

the kind of designer
I don't want to be

a self-experiment

by Ruben Borer

«There are professions more harmful than industrial design, but only a very few of them» (Victor Papanek)¹

I want to do good, as the person I am as well as a designer. But what is the right thing to do? What is desirable – does benefit, without doing harm?

Not so long ago, I strongly believed in there being a right thing to do. But I grew to understand that it's not that simple: The things I thought to be beneficial were merely based on my subjective understanding of things. These studies and the months I invested in looking into the question of a sustainable future as a product designer taught me a lot about what I did not yet understand – and will most probably never be able to fully grasp: The relativity of things!

There is not the one truth out there, so I suppose there can't really be the right thing to do either. Good is in the eye of the observer and depending on whose stand you take the verdict changes. I often can't even tell what's good for myself – or so I learned from experience. How am I to say what benefits others (of the same species) or the nature (of all things) around us as a whole?

In this project, I set out to find answers to these questions – not universal but personal ones. Because these questions matter to me and I need answers that I can make sense of, that I understand, that are in line with my experiences and my understanding (my version) of the truth.

¹ See preface of Victor Papanek's *design for the real world*, London 2019.

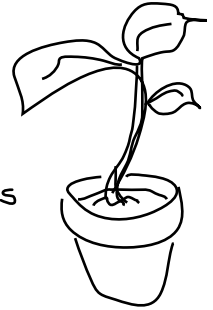
I want to do nice, aesthetic products

I started these studies with the idea to become a textbook designer, coming up with cleverer and aesthetically more pleasing solutions for existing or new products to enrich people's lives. I thought I could make improvements on everything already existing – and maybe one can but at what cost?



Learning more about material supply chains, global scale of production and waste thereof during the studies had me reconsider my aspirations: I found not to want to create new products at the cost of the environment. So, I started thinking of alternatives that are more eco-friendly to lessen the harm done to the environment. Because this planet is the only eco-sphere we have, and can sustain us, as long as we don't damage it irreversibly.

I need to come up with eco-friendlier, alternative products

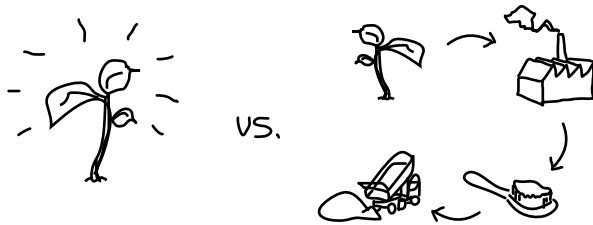


Sometime later I came across a video by German physicist Harald Lesch, where he answers a question about sustainable energy sources. Concluding the topic, he claims using less energy will be our most sustainable source of energy in the future. This – for the first time outside hearing about monasteries and other forms of reduced lifestyles – put me in touch with the idea of sufficiency.²

using less ... will be the most sustainable alternative

² See minute 02:59, Harald Lesch (Terra X Lesch & Co), *Harald kommentiert Kommentare #8: Wie klingt Musik auf anderen Planeten?* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cNMfjQcAcq0&t=188s>, (accessed 16 May 2024).

Not really seeing how this would affect my work as a product designer yet, I could relate to this statement: Not needing something in the first place eradicates the whole question of how to source and after using sustainably dispose of it: This results in the tree, water, heat or CO² just following its own natural cycle instead of a man made product cycle.

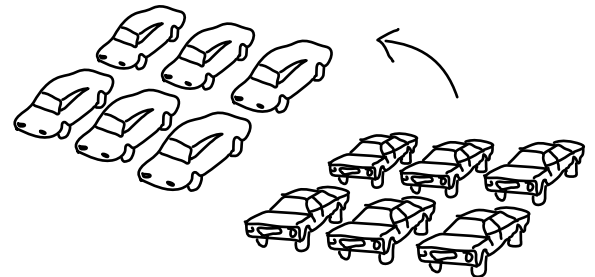


When I was talking to a fellow student in the train a year ago, she helped me come to the realisation, that in product design this means:

no new products are
the most sustainable products

She made the very valid point, that eco-friendly alternatives for products are just a fix to continue the same behaviour of consumption. This means that improving, reusing and repairing are still less effective than just reducing.

Thinking about what this looks like I always come to the example of the electric car – one of the big technological advances of the last years, although electric cars have been around forever, they just haven't been as attractive as the cheaper fuel engines: Wouldn't exchanging every fuel engine with an electric one result in double the resource consumption and create a huge environmental deficit? How many years would these cars need to run (without repairs) in order to overcome this deficit and turn «green»? And do we substitute these cars again once the hydrogen technology comes around?



