

# The (re-form) manual.

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*This paper examines the design potential of the manual (as guidance or step-by-step information, score of music notes, or method of operation) as a form of immaterial product promoting re-forming (as a transformation) of objects as an emancipatory process. This should be seen as an open program for change of a product's form and expression, material as well as immaterial. Specifically the paper looks at methods for re-forming fashion and reinserting the objects into system of consumption but at a level of more thorough understanding of the technical garment itself but also the mechanisms of the surrounding systems of meaning. The "value" of these re-formed garments is set by the same vectors of power that once marginalized them as out-of-fashion, but now they are coming back as the product of an independent and autonomous actant<sup>1</sup> in a symbiotic position. The context of the paper is the re-form methods for fashion proposed by the author and collected as micro-political manuals of subversion of interpassivity and radical mediocrity.*

*In the end of the paper I add an appendix with some possible paths to take this research further.*

The manual is a step-by-step documented process describing a method of change. It spans a wide range of possibilities and versions, as well as forms and user situations. This text focuses on the emancipatory aspects of the manual and thus a process where the manual itself becomes unnecessary as the end result. But to get an overview we can just shortly look at two different types – the IKEA- and the cookbook-formats.

The IKEA manual is a ideogramatic depiction of a step-by-step process. Usually without text the manual aims at a wide range of users from many cultures but its object is the fixed and ready pieces in the package. You follow the manual, assembling the pieces and have a sofa in the end of the process. Your aim when reading the manual is to transform the pieces you bought to the sofa you saw in the shop.

A cookbook manual is quite the opposite: from a quite specific step-by-step process, but from ingredients only connected to the manual by their names (not contained), you hope to get something looking as tasty as on the image in the book. Usually this image is also more of an atmosphere image than a pure product description of taste (which would hardly be depicted). In the end the hope of the cookbook is to make the user/chef find out that s/he could make something unexpected out of quiet general ingredients (they are not specifically provided with the book). Thus the cookbook is opening a wider field of action and breaks a field of habitual cooking – you make something you were not making before – a new dish. Even if the result does

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<sup>1</sup> I here use the semiotic term "actant" as an agent with a specific position in relation to its surrounding system. This position is noted by the interdependence within the system. The actant's position in the system is not submissive but more equal, as an own entity within the structure. This makes its role more independent, and thus able to create its own position in the situation. In this text i propose a reading of the actant as a re-form activist (in action) or operator of fashion symbolism, quite similar to the role of the semionaut in Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* (1998) and *Postproduction* (2001) inventing trajectories between signs.

not look like the picture in the book the experience of taste is new, the process is a little different than the everyday dish, and hopefully the result is a better confidence as a “kitchen activist”.

There is a big difference between these two manuals even if they both are similar in the step-by-step process itself. The IKEA manual is locked into its pre-programmed system (even though it is ideogramatic and speaks a language understood by many)<sup>2</sup>. It is a submissive instruction where the user is replacing a machine in the factory – thus creating a passive position of the user. The cookbook on the other hand is more open for experimentation and closely related to the action of cooking itself (but of course still locked into its system, style or theme). It is an approach to the process, a *knowledge-in-action*<sup>3</sup> and it aims at its own dissolvent – by making the user a better cook that uses the book as inspiration trying out new forms and versions of the recipe with other ingredients. To put it radical – the aim of the cookbook is to liberate the chef!

It is this later from of manual that I am exploring here; a tool for guiding the possible interventionist through an unknown space of action. It takes the user on a route of safe havens (the documented steps) through a specified territory of action mapped by different poles of tension (fixed ideas of how things *should be*) and in-between space of strong habitual gravity. The poles of tension are a variety of forces; material as immaterial, mainly defined by the operating system of modernity - such as labor specialization and radical consumerism of prefabricated goods. But the field I will stress in this text is on a micro-political level between producer and consumer and as a free and emancipatory manual.

