

THE APPLICATION OF

F E L T

INTO

CONTEMPORARY FURNITURE

DESIGN

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Begüm AKSEL

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INTRODUCTION

Waiting for bus, train, and tube ... Time is running. Who can pass time? In reality we race against time. In most of our daily lives we wait for bus, train, tube. We try to catch vehicles to go somewhere such as school, work, parties. We spend the rest of our time working in offices and outside. The curious thing is that everything has changed so fast. Thus, while life gains a faster pace, we spend more time away from home. We miss our homes....

However, the nomads are people who never get away from their homes since they carry their homes along with them. In fact, today people carry along their needs in order to reach them immediately. They are able to carry with them every single thing, every belonging they need: phone, dress, home made food, shoes etc. They can go from work to a cocktail party or to a meeting from a flight easily without having to go home and change. Thus this fact is what is drawing us into a nomadic life making us nomadic/portable people. The tendency is going back to a nomadic lifestyle, of course in a more deliberate and different way peculiar to the 21st century.

Therefore, contemporary people may be defined as contemporary nomads. Contemporary nomads are people who spend long hours at their offices and have to travel a lot for their jobs. However, they do not carry their homes, just their essential needs.

In our Turkish culture nomadic life was lived for ages until settling to the Anatolia from the Middle Asia. Turks had nomadic lives until settling in Anatolia, which is a common name of the lands of Turkey. Some circumstances forced nomads to migrate from one places to another, thus these people were continually searching for new environment to live, to settle. The tents were homes for nomads. Tent was made of felt, which was robust and made up of 100% natural fibres (wool). They were used to living with felt and made cushions from it for lying on as well as rugs and blankets for wrapping around their bodies. The use of a material as rugs, tents and blankets makes it a multi-use material and gives that material flexibility in utility. The nomads have to adapt to any condition. Thus, the material that provided them this flexibility to adapt to different conditions has been felt.

The only material that is needed to make felt is wool. Although it has served the nomads as a border dividing the inner space from the outside, felt has provided a flexible living in the inside as well. Since it is a material that can be adapted to any condition, felt keeps the interior of the tents cool in the summer and warm in the winter. This property makes felt a unique material. In the 21st century where mobility is the driving force, the felt as a natural material may be reinterpreted into contemporary furniture design.

The materialistic properties of felt, which make the material a unique one has attracted the attention of contemporary artists and designers as well. Because of the variety of areas that felt can be used, its non flammability, and isolation properties have provided opportunities for artists and designers to use felt both as an art object and a design object. For example some artists have used it as an art object in the oeuvres and some have used it as furniture material like in lamps or chairs because of its transformation to three dimensions easily.

Being a Turkish interior architect has led me consider hand made felt as a tool to make a mobile furniture which is lightweight, easy to carry and which enables the user live flexibly. The aim of an interior architect is to create an atmosphere, convert a void space into an ideal one that is more practical to use in accordance with a client's needs. We, as designers and architects provide a safe, secure and comfortable place like home where people live. Maybe with everything else, the notion of home loses its value and meaning. Do we need a home built with concrete or timber complete with walls, floor and ceiling? This background encouraged me to create a felt made shelter/urban dwelling which people can carry with them comfortably and inhabit, and which can help them feel as secure as a nomad "living in a house of hair"¹, in the 21st century.

Eventually I had the opportunity to use felt in my *soft box* project. The project makes use of many properties of felt. The multi-usability of felt, its lightweight and its opportunities for a more flexible living are all integrated in my project. The soft box is beyond being a box. It is both a blanket and a bag, and moreover a shelter when needed. In this respect, throughout my thesis study, I will dwell on felt and portable dwelling under three main headings.

In the first chapter I have explored the meaning, process of felting, and analyses as the significance for nomads. I have also investigated mystical areas that felt was used in shaman beliefs, Sufism, Sufi - wool people.

In the second chapter I have explained my primary research. I inquired why they have used felt and why they have preferred it. In the Milan fair I had the opportunity to talk to three designers; Nahoko Koyama, Fabio Pansera, and Roberto Monte. In addition to that Gaetano Pesce is a well-known Italian designer that has been useful for this study. Also the interview with Selcuk Gurisik who is a famous Turkish artist, and the interview with Imogen Welch who is a fine art student were great opportunities for the proceeding of my study. Aside from the primary research, two more artists were helpful for my study; Joseph Beuys and Robert Morris.

¹ W.am Rhein; Living under the Crescent Moon, Vitra Design Museum, Germany, 2003, p.35

In the third chapter I have been questioning boundaries between clothing and home. Designers such as Hella Jongerius, Jennie Pineus, Kosuke Tsumura, Yeohlee Teng, the architects group Archigram, Lucy Orta, and Hussein Chalayan challenge the status quo, causing the existing boundaries in fashion and architecture to collapse. They aim to reconcile extremes: create a cloth, which is worn and lived in at the same time.

CHAPTER 1

THE MATERIALISTIC PROPERTIES OF FELT

In the first chapter, I have been investigating what felt is, the process of felting, s.w.ot analyses and the most common legends about how felt is discovered. I worked with the Turkish craftsman Mehmet Girgic to learn how to make felt. I have also investigated the uses of felt by Turkish nomads in relationship to their lives and mysticism for Sufi who is a 'man of wool'², totems and fetish objects for shamans' beliefs.

What is FELT?

Felt is a non-woven fabric, which is produced by not involving weaving.

Felting is the process by which the wool fibres are matted into a fabric. Only natural fibres (wool, hair, fur, and cotton), soap (it gives strength to the wool and provides better results), and hot water are needed to make felt. Natural fibres are soaked up in the mixture of hot water and soap by compressing in moist conditions to get penetrated.

There are many legends and myths regarding the origins of felt. In all the stories there is the correct formula of felting. The most common one is a European legend, a monk went on a pilgrimage, wearing sandals, and discovered the process of felt making. While stopping to have a rest, he saw that pieces of wool from passing sheep had been left sticking to a bush. He put the wool into his sandal to alleviate his blister while walking to the monastery. At night when he was washing his feet he saw that the wool had become felt. The sweat and pressure of his feet and the friction caused by the heat had caused the wool fibres to turn to felt by the end of his journey.³ Felt had been made by pressing together the hair and wool of animals in warm, moist conditions. "Felt is a primitive way of making fabric"⁴

² F.C.Mish; Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, Merriam-Webster Inc., Massachusetts, 1991, p.1179

³ V.Brown; Feltwork, Raincoast Books Distribution Limited, Canada, 1996

⁴ Selcuk Gurisik, designer, London, Interviewed 13 May 2005



Figure 1 Ikonium Workshop, Konya/Turkey

As part of my primary research during my Easter vacation when I was in Turkey I joined the workshop (*fig. 1*) of the well-known felt maker Mehmet Girgic. I designed and created my own felt by crawling on the floor, rolling felt backwards and forwards using my elbows on the top of the table.

The felt maker Mehmet Girgic states that the felt-making process has three steps:

- Throwing the wool
- Kicking
- Heating

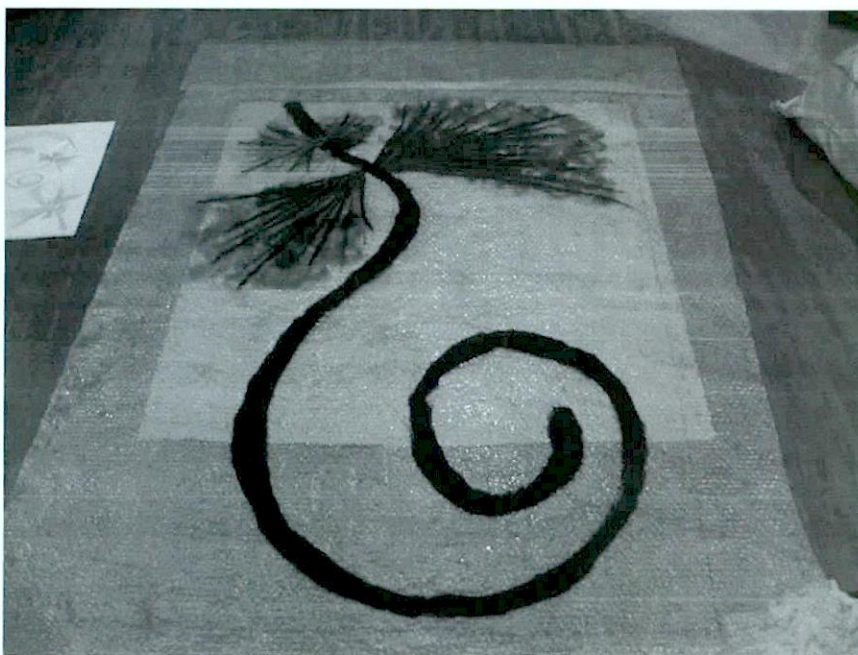


Figure 2 *the coloured fleece, Ikonium, Konya/Turkey, 2005*



Figure 3 *the natural wool fluffed up, Mehmet Girgic, Ikonium, Konya/Turkey, 2005*

