

## **Graduation Portfolio**

Title:

### **Escarbando la Casa Grande (Digging the Big House)**

Name student: Lina Bravo Mora

Student number: 1542298

Date of delivery: 24 July 2020

*“There is no escape from matter. To exist on earth is not to manage or own it, but to participate in the dizzying adventure of matter” (Laverey, 2019 pp. 262)*

### **Introduction:**

During this year in iMAE, I have been exposed to multiple examples of ways artistic thinking can come into play in the social sphere, and some of them I find profoundly inspiring. I consider my work on other levels of impact, but I believe it can provide possibilities in its small and intimate scale. My educational practice is based on the generation of collective hubs for aesthetic exploration and experimentation. My interdisciplinary artistic research goes towards enabling practices of caring, *thinking - with others and becoming – with (Haraway, 2016)* different materials. I want to work for an education that stands for creative thinking, collective care, and experiential knowledge production because I believe through it, societies can build themselves with social justice and face conflicts through creative conflict transformation and practices of partial recuperation instead of violence (Lederach, 2005). COVID -19 policies have challenged every sphere of physical, collective based work, and mine has not been an exception. Yet, being isolated and far from feeling at home has strengthened my drive to become *involved in one another’s lives (Haraway, 2016, pp. 71)*, and I have found a strong, caring community within my old and new friends. I am presenting an initial research and prototyping (Ratto, 2013)<sup>1</sup> phase; I conceived it and executed thanks to their inspiration, care, and collaboration. In general terms, It is an inquiry on the concept of home, that I am

---

<sup>1</sup>Prototype: “Rather than being purposive or fully functional devices, prototype development is used to extend knowledge and skills in relevant technical areas as well as to provide the means for conceptual exploration” (Ratto, 2013 pp 253).

convinced, needs to be revisited in these critical times.

### **Artistic research and Educational Practice: Playing Laboratories**

*"(...) Serious occupation playing is, when looking for other doors, other accesses to the non-usual simply to embellish the usual by illuminating it suddenly in another way, take it out of its boxes and define it in a new and better way". Julio Cortázar, 1962*

De-colonial and feminist social movements and studies have pointed out to the non-western and western world, that knowledge production is not exclusive to men and western academic spaces, universities, classrooms, libraries, archives, museums, or laboratories (Curiel, 2020) (Dussel, 2013) (Guzman, 2020). Knowledge can be socially produced through interaction, dialogue, collaboration, and negotiation (A guide to feminist pedagogy, 2015, pp.5 ) and can be produced in a plurality of places, through different types of collective experiences, and sharing practices.

*"The experience in the feminist educational processes is considered more as a producer than as a product of the educational subjects, as a constructor of subjectivities that place us in the social reality, signified in different ways. (...)The pedagogical intention is to question how we have created ourselves through these experiences". (Ochoa, 2007 pp. 9)*

They work with subjective experiences as a starting point to dig into the person's placement within power relations and their implications from the micro to the macrostructures (Ochoa, 2007 pp. 9). *"The personal is political" and "the collective is political"* (Curiel, 2020).

Donna Haraway's idea of *Staying with the Trouble "as a commitment to work in modest possibilities of partial recuperation and getting on together on a planet that is in an undeniable process of destruction."* (Haraway, 2016, pp. 10) is an inspiration for the broader objective of my educational work. I have been guided by the notion of feminist

care practices, inspired by Foucault's caring for oneself, and the socio-affective approach, that have been the most potent and influential encounters in my educational path<sup>2</sup>. To *Stay with the Trouble* of living in this damaged world, I have been searching for a way of contributing to change from the cultivation of criticality and freedom in thinking about power relations and violences that integrate creativity and emotional and body intelligence. The stronger policemen inhabit our heads (Freire, 2004), and I have experienced artistic languages effectively and honestly recognizing and addressing them. My artistic research methodology starts with my body and the study and recognition of my identity through artistic practice. It is fed while working with several materials, clay, and images being the most prominent, writing, mapping spaces, situations, and most importantly, by the encounters with people. I aim to deepen the educational aspect of it by finding ways of socializing the processes by which arts have permitted me a personal intimacy and empowerment, to think together and enrich individual and collective living practices of critical making.

