“Habits and Habitats”
Crafting Through a Prism of Culture Shock

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Abstract

This is a text about a work of art, “The Room”, and about the process that brought it about. The process includes experiments in clay bodies, mixing different elements with the base clay in search of a material both suitable to work with in terms of texture and color, but also rich in less tangible qualities, as I mix in elements which carry a set of values of cultural identity.

The text follows the path towards development of the final piece during the two-year course of the master program at Konstfack. During these two years, external factors such as dealing with the issues of culture shock, and searching for a place to live, interfere with my way of thinking, leading to unexpected turns in the direction of my artistic process.

Searching for an apartment finds me standing in strangers' apartments as they sell their homes, their ways of life and their house rules. These sometimes awkward meetings provide a good starting point in my research of people's habits and habitats. In trying to understand some elements of Swedish culture, I become aware of the fact of my own culture and start thinking about it from an outside perspective.

Eventually, the central question of the essay crystallizes: Who will carry on the traditional craft techniques of my home country? Romania is the rare place in Europe where crafts are still being practiced as they have been for hundreds of years, in the villages by crafts persons leading traditional lives.

As the villages are emptied of young people, moving into cities, and as Romania as a whole is drained of a large part of its young and ambitious generation, moving to other European countries for jobs and education, a trend that I am of course part of, the traditions that I have taken for granted, growing up with my grandmother in a traditional village, become threatened.

The answer to the question is a simple as it is demanding: I have to be part of the future of Romanian crafts. To document them, understand them, and incorporate them in my art. For this purpose, I undertake an investigative research trip. The text presents my findings about the crafts, and about the people working to document and preserve the traditions. The research trip is also presented in the movie “Six days in Romania”, which I include as an appendix to the essay.

Over the course of two years, several short-term art projects have been completed within the master program. They are presented in the form of an interview with myself. Looking back at these projects, they become explained as necessary steps in preparation for the final piece, a viewpoint very different from the utter confusion that was the dominating feeling of at least the first year of the course. The interview tries to give insight into the non-linear process that is the creative work.

Finally, in a poetic description of the final piece, I let my art speak for itself in a very literal way. In giving voice to the piece, I try to access truths hidden even to myself, in an effort to be as transparent as possible about the value of my efforts.
There were a few important rooms in my life. First, there was the two-room apartment in Sector 3, Bucharest. You could feel the earthquakes even from the seventh floor. To fit the whole family in the kitchen, all of us had to enter, close the door behind us and fold down the dining table from the wall. I remember watching my father melt tin for stained glasses in the living room. I was three or four years old, sitting next to him on the couch. From time to time a droplet of tin would fly off the soldering gun, and land as a perfect sphere on the carpet. I couldn't resist the temptation to touch the glittering silver ball, despite the warnings from my father. -AAAHHHH!!! This was my first contact with craft.

Then there was my grandmother's house in the South Romanian village. The region is well known for the water melons. We ate a lot of melons during the hot summer days, me, my brother and the cousins. Milking the cows in the morning, and then herding them through the fields all day. Making cheese and wine and soap, and baskets from twigs and shoes from pig skin. My special duty, since I was the smallest of the kids, was cleaning the inside of the wine barrel. They would help me climb to the top, and then I would let myself fall into the huge wooden drum. I remember the smell of alcohol vapors, and the grilled corn my cousins would feed me through the spigot hole. The memories are coming back as I'm writing about it. It's sad to think that it was such a short period of my life.

Later, there was the house my parents built. They dug out the entire basement with shovels. I was nine years old, and spent a year of weekends watching the house rise from the mud. My first commission, a couple of years later, was making stained glasses for the staircase of the house. I received five euros per window pane.

My final project in the bachelor programme at Universitatea Națională de Artă in Bucharest was turning all of these rooms, and a couple more, into ceramic pop-up models. When I applied for the master course at Konstfack, I thought I had left the houses behind me. The plan was to make land-art at Konstfack. I ended up making more houses. A lot more houses...
Artistic Development 2012 – 2014: An interview with the artist

Today is Thursday, February 19th. The time is ten in the morning. What is your name, please?

Diana Butucariu. Is it recording?

The tape is rolling. Do you know why you are here?

I need to write my master essay, what do you mean? I guess I have to sort out some stuff, get my thoughts in order. I'm here because I was accepted here. I'm here because I chose to apply here. I'm here because I want to be happy. To not lose time. To do as much as possible and help other people achieve their goals. To have a studio and to work there with my colleagues. I'm here because I like to travel.

You have been here for a while now. Is it working out like you hoped for?

Well, my project proposal when I applied to Konstfack doesn’t connect with what I’m actually doing for my master. I wanted to do land art. The proposal was written in December the year before, so the idea was almost a year old when school started. I think I had already given up on the idea before starting, and I was nervous since the beginning about coming up with a new subject for the thesis.

In the second year of Bachelor I did an exchange in Estonia. My expectations for Konstfack were connected with my experiences in Tallinn. A higher level of information in the craft field than at my school in Bucharest. A more open, international access to the art scene. Going here was also connected with independence. Being far away from everything I knew, and trying to develop something for myself.

My first impression of Sweden was being really, really cold. I was impressed by the presence of nature inside the city. The first impression of Konstfack was being
scared. It took me six weeks just to dare to enter the workshop. I was the only international student in the department and it felt hard to integrate and to make people speak in English around me. The Swedish culture seems a bit closed, it’s easy to make connections with people, but harder to make closer relations.

The first word I learned in Swedish was Friggebod. One of the rooms I made in porcelain for my Bachelor project was a particular small house of this kind, but when I made it, I didn't think I would be living there a few months later.

From the beginning I became involved in a music project, making the cover for a CD. The cover was a collage, illustrating a small town in Transylvania that I had visited the year before. The inside of the cover was a pop-up model of a room. The album was called Salonul Magic, The Magic Room.

Together with the CD cover, I also built an exhibition in porcelain. The center piece was two objects that I call Quiet Creatures, a sort of living bedside tables, filled with pictures of memories, scratched in the surface. I had this image of a mechanism in my mind. A perception around a house as a mechanism, what does it do when we are not present? Does it function on its own? I was trying to create some objects to reflect that, objects that people could interact with and discover their inside.

That is what I was doing also in my Bachelor, creating a facade to be a bit more impersonal. Once you get the curiosity to know more about them, you are able to interact with them, open their doors and inspect the inside for yourself. I wanted to investigate how people in different stages of their lives connect with their house.

I also made almost two hundred small porcelain houses, each hand-painted and fitted with a bell that made sounds when the houses were moved. This project took up most of my first semester, and culminated with the release of the album in December, which was combined with my exhibition.

The work was filled with a huge number of problems, and I felt like wasting my time instead of focusing on school. What I didn't realize was that Salonul Magic and Quiet Creatures were pointing out a direction for my work during the master. It was the first time I was looking at Romania from the outside, and trying to present the country to a Swedish audience. With the Quiet Creatures started my interest in the way people hide their most precious secrets inside boxes and drawers, a theme that is an important part of my final work.

In combination with all of this I made a never finished animation, inspired by Indonesian shadow puppetry. I named it Habits and Habitats. Going around to people's homes in search of a place to live, I became fascinated by the Swedish way of organizing a house. Unlike the Romanian habit of filling your space with all kinds of objects you might or might not need, Swedish rooms looked to me like hotel rooms, totally derived of a personal touch.

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Definition of Field of Research

Habits and Habitats is an exploration of the different ways in which people develop within a certain space, and the traces they leave behind. In other words, my research deals with houses, homes, and the difference between a house and a home.

The subject emerged from the very confusing situation I found myself in when I moved to Sweden to attend Konstfack. The most acute problem that had to be addressed as a newcomer to this city, was the impossible housing situation here. In my desperate hunt for somewhere to live, I found myself in the middle of strangers' homes, as I came to look at their rental rooms.

In turn, being a new arrival, an immigrant, made me think about what I had left behind. My previous life, my family, my culture, my nation. The clash between the old and the new life taught me the meaning of a concept I hadn't encountered before, “Culture Shock”. This word summarizes my time in Sweden, and the resulting works of art, developed in this state of mind.

Habits and Habitats is also an investigation of the traditions, specifically in craft, of my native Romania, seen from a new point of view, as an emigrant outside the country. As the country rapidly modernizes, now is the right time to ask ourselves what will be the role of traditional craft within the next few decades. How will it be practiced, what forms of existence will it take, who will carry the traditions and how?

