



design_ destruct

design_destruct is a look at industrial design education, straight from the source; it tries to understand the relationship between conscious, radical intentions and the continued embrace of a status quo that upholds and deepens structures of destruction.

it focuses in on corporate collaborations as a central culprit to this acceptance, and encourages design to be a tool to build for a structurally sustainable world, instead of the world as it is (and physically, socially, and environmentally can't continue to be). it is a call to action, to question, to reject and to refuse, and to protest.

the knowledge gained—both through and despite the education—is turned against the structures we are taught to fit into, resulting in a collection of designs that use text, typography, space and form to educate and mobilise.

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they/them



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INTRODUCTION

“You can’t really talk about liking cars anymore.”

- disappointed design teacher, 2022

What do you do when your education prepares you for a world that should not exist?

Growing up into raging social and climate crises has affected me deeply. When i look at current climate science or listen to people living in communities directly hit by its effects, the way that society at large talks about sustainability and transformation instills an overwhelming fear and anxiety in me. Looking for design courses in the spring of 2020, the description of Konstfack’s industrial design bachelor programme spoke to me: it talked about the role of the industrial designer as essential to an “ecologically, financially and so-

cially sustainable future” (Konstfack, 2021) and gave me hope that people’s sentiments would be better here. That sentence was a large part of why i moved to Stockholm, and applied to Konstfack a year later. But i got disappointed. There is a huge disconnect between the worlds of climate science and the way “sustainability” is treated at Konstfack—much as it is anywhere else.

Throughout my 3 years of studying here, i have observed that sustainability rarely gets defined by educators or students. It floats loosely—degraded to a buzzword—through design briefs, project descriptions and final presentations. There is no common starting point, no shared understanding of the urgency for change and a strong—largely uninformed—disagreement on suitable methods. Underneath a bold claim of sustainability and disruption often lies a core not all that different from the old ideals of industrial design. The products of our work are often aimed at large companies, ready for mass production, in a system that me and my peers are actively fighting against. Are we being educated for a job that needs to be obsolete?

QUESTION

As a final task in my 3 years of Industrial Design education, i want to answer the following question: What is a designer’s role in a just sustainable transition?

Trash Poster, announcing the Global Climate Strike on the 19th of April 2024



FRAMEWORK

“If something did go terribly wrong in human history—and given the current state of the world, it’s hard to deny something did—then perhaps it began to go wrong precisely when people started losing that freedom to imagine and enact other forms of social existence to such a degree that some now feel this particular type of freedom hardly ever existed or was barely exercised for the greater part of human history.”

— David Graeber and David Wengrow (2021)

In *Defuturing: A New Design Philosophy*, Tony Fry argues that to be truly sustain-able (the hyphenation highlights how sustain-ability is an active process), one first needs to “identify, read the forms and map the causal picture of the unsustainable” (Fry, 2020 [1999], p. 239). Because of how media and discourse currently fragmentise the crisis into individual, often disconnected facts and images, people lack the understanding and sense of urgency that would be required for actual change (Fry, 2020 [1999], p. 41). In this section, i want to use some examples from personal experience, science and design thinkers to highlight just how far we are from actually realising sustain-able design.

The latest report of The Intergovernmental Panel of Climate Change’s (IPCC) Working Group III concludes that:

“There is high agreement in the literature that the updating of educational systems from a commercialised, individualised, entrepreneurial training model to an education cognisant of planetary health and human well-being can accelerate climate change awareness and action”

—IPCC, 2022, p. 548.

While the industrial design department at Konstfack has attempted to move into a more cognisant approach, it is in many ways still fixed to commercialised, individualised and entrepreneurial ways of looking at design. To demonstrate: the department has a “friendly”

relationship with Scania, the Swedish truck and bus manufacturer (through personal connections with the company’s head of design, an alumni of the education). In the fall of 2023, a workshop with Scania’s design team showed up in students’ schedules. A group of peers and i objected to this event in an email to staff. We argued that platforming Scania, a profit-oriented company, would skew the perspective of the education, as it was not accompanied by any critical voice. As students, we were not equipped to argue with and thoroughly investigate Scania’s credibility, allowing their perspective to function as a de-facto truth. We saw more dangers than possibilities in the event and thus asked the department to cancel it. This resulted in teachers arranging a Question & Answer session with Scania’s head of sustainability, Andreas Follér, going against our explicit wishes.

Leading up to the event, i went through Scania’s latest Sustainability Report and compared the results with the demands of current climate science. This meant taking Scania’s reporting by face value, something which largely disregards the interest the company has in misrepresenting its negative impact; as the IPCC puts it: “Corporate advertisement and marketing strategies may also attempt to deflect corporate responsibility to individuals or aim to appropriate climate care sentiments in their own brand building.” (IPCC, 2022, p. 506); but as a student, with no education or capacity to do investigative research, i was limited to accepting their numbers.

Even then, the mismatch between what current science calls for and what Scania does was considerable. A central example: Scania targets a 20 percent CO₂ reduction from the use of its products (which amounts to 90 percent of the company’s emissions) between 2015 and 2025. They had achieved a mere 2 percent reduction in the years leading up to 2022, even increasing again in the last two years (Scania, 2023, p. 4). But even these original targets are far removed from the emissions reductions necessary to remain within a 50 percent chance of keeping global warming below 1,5°C, with 2022 carbon budgets requiring Sweden to reduce its emissions by at least 21 percent annually starting January 2022, with that percentage increasing to 38 percent annually by 2023 (Stoddard and Anderson, 2022).

