Terms and conditions
— exploring our becoming with the digital through designing objects for sense making.

a Master degree project by Maja Frögård, Industrial design, Konstfack, 2014.
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Internet and digitalization is changing our reality. Blurring away physical boundaries, the Cloud ignores geographical distances. It is an enormous space to share information globally, it provides us with spectacular possibilities, but how is our entanglement with this digital dimension affecting us?

My aim is to explore our becoming with the digital and to evoke personal judgment in our everyday use of digital devices.

I explore by challenging my preconceptions through confrontation with situations and events alien to me. My curiosity drives me to make sense of my environment. I make sense through designing, through making.

My objects, the Haze, the Self Portal and Bad Habit/Phone cover, are all in different ways attempts to make sense of immaterial aspects or phenomena in our relations to and through the digital. Through putting the objects in relation to your body you can yourself experience and feel these ambiguous relations and make bodily sense of them.
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1. POINTS OF DEPARTURE

The digital is embedded in our everyday lives, but how does that affect us? A very big question impossible to answer, but possible to explore!

1.1 DIGITAL REFLECTIONS

Before staring my bachelor in Industrial design here at Konstfack I was in Indonesia. At the time I had a Samsung phone, probably one of the thinnest phones ever produced at the time. Placed in the back pocket of my jeansshorts when i was walking up a very steep stair it broke and became a two piece phone. I kept the phone held together by duct tape for a year. Ironically that happened to be my first year in a Industrial design education. The next summer i upgraded my two piece phone, that had developed the annoying habit of hanging up in the middle of calls, to another Samsung but now with a metal casing so it would not break. The phone still works but is lying in my drawer at home, and has been replaced by a second hand iPhone with a broken glass backside. One of the reasons why I got interested in doing my master thesis on people and their relation to the digital was the fact that my phone choices often made people pose questions. My laziness in upgrading was seen as a statement, which I have always claimed that it was not, but maybe it was. Maybe in the context I was in, not being conscious of what phone you had was in fact a statement? And of course I was conscious of what phone I had, I mean the reason I got the metal cased phone was because that the one before broke, I kept to the same brand because I liked the interface and did not wanna go through the hassle of learning new menu systems. It was conscious when I bought it but after that my idea was to use it until it broke. Maybe this whole project is just a disguised reason for me to get an iPhone, like those people you hear about that consciously breaks their phone because a new one is available? I prefer to think not.

The word “Selfie” has entered the Oxford dictionary, the New Yorker wrote articles about “How today’s computer weakens our brain”, “How Facebook is making us unhappy” and “Why we should think about the threat of artificial intelligence”, the Swedish “Vårdguiden” (the Care guide) writes about “Moderna åkommor” (Modern conditions) which are diseases connected to the use of different digital devices and Dagens Nyheter has a whole article series about “Du nya digitala värld” (this new digital world). Philosopher and Cultural theorist Byung-Chul Han, writes in “Trötthetssamhället” (Fatigue Society) about how we are living in a society of self exploitation and multitasking with no room for breaks or gaps. He claims that this is the new normal condition. He advocates boredom. The humans cultural achievements he argues can only be reached through deep contemplating attention which is today being pushed away by hyper attention. Hyper attention is described as a form of multitasking; switching between tasks absentmindedly.

Something is going on. I read about it in the paper, I experience it on the subway, life as I know it is in transformation, an intangible layer hovering on waist height, lurking, finding its way into your home, into your mind...

Byung-Chul Han means that depression is a condition connected to the positivism in todays society. The use of the limitless can puts the individual as outermost responsible for their own success and creates a achievement society of depressed and failed people; the paradox of freedom.

I am on the tram on my way to school. There is a few moments in my day where I can let my mind wander, where I am not concerned with any musts; sitting on the subway or tram and when brushing my teeth. I like to take the tram from Eslov to Liljeholmen. I travel over water and islands and it is not so crowded. I look, I think, I sit and watch other people. Sometimes my mind makes up stories. Over time there has been a change in posture, in movement walking on and off the tram. I am surrounded by zombies. Their heads are hanging slightly bent forward, their eyes are focused but empty, their pace slows down, their souls are not in this world. I am on the tram, I am in my own mind.

Nina Wormbs, reseaching on the relation between technical and societal development, explains our use of digital as metaphor. Digital in our age stands for a change occurring because of the accessibility of new types of technology classified as digital. As I read her text she seems to think that we are focusing on the wrong thing being occupied with the digital rather we should focus on more consistent humanistic concepts such as integrity. She means that it is problematic to discuss concepts as for instance human rights to tightly tie to a certain technology because it might lead to a focus on technological development rather that societal.

My laptop broke down before summer had started, so I spent the summer without it. I realized that my normal condition, my habitat, includes a laptop. In the beginning of the fall semester I needed to write so I borrowed a old laptop from a friend. It had studns on it and was painfully slow. I never felt like it was mine.

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1 Han, 2010, p 22-37
2 Dalunde, 2012, p 81-90
1.2 ATTENTION IS MONEY

“Information is no longer merely power. It is big business. In recent years, the fastest growing component of international trade has been the service sector. ... The use of computer facilities, of course, considerably greater efficiency and velocity in the collection, storage, use, retrieval, and transfer of information.” As Professor in law and legal theory, Raymond Wack, points out there’s both power and big money in providing and handling digital information. Our relation to this big business with multiple stakeholders and intentions, becoming omnipresent through digitalization of our everyday need to be considered and reflected on.

