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‘NOBODY PUTS BABY IN A CORNER’
A critical response to apartments & furniture designed based on modernistic ideals.

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All materials presented in this document are the author’s own, unless stated otherwise.
My study challenges the status quo that seems to exist in the design of modern apartments, which is heavily influenced by the modernistic movement that flourished in early 20th century. Modernists strived to create a just and equal society, by challenging the social order and the traditional hierarchical system. The architecture of the time reflected these ideals and ultimately resulted in simplistic and repetitive designs that often formed box like interiors with standardised furniture. Consequently, these designs are detached from the individualism of the inhabitants, forcing people to sit, sleep, dine and socialise in a predefined space in a prescribed manner.

My project is an artistic intervention to the BOX - the soulless interior of modern apartments. My aim is to explore and imagine alternative ways of existing within the box and push the boundaries of how we conduct daily activities in the living space.

Similar to the saying, it takes a village to raise a child, it took a village to successfully research and realise this project. I have received a great deal of assistance and support from numerous people, from close and afar.

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Introduction

After the post-war economy improved in the 1920s, modernists set sail to create a better world, a fundamentally new way of living. This became the catalyst for a new social reform movement that aimed to tackle the social and economic inequalities of the time.

*The house is a machine to live in* - Le Corbusier

However, modernism’s influence was not limited to the socioeconomic arena, the movement affected various facets of our societal structure, including the way we view spaces that are constructed to inhabit. A new design philosophy of compartmentalising and separating based on functions became a revolutionary template to build homes. The aesthetics of this new architecture lied in overly simplified geometries blanketed with glass, steel and concrete; an accumulation of blank, white-washed, featureless boxes that fulfilled the desire of extension.

And so, the denomination by the upholsterer began; it was a reign of terror that we still can feel in our bones. Velvet and silk, Makart bouquets, dust, suffocating air and lack of light, potiéres, carpets and “arrangements” - thank God, we are done with all that now.1

Designs influenced by modernism was simple to construct and economically viable, at the same time challenged the social hierarchy that existed at the time modernism was born. However, one of the paradoxes of modernism occurred when the very principals of the designs were hijacked by the elite. The simplicity and functionality were soon embraced by the privileged individuals as fashionable. Ludwig Mies van der Rohe’s *Farnsworth House* is a case in point, and a much-used reference to build luxury homes. His expensive designs embrace minimalism and exaggerate the principals of modernism.

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Serial replication and the model of factory production offered the modernists a means of democratizing their work and of eradicating the individualism associated with bourgeois domesticity.

The triumphant concept of assembly by methods of standardisation, further enabled modernism to boost its philosophy and conquer the world of residential architecture in a global scale. The standardised dimensions and furniture present in the modern house magnified the subtraction of the individualism within the interior.

The current proposal of modern house was suggested by members of the architectural and design profession, that was almost exclusive to men. This manifesto adhered a masculine value system and suffocated the feminine role as just the "beautifier of the home" and masked the interior with a coat of white paint. Consequently, this erased the personal peculiarities and taste of the inhabitant within the interior of a home.

The triumphant concept of assembly, by methods of standardisation, further enabled modernism to boost its philosophy and conquer the world of residential architecture.
This interior has been austere or luxurious, Marxist or fascist, artistic or clinical, fulfilling the wishes of every client with the same answer.

Despite the efforts of numerous architects and designers, such as Zaha Hadid, Friedensreich Hundertwasser and Fredrick Kiesler, who challenged the “soulless” modern architecture and employed uniqueness and individuality in their designs, such proposals failed to enter the interior-architectural realm of dwellings.

Projects such as Frederick Kiesler’s notable work - Endless House, supported by his theory of Correalism, embraces biomorphic forms and creates a topology; a “correlation between the space, objects and human experience” that gives an endless elastic experience for the inhabitant.

Another activist against modernism, who was well known for his rejection of straight lines and standardisation in his designs is the Austrian architect Friedensreich Hundertwasser (which translates to “Multi-Talented Peace-Filled Rainy Day Dark-Colored Hundred Waters” in German; a name given by himself). Hundertwasser’s manifesto was to entirely re-invent the relationship between humanity and architecture. He alleged that straight lines that build up rigid lifeless structures limit human creativity and are barren of humanity.

