



*identity
of things*

by tessa geuze



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Degree Project for Master of Fine Arts in Design, Main Field of Study Industrial Design, from Lund University, School of Industrial Design, Department of Design Sciences.

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identity of things is
AN EXPLORATION WRITTEN
BY TESSA GEUZE, SUPER-
VED BY CLAUS-CHRISTIAN
ECKHARDT + PER LILJEQVIST
AT THE SCHOOL OF INDUSTRIAL
DESIGN IN LUND, SWEDEN

tg

erf de ogen van je kind, kijk
er door.

inherit the eyes of your
child, see through them.

(Kom terug, Spinvis)

dear reader,

It is my pleasure to finally share my degree work with you. Over the past 20 weeks my brain has worked overhours. These twists are reflected in this thesis, in which I express myself about the lack of emotion and imagination in today's world of design.

I want to thank the School of Industrial Design, the teachers, my classmates, friends and family for giving me the opportunity to find myself and my own ways of working. I want to thank you for questioning me, for making me feel vulnerable and insecure, and for giving me the confidence and space to establish my own guidelines. I could not have imagined a better education. I want to thank Claus-Christian Eckhardt for supervising me during this journey. I had to work hard to convince you and that has taught me more than you will ever realize.

Most of all, I want to thank Per for always trusting me and for understanding my brain better than I do, throughout my whole education.

abstract.

This project is an exploration about the coexistence of man and product. I looked into what kind of relationships we have with our surroundings and sought for ways to relate differently to our stuff by giving people more room for their own interpretation.

My research shows that we surround us with many things we do not care about. I believe designers could play a role in curing these poor relationships between mankind and product, by shifting our focus from users, usability and user-friendliness to that of participants instead. Dictating people what and how to do excludes them rather than includes them, which makes it hard for us to build up close relationships. Making products less defined gives participants the opportunity to fill in the core with their own imagination, love and memories. Only then objects start to exist in their own rights and become much more valuable to us.

The result is a series of objects that should remind us of this, called 'Almost a hairdryer', 'No ordinary iron' and 'More than a shower'.

what you find in here:

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introduction.

In today's material world we suffer from all kinds of symptoms such as overconsumption, environmental problems and identity crises. We buy things we do not need and we need things we can not buy. As I am soon to be released in this world as a freshly graduated designer, I am very likely to be placed in a situation where I have to face these problems and be ready to respond. Therefore I wanted to dedicate my thesis to seeking new ways to relate to our personal environment. Could we reshape our surroundings in a way that we need less and that what remains means more?

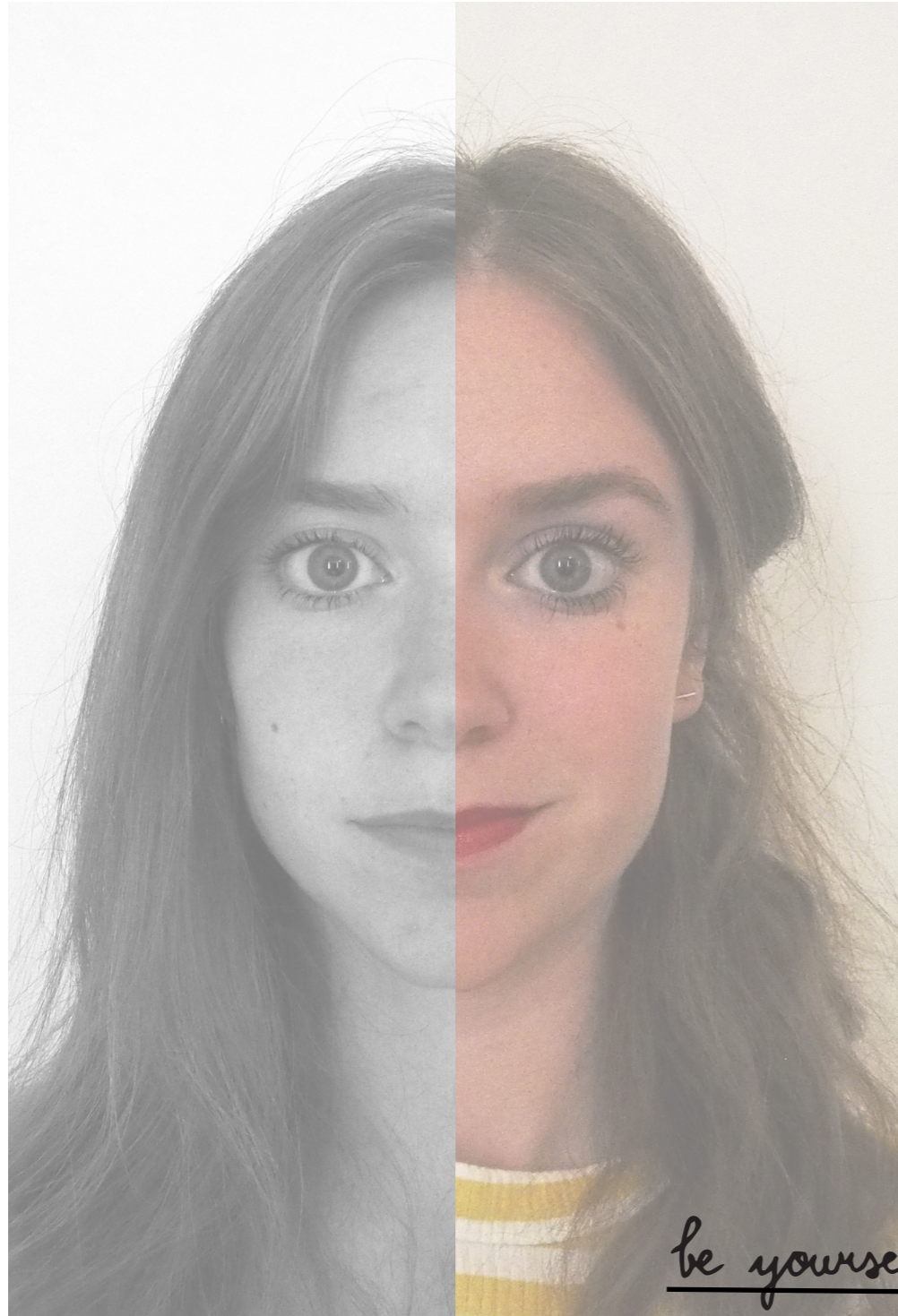
We use our surroundings to reflect our own identities. For example, a chef may perceive his cooking utensils as self-extensions because he needs these utensils to prepare his food. Additionally, his utensils are part of his identity: without them he does not feel like a chef anymore. In a way our products are extensions of our limited human bodies with the ability to be appreciated in both emotional and practical ways.¹

In this thesis, you will read about my attempts to find new ways to establish long-lasting relationships with what is surrounding us, by filling the lack of emotion and identity in our products.

I call it... *identity of things*

The qualities, conceptions,
beliefs, looks and expressions
that distinguish a person or a
thing.²

identity



be yourself,
only prettier and
more confident.

“be who you are...”

...only prettier and more confident.” At the very start of my thesis, I read this quote in a magazine where it was used as an advertisement for Bobbi Brown Cosmetics. It explained that makeup artist Bobbi Brown can help ‘to make any woman look and feel like herself, only prettier and more confident’.

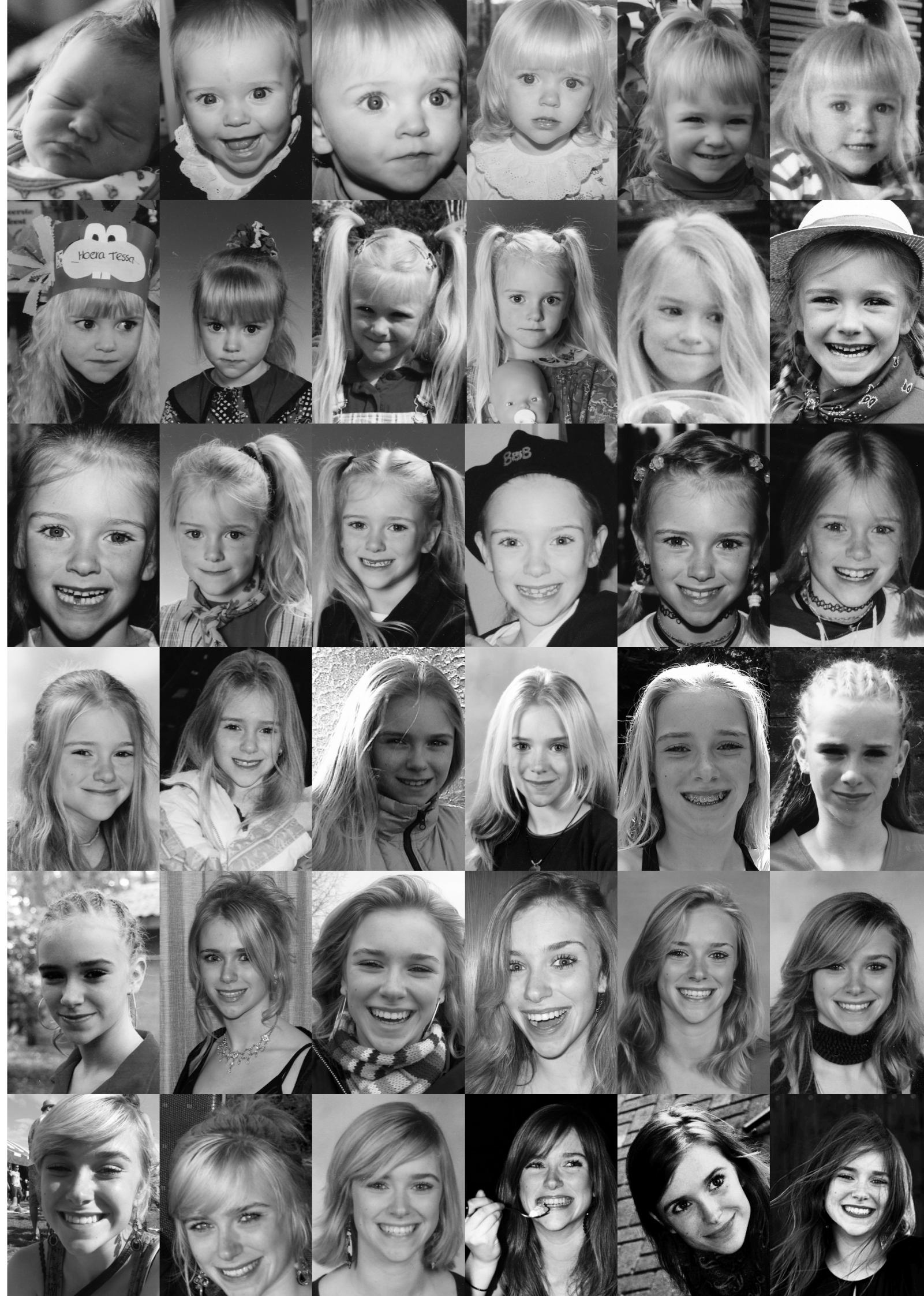
I felt very provoked by this advertisement. Do I need to wear makeup in order to feel the confidence of truly being myself? Am I a different version of myself on mornings, days and nights when I am not wearing makeup? The advertising industry uses our weaknesses to make us buy their products and it is good to be aware of that. At the same time, this advertisement indicates that there are multiple versions of ones self. It is mostly that last thought that I am interested in for this project. What is it that makes us who we are?

