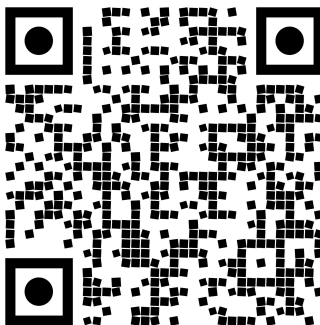




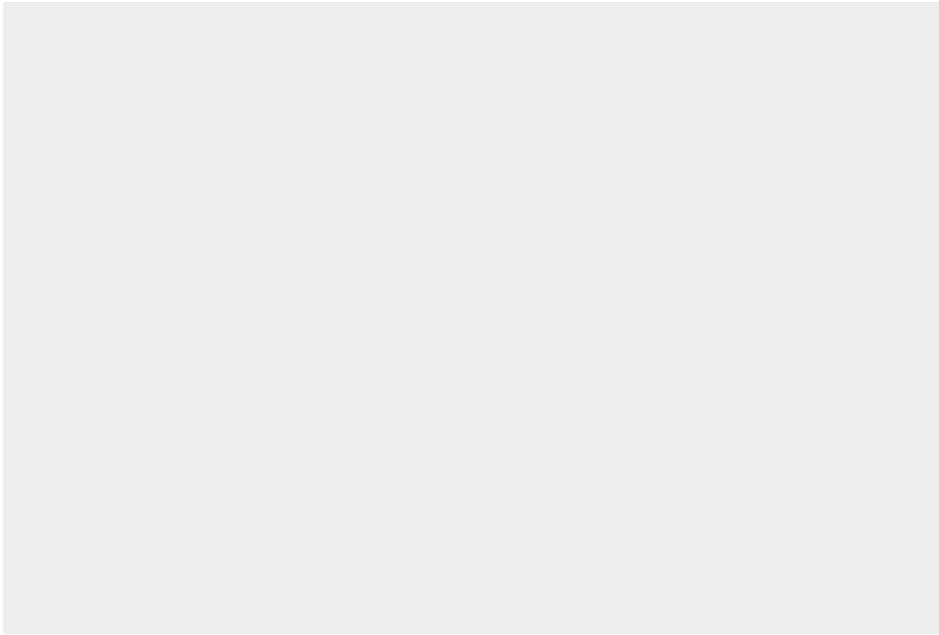
**Desired**

**Commodities**



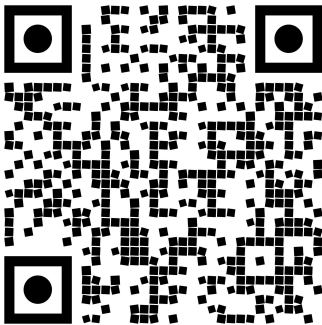






**Desired**

**Commodities**





**Desired Commodities** observes deceptive design and the generation of identity in *hypermarketing*, using IKEA as a case and terrain for intervention.

A common problem in market economies is the organisation of large-scale supply chains. Gaps in the supply chain lead to shortages or overstocking, both of which can have devastating effects on the company's profitability. In 'The People's Republic of Walmart', authors Rozworski and Phillips describe the counterintuitive way in which mega-corporations such as IKEA attempt to avoid gaps in their supply chain. Rather than attempting to predict how much of a certain product IKEA will need to produce in order to meet consumer demand, IKEA and comparable companies flip the process head-to-tail and start from the supply chain outward toward the consumer.

This means that, instead of reacting to demand changes, IKEA attempts to create a demand through marketing.

Marketing in this way functions on the creation of desirable 'image' identities. Market research determines a link between an aggregation of many splintered identity categories and a consumer product, in order to create a demand. Think of internet cookies, and how in 2015 it became clear that Cambridge Analytica was grouping enormous swaths of personal online data into categories for exactly this purpose (which has since become common practice). The split divide between our physical presence or identity, and another virtual, discretized, controllable entity has been called 'dividualization' [*Postscript on control societies*, G. Deleuze 1992].