I forgot my phone at school, so I spent my morning with my thoughts. Instead of instantly calling you to tell you about my euphoric state, I reflected on my own findings. Smiling on the subway, having time to formulate what I would later tell you. This morning I could not ask my phone for the quickest route, so I went with my gut feeling. It was sunny. I took the tram.

Sarah Kember, Professor of New Technologies of Communications, talks in the recording of her “Ambient Intelligence: the makeover and metamorphosis of the self in relation to technology and capital (and what we can do about it)” from the Society for Existential Analysis Conference 2011 about technological development as self-critical and evolving. From the critique of the hostile AI with HAL (from Stanley Kubricks 2001: A Space Odyssey) as the most infamous representation, came the speech focused Artificial Life who’s critique helped to shape the servile Ambient Intelligence forfilling our every need and wish. According to Kember there is reason for suspicion; “I don’t want to be paranoid but am suspicious, we have to consider the possibilities why the role of the home is being made over. I do not think it has much to do with universal human needs but rather contingent political ones. The cycle of self reinforcement, so called, answers asymmetrically to governmental needs, the perpetuation of technologies of everyday control. These largely invisible, flexible, friendly agents are gonna relate more to each other and their databases than to us. We will feed them, we will be the source of their data, all the time when we are acting and interacting online.”

The Cloud. It’s not really a cloud, it’s a centralized network consisting of big buzzing server halls as the Contemporary Historian Rasmus Fleischer puts it. The cloud as a metaphor is according to me not helping the understanding of this widespread network, it makes it feel even more abstract and intangible, like a pretty, fluffy, global dream you want to be a part of. Present in the cloud we find actors like Google and Facebook who’s business models build on surveilling user behavior, according to Fleischer. This is not surveillance in the sense of reading personal letters but rather gathering personal data that can be used to tailor advertising or to sell to other companies Fleischer explains. This centralization and collecting of personal data has been up for debate, how to create legislations to protect the private integrity. While some argue that to use a mobile phone (geographic position) or to use Google is optional, and that we choose to be under surveillance, Fleischer questions just how optional this is in today’s digital society. He argues that the companies by not being transparent with how they use the information, also the necessity of the mobile phone in professions as for instance freelancers makes this debate of “own choice” problematic.

Hanna took care of my forgotten phone and put it safely in her locker. The code was 5860. When I got to school in the morning Yu-Ching handed my phone. On the phone was a message from Hanna saying; “Hi Maja, I couldn’t find my lock so your phone is in Yu-Ching’s locker.”

Critical designeduo Dunne & Raby questions who this fast paced technological progression is for? Do we need it? “Critical design is one of many mutations design is undergoing in an effort to remain relevant to the complex technological, political, economic changes we are experiencing now. Rather than speeding up the entry of technology into everyday life, we need to reflect on its impact and ask if we need it.”

My computer thinks for me. Sometimes I automatically click on the web browser, type in f, scroll down and enter Facebook. I took me longer to write that then what it does for me to open Facebook. I don’t think, I just do, and my computer is there to helpfully suggest where it was that I wanted to go. Where was it now? Do I even have time to formulate that thought before I take in suggestions to alter my first line of thought? Is this what subletting parts of your brain feels like? I now have the memory of a goldfish, but maybe it is just me getting old...

3 Wacks, 2010, p 110
4 (http://vimeo.com/44357777)
5 Fleischer, 2013, p 111-112
6 Freyer, 2008, p 266
Internet and digitalization is changing our reality. Blurring away physical boundaries the Cloud ignores geographical distances. It is an enormous space to share information globally, it provides us with spectacular possibilities, but how is our entanglement with this digital dimension affecting us?

Studying Industrial Design I find our love for technical innovation and development sometimes becomes a bit too unconditional and driven by the logic of technical and economic progression rather than human interest. This is why I will look at designers role in digitalization. Who are we designing for?

I want to tweak human/digital processes to pose different views and possibilities overlooked by an-economic/technical mindset rather than a humanistic one. My aim is to explore our becoming with the digital and to evoke personal judgement in our everyday use of digital devices.

1.4 EXPLORING AND SENSE MAKING

Having an exploratory approach, allows me to become as I explore with no set idea of what the end result will be, it helps me keep an open mind. Another important part in my approach is mixing theory with practice, through reading, discussing, observing and self immersive research I can find connections and bodily make sense of my research.

I explore by challenging my preconceptions through confrontation with situations and events alien to me. My curiosity drives me to make sense of my environment. I make sense through designing, through making.

1.5 THE DESIGNER ROLE, IDEAS AND IDEOLOGY

Concerning the role of the industrial designer working in and with digital technology I think it is crucial to be aware of the ideological framework. I as an industrial designer want to take the role of the human advocate and I would like to create tools/theory for this.

Industrial designs existence has a historic relation to the Industrial revolution, something that can be seen in it's close ties to industry. This comes with a Modernistic heritage that is still not broadly questioned and argued for it's relevance in the contemporary role of the industrial designer and what we want to become.

Dunne and Raby talks about this heritage in an interview in the book “Digital by design: crafting technology for products and environments”;

“The world we live in today is incredibly complex. Our social relations, desires, fantasies, hopes and fears are very different from those at the beginning of the 20th century. The role technology plays today in shaping our experience of everyday life is unprecedented. Yet many key ideas underpinning contemporary design practice stem from the early 20th century.”

Dunne and Raby further talks about the possible role of the designer as taking the role of an author;

“But being an author is not about ego; that's an old-fashioned view of authorship, it's about a designer being involved in the definition of values that are embedded in an object. Questioning the implications of ideas and ideologies locked into the operation of a product.”