There are plenty more of these, contradictory seeming technological advances. *Degrowth*, a movement that dates to the 1970's, makes the argument that technology was primarily advanced to more efficiently grow capital: Only with wide adaptation and therefore decreasing cost innovations like cars, air travel and computers got affordable to the common people.

degrowth

As the name already hints, *degrowth* is all about getting away from our growth oriented economic system, which is seen as the root of many undesirable events today. Put shortly: By following the recipe of taking more than I return, I can accumulate excess. This profit can then be reinvested and put to the same task again, repeating it infinitely – or at least that is the opinion of some economists. This excess accumulation of capital leaves deficits elsewhere which tips systems out of balance, seen with the climate crisis.

Our system's need for growth will absorb all the efforts to become more sustainable. This is called the Jevons paradox³. It describes the phenomenon within growth-oriented systems, where innovation is never put to the effect of doing the same in less time but more in the same time. Freed up resources get reinvested right away, ever-increasing our demands.

Ever since learning about degrowth I came to understand a lot of their arguments. It's a thorough self-reflection about our ways today and how we got here starting from the 13th century. I would love to go on about it in detail, but then again, there are well founded books that will find better words to repaint history.

Even before learning about us (the global north consisting of the USA, Canada, EU, Russia, Japan and Australia) being responsible for 92% of the overshoot emissions and therefore nearly all the damage of climate breakdown⁴, I knew that, if something is to change – and I'm pretty positive that sufficiency plays a lead role in that – it's got to start here, with me: I can't expect anyone else to do, what I won't do myself.

³ See p. 152 in Jason Hickel, *less is more: how degrowth will save the world*, London 2020.

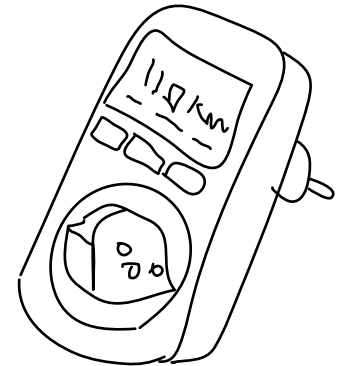
⁴ Ibid. p. 111-116.

Ever since starting these studies and learning more about the real cost and labour tied up in products, I started to reduce in many ways. But I could tell from comparison with my surrounding that there was a lot of potential still – potential to live even more sufficiently and lessen the harm done.

what does sustainable product
design look like today?

When I set off to answer this question, I quickly understood, that I can't separate the work from my personal lifestyle and vice versa. I believe that sustainability starts in the very depth of oneself. The way I look after myself reflects in my relationships with other beings and matter, and the sum of these relationships are the work I leave behind in this planet. This was the moment when I decided on improving my life in order to improve the relations with my surrounding and therefore my work. And improving in my opinion starts with being more sufficient, ridding myself of unnecessary.

the self-experiment



The self-experiment started out with me wanting to see how sufficiently I can live without changing my life circumstances from scratch. With how little resources and goods would I still feel somewhat comfortable and what would it do to my mind?

the rules

- *I must do maintenance*

I have to take care of the infrastructure put in my care, repairing defects and damages as well as keeping the garden in good health and shape.

- *I have to keep up my studies*

Working on my thesis and travelling between Dübendorf and Emmenbrücke for appointment or physical work is required.

- *I have to keep up social obligations*

This means go to see friends and family, let friends and family visit, look after my grandparent's pets (for the total duration of a month).

- *I can use my mobile phone*

I can use my mobile phone for calls, texting, accessing e-banking, renting PubliBikes, writing notes and looking up train connections.

- *I have a single charge of the 2015 MacBook a day*

This specific MacBook has 1100+ charge cycles and a left over battery charge of 4120 mAh. Charging it consumes 0.070 kWh and lasts anywhere from a hour to a day depending on usage.

- *I get a power-consumption meter and a camera to document*

I got to borrow my grandfather's power-consumption meter to monitor single appliances and a friend's camera to document my experiment for the practical BA-project. One battery charge for the camera is 0.010 kWh.

the product

The product I want to exhibit in the end of this project is a cinematic documentation of my self-experiment. I know, I can't give a universal answer to the question I raised: This is a very personal topic and so will be the findings. But I can take people along the journey and let them experience moments and bits I lived through myself.

A film is the best medium therefore, combining images, sound and time, which tells a story way better, that I ever could with words.