I propose a reading of this kind of manual as a collection of methods and actions, and these methods are in themselves the designed object. The methods are then applied to transform an object or product. This object is most often related to the system of consumption – a commodity. The commodity is created in its proposed form through this process of guided transformation – re-forming. By re-form I mean both recreating a new object with hands-on physical remodeling of ready parts as well as *re-programming*<sup>4</sup> an image (or myth) and bringing its new “aura” into existence.<sup>5</sup> But the emphasis here is the transformation of a product into another. Compared to classic “Do-It-Yourself” activities I see the re-forming as a more conscious activity, not necessarily connected to use, but more the transformative action of change, both physical and imaginary. Thus the re-form manual is breaking its own borders and creates a result freer from a specific style – a cookbook not in a special theme or taste. It is important to note both parts since the manual in this sense is a tool for manipulating our reality at many levels, both the

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<sup>2</sup> IKEA manuals can perhaps in this sense be read as “weapons of mass-instruction”

<sup>3</sup> I here see the re-form action itself as the design action (the manual is in the background of the action). In the re-forming of the object and after that the wearing there is a re-forming of the whole fashion situation (where once there was a passive role of the consumer). It is a new relation created and this whole situation *is* the actant role. An understanding of this process is an understanding of oneself. The knowledge produced in this process is the contact surface between the action and the object in transformation – as performed by the actant. This is the act(ion) of knowledge.

<sup>4</sup> As in *cross-programming* (changing the intention of a program, a displacement, as crossdressing), *trans-programming* (combining incompatible programs, as planetarium rollercoaster) and *dis-programming* (contamination between programs and configurations) of Tschumi). I here use the term not in a structural way (as in the works of Tschumi – *Event-cities*) but in the light of an emancipatory process. A process of disrupting conventions, programs and expectations as in a role of an actant.

<sup>5</sup> The actant is also a re-producer active in the operation of signs. Especially this is obvious in fashion where physical garment and image are usually intersected and melt into one. Thus the actant deals both with the re-forming and re-production itself, and I generally don't separate these actions.

physical environment of existence as well as the simulated level, created by systems of “meaning”.

### **Passivity and control**

Some would agree that there can be traced a movement in consumer society not of increase interactivity but instead of *interpassivity* and *radical mediocrity*.<sup>6</sup> This is characterized by an interlinked system of consumerism based on a pacifying homogenization of society through ready-made diversity. We are given more choices but less space to maneuver own initiatives – the choices are more numerous but narrower. I shall give an example: In my old mobile phone I could compose simple ring signals based on written music. It was rather complicated, hard to make sound like I wanted but I could actually do any piece of piano-like music. In my new high-tech phone I instead have a “Music DJ” of polyphonic beats and can choose between many different instruments, rhythms and sounds – and they all sound very professional. But I CANNOT make my old simple piece of piano-like music. My “Music DJ” piece will definitely sound more professional and complicated – but still – *I cannot do what I really want* (in the simplest sense). I am more controlled by the pre-programmed interface of my instrument than before and our joint effort brings the action I want to perform further away from me as subject and creator. Thus we end up in a situation that might be called *radical mediocrity*. The act of creating has left my hands and will and went deeper into the pre-programmed will of the instrument. My performance is better sounding but not *mine*.<sup>7</sup>

This homogenization of ready-made actions is one side of this passivity but also in society our post-modern diversification is providing us with an even more varied range of different (sub)cultures to choose from – there will be one ready and pre-fabricated for us out there. An image of ourselves ready to use, with style, music and magazines to come ready with it! We are not so much authors of ourselves as we might think, but ready-to-wear. So *interpassivity*, as I use the term here, is not so much what we think we are doing (or choosing) but the social activity itself (often non-choices). The notion of interpassivity is usually connected to our relation to gadgets and in a context of ritualistic fetishism (we believe in a gadget replacing the subject/ourselves) – like in examples of the prayer wheels in Tibet or canned laughter on TV.<sup>8</sup> It accomplishes actions for us and in a relieving way and even the tension from ever growing range of possible choices and emotions is released from us.<sup>9</sup>

These rituals reach further and are especially a big part of the belief system of fashion. For example we always say *we* have an own style, but might still ask a friend accompanying us to the store – “is this me?” holding up a garment, as if this person knows us better than ourselves. In a

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<sup>6</sup> These two concepts are not usually related but I here propose a reading where they create a specific field of tension in which the re-form manual acts.

<sup>7</sup> The same development can be seen in LEGO for example where more and more parts are having a better finish but locked into their roles. The pilot in Barthes *Mythologies* might be another example where he becomes ONE with the plane – he is in the hands of technology. (as we are in the hands of fashion when we go to the shop or even dress in the morning) (mentioning of “real metaphor”?)

