a blob, a snap

* materialized revolt against the patriarchal structure, against everything women are being told to endure.*
a blob, a snap

a materialized revolt against the patriarchal structure. against everything women are being told to endure.
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This is a personal project about a fed-up woman who sits down on the chair by the pottery wheel simply because she craves it.

It is about conducting a non-result oriented design process. A process where the making, the closeness between the mind and hand, is both the research and meditation.

It is a project that acknowledges the potential care has in relation to design, while it's dealing with the controversial aspects of a woman caring for herself.

The project is a snap, a feminist snap, represented and materialized through the objects of clay. Where a collapsed bowl, a blob, becomes a materialized revolt against everything women are being told to endure.

It is a project that brings design and poetry together. Aiming to explore how objects can gain agency and be in dialogue with society. How objects can materialize both the resistance against, and the result of, the patriarchal structure.

keywords: practice based research, feminism, poetry, care, willful objects, autoethnography
This project wouldn’t have happened without the support and guidance from some people. Thank you,

Celia, for being my eternal friend and partner in crime. For having been next to me from the beginning to the very end. For telling me when I’m confused and when I’m not. For believing in me when I don’t.

All the critical, badass women around me, for challenging and inspiring me. And for helping me and tapping my shoulder when I need it. You know who you are.

Laia, for having your door and mind open. Wendy, for your honest and warming responses. Eric, for always asking the right questions. Christina, for being the feminist snap in this project that made me believe in my path.
introduction /

what do i do
when my heart
is
suddenly
not beating for much
anymore.
when the things that used to
create sparks
just aren't.
when i'm blocked
emotionally
and creatively.
when nothing really
makes sense anymore.
what do i do?

prologue

i listen carefully
to no one but myself
and
i just go
without much thought.
and then,
when listening
without thinking.

i know
that i have to let my hand make.
and to do so by the pottery wheel.

i know
that through making
things will
make
sense
again.

i don't know why
i just know.
introduction /

This is a project about a maker having to make again. About a mind needing its hand in order to function. It’s about a craving to sit in the corner on the chair by the pottery wheel, and to not care about the result.

It’s about practice-based research. About allowing moments of making to take place and shape the project. It’s about the blobs and the bowls that happen when sitting on the chair by the pottery wheel – what they symbolise and represent.

It’s fragile. Transparent. Personal.

It’s all about honesty.

But in the very core, there is me, a woman.

A woman who sits down on the chair by the pottery wheel simply because she is done. Done with doing great. Done with being perfect. Done with compromising. Negotiating. Adapting. Done with making sense to others than herself. Done with enduring the pressure.

Done with sitting on chairs of others. For others. Chairs of expectations. Of society. Chairs of the patriarchy.

I am making blobs because I want to. And because I can. It has become my way of practicing feminism. It is my, as the theorist and feminist Sara Ahmed (2017) would name it, feminist snap. A snap can reflect a breaking point. Think of a branch that’s been bent in many, many ways and directions over time. Sooner or later, it will snap. If the pressure is the action, the snap is the reaction. The branch and I snap because we simply can’t take it anymore. The reaction of snapping might appear as sudden, but it’s coming from a history of hitting walls. Of enduring. Of being affected. The snap is a sudden moment with history.

Sitting in the corner on the chair by the pottery wheel is my personal creative reaction to the snapping point. In other words; a starting point – finding and creating a space, a corner, for myself. Going back to a condition I haven’t allowed myself to be in for a long time. A condition where my hand leads the unpredictable way. A condition where there is room for the blob – a materialized reaction to the patriarchal structure that has done its best to tear me down. The patriarchy that is building walls and blames me for “not hitting hard enough” when I try to smash them, and for “hitting too hard” when they crash. The patriarchy that asks me “what’s wrong?”, and rolls its eyes when I explain. That tells me to “sit still quietly” while the structure itself is tearing down the place and myself. The patriarchy that tells me to stay thin, and to hold on to my low self-esteem in order to finance the system. The patriarchy that calls me a killjoy when I claim that women should have the same rights as men.

This is what I am reacting to. Snapping to. What the materialized snap, the blob, carries within. It’s a way for me to navigate in my own being as a woman, my perception of myself and the way I tend to do, think, live. Also, it is facing outwards, to the bigger context – trying to figure out how fed up women can exist and survive and flourish in a system that is not ours. The blob is a materialized snap against everything women are being told to endure. I want to expose, name, materialize this struggle. Bring it to the surface for others to touch upon. Relate to. Respond to.

It is a project that brings design and poetry together, aiming to explore how objects can generate, and be generated by, a dialogue with society. How objects can materialize both resistance against, and the result of, the patriarchal structure.