what defines us?

What makes me, me and you not me and me not you? When you say the word 'me', you probably have a clear feeling about what that means. It is something you have understood since you were very little. If I would ever make it to the age of 100 and you would ask me who the girl is on all these pictures, I would answer you with 'that is me!'. 3-year-old Tessa and 100-year-old Tessa are the same person, but at the same time we have hardly anything in common. Physically we are completely different and also our personalities have changed over time.³

What makes me, me is not about similarity, but rather about continuity. An unbroken string of continuous existence. Identities are dynamically constructed in the moment and are not the fixed markers people assume them to be. Who you are is not really a thing as much as a story or a progression. Your contents are constantly changing, growing, and being updated. This flexibility is part of what makes the self important.⁴

To get back to my topic, imagine to apply this knowledge to the world of consumer products. Right now, one might say that the products we find in the industry are designed in a static way with very little space for this important flexibility. Where people evolve over time both personal and physical, products are designed for a certain function, produced in factories for this same function and then that is it. They are used and abused by their owners in the way they are designed, and they serve us in the way we expect them to. I believe it is very important to bring more flexibility to the static world of design to give the product a chance to establish an identity of it's own.



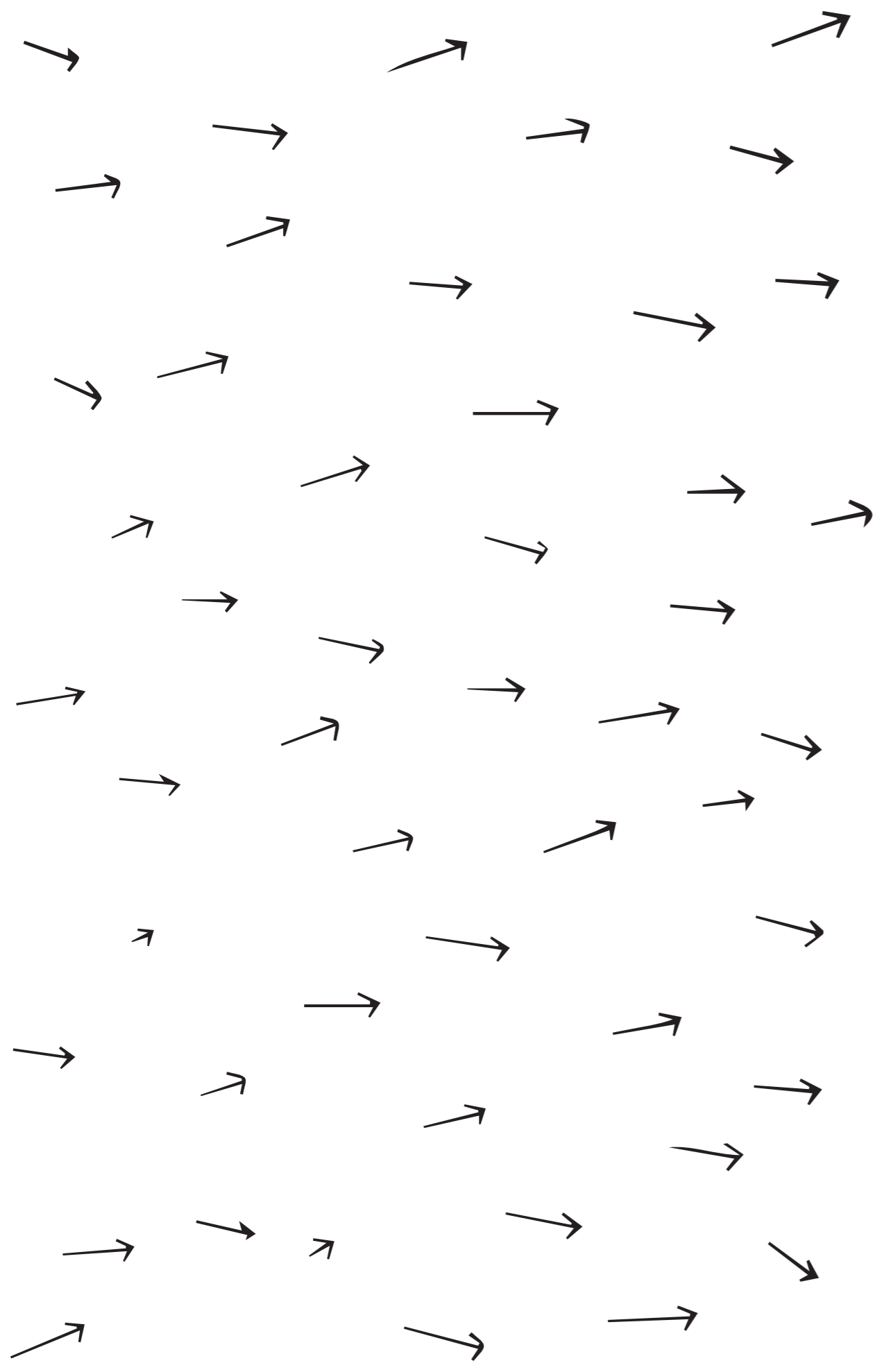


our identities are part of a process,

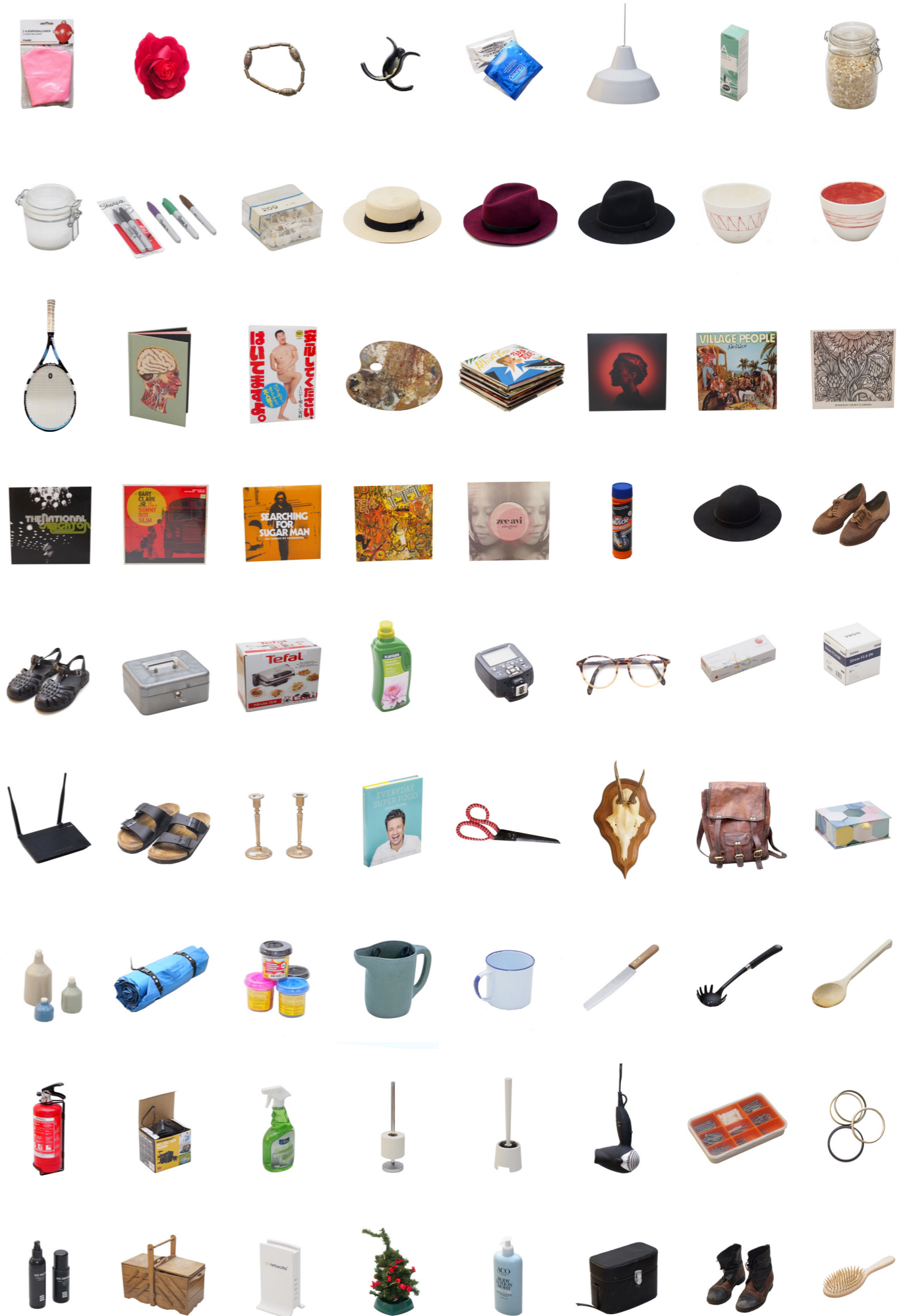
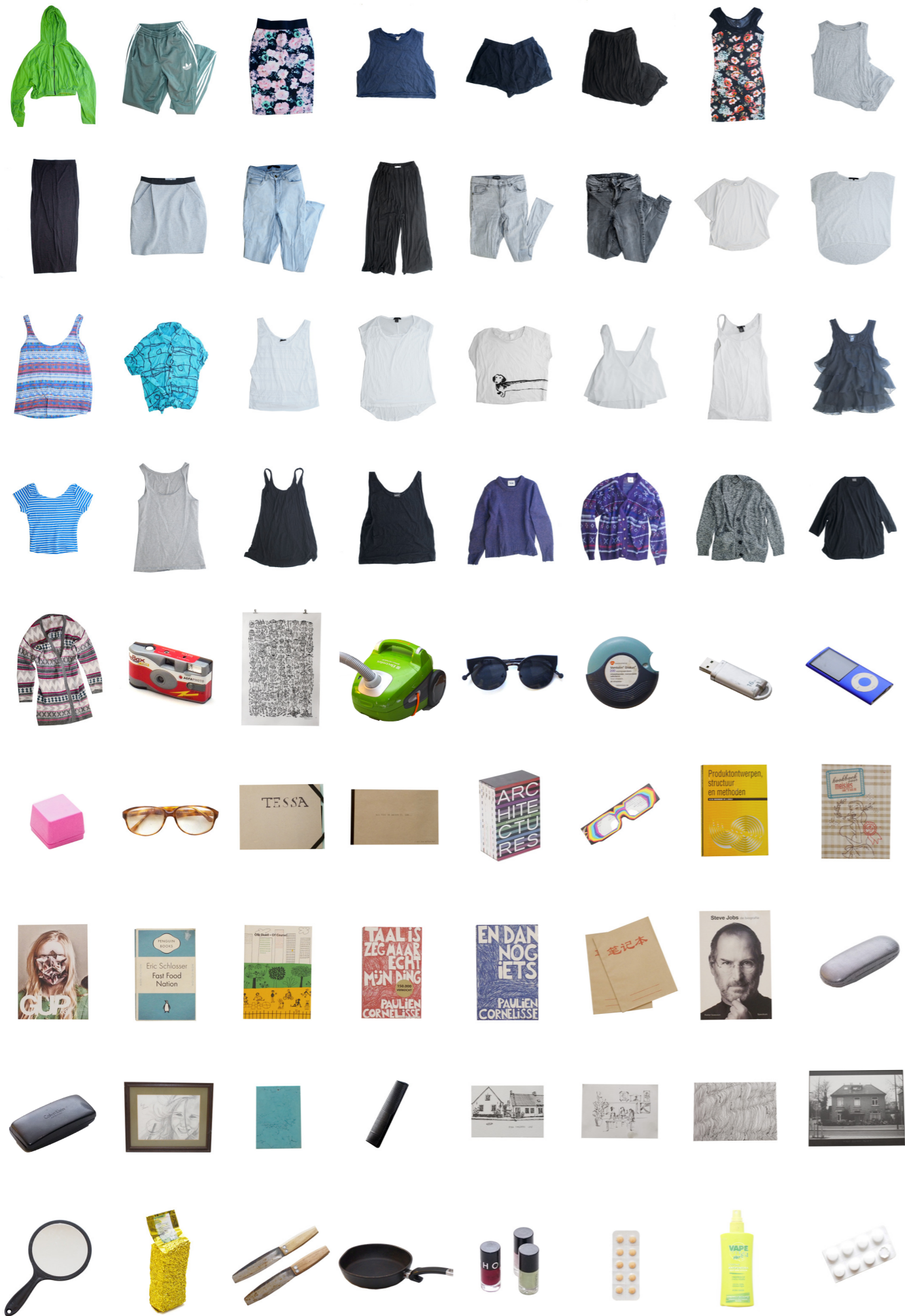
influenced by our environment.

our environment is influenced by us,

and helps us to create our identity.



things





*i used to be closer
to things than people*



*now i am close to people,
but what about my things?*



what about my things?

When I was little I used to be closer to things than people. As I grew older, people started to become more and more important to me. What happened with my relationship to things?

