, that which is shared and passed around. It is difficult to separate engagement and intimacy from ceramic objects when we consider the long traditions of the teapot or the mug within many cultures. Ceramic craft is bound to tradition and the tactile experience.

Tactility is important as it is necessary for a ceramic artist. Ceramicists often say working with clay is a collaboration, a conversation between the material and our bodies. We squeeze and press its boundaries, meticulously working with our hands to shape it. Clay responds. It pushes back, bending, slumping, or breaking apart. As with any conversation we must learn to actively listen, mindfully take account of the clay, as well as our bodies, as we continue towards a mutually agreeable form. For me, working with clay is a therapeutic, bodily experience, an engagement where I practice intuition and consideration of space and bodies. This collaborative relationship dynamic and physicality became the foundation and a kind of philosophy for my process of working with clay.

Continuing to work with clay I found myself drawn to the forms and textures of those early human stone structures and handheld ceramic artifacts. There was a mystery surrounding

these ancient objects, the potential stories behind their construction and intended purposes all now blurred from weathering, developing a rich surface of degradation through time. I was reminded of clay's behavior through its process of becoming fired ceramic, its transmutation through time, and the similar weathered appearance in my work, embodying the technical craft nuances that I was beginning to understand.

With each stage clay offers its unique and time sensitive potentials and limitations from which we must learn patience, listening to and recognizing them within the scope of our craftpersonship. From damp greenware to dry boneware, handling too roughly, quickly, overworking or carving too deeply create points of tension in the clay body. In many ways the forces we exert and ways in which we handle the clay object become embedded in its memory, often exposed soon after in its later states. Some forces are even less in our control. Our environment and the weather can determine if moisture leaves our clay too quickly. The kiln can be a great place of chaos. Direct flames and temperatures rising too quickly can push such aforementioned stress points to react unfavorably from thermal shock, and firing clay still containing moisture risks severe cracks and shattering, affecting the other work around it.

Clay is a unique artistic material in its permanence. When it undergoes its chemical reaction to become fully fired ceramic it becomes impermeable stone, able to break, sure, but well able to outlast our fleshy bodies. Realization of this dynamic between the ceramic objects I made to my body was sobering and humbling, testing me with a lesson of acceptance. All the technical mistakes, avoidable excess weight, and gaudy craftpersonship within my work are irreversible, and it is much healthier to accept this, learn what I can from the experience, and move on. Each piece became a testament to my artistic growing pains, but each "failure" lends something to the unique life and personality of the piece. In time this became significant to my ceramic process; even as I became more seasoned in my understanding of conventional "craft success" within ceramics, I welcomed technical challenges that I could learn to better control. I

embraced and highlighted my “failures” a number of ways. Through staining the clay body with oxide washes and my unique glazing methods I drew attention to the natural cracks and my high relief carvings of my ceramic objects by caking textures with colorant materials, providing greater depth of surface enrichment. In time I would intentionally work in impromptu ways or set up controlled failure, such as hitting my ceramic objects with large sticks or by throwing rocks, the clay body recording the tension which became exposed after firing. In yet another framework of controlled chaos, I often approached glaze application as an act of collage/de/collage, applying multiple layers of different glazes while sporadically disturbing them. A technique I often used was aggressively dry rubbing glaze so that the minerals of dust smeared over other glazed areas, reacting in subtle and sometimes not so subtle ways. Another technique I became fond of was hardly mixing or not mixing buckets of glaze prior to their use. As beginners we are taught to thoroughly mix glazes to achieve a proper and successful coat of glaze. Glaze, a final step in the ceramic process providing a glass coating of protection and decoration, is essentially a bunch of earthy materials suspended in water often prone to separation. Seeking the improper and unsuccessful, I discovered different degrees of glaze separation that expanded my options in glaze application and towards new subtleties in a weathered finish with my ceramic work. Dunking pieces in this watery, non-homogenized glaze gave me gradient washes ~~to~~ and sporadic splotches of material allowing opportunities for unpredictable reactions once fired. In some cases I felt the resulting glaze would not complement the finished piece and altogether wipe away large swaths of glaze only to reglaze it with slight difference. In these instances it became important for me to leave trace amounts of the first glazing attempt, in the corners and cracks, whatever remained after several wipes of the sponge. These leftover elements became records of the object in its glazing process, blemishes on the finished piece that described the possible life it could have had. This system of adding and removing through abrasive brushing, scratching, and impromptu forces allowed for the

complex layers of rustic and worn glaze reactions I sought for my work. Like those ancient objects with weathered surfaces, the flaking and cracking of my sculptures revealed the life and the chaos of our collaboration. Ceramics are time capsules.

