

Agne Vei

touching mars



Touching Mars

An autobiographical book-collection of writings

by Agne Vei

*To six individuals who once happily lived under one roof:
mum, dad, brothers Tadas and Vitas, godson Vincentas and niece
Vaiva.*

A big 'Terima Kasih' ('Thanks') to Ažuolas.



I create life. Life, that has started with a wish to touch Mars.

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ISBN 978-609-408-339-6

Publisher and author

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Design

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English translation © Agne Vei 2012

Translated from the Lithuanian by Hesi Group

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PREFACE

“We are free to go where we wish and to be what we are.”

Jonathan Livingston Seagull

Malaysia. The Fortune Court. A nice pocket-sized apartment. Morning, about 11.15 a.m. Squirming like a cat in my bed, I feel a sun ray tickling my leg through the chocolate curtains; outside the window is Sunday. Bath with the thought in my mind “Today I want to be light”, sunglasses with the thought “Want to see less” and my legs with Miu-Miu pink shoes – “a rose, rose, rose-coloured, nice and beautiful world!”. Me, my umbrella and my L – all on our way to hunt for late breakfast. Good morning, Kuala Lumpur’s sleepyheads! It’s time to wake up! Today we want fresh air and refreshing wind and have no thoughts... No thoughts! Do you hear me – no thoughts...! According to my L, life is a game and you have to play it. Let’s be children...! Let’s play and not think!

12.15 p.m. The bubbles in the soda water remind me of rain, the natural orange juice gives strength... Music, music, quietly peaceful music further puts me in a state of no-thinking...! At the café bar, a hundred weird cards lie on the table... We start playing. “Draw!” soon I hear. And in a couple of moments the morning “no thinking” mood somewhere disappears because the card I’ve drawn asks me:

“If you were to write a book, what would it be about?”

The Book

Not long ago, maybe a few years back, I received a letter from my friend in e-mail box. His question “How do you seek peace of mind?” has become a part of me. Having perceived myself as a ray and having exchanged promises for the unknown, I started to search for answers to the questions that always haunt me – constantly, everyday. I want to share everything I have discovered and I believe that “it” will easily and sweetly mess up your world and remind you that you are a beautiful, active and happy human being. As my friend wrote, it only takes an idea to move the whole world...!

My luxury is details and the art of finding a connection between opposites. The first detail of my life was being born in the early morning hours after the night that gave 12 boys and one girl to the world. She was named Agne by her parents. The meaning of my name is the combination of fire (Lith. *ugnis*) and innocence (lamb of God). Throughout my whole life I have been filled with passion for life and sought for my “own” innocent and intoxicating freedom of being full of flight. Fashion design is my life’s key to thousands of questions that haunt me constantly, everyday.

I began my preparation for the fashion design studies at the age of twelve. Sixteen years have passed since then. Over those years I have learnt to observe, to see, to keep silent, to act, to listen, to inspire, to run, to seek, etc., and it is two X 8, or 2 infinities. I have decided to share the things I have long kept secret. And now I’ve turned 28 and it is also two X 8, or two infinities. Some Asian morning I asked myself if I, as a representative of the fashion world, could be a role model in taking care of our planet in a broad sense, which starts with the person

having a vision to study fashion design? Encompassing him or her as an individual (uniqueness, thinking, body, nutrition, clothing, art of conversation) and an environment in which he or she is present but, more importantly, where he or she intends to travel.

What contribution can I make as an individual having unique experience in being a lecturer or an inspiring role model for young people?

Huge! In a positive way and with the most sincere smile in the world.

And this, my friend, is my peacefulness.

Asia has set me free from “me, me, me”. The silence of two years has put my thoughts in order. A smile has settled inside me...!

I joyfully announce the birth of my first book *Touching Mars* here, in Malaysia, in the Fortune Court.

I am equipped to see (my luxury is details), hear (myself, you, the world around us), feel (I live listening to my intuition and following my heart) and know how to act (no matter how difficult it is, you get up from the table and meet the world). I will teach you these as well. Let's be open to new ideas!

Once I decided to enter the word “stairs” into the Google image search. The vast online resources have opened hundreds of pictures portraying stairs upon which people were living their lives – someone was drinking coffee, someone was jogging or running, someone fell in love or even had their first kiss, someone was breastfeed-

ing a baby, the stairs were colourful, colourless, led nowhere, turned into a cat walk or part of a creative photo shoot, and so on and so forth. Fascinated by the abundance and diversity of pictures, I started looking for the stairs that would represent my life at this point.

Here it is! Here it is! Here it is! I screamed joyfully.

Stairs white as milk. Each step is a design form which is born when each millimetre counts. Precision. Life. Each millimetre counts. Design. They reflect the most perfect natural shape – a spiral and an essence of a human to be the best, then the worst, and then again the best. Each millimetre counts. Three steps and three flights. These are the three stages of my professional life which will, or maybe will not, inspire you. Anyway, it's worth trying. Each millimetre counts.

The first segment, the first flight. To put it shortly... it is about the first experiences – the first collection, the first job, the first works, the first titles and various “epaulettes”. This is the beginning of it all – the dream. This is about no longer being a child, this is about difficulties one faces as an adult, this is about being in a hurry to learn, the hunger for knowledge, the fall, the naivety, the love for love and the internal strength that pushes you further and further.

The second one... In brief words... this is about a quest, search and byways, this is about the question “Who am I?”, this is about you and your unique path. This is about “them” who mislead you, this is about the soul's voice and belief in yourself.

The third one is called Asia. To put it shortly, this is about a treasure, about a treasure of being able to understand who you are and where your life journey will take you. This is about it – simplicity, humbleness, openness, this is about giving, sharing,

educating, not stopping. This is about it – peacefulness, smile, wish to inspire others. This is about love for your country, your family and the world, this is about the wish and reluctance to return, a wish to be here, now and forever... This is about the meaning.

