

The thing about this thing called a 'Washing Machine'

The weekend brings with it the onerous chores of the workweek one conveniently pushes to the day known worldwide as the day of the 'lord', of worship and rest, the deceitful 'Sunday'. But rest assured one is engrossed in errands that must be fulfilled for the following competent workweek. It no longer is the end to the week of labor. It is the pre workweek assembling of laundry, groceries and just enough shut eye to start the cycle again. But, have we not enough devices designed, strangely most of them in the forms of boxes, for our convenience. All solely dedicated to provide relief. I have often thought about the landscape of my current space of domicile and wondered how is it that if I drew a square and tried to fit in every device in it, each box would be a refrigerator, microwave, dishwasher, toaster oven, oven, bed and a chest of drawers. All carved into a box, shaped from metal, plastic or wood.

Every Sunday as I trudge down two stories of my apartment to the dingy and moist basement, my heart goes out to one such device designed to ease the laundry routine. The elusive washing machine for some reason is found divorced from his tribe and left all to himself with his adopted sibling the 'dryer'. A washing machine has become synonymous with laundry in today's time. Its functional positioning although varies from apartment to homeowners across cultures. In the west predominantly personal washing machines are found in the basement, garage or a separate laundry spaces. The communal apartment machines are coin operated and charge about a \$1.5 for each wash and a \$ more for drying. The laundry routine although not elaborate is a careful alignment of multiple decisions that marry to give you clean, washed, fresh and fluffy laundry. The array of products and resources that have to coalesce for a 30 min wash cycle are detergent to clean, hot or cold water to wash, fabric softener for fresh and fluffy clothes. Not to forget the power each wash consumes. Usually as I leave my laundry in for a wash I catch up on reading or make phone calls to family. But on rare occasions that I am left with nothing but the eeriness of the basement and the mechanical whoosh of the machine I remember the story of the elves and the shoemaker. Of all the magical little elves that come together at night and leave the shoemaker with beautifully crafted shoes in the morning. I think of all the forces that come together into this magical box that cleans and washes, twists and turns, wash after wash with no questions asked. I am given the gift of clean laundry at a \$1.50 of course.

The following essay is a result of an exercise that looked at things in our lives as entry points into systems and interconnected ecosystems. The washing machine in this case was mapped and all the systems, infrastructures and behaviors that emerged from its use were looked into. Having gone deep the world the washing machine affords three probable interventions into this world was proposed to see the emerging effects on the supporting systems in place. All the three interventions arose from a common premise that laundry was directly associated with the washing machine. The aspects leading to the laundry before and after were looked into to find key entry points of intervention. The common understanding of what is dirty, clean and convenient. People are willing to spend more money in buying more clothes to postpone laundry instead of spending more time on laundry itself. The concept of what that time means that what kind of intervention could change a mindset was thought about. Laundry is still considered a chore and hence any other activity done while doing laundry is considered to be more productive. The three interventions move from the individual self to the community and finally to the thing itself and relooking at its role in the environment and it interacts with people.

Intervention 1

Division of Labour

The first intervention looks closely at washing. What the act of washing encompasses. Whether it's washing yourself or your clothes the idea of washing is deeply rooted in what one considered clean and dirty. Until the early 18th century it was a common belief that through water diseases penetrated the body. Clothes were dabbed with large amount of perfume to avoid body odor. But times have change and with the development of a separate space to wash oneself and pipe water being made available. It has become easier to take bath regularly. It is not common in most cultures to bath on a day-to-day basis. But even so bathing is more frequently done than laundry. What could be considered a rather strange practice is that we are able to tell when the body needs to be washed and washing is considered cleaning but when it comes to clothing and the fabrics we use, most people wash there clothes after being worn once. Which is not washed immediately. Laundry is an intermediate activity that has a number of events before and after. One wears a type of clothing depending on the activity and time of the day. Whether its work, school, running, exercise, or just your plain pajamas all are worn once or twice and then collected over a period of time. Most laundry is collected in a laundry basket, bag, bucket; some even directly place it in their washing machines. Laundry is an activity that is postponed in most cases. The frequency with which one does laundry usually varies from weekly, to 2 weeks and some very disturbing cases including the essentials, monthly. In apartment set ups where the laundry room/ section is situated in the basement the washing