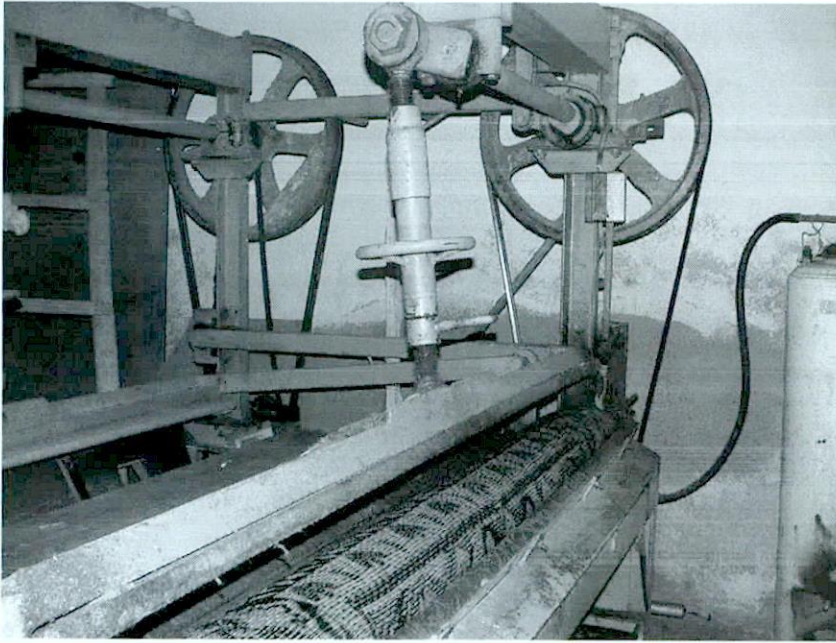


Figure 4 Kicking machine, Ikonium, Konya/Turkey, 2005

In two-dimensional felt making, the coloured fleece (*fig. 2*) is cut on the rush mat. The natural wool (*fig. 3*) that is fluffed up all over the textile is submerged in hot water and rubbed together by hand. And it is rolled into the rush mat to get ready to be kicked. The kicking process is used to get wool cramped. Using two different kicking methods produces felt. The first one is machinery (kicking machine technique (*fig. 4*)), unlike our ancestors who used to kick it with their knees, feet, and chests. The second method is mainly man-made, (classical kicking techniques (*fig. 5*)). The felt is raw at this stage has to be steamed in order to be completed. The felt is rolled up, pressed again back and forth with the maker's elbows. Afterwards the maker turns the opposite side of the felt and the process is repeated a few times until it is absolutely felted. Then flat felt is left to dry.



Figure 5 Classical kicking techniques, ancestor



Figure 6 Flat felt, designed by me, Ikonium, Konya, Turkey, 2005

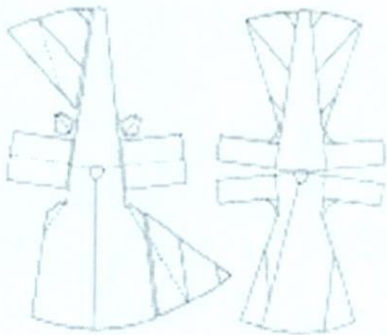


Figure 7 2-d Template



Figure 8 3-d Caftan, Selcuk Gurisik

For the three-dimensional designs the same process is used as the process of making flat felt (fig. 6). You first have to plan it in two dimensions. Template (two dimensions) (fig. 7) has to be symmetric. Then it is folded and fixed two edges to convert into three dimensions (Fig. 8) by using different types of solution such as Arabic gum and melted sugar solution. After that felt is put on a mould at a certain stage of the process. Then it is left for a while to take the shape of mould. At the end natural resin is used to make it harden.⁵

Although traditional and conventional methods have been passed from master to apprentice or father to son by sharing knowledge, the Turkish artist – designer Selcuk Gurisik who is a current PhD student in Central Saint Martins College in London become a felt maker

⁵ Selcuk Gurisik, designer, London, Interviewed 13 May 2005

by his own studies. When I interviewed Selcuk Gurisik he gave me all the clues to how to make seamless three-dimensional felt. He explained the solutions of fixing two edges. Selcuk Gurisik has brought a new approach by using felt with organza, suede, tulle, silk, and jeans. In the following chapter I will give more detail on Selcuk Gurisik and his works.

For many centuries there were not any changes in the features of felt, nor were new methods developed to convert it to a high quality product. Untreated, raw materials and traditional methods have been passed on from one generation to another for many centuries. It is an inheritable type of business from father to son or master to apprentice. Due to these features it did not succeed in becoming involved in the changing environment. Felt has been considered as a material for the rural areas, usually used for the making of cloaks (*fig. 9*), horse saddles.⁶ It has not been brought to the cities and has only been used in nomadic life and rural areas. But how can we attribute a new life and meaning to it? As we move into the 21st century can felt survive? Can it continue to offer us any benefits? This may revive people's interest.



Figure 9 shepherd's felt coat (cloak)

Each piece of hand made felt hides its own history inside. People who create felt put their own feelings, pure emotions into it. You cannot make exactly the same felt again. No piece of felt is ever quite like another. It is never the same from one end of the piece of material to the other. That makes hand made felt unique. Apart from these, when we examine the S.W.O.T analysis (*fig. 10*) of the felt, we can see that it has many distinctive features.

From the earliest times, felt has been found in archaeological excavations, giving us a large amount of information about the variety of home textiles and their areas of usage. Nomadic tribes consistently used felt fabric for such things as carpet, girdles, saddlecloth, horse blankets and other items of clothing. These all forced them to learn how to make felt and live within.

⁶J.Harvey; Traditional Textiles of Central Asia, Thomas Hudson Ltd., London, 1996

Figure 10

S.W.O.T analysis

Strengthen	Weakness	Opportunities	Threat
Heat isolation	Expensive	Flexible	Face to get lost
Sound isolation	Can be harmed	Multi-use	
Ecological friendly		Easy to shape	
Waterproof		Seamless	
No warping		Thickness	
Non flammable		Unique pieces	
		Can be decorated	

FELT IN NOMADIC LIFE

Nomad: "a member of a people travelling from place to place rather than living in one place all the time."⁷

Felt was originally in Central Asia, and came to Anatolia in the 3rd century when Turks migrated. Felt, was a significant textile that Turkish nomadic people used for different purposes: tents, floor covering, prayer rugs and clothing. It was the part of Turkish nomad's lifestyle.

The factors such as social conflict and changeable climate forced the majority of Turks in Central Asia to migrate away from drought-stricken places to fertile areas, people were continually searching for new places to settle. As they travelled widely and moved on frequently, it was difficult to build a permanent house. So they were obliged to build more mobile dwellings. Consequently, they built houses with wooden sticks, which could be dismantled and reassembled relatively easily. Felt was used to cover the wooden sticks from outside thus producing a tent-like skin. The main material of their tents (*fig. 11*) was felt. Since felt is a material that fulfilled the accommodation requirements of nomads, it can be interpreted as their skins. Felt was also an efficient fabric for insulating against both heat and cold. Felt protected the tent from heat in summer and cold in winter.⁸ It also does not let water in. When we consider the interior, the tent is the ceiling, the rug is the floor and the curtain is the wall. The curtain serves to divide different spaces and provide warmth and isolation of noise. The Turkish nomads also used felt to cover the mats laid on the ground in order to cut off the moisture of the soil, and they put pillows and cushions made of felt at the corners of the tent to sit on. These features of felt provided nomads to have a multiple convention and flexibility inside tent.



Figure 11 *Mongolian tent*

When it was time to migrate, the tent was dismantled and furnishings were packed in a sack or on the back of an animal. The nomads used felt saddlecloths under horses' saddles to soak up the sweat. All these notions show that felt was an indispensable part of

⁷ J.Sinclair; Collins Cobuild English Dictionary for Advanced Learners, HarperCollins Publishers, Glasgow, 2001, p.1041

⁸ J.Harvey; Traditional Textiles of Central Asia, Thomas Hudson Ltd., London, 1996

their lives. Everyday objects the nomads used tended to be robust and lightweight in order to facilitate constant mobility, and were carried with them each time they moved. Furthermore, carrying their items of furniture, such as mattresses, rugs, pillows, cushions, carpets, and chests was normal for the nomads as they were rather light to carry.⁹ In a life where there is constant change and mobility, felt which is robust and lightweight provides lots of opportunities to its user. For example when we consider the contemporary age, felt may be seen as a flexible material that may be used in the interior space. It may divide spaces to provide isolation in terms of warmth and noise, provide interior spaces that may change in accordance with the users' desires.

Shamans before the nomads used felt for magic. This gives it a mystical meaning. Another mystical use of felt may be seen in Sufism.

⁹ F.Irez; XIX.yuzyil Osmanli Mobilyasi, Ataturk Kultur Merkezi Yayini-23, Ankara, 1989

MYSTICISM OF FELT

Mysticism is the belief that there is a hidden, secret meaning in life. The mysticism of felt goes back to ages ago and there are some unresolved powers hidden in felt.

Generally the mystical uses of felt are referred to in books. It is known that felt existed before the religions and was used for the fetishist objects and totems of shamans. Whatever the weight of felt was, they were convinced the belief that felt would enable them to fly because of the patterns of birds and trees which decorated it. After death, the ashes of the deceased were buried opposite a life-size felt puppet called a 'friend', in the belief that it would accompany the dead person and alleviate the final journey.¹⁰

The other mystical happening was that Sufis were felt people. There is a phrase, *one morsel one cardigan (dervish's coat¹¹)*: the cardigan worn by dervishes (Sufis) is felted, and also *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* defines *Sufi* as '(man) of wool'¹². Therefore, Sufis, who wore the cardigan made of felt, are called wool people.¹³ This gives wool and felt importance in the religious and mystical ways.



Figure 12 Whirling dervishes

Because of its nature Sufism is a kind of transcendental metaphysics, which accepts all religions as one is founded upon universal and unconditional forgiveness.¹⁴ *Whirling dervish (fig. 12)* represents a mystical journey of spiritual ascent through mind. When dervishes spin they have to wear garments that reflect specific, mystical meanings. *Sikke (fig. 13)*, one such seamless garment, is a brown tall felt hat worn by the dervish and which

¹⁰ http://www.selcukgurisik.com/text_version.html

¹¹ <http://www.evsiad.org/V2/Pg/PublishPage/Mia/8/Year//PubNumber//PupNumeber/353>

¹² F.C.Mish; *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster Inc., Massachusetts, 1991, p.1179

¹³ Selcuk Gurisik, designer, London, Interviewed 13 May 2005

¹⁴ <http://www.bazaarturkey.com/tours/SufisandSufismtours.htm>

appears on gravestone. Sikke should be without any stitches¹⁵; because in the Sufis tic sense felt represents the nothingness of the world and it is the most invaluable production because of its ingredients.¹⁶ Felt, which has continued up to the 21st century protecting its mystical and cultural features, started to gain the attraction of artists and designers. However, while for some artists only the materialistic properties gained meaning, for others it still carried its mystical qualities.