The investigation follows a development in my thinking over several years. My final art project at Konstfack, which I call “The Room”, is a synthesis of all of the themes presented in the essay. There is a straight line to this work, starting from my Bachelor project in Bucharest. Over the two years since, the elements of my final work have presented themselves one by one, in the form of short-term art projects, all of which have relevance for the final piece.

Houses and Homes

In the first year of the master program, I was consumed by questions of dwelling. This obviously had to do with my life situation, being in a new city, without a place to live, and without the social structure around me to easily find one. For a month I was visiting apartments and houses. I was completely unsatisfied with all of them. What was I searching for? What kind of room did I need? An empty room would do fine, it didn’t matter what area. Neither did the size of the room, or who I would be sharing the apartment with. I just needed a place to sleep, later on I could transform it in a cozy place.

As it turned out, I would have to move seven times during the first year. Soon I realized that the word “home” for me meant only my parents' place, the place where I had lived for the ten years prior. The places I have been staying lately, I have referred to simply as “my place”, which deprives the dwelling of the harmony of a settlement. It becomes more an object that has functions that I need in that moment.

Many times during my visits in search of a room, I had to listen to people describe their homes like that, in terms of facilities, pluses and advantages. The way that people advertise their place doesn't actually match what it truly represents for them. They consider themselves lucky not to be in my position. They are the ones who set the rules of the place and how the place should be run. For them the place is a home but they rent it out...
as a place to live. The sad part in this process is that not many people realize that their home should also become a home for the tenant. In the words of conservative philosopher Peter King: “This is precisely because dwelling is properly private.”

Another quote, a fitting moral for the story above, is the words of philosophy scholar David Schmidtz, in his book about the Harvard philosopher Robert Nozick. “Life is a house. Meaning is what you do to make it home.” Calling your home a place to live is to limit and underestimate your capacity of creating a secure, warm and private place inside it. Sharing a dwelling should be an equal act between the people sharing it, of respecting the place they are living in and the capacity of what that place could become. We shouldn’t ask ourselves what a place does for us, what it is offering us. It would be wrong to put it that way. The power of receiving stands more in our actions and becomes subjective when we talk about how other people interact with the same place. As Gaston Bachelard writes in The Poetics of Space:

In the life of a man, the house thrusts aside contingencies, its councils of continuity are unceasing. Without it, man would be a dispersed being. It maintains him through the storms of the heavens and through those of life. It is body and soul. It is the human being's first soul.


During our lives, we try to reassemble the house where we felt the most relaxed and protected. Each time we move to a new place we create a copy of previous interactions with other spaces. We bring along objects that we are attached to or replace them with similar ones. And as comfortable as we become in a space, there is still the need to have a deeper privacy within that space. Even if the dwelling is only one room, we divide the space in corners that are more accessible, areas for working, or exhibiting, and parts that are more hidden and where we feel relaxed enough to reveal more of our personalities through objects we like. If the space is not big enough for that, we hide our small secrets in boxes, drawers, bedside tables, cabinets etc.

The ability to develop habits using only what by chance is offered to you, and the ability to transform a difficult environment into a home are stunning feats of human ingenuity. Kobo Abe writes in his novel “The Woman in the Dunes” about a group of people subordinated by raw nature, and finding a surprising way to live with it. He pictures an unbelievable desert scene of people living in houses inside huge holes in the sand. There they spend their time digging out sand all the night around their house to avoid being swallowed alive by the desert during the hot days. The sand is not an element anymore, it becomes the universe itself. “Love your home” is a motto the villagers adhere to as a rule that can’t be negotiated, just followed.

The young men, who uttered not a word of ridicule at his helping with the sand, appeared to devote themselves energetically to their work. He felt well disposed toward them.

"Yes. In our village we really follow the motto 'Love Your Home.'"

“What sort of love is that?”

“It's the love you have for where you live.”

- Abe, Woman in the Dunes, p. 37.

“Love your home” is a metaphor anachronistic to our modern times, reflecting as it does, the belonging to a place without having the options to question your wish to be a part of it. The community works as a mechanism where all people are involved and everyone has a role.

In a modern society, the concept of belonging to a geographical location seems like an extreme notion. From a rural perspective however, it looks different. An important part of my master program at Konstfack is the research trip I made in November, 2013. The main purpose of the trip was to study the traditional craft practiced in the villages of the Romanian countryside. But

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1 Peter King, 2004, p. 41.
being in that environment also gave interesting perspectives on my interest in houses and homes. By observing the dynamics of a small community, I was able to draw some conclusions about the problems of modern dwelling.

Owning a house with a garden, with a few animals, transforms the area in a settlement. A range of connections develop. The presence of nature affects the need for space. The size of your home can be compensated by nature. The yard and open areas diminish the need for a big house. If the garden is what provides you with food, that connects you with nature. People consider the nature making part of their habitat. A habitat that is in continuous change and that needs constant attention. Relying on each other (human and nature) builds a relation that a house can’t provide in the same sense. You receive a shelter in open air and start using nature with everything that she could offer.

In his essay “Building, Dwelling, Thinking”, German philosopher Martin Heidegger investigates the etymology of the German word for “building”.

What, then, does Bauen, building, mean? The Old English and High German word for building, buan, means to dwell. This signifies: to remain, to stay in a place. The real meaning of the verb bauen, namely, to dwell, has been lost to us.


Heidegger puts together all forms of human buildings and settlements and calls them dwellings. He investigates the perception of space.

A space is something that has been made room for, something that is clear and free, namely within a boundary [...] A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins its essential unfolding.


We could perceive the walls of a house as a boundary for nature to expand or as a boundary for the house to expand. He underlines that it is relative to say where a limit exists and that on both sides of the limit exist unlimited possibilities.

An interesting documentary titled Microtopia by Jesper Wachtmeister³ shown by SVT presents a series of people - most of them architects in a broad sense - from all over the world, who debate the problem of how big the space is that a person actually needs to live. All of the people who appear in the film demonstrate examples of compact living. The American designer and entrepreneur Jay Shafer, co-founder of the Small House Society, has been creating tiny wood houses for the last fifteen years. Circumventing building codes - which often don't allow for the building of very small houses - the houses are built on wheels and can be moved like trailers. This solution offers mobility and fulfills the urgent need of demonstrating examples of living with as small impact on nature as possible.

Sweden of course has its own special option for building small houses, the Friggebod. Keeping within certain dimensions of the construction, you don’t need to apply for a building permit, significantly lowering the cost and time for construction.

Thinking about environmental issues in relation to housing, I often found myself thinking about the old Romanian houses built from clay and wood. On a trip during summer in the south of the country, I noticed how these houses have been degrading over time. Some of them more than others, and by studying them it became clear how perfectly they integrate back into nature. Even their roof tiles that are made from red clay, collected locally and burned on a low temperature, will eventually shatter and return back to the earth. Their process of degradation is constant with the movement of nature to take over them.

Being restricted by your budget or resources you end up using efficient solutions. As Jay

Shafer demonstrated in “Microtopia”, or as any peasant in need of a house but constrained by limited resources has found, the house becomes as strict as possible. Le Corbusier developed the concept of a home as a “machine to live in”. In the Villa Savoye, he put a lot of consideration into how people would experience the house.

“The crucial model was vernacular and peasant domestic architecture. Thus art in the home would chiefly take the form of craft, in the form of vernacular pots and Romanian and Berber rugs.”

- Adamson, 2010, p. 516

Many Romanian village houses integrate the inhabitants' working area in the space of the house. Studying the community of a small village you understand the mechanism behind it. Almost each settlement is specialized in an activity and provides people with required goods and needs (like education, food, medicine etc). They rely on each other and use their skills as a method of payment.

In my art, everything I touched turned into houses. Whether drawn with watercolors or assembled in collages, sewn in paper, or sculpted in clay, the houses seemed impossible to shake. During this period I was influenced and inspired by the Argentinian ceramic artist Graciela Olio's work on the subject of houses, households and the memories contained by a space.

Her houses play with the whiteness and the plasticity of porcelain, in contrast to the dark brown graphic images on their surface, or with other colored clays used as parts of the 'household'. Her pieces are open, and invites for a talk as she has also written in her statement. “This pluralist art tries to be an open space that allows for a critical look and does not turn into a place where knowledge is made up of certainties.”

The softness of the objects offer warmth. The presence of graphic lines don't compete with the shape, they are perfectly in balance under a spotlight. Observing her work made me recognize my own inquiries into the same subject. Expressing myself through ceramics, but using unspecific methods (combining different medias such as wood, plants, stones and metal with clay) is a need I have to remain committed to one field without feeling stuck in it. The pleasure of combining methods from different crafts in my work enriches each method with new aspects and offers me a certain astonishment around the new possibilities.