This is my mission. The mission to inspire, to find answers to everyday fashion life design questions, a mission to move your world and my intention to bring light and belief in design people (in today's world they include all of us) scattered across the entire length of the planet's 24,902* circumference, only through the fashion filter. Let's create, let's search and let's not stop!

I ask myself: am I doing the right thing? YES. Am I failing? Again YES. I am trying since I have the opportunity to be wrong and the opportunity to discover. I am smiling and I am opening the window of opportunities.

* Capitalism 24902 is the new business, the new today's responsibility to make business take care of individuals and the world across the entire circumference of the earth of 24,902 miles. I support this Richard Branson's idea.

Window

Flight (Fulfilment of your dream) requires a window. Open it. Want to travel? Start reading travel books. Want to learn Italian? Sign up for the Italian language courses. Want to be-

come a fashion designer? Try your hand at sketching a dress. Want to be fit? Take photos of apples. Want to drive a Ferrari? Try renting it for a start. Want to understand yourself? Start writing a diary. Want fame? Think of something you can accomplish to earn it. Open the window! “You are capable of anything,” my mom always said to me. She knows it because you came from her. Open the window!

Yes, yes, I know. I’ve already opened it. While waiting I no longer wait, I believe – Life is Beautiful (Have you seen this movie?), be open to new ideas. I close my eyes, meditate, I see the sea, I am surrounded by a good world, I feel good, I am flying with my belly touching the tops of the trees! Open the window!

I was 22 and I was deeply in love, to be exact, I have always been like that as far as I remember myself because Love is my essence. At the art mill I met an artist-jeweller. What was he like? Old, angry, shouting, a choleric person and on top of it all an alcoholic, a veteran, beating his wife and slamming the doors of my ex L’s studio. A black raincoat, a black hat and a white scarf – a split personality: “Mr. Anger” used to turn to “Mr. Goodness” when conversation turned to the topic of jewellery. “I’m a *fucking* genius!” such shouts were quite common at the old art mill. Most interestingly, it was namely who he was. His studio was very tidy and clean, and his works were incredibly beautiful. One day he was telling more about himself and about the window he liked to engrave on rings. A window for escaping, a window for hiding from others, a window for getting out and hearing yourself, this *fucking* window that gives you a sense of meaning when you are cheerful, when you are sad, when you feel good, when you feel bad, when you want to disappear. After he calmly explained me the concept of the window, the *fucking* genius went back to yelling... I thought

to myself “OK, you *fucking* sick man, I wish you calmness, but the works... They are *fucking* beautiful...!”

Quit crying, complaining, giving excuses or blaming others.

Open the window, your window, the window of opportunities.
For your own sake, for the sake of your neighbour, for the sake of the world!

* The movie *Life is Beautiful* by Roberto Benigni.

1.) FASHION DESIGN LECTURER

Since the day I gave my first lecture in fashion design – it was the end of a deep winter in 2008, I understood that I am an educator.

The same day the questions started to haunt me that I am still looking for answers to every day:

Who is a fashion design lecturer? Is it a reflection or a shadow of fashion design? Is it an observer or a follower? Is it an individual or a grey mouse? A fashion designer or a fashion representative? And so on and so forth.

Today I answer to these questions:

Yes, both a reflection and a shadow. Yes, both the observer and the follower. Yes, an individual and a grey mouse. Yes, a fashion designer and a fashion representative. Yes, yes, yes.

You know what?

The fashion design lecturer is:

A lecturer. A bringer of silence. A carrier of peacefulness. An angel. A traveller. A clown. A psychologist. Love dependant. Colourful. Interesting. Serious. The one who thinks outside the box. A thinker. An observer. A forward mover. A rower. A collector of thoughts. A farmer and spreader of light. A dreamer. A mystic and visionary. A baker of clouds. A dolphin. A lion. A cat. A fish. A believer. A writer. Figure of eight and infinity.

Fashion, design and lecturer

Fashion is both ergonomics and beauty. In other words, it is a recreation of nature or a natural form which performs a function, which is able to renew, and which finally dies in a vicious circle. Beauty is the essence of fashion and an aesthetical understanding of the form through cultural lenses.

Design is giving both shape and attraction to the form, or an intellect in the worlds of ideas. In the real world, this corresponds to action: I reach out, I take and I say “This is mine.”

Teaching is the dissemination of ideas, and the lecturer is a role model or “I want to be just like you” form which assumes responsibility for providing knowledge, warning and setting young people to their mission they were called for. Primarily it is a human being meant for giving, then it is a human being meant for tolerating, and finally it is a human being meant for wishing luck and belief.

Thus, the fashion design lecturer today is an individual (a role model), a colleague and a professional able to detach themselves from all personal issues and guide young people towards their path – to inspire, to share, to think brightly and exist/act for your own sake, for the sake of the world and for the sake of future generations.

Inoculation of design thinking – solutions of the today’s world!

Three lecturers

Over the 16 years of my friendship with fashion, I have met three lecturers who are a credit to their profession.

A person who has been dearest to me has not even come from the fashion world.