Hundertwasser’s whimsical complex of residential apartments; the Green Citadel, in Magdeburg, Germany is a standing proof of alternative architecture which embraces the organic-ness of the human in architecture and interiors.³

As evident from the preceding text, numerous architects and designers have challenged modernism and attempted to introduce varying degrees of individualism to their designs. Although modern residential apartments seem to be immune from such design moments, it is one of the most important spaces we as designers develop. It is an environment where many of us will experience our most important moments in life and also spend most of our time.

My artistic intervention, to soulless boxlike interior, is to introduce a new dynamic within the rigid structural dwelling, that correlates to the inhabitant. The objective is to liberate our bodies from the standardised furniture; explore and imagine alternative ways to exist within the box.
I used my body extensively as an organic template in the design process, to create a synergy between the interior and human body. Though this project intends to challenge modernism, I employed strategies, methods and tools related to modernism; the intention is to demonstrate that the same methods can possibly be utilised to achieve a result that is more 'in harmony with the human being'.

By doing this work, I hope I have contributed to the tradition of challenging the over-simplified designs heavily influenced by modernism. Also, through this project, I aim to highlight the importance of viewing the interior as a reflection of the individual inhabitants rather than a 'fit for all' box.

Finally, I hope this read provokes thought regarding the current apartment design concepts and challenges the existing design status quo.
The definitions used in this work as well as the cultural norms discussed in the document are limited specifically to Sweden and in general to Europe. For instance, "sitting" is defined as the action of resting one's buttocks on an element such as a chair or a sofa, as opposed to on the floor, which is a common way to sit in many cultures around the world.

**Stage 4: Prototypes**

The resulting shapes from Stage 3 were developed into full-scale prototypes. The goal was to experience the connection between the form and my body, so I tried to experience the symbiosis between you and the interior. Explore and imagine alternative ways of existing within the space.

**A brief summary of my design process**

1. **Stage 1: Standards**
   - In this stage, I studied and analysed my body movements during daily activities conducted in my box-like apartment. This exercise was later documented in a full-scale cardboard box, staging the interior of a home.
   - The chapter titled "chalk outline" explains further the documentation method employed in this process.

2. **Stage 2: Come and hug me**
   - In this stage, I aimed to dissolve the rigidity and soften the corners of the box; for it to come and hug my body.
   - I tried to liberate my body from standardised furniture. Disregarding any standardised activities reinforced by civil behaviour, I stretched my body in various positions to explore and develop a new dynamic between my body and the box.

3. **Stage 3: From shapes to forms**
   - Here, I extracted the organic shapes of my body outlines to create ambiguous shapes. These abstracted shapes were then iterated in a process of abstraction and form making. The abstraction process enabled me to disregard any intentions for the design outcome. Then, to create forms from these abstracted shapes, I experimented with several methods such as scaling, extrusion and tapering.

4. **Stage 4: Prototypes**
   - The resulting shapes from Stage 3 were developed into full-scale prototypes. The goal was to experience the connection between the form and my body.

**Outcome**

The "Come Hug Me" collection is the result of my artistic intervention to the soulless box-like interiors of modern apartments. I used my body extensively in the entire process, to create an outcome that would connect to the human body. Through this process, I hope I have resurrected at least a part of our individualism that was buried in the modernistic interiors we live in. So, come and hug me to experience the symbiosis between you and the interior. Explore and imagine alternative ways of existing within the space.

**Conclusions**

By combining the forms of my body outlines with the box-like interiors of modern apartments, I have attempted to create an outcome that would connect to the human body. Through my artistic intervention, I hope I have brought some of our individualism back into the modernistic interiors we live in. So, come and hug me to experience the symbiosis between you and the interior.
Apartments in Sweden

I began my process by analysing and documenting floorplans of the residential apartments in Stockholm. The designs of bourgeois apartments and social housing apartments I documented during this process were from the timeline of 1960’s to the current date.

The floor plans of the apartments I studied, were evidently designed based on the principles of modernism. This low-cost effective design has been the answer for social housing in modern architecture.

In order to understand if economy is the only aspect that justifies the dwellings’ simplistic design, I headed out to explore luxury apartments marketed for the high-end consumers. I visited the newly constructed apartment building - 79th & Park, Gärdet, built in 2018 and the currently developing, Gasklockan, set to be completed in 2022.

Figure 1 Student apartment, 20m², 1959.

Figure 2 Studio apartment, 32m², 1931.

Figure 3 Two room 59m² apartment in Sweden, 1960.

