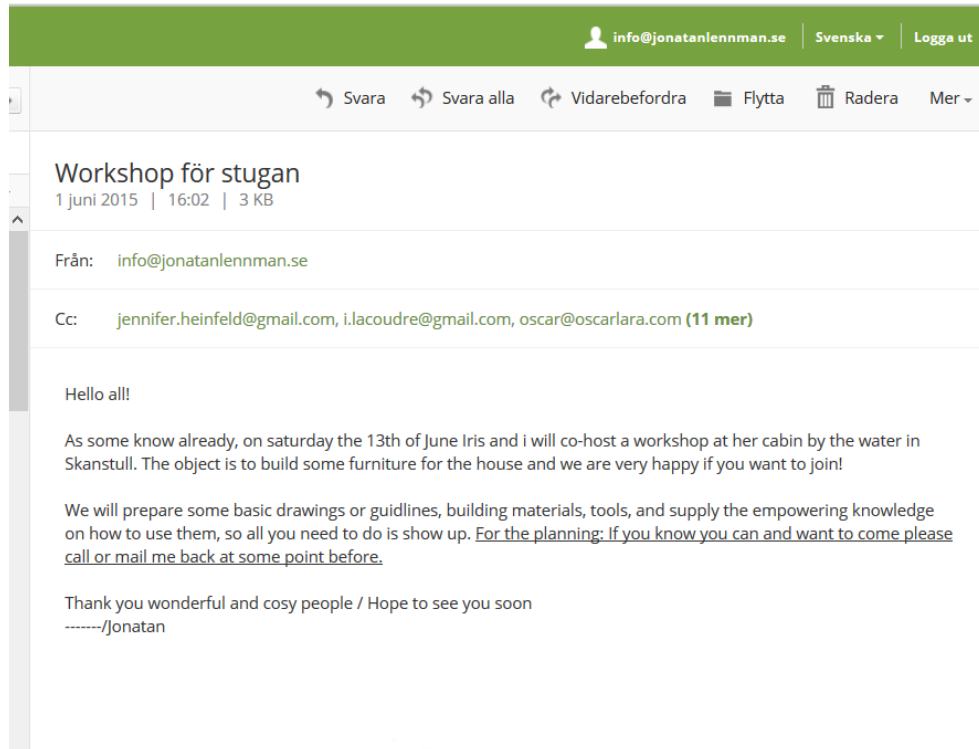


# Building (a collective thing)

### **ABSTRACT**

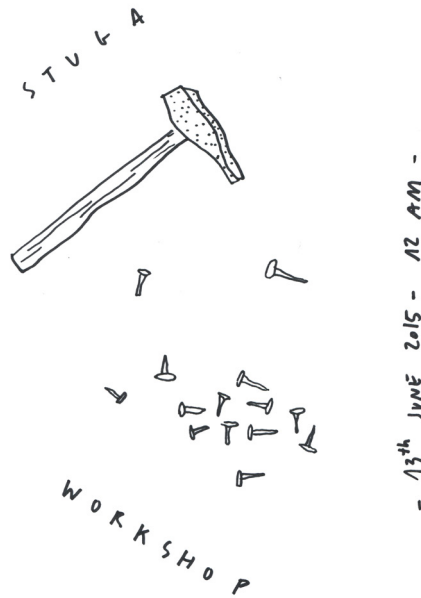
How can we claim our rights to access and understand the things and spaces around us? How can we deal with the complex structures that control them? Can we make it more simple together? Could it be more like cooking?

