Det Kongelige Danske Kunstakademis Skoler
for Arkitektur, Design og Konservering

"Porcelain Whispers"

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The autonomous art object
5 semester
Blok 2
Characters: 35 114
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INTRODUCTION

Sound is everywhere, at any moment. It is a big part of our everyday life and one of our five senses. The hearing, however, a bit like the air we breathe, is such a natural perception of our environment that it often escapes of our awareness.

As a person working with clay I have always attached big importance to the choices I made to produce one object following the visual aspect I wanted it to be : choosing the right type of clay, making the right shape and then fired it at the right temperature to get the right glaze. Today I want to work with clay in another dimension, and think about producing sound with it. But what kind of sounds could emerge from that material?

We all know about clay sounds because ceramic and especially porcelain is everywhere in our everyday life. Our dishes, our cups, our sinks, our tubs, our toilets are made from a porcelain. We are used to hear the sound coming from those objects in home context.
In this project I am really interested in experimenting with the material following one main goal: try to get different sound that you don't necessarily expect from porcelain. I will work only with porcelain: the sounds will be produced by the material itself when it will rub, bump, etc.…against another part of the object. This type of percussion is called "idiophone".

Clay is a very flexible material in a way that you can play with it: mix several types of clay to get one special effect, use different techniques to make different shapes, fire it at different temperatures to get different porosity, choosing to glaze it or not to make different textures. No other material can be shaped as easily as clay, and few others materials are as durable as fired clay. That is why it is interesting to work on in terms of sonority.

I also chose to work on this issue because sounds and music are very important in my life. I grew up while listening to music coming from all over the world, and especially classical music, traditional West and North African music and Middle-East music. Listening to all this different kind of sonority has certainly made my tone-deaf more sensitive. For me it's important to listen to music with good sound equipment. This way you can enjoy more, and each sound can be clearly defined as different from another: feeling the breath of

the singer, the vibrations and resonances from instrumental strings, etc... All those little sounds bring together and distinguished compose and reveal all the depth of music.

The power of sounds always impresses me. I have a strong feeling that some sounds can fill the lack of human warmth for a time and bring positive energy or, contrary, remind you moments that you'll prefer to forget.

We all go through a difficult period in our collective history. Fear is pervasive, and the nightmare may arise at any moment. The events occurred in my country last month has greatly touched me and changed something in me. The only way I found to fill the absence of loved ones by my side during this hard period has been to feed me with sounds and music. The album "Musique de nuit"[1] ("Night music"), was one of my main source of consolation.

Vincent Ségal and Ballaké Sissoko in Bamako, Mali

This album was recorded during night on the rooftop of musician Ballaké Sissoko's house in Bamako, Mali. The sounds of his kora (string instrument from West Africa) intertwine with those of the French cellist Vincent Segal and also with sounds coming from the surrounding area environment. The vigilant listener can capture in the background

[1] « Musique de nuit » - Ballaké Sissoko et Vincent ségal - NØ FØRMAT! - 2015

sounds like the hiss of the cars, the furtive flight of a bat, the sound of a prayer rug that is shaken, the distant and haunting song from sirens' police or train, and the quiet bleating of Ballaké Sissokos's sheep... This album was recorded in January 2015, shortly after the Paris terrorist attacks, targeting the satirical newspaper "Charlie Hebdo". The cellist Vincent Segal speaks about it: "I left Paris to find Ballaké in Mali after a trying week in January 2015. In Bamako hope seemed to vanish. As Music is a cure, it protects us from the fury of world. We play the night on the roof of the house of Ballaké right in Bamako. [...] It was as if the neighborhood listening to the kora and cello was finally able to sleep as a child. The next day, neighbors said they were hearing their whispers while dreaming... ".

By fully echoes with events happening in November, in Paris again and in Bamako a few days after, this music has emerged as a counterpoint of intense sweetness. Sounds celebrate what still makes this world poetically habitable: far from his wrath and closer to its sensitive knowledge.