Figure 4 Three room 75m² apartment in Sweden, 1963.

Figure 5 Gasklockan, 96m² apartment in Stockholm, to be completed in 2022.

Figure 6 79th & Park, deluxe apartment, 125m² apartment in Stockholm, 2018.
79th & Park, Gärdet, Stockholm

79th & Park is a high-end luxury apartment building, located at the edge of the national park in Gärdet, Stockholm. A project commissioned by Oscar Properties and designed by BIG (Bjarke Ingels Group) that was completed in 2018. The building block is described as a “manmade hillside in the centre of Stockholm”. The architecture strived to relate to nature by creating a descending profile to reduce the mass of the building, in doing so, connecting the tectonic building to human scale. Although the pixelated organic exterior is successful in articulating the relationship between the building and nature/human, the interior can be perhaps only expressed as an accumulation of white boxes. A perfect box ready to be filled with standardised furniture.

Site visit to high-end luxury apartment at 79th & Park, apartment showing, 2019.

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Gasklockan, Norra Djurgårdsstaden, Stockholm

For next case study, I visited a showroom featuring Gasklockan apartments, located in Norra Djurgårdsstaden, Stockholm. Gasklockan designed by the Herzog & De Meuron, is under construction and is estimated to be complete in year 2022. The showroom consisted of a full-scale mock-up of the kitchen area and toilet, scale models, floorplans and renderings visualising the interior and exterior of the tower. To minimise energy loss and to subject the apartments to natural light, the apartments were set in a V shape arrangement within the cylindrical tower, giving the building a striking exterior and a remarkable panoramic view from the interior. Judging by materials displayed in the showroom, the rooms of the apartment had a striking resemblance to the interior of 79° & Park apartments.

Apartments in Gasklockan has an average asking price of 99,000 SEK (9255 EUR) per m². In comparison, the average price of an apartment in 79° & Park is 113,000 SEK (10,563 EUR), suggesting these apartments are targeted for the high-income individuals. The interiors of these two high end apartment buildings are not very different from many of the apartment designs found in social housing projects like Snabba Hus in Västerberga. In 2017, Sveriges Kommuner och Landssting (Sweden’s municipalities and county councils) signed a contract with a number of construction companies to build prefabricated, standardised social housing to tackle the housing crisis. This quick to build apartments costs approximately 23,000 SEK (2150 EUR) per m². Independent of the cost to the end user, a common denominator, in all these examples is the simple, repetitive geometry forming white-washed, box like rooms.

Here I wondered, if the interiors of all apartments are strikingly similar irrespective of the cost, is the premium price tag associated with high end apartments justifiable? Perhaps the increase in price is more to do with the location or maybe we have been persuaded into thinking this is the only way to live!

The interior is reduced and standardised to such a degree that there is simply no work for architects to do... All apartments have the same cheap stairs, walls, doors, etc., no matter if it is luxury or social housing... The next step will be that the interior as such will completely disappear.

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18 Herzog & de Meuron
While the preceding examples are from Stockholm, the issue is not limited to one geographical location. The Swiss Pavilion at the Venice Architecture Biennale 2018, Svizzera 240, a project by Alessandro Bosshard, Li Tavor, Matthew van der Ploeg and Ani Vihervaara, depicts the dwelling architecture of our time. Similar to the previous examples, the Swiss Pavilion draws attention to the non-imposing white blank interiors.
This daunting thought of the disappearance of interiors has been well demonstrated by the illustrations of *No-stop city* by Archizoom Associates in the 1971. An ideology for a future city; an optimal effective urban structure that poses on a grid, potentially endless, where human functions are arranged on a free field. This uniform system makes the house "a well-equipped parking lot" with no spatial hierarchy.\(^2\)

\[\text{[\text{\ldots}]}\] a freed society (freed even from architecture) similar to the great monochrome surfaces of Mark Rothko: vast velvet, open oceans in which the sweet drowning of man within the immense dimensions of mass society is represented.\(^3\)


\(^3\) Michael Hay.

Why don’t we usually do things differently? Why don’t we crawl on the floor, hop on the bed, swing like a chimpanzee? play in like a child? Our bodies are constrained by the politics of civility accepted by the society and the economic rationalisation in architecture. What is the capacity of our bodies? Are we also industrialised, doing the same things the same way? The civil way!