Illustration 4: Graciela Olio, "Mil Ladrillos", 2012.

You seem a bit distracted. What's wrong?

I was dreaming last night that they caught me without a ticket in the subway. I was with a friend from school. I showed my card, knowing that it was expired. Thinking about the amount of money the bill would be, I started to panic. They were speaking in Swedish with my friend, I didn't understand so much. I looked around, feeling embarrassed, and almost wanted to cry. It felt like I had stolen something.

In the next moment the doors of the subway cart opened. I looked the ticket inspector in the eyes, and then started to run. As is normal in dreams, I couldn't run as fast as I would in reality. I was in a big labyrinth, and when I got out on the other side suddenly I was in the tram, in Bucharest. Again, an inspector asked for my ticket. I didn't have one, so I accepted the bill he gave me. This one was only for ten euros, one way or the other I would be able to afford that sum.

Do you think this has anything to do with your master project?

It relates with the text I'm writing, of course. Dreams don't come from nowhere. It's the same situation played out in two different contexts, and my reaction in the dream is totally different when I'm caught in Romania than in the Swedish situation.

You know, I never considered myself an immigrant here before going to the international office one day, asking for help with my Swedish residence permit. She told me that I’m an immigrant. It never occurred to me before that point. It’s not a word I would have used about myself, I would have preferred to be called a foreigner. I don’t think I will ever call myself anything else than a Romanian, no matter how long I stay in one place. It bothered me, because I was having some problems with residency and insurance, and my mind connected her words with referring to something illegal somehow.

It sounds like you are suffering from Culture Shock.
Are you familiar with the concept?

I am familiar, yes. I even made an art project about it last year. Paper houses, typical Swedish type of house, but covered with Romanian traditional patterns. The patterns were put as extra layers of paper, and then I put a lamp inside it. It was just after I finally found a nice apartment. A small one, but nice, on Hägerstensåsen. I went around to the cafés in the area to find a place to exhibit my “Flying Floors”, it was part of the course to find an unconventional exhibition space.

My idea was to put them just above the tables to inspire to conversations about culture and identity. Later in the year I made more houses with Romanian patterns, but in porcelain this time. They remind me a bit of the chest in my final project, I don't know if you have seen it?
Culture Shock

The four of them passed through Christiania, Stockholm and Helsinki, where the public considered them exotic and authentic, having a big success with their shows. From the Finnish Gulf to the Caspian Sea, over 3000 kilometers, the conditions started to be much more difficult.\(^5\)

Gazeta Sporturilor, 2011.

The original Romanian student abroad, Dumitru Dan, travelled 100.000 kilometers by foot with his three friends and their dog. In the years before World War I, they walked all over the world, crossing all the continents. They even walked ten hours per day on deck during the passages by boat. His moving story, previously unknown, was re-discovered a few years ago and is being turned into an animated feature film.

An article in the sports magazine Gazeta Sporturilor describes various dramatic episodes of profound culture shock during the travels.

Pasco and Dan adventured into the unknown and found themselves in a hole of twenty meters, one of the aboriginal animal traps. They fired their revolvers, hoping that they would be heard by the other two colleagues, but instead of them the native people appeared and tied them up with ropes and brought them before the chief of the tribe.\(^6\)

To say that my experiences of culture shock in Sweden are comparable to these young men a hundred years ago would be an exaggeration. However, still in our globalized time, exchanging the known of your home country for a new reality abroad can have profound effects on the thinking and wellbeing. For me the impact was considerable, eventually leading me to make art on the theme of culture shock.

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Students attending universities in a culture different from their own have to contend with novel social and educational organisations, behaviours and expectations – as well as dealing with the problems of adjustment common to students in general. This is difficult enough when the newcomer is aware of the differences in advance, but even more difficult when the newcomer is unaware and falsely assumes that the new society operates like their home country. Newcomers easily become ‘lost in translation’. The collective impact of such unfamiliar experiences on cultural travellers in general has been termed ‘culture shock’.

- Zhou, Jindal, Snape, Topping & Todman, 2008, p. 64.

A 2008 research paper in “Studies in Higher Education” publication summarizes the academic understanding of culture shock in international students. The authors account for the development in recent decades, of models to describe what happens to a young person moving abroad to study, starting from the assumption that encountering a new culture is an issue that requires medical treatment, towards a view of culture shock as a learning experience that might be positive for the individual, especially with the right preparations in the culture of the new country.

Myself, I wouldn't mind a culture pill, to take with a glass of water. Not necessarily a Swedish pill, but one for global cultural understanding would be a wonderful thing to me. I felt the culture shock very strongly, and it was an upsetting experience. I was ill and had fever. The high stress level was constant.

Maybe naively, I thought moving to another European country would be relatively easy. But dealing with various bureaucrats by phone, starting with the Swedish University Admissions staff even before I moved here, turned out to be a very tedious and annoying experience. Even my Swedish friends, who eventually started making the phone calls for me, were surprised by the level of miscommunication, sometimes bordering sabotage, that the anonymous phone officials got ensnarled in, explaining details about Swedish tax law or immigration rules. Also the international office at Konstfack, where I went several times desperate for help, was unable to make sense of the information at the government agency web sites.

At one point, it seemed that the only way I could get a residence permit in Sweden, necessary for example to receive free courses in Swedish, and to have a spot in the student housing provider SSSB's system, despite being a registered student and an EU citizen, was to provide the tax agency with a bank account, in my own name, not my parents' names for example, with minimum of 30,000 euros. I realize that there are students with that kind of cash in the bank, but none that I know, and personally this arbitrary rule would have caused me a lot of problems, had it not been changed later in the year.

It was also hard to grasp the core and purpose of the education system. For example, the Swedish habit of having constant, short meetings was a mystery to me. I was trying for each meeting to demonstrate to the group that I was taking it seriously, coming prepared with something to present to the group. Inside of me, I really didn't understand the purpose of these 15 minute sessions. They never seemed to lead anywhere, and I couldn't manage to put my thoughts together in such a short time to get anything out of the meeting. At one point we had five minutes to present what our last year of work was about. It seemed so obvious to me that this was an impossible proposal, but as inconceivable as it was to me, the rest of the group managed with their
presentations. Total culture shock.

In Romania, the same result would be achieved in a much more informal and relaxed way. The professors are also the workshop technicians, and spend their time between and after classes in the department, working together with the students. There is lots of time to discuss school matters as well as private thoughts about work or life with the professors informally, over lunch or while working, without the need to schedule five minute meetings.

Adrian Furnham, of University College London, stresses the importance of mitigating culture shock in international students. Listing a number of steps an institution should take to care for its newcomers, he emphasizes that “counselling should be proactive, not reactive and seek out international students who may be vulnerable” and that “guidance services should be continuous and comprehensive, not simply confined to orientation sessions soon after arrival.”

The foreign exchange students who come to Konstfack for only one semester have activities together organized by the school, and in general receive more help, with housing, phone cards, etc. They live together in the same dormitory, making it easy for them to organize and socialize and feeling protected as a group of foreigners.

My situation was more difficult, being the only non-Swedish speaker in the Ceramics and Glass department. Lectures were held in English, but once classes ended I often found myself alone, with groups of people around me, discussing and joking in a language I didn't understand. It took me half of my time at Konstfack to develop closer relations with my colleagues from the master group.

In these circumstances, it was inevitable that my work would be affected, by the deprivation of familiar culture, and a perceived exclusion from the new culture I was surrounded by. I felt a growing wish to present my own culture. To make the people around me identify me from the specifically Romanian identity which is part of who I am, not just as a generic “immigrant”, or non-Swede.

Illustration 7: "Whilst the term culture shock may have originated in the academic literature it very quickly took root in the popular imagination. The popular media has been full of references to culture shock for 50 years. Guides in how to mitigate the effects of culture shock are offered to all sorts of travels." - Furnham, 2012, p11.

It sounds like you had it rough over the past two years. Were there moments of happiness?

I'm not the kind of person to say “the two best years of my life”. I just had a roof above my head, and money in my pocket. And all the problems that come with it, what can I say? At least I had water to drink.

When I started to like swimming in cold water, and to jump from the pier, that was a happy moment. And when I was running to school, and met the rabbit. We were running towards each other, too focused on running to notice each other until we were close.

The most pleasant course in school was called Tradition in Change. We were asked to pick a tradition to work with, and I picked a tradition from my family that is really important to me. I felt good working with it, I let myself finally be much more free in the work process. It was really nice.

