

SELF-PORTRAIT/THE CHAIR

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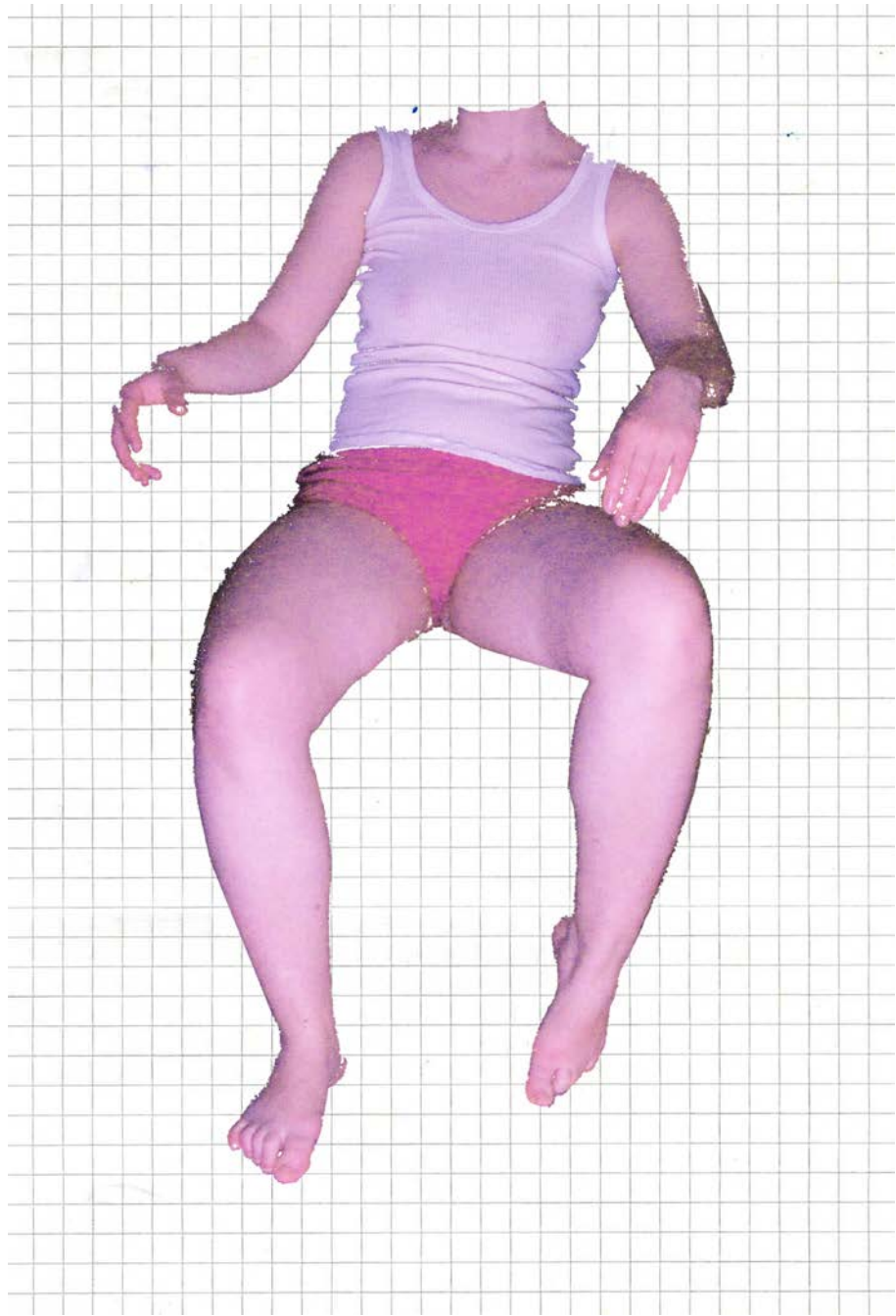
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PROJECT DESCRIPTION

„Self-portrait/the Chair” (Working title)

I have chosen to make a self-portrait in tapestry technique for my degree project. The reason for this is that I want to develop more in-depth understanding of tapestry weaving. I have also chosen tapestry, because it is suitable medium for bringing more layered and twisted approach to my main interest: telling my personal story through self-portraits.

The degree project goes under the theme of contemporary tapestry. I would like to interpret and find comparison for my work in this context. I am especially interested in those artists who have made self-portraits within tapestry technique such as Vita Gelubiene (Lithuania) or have otherwise used their own features or personal story as the subject of their work.

The project is built around the problem of what happens to a body without a face? How can I express myself, which methods, poses of a body, textures, colors I would use, if I would leave my face out? What would I chose to show to the viewer instead and how those choices come to be?

Under this concept I want develop a personal approach for tapestry making. Instead of the traditional thinking of tapestry as a design-on-paper interpretation to yarns, I want to show tapestry as an even and growing process, where the final woven piece is just as seconding to the whole as the design, its predecessor.

To achieve this, I “stage” my design in real life, then photograph the scene and finally will weave a tapestry after the photo. In this particular project, I will reconstruct an armchair, covering it with hand-embroidered and hand-dyed fabrics. I will also make additional decorations in porcelain. Then, wearing a special outfit, I will take a picture of myself sitting in that chair, after which I will use the photo for weaving the tapestry. I will present both the chair and the tapestry as an installation in the end.

I will use several different techniques and materials throughout the project with an emphasis on textile materials and techniques, such as embroidery and tapestry weaving.

Schedule:

Nov-Dec: finishing the chair, photo shooting, choosing the final picture.

Jan-Feb-March-mid April: tapestry weaving.

End of April: taking the tapestry off the loom, finishing, preparations for the installation

I would propose Ewa Brodin as my tutor. I would like to work with someone I know from before and feel comfortable with.

Eva Mustonen

Accompanying notes for the original script:

BODY - The “bodies” under the discussion in this project are anonymous, they can belong to anyone. The actual identification with someone is not a goal in itself. Instead, the attempts to portray myself are carried out for questioning the identification itself.

CHAIR – The second-hand armchair, probably manufactured in the 1940s, is the chief protagonist of textiles and textile techniques in the project. It is meant to serve as an accompanying self-portrait, where the printed and embroidered covers represent the nameless devoted hours, every breath and stitch enclosed within, thus stating the presence of my hand in the work.

TAPESTRY - the grand finale, where the chair and the headless body are coming together in one woven act, proposing the question of acceptability. The tapestry communicated similarly to the chair a claim for space. It serves both as a reproduction and interpretation of the processed material, but it is not meant to be superior to the latter.

She-story I

She grew immensely interested in unshaved armpits. She decided not to shave hers for a while and let the hair grow. At first she regarded it as an act of rebellion. Then after a thought, she could find the basis for her obsession in her childhood. Later she could also find reasons for its awakening in the past months. She greeted the growing hair as old friends, but made sure to cover them up with long-sleeved clothes before leaving the house. She inspected their advance closely in front of a mirror after each shower. As they grew, disappointment grew in her. They seemed brittle and scattered, hardly making any kind of statement at all. But they were unmistakably hers.