Nowadays I possess much more things than I used to do when I was little, but it feels like the affection for my things has become less. Where my imagination used to enable me to look beyond the shapes and functions of any object to transform them into what was desired and make them almost alive, I am now stuck in just seeing and using products in the way they are designed.

If products were designed in a way that they could develop a stronger identity, would we treat them differently? Would we get more attached? Would it become easier to build long-lasting relationships with products if our grown-up minds could see more than just the shapes and functions? If we would be capable of doing so, we could reshape our surroundings in the way we desire, activate our imagination and create just what is needed with much less material.

everything I have.

In Australia a man promised to 'love, honour and obey' on the day he got married to his television. It had occurred to him that he had spend so much time with his television that it had become the best companion he ever had. This story might sound humorous or even pathetic, but it also shows that we are capable of building up close relationships with our products.⁵ Although I do not think it will ever come to a point where I place a golden ring on one of my possessions, it did make me wonder what kind of relationships I have with my stuff?

I decided to take the challenge and I went through all my stuff to see what things mean to me. Which things in my life are precious to me and are thereby irreplaceable? Which are indispensable, but also easily replaced? And which are the things I could actually just get rid of?

I conducted this experiment using the method of Marie Kondo. Marie Kondo is a best-selling author of the book *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*. In her book she describes how to declutter your life by taking all your stuff into your hands to feel if they 'spark joy'. If they do not, you should thank them for their service and say goodbye. Hereby the focus should not be on what to get rid of, but rather on what to keep.⁶

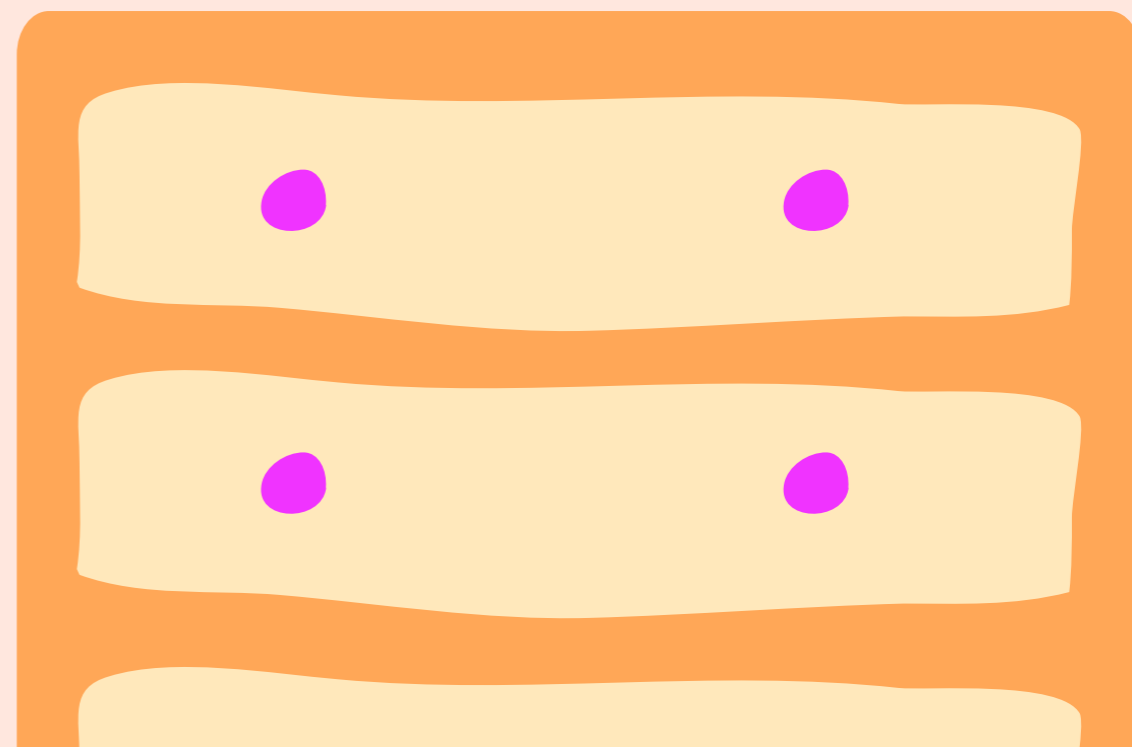
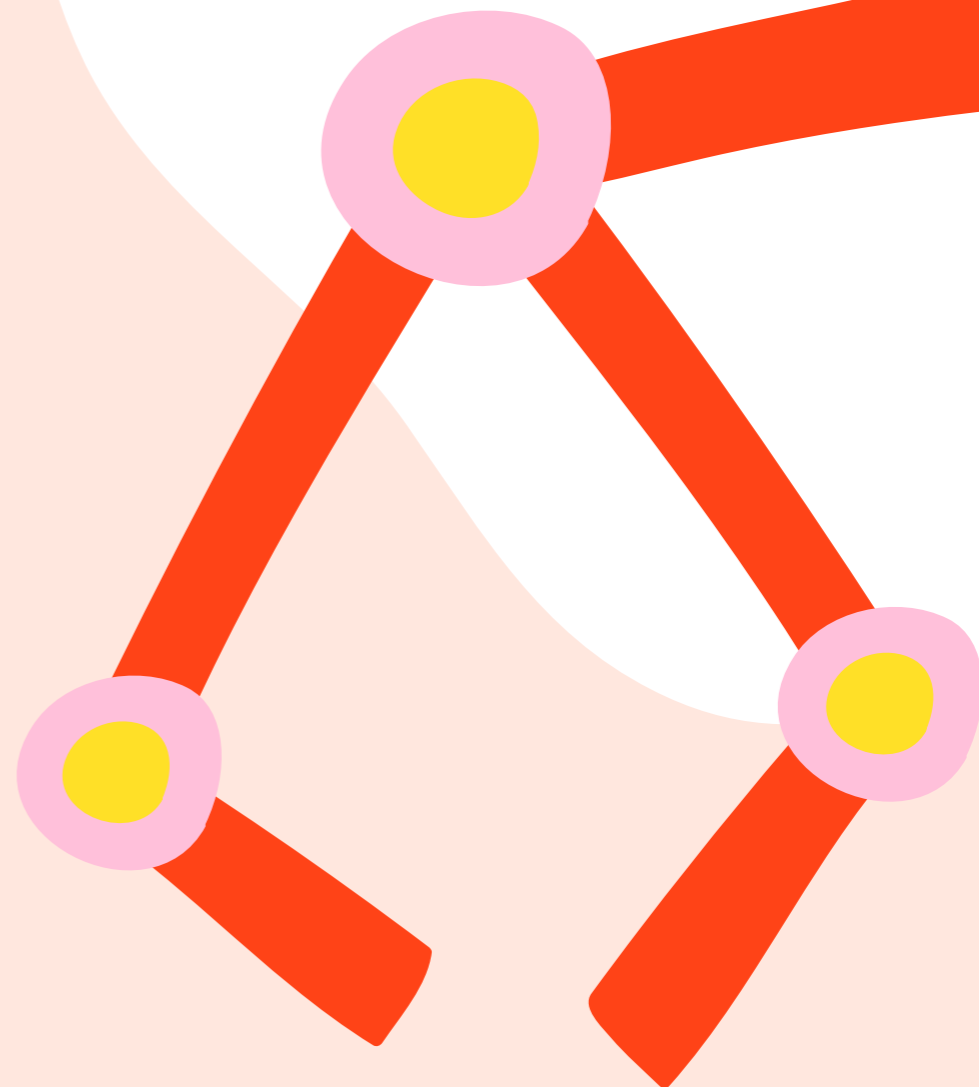
One thing that became very clear to me during this experiment is that most of my possessions are replaceable. I was shocked by how easily I could say farewell to things I before thought of as very important to me. There was only a handful of things that I really cared about and thereby felt as irreplaceable. Most of those things were gifts from loved ones or were things that I had made myself.



