I WANT TO BECOME A DESIGNER

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Konstfack
University of Art, Craft and Design
MA Textile In The Expanded Field
Essay supervised by Jonna Lappalainen
2012-2013
Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BACKGROUND</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I LIKE CLOTHES</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MY PROJECT</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PICNIC</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BETWEEN ART AND DESIGN</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DENNIS DESIGN CENTER</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOOST-BUST</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MY MASTER’S PROJECT</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHAT IS A DESIGNER?</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMMAUS</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OVERSTUFFED LAND</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHERE I AM, WHERE I’M GOING</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

This text is divided into two main parts.

In the first one I write about the origin of my desire to work with clothes and how I get to the point where I’m now, describing some key projects and important steps. I describe how I move from the Art world to the Design world, all while giving references.

The second part begins with the question: “What is a designer?” a question I first try to understand and then answer. I then explain the work I’m doing for my Master’s project: a landscape of furniture made out of second hand clothes and a booklet with my research and questions. Finally, I explain where I am now and where I’m going, where I would place myself in this world.
BACKGROUND

I LIKE CLOTHES

When I find something for free in the street or in a bin, I feel like an archaeologist discovering a treasure. This emotion of surprise is great! I have been picking up things here and there for many years. It started when I was around fifteen. One thing every teenager did at that time in my city, Geneva, was to go every Saturday afternoon, back and forth in the mainstream and look at each other’s style, sometimes buying something. This concept didn’t fit with my friend’s and my ideas, so we started to steal. We didn’t want to give money to thieves. I probably would have never done that by myself, especially at that age when you need to be surrounded. It was a lot of fun, but after a while; we found the clothes a bit boring. Twice a week there was a huge flea market on a big square in the centre of Geneva. We discovered that at the end there were many things left over that we could pick up for free. So, instead of shopping for mainstream items like my other classmates, we used to go there and “do the garbage”. We got stuff which was much more special and unique, and the experience was a lot of fun and full of emotions!
MY PROJECT
I finally got into Art school. I did a lot of experiments but was often lost. I felt that my teachers were too conceptual and that they regarded me as too crafty and not clear with what I really wanted to do. I was not a good student. In the last year I finally understood that I wanted to talk about my relationship with clothes and about my vision of fashion. That was thus what came to be. Since I also wanted to show all of the techniques I’ve learned during these years, I built an installation with a projection of a slideshow of shop windows from which I had removed the mannequins, a picture (real size) of my closet, a sculpture of a sheep wearing a wool pullover (fig. 1), collages, silhouettes of women made out of pictures of accessories I had cut out of feminine magazines, embroidery of the Nike logo revisited (fig. 2) and a small booklet of text telling some stories of my life related to clothes. It was a mess! I was not so happy with this installation. The jury told me that I could have just shown the sculpture and the booklet. I was happy because they finally gave me the diploma but disappointed by their minimalist point of view. If I today think about this installation, I still like the sheep, the embroidery, and the booklet because they are funny pieces that clearly show my critical point of view of the fashion system. I like clothes and I play with styles, but I don’t like the way the media, the brands, and the fashion system try to manipulate us, telling us what we should wear as if we were sheeps. I would like people to have more freedom by choosing their own style. We are constantly influenced and attacked by images (advertisements, magazines, blogs, and television) showing us what we should wear. The fact that fashion changes every season makes people consume, and this is a catastrophe both for the environment (production of cheap clothes can be very polluting, cotton treatment, dying process, etc.) and for the people working in this chain of production. The image of the sheep is simple but strong. If I had to redo it today I would probably be sharper, meaning I would show fewer things, but certainly not as minimalistic as the jury wished.

1. Detail of installation Sheep wearing a wool pullover + badges, metal, fabric, pullover and badges, 120x80cm, 2009
2.

Detail of installation *sNike*, embroidery on canvas, 20x20cm and *Mon mode*, a 26 page booklet with text (for free) 8x4cm, 2009