At the event, with the entirety of Scania’s design team present, it was on us students to be critical of the company’s operations, with

5 an extreme power imbalance between us and Follér—tasked full-time with defending Scania’s position. The discussion made me feel extremely exposed and dismissed, with the patronising tone of Follér (who in his condescending politeness also managed to misgender me), the laughs of some of the Scania designers, and the group of educators who had organised the event, and now were watching it happen.

Afterwards, Follér recounted the interaction on LinkedIn, using it as another possibility to promote the company’s destructive “sustainability” plans.

“It is no wild claim to suggest that [corporations] are unwilling to learn what needs to be learnt for sustainability, for this would require them to overcome the defutured in forms of design, technology, science and culture that the corporation embraces as it changes in order to stay the same”

— Fry, 2020 [1999], p. 219

Fry argues that we are confusing the appearance of change—crafted through rhetoric and visual communication—with actual transformation. Something the IPCC agrees with:

“The current effects of climate change, as well as some mitigation strategies, are threatening the viability of existing business practices, while some corporate efforts also delay mitigation action”

— IPCC, 2022, p. 506

The relationship with Scania is not unique. In our education we were made to work with a large collection of other companies: with the headphone and speaker giant Marshall Group, presenting itself to us proudly as having been “Sweden’s fastest growing company”; electric scooter service Voi; construction equipment supplier Dynapac; flying taxi startup Katla; heat sensor company Flir, who also produces thermal imaging attachments for sniper rifles; and the “complete solutions” engineering consultants Svekon who, as part of their “defense and security solutions”, build mounts and cartridge

collectors for machine guns. In the last two cases, we see the most direct connection between design and destruction: actual warfare.

Designers are seemingly never more than barely removed from working with designing products that actively kill and destroy, without even looking at how we do it passively by aiding overconsumption and greenwashing. When we got to visit factories and company offices, we only ever talked to the bosses, without interacting with any of the workers employed. Combine that with the following: in my interactions with ID students, many voiced concerns about the way the collaborations with these companies work today; the school seemingly clamouring for and priding itself in the partners it has amassed, making students feel unwelcome in voicing criticism during these collaborations out of a fear of losing a possible collaborator.

The result is a student base that cares deeply about our world and wants their work to change it for the better, faced with an education which implicitly tells us that we need to work with and accept the people and companies that are responsible for the horrors that threaten our existence; while they themselves often stay wholly guilt free because of layers of bureaucratic detachment. Corporations and technology appear to us as natural, a backdrop to Design and to our reality, instead of being seen a central part of what is designed and what designs the world that we in turn accept as normal (Fry, 2020 [1999], p. 220). To understand the scope of destruction that design currently causes, that naturalisation needs to be reversed, the human-made-ness made more apparent.

Looking at Stoddard and Anderson’s research, it is crucial to highlight just how radically the world needs to change to be able to keep global warming below 1.5°C—the only way to make sure climate change does not spiral completely out of control. 38 percent emissions reductions starting January 2023 will change everything about our way of life, or as the IPCC puts it: “Ambitious mitigation pathways imply large and sometimes disruptive changes in economic structure” (IPCC, 2022, p. 101). There is frankly no time for “change from the inside”, as comfortable as that would be.

Coming back to the quote from the start of this section: a globally representative study of individuals’ willingness to contribute to fighting climate change finds that 69 percent of people globally

6 would give up 1 percent of their income to the cause—the necessary amount calculated for climate change mitigation—and almost 9 out of 10 respondents agree that governments should do more to combat the crisis. At the same time, “individuals around the globe strongly underestimate their fellow citizens’ actual [willingness to contribute] to the common good” (Andre et al., 2024), with individuals globally guessing that only 43 percent of others would be willing to contribute 1 percent of their income (instead of the aforementioned 69 percent). This is especially troubling looking at how the study also shows that, if people perceive their surroundings as willing to contribute more, their willingness also increases. The article concludes that an effort to increase awareness for others’ actual willingness to contribute can be a powerful intervention to mitigate climate change (Andre et al., 2024).

DEFINITIONS

To make sure that the terms i use in the following text are clear, i will attempt to define them, with the understanding that these summaries are not universal and hardly complete, but nonetheless useful for a common understanding in the specific context of this thesis.

SUSTAINABILITY

My definition of sustainability is based largely on Tony Fry’s aforementioned 1999 book *Defuturing: A New Design Philosophy*, in which the reader gets a very broad and structural view of what sustainable change is about. To Fry, sustain-ability is the “ability to sustain” (Fry, 2020 [1999], p. 7), a continuous process (sustain) that requires us to learn, understand and act upon (and constantly change) the systemic destruction of our future (ability). This means acquiring a deep knowledge of current unsustainability before we can even attempt to change the way build our worlds. In the context of this thesis, sustainability means not contributing to the destruction of communities, environments and the climate by continuing to work with large, profit-oriented actors. It means actively working towards climate justice.