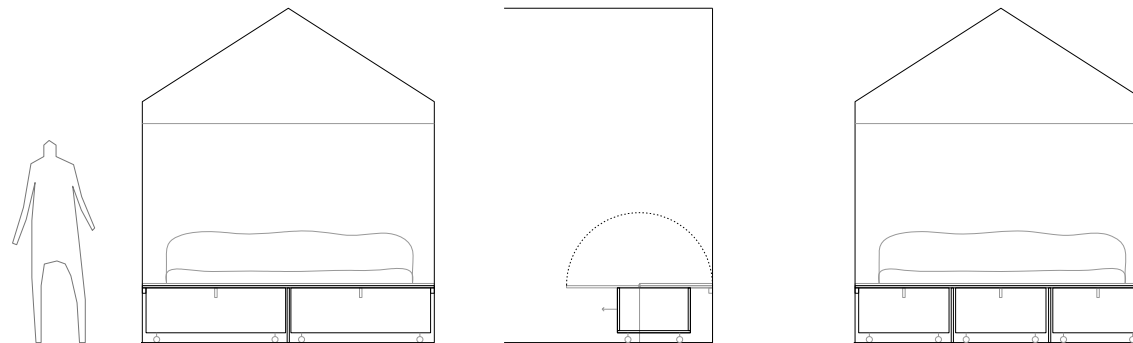
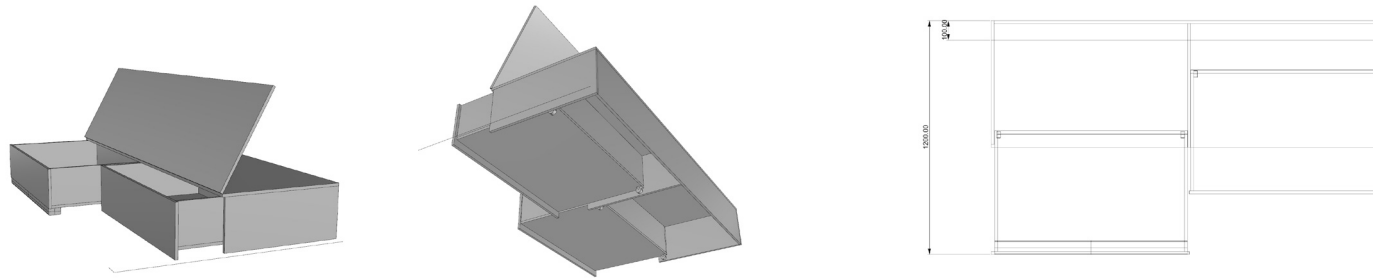
‘Building (a collective thing)’ is a series of workshops exploring the creation of temporary collectives or collaborations around design related issues. The verb “Building” in the title is understood as a collective process that creates both physical and social structures. By using that word i claim that working together hands-on is a good way to meet (at least very interesting) and everyone should do it. The process of making with materials can bring up issues for discussion as well as it can allow conversation to take other forms than just words.



# WORKSHOP #1

Gathering friends and colleagues to help build furniture for my classmate Iris Lacoudre's house

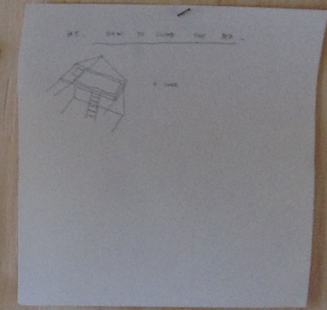
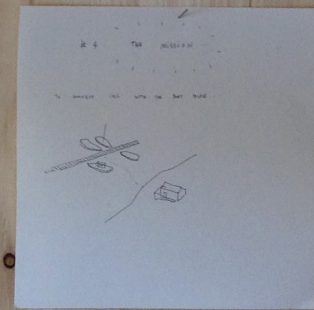
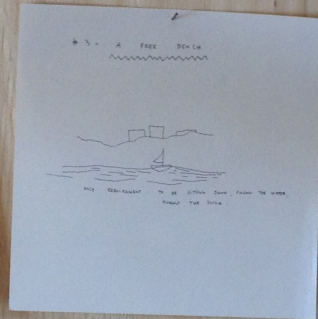
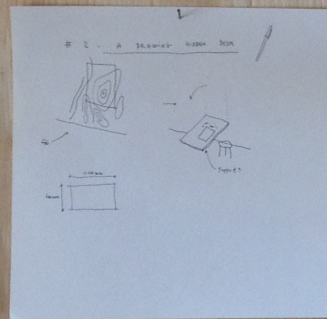
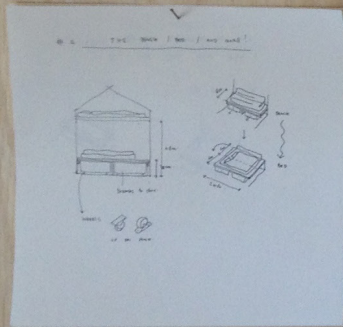
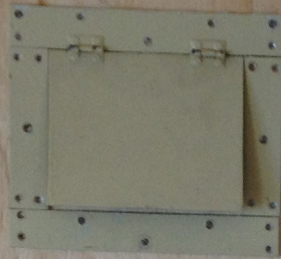




CAD-drawings we made before the workshop in a correspondency on how to possibly design the bed (mine above and Iris's below)



After discussing what other furniture functions Iris needed we agreed on the most important design tasks and their delimitations, and Iris drew...