the things i own :

1. RUBBISH
2. REPLACEABLES
3. INDISPENSABLES
4. IRREPLACEABLES

it's all
replaceable





what would you save?

Although I always take a lot of inspiration from my own experiences and observations, more important is it to talk with other people. I came up with an experiment to test what kind of things really mean something to us. In this experiment I asked 25 people from different ages what they would bring if their house was on fire. I clocked for each of them 1 minute, where they got the chance to go into their houses to save the things they did not want to lose. After this minute they had to come back to me so we could talk about the things they had saved from the hypothetical fire.

The amount of items that the participants brought back varied between 3 and 6. The reason why items were saved was either because of memories (irreplaceability) or because of practical reasons (indispensability). An interesting item that was saved was a broken necklace, it could not be used anymore but the memory that this necklace carried was more important than the functionality. Only very few things were saved with economical value, people rather saved items with an emotional value. When I asked them what would happen if I would give them more time, they all responded with that they could not come up with any items which they regretted not saving. One of the participants compared the items that he had left behind with Facebook-friends, which you also keep collecting but they don't really mean anything to you.

Almost all participants told me that until the experiment they were not aware of how much crap they possessed. They thought and had hoped that their things were more precious to them.

x practical clothing

x computer/hardisk

x phone

x presents from loved ones

x diploma's from children.
x wallet / documents

x something that belonged to a person that passed away

x photo(album)s

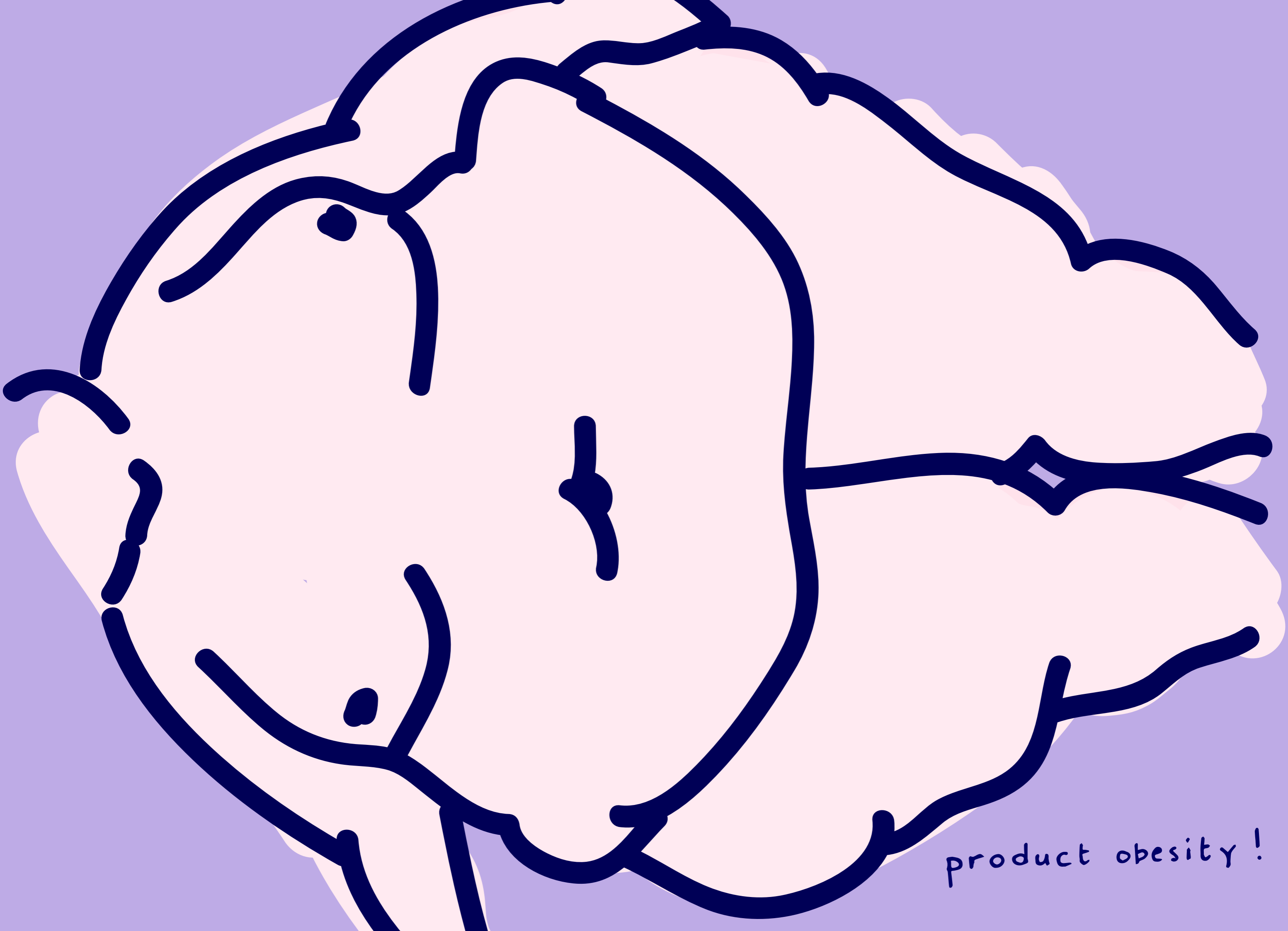
x instruments

x things that were made for the person

x or by the person

x something the person had for a long time

x jewelry



product obesity!