I maybe move a little bit away from porcelain describing all this but those times have comforted me in my desire to produce sonority, and not whichever. Music is an important component of my personality and my everyday life and that's why I decided to work ceramics in terms of sonority. Through this project I want to let speak the porcelain material, because beyond its visual and functional quality, I think that porcelain has a lots of think to say. During this project I will constantly ask myself and try to find out **how to shape and highlight the sound of porcelain ?**

SOUND AND PORCELAIN: A CALL FOR EXPERIMENTATION

When I start thinking about working on "sound dimension" with clay I first choose to work with porcelain. We all have an idea about the sound this material is producing and I wanted to play with that to go in another direction: create sounds with porcelain that you don't necessarily expect from it. After taking this direction it was the open way to experiment lots of things, especially with shapes and firing temperatures.

RESEARCHES - Before starting to produce some experiment pieces, I made some research about artists who have worked with clay and sound before. Then I discover the work of Nicolas Frize, a contemporary French musician composer. He writes electroacoustic music with objects sounds often from the daily environment. In 2007 he started a 3 years art residency at "Manufacture de Sèvres", a well-known porcelain factory in France. During that period he created an "instrumentarium": a set consisting of hundreds porcelain instruments as percussion or stringed instrument. Some were copied from traditional instruments like gongs, keyboards or triangles… and others were totally invented to generate new musical gestures. Other pieces were traditional objects of the Manufacture diverted from their original function to become musical instruments.

Nicolas Frize and his porcelain instruments at "Manufacture de Sèvres", Sèvres, France
Images taken out from "Notes blanches" a film summing up his 3 years art residency

At the end of his residency he gave a "porcelain concert". It was performed by a group of percussionists with the instruments he made, in collaboration with craft people from the Manufacture.

At the "Porcelain concert" gave at "Manufacture de Sèvres", Sèvres, France

A film called "Notes blanches"[2] ("White notes") was taken during his three years residency, and viewable on the video platform: Vimeo.com. As I haven't had the opportunity to see his work exhibited at the Manufacture this film was a good way for me to have a first idea about the field of possibilities. It gave me ideas to intensify researches he had done on certain shapes with declining them.

During my following researches I found another musician working with clay and sound but in a different way: Tomoko Sauvage. She is a Japanese musician and sound artist based in Paris. She has been working on a project called "waterbowls": porcelain bowls of different sizes filled with water and amplified with hydrophones (under-water microphones). She plays with different forms of water – drops, waves and bubbles - resonating in the bowls as well as audio feedback: creating waving drones and natural

[2] "Notes Blanches" Corinne Dardé – 42 min – 2015 – Vimeo.com

overtones. Her work is about the delicate balance between controlled and uncontrolled: with random percussion of droplets, acoustic characteristics of the space, and the fragile tonality created with the fluid material that is constantly evaporating and moving. Tomoko Sauvage has been giving performances, exhibitions and workshops in Europe, US, Canada and Japan, often in solo but also in collaboration with musicians and choreographers.

Tomoko Sauvage performing with "waterbowls" // View of an installation with ice block and bowls

Whereas Nicolas Frize is experimenting sounds with a lot of different material to create some kind of instruments, Tomoko Sauvage is only working with clay bowls in different sizes and water movements. This random aspect in her work, with the sounds coming out from the same shapes but with different scale interested me a lot. As you will see later in this report, the random and scale aspects inspired me for the next phase.

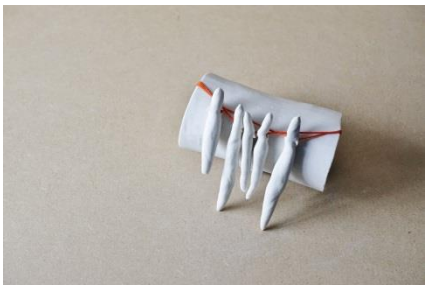
As I'm not a musician, my way of working with sound is different from those two artists: I'm acting in contrary direction. Their knowledge is all about notes, music composition, and instruments. And as a ceramist my skills are about clay material, its process and its applications. We are, in a way, both working and experimenting in another field developing other kind of sensitivity. Consequently, in this project I will not act as a

musician player but working as a ceramist who want to explore clay material through sounds.