It’s about what design can be. Unravel. Change. Become.

context

This is a project about a maker having to make again. About a mind needing its hand in order to function. It’s about a craving to sit in the corner on the chair by the pottery wheel, and to not care about the result.

It’s about practice-based research. About allowing moments of making to take place and shape the project. It’s about the blobs and the bowls that happen when sitting on the chair by the pottery wheel – what they symbolise and represent.

It’s fragile. Transparent. Personal.

It’s all about honesty.

But in the very core, there is me, a woman.

A woman who sits down on the chair by the pottery wheel simply because she is done. Done with doing great. Done with being perfect. Done with compromising. Negotiating. Adapting. Done with making sense to others than herself. Done with enduring the pressure.

Done with not taking herself and her cravings seriously.

a blob

general definition: a small drop or lump of something viscid or thick. Tied to other words like; lump, chunk, clot, clump, glob.
(merriam-webster.com)
my definition: so much more.
making sense through the hand

I was blocked, I didn't know what to do. The only place I saw myself happy was on the chair by the pottery wheel.

So. I knew I had to let my hand make and that I had to do it by the pottery wheel. That was the only thing that made sense to me in the moment. I didn't know why, or what was going to come out of it. But I was curious of how the making could lead the process of figuring things out. Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) argues that the haptic holds promises of thinking and knowing that is in touch with materiality. Will it be touching to be in touch with clay?

an unpredictable path

Not really knowing why I was doing this or what the outcome might be meant that I was choosing an unpredictable path. A kind of path I haven't been walking on much in my design work, nor in life. Yet, the only path that made sense to me. It was a way of conducting “responsive design” (Lundebye & Jones, 2013) where I would allow myself to fly in the dark and delay the idea-forming to a longer period. An approach that would immerse myself in my project and its context, and hopefully make sense of it. This approach also felt especially relevant since I was practicing a, to me, unexplored craft in a relatively unfamiliar material. Materials and techniques can not be fully controlled – they have a will of their own. Therefore, planning my path or dictating the outcome made very little sense. Discovering material requires openness to whatever appears by chance - as well as welcoming failures and mistakes as new options.

condition

Initially, I was curious about this strong need to make. Where is it coming from? What is actually happening when I’m making? And why this craving for pottery? This curiosity revealed that this project wasn’t about becoming a skilled ceramist. I wanted to foster a space where the energy was towards making and not towards succeeding. I wanted to focus on the moment of making and not the physical result. I placed myself on the chair by the pottery wheel. In my own corner. I placed myself in a condition. A condition where I could allow myself to snap. To not care. Where I, through the connection and closeness to the mind and hand, could discuss, question and understand things. Dilemmas. Issues. Situations. Thoughts. A condition where things might change. Where I
might change. A condition based on my own needs. A condition that could help me make sense of things again.

a making moment / the birth of a blob

// A package of clay.
Cut through. Swrrish.
A smaller piece. About the size of my hand.

I throw it on the table.
Dunk.
Once more.
Dunk, Dunk, Dunk.
Air bubbles out.
Dunk, Dunk.

I fold my hand around it.
I take it with me. To the pottery wheel in the corner of the room.
To my chair.

Smash.
Placed. In the middle. Kind of.
I sit down.
Burn on chair. Left elbow towards knee.
Stable. Resilient.
Right foot on pedal. Focused.
Gentle press.

Wroom. Wroom. Wroooooom.
Speed found.

Water on hand.
Hand on clay. Two units becomes a unit.
Clay decides.
the form of the hand.
And the clay responds to the agency of the same hand. The agency of the muscles. And the mind.
A friction

between wheel and hand.
Hand and clay.

Scraping the skin.

A friction
telling
that there is nothing in between.

It’s only us now. The hand, the clay and the centrifugal force.

A dance of agencies.
Directions.
Trying to find something common.
A form. A shape. Something that we all can agree on.

A becoming of something.

A bowl.
A good one for my breakfast yoghurt, actually.

Nice form. Actually.
Kind of happy with it. Actually.

And then.
The bowl gives in. It collapses under my hand. It loses its grip from the wheel. And in less than a second

the bowl becomes

a blob.

It goes up on the shelf. The shelf that faces my chair in my corner.
The shelf with the other

blobs and bowls,
from other moments,
of shaping while being shaped.

A blob has been born. //
A failure. A collapse. If a bowl is something, a blob is nothing. Expected, yet hard to accept.

what is a blob?
In this moment, when my hand is making, my mind is free. Also free to dance. To fly away. Just like a piece of clay does when it loses its grip from the wheel. Yet, the mind is, while flying, highly present. Close. Connected. Focused. I am making, and things are making sense. The hand and the mind is inevitably dependent on each other. My hand is making and my thoughts and feelings are being shaped. Just like making in everyday, since I was a child, has been a therapeutic help it is now serving the same purpose in my research. Building upon the definition on the previous page; making, to me, can mean kneading a dough or digging a hole in my garden as much as it can mean doing pottery. It doesn’t matter whether my hand made a bowl, a baguette or prepared a pit for a plant in the soil – the experience of making is the same. A moment for my hand to work. For my senses to be nourished.