Lile will remain in my memory till the end of my life. She was the most virtuous, the most pure and the most sensitive person who has gave essence to my path of learning, my personal growth and maturity. She was a ceramic artisan, an artist practicing her art with an emphasis on cleanliness, aesthetics and positivity. I was privileged to spend as many as five years of my learning with this person. She evokes the warmest memories in me: it was Lile who explained to me what a blank sheet of paper is, she showed me that pencil sharpening is both a preparation for work and a certain cleansing meditation before the birth of the sketch; she showed me how Paris blue (!) looked like. She was a person who subtly shaped me with her endless patience, always reminding me that quality is always above quantity. She would always leave me the option of choice. "Never say you don't know," even today I hear Lile's words. "You know. Listen to your heart." For five years I was preparing to enroll to the Academy of Arts but she would always preempt me and make me have second thoughts. "Only brightest student get in there. Have you thought of what you would do if you did not get enrolled?" "Yes," I uttered. "I will continue working on preparation. At the end I will enroll, if not on the first year, then on the second, if not on the second, then maybe on the third year. At the end I will make it, won't I?" Her words were often accompanied by silence and it gave space for the development of my thinking. "1 percent talent, 99 percents hard work" was

another Lile's phrase I remember till this day. "Fashion is expensive pleasure, you are taking a risk. Talent and passion is not enough, you have to put effort to it," she used to say with calmness and a fine smile in her face.

When I witnessed Lile's final journey, I had already been done with my studies at the Academy of Arts, to which I enrolled on the first year, being the 4th on the admission list (!) to the state funded place. Later I pursued a successful career as a fashion designer. "So long," I said to her in my mind. I tried to remain strong but as soon as I went out to take a breath of fresh air, I burst out in tears. How can a single person give so much? She was so down to earth! She is my angel!

My dearest lecturer was a professional of her field who perfectly embodied the "I want to be just like you" form.

I met Jolanta at Vilnius Academy of Arts, during my third year of studies. Together with her, I started creating my first collections. My study years were very intense and marked by events, competitions, and various projects – I was constantly on the go. I was an over-achiever, I felt hunger, I was hungry for science and knowledge. "The sickness that you have may not necessarily be shared by others," she uttered rather painful words. Whenever I tried to complain about the necessity to be financially strong to be able to create collections, she would suddenly ask me: "Didn't you know that before you chose the design field?" Her phrases would be accompanied by silence and a smile, sometimes it would annoy me and you started getting angry at yourself and the world around you, and at your poor parents but at the end this provoked my thoughts and promoted my creativity. Having limited finances (I didn't have money!) I started learning to approach solutions in a creative way – after all, a good collection may be created at a cheaper price – the most important thing is the concept/idea/message

that you want to convey, the quality, the prototype, the presentation, form, silhouettes, colours, etc. Jolanta was the chief designer and a face of Vilnius Models' House. She was everything who I aspired to be. Modest, down to earth, stylish, nice, although very busy, she would always find time for her students. During the time of developing my Bachelor's and Master's collections, she became my main guide who, strange though it may seem, gave me an enormous amount of freedom. She would never make me do anything; she would leave room for your decisions and choices – you could be the worst or you could be the best – she made you understand that you control everything. It was the greatest lesson – YOU CONTROL EVERYTHING, or to be more exact, you are your own boss. I was very fascinated by this collegial distance that she was able to maintain – the distance when you respectfully understand that you are a student and she is your lecturer. The intelligence of her look and movements always made you to be your best. Respect. Cleanliness. Aesthetics. Silence. Details.

My dearest fashion design director.

Giedre is a founder and a director of the design college. Our roads crossed at one party. At that time I was working as a fashion designer and was mentoring several projects. Suddenly I was offered a lector's position and a new stage began – I started sharing my knowledge with the young generation. The time of new challenges scared me and at the same time made me feel useful. Giedre is a person of action. A diminutive, intelligent, very strict and demanding, smart and having a flight of imagination. She is a real educator who has combined the essence of learning – to see, to listen, and to act. She is a person who, without having to say anything, convinced me that the perception of who you are speak louder than words. "I know perfectly well who I am," her words again moved me and got me into

deep thinking – instead of hanging papers and diplomas on your walls, you have to collect “pluses” in this life. The essence is to understand who you are and what you aim for, how can you help your family, your friends, and finally, how you can contribute to the world’s welfare. I have been thinking a lot. Oh dear... I have carried my reflections with me even to Milan and finally to Asia. This has inspired me to find peace of mind (to travel, to write books, to observe), to read hundreds of books, to speak, to share, to howl like a she-wolf and even to grasp my essence. I have understood that the most difficult task in this life is working with yourself. If you are a good boss for yourself, the rest can be overcome. This person has helped me find a meaning in my path by being my role model, simply by being, by her silence. When I received a job offer to work as lecturer in Asia, she was the one who gave me a hug, who was sincerely happy for me and who wished me all the luck in the world.

I am thankful and I am happy to be able to share the wisdom of my three lecturers with my present students. I believe that it is important to be together and to learn from one another. The word “together” in the Lithuanian language means not only togetherness but also the bitter taste. You cannot know what to expect in this life.

I have to admit that I have met lecturers at whom I looked and thought “I don’t believe you”. She was an English lecturer. She was my friend’s friend who put me up for the first night after I arrived to Milan. Cold winter wind was blowing through the windows; I was lying on the ground crying. “You will never live in the Naviglio Pavese!” a fat “lecturer” said while eating pasta with onions. Next day in the afternoon I came back for my stuff.

“Have you found an apartment?” she asked me coming out of her room resembling a cave. “Yes,” I said and continued packing my stuff. “Where are you going to live?” she asked me suddenly. Returning my key I smiled to her and said, “In the Naviglio Pavese.” Then I rushed to the white apartment at the Gola Street with the windows overlooking the Naviglio Pavese; the apartment belonged to the language school which courses I attended for several months and this did not cost the alleged million. I understood that there is no “never” in life and I stopped asking myself “how?” and I exchanged everything for “action”.

And finally, I want to talk about one more lecturer whom I met in Asia...