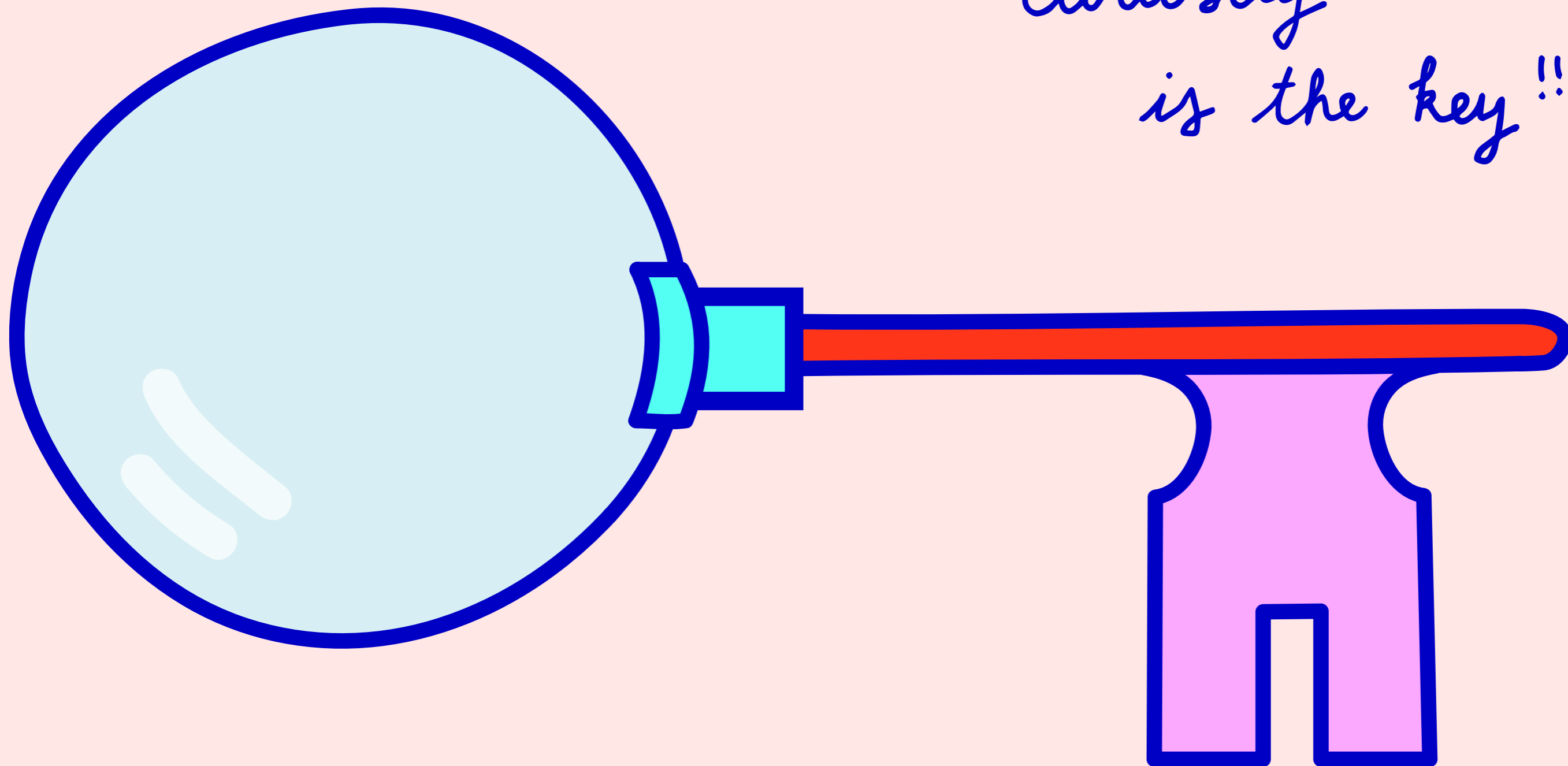
*dear therapist,
could you help me
cure the relationship
between mankind +
products?*

relationship therapy.

My diagnosis so far is that relationships between people and products are very poor. I think that if we would have less 'failed' relationships with our products, we would consume differently and be happier. So maybe it is time for us and our products to go to relationship therapy so we can learn how to relate differently to our stuff.

I paid a visit to Tommy Waad, a therapist specialized in emotionally focused therapy for couples. In my interview with him I tried to get a better understanding about how relationships are built and what the essentials are to make them work.

Tommy explained to me that it is a common saying that 'maintaining a good relationship takes hard work'. He did however not agree with this. According to him it is much harder work in the beginning of a relationship. He said good relationships are all about curiosity. It starts with the honeymoon period. In this period you are all the time trying to be the best version of yourself. You are putting effort into being fun, being interesting and looking nice. This can take a lot of energy. After this period, when you feel like you trust a person, love kicks in. When this happens it is very important to stay curious. In the beginning of a relationship people are usually extremely curious. You want to know everything about the other person and you interview each other till deep in the night. That curiosity you should never lose. Curiosity is the key to a good relationship, and that should also be implemented in products.



*curiosity
is the key!!*

curing relationships.

With the knowledge I gained from my conversation with relationship therapist Tommy Waad, I organized a workshop to see if we could find a way to cure relationships between people and their products. During this therapy session I asked a group of people to bring a product from their home that is replaceable.

During the therapy session we tried to change the way we relate to our stuff. We tried to see if we could heal the relationship. During the session we were not allowed to define the product with its common name and function, so instead of saying 'I brought a spatula' you had to say 'I brought an item made from plastic that has a flat surface connected to a handle.' In this way we tried to look beyond what the object was designed for.

The next step was that we all had to give our objects a name, almost as if they were our friends. We all took our objects in our hands, looked at them and talked about how we met, for how long we have known each other and what things we have to work on in the relationship. All these insights were filled out in the 'healing relationships workshop form'.

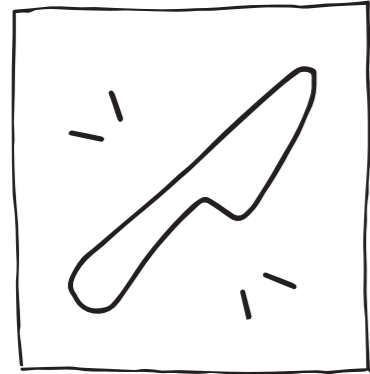
After the workshop, everyone felt much more connected to their products than before. They felt the object had become more unique, because of the memory they had created. It seems to be possible to change the way we relate to products. However, to bring all your products to therapy is maybe not so realistic. Instead, we as designers should start searching for ways so people can more easily make emotional connections with our products. We should search for ways to create memories, and leave more room for the user to let that happen.



relationship therapy
FOR STUFF!

WORKSHOP

relationship therapy for stuff



... bibi ...

— HEAL A RELATIONSHIP —

AGE: 3 years

FIRST MEETING: between other knives
at IKEA malmö

PLACE IN HOME: kitchen drawer

USED: 50. times

PRICE: 3€

DESCRIPTION OBJECT:

pinewood, thin, curved,

simple shape, used ~~for~~ for
creamy substances

DOES ANYTHING ANNOY YOU ABOUT THE OBJECT?

there are splinters on it.

REASON HE/SHE IS HERE TODAY?

it is so easy to replace. I bought about
5 of them at once. It was cheap.

WHAT WENT WRONG IN THE RELATIONSHIP?

dear ms. bibi, I am sorry but it is so
easy to replace you. you are cheap and
not unique. also your quality is bad,
although I like wood. and you help
me make my knäckebröd delicious.

WHAT OTHERS THINK:

YOU REMIND ME OF MY HERITAGE

AND THAT MAKES ME HAPPY you are totally iconic

THANK YOU!

BIBI YOU SMELL LIKE

SOMETHING REAL ~~about~~ for the Swedish tradition around

I like that it's not so perfect. smörgår, I like you!

knives have lived longer than longer your potential is high.

us to grow these objects

i respect you because look
like you have been through

AFTERMATH:

a lot

WHAT ARE YOUR FINDINGS?

now it feels like a more unique object.

DOES THIS MAKE YOU THINK DIFFERENTLY ABOUT THE OBJECT?

it makes it more different from other objects,
because now there is a memory connected

DO YOU SEE SOMETHING YOU DID NOT SEE BEFORE?

it is my knife

IF WE WERE TO REDESIGN THE OBJECT, WHAT WOULD YOU RECOMMEND?

it has exactly the ~~same~~ shape that it
needs to be a usefull tool.

ROOM FOR THOUGHTS:

maybe we can create memories instead of
designs?

In design we are taught to focus on USERS and USABILITY to create USER-FRIENDLY products with USECUES to guide the USER in how they should USE the product.

~~USER~~

PARTICIPANT



I want to create
participation -
friendly products.



This sketch was made in
week 1 of my project and
describes my intentions
perfectly.

room for imagination.

Instead of designing for users, I want to create products for participants. Not user-friendly, but rather participation-friendly. Dictating people what and how to do excludes them rather than includes them, which makes it harder to build up close relationships. By making people part of the creation of the product, it becomes a mutual understanding where both designer and participant have to put in effort to make it work.

If I for example ask you to imagine an apple, we probably all see a similar image. If I would now ask you to remove the core from this apple, you will still see an apple only now with all the parts pointing to this missing core. This core is a very valuable part, because it makes room for your own interpretation and imagination.

If we would design our surroundings in the same way as we just did with the apple, our products would leave more room for establishing relationships. The core can be filled in with the own imagination, love and memories of the participant. That means that something new will be created depending on which person is using the product. New memories, new stories. In this way objects start to exist in their own rights and become much more valuable to us.

I am creating objects that do not dictate. The core is for the participant to fill in with their own imagination, love and memories. Only then, objects start to exist in their own rights.