This ability to speak across time was interesting to me. Considering our understanding of how early humans experienced and viewed the world around them, I felt the mythos they imbued in these objects and structures spoke of a fundamental and shared humanity that connected and resonated with all people. The surface enrichment brought on by impromptu and natural forces as well expressed a fundamental understanding of the chaotic cosmos we all move through. This thinking that an artifact or object could hold timeless messages of shared core truths was powerful to me, something I wanted to communicate in my ceramic work.

Though for all their interesting glazes, surface textures, and monolithic ceramic forms of quirky anthropomorphic creatures and deities, attempts to speak of any universal harmony read largely too ambiguously idiosyncratic to be decipherable. If the work did not communicate it, what did it communicate? Was there something more important to be saying? What if it could say it, then what? What did it mean to say that now? I started to imagine this theme of ancient mysticism I had idealized was subject matter far too removed in time to connect with a contemporary audience. Maybe it was too grandiose. So what could I possibly add to the conversation through my work? I began to question my abilities and my role as an artist. The creatures began to feel silly and childish. I had become so entrenched in these ideas and my go-to forms and processes, something kept bringing me back there, and so this growing self doubt and uncertainty of where to take the work became a wall to my making.

In retrospect what I was doing was self imposing such serious and esoteric criteria on my ceramic objects rather than simply listening to that inner spark of curiosity to lend shape to clay and let the sense-making come later. The making began to feel automatic and joyless, with what few projects I followed through on feeling empty and lacking a sense of “me.” Looking to

peers and mentors for what brought them joy in making and methods of working towards resolution their work when a wall was me, I would in time see the value of letting go of doubt and leaning into the ideas that bring us discomfort or appear silly. You also can't work through something if you don't see it through. It is in this way we provide ourselves opportunity for perspective and greater scope of information for investigation towards personal and artistic growth. I would also witness instances of personal story telling, and such strength in work that drew from life experiences. Again, through the craft of clay there was this test of acceptance and learning a willingness to be vulnerable at times. This realization was and often still is the most difficult to remember in times of doubt; the idea of vulnerability terrified me, especially at this point in time when a destabilizing shift in my life swept away any enthusiasm to make at all.

Being diagnosed with type one diabetes at 29 took a long time to sink in. It was not something I expected, but who could have? I mean, you go through life thinking you have a clear idea of how your body works; now with every decision from what to eat, to daily activities, to the question of why my mood was irritable or my body ached meant consideration of my body and blood glucose levels. That whole first year was a blur as I came to understand the changes it would make to my life; the practice of self administrating medicine, numerous doctor visits, maintaining a stock of medical supplies, back up supplies, and emergency carb-y snacks overwhelmed me. It was emotionally draining and often felt out of my control. Often the act of using syringes to inject insulin into my abdomen would catch me off guard and be too much to handle emotionally, such a reality was surreal and alien. At its worst, this chronic disease brought anxiety that left little mental energy for making art, let alone getting out of bed; and the regulation of blood sugar was always at the back of my mind.

This new way of living completely removed the joy and enthusiasm for creative endeavors, and for so long my ceramic practice stagnated. I just wanted to put as much distance as I could between me and my situation. I did not want to talk about it with anyone, and

eventually I just didn't want to talk. When I returned to working in ceramics I vehemently refused to allow it to be the subject of my work. Such vulnerability was deeply uncomfortable. In any case I could not see why the two worlds should meet. In retrospect it was foolish to believe my condition could stay out of my work when it affected all aspects of my life. What made ceramics safe? It decided when I worked. Every couple hours, if I felt faint, or I needed to eat, I had to stop what I was doing and check my blood glucose levels and make sure I was okay for strenuous activity. Or I would need to consider how many carbohydrates I ingested and measure out the appropriate insulin dose to counter the food. I also learned it was important to feel things out for some time after to see whether what I ate or the dose of insulin was adequate or if I would need to rest a moment longer to avoid severe symptoms of hypoglycemia.