machine is a lonely functioning device in a damp and dingy environment that a majority of people avoid going to. Leading to a constant pushing away of the act of washing. Leading to a need to buy more clothes to constantly have a supply of clean clothes. I often wonder if the laundry room was not in the basement or maybe situated in a cleaner less offensive environment would people do laundry more often. But the monetary aspect of community laundry brings a whole new dimension to this activity. In most cases people probably do laundry once or twice a month is because it costs money to not only use the washing machine but to buy detergent, fabric softeners and other related products to maintain the quality of the fabric as the most community washing machines are the heavy duty kinds that finish a cycle in 30 min. The intensity is too strong sometimes for certain fabrics and can damage their quality.

This led to the first thought of the intervention in the washing space itself. While sorting in most cases we separate the dark from light, delicates from the heavy and then end up doing multiple rounds of washing and in most cases they all go together for one mega wash. What if the bathing space was realigned to afford the washing of our daily delicates and essentials such that it never landed up in the laundry bag getting accumulated for unhealthy and unhygienic weeks and even a month? A similar concept although already in practice in Asian countries like South Korea, where homes have separate drying and washing space with a separate wash basin where one washes the essentials and hangs them to be air dried. The western countries could relook at the alignment of their shower space altogether. What if right under the shower there was a foldable resting plane that would open during a shower where you could store your washing tools, brushes, soap and detergent. Bring it out while you shower and quickly wash your socks, underwear and delicates and rinse them while you shower. Usually there is a lot of space over the shower towards the ceiling that is available in the bathroom, what if there were air vents that opened out after your shower allowing circulation and there was a pulley system that could be pulled down on which you could hang your clothes and lifted back up towards the ceiling. After your done with the shower you could open the air vents and clothes would get air dried whilst you're not using the bathroom. You could leave them there until they dry and they would be clean and ready to wear the next day or go back into the closet. There could be space allocated next to the foldable platform space for washing to even store the folded washed clothes and there would no longer be the need to have a separate chest of drawers that one would need to open to get their essentials before a bath everyday. A more high fi version of the same in places where air drying is not an option in the bathroom itself could be small scale dryers that could be installed along with the flush tank. It could dry maybe 2 or 3 pieces of clothing at one time depending on its size and could be powered by the energy consumed in flushing the tank every time or the hot water that is used to take a shower.

The idea behind making small changes in existing spaces to afford and allow doing small amounts of laundry on a day-to-day basis is to divide the energy spent on one wash over a period of six days of a week. Instead of collecting all your clothing for longer periods of time doing bit and bit everyday and using natural methods to dry. Socks, undergarments, face towels and other such smaller pieces of clothing can be taken care of more frequently if the space afforded people to spend time on it. The water spent on bathing could be doubly utilized and the final load that would lead to using the washing machine would reduce. This would also lead to realizing that one has enough clothes that can last for more than a few months and maybe people will buy and consume less. Clothes that really do get dirty and need to be cleaned will get attended to more frequently. Hand washing also leads to more care of the fabric and a longer life. Use of less detergent and resources. There are communities in suburban India who still hand wash white collars and essentials on a day-to-day basis and air-dry them instead of putting everything through an entire wash cycle. There are cultures practicing sustainable ways of caring for their clothing and are willing to spend time on it realizing that they too are products that costs money.

Intervention 2

Care for everyone's dirty laundry

The idea of a community laundry has existed since the roman times. Where the common man, the worker or the fullones washed their clothes in fulleries using detergent. In India the concept of a 'Dhobi Ghat' is similar to this and is actively in use even today. A dhobi is someone who washes your clothes, folds and irons it and delivers it to your home, similar to the concept of a 'Laundromats' in today's western world. Except that at a 'Laundromat' you do your own laundry and fold and take it home to iron. The idea of the above intervention looks into the context of overpopulated city apartments that cannot afford individual laundry spaces and people look for external services to carry out their laundry. It hopes to relook at a community activity that brings people together and the design of a small intervention that could make doing laundry a fun social activity that people look forward to instead of a weekend chore.