The craft theorist Glenn Adamson (2007) argues that craft is not a defined practice but a way of thinking through practices of all kind. I agree on this, but would like to change the word “craft” into “making”. Making, to me, is both the practice and the tool. This is supported by the social anthropologist Tim Ingold, who writes in his book Making. Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture (2013) about thinking through making and knowing by making. He describes how making creates knowledge around practices and materials. How making can be the basis of both the research and the outcome. Or to put it in the same way as the craft artist Frida Hålander writes in her doctoral thesis Whose hand is making (2019); making is both the method and the mediation since it gives me an opportunity to follow objects as a way to ask questions in relation to the making.

The philosopher Martin Heidegger is beautifully describing his perception of the hand in What is called thinking (1954, in Ahmed 2014). He writes about the hand as something more than a part of our body, something more than an organ which can grasp. He made me think of my hand as something that “reaches, extends, receives and welcomes, carries design and signs”. An acting, thinking, expressive hand.

**self-discovery**

To walk on an unpredictable path, hoping for the moments of making to lead the way, was easier said than done. But as time went by the making ritual felt more and more natural and the expectations on it went down. Every making moment involved a reflective documentation through notes and photographs. This was an attempt to capture my initial thoughts and feelings – an honest reflection of my design process. It was a process of self-discovery. Ingold (2013) argues that the only way one can really know things is through a process of self-discovery. This supports my attempt to, by the pottery wheel, discover “something” by myself rather than following surrounding opinions. For example, how to do pottery. But the self-discovery it was also about understanding and acknowledging my needs. A self-care through self-discovery.
The project emerged from a need of self-care. A need to acknowledge my craving to make. To simply go with what made my heart beat. This made me interested in the topic of care and design, a topic that was yet to be explored. What role could “care” have in this project? Is this, in the end, a project about care and design? I didn’t know. And I didn’t want to know yet. Walking my unpredictable path meant being open for change as much as holding myself back from immediate decisions. Still, I decided to carry “care” with me to see if it might lead me somewhere.

care and clay

When working in clay with care in mind I could see a clear connection between the two.

Clay has its own will. Agency. Its own need for time. Its own deadlines. Its own specific requirements. Things my making hand have to adapt to.

It cracks when it’s too dry.
It collapses when it’s too wet.
It explodes from the air bubbles.

I sat there on the chair by the pottery wheel and realized that what I was doing had a lot to do with care. The care for myself and the clay. Acknowledging how fragile we both are. I wondered, how can design care?

When making in clay, everything can’t be done in one go. For my hand, there is a lot of waiting involved. By giving the clay its time I am giving it my care. If I just have the patience, it will soon be ready for my hand again. My caring hand. The one that wants to sense how the clay is doing. Is it still too wet? Can it be lifted up yet? Can it be polished? Or should I take care of it by letting it care for itself for a couple of more hours?

This way of caring for something external made me reflect on the care of the internal. The care of the making hand and the body it belongs to. The care of myself. What if I would care for myself as much as I care for the clay? What if I would wrap myself with self-care as thoroughly as I’m wrapping the plastic around the package of clay? What if I would treat myself as something as fragile as the piece of unfired clay lying in front of me?

care and design

Care expresses our relationship to ourselves, each other and the world. How are these relationships manifested in the way
We design today? How can design bring to presence, direct or facilitate the care that already exists? These were questions that came across when reading the Lancaster Care Charter (Rodgers, P. et al., 2019), written by a multidisciplinary group of people in response to the question “Does Design Care...?” It’s an article that presents a collective vision and sets out new encounters for the design of care and the care of design:

“Design-with-care shifts away from a model of the “designer-as-hero,” and instead offers a more humble, but no less valuable, expertise. Design-with-care meets people, things, and situations as they are, caring for the dynamism of difference and celebrates diversity and fluidity, operating inclusively and leaving the processes and products of design open and transparent.”

Reading this gave me reason and support to frame the project as one driven by, and dealing with, care and how it relates to design. That this, in fact, is a project touching upon how designers can honor and engage humanity by being human ourselves. Being human. Meaning: Being a human, that is, in a design context, practicing ethics of care by being mindful and reflexive.

A human that acknowledges the need for design to be attentive to context, difference and time in order to be relational, ecological, modest, and therefore caring (Rodgers, P. et al., 2019). A human that is allowing herself to be personal and honest in her design work, trying not to curate or manipulate answers, reasons or attempts.