<sup>8</sup> Slavoj Žižek “The Interpassive Subject” (April 13 2005, [www2.centrepompidou.fr/traverses/numero3/texts/zizeke](http://www2.centrepompidou.fr/traverses/numero3/texts/zizeke)) and Robert Pfaller “Little Gestures of Disappearance: Interpassivity and the Theory of Ritual” *Journal of European Psychoanalysis*, No 16 Winter/Spring 2003 – with examples of historical professional weepers at funerals or contemporary examples of VCRs watching the shows for us, copy machines reading for us etc. (in a similar way we can also scream excited at the TV or talk to the car when it won’t start)

<sup>9</sup> We have more possibilities but the system generally simplifies and chooses for us, as in the example of the “Music DJ”, thus they generally never appear to us (as we feel the performance of the system is “better” than our own).

similar way we use the fashion images and “believe” in their messages to us since we, the interpassive subject, and the medium itself is connected by rituals of representation, and we might even dream in images of these symbols.<sup>10</sup> Like in a magical act we let the garment have the full value of the symbolized. We are delegating our relation to our clothes, the pleasure and consumption of myth.

The belief is thus based on a paradoxical unawareness of the pleasure, our “cold logic” of modernity is unable to consciously enjoy these possible pleasures (since we don’t believe in this magic). I am not meaning the pleasure of material consumption here (the ritual of collecting status objects). Instead I am talking about the pleasure of the interactive ritual in contact with the belief system – the ritual of actually testing the garment (as our social interface) in a social situation.<sup>11</sup> In this situation we confront the dimensions of representation, wearing the magic itself. Putting our full belief in the system, but usually having consumed it passively.<sup>12</sup>

So what is the role of the manual in this context? It might be a tool subverting the passivity and mediocrity of the system with a wider range of conscious intermediality presenting a practical relation between subject (as re-creator) and object (to be re-formed). We might use the manual to come deeper into our role as conscious subjects and re-form our position. We could see it as an existential modification, intervening and changing our relation to these systems of belief, and to take pleasure more consciously by interacting on a deeper level.<sup>13</sup> It might encourage us to try.

### **An intermedial subversive tool – symbiotic re-production and the birth of the actant:**

The (re-form) manual can give back initiative to the consumer and arming the user to become a re-producer and actant in relation to the surrounding system of which she is interacting with. The positions of consumption are thus altering as the manual is bridging the gap between these poles and turning the old consumer into a conscious actionist, thus reclaiming the initiative of her position in the belief system of consumerism<sup>14</sup>. As an actant the user is intervening both with the physical objects as well as the system of representation, and become a hands-on activist in creating her own place in the very same system, using the infrastructure or vectors for a collective and subjective becoming.<sup>15</sup>

In relation to fashion we are usually told by the advertising and marketing to absorb the product as it is and feast on its immediate and ephemeral desire. Later when the image has gone “dry” of fashionable projection we should waste it. But what the re-form manual offers is a

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<sup>10</sup> We celebrate them as in Baudrillard’s example of “Logic of Santa” in *System of Objects*, where we don’t believe in Santa but still celebrate as *if we did*, because the trick creates a cozy feeling of “Christmas”.

<sup>11</sup> This situation is also saturated by lived expectations. We embody the expectations like the excitement before a trip.

<sup>12</sup> To put it cruelly the belief in the fashion system is quite simple – it promises positive attention and eternal social life (as long as we live) if we sacrifice enough on its altar (time, money and flesh). We here also see the gender politics of modernity – women like fashion (emotional, ephemeral), men wear suit (logical, eternal).

<sup>13</sup> Fashion can in this sense be seen as a conscious play and by exploring the sources of pleasure a relation of reflective satisfaction of grounded awareness might be established.

<sup>14</sup> as in Bauman’s *Life in fragments*

<sup>15</sup> In this case the vectors of power and representation in the fashion system. But working in the very same way at the vectors of power Wark’s *A Hacker Manifesto*. The vectors of the fashion system owns the means of production of the immaterial *image of fashion*.

In this example we can also look at the actant as a driver – when in the flow she *is* the traffic, in the system but drives (almost) where she wants to, using the infrastructure of roads. (to quote the bikers of Critical Mass “We don’t block the traffic – We *are* the traffic”)

subjective re-programming, a resurrection of the inherent spirit or potential of the object and replacing it into the system after adjustments according to the actant's will and needs. The actant can thus be said to temporarily liberate the vectors from the commodity reign and reinstall herself as the author of her position statement through the revitalized object.