Figure 13 *Sikke, camel wool, whirling dervish's hat*

¹⁵ <http://www.zaman.com/?bl=turkuaz&alt=%hn=16582>

¹⁶ <http://launch.groups.yahoo.com/group/turkmusikisi/message/3373>

CHAPTER 2

USAGE OF FELT

In the second chapter I am investigating felt in the designers/artists interpretations using both traditional and innovative methods. For my primary research into the project I investigated why the designers/artists preferred to use felt as a furniture material or an art object. I interviewed three designers using felt as a furniture material Nahoko Koyama, Fabio Pansera, and Roberto Monte whom I met at Salone Internazionale Del Mobile in Milan and emailed. And the well known, influential, accomplished *Feltri Chair (fig. 18)* designed by Gaetano Pesce. Two artists whom I also interviewed individually are: Selcuk Gurisik and Imogen Welch who preferred to use felt as an object. In my secondary research I have studied the artists Joseph Beuys and Robert Morris' works about felt used as an art object.

During my primary research, I have investigated why the designers/artists preferred to use felt. When I was in Salone Internazionale Del Mobile in Milan I had a chance to talk to three designers: Nahoko Koyama, Fabio Pansera and Roberto Monte who are interested in using felt in furniture design. All three designers' answers were quite different from each other. Koyama's concern was simply to give shape/form to felt to design a lamp. Pansera's approach was concerned in offering a soft, resistible, and robust material for his chair. Against all, the designer Monte's approach was less concerned with the material properties of felt. Felt reminded him of an ancient world as well as felt's soft, warm feeling for his chair. I have also interviewed the well-known Turkish artist Selcuk Gurisik, and Fine Art student Imogen Welch in BCUC whose answers attracted me because they dealt with the essential meaning of felt.

FELT AS A FURNITURE

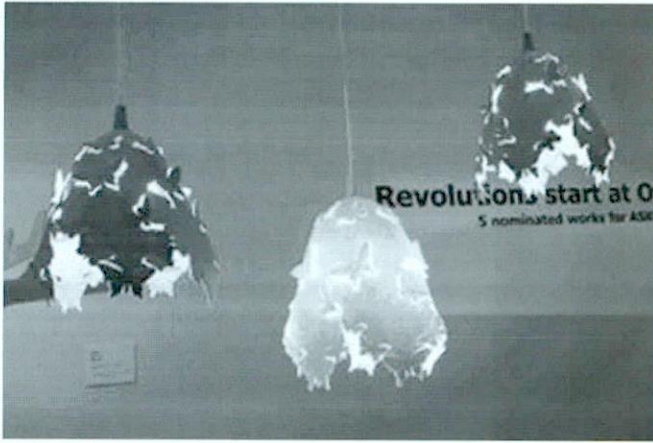


Figure 14 *Delight, wool felt, Nahoko Koyoma, Japan*

Nahoko Koyama, whom I met at Salone Internazionale Del Mobile in Milan is from Japan and based in London. She first used felt as hats (*fig. 14*) for lampshades. "I wanted to use the Mexican Sombrero to start with. But it is ended up using wool felt to make hat bodies because of its simple form. A variety of shades are available on wool felt hat bodies. That's another reason I use them rather than getting felts in sheets"¹⁷. Felt can be easily and simply given a form/shape. The lamp design of Koyama shows the non-flammable feature of felt as well as its being shaped easily.

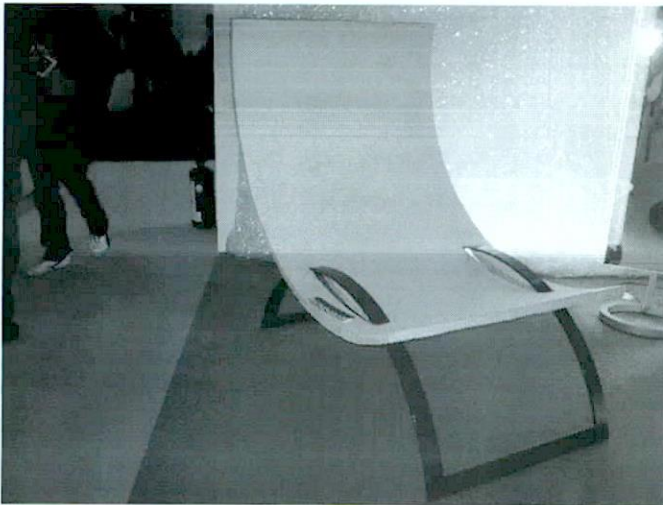


Figure 15 *untitled, industrial felt, Fabio Pansera, Italy*

Fabio Pansera who is an industrial designer based in Milan featured his prototype chair (*fig. 15*) at Salone Internazionale Del Mobile in Milan. He chose industrial felt in his

¹⁷ Nahoko Koyama, designer, Milan, Interviewed 14 April 2005

prototype because he wanted to have a soft effect when you sat on it while at the same time supporting the idea of lightness with a very thin shape. He also mentioned that felt was a delicate material for furniture especially for chairs. Metal is a cold material compared to felt. In order to overcome this, the designer used two materials together and tried to manage a softer effect. Fabio Pansera used an industrial felt in his project. I believe that if he had used hand made felt, he would not have had any problem with material.

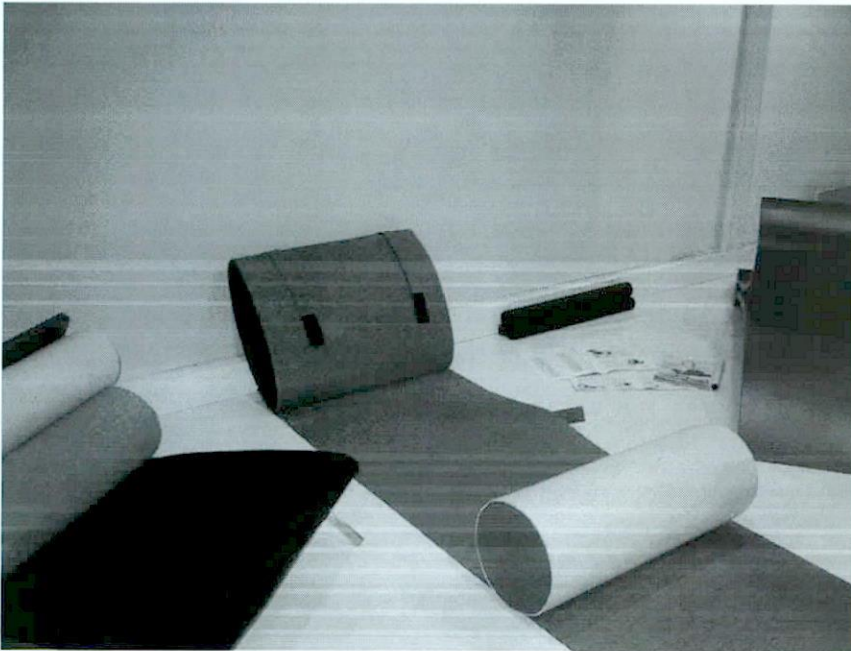


Figure 16 Baroque sitting, industrial felt, Roberto Monte, Italy

The Italian designer Roberto Monte is based in Milan. He required a material that contrasted with the steel and was also soft. These two keywords reminded him of natural felt and how nomads, shepherds, used it in the ancient world. There were only three pieces of odd chair, which was made of felt, steel and wood until Roberto Monte presented it. Monte's works are more theatrical than the other designs in the Milan exhibition. They were integrated with each other and could be adapted into the different positions.



Figure 17 Baroque sitting, industrial felt, Roberto Monte, Italy

He explained to me why he chose felt in the Baroque Sitting (*fig. 16-17*)

“The felt was perfect as a material because its thickness and consistency allow it to be easily rolled up and unrolled, making it into a carpet on which to lie down, or cover/blankets.”¹⁸ This design shows that the thickness and density of felt may be rather varied and felt provides the user multi-use, both as a rug and a blanket.

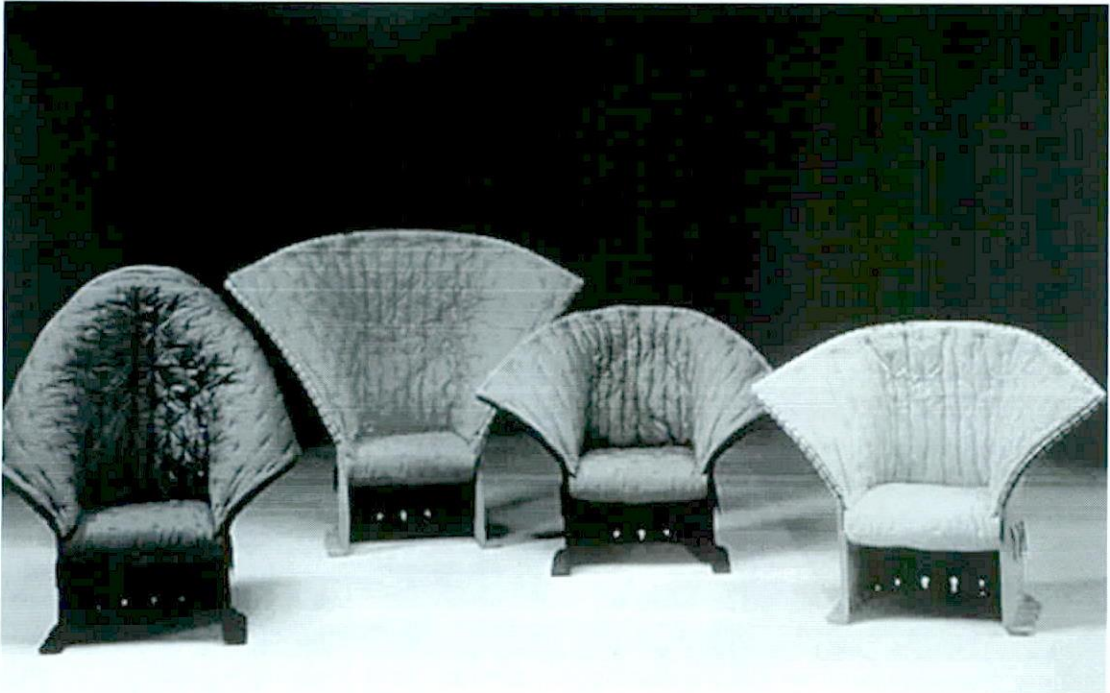


Figure 18 Feltri chair, 1986, wool felt, polyester resin, Gaetano Pesce, Cassina Spa, Milan

Apart from these designers, the famous Italian designer Gaetano Pesce has made an *Feltri Chair* (*fig. 18*) in 1987 where a semi-circular piece of industrial felt combined with epoxy-resin provides rigidity to a soft material. The interesting part is that he has not used epoxy-resin in the back of the chair and has not put it into mould.¹⁹ This has provided the chair to be soft and flexible (easy folding for example). The person who sits on the chair may wrap him/herself up easily and use the back of the chair by folding it in different ways. In a way it may be called a blanket chair.

