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Japanschz keynote

a story of pots, potters, and pottery from Japan

(e-e) lecture series



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a I just landed in Japan. Immediately some people told me my luggage took a different plane. I filled in some paper, with corners populated with faces of smiling animals. They also stood behind the grey plastic table I was writing on, the animals, but real, full-body version. They were going to be delivered at my door tomorrow, my luggage. To get out of the airport, I filled in some more paper. For each paper, I am given a sticker, shiny, that I give to someone else against

another paper, etc. The whole scene dropped me out with a complete set of pastel colored documents of different playful formats and cover with serene graphics of smiling nuclear families, cute syringes and wagons. I kept them, in the flower covered plastic envelop in which I received my school certificate.

- b The next day I went to uni. I biked there, on the left side of the road for the first time. It was chill outside, it felt great. In uni I was asked to propose a concept to produce this semester. I started sketching some ideas. I was searching for something to figure out, a problem to solve, something my mind could wrap a priori. I was very proud of my idea of a highly stackable set of tableware, something versatile because abstract, that could fit both Japanese and European customs. I showed my sketches to Miki, who, simply explained me that the walls were to thin, and the bottom to wide, that it was very beautiful but that in the kiln, the pots move, and that they move because they melt really, and shrink, and that if I would regard it as the viscous liquid it becomes, I would better understand how the precarious walls would collapse and the long bottom flange. I tried to approach an object apriori, and that was not going to work out in Japan. A plan decoupled from a specific technic is a nice dream but an irrelevant plan. The authoritarian and floating medium of the drawing is blind to the constraint and tendency of material and technics, that even the technically informed mind can emulate but not intuitively explore and leverage. (*Szekely*). I would feel frustrated by that I couldn't throw closely enough to the shape I drew, and that when I would, the material result felt feel awkward to throw and underwhelming to see, appearing dull and arbitrary. Later I would prefer to work following a sort of back and forth motion between throwing and drawing, drawing a posteriori, to understand the shape I was throwing really, to formalise an attempt and clarify a curve, to wonder and question too quickly established automation. In pottery, one throw not what one want but what one can.
- c Back in the Netherland, I was concerned with disembodied and conceptual matters, of communication and cybernetic. I had to remember that it's a sympathy for construction that drew me to design in the first place, when I found myself breaking my head on some dead end of theory. I chose pottery because the back back of my head is filled with images of catastrophe, in which, somehow treating my apprenticeship like a training camp for the apocalypse, I put myself in position of productive and technical effort, rather than, for say, emotional one. And maybe I misinterpreted neoliberalist demand for flexibility and originality when I thought of pottery as a strategic choice for my carriere.
- d I was amazed, in traditional art museum, of the beauty and oddities of all the pots I could see behind vitrines. I thought of them as genuine artefacts holding great cultural signifiante, made from the traditional knowledge of local craftsman to fulfill the vital need of the local population for containment. But it appeared that pots, accompanying people in their traveling, are of porous nature and shape greatly influenced by migration. As a product, pots not only further daily use, but

also broader schemes of commerce and influence. In the Syrian town of Raqqa, salesmen would postdate looted ware from illegal excavation as market scheme for tourists fascinated by the 9th century narrative of the tales of the One thousand and one night tales newly translated by the French colons. In Arita, Japanese tradesmen would import European ceramic body, paint them in Japan with the distinctive Japanese style of Japanese copy of western style, using them in their western style house to promote Japanese ceramics, copies or originals to foreign tradesmen, eventually selling and shipping them back to Europe. And pots turned shaped by a culture of copy and trade, being as local and culturally significant as local business leveraging exotism as a sale argument can be. These stories are numerous and participate at blurring the line between notions and actual things of copy and original, traditional and influenced, western and eastern. Drawing a map of the provenance of their shape and intent, tracing fluctuating related function, technic, religion, commerce would reveal the inherently messy and syncretic nature of pots. They are ambiguous objects who don't hold straight lines. The perpetuation of these practice along technical democratization and the spread of creative hobby among society broaden the range of pots produced. They now span from the very few, exclusive and rare, touching and delicate ware to the most available and outrageously dull and ugly and the kitschiest, coming straight from the biggest piles of similar thick and overglazed casted pots from every style mostly found in wholesale shop, a type of shop whose emptiness and unease can only be highlighted by their harsh white lightning. In Japan, it is the production from the late 19th century that reemerge and overflows, from before the war, from when the economic crisis and subsequent gradual lack of interest in ceramic didn't strike yet. They are the leftovers of thus wasted harshness of working condition. Ugliness and unease are strong feelings easily convey to and by pots. Subsumed to taste (*Sontag*), they are good indicator of their strong tights to socialities and bad feelings.

- e The figure of the potter also was for me the subject of many fantasies, tropes and cliches. Starting from the estranging meditative youtube videos of zen Japanese pottery master. Alone, crouched over his wheel for hours, effortlessly extracting delicate vessels from a mere mass of clay. I've seen potters only in the romantic version of documentary and exhibition, that created this sort of mythological figure of the potter, a male, relentlessly pushing back the possibilities of matter, hiding his alchemical findings in the secrecy of his dark workshop, playing with fire, and often compared by a dramatic voice over to the primitive deities giving birth to the first humans from their sculpture of clay. There are indeed stories of firing for instance, that dwell deep in dreams (*Bachelard*), and shape the nightmares of many potters. There is the welcomed gift of the fire, and the death by hanging of the desperate who powerlessly witnessed in the kiln the collapse of month worth of throwing because of the slightly too quick evaporation of the moisture content of its thus slanting ground. There is the intensity and fascination of the flames, depicted in books, but there is also the domesticity and comfort of the electric heat. Pottery can be bragging but it can be silent too.

Lucie Rie for instance, represents well this tradition of urban potters, closer to trend, who challenged the notion of the isolated country potter working in their large workshop. For decades she made the most amazing work from the restricted studio part of her London home, and from a usually despised electric kiln, giving “the confidence to many to keep making from tiny corners of our homes, kitchen tables and dark damp cellars when we have no other options” (*watw*). Her buttons and tea room, although in their way part of the 2nd world war war economy, were thus very far from the other side of the world’s battle fields where Japanese soldiers for instance would use unworking porcelain grenade, and bowls glazed with an irregular glossy grey, the combination of whatever they could find that melt, just to keep the soldier cleared from any disease suspected to develop in otherwise unhygienic eatware. Pottery could be serious if it wasn’t also so gruesome, and powerful if not so frivolous. It is made of matter, filled with myths and gossips.

- f Some more instances of contrasted practices; next to the disturbance for an afternoon creative hobby for children and retirees stand the fascination for an ancient and empowering craft, next to which lays a harmful productive activity, exploiting of people and landscape. Back in Arita, we learned that its history is tightly bound to the colonial campaign against Korea led by Japanese feudal lord Toyotomi Hideyoshi which brought back abducted Korean potters and knowledge. Pottery even has its war (*Yellin*). Unlike what we were told in museums, it appeared that it is not really Kanagae Sanbee, or of his korean name Yi Sam-pyeong who discovered the original porcelain quarry of Izumiyama, but that this version was later created by its descent to take advantage of the Taku family, and spread during the meiji period to unify the region’s origin story of its pottery tradition. This critic first articulated in 92 (*Wiki?*) has still not been updated, neither by the local museums nor our teachers and is not part of the city’s narrative we experienced in Arita. Also, although it is more or less acknowledged in Japan, it is a lesser known fact in the superficial views the west for example can have of the Japanese pottery tradition, that it got praised by freezing in time Chinese style and Korean technic. It is this ambiguous fabric of facts and stories that the landscape is made of in Arita. The quarry exists, has been discovered, but the founder not, but the monument exists, in his praise, has been raised next to the quarry. In Okawachiyama, the hidden village of potters, masters pushed to work at the production of the shogun vessel died falling from the mountain as they climbed to escape this gated and fiercely locked up town. All of this to create the most delicate ware known at the time, that would be praised inland and overseas alike. Not to mention the inherent sexism in the division of productive tasks where the throwing of big pot is reserved for the men, and delicate decoration allocated to women. In a keynote about the white road, de Waal displays a porcelain Bambi, of the kitschiest type, sadly produced in the concentration camp of “”. I can only imagine that the field still bear in its roots the stygmate of such violence, but to know under which form and what extend would ask more of an historian work. It is clear though that pottery is not the

source of these oppression, but a space for their expression. It is not as potters that potters should stand up, but as workers part of society. Standing there in Arita, among the people of the past and present, learning this stolen craft, situating the roots of each movement I learned in these ambivalent lineage of violence and emancipation made impossible my settling in a simple position. How was I suppose to approach this history, these injustices that were not mine and how to deal with contradicting narratives toward the nation's past ? What was I suppose to do with these technics I learned from a culture that wasn't mine, with that I would bring back a knowledge already brought back from other place ? How to navigate this contrasted field, and develop a practice that acknowledge the violence, the thievery, the purity ? I couldn't but feel awkward and doubtful.