In the context of fashion re-forming the user is becoming the new author and designer of the expression of the garment – related to the contemporary fashion (the context of use). Thus the actant is putting the new garment into the existing system, but taking the role as a conscious inter-dependent actor within the system. By putting an emphasis on the micro-political potential in this action the actant is creating her own space in the system. Not creating an anti-fashion but using the fashion vectors for creating an own position within the mesh – what might be called a *symbiotic* position.

This symbiotic position is placing the actant as a free entity with her own space of action within the system. Autonomous but still within the system, using the infrastructure of meaning as a tool for wider expression and participation. Acting in reverse consumerism reclaiming a position of originator. As an example an artist working with clothing as an expression but still looked at as an inspiration from the eyes of the fashion magazines.

### **Manual as transparent model of action:**

In the shape of the manual there is a radical democratic potential of openness, both in process and end result publishing, presenting the internal mechanics of (re-)production. The product of the process is a new object but belonging to both the system and the actant. Thus the manual is a transparent catalyst of design, producing room for activity without being consumed in itself. Anyone can use the active methods in the manual. It promotes free ownership of the end result and opens the rights to the process. It delivers an open tool for change.

We can go back to our first examples: the IKEA manual is closed both in its application and as a tool in itself. It can only be applied to the parts in the box and can only become what it is supposed to be (as the intention). The special IKEA key also is used on the screws, a special tool only to be applied to the IKEA furniture (instead of a screwdriver or a hammer that are “open” tools). We can quite easily follow the process, but it is locked into the physical realm of the package and the instructions. The cookbook on the other hand opens the rights to the process, delivering the process to pure action (in an utopian reading) and delivers a path for becoming a better cook.

Thus the cookbook hopes to be an agent in the background. The cook is always making her own version (since it is impossible to exactly the same as the recipe suggests – the user is handling unique ingredients). By guidance of the cookbook the user is putting a physical trace and sign into the world, by her own hands – a new dish. It is her own statement, even if it is a partly guided one and aimed at a specific image or taste.

Re-forming fashion in this sense makes the structural model of the fashion system visible (at least partly), mainly through the realization of how the manual's output expression (the re-formed garment) resembles the contemporary fashion. If we look in some old magazines and their “makeover” pages we sometimes get painfully recalled on how ephemeral the concept of beauty is, especially in its format on the fashion pages. Instead it is fruitful to look at the manual just as a collection on the cat walk – it is an immediate statement, aimed both at the fashion as well as

political situation of the now. It is a toolbox of emancipation from the organization of the now into the micro-political level of the immediate future, but with the user as creator, as a free actant.

### **Inspiration and instruction:**

As all tools which we use to understand our world we might also get trapped in the eyes of the tool itself. As the hammer seeing all problems as nails, or the map as a screen. It is thus important to keep in mind that the manual is a collection of proposals and not fixed ideas, it needs to be read as a cooperative tool for navigation and not as the act of navigation itself. It is between the steps that the action takes place, in the space of “closure”. This is something very important to keep in mind when writing the manual – to open space enough for fantasy, a general and generative action and instruct less! The best model for changing the immediate environment is standing firmly on both legs – practical as well as abstract – thus placing the tool in the world and not isolating it into the practical action itself. Making the hammer get to know some more of the tools in the box and make it useful to operate in different situations.

But this problem of the tool should not be underestimated. When we now propose an alteration of the relations of passivity within the system by helping the becoming of a freer actant, even at a micro-political level, it is important to take into consideration the new autonomy of the actant, framing a new legitimacy of these actions and methods. This requires a new responsibility and should be done at the same political level but raising the abstraction into a sphere of utopian wishes for better perspective, taking economical, ethical, political and sustainable issues into account. Not all consequences can be seen, but at least the immediately visible should be regarded, not only the immediate individual gains - as is most often related to in our narrow concept of “freedom”.<sup>16</sup>

### **The role of distribution:**

Pierre Bourdieu was investigating the power system in the Paris fashion scene in the 60s (in “**Kultursociologiska texter**” ) but by combining these old texts with McKenzie Wark’s *A Hackers Manifesto* (exploring power primarily within digital knowledge production) and apply onto the fashion system we come to see some mechanisms of power within the system. This power is mainly connected to the myth production of fashion – on the shimmering surface of the technical garment, in the form of advertising, brand, label and retail situation.