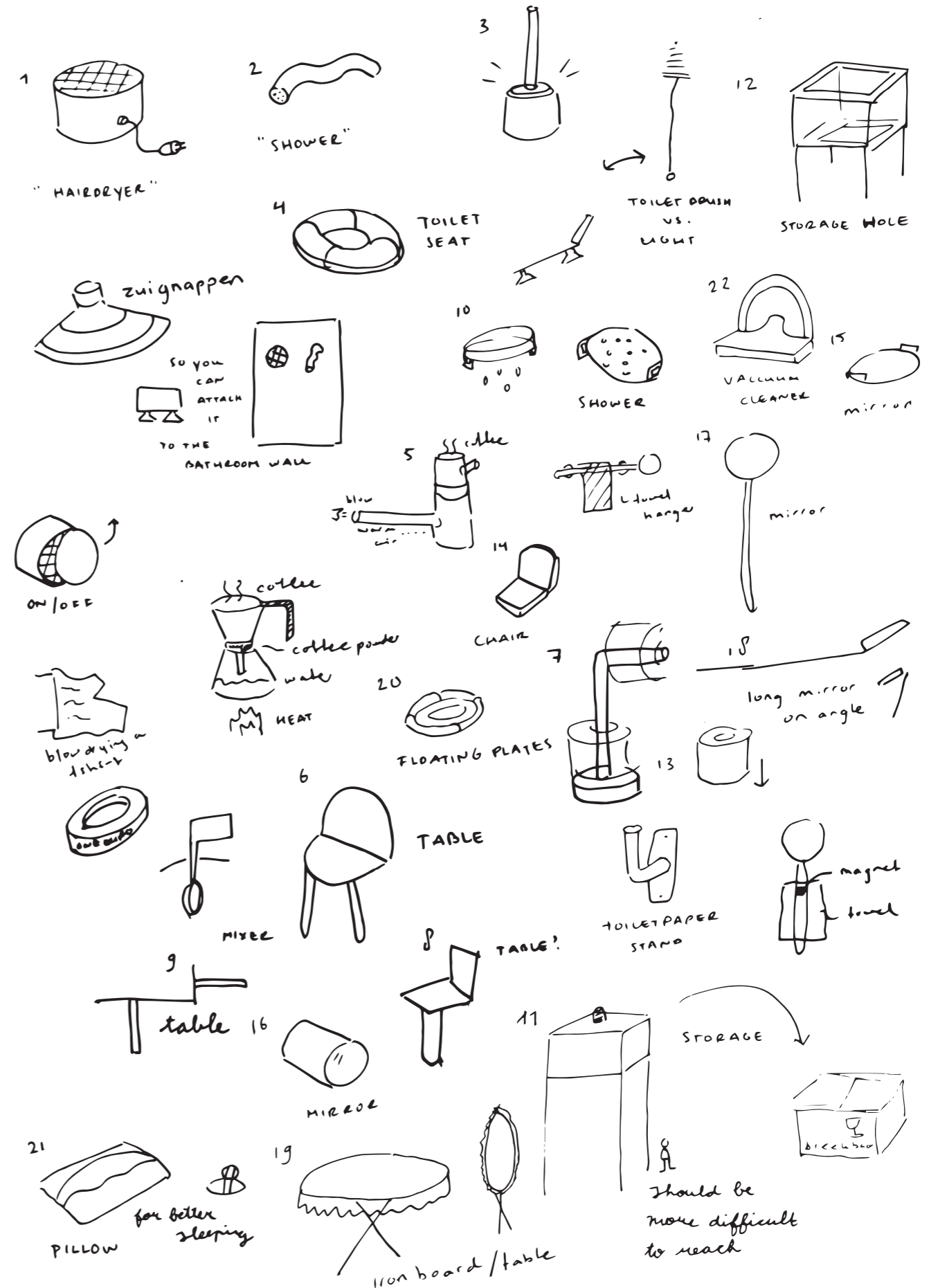
to see more, it should be less.

My aim is to create products that are less defined, so people can learn to see products with a child-like imagination. To help myself with the ideation of potential products, I challenged myself to come up with 100 ideas. To reach that amount of ideas I came up with a method that I would like to call 'inherit the eyes of a child':

You take a product. Look at this product as if you were a child and try to come up with as many possibilities as you can of what you could do with this product if you would look beyond it's intended function. When you have all these new scenarios in which you could use the product, you try to think about what the product should look like in order for other grown-ups to imagine the same scenarios as you just did.

This method led me to 100 more abstract versions of existing products which I nailed down to three elements: an element of air, water and heat. Or, how I would prefer to call them...

*almost a hairdryer,
no ordinary iron &
more than a shower*



the elements.

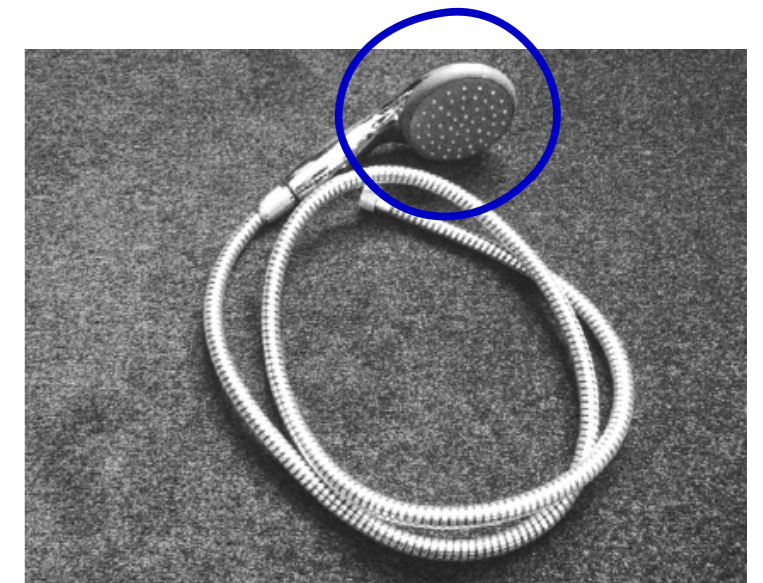
For a while I considered making very abstract objects that people could use to basically create anything. Then I realized that people need a little bit of direction in order to trigger their imagination. Therefore it is important to add a factor of recognition. In that way people do not have to completely come up with it themselves, but they instead get the chance to fill the core from what is already suggesting a direction.

To create the elements of air, water and heat, I simplified existing objects connected to those elements such as the hairdryer, the shower and the iron. I removed parts until only the necessary ones were left. In that way you do not create an iron, but rather an element of heat which makes it possible for you to pop your popcorn, fry your egg, boil your tea water or do whatever you desire to do. More examples I won't give, because that would take away the purpose of this project.

Now it is time for you to fulfill your part of our mutual understanding. Enjoy exploring the objects and your imagination!