Kathryn Moore, Professor at the Birmingham Institute of Art and Design, writes and gives lectures on design quality, theory, education and practice. Moore argue that designers should not hide their choices and values behind “the supposed objective neutrality implied by more 'scientific', technology-based, problem-solving approaches” but rather to discharge the concept of a subjective, subjective dichotomy and see that everything we do or say has gone through our own “cultural lens”.

“Design is often characterized as a highly personal, mysterious act, almost like alchemy, adding weight to the dangerous idea that it is possible, even preferable, to hide behind the supposed objective neutrality implied by more ‘scientific’, technology based, problem-solving approaches.”

Moore also argues for focusing on the experience and to see that as something holistic, the different parts must be judged together, to create an idea. Exploring ideas to frame the research is in her view central in design projects and to Moore ideas bind all manner of things together; argument, opinions, values. By collapsing the different fragments of our consciousness into one holistic concept of perception we can discharge the “supernatural element” of aesthetic experience and see it as “dependent on and limited by what we know”

Seeing the design proposal as a complex whole, as suggested by Moore, does not imply that my work is either artistic or scientific but can be both.

7 Freyer, 2005, p 266
8 Freyer, 2005, p 265
9 Moore, 2010, p 2-235
1.6 POSITIONING THE PROJECT

In this diagram I have chosen other projects to position myself in relation to. The projects range from research to commercial. They all put new perspectives on our relation to the digital, or in some cases technology, but does so with various intention and result. I have here chosen parts of different project referred to by me as products although in some cases they are seen by their authors as probes, objects or events. Mapping them from product to event is an attempt to see how the different projects relate to the concept of becoming, something they do very differently and that this two dimensional representation only shows very simplified. A few examples could be for instance Jawbone UP that sees becoming in relation to their product, the activity tracking wristband is to be used over time and it is in this longer relation you can learn about yourself from the data you produce. However they do not question the context that they are in, the development of personal digital devices and the ethic problematics with for instance surveillance or production. Fairphone on the other hand has focused on the becoming of the product, mainly the production process, but leaving a lot of unexplored potential in the actual use of the product, only doing slight modifications from a standard Smartphone. As I have used becoming here, it is becoming mainly tied to the use of the product or event; the possibility to achieve change through the products taking into consideration the use, how it is perceived and the potential to live on.

Projects and links:
- Alignment, pink airbag explosion sign, part of “Do you want to replace the existing normal?” by Dunne and Raby, 2007/2008.
  www.dunneandraby.co.uk/content/projects/75/0
- Fairphone, a smartphone with social values by fair phone, 2013.
  www.fairphone.com
  www.jawbone.com/up
- Monolith babuskja + Laptop pajama, digital rituals through impossible products (prototypes) by Maja Frögård (me), 2013/2014.
  see page 17
- Siren shoes, shoes that shriek loudly when both feet are on the ground, part of “digital peacock tails” thesis by Unsworn, 2003.
  http://www.unsworn.org/dpt/index.htm
- Threads - a mobile sewing circle, part of the dissertation ”Patchworking Publics-in-the-making” by Kristina Lindström and Åsa Ståhl, 2014.
  http://dspace.mah.se/handle/2043/16093
2.0 BECOMING

"Time is that which disappears as such in order to make appearance, all appearance and disappearance, that is, events, possible. Its disappearance is twofold: is disappears into events, processes, movements, things, as the mode of their becoming. And it disappears in our representations, whether scientific or artistic, historical or contemporary, where it is tied to, bound up in, and represented by means of space and spatiality. It suffers, or produces, a double displacement: from becoming to being, and from temporal to spatial."10

- Elizabeth Grosz

Using the term becoming should be seen as acknowledging the relation between now and the before and after. Or as Lindström puts it "emerging rather than being fixed and still"11. Nothing is created out of nothing but builds on previous knowledge and understanding. Seeing human as becoming emphasizes the ongoing process of constantly being shaped in relation with what surrounds us.

Becoming is important in my exploratory approach where I allow my process and findings to transform my ideas and I explore through making. By making something and then reason around it opens up for new interpretations and multiple perspectives. It stretches my habitual patterns, and in the detour I can create new meaning and knowledge. By seeing the transformation as important I move between concrete concepts and abstract form interpretations to find new connections and nuances, my theories takes form in the making.

I also use the concept becoming and its implications of that we confirm and construct our surrounding and world view through what we create to explore and expand the designer role. Seeing the designer role as emerging, a lot of the values in industrial design does not hold the same releuace today as when the profession started to take shape. Through not questioning but conforming a lot of these ideals and values are still widely used today. Exploring this emergence means trying to find new potential for our skills as designers. The designer skills I focus on in my work is shaping and understanding our surrounding, its history, its contemporary relevance, how it affect humans, our relations to each other and our world view. How we are shaped and how we shape. How we reason and argue. Pushing the importance of how our everyday things and surrounding shapes us gives the designer a big responsibility to acknowledge and understand underlying values in objects and products and how different perspectives and world views are chosen or excluded.

10 Grosz, 1999, p 1-2
11 Lindström & Ståhl, 2014, p 272-276
3. EXPLORATIONS

3.1 DISCUSSING THE DIGITAL

To start exploring different realities to the digital I made toolkits that I used when interviewing people.

