

Degree Report PART A (7,5 credits)

Title: Telling a migrating story by Clay

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Introduction

The notion that the clay I use might once have been part of a majestic mountain, transformed and gently lending itself to me to create, has started shifting my perspectives on making in relation to materials and expression, my claylanguage. The origin of clay has made me aware of the origins of my artistic practice and my roots, and the importance in maintaining a sustainable practice, to stay grounded.

When I began investigating my platform and roots, I found that my family holds an archive of items from my grandfather's work migration to Sweden from Italy in 1947. The Cresta archives contain legal documents, letter correspondence, super 8 movies, and tape recordings by my grandparents. This family story, the roots surrounding my family tree, also tells of the integration attempts in the Swedish-Italian community blossoming in Gothenburg shortly after the Second World War and marks the beginning of a new era in Swedish history in the late 1940s. All carefully hidden, awaiting future in the care of my parents...and me.

Relations between people, materials, objects, body embedded memories and bodily engagement are sensoric translators for emotions. My research focuses on how this may develop my artistic practice and claylanguage. I'm unfolding the archives, letting my body guide and detect what feels of essence to speak of. By making transition from ceramics to unfired clay, I attempt to take history into the future, telling a migrating story by clay.

Keywords: Circularity, Migration, Diversity, Sustainability, Remake, Raw Clay, Body

Background

Today's political climate on immigration is somewhat restrictive in Sweden, although not so long ago the tune was of a different character. Right after the Second World War, The Swedish Workcomity in Turin, asked my Nonno Carlo to take employment as Milling machine operator for SKF.¹ They were twelve North Italians who pioneered among the skilled metalworkers, leaving Fiat to work in Gothenburg. Carlo and Miriam, my Swedish grandmother, met at SKF and fell in love. They became the first couple among the work migrants to get married in 1948, within a year since Nonno set foot on Swedish soil.

To get this opportunity right after surviving war must have felt unique. You might leave home and family for the chance of a brighter future, but what drives someone who's not

¹ "SKF Aktiebolaget Svenska Kullagerfabriken", SKF: Ball Bearings manufacturer, founded in Gothenburg 1907. Accessed 1/3 2023 at: <https://www.skf.com/group/organisation/about-skf/history-timeline>.

afraid of moving on, to settle and engage in social constructions, building a new, sustainable future? Is it a place, feeling of belonging or wanting to create that for yourself? What supports your foundation to secure the core?

Circular sustainable societies² and the individuals they include, need all three parts of environmental, economic and social components to succeed and prevail over time. The Italians arriving in Sweden were promised economic welfare, in contrast to widespread unemployment in Italy after the war. I'm however convinced they were skilled in creating the social and environmental pillars needed to adapt, negotiating social arenas like boccea and football fields at the factory and permission to have a wine bar.³

In 2011 I attended ICS, *Ceramic Arts and Design for a Sustainable Society*, held in Gothenburg. One of the keynote speakers, Merran Esson presented "*Sensuality and Sustainability, Can They Co-exist?*"⁴ reflecting upon what sustainability meant to her. Esson described the situation in Sydney, Australia, right before she departed for the conference. She was concerned for the future regarding climate change with temperatures around 42 degrees Celsius and cyclones causing flooding of catastrophic proportions. What Esson described, is sadly still part of humanity's biggest issues of today. Esson's publication ends with quoting Henry Glassie

*At work the potter manages the transformation of nature, building culture while fulfilling self, serving society and patching the world together with pieces of clay that connect the past with the present, the useful with the beautiful, the material with the spiritual. The one who can do all that has done enough.*⁵

But is it enough I ask myself? I was under the impression that I listened to my body, developed and maintained good, safe work conditions, feeling content with an acceptable level of sustainable practice. I can agree when Esson argues that bigger production companies have far more negative environmental impact than we as a collective of Potters, but why not try to walk the extra mile? At least we owe it to ourselves to review what we do, don't we?

² "Circular economy theory": William McDonough, "What is cradle to cradle?" *Cradle to cradle*, URL:<https://mcdonough.com/writings/cradle-cradle-remaking-way-make-things/> accessed 2/1 2023.

³ Jacob Cavallin, 2015. "*När italienarna kom till staden*" Accessed on 3/3 2023 at: <http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:938058/FULLTEXT01.pdf>.

⁴ Marron Esson, 2011. "*Sensuality and Sustainability, Can They Co-exist?*" published in "*ICS 2011, Ceramic Arts and Design for a Sustainable Society*". Editor; Jeung-Ah Kim (Västra Frölunda: Frölunda kulturhus, 2011), pp.14-20.