CLIMATE JUSTICE

In 2002, the International Climate Justice Network published the *Bali Principles of Climate Justice*, working off of the People of Color Environmental Justice Leadership Summit’s *Environmental Justice Principles*. The Coalition defines climate justice through a list of 27 principles. For a just transition, burdens and benefits of climate change and its mitigation need to be distributed equitably and fairly, taking into account historical exploitation, wealth inequalities, marginalisation, and war (International Climate Justice Network, 2002). The climate justice movement does not just demand a reduction of emissions, but also a dismantling of the structures of oppression that enabled the exploitation of life and resources in the first place, seeing one as a necessity for the other.

AIM

On the basis of this framework, the central aim of my thesis emerges: to educate and mobilise designers—and everyone else—by showing that design’s sustainability crisis cannot be solved through working within existing structures and that any future occupation always needs to be accompanied with our role as active and disruptive citizens. My collaborator is Fridays For Future Stockholm, with the aim of mobilising for two events: the Global Climate Strike on the 19th of April, and an action leading up to the EU-elections on the 31st of May. The work should use the different contexts that i can influence as points of intervention; from my classroom, through the school’s hallways, to the public spring exhibition and beyond.

FRIDAYS FOR FUTURE STOCKHOLM

Fridays For Future is a global, youth-led climate justice movement that started in 2018 in Stockholm. As a decentralised movement, it consists of autonomous local groups all around the world that coordinate to strike from school, university and work on global days of action to demand political change. My collaborator Fridays For Future Stockholm is the local group for the city of Stockholm. As a grassroots network, it doesn’t have any membership count or official positions, and instead organises through online channels and weekly

7 meetings, where all people under 26 are welcome. Like many other Swedish local groups, FFF Stockholm has a climate strike every Friday, outside the parliament building, for the last five years.

Many of these strikes are centred around a specific theme within the larger field of climate justice, in the effort to educate about the connection between the climate crisis and different social issues. On top of that, the group regularly organises larger actions, like the ones on the 19th of April or 31st of May 2024.

PROCESS & PROPOSAL

This project got its start in the work *print dialog* (see online: “hitting a nerve”), in which i explored printing tools, while also researching and interacting with the connections between activism and art, on a Konstfack-specific level. One of the takeaways from the

project has been that people at Konstfack have a surprisingly cynical, or perhaps resigned, approach to politics, while the school as a public institution aligns itself with the status quo, even if that status quo is unjust and unsustainable. People took down my posters when they could have caused controversy, criticised them for their provocative nature and stuck harmless sarcastic jokes on top of the genuine political messaging.



Poster resulting from the project *print dialog*, criticising (self-)censorship at Konstfack

The result of this thesis cannot be a specific product or service, it is a call to fight for change. Cutting short the criticisms of our current sustainability approach to propose a solution would lead to results that continue sustaining the unsustainable. What follows includes an attempt at detailing methods and design actions that try to communicate and work the criticism into practice.

In his upcoming dissertation, Erik Sandelin talks about the concept of *grace*, of “actively not doing what you are able to do”. For me, this meant choosing not to work with the materials, tools and knowledge that my education gave me access to, symbols for the destructive nature at design’s core. Throughout our work, we defend unsustainable material usage and extensive energy and resource consumption for prototypes and processes, claiming to contribute to a greater good that—when looking at the current state of design—has yet to materialise; we assume sustainable futures where industrial designers have a place, while also being taught how unrealistic our hopes truly are. Building on a refusal of those practices meant that i needed to find ways to show that my work was a design process regardless.

Sandelin’s terms of *undesign* and *adesign* help with that placement: The concept of *undesign* talks about the acts of designing that actively destroy and work against current unsustainable practices—in line with most activist interventions, to which my efforts in mobilisation and structural critique of design can be counted. The idea of *adesign* describes the creative act behind questioning and rethinking what even counts as design—opening up new ways to see the designer’s role in a sustainable transition; as bodies in protest.

To be sustainable means to resist—because the ways we design, and think about design, are keeping us from building the world required for our continued survival. My proposals are split into 3 parts: *design as tool for resistance*, in which i attempt to rethink how we work with design; *design tools for resistance*, a collection of physical and digital tools to facilitate grassroots interventions; and *designer in resistance*, where i am participating in and hosting interventions myself.

DESIGN AS TOOL FOR RESISTANCE

Without trying to propose solutions for a problem that i am not able to detail the scope of (in the frame of this work), i make an attempt to show pathways towards a changed design education and practice.

A MANIFESTO

My research and experience lands in a proposal of how we need to “design for *each*, not everyone”. Here, i write about how the way we design has to change from trying to create mass-produced mass-appeal products, to creating solutions for—and together with—communities, individuals and localities, based on their specific needs. It is an attempt to exit the spiral of perfection that current sustainability thinking in popular industrial design is prone to, and enables a more fun and caring approach to design (see text “design for *each*, not everyone”).

FINDING NEW GUIDELINES

If our design practices need to change, the methods and strategies we employ are crucial leverage points. The book and website *Beautiful Trouble* (beautifultrouble.org) is a collection of “Creative tools for a more just world” (Beautiful Trouble, n.d.) by a long list of grassroots groups, artists and activists; detailing and referencing hundreds of theories, stories, principles, tactics and methods relating to direct action, protest and disobedience. It is strongly reminiscent of the *biomimicry principles*, *circular design guidelines* or *Hyper Island’s method toolbox*, which we are already encouraged to use in our processes; but now with a focus on subversion and protest. It can be a great tool in transforming the methods and processes designers use towards more structure-critical work.