I was inspired by the idea of the way a Food coop is run in a many American cities. A Food coop is a community run grocery store that is run and maintained by the people of the community. They sell fresh produce and support local farmers and businesses. Representatives of the community decide the working of the coop, the kinds of produce to sell and volunteer and give the space-time. It is an interesting concept of being

could become members of. You would still need to come and do your own laundry but in this case the Laundromat provides each member with a 'wash bag'. A wash bag is a bag that is designed to go into the washing machine with your dirty laundry inside it. It is a mesh like porous bag that allows soap water to enter and clean your clothes whilst in the machine. The idea of the bag is to allow more than one person to throw in their wash bag into the machine at one time. So instead of one person doing their laundry using one washing machine at one time. A group of two or three people who could form smaller member groups who use the same resources like, detergent, softener and water could benefit from one wash cycle. When you sign up for membership at the Laundromat these are criteria's that one can pick and choose and find laundry partners to do laundry with. This way the Laundromat could have different format washing machines for different kinds of fabrics and allow multiple washes for people in just one wash cycle. The 'wash bag' would be provided free with the membership and members could procure more depending on sizes. People could collaborate and decide wash timings together and form folding groups to make the even the mundane activities fun. Laundromats are usually centrally located in city blocks. Multiple social events and activities could be planned and arranged by the Laundromat itself to encourage more social interaction. Laundry no longer has to be a chore that one postpones for the end of the month but a community gathering and activity you look forward to on a weekly basis. The idea is to utilize the time people spend between washing and drying and turn it into an active social activity. The use of the wash bag would result in the less use of resources like water and power. The time people would spend in front a screen or trying to get work done would be spent interacting with people. It will be a great way to meet people, build trust in the community and care for your dirty laundry.

Intervention 3

A washing machine that's not ready

The third intervention relooks at the thing itself and the environment it is situated in. It questions the current alignment of space and the activities around that space. For instance we have a room where we sleep, where we eat and cook, a room where we share our common activities in and bath and wash. Each space uses a set of resources and materials for it to fit its purpose. For instance the kitchen, the bathroom and the laundry space all need water to carry out some of their basic functions. What if we relooked at the way our spaces were designed such that the three were always found together and then the rest of parts of the house were aligned around them accordingly. That would require relooking at the plumbing, and hot water could be made available only through one faucet. Affording less use of hot water and energy. The carefully designed space would be integrated such that it would allow for sorting of laundry based on whether or not it is

ready for a wash. The key aspect of the space would be a smart washing machine. A washing machine that would assess if your laundry is ready to be washed or not. As soon as you put the piece of clothing in it, it would either spit it out through a dispensing tray below and indicate the number of times it could still be worn and identify a stain or spot that could be either hand washed or rinsed and air dried. The kitchen and washing space would be integrated such that it would allow for small stains to be removed from natural ingredients found in the kitchen itself instead of going through an entire wash cycle. The smart machine would become the center of a person's cleaning routine and the machine takes onus on itself to decide whether it's ready or not. The idea is to question the notion of what dirty or unclean means to people and the need to not necessarily wash every piece of clothing that one wears for not more than one time. The washing machine in this becomes the object of manipulation and makes the user think about the piece of clothing that he puts into it. The design of the machine itself would always allow for it to be placed in unison with the kitchen space and a small drying or wash area forcing a whole new approach to urban design and space planning. Most clothes don't even need machine drying and having a designated small space for drying small pieces of clothing or ones that could only be rinsed would help reduce the consumption of energy that goes into drying. Maybe not immediately but through the constant act of rejecting clothes that are not ready for wash yet, it will over a period of time make the user think twice before throwing laundry into the machine. The smart machine not only is helping itself by reducing load, use and consumption but also the environment and the activity of washing itself.

The smart machine would need a new kind of engineering and integration with artificial intelligence. The manufacturing process would have to work closely with a new kind of technology to integrate a machine that is able to think for itself.

In conclusion, it is the hope of this exercise to relook at not just the washing machine of our life but also all the other boxes of convenience we accumulate and have become attached and accustomed to. They bring with them a web of conscious use of resources that one must become aware of, which is constantly modifying our system of functioning. It is very hard to move back to an earlier model of either washing, bathing or cleaning, but it is possible to consciously find sustainable ways of using and designing new systems that are not resource intensive and change the future of human interaction and product development.