⁵ Ibid. 4, p 20. Esson quote of Henry Glassie, first published in his book "*The Potters Art, Material and Culture*".(Glassie 1999) p 116.

Social economic ecologic ergonomics

My research takes me deeper into questions about what we have, where we are, who we are? How to go about searching for answers and implementing them? How can my sustainability pillars develop and encounters between the archive and my body/bodily knowledge (history and presence) work together, to develop languages to speak of my experiences on how clay-, body-, circular life-practice, relate?

Looking back on Essons speech in 2011, given that conditions for the planet seem rather worse now than twelve years ago, I've favored possibilities. My focus is to combine clay with already burned ceramics, reused material or items and lower my current firing range. Most recently I don't fire at all, making the transition from ceramics to clay.

Where Michel Foucault so elegantly captures the essence of the garden by composing this sentence "*The garden is the smallest parcel of the world and then it is the totality of the world.*"⁶ I sensed the terms of a garden being a way to explain my development of a more circular practice, theoretically helping to define my aims in my investigations, installations and outcomes. The garden concept I can understand; grow, nourish and take care of, waste not what you have. In my perspective there is no garbage, just materials, artifacts, memories mixed together, capturing the essentials of embracing benefits of decay, the nourishment for life and growth. This perspective stretches the importance of caring for your body (work, social, environmental conditions), yours and others collective (hi)story and how it's told, the use of material, financial, bodily and social resources/capital as well as in relation to eco-economics.

The garden metaphor may apply to my way of collecting and assembling my installations. I like to think it's letting one enter a world within the world. Using clay gives me possibilities to continue transforming the outcome, like stop-motion movies, characters can shapeshift and ingredients be added thus still using some of the core over time. My "garden" can continue to grow or nourish other stories, be rebuilt or reused in another context.

⁶ Michel Foucault "*Of other spaces, Heterotopias*" (1967) Accessed 23/2 2023 at <https://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/foucault1.pdf>. p 6. Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité October, 1984; ("Des Espace Autres," March 1967-Translated from the French by Jay Miskowiec)

Language-ness of clay, body and heart ❤️

Moving Mountains, telling a migrating story by clay; the workname of my master research, is a story about matter in motion, a journey of transformation. My bodily engagement in craft practice, building and creating, enables expansion of my inner garden into the universe, in dialogue with clay. Raw clay, unlike fired clay, possesses potential of growth and transformation. Clay hibernating in its dry state, particles waiting to be rejuvenated, seems not that different from stories in archives, longing to escape and bloom like seeds in new settings. Foucault's words of garden space accompany me.

In "*Clay-Based Experience and Language-Ness*" Mårten Medbo⁷ says that in dialog with the plastic clay, you might feel it answers back, sometimes suggesting something completely different and more interesting, than what you had intended to express. I feel this is very real and useful in correlation to my own making.

Openness and skills of languageness in relation to your material is emphasised also by PhD Archeology and Artist Katarina Botwid.⁸ She describes her role of acting as a translator between clay and people, disciplines and materials, as an ever growing task while gaining more knowledge, learning new languages.

Botwid states further at the seminar "*Lera/Clay*" at Sörmlands Museum⁹ that she is one of two researchers in Europe whose hands are approved as analysing tools in their profession, therefore allowed touching collected archeological items without gloves, to give an expert opinion from an artisan perspective. In Botwids case of course essential approval of knowledge, in her profession as archeology specialised in ceramics shards, situated in institutions protecting fragile and valuable artifacts. Although the situation of the family archive I'm currently investigating is on a totally different scale I can feel Katarinas achievements show me an entrance in my bodily approach and interpretation of findings and sensations in connection with the artifacts and memorabilia.

Nonno Carlo, gained solid skills and bodily knowledge at The Fiat Factory in Turin. He migrated bringing what he could carry in the shape of body knowledge, language and stories, figuratively rebuilding his mountain with tiny clay fragments, in new settings. Like my Nonno, my best asset is my body, my tool. My entire being engaged in working raw clay,

⁷ Mårten Medbo, 2016. "*Clay-Based Experience and Language-Ness*", chapter: "*The Poetics of Clay*" p 80.

⁸ Katarina Botwid, Ph D Archeology and MFA in Ceramics at "*I dialog med materialen (In Dialog with the Materials)*" on the theme: "*Clay*" at Sörmlands Museum 2021. "*Från hand till hand*" accessed on 20/2 2023 at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D4kZKN-szyM>

⁹ Ibid 8.

awakens bodily memories. Mixing, wedging, stacking clay, when preparing and executing clay fire sculptures, has been essential to my practice since my first monumental sculpture in 2004.