1 [COVERT/OVERT]: INTRODUCTION

I have arrived at a point where I have discarded the techniques and mediums familiar to me. This arrival has been both conceptual and practical. When I realized that the project was taking up directions that I never intended for in the first place, it took me a while to understand the reasons for this down-fall. Besides the fact that I had taken too much on my plate at once, I was also using the textiles for covering up, for hiding the so called true meaning. But what for?

I tried to produce textiles, which in their deafening décor were meant to draw the attention from the content to themselves and I was printing, embroidering, and sewing them by hand. I was doing so on purpose, wanting to leave behind unquestionable touch of the hand – my hand – thus portraying my various self through the diversity of layers.

But besides helping me to portray myself, the textiles also covered up the foundation of the personal story, which I was in fact desperate to reveal.

Of course, concealing was not the only purpose, which textiles served in my attempt to conduct a self-portrait, but once they were removed, their former agenda became evident. It was also the looks of the wood-bare every-day-object, which proposed the juxtaposition of covert-overt. It brought up simple but hard questions, such as how had I been using textiles previously, why was I using them in the first place and more importantly, what did it mean not to have them in my work?

These questions became the new foundation for this project, helping me to find a way back in while trying to understand, what had caused the sudden change. After them, new questions emerged, leading the project on down its natural path. I gave up control.

- *Why did you remove the upholstery? Couldn't you just cover it with new fabric?*
- *It stank terribly. I didn't want my art to stink.*
- *(confused gaze)*

1.1 Fillings and pillows

The textiles intended for the chair were all of fine materials, mostly silk and smooth cotton. I hoped to cover the interior with crimson silk velvet and the exterior of the chair with hand-embroidered silk fabric (fig 1).

I also ordered thicker silk thread for weaving parts of the tapestry. It was all going to be fine and elegant, excessively soft and comfortable; an experience similar to walking through a corridor, which has heavy curtains and tapestries hanging on the walls and a thick red carpet covering the floor. If you would accidentally push over a Chinese vase, no-one would hear it fall, even the shards would disappear into the softness and lose their ability to cut and hurt. This was my starting point.

Many contemporary artists use textiles for their muffling and covering effect to deliver the hidden, often uncomfortable pun. For example Craig Fisher, whose textile installations feature crashed cars or harmless bloody knives or Annette Messager's exposed "skins" from stuffed animals.



Fig 1

The familiarity of textiles evokes us to give it a closer look, where the "true meaning" is discovered. Even Silja Puranen's second-hand blankets and rugs used as canvas for her prints confirm the viewer to be on safe grounds, though the subject of the pictures is usually far from being easy.

This is, of course, an intended contrast between “nice” and “naughty”, which often finds practice in arts, either brought about using soft materials, domestic reputation of textile techniques or the material’s closeness to everyday life. In my own work, such pursuits have never been fully developed or are often left rather feeble and unconvincing, but having personal story as a reoccurring theme, this method is none the less useful for escaping “full frontal” or in other words, hinders giving too much out at once.

So it happens that in some projects I have used textiles literally for covering up, as it was in “The Closet Sisters in the Old Mansion” from 2011. Also an attempt for a self-portrait,

I stretched stockings over a bowl and a cup which served as frames for photos depicting myself (fig 2). The board, to which the pieces are attached, is padded, eliminating even surfaces and evoking domestic feel in the composition.



Fig 2

Compared to the project at hand, these choices were made to communicate the still-life-like and haunted feeling of an old house, but are similar in a way how the content is kept secret, knowing, that if being said out loud, shame must follow.

However, the present project had widened much of its scope as a self-portrait through depicting an anonymous body and taking up a different path from its predecessor, but I could still read out similar cowering behind the veils.

In fact I was doing everything in my power to pile up more and more layers to quiet things down, a rather deluded attempt, as the contrast was still going to be many times greater than in my previous self-portrait no matter how many embroidered pillows I made to cushion the impact.

But perhaps cowardice is not the right word for describing the situation. The meticulous embroidery and laborious tapestry claimed the space, made it their own as they owned nameless hours and days recorded into their bodies, and thus proclaimed the right to be there where they were, no matter the content. Similarly to the above-mentioned artists, I tried to pass by a bitter pill as candy floss, having the textiles softening the uncomfortable absurdness and suffocating the questions aroused by the headless body.

Though I might have succeeded in delivering a wonderfully contradictory installation, the burden of it was busting the foundation in the meantime. The inappropriateness of the body begun to dissolve, and though at first I thought that this is what I want, the whole project started to sound monotonously not only because of the repetitive nature of labor, but also because of the one-sidedness of the concept.

If the anonymous body was the main thing I was interested in and the textiles but an overblown act, why did I stop there? It seemed that I was going through all this trouble only to propose a question of unacceptability instead of exploring what it might mean. Unfortunately I had to come a long way before I started to ask these questions.

Working with chair and molding the first porcelain hand opened unexpected paths for me and it didn't help that the chair started to walk and talk on its own as well. First it was humming rather quietly and I reflected it unknowingly by writing short stories about working, my family and little excerpts from daily life. Things got worse. One moment I just lost touch with silk and with the aspirations for weaving. I was horrified and longed back to the playground which I knew well.

I failed to recognize at first that the messy business with dirty underwear had transformed into the naked chair with pathetic sprouts for limbs. There was no need for revisualization via tapestry as the unstable and withering state of the chair was already enough for undermining the certainty of perception as the double-representation would have done in that case.

Textiles became unnecessary. I used them for making richly decorated fully functional object/ part sculpture, a back drop, a tool for upgrading my assumingly unacceptable body. They worked as veil what became a see-through only for those, patient enough to look for an exit, for one nominator in this beast of a portrait with several heads. By removing the fillings and pillows, I could work straight in the material and examine, invent and reflect being inappropriate, indefinable, uncertain, in-between. The chair, stripped from the upholstery, asked the question for me, I just had to take the next step.

An excerpt from notebook:

"I am so convinced by the rightness of my decision that I cannot remember exactly how it happened anymore. Every day spent on working with wood, carving out joints, pulling out rusty nails, I feel happy and satisfied upon the collision between my ignorance and the vulnerability of the material, or should I say marriage?"

1.2 *I dropped my Skirt*

The turn of the events made me think about if I express myself differently while using different materials and techniques. Am I more honest in wood, more hands-on in porcelain or am I just thinking too much in textiles? Though they are rather naive questions, the way I am working now partly justifies them. That means that instead of crafting I am simply making things. Most of the time, I have no idea, what I am doing with porcelain or with wood. I am producing an artifact, which has technically low quality and show little skill.