Meanwhile my clay dries out, the work flow becomes disrupted, and it takes a moment to reassess where I left off with a project. Needless to say watching valuable work time slip away was incredibly frustrating. The sudden and strong onset of chills, anxiety, and confusion from low blood sugar was terrifying. Those still get pretty bad. Embarrassingly they seem to come at the worst times like when loading a kiln or assisting a student. I joke and say I just need a snack. As much as I tried to deny it, my health condition, the ritual of checking my blood and all of it had become imbedded in my ceramic process, whether I liked it or not.

In his video *My Worst Trainwreck*, Youtuber, music educator, and jazz bassist Adam Neely details his worst, "train wreck" performance at a wedding gig that increasingly drove off the rails. What sounded like a nice moment, a bridesmaid requesting to sing Elton John's "Can You Feel the Love Tonight" as a dedication to the newlyweds, unfolded into a disconnect of key centers, with the band playing Elton John's version, originally in Bb Major, and the singer, the band speculates, following Disney's "The Lion King" version in F Major. Now half way through the song and unsuccessful attempts by the band to subtly suggest the correct pitch by playing the melody behind the singer, Neely admits to us that "Can You Feel the Love Tonight" is just

“one of those songs you can’t really remember if does this big climactic modulation in the final chorus. I mean, without checking, can you remember... Yeah, and at this point neither could I” (Neely). Using hand signals, the band attempts to agree on whether they should modulate up, down, maybe stay the same, but the final chorus arrives without resolve, and the guitarist, bassist, pianist, and singer end up modulating to four separate keys, resulting in an inescapable, cringy, quadritonal mess.

For all the chaos he describes of the experience, Neely nonchalantly admits it wasn’t that bad, it comes with the territory, “don’t get me wrong, musically it was god-awful”, but that whatever the performance, “technical and logistical meltdown could happen... if a few minutes of cringe is the worst thing to happen in your job, honestly it’s a pretty sweet gig. It certainly keeps things in perspective” (Neely).

Neely continues: “I have a friend who is a jazz bass player who quit playing jazz full time to pursue a Maritime career... And he said that the worst thing that happens in music is you look kinda stupid. When you make a mistake in music, nobody gets hurt, nobody dies, the only wrecks are metaphorical... I think about this sometimes when I’m getting dark and inside my head... when I don’t feel I am playing very well... It’s easy to get wrapped up in something that you believe in and that you love but it is important to learn how to let go and I think it is an important experience for everyone who plays music to have at least one good train wreck. Musical train wrecks are just great practice for the real train wrecks, when the world really is falling apart around you. And you need to know how to let go and ride that energy and not break with it” (Neely).

I know I had watched this before, but this time it just hit differently. I couldn’t help but relate in terms of how I felt back then, of course retrospectively, coming out of a lengthy depression after my diagnosis, but specifically to how in denial I was of the reality of things, doubting that I would return to a state of normalcy, or that any good could come of it. I

remember being averse to hearing positive, perspective, stories like this, too. It's funny to think how relevant this perspective check is now too in context of what's going on; writing this during quarantine, the campus closed, and I am unable to have closure with my current work. Having spent all that time working towards graduation it feels terrible leaving the work unrealized, still greenware, but it doesn't have to be the one perspective I focus on. Really, I am not the only one, all lives and routines have been upended in some way by the Covid-19 pandemic, some better and some much worse. Coming to terms with being diabetic was certainly a chaotic experience, maybe akin to a quadrilateral rendition of "Can You Feel the Love Tonight," but for as bad as it felt then the experience would become a reminder of awareness of my perspective, and knowing when to let go especially when life throws even stranger challenges and unknowns my way. From my diagnosis I've come to truly appreciate the support of family and friends and the access to medical care which allowed me to manage my blood glucose towards a healthier life. Writing this now, although unable to fully concentrate on the completion of my graduate work, I am awe of my work's trajectory, to see how far I've come in my academic career from when I began at California State University, Northridge, and how my life experiences can connect and inform my artistic practice and think more deeply about my role as an artist.