PICNIC
A few months after my graduation, my boyfriend and I moved from Geneva to Berlin with a car full of stuff. We really wanted to create a project together which fit with our personalities. We both studied art and love making people meet. So we rented a space, an empty big space on the ground floor in a popular area called Neukölln. Our plan was to create a workshop, a social and short-stay residence art space, and so we did. We called our project *PICNIC*. We invited several people (all are artists that we more or less know) to come and spend a few days in the space, which was also our living space. The task was to make a project in situ. It was nice we met people in a different context, were close to the creation process, while discussing and spending time together, like we do at picnics. We had a great time. With every guest the situation was different, different needs, different atmospheres. We took different roles. I really enjoyed all of my roles, hosting, helping artists in practical aspects, sometimes having discussions about the work or the display, and organising a public event. Yes, the artists had the choice to show their work either just in the window or during an opening. These openings were great moments to exchange ideas, to meet new people, and to have fun. All of them were really unique, depending on the invited artist, his work, and his network. With these experiences I developed more confidence, both in myself and in Art in general. I really appreciated these picnics also because I felt I was actively participating in the Art World but in my own way, with my own
point of view. In a much smaller proportion, I can relate this project to The Factory\(^1\), a space created by Andy Warhol in the middle of the ’60s. The Factory was Andy Warhol’s loft, an atelier but also an exhibition space, a place to party, to meet, and to socialise. I relate our project to that one in the way that he created his own space, inviting whom he wanted because he liked them, he liked their work, and who they were. The main difference was that he would also expose his own work, something I think that I couldn’t manage to do. If I continue this project, I'll give more space to my own practice.

During this time what I missed was my individual work: working with my hands by myself on my own projects. In between every guest we tried to rearrange the space for us to work, but for me this was not easy. I was too much concentrated on the work of others.

Everything changed when I got the positive answer from Konstfack. The profile was to spend a period of two years concentrating on my own work. I was sad because I was leaving our new project but also excited because a new one was starting. Before I left Berlin, my friend (the same one with whom I used to steal and go “garbaging”) came to visit me, and we decided to do a “self short stay residence”. We decided to build a “cliché-jungle” out of recycled clothes and to write stories about our vision of travelling behind (on the cardboard supporting the installation), much like a postcard. We named this project Dschungel (fig. 3). We went to the second-hand shop next to PICNIC and borrowed four huge bags of clothes for three days. It was also a way to experimenting the spontaneous way of working. We had a lot of fun, and this experience of working in collaboration excited me a lot. I really enjoy this feeling of playing with material on a large scale and working with someone else. I think that this made me feel more secure in a way. I was not the only one taking decisions, we discussed together and thus were stronger. In working in collaboration, I realise that, while we could spend more time discussing and deciding things, there are always questions and ideas you did not have yourself and pop up because you are two. This is more complicated but also richer.

In the case of this project, things actually happened how we imagined and nothing unforeseen arose; we had an idea on a Monday and the following Thursday we could show it, celebrating it in the form of an opening. I of course think that things turned out so easy because I worked with someone I knew very well. With this project I realised I wanted to work with second hand clothes; in that way it has been a trigger for my Master’s project.

**BETWEEN ART AND DESIGN**

Last November, the Icelandic artist Shoplifter came to Konstfack to speak about her work. I really liked her energy, the way she places herself between art and design, and her way of working. She is used to jumping between different projects, design, art, alone, collectively, installations, performances, and sculptures. I admire this way of working, I feel like that too, and I really hope I can make my living in that way; that is, doing one day art pieces for galleries or art spaces, the other day a window for a shop and then thinking about products to sell, all the while being able to work with different people. As Shoplifter said, in this way we will touch many more people, those who go to galleries, those who go to museums or those who shop. I think that this could be possible since acting in this way offers more possibilities, opens more doors. As she said, “I don’t want to be stuck in a single category! I want to have access to different worlds.” I have a similar feeling. I want to continue to explore techniques, concepts, and aesthetics and be able to go back and forth between the art and design worlds. I think like that I could be freer, more open to surprises and to unexpected collaboration that hopefully will happen.
When I saw Neverscape, (fig. 4) I immediately related it to Dschungel; building a landscape is like trying to make people feel like they are somewhere else, introducing them to our world, making them travel.

At the time I applied to Konstfack I thought I would do some more art, but that plan was vague. Soon I realised that I could also choose design as a direction. Maybe because I got a scholarship from IKEA (to study design) or maybe because I allow myself to try to realise another of my dreams, I finally decided to try to understand the design world. In this way I can go back and forth between these two worlds.

This switch really began to operate when I decided to participate in the Stockholm Furniture Fair (2012) project, my formal entry into the Design World. I knew that I wanted to do a design project, something people could buy and have in their houses.

A few weeks before the Fair, I participated in a site-specific project for which I had been working around Telefonplan (the area around my school) searching for abandoned fabric. I found some. (fig. 5-6) One of these items was a pair of white trousers so old that when I washed them they become almost transparent and fell apart. I found them really interesting as an “object”. I hung them in the window. This reminded me of a curtain (fig.7).