I tried a few different ‘tools’ for conducting interviews with users; a daily timeline, a few sentences with blank spaces to fill in and a smartphone on which they could only choose nine apps. On the daily timeline the participants (3 men aged 25, 28 and 30+) would mark out what digital devices they were using, for what purpose and how that made them feel. One of the sentences with blank spaces the participants filled in was to use the metaphor of a building to describe their phone and why they chose that building.

In this case I think the timeline was a bit too general but it did provide an overview of the participants use of digital devices that showed that the smartphone was something that was more or less present throughout their day. Here the participants had to abstract their idea of the phone and apply it on another form which made them explain how they see their phone without asking explicitly.

I later chose to develop a mix of these ideas into a tool used for talking to different stakeholders; the ‘discussion map’. In the discussion map I wrote words connected to the topic I wanted to discuss, also brought in the draw your phone as a building metaphor, and a space to share a digital message. For me this worked better because I could more freely talk about the topic and ask about things I wanted to know more about.

3.2 MAKING MY PRECONCEPTIONS EXPLICIT

Early in the project I decided to prototype my preconceptions, to show my naive view on the topic at the same time as I was starting to explore it.

My preconceptions and first hypothesis was that the accessibility of the digital flow of information create stress. I also thought that digitalization is distancing us in a problematic way from our surroundings, which was why my response to this stress took a physical form, pulling you away from your digital reality.

I generated design concepts for one day based on the few things I thought I knew about the topic and decided on one concept called “put away digital devices before sleep”. The concept was influenced by the researcher and writer Dan Hasson’s lecture at Konstfack, “Stress right! — and find balance in life”, that I attended before the project had started where he talked on the importance of taking breaks throughout the day but to also try to wind down before going to bed to sleep better. The laptop pajama concept came from the idea to tuck someone in and so I wanted to try another concept for putting away your smartphone. The context of the Monolith-Babuskja comes from the 2001: A space odyssey mixed with the idea of making the action of putting away your digital devices before going to bed into a ritual, hence the repetitiveness of several ‘boxes’ or layers.

Prototyping my preconceptions and making them explicit to myself helped to push me further and to move beyond.
3.3 BECOMING WITH SMART PHONE

To me, my outside perspective to the digital omnipresence was obvious, I did not own a Smart phone. Something I on numerous occasions had been questioned about by people seeing this as an active choice, which it was not but later felt like it might be. Because of being a novis in parts of the digitalization of the everyday I decided to dive in head first. I started using a Smart phone.

I don’t understand technology and the digital and that scares me, but what scares me even more is when it’s so neatly packaged even I have a hard time not being enchanted by it. Maybe it’s bad experiences from using my computer too much, maybe I’m just scared of fluffy intangible clouds that affect other parts of the world beyond my knowledge and control. I soon however saw my behavior changing, checking emails, Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp on the subway. When I had time to prepare and wasn’t stressed, I could find an interesting program on P3, but for most of the time having the Smart phone only meant more restless checking of social media.

I soon realized that I do adapt quite easily and going from not letting any of the apps access my position or microphone I later didn’t even really think about it. Although this is really contradictory because I did think about it, a lot, but in a distancing theoretical sense which proved to be hard for me to put into practice. I think Google is a good example of where I know that it is one of the biggest companies in the world, I know that I’m “paying” with my personal data being logged and then probably sold on to other companies when I use their services, but I haven’t found a way around Google and for my level of tech skills there probably isn’t one. On the web I'm dependent on other peoples services and intentions, intentions that rarely are explicit, and rarely has legislations that can keep up the pace.

By keeping a video diary of my initial phase of using my Smart phone I discovered my own skepticism. I also saw how quickly the Smart phone was normalized and became a natural part of my daily routine.
3.4 QUANTIFYING MYSELF

The use of the activity tracking band + app from Jawbone called UP was an attempt to explore the concept of the “quantified self”.

The “quantified self” uses self-monitoring systems using sensors to log daily inputs, moods, performance etc. UP by Jawbone monitors movement using Motion X and is said to help you to “know yourself, live better. UP is a wristband and app that tracks how you sleep, move and eat — then helps you use that information to feel your best.”1 Using the band has enabled me to see an interpretation of the data collected from the movements during my sleep and how much I move during the day. I then receive tips in a “Did you know?” format giving me information about my own result as well as info about why it’s good to sleep and why it’s good to exercise. UP gives you feedback on your daily bodily behaviors, which can on one hand be experienced as distancing you from responding directly on bodily senses and on the other hand it can be said to make you aware of and put emphasis on the importance of ‘good health’ which may make you more aware of your body.

I personally feel that I don’t respond well to the concept of quantified information about myself but I did notice that I for instance tend to try to walk more because it was being measured.

11 https://jawbone.com/up/international

3.5 TESTING THE LAPTOP PAJAMA AND THE MONOLITH-BABUSKJA

To explore what would happen when using my prototypes I handed them out with instructions to two participants to try out.

The prototypes of my preconceptions was handed out with instructions and a logbook for the participant to write their reflections in. (two women aged 26 and 28) I also talked briefly with the participants after the test period of three days was over to get a more overall feedback.

”computer is more often turned off then the phone that is extremely rarely turned off even if not used. Turning on the phone in the morning (alarm) the pin codes needed can be annoying.”

— Stealing attention from the ritual? What would be the focus of the ritual? Block the signal automatically when in the box?

”I, myself want to get a routine that is more non-connected and non-screen related behaviors. What do I do instead? I read the book “det kallas kärlek”."

— led to reflections about the participants digital use and what to if not connected

”Fell asleep on the couch at 20.15, with the iPad still on.”