When I compare artist Selcuk Gurisik and Imogen Welch with the designers that I have mentioned above, I can say that the designers have emphasized the material qualities of felt.

¹⁸ Roberto Monte, designer, London, Interviewed 14 April 2005

¹⁹ <http://www.moma.org/education/openends/guide/theme/c2c/02pesce.html>

FELT AS AN ART OBJECT

Selcuk Gurisik, who is a Turkish artist, designer and commercial art director, did his PhD in Central Saint Martins. The title of his project is *the paradox and contradictions in the cultural value and exchange worth of Turkish crafted wool felts*. When he was doing his project presentation on 26th of April 1999 and explained why he had chosen felt, he used this sentence in his presentation: "... I seek to bring new myths and philosophy as well as technology, into this ancient activity through research, development and creativity. The material allows me to be able to work on a very large scale. Two-dimensional surface designing turns into a three-dimensional sculpture easily."²⁰ Gurisik has not put boundaries to himself when working with felt. Apart from the material features of felt he has mixed his interpretation of the philosophy and mysticism of the material with technology.

In August 2002 he gathered 20 Turkish craftsmen together for a common aim; producing felt: large floor covers, prayer rugs, and smaller mats ... for the British Museum. The other exhibition, which was curated and designed by Selcuk Gurisik was associated with the Turkish Ministry of Culture, the British Council and the British Museum was in Topkapi Palace in Turkey.

Interviewing Selcuk Gurisik on 13th of May 2005, I found out how felt has a fundamental meaning for him. He believed that "a bulk of felt generates energy. It is an accumulated/radiated energy"²¹. I spoke to him at a time when he was preparing his PhD research exhibition; *Felt it Again (Reflections of inherited 'turkic' tunes)*. He exhibited all his felt projects, which were produced in Turkey with Turkish craftsmen, at *the Lethaby Gallery* in Central Saint Martins College. Gurisik aims to make a kind of a club like Mercedes, BMW by putting a little label in his products and getting notes from the people who buy. He claimed, "My felted products' people who use felt become a club".

I asked him what felt is losing in the market:

"Felt is losing a lot. You cannot copy it like other contemporary high-tech products in the market. On the other hand, the tendency is going back into ecological friendly movement. Cultural value is re-emerging in the proper market. We should consider authenticity of anything traditional. Not copy it, not repeat it, but revive it."²² In this respect, my purpose is reinterpreting the ecologically friendly material of felt which is composed of 100% wool fibres and present it to the users of furniture.

²⁰ http://www.selcukgurisik.com/research_project.html

²¹ Selcuk Gurisik, designer, London, Interviewed 13 May 2005

²² Selcuk Gurisik, designer, London, Interviewed 13 May 2005

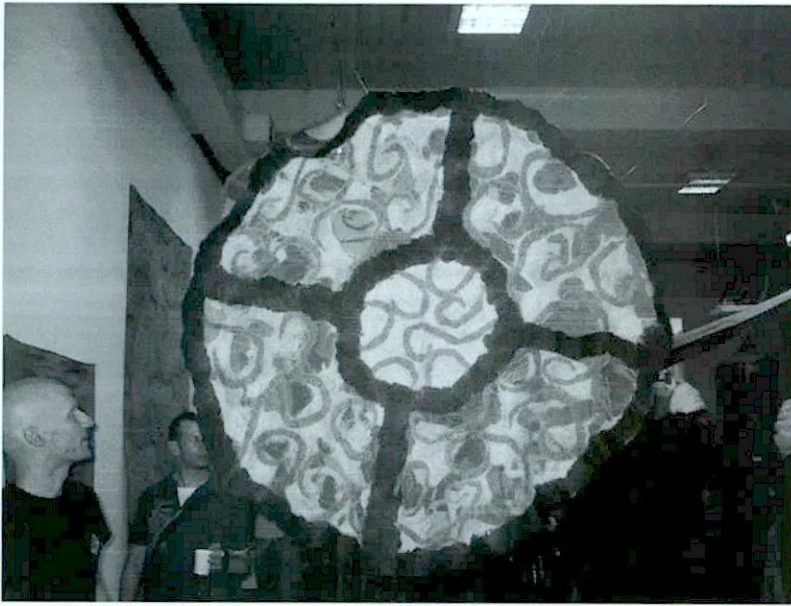


Figure 19 felt integrated with tulle, Selcuk Gurisik, featured in C.S.M, 2005

On 16th of August 2005, I went to Selcuk Gurisik's private view; Felt it again at the Lethaby Gallery in CSM in London. His PhD research exhibition featured conventional felt was mixed with tulle (*fig. 19*), suede (*fig. 20*), organza, silk collaborated with Turkish craftsmen in Turkey. He reinterpreted the traditional felt with the help of the Turkish felt makers. If such an old material may be in such a harmony with the contemporary textile material and still be different and unique, then it may be used in this respect in the contemporary furniture as well.



Figure 20 Felt integrated with suede, Selcuk Gurisik, featured in C.S.M, 2005

Selcuk Gurisik has developed a psychological and emotional bond with the felt. Imogen Welch on the other hand dwells on the isolation feature of felt, capturing noise and people.



Figure 21 *Infiltration-homogen for grand piano, Joseph Beuys, 1966*



Figure 22 *Muffled room, Imogen Welch, 2005*

Imogen Welch is a Fine Art student at BCUC who has been influenced by Joseph Beuys's work, *Infiltration-homogen for grand piano* (fig. 21) (1966) he wrapped the piano into felt which muffled and trapped sound inside to cut off the communication ability of the piano. Welch has covered all the details of the bedroom from the table to the slippers with felt, as he wants to silence the bedroom. Beuys has interpreted the isolation feature of felt as suffocating. As Welch explained her *Muffled Room* (fig. 22) project to me she said, "Felt is

generally a low status substance used to insulate, protect and muffle. Robert Morris who liked its 'non-art' and 'non-form' qualities and Joseph Beuys who used it in lots of his work, famously covering and silencing a piano with thick carpet type fabric, has used it in art"²³.

Beuys said: "the negative psychological character of insulation means the inability to communicate. The positive physical character of insulation lies in the protection it gives from cold, heat and sound."²⁴

Joseph Beuys (1921-86) was one of the most influential artists of the twentieth century. He was an outstanding sculptor; also a shaman, showman, teacher and untiring debater. His challengeable character and his unusual style of incorporating ritualised movement and sound, and materials such as felt, fat, earth, honey, blood, and even dead animals in terms of his work, have given him international fame.²⁵

Beuys initiated using felt in 1960. Later on, he realized that felt has both negative and positive sides and started to interpret felt with his point of view into his sculptures in terms of his sight. I went to Joseph Beuys exhibition at the Tate Modern in 2005. The London exhibition focused on three distinctive ways of Beuys works: Actions, Vitrines, and Environments.



Figure 23 *Felt Suit, Joseph Beuys, 1970*

Felt Suit (fig. 23), which is one of the soft sculpture works of Beuys, means to relate the story of his rescue by Tartars during his wartime military service.²⁶ In his project, Beuys has provided isolation by wrapping his body with felt and giving his body warmth. Also he has

²³ Imogen Welch, artist, High Wycombe. Interviewed 16 June 2005

²⁴ J.Beuys, Thames and Hudson, New York, 1979, p.120

²⁵ tate catalogue

²⁶ tate catalogue

seen the *Felt Suit* as a shelter and provided his vulnerable body, security, warmth and protection by wearing it.



Figure 24 *Untitled, Felt* 284.0 (h) x 363.2 (w) x 111.8 (d), Robert Morris, 1969

Robert Morris (1931 -) is an American artist who works drawing, painting, objects, readymade (like the urinal exhibition of Marcel Duchamp as an art work) and sculpture. Morris is among the avant-gardes of minimalist sculpture, process art and land art towards the end of 1960s. In Process art the aim of the artists is examining the relationship between the process and the product. And they were against the idea that art ends with a finished product. Because of this in order to detach the oeuvre from a designed form, they accumulate to some place; leave it loose or stock on top of each other. He has used oil, rubber, felt, wood, or wood shavings and instead of giving shape to these materials, he has left it to the hands of gravity, time, temperature and the natural powers. He has emphasized the organic and vivid features of the materials.²⁷ He has used felt as a soft sculpture (*fig. 24*).

Each designer that I interviewed with or investigated from the books has interpreted felt in their own way and emphasized the unique and distinctive properties of felt. Some have been moved by the way it be easily shaped, some from the warmth and noise isolation and some from the mystical features. The only common ground for all of them is that they each have seen the hidden features of felt which was seen as a rural textile product, in a furniture or art object.

²⁷ <http://www.zihin.net/mimar/sanat.htm>

Although my project is a portable dwelling unit it is very much related to the use of felt in furniture design. Think about a box. But it is not only a proper box. It is soft, wearable and may be used to dress your chair. Therefore, it can be integrated with your chair with armrest or without. The property that affected me most is that my soft box may be easily adapted to chairs surely because of the materialistic properties.