WRITING STYLE AND LANGUAGE

This text is written in the format of a bachelors thesis, entailing a collection of formal rules dictated by the course. In what i would deem a creative writing process, this forced structure created a fertile ground for explorations of language, form and ideas. And it remains visible in the published text, as a conscious choice to highlight the process.

Throughout the project, i struggled with the following questions: How could i be vulnerable in my work while still being political; show insecurities and fears without being seen as too emotional or uninformed? How do i navigate personal struggles from an intersectional perspective; recognising that my white, European, middle class existence makes me extremely privileged to not currently be in danger of losing my livelihood, or even my life. While at the same time being directly affected by the rise in transphobia, global temperatures, carbon dioxide levels and right wing politics? How to i make people feel the urgency that i perceive every day without placing myself in the centre of attention?

Again seeing the text as something to be designed, i attempt to de-centre myself in this otherwise deeply personal and individual task. By not capitalising my name or the pronoun “i” throughout, i make them less pronounced in the text flow.

To counter the cynical and sarcastic tendency that i experience in my environment, including myself, i try to be as genuine as possible in this text and in the works that grew from it. This is an attempt to convey the criticism and urgency that result from my research in a way that does not feel like an aggression towards those currently subscribed to an unsustainable way of sustaining themselves.

DESIGN TOOLS FOR RESISTANCE

As a second step, i started working on tools that could prepare for different types of intervention.

GRASSROOTS DESIGN HANDBOOK

Because climate justice organising needs to be an ongoing and sustained effort to be successful, the work i do should also be useful in future campaigns and actions. For that reason, i started writing a handbook collecting the tools i researched and employed in my work (see online: “designing with grassroots movements”).

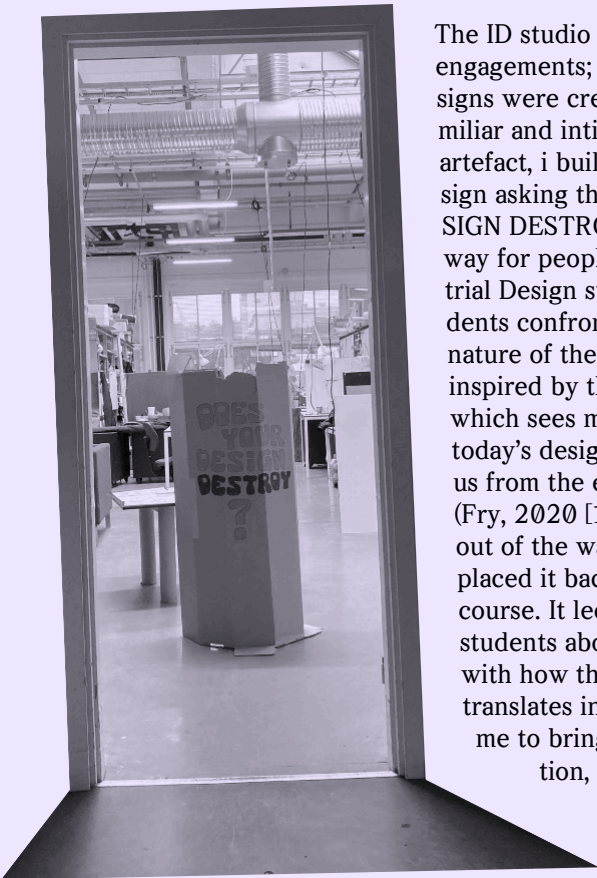
DESIGNER IN RESISTANCE

As a last stage of this project, i put my demand of a more engaged designer into practice, and designed and partook in a row of interventions, using—and in some cases *hacking*—the platforms and contexts that i move between to make them as specific and effective as possible.

This resulted in three spheres of interaction: the student's workspace, the ID studio; the larger semi-public sphere of Konstfack's common spaces; and a more general Stockholm public.

INDUSTRIAL DESIGN STUDIO

The ID studio was the starting point for my engagements; the environment that my designs were created in and the one most familiar and intimate to me. As a discursive artefact, i built a half-cylindrical cardboard sign asking the question “DOES YOUR DESIGN DESTROY?”, and placed it in the way for people trying to enter the Industrial Design studio space—making students confront themselves with the very nature of their creations. The question is inspired by the concept of *the defutured*, which sees much—if not almost all—of today's design practice as actively barring us from the existence of a viable future (Fry, 2020 [1999]). The sign was moved out of the way after half a day, but i placed it back to encourage further discourse. It led to several discussions with students about how they feel unsatisfied with how the sustainability focus at ID translates into actual action, and allowed me to bring up the project in conversation, leading to people voicing interest and adding the demonstration to their calendars.



Reminder: DOES YOUR DESIGN DESTROY?

KONSTFACK

Leaving the Industrial Design Studio, i used the spaces and tools available to me at Konstfack to mobilise both at and outside the school.

