The bearable absurdity of being
Being raised by a wonderful, free-spirited hippie, who dedicated her life to charity, living in Pipi Longstockings house in a highly conservative wealthy little town was unique but absurd.

My philanthropic mother gave her all to make me become a thoughtful, sensitive and polite human being, whilst my environment gave its best to teach me about first world problems, superficiality and social competition. This resulted in me becoming sarcastic, analytical and straight forward but on the contrary an emotional dreamer.

Never could I withhold my love for fashion, from early age onwards there was something highly fascinating about it. However, every now and then my view of the glorious fashion industry tumbled, especially when learning about its cruel sides: how damaging the industry is, not only when it comes to environmental pollution, but especially regarding working conditions and the abuse of people.

“Not everyone has to help solving the problems of our world, there have to be people who make sure the beauty stays in it as well!” - my mother tried comforting me 4 years ago, though little did she know about beauty not being a crucial element of the fashion industry anymore and neither did I!

The decision to become part of fashion has been a very egoistic one, but only those who actualize themselves, can contribute to the world. Contribution does not always necessarily have to be on the big scale, but to change a system one initially has to be part of it.

To illustrate my vision on fashion and why I felt the urge to be involved I will elucidate my personal background and beliefs of how I struggled between making a statement and merely light-footedly creating, which will organically lead to my sensitive, but conceptual design approach. What follows will be an attempt to position myself as a future fashion professional in the industry, and illuminating my decision to follow a rather commercial path. Thereafter I will explain my humoristic graduation project ‘the bearable absurdity of being’, inspired by the artist Hannah Höch and how our current slightly disturbing news headlines simply make fools out of us and our realities, and ending by elaborating on its relevance for our current fashion industry and society.
My approach to design has always been on a very wearable though sensitive level. I experimented a lot, which shows in me having engaged in menswear, womenswear and even kidswear. One thing all of my try-outs had in common: The focus was always delicate with a lot of dedication to the detail and an appreciation of the body and working with it rather than working against it or deconstructing its silhouettes.
Obviously studying together with many other talented individuals, one does compare oneself and seeing other students daring to work big, voluminous or completely against the body has been intimidating every now and then and it clearly took me some time to strengthen my confidence about my design approach and dare to stick to my rather classic aesthetics.

Certainly a study is there to experiment and even make mistakes, this I did: I tried to work on a bigger scale, to think out of the conventional rules, during my specialization iNDiViDUALS I worked in a team with other designers where we had to adapt to one another, but this only emphasized my style and though I experimented and got out of my comfort zone most of my designs had one thing in common, they had delicate and elegant features and I got told by people that these made them recognizable as my designs. Eventually the experimentation led me back to myself being an improved version of where I came from, still believing in the more classic and body conscious aesthetics, but being more playful in the execution of my designs.
The ready-to-wear section is where I see myself in the future. While designing people are on my mind and it is my desire to have them wear my work. As becoming a designer is a big part of self realization, creating actually wearable designs will bring me satisfaction.

The path taken at AMFI (denim minor, internship in Paris at a ready-to-wear designer, iNDiViDUALS) is clearly leading me in a more commercial direction, which is a decision consciously made. Team spirit, communication and multi-tasking were desired qualities of mine, hence a bigger fashion company (e.g. Calvin Klein) would be a suitable working environment for me and after finishing my studies my plan is to apply for the post-graduate design program of the PVH group and hopefully get the chance to pursue my ambitions and develop as a fashion professional in the industry.

The power of details is something I strongly believe in, outspoken and interesting is not necessarily the biggest and boldest, but it can also come along in a subtle and smart way.

Purist fashion house Jil Sander for example the master of “luxurious simplicity and sophisticated function” (Angelo Flaccavento, BoF 2017) have for years convinced with their signature of a refined rigour when it comes to tailoring. Jil Sander didn’t invent tailoring nor a new silhouette, but the way the body is approached by tailoring is always elegant and intelligent. Might it be simply the unusual but still efficient shift of a dart, the elongation of a simple cotton shirt and its collar or creating the illusion of a cotton corset on a modest shirt, Jil Sander manages to give power to the details.

Design does not always have to be pure innovation, it’s also important to appreciate what is already given, play with it, combine it differently and simply create a new vision of it, this is the freedom fashion offers.
The graduation project is the chance to make a statement about oneself as a fashion professional and my main objective was to remain true to myself, express who I am as a designer and find a subject matter that is contemporary, stirring and personal at the same time.

The overall goal for the graduation project and the completion of the studies was to liberate myself in my creative and personal process. The last years made me realize, that I am more suitable for the ready-to-wear section rather than haute couture, because of the approach to design. With great dedication for the detail and as mentioned above I prefer to work with the human body rather than working against it.