Furthermore, my project in a way challenges the boundary between the chair and blanket. It gives the person who uses it a feeling of security and warmth like a second skin, whether you sit on a chair or on the floor. Indeed the traditional use of felt as a shepherd cloak may be an example on this kind of use. The material protected them when they had to sleep in the cold weather.

In the next chapter, I will dwell on the usage of textile material as portable dwelling and discuss whether felt is appropriate for this.

CHAPTER 3

PORTABLE DWELLING

"We inhabit three shells: skin, clothes and buildings. The first is a gift of nature. The other two are of our own design. We define the fabric loosely wrapped around our bodies as well as the fixed structure of our abodes. Both are impermanent, both are vital elements of our lives and our culture,"²⁸

Werner Blaser, 2000, *Habit Habitat*

In this last chapter I will discuss clothing as a portable dwelling. Cloth has changed according to the people who have used it and the period of history in which they have lived. While nomads use cloth, as a shell to live in, for homeless people cloth is a second skin. For both kinds of people, cloth is therefore bound up with the body and has the same function: it gives them security, comfort, warmth and protection from the outside environment. I have supported my debate through the work of fashion designers, architects and industrial designers who have crossed the borders, delineated the boundaries between architecture, fashion design and urban life according to their own distinctive lifestyle. The concepts of urban fashion and contemporary nomads have attracted a range of designers and architects all around the world that are looking for solutions for contemporary living.

The *Mobile Dreaming* (fig.26) was designed by Hella Jongerius from Holland for itinerant people who travel across the city; spending long hours at the office compared to times that are spent at home, to provide the users with the means to rest comfortably. Through her graduate work, the *Cocoon Chair* (fig.27) and the *Cocoon Mask* (fig.28), the architect Jennie Pineus in Stockholm enables the wearer to avoid the stressful environment and transitional areas such as bus, and tube.

Kosuke Tsumura, Yeohlee Teng, the British architects group Archigram, Lucy Orta and Hussein Chalayan's works support my debate, interpret the same ideas, according to the customer's demands and the society needs, transform fabric into the wearer's own shell like skin. They convert a fabric into familiar dwelling as home where people live safely, and comfortably. The starting points may be different, but the end results are similar.

²⁸ W.Blaser, L.Muller; *Habit Christa De Carouge Habitat*, Lers Muller Publishers, Switzerland, 2000, p.8

PORTABLE DWELLING AS FURNITURE

The Dutch industrial designer Hella Jongerius creates unique products including ceramics, textiles, tableware, and furniture. In 2000 Jongerius her own design company, *JongeriusLab*, based in Rotterdam. Jongerius' two works, which are *Bed in Business* and *Mobile Dreaming* (fig.26). The *Bed in Business* (fig.25) project, which Jongerius undertook for Moma, New York, for Workspheres exhibition, opened in February 2001. The brief was about to design a home office. "Home is where the heart is,"²⁹ Hella Jongerius said when starting to explain her bed in business project. Now everything has changed, the heart is elsewhere at work, tube, taxi, home. Time has become the most important thing in our daily lives. The people of the twenty-first century have become mobile. The barriers between public and private, living and work have collapsed, as can be observed in Jongerius's design. Jongerius tried to interpret the congruity of extremes: living and working, sleeping and surfing the internet, reclining in front of the fire and still being able to see the outside world; having a wide screen computer only a foot away while lying in an extra long bed; keyboard mouse ball can be found in the "touch pillows". The archetypal characteristics of bed, textiles and cushion are assimilated to the domesticity by using a great deal of domestic products that are integrated with new technology. Jongerius has combined the products that are used daily with technology. For example she has used a keyboard in a knitted pillow. It is more than a bed, as the designer said.³⁰ It is the most important part of your home, your heart.

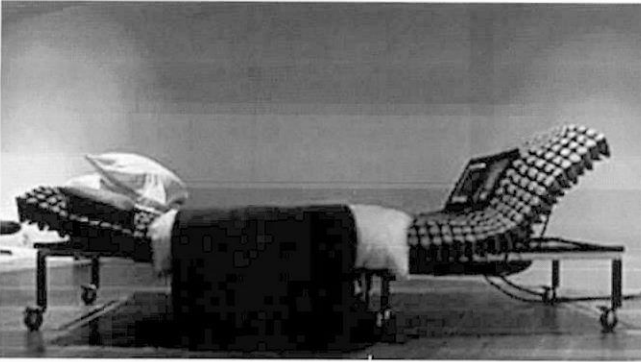


Figure 25 *Bed in business, Hella Jongerius of Jongeriuslab, 2000*

²⁹ <http://www.jongeriuslab.com>

³⁰ P. Antonelli; *Workspheres: Design and Contemporary Work Styles*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2001



Figure 26 *Mobile Dreaming, wool, cotton, Hella Jongerius of Jongeriuslab, 2001*

The other Jongerius' project is *Mobile Dreaming* (fig.26). While travelling from city to city or spending long hours at the office, *Mobile Dreaming* helps the user by becoming a second skin. It is a mixture of bed and abode to sleep in that can be worn on the body.³¹ It works as a coat, blanket, and sleeping bag and provide the wearer with comfortable shelter in which to rest and sleep. It is not just a functional item of clothing; the garment integrates with furniture to create one inseparable unit.

³¹ <http://www.jongeriuslab.com>

The Swedish designer Jennie Pineus first featured the Cocoon Chair in the graduation exhibition of Beckham's School of Design in Stockholm in 2000. After that exhibition her design started to be exhibited all around the world – Stockholm, the exhibition Workspheres at the Moma curated by Paola Antonelli in New York, and Tokyo in the exhibition Swedish Style 2001, curated by Teuro Kurosaki. Pineus started to work for Promise Park design studio in 2001. She concentrates on combining furniture and product design with interior and exterior exhibition design for offices, shops, private homes and museums.³²



Figure 27 Cocoon chair. Steel, polyamide fabric, and plastic, Jennie Pineus, Sweden, 2000

Pineus considered *the Cocoon Chair (fig.27)* as a meaning of being unplugged from the stressful, chaotic environment people have. The *Cocoon Chair* encloses the whole body like a baby in the womb, providing privacy and a space in which people are sheltered from a stressful, tense environment, thus enabling them to relax, read, even a sleep for a while.³³ It allows them to save energy and refresh both body and mind. You are in with society but at the same time you are not, you are in your own cocoon.

³² <http://www.promisepark.com>

³³ P.Antonelli; Workspheres:Design and Contemporary Work Styles, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2001



Figure 28 *Head cocoon. Polyamide fabric, Jennie Pineus, Sweden, 2000*

Pineus also designed a head version of the Cocoon Chair– a cocoon mask, which was portable, and thus ready for use whenever needed. The *Head Cocoon (fig.28)* is used in transitory spaces such as train stations, bus terminals, and airports that are, in stressful environments where you have to be on time to catch train, bus or plane.³⁴

If we are able to carry and use our clothes as an immediate source of isolation, abandonment from our environment and from such transitory spaces as terminals, why cannot we tuck the comfort and security of our home in a box, and take them with us. Furthermore whenever we go which version we need why we cannot create our own safe and secure shelter, our isolation unit. With that isolation unit I want to express an important issue of nomadic life. My aim is to enable the user to say *home sweet home* whenever he/she gets in his/her temporary shelter. I want people to make their own interpretations, create their own story by using it. A box is easy to dismantle and reassemble, is soft to touch, warm and at the same time can be worn to live in.

³⁴ <http://www.dobers.se/2003Cocoon.pdf>

PORTABLE DWELLING AS CLOTHING

No wonder a coat, jacket is our primary and single outfit that protects us in winter, provides us comfort and warmth. Whilst it has little pockets we put or try to squeeze our gloves and even our umbrellas into them. Beyond the single jacket as our cloth is also our shelter, our protector. In the hand of the designer Kosuke Tsumura the coat is recreated as a minimum dwelling that enables the wearer to spend all night outside the home without any needs, belongings because he already has everything within his garment. Tsumura extends the possibilities of one single jacket when converting into fully equipped clothing that can enable wearer give a sense of security, self protective shelter and keep warm when spending times away from home.

Tsumura started to produce the *Final Home* (fig.29) trademark in 1993 on leaving his job after he had worked 10 years for Issey Miyake. Tsumura preferred to design, create extensive garments, shoes, and accessories for a nomadic society, itinerants like urban nomads. "Living in a big city, you could do without housing. Your clothing could function as your housing." Tsumura explained his *Final Home* project. When he launched his project in 1994, it aimed to create a new wardrobe that was based on mobility and autonomy.³⁵



Figure 29 *Final home, Kosuke Tsumura, 1993*

The *Final Home* jacket has plenty of pockets (44 multifunctional zip pockets) in which to keep personal belongings such as the garments, accessories that you need to wear next day. There are hidden pockets for the photos were taken with your friends, your paperwork relating to your job or pockets containing soft (yielding) cushions for comfort and warmth when you sit on a metal bench or your spending all night out was put under your head. Tsumura suggests that some pockets are used for a survival kit and the wearers' blood type

³⁵ B.Quinn; *Techno Fashion*, Berg, United Kingdom, 2002

should be written on the label outside of the jacket in case of emergency.³⁶ Although Tsumura interprets his project as a final home, or ultimate home, in my opinion this project is a blanket and a multifunctional bag. Putting magazines, telephone, and clothes to the pockets of the jacket to preserve the essential requirements gives it a multifunctional and the jacket itself serves as a blanket.