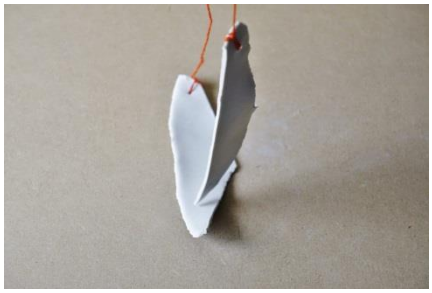
EXPERIMENTS - After studying the work of these artists, I made researches about the different types of existing percussion and I have listed six (but we can always imagine some more). Percussion can be: hit/ scraped/ clashed/ shacked/ plucked/ bowed. Then I start drawing and very quickly start making shapes with porcelain. During the first step it was important for me to have an overview about different kind of sound I could get out from porcelain. I didn't pay a lot of attention about the visual result of those objects but I was really thinking my shapes through sound and trying to imagine what kind of sound could emerge from those.

These pictures show part of "sound objects" I made during my experimentation phases. First I choose to fire all the pieces at 1250°, then I produced the same shapes but fired it a 920°. After that I decided to explore other temperatures and fired same pieces separately at 920°/ 1050°/ 1150° and 1250°. After getting my pieces out of the kilns, I made some sound records from each piece. It was important for me to be able to hear the sounds without having to manipulate the object. That way I was able to focus only on the listening. All those objects could be used in a different way, and some of them can be scraped, beaten and shaken in the same time for example, depending what kind of sound you want to get.

Waves sound // Three different bowls fired separately at 1050°, 1150° and 1250°
they are filled with three size porcelain beads: one size for each

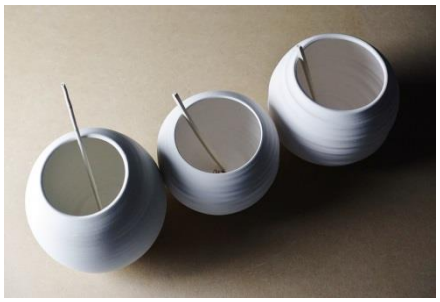

Strong metal sound // rubbed clink sound // rubbed stones with resonance sound


Stone clash sound // rubbed metal sound // soft claves sound



claves relief sound // claves hit sound // guiro sound


poles boats on wind sounds // metal scrapped sounds // rain sounds (tubes filed with beads)

