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Finding Place: Chaos, Control, & I

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FINDING PLACE:
CHAOS, CONTROL & I

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Art and Design Department
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts
at
Lindenwood University

By

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St. Charles, Missouri

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Abstract

Title of Thesis: Finding Place: Chaos, Control and I

Brandi Rackers, Masters of Arts, 2015

Thesis Directed by: John Troy, Department Chair of Art and Design

This thesis and accompanying exhibition seeks to investigate through visualization the role of individual units within a system through personal association with those individual units. The art forms in the exhibition are artifacts of the pseudo-scientific process that I have developed. Through scientific research and interpretations of personal experiences, the process seeks to explore system construction, functionality and degree of success regarding each. The role of the individual unit within systems and the manner in which it exercises a potent influence is elucidated. As a consequence, the exhibition provides self-reflective information and an environment for viewers to consider the effects that they have on systems.

Acknowledgments

The journey that I took to develop this thesis and exhibition was certainly not a lonely one, and I have many people to thank for their support along the way. My professors in the Art and Design department at Lindenwood University did an excellent job of continually challenging me to understand the role of art today in society and to recognize my potential as a contemporary artist. The constructive criticism of my work received from fellow graduate students over the course of matriculation was also extremely helpful. Finally, my husband, parents and sister have been the ultimate, behind-the-scenes support team; they understood the importance of this process and often believed in me more than I believed in myself.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments..... 3
List of Images..... 5
Introduction..... 6
Contextual/Literature Review..... 10
Methodology..... 14
Production and Analysis..... 16
Conclusions..... 22
Bibliography..... 24

List of Images

- Figure 1. *Stained 1*, 2014, 22"x30", Food Stains, Smoke, Watercolor and Thread
Figure 2. *Stained 2*, 2014, 22"x30", Food Stains, Smoke and Watercolor
Figure 3. *Stained 3*, 2014, 22"x30", Food Stains, Smoke and Watercolor
Figure 4. *Flow*, 2014, 16"x96", Stoneware Clay, Mud, Foam and Wood
Figure 5. *Generative Evolution*, 2014, 16.5"x57", Paper Clay, Milk and Honey
Figure 6. *Non-Matriarchal Dwellings*, 2014, Stoneware, Tea and Egg
Figure 7. *Entanglement*, 2014, Stoneware, Smoke and Glue
Figure 8. *Sustainable Development*, 2014, Stoneware, Bark and Moss
Figure 9. *Maneuver Wave*, 2015, Stoneware and Oil

Introduction

“Why?” For me and for many others this is a very important question, which can be posed in many different ways with many different implications. “Why do things exist?” “Why am I here?” “Why do I behave the way that I do?” “Why are my actions important?” “Why do others respond or react the way that they do?” In the process of answering these questions, inevitably more “why” questions arise to answer. Our drive to continue this undoubtedly endless cycle of questioning will reveal the quintessential existentialist dilemma facing us: understanding our place in the world and our role in existence as finite beings capable of imagining the infinite.

The journey taken to arrive at this thesis exhibition began with me unknowingly seeking answers to several “why” questions about myself. Previously, I had been using altered clay forms and obsessive decoration to find some sort of balance between chaos and control. It was not until a trip to the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art in Kansas City, Missouri where I saw the installation *Split* (1998) by Polly Apfelbaum (1955-present) and realized that I was using clay forms as a way to seek balance and understanding of my many roles in life. Hundreds of Apfelbaum’s individual, dyed-fabric pieces were spread across the floor, showing me that while one segment of the piece may seem insignificant, as a group, the piece takes on a new and deeper meaning. *Split* is a visual representation of the Butterfly Effect.¹ It was edifying for me to clearly see that one unit could have such a strong impact on the success of the entire piece. The realization of this significance provided the seminal theme for this project, which moves beyond my individual desire to find purpose. I wanted to understand not only my potential as a unit within society, but also the potential impact of any unit within the context of their systems.

¹ "Polly Apfelbaum: Split." Polly Apfelbaum: Split. Accessed January 8, 2015. https://www.kemperart.org/exhibits/apfelbaum_2009.asp.