Figure 30 *Intimate Architecture: Contemporary Design, Yeohlee Teng, 1982*

Yeohlee Teng is a fashion designer who has used fashion and architecture along the same principles. Her approach, clothing as shelter, was featured in *Intimate Architecture: Contemporary Clothing Design (fig.30)* exhibition at the Hayden Gallery, Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1982. In her *Urban Nomads (fig.32)* collection (autumn/winter 1997) she was inspired by the curvy, textural shape of Kansai International Airport (*fig.31*), which was designed by Renzo Piano in Osaka. Teng did this collection to show how people would look in that environment. In one of her interviews Teng said that she preferred to wear as efficient clothes as possible when travelling (wearing a jacket with lots of pockets to put her essential belongings in them instead of carrying a bag).³⁷

³⁶ B.Quinn; *Techno Fashion*, Berg, United Kingdom, 2002

³⁷ B.Quinn; *The Fashion of Architecture*, Berg, China, 2003



Figure 31 *Kansai International Airport, Renzo Piano, Osaka, 1994*



Figure 32 *Urban Nomads (autumn/winter) collection, Yeohlee Teng, 1997*

Teng believed that clothing has a fundamental meaning that defines the wearers' space and as well as their relationship with the environment. Teng echoes her ideas in her collections. Yeohlee Teng's approach is to extend peoples' possibilities beyond daywear or eveningwear into their wardrobes that are converted into the living sphere in their everyday lives. The designers Robert Mangurian, Mary-Ann Ray, and Jeffrey Hannigan of Studio Works came up with *Portable Person* (fig.33) in 1973, and in 2000 it was revised for the

Worksppheres Moma exhibition. "The Portable Person is a vision of a future mobile ..."38 They conceived of the portable person as an extension of the human body through *clothing* boosted by some technological devices. All of these support my argument that humans can become portable, can go to a cocktail party directly after spending long hours at the office or after a long journey. Similarly Teng`s garments are easy to wear and enable people to go wherever they want. In Middle East Technical University`s panel discussion Koray Malhan, who works as a product director in Koleksiyon Furniture Company in Turkey, summed up the project of Mobile Furniture: "Everything has changed; only one thing, humans have never changed."39 Through technological devices, multifunctional clothes can be worn and changed according to itinerant`s demand. But people have not changed.

As we head into the 21st century in the cosmopolitan and multicultural city of London; many people carry huge bags, or drag bulky luggage around on wheels. I have seen people wearing their white or colourful training shoes under their dark colourful suits when commuting to offices, which look very strange. Some people said that it is a street fashion but in fact it is a common need to ease the feet. It is quite certain that people need comfort. Inside handbags, and rucksacks leather shoes wait to be swapped with training shoes and smart clothes for work.

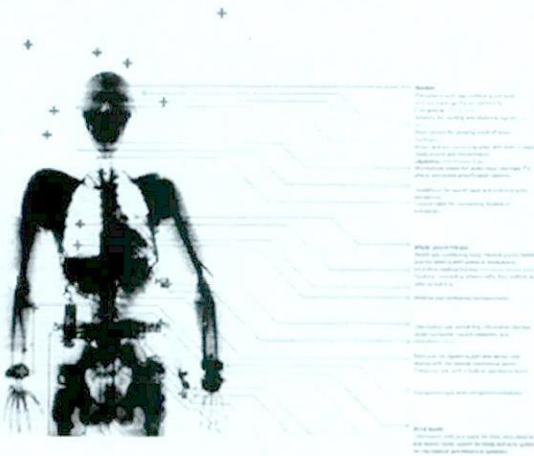


Figure 33 *Portable Person. Ink and pencil on paper. Concept, 1973 (revised 2000)*

"...We need a shell. Our bodies and our soul`s need a home in which they feel comfortable and secure. Thus my clothes are like rooms for the body. They have to be simple, comfortable, and of the finest materials. I have to feel at home in them in any situation - at work, taking a walk in the country, at a gala, or asleep in the bed. The room of

38 <http://www.studioworksarchitects.com/portable%20person.htm>

39 Koray Malhan, product director of Koleksiyon Furniture Company, METU BA show, Ankara, 2004

my body must adjust to the changing needs of my body – and not the other way around”⁴⁰. These sentiments expressed by the textile designer Christa De Carouge evoke the same notions of clothing as Yeohlee’s. Yeohlee’s other approach to clothing is as a second skin, as was shown in *Energetics: Clothes and Enclosures* at Aedes East Gallery, Berlin and at the Netherlands Architecture Institute in Rotterdam in 1998. Teng was influenced by the Shanghai Armoury Tower, which was designed by the architect Ken Yeang and shown in this collection. This building is climatically controlled, a double-skin facade which traps cool air inside the building during the summer and in winter. Cold air is not allowed to affect the inner space. According to Teng’s design, the layers, which are obtained by slashing fabric can trap and circulate the warmth around the body. Teng invented the “*fifth season* of the controlled urban environment,”⁴¹ as Richard Martin said in his essay.

“There is an aspect of clothing as portable architecture,” Yeohlee said, and “our clothes, which are modular, are also our shelters, which is the main function of buildings. Depending how extreme you want to be, you could say that clothes are your ultimate home. There has always been a dialogue between the two disciplines. It is a constant in our lives. I think it is a very practical step for designers to explore the possibilities and potentials the two yields,” Yeohlee explained.⁴² Her designs like following the principles of Archigram and are supported by modular systems.

⁴⁰W.Blaser, L.Muller; *Habit Christa De Carouge Habitat*, Lers Muller Publishers, Switzerland, 2000, p.68

⁴¹ C.Evans; R. Martin, ‘Yeohlee: *Energetics: Clothes and Enclosures*’, Fashion at the edge, Yale University Press, Italy, 2003, p.283

⁴² B.Quinn; *Techno Fashion*, Berg, United Kingdom, 2002, p.17

PORTABLE DWELLING AS STRUCTURE

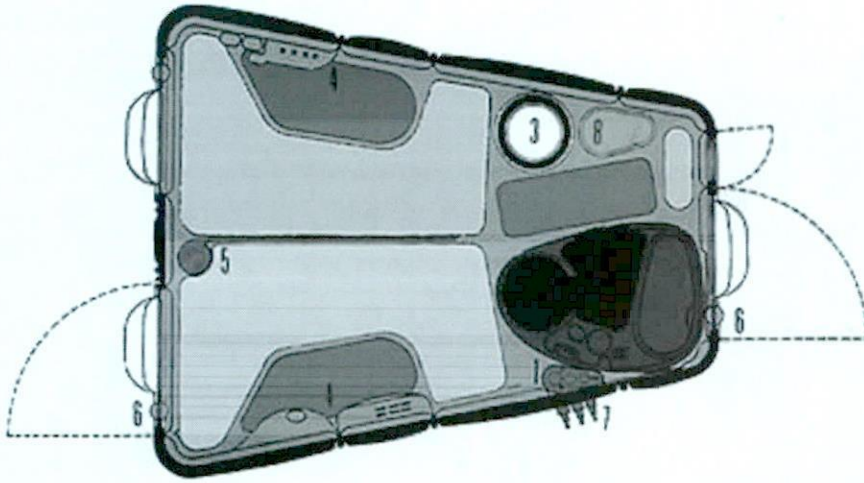


Figure 34 *Capsule, David Greene, Archigram, 1966*

The London-based architects group Archigram (the name of a British group which got its name from *architecture* and *telegram*) promoted a more organic and free flowing form of building and structure, which rebelled against the Modernism movement of the 1960s.⁴³ David Greene and Micheal Webb were members of Archigram. David Greene designed *the Capsule* (fig.34) and *the Living Pod* (fig.35), Micheal Webb *the Cushicle* (fig.36) and *the Suitaloon* (fig.37) to manifest the mobile environment and wearable dwelling. The challenging potential of an expandable architecture was proclaimed by the group, which designed in order to accommodate the individual inhabitants.

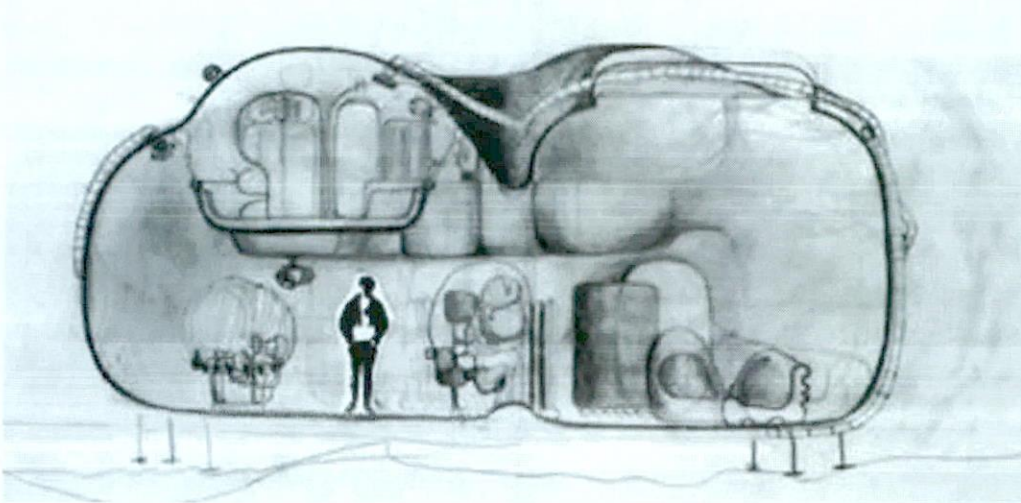


Figure 35 *LivingPod, David Greene, Archigram, 1966*

⁴³ A.Massey;The Independence Group, Manchester University Press, Great Britain, 1995

The Cushicle and the Suitaloon were created to conform to their surroundings and interact with them. Both designs gave the nomadic dweller a sense of refuge, presented their clothing as shelter and security. "The Cushicle and the Suitaloon collapsed the existing interior/exterior and subject/object hierarchies and dualities evident in built structure, and formed a set of intelligent and interactive objects, surfaces and skins, with supple, responsive and interconnected interiors."⁴⁴

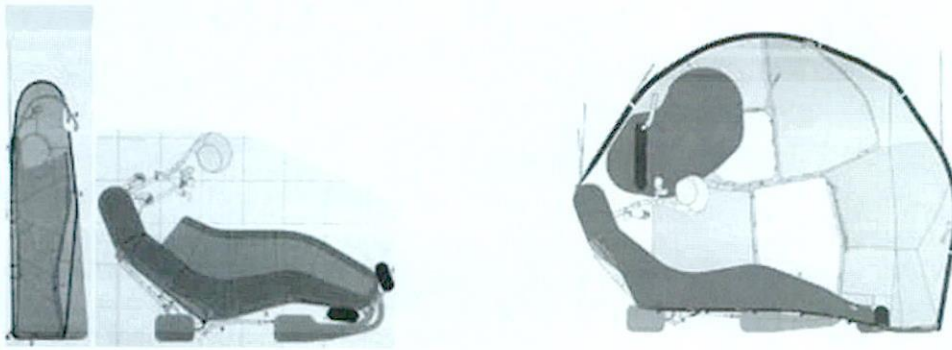


Figure 36 *The Cushicle, Micheal Webb, Archigram, 1968*

The Cushicle (fig.36), which was designed for one person only, was an inflatable wearable "house"⁴⁵ which allowed a wearer to carry a whole environment on his back. It was a "complete nomadic unit"⁴⁶, which enabled the wearer to carry food, a water supply, radio, television, and personal belongings with him.

