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Beyond Fragments: resilience of ceramics

MA Thesis Project

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Tallinn – Muhu  
2022

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[abstract]

This thesis is based on my personal relationship with ceramic fragments, and the investigations on how different physical and imagined collages echo space, time, memories and experiences. I observe how material memory impacts the reconstruction or interpretation of the totality, through interviews. I investigate the significance, perception of totality and different perspectives of a fragment, through theoretical discussion and case studies. My ceramic practice is a path for exploring the resilience and agency of materials – clay and fragments – in the assembly of compositions, elaborating possibilities of wholeness and reconfigured value.

fragment – perception – resilience – reframing

[kokkuvõte]

Antud lõputöö lähtub minu isiklikust suhtest keraamiliste kildudega, uurides seda, kuidas nende erinevad kooskõlad vormivad taju ruumist, ajast, mälestustest ja kogemustest. Fragmentide põhjal tehtud intervjuude kaudu jälgin, kuidas materiaalne mälu mõjutab tervikpildi rekonstrueerimist või tõlgendamist. Uurin kildudega seotud väärtuseid, tähtsust ja tähendust, mis kerkib esile osadest eri vaatenurkade ja tajutavate kogemuste näol, toetudes teoreetilistele aruteludele ning juhtumiuuringute. Oma keraamikapraktika kaudu tegelen materjalide – savi ja fragmentaalsuse – vastupidavuse/-panuga ja agentsusega, luues visuaalseid kompositsioone, mis omakorda täiendavad võimalusi terviklikkusest ning taasluues väärtushinnanguid.

fragment – taju – vastupanu/-pidavus – taasloome

[structure of the thesis]

The following thesis consists of pieces, rather than sequential chapters, which can be read independently or assembled in various order. It is my intention to open possibilities for reading and, thus, the parts of the thesis are also presented as fragments of text and images.

I would like to encourage the reader to decide how to put together the fragments of this research, letting titles, illustrations, shapes, hands, and eyes act on the assembly. And decide how arrangements alter the understanding of the whole or how many pieces are needed to achieve completeness.

All visual materials presented are related to my process and work, and are woven throughout the text, I used different media to build narratives from and about my ceramic practice. Some artists' artworks are mentioned throughout the text as references for transmuting fragments in their various dimensions.

Each textual piece should create its own connections according to the gaze they are treated. Perhaps, dealing with fragments would bring hope to find associations and integrate new meanings into what remains resilient across time and space.

## Acknowledgment

First I would like to thank my supervisors. Urmas Puhkam who kindly listened to my wishes and helped me to get into the master's degree and Juss Heinsalu who enlightened some directions during the journey, were both indispensable help for me to the completion of the thesis.

I would like to thank the Estonian Academy of Arts, especially the Ceramic Department, for the patience with the newcomers, and availability. The development of this work is also due, in large part, to the discussions promoted by competent and interested teachers in zoom and presential classrooms. It was a challenging year to continue studying. Finally, the materialization of the project for the thesis presentation would not have been possible without the tremendously generous help of Eve Kaaret, manager of the bookbinding workshop.

Also my special thanks to my colleague Vlad-Teodor Stochita, for sharing a lot of coffee over the last two years and supporting her middle-aged classmate.

Last but not least, I am grateful for life's gifts, that brought me here; and the endless support of my beloved husband Hindrek Auväart, who patiently listened to all my ideas.

## Parts of the fragment [introduction]

I hold the belief that ceramics fragment embodies multiple layers of information and unknowns, stories and histories, something unique. Once it is in our hands, partakes properties from the past and also the present, full of new values. Fragments do not speak, not for themselves, and tend to be discarded. However, it is necessary to recognize them and create associations, effort, and investment to reveal meanings mainly when transmuted into wholeness.

The subject of my master's thesis has been lurking since the beginning when I applied for Estonian Art Academy in 2020. But even if it was always there, it took a pandemic year with lockdown to unveil that play with potsherds could be a new framework, a language on fragments, manifesting as experiences and knowledge.

As a ceramic restorer and researcher, I have worked with potsherds with different provenance, characteristics, fragilities, functions, and meanings in the last twenty years. Recently, I moved to another country across the world and have been stimulated by the radical difference within the environment, both natural and built, and the cultural setting. A new perception of life as fragments of experience landed on me.

As a foreigner who migrated to a tiny Muhu island in Estonia, reinterpretations of the feeling of belonging were also unexpectedly vivified by the finding and agency of local clay.

Fragmentation could be viewed as part of human life. Our experience forms the evidence through separations, migration, disruption, changes, alterities, oppositions, disconnections, and decontextualization. Through my thesis, I have engaged in converting experiences into a set of fragments, as a way of reactivating and reframing. Therefore, the challenge was to deconstruct and unravel the fragment's potential.

Playing with potsherds — communing, collecting, reading, searching, crafting, touching, shifting, assembling, interviewing — this master thesis aims to reflect on the possibilities and limits beyond a fragment:

*Could a fragment contain the past and the present, even when the whole object no longer exists?*

*Do fragments hold memories and meanings? Are they resilient?*

*Could alter the meaning of the past in the present by assembling the fragments differently?*

My master's thesis practical part culminates with artworks where potsherds from me, with or without provenance, from the past and the present, are reinterpreted, appearing connected through different values and compositions, experimenting with reframing it.

And the master's thesis writing reflects an effort to see beyond the sherd and its unlimited contacts — matter, other fragments, environment, and people. And unveiling it through various lenses and theoretical references, aware of the fragility of some proposed connections, either by the brevity of the text, of the readings, or by the breadth of the existing literature on the subject.

Putting fragments together  
[assembly of content]

[abstract]

[structure of the thesis]

Parts of the fragment [introduction]

Fragment as subject [the manifest]

Pieces of self [contextualization]

Touching ceramic material [wholeness]

What is in a sherd? [some references and reflections]

Fragment of what [material memories]

Potsherds or Fragments of others [case study]

Crafting evidence [ceramic practice]

How to put everyone in the same pot [drawing interviews method]

Different languages, different shapes [afterthought]

[fragment wishes]

Material and materiality [ontogenesis]

Incompleteness [conclusions]

[bibliography]



Agency

# Fragments as subject

[the manifest]

*What defines a fragment? Is it possible that a fragment itself is enough to represent and to understand the whole?*

In general, a fragmented object has non or very little value. Sometimes, even a little missing part can cause the whole thing to become invalid, useless, or abandoned. Although, it does not bother the unceasing fragmented information of every day. Fragments that make up meanings.

Ceramic is one of the oldest and most abundant materials that tell us about the being and doing of human beings. Archaeology and heritage conservation through pieces of things, cultural materiality, build up or restore narratives from the past, aiming to articulate them with the present.

Archaeologists dig, classify, and study ceramic fragments to find geographical, ethnical, and aesthetical associations, technological patterns, and through sherds, visualize the past and try to trace the path to the present. Archaeologically narrating, a pottery fragment with specific characteristics is enough to tell a lot about the entire piece. The composition, temper, porosity, and shape can lead to interpretations, for example, about the origin, tradition, technological choices, function, and performance of things.

The fragment can be understood both as an integral testimony and as a sample, and as such, it must contain all elementary data. Narrating from archaeometry, a fragment can replace the entire piece since the completeness does not always provide more information than the fragment itself.

Restorers look at the interactions of things with their surroundings, yesterday and today, and at properties that help to build an association between them. And thus, through fragments of the past, it promotes new meanings for things that might otherwise remain unseen. To restore a narrative, a fragment by itself is not enough, which means that it needs more than one to reintegrate the whole — an assembly of recognized original parts that make up the biography of things.

Fragments can tell us about narratives, and also about our assumptions, losses, traditions and material memories that act in our interpretation of the whole. From sherds of ceramic material, I intend to explore possible reconstructions of form meaning.

*What possibilities a fragment can contain? It is possible to build up different narratives from the same fragment? Or rearrange fragments through different connections preserving their memories?*



Embracing experiences

[photo Hindrek Auväärt]

# Pieces of self

[contextualization]

[contextualization of the past]

A bachelor's degree in History and my passion for ceramics were followed by 2-years of studies in conservation and restoration of ceramic and stone materials in Florence, Italy. After my return to Brazil, I began to work with private restoration of ceramics and, subsequently, as an employee of the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology of the University of Sao Paulo. Ever since I have gradually oriented my interests toward the conservation of archaeological materials, and my initial ceramic practice was abandoned.

The contact with the university impelled me to continue further. I did my doctorate<sup>1</sup> in Archeology with a research project on the Chimu<sup>2</sup> ceramics from Peru, developing original research with the museum's collection through

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1 Tecnologia cerâmica chimu: estudo arqueométrico da coleção do MAE/USP, PhD dissertation, Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology of the University of Sao Paulo, 2010.

2 A pre-Inca Peruvian culture that maintained one of the largest and most important political systems in Peru before the Inca. Also known as the kingdom of Chimor, their influence flourished on the northern coast of Peru between the 12th and 15th centuries.

archaeometry studies.