- g Back in the workshops, I didn't feel like continuing the modernist agenda I first had in mind, of highly stackable, cross cultural set of tableware. For a bit I liked the idea of focusing on vases, because I liked their acknowledged uselessness beyond mere decorative qualities. I learned their restricted typologies, enumerated by the Chinese imperial body and was interested in how so abstract and arbitrary curve could be imbued with so much culture. In the meantime I believed this vase study could only be undertook along the creation of some sort of a potter union, to defend the interests of the region's potters. The futility of vases on one hand, the seriousness of unions on the other. It quickly appeared obvious though that this was not going to happen. It was really not in my character to gather people around causes, especially not social one, neither was it to stand out and fight. Even toward one of my schoolmate, whose not even one, of the tiny collapse of her hump, or swift silent exist from the classroom I witnessed, proved enough to make me stand and go, nor say hi, ask the faintest question, or provide any sight of support. It showed sad but clear that building a systematized social infrastructure of such support was out of my range. I couldn't dare to do it. It would have feel so awkward coming from me no ? Maybe it would have been super irrelevant. It is such a french thing in the end. In Japan, welfare is taken care of by the so called familialism system. But I hope I would stand this kind of posture in the future. It is maybe the only useful thing I can do, because I know real change won't come from individual tiny ceramic project, even though discursively very critical and nice. It'll surely come more from collective action of a systemic scale, toward politics of sales for instance, mainly to who are things sold and from who are they bought, or more generally from where does the money come, and where does it go. But maybe I wasn't there for that yet.
- h Instead, totally reluctant to the production of any new concept, I decided to settle a simple set of guidelines, to outline a practice that I decided would be mine for the coming months. I would focus on throwing and throwing only. I would make pots for me, the pots I needed. I would make, use, and make better. Understanding what a bowl is, how to make one, and some, and what it meant to make that, was already too much for the five months I had, so why even bother thinking of anything new. It is not catching up. It is going back to simpler bits, but tackling

these myself from the roots. I specialized on the wheel because it is iconic, sometime metonymical to the whole of pottery, and because it seemed like a rich technic to unravel. But before I had to convince the teacher, as they seemed concerned at first about my decision to make a project about throwing. I had to prove them, and to myself, that I would be able to learn, and learn fast. With this one thing in mind, I locked myself for a week in the tinier throwing room restricted to stoneware. The tools were simple, abstract and unknown almost like artefacts. I first learned how to wedge the clay, or the first step toward a potter's autonomy, and it took me some time to get it right. Yuki Sensei showed how to throw a bowl, and then it was my turn. The results of the first attempts were hunched, homogeneous, and of a small radius. After some time spent with the clay, experimenting with my fingers, interacting with the speed, getting acquainted with the response of the clay, the intensity stayed but the fear slowly waned out leaving space for gradually scaled up pots. I'd experiment stretching the clay to its limits. At first, every *thing* thrown would fail really and directly join the wet pile of clay resembling a monster of fusing pots, turned into a sort of arch to dry, and wedged back to the wheel to be thrown again. For few days, I threw maybe a hundred of attempts at pots with the same five kilogrammes of clay recycled over and over. Stretched and listened to. I was getting closer to understand the clay its natural *constraints and tendencies*, and aimed to do the most out of that. I wanted to *dig as deep in as little*. In this impetus of alternating between the glove of velvet, that listens and softly follow, and it of iron, that argue back, impose and bully, I saw myself as reenacting the never ending dialectic of tradition and innovation, that are sociological terms given to the more ontological question that of the origin of change in things. I also mean that there are materials under their geological form that could barely recognize their domesticated self. I think of crystal and silica and window glass.

- i I eventually managed to take some standing shapes off the hump which I lied to rest on the board on my left as I was being taught. Although I could still only throw whatever shape came to my hands. Kai or Yuki sensei would pass from time to time to see my progress and give me some advice. The rest of the time, I learned following youtube tutorials, to which I own a lot. For a week I didn't mind the contingent end result. I would keep even the ugliest pot, to experiment on, practice trimming with, eventually breaking them all back into pieces thrown in the puddle of clay waiting to be recycled and thrown again. I didn't yet mastered basic shapes like big bowls or plates even, that I already started throwing vases. I would spend hours trying to have the more dramatic ratio of belly to mouth, the tallest neck, the wider overhang. Even if I then got interested in more classical typologies, I noticed later that idea of flamboyant vase really is what I learned to throw with, and that I then could feel a certain acquaintance with vases, as I knew by heart each bits of the architecture of their many kinds, that I spent a long time, looking from up close, touching, giving it an intimate almost pervert attention. Foot, belly, neck, mouth. Ultimately a discrete deconstruction of the parts of pots that proved limiting in the material realm, if not false, and to which

I favored the acknowledgment of a more continuous influence of each bit of a pot on the other bits. This helped me to throw better, and appreciate more subtly what a particular pot actually is and toward what it is actually oriented and leaning toward (*Ahmed*). But they stay convenient descriptive tool that enable discussion about pots, and interaction with them on a linguistic level. I can say, for instance, that adapting a foot ring can make the related pot float more, more or less, grounded, detached, still or escaping. I can also tell that changing the thickness of the rim can make its pot repulsive to the outside, or else welcoming, empty, blocking or happy. Describing my pots, I wondered what relation I wanted them to have with their surrounding. I thought of illusion first, where pots would stand lying on their dimensionality. I quickly shifted to less obtrusive and more functional ways to stand and relate. I was interested in the relation between matter and idea, or the ambiguity of a bowl or a pot as both and simultaneously a notion, an object and an image, that all inform and interact between each other and the interactor. The mere visual perception of an object, in all its flatness, alters the prehension of its dimension and volume, of its handling and use, and with the hallucinated details given to the sight through the grab, outline an apparatus of sensation and feelings that create an idea of the things in the interactor mind in relation to its culture and subjectivity, that goes back to their senses, and back and else (*Judd*). Maybe this make for some kind of a phenomenological approach to bowl making. I noticed then that some pots radiate and expand, they shine bright and construe their environment. While on the other end, sometime, some pots disappear. They mirror their environment and disappear. I liked thinking that porcelain, maybe the idea itself, would disappear, like bone, teeth or eggshell does.

j At that point though, I still had no pots fired. I was focusing on trying to make technically achieved pots, but teachers and classmate alike could only enjoy original failures. I think they liked them, and me in return, for how non deliberate throwing made them ambiguous enough to fall in between known categories of pots. That convinced me to keep, and eventually fire some of these attempts, and to consider a bit closer this formal vocabulary of failure, qualities only witnessed from the production side of goods that I tended to overlook in the first place. These in-betweens represented a range of potential use, that would otherwise not fit settled format of bowl, plate. They'd be the fitting receptacle for specific yet unformalized use and need. From that on, I loosened a bit this constraint I had for myself, of making only the pots I needed, and explored how random pots would tweak my habits, adding friction or suggestion in my routine. I'm thinking of a narrow but heavy small glass that became a steady toothbrush holder, things like that. It could take some time for me to find them a use though, and some didn't really find their place and just felt awkward forever, like this very heavy small bowl with huge lips or a container too wide and flat to be a bowl but too deep and flared to be a plate. But maybe if enough people share a new specific use fitting a new trend or else, it will be given a name, and its related pot with it ? It also opened the production to the typology of jugs for instance, not

a familiar item of mine, but part of the potter folklore, as well as to big vases I never put flowers in. On the other end I did use big bowls and trays that I didn't built myself. In this sense, the position of the maker-user is interesting because it allows for the development of bespoke standards, making object that fit specific and so far unaddressed need, habit or desire rather than the other way around.