Why the distinction? Couldn't I just disregard it as irrelevant to this work? Furthermore, how theoretic Glenn Adamson puts it in words: "It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that craft is either present or not present in a work, or that it is present in some quantifiable sense. In fact, craft is strictly qualitative consideration, in which the goal is always effacement in the service of the total work."¹

Though one may imply from this quote that craft altogether is not essential enough to an art piece to discuss it separately, it is exactly why it is important in this case, especially regarding the "qualitative consideration". As I have studied textile for now more than five years, it is inevitable to have a special regard for the material and how it is handled, not only textile. Making things badly is just not my thing. But this notion has not come to be only because I have been educated in certain kind of institutions, where enhancement of skill and proper use of the material in ones work have been encouraged.

This love for things made by hand has its roots already in my childhood. I grew up in the countryside, where respect for knowledge how to make things by yourself were held in high esteem. Practical skills were always regarded as a key for independence and originality² and, if things got rough, even as means to bring bread to your table. My

¹ Adamson, G. (2007) *Thinking through Craft* Oxford: Berg, p. 20

² Though I was only four when the Soviet Union collapsed, I still spent most of my childhood in the society struggling with the aftermath of the rapid change from socialism to. As people remembered well the times, when there was little to buy from the shop, make-it-yourself was a common practice.

mother knitted and sewed with ease and I grew accustomed to have some home-made clothes in my wardrobe. As I got older, I took eagerly part in the “designing” processes. My father was also considered an excellent craftsman and though I seldom got to see a proof of his skills because of his absence, the image still took place in my mind and encouraged me to think favorably of any kind of knowledge of hand.

Perhaps this fondness for crafts has also its reasons in the recognition of my own talents. I do not like crafts not only because I grew up surrounded by it, but also because learning to manipulate with materials came naturally to me. But underneath the appraisal of the handmade, one can also find an unwritten rule of functionality. Never was anything done without practical purpose, no idle doodling with a crochet needle was ever anything more than wasting useful material.

So, strictly speaking, I am working against my good upbringing at the moment. But not entirely as there was another rule, not so obvious one, perhaps: whatever works. If something broke down, (and you could bet that substitute was hard to come by) fixing was up to you and by any means possible. However it looked afterwards the main thing was that it was working again.³

One of the best do-it-yourself practitioners in my acquaintance is my mother. Her inventiveness in making the most odd-looking, yet functional things have always amazed me. She hardly ever hesitates or reasons, just goes for it, whatever the outcome might be. I, on the other hand, have always been rather skeptical if not scared of such prospect. When it comes to making, I prefer quiet, controlled progress, where changes come in softly even if they are unexpected.

Some of my recent projects have revolved around embroidery, befitting for slow, measured type of working. For example, “I am you hunger, aren’t I?” from 2011 and “She tries so hard to remember” (fig 3), which I started this year. In both of the projects, I am covering the whole fabric with monotonous, monochrome stitching. I think the main reason for working in that manner can be found in the importance of textiles

³ I guess this notion has lived on till this day. I remember my brother fixed a broken flushing button with a string and a stick as a handle. It was odd to flush pulling that thing as everything else in the bathroom was shiny and freshly renovated (meaning, according to EU standards from plug-ins and taps to over-all carpets).

for creating a home, the feeling of being safe and protected. While everyday life can seem discontinuous and hectic, there is much reward to be found in the slow progress of the embroidery, like putting up curtains after moving to a new place.

Handwork itself can be helpful to get in touch with reality. The air between the fabric and stitch might serve as a proof of being, captured and imprisoned in solid presence. By act of hand I can define the space around me, reason with it, relocate myself according to it. Through it, some part of the questionable is given a shape and becomes undeniable. A nest of a space where safe ground can be found, alas temporarily, as making is foremost a process, where common ground between the steps can be obtained through repetition.



Fig 3

In the light of these thoughts, especially concerning textiles and making in a way familiar to me, discarding them in this project seems to gain heavier meanings. Though the above-mentioned understanding of making can be applied to any kind of working, their original attachment to

textiles cannot be overlooked. It sounds almost as if I have closed down a way to home, to some certainty of things.

How to know where to go, if one doesn't have a compass? I went back to the beginning and examined it more closely. What had I done? I had taken the chair apart, removed its upholstery, cut off the arms...

Looking back brought up many questions about defining home, certainty in space through employing either craft or amateur making, but if there was something that stood out the most it was *breaking down*.

There is no recipe for putting together something that is broken and there is no correct answer for how. From this point on I focused on fragments, bits and pieces, decomposing, rearranging and on whatever that worked.

About the ways of working in my family

I was told that I inherited my artistic eye from my father, because he could draw very well. No one ever mentioned my mother, because she could only knit and sew. I learned how to knit and sew from my mom, but my father never taught me how to draw. In general, my father hardly ever drew; mostly he earned living as a metalworker, carpenter, construct worker, oven builder, etc. People used to say that my dad had golden hands.⁴

My mother has gnarled, tanned hands, wide as a spade. She works intensively and quickly, applying lot of strength in one movement. She works like she's angry at what she is doing. She pours out all her mad energy on it at once. She works till late hours, till exhaustion. While she works, she forgets her body and the surroundings; she even forgets the thing she's working on.⁵

My father, on the other hand, works in a slow, measured pace. He keeps his toolkit in order. As a child he was punished by his father if he was careless with tools. He is always in control of the situation, quietly drifting into the rhythm of the work, but never losing the goal from sight. If he is not in his own workshop, he would make the nest for working in the middle of the room, so that everybody can see him. If he is making something small, for example, he would sit by the stove, close to the fire, so he could smoke conveniently while he takes a break.⁶

⁴ In the evenings he washed his hands with washing powder to get rid of the machine oil. This unguarded treatment gave way to eczema.

⁵ My mother dismantled an old farm house within couple of years. I don't know exactly how many square meters it had, but it was a large house. Her sweat smells like bitter-sweet anger.

⁶ My father's hands shake so much that it makes me want to scream. Before each stroke he puffs and grunts as if recollecting the remained strengths of his heavily abused body. He reminds me of Howl's Moving Castle on better days, but in real, he is just a human wreck.

My style of working commemorates them both. At times, I find myself working like my mother. I regard my body as a simple, blunt tool, something that could be easily replaced. My work is my enemy. I throw myself upon it, like wanting to break it down, to hurt it, and destroy it.⁷ Other times again, I sit working patiently for hours and hours, with no excessive movements besides the ones necessary. I plan and sketch for obtaining utmost control in the making process. I crave for perfection, a sense of “properly made”, making the rules applying for “proper” up by myself, though sometimes, I have no idea what for.⁸

⁷ I strip an armchair from dusty stinky upholstery, prying out all the nails, one by one, which set off by the suddenly revealed tension and land with a click somewhere about the room. My fingers start to hurt. The veins resurface and make their bulging paths along my arms and wrists. The pale white of the skin is replaced by red and blue. Blue, the most human color (a verse from the song “Blue veins” by Regina Spektor).