After some time, I resigned my position in the public institution, and as an independent conservator-restorer, had the chance to participate in several archaeology projects, mainly in the region of Amazon in Brazil. Also in international projects in Peru, and during some years in Egypt. These experiences led me to develop a post-doctoral research project<sup>3</sup> about archaeological conservation. In short, I explored inter-, multi- and transdisciplinarity cases through laboratory restoration work, archaeometrical investigation of ceramics decoration and raw materials. As well as an experimental methodology for in situ conservation of ceramics in archaeological sites within community villages, and collaborative conservation-restoration with indigenous people.

The visual linearity (linear orientation) of the chosen words to tell about twenty-four years of professional life is far from the real winding road. The cultural heritage conservation-restoration profession in Brazil, like in other countries, is a young discipline and still lacks regulations (even if a lot has been done in the last decade, the profession does not yet have its legislation). The participation of a conservator in archaeological missions was absolutely nonexistent, and during these years, I slowly slipped in; I penetrated projects digging space between colleagues who also envisioned possibilities for collaboration and integration between the areas.

[contextualization of the present]

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3 Conservação Arqueológica: uma reflexão a partir de estudos de caso no Brasil, postdoctoral fellowship, Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology of the University of Sao Paulo, 2016, 2018.

The tortuous and colorful path brought me to Estonia, guided by the heart, not by reason. In between so many uncertainties of the migration, I knew that ceramics was one certainty.

The choice of Design and Crafts Master intended to be an opening to look at ceramics from a different perspective and learn about ceramicist's practice. If my previous investigations and approaches initially guided the project to archaeometry questions, the experience - personal and worldwide pandemic - of the last years has transformed my master's degree into a new process.

Having always lived surrounded by fragments, on the one hand, it was almost natural that the fragment became my subject. On the other hand, the simple definition of a fragment as "a small part of something that has broken off or comes from something larger"<sup>4</sup> was not enough to express layers of values and possible narratives.

Concurrently with these two years of studies (mainly at a distance), I settled in a new address and started to set up a ceramic workspace, where I intend to continue developing experiences and investigating the use of wild materials. For me, it became clear that practice has always been the guiding thread of my research approach, even if during these years it was limited by an ocean of differences and challenges.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/>.



Casualty



Fragment birth

[photo Vlad-Teodor Stochita]

# Touching ceramic material

[wholeness]

*I don't know what I'm writing about: I am obscure to myself. I only had initially a lunar and lucid vision, and so I plucked for myself the instant before it died and perpetually dies.*

Clarice Lispector<sup>5</sup>

Ceramic is resilient when thinking about the relationship between people and things. One of the oldest testimonies of humanity, ceramics are an abundant record of human activities, developments, adaptations, rituals, and knowledge.

Ceramics or pottery<sup>6</sup> is generally made from clay. Practically, clay can be found and collected everywhere, and through local sources record a lot of information within the transformation of clay to ceramic. The wild clay needs preparation according to differences in the material and intended use. Or perhaps in different ways based on a cultural tradition incorporated within the matter. The knowledge about the material goes hand in hand with technical skills, intending to control the uncertainties of the crafting process.

In other words, Richard Sennet proposes in his book *The Craftsman*,<sup>7</sup> that humans have an inert need to make things, that could be seen as a way to control the environment. According to the author, the hands are central in our perception, and relation with the surrounding world, and the varied ways of gripping and touching affect how we think. In this world controlled by humans through things, the technique links hand and head.

To situate a different perspective on this relation between head-hand-thing, Lambros Malafouris<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Clarice Lispector, *Agua Viva* [English], translated by Stefan Tobler. USA: New Directions Book/ Canada: Penguin Books, 2012: 17.

<sup>6</sup> I tend to use the word ceramics, first, because of direct translation from my mother language, and curiously also from Estonian language (keraamika); second, though the term pottery is often used diversely to define objects made from clay, the noun ceramics appeal to the materiality, the material, regardless of function.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Sennett. *The Craftsman*. Penguin Group, 2008. In his book, the author engages in the universality of craftsmanship, identifying in different time and space connections between material, body, and development of skills.

<sup>8</sup> Lambros Malafouris. *How things shape our mind: a theory of material engagement*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013. In this book, he proposes “a cross-disciplinary analytical framework for investigating the ways in which things have become cognitive extensions of the human body”.

examines how this phenomenon is also affected by other variables such as situatedness, embodiment, and time, among others. He situates the relation between hand, head, and making on the sense of agency where variables matter, and the acquisition of skills, for him described as a sense of effortless performance, might be associated with the loss of agency, instead of control.

Makers vary in what promotes their intention of doing; conscious or unconscious attempt to control or interact with. The properties of clay are only one fraction of the almost infinite variations allowed in the pottery's process where traditions, improvements, repetitions, and errors, are irrevocably etched by the eventual firing. In return, the material itself might initiate an exchange with the potter. Skillful hands glide through matter crafting wholeness. The expression of identity may come with time, belief, and the pursuit of success in technique.

While clay, the learning from one's mistakes can be undone. The plasticity of the clay is permissive to our mistakes. Clay has origins but has no shaping rules.

When pottery, reverberates a crystallized past, ideas, trials, and experiences materialized in composition, shapes, and glazes. The fire determines birth and eternity.

In the past, pottery's function used to be determined by its wholeness, but when acting in the present, even a sherd of pottery could open a path to varied perspectives and values. A fragment carries origin, knowledge of the matter, damages of the time, history, and stories. As materialized memories, sherds can be recycled, abandoned, mixed, or disjointed. It does not matter; the past and the present will be in their elementary structure anyway.

Sennett claims that today neural science has shown that different sense organs do not have separate neural channels to the brain and thus that the senses cannot be isolated from one another, indicating that "a neural network of eye-brain-hand allows touching, gripping, and seeing to work in concert".<sup>9</sup> On this network, touch and weight help the brain to understand the two-dimensional and three-dimensional world of objects. Crossing the seeing, the touching, and the stored information in the brain might be possible to rapidly comprehend the surrounding world and read the environment.

*Could we think about materiality in our memories (material memories) acting through the same neural network eye-brain-hand? When dealing with fragments, in the everyday life, what mechanism forms meanings and creates the whole?*

Exposed to a fragment, we grasp the wholeness. Investigating the network eye-brain-hand, Sennett

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<sup>9</sup> Idem Sennet 2008: 153.

proposes that we *grasp something* when we anticipate the understanding — when the body is ready to do before it knows the complete information about what it will reach for. He named these movements prehension. Through different examples, the author shows how humans begin to practice prehension some weeks after being born and keep practicing in different life situations as the opposite of prudence or such as alertness, essential for collaboration, could be insidious as pre-judgment.<sup>10</sup>

With the eye and the hand acting together, Sennett says that “prehension gives a particular cast to mental understanding as well as physical action: you don’t wait to think until all information is in hand, you anticipate the meaning”.<sup>11</sup> An exciting experiment reported, shows how people exposed to objects in a dark room when inquired to describe them, were more accurate and detailed, which he explained being in part because of the natural effort to *grasp for a sense*.

*How do we react when presented to an unknown pottery fragment? Could it be that the four dimensions of prehension – anticipation, contact, cognition, and reflection – are incorporated in the process of achieving wholeness, aiming to establish facts that we can understand? Could we make visible our prejudgments?*

As practitioners of apprehension, seeing and touching a piece of pottery can stimulate and trigger material memories different from those generated by whole objects. The imagination of wholeness or creation of meaning is part of this neural network that accesses the information stored in the brain. The principle, in my practice, is reasoning backward, from consequence (the whole piece) to cause (the fragment), and inverting this movement to reach the understanding of the fragment seen.