**Upon entering IKEA we affirm ourselves as dividuals, rather than individuals.**

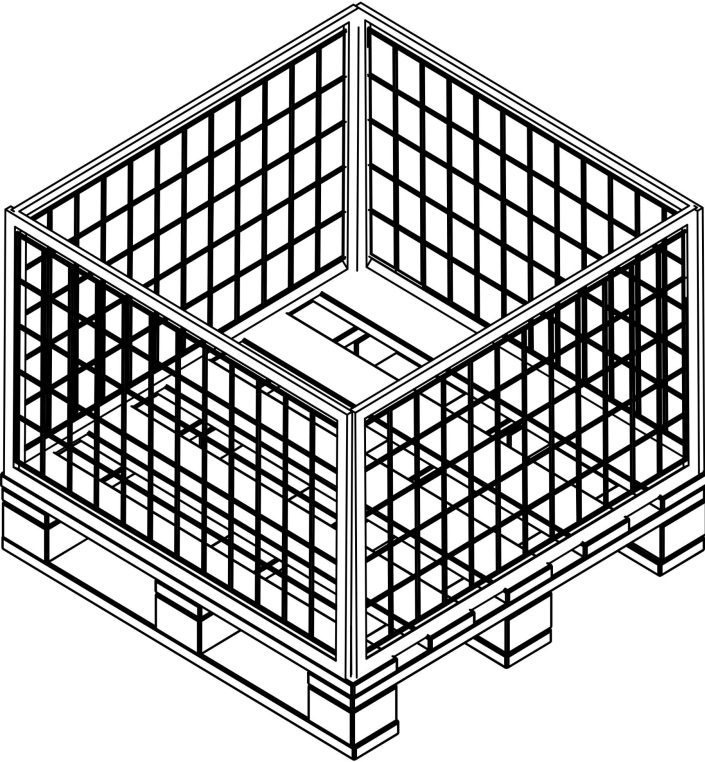
IKEA employs a number of strategies in order to maximize sales. Most recognizably, the IKEA floor plan intentionally resembles a maze, filled with a myriad of generated identities. IKEA uses a method called 'deceptive design' [*The Truth About IKEA*, J. Stenebo 2011], where the consumer is deceived into purchasing more than they came for. Examples: upon entering the store, the consumer is shocked and disoriented by the many inputs, smells and sensuous experiences on offer. This is called the 'Gruen Effect' (*Shopping Town: Memoiren eines Stadtplaners (1903-1980)*, V. Gruen 2014). A now common deceptive design practice is the use of a 'Bulla Bulla' (in IKEA those



are the large bins filled with many copies of the same item, such as 1-euro candles), grabbing a customer's attention and further distracting them from their sense of self. What IKEA attempts to do, is create an overwhelming consumer experience, in order to imprint a new set of identities, suspending the consumer in a self-less limbo.