⁸ Sometimes the nail’s head was corroded and broke in a way that I couldn’t by any means retrieve the leftover from the frame. It felt as if they had settled down in my heart instead, digging themselves even deeper, and made me repeatedly to have another go on older left-behinds. My anguish and pain were paid off, when the chair was once bare. A humble skeleton of some unmemorable has-been. My mom taught me to beg forgiveness, if I happened to cut a branch from a living tree. It seemed now somehow fitting. I undid something that was done by someone else a long time ago, tracked back his steps that concluded in that chair. Though I removed the covers and the prominent function, the simple base construction still conveyed the meaning somehow. The plain meaning of something been made with a purpose.

1.3 Expanding the toolbox

I used leftovers in the wood workshop and found materials for building and complementing the chair with. It was my first time to work with wood and I intentionally tried to keep myself from asking too much for help. I learned how to use ban saw and got some instructions on how to use dowels in joint making during a ten minute conversation with my brother over the phone on the way to Clas Ohlson.

Quite similar description goes for handling porcelain. I lurked around the ceramic department and got some basic pointers from chatting with fellow students. Then I started trying. Fired the first set and then learned that I have to make them bigger. I let them dry too fast and the cracks appeared. Though the appearance of the pieces improved over time, it was far from showing actual skill.

Despite my ignorance, I wanted to give the sculpture a proper, acceptable look. I drew inspiration from such artists like Rachel Harrison, Kristen Morgin (fig 4), Cy Twombly and Robert Rauchenberg.

I was impressed by Rachel Harrison's ability to merge together the most disparate things. It seems that the choices she has made are extremely random, but the precision in joining them together leaves us with astounding results. Kristen Morgin's clay and wood sculptures were missing out my own aspirations only by an inch, being even more brittle and decaying as she is using unfired clay. I also looked into Rachel Whiteread's works of casting places in-between, though I was more interested in being in the state of it, not in documenting the actual space.

I started to think more about the meeting points between porcelain and wood, which led to further sketching. I was treating the chair more and more as a composition. I removed all the legs, made it taller, cut off the back-side and put it back on again. I gave myself totally to decomposing and rearranging after finding an old pallet on my way to school. At the spur of the moment, I decided to drag it to school, took it apart and cut it into bars on the ban saw. I was rewarded with beautiful array of colors and textures; all the shades from brownish to dark greens, greys and subtle whites on fresh cuts.

Finding the pallet coincided with writing about milk churn stands and refreshing my memory with their shape and function as they were the most common samples of architectural “whatever works” in Estonian landscape during 60s till this day⁹. At the same time I was facing the problem how to present the chair as from the earliest sketches it was supposed to stand on a pedestal, so the viewer has to look up to it. The pedestal also featured a staircase in my mind to stress the act of lifting up and giving importance to the piece.



Fig 4. “Lion” by Kristen Morgin (2006), *The New Museum, G: Class’ open libraries*

⁹ Piimapukk, Teeaeg, Eesti Maanemuuseum, URL: <http://muuseum.mnt.ee/piimapukk/> (used in April 2012).

Things started to fall into their right place as I began building the platform of it, playing around with the worn-out and fresh materials. I was using pieces from the pallet in the chair as well. Though the prospect of the podium starting to overshadow the chair was little intimidating at first, the pure joy of making the quirky edifice swiped out every doubt. The skeleton of a podium, having a little ladder instead of stairs, became intrinsic part of the sculpture, contrasting with the porcelain pieces and with the frame of the chair itself with its tacked surface, visible joints and lacquered and not lacquered parts, like areas on skin either tanned or not tanned after summer vacation.

The process is still in motion and the final look has not been decided yet. In a way I don't even want to do that.

*A frame.*¹⁰

¹⁰ Some meanings:

1 a) : something composed of parts fitted together and united **b)** : the physical makeup of an animal and especially a human body : physique; figure

2 a) : the underlying constructional system or structure that gives shape or strength (as to a building)

Synonyms: architecture, armature, cadre, configuration, edifice, fabric, framework, framing, infrastructure, shell, skeleton, structure

