

# **Flood**

**an investigation in clay**

**Master Thesis 2012/ Konstfack/ Ceramics & Glass/ by Supawan Sihapoompichit**

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**•Abstract**

Pottery is a kind of craft which requires retentive training. The only way to achieve each technique is to practice in repetition till the skill has been absorbed into the hands and body of the practitioner. The most obvious problematic achievement in pottery skill is 'wheel throwing' technique. With the long history in straight forward training, one needs to free the mind and allow oneself be a 'copy machine' in order to learn the technique properly. The paradox of traditional practice of having mastered the skill, but could not break through, is one of typical obstruction to many crafters.

'Flood' as theme for investigation in clay was an attempt to set up a method in order to find the 'breaking through' in term of 'thinking' and 'making' for traditional pottery practitioner to be relevant in the pace of contemporary surrounding.

The investigation was planned to de-familiarize my perception over my tradition and practice, and it was an eye-opening to how I positioned myself personally and professionally to the discipline, the society and the world.

## •Introduction

From my starting question of the master project “How can I find a new approach in order to make traditional pottery more relevant in the contemporary craft scene and society?”. I saw this project was a part of my next step in searching for the new way of remaking my tradition in the realm of 21<sup>st</sup>C. The designated process of pottery such as ‘wheel throwing’, which has been developed through human civilization for more than 3000 years, had been tracked down and de-processed to defrost my frozen mind-set in order to find a new approach in ceramics.

‘Theme investigation in clay’ was the method that I had chosen to be the topic of my master project. The intention was to shake off my linear thinking in pottery practice, since I had become aware of my imagination was getting limited.

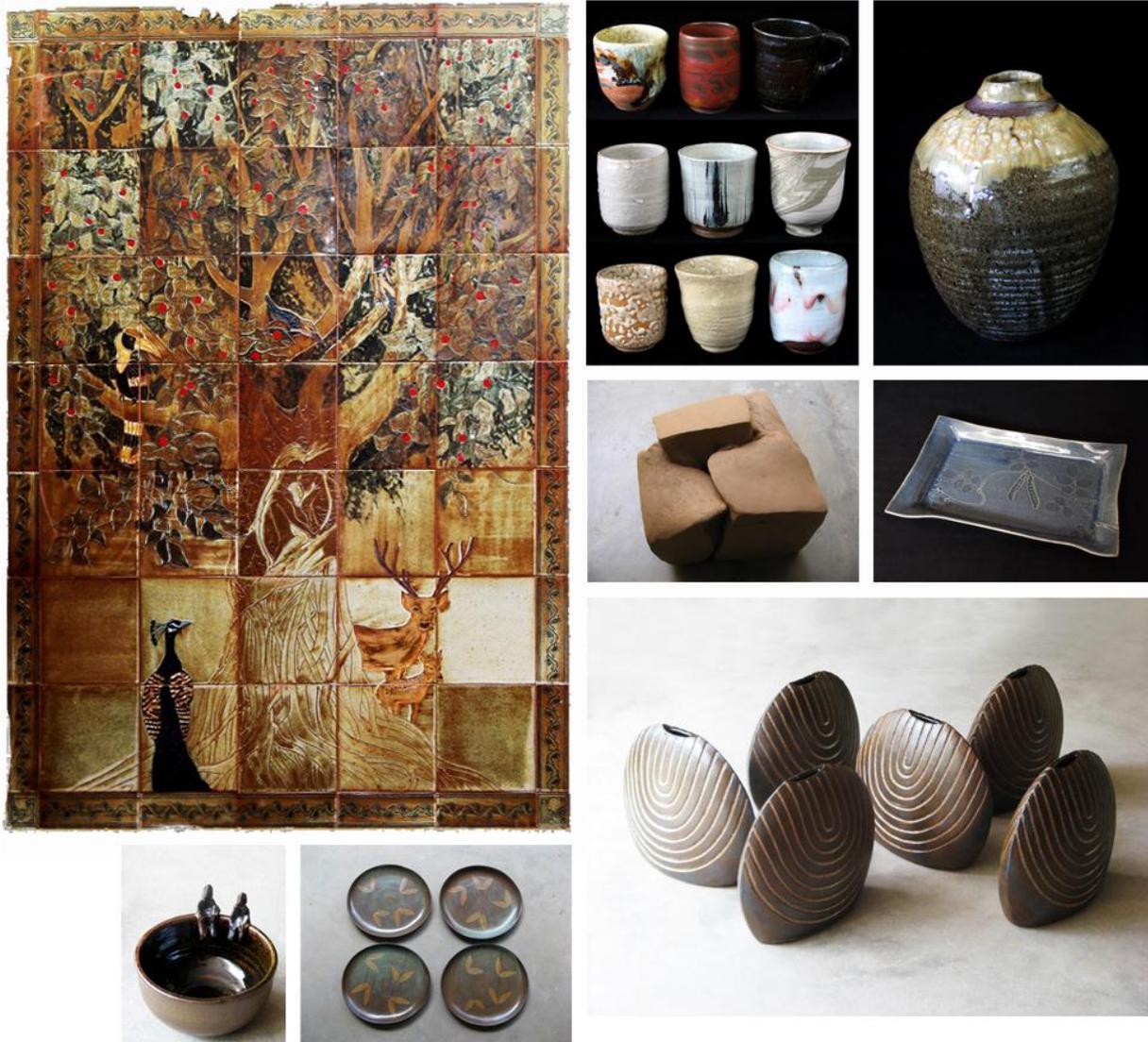
In my previous way of training and working, the cycle of pottery production had somehow drawn me into ‘the danger of being comfortable in what I thought I know, and what I do’. The whole process had become *too familiar, too circling, too focus* in my vision until my ‘seeing’ became blurry because my mind was so stabilized. It was the fixed stage of my creativity which I had embedded myself comfortably into the skill and thinking which I had mastered.

Therefore the formula of my project had been set up to against my previous way of pottery making. Enough reason for ‘spontaneity’, ‘instinct’ and ‘intuition’ to play the important parts in this investigation. The reason why I chose the topic ‘*Flood*’ as a making theme was because the word ‘*Flood*’ has a character of ‘unexpected’ and ‘uncontrollable’ which became an interesting de-stabilizer for me.