## 4

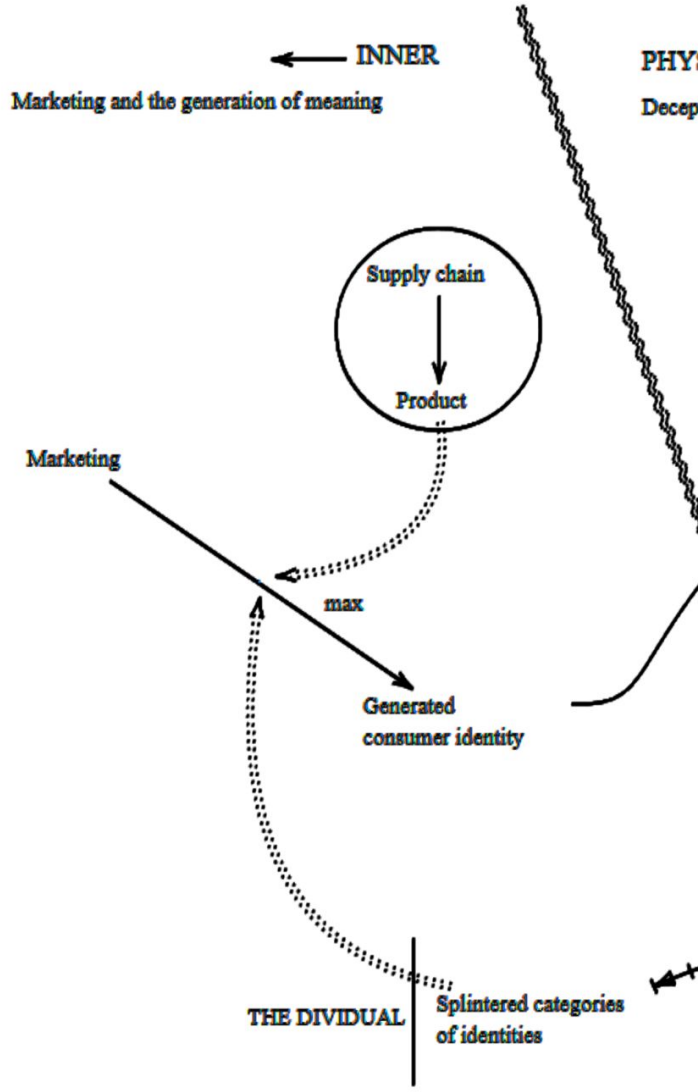
When described graphically, the system of deceptive design in IKEA appears as a feedback loop, from which a notion of consumer identity and meaning emerges (see below).



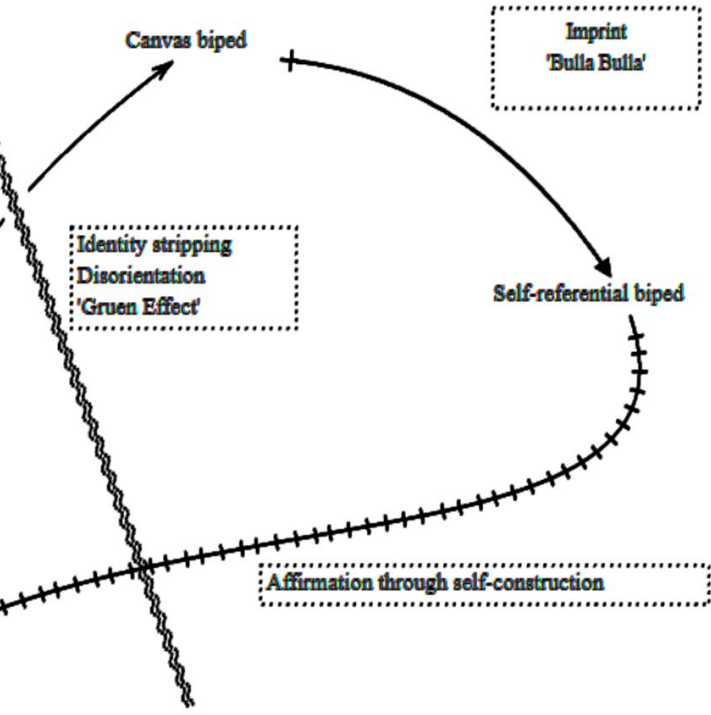
### **Bulla Bulla**

*From Swedish: "huller [om] buller" i.e. mishmash or higgledy-piggledy*

- a bunch of items are purposely jumbled in bins to create the impression of volume and, therefore, inexpensiveness. A deceptive design strategy to encourage impulse consuming