Facing this new understanding of my body has led me to confront notions of what presence, belonging, and physicality mean in my ceramic work. The way I move my body and its functions, instinctual things I had taken for granted before, shifts in the things I thought I depended on and engaged with became subjects of investigation as I adapted to new methods of working. I would need to adapt to new extensions of my body, both literal and physical extensions in the form of tubes connected to insulin delivery pumps, and extensions in the form of tools that helped me monitor my blood glucose to manage a healthier quality of life. Lugging these objects around as new parts of my body and identity was unbearable, embarrassing, and strange, they were both part of me and not part of me. Thinking about these medical tools,

these objects, led me to consider other previously unrealized extensions of me, the stuff separate from me yet that which helped to construct my reality. Where did it end? What is connected to what? This shift in perspective would lead me to reevaluate the way I approached my ceramics, connecting the health and wellbeing of my own body to the work. Thinking about what I had believed to be dependent on and engaged with, the dynamics of relationships between people, memories, and objects like insulin delivery pumps, all translated into approaching ceramic objects with regard to their connection and varying proximity to one another. I was interested in discovering the ways objects held new dynamics in relation to one another as I rearranged them, resting on each other, placed inside each other, supporting or depending on each other, creating new meaning with the objects in my work through these relationships. This intent was simple, moving pieces, and I was okay with that. Having felt emotionally and physically depressed for so long and finally coming to terms with the vulnerabilities that living with type one diabetes presented was permission for me to not hesitate with ideas I may have thought before as too simple, silly, or embarrassing. It would not be the worst thing if I made strange or terrible art once in a while, if nothing other than to be okay with making again. To see these absurd ideas through provided information not obtainable otherwise. Indeed these investigations became catalysts for development of and direction for a new body of work.

There was something interesting about objects that needed others in order to perform the functions they were imbued with. These thoughts culminated into my piece *Dependence*; its clay slabs depend on the thrown vessel in order to stand up. What makes this piece so important to me was the permission I granted myself to produce an object with a premise so simple and silly, the conception of its form coming from a dream vision of the bins that are left by the door to hold visitor's umbrellas. Throughout the day I saw the form in subsequent visions whenever my mind wandered, it seemed to ask very little of me in terms of changes. As I

invested myself more sincerely to the idea's legitimacy there was a growing sense that it just made sense to see the idea fabricated in clay through my hands. I never made preliminary sketches. It was just a rainy week. To say "What the hell, why not?" was the most liberated I had felt as a maker. The resulting work felt so poetic to me, communicating my ideas of belonging and dependence. The sentiment felt relatable, at least something I could relate to, considering the different iterations of relationships I have experienced in my life in which I felt dependent on others' acceptance and validation, and more recently my dependence on technology like an insulin delivery pump and medicine to manage a healthier quality of life. I too realized the potential of using my art as a creative outlet and generating conversation around these universally shared experiences of emotional and bodily health and our social dynamics with one another.

Another focus that emerged in the course of making work was the idea of touch, movement, and, in time, audience participation. Granted, touch is what clay is all about, what pottery is all about, yet strangely it never occurred to me that this fundamental quality of working with clay, the physicality experienced in my process, could become a focal point to talk about in the work. I began to see it in the types of objects my work would reference. My work, *Symbiotes*, in its form, calls to mind a combination of reliquary artifact and mortar and pestle device. Its legs resemble a kind of ancient architecture, columns that prop up a worn stage built for the sole purpose of holding up a spherical object that cannot stand stationary on its own. Both *Dependence* and *Symbiotes* possess a palpable sense of tactility. The slabs with hand grips, a subtle and significant answer of including me more literally within the work, as well as the mortar and pestle, both could be manipulated and reorganized. Once the multiple objects began interacting with each other on their own, through physical interaction with an audience, their potential was becoming realized. The work was becoming kinetic, participatory, and, as I would find, grating to the ears.