You felt more free working with traditions?

That's a bit ironic, don't you think?

I never thought about it that way. Usually I picture how the piece will be in the end, now I was just playing with different forms. Was also the summer coming, other factors that made me feel relaxed. I wanted to make a difference. To do something. I guess to make a difference in the sense of not letting down my own culture.

Some of the traditions disappeared when my grand-grandmother died. I felt the differences between her and my grandmother. Differences in the way of life. For example my grand-grandmother was washing dishes with ashes and brushing her teeth with salt using her finger. And she had all her teeth until she died.

A tradition is something that excludes something else. It refers only to something that has been transmitted over a period of time. When I thought about traditions, I immediately thought about my own traditions. What are my own traditions? At first I was thinking about recipes, about food. Then I thought about the tradition of the fireplace. And about this ceramic lid inside, where my grandmother was making bread. In this moment I realized, that if I don't focus my attention on the traditions in my family, then
I'm not able to pass them on later, to share them further on.

The more I thought about it, the more I realized how strongly it relates to my work. And I think that's what I needed, a way to be able to pass on my own traditions. It's about how much you relate with the traditions. If for you they're not important, then why would you pass them on? It was important for me because the material itself, the fireplace made from clay, it is a craft in itself to make the fireplace.

The Smoked Houses are porcelain objects made from different parts that I put together. All the parts were slip-casted from around twenty molds. So I assembled the houses from different pieces, making all the finished objects different. Some of them were sand-blasted after burning. On the stairs to the department, I built a fireplace. I didn't want the flame to reach the pieces, that would have cracked them, so I made a chimney from bricks where I placed each house for a while, so the soot could deposit on their surface.

The shape of the Smoked Houses was inspired by the geometry of the old fireplaces. Sometimes the kiln is prolonged, transforming in the shape and function of a bench or a bed, made out of clay, keeping you warm by the heat of firing in the kiln. Usually traditional Romanian fireplaces were white, painted with limestone. Over time, using them would leave layers of black soot.

The Smoked Houses re-creates the contrast between white clay and black smoke, which for me also relates to the old folk stories. The smoke is a source of communication with the outside world. Once it goes out through the chimney, it shows a sign of life inside the house. There are a lot of stories of witches and of mythological creatures, entering the house through the chimney. The chimney creates a transition.

Ok, Diana, thank you, that is all the time we have.
Good luck with your exams, and have a nice summer!

Traditional Craft

The tradition which inspired my “Smoked Houses” project is a specific type of oven for baking bread or heating food. The type of oven is called a “tast”, from the Latin “testum” which means clay pot, clay lid. The bread is put on hot coals and then the clay lid covers the bread, having the function of a small portable kiln.

The process of making the kiln is a long process that lasts seven days. Yellow clay is combined with horse dung, goat hair and straw, and is kneaded every day over the course of one week. The process of creating this kiln is performed exclusively by women, in the third week after the Easter. This method of baking can be traced in Romania since the ninth century, but the origin of the word suggests that it has a much larger area of distribution.

What intrigued me about this tradition was not only the process of creating the kiln or the amazing taste of the bread, no it is also all the connections and symbols that this object/tradition creates. The oven belongs to the house hearth. The hearth in the old houses is the central structure of the house, the place that keeps the house together, that provides the family with food. A sacred place under the female sign that connects the house through the chimney with the natural world.

Even in my family, when my grandmother is making bread it is an act that brings not only the family together in the same room but also the neighbors. Seeing the smoke coming out of the chimney, they understand that there is a moment of peace and waiting in the house, and a good opportunity to come and socialize. After the kiln has been made, the tradition is to carve a cross into the clay. The fire and the burning process symbolize the devil and the cross banishes it.

I was born in early 1990. Like in other Eastern European countries, the generation of Romanians born in 1990 represents something very special. We were the first children of the new
Romania, born during or just after the revolution, symbolizing the new spirit in the country. My generation is special also in another way. In many cases, our parents were born in the villages, but moved to Bucharest or some other large city to get an education. This means that our grandparents still live in the countryside. I grew up spending the summers in a village where life is still very traditional, and craft still practiced in the old ways, like it has been for many generations.

But the situation is changing very rapidly, as our grandparents get too old to work and keep the villages alive. They will not be around forever, and with them a lot of the Romanian traditional craft will disappear. This phenomenon is playing out also in my own family and I can't allow myself to be careless about it. During my time in Sweden, I have felt an increasing responsibility to do something about it.

This master project is my contribution. I have decided that my way to preserve the traditions is to make an investigation trip to the Romanian countryside, and to incorporate the traditions I came across into my final work. After a period of practicing these traditional craft techniques, they will become internalized, allowing me to develop a personal style based on traditional elements. My primary goal is to inform myself of the state of the traditional crafts in Romania, and to collect inspiration, references and objects to integrate in my final art works.

But I also want to bring into the art education context another perspective on traditional crafts, a picture of a life where traditional craft is practiced in the every-day life, as a practical way to provide necessary objects, tools and clothes for the people living in that reality. This reality has been, and continues to be part of my life. The people I have met, and who I write about in this text could be my own family members.

To contextualize what I'm doing in this research project, I read Frida Hälanders text Vernacular Craft. She investigates an effort by Lilli Zickerman to document the Swedish craft traditions around a hundred years ago. One thing that strikes me is the omission in Zickerman's archive of the names of the crafts persons. From my perspective it seems obvious that the names of the crafts persons should be included in the descriptions of their work. The traditions exist through
Hållander describes Zickerman’s archive as similar to an “ethnographer's field work”. I see myself as at least equally a participant in and carrier of these traditions, as someone coming from the outside to describe them. Until now I never asked myself the question how my life would have been if I wasn't familiar with all the traditions in craft that surrounded me during my upbringing. As I get older, it has started to be more and more rare to have grandparents living in the countryside, following their own beliefs and methods of surviving without being narrowed by modern technology. I feel the need to make this investigative trip, to assure myself that I will be able to provide further generations with the skills and knowledge of craft methods that were still practiced during my life.

Research trip: Day 1

I picked up Radu with my parents' car in Ploiesti around lunch. It was a sunny day in the beginning of Winter, before any snow had fallen. The hundred kilometers of the Bucharest highway were behind me. In front a thousand kilometers more, mostly on narrow country roads. Radu is a good driver.

Our first stop was Pucheni – Moșneni. There are two types of villages. The ones really far off are usually quite primitive, their houses made from mud and wood. The villages closer to the cities have easier access to concrete, sand and other building materials. Pucheni – Moșneni is right on the end of the highway, and the houses are made from concrete.

We rolled into the village, famous for its rafie craft, not knowing that the season for making the bast objects had just ended. Like most of the Romanian villages, Pucheni is divided in two by the national road running through it. Every time we stop to ask a villager where to go to learn about rafie, we have to negotiate the sometimes agitated traffic. Passing the road is a gamble. A woman overhears us asking around, and agrees to take us to a family making bast carpets.

Mr and Mrs Bruma are in their seventies. They live with their son Florin and a large number of cats and dogs in a typical village house. We entered the working place through a small kitchen. On the război, the loom, a half-finished rafie carpet was taking shape.

Mrs Bruma has pains in her hands after a lifetime of work. Her fingers have become deformed from the repetitive motions. She has completely mastered the technique of weaving the bast carpets. Sometimes it's hard to distinguish between the woman's fingers and the material she is working with, her motion too fast to follow. I watched the carpet grow upwards on the loom, seemingly by its own will.

During the communist era in Romania, Pucheni was a bast exporting collective. The whole village was involved in the making of chairs, and everyone had to make their hours and their quotas in the local industry. In the evenings, the traditionlal way of making the craft was practiced at home by the villagers. The Brumas learned the craft from their parents.

I asked to see how the bast rope is made, so we moved back into the kitchen. The vârtelnită is a truly medieval looking tool. The reel half-full with new rope. She twists the rope to the breaking point, and then adds a few strands of bast to the end. By releasing the energy of the twisted rope, the new strands are caught by the end of the rope, and the process starts again.

There are several lakes around the village, where Mr Bruma goes to find the bast. The week before, he was down near the water to collect the grass. Over a period of several days, the bast is repeatedly sprinkled with water. As the plant absorbs the water it swells, becoming more flexible to work with, and softer for the hands to touch.