Children play without restrictions to their bodies. They can find several ways to play, they climb, crawl or slide. Imagination is the limit. We adults socialise in a behaviour where we have refrained from doing that. Our versions of playgrounds are gym or extreme sports, to challenge and liberate our bodies. These activities are appropriated in specific places in a society, such as amusement parks gym, ski resorts etc.

Can a developed interior topography liberate us from the civil and social behavioural restraints and consequently stimulate our imagination and activate our body?
This idea was exemplified in *Living structures* by Ken Isaacs - the micro dwellings which unified furniture and home created on a matrix. It is a brilliant proposal that prescribes towards individual needs. Although these structures relate to being streamline and box like, it offers a playful dynamic by using the verticality in human scale. The design Corresponds to Adolf Loos’s theory *Raumplan*, skilfully playing with the height of different spaces to create an inter-connected continuum within the whole structure. Ken Isaacs’s system is designed by applying DIY (do it yourself) method and uses inexpensive materials and easy joinery. In short, the design is inexpensive and do-able.

Another example is the Fantasy landscape; *Visiona 2*, designed for *Cologne Furniture Fair* 1970 by Verner Panton. Aiming to promote synthetic products linked to home furnishing, Panton took specificity of space to another level. The project composed of layered organic forms with vibrant colours. This installation became one of the most prominent spatial designs of the late 20th century.

I wonder why such unique designs never penetrated the apartment design industry. Why are we so reluctant to design interiors by individualising and adding uniqueness to our homes? The promoters of the box design philosophy would argue that it is not economical to apply individualism to apartment complexes. Especially when apartments are designed to a mass market where the architects design to unknown inhabitants. This justification can be challenged when we continuously see the same soulless interiors, found commonly in social housing, being also repeated in luxury apartments targeted for people with less economical constraints.
Stage 1: Standards
Chalk Outline

In order to understand the activities conducted at home, I built a human-scale cardboard box to depict the space of a home. My method of documentation is inspired by the reference book: Neufert’s Architectural Data. The reference contains the norms of modernity; a catalogue that prescribes the standards of architectural dimensions illustrated with plans and sections.

Chalk Outline is a method developed taking inspiration from the way figures and objects are presented in architectural handbooks. I am using myself as a subject throughout this project to document my body within the interior space. Although such studies have been done extensively in the past and are well documented in books like Neufert’s Architectural Data and Arkitektens handbook 2017, I found importance in conducting a study utilizing my own body as a template. This enabled me to completely immerse myself in the design process and fully understand the relation between the body’s motions and the design manifestations.

Documentation of activities done at my dining table in my apartment.

Figure 12 Bauentwurfkunde by Ernst Neufert, 1936

30 School of Architecture official blog.
31 School of Architecture official blog.
During this process, the temporary chalk outlines gave me a flexibility to redraw, erase and adjust the body position according to the task. The image below shows the method employed to document the body motions. A light source was used to project a shadow of my body on to the cardboard wall, then the outline of the shadow is traced easily with a chalk.

Chalk outline: Standard scenarios; Documentation using standard furniture in an apartment.

Subject: Sawsan Ahmed
Gender: Female
Height: 1640mm
Documented scale: 1:1

Chalk outline: Phase I, is an exploration to record my body actions in a home surrounded by mass produced everyday furniture. To simplify the process, I have excluded the actions conducted in the kitchen and bathroom, from this study, focusing on everyday postures we hold when in the living area and bedroom. The said postures are positions we may hold when sleeping, dining, reading, studying or relaxing. Here I used the standard furniture heights, found in Arkitekten handbook 2017, i.e. table (H720), chair (H450), sofa (H400) and coffee table (H400). In addition, I experimented by adding and subtracting heights to furniture, in order to explore how my body feels in the resulting postures.

Arkitekten handbook is used as a reference because it is a widely accepted source by the design community.
Scenario I: Chair and Table

**Furniture used:**
- **Table:** H720mm
- **Chair:** H450mm

Photo series on the right shows the documentation process while dining at a standardised table (720mm height). Afterwards, I increased the height of the table at set intervals to experiment with the consequent change in body posture and comfort level.