Being involved in dialogues with several materials and experiences, I am developing an educational working methodology that goes towards the creation of *laboratories* as embodied experiences for critical thinking, Critical Making (Ratto, 2015). It is essential to highlight that the word *laboratory* conflicts me, due to the strong involvement it has with western scientific academia. Still, the arts have been reclaiming the laboratory as an interdisciplinary creative space. Going back to the Latin origin of this word, as Clara Bofill does in her essay about the notion of artistic laboratory, which has been defined as "the

---

<sup>2</sup>"As we see, *self-care* is the opposite of educating the individual to exercise any professional activity or technical activity. *Self-care*, which can be translated as training of oneself, as self-knowledge, as self-practice, turns out to be a hermeneutic of the subject which seeks to make they listen and look at themselves, to question them as a person, so that they can properly support all possible events, all the afflictions and problems that can affect them throughout their lives" (Lanz, 2012, pp. 41).

place to work, to put, in value, to cultivate" (Bofill, 2013). I recognize that it is precisely the intention I have. In my work, there is frequently a playful winking to western scientific disciplines and practices, like archaeology, botany, and cartography. My purpose is to play with them and queer them by working creatively and with humor within their frames.

*"As Oswin (2008, page 90) argues, a queering of social theory "goes beyond a sexual politics of recognition" to encompass other fields such as feminism, materialism, and postcolonialism. Similarly, Kath Browne (2006, page 888) proposes 'queer' "not as a simplistically appropriated identity category, but as a fluid set of possibilities and contestations" and calls for a "broader inter-disciplinary queer theory." (Gandy, 2012, pp.735 )*

One key aspect of my design of the laboratory working methodology is experiencing and affect. My laboratories are not aseptic, silent, and white. We don't use gloves; on the contrary, we dig our hands into the mud to let learning happen through emotion and muddy experience. As a methodology, I am guided by the socio-affective approach used in Education for Peace<sup>3</sup>.

*"It is necessary to combine the transmission of information with personal experience to achieve the emergence of an emotional attitude. The socio-affective approach starts with empathy, the feeling of agreement and correspondence with the other, which allows the development of security and self-confidence, and verbal and non-verbal communication skills. As individuals who form part of a group, each one lives an empirical situation, analyses it, describes it, and is capable of communicating his or her experience" (Escola de Cultura de Pau, 2000).*

In other words, I could say that in these laboratories, we play as an empirical construction of knowledge. We put special attention to the individual and collective emotional involvement while working with the material. We also attune to the material to explore the possibilities it gives. To dig in more in-depth about my working methodology, I will illustrate it with one concrete example of my practice.

---

<sup>3</sup> Corporación otra Escuela; Diploma on theory and practice of Peace Cultures' Construction (2016) . Artherapy and Education for peace (2017) Facilitation Laboratory 2.0 (2019), Diploma on Theatre of the oppressed (2018).

## Claying laboratory for a home in construction



Living under the COVID- 19 quarantine in the Netherlands and observing the different experiences of isolation policies in the world, a broad understanding of the concepts of home and house became inevitable for me. The Corona crisis highlights social inequality and the violent capitalist and colonial structures. Housing is an excellent example of it. *Stay home* does not have the same meaning for everyone on this planet. Being aware of the privilege that staying safe at home means, I spent weeks frozen by anxiety yet, slowly, started moving. The first significant move was to bring home 10kg of terracotta clay. From stillness, a small and humble construction game began. A bird carrying a nest in the back, a small house in the roots of a big tree and a couple of houses that remind amazonian Malocas, started appearing inside my hands and with them, new thoughts and an eagerness for researching about the house- home and their relation to the body. What do they mean to me, and what do they mean to others?



The title of this essay: Escarbando La Casa Grande, means *Digging The Big House* in Spanish. The Big House, as a concept, comes from the Native Amazonian cosmologies. In the Amazon, Native Communities live in big houses called Malocas<sup>4</sup>. By no means, I intend to appropriate this concept, because I am entirely aware of the distances. The Maloca has come to my hands shaped by clay as a metaphor. As Lederach says, *“Metaphors are like a living museum of conflict resources”* (Lederach, 2005, pp.72). People talk about conflict through images, and through their contemplation, we can understand the subtleties of the conflict. My clay figures were an honest entrance to the pandemic world’s scene because I started to work from affection. “ Being affected is learning to listen, taking things in and transforming oneself, breaking something of oneself, and recomposing oneself with new alliances” (Garcés, 2012, pp. 2). Clay has taught me to experience my home and my house as cosmo-political terrains, claiming my space in the world from inside them and remembering that this planet is indeed our big house, our big home. It needs us to be political with radical tenderness in all instances.