The economic value of the production extracted through retail. Not from the catwalks but mainly from perfume and sunglasses. Thus the ready-to-wear collection is the core-actor of the brand onto which the glimmer from the catwalk trickles down and signals the brand as a high fashion brand.<sup>17</sup> To protect the myth the brands are exercising strict control over the whole production circle and situation of consumption. Since the physical production today is so cheap and the main cost is the myth production the brands try to control just this sector of the market. By a raising claim of copyrights and trials this immaterial aspect of the production is protected. The material production itself becomes less relevant since the copies come over night and often

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<sup>16</sup> An example could be how we make cars safer for the driver so she can endure any crash – but not the object (person) that got hit by the car.

<sup>17</sup> There is of course varying degrees of fashion and not a definite border between fashion and non-fashion. The brands and catwalks of Paris, New York, Milan, London and Tokyo as represented in media such as Vogue and Herald Tribune are here considered as the top layer of the hierarchy now.

from the same Asian factories that produced the “originals”. According to Wark we can see a shift in the economy from a material production controlled by the capitalist class to an immaterial production controlled by the vectoralist class. This vectoralist class controls the vectors along which information is abstracted, owning the means of realizing value of intellectual property. They are thus not limited to material or industrial production but reach into a global and immaterial production of value such as stock and money markets as well as copyrights.

As more and more immaterial aspects become protected by brands (sentences like “just do it”, “because you’re worth it” etc) there is a movement of creating information commons, open libraries of knowledge that protects the common good from corporate ownership. Shareware, open software, Linux, copyleft and creative commons are all answers to a narrowing field of action as the world around us and our work becomes properties of others or a vectorial class (just like the production of the workers became the property of the capitalist class the production of the knowledge producers fall in the hands of the vectorial class).

But at the same time we see the rise of more actors on the field. The old top-down rigid structures coexists with producers of dialogue and more fluid networks of production and participation. New coalitions are formed and new critical masses are formed not so bound to the epicenters of urban myth (such as the synergy effect of the Antwerp 6 in the 90’s). But this also means that the market is getting even more stressed and all actors try to protect their positions, thus closing the shell around production.<sup>18</sup>

In this context the open manual becomes a subversive tool. By free distribution of the acclaimed methods it might also trespass some of the rigid borders of production of today. In a strategy of moving along the vectors of power (the image of what is in-fashion) the manual can open a field that defy the protectionism of copyrights and promotes a social change in relation to both material as well as knowledge production. With a better understanding of the possibilities of production there might be a more involved participation in the means of productions well as in the modes of production. A change of attitude as well as a trigger to think things otherwise.

The emancipatory manual is having both a practical and abstract level. In the practical sense it is a mechanic manipulation of the physical or technical reality, but also symbolic. It is an active intervention with products and objects – but *it is not the object itself*. Like a wind of change taking the objects through a metamorphosis, orchestrating the transformation from a distance of immateriality (and is hopefully even getting more immaterial through the transformation process). On an abstract level the manual is placing the transformation as an action in the world, as a statement based on a new understanding of the world and the systems entangling it. This process makes us see new possibilities and thus brings us a set of new glasses for seeing our relation in the world.

Between these two levels there might arise a school of sophisticated dialectics of practical processes – spanning both fields, thus placing the activity and process in the world as a political operation. The field spanned by these methods and manuals are not producing new singularities but open new spaces of action, a range of wide cacophonies of dissentient collections of design.

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<sup>18</sup> Small fashion actors might not even open shops since they are scared of copies and thus sell their whole production through contacts – which of course becomes a part of their myth production...

The aim is to trespass the borders of the manual itself. It is triggering an impetus out into the void, the blanks of our perception by actually leaving blanks between the documented steps – ready for our own act of “closure” – our projective fantasy of creation. As an experienced guide it is leading us into *terra incognita*, but we still lead the expedition!

In the field of fashion the manual and its collection of re-forming can be a strong instrument for understanding the symbiotic possibilities within fashion. By extracting and changing information from the system and applying it physically onto the old garments and re-inserting them back into the system by different forms of use and retail the actant can create an independent position in relation to the passive consumption. When taken to an operational and strategic level there are very subversive structures within this practice that should be further explored. Not only in promoting a further immaterial aspect of design as in the method but also in its layer of altering representation and projection of reality in the systems of “meaning”. It has a position of ontological potential, proposing and re-inserting the actant as a political being into the social body as now a pilot exploring the stormy sea of existence and things in our quite unstable construction of reality.