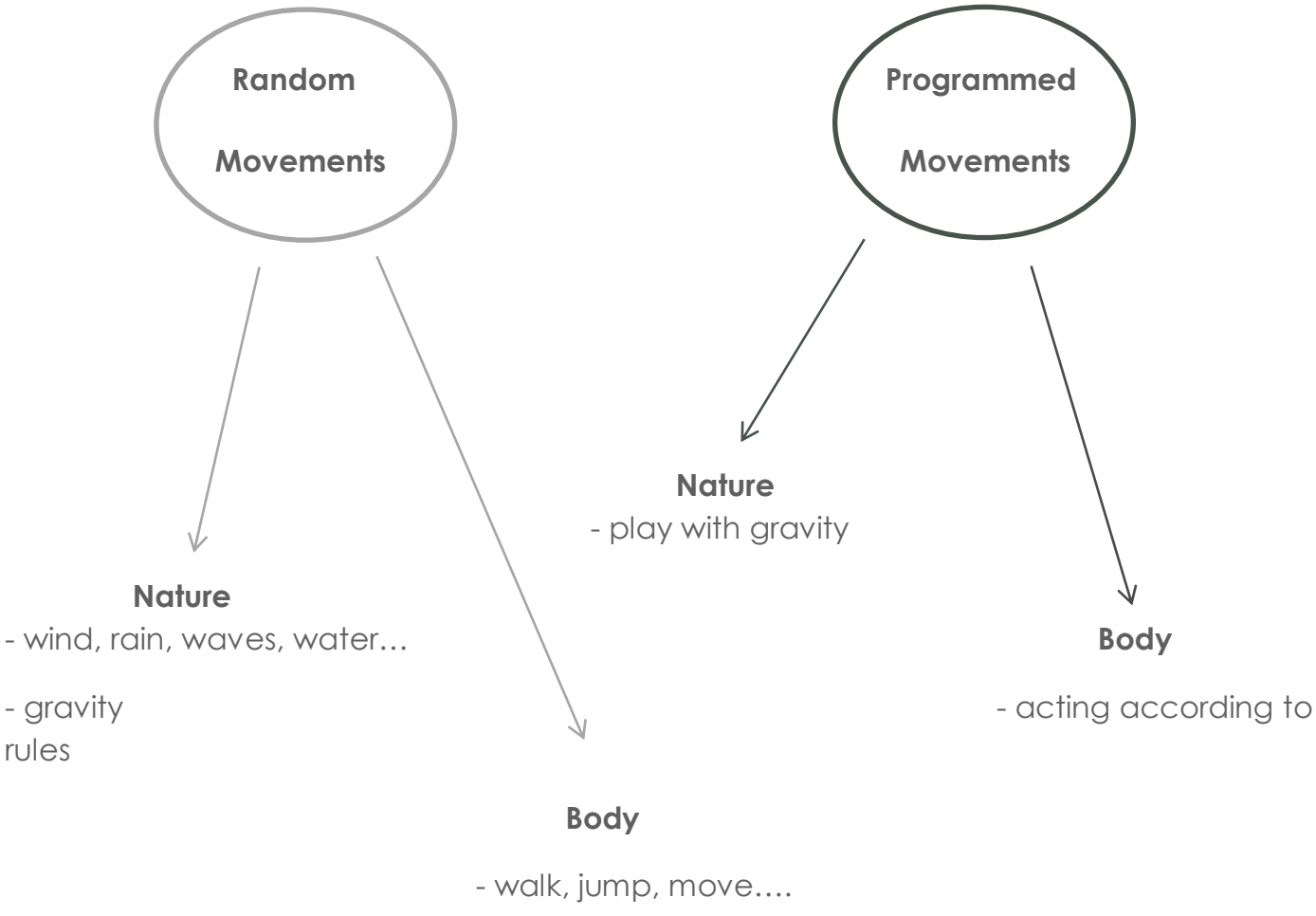
While listening to the sounds produced by these pieces, I noticed that porcelain biscuits are more deep tone and with more resonance than high fired porcelain sound that is more high sound and distinct. The diameter and the thickness also influence sonority. That is to say: the possibilities are endless. That's why this is important to research further but with scatter.

From these experiments I tried to determine how the sound would appear: what type and source of movement will make them move and "sing"? This was the second step of my work.

[This first part of my report was all about sound. Unfortunately I can't share that with you through writing, but you'll of course, have the opportunity to listen to some of them during the final presentation.]

MOVEMENT AS A SOUND BASIS

The movement is the basis of sound: If nothing moves, there is no sound. From this departure point, I started to think and determined what could be the different sources of movement. Then I found two basic sources: nature and human body. And within these two categories there are two ways to consider the move: the random / spontaneous movement, and the programmed movement. I will talk more in detail about those points in this part of the report and try to find out what kind of those I want to work with. Here I made a simple model to sum up those different points:



BODY // RANDOM MOVEMENTS - I started to care about body movements and the relationship between porcelain under it. I then imagined my sound objects as kinds of