Gaining bodily experience working with clay is not solemnly in the work of hands but in the whole body. Encounters between material and body generate valuable information. Listen and the clay may provide approving or disapproving sounds; -is it about to collapse or crack? Occasionally experiences advise you by the smell if this type of clay means appreciation or an all too trying challenge. Sounds and colours in the kiln of fire collaborating with clay, gives you directions on how to maintain the firing.

A strong psychological impact has often made me refuse the terracottared earthenware clay, because of the aggressions it aroused in me. I still recall the ever-growing discomfort of red mass stuck to my body. Water becoming alarmingly, increasingly red the more I scrub to get rid of the mud, violently spreading like a red-flaming, volcanic raging eruption in the before so still water. Me overflowing with agitated emotions, rushing out!

The city within the city is my physical garden. I have been conducting present walks in Majorna, between places where I feel most connected to my grandparents, Slottsskogen, the cityforest, Mountain Gråberget, where they lived and my mother and father grew up, nearby the place where I lived my first two years. Downhill from Gråberget, one road leads me to Västra Kyrkogården, the cemetery that has become all four of my grandparents final resting place. During last year's walk between these, to me, historic landmarks, I passed numerous dugouts in the streets and felt as if both my grandparents and the clay were speaking to me from those mudpits of Majorna. Similar voices have been guiding my practice before, an encouraging force, gently pushing me forward or pulling from soft ribbons around my heart. As the title of Susanna Tamaros novel: *"Va' dove ti porta il cuore, Follow your heart"*¹⁰ suggests, I am proceeding, interviewing myself: What sort of memorabilia is this? How does it feel? What holds my attention? My way of honoring life changing choices and bodily engagement is letting clay and body relate, carrying the narrative found in interactions and interpretations of the Cresta archive, seeking deeper understanding on how clay combinations works in my practice as a mediator of sensations.

Eric Magassa¹¹ describes vividly in an interview about his influences from childhood, from being in transit between his home in Gothenburg and father in Paris, and the importance of

¹⁰ Susanna Tamaro, 1994. *"Va' dove ti porta il cuore"*. Milano, Baldini & Castoldi.

¹¹ Eric Magassa, 2022. Interview in connection to *The Stena Foundation Culture Scholarship of art 2022*, and following exhibition at The Gothenburg Museum of Art, spring 2023 Accessed on 5/3 2023 at: <https://youtu.be/hhhpMgG1kHI>

oral tradition from first and foremost his grandfather, living in exile in France with his roots in Senegal.

I can feel recollection of longing and admiration in a complex mix of searching for identity and senses of belonging in the vibrant and fragmented collageart of Magassa. Him connecting colors, significant objects and portraits of persons, places or events, awakes resemblance in me, of partly present, partly imaginary worlds, wovnen out of memories and wishes, or perhaps lost opportunities?

Unlike Magassas story, my Nonno seldom spoke of his journey of migration. He did not speak Italian at home with us and I have no experience of where Nonno grew up or lived before migrating, me being the third generation of immigrants. Where Oral tradition skipped one generation, me and my mother are patching together fragments to a weave of memories. Uncertainty created due to the recent pandemic during 2022-2023 and political impact has emphasized the value of caring for my parents experiences, my link to family memorabilia, treasuring our new dialog through our bodily engagements, listening to voices of the past..

*“Language is power, life and the instrument of culture, the instrument of domination and liberation.”*¹² Language, a complicated, nevertheless important issue in terms of integration, has come to play a significant role in my ongoing research. One of the most precious findings from the Archive is the sounds from tape recordings by Nonni around 1947-1957. We repaired the old recorder actually used in 1947, back then a brand new device for my grandparents, and suddenly found ourselves attending festive occasions among Italians and Swedes, learning each other's language by song lyrics, singing, laughing together, somewhere in the history of integration.

Katarina Botwid wrote following comment on her interpretations; *“I wrote in the beginning of my studies; “There is no truth. We weren't there.....” What I think today is that there is no possibility to avoid a transfer of values. We are people, and therefore never objective.”*¹³

We can physically only take part from where we are at this moment, from present perspectives, but the feelings might evolve. We were not there, they are not here, but together we make new memories of the present, gaining joint experiences in connection with the past. Keeping these stories alive, engaging in new dialogues and storytelling, celebrates the impact of encounters and transition. We have new conversations about the

¹²Angela, Carter.1998. “Shaking a Leg: Collected Writings”, Penguin Group USA.

¹³ Katarina Botwid, “The artisan perspective in action: An Archeology in Practice” 2016. p17. <https://lucris.lub.lu.se/ws/portalfiles/portal/4001683/8599030.pdf> accessed on 15/1 2023.

conversations in the created intermediate spaces and can never go back to who we were before this took place. Transformation of memory is inevitable.