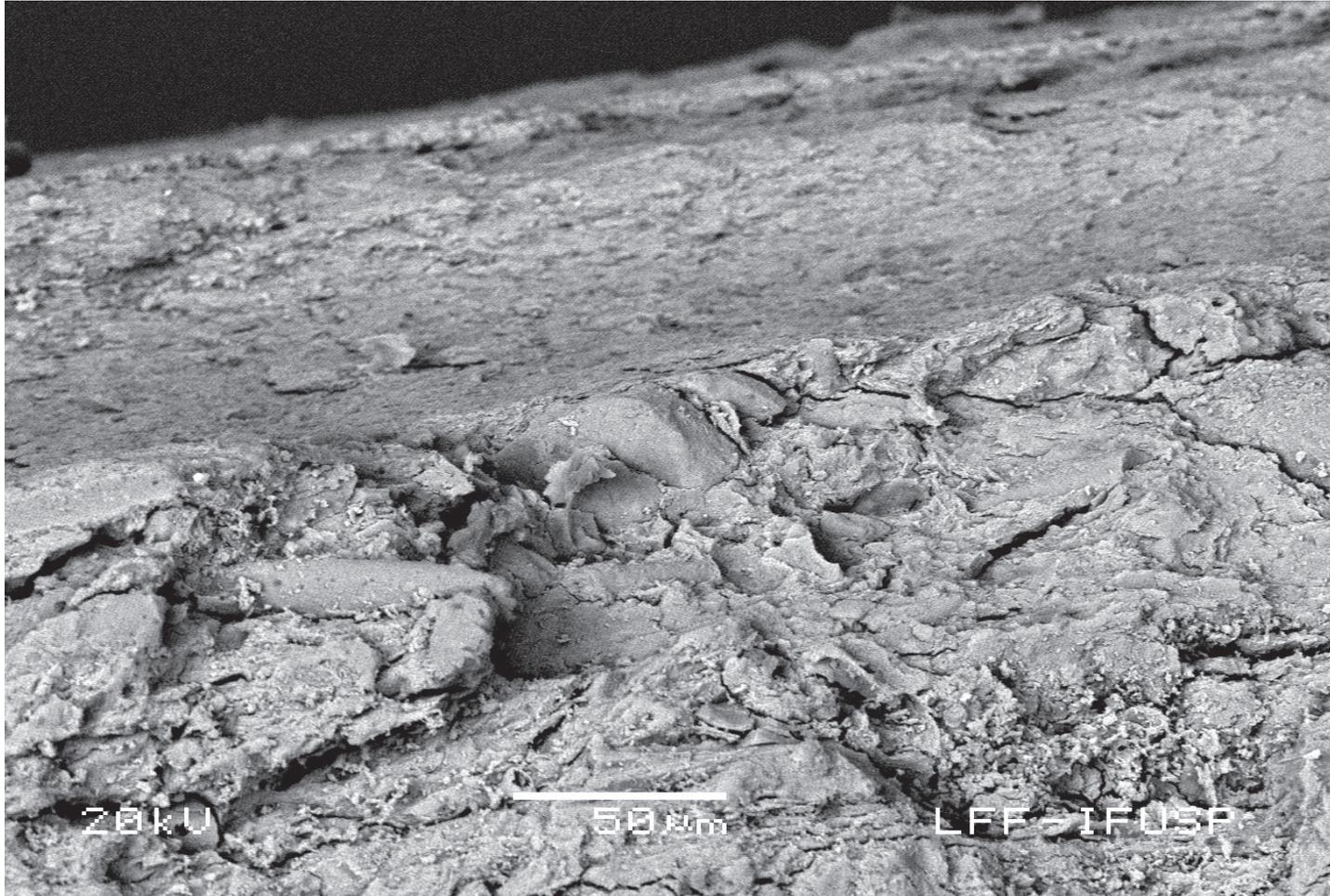
The fragment in action on the project comes from some unknown object and is made of clay by some more or less skilled hands. The sherd is not the object, is not the place, is not the potter’s design; it is a piece, a sample, or something else. The value is no longer defined by the potter’s skilled hands, by the qualities of the clay, or by the traditional/innovative design.

*Thus, where is the value?*

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10 The anticipation of meaning is also seen by philosophy as prejudices, which accordingly to Endre Begby, Professor of Philosophy at Simon Fraser University, “once they are internalized as background beliefs, they quite reasonably come to control the assessment and interpretation of new evidence” (*The Epistemology of Prejudice*, 2013:2). He recognizes prejudices as “epistemically insidious”, a property that could also help to explain why prejudices are frequently invisible to introspective reflections.

11 Ibidem Sennet 2008: 154.



Elementary grammar

[Image made with a Scanning Electron Microscope, 400X magnification]

# What is in a sherd?

[references and reflections]

*f / observe the microscopic state of things, then the difference between past and future vanishes (...) in the elementary grammar of things, there is no distinction between 'cause' and 'effect'.*

*Carlo Rovelli*<sup>12</sup>

When investigating a material's state, the potsherd is a mysterious crystalized system intertwined with chemical bonds, static elements, and dynamic ones, pores, cracks, and capillarity that allow complex relations with the world outside. Inorganic, solid, and hardened by heath, the ceramics become a dynamic medium where a tangle of atomic forces and exchanges occurs. During use, abandonment, or burial, the environment, friendly or aggressive, certainly will penetrate and interact, creating a network of relations between matter-matter, and matter-surrounding.

On this network, for instance, trace elements attribute provenance, iron particles influence color, calcium is unstable and, with phosphor, might be a piece of the composition or the result of slow adaptation to a specific site. Hence, depending on the element's position on this network, will determine a different

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<sup>12</sup> Carlo Rovelli. 'There is no such thing as past or future' Interview to Charlotte Higgins, *The Guardian*, 14 April 2018. Author of works such as *Helgoland* (2021), *The Order of Time* (2018), and *Seven Brief Lessons on Physics* (2015), some long winters are necessary to incorporate concepts and the philosophical approach with roots in quantum physics.

meaning.<sup>13</sup> The knowledge of this *elementary grammar* is relevant to accessing the state of conservation or processes of degradation, active or inactive, and what happened and still happens to the fragment. The more I understand about the potsherd today, the better I ensure its future, it is common sense.

This network of relations also turns to our eyes. Including people in the surrounding may alter the biography of the potsherd, but, as asserted by the Italian physician Carlo Rovelli, materials have a grammar fixed by chemical-physical laws in the past and are resilient regarding the present.

The theory about the nature of time revealed to me by an interview with the author, I try to grasp, at this moment, more as a synthesis of different experiences that the fragment contains than with the ambition to explore the theory itself. Like other references cited throughout this work, they appear as a source, but above all, they are paths to be followed.

Looking at the fragment from the inside and outside, Bruno Pedretti's book was an inspiration that helped me define the subject of this thesis and enlarge my viewpoint about the practice process. His book *La forma dell'Incompiuto*<sup>14</sup> offers various digressions on the possible meanings of the finished artwork in modernity. Treating the sketchbook, and the diary, as fragments of the experience, as the process that constitutes the final artwork, the author highlights that authenticity is in this process. Corrections or attempts to see a complete form, instead of fragments, would be a distortion of our mind trying to envision a totality or finality that does not exist in the spontaneity of the process actions.

In Pedretti's words, "the meaning consists of the experience as a collection of events germinated by

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13 A specific correlation between calcium and phosphor might indicate the presence of hydroxyapatite, the inorganic parcel of bones. Nevertheless, traces of bone might be from the ceramic composition, related to the function of the pottery or a burial environment.

14 *La forma dell'Incompiuto: quaderni, abbozzo e frammento come opera del moderno*, 1edition 2007, 2011.

the infinite contact between existing fragments”.<sup>15</sup> Thus, the idea of experience as a fragment of our existence, as a word is a fragment inside a speech, inspired my perception of the potsherd as a thing by itself, autonomous, capable of creating different other things. Furthermore, the reading oriented my unsystematic collections of references and practices embracing it as a process.

The subject of fragments is explored through different media. For instance, the Chilean, London-based artist Livia Marin refers to her artworks as a reflection “on aspects of loss and care, disposal and preservation, and the relationship we develop with the day-to-day objects that populate our everyday lives.”<sup>16</sup> I was captivated by her idea of the resignification of broken pieces and the ambiguous perception of broken/complete that she emphasizes in her artwork. In addition, she also explores the meanings of value, opposing ordinary/prestigious, uniqueness/universality, and the concept of reuse as a recovery of relationships.

As part of the series *Broken Things*, the artist uses photographs of various discarded or obsolete ceramic objects and, after tearing the images, assembles them back, also referring to the traditional Japanese technique of ceramic restoration *kintsugi* (golden repair). The persistence of the object and the noble treatment of its fractures convince about its completeness.

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15 Pedretti 2011:19.

16 The information about the artist are from the website [liviamarin.com](http://liviamarin.com).



Crafting sherds



Carving sherds

# Fragment of what?

[material memories]

*Tupí, or not tupí  
that is the question.*

*Oswald de Andrade<sup>17</sup>*

Every narrative has a starting point, even if not necessary at the beginning. Every sherd comes from somewhere, is part of something. Thus, in order to begin my thesis, I needed to craft a thing.

After so long of working with fragments, I found myself apprehensive in front of the clay with the task of making a pot. Surprisingly, even if my hands were a little clumsy, my head knew the steps visualizing the path.

The first touch on clay evoked memories and claimed the past.

The archaeologist Bjornar Olsen explores ideas of *material memory* and concludes that we do not think about why the presence of things and what they represent about our own identity and experiences; even so, they persist and resist as material memories acting quietly in our environment. Furthermore, articulating different layers of the relations between subjects and objects, the idea of *habit memory*

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<sup>17</sup> Remarkable phrase from the *Anthropophagic Manifesto*, written in 1928, inspired by the famous Shakespearean phrase. Reference to the anthropophagic cultural movement/revolution that, despite the necessary revisionist criticisms, more than a romantic nationalist ideal was an anti-colonialist contribution.

asserted by the French philosopher Henry-Louis Bergson enlarges the perception of things as material memory; meaning that we could assume that things embody within themselves layers of different pasts in the present.<sup>18</sup>

A form emerged from the dialogue between memories, the clay, and my hands, that wavered on unforgettable as much as unknown skills. Not only did I have a shape, but I was also surprised by how Tupi<sup>19</sup> it was. Considering that things embody material memories as human experiences – cultural, technological, social, ecc – have no surprise that as a Brazilian, who used to work with our long-term indigenous history through the conservation and restoration of heritage, I cannot treat my own material culture detached from myself.