Next, I tried using the dining table, with the height of 720mm, as a study table. Here I did activities such as writing and typing on a laptop. After a while, the 720mm table height gave me a sore back as I have to lean downwards, in an unnatural posture, to get my line of sight in line with the laptop screen. I experimented by increasing the height of the table, at set intervals, until I achieved a comfortable body posture for the tasks I was doing at the table. Furthermore, I also tested my body posture when doing the same task while standing by the table. In the standing position I achieved the best comfort at a table height of 1000mm.
In 1944, "In search of comfort in an uncomfortable chair", Bruno Munari explores sitting by changing the orientation of the chair and sitting in experimental positions. Similar to his exploration, I sat on a standard chair at the table working on my laptop for an hour. During this time, I documented my body's feelings of fatigue in the format of a dialogue between my body parts.


Screams of my body while sitting at a standard desk for a long time.
Scenario II: Sofa and coffee table

The living area usually has a comfortable sofa and a coffee table. This is a space designated for socialising with family and friends, a place often used for on-screen entertainment, such as watching television or playing video games.

- **Furniture used:**
  - **Sofa:** H400mm
  - **Coffee Table:** H450mm

Here, I have tested different body positions when sitting on a sofa (refer to the photo series on the left). I have also tested different heights for the coffee table while conducting different tasks, such as, writing, working on a laptop and drinking coffee (sitting upright).

In this exercise, I kept my thighs restricted to the sofa seat, both my feet firmly touched the floor, consequently my legs were positioned between the sofa and the coffee table, in an inverted ‘L’ shape like posture. My hips acted as a pivot to adjust my back to different positions. This is the posture we will generally associate with the act of ‘sitting’. It will be unconventional and against the norms, to visit a friend or a colleague and lie on the chair upside down.

Possibly, the seating elements have been designed to accommodate this definition of ‘sitting’, setting a template for a fixed posture when resting, socialising or doing working. One could argue that a combination of imposed societal norms and furniture elements define how we choose our postures when doing daily tasks, and these postures may not necessarily be the most comfortable, heathy or natural shape our body wants to be in.
Scenario III: Bedroom

Furniture used: A flat surface to act as a bed.

During this stage, the chalk outline was traced off my body while lying on the cardboard floor. Image on the right shows different sleeping positions traced on to the cardboard.

Apart from being confined to a flat surface, sleeping was the only activity that was experimented, where my body felt fully liberated. Perhaps this is because sleeping, like sexual intercourse, is one of the most natural activity we do, an action that is devoid from the regiments imposed on us by the other.
Chalk outline: Come and Hug me

In this phase of exploration, I have removed all the furniture. What is left is a bare and blank box. My aim is to impose my liberated body (free from all the elements usually found in an apartment) on to the box. “Come and hug me” is how I describe this exploration.

In this exploration the sole focus was to free my body by stretching in various positions. To enable freedom, no specific activity done in the home was considered in this process. The only limitation was my body’s flexibility.

As I freely move my body with free forms, I am activating the non-imposing blank box, I was having a dialogue with the space. This dialogue developed into a symbiotic relationship; as the body continued to mould the space, the space activated the body. The ‘transcripts’ of the conversation between my body and the box was recorded and is shown in the photo series below.

Photo series: Stretching my body to liberate from all constraints.
Negative abstraction; Creating abstract shapes from my body outlines

In combination with scales 1:10 and 1:20, I overlaid my body outlines randomly to extract an abstract shape. This method was repeated to create several abstract biomorphic shapes.

A process of creating abstract shapes from body outlines.
Since my documentation method used in Chalk outline phase I and II were two-dimensional shapes, I experimented and explored methods to create three-dimensional forms from two-dimensional shapes.

Methods explored to create form from shapes

1: Extrude + Taper
2: Extrude + Union and or Boolean
3: Euclidean space: X, Y, Z axis

3D technical terms definition

**Extrude**: A method to create 3D models from 2D plans by pulling out the shape.

**Taper**: A technique to skew the model by progressively narrowing down at one end.

**Union**: When two or more elements are joined together

**Boolean**: A method to subtracts or combines two or more objects based on the given geometry

**Euclidean space** is the three-dimensional space in which three values are given from the x, y and z axis to determine the point.
1: Extrusion + Taper

One quick way to create three-dimensionality from a shape is the method of extrusion. This is a familiar technique used in modernism and industrialism to mass produce goods. Nevertheless, Verner Panton and Robert Sebastian has applied this method to create organic structures and furniture: the fantasy landscape: Visiona 2 and the sculptural furniture collection, Malitte lounge.36,37

A selection of the abstracted shapes was extruded to create a form. I used clay to extrude from these shapes. This medium of using clay and moulding by hand was an effective exercise to feel the space and to be closer to understanding the curves that shaped the form.