A human that, in a design project, acknowledges her own fragility, as well as the raw, visual and physical fragility of her practice with clay. Meaning, a human that is operating in a fragile space.

**a fragile space**

A human that is creating space for this fragility – her own and the material’s. A space in a corner of a room. A self-care-corner. For the clay to crack. For herself to crack, like humans do. A corner with her own chair. The chair by the pottery wheel, chosen and approved by herself.

The shelf in my self-care-corner was slowly being filled with blobs and bowls from my making moments by the wheel next to it. My attempt was, as mentioned earlier, to focus on the making itself rather than the physical result. Still, when the bowl on the wheel suddenly, in less than a second, turns into a blob under my hand, I yell;

fuck it. This sucks. I suck.

However, as time went by these blobs stuck with me. They were disturbing but also way more interesting than the bowls next to them. It was clear that both the bowls and the blobs wanted to tell me something. I just could not yet hear it.
A failure. A collapse. If a bowl is something, a blob is nothing. Expected, yet hard to accept.

**what is a blob?**

A blob, feb 12th

Something (not nothing) that has something to say. A symbol for fragility, care and imperfection. A signifier for “not doing what’s expected”. A challenging friend and a thorn in the side.
I sat there, on the chair by the pottery wheel. In my corner. And I felt good. In peace. But as time went by also concerned. A bit stressed. Why am I actually doing this? What is this all about? I was constantly grasping for topics and theories that would somehow support this craving to make. Things that would give me "real" reasons for it, as if the craving to make and need of self-care wasn’t enough. I touched upon topics like: the design of a design process, our relation to objects, handmade vs. machine made, and making in relation to well-being. However, nothing really spoke to me. None of these things was what the blob was trying to tell me. So, I continued to let my hand make, hoping to find answers. I made and I made. Until I didn’t feel it anymore. Until it was no longer tempting to sit on the chair by the pottery wheel.

Then, I took my right foot away from the pedal. My left elbow away from my knee. And I stood up from the chair by the pottery wheel. Scratched my forehead. Looked at my safe corner. At myself in the mirror on the shelf. And I wondered. What is this all about?

I went away from my chair and my corner. And I talked to people. My critical friend and colleague Cornelia made me go back in time and reflect on who I was when entering the corner with the pottery wheel for the first time, feeling convinced that I just had to make. Was I a designer wanting to do things differently? Was I an adult craving to make in the same way I did as a child? Maybe. The question was; whose hand is making? Hållander (2018) writes about the situatedness of the hand, that the making hand is shaped by the structure of the room, its grounds and resources. To understand whose hand is doing what, is to see that the hand is always situated. I understood that the situatedness of my making hand was a core question. And not finding the answer to it made me frustrated. I told my critical friend Celia that: it’s weird, it feels like the core is right in front of me, but I can’t see it.

Celia said: go home.

So I did. And had some soda with my critical friend Ellen and I said that: maybe I’m doing all of this just because I’m a fed up woman, done with being perfect.

Ellen said: of course it is.

Of course. The one that had been sitting there on the now empty chair by the pottery wheel was simply a woman. A fed-up woman.

This was what the blobs had been yelling. What they had tried to communicate when they lost its grip and flew into the wall. When they collapsed under my making hand. I had just been yelling “fuck, this sucks” too loud to be able to hear them. It was when I stood up that I saw what I had been sitting on. What the chair was made of:

A solid piece of tiredness. Of fed up-ness.

It was so obvious. And I had not been able to see the chair simply because I had not been honest to myself.

honest design

I had very early on in the process been touching upon the topic of honesty in relation to design. How design often tends to beautify reality rather than reflecting it. I was curious about how design can imagine and uncover conditions, and not manage or manipulate them. Despite this,
I had managed to manipulate the very core of my own design up to this point where I could no longer curate any answers. A point where I realized that only the truth, how naked and difficult it might be, could have a saying. This meant that;

the project

had become dependent on honesty, on my honesty.

Had become a reflexive project – one that is putting the mirror to what the mirror is reflecting. My truth. My perception and experience. As a woman. With nothing in between.

It had become a political project. A feminist project.

And this felt controversial somehow. A bit frightening. What will this path mean to me? Require of me? These words from the poet and activist June Jordan (2002) felt like a good tap on the shoulder;

“To tell the truth is to become beautiful, to begin to love yourself, value yourself. And that’s political, in its most profound way.”
feminism in practice

Sitting on the chair by the pottery wheel is my way of practicing feminism – my way to exist, survive and flourish in a system that is not mine. The design, the blob, is a materialized revolt against the patriarchal structure.

So. In the very core, there is me, a woman.

A woman who sits down on the chair by the pottery wheel simply because she is done.