I am not saying that I am doing tupi ceramic - artefactual sets with particular characteristics. Produced by speakers of one of the 43 languages that make up the Tupi linguistic trunk, the pottery is governed by rules of traditional technological knowledge reproduced at each generation<sup>20</sup>. However, in front of the task of forming my pot, I started to form one of the recognized Tupi ceramic shapes.

That provoked me to expose my identity and to position myself facing the misgovernment of the current policy, which aggravated the genocide of traditional peoples who occupy lands coveted by globalized capital, and a setback in education and culture. If being Brazilian can lead to some misunderstanding about my political position against this government, I want to say that I am Tupi.

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18 Bjornar Olsen. 8 Reclaiming things: an archaeology of matter. - P.I. Carlile, D. Nicolini, A. Langley, H.Tsoukas (eds) *How matter matters: objects, artifacts and materiality in organization studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 171-196, 2019:182.

19 Classifying category that makes reference to ethnicity, linguistic affiliation, local and national identities, or even to specific political-social groups in certain historical moments. Linguistic studies confirm the presence of Tupi-speaking people over a horizon of 5000 years (Correa 2014:26).

20 The brief paragraphs presented here about Tupi terminology and the long-term history as well as the definition of their ceramics artefactual sets as a material reference for current research in archeology, ethnology, ecology and linguistics were extracted from the doctoral thesis of Angelo Alves Correa, *Pindorama de Mboia e Iakare: continuidade e mudança na trajetória das populações tupi*. Museu de Arqueologia e Etnologia, Universidade de São Paulo, 2014.

The name Tupi, originally one indigenous group self-nomination, began to be used by explorers/colonizers as a generalization to define different indigenous peoples with similar language in the 16th century. Although during the 19th century, it acquired an ambiguous character in the construction of a 'romantic' national identity, my material memory does not represent this glamorized and dead *bon sauvage*.

My tupi form that originated this thesis, as well as the initial fragment, is resilience, the resistance of people and things, and openness to the future. In addition, it makes reference to the Brazilian anthropophagic cultural movement, conceived by a group of intellectuals in the early 20th century, seeking to reflect in opposition to the concept of passive acculturation. According to the artists who self-called cannibals, "Only anthropophagy unites us. Socially. Economically. Philosophically." <sup>21</sup>

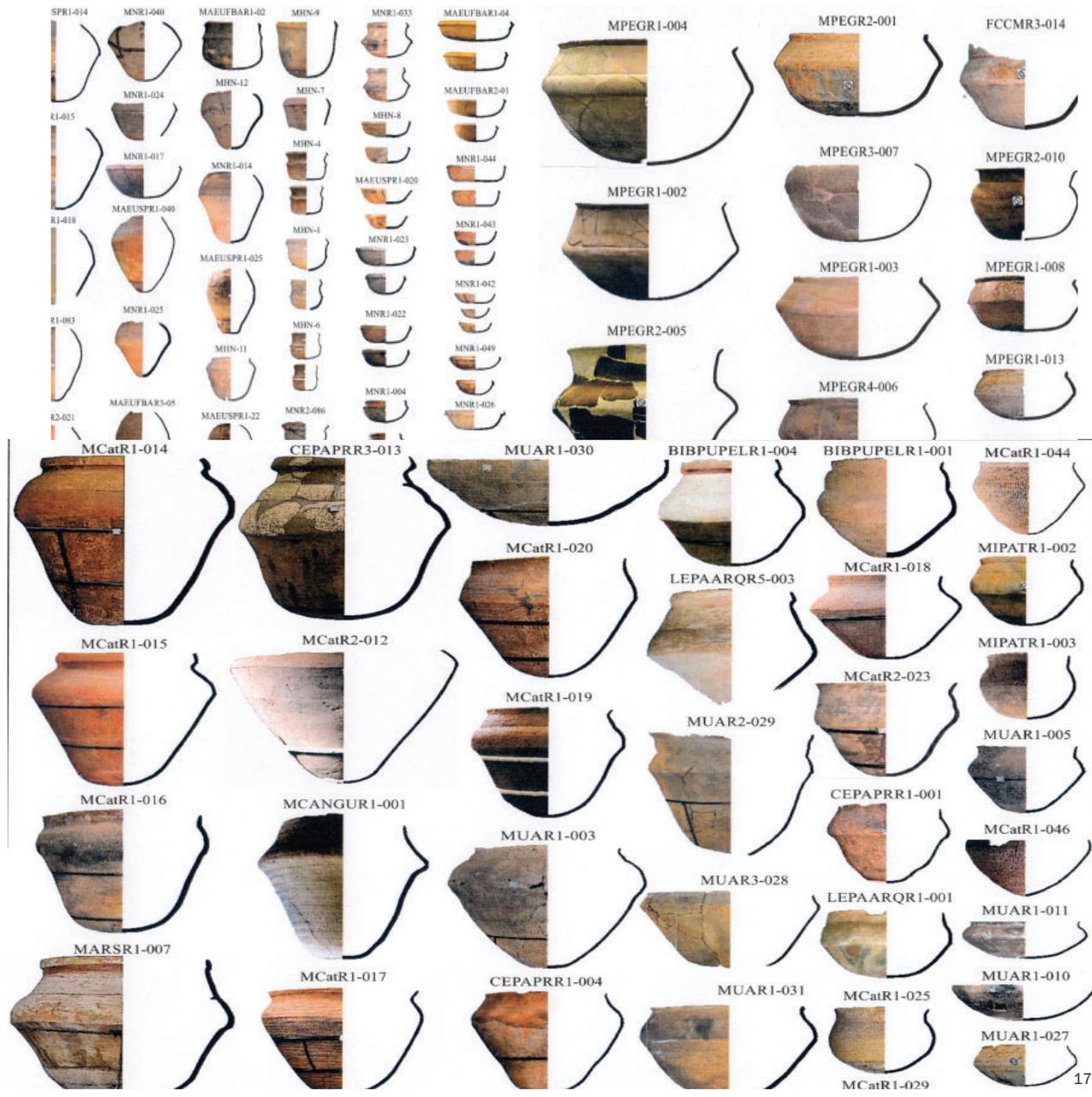
The same object in different hands and changed environment certainly will reframe the relation between people and the material and its signification. Without canceling its origin, the fragment could encompass other memories through different meaning-making processes materialized in things. The fluidity of the process of making meaning and making memories<sup>22</sup> should be preserved, with the fragment as a tool to make visible what it is visible, avoiding 'colonizing' meanings through the definition of just one correct wholeness.

Finally, I understood that reframing the fragment from the encounter between different cultures, places, people or things should be an anthropophagic experience - where we eat to absorb the best of the other.

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21 Oswald de Andrade. *Obras completas: do Pau Brasil à Antropofagia e às Utopias*, Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1970: 13.

22 Inspired by Annette Kuhn's paper 'Remembrance', which discusses the tangle of the meaning-making process of personal, cultural, and social memories through a family photograph. In Jo Spence and Patricia Holland (eds) *Family Snaps*, London: Virago, 1991.





Adaptation



Perception

# Potsherds or Fragments of others

[case study]

*How does one keep from being fascist, even (especially) when one believes oneself to be a revolutionary militant? How do we rid our speech and our acts, our hearts and our pleasures, of fascism? How do we ferret out the fascism that is ingrained in our behavior?*

*Michel Foucault<sup>23</sup>*

Fragments from past experiences are incorporated in the thesis insofar as they enlarge the perceptions about a fragment and the entirety reconstructed.

The assembled fragments, with the absences, might stimulate the perception of antiquity, original, and valuable. Developed since Ruskin and Viollet-le-Duc<sup>24</sup>; seems that this attribute links us to the past of human history, and no fake reconstructions are highly evaluated between archaeologists, museologists, curators, and restorers. For us, Western researchers, the fragments – in their fraction state - are seen as representative of our and others heritage. They carry the status of original fragments of a culture that should be studied and preserved.

These pages are a fraction of the history of a set of potsherds from the Asurini's indigenous territory, Brazil. The fragments mentioned were collected during an archaeological mission – involving indigenous, archaeologists and ethnographers – organized to localize old settlements occupied by Asurini according to elders' oral history and memory of meaningful places. Pottery and sherds were found; among them, entire pieces were collected by indigenous and taken to

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23 Preface in: Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, New York, Viking Press, 1977: XII.

24 Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc (1814-1879), an architect responsible for the restoration of many landmarks in France, and John Ruskin (1819-1900), a philosopher, and polymath who wrote on varied subjects concerning architecture and literature, among others. Their reflections on the restoration of architectural heritage are among the classic literature responsible for the debate and definition of many concepts dear to restoration theories even today.

their actual village. However, all potsherds were allowed to archaeologists take to the museum for further study. It is advisable to clarify that this indigenous group is used to working with white researchers. The head of the project has worked with Asurini indigenous people, material culture, and history for the last twenty years.

The Asurini of Xingu nowadays is a group with 184 individuals, contacted by white people for the first time in 1971 (official contact), living in their territory (recognized in 1986), located on the right bank of the Xingu River, their land traditionally inhabited.<sup>25</sup> All fragments collected during this mission were packed and labeled for travel by boat for four hours to the closest city and 2845 km to Sao Paulo University Museum.