k But in use like in production nothing happens without friction and some even say friction is the beginning of every craft (*Morris*). In the same way is the history of constraint, a notion I had difficulties apprehending, on both level of production and theory. Current digital manufacturing technology made it possible, without much effort, to make, use or transform even, any material into an other one, most of the time for a fraction of the time and price (*Stadler*). I can bandsaw, water-cut rocks, 3d print wood and metal, eggshell and what not, CNC, water transfer print any motif on intricate surface (*Kabel*), stereolithograph mass colored volumes, etc. Plastic is the latest of these expression of the purely artificial, virtually constraintless materiality (*Barthes*). But if the thing has no form, no real self beyond the shape of its handling, so did clay for a long time. This new possibilities freed designers from the now deprecated Bauhaus dictum of truth to the material. Let's assume a society, not so different, in which technics are not bound and restrained by costs of time, ressource or money. I think the question quickly rises of what to build and how, and ultimately why. There is a *prehistorical* matter that is still, prior to human perception, virtually formless. Only being seen, being brought to sight, gives it shape. Concretely, one can put a rock in his living room and call it a true to the material modernist piece of design, but the possibility of this situation already implies transport, or deterritorialization and handling, or artificialisation. The thing is already alienated, from the taste in the choice of one rock among rocks, the choice of the scale of extraction, the stigma of handling and the new web of sign woven with the new setting. Maybe the table is true to the material when eaten out of onsite, but from the tip of the iceberg of what has deeper root, only acknowledging matter as the perceived and hacked version of itself to fit one need, here of a plane surface to eat out from. Framing constricted use out of more mysterious form of purpose, the idea of function can in itself be alienating (*Aristotle*).

l About smoothening that is so magical. Sanding erases the trace of the previous intervention only by leaving its own trace, always thinner, until its own trace is smaller than the grain of the material, and soon than the grain of our skin to feel. Terra sigilata, decant the clay to keep only the thinner particles floating at the surface and using this slurry to cover, brushed or poured over the rougher surface of the thrown piece, until smooth, shinier depending on the time and care of decantation and number of layers applied. Similar technic exist in polishing shoes to a mirror gloss by adding layers of wax thined down with a drop of water layer after layers. Polishing, consist of rubbing a smooth material or smoother than the surface we want to smoothen, like polished rock, or glass, and rubbing them against the leather clay to push the bigger particles of clay protruding at the

surface back below the smaller ones, until it equals the smoothness of the rubbing object in capacity of the size of the small particles of course. Whatever the technic, it closes pores, and stretches together the object's surface, singling it out as a whole. Smoothness appear, radiate godlike. It *means* finished, clean, safe, comfortable. I feel like maybe it is from where emanate the possibility of immorality in a productive scheme, from this chiasm between what was before, and after, of this ultimate surface that negates other signs. On the market, it is called an information asymmetry. The impossibility to deduce a precise process from a surface is a vital element to industrial secrecy and strategy of wonder. The disparition of the evidence of artifice, whether materially in the world or cognitively in our belief might be where lies the original separation from nature, and the origin of the unease I sometime experience toward my material environment and my limitations to apprehend it free from my own perspective.

- m One aspect of this can be what personal lineage of interest drew me to the close consideration of ; technics, or in other word, *means*. They can't, ontologically be considered as ends in themselves, but I think they tend to be overlooked while having beautiful things to say really, ask for different sensitivities in their practice, and hold great poetic qualities. I was interested in this dialectic, of means and ends and tried to question it, the existence and its ways, design being definitively on the way side. But objects, especially of the long lasting ceramic kind, naturally outlive their maker, user, eventually their original and soon to be deprecated very function and nation. They are most of the time encountered decontextualized and deterritorialized. The bound is lost, and with it the genealogy. Museums do this work of reterritorialization, but only on the linguistic if not fictional level of discourse. In the apparatus of display - vitrine, lamp, notice, date - I see a sort of \*mise en image\* of the object recognized but as a conceptual object. If I am in a good mood, I can fantasize on some potential use, otherwise I'll stick to their technical and formal analysis, treating them as aesthetics that I can situate on a chronological axis, but not much more.
- n In a parallel effort, I tried to go from an electric wheel to a dusty Korean kick-wheel forgotten in the school basement, studying its specific constraints and tendencies, as a sort of experimental archaeology going up the stream of the history of curvatures, gradually reaching back the technical and functional origins of the seemingly arbitrary and formal shapes and typologies of pots I learned to recognized. From the ground up I learned that simple straight walls and right angles are more elaborated than complex curvature system for instance, or else that bigger the ratio between the body and the mouth of a vase, the harder it gets, owned through clay consistency, throwing skill and great control over firing. Maybe there is conclusions to draw from studying this ratio on ancient pots, for dating and analysis purposes. It now became a proof of skill, and I witnessed it falling over the edge of kitsch, stretched to such absurd and purely decorative extend on youtube videos by cocky potters. What I aimed for was to derive not the forms but their underlying mechanism by reinvesting highly influential technic.

The wheel especially, paradoxically both highly constrained and ultra-polyvalent invited me to reconsider deeply what I had at hand and to create a sense of necessity, eventhough subjective and artificial. Also, through the wheel it is really a mode of existence of objects that unraveled, where objects held temporary position in the world, which I extended to the acknowledgment of the always transitional state of object. I didn't want to believe the brand discourse that singles out products, raise them to frozen icons. The iPhone was incrementally innovative, as all products, just a syncretism that benefited innovation from other fields and products, morphing into its solidified self through continuous prototyping phases, and new versions to come. Maybe some prototype would even have better suited certain persons. Looking at objects as of a transitional and moving nature just makes for a more realist portraiture of the structure of object evolution. It obliterates the false myth of the individual creator and the fictional and excluding status of perfection, as well as opening the door for whoever to sneak in and fetch, fork and branch out their own version, modify and appropriate (*opensource*).

- o Through my daily practice, it is also some fragment of the history of standardisation that I embodied. It was the desire of perfection that led to repetition. I would throw a rim over and over again, like a rehearsal on the same mock up cylinder, to find the right curve and the best way to throw it. This process naturally led to a certain convergence in shape, a natural tendency for standardisation, where the object becomes a prototype for the next one, a sort of a defected instance of an ideal, or a becoming-product in the process of individuation (*simondon*). Once fired, these pots were only frozen discrete values of a continuous momentum, with only some details betraying their belonging to the 5th or the 4th generation. The situation is one where what happens in the kiln matters maybe more than the actual result of its firing, the pots themselves. There is an abandon of the object toward the project, a Christic approach to the sacrifice of the pots for the Pot. The distinction at stake here is between the product, the idea of the thing, and the thing, the object itself, that are as many instances, of this idea. Such realisation is ensured by different artefacts that acts like guarantor of whom drawing is the primer, and more ethereal. In the case of casted pots, it is the matrix or the mother mould and for thrown pots it the dragonfly bamboo gage. In some factories, we witnessed the throwing of multiple pots guided solely by the eye comparaisn with a unique sample from a past collections.
- p In the process of making pots, I experienced a progressive distancing of the clay, made of inexplicable behavior and transformation. Firstly, the distant and hidden guts of the wheel convey to the clay a motion, of surprisingly great torque, that always felt uncanny to interact with, as it seems that the clay itself is pushing back, like an alter. It is like a big chunk of video, the recording of my gesture, the negative space of a choreography. These pots are my shadow, my counter-form. They are everything I am not, and everywhere I've never been; some sort of vitality has been exchanged. Then, slowly, and out of sight, the clay

my pots are made changes, from moist and soft to stiffer leather hard and stiff bone dry. This distance could feel awkward to me, a type of feeling I also experienced when throwing from someone else's hamp, or when moonjaring two bowls thrown individually glued together on the mouth for bigger pots, or in any case where I didn't witness or accompanied the whole transformation. Also, throwing consists of a *revolution* that is *extruded* and the resulting extruded revolution bear the opacity and complexity of emerging behavior from the encountering of these two simple logic that of extrusion and revolution that participate in the estrangement of the clay. Eventually, the pots coming out of the kiln are not the pots putted in. They differ from the moment I touched them for the last time in every way ; size, color, texture and form. Firing takes control away, and the many flames are like mini-craftsmen doing some work for me. All these phenomenons make for an incomprehensible chiasm between what is done and its result. Making pots sometimes felt more like some ritualized act of summoning than purposeful technic, where the potter merely learns to sing the song and from somewhere, from the good will of something, the bowl appears. The possibility of every pot to exist is a tiny miracle, sparking within the silence of the centered clay and the song of the wind.