---

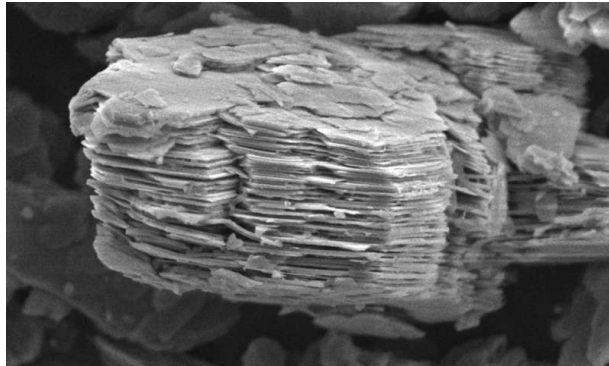
<sup>4</sup>The Maloca is a large communal house inhabited by the indigenous of the Amazon. In a general sense, it is also a traditional social unit, a type of dwelling whose symbolism represents for Amazonian communities and a synthesis of the universe. In other words, the Maloca is a divine archetype, the womb of the mother earth, the house of the sun and moon and the receptacle of the celestial ray. Although the Maloca type changes depending on the community and the design has been altered due to the time and place, it is common that, on the density of the jungle, a conical or cupular structure of great size raises above the trees. This form reproduces the configuration of the worlds occupying the cosmos” (Von Hildebrand, 2019).

This involvement of concept, emotion, and clay through metaphor was my research's initiator. My research continued with poetic writing and video making (see appendix 1). As an expansion of the inquires about the metaphors for home and house, I created two critical making laboratories: About the House the Body and the Mud (see appendix 2) and Claying Laboratory For a Home in Construction (see appendix 3).



The laboratories are hubs for affect and intimacy and for building criticality collectively through making and discussing (Wernimont and Losh, 2018). Clay is the constructing media, and its specific properties shape the experience. It forms part of the laboratory as a *non-human educator*. Clay's features vary depending on its origin and weather conditions; this means it is territorial. From a piece of clay, one can have an understanding of the landscape. Its molecular structure looks like a book. Water molecules hydrate the sheets, so the more humidity it has, the more plastic it is. Understanding the relationship between the warm of the hands, the dryness in the air, and the properties clay has in different humidity stages is vast learning. Clay is an educator due to its materiality. Following this idea, my first task is always to invite the participants to breathe and attune with it through their tactile perception. This way, embodied learning starts.





Ordinary Kaolinite (clay molecule) seen under an electron microscope. Credit Yonsei University

Considering the work with clay is an ancient and contemporary technology, Ratto's concept of Critical Making is a vital referent. *“Critical Making emphasizes the shared acts of making rather than the evocative object. The final prototypes are not intended to be displayed and to speak for themselves. Instead, they are considered a means to an end and achieve value through shared construction, joint conversation, and reflection. Therefore, while critical making organizes its efforts around the making of material objects, devices themselves are not the ultimate goal. Instead, through the sharing of results and ongoing critical analysis of materials, designs, constraints, and outcomes, participants in Critical Making exercises perform a practice-based engagement.”* (Ratto, 2013, pp. 253) I propose to construct houses or homes to think about those concepts, bring metaphors, and feel the emotions that come when doing so. My objective is to raise awareness of the automaticity in which we take them for granted as something we already know and something everyone has. The truth is everyone experiences it in a different way depending on many variables. Politics and power complexly cross the delicate balance between the personal, the private, and the public, and its relation to the property. Even though the home may be a feeling and a spiritual place, it may not be safe for everyone

why? (Shah, 2020) In these pandemic times, it is worth asking these questions and finding ways to talk about these urgencies through different channels.