— doesn’t work for all

By testing the concept I found that even if the products were not always “used”, the users still started to reflect on their daily use of digital devices, the idea and concept in itself evoked reflection.
3.6 VIKTORS DAILY PHONE USE

To see how someone use their personal digital devices in their everyday I decided to follow my friend, film editor Viktor Skogqvist, for a day.

We started early, I got to his house just as he woke up and let me in. I told him to try not to mind me, and just go about his day as he normally would. Of course he did not since I was always present and taking a picture every time he picked up his phone. After work Viktor attended the opening of Tempo, a documentary film festival. During the opening of the festival a woman was doing a performance simultaneously as her film was showing in the packed theatre. I noticed that a big part of the audience was checking on their phones instead of or simultaneously watching the performance. The day ended late after attending the film festival after party. I had to take the night bus home after photographing Viktor going to bed.

Digital devices are commonplace and provides a constantly present choice between presence and escapism. The use of digital device can distract from the surrounding environment, creating a form of fragmented attention. This mix of the private phone use in public environment might enhance the separate subjective experiences, since personal references is omnipresent and becoming part of our shared experiences.
3.7 48H HACKATHON

I wanted to try to challenge my preconceptions about the “digital scene” here in Stockholm. I thought that they saw apps and gamification as the answer to all our problems. And so I chose to participate in “Switched on nature”, a two day event and hackathon curated by SHIFT, Stockholm Resilience Centre and Protothon.

The goal of the hackathon was to “explore the role and importance of innovation and technology for resilient urban systems, through a half-day intelligence briefing leading into a hackathon. Your challenge is to create a tool using big, open, geo-located urban data that will be used to enable collective action and drive behavioural change for resilient cities.” What was interesting was to meet people from different backgrounds, get some of my preconceptions confirmed, and others crushed. What I did see was the use of the “app” format as default and a strong culture of technological solutions through for instance “gameification” of different behaviors, a game where you did well by using “green electricity” or simply by using less electricity. In my group however there was me and two programmers, one of them, Stefan, was working for Omni, a news app curated by journalists, and the other one, Linus, had just decided to become an artist. We ended up talking about life, philosophy and technology in a very open-minded way, which on one hand was very nice but on the other hand I was looking for the friction of not agreeing but still having to come up with a proposal.

In the end I got my preconceptions both confirmed, but definitely challenged. When you go in to something with an open mind, you will almost always find some type of understanding of something you before found so much easier to discard. You will always find nuances.

3.8 “AFTERGLOW” TRANSMEDIALE 2014

Attending the Transmediale with this years theme “Afterglow” was another attempt to go deeper into the “digital scene” but now in a more global perspective.

“Transmediale is a Berlin-based festival and year-round project that draws out new connections between art, culture and technology. The activities of Transmediale aim at fostering a critical understanding of contemporary culture and politics as saturated by media technologies.” Many of the events I attended was explained as discussions concerning a topic but was rather 2-3 people presenting their work (which was often very interesting) and then some time for questions. Some of the discussions went over my head, but I still felt that I got the most out of the more academic lectures, plus the Keynote with “Documentary film director Laura Poitras, independent security analyst Jacob Appelbaum and artist and geographer Trevor Paglen reflect on upcoming frontiers of action and awareness for hackers, activists and artists in the present context of geopolitical surveillance and control.” What I did feel, and this is a very personal opinion, was that there was a gap between the art and the theory, it can probably be the fact that I’m not that knowledgeable in this digital field but I often had a hard time to understand the art, that to me seemed very unaccessible.

Being at Transmediale made me think that maybe I can use my own frustrated position of not knowing and not understanding to make the understanding I produce more accessible.

12 http://www.transmediale.de/festival/info
3.9 VISITING THE CLOUD

To better bodily understand the digital, how it operates, to kill the fluffy, intangible cloud metaphor, I went to visit the server halls.

Getting access to visit a server hall is not necessarily easy. I convinced a friend of a friend who works with maintenance and support of servers to sneak me in. Unauthorized people where not welcome in the server halls we visited, so I had to pose as his employee and was not allowed to take any photos. What I gained from the visits was an embodied experience of being in a server hall as well as some type of proof of the existence of such places. The server halls we visited were very much selling services, selling an idea and image. The server halls need to be perceived by companies buying server space as trustworthy and bulletproof.

A server hall, you could say, is a place we visit everyday when searching or browsing the internet. However, the server hall, the actual place, is hard to access, and is commonly referred to as “the Cloud” (or at least, the thing that the Clouds existence is made possible through) or sold as sleek services for internet access.
4.0 REASONING THROUGH MAKING

To make sense of my research material I reason through making. By articulating gestalt qualities I can reason with findings of my research, trying to make sense through moving between ideas and concept sketches, interesting theoretical findings, observations, my own experiences and gestalt.

Finding a way to work with design that works for me started in a course held by Cheryl Akner-Koler, professor in theoretical and applied aesthetics, during my second year in the industrial design bachelor program. In the course we collected objects that gave gestalt to different aspects of a product we were making. This is something I have later done different versions of in other projects, and recently been inspired further by a method used by Anna Odlinge, materializing "inner logic", but also by a method shown by Ramia Maâz of embodying a gestalt. My intention has never been to use one of these methods, and my mix builds on my very loose interpretations of the methods mentioned.