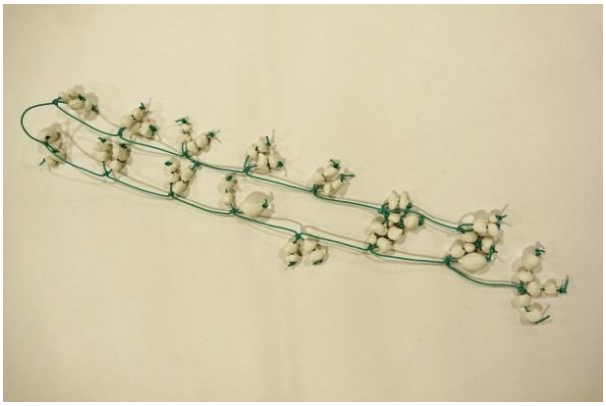
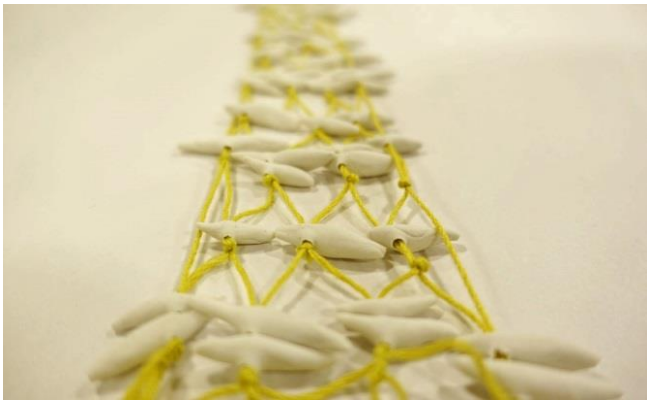
"sound- jewelry" objects that would move according to the movement's wearer. What is interesting with the body is that depending to the body part, the movement will be completely different: the movement of the head relative to that of a hand, for example. Moreover, the movement and then the sound will also be different from one person to another: a calm person surely produces less sound than a hyperactive person for example.

My research and artistic references were oriented to artist Kristi Paap, an Estonian jeweler, and especially his series "A room with a view" where she is working around jewelry and sounds. She is more precisely investigating what you in general terms might call the sound of nature, such as the drone of insects, leaves rustling in the wind and waves lapping against the shore. The jewelry in this series is a part of nature's low-key sound or loud silence. They makes a quiet noise when put into motion.

Kristi Paap *"A room with a view", 2010 // series of brooches made in* plexiglass, wood, silver

I started experiment with body as a support for my sound object, from the little objects I have done during the first step. What interested me was to work with the body in a spontaneous and random movement. I join little kind of porcelain beads and accumulate those to create some hitting movement between them. I try to use different

kind of string and different way to join them. After several trials, I didn't go throw this way because the work with string and joining system was about fifty percent of the work and I didn't have the required skills for that work. Even if that parallel between sound, porcelain and body would be interesting, for this project my goal was to focus on clay work.

Experiment with porcelain beads join with strings

BODY // PROGRAMMED MOVEMENTS – I will call "programmed movements" a body movement that is made taking in consideration a future action (for example: to grab an object, I reach out). Throughout my research on this subject, I became interested in a project concerning the creation of "sound ricochets" ceramic objects. The project is called "ricochet whistling" and made by three French artists Amaël Bougard, Christian Morin and Jean-Louis Raymond.


Amaël Bougard, Christian Morin and Jean-Louis Raymond // "Ricochets whistling"

The artists realized different forms of "ricochets objects" by being aware about object's ergonomics, relative to the hand and the throw/shot. They also created some specific cracks to allow the creation of sounds in contact with air and then water. They first worked by hand directly into clay and then with 3D modeling software to better accommodate the objects with density constraints, bounce, etc...

I didn't go throw this kind of experimentation but this approach: trying to create objects and sounds for one specific move and also having interaction with another element (air, water,..), interest me a lot.

NATURE // RANDOM MOVEMENTS - After considering the random and programmed movements of the body, I got interested in the second movement's source: nature. I would start by talking about random movements, and especially wind. My research has been directed towards the "Wind Music", through which many musicians are experimenting. I will talk first about "l'Orgue des Fées" a wind instrument installation.

Didier Ferment, Bruno Tondellier and Patrick Mouchague // "l'Orgue des Fées"

This installation called "l'Orgue des Fées" ("the Fairies' organ") was created by artists Didier Ferment, Bruno Tondellier and Patrick Mouchague and located in the French Alps at 2600 meters above sea level, to enjoy a maximum wind. The place is accessible by a footpath. The work is a set of ten wind organs, made in bamboo. To be a multiphonic and harmonious orchestra (according to wind forces), a set of poles singing is erected

on top of a hill, in very close relationship with the surrounding natural environment, such as a land-art sound composition. The instrument player is, the wind itself, as luthiers, completed with their machines, having left the wind completely free of execution. This set gives a mountain space altitude often fairly quiet, a special sound dimension.