hairdryer

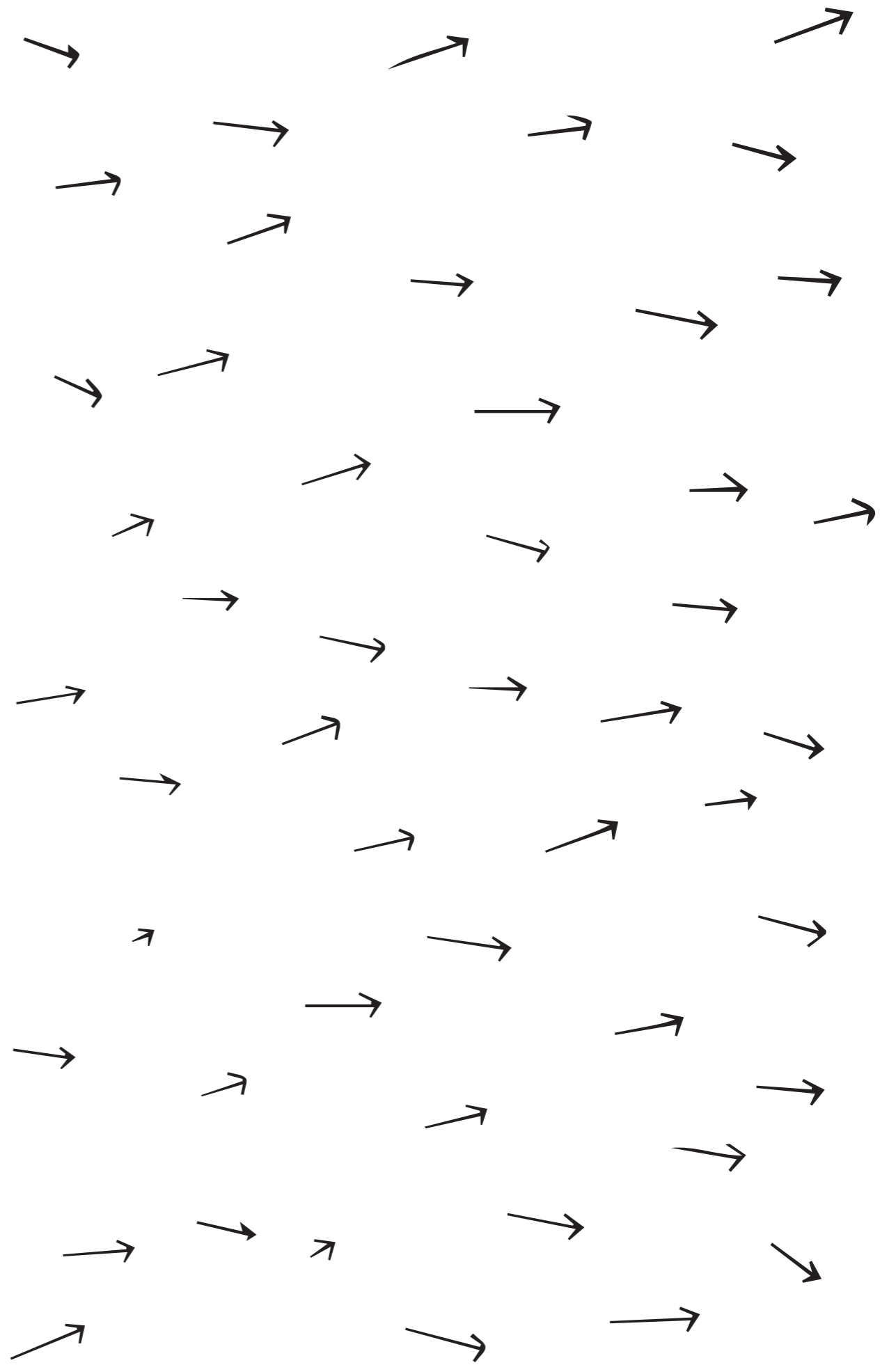


shower



iron

*identity
of things*



*more than a
shower*



*almost a
hairdryer*



*no ordinary
iron*

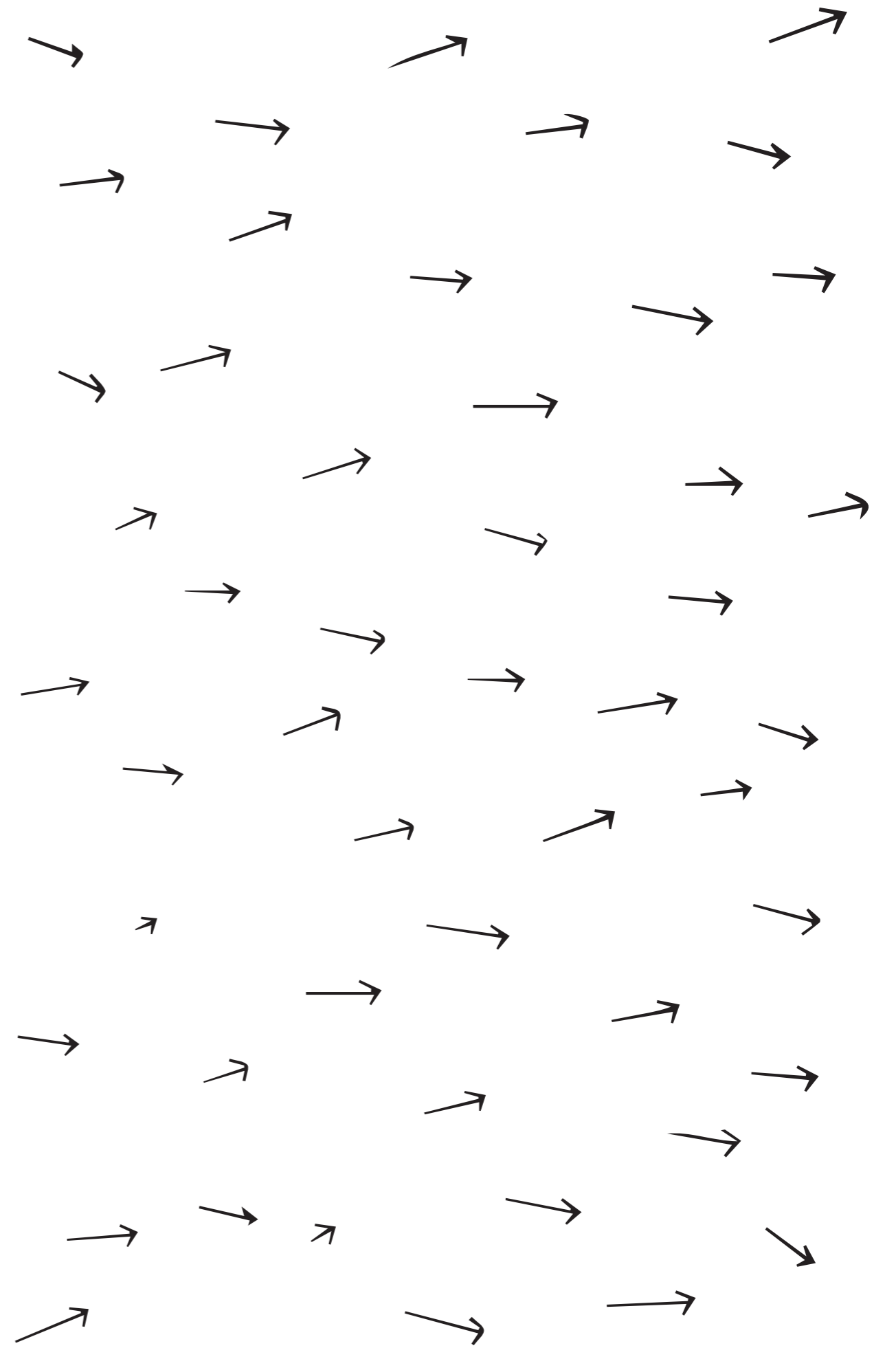


almost a
hairdryer





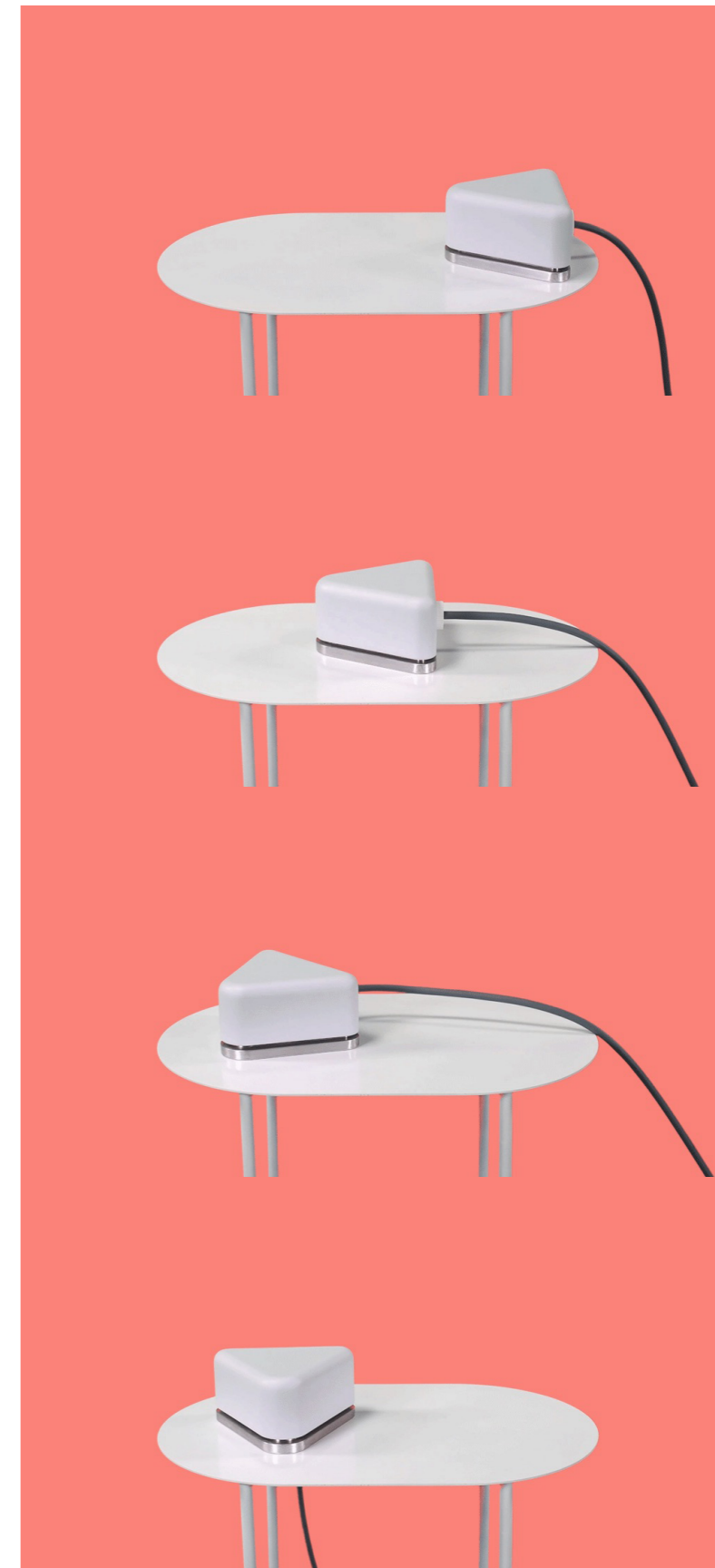


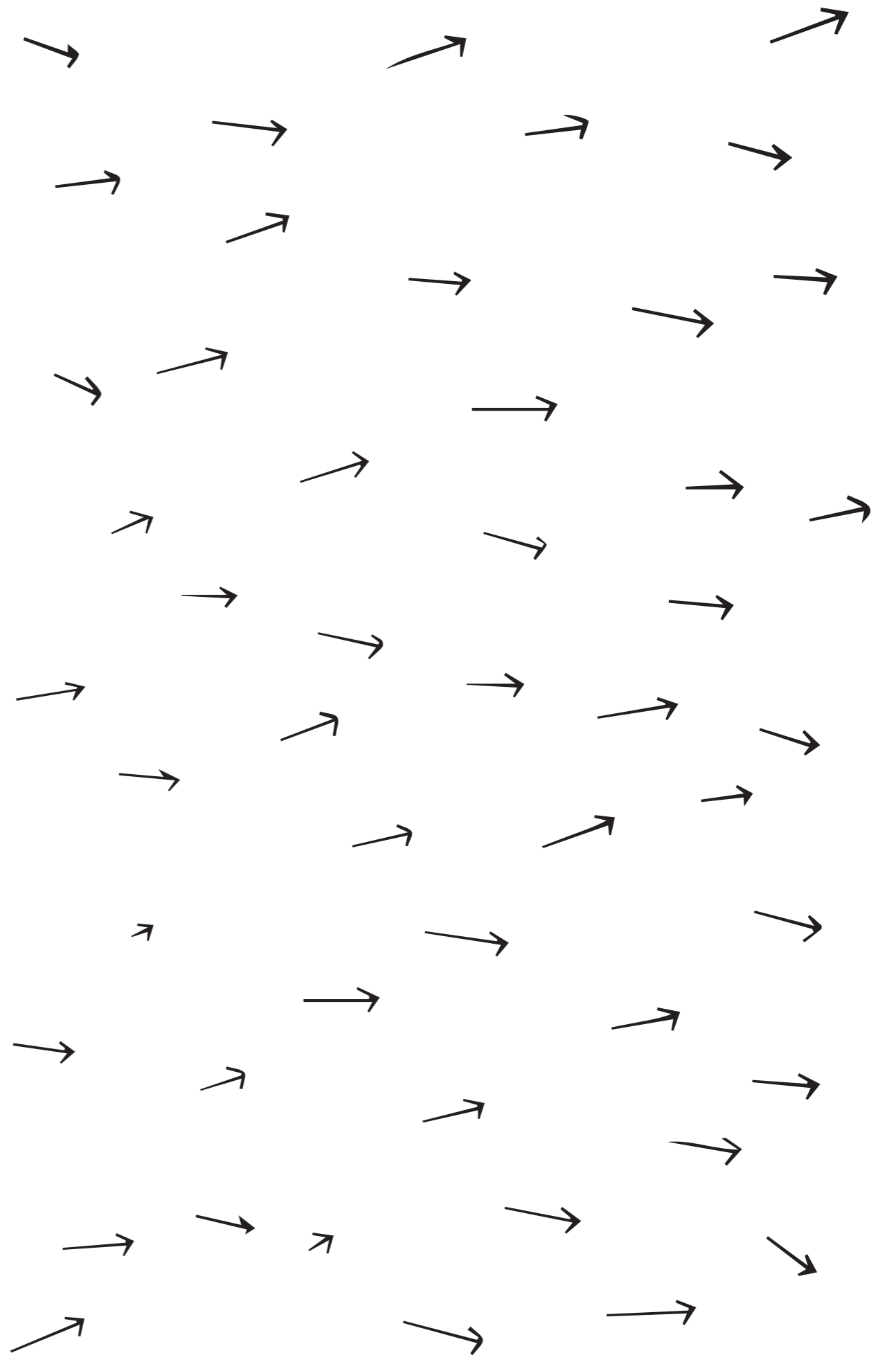


no ordinary
iron









more than a
shower

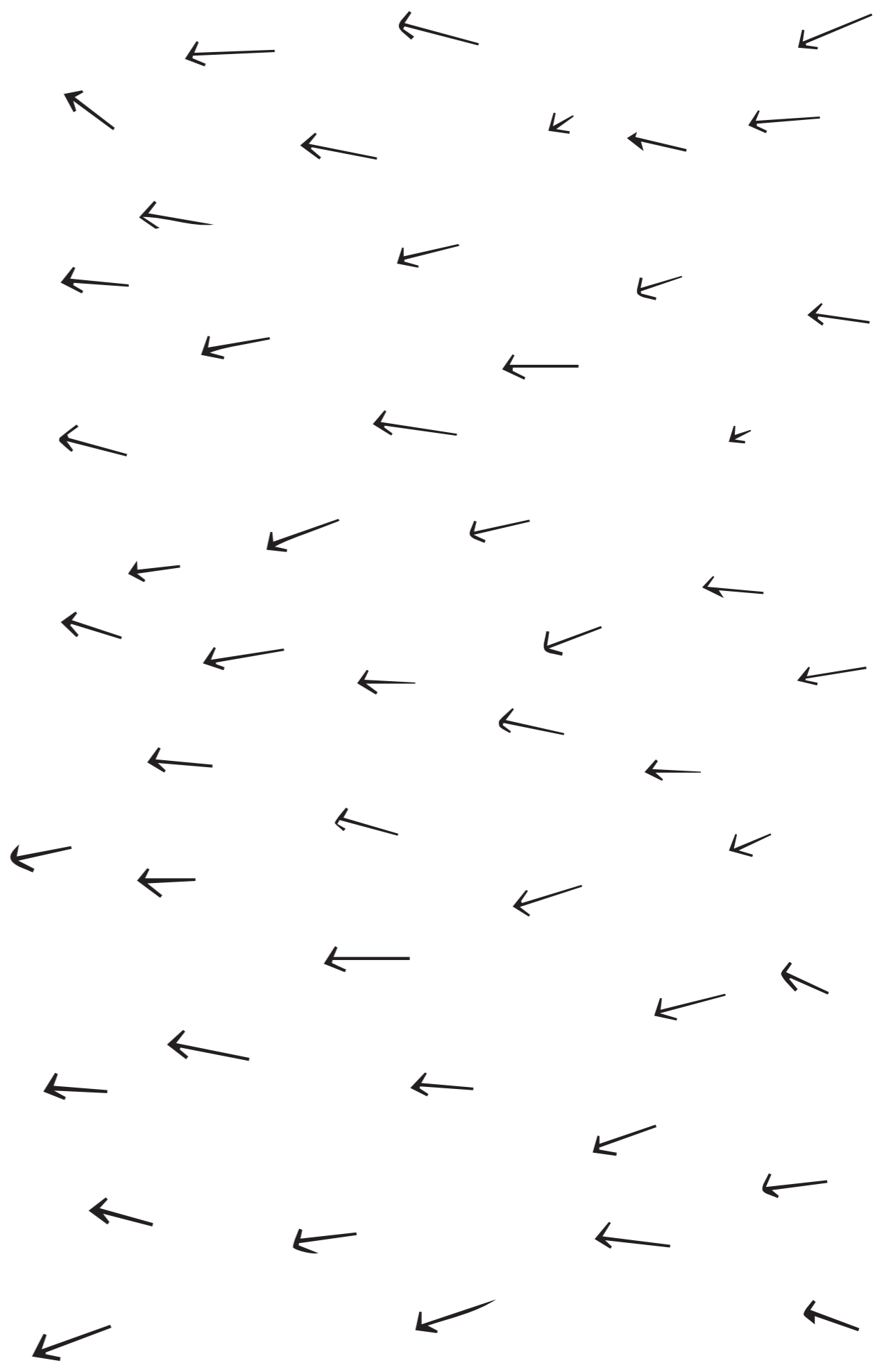
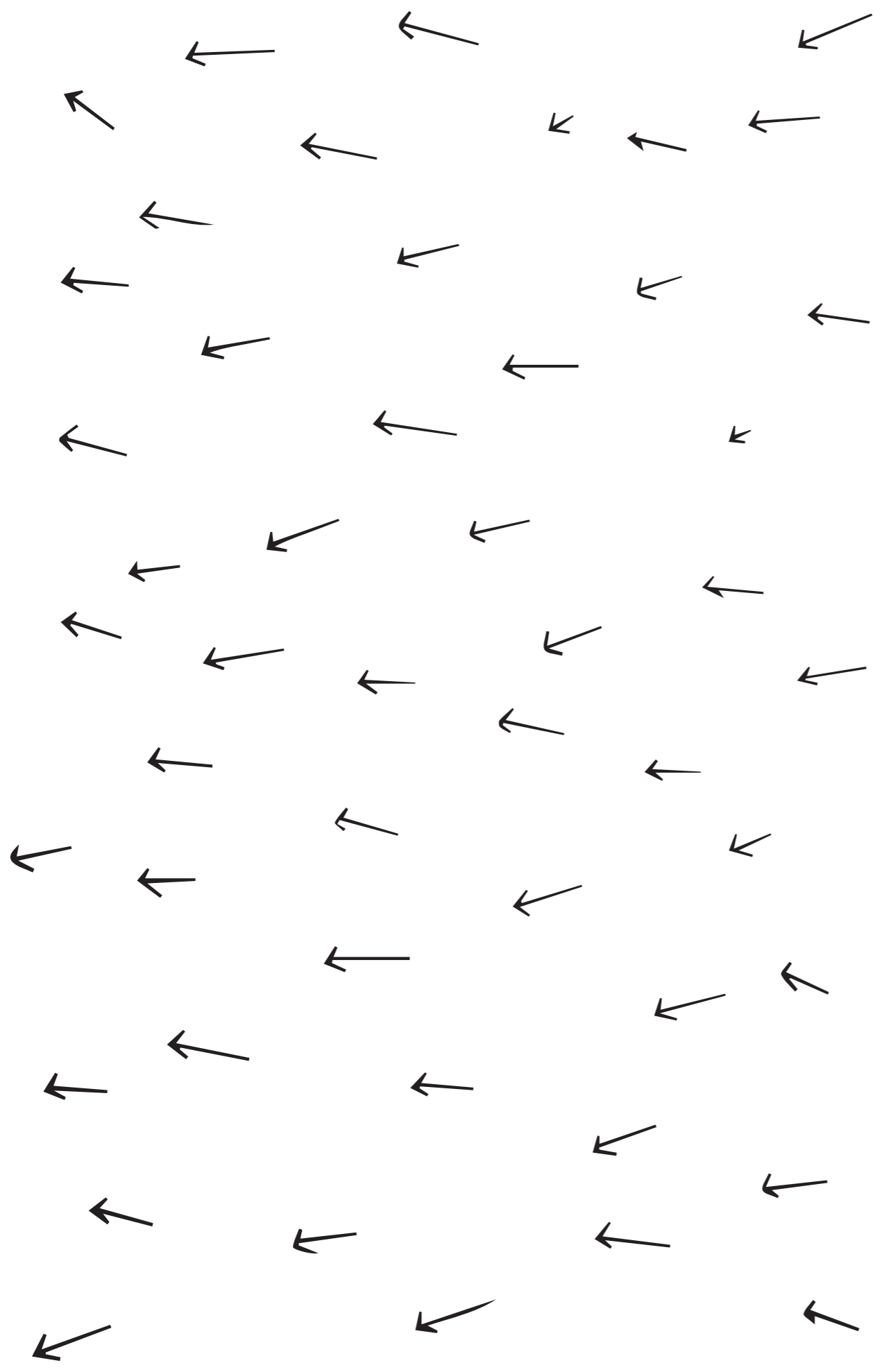








Last but not least, identity of things comes with instruction manuals filled with 30 empty pages.





i survived.

What more is there to say? 20 weeks of engagement with Identity of Things has taught me so much, both educational and personal. It has been a tough process where only a very small amount of people understood what I was actually doing, or at least pretended to. I had no idea where this project was going, but at the same time I had a very strong feeling that it was going to be alright. So I continued.

It was 4 weeks before the finish line that I started to lose my confidence. This is when one of the most valuable moments of my education happened. I met with Per and in our conversation we did not speak one word about my project. Instead, he started to point out what my design process usually looks like. From the moment I start I go all kinds of directions and come with information that does not really seem to be connected at first, but when the journey is coming to an end all of it starts to make sense. He told me this is the Tessa-process and you will not be understood until you finish. This has been one of the most valuable insights I got out of this project. It gave me the courage and confidence to continue and finish this mess.

This might all sound a bit cheesy, but the main things I learned from this project is to have trust and to stay true to myself. When I was younger I was extremely shy, which continued until I was about 15 years old and I worked in a bar. My boss back then told me to 'have shit!' which was his way of telling me to just do and think what I want without caring too much about what other people think. I think I now learned to also 'have shit' when it comes to my design process.

When it comes to the outcome of the project, I could probably have done it in a million different ways with a million different results. I am however happy with the end result. It reflects my initial thoughts and it got me a step closer to finding my statement in design. Objects are a good way of expressing a philosophy and that is what I have done here. In the future, I hope I will take some steps away from products to focus my thoughts on people instead.

thank you for borrowing your knowledge:

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