After this experience, I realized that my desire to find one ultimate “truth” through the process of analyzing and deconstructing my thought process was not elucidating and only causing further confusion. I needed to simplify my inquiry and break things down to their most basic elements in order to understand the units that are responsible for the construction and/or deconstruction of the systems in which they exist. From my further research on the Butterfly Effect, and Chaos Theory in general, I became increasingly intrigued not only by the fact that a single action by one unit within a complex system has the ability to change the entire system, but that the action’s effects do not go about that change in a linear fashion. A unit’s actions have a web-like reaction within the system, and the potential for these actions are never entirely predictable.² The fastest and most accurate way to know what the final outcome will be is to simply let the action play out. Of course, patterns may develop over time, but due to random, outside influences, or unscheduled changes in unit behavior, the true significance will be allusive until the sequence is complete.³ The relative efficacy of the process parallels the futility of my attempts to predict why I do the things that I do, or even why I exist. What this research helped me to understand was the potential that I have as a unit within a system to create changes that may or may not be predictable.

It is because of effective web-like interactions between all units that complex systems even exist. Even though some systems may appear to be run by an elite group within the system, without the reactions from all of the other units, the demands of the few will lack the power to

² Cambel, Ali. "Applied Chaos Theory- A Paradigm for Complexity." *NASA Astrophysics Data System*, 1993, 264. Accessed January 10, 2015.

<http://adsabs.harvard.edu/abs/1993actp.book.....C>

³ "A Glossary of Political Economy Terms." *Systems Theory Models of Decision-making*. Accessed January 10, 2015. http://www.auburn.edu/~johnspm/gloss/systems_theory.

create any change within the entire group. Each individual within a system should be seen as an important component because it has the ability to stop, continue or affect change for not just one unit, but for the multitude of units in the web around it. Swarm Theory discusses the magnitude that effective interactibility can have within even the most seemly simple systems, such as those of swarms of ants or bees. Both ants and bees use pheromones to continuously interact with their peers; they make decisions as a group and always have the best interest of the group in mind. These swarms know that by effectively communicating and working together that they have the most effective means of survival.⁴

Beyond efficiently interacting as a group, successful systems are also able to create and follow self-organizing rules. These rules are not necessarily comparable to those laws that are often written by an elite few as an attempt to control the rest of the masses, but rather those actions that units know to do or not to do in order to ensure that the group as a whole behaves in a more operative, harmonious and reasonable way. The struggle for some systems comes when these rules become outdated or individual units stop following them due solely to self-motivated agendas.⁵ This is when it is most important for units to feel empowered, remembering that even their smallest actions have the ability to create change. The individual units are the ones that have to be responsible for rewriting the self-organizing rules, which is enacted through their actions and concern for the system as a whole. Self-regarding units need to be reminded that if the system in which they exist collapses that they will eventually fail and lose their place, as well.

⁴ Miller, Peter. "Swarm Theory: The Genius of Swarms." *National Geographic Magazine*, 2007. Accessed January 10, 2015.

<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2007/07/swarms/miller-text>.

⁵ Heylighen, Francis. "The Science of Self-Organization and Adaptivity." Accessed January 10, 2015. <http://pespmc1.vub.ac.be/papers/eolss-self-organiz.pdf>.

When analyzing a system as a web of interactions, it will appear as though some units serve as hubs through which information is frequently passed. This node was best described to me as being analogous to the philosophy of six degrees of separation. Frigyes Karinthy originally hypothesized in 1929 that everyone is connected to everyone else by no more than six degrees. For instance, I may not know you, but chances are that you know someone and I know someone who know each other. With recent technology and social media, it seems to be that this number in the human system is shrinking more and more every day, although the genuine nature of these connections may easily be questioned. The hubs within systems are those units that are the most social and have the most connections to other units. These units have no more potential to create change than any other unit; however, because of their place within the web, the impact of their actions is more quickly noticed.⁶

Each system is a network, and each network consists of an entangled group of units. These networks need to be able to generate new goals and attributes in order to evolve. Even if a system has the perfect infrastructure, it must be able to adapt as a whole and new behaviors must continually emerge. As Peggy Holman explained, the process of this emergence is “order rising out of chaos”.⁷ Chaos is inevitable, brought about by such external agents in the form of an attack or other opposing threats from other systems, and, in order to survive, each unit must find its role in helping to control that chaos, spurring evolution.