The box with potsherds opened at the museum's laboratory was organized according to the location they were found. The pertinent matter here is that curated steps made for the treatment of the ceramic material were proposed by the restorer (me) and decided together with the archaeologist (head of the project). Indeed, the conservation work sought to associate demands from different research areas and consider our knowledge about the Asurini people after years of collaborative work.

The chapter in the history of the set of fragments may be changed when we engaged in the task of bringing two potters from Asurini territory to the museum. We wanted to discuss ethnographic information and the conservation treatment, but mainly the criteria for restoring their pieces. The formal and aesthetical reintegration of the assembled fragments was still an undergoing activity.

Another clarification. When acting for the conservation of ethnographic or archaeological material, some treatments – considering our premises of preservation towards eternity — are needed to stabilize the matter and promote better legibility and safe handling by researchers. However, quite often, the criteria for formal reconstruction and pictorial reintegration to restore the aesthetical and exhibition potential of the piece are choices (that should not directly interfere in the conservation of the material) made by museologists, restorers, archaeologists, and curators.<sup>26</sup> The result is expected to be understood as significant and a narrative depiction.

The collaboration with the Asurini potters at the museum's laboratory occurred during a week of activities prepared aiming to create the space for a common understanding or a horizontal dialogue (as much as possible). First, the idea was to explain what we had made

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<sup>25</sup> [https://pib.socioambiental.org/pt/Povo:Asurini\\_do\\_Xingu](https://pib.socioambiental.org/pt/Povo:Asurini_do_Xingu)

<sup>26</sup> Working with restoration of archaeological and ethnographic ceramic pieces, I frequently asked myself if the criteria and decisions made about the restoration could find an echo in the people who are the original owner of the things.

with the potsherds they collected and delivered to us (white researchers), featuring pieces in the different stages of conservation-restoration treatment – cleaned, glued, partially reconstructed, morphologically reintegrated, for instance. Moreover, before discussing the restoration criteria of the pottery set, some practical activities were proposed to explain what constitutes western restoration methods.<sup>27</sup> During few days, the Asurini potters experimented with doing standard treatments and using tools for restoration.

The common goal is through these methods to preserve culture, restore objects, create new meanings to their cultural material, and make it available for the future and for others` appreciation. But, after the days of activities, what do we understand about their aim, what else we should do with these fragments; what the criteria, according to them, Asurini, understanding of restoration that should prevail to preserve their material culture?<sup>28</sup>

Frequently asked to speak about this indigenous population, Fabiola Andrea Silva,<sup>29</sup> head of the project, says after years of continuous research that, as observed by various scholars concerning other indigenous peoples, the appropriation of Western goods, concepts, and the establishment of social and economic relations with non-indigenous people result in changes in their ways of life and territories. However, these transformations do not necessarily represent the end of peoples and their cultures; on the contrary, they can constitute a reinvention of them as a condition for their continuity. Still according to Silva, we already know that indigenous peoples have specific ways of appropriating externalities and transforming their cultures and that these are defined based on the structural principles of their ways of being and conceiving the world and the circumstances in which they are inserted.

I turn to the different relationships between people and fragments between so many exchanges and learnings that could be explored from this experience.

For the Asurini potters, owners of the sherds (the ceramic material treated was directly related to their ancestry), their being and process of making was present in the entire pot, at least in the entirely reintegrated object. On the whole pot, they recognize the making, clay, and details

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27 I do not intend to delve into this discussion, but I understand that the notion of `restoration` is also cultural, and methodologies may vary according to different theoretical choices.

28 This experience was published partially in the article Cunha Lima, Sílvia & Silva, Fabiola A. 2021. Colaboração em Museus: a participação de mulheres asurinís na definição dos critérios de restauração de vasilhas cerâmicas produzidas pelas suas ancestrais. *Revista Museologia & Interdisciplinaridade*, 10 (19): 484-497.

29 Fabiola Andrea Silva, archaeologist and ethnologist, professor at University of Sao Paulo. Among the vast production published, here I refer to two articles;

2002. Mito e arqueologia. A interpretação dos Asurini do Xingu sobre os vestígios arqueológicos encontrados no parque indígena Kuatínemu – Pará. *Horizontes Antropológicos*, 8(18): 175-187.

2013. Tecnologias em transformação: inovação e (re)produção dos objetos entre os Asurini do Xingu. *Boletim do Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi. Ciências Humanas*, 8(3): 729-744.

of shape, the possible functions, what food could have been cooked, and see similarities with their material culture even today. The entire thing is what echoes their culture.

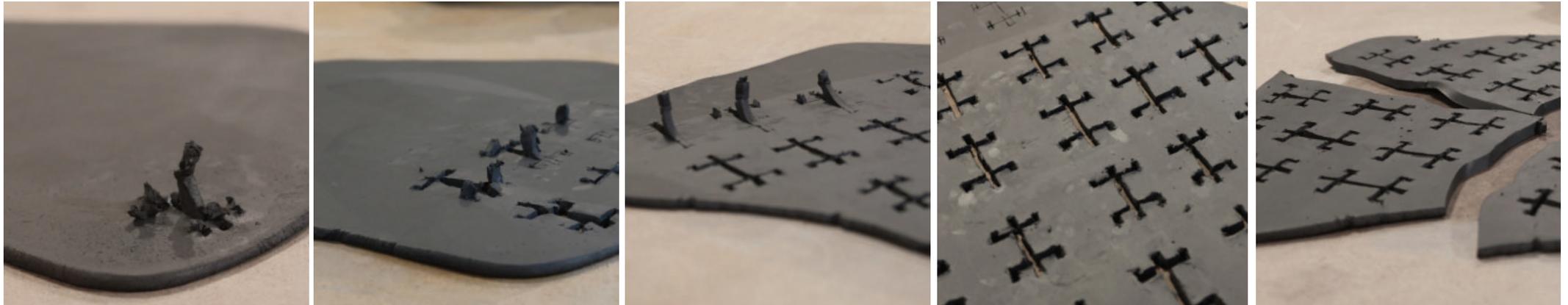
The isolated fragments were not perceived as representative of their culture. Fragments or pieces with absences in the form do not reestablish the entirety needed to represent the beauty of Asurini people, as was said by one of the potters, their entities.

The relationship between people, things, and nature (as well as the definition of these concepts) is not univocal. In Amerindian ontologies, the acquisition of things from the Others can be translated into a way of appropriation of their capacities and powers, as things are also the embodiment of subjectivities and agency. Thus, in native theories, things are people and, at the same time, are evidence of people's presence.<sup>30</sup>

Regrettably, the potsherds, sometimes, receive more care and attention than the people themselves – fragments can represent us while people are others.

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30 Idem Silva, 2013: 734.



Broken connections



Broken connections

[photo Vlad-Teodor Stochita]



Meditation

# Crafting evidence

[ceramic practice]

*So what's the harm of moving away from logic?  
I deal in raw materials. I'm after whatever is  
lurking beyond thought..*

*Clarice Lispector<sup>31</sup>*

During the development of the thesis, it became difficult to distinguish between the feelings of loneliness, misguidance, uncertainty, repulsion, fragility, discomfort, boldness, and curiosity, whether emanating from the pandemic world situation, the immigration/adaptation process, or the challenges of studio practice. Hence, the artistic process I ended up involved in corresponds to these various forces to a certain extent.

My practice, as well as the methodologies, are unsystematic - I affectionately call it chaotic - intuitive, experimental, fragments dispersed of knowledge, collaborations, bravery, indecisions, experiences sewed together through research gaze. Moreover, stepping into a new area poses questions about skills and the ability to change what I do or what I used to do: I needed to delve into the unknown artistic-based research, materials, and new environments.

A project that began focused on the elementary properties of the material related to technological issues, was swallowed by silence, opening a journey to investigate the agency of a fragment, glimpsing an understanding of the role of materiality and otherness as adhesive and designing of imagined shapes or assembled fragments. The transition that followed idea-research-practice-narrative went through moments of greater or lesser awareness of the process.

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31 Clarice Lispector, *Agua Viva* [English], translated by Stefan Tobler. USA: New Directions Book/ Canada: Penguin Books, 2012: 7.

Working with potsherds meant working with pieces of recorded memories, once fragmentation does not vanish the ceramic's origin, even if renews uncertainties. On the other hand, working with sherds meant to add new layers to the many already existing crystallized in its structure and form.

Making, breaking, and recreating. To break my crafted pot meant to create new possible connections to each of the fragments. Maybe, in the beginning, the pleasure was more about creating sherds than crafting ceramic pieces. A little confession: breaking is between an epiphany and an illicit act as a restorer. In my practice, craftsmanship became make and break, and, when the sherds became raw material, they led the process.

Possibilities of fragmentation were explored and recorded generating illustrations of the process. The Broken Connection, an exercise in pattern creation, portrays fragmented references of faunal beings and ways of incorporating these entities into everyday objects.

The recreation of wholeness appears in few objects as a result of changing perception or adaptation to the environment. The influence of the environment was undeniable as it occurs in different directions. A background dialogue between the research and the place<sup>32</sup> was continuous. Nevertheless, the environment reverberates decisively on the studio process after an unexpected discovery that changed the role of clay in my practice.