Another interesting example of wind sound, with ceramic this time, is the Portuguese "Singing windmill". Open to the strong winds of the Atlantic sea, Portugal has a long technical tradition of using the power of the natural wind. The windmills of the country have a particularity which is unique in the worlds' windmills: they are equipped with earthenware vessels at the surrounding tow of their wind-wheel.

"Singing windmills" in Portugal // Flutelike sounds, which varies according to different wind-speeds and weather conditions

These sounding jars were developed for both practical and aesthetic reasons. First the sounds of the ceramic provide an audible monitoring device: if the mill became damaged or out of alignment, the miller would immediately hear a change in the sound, even if he were far away. Aesthetically, the mills were also intended to sound pleasing: the miller took great care with the tones and harmonies produced by the particular clay jars he selected. Where there were several mills standing in close proximity, the whole ensemble had to be perfectly matched in order to not offend the ear.

I wanted to work with nature too, its movement and landscape. I handpicked two types of objects percussion made in the previous step and placed them in contact with the

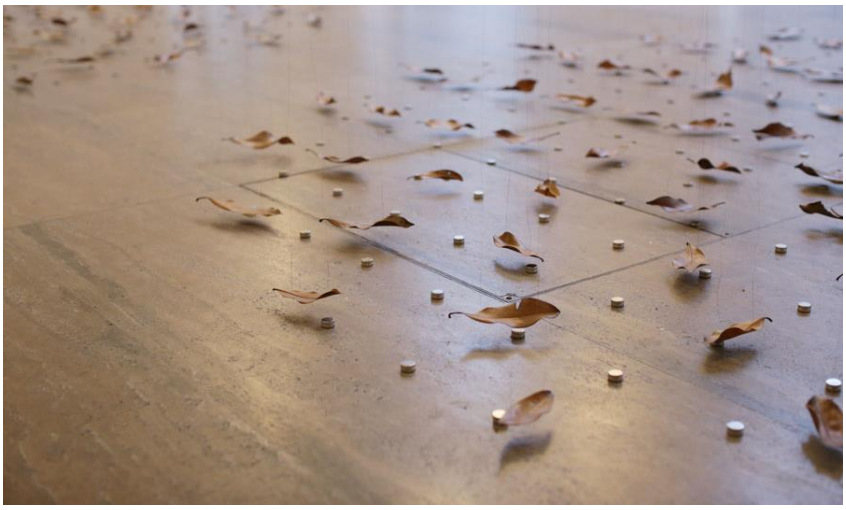
wind at first, then with waves. It was a very tempestuous day, the wind was strong and the waves too. My small items were sensitive to this and it produces some sounds. But they were fully covered by the power of waves sound and wind. After several tests with different types of objects I have concluded that I had to change my working scale if I wanted to interact with nature. I did not continue in this direction because I was thinking that building large-scale ceramic pieces would take me much longer than I had.

Experimenting porcelain pieces with wind movements

Experimenting porcelain pieces with waves movements // Water movements

NATURE // PROGRAMMED MOVEMENTS – In this last part I will discuss the movement programmed through nature, or rather how is it possible to disrupt the natural movement by programming things. To illustrate this example I will present a sound installation made by Rudy Decelière, a French artist, living and working in Switzerland. His last installation "âmes sensibles" ("sensitive souls") is composed of copper wire, 378 magnolia leaves,

magnets, and small engines. Three wooden structures are suspended instead of the ceiling and perform slow rotation to invariable and slightly different speeds. At the end of each cooper wire is suspended a dried sheet of magnolia. There are hanging few millimeters from soil and between magnets which are distributed uniformly. The copper wire is vibrating slightly when it passes near a magnet. The sheet membrane amplifies this vibration as a loudspeaker. In order to perceive the sound aspect, the system asks all visitors to present some downtime and silence.



Rudy Decelière // "Bleeding hearts" 2014

What got me interested in this project was the use of natural attractive forces of gravity combined with that of magnets.

Personal experimentations - 2015

magnet with iron fillings // objects made with mixing iron fillings and slip casted porcelain

I myself started, one year ago, researches to make "magnetizable" porcelain, by mixing a certain percentage of iron filings in the casting porcelain. I stopped this research, waiting to find a good way to use it. And I think it would be interesting to one day, continue my research around it and the porcelain sound. For example it could be elements only moving by the attractive or opposing forces.