What I aim to do in this thesis is to use what I have learned from my scientific research and combine it with personal observations of systems and/or, alternately, my experiences as a unit within a system. Significant inspiration has been drawn from natural forms and observations

⁶ *Six Degrees of Separation (The Documentary)*. BBC, 2009. Film.

⁷ Holman, Peggy. "What Is Emergence?" In *Engaging Emergence: Turning Upheaval into Opportunity*. San Fransisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2010.

of how nature functions. The elements drawn from nature are combined with aspects of human development to foster viewer awareness of their own impact specifically as a unit on their own systems and the systems that exist around them. I believe that we as humans have something to learn from nature and the beautiful ways in which nature's systems survive. My ultimate goal is for my viewer to connect with the repetitive units that I have used to build systems that showcase aspects of what it is like to exist as part of a whole.

Contextual/Literature Review

Although much of the inspiration for this thesis arose from scientific research and personal experiences, the works of other artists informed not only my content, but also the technical aspects of my work. To begin with, Tom Shadyac (1958-present), film writer and director, released a documentary titled *I am* that has influenced the content of many of the pieces in this thesis. In this documentary Shadyac asks himself, "What is the problem with the world?" He sets out around the world to find the answer to this question by interviewing those who seem to have found true happiness or have reached some sort of enlightenment. He quickly concludes that the answer to his question is, "I am." The reason that he believed *he* was responsible for many of said problems is because he had taken on many of the qualities that contemporary society seems to value. He was individually competitive, excessively wealthy and reasonably intelligent. However, he was not truly happy, and he saw that many others around him were the same. What he learned from interviewing the enlightened was that none of them had an over-abundance of the qualities just listed. They were not only uncompetitive but also compassionate towards others. In addition, these individuals shared any wealth that they had and were not greedy with their knowledge. He learned that most successful societies throughout history were,

in a sense, matriarchal; or showed strong balance between qualities associated with both males and females. Beyond history and anthropology, he discovered through talking with physicists that science is beginning to see how connected we really are with one another and the world around us through discoveries in quantum entanglement. This further illustrates that it is unnatural to isolate ourselves or to have little regard for how our actions affect others. After seeing how important it was to find balance and a sense of connection with everyone and everything around him, he reevaluated his question to consider: "What is right with the world?" This time, however, he was able to quickly answer, "I am."⁸ Shadyak's research coincides with my research in that the success of a system or society depends on the effective interactions between its parts. The whole is the sum of its parts, and if the whole cannot find balance through the distribution of the strengths and weaknesses of its parts, it will inevitably fail.

Eva Hesse (1936-1970) has been a true model of how I want to create and appreciate the process of making art. She used simple materials from her everyday life in combinations that form organic pieces, which communicate moods and often proto-feminist ideas. The disparate parts that she used from a range of sources are combined in such a way that the viewer is forced to quietly reflect on not only the piece which they create, but also the world around them.⁹ I, like Hesse, use materials in my work that embrace personal symbolism, while remaining flexible enough to allow viewers the ability to reflect on how the material relates to their own experiences. The nature-inspired aspects of this thesis also mirror some of the organic qualities of Hesse's work. Hesse believed making art is synonymous with communicating aspects of the

⁸ *I AM*. United States: Flying Eye Productions, 2010. Film.

⁹ "EVA HESSE SYNOPSIS." Eva Hesse Biography, Art, and Analysis of Works. Accessed January 11, 2015. <http://www.theartstory.org/artist-hesse-eva.htm>.

soul. For me, creating art is a deeply personal way to communicate my ideas and emotions, especially when words are not capable of doing so.

While Hesse provided a formal model for the natural forms in my work, Michael Kidner (1917-2009) inspired the content. Kidner created a series of paintings that he called *Pentagon*, inspired by chaos theory. In the series, he used repetitive pentagons to seek order amongst the chaos in his work. Color is the chaotic element in these works, requiring varying degrees of focus during the viewing process. Kidner was using these paintings as a metaphor for the many chaotic events that he saw taking place in the world around him, such as global warming, wars and terrorism. He postulates that within the chaos, there may exist “some kind of order that perhaps we haven’t recognized yet.”¹⁰ Although Kidner’s pentagon motif is very different than the multitude of naturalistic and manufactured materials that I use, we are both seeking balance amongst the works as a whole through the use of repetitive parts.