From the beginning to the end of this project, the ‘*Flood*’ force had powerfully woken up my ‘*seeing*’ in both making and thinking. I had become aware of what I had been doing both in the ‘*individual*’ and ‘*social*’ level of contemporary being. And this rediscovery to self-awareness had led me to the ‘*decision making*’ which responded to my starting question, in completion of ‘*Why do I do what I do?*’

What you find in my thesis are the records of my working process through *Flood as theme investigation in clay* in form of photographs, and written words on how I worked and how I found this methodology helped me working through my ‘contemporary will’.

•My background and traditional pottery practice



*Photos: Supawan Sihapoompichit*

I have been learning and working in the ceramic field altogether since 2004, particularly on tableware and interior decorative pieces in a pottery studio in South India from 2006-2010, before I moved to Sweden.

From my previous pottery world, 'repeating', 'functional', 'practical', and 'controllable' had been an important frame for pottery production cycle. Until at one point, I started to become aware of my limitation. And that was the main reason which made me coming out and looking for the new way to break my rigid 'thinking' and 'making' in my pottery. I decided to join Konstfack with the question of 'what is beyond pottery?'. This question had been my starting point of the investigation, in order to break my convention, since I started the Master Programme from 1<sup>st</sup> year.

Firstly, by mentioning the status of 'traditional potter', I had no mean to be disrespectful to other potters who carry on their tradition across the world. Since my inspiration to become 'a potter' was originally from my appreciation in various traditional potters work and way of life. It was the simplicity, devotion, discipline, consistency, Humility and integrity from one's being, to working in

potter's way like what Hamada Shoji demonstrated on his wheel<sup>1</sup>, Bernard Leach's aesthetic<sup>2</sup> and Michael Cardew's pioneer<sup>3</sup>. Their words had inspired me to choose this path as an alternative and beautiful way to live.

Hamada Shoji: "Making pottery should not be like climbing the mountain, it should be more like walking down a hill in a pleasant breeze,"<sup>4</sup>

But before the scenery of 'walking down hill in a pleasant breeze' would happen, from my experience, it involves a lot of practice with discipline. Especially with the skill practice such as '*wheel throwing*'<sup>5</sup>

Learning '*throwing*' is a fundamental skill that every potter should have. *Throwing* provides a lot of virtue to overall ceramic making, not only for pottery. (But of course not every ceramic practitioner would take *throwing* as their priority.) And refer to myself as a potter, *throwing* is one of the crucial skills to achieve. The easiest way to explain 'how to *throw*' to the beginner is, "*Throwing* is just like learning to ride a bicycle. You have to watch and learn, and just do it. Once you've got it, you'll never forget." ...Every potter would say so.



*Photos: Sarin Tgamol*

As most crafters are aware of, tacit knowledge<sup>6</sup> is a practice with time consuming and solid consistency. The practice in imitating and repeating for the beginners is the traditional way to learn. The reason behind is to embed the knowledge/skill into the hand and body of practitioner. And for the case of learning *throwing*, the only way to master the skill is to 'keep on *throwing*' and collecting mile stones by the difficulty of technique and form. "A hundred of those", that is what normally master would assign to his/her pupil. The visionary way to describe on how one should absorb the skill is an example line from what Yanagi<sup>7</sup> wrote in an article about Hamada Shoji and his repetition painting on his pottery, "...The painting has become part of his hand."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Peterson, Susan 1978. *Wheel*. Page 39. *Shoji Hamada: A Potter's Way and Work*. Japan. Kodansha.

<sup>2</sup> Leach, Bernard 1955. *A Potter's Book*. London. Faber and Faber.

<sup>3</sup> Cardew, Michael 2002. *Pioneer Pottery (First published 1969)*. Ohio. American Ceramic Society.

<sup>4</sup> Peterson, Susan 1978. *A New Cycle*. Page 183. *Shoji Hamada: A Potter's Way and Work*. Japan. Kodansha.

<sup>5</sup> *Wheel throwing = Clay forming technique which would be done on potter's wheel*

<sup>6</sup> Babbage, Charles 2010. *Economy of Machines and Manufactures*. Page 53. *The Craft Reader (edited by Adamson, Glenn)*. UK. USA. Berg.

<sup>7</sup> Yanagi, Soetsu (1889-1961) *The founder of The Japan Folk Crafts Museum*.

<sup>8</sup> Peterson, Susan 1978. *Wheel*. Page 92. *Shoji Hamada: A Potter's Way and Work*. Japan. Kodansha.

Knowing that *throwing* skill being crucial and useful, there is the ironic behalf of strategy *after* the learning as well. With its repeating and imitating manner (especially in the pattern of pottery production), the achievement of skill could create the thin red line of '*being too comfortable after the practitioner had mastered the skill*'. And when I said "being comfortable in what we do", I meant it was the time when our *creative thinking* was shut off, and we turned ourselves into a 'copy machine'.

Our hands were turned to be an 'autopilot' device. They kept on doing like what they had been programmed. This is the example case that I could see clearly from my experience in the last year in India that, if I sat on the wheel, my autopilot hands will throw out some cups, plates, bowls and vases without having to think about it. I just could not imagine of anything else. And I felt trapped in my imagination.

I introduced myself as a potter who also took care of a small pottery production. In my previous way of working, everything in production process has to be 'in control'. At the pottery studio where I worked before, I even thought 'backwards' when it comes to pottery production. Starting from my vision of the end product e.g. cup or plate, and figuring out how to make it in the most practical, controllable, and repeatable way to become like what I planned. My mind and hands had been set/fixed by being comfortable in what I do.

This is where the thin red line of 'being comfortable in what we do' started. Either after we mastered the skill and fly freely/creatively which many potters do, or we are stuck. Unfortunately I felt that I was one of the 'being stuck' cases. The skill had mastered me back.

This caused the reason why I started off the journey from where I was. I had called it 'Beyond Pottery' since I had been in the Master Programme at Konstfack. I wished to deal with my blockage that I had in my profession. Throughout the 1<sup>st</sup> year, I had tried to put myself in many new situations. From shifting my location wise from India to Sweden, changing my materials in different types of clay and technique, to working with completely other materials and disciplines such as, mirror, glass, metal and textile.



Photos: Supawan Sihapoompichit

I did not think that all had been a completely waste of time, but instead a great opportunity to trying my hands on something new, giving my autopilot hands a break, seeking a chance for combination of different disciplines, and refreshing my point of view. Nevertheless I did realize that, somehow I had not actually dealt with the real issue that I had had, which was 'pottery practice', my own tradition.