- q I never followed any production schedule really, and so never attended the kiln schedule meeting, that also represented uneasing social gathering. I was rather reluctant at firing pots in general. I would keep them for ages on the shelves, thinking most of them didn't deserve the energetic cost and irrevocability of firing, not daring to throw them all away neither, or waiting to find answers to my decoration issues. Yet eventually always come the loading. With Janneke we shared one time a kiln we had to fill up by ourselves. My pieces spanning from big vases to small cups made it a real puzzle to stack, strangely both inefficient as it took time and trial and error to find the good lay out, and efficient as tiny pieces filled up all gaps thanks to the most bizarre and risky arrangement. On the other hand, Janneke's serial work occurred pretty straightforward to load, expression a certain call from the kiln for standardization. It was always a miracle to see how much pieces would fit in the abstracted little space of the kiln, which made clear how vessels really fill little space concretely when stacked, but nicely occupy generous amount when spread horizontally. Also I heard the technicians would sometime sleep at school to check important firing.
- r If firing turns out to be as much the deliberate control of heat within a defined space, than the social ritual of planning moment and allocating space, and if in a similar logic, throwing is as much the dexterity into someone's hand than it is the constant monitoring of subtle drying stage and the optimisation of space in this regard, there is then a propension of technic to spread in time and space, on a broader scale than the individual, but to the architecture and social organisation. I mean that technics, are an articulated chain of motion whose beginning can go as far above and before as the biological and emotional needs themselves if not further, and roll down to such extend below and after the predictable consequences

of such established changes. In this sense *technic*, is a sociological term that merely frame the human version of change. And in this term, I also see a propension for, or a disintegration into, the looser notion of attitude. Learning a craft means constantly facing incompetence. What was left next to technicalities, or imbued in every gesture, in the case of throwing, was commitment and honesty behind the wheel, kindness toward the clay, and informed spontaneity during decoration. Throughout I tried to embrace this apprenticeship like the adventure it was. I believed that recurring and fundamental moment of a practice, such as waiting for things things to dry, gets embodied in character trait. We can imagine in the wheel a civilizational potential (*hui*). We can fantasize on the qualities of such a civilization ; a cosmology originating from the primal movement of revolution, some advanced forms of hypnose developed, an acquaintance with speed, innate concentration capacities, a sensuality concerned with everything that is not present at work, so all the contrary of wet and slow. Maybe this shift from technic toward attitude, can roll even further to aesthetic and political agenda, in trends like billionaire collapse enthused and cottagecore.

- s An important point of this influence run-off of matter onto technic and lifestyle, was for me the discovery of a peculiar pace, in which all technicalities dissolved, and that was specific both to the practice of pottery and of its special occurrence in Japan. In the first place ceramic is not my go to medium, because it requires a heavy apparatus of combined infrastructure, indirectionedness and anticipation. In Arita, where ceramic is the beginning and the end of everything, a pace is both enabled and dictated by the whole settled infrastructure. Arita is the apparatus. It actually became Arita, not only because of the discovery of the Izumiya quarry for porcelain, but also because of the river flow to power the machines to mill it and the forest with the wood to power the kiln to fire it. Now, the roads are bumpless, gas ready, the space is cheap, the material next door, labor-force trained. In school, the building scheme allocates a space for every step in the process, and in the building is a tool, an ingredient, a solution for all your need just waiting for you in a specific cupboard. Next to that, drying one or a hundred pot takes virtually the same time, clay is endlessly reusable but only a good quantity would make the process worth it, and the kiln need almost the same energy to reach such high temperature whether it is empty or fully packed. In economic terms, we say that the fixed costs are high, but the variable costs are low. This simple equation makes batches inherently suited for ceramic. Next to being efficient, they convey a \*feeling\* of efficiency through the simple means of repetition and focus. I could turn the burden of hours spent in repetition into a bearable gem of a pace if I had the certitude that, except through a paradigmatic shift in the production scheme, there were no more efficient way to do what I was doing, and that all preventive measure undertook that would throw added seconds and minutes on the pile turned empirically rightful. I'm glad I didn't trust all the sayings in the first place, because I could do all the mistakes myself which in the long run helped me to surrender I think. If they could be loosely interpreted when working with stoneware, the Amakusa porcelain offered no buffer

space in it to bear the impromptu and unlikely and appeared as a matter of the virtual, of the theory, where everything \*said\* about it, will sure do. As for the daily endeavor, I would bike the same path, the main road of the old Arita town, along which all the former workshop were and all the shops still are. I like to believe every house in the street was related to porcelain, closely or loosely bound. I would see the same vitrine every single day, the same agencement of pot, some old and dusty, some rare and precious, some modern and modernly displayed, all types of shops. One vase in particular made a great impression on me, which became overtime a faithful reminder of what could be achieved, that helped to get over some days. That constituted most of this pace I'm talking about. That and the practice of spreading the production on several days, working along the drying stage of the clay, monitoring closely, trimming, decorating, firing, and throwing again. That is what shaped my days and weeks and months. And only this repetition could clear the headspace for a closer look. Only bathing in a pace like this, like a syrup could open up my body this antenna to the perception of the slightest change, to the understanding of the subtlest resistance in the clay because of remaining water, or to the drying fluctuation because of a light breeze. Only then could rise the awe. Differently, I could see the most zealous student already behind the wheel when I would arrive in school, and still there when I'd leave. I saw the flowers decorating our plates, suddenly on the floor of the street in winter. It was a pace made of other paces, it was a waltz.

- t The pleasure of this pace, the natural pace of all things, or of the potter's life, can be opposed to the anxiety of an exterior imposed cadence, expressed through different means in medieval feudalism (*Schmidt*) or industrial capitalism. Mechanization gradually made craft totally irrelevant at facing modern way of good production, that of dealing with, if not creating, the demand for mass cheap goods. Being useless freed it from imposed cadence, and aided by machines, the practice lost its negative connotation of sweat and tears and enable the craftsmen to focus on the pleasant side of their job. Craft progressively shifted from a productive profession, to a maker sided passion to fulfil, sometime close to a form of craft escapism. The work is said autotelic in that the pleasure comes not from the result of the work, but from the work itself (*Levi-Strauss*). The Leach school of pottery was already motivated by a more or less articulated attempt to reconquer pleasure and fulfilment at work, opposing the gradual discovery of the ravage of industrial capitalism in workers mind. Latest theory go even further and praise the therapeutic qualities of craft, fostering care and connection to nature. While trendy craft practices flourish here and there, Japan keeps seeing its manual workers and many specific sub categories of material production, disappear. Another imposed pace or cadence is the pace of stars, meteorological.
- u Then, I got interested in trying bigger pots. Of course I was going to. The first weeks I was already pointing at my senpai and mentor, Masa his pots, the biggest in school, telling him that one day I'll do the same if not bigger. Of course if boys throw big pots, girls decorate delicately, and masculinity in Japanese pottery

schools could be an interesting research topic. In this situation it was nice to see our classmate Yuri, in the end of the year, coiling up the biggest pot of them all. I liked big pots for how they highlight bodies. I liked to see Manji Inoue working on his famous bigger pots. He mastered the technic of dividing them in sections thrown separately and later assembled, that he taught around the world until a great age, eventhough with obvious diminished ease in the end. Often I would hear practitioners saying they stopped doing big pots when they grew old, to focus on other qualities, glaze for instance. There is also this famous picture of Lucie Rie diving in her kiln, and so many of these picture that I like a lot, of small potters standing next to their big ass pots, bigger than themselves. For me, big pots represented a high stakes adventure. If on the wheel the pot finally collapse, it is after long and painful minutes of hard wedging and centering huge piles of clay, wasted and to be tried again. Eventually I had difficulty reaching the desired size in one section. Even if I valued a lot the virtuosity and conceptual purity of such thrown pots, and after lots of research that showed how common it was of a thing even among big names of the profession, I conceded to sectioning my pots. And so in two sections I threw the tallest I ever did, of which awkwardness of the curve I immediately got seduced.