Elizabeth Murray (1940-2007) was another artist who helped me to realize what I was trying to do in some of my earlier ceramics forms. She used oddly-shaped canvases to paint collections of objects that she saw and used every day, such as paintbrushes and tubes of paint. In an interview she was asked how she knows when her canvases are finished. She responded by saying that she knows because she no longer feels anxious and sees balance between the objects in the piece.¹¹ What I saw after watching this interview was that I too was using oddly-shaped forms and decoration to find balance, and I knew that I had achieved balance when the anxiety that I felt was gone. Although the direction of my art had changed since the beginning of my

¹⁰ "Biography." Michael Kidner RA Biography Comments. Accessed January 11, 2015. <http://www.michaelkidner.com/biography/>.

¹¹ "Balancing Your Life with Ellen Susman - Elizabeth Murray Interview." YouTube. Accessed January 11, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M6ZHnVeUdsY>.

thesis, Murray influential for the way that she saw a connection between the many symbolic units of her life and brought them together to create a unique and balanced work of art.

Moving beyond the canvas, contemporary artist Judy Pfaff (1946-present) has challenged my thinking as an installation and interdisciplinary artist. She creates large, site-specific works that bring together landscapes, architecture and color into an organic whole. Although her work may seem chaotic, as the viewer moves through the piece, it is easy to see how all the separate parts come together to create the whole. She also combines human-made materials with natural elements as a way to challenge the thinking of her viewers. Additionally, her works fluctuate between two and three-dimensional, making the viewer more aware of their own relationship to the pieces.¹² The systems that I have created in this thesis may seem chaotic at times; however, the many repetitive parts must work together for the pieces to achieve the balance that I seek. Also, even though I am using ceramics as one of the main materials in this thesis, its materiality is often used in ways that challenge how viewers traditionally engage with art, much as Pfaff has used space to challenge the perspective of her work.

Most of the theoretical and contextual influences for this thesis came from post-World War II artists, especially those from the post-minimalist and post-modern art movements and strategies. I believe that my reason for gravitating towards these art-making approaches is because my art became less decorative and more expressive in idea as well as form. Science, history and art are combined in this thesis to communicate relevant ideas of individualized potential within a group through the combination of contemporary materials and forms. While I use personal influences and individualized interpretations of how I see the development of

¹² "Judy Pfaff." PBS. Accessed January 11, 2015. <http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/judy-pfaff>.

systems, my pieces remain open to continued dialog between the artwork and viewer because of the balanced mix of abstracted and recognizable materials and forms.

Methodology

While I have chosen to use ceramics as my primary medium, I am not using it in the historically functional or decorative way. Instead it serves as a tool to create and manipulate the individual, repetitive parts of the fluid systems that I wish to explore. While my forms may resemble aspects of nature or use found objects from nature, they are each a unique representation of how I see and understand their function as a unit within a system. These forms become innovative through the balance that they have between being identifiable and conceptual. They challenge the viewer to understand them in the context of their surroundings, leading the viewer to a deeper understanding of the artwork as a whole. Another novelty to the ceramics forms that I create is the lack of traditional surface decoration or glaze. Instead, I chose to stain or cover the pieces in natural materials as a way to further communicate my content. The stains, which are absorbed into the ceramic material, actually become part of the form instead of merely covering the surface. These stains become attributes of the individual units, and further link the viewer to the experiences of the unit. Finally, the relief-like, wall presentation chosen for the majority of these forms is rare for ceramic work and was arranged in such a way to elevate the status of the material to one that can communicate a deeper conceptual dialog. Also, by hanging my systems on the walls, I make them more accessible to my viewers.

My thesis is conceptually advanced in that it fuses scientific fact with subjective understanding as a way to entice questioning of the potential that units have in shaping and maintaining systems. Although we live within a complex society and are witnesses to many

systems at work around us every day, we often overlook the roles that each individual has within the system. I offer an opportunity to break down these complex systems so that my viewer can have the chance to find their place and potential within the systems around them.