...building instructions that would allow some interpretation



Gathered materials



Old materials found in the cellar





Some of the tools

Collaborators: Iris Lacoudre, Nefeli Oikonomou, Ioana Leca, Marina Turmo,  
Katie Jacobson, Tristan Zelic, Akane Moriyama, Francesca Lusuardi, Johan  
Hjerpe, Isak Nordell + his friend

Schedule: 11.00 Introduction with lunch  
12.00 Split into groups and work



Lunch preparations



Introducing the tasks



The outdoor bench



The bed



The fold down table



and the nail to hold it up



The loft ladder







## Exemplify - discuss

## Discuss - exemplify

After the workshop i listed two main problems:

1. We didn't have time to help people out as much as i was hoping. The goal was to empower them, instead some felt incapable of contributing. To care for this, the next time the group should either be smaller, tasks of responsibility for equality distributed (according to Jo Freeman's methods for feminist decisionmaking), a sort of apprenticeship workshop before the actual session, or all of the above. One interesting thing about this layout is that learning can still go both ways, in some constellations i can get skills from more knowledgeable collaborators.

2. There was not much discussion on what we were doing. What it meant. I was hoping to somehow fuel this during the day or initiate it after the work was over, but it didn't happen for several reasons. Both because the joy of just working took over (more positive) and because of the fatigue that set in from working too long (more negative). This made clear that the planning needs to be much more precise about time for discussion. The ideal that i imagined of everyone working together and spontaneously entering and exiting verbal

discussion in the process of it did not work in practice. After some feedback discussions i understood that the workshops need to be divided into parts of action and reflection. On the other hand i could conclude that it was totally fine to just work together. The design and build collaboration is always a form of discussion on functions and needs and additionally, this whole event is an example that can be used in a larger ongoing discussion. This distinction in which ways the workshops are discursive would be important to make and to communicate with participants if possible.

So the experience itself and the role it can play as an example is the "result" i'm looking for: we did a group effort to help a friend furnish a home, it was an act of design by the least controversial definition of the word because we solved problems together, and it was an act of empowerment in the way that the group empowered her.

For the next collaboration i made an instruction sheet, both to inform the collaborators and to have it as a script that could be altered to try out new things or improve the structure after each session.

## INVITATION TO Building (a collective thing) #2

(A project by Jonatan Lenman for the Konstfack independent postgraduate course 'Organising Discourse')

Welcome to a workshop around a question of **design and empowerment: Can we help each other out right here? And what is real empowerment in relation to design?** on Saturday 28th of November, 2015.

### SETTING

We meet in my studio in Elektravägen 5 in Västberga industriområde, a 15 min walk from Telefonplan. Materials and tools present are different sized wood and boards, electrical saws, drills, hammer, foam rubber, adhesives, a small amount of textile, tape, pencils, a few rocks, paint, clamps, rubber bands etc.

### INSTRUCTIONS

The premise of this workshop is the collaboration of individuals around a question for discussion. In order to maintain a functioning group, personal responsibilities are also assigned.

#### All

Define a need you have in terms of objects or spatial functions. It can be as simple as the need of a specific piece of furniture for your home. Bring your thought on Saturday.

#### Personal

Your task is to be one of the following:

Facilitator (Jonatan)  
Timekeeper  
Power intervener  
Vibes-watcher  
Recorder

The personal tasks are important for the care of the group.

### SCHEDULE

Saturday 28th of November, 13.00-17.00

13.00 Introduction with coffee, look around the space

13.40 Group work

17.00 Optional feedback discussion & dinner cooked by

Jonatan

### PROJECT

The verb "Building" is here understood in a wide sense, meaning actions that create both physical and social things or structures. The claim is that working together hands on is a good way to meet. Like cooking. Physical interaction with chosen materials or the context can bring up issues for discussion, and it allows the conversation to take other forms than just words. Every workshop starts with an introduction and a set of instructions that are to be followed throughout, and ends with a debriefing discussion. The instructions are a sort of design that aims to delimit the work, opening or closing possibilities, overcoming or creating hierarchies. The goal is to explore ways of working with design related issues collectively.

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

How should we deal with the complex (?) networks and cycles of need, demand, production, consumption and its effects on environment and workers conditions, and up close on ourselves as passive consumers with too little time or knowledge to do anything else than solve our needs with IKEA&co. How should we deal with IKEA&co? They HAVE really nice

designs sometimes. Should we strive to change it from within, boycott or attack? How should we take the power over design in our lives? How to claim our rights to tamper with and understand the things and spaces around us? Do we hack the available designs? Is this even possible or just another type of consumption identity? Should we do many different things at once? What exactly is the empowerment in building it yourself? Is the description here even real? Can we make it more simple together?