## Context

Its silly but, the convention to not touch art in museum spaces intrigued me, soon becoming an absurd directional focus of thinking of ways of inciting engagement in my work. I suspect compliance with this unspoken condition is just as much out of respect for the art object as it is fear of repercussions for damages, but I mean, is it even on our minds? Personally I like to get close to art objects to study them, and if it wasn't for that nervous museum attendant reminding me to mind my distance when immersed in an artwork I probably would have forgotten about this ingrained social condition. This unisensory position was not always the standard of museums, with touch once being an "appropriate and accepted way of relating to art and ritual objects" (Levent). In the past some tours included the handling and lifting of objects, seeing it as fundamental in the acquisition of information, such as the object's weight or smell, to establish a connection with the object (Levant).

Perhaps working with clay for so long has established this pro-tactile bias in my mind. I cannot help but agree, because how awful that a material like ceramics, with its intimate and culturally rich history with humanity, so active and tactile, once placed in the museum, the exhibition, or academic critique, becomes stripped of its innate allure for tactile engagement. It seems we conform to the visual-centric worldview, relying mostly on sight to provide information and, despite the allure or question of touch, there is hesitance to do so. Of course the material should be handled and experienced; the physicality of clay was a historic and personal joy within my practice that I want to share and express through my work. So the absurd question emerged: How do I get audiences to touch my ceramic sculptures?

A silly prospect, and from various critiques of and conversations about my work and this aim of audience participation it seemed the only guarantee and certainly the common practice was to put up a sign that reads, "It is okay to touch." True, but I didn't want the simplest solution. I didn't want to tell the spectator what to do; not like that, not yet anyways. What was important

to me was using this ridiculous proposition as a self-imposed challenge to critically investigate and question possibilities for resolving my ideas within the work. This framework pushed me out of my comfort zone to question my process, my material, my understanding of the resulting work, and how it could live in the world.

An artist I found influential, in her approach to ideas of participation, the body, the art object, and role of the artist, was Lygia Clark. Looking at the breadth of her work, it was inspiring to see the development of her research and practice towards resolution which successfully fused art and life. Clark's interactive pieces, such as the masks and wearables, redefined artwork from static object to what she termed a "proposição" (proposition), with participants necessary and tied to the act of making something, an "event taking place in the now" (Macel). With these works, what mattered to her was the psycho-sensory experience of the participant, and the "act-in-progress... the viewer... becomes an author, or rather, the agent of a perception defined by the act" (Macel). I found it fascinating that through these propositions and staged events, though focused on the subject's experiences, the art objects held an active and equal position to that of the subject as a collaborator to the meaning making of the work. Also interesting was how these propositions severely blurred the lines between artist, art object, and spectator; the art objects no longer fixed to the wall or pedestal, entering space, the participating subject necessary to complete the work, and the artist present to facilitate these acts.

Clark's focus would continue to delve further into the realm of psychoanalysis, participatory art, and art therapy, to completely dissolve any barriers between life and art when her practice moved to therapy sessions held in her apartment. During this time she came to focus on what she referred to as "relational objects", objects that held "no specific nature in [them]selves... It is in the relationship established with the fantasy of the subject that it is defined" (Hudek). These objects were mostly common, ephemeral materials, of different weights, textures, and smells, such as plastic bags with air or water, foam, sea shells, cushions,

and rubber to name a few. In private sessions, Clark would use an assortment of objects, laying or pressing them on patient's bodies, while pairing other therapeutic techniques. Clark describes her methods: "I used...the application of Sapir's method through which I had passed in Paris: relaxation based in verbal inducement, one session per week. I gradually abandoned inducement, beginning to use only my own materials...The process becomes therapeutic through the regularity of the sessions, which allows the progressive elaboration of the phantasmic provoked by the potentialities of the "relational objects." In manipulating the "relational object," the subject lives out a pre-verbal image. The "relational object" directly touches the subject's nucleus" (Hudek). As a maker of clay objects I often feel my material comes with so much baggage, informed by its ever present history and craft. This idea that objects could hold alternate positions, of immediacy, intuition, and positions of agency was renewing for me. Clark's investigations would lead me to reevaluate my understanding of the different ways objects can relate to other bodies and be more thoughtfully employed to facilitate engagement.