- v What big pots offered me then, was a massive and blank surface, a white canvas stretching all around, crying for decoration. But my modernist mind had real difficulties wrapping around and finding valid reasons to do so. I had been trained, and took pride, in being able to appreciate blank canvas, bereft from vulgar ornaments merely covering up the already exciting and rich enough texture of raw material, distracting from the essence of matter, or something like that. If I did start to attack the surface playfully in the beginning, I quickly felt uneasy, and couldn't bear to feel like decorating headlessly. I would pick a technic, but in the vacuum of its material qualities only, not involving personal intent or topic or sensitivity, like I had nothing to say. I was surprised to discover in Japan a decorative vocabulary that often include and represent stage of the process, and I would eventually feel quite empathetic, of these potter who could barely decorate with the only thing they knew, pottery. I felt locked, and had to find myself a point, to feel meaningful enough to eventually dare firing something. More importantly, I felt haunted by the acute awareness of the influence that decoration have on pots, articulated and informative as they are, in comparison to the abstract and ambiguous sculptural vocabulary of their support the pots themselves that they can very precisely situate. I wanted to overcome the modernist idea of their inherent superficiality, to understand better how the production of surfaces is actually the result of heavy agendas and infrastructure. Art history outlined periods that all produced different decorations, both in type, or how they were understood and used, and in style, or formal expression, each different because coming from different contexts, different productive infrastructure, national values or geopolitical agendas. I saw the source of my concerns in the hazy and constraintless context I was creating from. I didn't need sales to backup my practice and so didn't have to orient the style of ornaments toward trendy,

pleasing, sales arguments. I didn't have technical constraint neither as the whole city was behind my back ready to help out. Nor did I have any other goal in ornaments else than the exploration of what I was going to do, the notion itself, which constituted quite an ungrounded, conceptual and reflexive use of decoration. Also the ambivalence of my presence in Japan, a mix of educational politics, soft power prestige and globalisation, didn't help me to clarify a precise intent. It felt like the means and end circle was broken. I saw in pots embodied strategies that organise time and space in a global apparatus. I wanted to establish a meaningful dialogue between the support, the image, the process and the context, a way to inflate technic back with a sense of necessity, in the form of so called decorative strategies, or well oiled ensemble of means and ends. Or else, I dived in search of ways to navigate the dialectic of means and ends, the relation between action on pot, the functions of decorations.

- w Trying to overcome the situation I would come up with different theory of ornament, that would inspire or justify my act of decoration, or the other way around, decoration that would nurture theories to come. For instance, the theory that decorative art can be understood as both the decor of things and the things in the decor. Else, the theory that sees in ornament a conceptual frame, whose function is to highlight a subject. A real frame embellishes a painting because it isolates it, sets it apart from the surrounding mass of other objects and commands it to our attention as an exceptional object. The vase, the container par excellence is thus an ornament in itself because its form of the vase emerge from the natural idea of containing. A thing that is to contain will open and widen gradually for if it was wide below as it is above it would appear passive rather than active, it would not stand for the living idea of containment. If the vases character is of conserving the form is contracted still further beneath up its rim which represent its completion. If it is made for dipping it must slightly retreat into itself beneath its rim, if it is of the offering kind, its wider rim needs not give away its rim to a contraction in the vase the ornament has become (*moritz*). Yet another theory, sees decoration as images, for that they behave as such, standing on a surface, making a surface, traveling in the world and being seen, and for their expression, what they express as a crafted image, and what they express as existing, or what they tell about the world from the stand of the very possibility and condition of their existence.
- x In Japan, unlike in the Karatsu tradition, just few kilometers up north, that emphasizes the raw quality of wild clay and the potter's energy through defects and unique pieces, the whole Arita tradition of porcelain is about throwing series, with gages, patiently trimming away any trace of tear and sweat and bits of unevenness that would make obvious their manly origin, to make them look like coming straight from the ether. One is about finding beauty in the natural expression of the material and the display of the hand at work, although it doesn't mean less virtuosity or less processed material. Indeed it is established that technical mastery is needed to throw swiftly, and that the clay used, if still

less processed than the laborious porcelain, still sees additives like sands of various precise coarseness added to its recipes refined over time, for the final result to appear more natural through the sign of surface roughness. While the other finds beauty in smoothness, or a widely spread representation of refinement and control, in perfect artifice. Reluctant to this idea at first, I learned to see beauty in this tension of genuinely trying to erase yourself from the pot but never really managing to do so completely. Imperfection and energy always seeped in from somewhere unexpected, a deformation, a crack, a smush or a bleed, a stroke. I left them among decorations, treated as such, wandering for myself when exactly does a mark become an ornament. I started by stretching this definition of decoration as any visual information that disturb a plain surface. I looked at cracks and textures and marks from the process like finger prints as potential ornaments, from which I extracted a broader vocabulary of marks, highlighting existing one, artificializing some other. I messily tried out all any and all technic, marking device and related formal vocabulary, exploring the surface, its depths, softness and hardness, its architecture. This messy experiment marked an important step in the process and was the source of many other pieces in which I always seek to get closer to the act of decoration, the possibilities given by a pot.

y In the end all the tension I felt, fearing to waste countless hours carving curves on curvy surfaces without any conviction of the point I was making, would sometime vanished when witnessing plates suddenly uplifted, turned extraordinarily moving and beautiful by the addition of a single stroke, of a straw, a leg or a character. Or visiting the Nishi Hongan Ji temple in Kyoto and struck by the richness of the surrounding decoration, unified motifs, objects and buildings, competing with European mannerism in detail and exuberance, this fear would be temporarily but totally relieved. All this time appeared not wasted but offered, to who deserve it unconditionally, the material proof of another form of almost doing nothing. I understood spirituality the reason behind the time spent on ornament, the cost in sweat and tears and the reassurance. Once again, next to its rational interest, it revolved in ornament also behaving like a pulsion, born maybe from deep will for repetition and control, and seeing other people doing so makes it a thing and enough of itself.

z Errands, I would stumble on pattern held my attention. explored the specific shippo pattern, symbol of good luck, perpetuation of the lineages of connected families, and made a system of writing with it. I also wondered what do they harbor in their abstractness, and what relation do they tie between the object, the world and their maker. I like them because they are nothing useful really, their prime function as decorative element could be to \*mechanically\* embellish, or obstruct a blank surface, for matters of distinction, between one object over another, one maker over another, or to change its visual obtrusiveness with less pigment than an all over would, as they are the means of a period where time was plentiful but resources scarce. They hold simple functions, yet do this in an infinite and infinitely complex ways. One could easily lose them life in unraveling the mathematical

ins and outs of this or this geometry, and their emotional response. Weaponised means for simple ends. Of course, I also cherish their contemplative potential. getting lost, getting hypnotised, just developing pattern can be a thing, like the albers, very design assignment, bauhaus like, but for oneself. medium free it is a bottom less source of enclosed systematic exploration, developing pure pattern, following a thin line of formal interest, and getting lost in its intricacies and possibilities. Also patterns can be seen as the first instance of seriality, making a lots of similar to be things, but that differ.

- aa I also found in writing some bits of natural act of decoration. Just before leaving France, I spent a week learning Japanese basics. I learnt to read and write the kanas, discovered the ideogrammatic and logogrammatic nature of the kanjis, and memorised the basic particules of its grammar. I understood later that, even though gradually discontinued, this first encounter initiated the project in the questions that stuck with me throughout, of the dialogue between technic and language, gesture and speech. It also paralleled with this idea of bowls like language, recipients for ideas, of the pot, simultaneously an object, an image and a notion. If I started just liking the aesthetic of scribbles, I would later question the condition of their existence, or why would there be something written here? In museums we encountered these surprising Japanese pots meant for 18th century European market with things like Soyu or Japanschz brushed in big blue letters. I wanted to digitized the distinctive typeface originating from this encountering of Japanese tool and latin alphabet, but gave up for cause of missing letters. Also pots used to be signed, not with easy to scrape off overglaze but rather cobalt sealed under the glaze. So different technics call for different use of text, different textualities. Formally also, Certain technics seemed more fitting, certain type of imagery, I called them le *registre amicale* or friendly range. But we can also go out of the friendly range and *emulate*, other imagery, which has for effect to display the illusion mechanism and bring to awareness the image artificiality, fruit of craft, makes it float. Fat brushed gosu makes generous and swift strokes, good for drawing motion and things alive, like moving grass and animals. But it's hard to write with it. Sgraffito, on the other hand grips to the surface, makes long elegant lines impossible but cries, even in its name, for scratching letters. Sgraffito is a name given to a technic that whoever playing a bit would find back for themselves. It is the name given to a technic that doesn't need to be taught, that is nothing really but that has been formalised, outlined, katanised, and given a latin sounding name. I came to think of technic as motion, that exist in a continuous range, under, over, between and behind formalized, named, culturalized and iconified technics. And so the means. Through writing I searched to built a coherent whole, to build narratives through conception. liked stories of urgency or discretion some words conveyed, like a journal, a banner or a billboard.