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8 Hållander, 2010, p. 42.
I left the Brumas with a roll of bast rope on a wooden stick, and with their words still in my ears -
cursing the dirty job and the pains of working with cold water and sharp grass, but thanking the
craft for allowing them a modest pension. At nightfall we arrived at the Transylvanian metropolis
Brasov, known to the German tourists that flock on the narrow cobbled streets as Kronstadt, and
during a short period in the near past simply as Stalin City. My cousin Iulia had offered us quarter
there for the night.

Illustration 10: Bast carpet making in Pucheni.

Illustration 11: Brasov, seen from Tampa.
Day 2

Iulia has a master's degree in tourism, and a doctorate in natural preservation, working with NGO's in Transylvania to raise awareness of the unique ecology and history of the region. After she prepared what must surely be one of the best vegan raw-food breakfasts in Eastern Europe, we got in the car. After a quick stop at the Brașov Ethnographic Museum, to get some contacts from the receptionist, we started West on the national road.

One primary goal of this research trip was to investigate the conditions for craft in my country. The traditional village life seems doomed to atrophy, with most young people moving into cities for jobs and education. I wanted to find out if there are young people carrying on the cultural heritage in other ways.

At the foot of the mountains, in the village of Mândra - “The Beautiful” - Alina Zara returned home in 2011 to start the Museum of Fabric and Stories. After studying in Bucharest, she became fed up with the city life and decided to return to the countryside. One of the old women in the village donated an empty house to be used for this purpose. In the hope of meeting Alina Zara, we drove the fifty kilometers West, with the wall of the Carpathians on the left-hand side of the road.

Unfortunately the founder herself was not in, but we were greeted at the museum by her mother, who told us about the important work they do in the community. Being a local, the villagers have trusted Alina Zara with precious family objects, such as traditional clothing for different occasions, wedding dresses, baptizing clothes, blankets. Also objects large and small, wedding chests, cupboards, old irons, tools and machines for craftmaking.

The museum offers courses for free for the children in the community, teaching them the traditional crafts that a couple of generations earlier would have been taught at home. The old women in the village, with irreplaceable knowledge passed down through generations, are also...
being involved with the museum. They teach the old craft techniques, and tell the stories and traditions of the region.

In trying to grow the project further Zara organizes courses in the local schools, sewing clothes with the school children and selling them to raise money for the different activities. The kids come to school dressed in their family's traditional clothes, and are taught to analyze the patterns and to copy them. In collaboration with other activists of Romanian culture promotion, Zara works to expose these traditions to a wider audience by transforming the motives in more contemporary objects and installations.

From Mândra we continued West. Outside the village “Lisa” a family operates an unusual laundromat, called “La Vâltoari”, where people from the whole village, as well as the surrounding villages, come to wash their new wool products. The process of washing the new blankets and carpets is a way to harden the material. The beating of the Vâltoari makes the fibers of the wool stick better together, and makes the material more durable and better at keeping heat.

The people in the village don't have running water in their homes. Water for drinking and cooking is taken from wells in the gardens, but to wash clothes they come down to the Vâltoari. The washing machine consists of a large wooden barrel, placed just below an elevation drop in the stream running by. The water entering the barrel from above creates a vortex, spinning the clothes inside like a perpetual washing machine. This used to be a common sight in the Romanian landscape, now the Vâltoari is one of the few traditional washeries in the area.

Inside the village, we asked around to find someone weaving from wool. Sitting on a bench by the road, a woman told us to go see Leana Constantin a few houses down the road. We encountered the Constantins in the midst of cutting the pig for Christmas, the whole family gathered in the yard.

They were kind enough to interrupt the whole affair to show us their loom, where the old woman had a half-finished bed cover, decorated with a floral pattern traditional for the region. This would be her final weave, she told us, after this she wanted to get rid of the loom.

Before retiring, she had worked together with the Ethnographic Museum in Brașov, where our day started. Every day, she was making one small wool towel for the museum shop, and sometimes she would weave inside the museum, demonstrating the traditional craft for visitors.

We returned in darkness to Brasov, feeling inspired by the work of Alina Zara and the people of Mândra, and thankful for being received into the Constantin household in the middle of the Christmas preparations.

Day 3

Next day was Sunday. I made a few phone calls, but felt increasingly bad trying to arrange meetings with people on their only day off. So we stayed in Brașov, where we spent a few hours with a wood carver, working in one of the towers of the town fortress. He showed us his studio, and gave me some literature. A self-proclaimed wise man, he prophesied my failure as an artist and as a person.

We took the teleferic up to the top of Tâmpa, the highest point of Brasov. Standing between the huge letters of the Hollywood style sign, we could see every part of the Brasov and the surrounding suburbs and fields below us. I was feeling stuck in the city. It was time to move on. On the way down the mountain, I stopped and picked up some stones from the ground. I thought they might come in handy for my final clay experiment.
Our first stop was the old village of Viscri, famous for its 12th century Saxon church, part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site, as well as for the old German estate which is one of the summer houses in the area owned by Charles, the Prince of Wales. At the blacksmith's, I had the pleasure to make the acquaintance of two of the Prince's friends, the carefree Matei Gabor and his older brother Iștvan, blacksmiths in the seventh generation.

We stayed with the charismatic brothers for three hours, watching them work in metal with their simple tools, and the four hundred years old bear-skin bellows, and talking about the craft, old techniques, education, and about modern challenges to the traditional lifestyle. They are skillful craftsmen, and quite content with life. Having one English crown prince and one UNESCO site in a village of five hundred people means that all local businesses are touched by the extra income the tourism brings.

However, a recent phenomenon threatens their horseshoe business: it's hard, working with traditional methods, to compete with the cheap Chinese-made horseshoes, sold in packages of ten at the big box retailers off the highway. We left the brothers Gabor with a horseshoe each as a memory, and for my master project, fifty handmade iron nails. As a final favor, they pointed us in the direction of the village brick maker.

Up the hill, on the edge of the forest lives Gheorghiță Lascu. He moved there a few years ago from the center of the village to be closer to the patch of land where he gets the red earthenware necessary for brick making. The family are brick makers since many generations, but growing up with a single mother, the craft wasn't practiced in the home during his childhood, so he never learned the trade in the traditional way.

As part of the work of Mihai Eminescu Trust, restoring the Saxon villages of Transylvania, Lazcu received training in traditional brick making. The organization works in the area restoring the architecture, protecting the ecology and providing training in traditional craft, funded in part with the help of Prince Charles.
The Trust's founder Jessica Douglas-Home describes her first meeting with the area on the trust's website:

A spell had been cast on us. We had discovered a visual record of rural Europe with all its ancient richness and beauty intact. Laid out before us was not just a panorama of evocative architecture and magnificent churches, nor was it reducible to the unique harmony between man and nature or the traditional ways of farming which still survived here. Its secret was that it was the outcome of successful settlement, the visible result of routines maintained over centuries, in which men and women had shaped the earth to themselves and themselves to the earth.10

Passing through picturesque villages and towns, we arrived at night to our hostel in the medieval city of Sibiu.

Day 5

Sibiu was known in old times under its German name Hermannstadt as the centre of the Transylvanian-Saxon culture. The city, located on the banks of river Cibin, was the 2007 European Capital of Culture and is listed by Forbes Magazine as one of Europe's most idyllic places to live11.

At Piața Mică, “Small Square”, in the city's centre, between a 14th-century building formerly belonging to the Butchers' Guild, and the Luxemburg House, a Baroque four-storey building, glass artist Ion Tămâian owns a gallery. Parts of the catalogue is produced at his factory just outside the city, where we met him in the morning of the fifth day.

The factory was established in the early 90's, and employs around fifty people, doing everything from glassblowing, decorating and retouching to selling the products in the factory shop. A big part of the glass goes on export. For example they made glass globes for the Washington White House Christmas decorations a few years ago. The raw material they use is crystal imported from Sweden.

Illustration 14: Liars' Bridge, Sibiu.

Tămâian is a friend of my father's from their student years in Bucharest, and he took the time to show us around the factory, and to arrange a meeting at the Sibiu Ethnographic museum. The museum was founded in 1905 “out of the Transylvanian people’s desire to define their own ethno-cultural identity within the Austro-Hungarian Empire multiculturalism and having as background the cultural emancipation of all peoples from the centre and south-east of Europe.”

The Ethnographic Museum is one of the most important institutions for cultural preservation in Romania, with a big collection of traditional craft and art, and it keeps in close contact with the craft community in the area. Mirela Crețescu, director at the museum, showed us around the current exhibition of traditional clothing, and gave us the names of people to search for on our continuing village road-trip.