I arrived at a clay deposit on Muhu island with the simple and naïf reasoning: if there is clay everywhere, where is clay in Muhu? Not only did the first trials look quite possibly successful, but beyond that, adding wild local clay to the practice aggregated different perspectives.

*How to process wild clay? What value/meaning is incorporated when using Muhu clay in my practice? How do I feel working with Muhu clay? Can a foreigner work with local clay? How to put together Muhu and Brazilian clay?*

Several tests to understand the applicability of the local clay and enhance properties to integrate into ongoing project

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32 Inspired by the concept of situatedness as proposed by the archaeologist Lambros Malafouris to explain `the environmental, technological, cultural, or social situation that may shape and/or become part of the embodied thinking process` of pottery making (referenced in the bibliography).

started blind and diffuse, and quickly realized, they should go beyond the master`s thesis. More than technicalities for material development, the engagement with local clay seemed to respond to uncertainties: I transformed the slow handmade processing of Muhu clay into meditative reasoning about belonging.

The inclusion of local clay had another surprising reaction or agency. I felt the need to merge my current ceramic practice also the materiality of my past. In this coming and going with suitcases, literally a heavy part of the immigration process, I brought local clay from the place I used to live in Carapicuíba, Sao Paulo, Brazil. Furthermore, I broke old pieces made twenty years ago and packed to travel to Estonia to be part of the fragments that make up this new experience.

Clearly, the lack of practice oozes from every pore and the few opportunities during my studies have shed light on the challenges I will choose to pursue.

I have been affected by Steven Young Lee`s work and practice. The strange perception of beauty comes from an object that is fragmented. Simultaneously, solid and fragile, existing and fading away. According to the artist, “deconstructing and imploding the forms creates a visceral reaction that defies the human desire for perfection and confronts the perception of value (...) and redefines what is beautiful.”<sup>33</sup> His pieces show a lot of craftsmanship and knowledge of the material involved, also advising about the challenges of ceramic practice to accomplish the challenge of resignification of object`s perception.

The artist, a Korean immigrant grown in the United States, sees himself often in between cultures, as an outsider in his heritage country and a minority in his living place, which he expresses by confronting ideas of belonging and cultural heritage by mixing materials and traditional techniques.

More specifically, the *Fragment Series* consists of pieces with massive portions of clay finished with fine hand-painted techniques, exploring cracks and asymmetry of the shape, majestic perfection, denouncing and reminding the wideness of possible interpretations for a fragment.

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33 The information are from the website [stevenyounglee.com](http://stevenyounglee.com)



Heat resistance  
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Wild clay

# How to put everyone in the same pot?

[drawing interviews method]

*Subjecting things to words and language  
have always been the preferred intellectual  
taming device to cope with objects` disquieting  
material obstinacy.*

*Bjornar Olsen<sup>34</sup>*

For archaeology, the ceramic material is one of the primary keys to accessing societies of the past and cultural relations, but when we think about material culture nowadays, what is the role of ceramics in our lives?

*Could ceramics as materiality, pottery like other objects, assist in forming or negating personal and group attachments, mediate the notion of self-identity, and integrate social differences?<sup>35</sup>*

Finding a way to reflect on the variability, history, permanence of shapes, aesthetics, and cultural connections was always a relevant issue, conscious or not, in my practice; and interview`s method appeared to be an exciting gate to investigate the agency of a potsherd.

Undeniably, the cultural encounter/conflict that I was experiencing probably also instigated thoughts about how the agency of cultural bias and various backgrounds could be in the construction of a whole thing from the same fragment.

The relationship between materiality and identity has always been a fundamental expression, as claimed by many archaeologists, once objects, especially ceramic objects, are the most resilient and numerous forms of evidence that characterize prehistoric

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34 Bjornar Olsen. `8 Reclaiming things: an archaeology of matter`, in P.I. Carlile, D.Nicolini, A.Langley, H.Tsoukas (eds) *How matter matters: objects, artifacts and materiality in organization studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019:

35 During the writing process, I came across the following article from *The Guardian* online on 10 April 2022, "a single ceramic cockerel sitting atop a kitchen cabinet, survived a bombardment of Borodianka, it became a symbol of Ukrainian resistance", by Mostafa Rachwani.

cultural groups.<sup>36</sup> Fragments might be read for their meaning to culture.

A fragment can be irrelevant if not recognized on behalf of an entire thing or only seen by its loss or interruption of the original function. However, I assume that a potsherd may also have the potential to activate stored material memories, allowing the imagination of different whole materialities. And so, multiple possible reconstructions of the same fragment could be visualized. According to Bjornar Olsen<sup>37</sup>, things help us to absorb or understand the past and the acquisitions made, while “a minor disturbance (...), a broken part, that compromises the material existence in our lives, could be the ignition for growing the concern, making things visible, and thus activate their potential for change”.<sup>38</sup>

Drawing interviews functioned as a narrative research method, where questions were asked to encourage respondents to describe their own experience with the fragment. Because the interviews consisted of asking the interviewees to draw their responses, it was possible to deviate from one common limitation when interviews are used as a method for data collection, which means the researcher’s involvement, as interviewer or interpreter, with the participant. Concurrently, through their drawings, the participants could directly share their interpretation of the fragment, even considering the interview’s local and the observer distance may disrupt or affect responses.

As a protocol, I try always to keep a certain distance from the interviewee while they observe the fragment and draw. When possible, I leave the person alone in the space. I also avoid long explanations regarding questions or the research before the interview is finished. I only provide paper and a pencil, and clarify that I would like to collect the drawing and a few personal data (citizenship, age, and professional occupation).

The question was: Looking at this fragment (only then, a box was opened and the sherd could be touched), how do you imagine the whole?

The haptic knowledge<sup>39</sup> certainly helped interviewees build up their *object*, but it seems to me that it was not determinant in this case. Participants did not generally refer to the

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36 Ian Hodder, archaeologist, pioneer of archaeological theory that brings to the fore the subjectivity of archaeological interpretations, known as post-processualism. Hodder, Ian (ed). *Structural and Symbolic Archaeology*. Cambridge University Press, 1982: 185.

37 Bjornar Olsen, an archaeologist who, together with other scholars, promotes the “turn to materials” in humanities and social sciences.

38 idem Olsen 2019: 191.

39 The perception of objects by touch, “haptics is that subsystem of non-language communication which conveys meaning through physical contact”.

clay, dimension, thickness, or finish of the potsherd; most drew medium to small-sized objects, regardless of the original shape being a large vase.

The drawing was the result of observation. The observation is a tool to build knowledge about a particular event – the fragment. Nevertheless, observation is not neutral, and our background knowledge and experiences influence what we see. Thus, observations as a method of analysis of the fragment always include interpretation. Observation can also be understood as a perception of reality<sup>40</sup>, a phenomenon where the experience is the meaning inside it. According to this perspective, the experience of the fragment's interview could be explained by three phenomena that occur simultaneously: retention of the past, present experience, and projection of the future. The objects drawn could be understood as a mythical speech<sup>41</sup>; assuming they mean something, that they are a communication system conveying signification socially constructed to the fragment.

The collection of objects drawn could be seen through many different lenses. All these theoretical/ philosophical perspectives were an attempt to expand my look beyond the material, envisioning a holistic view of the thing – interviewee, fragment, whole object drawn – approaches to qualify and use the data collected with the drawing interview method. However, the challenge of dealing with these concepts and relating them to my practice guided my choice to put everyone in the same pot embracing the concept of memory. I was aware and apprehensive that simplifying the complexity of the data could reduce the drawn objects to stereotypes of identity or universalities that can easily hide a subtle game of exclusions.

Memory is multidirectional “subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing”.<sup>42</sup> At the same time, memory can mean different things at different times, being a traveling concept. The range and potential of memory in the construction of meaningful experiences is defined by Cathy Caruth “as a kind of language that differs from empirical laws, but also is not entirely conceptual, once also tell us facts about the world”,<sup>43</sup> a concept explored through different media.

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40 Perception is a complex concept that as visual information can move in both directions, from the eyes to the brain and the opposite, meaning that prior knowledge and experience collected during a lifetime affect your view. This concept was explored by phenomenology, philosophy and research strategy study of phenomena.

41 Reference to Roland Barthes, philosopher, critic and semiotician, and the book *Mithologies* from 1957, where he presents reflections on culture and the system of signs beneath, developing the concept of myth as a semiological system.

42 Michael Rothberg. *Multidirectional memory: remembering the Holocaust in the age of decolonization*, 2009: 3. The author and the idea of the interrelatedness of memories were brought into the classroom by the lecturer Annika Toots.

43 Cathy Caruth, professor of English and Comparative Literature, focuses on the languages of trauma theory. In a way, I made a point of inserting a reference, even if brief, to this author, as her book was part of the

Looking at the wholeness that emerged from the fragment as material memories, I managed to fuse the drawings and the interviews and read them as narratives. In other words, the fragment meets the wholeness only through the interviewee's memories, seeming to be possible to establish a bridge with the concept of landscape photography explored by Liz Wells.<sup>44</sup> She investigates landscapes pictures as a trigger for personal and cultural memories beyond the frames of an image, often hidden in absences, traces, and loss, shaped by our perception and construction of the space.