Figure 1. step-by-step images on re-forming boots.

## Appendix:

### 1. A grounded awareness – critical apparel:

The act of re-forming might also be seen as an aware reverse engineering where the focus is on breaking down the object into pieces and then putting it back together. Just like in the act of meditation where the concentration is usually based on the body (like breathing or a repeated word) to lead deeper into the experience of existence.

By breaking down the garment into pieces it is more graspable and easier to understand as a whole. The technical/physical garment of the fabric itself and the cut and pattern. But also see the pieces in relation to the ephemeral system; why the piece look like this now and why do they change? We might see a relation between the system and ourselves and reflect our intentions in relation to this. And we can feel it with our own hands, touching it like our own skin, almost like a basic anatomy lesson as we map the social image of ourselves.

What is important is to build enduring concentration on the task. A consistency. This is most easily made through concentrating on a small field – in this case one garment – and being aware of its full existence but also its possibilities.

This action is a hard work. Just like we take walking for granted (but it took us years to learn to do it well) we take our social relation to clothing for granted (it took even longer time). We have this image of ourselves and our visual identity and consume according to it. Breaking these habits is hard.

The re-forming manual here acts as a structured method for greater awareness: to be situated in the moment and in the self. The manual might lead the user to the water but not drink for it.

But the re-forming is just half the work. The fulfillment of the action comes in the wearing of the new garment. By relating outwards we recognize inwards. The testing/wearing action and its experience is central. –“why do I feel like this?” and the feeling of how the experience *moves through us* and makes us act is the basics for creating an awareness of internal and intentional control.

It is a meditation in action – both on a hands-on level in interaction and re-forming of the garment but also in the social relations in the act of wearing. It is a regaining of control, based on a local view of our own position. We wear a practical standpoint, created by ourselves in a relation inwards.

But the awareness comes from the depth of the act itself. It is the energy in relation to the object and the re-forming that is the centre-point of the manual and action. The verb of free transformation – not the noun of the finished product.

“with awareness comes choice and with choice comes freedom”

(“two kinds of energy, solidity and freedom, have to be cultivated”)

Thich Nat Hanh

## **2. A second-hand experience – Fluxus instructions.**

When going to the second-hand store in the last day of a season there is usually a big sale. This last day you almost get the clothes for free. This also means it is the most “unwanted” garments still in there. This is the perfect situation for some identity exploration; looking for garments which might be interesting for you. By trying on different outfits you can feel your identity stretching. Not by choosing the most hideous ones but the ones that could almost fit your style. It is like a theatrical play in front of the mirror with the absurd scenography of re-cycled objects and the smell of other peoples discarded identities and skins in the store.

Having tried some on that would almost do and even maybe some that you feel almost comfortable in you head for the cashier and buy a bag full of clothes for almost nothing. And when walking out of the store you can feel how your identity has stretched a little into a direction you still don’t really know. It has somehow become more of your choice and also a little more of a play. A serious play. A conscious awareness of the possibilities of your lycra identity.

Thus we come to the following:

*Second-hand store identity test.*

1. find a second-hand store with final sale

2. collect some garments you could almost like
3. try them on – experience
4. buy them most interesting
5. walk out with your new identity

By structuring the process like this we end up with a step-by-step method very similar to the ones used by the *fluxus* movement in the 60s. Many works consisted of only instructions (like in mail-art which was only a mailed instruction for the receiver to follow to make his own work of art). The viewer then realized the work by following the instructions – if only in imagination. Much inspiration of the fluxus came from Zen-Buddhism (*Zen-koans* are small riddle like questions as inspiration for meditation, for inducing enlightenment by transformation of our vision of world and self) and the works of John Cage, but can also be tracked back to Duchamp.

It is important to notice that the instructions are for execution of the work – not the work itself. The instructions have to be followed for the work to exist. The work exists in the mind of the originator and then in mind of the receiver – the instructions is the passage between the two. Thus there is no original or copy and the instructions are meant to be mass-produced, open for all to use.

Jasper Johns issued a set of instructions:

*Take an object./ Do something to it./ Do something else to it.*

Yoko Ono's version would be:

*Imagine an object./ Imagine doing something to it./ Imagine doing something else to it.*<sup>19</sup>

The imagination here becomes the guidance to a new vision on the world and how the transformation of the world opens new paths and possibilities, leaving the physical world several steps behind. What we thus come to here is a re-imagination of the imagined.