Alex is my colleague and my friend. Today we had a lunch together and had a passionate one-hour discussion about this “upside down” world. He made me rethink everything and brought me back to reality, the human reality where all that matters is to be good, to listen, to hear and to see. “Wealth gives temporary happiness,” he said. “Giving, sharing, teaching... Agne, we are lucky we don't have bigger problems. We should be grateful.” Most of the time I kept silent and listened. It had been a while since I had had a sincere chat with someone so when I heard him speaking sincerely I only wanted to listen and draw at least a piece of wisdom from him. His thoughts came as addition to the book I bought yesterday, a spiritual biography of Dalai Lama. Suddenly, the vanity of my past couple of days which manifested itself in binging on milk chocolate started to fade away. I understood that this hour was special, it was in a way a wake-up call saying: devote some time to personal meditation, devote some time to prayer, ask for strength, broaden your horizons, have a brighter smile, you are here and now, and you have God, the great lecturer, in you. You are

happy to be able to teach and learn from him, and from yourself – to see, to listen, to feel and take action. Tired of the blazing heat, we got back to school where we were carried away by our work. Alex is a good person. He is a devoted father and an open-minded individual who can speak with great understanding and wisdom. He is a traveller who sometimes looks like a clown. He is a deep person whose luxury is “simplicity”. Our conversations sometimes have continuation. What I like about him is that this lecturer teaches students to look at the world in a simpler and more rational way, but this is a task of great complexity.

2.) *FASHION DESIGN STUDENT*

Education is a key to your self-realisation “room”. By improving yourself daily you get rid of piles of trash in your head and become open to new ideas. You are growing. You are developing. You start seeing that life is full of challenges which is why it is interesting. Lucky are those who can remain students throughout their life, at this point I am talking about curiosity/hunger, without forgetting “beer”, “Facebook” and “parties”.

During my years as a fashion design student I realized and noticed a few important details or nuances the absence of which would make being a fashion design student difficult. A fashion design student has a vital need for a close person who supports you, encourages you and believes in you and is the biggest fan of your works, even if you are at your worst at this stage of your life. You can call this person in the middle of the night or at six a.m., you may write him/her the craziest letters and you know that this person will accept you as you are and listen to you, have a cup of coffee with you and, if needed, feed you and finally remind you that “you can”. These words, uttered in the right place and at the right time, can do miracles. In my case, this is my mom and my best friend.

Another factor is hunger; the hunger for art, beauty, flight and curiosity. You must be hungry.

What follows next is the result of your hunger – the first collection which becomes part of your self-introduction or “Hello, I am a young fashion designer and this is my first collection”. The first collection is already the first investment to your fu-

ture, and no matter how much effort it would cost, it is your “to live”.

The first job is the result of your study years. If you have worked honestly and with love, and knew what you were doing during your study years, then the first jobs often knock at your door uninvited. Reality often lags behind. When you are consciously planting seeds, one day you will start watering plants of remarkable beauty.

And finally a financial issue that I also intend to discuss. Everyone knows the saying “Money is not the most important thing in life”. Yes, I agree, but speaking about fashion its amount becomes of particular importance. And the last but not the least observation – there were several lines in my friend’s letter: “Even knowing what I want, I cannot find anyone to learn from and ways to achieve my goals <...> I don’t want to get warm from my thoughts, I want to ignite. Because I already know how to wish nothing, how to not get attached and be at rest even in critical situations.” You know what this is? The words from my Friend’s mouth refer to the so-called generation Y whom I will start with.

Generation Y

Today I went to college through a newly built pedestrian crossing which joins the large store mall called Pavilion and the famous Kuala Lumpur twins. My way zigzagged over cars and across the inside of buildings, through underground parking lots bringing me through a crowd of people of different nationalities, and during that time my mind was drifting and

tried to swing me up reminding me over and over again of various life challenges, experiences and a further road, and my female friends whose families are “flooded with babies”. I felt sad, then funny, then curious and suddenly my eyes caught a t-shirt one guy was wearing which said “Let it be”. After a few moments my mind brought me to the grand Asian fashion convention in Singapore where I had a 3-day professional development stay. In a seminar, I heard about the Generation Y. It is the generation born between 1977 and 1994 which is unimaginable without the internet, the “green” life and monstrous consumption. These are people with a strong entrepreneurship spirit and full of life energy. The major part of their life is occupied by technologies used for self-expression and communication. It is a generation who shapes the world through the internet. The representative of Debenhams announced that their website experiences highest sales at around 10 p.m. when most people are snuggled up in their cosy blankets shopping online using their smartphones before sleep. The most famous figure of the generation Y is Mark Zuckerberg, the creator of the social networking site Facebook, inceptioned in his dorm room and developed to a worldwide company. It is a very ambitious and impatient generation who is very receptive to novelties. These are people who exchange information at the speed of light, who communicate and express themselves individually taking into consideration their life. These are positive people who are inspirators. These are very sensitive individualists the communication with whom should be based on wisdom.

“How do you teach this generation? How do you communicate with them without ruining them?” these are questions that haunt me because I’m a part of this generation. Using wisdom, smile, patience and sincerity, with your eyes cast down and with respect – this is the only way. The king of wisdom and perceptivity, the master of writing and a person of extraor-

dinary talent – Paulo Coelho and his books – is one of the greatest inspirations in my life. So simple and authentic. I am greatly inspired by his books, stories, novels and life lessons put in them. In one of them I have found what a good lecturer and a good student is. Let me share this with you. These lines apply to both the fashion design lecturer and the fashion design student. From the conversation between two people, it follows that a good lecturer is someone who questions everything he teaches allowing old ideas acquire a new form. It is a person who uses the wisdom of the past without forgetting the challenges of the today's world. A good student is someone who listens to his lecturer but adapts his learning to life and never follows it blindly. It is a person who seeks not only employment but also a job who provides him with dignity and nobility. It is someone who does not seek to be noticed but aims at achieving something noticeable.