Materializing these narratives by crafting selected drawings objects, intent to act as holders of knowledge and memory collected in the interviews.<sup>45</sup> Perhaps, the way presented by Janneke Wesseling, "artworks do not describe, explain or analyze, but they enact or embody points of view and values".<sup>46</sup>

*May a fragment could make visible what is beyond the language?  
Could it provoke the audience to reflect on our bias when interpreting  
fragments of reality?*

Furthermore, the fragment might materialize the experience, as an interweaving of change and permanence<sup>47</sup> – perhaps where resides the resilience of the fragment. The thing, the fragment's experience, real and imaginary at the same time, is what appears in our consciousness and thereby differs from how it is independently of our experience. Unique and diverse.

In this crosswind of interpretations, the experience of the fragment may also act as a time machine. The emerging things depict simultaneous experiences. Thus, instead of a rational linear cause and effect explanation of drawings as socially constructed objects, perhaps, they might be placed in another circular perspective of time.

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beginning of a re-reflection on how to cope with fragmented experiences. Caruth. *Unclaimed experience: trauma, narrative and history*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996: 78.

44 Liz Well, curator, writer and lecturer on photographic theories and practices. Here I refer to the article "Hidden Histories and Landscape Enigmas", *Photographies*, 12:2, 177-192, 2019.

45 According to Maarit Mäkelä "an artifact can embody a greater range of roles: as an object made by an artist-researcher during the process of research, it can also be seen as a method of collecting and preserving information and understanding. Thus, the process of making and its products are strongly connected with the source of knowledge". In Mäkelä, "Knowing through making: the role of artifact in practice-led research", *Know Techn Pol* 20, London: Springer Science, 2007:158.

46 Janneke Wesseling. *Of Sponge, Stone and the Intertwinement with the Here and Now. A Methodology of Artistic Research*. [Artistic Research Does #1]. Amsterdam: Valiz, 2016: 23.

47 Borrowing of the concept of experience expressed by Whitehead, mathematician and philosopher, an eminent representative of empiricist philosophy, that asserts the relation between entities, or things, as experiences where parts are engaged in mutual interaction, both with equal importance and reality, as cited in Wesseling 2016:23-24.

As a restorer, I immediately sympathize with and would like to bring forth, the geniality of Bouke de Vries. He`s artwork and particular technique to overlap layers of narratives, starting with the provenance of the fragments. He challenges and emphasizes questions that seem to be related to the heritage conservation field. Nevertheless, the artist articulates that his background as a ceramic restorer emerges mainly through the technique and materials used to construct his pieces and his interest in specific historical periods of ceramics production.

Born in the Netherlands, he built his career in conservation and restoration of ceramics in the United Kingdom, where through the everyday activities of the studio his artwork projects started to be shaped, confronting contradictions around perfection and value. The artist also explains his work as “the beauty of destruction”,<sup>48</sup> where “instead of hiding the evidence of this most dramatic episode in the life of a ceramic object, he emphasizes their new status, instilling new virtues, new values, and moving their stories forward.” For de Vries, seems that the fragment depicts a traumatic episode. And his artwork seems to allow for healing without hiding fractures, adding new layers of meaning and value to the ceramic fragments of the past.

Perhaps through his work, I felt obliged to face the influence of my own background. The years of practice with heritage conservation seem to provoke the leakage of issues such as provenance, completeness, attribution, reconstruction, and memory. The transparency of the object`s memory proposed by de Vries might trace one path to reframing them.

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48 The information is from the website [boukedevries.com](http://boukedevries.com).

A



estonian, 25  
travel worker

A



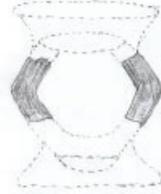
bray law, 37  
restorer

A



spells american, 40  
archaeology of professor

A



bray law, 48  
archaeology of, caravast

A



bray law, 40  
professor

A



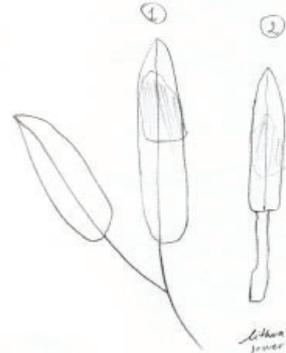
bray law, 36  
federal employee

A



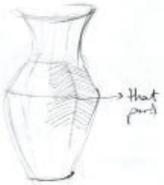
bray law, 46  
architect

A



lithuanian, 30  
jewelry maker

A



forster, 27  
painter

A



forster, 54  
handcrafter

A



estonian, 32  
journalist

A



estonian, 32  
specialist





# Different languages, different shapes

[afterthoughts]

*Speakers of different languages think differently.*

*But the question is not about how people elsewhere think, is about how you think.*

*It is how the language that you speak shapes the way that you think. And that gives you the opportunity to ask 'why do I think the way that I do', 'how could I think differently'.*

*And also, 'what thoughts do I wish to create?'*

Lera Boroditsky

*How language shapes the way we think*

(TED Women, November 2017)

[fragment`s wishes]

The fragment as becoming,  
a whole and not just a part,  
as a 'thing' that potentially contains  
in itself  
many forms,  
both tangible and imaginable from it.

At the same time, the fragment is unique as part of a specific whole –  
personal – that shapes a single form, a single pot – which repels being other things.

For the fragment, it is enough to exist, to be the sum.

If the pot represents and stimulates specificity, memories, a geographically and temporally defined

cultural references,

the fragment is freed and allowed; it may be the representation of multiplicity.

If the pot differentiates us,

despite the unexpected similarities in the material memory of humanity,

the fragment aggregates us, echoes, and puts us all

in the same thing, incorporating

diversity and differences.

[fragmendi soovid]

Fragment muutumas,  
tervik ja mitte ainult osa,  
kui “asi”, mis potentsiaalselt sisaldab  
endas palju vorme,  
nii käegakatsutavaid kui ette kujutletavaid.

Samas on fragment unikaalne osana konkreetsest tervikust –  
isiklik – mis kujundab ühtse vormi, ühtse poti – mis tõrgub olemast midagi muud.

Fragmendi jaoks piisab olemasolust, summaks olemisest.

Kui pott esindab ja stimuleerib spetsiifilisust, individuaalseid mälestusi,  
geograafiliselt ja ajaliselt määratletud kultuurilisi mõjutusi,  
siis fragment on vabam ja talle on rohkem lubatud; see võib olla paljususe esitus.

Kui pott meid eristab,  
vaatamata ootamatutele sarnasustele inimkonna materiaalses mälus,

siis fragment ühendab meid, kajab ja seab meid

samas asjas, kaasates

mitmekesisuse ja erinevused.

[desejos de um fragmento]

O fragmento como vir-a-ser,  
como o todo e não apenas parte,  
como 'coisa' que contém em si mesma  
tantas formas em potencial, tangíveis e imagináveis.

Ao mesmo tempo, o fragmento se impõe único, parte do todo específico,  
pessoal, forma única, um único pote – repelindo a possibilidade de ser outras coisas.

Ao fragmento, basta existir para ser soma.

Se o pote representa e estimula especificidades, memórias individuais, referência cultural  
geográfica e temporal; o fragmento é livre e à ele é permitido representar multiplicidade.