By giving shape to something I can see other things than what I see in theory, through reading text on a paper. Giving something a gestalt and putting it in relation to my body helps me to feel my way in a project. If something does not feel right, I go back to the idea or theory and try to find what to change and how that would effect the gestalt to then do the same thing all over again. Thinking through making is for me a way to mix theory with observation and emotion, to acknowledge and work with complexity.
MY EUREKA MOMENT
Maybe it was because I ate glow-in-the-dark candy yesterday,
or that I had a late night smoke in my kitchen window.
Maybe it was because I dropped my laptop to the floor, giving it its first bruise,
or that I forgot my phone at school and did not get distracted.
Maybe it was because I had three beers in good company
and started to access the english thinking parts of my brain.
Maybe it was because I dreamt that my sister stole my favorite coat,
or simply that I let my mind wander.
Whatever it was,
when I woke up this morning I knew;
Alex material needed a job interview;
and I needed the courage to simply make;
objects for sense making.
34

4.1 THE POWER OF CREATING

One interesting aspect of becoming and performativity for me as a designer is how mine and others making confirms or problematizes contemporary societal norms. How the intentions with my design, articulated or not, affect the becoming of others, what realities I create or legitimize through my design. If reality is what is performed in the now, if we affect other peoples emergence through retelling reality, always excluding through making choices, I see the need for nuancing the digital, showing what is not showed, opening up for more possible interpretations and relations to and through the digital. Sarah Kember draw this relation between the work of criticism to creativity and making, since according to Kember there is no gap between the experiment and its telling, saying is a kind of doing. She ends her book "Life after new media" with the call; "Critics of the world, create!"12

Kember continues by criticizing the digital for making us over as "sovereign subjects" and "metamorphosed as data objects for the market", stressing the problematic relation of this "highly political technology with integrated surveillance and marketing system". Amongst other things, this hold the possibility or threat of an expanding view of human as consumer. Seeing this in a design context, creating products could be said to if not produce, at least confirm human as consumer.

One perhaps trivial but personal experience of this was when they started putting up screens for video on subway platforms in Stockholm, claiming it was going to be used for traveling information, and later of course used to show advertisements. This is a banal example of how technology is first legitimized by one reason and then used for another. Making these steps gradually, moving slowly, reduces the risk of upset reactions.

4.2 MATERIALIZING

Materializing in this project is to me crucial since the metaphors for our understanding of the digital are powerful but misleading, as the earlier touched upon Cloud metaphor. In materializing I see a possibility to show more of the complexity of the digital, to reason with phenomena and structures important in becoming in a digital world. What I have found interesting with materializing is that things that first seemed important can be concluded as for instance being to general, and thoughts interesting, but ambiguous and hard to articulate can be reasoned with and start to make sense through the making. My project aims to make sense of the complexity of the digital through making.

Materializing is also a way to make the critical voices explicit and give room for other narratives in a world where commercial narratives seem to be the norm, becoming better at disguising themselves, harder to differentiate between being seen as for instance a citizen or a consumer. The language and structure of healthcare is an example that tells that story, where the patient became the customer. City planner and politician Enrique Penalosa writes in his article "Symbols and rituals of democracy in urban spaces"13 about the power of materializing seen as a type of language, of how environments affects human. Penalosa means that the city environment reflects the values and behaviors of the society simultaneously as it forges those values and behaviors. He highlights the effect of value experienced through environment;

"The sight of the red buses moving swiftly along a bus-only lane as expensive cars stand still in traffic is a symbol of democracy in action. ... As symbols and ceremonies are, they convey messages in a non-verbal, non-rational, almost subconscious way. But they can be effective and powerful, for example constructing legitimacy, which is as well a subjective perception."14

This relates to becoming as I see it, where the intentions and values in a design are important because they affect other people and how they view and construct reality. Giving shape to something also puts that in relation to your body, gives it more dimensions and make you react and reflect with mind and body, eliminating any possibility of there being one answer.

12 Kember, 2012, p 205
13 PLAN, 2014, p 20-21
14 ibid

materializing the ambiguity of exposed protection

Critics of the world, create! —Sarah Kember
5.0 SENSE MAKING OBJECTS

My proposals are objects that in different ways attempt to make sense of immaterial aspects or phenomena in our relations to and through the digital. Through putting these objects in relation to your body you can yourself experience and feel these ambiguous relations and hopefully make your own bodily sense of them.

The Haze is a reflective Sense making object; a materialization and a restructuring of metaphor, exploring how metaphors can both help but also omit our understanding.

The Exposed protection is an active Sense making object; it materializes the feeling of inescapable exposure and is an object made to use when interacting with the Haze. A trigger by name and shape to explore possible interactions.

The Self Portal is a poetic Sense making object; it materializes the gravity and power of the Smartphone, it explores the poetic potential of working with text and object to understand this relationship and where it takes us.

The Habit is an active Sense making object; a materialized resistance that puts a layer of different haptic sensation and disrupts the otherwise seamless Smartphone experience.

The Private search engine is an active Sense making object that is a quite literal materialization. Here the potential of materialization as making explicit and confronting is explored. Through giving shape we provide something that can be agreed or disagreed on, another hierarchy is constructed by the use of abstract objects rather than abstract theory.