As a student I have pursued my tasks listening to my inner voice, sometimes being naïve, believing in miracles and looking at the world through rose-tinted glasses. You know what? No matter how many ups and downs I have had in my life, I remained the same. People don't change, do they? And if you asked me how I feel now I would answer that you are reading the book by the happiest person in the world and the representative of the Generation Y.

Mother

I am very grateful for having a mum who gave me birth, loved me, cuddled me, fed me and was/is my most sincere life design lecturer who has accepted me as I am and allowed me to

discover myself as I am. Thank You. Thank You for having so much patience which likely comes from your endless love for your children, all of whom are so unique and different.

My road started and continues with/through/to/from you, no matter how our opinions used to collide.

Over time, you start letting other people into your life. You listen them talking, you observe them moving, you check out their clothing style and you look for answers, you keep silent/grow and step by step you become someone you really are: “Hello, I am Agne Vei, I would like to sign up for the Italian language courses. Hello, I am Agne Vei, I would like to open a bank account. Oh, yes, this is Agne Vei, I am a fashion designer and I would like to ask you if it would be possible... Agne Vei, date of birth 19..., personal number, height, weight, philosophy... U-vee! U-vee! Do you have a bottle of water in your bag? Oh, yes, I’m sorry, sometimes Agne Vei is terribly absent minded. What could your smile mean? Agne Vei, a fashion design lecturer, nice to meet you...”

Today you are already on your road but everything starts step by step, everything starts with the purest person – your mum – and moves up and down changing rainbow colours and the colours of its shadow. And sometimes one step is only 2 mm long, but it does not matter how slow you move as long as you don’t stop.

From our telephone conversations:

Mum, you make me come to a boil, you make me nervous, why so much doubt and so many questions! What a vivid imagination! Aaah!

Mum: No, no, my dear, I simply keep you burning.

P. S. She is an air sign and I am a fire sign.

From our daily life:

I was lying in my bed and watching clouds kissing when the phone rang. I was actually waiting for a phone call, I have always waited for a phone call that would change my life. This was supposed to be the right call.

Me: Hello, - I answered with a toned down voice.

Female voice: Hello, we would like to ask you if you have a cable TV and if yes maybe we could offer you...

Since something inside me did not let me interrupt the nice female voice, I kept listening. While she was spitting out her words like bullets, I was looking through the window and watched clouds making love. The voice kept speaking, kept asking me something, but I was waiting for a phone call that would change me life without even hanging the phone. Instead phone calls only corrected it, and, for example, the next day I was snuggled up in an armchair watching my favourite travel channel on cable TV with a devil smile on my face and a thought in my mind: "One day I will visit all the world's Indians...!"

Me: Mum, don't you think that the most important thing in life is the FLIGHT, - I said to her one day.

Mum: Oh, Ms. Flight, it's about time you quit thinking about flying. It's time to bear children! It's not good for 30 year old woman to think such gibberish, - my mum said looking hope-

lessly at her Agne.

Me: For your information I'm 26, and if we round like this, then you are 100 years old, my grannie, - I said to her and started giggling.

Mum: Wanna eat something?

Me: I'm on a starvation diet.

Mum: Since when?

Me: Since now.

Mum: Oh, - I heard her saying.

Me: Listen, mum, let's buy a multi-purpose kitchen appliance from the commercial where you throw your shoe from the sitting room to the kitchen and in a few seconds a meal is ready, and you don't even need to buy products, - I sighted.

Mum: But you said you were on a starvation diet, - my mom said adjusting her glasses.

Me: He who has four eyes looks like a diver, - I started singing and mocking her for wearing glasses.

Mum: You are nuts, - my mom said. You'd better tidy up your room. Your room is a mess.

Me: It's not mess, it's chaos, - I said angrily. It's my space where masterpieces are born...!

Mum looked at me with a smile and left the room.

Me: Mum! (I shouted.)

Mum: What?

Me: Come here, I want to talk to you.

Mum: Go away, - she shouted and I heard her pushing the kettle button. After a few moments I felt a smell of coffee in the air, and looking at the ceiling I was thinking to myself how independent she is being sometimes.

Me: That's my girl. (I thought to myself.)

3.) *HUNGER FROM MARS*

What is hunger? Where does it come from? Are you haunted by a feeling like there is something you desire to do, to accomplish, to see...? Does it wake you up in the morning and say to you:

“Hey, a new day has come! Faster! Get up and wash yourself. What? Are you still in bed?”. It is similar to a physical urge to eat except that it does not disappear after you eat. To quench it you need to take action. It blossoms when it sees you succeed in creating, realizing and doing something different. Haven't you ever wondered where it comes from?

My hunger is from Mars.

I have always had a feeling inside me that I could not name until one day I came across a book about hunger in a pile of bargain books. It wasn't a book on diets or food – the killer of physical hunger but rather it was about a hunger with a capital H. It is a creative hunger. A paper treasure bought at a ridiculously low price has become a starting point of my search, and my feeling without a name has finally got one.

“Hunger means desire. It is craving larger than desire. It is not will which is strength. Even more so it is not weakness because hunger does not recognize passivity. A hungry person is someone who seeks,” said Amelie Nothomb, the author of *Hunger Biography*.

I have become a seeker because I had to find a way to quench it or in other words hunger has made me to sort of embark on a journey to discover myself.

Hunger is my ally, it is always by my side.

Elderly lady: When you grow up and have money, you have to remove this scar.

Me: How can I remove my symbol of luck? (I slit my eyes bitterly and smiled.)

Elderly lady: What?

Me: Meh (I said to myself.)

Leaving her confused, I continued walking my road with my hands in pockets. Suddenly I remembered the trousers my ex L dreamed about – trousers with pockets freely hanging on your shins so that they flutter like wings when you jump around. I was 19 and at this moment of conscious awareness I felt a need to jump around; I would have made use of these trousers.