Formally, I want my film to be in line with my attempt to live more sufficiently. So, I will not use excessive gear and post-production to enhance the result. I allow it to be, whatever it turns out to be after taking the shots.

the empiric method

I started off the experiment with a week of meticulously collecting data on goods I consumed. This was quite challenging because I've had a guest over for most of the time, but then again it created a more realistic setting:

Water (litres)

mon	tue	wed	thu	fri	sat	SUN
2 drink	5 WC	8 WC	1 wash	1 drink	12 WC	5 WC
2 WC	4 rinsing	4 WC	10 WC	26 WC	5 clean	2 drink
8 WC	13 shower	2 WC	5 WC	88 clothes	5 clean	4 WC
1 wash	1 drink	9 WC	3 drink	18 shower	1 drink	
1 drink	8 cooking	1 drink		1 drink		
9 WC	4 rinsing	17 dishwash.		5 cooking		
1 cooking		3 WC		1 rinsing		
1 rinsing				5 WC		
25 l	35 l	44 l	19 l	133 l	35 l	11 l

That's 302 litres of drink water in total consumed by me. In the same period my guests consumed 263 litres.

Electricity (actions)

mon	tue	wed	thu	fri	sat	SUN
2 teas	1 tea	1 macbook	1 macbook	1 iPad	1 tea	1 macbook
1 macbook	1 macbook	1 iPad	1 iPhone		(12 min)	1 dehumid
1 dehumid	1 iPhone	1 tea			hoovering	
6.07 kWh	6.9 kWh	8.19 kWh	8.7 kWh	8.88 kWh	7.86 kWh	7.4 kWh

That's 54 kWh of electricity in total consumed. Unfortunately, I don't know the percentage my guests consumed during that period.

gas (actions)

mon	tue	wed	thu	fri	sat	SUN
heating	*heating*	*heating*	*heating*	*heating*	*heating*	*heating*
1 meal	1 meal	1 meal			1 meal	1 meal
shower	1 meal	*shower*				*shower*
6.07 m³	6.4 m³	6.9 m³	5.7 m³	1 m³	3.9 m³	10.2 m³

That is 40.17 m3 of gas in total consumed. Unfortunately, I can't tell the percentage for warm water and heating exactly but gas consumption for heating is rather stable, so the peak readings must be the hot showers the guests took.

My collected numerical data compares as followed to existing one (weekly consumption):

2 ppl/week	Water	electricity	gas	Waste
me	565ℓ	54 kWh	40 m ³	4.9 kg
my family	4960ℓ	138 kWh	48 m ³	—
average	4046ℓ	54 kWh	44 m ³	27 kg

But this comparison is not saying much. All these numbers are averages won through statistics and equations that cannot capture the complexity of reality. Just to give some examples of what I mean:

My 302 l of water look bad compared to my guest's. But consider that 88 l of that is for the washing machine that I don't run weekly. During the two initial weeks I was also using way too much water to flush and shower: Since then, I have been able to lessen it to 6 litres a shower and 5–10 l a flushing.

54 kWh of electricity a week looks average. But if you factor in, that my guests did not try to cut down their consumption and I've got a dehumidifier in the basement that itself consumes 3-4 kWh a day, this will reduce my own consumption to probably 3-4 kWh, essentially being a 40-Watt-society. And yet again, this is probably way too much and not factoring in the industrial needs or hidden energies.

I think gas consumption looks bad from all angles and is too complex to compare. My number is an estimate so is the average. My family's number is the real consumption over a year but if you factor in the probably bad insulation standard of the house, the 10-year-old technology and the additional cooking with gas, the result would be different. But most importantly: I personally live without heating and warm water for about 10 years now, so I would only need about 0.3 m³ per warm meal.

from experience

Having continued my initial experiment for months now, this is what I have learn in regard to what goods are essential to me and where I found potentials to save resources.



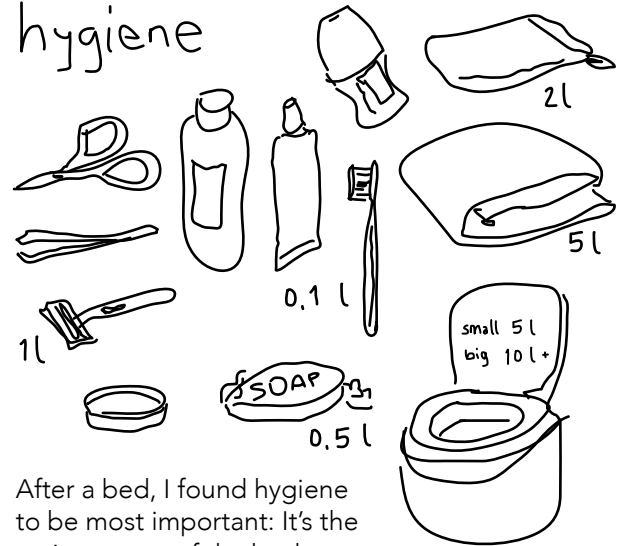
furniture

Setting of this project, I changed my dorm to the smallest room in the house, the one under the rooftop. After selling the existing bed, I now have a mattress on the floor that I picked off the streets last summer, my mother's former blanket and two pillows. Then there is just a small metal sideboard to store my few belongings inside the house and lamp. In the beginning I was still using the lamp in the evening out of old habits, but eventually I started getting up with the sun, and going to bed when it got dark.