### **About the Clay the House and the Mud**

Mariana Villa, Mexican ceramicist and designer, invited me to facilitate an online clay laboratory through her ceramic's studio platform @teorema. We collaborated, creating a workshop that would focus on the relation between body, home, and house. The methodology's conception was a fruitful process, mainly because we were working with clay to think about it. We lived the experience of linking our bodies with the clay, placing it where we had pain, releasing difficult emotions by hitting and dropping, working with our feet, constructing a house that felt like a cage and a coffin, destroying it, and beginning again. We kept researching the Malocas and other native house architectures in Mexico and crossed points of view from our different disciplines. According to our experience, we organized a step by step structure for the laboratory. Mariana gave some construction instructions and design insights to build the house. I focused on using the Maloca's image and narrative as a living house to introduce our questions and reflections on the possible relationship between the house and the body. Participants in México city and Bogotá were in complete isolation, and starting from that experience, the laboratory was rich in content and intense in vivid emotion. Each person's house had so much to add conceptually to the discussion and became a translation of their experience relating their body to a house. I was impressed by the close interaction we had despite the physical distance. The effects clay has over the body, the thinking and the attention are so strong, that they do not need physicality to join people around the collective reflection. From this laboratory, I stayed with the certainty that clay is material for resistance. It gives us time to be in the present. (see appendix 2)

### **Claying laboratory for a House in construction:**

After doing a Pit fire<sup>5</sup> in collaboration with Kunstwerplaats, feeling some of Arnhem's soul of place (Lederach, 2005 pp. 103), the energy of working together, and the power of matter, I decided to do a live house construction laboratory. I created it's step-by-step structure while playing with Andrea and Tong, bringing elements from the online laboratory and also from Nishant Sha's lesson and writings (Shah,2020). I did two prototypes. For the first one, I made an open call in iMAE'S and ArtEZ International Student's Facebook pages. The second one was an invitation to a neighborhood festival in Coehoorn Park (see appendix 3). As a facilitator, I focused on them to be safe and caring spaces, so people would feel comfortable working with the material and sharing their thoughts and feelings at home.

The first prototype was done in a public park in Arnhem south, and participants were art and theater students<sup>6</sup>. The involvement with the questions and their exploration of the work with clay was highly sensible. I proposed two exercises. The first one was to construct a prothesis for their bodies and find a way to link everybody around the table through clay. The second one was building their idea of home and find a way to connect everyone's work using clay. Discussions were fruitful. They solved exercises in creative ways. I could see that the change from the first exercise to the second one was abrupt, and they lost interest in the involvement with the home as a new idea after playing with their prosthesis.

---

<sup>5</sup> See the video of the whole process: <https://youtu.be/X5pkpIY7Wws>  
6iMae alumni, current students and future cohort.



Being part of a community festival and having so many things happening around, gave the second prototype a different atmosphere. I did not feel this could be a space to question privilege carefully, so I decided to leave it in the stage of constructing homes and sharing. The participants were varied, art students, kids, and neighbors from Arnhem. I smiled when I heard it was called *philosophical clay* by the participants. As a non-Dutch speaker, I was missing parts of their sharings and discussions, and it was beautiful to see how clay was shaping their movements and was also leading them in the construction of their ideas and feelings about home. The conversation was happening without me, and I was grateful to see that. The results were full of meaning. I took part in the discussion being a foreigner; they were curious about my experience living here and my feelings about being far from home. I also constructed two little houses.

As prototypes, these were too remarkable exercises. I have taken good feedback on the working experiences on the different tasks, and on the way, I can initiate discussions (hear appendix 4). The plastic results were fascinating and assured me that clay is a material that is versatile and links people with their creativity.

## **Conclusion:**

Digging in the Big House means researching how I and people I encounter, see and experience home, the ways we relate the body and the house, and inhabit this planet as a big house. I am in the initial stage of this research. Yet, I have traced a methodological path that includes aesthetic exploration and material research with clay, storytelling through texts and video, and the development of laboratories or community hubs, to dialogue and enrich these concept's spectrum of meaning. I consider these spaces of care for oneself and others. They initiate a collective ethical practice or thinking and feeling oneself concerning systemic relations through making. I like to raise questions to others while I rise and experience them myself, in a continuous cycle of mutual learning. The stories told by the dialogues between fingers and clay, in their small and intimate scale, are alive. They are fertile spaces to give time and cultivate radical yet tender (Chavez, and D'emilia, 2015) thinking and the ways we are in the world. Claying builds collectiveness and I will keep researching it and finding ways of systematizing it because I trust that through these educational spaces, we can start a partial recuperation of care as a damaged society. We can begin to build a collectivity with autonomic practices of social justice facing conflicts with creativity. We will need it to be able to feel home.

*"Urgencies have other temporalities, and these times are ours. These are the times we must think; these are the times of urgencies that need stories"* (Haraway, 2016, pp. 37).