We are constantly surrounded by people and their attitudes which could be defined as the limitation that restricts each individual. A human is a ray and it's a pity that most of them see themselves as a segment. We have to shine. I remember myself playing the universe – at the time I was only two but I remember it as if it happened yesterday – and my goal was to reach bright blue-orange Mars. I placed a chair on top of another, then climbed onto a cupboard and put my leg on the second chair. Mars glittered in the sky... I felt like I could touch it... Unfortunately, it was not meant to be. Suddenly everything

collapsed, my nose split, and the last thing I remember from that evening was my cry, my fear and many doctors in white gowns. Then I had a primary realization that fantasy is not reality but it's real and is the most powerful force and the essence of this world's self-realization, i. e. I dream – I make it happen, I fall (It hurts), I get better/recover (I think), a new morning breaks (I try again). The accident left a scar on my nose which I named my symbol of luck. After some time passed following this accident, I kept recalling it and I coloured my nose in blue in most of my family pictures because my perception was accompanied by pain and pain was accompanied by recovery. We are growing through pain. When we cry, we remove excess energy that has misled us – we climb one more step up. After all birth is painful. But we can be born many times in our lives. In my thinking dimension, fantasy corresponds to the flight of soul and reality – to mind. The combination of mind and soul does miracles. Thus my famous scar or the symbol of luck constantly reminds me how important hunger is or how it is important to walk your own path, and then all the rest roads open up.

What's important is to be hungry because it's our main driving force.

Where does your hunger come from?

P. S. I know I'll manage to touch it.

My first collection

Maybe now you are creating your first collection? Are you

scared? Are you tormented by doubts and lack of self-confidence? It sends shivers down your spine? I congratulate you, you are a winner. You already are a young designer and this is a considerable achievement. The first collection is a step towards your fears, a step forward and a step to the things for the sake of which you find yourself in a design institution. Your dreams are coming true, aren't they? Believe in yourself, build patience and aim for the best result. Remember that what's important is to find your unique path.

My first collection.

I've got accepted. I am walking across a corridor of the old building at the Academy of Arts, I take a breath of air around the abbey, watching through the window I bow down to the glorious blue sky, I shake off all troubles and nonsense hammered in my head ("You'll not get accepted, you have no money; fashion design is only nice words", etc.) and I feel the luckiest person in the world. I've made it! And not just that I've made it, I've been accepted at number four on the admission list to a state-funded place and I'm going to get a scholarship. La la la! Five years of hard work have paid off. I am walking with my heart singing, the adrenaline rush of the unknown makes my legs tremble – damn it feels good.

My first year of study. I am a fashion designer! (Easy, tiger!) I draw a collection and, thinking to myself that it is a masterpiece of my life, I decide to consult the head of my department. After fifteen minutes of conversation, I understand that I understand nothing. What follows next is two years of silence and work. Then a single-model competition which shows injustice to me – the chairman of the commission is the winner's father. Disappointment and endless questions ensued.

My third year of study. I create my first collection which I name Fast and Furious. The main concept behind it was speed and carrying on. In fact, it was sort of my first creative improvisation which resulted from listening to my inner voice and having no clue of how you create. The main fabric of my collection was knitwear (cheap and perfectly suitable for sports style), colours – white, red, black, blue and salad green. I hand-drew graphic paintings on fabric with textile dyes using stencils (it was too expensive to make a digital print). I felt complimented by hearing people ask me “Where did you get your prints made?” My answer was “Agne&Co” (in my room) ha ha... I found such accessories as glasses in a building supply store, and I bought the sneakers at the lowest price in a supermarket. As a wolf I went hundreds of kilometers to find what I was looking for.

My first collection.

Night time. The door to my room opens and my mom enters with an “explosion at the macaroni factory” hair-do rubbing her sleepy eyes and she says to me: “Agne, go to bed; you have to wake up early tomorrow.”

Me: In a bit, mom. I have to finish my work or I won't be able to sleep.

When it feels good, when you are realizing your potential, when you are quenching your hunger, you don't count the hours, you forget to eat, you tune into the universe. You simply feel good.

The first collection.

I apply for a competition. I make a file, I submit the application and wait.

A phone call: “Hello, this is Name Surname from the fashion competition La La La Tra la la. I am sorry to inform you that your application has been denied, you will not be participating in the competition.” I ask her why, and I do not hear her answering me. A women on the other end of the line speaks about commission members who disbanded without leaving any notes...

I hanged up the phone and in my head I am standing at the edge of the abyss, I take one step forward and I fall.

This is not a flight. This is a fall and a wish to disappear. I hear words sounding in my head: “You haven’t been accepted...” Then I hear as if someone is laughing at me... Then someone mocks me – you will never get accepted... We congratulate you on being accepted... I told you you have to be rich...

You have to rely on your dad to help you out, but not in this life because he does not have a company.

STOP!

The first collection.

I don’t believe what I’ve heard! I don’t believe it! Do you hear me? I don’t believe it!

I push a replay button, I take back all my thoughts, I take one step back, I wake up, I wipe out my crocodile tears, I take my kit and I run to academy. All covered in sweat, I storm in to the department, I put my pictures on the table and...

Me: Fashion design lecturer, please tell me what’s wrong with these? How can I improve them? Is my dream of becoming a designer real?

Fashion design lecturer: Easy. Be glad you didn't get through. It's a good sign (smiling). A prophet is without honour in his own country. An international Baltic design competition has been announced in Latvia. Here is the form. Apply for it. Good luck. Think outside the box.

I thank her and silently leave the room asking myself what he meant by saying "think outside the box". I have a chaos in my head, to be exact, a picture of a library after a war – all the books have fallen off the shelves, some of them are damaged, some of them are torn and burnt, some stolen or missing. I surrender, I succumb to my lecturer and I accept the fact that I will be a famous fashion designer in my next life.

The first collection.