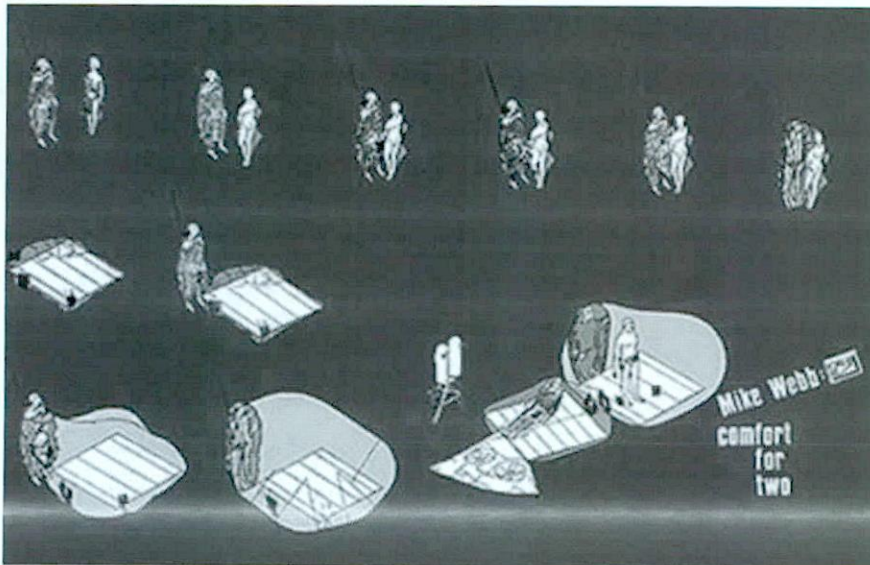


Figure 37 *The Suitaloon, Micheal Webb, Archigram, 1967*

⁴⁴ B.Quinn; *The Fashion of Architecture*, Berg, China, 2003, p.98

⁴⁵ <http://www.designmuseum.org/design/index.php?id=87&print=1>

⁴⁶ P.Cook; *Archigram*, Studio Vista Publishers, Great Britain, 1972, p.64

*Clothing for living in – or if it wasn't for my Suitaloon I would have to buy a house.*⁴⁷

The Suitaloon (*fig.37*) was designed for the exhibition called “house for the year 1990”, which was exhibited in Harrods in 1967. Micheal Webb tried to predict how a 1990s house looks like by designing the Suitaloon in 1967.⁴⁸ Now we are in 2005 and looking at the notion of home as portable, carrying all our belongings with us in a nomadic lifestyle. The Suitaloon designed as a minimum house, is like a family model of the Cushicle. Walls have a changeable structure; ceilings and floors were considered as inflatable sleeping and seating units.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ P.Cook; Archigram, Studio Vista Publishers, Great Britain, 1972, p.80

⁴⁸ <http://www.designmuseum.org/design/index.php?id=87&print=1>

⁴⁹ P.Cook; Archigram, Studio Vista Publishers, Great Britain, 1972

FROM CLOTHING TO FURNITURE

These days a huge number of designers are exploring fashion and architecture themes. Yeohlee and Orta are among these designers. Yeohlee looks at simple lines used in her garments including little pockets, which work as a handbag for carrying all one's belongings all the time. By contrast Lucy Orta's designs, such as her *Refuge Wear* (fig.38), and *Nexus Architecture* (fig.41), have been more conceptual instead of practical and simple to use.



Figure 38 *Refuge Wear, Lucy Orta, 1992*

Orta is concerned with the growth of homelessness in the 21st century. She defends homeless people who lose their identities and become invisible in society. She also defends the idea of clothing as an expression of people's personification. She helps people to give a shout to the world with their garments. Therefore, she started to work with the Salvation Army, for which she organized some workshops and activities in Paris and New York in the 1990s. These pointed out that homeless people in fact have an identity, body and ideas of home.⁵⁰ She reinterprets the notion of home as an unstable, unfamiliar, mobile, and wearable shelter. Her works are expounded as both art and fashion designs, which can speak for themselves: *Refuge Wear* (fig.38), *Modular Architecture* (fig.40), *Nexus Architecture* (fig.41), *Life Nexus Village*, *All in One Basket*, *70x7 The Meal* and *Citizen Platform*.

Orta's designs are effectively more conceptual instead of practical. The social link is fundamental to her designs: her works observe that people in the community need to connect in order to survive. Her idea of the social link reminds me of Maslow's Triangular Hierarchy of Needs (fig.39). Abraham Maslow who is an American humanistic psychologist, has initiated well-known *hierarchy theory of needs*. According to Maslow, there are two types of needs. The primary needs, which are physiological needs and safety. Physiological needs are the very basic needs such as air, water, food, and sleep. Safety needs are the security of home and family. The secondary needs, which are love, esteem needs and self-

⁵⁰ J.Michel Place; *Process of Transformation Lucy Orta*, Editions Jean-Michel Place, Paris, 1998

actualisation. Love: humans need to belong to groups; clubs, work groups, family, etc. Beer commercials are quite good examples of showing how beer makes people together for sociability, fellowship. “When was the last time you saw a beer commercial with someone drinking beer alone?”⁵¹ When looking back to Lucy Orta’s approach, we see that she tries to provide people with a safe place and encourages them to belong to a group through her workshops and by attaching people together, as in Nexus Architecture. It will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

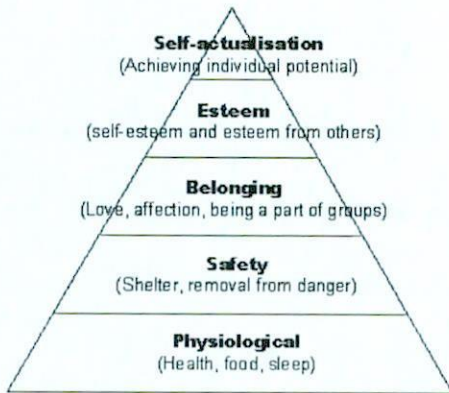


Figure 39 Maslow's Hierarchy Needs

Orta’s designs, which are clothes to adaptable surroundings and climatic conditions change from parkas, anoraks, and ponchos into tents, sleeping bags or furniture. She studied textile and fashion design. These two disciplines provide her with the ability to use high-tech, durable, robust fabrics in her designs, which can resist the extreme climates confronted by mountaineers. These include polar fleece, rip stop nylon, Kevlar, aluminium fibre and materials.⁵² These adaptable and multi-functional clothes provide the user multiuse by turning into a tent from anorak or sleeping bag.

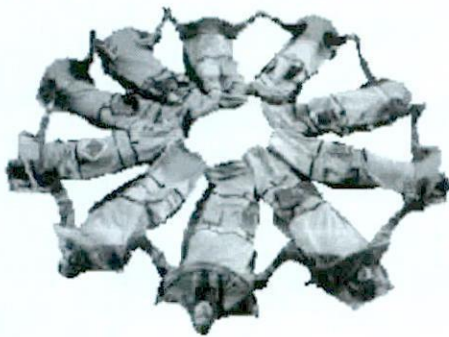


Figure 40 Modular Architecture, Lucy Orta

⁵¹ <http://web.utk.edu/~gwynnc/maslow.HTM>

⁵² www.ycohlee.com/article4.html

Orta's *Modular Architecture* (fig.40) is a temporal dwelling, which has numerous items that can be put together to create different variations of structures. Separate itinerants who are on the road all day long wear "waterproof, insulated, hooded bodysuits made of aluminium-coated polyamide"⁵³, which have numerous pockets carrying whatever the wearers need, such as water supplies, food and medicines. Here Orta has developed Tsumura's work and has turned a raincoat to a tent. When the night comes, these people meet in an area, which is determined beforehand or by chance. They take their bodysuits zipping them together to assemble an extensive, warm space (tent) for four people. The next day, they unzip the tent and wrap themselves again continuing their journey. Maybe later they meet again and repeat the same exercise with the same people or another.⁵⁴ In this design Orta provides a living space by combining people and also an opportunity for isolation when used separately.



Figure 41 Nexus architecture, Lucy Orta

According to *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, 'nexus' is defined as 'a connected group or series'⁵⁵; this shows where *Nexus Architecture* (fig.41) takes its name. Nexus Architecture has a fundamentally symbolic meaning rather than potentially practical use. Throughout Nexus Architecture, Orta uses fabric "as a technique", meaning she deals with fabric as the membrane or a second skin around our bodies, fabric that forms the walls of our own architecture"⁵⁶. The people are linked together by tubes of fabric – "the umbilical structure"⁵⁷ - that zip one person's stomach to another's back. Thus, hundreds or thousands people join together to become one strong chain at the same time.