The bed became my living room too, working, reading and eating there too. Partly because of the 14-15°C room temperature in the house due to the heating being turned off but mainly to reduce the living area to a minimum. I still have the kitchen to prepare my meals and the garden to go enjoy or do physical work.

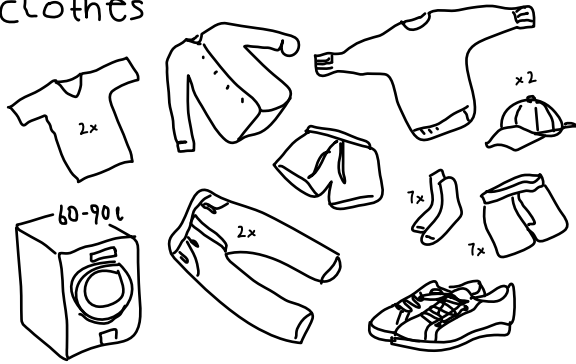
I always shake and remove the sheets during the day (unless it's super cold) in order to keep everything clean any tidy for as long as possible. This allows me to wash the sheets alongside the clothing once per month.

hygiene



After a bed, I found hygiene to be most important: It's the maintenance of the body and I enjoy it every time, unless it's time to shave with my razor that I refuse to change the blades on. Flushing the toilet is very water-intensive, especially if you go with the bigger flush. I can take 2 cold showers for the same amount of water or almost run the dishwasher. Peeing in the shower in the morning sound controversial but will easily save 6 litres of water. I can even clean the whole bathroom after and still save 3 litres this way. With flushing and opening the tab to wash the hands, less is the key – no need to go full load.

clothes



I chose a white and black outfit, consisting of a shirt, pants, a pullover or dress shirt. White because it's undyed or the natural colours of cotton. Black because it's very uncomplicated in terms of filth. I started with 7 pairs of boxershorts and socks. I found it to be too few, since I will run out of socks and underwear before anything else. At home I try to wear my active shorts and nothing else to save the other clothing. The washing machine is 60-90 litres a cycle, so I try to limit myself to one a month – but I found it to be tricky. Some clothing can be disinfected in the sun to eliminate germs and smell but underwear not really. The pair of sneakers I use are already worn down quite a bit. The soles are open what results in wet feet by rain, but I honestly already got used to it. I like them a lot and plan to restore them in the nearer future.

cooking



Cooking with gas is an easy one: I just don't or save it for special occasions. I try to eat as raw, basic and local as possible, mostly getting by on cucumber, carrots, potatoes, oatmeal, oat milk, old bread, seeds, nuts and fruit. I grow herbs, onions, strawberries, apricots, figs, apples, pears, grapes and lemons in my garden. Feeling lucky, I do pasta or something like a homemade mayonnaise if I can source ethically sourced eggs. I normally take the pasta water after boiling and mix it with the mineral-poor water from the dehumidifier to water the plants – seems to work for now. In terms of tools, the kitchen knife is my workhorse. I use this one big one to prepare everything to the point of be-

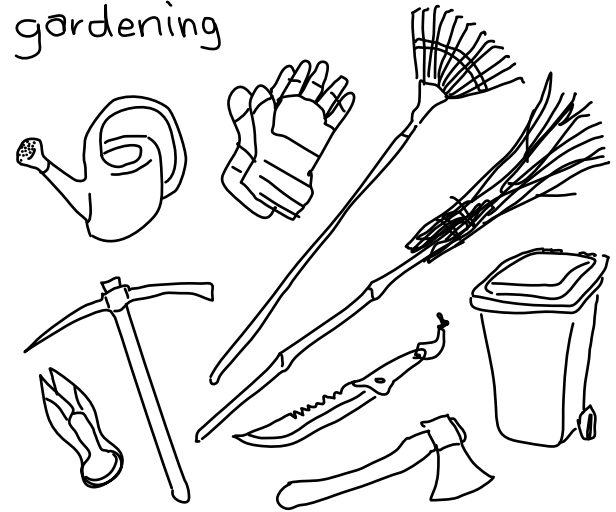
ing able to eat it by fork, spoon or hand only. The grater is mainly used to grate garlic into uncooked dishes to spread it evenly.