- bb After all that brainwork, when exhausted at first, daily then, during lunch, came the comforting time to go to the 7 eleven next door. I would pass by the magazine

section, to the snacks, to the fresh stuff, back to the magazine, one or two round, each time, and to the cashier. Every time I would discover something new, a new corner, a new product in these compact allays expanding into a rabbit hole of which I couldn't seem to touch the bottom. It felt important and lays deep inside me now, as a state of pure consumption and delight, of total surrender, of awe, the ultimate stage of capitalism, with no wish to fight, just melting, melting for easy onigiri lunch, melting for missing toothbrush, melting for late crispy chicken. Still in search of a topic and a meaningful way of making pots, sometime I would go further, I needed to go farer away, to think of something else. Sometime I would travel even, to clear my mind from technicalities and fear, to expand my views, showing me the answers I already had, beside formal inputs and stories to tell - although I still don't quite get the complex web of contradicting desire, doubts, and needs that create a drive, the energy to go further or not. I wrote about all of this. From this little life and travels I extracted graphics and imagery, slogans, typeface and logos, sliding from letters to text and stories, and back to signs and symbols. Along the months, I got to acknowledge the collection size, of concepts and interests, crystalized in visual artefacts I gathered. Sometimes the graphic would take over the concept. It asked, what if ornament break free from the pots, what if they overcome their decorative origins which I think they do when considered from the maker perspective, following this craving for pattern that can arise from time to time, this indulgement for this mechanic of continuation of external logic and its awe. It is also what I see in the multiple artless, and impromptuous acts of engraving witnessed on public benches, nightclub restrooms or cells walls my pots ended up looking like. These primitive ornaments are not asked for, are non premediated and non coordinated, they are linked to a place and cannot travel, eventhough fashionable at time and sold like most signs do. All my perceptions were doomed with triviality. All, coming from this weird biased and blend of internal perception of more or less direct and estranged environment, somehow shared this close bound to japan's institutionalized glaring side. I am talking overwhelming and gaudy advertisement graphics, kawai culture and mascotisation of state bodies, schools, cities, and any agent of power in need of increased trust, derelict rurality, shrilling heteronormativity, nomination of national treasures etc. From the 80s on, lots of these things were formalised and institutionalised through the so called Cool Japan campaign, that is a nation branding and foreign policy effort aiming at inland opinion control and oversea increased soft power. Eventhough critic emerges, notably against japonism, that is, the constructed fantasy of the racial and ideological homogeneity of the japanese people, cool japan is largely perceived as a good thing, and made mostly for the global japanese cultural landscape from which art movement like superflat originated. I'm thinking big eyes big smiles, funky typefaces on packagings, screentone backdrops in mangas, etc. Or cultural promotion system like the national treasure. This make for a strange account about the self-awareness of a population, a state, that once again can be seen as a relation between the surface, the image, the brand, and its core structure, reason and intent. I was fascinated about the potent unease and sadness that so neutral and flat

vessels could hold. And so with pots I would lay down and build up these stories, to read and see, to tell and decorate, to see what it does to create a linguistic existence to pots. After experimenting in the means, I would then start improvising on the ends. I would refer back to my notebook, its notes and doodles and scheme from these book and travel, a process I very much enjoyed, I think first for the personal and off hand material it provided. And because it is virtually not subject to decay, porcelain is a great advocate for shy and ephemeral situations. And also I guess there was something to understand there, on how personal stories would end up outside of me in, or on a pot. I think I was trying to get which from language or technic informed the other, whether language articulate to communicate or to understand and generates, a space for technics. Eventually I had to surrender to the vertiginous idea, that whatever I would do, would eventually prove right to the theory above mentioned, of being true to a context, as unclear and apparently ungrounded as it felt.

cc Working on these pots, it felt that clay as a material holds very well the object of pots, and that together they very well embody this opaque relation between surface and structure, image and object, starting with glaze. While other material often count varnish or paint as surface finishings, ceramic offers glaze. Which I despised originally, precisely because I thought of it as a paint-like superficial surface add-on, hiding away the material true expression as promoted by the modernist tradition I was relating to. Coupled with the insofar modernist sensibility toward white monochrome as walled in museums, I saw in porcelain natural watertightness the decisive sign of glaze irrelevance. And so it took me some time to yield it its qualities, that appeared clear after few deceptive firings where the matt finish of raw porcelain was, eventhough clearly waterproof, not so satisfying to grab, not to say unsettling, as my mind fantasized water in it's pore, feeling warmer to the hand yet less pleasant, and made it also harder to clean, if not impossible as I then witnessed several month later from the cup given to a friend that rapidly turned distinctively brownish in the inside, which would easily be perceived as gross if by one if one didn't had access to the background information that the coloration actually only comes from the same teabag dunked every morning for some time, and is not therefore gross I assure. Really, he loves it. Not yet ready to indulge, I searched for ways to express better the qualities of unglazed porcelain surface, with range of powder of different grits, slips, and more importantly, I tried decorating it, with various engraving technics. Doing so, I understood that, in fact, what I was doing was displacing the thickness of the walls, that is, altering the structure of the construction that the walls of a pot are. Sometimes too deep of marks would jeopardize the integrity of the structural strength of a pot and cause it to crack during drying or collapse during firing. I understood that the engraving were not superficial image added onto a pot, but could also be deep alteration of its very structure, and so I had to find new ways to combine the two, to find a better dialog. To make the most out the different qualities of the clay I would do marking at different drying stage, as they all it is the gesture that we see, the dryer the clay and it is the material itself that we

see, its inner particle, powder structure. This is of particular interest when it comes to trimming. While clay is usually trimmed at leather consistency, at the same stage the drag will tear porcelain apart and open tiny crevices, and so it needs to be done at a dryer stage, which furthermore fits well porcelain usual aim of thinness as it allows for thinner trimming, until the body shatter, instead of collapse or teared apart when clay is too wet. And I was at first a bit scared of trimming. Because I first learned to throw, and as soon as I could could have decent results, trimming became this yet another spending of energy learning something totally new again, with its set of gestures and concerns. Afraid also because there is more at stakes; while failing at turning a mass of mud into an elegant bowl leaves you with nothing more than what you started with anyway, just a slightly muddier mass of mud and a little less time on earth, trimming meant risking to grind away drying patience, and fuck-up painstakingly erected almost elegant suffocating vessels, impressively break them into shatters, back into the shatter bucket, just for slightly lighter results. And so I would develop a special care at the throwing stage in order to skip trimming as much as I could, which happened to leave me with final product bearing tracks of throwing soft clay instead of trimming hard clay, which represent a totally different formal vocabulary of marks. Later, a more refined attempt to go glazeless, saw me trying terra sigilata - a recipe given by yuki sensei, actually coming from experimentation in the ekwc, so an originally dutch recipes based on ancient roman - actually boundless - tradition, brought in japan, flowing back to me the french student from the netherland. It gave convincing results, allowing to play on different level of glossyness, highlighting details that light absorbing mat surface tend to blur, flattening surfaces, smushing sharp edges. In the end it was as many attempts to say the most with the least of means, bearing visual and mechanical qualities of soft raw porcelain as a prime motif, to discover that the only *truth* of porcelain lies more in its handling than in its core.