Travelling north-east from Sibiu, we reached a village called Agnita, as the winter’s first snow started to fall. There we met with two people. The first encounter was with a woman in her seventies, wearing a scarf and walking with some difficulty. Before retiring, she used to be a weaver, making traditional textiles and going around to different markets to sell her work. She showed us her diploma from the museum, recognizing her skills as a crafts person.

The second meeting was with the furrier Trifu Aurel at his leather workshop. Also in his seventies, but still highly active, doing every part of the process himself, except herding the 180 sheep on the hills, for which he has hired a shepherd. He described the different steps in transforming the raw skin into a finished product. The skins are stored in salt, then the fat is scraped with a special tool. It is washed several times, including one time with sawdust, before being turned into leather.

Illustration 15: Strong Romanian men shaping Swedish crystal.

Illustration 16: The leather work of Trifu Aurel

hung to dry.

The exquisite patterns of his finished leather products are hand-sewn, his technique is very impressive. However, Aurel is not at all impressed by the current generation of young people. He has tried his hand at teaching, having a group of students in his workshop for two hours at a time, two times per week. He says: “At thirteen I was an apprentice and I learned for three years, and then two years as journeyman. Five years I learned, day after day. Not only two hours. Day after day, and I was also working the fields and taking care of the animals.”

Wet and cold after a long day, we finally got back in the car to drive back to Sibiu. I was carrying four sheep skins for my art piece. Over a hearty mushroom soup in a diner near the hostel, we took out the map to draw up plans for the final day of the journey.

Day 6

When the last day started I was totally exhausted, but still in a good mood, and very enthusiastic about the people we were going to see. We left early from Sibiu.

Maria Poenaru, lives in Laz, a village too small to be included on the maps, in what the villagers call “The House of Saints”. She is 93 years old and still painting religious icons. Maria Poenaru is on UNESCO’s Cultural Heritage list of Living Human Treasures. “Living Human Treasures are persons who possess to a high degree the knowledge and skills required for performing or re-creating specific elements of the intangible cultural heritage”. She showed us the family tree, documenting almost three hundred years of icon makers. The house collection of icons was impressive.

Maria doesn't have any children, but she is teaching her niece, who works as a teacher in the village, to take over the family business and keep the tradition alive. A foundation organized by a group of nuns has been started to transform the House of Saints in a museum, after Maria Poenaru is gone, to make the collection of icons accessible to the public. Her presence and way of talking makes me calm, and her stories of helping people during the second World War make me feel really small in comparison.

The next stop was in Sugag, ten kilometers down the road. We met there a strong man in his early forties, Similie Liviu Ioan by name and with a large, dark mustache. He showed us his studio up on the hill, where he makes traditional shepherds’ coats together with his wife, who assembles the coats after Ioan prepares the leather.

He put on one of his coats, it reached him almost to the feet. It was an imposing sight, but also gave a warm feeling, reminding closely of the feeling I wanted my final piece to give. He explained the function of the multiple layers of leather at the bottom of the coat, keeping the warm air trapped inside. Standing in this enormous piece of fur, outside his studio on the hill, the description of the coat turned into working as a portable house for the shepherds during cold and rainy days. His speech impressed me deeply and made me think of my houses. The connection was clear in my head, I had to pick this tradition and work with it.

Going the mountain road up towards Jina, the landscape got increasingly more winter-like. In Jina we had a brief encounter with a man, friend of Mr Liviu, who makes shears for cutting sheep, and a man making hats. I bought a black hat from him, put it on my head and called it a day.

We returned to Bucharest at two in the night, my flight was leaving at four, so I was running to catch it as always. I had an extro long transfer in Berlin, and had time to eat a currywurst at Brandenburger Tor for lunch, before passing a tourist store to buy flip-flops for my sore feet. And that's how I arrived in Stockholm at four in the afternoon, in flip-flops and a brand new Romanian leather hat. The next day was the Konstfack Christmas market.

13 See Appendix I, “Six days in Romania”.
Illustration 17: Inside the "House of Saints".

Illustration 18: The imposing house-coats of Similie Ioan.

Illustration 19: Nicolae Prode proudly showcases his scissors.
Experiments in clay bodies

It is not the easiest thing to find precise information about clay experiments. The recipes pass like rumors through the workshops. The books that exist list ingredients, and give temperatures for firing, but rarely reveal the entire process.

One reason for this lack of exact information might be the relative novelty of this part of the ceramic field. The field is in continuous development. Experiments can create trademarks for individual artists. This might create an incentive to not always share your best discoveries with the entire world, another reason that information is hard to come by. Artists spend entire careers developing new technical and technological possibilities for the ceramic materials, and might prefer to add some mystery around the creation process.

An investigation suggests that more and more artists during the 1970’s started to break the boundaries of working with clay, putting other aggregates into the mix. One of the pioneers is the British artist Gillian Lowndes.

She continued to experiment with a broad range of additions, which included Egyptian paste, 18th-century brick, nichrome wire, bits of broken crockery, granite chips, bulldog clips, curled bus tickets and wire mesh. She redefined the role of clay in her pieces, using it as a ‘glue’ to hold the form together.

- Standen, 2013, p. 11.

Standen’s book is the best and most useful text on additions in clay bodies that I have come across. It presents several artists with details on their techniques and is rich in beautiful pictures. Another book which I have returned to in my working process is Anton Reijnders’ important “The Ceramic Process” from the European Ceramic Work Centre.

The artists that use additions in their clays usually collect these themselves. Many times the act of collecting is more than just adding new ingredients to a recipe. It is part of the concept and process of the work. This is true in the case of ceramist Todd Shanafelt. His works gravitate between the definitions of two words, Environment and Vessel. Shanafelt says “this particular practice unveils constant new possibilities and combinations that encourage the game to ever continue and develop”.

He collects metal objects, wires and mesh screens to create frames and armatures to assemble the art pieces. By using items collected from his surrounding in the objects, he creates an environment and context for the work. The use of materials such as glass, rubber and various metals add a uncertain meaning to his form language, and to the utility of the pieces. Often he utilizes his own previous vessels as parts of a new creation.

At the beginning of the second year of the master programme, I worked a lot with additions in clay bodies. After going through the books in the school library and talking to my colleagues in the workshop, and to the school technicians, I started to realize the vast possibilities of creating a unique clay surface that would resonate with the final pieces for my master project.

I assure you that starting the journey of creating your own materials can be quite addictive. You will surely end up spending a lot of time experimenting and dreaming about what else to add to the clay, what might happen inside the kiln during burning, and how the end result will look.

As mentioned above, information on precise measurements and details in the techniques and processes used can be hard to come by. I kept a diary of my experiments (Appendix III) with specific recipes. Hopefully this could save someone else a little bit of time and guesswork and thus contribute to this fascinating field of ceramics.

The material that I ended up using for the pieces was developed from a white stoneware, a clay that is easy to work with and therefore suitable for the big objects I had in mind. The properties of the stoneware were the following: 20% grog, with particle sizes between 0.5 – 1.5 mm. To achieve a final texture of the piece that would be visually rich, I added different grogs to the main body.

I made grogs of six different colors, by adding between 2 – 10% of different oxides (iron, copper, chrome) to porcelain. The porcelain was worked to sheets of two centimeters thickness and fired at 980° Celsius. The burned sheets were placed on the cold floor of the workshop, and smashed repeatedly with a big hammer. Smashing them post-burn made it easier to control the dimension of the particles, with the added benefit of not risking them going soft again when added to the clay body. Using them un-fired might also have led to the grog coloring the main stoneware base, something that I obviously wanted to avoid.

Also added were almond, sunflower, walnut and sesame seeds, as well as small pieces of earthenware. Due to the high temperature during the burning process, the seeds carbonize and leave small empty craters on the surface of the piece. The red earthenware starts to melt, boil, and ultimately rises from the surface.

As a final addition to the clay body, a small percentage of tiny rocks was mixed in, collected from the mountainside forests outside Brasov, Transylvania, during a research trip made in November.

Experiments with clay bodies, November 2013.
The Room

Once you enter the rectangular room, a feeling of instability takes over. It's not an illusion, it's because the floor is soft. You look around, and there is nothing to grab, nothing that could give you stability. You look down on your feet. The floor looks like a footpath in the forest, where the grass has been ripped from the ground and beat into the earth beneath it. You don't have any mud on your shoes, it's just soft. Kneel down, have a closer look.  