Looking at identity as an imagined aspect of ourselves and in a constant negotiation with our immediate social surrounding this makes sense. Our identity might be the distance between our imagined self and the feedback from our surrounding – even in the sense of dumb images.

When applying this imaginative thinking onto our experience of identity and especially the dressed identity we might be able to handle the complex structure of our self-image. As we re-imagine this non-tangible image of ourselves in the footsteps of instructions and especially in the example of the second-hand store we might re-imagine or image and thus close in onto this immaterial aspect of ourselves.

### **3. Breaking habit between practical and abstract:**

This immediate future of creation is just one choice away. It is a mindful and conscious vision of how we want the future to be like. Where governments today has left the ideological discussions and reduced politics into economic responses to the market the manual can be used as a small re-

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<sup>19</sup> Example by Arthur C. Danto in "Life in Fluxus", in *The Nation*, December 18 2000 issue. ([www.thenation.com/doc.mhtml?i=20001218&s=danto](http://www.thenation.com/doc.mhtml?i=20001218&s=danto), April 11 2005)

Another example of Fluxus instruction is Yoko Ono's *Smoke Painting*: Light canvas or any finished painting/ with a cigarette at any time for any/ length of time./ See the smoke movement./ The painting ends when the whole/ canvas or painting is gone.

injection of micro-political visions. The manual is stretching the field of vision, making the user move in a new way through an unknown variety of possibilities firmly connected to the political situation. It is breaking the settled tendencies and routine practices along customary avenues of thought. Taking the role of a pilot through a ritual passage of practical emancipation the manual is increasing the variety in the toolbox and provides an interface of operation on the creation of reality itself. We are free to act, free to manipulate and transform!

If we imagine standing in an infinite field of possibilities we usually look down at our feet in our everyday life, moving between safe spots we already know all too well. And it is hard finding some landmarks to navigate by along the skyline – ideological goals along the horizon of dreams. The manual might just lead us on new paths, showing a journey to take, to new goals. Maybe we will never get as clear ideological goals as in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (which might also be thankful) – but the manual might just show a possible direction to head for. At least a path closer to democratic transparency of the social body and its systems.

This transparency comes from a personal understanding within the act itself, how the hands-on experience transforms our relation with the object and the surrounding world. The object is now in another relation to me, both physically and emotionally. We have become together. We have made a statement together.

#### **4. A more political discussion.**

It is important to look at the manual from a distance but still as a tool for practical micro-political debate. The manual can be used as a tool for **activity** towards **transparency** in systems not reached from within the democratic system. It is working on a personal level in systems where we have no vote, but might still create ourselves an actant role.

The micro-political can be seen as a too modest process to even be called “political” but the scale is also an inner safety-switch. The 20<sup>th</sup> century was a too obvious example of how the political mass-movements turn into a mob shading the individuals and freedom itself. The “common good” might turn more real than we wish for.

We have also stepped into a *word-trap*. We have come to see both democracy and freedom as nouns, as finished states – and we are already there. But both democracy and freedom are verbs – actions, and have to be constantly redone, over and over. We are living in a time of tensile passivity, where it is hard to see any influence by our own actions. It is at this level micro-political activities come in to reintroduce hope as a process of change, even at small scale.

But mostly this micro-political activity is rooted in an insurrection against a state of resignation. There just is no ideology left to aim for, to dream of. Cynical history has shown us that there just is no possibility for a radical better society on a larger political level (no revolution will bring us there). So we might act through democracy in small steps but also actively at personal level. Not designing our whole life, but an approach to it. A state of mind to it. Practicing a conscious lifestyle of small choices and steps building on a radical democracy. And at the same time participate in the larger system – but with these small processes setting the direction.

So to come back to IKEA – is it a model of democracy? Like equal right to vote? If our participation in the democratic system is like the IKEA box, with manual and key – the emancipatory manual can offer us a wider freedom.

*In the emancipatory and micro-political design process we have a possibility to TOUCH the future of our choice. Not as an abstract proposal or model for a democratic process, but as a hands-on project. We can feel the future change before our hands and eyes. The future materializes in our hands.*

#### Literature:

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Tschumi, Bernard : *Event-cities (praxis)*

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