*Being stuck in skill and technique* like what I described previously '*the skill had mastered me back*', I believed, it is not a unique problem to only me. It is common to many craftsmen and craftswomen, or even happens in other disciplines if the practitioner has been working with the practice long enough.

A recent example is Mårten Medbo's talk<sup>9</sup> on December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2011 at Konstfack. He mentioned that he had been trained as a potter from the beginning of his artistic career. And he also, at one point, faced the problem of after having spent such a long time in mastering *throwing*, but later on he felt that *throwing* skill was too limited for his imagination and ambition.

For Mårten's case, he took a choice to work with some other ceramic techniques, and even other materials instead, which I thought it was fair enough to divert his direction as his own choice. And I did divert myself for a while as well, as I told earlier about my 'Beyond Pottery' trip.

But to be true to my practice, I noticed my problem still existed whenever I sat down at the throwing wheel. And it was because my 'Beyond Pottery' trip had not really solved me the core problem. What goes round comes round. Therefore I thought it was about time and chance to use the space in the Thesis and exam project for my tradition investigation, and I had chosen the method of '**Flood**' as my **theme for investigation in clay**.

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<sup>9</sup> Medbo, Mårten. Artist's talk at KG seminar room. 2011, 14 December. Konstfack. Sweden.

●Flood as theme



Photo:

<http://www.metro.co.uk/news/857869-japan-earthquake-britons-speak-of-terror-as-death-toll-rises>

*“Flood myths are found in all parts of the world, usually as aspects of creation stories. Generally the flood marks a new beginning, a second chance for sinful humankind or for creation itself, as in Hebrew mythology in the Bible book of Genesis...---the Hebrew Noah, the Sumerian/ Babylonian Ziusudra ---Utnapishtim, the Greek ---Deucalion, the Indian ---Manu, or one of many others ---who represents the human craving for life. The persistence of the flood myth in all parts of the world, even those where real floods are unlikely to have occurred, suggests a human vision of both imperfection and the possibility of redemption...The flood myth is given culture’s “dream” of rebirth, re-creation, and renewal from the chaotic maternal waters.”<sup>10</sup>*

Flood is one of the significant natural events. The devastating power of flood was great enough to threat and convince the ancient civilization that this nature’s force was a work of a supernatural being. From Mesopotamia mythology; the Epic of Gilgamesh, to the most widespread of flood myth in Hebrew version; the book of Genesis, the Great Flood was sent by an angry god to punish the mankind.

In my opinion, ‘Flood’ is a word which characterizes a tremendous and uncontrollable force which influences the myths about the power of nature. The devastation side of it inspired the thoughts around the world in order to find the answer of ‘why we, humans, must face such a demolition’.

And to my current understanding of my thought at that time, it was the vital power of the word which I subconsciously needed for my limited way of thinking and working. I was at the desperate point for a sudden change to appear and wipe off my old mind-set. It was me who was searching for the new horizon for my pottery practice.

As I described previously that the world before my trip to Konstfack was ‘practical’, and ‘controllable’. Hence I thought the ‘uncontrollable’ force must be an excellent antidote or reversed psychology to break my convention.

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<sup>10</sup> Leeming, David 2005. *The Oxford Companion to World Mythology*. Page 138. New York. Oxford University Press.

At the time of exam project outline research (October 2011), there was the coincidence with the catastrophic flood in Thailand, the biggest one in 50 years. The news about the 'flood' was flooded all over the media such as internet and newspaper. I could hardly miss the information. Therefore I could not deny that, the overwhelming of the 'flood' news in my home country was one of the inciting factor, which encouraged me to pick up the word '*Flood*' as my theme.

It was my instinct and intuition to embrace the word '*Flood*' for my experimental process in making, although I had absolutely no idea of 'how' to use this word as a theme for my work at that time.

### • Investigation of the theme 'Flood': Working with words

I would like to refer to *Alice's adventure in wonderland: Through the looking glass*, the novel which was written by Lewis Carroll (1872). On the chapter 6; *Humpty Dumpty*, he playfully discussed the *Study of Meaning: Semantics*<sup>11</sup> and *The Ways in which Context Contributes to Meaning: Pragmatics*<sup>12</sup>.

*"I don't know what you mean by 'glory,'" Alice said.  
Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. "Of course you don't—till I tell you. I meant 'there's a nice knock-down argument for you!' "  
"But 'glory' doesn't mean 'a nice knock-down argument'," Alice objected.  
"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less."  
"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said... "It means just what I choose it to mean---neither more or less."  
The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make a word mean so many different things."  
"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master---that's all."<sup>13</sup>*

Lewis Carroll (1832-1898)

From the question of *Alice* that a word could mean so many things, and *Humpty Dumpty* questioned back, the only problem was "which is to be master---that's all". The discussion over word's meaning by Lewis Carroll was my reference which I could reflect upon my *Flood* project investigating process of how to work with **Flood as theme** in its **ambiguity**. Presumably I had chosen to start searching the meaning of the word 'Flood' from *Alice's* point of view since the autumn semester 2011. And subsequently I had selected my final outcome of the project according to *Humpty Dumpty's* point of view.

As I mentioned before that it was my intuition to pick up the topic from my wish to have a sudden and powerful change in my practice. But I did not really understand or know how I should use 'flood' as my theme for working in the beginning. Therefore at my starting point on how to work with this word, I made sure that I understood the word clearly.

Although I thought that most of us share a common sense of the word. But it was worth to have a clear idea by carefully checking its definition, and gathering most of the information from the online *Britannica Encyclopedia*<sup>14</sup>. That was the first step that I made.

Parallel to my searching for the meaning of the chosen theme, along the sketching in clay, I also built up some more understanding of this word by framing the concept about flood from its behaviour, and characterized the word from each stage of flood cycle...

As a matter of fact that flood is a **force of quantity**, not a constant state. And it is unstable. It grows and quiets down. It shifts and lifts.

<sup>11</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online Academic Edition*. 2012, 21 Mar.  
<<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/533811/semantics>>

<sup>12</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online Academic Edition*. 2012, 21 Mar.  
<<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/473709/pragmatics>>

<sup>13</sup> Carroll, Lewis 2010. *Humpty Dumpty*. Page 160. *Alice's adventure in wonderland: Through the looking glass* (First published 1872). London. Bibliolis Books.