By materializing intangible phenomena, feelings and relations in our becoming with the digital I wish to nuance the discussion by mixing theory with practice. The different pieces have been chosen and shaped in relation to each other; each exploring a new possibility of what a Sense making object could mean. Showing pieces that represents a mix of theory, feelings and observations is a direct reflection on how the digital boundlessly operates. Materializing this boundlessness can show important but overlooked perspectives and dimensions of our becoming in a digital world.
5.1 THE HAZE

The Haze was inspired by Contemporary Historian Rasmus Fleisher statement about The Cloud. The metaphor was explored further through visiting the server halls that uses the cloud metaphor when selling their services. My reinterpretation builds on a variety of research such as: following Viktor for a day to see his daily phone use, the discussion maps where people would describe their phone through using a building metaphor amongst others.

The Haze was put in the first diagram as the ambiguous counterpoint to the Cloud, then called digital haze and digital cloud. Since I found this metaphor crucial to our understanding of the digital I decided to move forward with it. In the first diagram the haze and the cloud are the two most finished concepts and to be able to problematize and to create a gestalt I made another diagram solely dedicated to the different aspects that together constitutes the Haze.

The different aspects shown in the second diagram are then structured in a sketch of the Haze and are moved through abstract form that reshapes the theory to then be adjusted and put in a new sketch. During the process I also write to understand, Short text where I try to capture or describe different sensations and emotions important in my project for example:

**THE HAZE**
Something is going on. I read about it in the paper, I experience it on the subway, life as I know it is in transformation, an intangible layer hovering on waist height, lurking, finding it’s way into your home, into your mind...

**BURNING**
Viral stories spreading like wildfire
events burning up before they are born
the ashes gets collected by server halls

**NEW BELIFS**
Quicker, faster processes,
made for machines
disappearing before the point has been made
Burning, growing, reshaping
disappearing, re constellating
becoming

Text and form to me complement each other. Sometimes a text or shape is only necessary in the process and not in the final proposal. In this project I have tried to used the different forms of presentation (written thesis, oral and visual presentation, catalogue and exhibition) to see what opportunities the different formats can provide and through that how accessible my project becomes.
the haze, first sense making model

the haze, making sense

the haze, sketch

the haze, sketch
5.2 THE EXPOSED PROTECTION

The Exposed protection is a sidekick to the Haze. It shaped and is shaped by the findings from exploring the concepts of intimate/exposed and shielding/protecting in the first diagram. It has several starting points: my fascination for the fabric woven from two different colors, a sketch of tactics showing how to protect yourself from the Haze and the ambiguity of feeling exposed and protected at the same time. The digital gives us the opportunity to create ourselves and our own parallel reality, but how do we pay? With our other reality and time or with our data? Since it is all dependent on the angle and perspective the object is made out of two layers of fabric creating different patterns and amounts of transparency.
5.3 SELF PORTAL

The Self portal has many origins, one being the materialization of procrastination in the first diagram. Procrastination is in itself ambiguous because you do in order to not do; you make so that you do not have to. The initial procrastination gestalt was then extended through looking at how we use our digital devices and how they build on algorithms enhancing our own digital persona through for instance targeted advertising and showing articles or post relating to what we have read or visited before.

SELF PORTAL
shiny glossy slippery
I am lead through the portal
into parallel realities
relieving me from my mundanity
escaping into someone else’s

not exchanging experiences
but chosen images

frozen fragments flowing
life mediated through layers of intentions
related
but isolated

choosing my reality
my attention
my presence

choosing what to remember
my external memory
my only memory

my head hurts

A lot of decisions and thoughts are expressed in the text or poem that is also included in the extension of the object through being plotted and put onto the acrylic tube the portal rests on. The text is fragmented onto the tube, answering to calculation and grid rather than to content, much like a lot of digital services work, having a set format that you get shaped to fit.

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1 page 29
2 page 52
5.4 THE HABIT

The Habit has its conceptual idea of taking of dressing up as a product from the idea of the impossible product and the Monolith babuskja and Laptop pajama. The material and shape initially came from exploring the concept of intimate/exposed in the first diagram\(^1\) and the initial idea was to make some kind of traditionally shaped phone cover dressing the phone in a skin that was a reaction on the aesthetics of the Smartphone. However following the shape of the phone felt like conforming to much both in shape and function.

I made quite a lot of material tests in silicone since I saw some type of potential in material but that I could not formulate other than in these tests\(^2\). I tried to put one of these blob tests on my phone and it stuck. I could still access my phone, it was just a bit harder. The blob stayed on my phone for about a month of the project, then I unfortunately lost it. The potential I saw in this blob grew out of a material experiment and then through my own use of it. The thoughts and ideas around it was transformed and took shape from exploring something that could be seen as completely useless; to limit your Smartphone by putting a silicon blob on it. By testing it myself I could see that there it had potential, this I could then package into an active Sense making object. The Habit is about experiencing and feeling; exploring and understanding through making and testing.

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\(^1\) page 29
\(^2\) page 35
the habit on phone, tested for one month, works well (I've gotten attached to it) sketch model

phone accessorie, sketch model

the habit, silicon color and shape testing

the habit, layer and depth testing
5.5 THE PRIVATE SEARCH ENGINE

The Private search engine does not have its origin in the first diagram but came to be when seeing the potential in materializing. It explores the potential in materialization as statement or as making explicit. It is a very literal materialization of a search engine that can then be reasoned with, a first step in a sense making process that is opened up to be shared and created together with participants and their understanding of it.

The shapes are references to the search engine box and image search. The filters represent the different filters put on our search that makes mine and yours result differing from each other even though we use the same words when searching. The filters that helps us construct our realities and world view based on what we already agree with.
Since my objects aims to explore and expand the designer role, I felt that the exhibition should do the same and chose to call it Sense making space. The renaming is an attempt to move beyond the limits of the exhibition concept and to be able to define what I want to use that space for, an important part in the project coming into being, becoming.