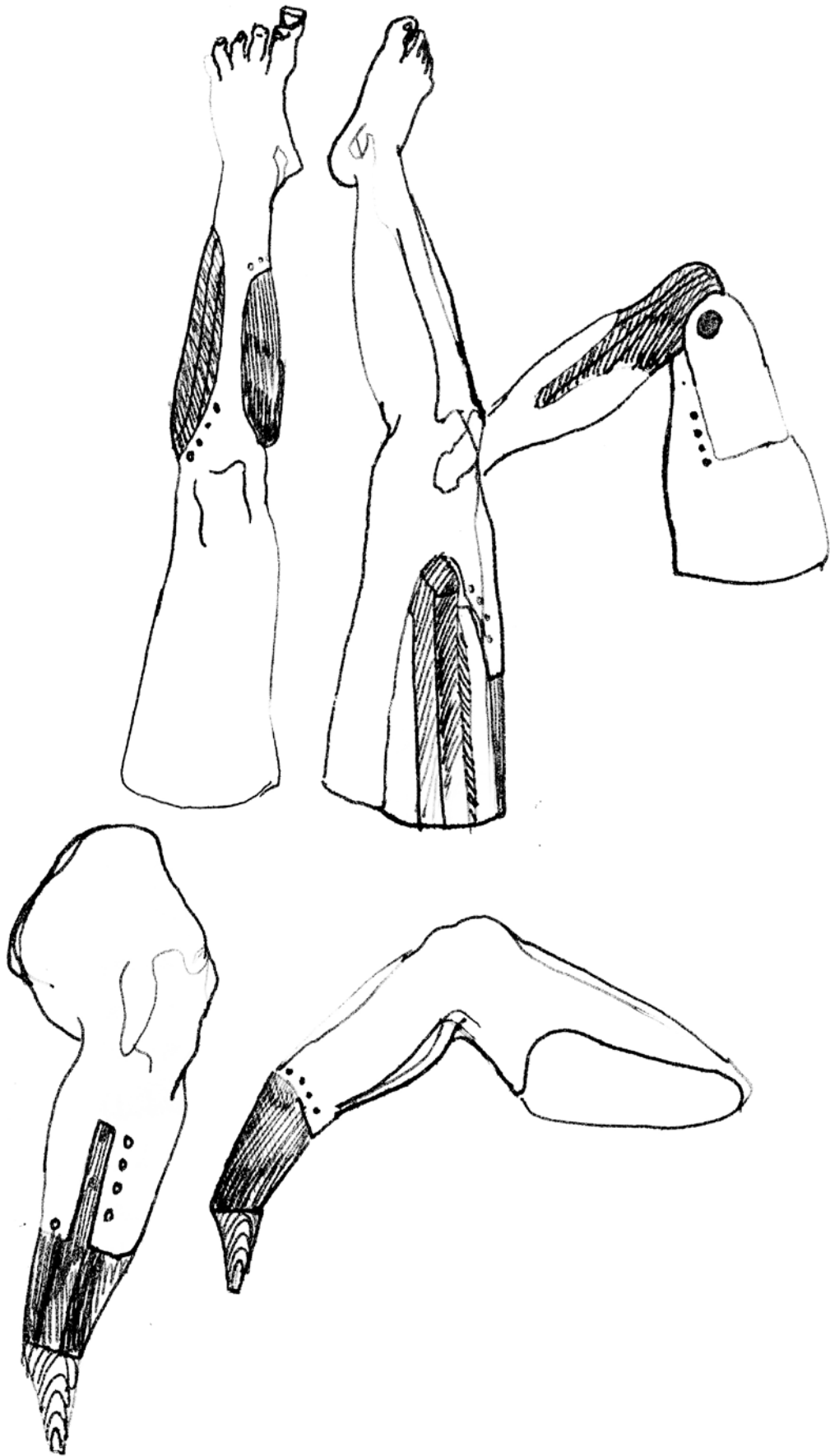






























Milk Churn Stand

Introduction

First a little linguistic detour. I have written altogether perhaps four-five sketches entitled „Milk stand”. This was a mistake. Actually, I should have been writing „Milk collection point”, because that’s how this thing is called in English. To clear things up, a *milk stand* is a place, a compartment in the dairy barn or a separate wooden platform, where you milk the cow or the goat. A „milk collection point” is a wooden structure, usually beside the road, where people brought their milk to be shipped to the communal dairies. In Estonia and all over the Soviet Union likewise, these creatures started to sprout throughout the countryside during 60s and 70s. Similar systems for collecting milk from small farmsteads were also used in Northern countries. During the new republic, this system has died out, mostly due to the EU regulations for food production and handling and also because very few people who live in the countryside nowadays, actually keep animals¹¹. The last working milk collection point in Estonia was closed down in 2003¹². I was surprised reading this, because I had thought that the system fell out of fashion already in the middle of nineties (around the time, in which the “Third attempt” takes place).

Now, about the confusion in using the right term, I decided not to fix that. If you read *milk stand*, you have to think the shape and function of the *milk collection point* instead of the original one. Why? The word itself handles a topic which is seldom discussed: items and tools found at a barn shed. The „real” vocabulary is relatively unknown. I tried to translate the word to English and the first thing I came up with was a *milk stand*, quite one-to-one translation from Estonian *piimapukk*¹³. I thought about a stand for milk, *milk stand* is a stand for milking. It was

¹¹ During Soviet times, literally everyone had cows.

¹² Viivik, A *Hüvasti Eestimaa viimane piimapukk!* Õhtuleht, URL: <http://www.oh tuleht.ee/142957>, (used in April 2012)

¹³ I was also encouraged to misuse *milkstand*, because it took me a week to remember that *piimapukk* was called *piimapukk* in Estonian.

short and had a firm, real sound, like the Estonian counterpart, so I started writing without further ado. But the wonder-if-this-is-the-right-word made me look up the correct translation. It was rather devastating to find out, what *milk stand* really meant, and how *piimapukk* should be properly translated (especially, when ten-tips-for-a-beginner-in-goat-milking pops up on the screen). But this mistake, which happens rather often while writing in foreign tongue, adds up the spice, I think. The same way the *milk stand* cannot represent the phenomenon I remember so dearly, I literally cannot reach that *piimapukk*. It was taken down years ago.

Third attempt:

There was a milkstand nearby our house. People from surrounding households carried their milkbuckets there and a truck would come early in the morning to pick them up or to pour their content into a huge container, depending on what kind of truck was at work. I guess it was not big: a wooden platform for about 1, 5 square meters mounted upon four sturdy pillars with zigzagging planks holding them together to keep the structure steady. It also had a simple stairway about four steps and a railing on the right side leading up to the platform and forming an L-shape around the top for keeping the buckets from falling over the edge. The wood was grey and weary, but the building itself was strong. I don't remember anyone using that specific milk stand. We were the only ones with a cow in that part of the village. My mother said that she did¹⁴, but how could I remember as I must have been always asleep, when she...did what? Milking and straining, first carrying the filled buckets to the spring for cooling and then dragging them up the hill again, past the local forest management office, and then, at the end of the office's garden, stopping beside the milk stand, lifting the buckets up one by one and placing them on top of the stand in a row (or hingedly-pigedly). How many liters of milk she must have had milked, strained and carried down to the spring and up the hill again? If two buckets, then one in each hand, if more¹⁵, then in the trolley. Quickly-quickly, before the car comes!

I played beside the spring, tipping my fingers into the freezing water, watching weird creatures wriggling and dancing in it, the bubbling sand. I played at the milk stand. I climbed on it, hide in it, played "home", carried stones and twigs and found rubbish there. (The smell of dirt and wet fallows in autumn. How the clothes swell and turn heavy in the

¹⁴ I hesitated, but called her right in the middle of the sentence, were I was just about to write that probably no-one used that milkstand anymore. „I did!“ came a hasty reply. One veil was lifted and yet another ten took its place.

¹⁵ How many liters can be milked during one milking session from one cow? Three to five? Two milkings per day, that will give us six to ten liters in one day. Which were the standard sizes for the buckets? Five, ten, twenty, thirty-five...? Heavy.

humid air.) There was no sign of milk buckets at the milk stand or at the spring. Or perhaps I once caught a glimpse of shiny metal cylinders drowned to mid-waist in the water while rushing down the hill on a bike? Do I want to remember it? Milk buckets tangling in a row with plastic lids on, a name written down with a marker. Black. Those plastic caps had sometimes a t-shaped handle formed by two crossing hollow tubes. There were caps of light green, all sorts of whites down to quite yellow ones. (Light green?)

When I ran up and down the hill, my mother wasn't there. She was at work or at home. When she moved about the same tracks, I wasn't there. I was asleep, I was at home.

CONCLUSION

Piimapukk, mannerg, lüpsik, lüpsma, piimanõu, pütt, klaaspurk, kurnama, marli, vaht, kollane, virts, labakinnas, konn, laut, kuurialune, turbahunnik, saepuru, savi, veetünn, leivaastja, rohi, võilill, loom, lehm, hobune, koer, kass, kassipojad, toigas, kepp, võsa, tihnik, mets, salu, põlluveerel, kraav, väli, niit, heinamaa, pajuviit, vibu, nuga, nool, puss, väits, lomp, tiik, järv, paisuvesi, kollane jää, kaanetama, kamarik, uisutama, päkad, põlvevalu, pastlad, krossiratas, koerasitt, lehmakook, õunakook, õietolm, lumepallisupp, kakao, kõrbema, toonekurg, allikas, jahe, ööviul, oja, jõgi, pais, pardipojad, teokarbid, libe, vähk, metsaonn, mädanenud, aknaraam, vakstu.



Where is in between?

1. House equipment

Is there anything specific needed for creating a home? Perhaps a room, seat on a train or a working desk where you can order the things just the way you like. Maybe it could be a line drawn on to asphalt, a skeleton of entire house: living room, bedroom, kitchen, bathroom, corridor, backdoor to the garden? Your home could be a boat, but is the home your boat or the stuff that are on the boat? A blanket you have had for years, bicycle, coats or hats (the ones you wear and the ones you plan to throw away), rubbish, filth from your skin. All the things you own, even if not intended. You don't need many, but it seems (if you try to connect home to things) you need one odd item besides your clothes to create a home. And that is usually something to make bed with: a piece of carton, mattress, (branches, leaves), ground for about 60x170cm in my case. But sleeping is just a momentary stop; would some hours of occupation of a certain space be enough for defining a home? Why couldn't be a hand holding the jacket little more tightly around the body enough? Is that one extra (odd) thing even really necessary; how about a state of mind, a gesture? If I'd be a nomad, my home will be my horse, carrying the things I own. My horse would be my "house".