dd Another drive to my glazeless enterprise was for me the opacity of its craft, leaning toward more complex territories of chemistry if not pure alchemia, trading soil and sand for more abstract and low level lookalike white powders bearing plentiful contradicting behaviors. And naturally with this nothing to lay on, blind corner of my mind, I skipped it. But facing all these gaudy colors and textures in museums and everywhere, the rational side had to give it a try, and also I was in japan for nothing else. Anyway, I so started digging glazes online existence; XXth century potters research from alikes of nigel wood out of book excerpts, blogs of technician like the infamous digital fire, facebook groups, or forums like glazy in which the most hazardous question from desperate potters are answered by mysterious people in texas or even more profoundly remote places compacted right before my eyes on my little computer in arita japan (*Gotheborg*). There I learned glaze and clay bodies usually consist of the same mix of clay, flux, silica and oxydes but in different balance and proportion. Proto-glazes were made of some of the clay body, watered down to a slip, and mixed with ashes. This close composition makes them porous to each other, and their fusion in the kiln more like an intimate

exchange of molecules, a rich dialogue of sorts, eventually bound by a so-called interfacial layer. On a less chemical side, glazes, mostly semi-transparent due to their high silica content, what we see is the light go through the glaze and back after bouncing on the clay body. If they originally come from the same ground, rationalisation of the ceramic industry set them apart, gradually turning what once was mere imperfection mastered from the ashes of the wood fired naturally flying around in the kiln and melting on the vase, at a refined in a myriad of potters books, to a fully distinguished and differentiated synthetic powders whose contemporary version is made of cutting edge lab equipment, r&d teams, and the gathering of their outcome in proper scientific papers and patents in the dusty files of some factory. It is in some ways this contemporary handling of glaze that can look paint-like, more than its mechanic. as their relation is of a more irreversible nature, that cannot be chemically exclusive and peeled off. Although, in the sense of a paint not confined to its industrial, modernist doomed material existence of a single chemical behavior, but rather to a state of mind, one of covering, with decorative endeavors infused in broader yet less obvious functional aims, glaze can arguably be a paint. Anyway, it was the recognition of their similarity in substance, and the intimacy of their relation that changed my mind on glaze in regard to bare ceramic. And if I had the modernist tendency of acknowledging if not highlighting the size, thickness, support and medium, altogether the sculptural that a drawing on a sheet of paper is made of, I also shared the post modern eyes that sees images in sculptures, and made me play with flatness, dematerialisation, conceptualisation, or the turning of a material thing into an idea through illusion. And so I like to sculpt, and doing so remembering that, if not always edible, everything still has a taste, and that is what matter.

- ee My hazy understand of glaze could actually be traced back also to their multiple and overlapping denomination or name, whose etymology can sometimes be confusing. Celadon, commonly referred to as a glaze, recognised by its final color ranging from dark greenish to white bluish, but that more precisely refers to a process, that of high reduction firing of low iron glaze. So there is a result called celadon, but also a process called celadon, but no proper recipe, as it can be made of a single celadon rock as found in the ryuumon quarry, japan, or artificially composed with external found or synthesised compounds. And its name doesn't refer to the above mention facts but rather to two hazy etymologic hypothesis, the name of a shepherd displaying such pale blue ribbon in a XVIIIth c french novel, or from Salah ad-Din, a sultan dealing pieces of this glaze later called after his deformed name.
- ff And so I tried different approach to glaze. In the beginning I would peep, disturbed with envy, at the glaze of certain students' bowl, and with shame and dishonor, eventually ask them if they'd share with me the secret to the beautiful milky mat white they would've in some mysterious ways manage to obtain, just for them to point me the common big buckets of default mixture they'd use. The school indeed carries on the region tradition for virtuose imperial wares, meaning shiny,

highly transparent glazes and bright opaque colors. These ancient recipes are now produced in house in generous quantities, used by default and shared by everyone, making for a common ground for further refinements. They now appear as an ubiquitous part of the landscape, as similar finishes unify the heteroclite production of all students standing in lines on the school shelves. I so started dipping my things in this big bucket of tenmoku, or black glaze, made by yuki sensei from local mud, and then in the one of yunomi, or paper white glaze. I especially liked yunomi on top of tenmoku like milk in coffee, that especially suit mugs breakfast cup. Or maybe it was seihakuji, the bluish, icy white. Next to these timeless bucket stand endless rows and piles of wood panels supporting the precious sample library developed through several years of student tryout in glaze chemistry classes, all abstract yet concrete porcelain little square samples of all colors and textures arranged in gaudy matrixes. And so I started brewing my own batches using the raw material from school, following traditional recipes handed to me by yuki, of oribe green and copper red, globalised name of traditional japanese name I forgot. I still have the oxblood recipe, that yuki sensei swiftly illustrated with a little picasso-like draft a cow that is very precious to me. Know able to use these powders, I still had to inquire their origin. Wandering in the 7eleven next to school, I recognised in toothpaste a potential source of calcium, and in the generous bag of moisture absorbant in package of dry nori seaweed a source of silica. I don't remember in what particular order it all came together, if its the parallel established between thrown shapes and toothpaste tube observed while throwing, or the fascination for the sensual shape of my glossy toothpaste tube, or else the need for a contextual sample support after reading the glaze potential of toothpaste as a prime source of calcium off of the tube. But I eventually found myself developing a score to throw fifty or so little porcelain toothpaste tube, a shape that actually fit very naturally the throwing technic, starting like a little sake cup but elongated, then taken off the hump but instead of narrowed and cut off flat with a wire, pulled until the ductility of soft clay draws the beak and tears it open. The proto-cup is then gently slapped in shape on the drying plank where the open mouth of the cup flattened on itself, and is then sealed not with a heat press like it would on the real thing, but by rolling the striped cap of a the model tube. And for the glaze, a simple linear blend with pure toothpaste on one side and pure nori anti-moisture packaged on the other, trying to find the complementarity and a good equilibrium between these two unrelated consumer byproduct, developing into a dozen of abstract puddle of color and material sketches. I added a little hole on the still soft porcelain tubes so they could later be nailed on a plank or on a wall like a little painting. From diy improvisation I would also go and try the other side of the axis, and give fukaumi the factory of sousuke our nice friend a little visit. Browsing through their extensive collection I would thoughtfully pick, some would say the ugliest, I would say the purest looking glaze off their shelf, the brightest and thickest, that are obviously and purposefully industrial, covering, opaque, hiding. One pure yellow plastic, the other pure shiny metal, pure product of science and machinery, that looked like they couldn't be reached by my bare hands and little means.

gg Glaze is also the potter's doors to color. I tend to overlook colors, even though I do believe they harbour a great potential of bliss and delight. In the existence of wares there are stages where their color is of agreement, matching or clashing with what is in them; the flowers, the food, the tea or the jewels. And there are stages where their color is enough, standing on their own behind a glass vitrine, and one can cry in front of the serenity of a celadon and I am happy every time I use my bright yellow cups (*Gevers*). I learned to see them not just as muted surface and dull image, but as carrying something more than themselves, delivering a message about something else, if not a meaningful expression, the dramatic reveal of the essence of things. In garden, the colors of growing fruits and vegetable reveals their ripeness, and in the pan it shares how cooked they are, because their core change, their color change, because sometime these are one thing. But because color is of necessity, that everything appear through color even when color is irrelevant, arbitrary. Industry standards elevated paint from a medium to represent color, to its pure and abstract presentation, through a superficial flawless, almost immaterial layer of pure color, with no physicality to interfere with its prime experience. Mastering colors opened the door for meaningless, contingent colors, that could advocate for their bad reputation as the main tool of lures and trap that knows how to stay on surface when asked for it. For glazes are mixtures, reacting with the heat, that is, the gifted energy of motion, crack open to a different structure, freeze to a color, or molecular structure dancing with light in various character, glittering around our eyes, following the sun. In their manufacturing as such, however how bright, trendy, flashy or modern, they are not picked up, not from a chromatic wheel, not gathered from materials around, but rather worked toward, asked for, sometime stumbled upon, or even thoroughly mastered, but never are they picked up. Unlike synthetic glazes in electric kiln, the result of natural glazes in wood fired kiln is of a porous nature, from the variety of wood used to the atmospheric conditions around, the result is highly contextual, and ended up representing places and cultures. Color is the witness, the prime outcome, if not the reason, for what happened in the kiln, like a thermograph made so beautifully that its contemplation would take over its toolness. In archaeology and forensic for instance, certain materiality of color can long outlived the process of their delivery and can help trace back advancement of firing technology. Some glazes were praised because difficult to obtain, thus expensive and rare. The infinite nuances of celadon or tenmoku were the subject of a whole life of dedication, if not abridged to toxic manganese or uranium as the only known path to reach the color of their dream. It is a fascination for color, a constant negotiation between means and ends, with a trade off of alchemical nature. How much and food safety of this plate traded for the shine of this bronze edge ? colors also appear in the trenches of trade and war. China would purposefully sell to Japan the cobalt Japanese craftsmen used to copy the blue on white ware the chinese used cobalt for in the first place. and people died for the whiteness of porcelain (*DeWaal*).