appliances



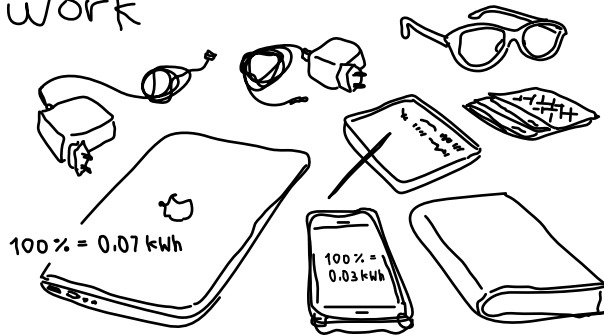
Although this house produces way more solar energy that I use myself, the goal is to reduce and not only optimize. The dehumidifier runs non-stop to control the climate in the cellar, consuming 3 kWh a day. But in return the good store in the cellar don't decay and I get 3 litres of water a day which is enough to water all plants. I use no hot water at all unless I allow myself a cup of tea. But this only in very rare occasions, which makes it that more special. A pot of tea comes nearly at the same cost as a 100% charge of my MacBook. The same with toasting: It is just a last resort if the old bread I buy regularly is just not soft or hard enough to enjoy.

gardening



While gardening I realised the most how much more time and energy consuming it becomes if I fall back on old manual labour instead of using power tools and electric appliances. Simple multipurpose tools like the pickaxe, the machete and the hatchet are also way unwieldier that the small, specialized tools I used to work with. But the machete I once bought for hiking, now became substitute for secateurs and saw – although I must admit it has trouble with the really thick branches. I had to straighten the blade several times already.

work



Working fully offline was not an option due to the whole school data system and communication being online. I limited myself to a single MacBook charge a day which was plenty enough to go around. The same with my Phone's battery, lasting for weeks sometimes. Turning off all unneeded services like WIFI, Bluetooth and software running in the back as well as setting screen brightness to a minimum and having black wallpapers goes a long way. I even started putting my phone into airplane mode to save battery: If I don't have it on me, I would have missed the calls and messages anyway. I also stopped using cloud and server-side applications like Google Docs, AI tools and many more thereof. Notes I take on my notebook, phone or physically on my bee wax notebook (counting).

Besides the MacBook, it's just books basically.

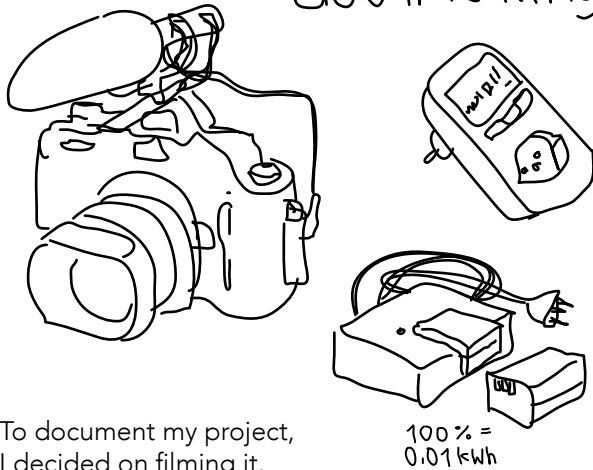
maintenance



Maintenance is a big thing when wanting to live sustainable. It makes sure the products I use stay in good shape and last longer. This includes keeping the house clean for example.

Here I too tried to fall back on simple, sometimes very labour-intensive solutions like for example the broom and scoop or the feather duster. Dusting off surfaces with a wet cloth is also very efficient. The floors I wipe with the mop. Sometimes a fall back on using the Dyson, preparing everything neatly beforehand so it only takes me 10 minutes and 0.143 kWh to Hoover the whole 3 floors and cellar of the house.

documenting



To document my project, I decided on filming it.

This, doing little takes of the things I do throughout the day and adding them up to a cinematic documentary. It's always stills without commentary, just showing the objects and my interaction with them. The talking I plan on doing through subtitles. This is less data-intensive and reduces the equipment and post-work by a lot.

Except for the Fujifilm camera lent to me by Raphael and a Rode Microphone to capture the sound more accurately I used no additional equipment to roll the shots. If I need a stand to elevate

or modify the angle, I just build it from whatever is at hand, be it boxes, my clothing or the cooking pot.

Besides the MacBook I got lend by my dear friend, I got an own one I only take out for rendering or cutting. It's a second-hand 2019 MacBook Pro with hardware power I don't daily need and therefore safe up. It's also way to power hungry, using 0.1 kWh (equivalent of a whole battery of the 2015 model) per hour run time.

To document the individual power consumes by devices, I borrowed my grandfather's power-consumption meter. Because without this, I only have a general figure of the solar system software.

findings

When I set off to start reducing my resource consumption, I had a different idea of how this would turn out in some areas. I never imagined flushing the toilet to be such a waste of drinking water for example. On the other hand, using my MacBook offline does not seem such a big deal looking at its power consumption – having to build a MacBook compared to printing a book in the first instance being a whole different story.