Done with doing great.
Done with being perfect.
Done with compromising. Negotiating. Adapting.
Done with making sense to others than herself.
Done with enduring the pressure.
Done with not taking herself and her cravings seriously.
Done with sitting on chairs of others. For others. Chairs of expectations. Of society. Chairs of the patriarchy.
Done with not caring for herself.

feminist self-care

As stated earlier, this was from the very beginning a project of self-care. I had created a safe corner with the chair by the pottery wheel. A safe self-care-corner. And finally, the very core was found. The feminist core. The core that situates the making hand. The core that reveals what the chair by the pottery wheel is made of.

A feminist-self-care-corner.

Feminist. A word that contextualizes the self-care that, until now, had felt rather controversial sometimes; who am I to do a project about me, me, me? Shouldn't I address other things? Larger things? Is more self-centeredness really what the world needs more of with the social, political and environmental crisis that it faces. Who am I to just talk about myself as an agent for change?

But now I knew. That is wasn't just about me, me, me. It was about me and other women. My safe, caring corner was, in fact, an expression of feminist care. It was dealing with how women can exist and flourish in a system that is not ours.

Sara Ahmed (2017) helped me justify the self-care and realize that it can be everything but controversial. That it can, in fact, “be a form of protest*. That it is a feminist self-care that needs to be defended. Defended towards those who dismiss women’s self-care as self-pity or self-centeredness. As something spoiled or egotistic, similar to how the feminist movement often is dismissed. Ahmed argues that those who don’t have to fight for their existence can easily dismiss the ones thinking of their own survival as egocentric. This is because these people don’t have to take care of themselves, the world is doing it for them. It’s not a self-care that focuses on my own happiness, but on how to exist in world that makes it difficult for me to exist in. To make my point clear on this, I’ll finish with words from the writer and feminist Audre Lorde (1988);

“Caring for myself is not self-indulgence. It is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.”

a blob, a snap

If sitting on the chair by the pottery wheel in my feminist-self-care-corner is my way of dealing with the struggle, the blob is materializing it. Materializing the revolt. Materializing my, as Ahmed (2017) would name it, feminist snap. A snap can reflect a breaking point as well as a starting point. Think of a branch that’s been bent in many, many ways and directions over time. Sooner or later, it will snap. If the pressure is the action, the snap is the reaction. The branch and I snap because we simply can’t take it anymore. The reaction of snapping might appear as sudden. but
a feminist snap carries history. A history of hitting walls. Of enduring. Of being bent. Sitting on the chair by the pottery wheel is my personal reaction to the snapping point. It is my way of practicing feminism, as my critical friend and colleague Leah so wisely named it once. The blob materializes this reaction, snap, and resistance against the patriarchal structure.

**a blob, a willful portrait**

What is the history that my snap carries? How did my walls look like? How was I bent? When reflecting on my own life as a woman, teenager and girl, Sara Ahmed managed to, again, catch me. Touch me. Give me words I didn’t know of. Words that are opening my eyes. That are changing the way I perceive myself. Words that explains the very root of my project in a striking way. It was in her book *Willful subjects* (2014) that I found the story of the willful girl. It spoke to me. To me, as a child. The willful girl, Agnes, whose stunning six year old self-portrait you have in front of you.

The girl with the constant need to do things in her own way. The girl hating to be told. To follow orders or instructions. The girl taking every opportunity to do the opposite of what was expected of her. The girl sometimes described as obstinate and defiant. And stubborn.

But also, a girl that did was she was told. A girl that learned to put others first. A girl that learned to adapt. To not be in the way. At least not too much.

The willful girl.

What does willful mean? It is typically tied to other words like stubborn, obstinate or unreasonable. Words that describes something at fault. Willfulness can then be understood as a *problem of will*. To me, this is a key aspect.

If willful means “too much will” I am happy to call myself willful. If willful means “disobedience” I am happy to let it describe me. If willfulness can be a choice, I am happy to choose it.

I want to reclaim the word that has been used as a dismissive tool. For me, but even more for the six year old girl on the self-portrait. The girl that didn’t know of the fight she fought by simply not obeying. That didn’t know that claiming her right could be seen as something radical. And if not for the young me, then for all women in history who also chose not to obey. Who also snapped. The women that have prepared my path. I want to turn the accusation towards us into a revolt, into a project – into my own tool to go forward. The willful act, snap, of sitting in the corner on the chair by the pottery wheel is an example of how willfulness is needed in my everyday, as a way to persist. Pull through. To find my way by actively finding my way. By this, I am determining where the problem lies.

The girl on the portrait isn’t the problem. The patriarchal structure is.

And the blob is my present portrait. As willful as the former.
what is a blob?

A failure. A collapse. If a bowl is something, a blob is nothing. Expected, yet hard to accept.