Se o pote nos diferencia, apesar das similitudes inesperadas na memória material

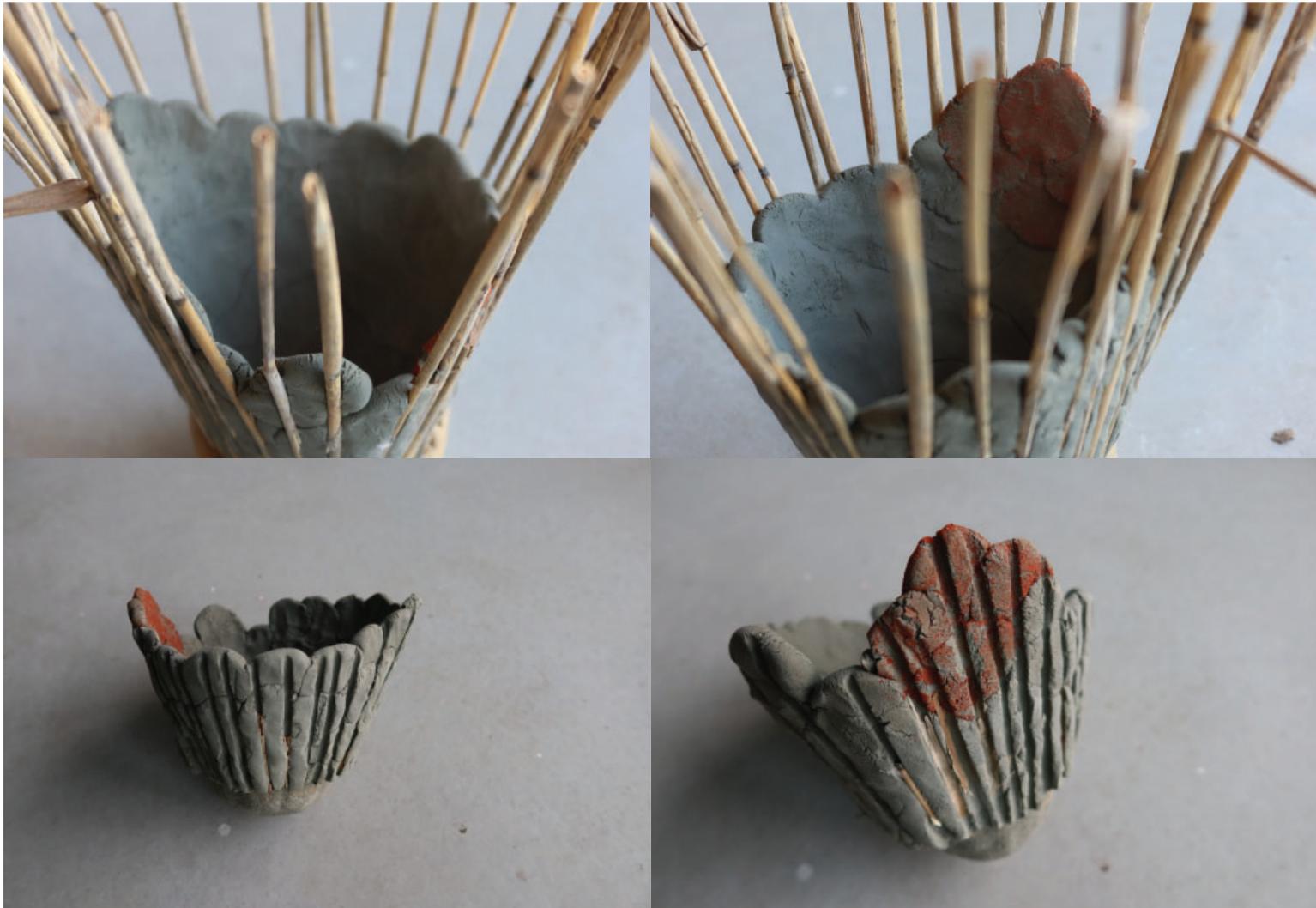
da humanidade, o fragmento nos agrega, ecoa, e  
nos coloca todos numa mesma coisa, incorporando

diversidade e diferenças.



Looking to belong, finding local clay

[photo Hindrek Auväärt]



Fragments of experience

# Material and materiality

[ontogenesis]

*What endure are the materials of life, not the more or less solid and inertial forms they throw up. Artifacts and monuments are the cast-offs of history, but materials, are “ongoing historicity.” Materials are not in time; they are the stuff of time itself.*

*Tim Ingold*

The concept of material culture keeps being widely used to reflect discussions about people and things, but the debate about this concept is vast. From cultural and social meanings attached within techniques and physicality of materials to emphasis on the matter as active and generator of these relationships, a view of symmetrical relation between people and things to different understandings of the human and inhuman worlds and their relationship, to name some of them.

Anthropologists and archeologists provide us with definitions and ways to think about the complex network of associations and significant relationships between humans, the material, and the social and symbolic universes. Contemporary reflections try to incorporate diversity, variability, and ephemerality, rethinking the interchangeable position between subject and object – who informs and who is informed – suggesting that knowledge resides in both and between them, and they are inseparable things. My objective is not to debate these concepts and theories; however, to experience this complexity as part of a personal process of an encounter between different things.

I experienced transmuting materiality and meanings by creating, merging, and assembling fragments not following their previous narrative, trying to see other things. The fragment itself brought forward new narratives through the conducted drawing interviews. Possibly, also a reflection on my own material memories and gaze on reality.

Through the process of provoking the encounter of fragments and clay, I experienced overlapping, withdrawal, imposition, absorption, learning, and adaptation, as necessary movements for changes in the view. The meeting became the *thing*,<sup>49</sup> where body and materials flow with equal and opposing forces in which all things overflow.

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49 The term thing can be used synonymously with object, but in this case, follows the understanding embodied by many scholars like Heidegger (1971) and Merleau-Ponty (1968), described by Tim Ingold as “every thing is a gathering of materials in movement (...) and to witness a thing is

*What form could emerge as transitory equilibration (we are in permanent movement) of this encounter?*

The research method of drawing interviews depicts the arbitrariness of the culture from the fragment. The potsherd becomes materiality and material<sup>50</sup> in each object-drawn interpretation. The static sherd, held in the hands as amorphous matter overflows the diversity and differences of the intangible cultural world through objectification. People draw objects that come from their memory or the everyday environment surrounding them. Nevertheless, the physical *brute materiality* of the fragment itself had few or non-relations with the image that emerged.

The drawings are complete entities, identifiable things in a network of relations. As the object depicted, they reveal some things from the interviewee's environment, something undeniable and immutable. However, the drawing, as a *thing*, becomes a flow wherein are involved the potsherd, the drawn, the object depicted, and the interviewee himself.

From the fragment point of view, my object was an equal possibility in the line of many others. Cultural material appears to be beyond the relationship between people and objects, once that the fragment itself was enough to express materialities.

*Thus, if memories and meanings are so effectively layered on materiality, how to absorb and propose different meanings through things?*

Exploring local materials appears as a practice to explore new interpretations of the fragments. So, incorporating wild clay and other materials collected in Muhu island, together with materials brought from Brazil, I transformed my making objects into crafting things, in which material and materiality are embodied as a process – where forms started to emerge rather than exist in advance.

The things formed could not exist beforehand; the cultural encounter is just happening. The thing is not the local raw material chemistry, it is not my skills, it is not my background, it is not my identity, it is not the environment, it is not the local traditions, it is not an assemblage of fragments, is a meshwork<sup>51</sup> process where matter, weather, tools, spaces, body, moods, time and sounds are gathering and activating each other.

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to join with the process of its ongoing formation". In Tim Ingold `Toward an ecology of materials`, *Annual Reviews of Anthropology*, 41, 2012:432.

50 idem Ingold 2012: 439, defines materiality as (a) brute materiality of the physical world, (b) the ways this world is appropriated in human projects; and material as matter considered in respect of its occurrence in processes of flow and transformation.

51 ibidem Ingold 2012. He proposes in his text the concept of meshwork as opposed to or to differentiate the network of connected entities (humans and nonhumans) proposed by Bruno Latour (actor-network theory or ANT).



# Incompleteness

[conclusion]

*No beginning of our actions knows how it will end. At the beginning we believe we are establishing its purpose, but this is rather an intentionality that never corresponds faithfully to the conclusion.*

*Bruno Pedretti<sup>52</sup>*

The narrative does not have an ending, it is up to us to decide how many fragments are needed to have wholeness. That being so, could the fragment with its broken connections represent an infinity of possibilities that the intact whole does not?

The master`s studies made me interested in the artistic research as a generator of knowledge or knowable perspectives about reality.<sup>53</sup> Referring to Michel Foucault, who defines art as a different form of knowledge, Katrin Busch<sup>54</sup> also

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<sup>52</sup> Free translation from “Nessun inizio delle nostre azioni sa come andrà a finire. Agli esordi crediamo di stabilirne la finalità, ma questa è piuttosto una intenzionalità che non corrisponde mai fedelmente alla conclusione.” Bruno Pedretti. *La forma dell`incompiuto: quaderni, abbozzo e frammento come opera del moderno*. Bologna University Press. (2007) 2011:5.

<sup>53</sup> Patricia Leavy. *Method meets Arts: art-based research practice*. New York, London: Guilford Press (1975) 2015:7.

<sup>54</sup> Professor of philosophy, and cultural theories studies at the University of Art in Berlin.

recognizes the artistic process`s uniqueness. Moreover, she proposes that art-based research has a wider capacity for innovation and originality in knowledge-making, because “while various orders of knowledge necessarily produce exclusions and restrict the scope of knowable, art seems to be able to refer to that, which cannot be articulated within the respective fields of knowledge”.<sup>55</sup>

### *How to generate knowledge through ceramics fragments?*

The archaeology background, where the fragment has a status of evidence, unique, contextual, and culturally associated, began to live intertwined with narratives that emerged from the interviews – drawing interpretations on the fragment which reveal multidimensional directions. The context, the culture, and memories made the materiality of the potsherd (concrete matter) slowly melt in a meshwork net.

The conservation background, where the fragment exists as part of a predetermined location, original, and meaningful only when reintegrated into the someone`s whole, reveals not to consider otherness or other perceptions, where the matter and its concrete connections have little to do with the memories accessed.

The crafting background in relation to the research practice enabled questions to emerge from the making and thinking

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<sup>55</sup> Katrin Busch. `Artistic research and the poetics of knowledge. ART&RESEARCH, 2 (2), Spring, 2009:4.

process. The ceramic practice became a path to craft materiality that could depict theoretical and self-reflection experiences. A long way ahead.

Seemly, the fragment could generate infinite assemblies when moved to explore the multiple relations inside the meshwork – between fragments, between fragments and people, between fragments and matter, and other unseen forces – which made the process of meaning construction the inspiration for my ceramic practice.

The drawing interviews as a narrative method and the ceramic practice with fragments open new possibilities for the research. Far from answering all the questions raised during my studies, the potential of the intersection between artistic research, archeology, and heritage conservation emerged as a sketch; tangled associations that could be the object of a future project.



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