<sup>14</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online Academic Edition*. 2012, 21 Mar.  
<<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/210457/flood>>

**Quietness/calmness/stillness**, is the *beginning* of the status.

**Collecting/Holding back**, is the stage of **pressure/ tension/confusion** building up.

**Breaking out/ Releasing** is the *action*.

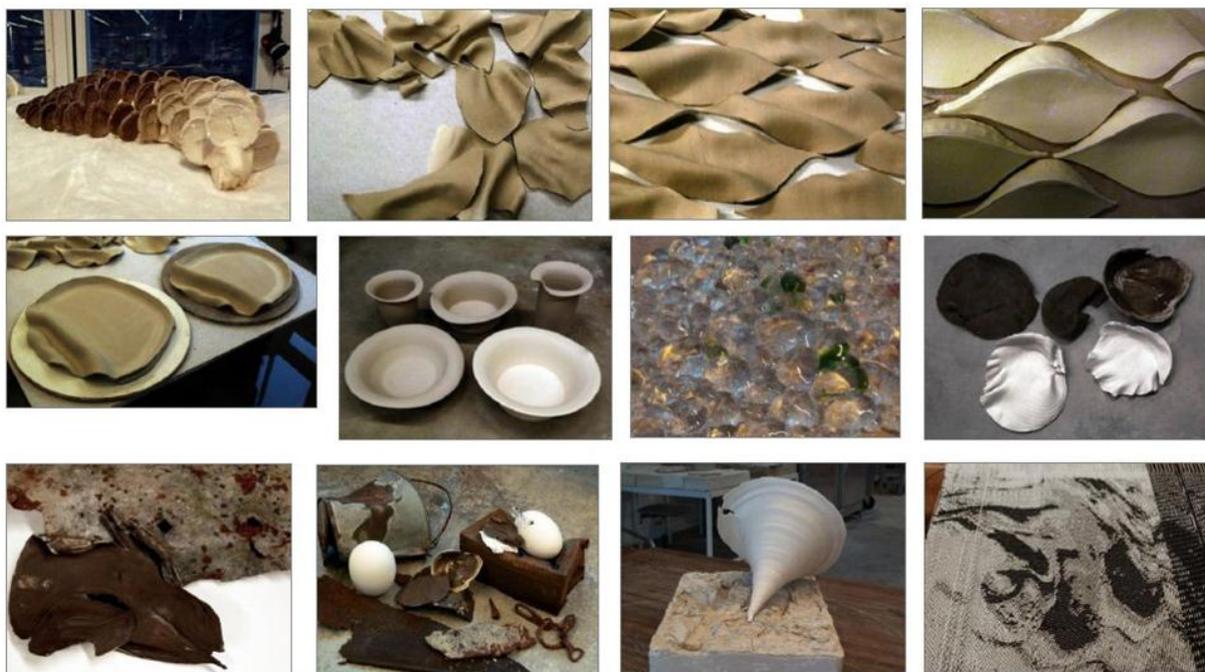
And all had been flooded away, left only the **consequences** which brings back to (almost) nothing--- the starting point of everything again.

It is **chaos** for **quietness**, on and on... It is the way of **how the earth renews itself**.

And these are the key concept that I would keep in mind and working with.

•My investigation in clay---Autumn Sketch: Collecting/Holding back

In the beginning of the sketch I was randomly, confusingly testing out many ideas of what I assumed to illustrate theme of 'Flood' according to its definition. It was a chaos moment; the back and forth period on how I put the meaning of flood 'on' clay by projecting the idea of illustration in what and how pottery and ceramics could be visualized either literally, metaphorically, or symbolically. And there were a few points when I even had a question of why should the theme were meant to be limited in only clay as material? Why not on the other materials such as, glass, metal and textile?



Photos: Supawan Sihapoompichit

It took me for the whole semester in keeping on reviewing myself, and became aware of what I had actually been through. And to honestly face myself that I actually had not put the aspect of the new way for ceramics making in those sketches yet. In all of my previous sketches, my deep feeling kept telling me that there was 'something' missing in my making. 'Something' did not exist in the work. 'Flood' expression had not been appeared on those sketches yet. All of them were very much the products from my 'projection', which explained to me the reason why I did not see them so different from what I had done before.

And when I said 'projection', I meant I had planned the outcome. I did not allow myself to carefully observe *my material, my making, and my theme*. But I used my 'old information' from what I thought I had known of clay and its process in my previous pottery production experience to control the way I sketched, as I used to do with pottery production. Therefore nothing had surprised me. All was expected. I did not truly let myself 'losing control' like flood's character should be. Or metaphorically speaking, I had not allowed myself 'being flooded' as I wished at all!

After I reviewed my autumn sketch, I could see the problem in my thinking that my skill had mastered me in a big way. Especially the planning skill which was my priority when I had to manage

the (small) mass pottery production for 5 years. I had trained my mind to master the planning skill in an 'expectable' way.

Therefore from where I had begun since the autumn sketch, and when I looked back through what I had done. I realized, I started off investigated my subject rather from the chaotic point of view, just like how '*Alice projected the numerous meaning of one word*'. Either I illustrated the word of flood in term of *quantity*, or visually drew a contour of *flowing movement of water*, or interpreted the subject to represent the cycle of *rebirth* and etc. And if I metaphorically compared the autumn sketch to the '*Flood*' stage character, I could see that I was at the stage of **Collecting/Holding back**, by going through all the meanings that had been gathered. But I had not release the theme out into the clay yet.

Nevertheless I could not ignore that *if I had not gone through all those layers from surface of my understanding toward subject, I would not have become aware and gained the understanding of how I wished my theme for making worked on my inner level. I do believe fooling around to a certain extent is necessary in the creative process; therefore I would never consider the autumn sketch as a complete waste of time. It was the knowing of when to stop and move on.* And from there, I had realized that I should actually let the theme acted on my making process instead, in order to put the theme in clay. Therefore I decided that I should let myself *be flooded in my action*.

### •Flood 50: Breaking out/ Releasing

It took me a round trip in Autumn Semester to come back to my pottery practice consciously, and insisted myself to stand on my own ground. And it took numerous reviews to realize that I was limited by my own mind-set. But among the confusion of the autumn sketch, when I looked through them all, I had spotted one sketch which was the scrap piece that I scraped and collected. It was the thin sheet of leftover clay from the pot which was cut by the *cutting wire* and took off the *throwing bat* or *wheel*.