As I have explained previously, my work started as a very personal way to find order amongst the chaos of my life through the alteration and decoration of clay forms. At the time, the forms seemed very important to me because they served as trophies of my personal victories over the chaos. As my concept developed through the exploration and investigation of systems, and the interactions between the individual parts that create them, my art became more installation-based and started to use more non-ceramic materials, such as found, natural elements- wood, glue, glass and foam- in combination with the clay forms. Also, the art pieces themselves became less important as my goal shifted from the objects to sparking dialog spread in a web-like reaction by the viewers of my thesis exhibition. This reaction will then become the “art” and is what will continue to make my work contemporary. There is a strong sense of “objecthood” in my forms and I am aware that the ideas that I chose to communicate through these forms have the potential to create a more lasting impact over time. My art has become less of a personal narrative and is now more available for a larger audience. I have also learned that there will always be “truths” to which I will not know the answers. This is where I must have faith that my actions as an artist have the possibility to lead to something greater than what I can be as an individual. In essence, my art may find the answers for me.

Production and Analysis

In each of my pieces, there is a collaboration of the individual, repetitive parts that make up a holistic system. These parts are often made of clay and stained with a natural material

and sometimes combined with found or human-produced materials. The purpose of these systems is to provide opportunities for my viewers to see connections between their behaviors' progression within a system and the effect that individual units have on the systems in which they exist; I empower the individual unit and the possibility for infinite interactions between those units. I chose clay as my main material not only because of my history with it, but because of its organic properties and the many stages that exist within the process. The ceramic process as a whole is made up of many parts, and the success of the process is dependent on successful interactions between the many parts. I combine clay with other natural materials or sculpt them to resemble natural materials because it is in nature that I find systems working the most efficiently and effectively. Nature is very mysterious, and within it there will always be a degree of the unknown. I believe that it is instinctual to seek answers in nature as it seems to have an understanding that we do not. Manmade materials are also tied into these works to bring recognition to how humans relate and affect these systems. These materials, such as foam, glue and glass, are not often seen as beautiful or expensive, but they emerged in our society as a way to make aspects of our being more effective; furthermore, they serve as a symbol of bondage between the units within the systems.

When I started making art for this thesis, I would always make the object first and then seek understanding or content in it afterwards. Although I developed some technical skills, such as staining techniques and texture simulation, during this early process, my work was not going anywhere, and I was finding very few answers. Once I found an interest in understanding complex systems and how individuals units behave, my artwork became more directed through the research that I was conducting. Many of my projects now begin with my understanding of how scientific theories related to complex systems. Scientists often use nature, such as swarms of

insects or plants, to help explore and explain their theories. These examples are things that I can relate to from my own personal experiences, or they remind me of aspects of my own natural excursions. Being inspired by nature, I frequently use natural elements to help build pieces that communicate my reflection on how systems behave. I consider my process pseudo-scientific since these natural forms are used to project humanistic qualities that I find equivocal to those found in nature, or as metaphors for aspects of human society. Reflecting their symbolic significance, these forms often become distorted and abstracted.

With regards to the building process taken with each piece, I begin by creating the clay units first, because without the units, no system can be formed. Most of these forms are built with basic handbuilding techniques and use very few tools. Also in the construction of these pieces, I must consider how they are going to later be displayed so that certain hanging features are included. I stain or cover the clay forms next with whatever material that I feel expresses the role of those units best, such as tea, mud, milk, honey, egg and smoke. Then, if necessary, I build whatever bondage or visualization of interaction between the separate units out of found materials. For this I have to use a range of techniques, such as drawing with glue on wax paper or constructing frames out of wood to support foam or glass. Finally, I create an assemblage of the many separate parts to create a holistic and complex system. Most of the completed installations are hung on the wall, and I simply use nails to do that. However, some simply need to be arranged on the floor.

The *Stained* series is about accepting chaos as an inevitability and using chaotic experiences as a way to show perseverance and development. Stains represent experiences that we do not desire or plan for and are often the most difficult to assume into our identity. However,

these are the experiences that shape us the most as individuals and we must accept them as the battle scars of our identity.