Something (not nothing) that has something to say. A symbol for fragility, care and imperfection. A signifier for “not doing what’s expected”. A challenging friend and a thorn in the side.

A symbol. Materializing the revolt, the resistance, against the patriarchal structure – against everything women have been told to endure. A willful portrait.
material revolt

Ok, so it’s a project about care and honesty and feminism and it’s all very personal and so on. But what about the actual design outcome?

What makes this into a design project? And what is the design outcome, really? Questions I kept asking myself for weeks while having the answer literally right in front of me.

I designed a blob

It was there, facing me on the chair by the pottery wheel in my feminist-self-care-corner.

It was there, on my working desk, right behind my laptop screen.

It was there, brought with my to the tutoring sessions, but hidden amongst books and papers and words.

The objects of clay.
My pieces of design.
The blobs and bowls.

I had talked about them a lot, but had not perceived them as the possible final outcome – as possible design objects. I had mainly seen them as objects leading and forming the process.

But of course this is the outcome. They are as pure, honest, real as they have to be. They are so perfectly done. As done as I am with being perfect.

This concern was really relevant, though. It pointed on some key questions I had to ask myself: What is design? What is a result? It was dealing with the general, and my own, expectations and preconceptions of design. I had been, without knowing, designing backwards. I had been designing in a condition where I knew nothing but that I had to let my hand make. I got to know things first when I could follow the objects, when I could question things in relation to them. The objects became my collaborator, My engine. My challenging voice. My disturbing thorn in the side. My vehicle getting me from A to B.

a poem with objects

However, the objects were not self-explanatory. A blob or a bowl on its own didn’t tell the whole story. This meant that the objects needed their words next to them. The words from the dialogue between me and the objects. My story. Their story. My will and their will. Our story. There were so many hidden words that needed to get out. So I sat down, on another chair, with a bold, black marker and a pile of white A4-papers in front of me and started to write. Furiously. Quick. Rough. Honest. See next page:
THIS IS A PROJECT
ABOUT ME

a WOMAN that is

ted up
trying to not care
done with making sense
to others than
herself.

having to do nothing but
what she wants to.

MEANING

i just have to fucking
make BLOBS.

BECAUSE that is

my way to
practice feminism.
take myself seriously.
my cravings seriously.

my way of dealing with
the structure.

IN ORDER TO

BREATHE
MAKE SENSE
TO SHARE
BE SHAPED
LIVE

AS A DESIGNER

I have the artistic license
to conduct personal studies.

When designing, I want to
BE IN A CONDITION
WHERE I AM

honest, transparent.
frugile, feminini.

non-result oriented.
open minded.
CARE DRIVEN
PASSION DRIVEN.
trusting my best friend and my

I WANT TO

MAKE

I don't know the
final shape of this yet
but maybe
it might be a MAKING FESTO
coming from the
making moments of self-care

and question

HOW CAN WOMEN LIVE
IN A WORLD LIKE THIS?

I have revitalized
myself, just like society has.
There's a systemic lack of care and

I want the blob to take
up space.

I want to
manifest it.
I want to name it.

name the environment.
I'm living in.
I'm experiencing.

I have the right to

say no
change my mind
not make sense

I HAVE THE RIGHT TO

dedicate this to women, girls,
ladies.

I want to
All the words that had circulated in my mind got out. And when placing a blob on top of these flat, willful papers it all made sense. This was a good exercise and finding in the process. I realized that I was bringing design and poetry together and that this, in fact, was a poetic project. A project that clearly goes in line with June Jordan’s (2002) definition of poetry:

“Poetry is a political act because it involves the truth”.

in dialogue with society

When the words were out there, they gave the objects, the blobs in this case, a context. Suddenly, the objects could speak. They could communicate their agency. Their will. What they were made of. Their relation to society. Suddenly, the objects could generate something. It was so strong to me that the bowls and blobs from the making moments in my corner generated, and were generated by, dialogue. They were so willful. Powerful. And wanting to understand their agency, what they were saying, became my engine. How are they in dialogue with society? Why do I react so differently towards the bowl and the blob? Why does the final shape of the piece of clay matter so much? I wasn’t supposed to focus on the result. Yet, it was all about the result. What the objects materialized. Generated. And when I could see the societal reflection in the blob, that it was materializing the resistance against the patriarchal structure, I got to know that the bowl materialized the opposite – the result of the structure. Because

when my hand suddenly had shaped

a beautiful bowl,
a strong sense
of contentment

overwhelmed me. And right there and then,

I lost the spark. And the desire
to make.

Because suddenly, it all felt rather dull. As if something was repeating itself. Something that was too familiar. A feeling. A familiar feeling

of obeying.

Of sitting on a chair, doing good. Doing perfect. In line with expectations of others.

The bowl was perfect.
It made sense.
It was predictable. Kind. Pleasing to have around. Smooth.