I found the key to be looking more closely at the things I do. A lot of wasteful and just unwise actions were merely based on habits I never questioned before. But becoming aware of what I do in every single situation helped greatly to rethink and redesign my everyday life, now using even less resources than before – when I thought I already had a simple life.

Not everyone is comfortable or able, depending on his circumstances, to take the same actions in order to honour his wish to live more sufficiently. Starting with ones expectations towards oneself and life around one, there are countless factors that determine how and what actions and changes can be implemented. Furthermore, it will always

be a journey: When I look at where I personally started off 3 years ago in terms of knowledge about sustainability in all its facets as well a real-life implementation thereof, I deeply wonder where this path will take me in the future. I have a hard time identifying with myself from 3 years ago, even one. The clothes I now have to get by on are a relic from that time and funny enough, it's always the first thing people point out when I talk about my project and now-life to them. This shows how far apart these worlds have drifted in terms of my mental and intellectual development on this topic.

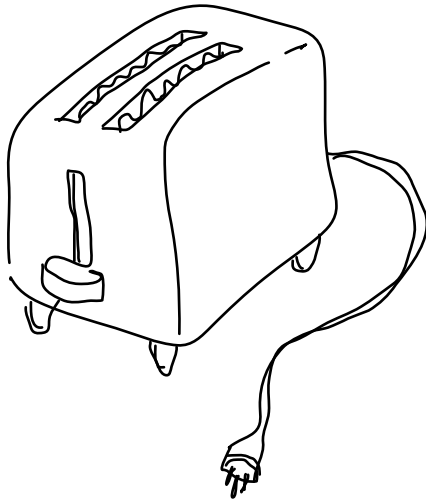
I don't think there is the one way how I can live sufficiently. Knowing that there is still unlimited things to learn, it's important to set sail and travel the seas that lie before us. Only by trying out – and sometimes even radically – I will find out what works for me and what does not, getting to understand myself and my surrounding better with every second. And that understanding will help one to identify the actions that are sustainable for oneself and do good without doing harm elsewhere hopefully. This is what I consider to be true sustainability!

Further reasoning and more data based insights about my conclusions can be taken from my written work alongside this project by the same name.

the philosophic method

I found that it's very hard to go by sustainability standards to ensure sustainable behaviour in my personal life. A lot of them try to find the balance between continuing economic growth while harming the environment less, which from my understanding really does not work out.

So, I took a lesson from Thomas Thwaites' *toaster project*⁴ and came up with three simple questions to ask myself to make sure I understand what I am building or consuming:



1. *Do I really need it?*

Before I carry a (physical) desire into the external world, I try to ask myself, whether I can't satisfy it within myself and how it is going to benefit me or my surrounding.

2. *Do I know how it is made?*

Do I understand what a product or a service is made from? Do I understand where the resources and labour come from? Do I know what the good needs to do and whether it does it well? If I do so

3. *What would it cost me – in time and effort – to build it from scratch?*

Where would you start with building the desired good starting off naked in a rainforest with only your knowl edge?

⁴ Thomas Thwaites, *the toaster project, or a heroic attempt to build a simple electric appliance from scratch*, New York 2011.

the mental effect

I had a lot of doubts in my mind before starting into my self-experiment. Having less just immediately sounds like losing something – and I wasn't keen on that.

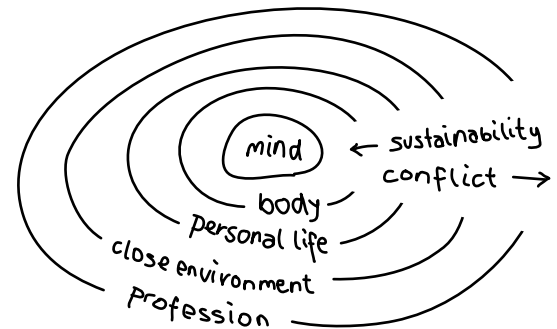
It's one of these situations where you know your side of the coin, but not the other. For me it takes tremendous courage to go investigate the other side of the coin, because somehow, I feel by doing that, I lose my current ways. But is that so? Isn't there always the possibility to go back to the old?

In my case there wasn't. Some things can't be unlearned and in order to keep my inner peace I was left with but one choice: Fully committing and seeing where it leads me. I always knew that I am very adaptable and creative when it comes to find solutions. I could also always count on the power of changing my attitude towards whatever this new situation throws at my head and that is what I did: Change must inevitably come with the feeling of not understanding, not knowing and feeling discomfort, that is how I know I left my side of the coin.

Do as you want to see done.

I cannot want change without being willing to change myself.