Leaning into my proposition, a work that I felt set me closer towards a resolution of engagement was *Manual Transmission*, an object encasing two protuberances that can be manipulated and repositioned along their path. Expanding on the thinking behind *Symbiotes*, I wanted to see how multiple ceramic objects would engage with each other if inside of and enclosed by another. The result immediately brought to mind levers, switches, and machines, except it was a machine out of time. Much like *Symbiotes* its worn surface lent an ancient quality that while we recognize it as a device with kinetic potential, calling to mind a stick shift or crank, its place of origin and function is playfully obscured. With both these objects, I wanted an audience to be enamored by such lines of questioning as, "What's this do?" their curiosity compelling participation with the object. This physical interaction between the object and spectator was important to me, the act inviting participants to experience a visceral awareness

of their own bodies in relation to the object within the exhibition space, tying them to this moment and place and facilitating their taking part in the meaning making of the work.

The prospect of crafting ceramic machines is still an exciting breakthrough that has exposed new possibilities for my work, curating participatory experiences. I feel it has made me more observant of the devices and simple machines around me, and as a result take mindful account from their undemanding gestures, from light switches and door knobs, to the mechanics of carousels and turnstiles. In these investigations I have become more aware of my presence in a world full of objects that often necessitate my engagement to generate meaning. This too became reflected in my understanding of the work and how it would unfold moving forward, becoming more thoughtful of the design of my objects, more ergonomically conscious and unquestionable to its purpose. With *Manual Transmission*, the two levers were a bit indiscrete with regard to their function, and could have been more resolved about the idea of participation if modeled after bike handles, or as I had already done with grip marks on the slabs that join my piece *Dependence*, the grooves fitting the hand and being more explicit in design about its function.

Working through these ideas and witnessing interactions with my work, I realized I had overlooked an opportunity to emphasize tension and promote engagement through the visceral grinding sound ceramics makes when handled and scraped against one another. There was something tantalizing, unnerving to some, about the ensuing tension made through this sound, which in its way also served as a reward for those who interacted with the work. This became an entry point towards considering soundscape and sound art, something I found fascinating, and I realized as an effective direction for investigation towards my goal. These ideas culminated in my piece *Gearbox* by using contact microphones and a large bass amp. This primordial machine, resembling a jack-in-the-box or pencil sharpener, is the most successful in presenting an obviously functional and inviting kinetic object, its knob and crank clearly

expressing potential to turn. The visual presence of guitar cables, microphones, and amplifiers aided in the work's approachability, the low frequency hiss functioning as a cue to the audience that this contraption held some kinetic energy. Pulling its crank rotates a series of gears encased within the weathered ceramic box, producing visceral drones of screeching and crunching.

## Conclusion

These investigations continued to develop my understanding of this body of work and what I want to say with it. Whether to create an experience by enticing touch or creating tension, both seemed to work towards heightening spectators' awareness of their bodies in a space and of the work through their senses. After acknowledging how embracing the uncomfortable fostered a momentum towards growth personally as well as in my artistic practice, this ridiculous proposition served as a framework in which to think and create in ways I would not have otherwise, critically challenging me to investigate and question the things around me, my practice, my material, the resulting work and how it lived in the world. Essentially this self-imposed challenge was a way to keep pushing myself and understand that even if the journey does not lead towards the initial idea, the points along the way are experiences that can lend unique insight or alternate direction. This practice would shape a mentality that has become an important practice of mindfulness as I traverse life and approach making. Because answers may arrive today, tomorrow, or in an unexpected or unfamiliar way, as a maker and craft person, I am innately listening to my surroundings and synthesizing interior and exterior experiences. Moreover, moment to moment it does not need to be perfect, completed, or last forever. The answer is in flux.

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Appendix A



*Dependence*, glazed ceramic, 2019



*Symbiotes*, glazed ceramic, 2019



*Manual Transmission*, glazed ceramic, 2019



*Gearbox, glazed ceramic, 2019*



*Claypositions*, glazed ceramic, contact microphone, fender amp, metal shelf, plywood, 2020