Nevertheless for the very last project there was a decision to be made. Shall the graduation collection be taken as an opportunity to go back to my very early trigger of studying fashion design, i.e. for the sake of pure beauty or will the collection bring across a message and if so, what do I have to tell to the world? The decision was taken naturally as I started brainstorming about me as a designer and my creativity. How could I liberate myself? A question posed many times. The search of a tool for the creative liberation led me to the Dadaist movement and one of their female leaders, the artist Hannah Höch, who functioned as main source of inspiration. She was part of the Dadaist movement, an artistic movement, which arose as a reaction to World War I. It was highly conceptual and aiming to challenge artistic norms, questioning the purpose or non-purpose of everything and the role of the artist itself (Hermann Korte 2007). Höch is known for being a pioneer in photomontage and collaging, she rearranged and appropriated images given by the mass media being the newspaper at that time, which resulted in socially-critical and back then contemporary works (Ina Boesch 2015). At first her work might appear humoristic, sometimes even childish but once the content is surfaced the appalling reality of these times emanate.
Höch’s approach to creation triggered me. How could her work be implemented nowadays? Obviously mass media today exceed newspapers, thus I started reading the news online on a daily basis. Soon I was to notice the absurdity of our headlines. Absurdity on the one hand in the way headlines are put together, on the other hand even more of what is perceived as relevant or of equal relevance.

One can find existential claims put next to petty gossip, world-shattering political announcements placed next to everyday life advices or Hollywood broadcast. According to a recent article of Forbes magazine it is very alarming that 59% of news articles shared online weren’t read at all. The news clearly come off as just another industry which is, as every other profit based and obviously can’t survive without anything groundbreaking to present to its audience.

Still hoping for a better source of news, I decided to try out Hannah Höchs original tools: Newspaper in form of real paper, scissors and glue.

An inconvenient fact opened up before me: real newspapers aren’t any more convincing than their online equivalents. Not only are their sensational headlines disturbingly put together, rather, many headlines don’t even give away any content.

“Peanutbutter on their chins”, “Why are so many more women still sucking their thumbs?”, “Inside a kosher pizza war” and “Is the pope the anti-Trump?” are only a few of the absurd ludicrous headlines passing my way.
Week-long reading concluded: the bigger the headline the less of relevance the content, the smaller it is the more serious it becomes. Eager to communicate the observations of absurdity to the outside world and to share my inner turmoil the graduation project transformed into a statement collection.

How political can fashion be? Living in a time where it is all about designers who send out political messages or make big statements with their collections. For instance in 2014, when Karl Lagerfeld created a feminist protest on the Chanel runway that even actively supported actress Emma Watson’s campaign ‘he for she’ fighting for gender equality (Jess Cartner Morley 2014, the Guardian).

Just recently Maria Grazia Chiuri made her statement debut as first female designer at Dior by clashing the well-known Dior femininity of romantic and delicate dresses with a simple white T-shirt claiming ‘we should all be feminists’ (Steff Yotka 2016, Vogue).
Feminism is not the only topic triggering a statement of designers. British Designer Daniel W. Fletcher for instance created a sit-in against Brexit in previous June and dressed his models as protesters wearing hoodies and T-shirts saying ‘stay’.

As fashion has become a platform that offers the freedom to express statements in a light and even humorous way, this is exactly what I want to do.

‘I look at the world and I see absurdity all around me. People do strange things constantly, to the point that for most part, we manage not to see it.’ - David Lynch.

Absurdity is around us, even in ourselves. The contrast between our easy western lifestyle once put in relation to global events, the absurdity of first world problems, carefreeness and individual realization presents itself. This is what has to be embraced. Creating an optical fallacy, a collection, which leads people through different stages - at least those who are willing to go with it. They will see something known at first, commercial outlines, silhouettes they are familiar with, then they will recognize a certain oddity about it not obviously knowing what exactly it is. The collection should trigger the observer to question its meaning. The intention is not to teach people better. There is no moral high ground involved; rather, I just want to reveal the absurdity of our Zeitgeist, which we mostly do not recognize anymore.

To make this statement the collection needs to act by itself, this is easier specifically through the amount and time of the presentation. Thus the number of garments is binary, as people need the time to record and process the message. Moreover the message has a higher priority than the design. The garments function like a plain canvas or the blank pages of a newspaper, therefore the base is white.

To emphasize the coherence the only colours added are different shades of blue as blue is a colour of contradiction: representing trust, authority, peace and intelligence, is the most popular colour world wide, but in contradiction is also defined as the colour of depression and naivety.

The design of the dresses are in its basis quite simple shirt-dresses, having my own designer hand-writing on them by the design of a very small collar, an extra slim button placket, a longer vent and opening at the sleeves, big but slim cuffs and a nicely fitted shoulder line.