TRASH POSTERS

Trying to create a more eye-catching alternative to the typical announcement poster, i created “trash posters”, with the messaging painted on pieces of garbage taken from Konstfack's recycling containers. The resulting artefacts stayed in place, or were carefully moved to other, partially even more visible locations, over the time of several weeks, something my posters from *print dialog* never managed to achieve; i attribute the success to the uniqueness of the artefacts.

POSTERS

One of the ways FFF Stockholm mobilises is through posters. For the Global Climate Strike on the 19th of April 2024, we worked together on a combination of designs, using **struggle** as a display typeface and the movement's iconic warning triangle—which was mainly used for the big climate demonstrations several years ago—as a central graphic. Through the research detailed in the grassroots design handbook (see online, “designing with grassroots movements”), we landed on digital stencil duplication as a printing method, which allowed for much larger control over the production of the posters, while keeping costs low, and which i had access to through help from other Konstfack students. Digital stencil duplication, known by the brand-name Risograph, works similarly to screen printing: it creates a stencil from a monocoloured source file, which gets attached to a rotating color drum pushing a plant-based emulsion through the stencil onto the paper. This process can produce a large number of prints in a short period of time, but keeps masters quite affordable, which means we could print several different posters for different use-cases. We created one poster with only the most central information and large graphic, and one that explains the necessity of protest in a short paragraph, both in Swedish and English, turning the posters into information material.



Trash Poster for the Global Climate Strike, on the back of product packaging



Trash Poster for the Global Climate Strike on a vacuum cleaner



Riso-printed announcement posters



Trash Poster announcing the sign workshop, on a car part.

SIGN WORKSHOP

To mobilise and build community leading up to larger actions or demonstrations, FFF hosts sign-making workshops, where people can show up to a meeting place and paint banners and signs together. On the 11th of April, FFF Stockholm and i held a workshop in Havet, the main exhibition space at Konstfack. To advertise the event (and the Global Climate Strike on the 19th of April) i sent out an email to all students and staff at Konstfack and placed a second Trash Poster in Havet two days in advance, this one made of a car bumper that i found in the trash.

The workshop went smoothly; we painted signs and banners, students interacted with people from FFF. In preparation, i had printed a combination of questions, scientific facts and previous protest slogans onto a large piece of paper as inspiration, which sped up the process of figuring out what to paint.



Sign Workshop in Havet

But only 2 people from Konstfack actually showed up. Many others had expressed interest in coming but, due to a lot of different good reasons, did not join. This rekindled a frustration i have felt in many

contexts of social and political engagement, both at Konstfack and beyond, of people—despite strong convictions—not participating in liberatory and community-building action.

what happens to a movement when
we all have reasons not to go
so occupied with living life
that we forget it's ending

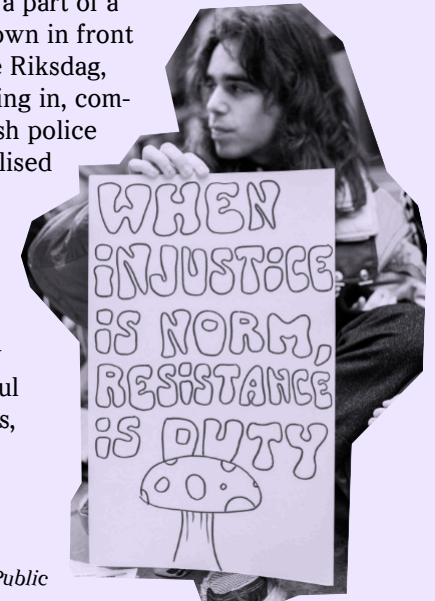
THE PUBLIC

Just like the posters i had produced, the rest of the work also needed to branch out into the public to achieve its full effect.

OCCUPY

In *A User's Guide to (Demanding) the Impossible*, students working together in the Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination in London argue for a rethinking of political art (and in extension design) into a practice of creative mobilising and direct action, highlighting historical examples of subversive art activism (Jordon and Grindon, 2010).

On Monday, the 11th of March 2024, i was a part of a group of young climate activists who sat down in front of the doors of the Swedish parliament, the Riksdag, symbolically blocking politicians from coming in, coming back every day for a week, despite harsh police responses. Using the letter shapes i internalised in the creation of *struggle*, i made a sign reading “WHEN INJUSTICE IS NORM, RESISTANCE IS DUTY” on the back of a subway ad, directing talking to the public walking by or watching, and telling people to join the protest. The action was not only criticising, it was also an extremely powerful generative force. School classes, pensioners, tourists and people on their way to work passed by, asked questions about why we



Trash Poster in Public

were protesting or how they could get engaged, and even sat down next to us, creating a new forum for discussion outside commonly accepted frameworks. People wrote poems and read books. During the week, the protest also acted as a force for creating community, with a tight-knit kinship building between people sitting in the blockade and the support group around, that volunteered to provide food and care.

From a perspective of *action logic*—looking at whether the message of a protest is clear just by looking at it (Boyd [Beautiful Trouble], n.d.)—the blockade was a success, the parliament building lending itself as a perfect symbol for political power and, in our storytelling, inaction and destruction. Our intervention led to an enormous amount of media attention, and public discourse around the legitimacy of civil disobedience.