The tasks that are distributed are based on methods for feminist decisionmaking. Since it is a small group and a short session it might be difficult to apply them fully, lets not stress about it if this is the case.

The facilitator aids the group in defining decisions that need to be made, helps them through the stages of reaching an agreement, keeps the meeting moving, focuses discussion to the point at hand; makes sure everyone has the opportunity to participate. Facilitators help to direct the process of the meeting, not its content. They never make decisions for the group.

A vibes-watcher makes sure everyone is comfortable and safe, not hungry, that the air is good, decides when it is time for a break.

A power intervener is attentive to the group dynamics and intervenes and redirects power when there are imbalances in participation, one collaborator is dominating the meeting or in instances of sexism or bullying.

A recorder takes notes on the meeting, especially of decisions made and means of implementation. Also documents the meeting with photos.

A time-keeper solves schedule issues and keeps things going on schedule so that each agenda item can be covered in the time allotted for it, preferably through discrete backwards counting (i.e. "15 mins left until the break")

Even though individuals take on these roles, all participants in a meeting should be aware of and involved in the issues, process, and feelings of the group, and should share their individual expertise in helping the group run smoothly and reach a decision.

The definitions are an adaptation of two sources: <http://www.nonviolencetraining.org/Training/facilitation.htm#top>, <http://ickevald.net/perhermgren/feministkamotesfunktioner.htm>

# WORKSHOP #2

Asking a group of designers to formulate their object needs, and collectively decide how to respond



Collaborators: Anais Quintanilla, Mansooreh shahtalab, Ullis Ohlgren

- Schedule:
- 13.00 Introduction with coffee
  - 13.40 Presentation of needs
  - 14.10 Discuss and decide how to respond. Do we respond to everyone's needs or just one? What is possible in this time?
  - 15.00 Design and build, in collaboration
  - 17.00 Optional feedback discussion and dinner

## NEEDS

ULLIS: - Collective things, everything. It should be ok to ask for help. Connect people who have knowledge and tools.

Dissolve regional boundaries? → the Googleing doctor

- Things to do in public space, specifically as a teenager. And as adult. Playing in the city. Active things in the city (bike example) - ("unlocked" bikes around stairs)

MANSOOREH: - A LOW CHAIR FOR SPECIAL SITTING while putting on shoes the one her sister made is not stable enough, 20 x 30 cm,

JONATHAN: - A TRASH BIN for the bathroom. 165 simply rude not to have one. Tampons etc.

ANATIS: - A TRASH BIN for the room, with a lid, not to have to go into the bathroom.

Shared need of everyone

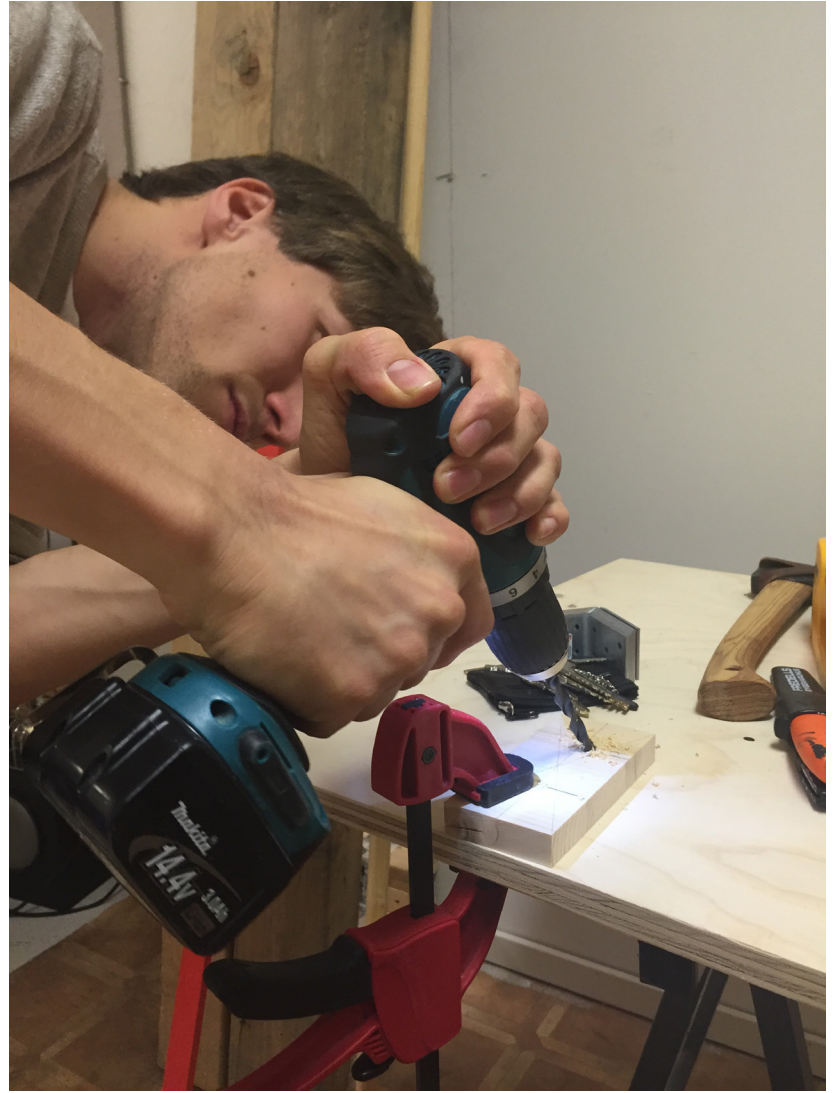
→ "A mobile need, like in a cottage, visiting somewhere, where to throw personal stuff?"  
- Ullis -