After these different types of shapes experiments and set in motion explanations, I will now present my project approach in a final shape while comparing it with theoretical writings and placing it into a fictional exhibition context.

SEEING, TOUCHING AND HEARING: REDEFINE THE VIEWER'S ROLE

CHOOSING SOUNDS - For a good progress in my research project, I focused on two different sounds. I chose both sweet and resonant sounds that reminded me of my current living environment: the island of Bornholm. These two sounds, just to summarize with words, remind me of the waves flow sounds for the first, and the sounds produced by the boats poles in the harbor in windy conditions, for the second.

DEVELOP FORMS – Both sounds are characterized by totally different forms: the former requires a soundboard and a multiplicity of small balls in the interior. These are balls which will create some variations of resonant sounds within the body, once the object is moving. The second sound requires several small hanging objects that will collide while moving. Their common point is the need for an external element to let them start move and produce sounds.

My first "sound-object" plays on the balance system of "culbuto": it moves in all directions, up and down, always returning to its center. What I like in this form and use of porcelain is the tension contained in the movement of the piece. Depending on the intensity of the users' touch, the object will move a little bit, brush the floor or break from scratch...

Three different shapes of "culbuto" system pieces // ready to be cast

The second "sound-object" is working on the system of a sound barrier, which consists of several strings where small ceramic pieces will be knotted at. The user can then choose to cross this space or simply to move it from the outside.

Little pieces ready to be molded and slip casted to obtain more than hundred pieces
// they will be suspended on strings (I haven't chosen the kind of string yet…)

In this project I will use the molding technique to reproduce my pieces, but it is not in a way to reproduce hundreds times the same object. Yes, output the mold the piece will be the same as others, outputted from the same mold before, but the difference is that these pieces will not be fired at the same temperatures in order to obtain a variation of sounds. This way, I will work with sounds and resonance playing with clay porosity. These objects will not have the same scale as others, they will not produce the same sound, and they will not have the same color and the same textures. For all this reason they will act as one to one and unique art objects.

What is interesting for me also in this molding technique is that it allows bringing my work closer to the viewer. From an economic viewpoint, making molds is an "easy" way to multiply the pieces and also (according to the good will of the artist) sell them at lower prices. This approach comes in my desire to create an accessible work: physically, intellectually and economically.

For this project I choose to not glaze my pieces because of important acoustical concerns. The two primary aspects of a sound object the glazes impact are body vibrations and surface reflections. First, the vibrating capability of a clay sound object may be dampened of inhibited by glaze if the glaze coating is too thick or not well fused. But in the contrary, if the glaze fits well it will function as an extension of the clay and vibrate in harmony. It can, perhaps, even enhance the sound. Unfortunately I have no time to make a research around glaze that can enhance sound, because it represents a very long work. The Ceramist Dag Sorensen, who works extensively with crystalline glazes on his non-musical ceramics, choose not to glaze his musical instruments. He explains "A crack in the glaze is enough to affect the sound". If I follow this work later, around sound and clay, I will work on that on a future project.

SETTING IN MOTION - My bias will be to use viewer's parts of the body to set the pieces in motion. The hand or the whole body of the viewer / actor will be used to create the sound.

Harry Bertoia « Sonambient Sculpture » - 1960/1970 - bronze

It is an important point of my work: to allow people touching ceramic piece and be part of the work. We can call my project as a participatory or interactive art project. It creates a dynamic collaboration between the artist, the audience and their environment. Participatory art is not just something that you stand still and quietly look at– it is something: you participate in. You can touch it, smell it if you want, talk to it also if you feel like, dance with it, play with it, and learn from it. In a way you co-create it. But it's maybe more than that because without the participatory audience my work is not completed. Their interactions will create the main purpose of the work: sounds.