A white box on legs reminds you of a wedding chest, the size of a washing machine. You get the feeling that this piece could move. The legs are pointing in different directions, not quite symmetrical. The surface looks covered in soot. Moving closer, you see that the chest has traditional patterns engraved in the soot, but the marks of hands have started to erase the patterns, little by little. The chest is closed. As you open the lid, you get your hands dirty, and leave your own marks on the chest. You realize that the patterns will eventually disappear, if enough people interact with the piece.

The inside is a chaos of colors and patterns. It looks like a sketchbook, with scribbling text and drawings, one on top of the other. It's an organized chaos, you sense an order, but you can't grasp it. Surprisingly, the inside walls are bent inwards, but otherwise the chest is empty.

In the far left corner of the room is a strange object, as tall as a tall man. The bottom section looks like a low bedside table with one drawer. It's wooden parts seem dirty and used. Above, the object stretches upwards in a molecular structure of clay, gray-green in tone. The shape is pointy, getting slimmer towards the top. From the holes in the structure, tufts of fur are poking out.

The legs seem barely able to hold the weight of the massive structure. On the front are two doors, and one of them is half-way open. Why is it so big? You wonder if you could open the door all the way and see what's inside...

Closet: Open my door! Look inside of me! It's the only time I get see the inside of myself. If you open the doors, you will find four pillows with different styles of patterns engraved in the surface. They might look all the same to you, but their patterns define them.

I'm natural. I'm colored with flowers and leaves. I'm totally honest! If you don't believe me, just rub one of the pillows and your fingers will get colored. Your touch will leave an imprint on me, Your touch changes me.

If you are too afraid, just open the drawer instead. That's the place where nothing can be changed. Look at the objects inside. The blouses and the wedding scarf from Oltenia are at least a hundred years old, and they will remain like this forever. The fabric is woven by hand. I could talk for hours about this part of myself. It's so inbedded in me, I couldn't get rid of it even if I tried. Even if I was smashed in pieces.

Have you seen my fur? I got it from a man, a skillful tanner in Terpezita. He makes coats for all the shepherds. They go on the mountain for months before returning to the village, and the coat becomes their home. They sleep in it on the ground. They have different pockets inside, a combination of fridge, bookshelf and table. As long as they have the coat, they are not worried about having a roof above their head. Like all his coats, mine is made from the skin of five sheep. I was there myself and picked the one with the longest hairs, to be warm enough for the Nordic climate.

Look at the clay I'm made from. The chest next to me is so jelaous of my surface. I contain rocks from the Carpathian mountains and seeds from the market at Obor. There is no one like me. Even if they try to imitate me, the clay would be slightly different. Do you see my freckles? The small, dark brown points are red earthenware. Everyone says I look like a chocolate biscuit.

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18 See Appendix III.
**THE ARTIST ENTERS**

*Artist:* This room has three main elements. The floor, the closet and the chest. When you step inside, I want to change your state of mind. Because the floor is soft, you instantly become disconnected from the surroundings. This is only your experience. The same kind of experience that you have when you move to a new country, the feeling of unstable earth, of insecurity. This recreates my situation when I moved to Sweden. It feels important for me to share with the society that has received me, the feelings that I have had moving here.

My two years in Sweden have taught me how deeply influenced I am by my own national identity. How proud I am to speak about the Romanian culture, and share it with other people. I think this is a natural reaction for a lot of people who move abroad.

On my research trip in the countryside, I had the privilege each time to see the objects that people treasure the most. Hand sown masterpieces, inherited in the family by generation after generation. After a while, I started to notice that these precious items always were kept in one of two specific pieces of furniture: either in the chest, or in the closet.

When I started to plan for my master project, I wished to have my own chest and closet to put my thoughts and feelings into. As many times in my life I wanted my own room, and

The two objects in the room represent a cultural identity in transition. The chest stands for the confusing and painful process of assimilation. The traditional Romanian patterns on the exterior become diffused by the touch of a new culture. This is represented by the violent process of letting the viewers destroy the carefully made patterns with their hands. For the viewer it's an innocent act of curiosity, and necessary to see what's inside the chest.

From my perspective it symbolizes the necessity to adapt to this new society. I know that to be accepted in the new context, and avoid feeling lonely, I need to let the Swedish culture change me. It's not always a conscious process. Instead it makes itself known by comments like “You started to dress like a Swedish person” or feeling trapped by the cluttered Romanian houses when I go home to visit.

The closet is about two meters tall, an imposing creature. We have this creature inside of us, just that we don't know about it until we face it. We never know that we have these feelings until we go to a protest, screaming our lungs out to defend our freedoms for the benefit of the country.

The closet is the Romanian identity, untouched and immovable by outside forces. The clay, backbone and skeleton of the piece itself, is literally filled with pieces of the Romanian land, picked by me during the Research Trip. The authentic pieces of traditional women's clothing were brought from the area in southern Romania, where my mother's family has lived for generations, and where I spent large parts of my childhood.

The closet represents a home of sorts for the elements inside it. Listening to the tanner speak of the fur coats as temporary houses for the shepherds during periods away from home, made me wish for such a mobile home, to keep the innermost core of my cultural identity.

Traditionally in Romania the motives on a pillow are specific to a region. Because of this, it is an object that exposes the identity of its maker, at least in the sense of where the person comes from. The pillows kept in my closet are decorated with authentic Romanian patterns from Transylvania and Maramures. I borrowed the technique for painting the pillows with hot wax from the famous Romanian tradition of decorating Easter eggs.

Also the chest contains pillows, but they are fixed on the inside walls. The feeling of intimacy is accentuated by the voluptuous shapes, like an old jewelry box lined with

*Illustration 22: Pillow colored with beetroot.*

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satin. The motives on these pillows are not the traditional type found in the closet. These are my own inventions.

During the master program, I have drawn traditional patterns over and over in my work process. In the beginning I was using photos to recreate them, now I could do them with my eyes closed. The motives became internalized. Like in every craft, I had to learn the tradition, the basic motives and what they represent. Having learned the basics, I started adding my own imprint. The drawings began to shift towards my own reality, incorporating more modern techniques, such as decals.

The inside of the chest is the result of adapting to a new life situation, and a new culture. Through the drawings and scribbling on these pillows, I have tried to sum up all the new influences I'm aware of and all the new impressions from the last two years. I start drawing using the traditional structure of the patterns, and then I let my hand free to wander, following a stream of consciousness. The people I have met here, and who over time have become close friends. New foods that I like, and new food that I can't stand. The routes I take in the city, and the places I go to feel safe. The never-ending days of June, and the eternal whiteness of Winter. These are my new traditions. These are my own traditions. This is what I mean by crafting through the prism of culture shock.

**Closet**: It has been pleasant to meet you. I think you are a good people, and you have such beautiful eyes. The exhibition is closing for the evening, please put all the pillows back on their respective shelves and start heading towards the exit. Next time, come visit me in Bucharest. La revedere, dear friends, see you soon! Now I need a moment alone with the artist.

**Artist**: How are you? Can you resist one day more? After that the exhibition is closing.

**Closet**: It hurts me. These plastic things around my wrists will outlast me for sure. All the people are opening my doors and they look inside. I feel so empty. And these heavy pillows I have to carry, I don't even know what they are. My bones are hurting me. The fur is tickling me, it's so ridiculous, I'm allergic to my own fur.

**Artist**: Yes, but you are a closet, and closets have doors, and hinges so the doors could be opened.

**Closet**: But you don't have any doors. I have so many patches and stitches. Why can't I just be made from one piece? Why are there so many parts, and why are they glued together? I'm so heavy, I feel my legs shaking under me. The only thing that I like about myself is that I'm taller than most of you. I could see at any level and anywhere around me. I see you bending and turning your head if you want to look around, me, I just see everything.

**Artist**: What do you see inside yourself?

**Closet**: First you need to open me, then I could see. Could you please open my doors? If you open the doors I feel shy, but I could see also that I'm full of beautiful patterns. I think I'm soft. Like you are soft. Warm and beautiful. Why do people look strange at me like that? Aren't we all shaped the same? Is it about the clothes? At least mine are matching. I feel like everything about me matches.
Conclusions

I have researched houses and homes, experiments in clay bodies, culture shock and traditional craft. All of these subjects continue to fascinate me, and the process of research has given me many new ideas for future work and inspiration to keep developing the theoretical side of my artistry.

Previously, I have studied art history quite extensively, but the education at Konstfack is the first time I have been pushed to put my art in a theoretical context, and to formulate the concepts behind my art. This has at times been very difficult, but two years into this journey, I feel that it is also a rewarding learning experience. Because of the Swedish culture, I have become much more disciplined, and more aware of my own rights and responsibilities.