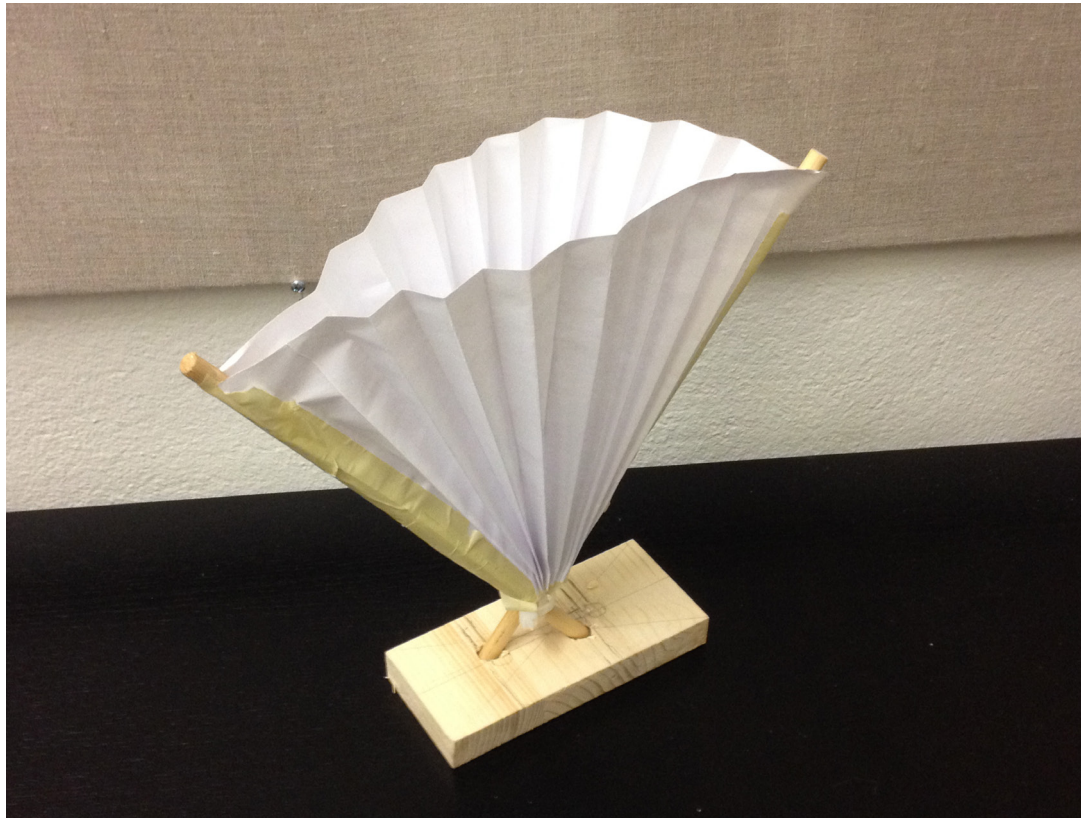
Needs defined, we agreed on making two things: first experiment with a trash bin to accommodate the need of a portable bin as well as one for the bathroom/bedroom, second to make a specific stool for Mansooreh to be able to put her shoes on with an injured foot.











The trash fan. Product of a conversation about shame and trash. On to the next task, a special low chair.