Home as state of mind could be feeling safe; no one can come and say: "Move! Leave!" Not everyone can afford such a place; there are whole nations who cannot. Refugee camp doesn't sound like a home, nor dose a hospice for children and women, nor a street. But people live in such conditions for years. And how safe you can feel depends on where you live (in the world). All in all there is no guarantee that the place you call home will always be your home. But perhaps if you live in a country which seldom experiences wars or natural catastrophes and your grandfather moved about the same house, garden, road to the village, then, perhaps you can say that yes, this place will always be my home. Of course, in such cases, feeling safe is multiplied by the direct connection with the ground as you were the tree in the courtyard, a certainty of mind which can only be bestowed by mother's milk, in which the past grandmother's and grand-grandmother's milk have names, faces and stories. But that still leaves us very few people really having a

home (if home is feeling safe), and that is no good, because home should be something that everyone has.¹⁶

Home is ownership. All sorts of lawful papers are the fundament for a home. A purchase contract, address registration at the migration office, loan agreements between the bank and you to buy the place; daily mail that arrives at your mailbox, bills on your name that find you at that specific spot. Home is property as everything in it and you can protect it by the help of law. But most likely you live off the paper. You sign hire contracts or you don't sign anything at all and make a verbal agreement and pay certain amount of money each month to that person who owns the place (or dose not). Your mail finds you only occasionally when you remember to update your bureaucratic self. What if you don't even have an identification?

But home could still be an ownership of some sort. Ownership bought via recognition and familiarity of things that surround you daily, for example. That house, that cat, a blanket knitted by my mum, my one set of bed-linen, that cup that's not mine, but what I like to use, that table not mine, but I'm the only one using it, that view onto the street and the one to the yard in the kitchen, that spot where I keep my cooking-oil, that shelve where I keep my toothpaste, that time that takes me to go to the toilet from my room, that time it takes to make a cup of cocoa by that stove and that edge of that sink where I like to place that dishcloth after doing those dishes.

There are some specific things (perhaps) that you keep with you at all times, wherever you are or however often you move. Some (let's call them) tokens of home, that you can take out of the bag the first thing on your arrival and put on the shelve, beside the bed, on the windowsill. A tiny basket for change, hairpins and things you cannot find other place for (that you've packed and unpacked since you were ten). Another one for keeping unfinished embroidery and knitting (perhaps the past

¹⁶ I guess it is hard to talk about home and not consider even a tiny bit of safe-feeling, but I would like to try and think. Can you be at home and die a violent death at the same time? Or better, can you be at home and feel fear simultaneously? If home is defined as feeling safe, it could be easily overrun by other feelings in the moment of stress (in extreme situations). Then, oddly enough, you are not at home when you die a scary-movie-death, though you were at home as it was stated in the police report.

four years). A Japanese jar for keeping tea, but mainly contains coffee (waiting to be packed and unpacked for the first time). A handbag, which decorates the wall on its free time. A set of spices, a towel you don't like, but you have had for years. A percolator, a lap-top (goes onto the table, stating "work"). The list changes: some tokens are sacrificed, new ones enlisted, some replaced. Surprisingly enough, I never notice the changes as they never change in essentials (being little markings of me being here and now).

Does it really matter? If I cannot take "my" things with me, I would use what I can find, what I can buy, and then those things become a part of the home in that certain place. The place itself becomes home, because I'm there. (One should take time how long it takes to start referring to the house keys with the preposition "my" instead of "the" after moving).

The custom-built setting is easily arranged, but a whiff of melancholy, longing for old and familiar stuff may remain. It would ease the passage to a new place. Shorten the list of things you have to learn.

However, the yearning for certain things seems false. How often it happens that I have forgotten all about the special emotional sphere or memories that one or the other token had! I have also forgotten the token itself, whatever it (then) was: a habit, a dish I preferred, routes that I took going from home to school, to groceries. I have forgotten (I forget) words, the names for the past tokens. I ask others, with whom I share the memory, and they also have forgotten. After a while, perhaps we come up with it a name and our tongues bend unwillingly to voice it. On the worst of cases, we have forgotten the spelling or right the pronunciation too.

Suddenly, only what is here, is here.

(Suddenly, only what was there, was there).

A friend told me a story once.¹⁷

¹⁷ *One Indian was sitting at the airport. He had just sat through a long flight. He sat and waited. A day, another one. Someone noticed and asked, what was he doing there, didn't he have a place to go? "I am waiting for my soul to catch up with me," the Indian replied.*

2. If you travel, you are out of yourself.

[There is one good phrase “to settle down”. “Have you settled down yet? How is the town? Do you like it there? What are the people like?” Before I come up with a reply, I close my eyes and say to myself: “I have all the answers”.]

It is lot easier to talk about home in relation to traveling. If traveling is going from point A to point B, then home is usually one of these points, it is never in between. But there lies the question, perhaps it is possible to be in between and to be at home? In the previous chapter I found myself listing all sorts of places under home, a lot of them extremely temporary in nature, even moving. How could a seat on a train transform into home, it is a typical example for traveling, is it not? But when I think of sitting on the bus or train, having your bag under the seat or above you, the coat you use as a pillow, a newspaper/book, bottle of water, lap-top – you can have, or better, don't you just have everything with you? What is that “everything” then?

A friend of mine said that if you travel, you are out of yourself¹⁸. In a way, I agree. Maybe it is because most of the time you are in places part of the public sphere. You are more vulnerable. You keep keener eye on your belongings, perhaps even divide your money and keep it in several places: some in your wallet, some deep inside your luggage. You pass through spaces which belong to everybody and nobody at the same time. Mostly you are hindered from performing your everyday routine: no trains come with kitchens or your bed. But these are trifles compared to the excess of information charging towards your gaze. You are bound to give in and resign to *l'm passing by*.

That's probably the focal point: missing out the routine, if you have any. Routine is the best way to claim ownership over your surroundings. In a way, you can dictate the way you travel and thus ease the instability of your current state, though you can never own the space quite in the same manner as at home¹⁹. For example, you can decide that whenever you take the train to Gothenburg you eat lunch at the Burger King's in

¹⁸ I would think, that being at home doesn't include being out of yourself.