The interactive installation piece *Flow* is formed from a myriad of mud-washed ceramics drops. These drops seem insignificant as individuals, but when organized as a whole, they have the potential to take on many intriguing systems. Although I had the control to set the initial conditions of the system, by allowing viewer interaction to arrange the drops, I am opening the piece to an infinite number of outcomes. The choice that one makes in their placement has the potential to change the final result. The fastest way to predict the outcome is to just allow the natural sequence of events to unfold. I chose foam as the backdrop for the theoretical river that will assume as a representation of the human desire to stay afloat or in control of the outcome of their actions.

In *Generative Evolution* the milk and honey that fills the paper clay cells represents fertility and nourishment. The unfired, porcelain paper clay was chosen for its flexibility, neutrality and absorbency. The wood-and-glass encasement was used as a way to define the system, as well as to allow visibility of the growth within the system from the outside. Although the milk and honey originated inside each cell separately, through interaction and a joining of separate physical properties, the cells symbolic nourishment left their confinements to allow their transformation to spread throughout the system, creating new and emergent properties in the group as a whole. There are three works in this series to show different stages of the progression over time.

Non-Matriarchal Dwellings is a piece that came from my research on similar characteristics between successful systems. The aspect that continually occurs is an equal appreciation for the role of every individual within a system, or not seeing any one unit's role as

being more important than the others. In addition to this, individual units within these successful systems seek to find balance between those traits that are traditionally thought of as masculine and feminine, such as balancing competitiveness with compassion. A matriarch for me is not about having a female-led system, but rather an appreciation for balance and equality between male and female characteristics. I choose the dwelling aspect of this piece because of its associations to maternal nurturing and protection. The dwellings are shallow and unstable to characterize the mobility of our society's current dwellings. The tea stains represent the natural unity that once existed in our society's dwellings, but has seen dried up. Our patriarchal and individually competitive society goes against nature's tendency to create unified systems nurtured by balance between male and female traits. The eggs represent the rebirth of feminism and the emergence of a contemporary matriarch.

Entanglement explores ideas that I have on the interconnectivity of individuals and the rules that we sometimes unknowingly use to organize our systems. A couple of theories that I researched for this project are the Six Degrees of Separation and Quantum Entanglement. Although these theories are often not seen associated together, as an artist I am able to combine them to communicate my concepts. The Six Degrees of Separation suggest that we are connected to every unit within our system by six or fewer steps. For me, this shows that an individual's action has a probability to encounter more than its initial connections and can ultimately affect the entire system. Quantum Entanglement seeks to explain the phenomenon of why a change to one unit will correlate to change in another unit at the exact moment of the originally changed unit. A simpler version of this can be observed through human behaviors, such as how the mood of one individual can change the mood of other individuals within a group without that individual needing to communicate anything about their attitude. By combining these two

theories, I am able to explain the power that an individual unit can have on creating and destroying the aspects of our systems that hold it together; what I like to call a system's self-organizing rules. The ceramics branches that hold up the entangled webs of interactions and connections are the self-organizing rules that have been damaged, broken and burned. The webs themselves are made of glue to show how an individual's actions have the potential to bond the system.

For *Sustainable Development* I moved away from the presentation of a single system to explore interactions between multiple systems. I have created four layers of systems to show that the existence of one system may support the life of another, creating ecological balance. Not only does each unit within these separate systems have the ability to contribute to its own system, but also each system has the potential to aid another system. Systems can do this by only taking what they need, offering up what they do not use, and giving protection or guidance if necessary. The clay forms that simulate fungus, and are attached to the tree bark, represent the false securities that systems get when they become overly greedy and take more than what belongs to them. Since these systems cannot adequately support themselves, they have nothing to offer other systems. This is why the top layer shows the unsuccessful growth of moss. The tree bark, on the other hand, is a system that gives both protection and a platform for new growth to other systems. Hidden behind systems like this are the emergent seeds of evolution.

Maneuver Wave is a piece that explores the instinctive connectivity that exists in flocks of closely linked units. These units have the ability to anticipate the actions of each other prior to them happening, making changes in the group appear fluid. Each member of a flock is aware of and compassionate towards each other because they know that the success that they have as an individual is dependent upon the success of the group. The understanding that they have of each

other runs through the system as an invisible, connective energy made visible by the wave the units collectively creates.