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I thought it was a good idea to redo this for the Furniture Fair, but on a bigger scale. Playing with sizes make us feel smaller, like children, and this reminds me of my desire to share the playful part of life. Or maybe I needed to prove something to myself. So I had this idea, but I had actually never made a pair of trousers before. One of my classmates who studied fashion proposed to help me. We drew the pattern on paper. Then I had to find the fabric. I wanted to do it with second-hand material, and there was this huge abandoned velvet curtain lying in the entrance of the Textile department since over a month. I found the owner, a teacher, and she sold it to me for a symbolic price. I was really happy.
In the end, I kind of like this project (fig. 8), but as another classmate said, it was missing something to be more “me”; is it because it’s too stiff, too proper, and too clean? I think I made it like that (clean and well done) because for me the Furniture Fair means “serious” design, I wanted to show the “serious” or professional part of myself, or to prove to myself that I can also be like that. Could this attitude also come from the fear that I have to finish my Masters and find a job? So I don't think it’s not me but rather perhaps another side of my personality. The process in this project was really different from Dschungel for example. I saw how people can be so helpful, but I found the technique of fashion patterns not really spontaneous. What I mean by that is that in fashion patterns we have to calculate a lot, make a first try with “bad fabric”, then see if it works and then do it with the right fabric; it takes a lot of time. Is it maybe for that reason that my classmate couldn't recognise me in fashion? I think that the trousers could have been more “me” if they had been a bit rougher and spontaneous. Perhaps then my classmates would recognise me more easily. Is it really what I want? This project made me ask a lot of questions, mainly about design. Some simple ones like: How would I produce it? Will I do it by myself? How will I find the material since it is second-hand? There were also some more personal ones like: do I really want to mass-produce it? And which position would I take in this system?

One “model” can be Andrea Crews. Andrea Crews is a collective led by Maroussia Rebecq who performs between art and fashion by federating stylists, illustrators, musicians, video directors, and performers. Andrea Crews creates clothes and accessories; every piece is individually handled, according to its initial function and its potential. Andrea Crews is committed to a sustainable development economy. Their ethical and innovative concept is based on an autoproduction system, allowing them to initiate independent projects. I admire this way of working and thinking through the production. Another collective I could take as an inspiration is Dennis Design Center.

DENNIS DESIGN CENTER
Last spring, I went to Fiera del Mobile in Milan (2012) with my flat- and classmate. I’ve heard that it was a very important event for the Design world, like Venice Biennial is for Art probably, so I went. The fair was divided into several areas spread out in the city so we spent the first two days together, crossing the city in all directions, walking and observing very intensively. There were so many things to see! I almost had pain in my eyes and certainly in my feet. We discovered Dennis Design Centre (DDC) on the second day (fig. 9). It was in the “cool and trendy” area of the Fair, the one full of young people, with young designers abounding and parties at night. It took place in the “street”, outside, in between several buildings on a parking

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3 www.andreacrews.com/ (18 February 201, 17:06)
4 http://milano.dennisdesigncenter.dk/ (9 December 2012, 13:30)
lot. DDC is a collective that works with site-specific pop-up installations. They transform the city into a playground for all ages. In Milan it was shaped as a self-made gas station made from wood pallets, which took place as a WIP (Work In Progress) project. There were people wearing red working everywhere and building take-away furniture which was also made from the same pallets. “A NEW DESIGN EVERYDAY” was one of their advertisements, so creative! Benches, stools, and swings were spread about. This day they were building portable stools which consisted of four legs and a fabric ribbon tied in a way that you could carry it as a bag. Some of the furniture was displayed randomly in the space around, and some of the pieces were traveling because people were moving them in the city or taking them home. They also designed site-specific items to solve small everyday problems. For example, when it was raining they built small ponds of rainwater that greeted guests; these were placed in flooded areas of the street. “Make your own — it’s open source!” Everyone could redo the thing by himself. I really like their aesthetic, simple and raw, and their concept, building site-specific furniture with very common material for everyone. It was so alive compared with the rest of the Fair so I spent several hours there, just looking around and enjoying. We could see the designers working, and we could ask them questions. I wanted to be part of the collective, thinking and working with our hands together.

DDC is a pop-up unit created by Bureau Detours in 2011. Bureau Detours operates on a mix of platforms, ranging from urban planning, to art and design, from which they are testing the limits of the public space. I could easily see myself in this kind of collective after my studies, with this way of thinking and working. I was touched by the humanity and the creativity of this project, the fact that they work with, for and next to people with such cheap or most likely recycled cheap material. In my Master’s project, I’m trying to develop something similar. I would like to play with recycled material and make people bring home ideas and concepts.