Luggage is packed. Vilnius – Riga, I'm going to Habitus Baltija competition. Hustle and bustle, international students, havoc, acquaintances, selection, laugh, first international experience and openness to new ideas.

Sixty participants.

A few minutes before the collection presentation, I asked my models to stand in a triangle at the end of the show with one model at the front, two behind her back and three behind those two. A crouching position, running to the end of the catwalk, smiles and a taste of victory.

They trusted me and did as I said.

After the break, the host of the event took to the stage. A pile of prizes were awarded, all titles were announced. Inside I am crying, I come back to my collection, I pack everything to my suitcase and pushing it with my leg I think to myself that my

mum was perhaps right when she said I had to pursue medicine.

And finally... It's time to announce the Grand Prix winner: And the winner of *Habitus Baltija* is the student from Vilnius Academy of Arts Agne Veil!

A statue, prizes, cheers, restored self-confidence, tears of joy, invitations to participate in other competitions, press, journalists, cameras, a VIP party and so on and so forth.

Wow! My first collection and most importantly a phone call to my mom asking her: "Can you believe it...?"

Following this competition, I was invited to participate in a professional fashion design competition in Riga where I was the only student having exquisite participation rights. I have claimed all special prizes and while repeatedly taking to the stage I was blushing thinking to myself "Maybe enough prizes for me, let others have some". My best friend was standing in a crowd and her cheers and her eyes full of joy was speaking louder than the entire crowd. Later I went to Sicilia to take part in a fashion project "The Road South" where I didn't have a chance to present my collection because my luggage got lost during three flights. And judging by the stickers on them, my bags visited the majority of the European countries before finally reaching my home two weeks later. Here I learnt one lesson – if your luggage contains very valuable items such as "collection", and your flight is not direct, you have to make sure your luggage is insured. Anyway, the trip was awesome, I lived in a wonderful hotel with windows overlooking a volcano, I drank wine on the house roof looking at white fir cones and learnt to enjoy a peaceful siesta. I was in love – my head was spinning!

To mark the accession to the European Union, the Deutsche Welle channel was airing a reportage Lecturer and Student. It was my first/real role, my first international interview making my legs tremble. The next year I defended my Bachelor's thesis featuring my collection Life is a Traffic Jam and still waiting for my diploma I got my first job. After a month, while defending my thesis, I released my product – knee high socks for teenagers with a slogan Life is a Traffic Jam for massive production. After around six years of professional experience, already working as a lecturer, I share experience with my students.

“I’m sorry, I don’t have money, I won’t be joining you...”, “I’m so sorry, my financial situation is now rather difficult so I will not be going”, “No, my parents won’t let me, we don’t have enough money”, “I have to refuse this time because I can’t...” these are the phrases from the daily FD (Fashion Design) life.

Be open to new ideas and correct your thinking:

1. You have money. Easy. There are millions out there in the world’s banks, you simply cannot withdraw them. Don’t forget that you have money.
2. Now you are learning, you are pursuing your goals, you are developing, and you have to approach solutions in a creative way so focus on this.
3. All successful people will tell you: “Do what you love, the money will follow”. It’s a fact.

My parents have never had much money. In my family I was the youngest child spoilt/teased by two brothers. My parents went to great lengths for the sake of me, they even took a credit

so that I have the main items required for a fashion designer: a personal computer, a sewing machine and a good camera. But what mattered most for me was them believing in me. You cannot compare yourself with others; it's a faulty way of thinking. Each person is unique, everybody has their own path. Some is rich, some is poor, some is yet different. Nothing falls out the sky, you have to earn everything yourself and it is a good feeling bringing you another level of self-realization.

Think. Try to approach solutions in a creative way. Today most things cost zero money.

My first job

“Keep calm and carry on” was the message on the picture portraying the head of Athena, the goddess of warfare, which I saw later in the afternoon on my way to my favourite Axis Lounge armchair to write, write, write.

I met Fairsun, a pilot of a mature age, who, to my surprise, sat down to chat with me. I served him as a reminder of his book he was working on – about everything that happens up in the sky. After I briefly held my finger up in the air and asked him “What’s it like up there?” I saw a smile on his face and I heard his short muted answer: “It’s good up there...” and I saw him sinking into silence and a rather long reflection. I kept writing. Suddenly he returned from his deep thoughts and said that he was planning to finish his book by his last flight and showed me his pockets full of notes. He also mentioned that it was very difficult to write memoirs and it took much effort because you have to relive everything you went through, no matter good

or bad. After saying good bye to me he said that we would meet up again expecting me to return here to write my book. An interesting person, I thought to myself, only what seemed bizarre to me was his question followed by his smile: “How do you like the night life of KL? I told him that I was not much of a nightlife person. He then replied: “What???” ... “And what about you, Mr. Pilot, are you planning to have some fun?” I thought to myself. These people are actually living double lives surrounded by beautiful women in another country tempted by thousands of vicious thoughts being far away from their home.

Thus time has come for me also to return where everything has passed.

My first job.

The first experience is like “the first time” – damn interesting, a little painful, sometimes bringing consequences, but once you tried it you can’t stop, and on top of it all this is all wrapped up into fashion glitter.

My first job.

Looking from today’s perspective, it was a school of life of four years where I learnt so much. It was called Sparta, one of the largest light industry factories in Lithuania where a couple of foreign companies also hid or worked with special orders. At the time when I got this job I was still a student and a 1000 litas salary seemed to me an enormous amount of money as well as the freedom I longed so much. On my twenty-second birthday I signed a contract and started working. My job included “doing everything” – not only did I create socks collections, labels, catalogues, children’s clothing, fabric patters, women’s blouses, but also I was in charge of the shopping centre, I had

to attend exhibitions, talk to managers, visit shopping centres, etc. Also at that point I had a chance to engage in my first and by far most interesting international project with Ridgedview company and its boss Vincent when I was creating a sports socks collection for the American company The North Face. I learnt so much during the time of working with Vincent. He would always say: “People buy a legend and not a pair of socks.” I would think to myself: “Then people buy a trick, but is it a good one or a bad one?” Vincent would always emphasize that I thought two years ahead.