SICAL →  
tive design arc

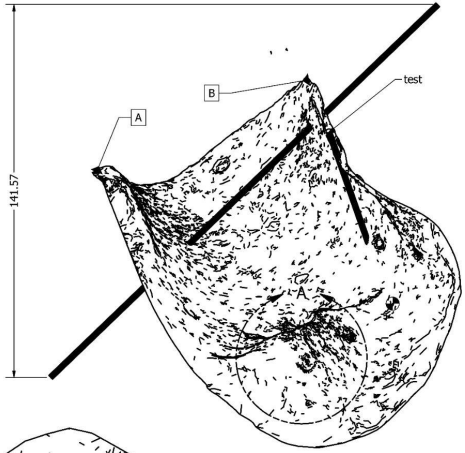


## **NPO** (Non-Prescriptive Object)

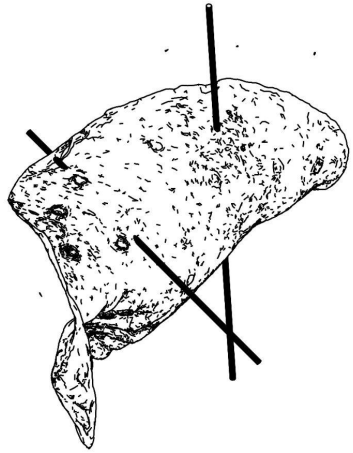
*Desired Commodities* describes a simple yet effective intervention in the emergent sigil of meaning, as put forward by deceptive design in IKEA. This is achieved through the development of the Non-Prescriptive Object or **NPO**.



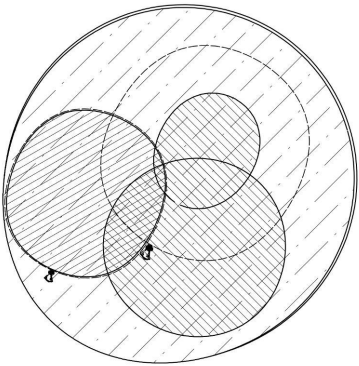
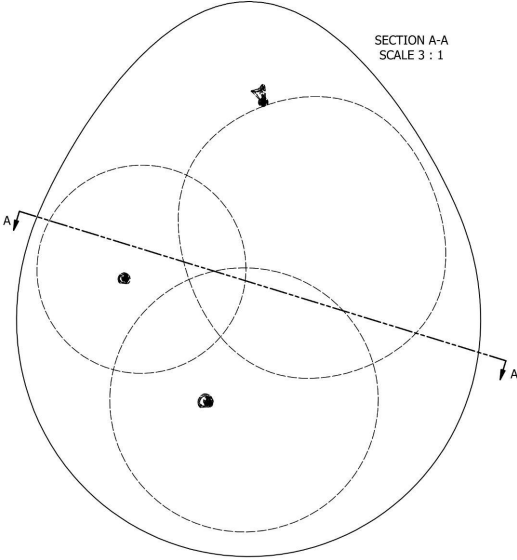
The NPO is intended not to prescribe an identity to the consumer, but to allow a person to project their own meaning onto it. Per definition the NPO has an elusive structure and image, thus a working strategy for “non-prescriptiveness” needs to be designed. What does it mean to tell a consumer who they are? How is this connected to concepts such as *use* or *function*?