It is hard to talk about what a house or home is, what is made of, how big it should be and what the most pleasant areas are, to fit our tastes and personalities. In some cases a cardboard box might mean a roof above someone's head. I think it is important to look around, inform ourselves and try to improve where help is necessary.

Even if we consider Sweden, the student housing situation feels impossible if you come from outside the borders. You can't get a room in time for school start. To get a spot in a dormitory is like a lottery. You need to stay in line and accumulate points day after day in order to have enough even for the smallest dormitory room. The exception will be of course if your university offers you a room.

I no longer feel disabled by the culture shock of moving to Sweden. I have learned that culture shock is a common thing. It is not something to hide, and a person experiencing these issues should reach out to the people around. I should have prepared myself better before coming to Sweden, learning about the culture and maybe corresponding with students and faculty before arriving.

I hope that my work could go some way in helping the school to become more aware of the phenomenon, and of the challenges in general of coming alone to a new country. Hopefully, students arriving after me will have stronger support. If my essay and my work could contribute to helping new students arriving in Sweden in the future, that would be a very satisfying outcome for me.

Making this deep research into traditional craft, I realized that there a lot people concerned about this matter, and doing a lot of voluntary work to maintain the craft. Sadly, the information has not been combined into a comprehensive resource for the public. Some of the people working with these traditional techniques consider it a pastime, not fully appreciating the fact that they might be some of the last active performers of a certain craft or technique. I wish to raise awareness also in practitioners, maybe inspiring to better organizing of crafts persons. The documentary, which is here presented in its first finished draft, is an on-going project, that I hope to be able to raise the funding for to continue to develop.

After the research I have done, I have a better picture about the field of cultural preservation in Romania. I am hoping to do collaborations with some of the young people whose work I have come into contact with, and to exchange information with them about the field.

The easiest and most straight-forward part of my master was the experiments in clay bodies.
It has been a nice distraction from the perils of writing and researching. The experimenting is a never-ending story. The range of options limitless. To create from a technique your own trademark seems like a long journey, taking years to develop. For the individual, this could be a rewarding experience, for the field of ceramics as a whole I would wish for more sharing of information about discoveries in clay composition. This might help the field develop faster than if each artist is starting from scratch.

The experiments I made before building the closet were on a small scale and easier to handle. Because of this I didn't realize until trying to move the piece into the kiln how fragile its structure made it. The next time I build a piece like the closet, I will not do it in the same way. For example I will build it directly on the shelf of the kiln, so it doesn't have to be moved inside the kiln. I would add paper inside the clay, that would make it bind together better for a less fragile and higher resistance material.
List of references


Image references

All images and illustrations are by Diana Butucariu, except the following:

Illustration 4: Graciela Olio, "Mil Ladrillos".
Source: http://www.gracielaolio.com.ar/

Illustration 6: Dumitru Dan, 1911.

Illustration 7: Book cover, Culture Shock Sweden.

Illustration 20: Gillian Lowndes a sculptural wire coil Form Length.
Source: http://www.bonhams.com/auctions/13760/lot/252/

Illustration 21: Todd Shanafelt, “Universal Joints-1, 2, 3”
Source: http://www.toddshanafelt.com/work2/work2.html

Appendices

I. “Six Days in Romania”, DVD. (Video is also available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kWPqAPVI8jU)

II. Examples of traditional Romanian patterns and their meanings

III. My own recipes of clay bodies

IV. Map of route during the Research Trip
APPENDIX I

DVD OF THE DOCUMENTARY
“SIX DAYS IN ROMANIA”
DIANA BUTUCARIU STORY AND CAMERA,
RADU DUMITRU CAMERA.

VIDEO IS ALSO TEMPORARILY AVAILABLE AT:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kWPqAPYl8jU
APPENDIX II: Examples of traditional Romanian patterns and their meanings.

Wolf fangs
You shouldn't be afraid of the wolf, you should make the wolf your friend, he sees the light through darkness.

Cuckoo bird
Cuckoo bird has the power to predict, he knows when Spring is coming and his songs are greetings of growth and abundance.

The Eye
Love starts in the eyes, they are the mirror of the soul.
Ram horns
Masculine symbol, derived from spirals. It represents power, energy, opposite forces.

Roosters
They keep world order. They bring the daylight and the sun.

Snail
Symbol of the moon and water. Symbolizes the evolution of life.
Curly flower
Is the natural beauty.
Means health and fertility.

Comb
Symbolize order and separates good from bad.

The X cross
Symbol of friendship.

The images are part of the project „Semne Cusute” by Ioana Corduneanu. The goal of the project is to make a free archive of vectorised images of traditional Romanian patterns and their meanings, to be accessible for everyone. (http://semne-cusute.blogspot.ro)
APPENDIX III: My own recipes of clay bodies

The base of all the clays is stoneware, 0.5-1.5 mm grog.
The samples have been fired at 1250°C, 10 min. soak, oxidation.

Leek green
- 2% Crom
- 1% white stoneware
  (particle size 1-4 mm)
- 3% red earthenware
  (particle size 1-3 mm)

Peach in November
- 2% Mangan Oxide
- 5% red earthenware grog
  (particle size 1-6 mm)
- 2% white stoneware
  (particle size 1-2 mm)

My cousin tea
- 3% Red Jahr Oxide
- 2.5% white stoneware--
  (particle size 1-1.5 mm)
- 1% red earthenware
  (particle size 1-4 mm)
APPENDIX IV: Map of route during the Research Trip
Not everything happens as I plan it. This was the case also with my thoughts on how, and what to exhibit for the final exhibition. As written in my master thesis the piece was composed by three elements: a closet, a chest and the common ground for the two, a floor. The changes that appeared between the plan and the physical objects were regarding the chest.

During talks with students from Konstfack and people in the art field I realized that the closet is perceived as a "heavy" piece. Heavy in the sense of being serious, based, secure on his own ground and determined. Thinking on these aspects, and due to the limited time, the chest started to become, in my own eyes, a playful piece, a much more younger character then his opponent, Closet.

The chest has an epsoidal form, held up by four skinny, tall legs. The surface of it is interrupted by colored tassels and the lid reminds of an old boat structure or of a wine barrel. I decided that the viewer should be able to see inside of it as you could do with the closet. The chest began to represent the same ideas as the closet. They refer to the same identity, the Romanian, but through different craft disciplines and methods.

In the work that was presented during the final exhibition a fourth element appeared, a set of nine porcelain pillows. The nine porcelain pillows refer to the new identity. The identity type that changes along years and that gathers influences and tries to adapt to different societies and norms.

The motives on the pillows are following a traditional pattern, a diamond inside a square inside a diamond. The drawings remind about Stockholm's urban landscape. The drawings are completed by texts that are sometimes subtle, sometimes direct.

The nine pillows are visually very rich in color and details. Since the pillows were on the wall of the exhibition space, outside of the Room/dirt floor, they were perceived as a second piece. An opposition to the Room.

During the Vårutställning 2014 the movie "6 days in Romania" was also shown. At the end of the exhibition space, behind a black wall, a small space was created. Small enough to have a few chairs inside and a projector for the movie.

The movie is about 30 minutes long. I had in my mind all the time that I should work more on the movie to make it shorter, and point out only the crafts that are used or referenced in the art pieces. I thought that by being put in the exhibition context, people would not spend more then a few minutes on a movie but to my surprise many people watched the whole movie or more than a half of it. One reason for this was that the movie was looping all the time and people were entering in different moments and got out when it was finishing. A lot of talking followed with people on the theme of traditional craft after they saw the movie or my pieces. An interesting talk I had was with Andreas Nobel, one of the founders of Uglycute. He is currently doing his Phd in Organic Design at Konstfack.

Comparing with the other works in the same room and also because of the position, The Room became sometimes during the ten days' exhibition a passage. Of course that was the biggest reason that the floor was put from one extreme of the wall to the other, so people were actually forced to pass it to see the other works. But sometimes it became to much of a passage and people would not spend so much time looking at the work, maybe because of the fear of being on an unknown land.

The material that the floor was made of has been used before with the same goal and because of that it started to have a specific smell. Probably the smell was from the potato flour that was in the composition. Some people seemed to be very bothered by it and others pleasantly surprised, thinking that it adds something to the whole perception of the work and one more sensorial dimension. Thinking that it wouldn't be such a good idea to increase the smell, the floor was left to dry out instead of being maintained soft.
As a whole, I was pleased with how my piece was perceived and commented. My work was also mentioned in two online articles\(^1\).

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\(^1\) http://www.omkonst.se/14-konstfackskolan-varutstellning.shtml