What I wanted to do was to create a space where the participants (instead calling them visitors) could in different ways try to make sense of the digital in their everyday. To show structures and problematize metaphor in the Haze, to confront with quite literal materialization in the printed version of my thesis “Terms and conditions” and the Private search engine, to more poetically and existentially reflect on where their phone takes them through the Self portal, to explore ambiguity, angles and perspectives in the Exposed protection and to take with them a reminder and small resistance in the shape of a new Habit.

Working towards the exhibition I saw it as a further exploration and evaluation. For me the potential was to show my different proposals and see if they could help people to start thinking about, understand and reflect on how the digital affects their everyday life. My use of text and objects in the exhibition took on different shapes in the different objects, in some the text was crucial, in some it took a smaller role. The balance between had new rules and ideas in each object; in the Terms and conditions text it functions both as something for those who want to read more and also as a paraphrase on the digital terms and conditions not meant to be read but only accepted. The Haze only had three questions surrounding it aiming at leaving room for interpretation, in the Self portal the structure and point made became more important than the text itself.

I had some discussions with people that wanted to know more about my work. What would usually happen was that I started to explain parts of it and they would then refer it to their own experience or opinion which was interesting and also what I was aiming for; to trigger thoughts and create space for sense making.
the Private search engine

the Self portal

the Habit

the Haze, close up
POSITIONING THE SENSE MAKING OBJECTS

My initial ideas and concepts, the monolith-babuskja and the laptop pajama, enabled me to create a space in which the Sense making objects could come to exist. In this updated diagram I have positioned my new proposals and marked out the new possible space they open up.
DISCUSSION + CONTRIBUTIONS

What I see as my contributions to the design field is questioning and expanding the designer role, and my process of materializing as a means to understand and work with complexity and ambiguity. I will also reflect on and discuss the further potential of the Sense making space.

In this project I have explored different ways of materializing and what possibilities that can come with this. My method builds on moving between theory and form and pushing what could be put in a gestalt. In pushing yourself to make things for understanding the world around you new meaning can be created. Uninteresting ideas found in a detour can become the most crucial part of your project, if you take time to explore and let them. And that through form legitimize feeling as a way to make decisions. These felt decisions however, are then reasoned with through analyzing and relating it to theory or other findings in my research, and then made into a form and put into context. I materialize to explore and understand rather than to conform. This can make the result hard to grasp since it is not the objects in themselves but the space and possibilities they create that could be understood as the result of the project. The objects however, are what makes this space or movement possible, and so they serve as some form of active evidence that of course also could be seen as a result. The reason why I see the space and possibilities created through the objects as the result relates to the concept becoming, it is the consequences and possibilities of the objects that are interesting and not the objects in themselves; it is how they become.

As designers we have the possibility to create our own language to argue for our choices and this is why I am interested in materialization. Materialization can legitimize feeling as argument, something that is undervalued in abstract theoretical reasoning, if working with applied theory the complex reality requires flexibility. This is why, in my opinion, materialization holds the potential of being used to work with complex realities and still deliver concrete, but abstract, proposals.

The Sense making space was my way of using the exhibition for what I wanted to achieve; a space for reflection and sense making. I wanted people to experience a lot of new concepts and ideas, there was six quite different pieces in the space, and maybe this was a bit too much for a exhibition with 177 exhibitors in total. Some people did stay for a long time and asked about all the different pieces, however in this context I think it could have been interesting to only show one or two pieces and focus on the implications of the project, both for the digital and the design profession. This is also a question of who this exhibition is for and with multiple audiences it is hard to argue for what to exclude. One interesting possibility could have been to give different entry points for different questions and to somehow make different possible interpretations more explicit.

The further potential of the Sense making space could be to create spaces in which I with others can work with people to together create Sense making objects or processes.

Concerning the designer role put in relation to the concept of becoming expands the impact of our decisions in the making process. We as designers need to be aware of the values in what we design, and who we design. Confirming existing norms should be considered an active choice since it comes with implied values to design for. As said by Kathryn Moore (page) we should not hide behind scientific objectiveness, but as I see it rather become aware of that we constantly make decisions when making and to be aware of what they build on, what they imply and what they exclude. How we argue in our discipline where we lend a lot of methods and tools from other disciplines making them fit into ours is also interesting. Decisions are made for practical reasons, for ideological, for vanity; what is interesting is that they can all fit into design. We do not have to have one way of arguing but can mix different theories and perspectives into a project or shape. Our skill as I see it lies in creating and proposing different future directions from complex and ambiguous realities; to make sense of the world through making.

What I want to argue that I have done with my project is explored possible directions for the designer role and what we as designers make through creating objects based on more existential questions, emphasizing reflection rather than technological and economic progression. I question who we are designing for and even who we design through making mass produced products. What reality do we wish to create or confirm through the products or services we as designers help to realize, what realities do we wish to construct? Creating and naming the Sense making objects is an exploration of possible directions for us as designers, a try to see what possibilities might lie in a design based on reflection and existential questions. The possibilities as I see them lies in creating understanding through discussion helped by objects, to legitimize feeling and to try to understand different opinion and what they are based on.

For me this has been a staring point in trying to find reason in the Industrial design profession today. What could it mean to be a Industrial designer in 2014? How can our field and our way of working correspond in new ways to the realities we live in today? How can we expand and create new relevance in the Industrial design profession? What are our special skills? What are the new potential and goals? What future do we wish to create?
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