Hussein Chalayan, a Turkish-Cypriot, is the most innovative, challenging and conceptual fashion designer based in London. I find him particularly interesting because we

⁵³ J.Michel Place; *Process of Transformation Lucy Orta*, Editions Jean-Michel Place, Paris, 1998, p.64-65

⁵⁴ J.Michel Place; *Process of Transformation Lucy Orta*, Editions Jean-Michel Place, Paris, 1998

⁵⁵ F.C.Mish; *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster Inc., Massachusetts, 1991, p.797

⁵⁶ http://studioorta.free.fr/lucy_orta/works_nexus_arch.html

⁵⁷ http://studioorta.free.fr/lucy_orta/works_nexus_arch.html

share the same origins of being Turkish. He has challenged the crossing of boundaries with his garments. When Chalayan articulates his collections he always comes up with a concept. Some of the collection names are *Panoramic (Autumn/Winter 1998)*, *Geotropics (Spring/Summer 1999)*, *Echoform (Autumn/Winter 1999)*, and *Afterwards (Autumn/Winter 2000)*. He challenges the collapsing boundaries between architecture and fashion in his clothing designs integrated with their surroundings. He has worked with architects, artists, textile engineers, and set designers.⁵⁸

For the *Geotropics (Spring-Summer 1999)* collection (*fig.42*) he explored the idea of carrying a chair, which is worn, thus enabling the wearer to sit down wherever she goes. Chalayan's idea as you can see, is a little utopian. It is more symbolic/concept design than functional. It is difficult to wear and to go wherever you want with this dress. But he challenged the idea of designing wearable furniture that can be carried about all the time.



Figure 42 chairs as wearable design (spring/summer 1999)

“A part of the idea was camouflage, so that things could be left in an obvious place and still be there when people came home again. That was the concept behind the dresses, that they were something valuable disguised as chair covers that no one would take,”⁵⁹ Chalayan used this sentence when explaining his concept in his *After Words (autumn/winter 2000)* collection (*fig.43-44*). In the *After Words`* collection Chalayan enabled the wearers to be in a safe, secure place by carrying their items away to retain the security and familiarity connected with them. Furthermore, the designs could be easily wrapped dismantled and reassembled again and again. This process emphasized the fundamental meaning of home and of familiar touch.

⁵⁸ C.Evans; Hussein Chalayan, NAI Publishers, Netherlands, 2005

⁵⁹ B.Quinn; Techno Fashion, Berg, United Kingdom, 2002, p.28



Figure 43 *Afterwords collection (autumn/winter 2000)*

Chalayan's *After Words* collection reminds us of Lucy Orta's garments that can be converted into inhabited spaces. It echoes the same notions of obligatory evacuation from

one place to another experienced by nomad. The people have to need a familiar environment that is safe and secure.



Figure 444 *Afterwords collection (autumn/winter 2000)*

Although everything changes very fast with time, what do not change are people and their needs like shelter, air, water and nourishment. These requirements are the indispensables. These designers claim that without having homes, people may fulfil their needs for a shelter with the portable dwellings they carry along with them. And since the opportunities that felt provides is in accordance with the concepts used here, felt is an appropriate material for the portable dwelling.

The notion of being portable is very crucial for my project as well. The soft box may be used with chairs to provide rest or to wrap you up like a blanket. However, probably the most important property of the box is that you can carry it with you wherever you go like a bag. It may be used like a bag to carry you belongings with the many pockets on it, and when you get in it will become a shelter, a second skin, an isolation space providing personal safety and protection. Like the works of the other artists mentioned above, my project is a portable dwelling unit that can be carried with you wherever you go. However, my portable dwelling unit is as portable as a bag and this bag contains anything you need as well as your blanket. This property of my project enables the person to be isolated wherever s/he wants. It gives you the protective atmosphere of your home.

CONCLUSION

“...We need a shell. Our bodies and our soul's need a home in which they feel comfortable and secure....”

Werner Blaser, 2000, *Habit Habitat*

As the traditional nomads migrated to survive, the contemporary ones have to be travelling in order to keep up with the fast pace of life. The contemporary people have to have their entire immediate requirements with them as they race through time. In this sense time may be even defined as their enemy. Losing time may mean losing their jobs, contracts etc. This overload merges their private lives with their business life, and this makes the notion of “portability” more important than ever.

The traditional nomads also had to move a lot although with very different motives. Their use of felt may be seen in many different areas of life. Their reasons for using felt is very much based on the materialistic properties of the material. It is soft and lightweight, easy to shape, thus very easy to carry and use as a rug, tent, cushion, mattress or clothing. Using felt as a tent helps isolation from hot, cold and prevents noise. These may be seen as the properties of an ideal shelter. When we turn back to the contemporary nomads, we can see that the requirements have not changed a lot. They also want to carry their needs with them and have a shelter to surround them when they need one. My portable dwelling unit is designed to enable the contemporary nomads to reach their requirements any time they like. It is lightweight, therefore easily portable; it is basically a bag with many pockets that enables you to carry your belongings with you. Furthermore, when opened it may be used as a blanket that wraps you like a second skin or it may be used to wrap the chair you will sit on providing you a familiar warmth. Such an item that satisfies so many personal requirements of the user would start to have a personal quality after using it for some time. Therefore, it may be designed using decorated felt according to the tastes of each user emphasizing the distinctive personal quality of the item for the contemporary nomad.

In conclusion, this dissertation gives a new chance to reinterpret the notion of home as a portable dwelling for urban itinerants/contemporary nomads by reviving the fabric felt, used by nomads for centuries, and adapt it into contemporary furniture design as we move into the 21st century.

Design Brief:

“KECHE” is the Turkish pronunciation of the word ‘FELT’

“A legacy of nomadic culture, felt is today taking new shapes in the hands of designers as it becomes a part of modern life.”⁶⁰

Felt is natural. It is made of wool. It comes from sheep. Each wool fiber is covered with a membrane with scales that keep the sheep cool in the summer and warm in the winter. “Fiber to felt – it’s pure magic!”⁶¹. It has resonance. It reminds us of home, family, security. So, it is here, it has made its presence known and it is here to stay. Nowadays “felt making” has almost disappeared in Turkey. But how can we give it new life? As we move into, the 21st century, can felt survive? Can it continue to offer us any virtues? I intend to find out. This is an exploration of its history, its practicality and its future.

Introduction to the Brief:

To the people of Central Asia, felt, is a most important textile. From the earliest times, felt has been found in archeological excavations, giving us lots of information about the variety of home textiles and their areas of usage. Nomadic tribes consistently used felt, fabric, carpet, girdles, saddles and other samples of clothing. In the middle of Asia the majority of Turks had to migrate away from drought stricken places to fertile areas, as a consequence of the changeable climate and social conditions which conflicted with other tribes. Therefore, they were in continual search for new places to settle. As they traveled widely and moved on frequently, it was difficult to build a permanent house. So they were obliged to build more mobile dwellings. Consequently, they built houses with wooden sticks, which could be dismantled and reassembled relatively easily. Felt was used to cover the wooden sticks from outside thus producing a tent like skin.

When it was time to migrate, the tent was dismantled and furnishings were put in sacks. They could afford minimal furniture and took it with them each time wherever they moved. Carrying their furniture, like mattresses, rugs, pillows, cushions, carpets, chests, was normal for them. These were comfortable and also lightweight to carry. Chests were made for storage from ebony, walnut, iron or silver. They were also a symbol of people’s status.

⁶⁰ B. Kapucu; ‘The new face of felt’, *Skylife*, Istanbul, January 2005, p.105

⁶¹ M. Docherty, J. Emerson; *Simply Felt*, Interweave Press, Colorado (USA), 2004, back cover

The main material of their tents was felt. Felt was an efficient fabric for insulating against both heat and cold. The nomads were using felt to cover the mats laid on the ground cutting off the moisture of the soil, and they put pillows and cushions at the corners of the tent to sit on the felt.

Felt was made from pressing together the hair and wool of animals in warm moist conditions. Each nomad normally had to know how to make felt, but would learn to live in a felt house, wear felt garments like distinctive cloaks (kepenek) worn by shepherds and use felt rugs.

The Brief:

“KECHE” or felt is soft, natural, environmentally friendly, recyclable, durable, sustainable and warm to touch. Traditional felt making is such a tactile experience; no piece of felt is ever quite like another. It has never been the same one end to another. I aim to revive this old fashioned fabric and review how to introduce it into the furniture industry. As I believe that this simple, soft, and natural material can offer a cosy ambience in any living space in the 21st century.

Aims:

- ❖ I aim to investigate the following characteristics of felt and to challenge any preconceived notions we may have of it as a material. For example, that it is lightweight (easy to carry), and that it keeps us warm.
- ❖ I intend to present ideas inspired by traditional notions of the cushion, blanket, pillow and rug for example, at my work in progress show, as a way of exploring other practical and theoretical issues.
- ❖ In the 21st century, many young people prefer to live alone in small houses and are alienated from their environment. I want to encourage interaction, through the form of both making and using ‘felt furniture’, and use the pieces to bring people together, recapturing the way this used to happen in the past.
- ❖ I aim to explore the opportunities offered by an existing wall and exploit such underused useful spaces.

- ❖ Nomads frequently roll all their belongings into felt fabrics when they move from one place to another. This basic “nomadic” textile for moving in the western world will inspire my designs. I intend to roll all comfort into felt fabric. The concepts of folding, wrapping and rolling will inevitably be part of the experimental process.

Design Methods:

- ❖ At this stage of my research I am trying to figure out the different variations of sitting, lying, and relaxing on the floor by using adjustable, removable fabric.
- ❖ Through the research I will identify practical problems, which are common to people wanting soft, cosy material to sit, lie, and relax on/with. Interview material will be analyzed in terms of general problems that occur. At the Work in Progress show, I intend to extend my primary research cooperating with people, collecting and collating their feedback.
- ❖ I will exhaustively investigate the possibilities of felt. Using existing forms chairs and stools and attaching felt to extend their function will be one of my methods.
- ❖ The issues, which have been identified, relate to different ways in which this project can be approached: form, function, ergonomics, and psychological significance of soft material. Conclusions about these will be drawn, and responded to during my Stage 2 development.

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