GLOBAL CLIMATE STRIKE

On April 19, at 10:00, around a thousand people gathered at Odenplan in central Stockholm to protest for climate justice. We marched down Sveavägen to Sergels Torg, where organisers from different social and climate justice groups held speeches, artists performed, and people chanted. Despite the freezing cold (a lost snowflake made it onto our banners every now and then), the atmosphere was energetic and loud. But again, just like the sign workshop i held the week before, the turnout was less than what had been the standard a few years ago, even though the climate crisis had clearly still not been averted. It is always impossible to tell what factors cause these fluctuations in engagement; maybe it was the cold, maybe the political climate, maybe a misguided mobilisation tactic; or maybe everyone was just particularly busy that Friday.

KONSTFACK SPRING EXHIBITION 2024

With around a month of the project left after the demonstration in April, i could now turn my focus on Konstfack's 2024 Spring Exhibition, where i would get a platform to exhibit my work. This is another opportunity to further mobilise and generate engagement, as this project's final intervention. With the discoveries made throughout this process, and the tools created for the cause, the exhibition space should be turned into a 10-day sign workshop, allowing people with different expectations and motivation to all take home a heightened engagement in the climate movement. To be as present

as possible, i applied for the workshop to be outside, next to Konstfack's main entrance.

As this text was first published in a zine format at the exhibition, my reflections on the spring show were documented on my website (klotter.supply/design-destruct) and are included in this document as a final chapter (see the pages 16 onward with green background: "Exhibition as Tool").

Extreme right wing politician walking on a banner reading "CLIMATE JUSTICE = SOCIAL JUSTICE"



SUMMARY

Through the designs we create and the ways that these creations make up the preconditions for the world we take for granted today (Fry, 2020 [1999], p. 10), we as designers have an enormous responsibility to “imagine and enact other forms of social existence” that we as people have always had the ability for (Graeber and Wengrow, 2021). This means we need to stop taking our world for granted, denaturalise the structures that currently dictate our practice, and change our education and work to be oriented around imagining a world that actually has a future.

Communicating the overwhelming support for—and willingness to contribute to—climate action is a very strong leverage point in driving change. Research shows that making people aware of how many around them care about the issues at hand increases the amount of people that care, building community. It is the basic mechanism behind social movements, political action, and revolution.

design_destruct tries to add cracks to the facade of a “sustainable” design education and shine light on the ways in which our practice currently pushes us further into crisis and collapse. At its most constructive, this project also attempts to show ways that Design, designing and designers can partake in encouraging and exercising sustained political protest.



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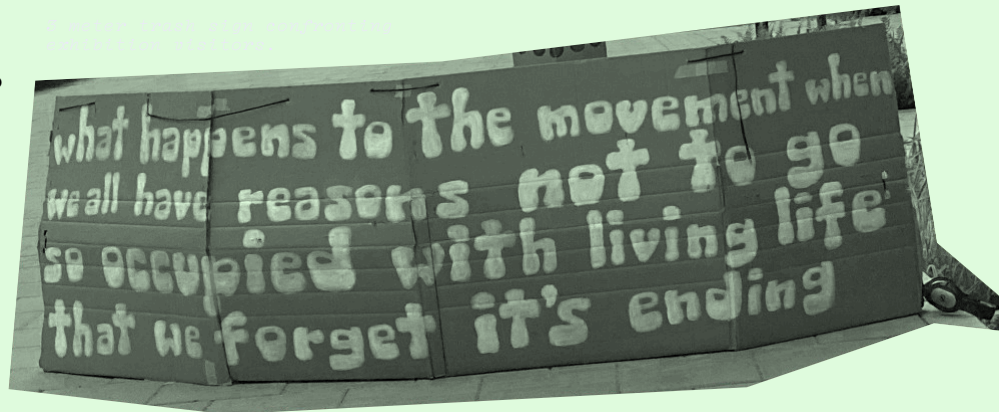
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For the final intervention of my project, i wanted to use the platform of the Konstfack 2024 Spring Exhibition, my degree show, to once more educate and mobilise. To be as visible as possible, i chose to work outside, next to the university's main entrance.

One conclusion from the sign workshop that i hosted at Konstfack in April had been that a lot of the stress going into the preparation of these kinds of interventions—much like for protest preparation—comes from the need to gather large amounts of people for the event to seem effective. To prevent that stress in the planning of the exhibition, i wanted to make sure that the space would seem complete regardless of the amounts of visitors. This meant creating an engaging environment that was inviting but also well-rounded on its own.

PRINTING

To make my research and conclusions accessible to as many people as possible, i printed 100 copies of my thesis as an A5-zine. As a printing technique, i chose digital duplication (Riso-printing) again, which al-

lowed me to print the 36 A5 pages quickly and cheaply. The paper i chose was standard photocopy paper, readily available at the school, and i used some red- and yellow-coloured sheets for highlights and a slightly thicker cream white paper around the cover. Then, i spent a day cutting, sorting, creasing, stapling and folding all of the zines together.

final chapter of design_destruct:

EXHIBITION AS TOOL



BUILDING

Since i had a quite large area outside the university building at my disposal, i chose to work with my concept of trash posters again, but in a much larger space. The weather forecast did not predict a significant amount of rain during the exhibition, which enabled me to use cardboard as the main building material, useful because of its structural properties and general abundance in Konstfack's waste containers. The process turned into a playful exploration of found material and ways to combine it; and it resulted in a collection of spacial structures that mobilise, educate and invite to discussion. The visitor gets greeted by a 3 meter wide curved sign with the poem that i wrote after the previous sign workshop, as well as a large artefact consisting of cardboard and the car bumper

that i had used to announce the last sign workshop—i wrote the opening quote of this essay on the car part, and and an announcement of the climate demonstration on the 31st of May on the cardboard. The centrepiece of the exhibit is a table with a large sign reading “DEMOCRACY NEEDS PROTEST” for people to sit and paint. To make it easy for visitors to read about the work, i hand-painted a large QR-code with a link to my project page, and built a podium for my printed thesis.