Those dresses vary in lengths, slightly in shape or rather flow and their finishings work according to the content which is put on them.
The collection emphasizes my skills for conceptual thinking and concept-building on the one hand, my feeling for the Zeitgeist and contemporary issues, and my technical skills, with the personal design signature, refined craftsmanship and commercial aesthetics on the other hand.

Consisting of 20 dresses, 19 different headlines were chosen to bring the message across, dress number 20 is printed with an all-over silkscreen print implicating all headlines.

Over weeks of research many headlines were collected, mostly picked from the New York Times, The Guardian, the Times, the Daily Telegraph, but also Daily Mail.

The headlines, which made it on the dresses are a wild combination, of absurd political headlines (“Trump vs Trump again and again”), over lifestyle advice (“working longer might be good for you”), peculiar facts (“short men are more likely to lose their hair”) to absolute nonsensical sentences (“peanut-butter on their chins”).

The design process of a dress starts with the headline and each headline influences the design of the garment, a more aggressive headline for example has rather roughly finished elements, furthermore the headlines are applied in many different typographies according to the messages.

For the application of the headlines different techniques were used, but can be grouped into laser cutting, printing, spray painting and embroidery.

The designs are sometimes obvious, but sometimes also contrary and humorous. For example the headline “short men are more likely to lose their hair” is embroidered in cursive handwriting fist sized on the right shoulder of the back of the longest maxi dress of the collection.
As absurd as some of the headlines are, is the way they are applied, sometimes very purposeful, but sometimes without any purpose or meaning behind it. “Peanutbutter on their chins” for instance is simply lasercut in different sizes and applied as a second layer of the same white fabric on a basic mid-length dress. On the one side of the dress it repeatedly says “peanutbutter”, while on the other side it repeats “chin” in all sizes, while the back spells out the complete sentence.

Some headlines aren’t even used as a whole, such as “Shall we banish the word ‘breast’ and call it ‘chest-cancer’ instead?”, of this headline I only made use of the words “breast” and “chest” and embroidered them simply on the right and left bust-points of the dress.
To emphasize the fragile content of the headline “Pollution is killing our wild flowers” the whole sentence is repeatedly laser-cut in very small letters in the whole fabric, so the sentence creates a new fragile structure in the fabric.

On the one hand the concept of the collection is very contemporary and corresponds to the Zeitgeist and the absurdity that lies in our current western lifestyle and society, but on the other hand the concept is also personal and closely connected to the absurdity of my personal life, which has been befalling me while growing up, as I tried to illustrate earlier. What is more, this concept and collection triggered me throughout the whole process and sustained to keep me enthusiastic, aground of it’s relevance, the possibilities of execution, but also mostly because of the humorous aspect that lies within it.

The concept further forms a bridge to my objective to work in the commercial sector in the way that it was executed in the designs: by creating a basic pattern, which is shifted, adjusted and manipulated in various ways, but still keeps the chosen carry-over elements of the collar, shoulder-line and button-placket which make all designs clearly recognizable as one collection. Apparently the collection is very wearable in its popular style of a shirtdress a classic item that should be found in every woman’s wardrobe according to fashion consultant Tim Gunn, who listed the most essential items of a woman’s wardrobe.

Surely the content of the dresses sifts the chaff from the wheat as only the brave and humorous ones will find their pleasure and hereby I might find myself reconciled by showing that not everything that is bold is necessarily big and obvious, but as in this case can also be simply humorous and might demand taking a second look, or thought.
Further examples

“Inside a kosher pizza war”

“China labels reports of torture as ‘fake news’”

“The offender of the free world”
The inner turmoil of making a statement or not, melted into thin air once the idea of the collection soaked in and the collection itself naturally became a statement without being forced to be one. Eventually allowing me to stay true to myself and even adding another dimension to my design approach, a characteristic of mine: humour.

Moreover the collection finally forms me as a designer as a whole and embraces my inner feelings, my points of view on the outside world, the commercial industry and the Zeitgeist - just what I had in mind before I even knew what the outcome would be. The search for the creative liberation was fulfilled in an unexpected way and revealed my strength in creative conceptual thinking. Just like it is with boldness, creativity is not always the obvious, but sometimes goes further and beyond the visible. The search for the creative liberation was fulfilled in an unexpected way and revealed my strength in creative conceptual thinking and I truly broke a knot in my head, which allowed me to improve myself as a creative, I dared to combine fashion with an observation of the world beside fashion and did embrace the absurd span between the once in awhile illusory industry and everyday reality by stating that the absurdity is not only to be found where we expect differences anyways, but simply in our mundane world confronting us constantly.
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