Agreeing on the above, I was in for a lot of re-programming. Getting rid of old habits and ways of thinking. I found that the deeper I manifest the idea of sufficiency, the easier it is lived. Starting with my attitude towards this new life in my mind, followed by committing the body to it, then changing my personal life, over my close environment and friends to changing my professional work, the level of sustainability lessens while the inner conflict grows.



For example, mentally questioning the wish to buy something before it physically manifests in the real world as a purchase will stop a lot of potential harm at its roots.

To sustain a sufficient life, I need to have deep intrinsic reasoning why I do it. Only then am I able to overcome the reoccurring challenges. Past the initial discomfort of the new situation, it shouldn't feel like a punishment: If it does, maybe it's not yet the right time or thing to do. Sustainability begins with the personal health – mentally as well as physically. By being well, this resonates accordingly with my surroundings.

the good thing about change

Change for me means breaking with the known in order to go towards the unknown, not knowing what it will bring. It always bares the possibility of both positively and negatively precepted traits.

In the case of my self-experiment, there was a lot of unexpected, good coming from the change. So much so, that despite the sacrifices wish to continue on this path for now.

Living more sufficiently primarily means having less. But as it turned out in my case, it was only less of the things that I thought would bring me joy – mostly material goods – but in hindsight really didn't I suppose. The time saved up by not having to care about all these unnecessities or spent consuming them, I was able to now spend on activities that gave me real joy, often free from the physical realm. The minimal distraction allowed for living more in the moment, enjoying everything as it unfolds before me.

Having less means having more attention to put towards it, resulting in the felt value of simple things increasing significantly. I have never been so happy about eating a cucumber or a carrot or

being able to take a quick cold shower. Only having a single battery charge on my MacBook and avoiding consuming online content like Youtube motivated me to spend more time outside what I lost in the past years.

Due to using less effective tools and methods to do my daily tasks, the time spent on them increased immensely too but with that also the intensity and appreciation for the result. Even with all this change in perception and newly won appreciation for life's essentials, I must be honest and say I did not think of everything this way. The air I breathe is a gift from nature too, and a very crucial one: But I did not give it as much thought as for example when the sun was out. Although I am way more grateful now, I suppose my appreciation of a thing is still somewhat connected to the cost of getting it. Translating this to my previous lifestyle, it explains how having a lot of easily and quickly available goods always leaves the desire for more – wanting to fill a void, a lack of meaning.

I came to see practicing sufficiency not as losing something or having less but just changing the focus. It helps me get my priorities straight and find back to the things that truly matter to me and my wellbeing.



but what to do for work ?

In order to be part of the societal system we established, I would either have to engage in work that is going to generate someone a profit or I have to generate financial means myself to then pay for services and goods that generate someone else profit. The fundamental problem I see with profit is: It is based on taking more than you return and when reinvested as capital keeps on feeding this vicious cycle than somewhere down the line will always end with someone's exploitation or harm.

Seeing, that I wouldn't want everyone else around me to change in order to subscribe to my beliefs, I think my most consequent option would be to live somewhere autonomously, fully providing for myself, practicing product design rather as craftsmanship of everyday functional necessities and engagement with autonomous technologies. Maybe a lonely cottage in the mountains, fresh water not too far away, a wood furnace for colder winter days and – as my only worldly vice – this notebook, a photovoltaic panel and a Starlink internet connection to keep in exchange with the outside world.

As under my current circumstances, this consequent version is not very feasible, I'll pursue it long-term. Until then I will stick to repair.

Conventional product design would be limited to building appliances for myself as well as friends and family. This would probably consist of functional furniture, tools and clothing items but only if really needed.

Repair and maintenance of existing products would be at the heart of my practice and hopefully be able to cover at least mandatory expenses. This skill I would also open up to the public to give back and help preserve what is. Wherever possible, I prefer to be paid by trade of goods or services as long as minimal expenses – I currently live on CHF 1500.–, but this could easily be reduced without great effect on life quality – are covered. I also learned how important the simplicity of a repair can be to ensure independency from monopolistic manufacturers and render them democratic .

I aim to source the materials and spare parts to do the maintenance, upgrades, repairs and hopefully only few ground-up builds from second-hand, offcut or waste sources. While this can be more sustainable than buying off the shelf, I want to stay mindful not to minimize damage that roots from false industry practices by absorbing it. This could ultimately lead to negating the incentive to change these wasteful practices in the first place.

the big turnaround

Doing a cinematic documentary as final product is still a huge investment of resources – that I set out to minimize wherever possible – and will never fully be able to tell this story as I lived through it.

I was willing to make that compromise in order to comply with the requirements and make my experience accessible to others but wasn't quite happy with the media I planned on transporting the message with.

But then something happened two weeks before I was to hand in my final product and everything alongside it, that completely changed this project to the better.