¹⁹ I'm still not 100% sure of that.

the Stockholm Central Station (otherwise you hardly ever eat at a fast food restaurant). Some habits applicable to movement are also good, such as smoking. But the easiest trick would be dividing the time between the most ordinary things and playing them out in planned order almost like performing a solemn ritual. First I read, then I'll try to sleep, I check my calendar and make a day-plan for tomorrow, I eat (it's amazing how slowly one eats on a train!), I go to the toilet, that includes also the time spent on finding the toilet, and then... The rhythm of a long journey. You are happy that you don't have to switch vehicles. That sort of traveling has definitely a destination (printed on your ticket), but it might not be home. Even the departure point might not be your home. It gets especially tricky when the traveling devolves into staying in some place or another for a while. When the actual transportation is over and you stay put, temporarily. It gets worse if you are not a tourist (your goal is to inhabit, to possess, to become the one who doesn't stand out in a crowd, temporarily).

Some people travel for months, even for years. Lot of books has been written on that subject. Finally they come home (maybe). What home, I wonder? Yes, usually it is just a metaphor, a coming-of-age-story, where they find a road back to themselves. But literally, to what kind of home to they come back to?

3. Concerning bridges

Moving, traveling, assuming, leaving behind, looking ahead, passing by, being on the road

Staying, rooting, possessing, knowing, stop sign, level, coordinates

They meet and change from one to another. First they send the messenger, like a snail poking around with its feelers and then arriving *there* with the rest of the body. One state is more active than the other, one part is more massive than the other, one consumes more time.

Bridges are between the banks. Something stops and continues on the other side. Or something is cut through and needs to be amended. Hair doesn't grow on scars.

You couldn't be *there* without the bridge: standing above the water, the stream of cars, the treetops, several meters above the ground. Bridges are impossible, but they are real.

In many cases we don't see things in between. Sometimes we are unable to confirm what was before and what is now, almost never can we say anything about what was in the middle.

1 2

1,2

1breath2

1blink2

As I have never seen a meat mincer, which has whole, intact objects going in and coming out, I assume that *in between* can be marked

down by the capacity to change of the thing which is about to enter the grinder.²⁰

If neither one nor two, then what? Three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten...take your pick!

The problem with in between is that it is regarded as alien and defined in negative terms: not this, not that. (And that the definition stops there).

²⁰ Confusing example. It only illustrates the passage from bigger to smaller. Change can come in many shapes and sizes.

She-story III

“Deceiving yourself is worse than deceiving your friends,” she reads. One is better than the other. One plus one equals two. Simple and logical. But truth is only truth when one believes in it and she sits still as if someone has just whispered in her ear that one plus one equals infinite set of numbers/a cat/ love/ window frame/ mirror/ sky.

The Speech

Good afternoon and welcome dear ladies and gentlemen, professors and opponents! My name is Eva Mustonen and I wish to present you today my diploma work for master degree in textile art, titled „Self-portrait/the Chair”. If you have any questions, please ask at the end of the presentation.

I better put this paper somewhere else, because my hands shake so much I cannot read from this anyway. Now, where should I put my hands? (Hehe)

So, where to begin? This, as you can see, is what I created for my master project. This should not look like that. You should be looking at something totally different if I had had my way with this chair. Fortunately, I did not, but let me tell you something about how I planned this thing at first. For starters, it should have been made at least 75 % out of textiles. To be precise, I wanted to weave a tapestry. I also wanted to make a self-portrait and I decided to weave an image of myself sitting on a chair. But that was not enough; I also wanted to make that chair myself. So, in the end, I would have made a chair (that meant finding suitable second-hand one and covering it with my own textiles), then had taken a picture of myself sitting on it and then I would have woven the tapestry after the photo. Rather long process, don't you think? But I was absolutely determined to do this. This is how it is going to be done, no other way!

So, how come it ended up with no textiles, with no replicas of any sort (pictures, photos, tapestries)? First mistake, if you want a chair to look just as you have it in your mind, don't go to the second hand shop, go to the wood workshop and start building it. As I am no carpenter, I went to the second hand shop and found a suitable chair, which I thought I would manage to change a little, and then it would work out fine. But it didn't, it was a catastrophe, for textiles, I mean. From the moment I removed the old upholstery, I had such a character just staring at me, in the eye, like this: “Are you really that stupid to stuff

me all up again?” It wasn’t so easy though, for another four months I thought: “No, I can do this, yes, I can do this.” I read about how to make upholstery, bought materials and printed and embroidered textiles for the chair.

And then I was making new arms for the chair and the next moment I was messing around with porcelain and it got more and more organic, body-related, dysfunctional, till one day, I looked at it and saw only a sculpture and to my dismay, a totally different one from the one I had in mind. I had already reached the conclusion without recognizing it – I had a self-portrait – and though at first I thought I had failed in so many ways, it started to make sense to me through writing about it.

Here’s something from my report to sum it all up:

In one way all texts presented in this compendium are similar to one another: I have been trying to write down what I think this thing is. I have no idea what this thing really is. I write and write, erase and write again, but it always goes pass the piece, over or under it, mostly without even brushing its sides. Seems like there is plenty of unpolished surface or a nail sticking out somewhere for the text to get a hold on, but no. I think I have succeeded quite well in the contrary. I have written about the post-textile, pre-chair, working with hands, childhood, described some loosely conjunct objects, which get lost in translation, home and moving and lot of rambling about being in between, but where is the chair itself? Oh, I have used the chair (mentioned it) several times throughout the text, but to tell you the truth (now when I just look at it), the chair on paper is but imagined ghost. Off the paper begins the no-mans-land inhabited by creatures ready to charge. It is so real, solid, fun-loving and proud. No negative space, I am here and now.

Thank you so much for listening (and coming)! If you have any questions, please ask!

Yes, please!

- I have a question. How are you related to this work? How come you chose to represent yourself with this naked chair and porcelain pieces?

When I started writing about this project, I found myself writing down more and more negations. I became very interested in the idea of being in-between as the chair was also in between after the removal of the suspension and covers. It was not what it was and it kind of wasn't yet what it should have been. It was in the middle of the process, so to speak, but I was skeptical, if it was only processes doing, that it looked like that. Maybe it was not going to look anything more than that – so what was that “that”? In between - really? So, not a chair, not a ceramic piece, not a classical self-portrait, not even a sculpture on a podium, because the podium is made out of the same materials as the sculpture and is thus incorporated into the piece...So, lot of negations in a way, not this, not that. And I think, this is what I can relate to. The same politics of definition are often used on female bodies, any kind of bodies really, and I have employed that often on myself as well. It is expressing the feeling that you always have to look and be something else than what you are, that you are always on the way of becoming the real “you”. Thinner, smarter, whatever, really, like the present doesn't matter. So, what you are now is like being in-between, being on the way “there”. Not this, not that, defined by negations, and I think it's ridiculous, but I'm not the person, who doesn't care, what others think, so I think this piece can really represent a part of me, kind of braver side of me, pointing out the fear of indefinable, because in the end, you just accept what you are, and this piece is kind of saying that: not this, not that, but it's your problem really, that you think like that, I'm here, I'm whole, I don't care! Yes?

- Why do you use porcelain? How did you find your way to it?