*Photos: Supawan Sihapoompichit and Sarin Tgamol*

From this part I respectfully gave my credit to David Clarke, the external Tutor, who has a background of silversmith, and has a vague idea of ceramics discipline<sup>15</sup>. It was David who asked the question on our first discussion, which made me realized that I had already got an interesting material in hand.

The question was “What made me spotted that scrap piece of clay?”

And my answer was “Because it has a swirl trace left from cutting wire which I could associate to the movement of water. Its trace looks beautiful to my eyes. And nobody would ever look at it. None of the potters I known would have looked at it. Only ‘pot’ was the thing”

This was the key question and answer for me to become aware of ‘how familiarity and convention of practice would make many craft practitioners over looked the process which has been repeating through his/her practice’. It was what David and I agreed in *‘the danger of being comfortable in what we have been told, and in what we do. Which is that’s the time when our creativity was shut off’*.

<sup>15</sup> *The reason that I chose to have a discussion with a person outside the discipline is to forget about ‘how-to’, and talk only over the object, what does it communicate? In our first meeting, I selected one of my sketches, which I focused on a ‘neglected step’ of throwing process to discuss with him.*

As I described before that the first crucial part of pottery training process is to master each skill. It is the repetition and time consuming process. In Eastern way of learning, it was the surrender of the student in term of thinking in a way, to complete initiate the pottery skill, which has been used as a strategy to embed the skill into our hands and body. *But* after some years there is a risk of we embed ourselves comfortably into the skill that we had mastered instead.

After the discussion, David and I had come up with the 'Breaking down' process for *wheel throwing* assignment. According to my theme and the scrap piece sketch that I chose, the assignment was set to reinvestigate particularly in the overlooked step of throwing process, to de-familiarize myself, and to put my theme '*Flood*' for investigation directly 'in' clay. And **the strategy** was...

***'No mind doing, but to think at the right moment'***

The exercise was called '**Flood 50**'. I was meant to *go flooding myself* 50 times in clay in one day by keeping my flood theme in mind...

*Without projecting of what it will become.*

*Using all of kinds of clay, includes the type that I never work with before,  
or putting together the unusual combination of clay.*

*And keep David's mantra strictly in my mind while making ...*

*"Don't step ahead, stay with the moment.*

*Stay in making, not in the mind.*

*Seeing where the clay will lead me.*

*And if I slipped off to projecting the outcome again, give myself a slap!"*

It ended up by me spending 15 hrs working intensively on throwing wheel without thinking of the outcome.

My eyes was fresher and investigating with the excitement of 'what wheel throwing could do' and 'what have not been done by the wheel yet'. It was an observation of details which was not an easy task, since the hand turntable or "Tournette" was developed around 3000 BC by Mesopotamian potter<sup>16</sup>. And from then, the potter's wheel and throwing technique had been tested and developed along the human civilization.

But by being a potter myself, I was aware of the most concern matter in wheel working which is 'pot'. The process of throwing has been carefully learning and doing to reach the goal only. But since I had spotted the overlooked part, which was the leftover from wheel work. I had put the spotlight over one part of the process which had been taken for granted!

Within the 'Flood 50' process, time pressure was a mysterious spark of the creativity (I might say) which had pushed me to exaggerate my focus on the 'leftover' in diverse...

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<sup>16</sup> Bryant, Victor. 2001, 6 April. <[http://www.ceramicstoday.com/articles/potters\\_wheel.htm](http://www.ceramicstoday.com/articles/potters_wheel.htm)>

*If I cut differently in term of 'how to cut', 'what to cut with', and 'what to cut from', what would happened?*

*If I change the type of clay, the roughness, softness, thickness, width, height, what would happen?*

*If I change the type of cutting tool, different wires or metal, what would happen?*

*If the speed and direction of cutting is changed, what would happen?*

*Are there any other way to cut on wheel, horizontal, vertical, slanting?*

And so on of what I could come up with at that moment...

The result of 'none-projecting' exercise was the unexpected effects from the action of doing. The outcome when I looked at them at the end of the day was a real surprise. Quite a few of them were what David had mentioned to me for '*letting the beautiful mistake to happen*'<sup>17</sup>.

*Flood 50* sounded very much a like a tough meditation, but I understood his intention. The intensive process was the antidote to my 'control' mind. It was set to put myself in the moment of now consciously, to set my mind free, to de-stabilize my thinking process, to be alert in what I am doing but not knowing what it is I am doing, to put myself into the insecure position which forcing myself to come up with solution, and to allow the *beautiful mistake* to happen. And by not having control in what I am doing or knowing of what it will become, I was flooded in action per se.



*Photos: Supawan Sihapoompichit*

From the result of *Flood 50*, I saw and felt a big shift in my awareness of making. It was the intensity that flooded me into the 'now' moment, and allowed the new reflection from myself to happen.

<sup>17</sup> Clarke, David. *Tutoring*. 2012, 19 January. Konstfack. Sweden.

### •Seeing but not seeing

The result of using *Flood* as force to reformulate my sensory and perception over my practice, the act of being flooded was rather intensive and overwhelmed. The intension of this strategy was to destabilize and reinforce my creativity which was strangled by being stagnant in my skill achievement comfortably.

Being still or stable in practice is dangerous to one's creativity. The incapability of 'not seeing' is the symptom of what David Clarke stressed to me, "Seeing, but not seeing"<sup>18</sup>.

As 'seeing' and 'knowing' are an important direct cognition for the artistic practitioner to perceive the understanding between object(s), practitioner and the world. (For your further reading please read, *Zen and the Brain: Looking, and Seeing Preattentively* ---"We look at much more than we "see"<sup>19</sup> was the statement made by James H. Austin, Professor of Neurology) Soetsu Yanagi also explained about Zen approach of how one could refresh our own perception by using our eyes as clear mirror to reflect what we see...

*"First, put aside the desire to judge immediately; acquire the habit of just looking. Second, do not threat the object as an object for the intellect. Third, just be ready to receive, passively, without interposing yourself. If you can avoid your mind of all intellectualization, like a clear mirror that simply reflects, all the better. This nonconceptualization—then Zen state of mushin ("no mind")<sup>20</sup>—may seem to represent a negative attitude, but from it springs the true ability to contact things directly and positively."<sup>21</sup>*

And this is what James H. Austin called "...First step into the real here and now, to establish direct relationships with simple, concrete things."<sup>22</sup>

This is a very useful *seeing* technique in order to gathering the most direct information of what one see without letting our familiarity interprets and neglects the details because one has seen it before. Just a like a little child when one sees thing with the fresh eyes for the first time. And this perception gave me a firm belief over my practice that without 'right seeing', how could we craft both object and subject insightfully?<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Clarke, David. *Tutoring*. 2012, 19 January. Konstfack. Sweden.