- hh I was breaking my head on how to decorate. Surrendering, it appeared clear that I was doing what is supposed to be done, in the context, as loose as it was, that I was in, and that nothing else could've go another way. I tried to show the decorative qualities of functional features, made and used stamps, wrote on pots and read from them, leveraged cracks. I got satisfied with just a looser, less ideological and more spontaneous approach, nurturing practices from both radical positions acknowledging the sometime superficial sometime essential nature of ornament, of color. It came clear that decoration is before everything, an urge, felt, from the potters side, as a game, of hide and seek, of curiosity, of exploration of the formal and detailed possibilities of matter, of dress and dialogue with surfaces and objects. Instead of a unified and unifying decorative gesture or strategy, what I left behind on these pots was a continuous stroke of wonder, like footsteps in the snow. It made for a floating world where the soft is hard and soft again, where the simplest topologies are zoomed in and out, and objects stand fragile, in hazy state of being, in equilibrium between the thing to the images to the thing, the notion, both still and moving, distant and intimate. In some ways, I did nothing but stayed, immersed with the trouble (*Harraway*).
- ii For the first time I had to plan a production schedule so that all the pieces of the set to come I drew on a big board could dry and be fired on time for the final exhibition coming closer. It was the first time for me, both to plan and to produce according to plan, and of course it turned out too ambitious. The set comprised, small plate or saucer, and plate, donburi set of a big bowl and a smaller one for the lid, the maybe fourth generation of my in famous cup, and few very big plate and very big bowls, and some jugs or proto teapots, and eventually a big vase. The big vase was a real pain to finish, and ended up decorated with the story of it's rush and intensity. I wished I had time for more personal piece, like a chess set for a friend, but I did not. After the final kiln loading, firing and unpacking, I had to sort pots out. Pots were enjoyed or depreciated, kept aside or thrown away. I always considered my pots functional and not artistic, eventhough I was aware and willing to, stuff them with the weight and details of research and ponder to give them some sort of a presence, a conceptual steadiness, much like a black hole. But discussing with the teacher, I understood that considering the japanese standard for pots, mine were seldom functional, while holding an originality in forms,for there standards once again, they advised me to display, to present them as art, I heard, as tiny sculpture ? I chose to focus on the collection, the ensemble. I dont know what ties it together though as it is really heterogeneous. just they are all made by me, in a framed period of time, in a space, all coming from the same kiln, all coming from the same hands and mind but taking different direction, crystalising different attitudes, that of searching. For the exhibition, I had to decide on where to do it, where to display all of this ? I first thought of wherever space outside, laying in the grass, a river bed or a forest, because it is where I was the most pleased to see ceramic in Arita, where shards are everywhere. It seemed like a natural space for them to end in. Or in the school kitchen ? This is where tableware are suppose to be right ? I like domesticities.

Still wondering, with a sample of a bowl in my hand I would place everywhere, to see the affect, I ended up in the school library. I wished I spent more time there, a library packed with books about ceramic and porcelain, what a strange place, what a dream. And so I wandered a bit, browsing in the arrays, reading this signs I could not for the most part understand. And when it was time to stop and go back to take this decision, I saw my bowl, that I left there to free my hands, in the shelf, on top of a pile of books, weirdly standing there as it always did. It was very still and muted yet seeming like it had a lot to tell. It felt right. And so I thought it made sense, to exhibit the pots in the school library. They were not old relics nor old shards really like in the outside. Neither did they deserve yet their status as object, as functional ware to use, and so didn't belong to the kitchen. But they were fragment of ideas and attempts, transitionary and proto objects to read like many words, and so belong in the library. I liked this form of hesitation, not yet tableware. For the set up itself, set it up, I stayed for a prepare it, I lived in the library for days, working on different things. it was a place we worked in, we wrote, we read, we ate and talk, we wandered in. wa layed. I like that we occupied, and used the space a lot. we charged it. I chose to acknowledge the inherent ambiguity of the display, that could still be all together a museum exhibition of relics to study, a market display of functional ware to buy, or an artistic installation of sculpture and image to contemplate.

jj Like this text, from which it was the premise, the lecture given during the final day of presentation was not an explanation of the project really, it was more a wandering through the worlds of sensation, feeling and theory the daily routine of craft sparked in me. It was understandable to see, the people, gradually falling asleep, the closing eyes of my tired classmates. No one could really understand what I was saying because I don't think it made sense by then, but I hope they got a feeling of it, estranged at least by the quickly curated collection of clumsy photos projected behind me that made for the hazy backbone of the lecture. Although after the lecture, a man still asked some question, about one bowl in particular I showed a detail of, a weird glazed spiral with a hiro, a red outline that I referred to as a drop shadow, like the photoshop effect. He was a man from the swimming pool that Janneke brought here. She then told me he asked how much for the bowl. My first sell ? Crazy, whatever he wants I said. She advised me not to embarass him and to fix a price. Ok, in this case it's gonna be expensive, because, because... well if it isn't a commodity, if I don't want it to be a commodity... but how to fix a price, a price that don't make it a commodity ? extra expensive or extra cheap ? coupling the price to the production value or decoupling it ? is it a bowl or a sculpture then, legally I mean. For what is he paying for exactly ? I did not have any answer. I think more globally it was the question of pottery within capitalism that was asked. How to be a potter without selling commodities, or what position should the potter have in a society, or community. Decoupled from job title, how to deal with pots in general, and the production of pots, in the fairier way. that is a question Ill bring back in europe. In the end I think I coupled to the production value, plus symbolic value that it was the bowl

on display during the whole presentation that people remembered, and he got to talk with the artists. I said 6000y. He never showed up.

kk The school, owner of infrastructure and resource, provided the material, tools and firing. The teachers, owner of ancient knowledge and skills teach me. Ultimately I, owner of the voice and energy, activate, and concentrate all of this, into pots. No one owns all of this really. In the courtyard of the school I left a big bowl for the growing plants, and the big vase, with the story of the vending machine nearby the one we drink from when early in the morning, or late in the evening, a coffee or a soda. In school I also left my marxists annotated plates from the overglaze painting lessons in the kitchen and dining area. Displayed behind the vitrine dedicated for past exchange student, I guess are the pots the teachers selected from all my pots, the messy ones, the ones no one else would do again. I hope there is also a cup or two standing in Miki's office next to the other samples from her friend and past student. Other pots were given to teachers, technicians, and classmates, and to people I met, according to what I knew of their taste or to relative stories. Others were left behind for a little give away party. It was nice seeing people cheerily picking their favorite. Some were thrown away. The rest I packed well to bring back home, for friends and family. The very few pots left, I kept for myself, for the shelf and table of my future home.

ll It's been 6 months now that I am back from Japan. By then I had the time to buy a wheel, entry level, and to throw some stuff for my graduation project. A vase, a trash bin, and some plates. They were glazed with self made glaze from the ashes of the pizzeria next to my place in Eindhoven, like Janneke show me back there. Now school is over and I am back in Paris. I can't make pot anymore, for now. I am living in Mathilde's flat, my friend who came to Japan to help me with the exhibition. During the weird month of august, I am in paris, at a tiny desk, to write this report. It's nice. In the room, I see a flashy and pierced, tall and flared bowl proudly standing on the heating unit. I see another one, small and high footed who receives bits of earrings and rings and pearls. I know there is a big shallow tray welcoming and displaying fruits and vegetable in the kitchen, and a collapsing two levels tiny glass holding toothbrush on the bathroom sink whose bump makes it trusty to hold even with slippery hands. I know at another friend, a rugged and unglazed, handleless mug with cracky lips serves black tea evemorning. There is also two cups, a yellow and a white one that my parents use to serve coffee every time coffee is served, and that somewhere else, a glaze test sample shaped as a toothpaste tube takes dust in a cupboard. They were all made from a porcelain I can't buy, using glazes I don't have the recipes anymore, following advice I don't receive. It gives them a preciousity I don't like. But it's ok. For now, all these pots populate the intimate spaces of people I love, hold still, or in motion, witness or accompany their daily existence and actions. I like them like that, like tiny spies scattered around, tiny angels.

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