All around the space, i placed found trashed design objects that i wrote quotes from this thesis text on. For showing and collecting all the signs that people would create during the exhibition, i built a display out of cardboard. As soon as i could move the building process outside, into the space, i did. This meant i could spend a week adapting to the unexpectedly strong winds that pushed over my structures, by finding new ways to lean, weight and angle them.



THE EXHIBITION

On the 15th of May at 14:00, Konstfack’s vice-chancellor and the exhibition curators officially opened the Spring Show. During the following two weeks, i involuntarily explored the myriad of ways that cardboard can fall over, collapse, fold, slide, and blow away, thanks to winds that seemed to increase by the daily, and blew in directions that i didn’t know were physically possible. Every morning needed to be started off by accommodating new conditions and rebuilding what had been

pushed out of place. Luckily, the material itself was quite resilient, so that even if things collapsed, they just collapsed into their different building blocks.

RECEPTION

During the exhibition’s opening hours, i sat at my spot, painting signs, ready to talk to people that stopped by. But not too many did. Many stopped to read the poem out front but then continued on, hopefully keeping it in mind even as they did not engage with it further. Despite my efforts to accommodate different levels of engagement from the public, i failed to effectively alleviate the stress that comes with hoping to reach a broad audience.

In what i would describe as a stereotypically Swedish act of silent (and socially avoidant) protest, i discovered several bits of Portion Snus on some of my structures when i came in one morning. That was the most confrontation—both negative or positive—that i experienced during the exhibition, part of a larger picture in which the confrontational and critical aspects in my work did not actually get acknowledged. In an article for Dagens Nyheter, Bo Madestrand described the exhibition as largely apolitical, declaring students to be self-centred, and conveniently missing the openly political and interactive projects exhibited by the teachers education, visual communicators and designers that span a large part of the exhibit (Madestrand, 2024). This fit into a larger media landscape that seemed to actively ignore the politics in many of the works in order to construct a narrative of a depoliticised and mature arts school that had departed from its long history of unrest; a narrative that in turn complements Konstfack’s recent attempts to appeal to Sweden’s hard-right, “anti-woke” government (read more online, “hitting a nerve”), in a time when a clear and unwavering stance is desperately needed.

EXTENDING THE FRAMEWORK: TALKING ABOUT PALESTINE

The day the exhibition opened, more than 35000 Palestinian people had been killed by the Israeli military in the Gaza strip since October (Reuters, 2024). A report released in April by UN Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese stated that there were “reasonable grounds” to believe Israel was committing a genocide (UN news, 2024). On Monday, the 20th of May, halfway into the exhibition, the international criminal court sought an arrest warrant for Israel’s prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, his minister of defence and 3 Hamas officials (McKernan, 2024). If there ever had been a “normal” time for the spring exhibition to take place, this was not it.

On top of the moral imperative to opposing these atrocities, a fight against them is central to an intersectional struggle for Climate Justice:

"Climate Justice opposes military action, occupation, repression and exploitation of lands, water, oceans, peoples and cultures, and other life forms"

— International Climate Justice Network, 2002

Fridays For Future Sweden, as a Climate Justice movement, has been outspoken about the rights of Palestinians (Thunberg et al., 2023); banners and signs in solidarity with the people affected by Israel’s war crimes are a regular occurrence at FFF Stockholm’s weekly strikes and large parts of the



Sign workshop in action.

network are also active in Palestinian liberation movements.

The day before the exhibition opened, students at Stockholm University (SU) and the Institute of Technology (KTH) started solidarity encampments, inspired by student movements in the US and spreading around the globe, calling on their schools to stop collaborating with Israeli institutions and weapons manufacturers (Sadikovic et al., 2024).

At Konstfack, the group Konstfack For Palestine handed out flyers outside the Spring Exhibition calling for Konstfack to cut it’s ties with the Israeli Bezalel Academy of Art and Design because of its support of Israel’s military and discrimination of Palestinian students. My exhibit became an addition to the group’s work, providing organisers and visitors with materials and space to make signs and mobilise. To further support Konstfack For Palestine and the encampments at SU and KTH, i was part of a group of students that gathered in the main exhibition space during the vernissage to design and print mobilisation material. Despite the urgency and severity of the situation, Konstfack’s response was slow and avoidant as it once again scared away from taking a stance, or acting on student criticisms.

CONCLUSION

My building plans had worked out well and my exhibit took up a lot of space, as i had hoped; people stopped to look and sometimes even talk to me and quite a few of them painted signs. But the general reception left me quite disappointed with the way that challenges to Konstfack’s status quo are handled. At best, i got recommendations for further reading or the recognition that the work was current and important, but none of it ever seemed to translate into a remote interest in acting on—or even just reacting to—my criticism. Look-

ing at the need for immediate and radical responses to the crises and atrocities that this work is trying to fight, i am left with a feeling of anxious desperation.