I cooked dinner and we agreed it was important to have an extra session the following week to finish the piece.

*Can you give me a bit of feedback on the day?*

To clarify the instructions, Anais pointed out that instead of asking people to bring a “need”, you can give them a method, for instance: “think about what you do during a day, what problems you encounter...” or “imagine a scenario”.

*Was this workshop relevant to discuss societal issues like what I wrote about in the invitation with empowerment and design?*

Mansoorah: “I like the idea that, in society when you involve people in making something, they really connect to that piece. They feel responsibility. Like caring for the shared garden. The empowerment is this. The challenge however is how to get people to a process like this in the first place.”

Anais: “When your designing you’re just focused on that. If you focus on talking it’s better in that aspect. About the empowerment, it was interesting to focus on only one person, to empower her. It led us to discuss empowerment in that way.”

Mansoorah: “Even as designers, we have different skills and experiences

from one another. To involve non-designers will be different. More difficult perhaps.

Anais: “Why not do it in schools? Workshops with young people. To make them think about consumption. If you have a discussion with them you train them to start thinking about mass production and sustainability. You also teach them to collaborate, empower them.”

*I agree that where big changes in society start, but it’s not what I’m after in this project. I want to see what we as designers can do in expanding our profession, what we can learn from working together in new ways and what we can learn from working with non-designers. Not saying I can’t learn from kids, but the project is not meant to be a teaching one.*

Mansoorah: “You can have workshops for companies. What I’m wondering is how to gather people in the first place? Go to organisations. You can also have a collaboration with teachers, not kids.

*Teachers are an interesting group.*

Mansoorah: “I think how you see the problem is also a cultural thing, in Sweden you’re so individual, in Iran people collaborate more in everyday life.

## Reflections on #2

My experience was that the method with individual tasks was not very successful. Though they did make us think more about power relations, we didn't follow through with them during the day. I would like to try in larger groups, and during a long period of time, which is actually the way they're meant to be used.

Anais was right in what she said about focusing on talking, again this division was too unclear. At first i just decided that from now on, ideally, the sessions would be divided in two equal parts of doing and talking. But i immediately adopted the view of the first person i told this to, that it's not the dichotomy that's important, i should experiment with different ways for discussion and reflection.

### DESCRIPTION FOR Building (a collective thing) #3

(A project by Jonatan Lennman for the Konstfack independent postgraduate course 'Organising Discourse')

Welcome to a workshop around a question of **How to decorate a shared space?** on Friday 29th of January, 2016.

Immediate questions:

Who will use these rooms? What should they contain in order for all users to feel good coming here? What decorations do you think are good to make a cosy room? What is needed for a childrens room? What skills do we have present that can be used for this?

Big questions:

Collaboration in designing shared spaces suggests a society where people are more involved in shaping their surroundings, and less dependent upon the market and patriarchal forces to solve their needs. Symbolic representation in public spaces can also lead to real influence in society. Can design methods increase self-determination? What are the methods?

### SETTING

We meet in Blå huset at Tenstaplan 8 in Tensta.

Materials and tools present are: textiles, thread, needles, sewing machine, flat iron, stapler, electric drill, paint, paintbrushes, rollers etc

### INSTRUCTIONS

All

Build the Multi-piece (Jonatan)

Paint the combo piece

Sew the cover and cushions for the combo piece

Add ornamentation

Personal

Your task is to be one of the following:

Facilitator (Jonatan)

Timekeeper (Johanna)

Recorder (Jonatan & Johanna)

The personal tasks are important for the care of the group.