A few months ago I discovered a word that explained what I’m trying to do in my art and design work. “Up-cycling is the practice of converting waste materials into products of greater value.” DDC and Andrea Crews are good examples of upcyclers.

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http://dennisdesigncenter.dk/DENNIS-Detours (27 March 2013, 22:30)
BOOST-BUST

I came back to school (2012-2013) with the idea of participating in a design competition run by a Swedish company. I thought it would be a good way to train myself for the future. Because I want to become a designer I’ll probably have to participate in that kind of competition pretty often. The task was to make a lamp. The instructions were “feel free” but they gave some keywords: fun, special mood, innovative, fashion, story, environmentally friendly, production friendly!

Sketches for a lamp, made with Paint, between September and October 2012.

I started with these sketches (fig. 10) and then made some models with different materials. Because I wanted to have recycled material, my first real size prototype was made with plastic ribbon the one used to pack large items in the shops (fig. 11). When I asked the salesman in the shop (Bauhaus- Stockholm) he told me: “You can have as much as you want; for us it is garbage”. It works in pictures but in real life it’s too weak. Then I decided not to be so picky (recycled material) and tried with wood, leather (from a sofa found on the street), and a stapler. It worked, but it was visually more aggressive because of the edges (fig. 12).

11. Boost bust, plastic ribbon, 65x40x30cm, 2012
12. Prototype with wood and leather, 65x40x30cm, 2013

Then I got a bit confused so I asked some questions to myself about Boost-bust and tried to answer them.
Where would I like to go with this project?

I don’t really know yet; maybe this is mainly an exercise.

Would I like this object to become an industrial design object or not?

Yes, but I would also like the production to be local, environmentally and socially friendly.

If I wanted to produce it, how would I distribute it?

Probably by going around from shop to shop with the lamp or with pictures, trying to sell it.

For whom am I doing it? What kind of people would like a lamp like that in their houses?

For young and middle aged people who have space and like clothes like me.

What should I improve?

The construction. I would like the product to be in a kit. People would buy it and then build in an easy way at home. I would also maybe consider producing several sizes.

Would I want this object to evoke a thought/discussion?

YES!

Do I think it will work?

I’m not so sure but I hope so.

The aim of Boost-bust is to provoke a discussion about the consumption of clothes; for that reason I would say it’s a critical design project.

Critical Design takes a critical theory based approach to design. Critical design uses designed artefacts as an embodied critique or commentary on consumer culture. Both the designed artefact (and its subsequent use) and the process of designing such an artefact causes reflection on existing values, mores, and practices in a culture.

This approach of design interests me very much because it makes people think about the objects around us in another way, and it also uses humour to pass a message. I would like to bring some humour into my work; I think that by diverting everyday objects and giving them new functions I could bring a poetic and humoristic aspect to the piece.

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MY MASTER’S PROJECT

WHAT IS A DESIGNER?

Before knowing more about critical design, for me the main difference between an artist and a designer was that the designer is closer to people because he designs things to use in everyday life. That's the main reason why I want to become a designer. In the beginning of my Master’s work it was quite difficult because I was still thinking in an art way. Maybe it was easier to find ideas and solutions wearing these glasses. In my mind, the role of a designer was only to invent new shapes of things that already exist. I looked in the Oxford Dictionary online. “Designer: a person who plans the look or workings of something prior to it being made, by preparing drawings or plans”. I would like to add that today almost everything has been made and often the role of designers is to re-design. Like in the fashion, furniture, or industrial design industries, people try to make new collections every season/year to make people buy again and again what they already have, thus stimulating consumption. So, what's my role? I’ll find my place.

My idea is to design sustainable ideas or concepts with which people could interact or do by themselves and make them think about their relationship with objects. Because of my interest in the consumption of clothes, my plan for the Masters is to investigate how I can find design solutions to re-value the clothes we don’t want anymore. I am designing a landscape out of clothes and am writing a booklet that will gather my research and questions about the design system. I plan to lay it in the middle of my installation. People will be able to sit on the clothes-seats and peruse it.