<sup>19</sup> Austin, James H. 1998. *Looking, and Seeing Preattentively*. Page 278. *Zen and the brain: Toward an understanding of meditation and consciousness*. USA. MIT Press.

<sup>20</sup> See explanation in **Addition: No mind doing**, page 17

<sup>21</sup> Yanagi, Soetsu. Leach, Bernard (Adaptor). 1982. *Seeing and Knowing (1940)*. Page 112. *The Unknown Craftsman*. Japan. USA. Kodansha.

<sup>22</sup> Austin, James H. 1998. *Turning Out: The Awakenings*. Page 528. *Zen and the brain: Toward an understanding of meditation and consciousness*. USA. MIT Press

<sup>23</sup> My further reflection on Simon Klenell's statement, "I don't craft only object, but I craft the subject too!" which was presenting over his Master project presentation in Spring semester of 2011 at Konstfack. Simone Klenell said on his thesis, "Crafted objects have both objective as well as a subjective layers of information. When making objects with expressions that are accepted and familiar, I am using the expected subjective aesthetic reactions of my audience."--- Klenell, Simone. 2011. *Crafting the subject* page 19-20. *MA Thesis: Frigger Tactics*. Konstfack. Sweden.

---Note on 'No mind doing'

*"Problem with the words: "Mind"*

*The old Zen term for this was mushin. It is frequently translated into English as "no mind". But it really implies two things: without mind and without heart... It implies that a wakeful brain has finally disengaged itself from its personal mythologies, its soap operas, and all other self-referent activities. Now it remains, simultaneously, both highly receptive and dispassionate. So the "no mind" of Zen implies a mental posture in which at least two things are going on: (1) bare attention still registers percepts, but (2) there are no emotional reverberations... "no mind" pass beyond simple, alert non-thinking. It enters the depths of that ongoing, perceptual awareness beyond emotional echoes."<sup>24</sup>*

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<sup>24</sup> Austin, James H. 1998. *Exploring States of Consciousness*. Page 293. *Zen and the brain: Toward an understanding of meditation and consciousness*. USA. MIT Press.

### •Post Flood: The Reflection from Personal Investigation to Public Relations

From the starting point of my Flood journey (October 2011) to Flood 50 (January 2012), my trip was about testing out ideas in order to search for the meaning of the word 'Flood' which appealed to me as an individual interest. From the act of making, to seeing, and to believing, it was the exploration on various aspects of the theme literally, visually, symbolically, metaphorically and action. But through all of my experiments, which aspect of Flood occurred to me the most?

I would like to refer to the request from one of my classmate, Kakan (Karin Hermansson), in our Part Time Examination on January 31<sup>th</sup>, 2012<sup>25</sup>. Kakan had asked me to hear about my '*personal opinion*' over my theme.

Pondering Kakan's question, I realized again that actually it was my concern about the environmental issue over 'Flood' incident in Thailand which has always been my most concern. This opinion had played the major influence over my '*decision making*' for the final outcome craft piece within 'Flood' theme. And what would environmental concern make the relation to my previous experimental process in making?

From my perspective, I could see that my previous investigation and reinvestigation was about my personal interest within the categories of my practice, tradition and discipline. The visual result of all sketches was very much related to me and perhaps people who are connected to the field. On the other hand, the opinion that I wished to raise was on the global level of issue within our contemporary period. Therefore the question of "How could I use my practice to speak out my concern to the majority?" became my next assignment because I was ***seeing the urgent matter of the subject*** on collective being level. Up to this point I could also see myself getting into the current of what many 21<sup>th</sup>C crafters have been up to; the trend of using one's own practice to influence the possibility of social change<sup>26</sup>. ***It is the function on the social level where I wish my craft could take some part.***

I am in a generation of when the awareness in the sustainability has been raised in a major way, because of the environmental situation and condition in our time. It was ***'my wish to do something with what I can do, and try to do it'***. The will of using my practice to communicate to the majority who are far beyond my discipline had brought me back to my starting question;

"How can I find a new approach in order to make traditional pottery more relevant in the contemporary craft scene and society?"

This is my way of relating my practice and my interest in contemporary social issue such as consumerism, throw away culture and environmental problems. It is a solution by using my tradition open up a discussion in both contemporary craft scene and society.

<sup>25</sup> Hermansson, Karin. Master Project Part Time Examination. 2012, 31 January. Konstfack. Sweden.

<sup>26</sup> Adamson Glenn. 2010. Section 7: Contemporary Approach; The Political and the Postdisciplinary. Page 586. The Craft Reader. New York. BERG.

•Contemporary Subject: The Critic on Consumerism and Throw away Culture



Photos: (from left to right)

<http://www.sustainabilityissexy.com/facts.html>

[http://environmentaa.org/whatwedo/whatwedo.php?dir=save\\_a\\_cup](http://environmentaa.org/whatwedo/whatwedo.php?dir=save_a_cup)

<http://trashfreenyc.blogspot.se/>

<http://www.sustainableguernsey.info/blog/2009/01/>

Apart from considering over the problem of environment and pottery practice, the observation around an everyday life of modern city like Stockholm (or Bangkok; where I came from), the speed of life here is so different from the forest in South India where I lived for 5 years before I came to Stockholm.

Eating out or buying readymade food was one of the common routine in city lifestyle. The need of food containers being mobility and easy to be discarded in the rush hour was the reasons for 'disposable' container to be invented. Paper cup, plastic and Styrofoam food box, they are built for a single use and be discarded.

But to be out of sight, it does not mean these garbage do not exist anymore. Apparently for these materials to be broken down by themselves it takes at least 20years for paper cup<sup>27</sup>, and indefinite for both plastic and Styrofoam as they are non-biodegradable<sup>28</sup>. By accelerating these garbage to be decomposed, especially by incineration would only create worse toxic pollution to our land, water source and air. Therefore most of them have turned to be the landfills. (For more environment information please have a look at the website of storyofstuff.org<sup>29</sup> and follow by 'Resources' menu:

<sup>27</sup> Baertlein, Lisa. 2008, 23 September.