During this project I met up with several people I knew had strong opinions and knowledge on the topic of sustainability too in order to challenge and extend my thoughts in dialogue. This time I met up with Thomas Wüthrich in Basel, who I met earlier on in a school coaching on the topic sustainability. I did not bring a schedule on what I wanted to talk about, I just wanted to see what he has to say and see the conversation take shape.

After an hour of talking about my project, various

aspects of sustainability and how to implement it in everyday life, he concluded the following to me:

“You know, looking at your project now, I think the product that you designed is your life – it's you! Why don't you exhibit yourself?”

I was thrown off by this idea immediately, but then within the next minutes of extending on it, I came to appreciate it. Looking back now, this was the most brilliant thing to bring up for Thomas. This elevated my project on another level of consistency.

I briefly thought about something like this early on in my work but dismissed it right away. I am not a fan of provocation – anymore – or most art performance or presentations as such. And apparently it bears the same reasoning as why I now changed my product: A monologue just does not come close to the communicative potential a dialogue carries. The monologue cannot pay enough respect to where your opposite comes from in terms of own beliefs, comprehension and experience. To make something understandable, I found it to be helpful to determine a common ground first and then go from there to make one's worlds understandable to each other.

the ultimate product

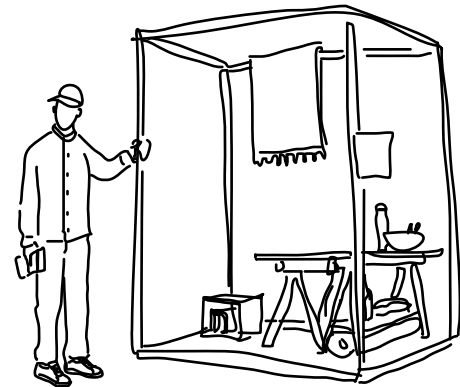
This project's final product is me and the newly found way of life and product design I currently live. To make this accessible to whoever is interested in learning about it, I will put my most precious possession – my time – to the task and be at their full disposal.

To give an accurate insight on how my findings changed my view, my life and my work as a product designer, I will be living at the Werkschau exhibition for the entirety of it, showing everything I can reduce my existence there to and hopefully engage in dialogues with whoever wants to know about living more sufficiently. Since the laws of the school don't allow for me to spend the night there too, I will go and sleep on the floor at my grandparent's place near the school, just the same as I planned to do there. But other than that, I will be there and life off the land and sea (school toilet), eating there, refreshing myself and my clothing in the river close by in the morning, continuing working on my project and maybe talk to you.

This will be regarded to be way less efficient than a film, but in my opinion it's the most sustainable way to tell a story. I don't wish to show my experience to hundreds through the to a monologue

limited media of the cinematic documentary when I can personally talk to a single stranger and show him on the spot. I want to be able to speak on one level, not just take someone's time to tell them a crafted message. I want to hear what concerns and criticism someone has to bring up. I want to understand their world at the same rate I make mine understood.

Therefore, I will exhibit myself and my findings through the sincerest media I know, direct physical human interaction. The changes are good that if you read this, you will be in the very same room I live in currently – so come by, say hi and maybe there is something of interest to you that I am more than happy to talk about.



the end

This project set off to answer the question of a sustainable product design existence for myself. The self-experiment conducted to test the feasibility, my own limits to and the potentials of sufficiency never ended – it changed and enriched my life in a way, that made me want to continue exploring this path. I also did not feel comfortable turning back to my old beliefs, thinking to know better now.

This project and the journey that came with it is far from being over too – it has just yet begun. The final exhibition is just a stop, where I show my findings thus far and will cheerfully look to what the future of this brings to the table.

thank you
for your time
and support

Thai Hua, Dagmar Steffen, Christoph Schindler, Jessica Celis, Raphael Zwygart, Vincent Schmid, Thomas Skelton-Robinson, Thomas Wüthrich, Thomas Kessler and if I missed you, you know, you too!

disclaimer

This work does not try to be extraordinary: It follows the idea of sufficiency and therefore does not see the urge to be more than it needs to be: It's just a documentation of my search for personal answers.

In order to make a difference, this work mainly focuses on having an impact on my life. If I can consequently improve there, this will be inspiration and example enough to whoever is interested.

This work tries to be as minimalistic as possible while still applying to academic and formal requirements. It does not try to unfold it's potential in the physical realm but the intellectual one.

This work is made with reduced or limited resources. It does not see fit to justify wasteful practice for its own sake: Instead of pictures this work uses vector drawings, directly realised in InDesign to save data volume. The same is true for the format, reduced profile font, the lack of colours and the overall scope.

This documentation has been realised with 13 battery charges on a 2015 MacBook lend to me by a good friend at the beginning of the studies, resulting in 0.91 kWh of power consumption.