I chose porcelain, because it made a lovely contrast with the warm wood. It also enabled me to mould organic shapes, hands and legs, but with very inorganic appeal, they are white, cold to the touch, more lifeless than the object they are attached to. This intrigued me, also because originally the porcelain pieces came from the idea of doll

heads, which had little holes on their necks, so you could sow them on the doll's stuffed body. The chair had already on the earlier sketches human-like hands and legs, mimicking my own. Again, the body-parts look real, but are not real. With little holes on the edges, they can be attached and removed if necessary, being mobile and unstable in essentials. I also enjoyed the fact that during most of their infant lives in the "creation incubator", they have been the most fragile counterparts of the whole project despite their hardness to the touch. I dissolved in water couple of predecessors to the ones on display now and over the past few months when I have had them around, they been mainly unfired, that means that they have been extra easy to brake. It pumped up my adrenaline level a great deal whenever I picked them up. It was also fun to use material that I'm such a novice with; I could make up my own rules. And it's really odd to hear what connotations other, professional ceramicists make, when they look at those pieces. They have a keener eye for cracks and mistakes for sure! I'm aware that porcelain has huge history and is very referential in itself, but I didn't read any books, I just did what I could with it and found that usable and satisfying. Porcelain worked for me, so I used it.

- You wrote in the project description that you want to tell your personal story through self-portraits, how do you think you have managed to do this in this project?

Well, there is lot of personal stuff inscribed into this work, but I don't think I should tell all about them. They are extremely self-referential and that part of the project I always regard more as therapy than art in a way. I wrote some texts referring to personal content, but I think what is out to see here has already a lot of information to go by for the viewer. I can just keep on writing about it. For example, in this work, it has lot to do with wood. My father was a carpenter or at least really good at it and I have also a carpenter's work here on display, which I have dismantled half way through. My mom is not a carpenter, but she has always made stuff, whatever necessary, whatever works: shelves, beds, doors...really, just like hammering away and the quirky patched-up beings would come to life...And for me it was interesting to combine

them and test, how I can make something unacceptable acceptable. I think the personal story became elevated and simplified during the making process. This project contained lot of dismantling, demolishing, which is hard work both physically and mentally. I have uncomfortable memories concerning taking something apart as a sign of something unacceptable, even so that one ends up as an outcast of the society, and I wanted to work with it and see how I can arrive at better understanding of it. But as I said, you could also go around it. It's based upon personal, but has become more universal in details. You could both see the exploitation of the material as it is, mull over the composition, but you can read into more symbolical, conceptual aspects of the work and think more about how it was done.

You have a question, please?

- So, if I get this right, the "carpenter's" chair is like your father, and whatever extra you have "improperly" built is your mother...? Is this opposition by any chance deriving from difference in valuing men's and women's work in the society? Do you relate to more feminist context?

As I said, the personal input is not that important in the whole context of the work. This work could be interpreted using feminist context or considering strictly the personal pointers what I gave you now, but this hasn't been my sole intention. I didn't want to represent something that belongs to my personal life directly, but something, that derives from it, but doesn't equal one to one as I have messed with it. It's more about what's acceptable and what is not, definable/ not definable, than just my grudges and things I should talk with my parents before they die. In a way, the whole talk of self-portraits and personal stories/statements might be misleading as already at the beginning of this project, when I still planned to conceive it using tapestry technique, I wished to make a self-portrait without my face. Rather than a self-portrait in the classical sense, the whole project has been balancing between a study of one "anonymous" body and a crude biopsy conducted on an everyday object, which eventually were fused into one body of work, where their indefinable disposition were analyzed through mixed materials,

conceptualized hand work and endless rearranging to bring the separate parts together.

- Excuse me, but I cannot see anything “anonymous” here, I think the chair has very personal attitude...

What I think under anonymity is that the objects, the chair and the pallet, which I have dismantled and arranged together in this work, have both specific but none the less irretraceable past. The chair belonged to someone, who knows who, I don't know, if this pallet has ever traveled outside of Sweden. What is most important is that they have lost their functionality and therefore their primer identity. While the chair can still be recognizable as a chair, the pallet has become totally invisible. It is like they have lost their “faces”. I have treated them like I wanted to treat my own body at first, presenting it without a head.

The porcelain hands and legs, of course, were made directly for the sculpture. But in a way, as they are rather plainly realistic, I have always thought of them as copies, not independent pieces, even if they have gained some “attitude” along the process. First ones I made were all in very passive poses, doing nothing.

What I find interesting here is how those different parts have come together in one piece, as I have processed each of them differently. The chair has suffered quite mild alteration, the porcelain figurines have mixed and uncertain appearance between a copy and an original piece. Recycled pallet and leftovers from the wood workshop have transformed into unique edifice, bearing marks from both old and new, and having somewhat obtained practical function as carrying the rest of the party.

What I have been trying to explore here is being fragmented and anonymous as not having unquestionable identification. And to be honest, I don't think that this eliminates being personal. As you said, this sculpture has an attitude (problem). I think it has conjured up some sort of identification for itself while not falling under any distinct category and is quite proud over it. Hahaa!

Yes, please!

- Do you think you found a way out from being in-between then?

Well, no, but I found a way to deal with it.

- How?

Through making.

Any more questions? If not, we shall end for today. Thank you very much!

One Very Modest Conclusion

My works have mostly been material-based. "Self-portrait/the Chair" is definitely among those which have brought the research to another level. This project has been special in a way that it has covered the widest spectrum of materials so far in the different phases of its process. One minute it has all been about textiles, in the next, anything BUT textiles. Apparently I have filled all these pages trying to find answers how these changes have come to be and if they have an extra sandwich packed with them. As the mismatched "Project Description" the Fourth states, I wanted to develop more in-depth understanding of XXXX making. Now, blanks can be read out of the text or into the text. I think I read them in and filled the blank with anything that I could get my hands onto. When the textiles dropped out of the picture, I thought I am finally able to make just one piece. However, there seems to be several. Both the text and the sculpture are producing layers and secret get-aways, pointing out vague directions quite in the same manner when I still had textiles on the menu. They manifest themselves in meticulous molding of porcelain, inadequate joints and in temporary bindings. They can be found in rusty nail holes or in the disparate texts of this compendium. I can think of two reasons for it. Firstly, it is just the way how I think, I have a natural tendency to connect everything with everything and I never seem to explain anything in one sentence nor can I find an ending to it. Secondly, it is because of the structure of this project. It was taken apart while being half way through and put together again from bits and pieces. Decomposing and joining together different fragments became an important part of working out the type of making suitable for this project. I discovered undoing – another side of making and practiced it various ways, hoping that I will get closer somehow to the personal story, to being in between. Tracing back the steps, restaging memories through physical work, reusing, collecting, sampling, rearranging, deconstructing, building, stripping, decomposing – is it really a way to strain some truth out of it? To catch up with that tiny moment "something's there", make it uneven, vague, but somewhat solid through perpetual repetition. And

*while repeating what? No idea, but now and then I get a glimpse of that
“that”.*

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List of Thank-yous

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(Continuing)