<<http://blogs.reuters.com/shop-talk/2008/09/23/how-green-is-your-coffee-habit/>>

<sup>28</sup> North Central 4-H Camp. 2008.

<[http://www.sdstate.edu/sdces/districts/south/1/minnehahacounty/upload/Dont\\_Trash\\_the\\_Planet.pdf](http://www.sdstate.edu/sdces/districts/south/1/minnehahacounty/upload/Dont_Trash_the_Planet.pdf)>

<sup>29</sup> Leonard, Annie. 2007, December. <<http://www.storyofstuff.org/movies-all/story-of-stuff/>>

NGO directory', there are various information and facts to learn about Consumerism and environmental effect. Or Environmental update at [sierraclub.org](http://sierraclub.org)<sup>30</sup>. Or 'State of the planet', environmental blogs from the Earth Institute, Columbia University<sup>31</sup>)

From the summary of the facts about the *disposable food container*, it takes enormous natural resource and energy to make them, and only use them once, then throw them away. Our Consumerism economic was built up on the basis of 'endless resource'. With all the statistic numbers on natural resource, speed of consumption, and its garbage, it is a rocket chart that we would trash our planet in no time<sup>32</sup>. The strategy of our way of living needs to be changed. On the topic of *disposable food container*, there are many suggestions from the environmentalists on re-useable container. And with my pride of being a potter, I am proudly to support the idea of using ceramic and glass container which are more likely a sustainable option, though the researchers have been still debating over the energy consumption throughout the making/manufacturing of ceramics and glass on their energy consumption and carbon footprint. Otherwise we should come up more with alternative innovation for food container. Or **the ultimate solution is to change the habits of our consumption pattern in the sustainable way, growing our faith in 'less is more'**.

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<sup>30</sup> Tilford, Dave. 2000. <[http://www.sierraclub.org/sustainable\\_consumption/tilford.asp](http://www.sierraclub.org/sustainable_consumption/tilford.asp)>

<sup>31</sup> Cho, Renee. 2011, 26 January. <<http://blogs.ei.columbia.edu/2011/01/26/our-oceans-a-plastic-soup/>>

<sup>32</sup> Tilford, Dave. 2000. <[http://www.sierraclub.org/sustainable\\_consumption/tilford.asp](http://www.sierraclub.org/sustainable_consumption/tilford.asp)>

•Reflection on the subjective matter of chosen theme '*Flood*'

Since my intension of making was to use my craft to make a critic over the environmental issue, I decided to use the everyday object to be the agent of my message. From my chosen subject and what I saw on everyday basis, the disposable **paper cup, plastic and Styrofoam food box** were the suitable and obvious subject and object(s) to me.

On my attitude over the chosen agents, I was aware of the influence of Pop Art over my choice. My purpose was to draw the attention of both connoisseurs and the untrained viewer by the objects which are familiar to most of people. The visual of these **disposable paper cup, plastic and Styrofoam food box**, is known to all of us. Therefore they are impersonal and nondiscriminative. Hence they are democratic and should be able to carry the message to the majority.

Coming back to my understanding over *Flood* as theme for my making and my critic over the throw away culture, I chose to use the ambiguity of the word (*Flood*) as Lewis Carroll had discussed through Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master---that's all"<sup>33</sup>, to apply in my objects.

From *Flood* word, I selected a few fragments of *Flood*'s concept which were ...

*The mass on the floating gesture*

*Time sequence*

*The act of force and its consequences (by human use)*

For the consideration of material, I used the monumental material such as *ceramic-porcelain* to capture *the consequences of paper, plastic and Styrofoam usage* which was altered by *human handling and time* in comparative. The presence and absence of familiarity by mismatching the forms and materials was my intention to extend the language of porcelain, and building up the conversation between 1 presenting material(ceramic) on 3 different objects without their actual physical materials(paper, plastic & Styrofoam) presenting, but the imitation of the surface and form which were casted. And by reduplicating the form and the surface of materials, I aimed to manipulate their visual, values and ethics from the evidence of time and decomposability in each material.

The reason of **material talks on materials**, was my purpose to point out my political statement over materials, ceramic discipline, environmental matter, with my awareness of time being. These materials(paper, plastic and Styrofoam) have undermined all the value of matters that I had mentioned. And it is because only for the sake of being '*convenient*' that we are polluting our environment so much.

In addition of these disposable food containers, apart from being an icon of 'throw away culture' and environmental problem from our consumption pattern, they also gave the other information about the contemporary lifestyle such as, the lack of time, globalization in consuming culture, economic power<sup>34</sup>, the value of time and domestic food culture, the awareness of health, food and environment, etc.

From all these layers of information which I described about the chosen materials and objects, the last important part for communication is the installation. I should concern on how much of

<sup>33</sup> See, *Investigation of the theme 'Flood': Working with words*, page 9

<sup>34</sup> *Diamond, Jared. 2008, 2 January.*

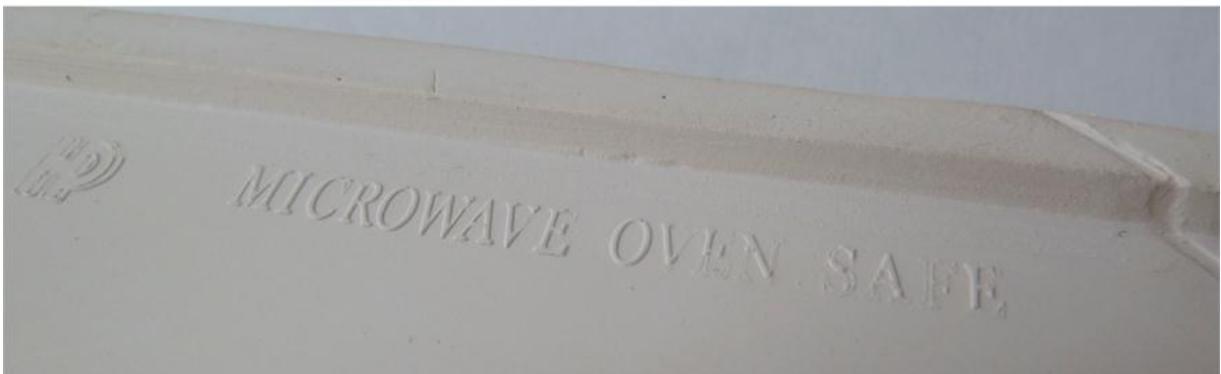
<[http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/02/opinion/02diamond.html?\\_r=2&pagewanted=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/02/opinion/02diamond.html?_r=2&pagewanted=1)>

information to be revealed and hold, in order to encourage the viewer processing or associating their own message by their own imagination.