DETAIL A  
SCALE 2 : 1

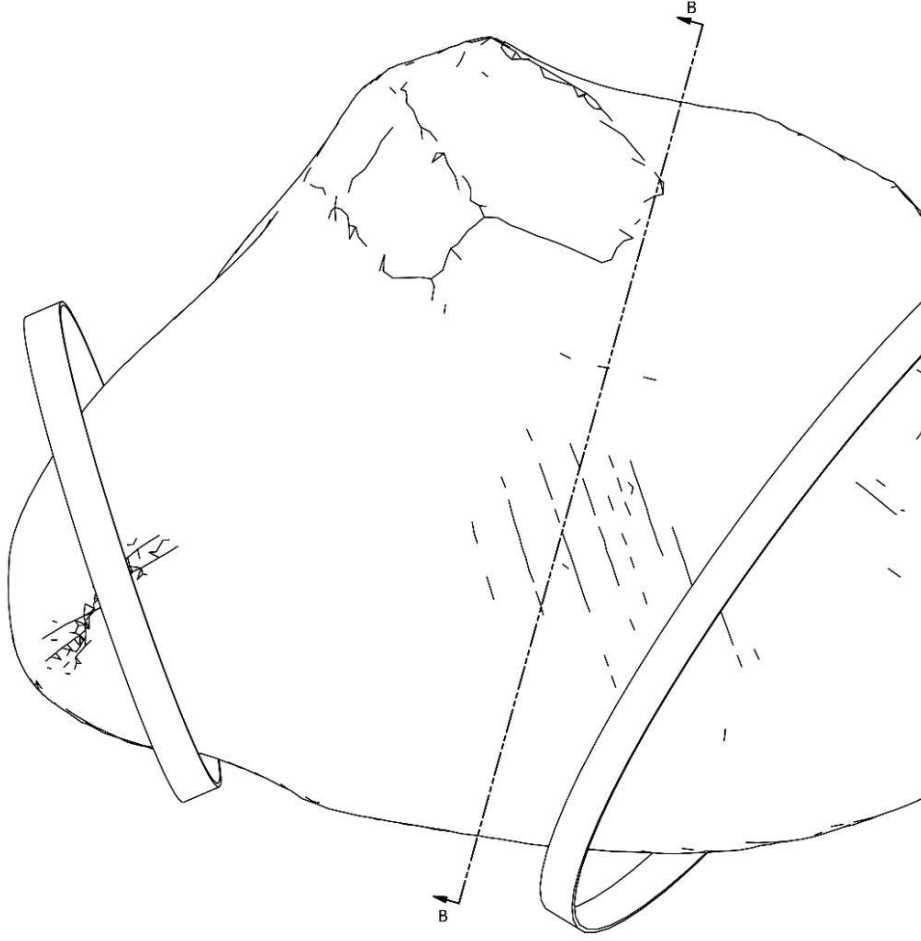


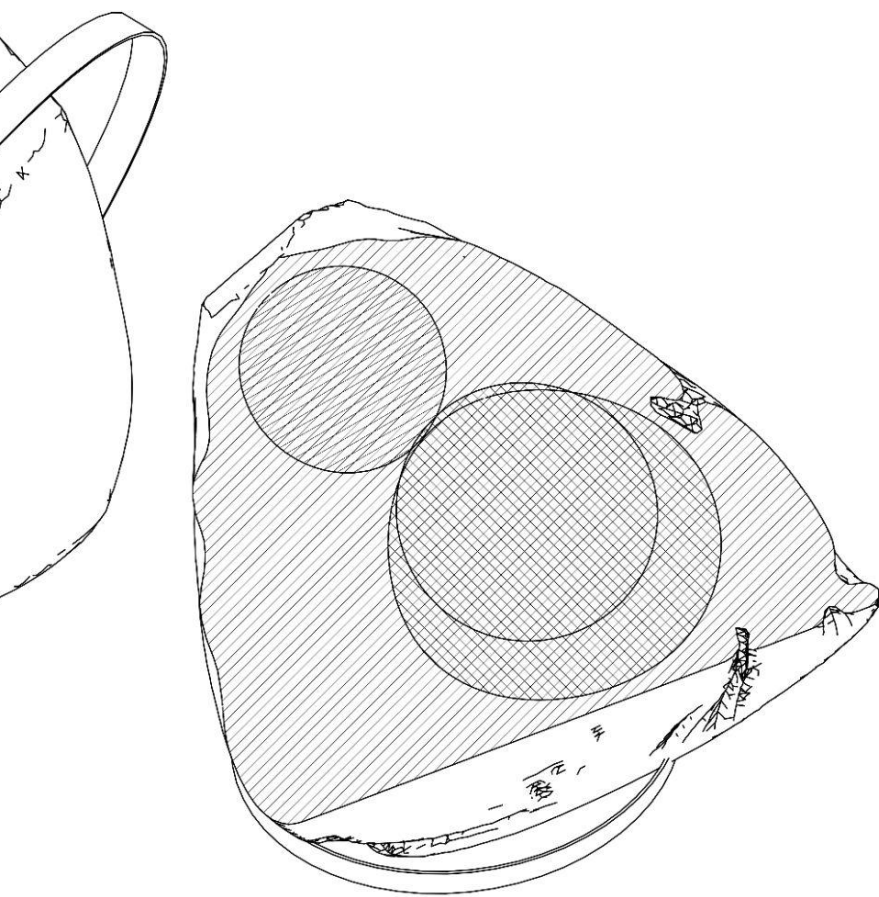
Silicone skin ..  
Filled with latex balloons...  
Filled with chalk..