As a fitting end to the project, it rained on the morning of the last day the exhibition had open. It felt right to finally give in to the weather, which i had been in a constant dance with, pushing back against the wind and moving around to stay in the shade; finally letting my structures wilt and bend, signalling their impermanence and mirroring my own mental and physical exhaustion.

Going forward, my hope is for my work and the struggles it highlights to actually be taken seriously, lead to active discussions and real change.

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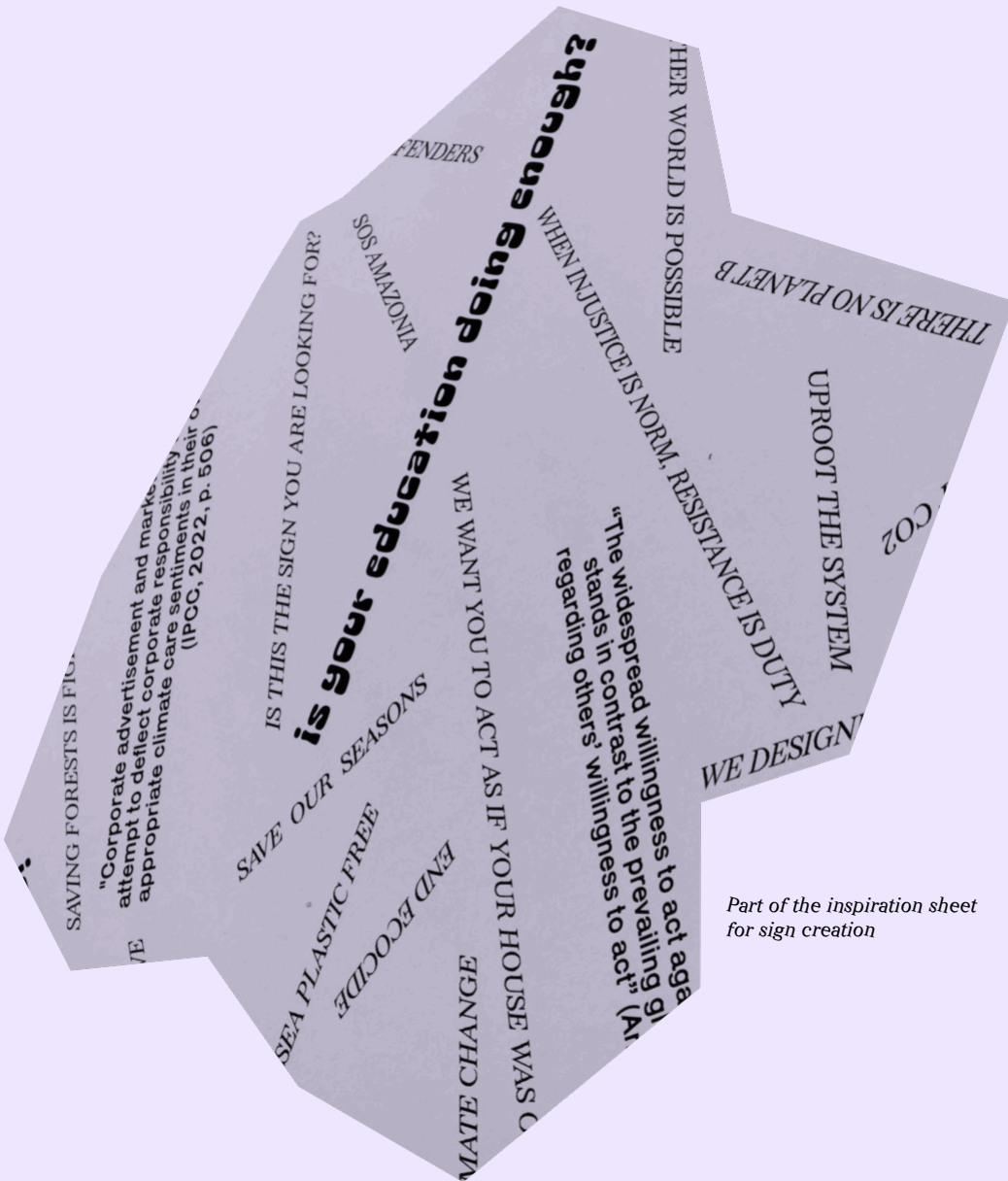
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Hand-painted QR-code with artist for scale.



Part of the inspiration sheet
for sign creation

typefaces used:

struggle

by falk

wremena

by roman gornitsky

isenheim

by benoit ferran

authentic sans

by christina janus and
desmond wong

karrik

by jean-baptiste morizot and
lucas le bihan

instrument serif

by rodrigo fuenzalida

calibri

by luc de groot

toren

by eli heuer

barlow

by jeremy tribby

latin modern

by GUST

league spartan

by caroline hadilaksono,
micah rich and tyler finck

sligoil

by ariel martin pérez

compagnon

by juliette duhé, léa pradine,
valentin papon, chloé lozano
and sébastien riollier

director

by ange degheest, justine
herbel and may jolivet

adelphe

by eugénie bidaut