Reference List:

A guide to feminist pedagogy, (2015). *Vanderbilt Center for Teaching* [online] Available at: <https://my.vanderbilt.edu/femped/> [Accessed 20 07 2020].

Bofill, C. (2013) Artistas en el laboratorio, CCCBLAB, [online]. Available at: <http://lab.cccb.org/es/artistas-en-el-laboratorio/> (accessed July 14, 2020)

Córtazar J, () Preámbulo a las instrucciones para dar cuerda a un reloj.[video] Available at:[https://youtu.be/p3iK\\_Zprndg](https://youtu.be/p3iK_Zprndg) [Accessed 23 07 2020].

Chavez, D and D'emilia, D (2015) Manifiesto de la Ternura Radical [online]. Available at: <https://danidemilia.com/2015/08/12/manifiesto-de-la-ternura-radical/> (accessed July 14, 2020)

Curiel, O (2020) Feminismos desde Abya Yala [video] Available at: <https://youtu.be/jfWjTurPiug>

Dussel, E (2013) El Giro Descolonizador, The Decolonizing Turn [video] Available at: <https://youtu.be/ml9F73wIMQE> [Accessed 20 07 2020].

Escola de Cultura de Pau. (2000) Metodología Socio Afectiva [online] Available at: <https://escolapau.uab.cat/img/educacion/anexo11e.pdf> [Accessed 10 june 2020].

Freire, P (2004) El Arcoiris del Deseo. Barcelona: Alba Editorial. pp. 179 – 244

Gandy, M (2012) Queer ecology: nature, sexuality, and heterotopic alliances. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol 30, pp 727 -747

Garcés, M (2012) Honesty with the real, *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, 4:1, 18820, DOI: 10.3402/jac.v4i0.18820

Guzman, A (2020) Historia Y Proceso Actual Del Feminismo Comunitario Y Antipatriarcal En Bolivia [online] Available at:  
[https://www.lamareanoticias.com.ar/2020/04/08/rondas-de-lucha-adriana-guzman-bolivia-feminismo-comunitario-y-antipatriarcal/?fbclid=IwAR3HHFgC00k9aPXJJHeZmiRy5XVsd1Mg9k\\_04lky7kO3ctxS-YP41i3NLR4](https://www.lamareanoticias.com.ar/2020/04/08/rondas-de-lucha-adriana-guzman-bolivia-feminismo-comunitario-y-antipatriarcal/?fbclid=IwAR3HHFgC00k9aPXJJHeZmiRy5XVsd1Mg9k_04lky7kO3ctxS-YP41i3NLR4)  
[Accessed 16 July 2020].

Haraway, D. (2016). *Staying with the trouble*. London: Duke University Press. pp. 1-116

Lavery, C. (2019). *How does theatre think through ecology?*. In: J. Kelleher, M. Bleeker, A. Kear, & H. Roms, ed. *Thinking Through Theatre and Performance*. (Thinking Through Theatre), 1st ed. London and New York: Methuen Drama: Bloomsbury. 257- 267.

Lanz, C (2012) le cuidado de sí y del otro en lo educativo. Maracaibo Utopia y Praxis latinoamericana vol. 17 num. 56 pp 39 - 46.

Lederach, P. (2005). *The Moral Imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press. 87-100; 132-149.

Ratto, M. (2011), *Critical Making: Conceptual And Material Studies in Technology and Social Life*, Taylor and Francis Group, vol.27, pp. 252-260

Shah, N. (2020) Home.

Shah, N. (2020) Making Change Liquid. The Netherlands: Making Change Project funded by Hivos. ds.

Von Hildebrand, M (2019). Maloca: The big house of the Amazon. [online] Gaia Amazonas Available at:  
[https://www.gaiaamazonas.org/en/noticias/2019-05-31\\_maloca-the-big-house-of-the-amazon/](https://www.gaiaamazonas.org/en/noticias/2019-05-31_maloca-the-big-house-of-the-amazon/) [Accessed 18 07 2020].

Wernimont, J., & Losh, E. M. (2018). Wear and Care Feminisms at a Long Maker Table. Jentery Sayer (Ed.), New York: The Routledge Companion to Media Studies and Digital Humanities Available at: New York, pp. 97-107. Available at:



<https://scholarworks.wm.edu/asbookchapters/5> [Accessed 14 Jul. 2020].