And the form of the bowl was so god damn similar to the form of woman the patriarchy is expecting me to take. The form the blob was revolting against. The form I now wanted to reshape. Reclaim. Snap towards.

This reveals that there is not only a dialogue between me and the objects, but between the objects themselves. A dialogue where the blob and the bowl gain further agency. Where they use each other to express themselves – to express what they’re each made of.

As stated, the two different objects materialize both the resistance against, and the result of, the patriarchal structure. The design is by that, through the objects, creating and finding a dialogue with society. It’s design that is writing a poem with objects, bringing issues to the surface. It’s design that is using objects to evoke questions. That is using objects to claim a feminist agency. It’s design in the shape of a material revolt.
A failure. A collapse. If a bowl is something, a blob is nothing. Expected, yet hard to accept.

Something (not nothing) that has something to say. A symbol for fragility, care and imperfection. A signifier for “not doing what’s expected”. A challenging friend and a thorn in the side.

A symbol. Materializing the revolt, the resistance, against the patriarchal structure – against everything women have been told to endure. A willful portrait.

A piece of design. Reflecting a societal issue. A storyteller. A poetic object. And also, at this point, a tattoo on my arm.
This project emerges from my own needs and wants, and relates to my own story. Therefore, it approaches the research and writing through the method of autoethnography. This method acknowledges the situatedness of the researcher and its influence on the topic of research. An approach to research and writing that, according to Ellis et. al (2010), seeks to describe and analyze personal experience in order to understand the cultural. Douglas et. al (2013) argues that autoethnography provides a unique opportunity: to learn about the general – the social, cultural and political – through an exploration of the personal.

In that sense, the making, writing and research within this project connects to the hand that is typing these lines – my hand. It is my hand, myself – carrying personal stories and experiences – that is in the centre. It is a way to, as a form of self-narrative, place myself within a social context. However, as much as this method focuses on the understanding of myself, my hand, autoethnography “hopes for its readers and observers to become co-participants and engage emotionally and personally with the findings” (Khosravi, 2010). Building upon this, I would really want to emphasize and acknowledge, as Hållander (2018) states, that “the me” is not something separate or individual to the rest. “The me” is always in relation to other and others. The inside is inevitably related to the outside. In that sense, I wish for my work to be relatable and brought into the context of my reader’s life.
Hey! It’s Blob. Nooo not blob. And not Bob. Blob. I feel rather offended that Agnes hasn’t given me a capital letter. I am so worthy a capital B. But oh, what can I do. Anyways, I thought it was time for me to speak up. To take a little bit more space here and be the one finishing up this paper. I might have an idea on what this project can pass on – what people might want to put in their pockets.

Many factors played a role when I came to life. It started with a maker’s craving to make, and to let the moment of making, the moment of my birth, lead the process and make sense of things. And during these moments, when shaping me, she realized that it was all about care. The care for me, and the care for herself. And she got curious in how design could care. Sure. But still, I always knew that there was more to it, and she didn’t know what it was although I was yelling it like craaaazy. It was first, when she stood up and decided to be honest to herself, that she could actually listen and hear what I was yelling. That I was, in fact, a piece of fed up-ness. A piece of revolt. That I was a feminist snap. Materializing the resistance against the patriarchal structure. That what she was doing, and what I am the result of, was her way of practicing feminism; claiming and creating her own space, corner, chair by the pottery wheel; shaping her own structure for her to exist and flourish in; a feminist, and controversial, act of caring for herself more than the expectations from the patriarchy.

But I’m not just a result from a feminist snap. I’m also, because of the context I was born within, a piece of design. So, what does Agnes, as a maker and designer, want to put in the pocket of other makers and designers? Well. If you ask me (which you’re not really but I don’t care) it’s going to be about the value of not knowing. Of walking on an unpredictable path in a design process. Also, I believe she would like to emphasize what the making hand can generate – that making can be both the method and the mediation. And as the willful, somewhat egoistic Blob that I am, I hope she will put me, myself and I in their pocket, and talk about what I, as an object, can do. How I can have, and gain, agency. How I am able to generate, and be generated by, a dialogue with society. How I can write a poem. And have a feminist agency.

But. Since this, after all, is a personal project I thought I should, as the also very thoughtful Blob I am, end with what I hope Agnes will put in her own pocket.

I hope it’s going to be the act of snapping. The act, and possibility, of sitting on her own chair. One where she can care for herself. Listen to herself. Where she can build resiliency. And where she can crack. Like humans do. Like clay does.
references


How does one mediate a project into an exhibition? How can one visually articulate the core of a project? What should be in, and what can be left out?