To add a new dynamic to the method of extrusion, I introduced the tapering technique to the form. This would allow to enhance the three-dimensionality of the form. This method was tested in full-scale during the prototype stage.

2: Extrude + Union and or Boolean

The technical terms Union and Boolean are commonly used in 3D software such as 3D studio max or Rhino. This is another method I explored to transform shapes to three-dimensional forms. These commands were tested in the physical environment using clay as material to create form.

3d scanned clay model of a form created using extrude + boolean.
3: Euclidean space: X, Y, Z

In this step, I placed three selected body outlines, from Stage 1, on the xy, xz and yz planes in a Euclidean space. The shapes were connected at coordinate point = (0,0,0) i.e. the point where the axes meet. Using clay, the shapes were then extruded from their planes to merge with one another to form 3d objects. The method was repeated with multiple different body outlines from Stage 1, resulting in different organic shapes.

By applying this method, I explored how the box and my body embraced each other. The clay filled the space between my body and the walls of the box, as if the walls came alive and hugged my body.

This process was only realised to this stage and was not developed further. Upscaling the resulting models to 1:1 scale was deemed unpractical considering the budget and time allocated for this project. Instead a different route was taken and is detailed in the following section. While the preceding process was abruptly terminated, it is considered a success, since the exercise gave me a deeper understanding of the developing relationship between the box and my body and eventually helped me to realise the next step.
A selection of shapes produced in Stage 1 were developed into prototypes. I opted to create furniture scale elements. Building in full-scale was the key to understand and experience the connection with the form and my body.

In this phase, my body was used as the dimensioning tool instead of the measuring tape. Design decisions such as dimensioning, scaling and setting the angles were made in relation to my body only.
By adapting this empirical approach of testing the forms with my body, I was able to successfully avoid any predeterminations or intentions for the design. Also, I have refrained from using the term ‘furniture’ to refer to the developing objects, since the word has a strong association to standardised furniture. Instead I call them elements. This enabled me, as the designer to distance myself from the conventional design line of thought.

Applying the described process, the first shape that was realised due to its versatility when rotated and turned. This element’s ambiguous but familiar shape was aptly named Häst, since the form has been frequently associated to a horse. Could it be a chair? a horse? a wave? Only your imagination can tell. The element has been frequently associated with a horse by visitors of the exhibition.

In the process of designing and constructing, to increase the variables, I tapered the element on both vertical and horizontal directions. This technique of tapering to the extrusion introduced a new dynamic to the elements. Perhaps, this multidimensionality is a compliment to some of the design examples I was inspired by, early on in the project, such as the Visiona 2 by Verner Panton and Malitte Lounge by Roberto Matta.
A modular system

[...] the goals of modular design: simplicity, economy, swiftness of construction, repeatability, and flexibility.

The article- The Modularity is Here: A Modern History of Modular Mass Housing Schemes, authored by Kate Wagner, excellently defines modular design in architecture. This prevalent method, to achieve limitless, flexible, prefabricated and mass-produced goods became an answer to the housing crisis faced after the post war.38 In 1942, a modular housing scheme was designed called the Flexible space by Skidmore, Owings, & Merrill. The unit was designed as an entire modular home, with the options to configure to a variety of families soon to inhabit the space.

Figure 16 Modular extensions from the 1950 Gunnison Homes.39

This solution of modularity to the housing crisis, was soon taken as a concept of luxury to extend master and deluxe homes. In the current times, modular systems are commonly featured in skyscrapers as an exclusive design.40

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38  Kate Wagner, 'The Modularity is Here: A Modern History of Modular Mass Housing Schemes', 99% Invisible, 2016
39  Modular housing schemes such as Dymaxion House in the United States by Buckminster Fuller and Winslow Ames House by Robert W. McLaughlin and his company, American House, Inc. can be dated back to the 1920’s and 30’s Kate Wagner.
40  Kate Wagner.
Design development of the next two elements were similar to the first element. *Glida* and *Elefant* were imaginative names used by two toddlers who visited my exhibition.