The shift and change in dining tradition by the haste of capitalism cause a dramatic distortion in our value of domestic custom, health and environment. The trend of 'convenient' lifestyle has flooded our modern society rapidly in regardless. It takes a courageous thinking to be conscious about ourselves, and to not getting carry away so easily by the effortless seduction of throw away culture.



*Photos: Supawan Sihapoompichit*



Photos: Supawan Sihapoompichit



*Photos: Supawan Sihapoompichit*

### •Contemporary artistic context

Since I had referred to Pop Art previously, and to be aware of the visual movement about the contemporary artistic scene, I would like to refer to several artists and designers works which show the echo of similarity in subjective or objective function.



**Claes Oldenburg** -Soft Sculpture  
ie. Giant Fagends **1969**. Canvas, urathene foam and wood. 243.84x243.84x101.6cm

>>>Deformed everyday objects which shattered and altered by collision, impregnated with humanity. The transformed soft object, implicated a state of decay, which indicated the human environment in an uncomfortable way.

As Claes Oldenburg himself said, "I wish to reflect things as they are now and always without sentimentality. To face fact and learn their beauty"(1961)<sup>35</sup>

*Photo: Book---Pop Art (Taschen publisher)*



**Rob Brandt** --- Crushed Cup **1975**. Porcelain. 6x6, 8x7, 10x8 cm

>>>Function

*Photo:*

<https://www.droog.com/store/tableware/crushed-cup/>



**Tapio Wirkkala**---Paperbag Vase **1977**. Porcelain. 18.5cm  
Produced by Rosenthal

>>> Poetry of everyday life and his reflection in Pop Art

*Photo: Book---Tapio Wirkkala: eye, hand and thought<sup>36</sup>*

<sup>35</sup> Osterwold Tilman 1990. Claes Oldenburg. Page 193-201. Pop Art. Berlin. Taschen.

<sup>36</sup> Aav Marianne 2000. Porcelain. Page 159. Tapio Wirkkala: eye, hand and thought. Helsinki. Museum of Art and Design.



**Leslie Buck & Graham Hill** ---We Are Happy To Serve You 1963/2003. The original paper 'Anthora' cup on the left and the ceramic version on the right. Life size.

>>> Icon of New York coffee culture to functional monumental ware.

Photo:

<http://www.callmethirsty.com/2010/05/02/anthora-paper-cup-designer-dies/>



**James Burgess** ---I am not a paper cup 2007.

Porcelain, Silicon. 15.24 x 8.9 cm.

>>>Function

Photo:

<http://www.swipe.com/?cat=16>



**Studio Seletti**

**by Selab & Alessandro Zambelli**

---Estetico Quotidiano  
(Daily Aesthetics) 2007.

Porcelain. Life Size

>>> Function: Table ware from throw away food container form

Photo:

[http://www.seletti.it/prod\\_est.html](http://www.seletti.it/prod_est.html)



**Kjell Rylander**---Street ware 2009. Paper, glue, porcelain. 11x9x7cm. The irony of 'quality coffee' in disposable paper cup and the historical Berså pattern(1960-1974) on bone china by Stig Lindberg from Gustavsberg's porcelain factory. Kjell Rylander consisted 2 pieces of a broken piece of porcelain handle and a crackled porcelain base to crushed paper cup. The piece was put together from trash to remake the object. It recalled the history, value and the way society consuming today.

Photo:

<http://www.norwegiancrafts.no/issues/01-2010/the-speed-of-arts-and-crafts/>



**Rebecca Wilson** ---Finest Paperware **2011**. The crisscross in replication of between traditions and materials to revalue the objects. Handmade Paper decorated in ceramic aesthetics of 'Jasperware' from Wedgwood, and Dutch classic 'Blue Delft'. Life size.

*Photos:*

<http://www.rebeccawilsonceramics.com/index.php/2011/06/finest-paperware-paper/>

## •Conclusion

On the question of looking for a new approach for my pottery tradition to be relevant to contemporary craft scene and society, I chose 'Flood' as theme for reinvestigate my tradition to de-familiarize my perception over my practice after several years of practicing.

'Flood' as a word in ambiguity has various kinds of meaning which I experimented the several concepts of *Flood* in material sketching. Through *doing*, I became more aware of my *thinking* in each approach of work. I gained a better understanding over the different mind-set between traditional pottery where my discipline stayed very much '*within*', and the contemporary ceramic scene which extended my view of my ceramic practice over the other issues i.e. social and environmental subject, and encouraged me to use my practice for the social engagement because '***I see the problem***'. And by *seeing* the problem and wanting to do something, I broadened my practice and discipline, from traditional to contemporary, my craft perspective and consideration had extended its practical function from the object-form, function, beauty and user, to the social concern.

From the beginning of Flood as theme for investigation in clay, to the intensity of 'Flood 50' exercise, it was an act of observation and self-reassurance in my position as potter and a person in society, on how I related myself to the present of surrounding. I used the vibration of 'Flood' theme to de-stabilize my thought over my practice by using the several acts of the theme that I selected. When I looked back through the process of my investigation, this project had been also about using the force of theme *revisoning* the overlooked details in my pottery practice, and to relate my practice to the outside world. Because not only that I am a potter, but I am also a part of society as well.

By '*seeing things*' and '*being aware of things*' is the ways to realize about ourselves and the time being. The right way of *seeing* inspires the action in the object, the subject and the person. It is a critical tool for an artistic practitioner like me to be confident and to believe in "*Why I do what I do.*"

*"The training of a potter is a process limited only by the span of his life time. In the preceding chapters it has taken us all the way from theories of the earth's structure to the minute particulars of craftsmanship. It is time now to pause and enquire to what purpose all this expense of time, labour, spirit and capital has been directed; to consider not only the products themselves but their final causes; to ask what is their meaning and value, and why we have to dig so deeply to produce them."*<sup>37</sup>

Michael Cardew (1969)

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<sup>37</sup> Cardew, Michael 2002. *The product*. Page 252. *Pioneer Pottery* (First published 1969). Ohio. American Ceramic Society.

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