To achieve a degree of “non-prescriptiveness”, two-part silicone was used to create a malleable and soft product. Silicone is often used to create prosthetics because of its skin-like properties. In the design process, it became apparent that in the search for a non-prescriptive object one stumbles upon the formation of a body - a formable, warm, soft, stretching, accommodating material. Viewing the NPO from this perspective allows for the production of new knowledge, in its entanglement between the consumer body and the product body. The relationship between consumer and NPO starts at a point of desire for ungovernability.







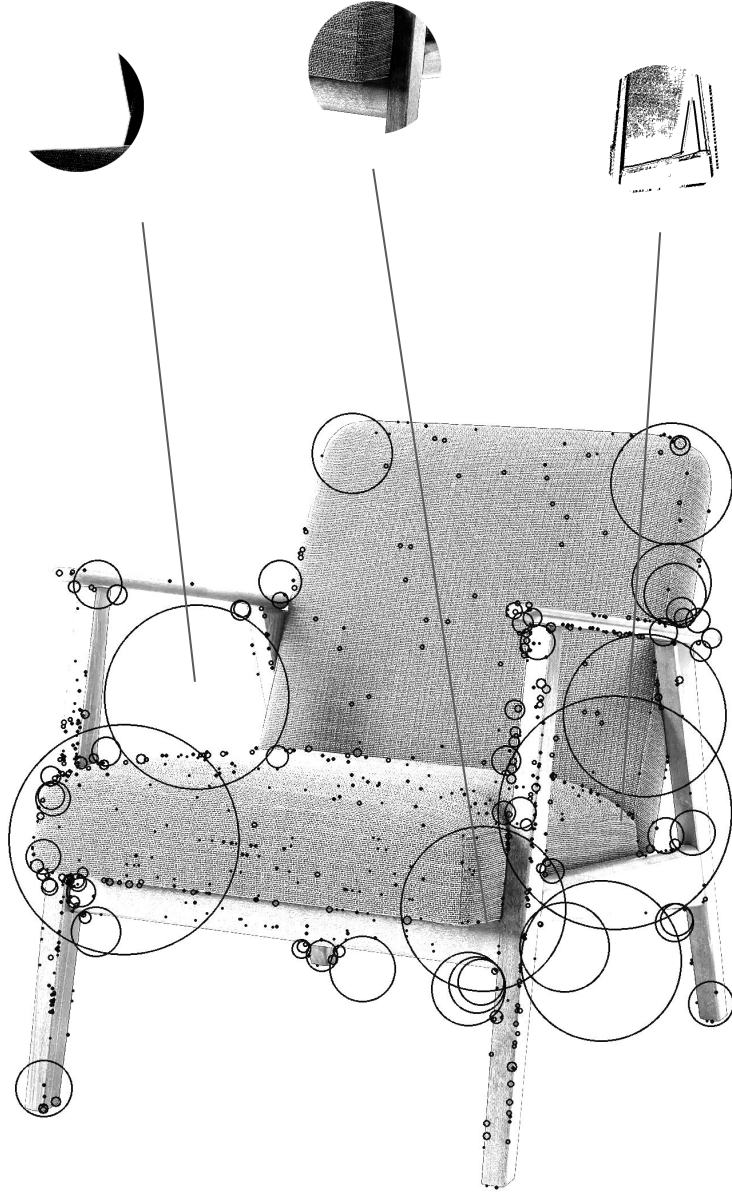
SECTION B-B  
SCALE 4 : 1

In order to allow for further mobility and structural formation, a notion of “non-prescriptiveness” must be developed with what seems to be an incongruous opposite: structure. Following artistic research such as ‘Bricks Like You’ (A. Holder) or ‘Incidental Space’ (C. Kerez), a non-conformist notion of material and form must be applied. *Desired Commodities* analyses the patterns of consumer identity in the IKEA store through a filtration-filtering system – first extracting seminal artifacts from marketable objects to then scramble and reorder the artifacts onto a base NPO. This system uses the Scale-Invariant Feature Transform, the process of which is outlined next.

## **SIFT** (Scale-Invariant Feature Transform)

The SIFT algorithm extracts pieces of visual information from an image and encodes it into a vector of gradients – a numeric representation of a salient visual feature. This vector is stored alongside the coordinates and radius of the pixels extracted from its source image. The encoded information can then be used as input data for e.g. convolutional networks in order to train for computer vision tasks or 3D reconstruction.

Or, for instance, to recognize design patterns on marketing image input sets. Page 12 shows the effect of running SIFT on IKEA's **EKENÄSET** armchair.