Carefully selected shapes were extruded and tapered. The angles of tapering on both horizontal and vertical axis are different in each element. These separate pieces were designed in a way that they can be fitted to the side of the first element, *Häst*. By doing this, I have introduced a modular system, adding a multidimensional combinatorial possibility to the collection.
The aesthetic values of De Stijl, that emerged in 1917, were weaved into the fabric of modernism and architecture, since the style reflected the ideals of modernism. The paintings were to be unspoken and understood completely on its own, with the use of simple rectangles and fundamental colours; red, blue and yellow accompanied by black, white and grey. This created the phenomenon of a "universal language", a painting understood by the world.42

Despite the simplified geometry practiced in De Stijl, I believe elementary colours has been undoubtedly successful and perhaps could be described as universal colours. For my elements, I have chosen the fundamental colours; red, blue, yellow and green, for their strong recognition. The colours further highlight the combinatorial modularity in the collection.

Tactility and materiality

Selecting an appropriate material became a crucial decision to convey the organic-ness and versatility of the collection. I considered painting the elements, however, the fragile nature of paint was not ideal for elements that needs to be frequently wobbled around.

To cover the elements, I resorted to a commercial, synthetic polymer material, typically used for flooring. The soft tactility of the material tightly hugs the continuous curves and tapers of the elements. The polymer allowed to achieve a good and comfortable grip for lifting, moving and rotating the elements position in the interior space.
Konstfack Spring Exhibition 2019

This photo is a collection of moments from the exhibition.
Konstfack Spring Exhibition 2019

During the exhibition, I emphasised on making a connection to the visitor through my design method. The objective was to create an understanding among visitors, of the philosophy behind the design and also demonstrate to them the process through which the forms of the elements realised.

My exhibition space was chosen to be placed at a corner, to reflect the box-like interior of an apartment. One wall was dedicated to explaining the process of Chalk outlines and the artistic design process with over-scaled, overlapped bodies of mine traced across the wall and floor, accompanied by a series of moving images, projected on the floor, that features how my outlines were traced with chalk (refer to the photo in the previous page). Lastly, the elements were placed freely on the floor with an invitation printed on the floor, with the words "Come & Hug me".

To communicate my design process, on the second wall, I left a blank canvas for visitors to trace their own figure. This interactive process demonstrates the contrast and disconnection between our individualism and the blank interiors we inhabit. Every addition of an individual’s outline symbolised our will to impose our actions and unique body shapes onto the flat, lifeless box-like interiors of our homes.
Observations and Reflections

During the exhibition, I played the role of an observer, my aim was to analyse the behavioural patterns and the way visitors chose to interact with the elements.

The large colourful outlines drew the visitors to the collection from a distance. Most of the people started slowly touching the elements, curious to understand the soft skin-like material covering the elements.

The collection was very popular with children, as they playfully imagined ways they could interact with the elements. While one child used an element like a playground slide another used the same element just to lie on his back. While one child saw an element as a pony, another saw it as just a chair. Each element can be many different things, depending on the individual’s imagination. The good reception from children, for the exhibit, is perhaps not a surprise; children are less restrained by the behavioural norms, that we as adults are subjected to.
Although adults were more hesitant, many explored the elements, in different orientations and resting positions. Some moved, turned and combined the elements until they found a satisfactory solution to how they want to rest or use the elements. While it was more evident from children, I observed that the elements were stimulating creativity and imaginations, the users were, in many cases, finding a new way to sit, lie and rest within a less defined and flexible space. While not a confirmation, these observations give weight to my hypothesis that we are influenced to live in a predefined way, denied of individualism, due to the objective nature of our interior spaces.
In my project, I have analysed, criticised and challenged the current apartment and furniture concept; a design inherited from modernism. My design reflects on our individualism and the organic form of humans. I highlight the importance of seeing the interior as a reflection of the individuals who inhabit the space. With the design I wish to provoke thought on the subject and stimulate people's imagination to explore creative new ways to exist within the interior space.

While I have taken a critical approach to modernistic designs, some of my methodology was influenced by ideals fostered by modernism. Perhaps I am hoping to convey a message that not all about modernism is 'evil' and we should embrace the positive aspects of modernism in our designs.

Even though an independent observer may feel that the lifeless designs of modern-day residential apartments are continuing unchallenged, there has been a long tradition, within the architecture and design community, of challenging the designs heavily influenced by modernism. As interior architects, it is important to constantly question and challenge the existing design traditions, to achieve advancements in the field.

I hope, this project has been successful in contributing to this important movement and also provoked thought on how we design and exist within the interior spaces.
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