APPEAL TO SENSES - What I like about this project is that it to appeal to the senses: the sight, the touch and the hearing. But it is also about sharing and connecting my pieces to others. Usually the visitor is only allowed to look at the exhibits in a ceramic gallery (which is also very frustrating in some cases). Glenn Adamson is talking about the concept of proximity on arts in his book "The invention of Craft"[3]: "Crafts proximity demands: the material to the maker, the tool to the work.". Then why we cut this body to body relation instantly the object is done and exhibited? Beyond this consideration I want to recreate the link with the body in the manipulation of the object by the user. The object is finished, but this physical link could continue over infinity and depending on each of us.

For me these values of making my work accessible and to share it are important. This possibility of having access to the pieces by sight, touch and hearing, also make objects accessible to a larger public. We could well imagine separating these three sensations and present my object to a blind person, and another deaf, or another who don't have hands. What would be their feelings? And what would those of a person able to hear, see and touch in the same time? And those of another who listen to the sounds while closing his eyes?

Yue Minjun – "*Inside and outside the Stage*" - 2009, oil on canvas

[3] "*The invention of crafts*" – Glenn Adamson – Bloomsbury
Chapter three – page 132 – "in and out of touch"

EXHIBITION PLACE - What will append if a ceramic Gallery encourages participants to touch and take part in the art work to reveal its main component: the sound?

I contacted Annette Sloth, who is at the head of a contemporary ceramic Gallery in Brussels (the city where my school is): "Puls Gallery". She is Danish, and living in Brussels since several years. She has been graduated at KADK in Copenhagen, few years ago and she frequently serves as a judge, curator and docent at international ceramic events.

I write her a mail to ask her about questions I have relative to exhibition places. First I ask her: what was her position relative to exhibit interactive art ceramic pieces. I explain her that the project I'm currently working on requires a gesture from the visitor to set the porcelain piece in movement and then to make sound. As I know that most of the time people are not allowed to do that in context of exhibitions, it was important for me to have her point of view around that. Maybe It requires more work from her in the gallery (to make sure people don't do anything wrong)? Maybe there will be problem with insurance? Or she will have to pay something more to protect the pieces? Then I ask her a really common question about percentages on sales: are they always the same for each artist exhibited or are they defined according to the type of pieces, or other criteria?

CONCLUSION

To conclude this report I would say that the way I choose to shape and enhance the sound of porcelain is to create an object both visual, tactile and audible, where visitor's role is central.

My desire is also to create positive and pleasing tone for the ear. Non-intrusive sounds, which can be played according the good will of the person involved. As Donald A. Norman said in this book "Emotional Design"[4] there is some kind of objects that can bring positive affect and emotions to the users. He drew up a list in which he describes some conditions the object has to have to bring us positive energy. "Smoothing sounds, and simple melodies and rhythms – harmonious music and sounds – symmetrical objects – rounded, smooth objects – "sensuous feeling, sounds and shape" are into the thirteen conditions list. I think that my objects are working around those particularities, or at least I tried.

Moreover, I totally agree with David Gauntlett, who in his book "Making is connecting"[5] describes the action of creating as a connection. This connection can be done at several levels. First, at the beginning of the creative process, you have to connect your ideas with one or several materials. Then the project will take a social dimension because it will be part of our environment, and you have thought about his role in this context. Your project will also be connected to the public market, people, and the world.

Through each of my projects I am thinking about connecting and also considering the possibilities of artistic collaborations to make projects richer. It is in that way that I want to work when I'll finish my studies. Very far from a personal approach that will be to work alone and have a workshop / store.

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[4] *« Emotional Design, Why we love (or hate) everyday things"* – Donald A. Norman – 2004
Chapter one - page 29 - "the prepared brain"

[5] *« Making is connecting»* - David Gautlett – Polity - 2011

From my point of view this project is still in its early stages and I intend to continue it in my school, in Brussels. I could imagine for example making collaboration with a musician to give to my object a more thoughtful sound. Also, this is with this same sense of connection to the people around me that I would integrate these objects in the domestic context also. And maybe think it as a component of a furniture object: maybe one day, porcelain sounds will resonate in the movement of our chairs, or why not that of our curtains?

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Websites :

- Rudy Decelière : http://www.rudydeceliere.net
- Tomoko Sauvage : http://o-o-o-o.org/
- Nicolas Frize : http://www.nicolasfrize.com/
- Film "Notes blanches" : https://vimeo.com/142652036

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