Conclusions

As a result of my thesis production and concluding show, I have a strong sense of pride in my growth as both a conceptual and technically capable artist, and I deem the thesis process a success. Although not all of my pieces were equally affective in communicating my objectives clearly, the show as a whole provided opportunities to effectively assess the potential small parts have in creating larger, more complex structures. The natural influences of my work were easily identifiable to my viewers and served as a bridge connecting them to the constructed systems. The essential lay out of the repetitive parts in each piece created a feeling of chaos for some while still providing a feeling of unity through the interactions of the individually repetitive parts to one another. With this being said, the title of the thesis, *Finding Place: Chaos, Control and I*, fits not only in the personal journey taken to complete this thesis, but also in inviting my view to explore how they personally fit in the natural chaos that exists in the universe.

As the artist, it was easy for me to identify a common theme throughout the thesis: individual units have a significant role in the shaping of systems through balancing chaos and control. However, the multiple scientific studies, which influenced my pieces, created a very broad concept for my viewers and at times left them confused. For my future work, I intend to narrow my scientific exploration to one or two of the ideas that I have presented in this thesis so that I can further dissect the concept and find new ways to visually communicate the ideas of systematic unity. The two pieces in my thesis that I found the most successful were

Entanglement and *Sustainably Development*, not only because they were visually stimulating, but also because they clearly communicated my objectives. Because of this success, I am excited to further explore these two ideas in separate series.

I found the experience of displaying in a traditional gallery setting limiting to my concept. Since my thesis exhibition, I have been strongly motivated to move my installation work outside, so that the repetitive units can truly be impacted by the chaos that nature provides. Along with the expected move outside, I plan to alter the ceramic process so that it also reacts more rapidly with the natural elements. I will still use clay because of its plasticity and its earthy qualities; however, I plan to fully combine other found elements by mixing them in with the clay body instead of using them as surface stains, while leaving the clay unfired. Also, because of the move outside, I plan to extend the number of individual units produced per piece so that my work remains visually impactful and continually stressed the ability units have in shaping larger systems through their interactions with one another.

My thesis has shown the potential ceramics has in communicating conceptual ideas through non-traditional means of presentation. Although some of my pieces remain traditional in form, such as in *Non-Matriarchal Dwells* when the individual dishes still served as vessels for other materials, most of the individual clay units severed as visual symbols that have no other functional means but to represent the natural elements that inspired them. Also, by exhibiting the ceramics works on the walls, I created an atmosphere in which the work could be interpreted more intimately and on a human scale in order that viewers could ponder their conceptual purpose without any need to fulfill a functional purpose. Furthermore, as a result of my thesis, I have found a way to combine scientific research with personal intuition to create original ideas

that can still be visually progressive for outside viewers. This was a challenge for me that I plan to continually work through as a process as a contemporary artist.

Overall, my thesis successfully investigated and expressed the structuring of systems and the impacts individual components have in the evolution of the systems in which they exist and around them through their actions and interactions. We, as units within a system, must consider our role in the world around us by finding a balance between the chaos that naturally exists and the control that we can provide. This thesis, with its multitude of influences, has provided me with many concepts to reinvestigate and further analyze in separate series in my future as an artist.

Figure 1. *Stained 1*, 2014, 22"x30", Food Stains, Smoke, Watercolor and Thread



Stained 1
2014
Food Stains, Smoke, Watercolor & Thread
22"x30"

Figure 2. *Stained 2*, 2014, 22"x30", Food Stains, Smoke and Watercolor



Figure 3. *Stained 3*, 2014, 22"x30", Food Stains, Smoke and Watercolor



Figure 4. *Flow*, 2014, 16"x96", Stoneware Clay, Mud, Foam and Wood



Figure 5. *Generative Evolution*, 2014, 16.5"x57", Paper Clay, Milk and Honey



Figure 6. *Non-Matriarchal Dwellings*, 2014, Stoneware, Tea and Egg



Figure 7. *Entanglement*, 2014, Stoneware, Smoke and Glue



Figure 8. *Sustainable Development*, 2014, Stoneware, Bark and Moss



Figure 9. *Maneuver Wave*, 2015, Stoneware and Oil



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