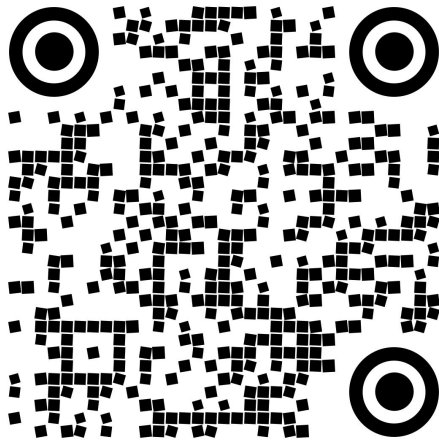


Using SIFT, it is possible to observe the features the consumer is exposed to upon traversing an IKEA maze. A video example of this can be seen after scanning the QR code on this page.

As the algorithm does not distinguish between the marketable objects and the non-marketable objects (store lights, support beams, inventory computers), it also does not discriminate between consumers and consumables. From this perspective a strategy of design emerges, acknowledging the absence of personal identity in the IKEA as its point of origin.

To present a subversive point of intervention, the collected features (marketable object element, nose, dial, hairline) can be reorganized into heuristic elements for the NPO.

In Appendix A<sub>1</sub> through A<sub>5</sub>, examples of extracted features from the are isolated **EKENÄSET** armchair and printed on transparent plastic, to be applied as overlapping filters over the base NPO. The process of creation can be then likened to a virtual three-dimensional collage.



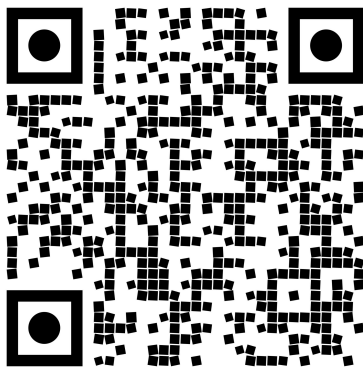
## Features

Usually, SIFT features are used exclusively to extract some visual information from a given object before running an AI network to train for a learning objective. However, in the present case, SIFT features are extracted to determine a set of structure defining visual areas. What the NPO features attempt to achieve is in effect a *hyperpop* or *maximalism* method of structure. The contemporary music genre of hyperpop, pioneered by A.G. Cook's record label PC Music, successfully disabuses the generation of classified identities through a maximal re-mixing and combining of pop material (music, fashion, styles). NPO features can be observed in the same way.









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**Made by Niels Gercama [2022]**



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