These were questions circulating in my head during this closing process of the project. In my report, I am mentioning how “I want to expose, name, materialize this struggle. Bring it to the surface for others to touch upon. Relate to. Respond to” (see p. 11). And now was the time to do this. When sitting down thinking about what to tell the audience and how, I immediately saw the risk of messing it up by trying to communicate it all. A blob, a snap is a very layered project with a lot of aspects and topics going into it. To focus on all of them in an exhibition context felt impossible. I do, in the end, want people, mainly the fed up women, to gain something from taking part of my stand, and not just leaving feeling overwhelmed with information. Therefore, there was a need to take things away, and focus on the core. A need to simplify. To narrow it down. This forced me to really consider the most important parts of the project that would do the best job in communicating the message visually. And I found that it had to be all about the blob + bowl, the chair, the hand.
the blob + bowl,

I was initially thinking of having all of the blobs and bowls there, to let them all have a saying, but realized quite soon that one of each would be enough. My family of clay objects is not a collection where all have to be presented to create a whole. It’s all about the two different objects, and the dialogue between them – their story. The story of how one became the other. This, similar to how Ursula K. Le Guin in *The Carrier Bag of Fiction* (1989) writes about an object, in her case a sack, as a fitting shape of a novel. “A book holds words. Words hold things. They bear meanings”, she writes. To this, I would also add that “things hold words”. Inside the blob and the bowl sequences of events are hidden, but can be revealed in their different expressions. They can, through each other, materialize something. Express themselves. Gain agency and be in dialogue with society. That is powerful.

the chair,

Sitting on the chair by the pottery wheel is my personal reaction to the snapping point. It is my way of practicing feminism. The action the blob is materializing. I want to give the viewer the possibility to sit down, or in some way interact, with this chair. With this piece of wood that has functioned as such a strong symbolic support structure in my work, my findings and in my writing practice. The chair that helped me situate both myself within the project, and the project itself in relation to other.
The making hand - my constant research tool. The hand that needed to be used. That had to make. The hand that made objects which I could follow, understand and question things in relation to. This hand needed to be prominent in the exhibition. And it was in the overall expression of the stand that I felt that it could be present. A **handmade** expression was needed. A raw, honest, analog materiality. With nothing in between. My hand is something that reaches, extends, receives, welcomes and carries design and signs. The hand’s expression is personal. Individual. Unique. What my hand does cannot be done by anyone else. I saw an opportunity to create this feeling in the way I communicated the words that I felt had to complement the objects. The words that were crucial in order to give objects a context. A voice. An opportunity to strongly communicate their agency. Their will. What they were made of. Their relation to society. With the words next to them, the design could *generate* something. I decided, similar to the way I previously have presented my project in process, to write these words directly on the wall next to the objects. This felt like the most suitable expression for the project as a whole, with its concerned topics. The handwritten words are transparent. Fragile. Honest. Naked. Not curated or manipulated. Just there, where they have to be. See next page.
what do I do
when my heart
is suddenly
not beating for much
anymore
when I just feel
empty

I sit down on the
CHAIR by the pottery wheel.
I let my hand make.
The hand. The clay.
A dance of agencies.
Trying to find something common.
A shape to agree on.
A becoming of something.

A bowl

My hand is pushing. Shaping. Its
expectations are forming the bowl.

And suddenly,
the bowl gives in
under
my pushing hand.

A breaking point,
A SNAP,
A BLOB.

fragile. honest. naked.
materializing my feminist act,
(SNAP) of sitting on my own
chair, and not chairs of the
patriarchy.
materializing the resistance
towards, and the need to
reclaim
the form I’m expected to take.
What can design be? How can it look like? What is a result? And what happens when the result isn’t physical, but rather invisible? These are all questions I’ve been touching upon in this project, and also things I’ve had to consider during the process of finding a suitable way of exhibiting my work. I decided to display my work in a kind of storytelling manner. It’s the story of a project. A blob. It reveals and brings in the person behind it all – the story of a fed up woman. This is pointing at the situatedness of the designer and how strongly this can imbue the design practice and outcome. Even if the physical design, the objects of clay, might not look like much of a design piece at all, there is a greater result than the one that can be seen at first sight. A greater achievement than the one that can be touched upon. An empty shelf, a simple bowl, an expressive blob, a chair and a written story is what, in this context, visually articulates my project.

If the way I was putting my design out there was successful or not, I cannot know. Has anyone brought the blob with them in their minds? Could anyone relate to my work, and bring it into the context of their own lives? Could any fed up woman see herself in my story? These are questions that will remain unanswered. And that feels perfectly fine. I will bring with me what I know – and that is the experience of how the blob, in my community of design students and teachers, became more than a piece of clay. It became a verb. Blobbing. An expression. Make it blobby. A description of a feeling, a condition, that there were no other words for. I’m a blob today.

Blob design. An example of what design can be, unravel, change and become.
references