### SCHEDULE

Friday 29th of January, 13.00-16.00

13.00 Introduction & work

15.00 Coffee & discussion

### PROJECT

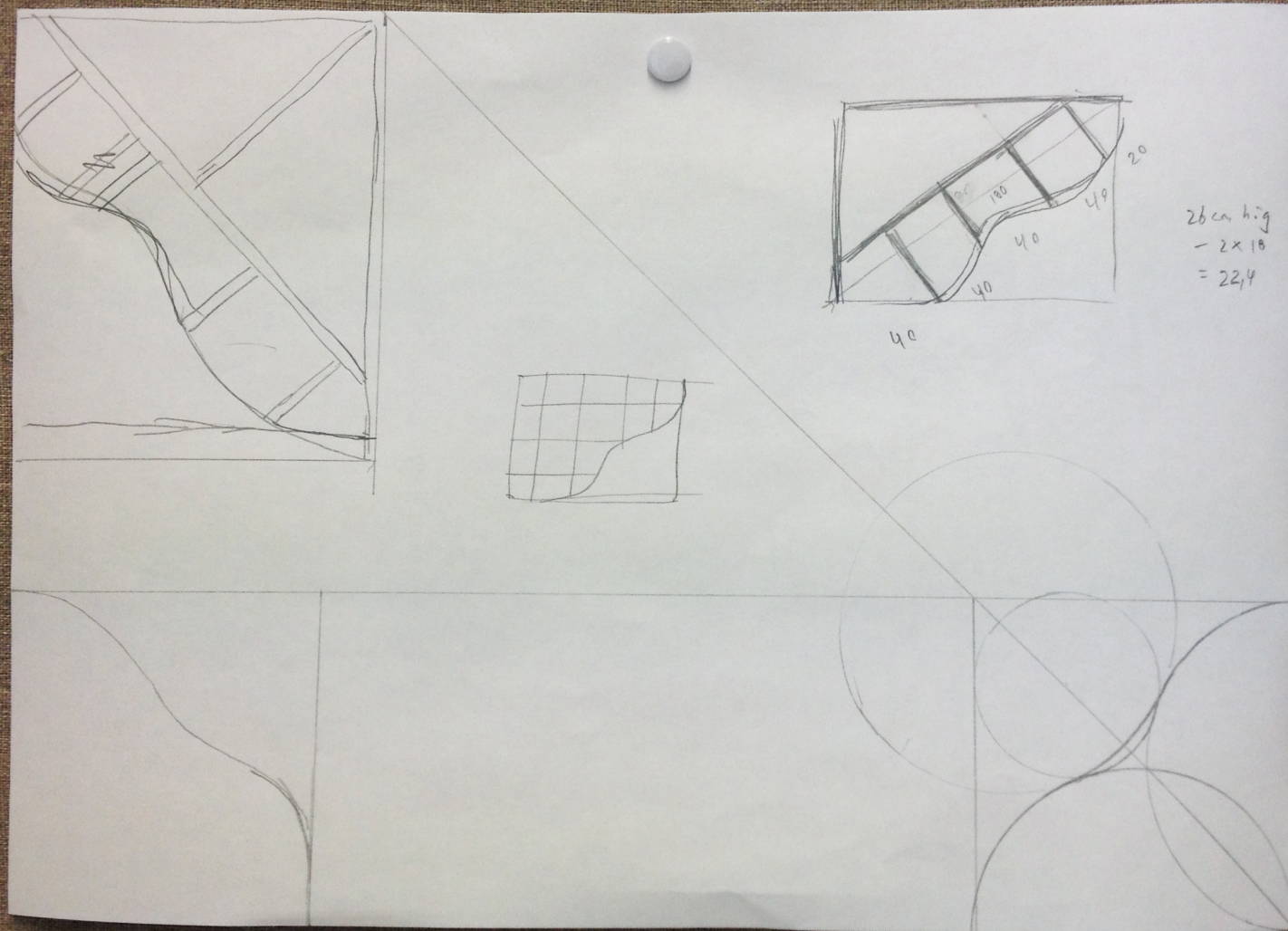
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### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Invited by designer/organiser Johanna Tysk, i worked with staff and visitors of a social centre to decorate part of their new shared space, a room for children and their moms



## WORKSHOP #3



Preparations: drawings for a piece of furniture i made specific for the childrens room, a combined stage, bench, cosy corner and storage





Preparations: building the piece in the studio. The workshop tasks are to paint, ornate and discuss



First session, Friday Jan 29, 2016

Collaborators: Johanna Tysk, Ayan Mohamed, Mia Stenberg Lind

Task: Paint and plan the further design of the corner piece

Schedule: 12.00 Introduction and work

15.00 Discussion with coffee





We sat down for fika and attempted a discussion. Since Ayan, who works in the nearby youth centre, is still learning Swedish it was a bit tricky to get my open questions across. The conversation instead found its way into this and that connected to the topic of interior decoration. For instance she explained the origins of interior decoration trends sported by many in the local Somali community. Johanna explained how her artistic philosophy, where she asks for help to tap into every available cultural aesthetic and create something new out of it, was put in practice in preparation for her interior design project here, including inspirational visits in the apartments of her friends and acquaintances in the area. To my question on what type of decor was needed here, Ayan said that's what we are doing right now, the colors (and maybe some more patterns), because you come in and you get surprised, which is good. Commenting on the collaborative aspects however she pointed out what her friends think of what's going on here: -People don't want to help with painting furniture, it's like working for free, why? When is it ready?