EMMAUS


I’ve been received very kindly by a girl, around my age. Behind her are two huge bins full of garments. In the middle is a conveyor belt with clothes passing by. Two other girls are facing us, gloves and paper masks in place, discussing and laughing while sorting. “They come twice a week to throw away, you can come whenever you want and take whatever you want ” one of them said to me. I head to the most empty bin. Trousers, pullovers, jumpers, knitwear, tablecloths, sheets, shoes, bags, textures, and colors are mixed. I was impressed by the good condition and the amount of clothes in the bin. I asked one of the girls how she sorts. She answers, “we throw away things that are dirty or broken.” I did not see any holes or dust. I took only a few items. It was the first time; I had come mainly to see. Now I have five big suitcases full of clothes. I’ve been there four or five times.
In 2011, Emmaus Stockholm received approximately 292 tons of clothes.
93.5 tons were sent to the Sahara
45.5 tons were sent to Angola
40 tons were sent to the second hand boutique in Stockholm

I made my own calculation:
292 - 93.5 - 45.5 - 40 = **113 tons** is the total amount of clothes they throw away every year.

In the ‘70s, at the beginning of the project they used to take care of all items they received, also because they used to get much less. Today they don’t have the time to wash the clothes, if they are a bit dirty; they go straight to the garbage bin! There is a company that comes with a truck, picks up the containers, and burns the clothes. For Emmaus it is a big cost! (143 000 kr is the cost for the garbage per year)

I arrived in Sweden one day before school started. In my suitcase I had: one pair of trousers, two pair of leggings, two pullovers, four t-shirts, three dresses, and two pairs of shoes. Because I went to second hand shops, I found things in the street, and in the garbage, today (one and half years later) I have at least four times as many things.

OVERSTUFFED LAND

**FUNCTIONINGLandscapes**
The landscape is the furniture of the planet.
The furniture is the landscape of the house.
The house is a planet

Inspired by the **Dschungel** concept as a background for my lamp, I planned to build a landscape out of clothes, which I’m collecting in the garbage of Emmaus. This idea popped up in the beginning of this year while I was making collages.

*Land 3-5-14-17-18-26, A4, between September 2012 and March 2013.*

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9 Emmaus, Verksamhetsberättelse 2011, EMMAUS Stockholm

I’ve tried to reproduce them in space with real clothes. It did not work as I expected but some unexpected things happened. I was with my pile of garments in an empty room with the quote of Augustina Woodgate (see above) in my head. I wanted to try to make an interior out of these textiles. I took a pair of wool trousers and started to fill them with other clothes and so on, connecting them. This happened:

(fig. 13-14-15)

13. Trial of an installation in space, variable dimensions, 2013

14. Seats clothes filled with clothes, variable dimension, 2013

A few weeks later, trying again in space, a similar thing happened between a ladder and a dress (fig. 16).

16. Lamp n°2 short ladder, dress and bulb on cord, variable dimension, 2013
For me, this kind of lamp is more interesting than *Boost-bust* because everyone could make them at home; it's even simpler. Looking back, I realize that I connected the visual of this object with some of the works of Erwin Wurm. Erwin Wurm is an Austrian artist, active in the art scene since the 80’s. He started with textile work and then continued to investigate sculpture in a wider perspective. As soon as I opened the book *«ERWIN WURM, I love my time, I don’t like my time»* (fig. 17-18) I felt close to his work, sometimes visually and sometimes conceptually. He’s also concerned about gluttonous consumerism. What I really like in his work is his comic-serious attitude. I can really feel that he is playing while working. His work takes many shapes; it's rich. This furniture made out of clothes reminds me of his earlier work when he exhibited suits as sculptures, the *Untitled* series, or multiple pullovers inside each other. Inspired by his *Instruction drawing*, I planned to investigate in a similar way but for design.

![Picture from the book](image)

I try again in space, I redo the seats in another way, (fig. 19) more stuffed, more stiff. Looking at them, I realize that the seats were like stones and the cloth in the background like a mountain. I want the visitors to feel in a land, a nice Overstuffed land (that’s the title of my work)

![Trial on space, Overstuffed land, March 2012](image)

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11 Erwin Wurm, *«ERWIN WURM, I love my time, I don’t like my time»* Hatje Cantz publishers 2004
WHERE I AM, WHERE I’M GOING

I still really like getting clothes for free and I am happy to have found a new solution for getting as much as I want and a project where I am dealing with treasure. With this investigation I discovered a way of being in the design world that suits me. If I had to name my situation I would say: I am a designer who’s working with treasure, somewhere in between art, critical design, and up cycling. Also I realised there is a gap I could investigate and in which I could place myself. It’s in between the garbage bin and the moment when the truck comes to pick up the clothes to burn them. After my graduation I will probably try to strengthen my collaboration with second hand shops to work with them, find a place as a designer in that world, and find the balance with the organisation of events.
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