So how does your heart remember? Ines de Carvalho and Deidre Denise Matthee the following perspective, describing their online cartography project *"The Palace of memory; Story-living in Object-telling"*¹⁴ where audience-participants are invited to enter and become co-creators:

*The chambers of the heart are layered with mementoes made of fragile matter(s), the sediment of sediment..... How then does the heart remember? Hart-felt remembering happens in the coincidence of sensorial memory and storied re-living, in the meeting of vivid sensation emotive evoking of a live(d) (hi)story.*¹⁵

Summary and conclusion

Twenty years in the ceramic field demands a recess of my motives, my assets, body, mind and materials, adapting a more circular practice. My intention is to avoid downcycling to promote reused materials and intentionally the use of the archive is one way of doing so. I'm accepting the idea of objects finding their way to me and to be open to the opportunities that are laid before me. I see no purpose in forcing things. My perspective in practice and sculptural work is influenced by thoughts on materiality and "no waste" policy from artists like Tony Cragg.¹⁶ Opening up to a different mindset, being attentive to potential in details, may make us reevaluate our surroundings.

The Cresta Family Archive is not public, nor does it belong to me, although it is part of my heritage. Limitations are what my parents and I agree on. Interpretations can only be conducted from where I now stand and I'm aware there are as many migrating stories as migrating persons and their families. This project reflects my story. The outcome will reflect my truth.

Engaging in bodily practice interpreting the archive with my parents has felt like we, as Carvalho and Matthee describe, by entering the sound zone became co creators in rewriting the (hi)story. I Would like to try and invite the audience to act as this also when presenting my artwork.

¹⁴ Nancy Duxbury et al., *"Part II Self and Place. 7: Other Lives and Times in the Place of Memory: Walking as a Deep-mapping Practice,"* in *"Artistic approaches to cultural mapping, Activating Imaginaries and Means of Knowing"*, London: Routledge, 2020. pp.110-123

¹⁵ Ibid 14, p. 120

¹⁶ Germano Celant.1996. *Cragg*, Milan: Charta

I speak not about the past or the future, what it is, is the present! What occurs is what happens NOW and what may come of that, we know nothing about, we can merely guess. I feel in this process I managed to get lost in my own garden. On my way I was lucky enough to refind a new but not entirely unfamiliar language all together. It sums up all the other ways of communicating, including them all: The language of the heart!

Mårten Medbos encouraging reflections upon clay-based language-ness:

The beauty of language, language-ness, and language-like-ness is that when they are provided with the right conditions they represent a sustainable way to create new meaning. The meaning a language can create has no end. Languages also tend to become richer the more they come to use.¹⁷



Sketch for sound installation, "Migrating Archive by Clay"
with original speakers from the 1950s. Photo by the author.

¹⁷ Ibid 7 p. 222

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Appendix



Sketch closeup of *"Slow Fashion Wedding Crown"* part of sound installation *"Migrating Archive by Clay"*
Photo by the author, 2023.



Process Photo of *"Moving mountain"* 2022.



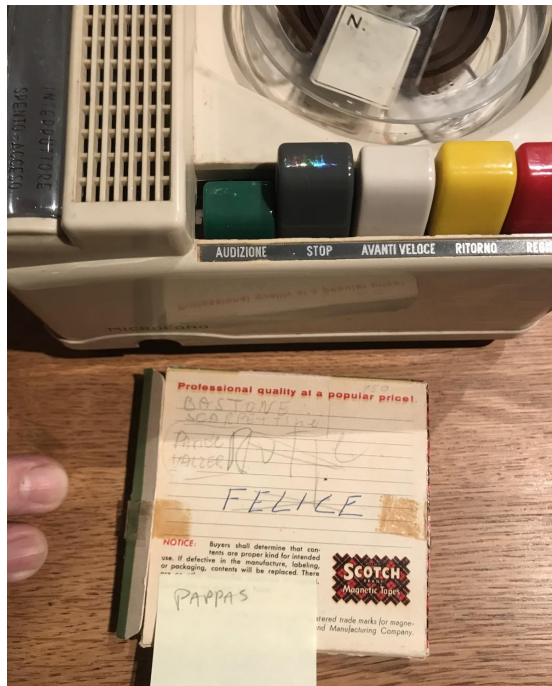
Processphoto of *"Migrating Archive"* 2022.



"Longing or Belonging" Photo by the author 2023.



Original equipment, tape recorder and microphone used by my grandparents in 1947.



The tapes have been reused by my mother when she was a teenager.



My mother and father using the tape recorder.



Original tape recorder used by my grandparents in 1947