That's what they want to know. And i tried to bypass that relevant critique of "participative" design approaches, by saying that this can be different, when you are involved in making a space for your own use together with others, it can give you new powers, collective ones. But i felt like i fell short in front of the money argument. (Besides, i'm thinking writing this, there are already local collectives, what gives power is money or being born into the Swedish majority culture, obviously) Mia, who is the manager of this social space, added that people do actually get paid for attending the workshops here, they will receive a small sum in the form of a coupon to be used in a certain outlet mall.

Being under the umbrella of this organisation, i had surrendered some control over the setup. This workshop was out of my existing network for the first time. I was hoping for more collaborators to show up, but atleast now there was four of us. I was hoping for a few more next session.



Second session, Friday February 12, 2016  
Collaborators: Johanna Tysk, Victoria  
Task: Dress and decorate the corner piece  
Schedule: 13.00 Introduction and work  
15.00 Discussion with coffee



The decor, red fake velvet and golden ribbon with beige tassels



After decorating with fabric, ribbons and tassels we sat down for coffee, buns and grapes. Victoria left the tools promising to come back next time and finish it. I had started from the other side but i was way too slow for my company.

Communication was tricky, Victoria and i could speak English and understand each other well, but she was there because she wants to practice speaking swedish. So we spoke swedish and the quotes are roughly translated from our conversation.

During the work Victoria explained to me how she used to work as a leader in a youth organisation in Ukraine, teaching rethorics to kids as part of a country wide UN-roleplay with annual summer camps and finals for the most successful teams.



*So what role does decoration and crafts play in your life?*

Every day since Ali was 1,5 we have done small handicrafts. But i can't do much at home since it's not my house. In Ukraine i changed the wallpaper every year. Here all i can work with is textiles in the couch.

*What is your thoughts on how to decorate a shared space, like this one?*

If it's a room for children there must be soft things, activities, games. Decoration can be activating too. When you can use decoration for activities.

*What do you think of the empowering potential in crafts and working together like this, on a shared space? Is it meaningful?*

Yes, but it must be something simple, not hard. Every person can do something. If a person gets to contribute the way they can, they feel like a hero.

## Reflections on #3

In planning this workshop, i was interested in working and talking about decoration and decorating. Somehow decoration, understood as care invested in details, give places extra value. Decorating is claiming space, i always assume investing your work in a dwelling space creates a strong personal connection to it. But it must depend much on the nature of the work. Is this workshop format too authoritative? Thats what i'm worried about. I'm here working with Stadsmissionen and Johanna Tysk who is hired by them to work on the interiors in her way, sort of an activist approach, which is to try and bring everyones perspective in. Mostly the users of a place but sometimes other artists and designers like now with me, and have them mix their styles with her, usually in the form of murals. Johannas mural techniques are open to include other peo-

ples expressions. But the furniture decoration workshop i'm hosting is at the moment only offering set tasks. Intentionally sure, since i wanted to focus on working and talking and if people would disagree with the designs we would develop it in further sessions. It works right now if you really look at it as starting up something, but it's not a "collective thing" yet. So after these first sessions it's even more obvious to me that this work, in particular, should be a long term commitment in order to be useful for anyone, so the collaboration can grow and include more and more initiative from the users of the space. Of course long term is exactly what Stadsmissionen is, but since i'm not paid, my time here is limited by my own economy to three or four workshop sessions.



## Questions for the continued project

*Who is this for? Who should be interested?*

Some of the audience may not be interested yet. I think the project can be valuable as grass root work in repeatedly producing experience with people of being a co-creator of ones environment. At the same time i want it to be a discussion space for designers and materially inclined people who want to engage with complex issues without having to be in an academic situation. To get away from that feeling that it's too difficult to address system level issues. So this question should remain open.

*Workshops for companies?*

Yes, maybe.

*What's in it for them?*

Event + documentation, creative exercise, teambuilding, credibility of some kind.

*What's in it for me?*

Pay, access to a specific group of professionals, a wider platform in total combined with unpaid workshops, credibility of another kind, on the other hand these sessions risk loosing some encounter aspect if everyone is from the same company.

## Things to try out (partly based on personal feedback on a previous presentation)

Invited special guest (who can situate the topic)

Preparational workshop (skillshare)

Restrictions in addition to tasks, to experiment with the social structure

Objects as “agents” in the workshop (by size, materiality, history, placement, permanency, use value, cash value, function, dysfunction..?)

Instructions by other means than language

Next step: explain the project simple, make a webpage