My first job.

I was proud of myself and I was the happiest person in the world seeing people in town wearing my creations. Sometimes I would get overwhelmed by a strange feeling when I was standing near a person together with me waiting in a bus station who had no clue that he was standing near the designer of the thing he was wearing. I would smile shyly but never dared to approach them. During one of my business trips to Paris I was approached by a stylish man in his forties who introduced himself as a designer at Camper and pointing with his finger to my shoes he said to be: “These were created by me.” After our conversation which lasted several minutes I realized something – simple, humble, smiling, polite, with a sparkle in his eyes and in love with his works – this is what a fashion designer should be like. I loved my campers but after meeting their creator it felt like I loved them even more.

The first job.

Years went by quickly, one collection followed another, everything was spinning like a powerful spiral of life. I was growing, I was learning, I was looking at my life as if at a movie, sometimes I would think that I was working in a circus feeling

glamorous, funny, bizarre, and finally, after three years I realized it was time to change something/myself. I thanked God for the opportunity to be a fashion designer, a person who has always been closest to the boss, but at the same time kept in touch with the whole staff of the company: cleaners, sewers, constructors, engineers, mall staff, etc. I could not make a sudden leave; I was left with author's contracts and my freedom. But I kept drifting away. Every time I went back I realized that it was no longer a place for me.

I am extremely grateful for this period of my life during which my eyes saw so many things and my heart experienced equally as much, but my legs one day decided to run away and never come back.

During an exhibition in Paris, I met Sigitas, an owner of Modestina, a company specializing in men's suits. This was my first job with author's contracts. Soon I was commuting to Siauliai and working as a freelance designer. It was a job of my dreams. I worked from home and one day a week I used to go to Siauliai to present new sketches or a concept, to check the production process or new models, to meet fabric or accessory managers, etc. My job was extremely interesting and I learnt so much over those couple of years. The only disadvantage was that I had to get up very early but traveling by train with a morning cup of coffee, a book or a sketches notebook put everything to place. I was happy, I was realizing my potential, but something inside me was howling like a wolf.

I fed my howling wolf with creative projects, teaching, evening Italian courses, I stroked him, calmed him down, until finally one summer, I went to Milan for two weeks. The two weeks in Italy made my head spin, in other words, I fell in love with it and made a promise to myself to work hard/to save in order to come back here for a longer stay. I did as I had promised to

myself, and after I returned home I bought come back tickets only to stick to what I had promised to myself. But during this half a year something more happened.

4.) *I LOVE THROUGH THE GARMENT*

My eyes are moving from one button to another on your shirt, I am marvelling at their fine form resembling transparent sugar-candies that you want to kiss, smell but not eat.

Creation. But maybe it's me?

I cry out: "Hey, I'm your Sun, your Angel and your Infinity." Do you hear me?

Yesterday morning you took pictures of me. I've changed. I've deleted almost all pictures. You're not mad. I'm running from myself. Let's drive away, please, let's drive away. Somewhere where ships are tickling the sea. Somewhere where you can fly around with sky birds. Somewhere where the setting sun will throw light on my long dress. Somewhere where early in the morning my running foot-imprints will be washed away by the water after the storm.

I want to run and write; that's all.

I'm looking at you.

You: Can I ask You?

Me: Yes.

You: How do You love?

Me: I love. (For a short while I go into deep thinking.)

You: How?

Me: THROUGH A GARMENT. I love through a garment (I said

with confidence).

Silence sets in again.

You are near; you sneak up like a cat and hold me close. And four stripped legs intertwine like four creepers.

Me: Like a little birdie, you are walking on my heart, on my heart... ” (I start singing silently.)

You: Go on. How beautiful.

Me: A birdie with little orange legs and an elf’s hat... (I smile.)

You: With a little bow-tie under his little neck (You smile.)

Me: It’s all so subtle. Do you know that God lives in details?

It seems it is even more silent.

Me: The most important thing is Flight, only a stylish one. I love THROUGH A GARMENT. To get undressed, to get dressed... To undress while getting dressed... To undress while changing clothes... To undress and not to get dressed... To not get dressed and live without clothes. To live without clothes or live naked? To not get undressed. To change. To take off your clothes. To get dress. To get dress in a hurry. To get dress in relaxation. To get dress feeling tired. To get dressed feeling happy. To undress in silence. To get dressed and leave. To find and get dressed. To scream and rip off.

You: To cuddle up. To wrap up. To cover yourself? To disguise yourself? To be reborn?

Me: I love THROUGH A GARMENT. You know what, I like to write above the roofs of Kuala Lumpur feeling my clothes (in my wardrobe, in my washing machine, on my body, on my chair or on

your body, on the bodies of thousands of people who I see through my window), feeling a smell of coffee in my room... you are reading what I'm writing and if the thoughts seem to be stupid at that moment we are making paper planes out of our thoughts and let them fly up high...

You: To get undressed, to get dressed... (A paper plane is flying.)

Me: To live without clothes or to live naked...? (Another paper plane is flying by.)

You: Without clothes... A red dress... Red shoes... Wet with rain... Smearred with jam... Unravelled... Yet to be designed... They are speaking...

Me: Finally I have something to wear (I start laughing.)

You: I want to make love... Slowly... (I close my eyes.)

Me: Do you know that you are my You (I am kissing your closed eyes.) Do you remember that morning?

You: Which one? (You are smiling.)

Me: The one when you were trying on a vest you had bought in Zara...

The morning when something happened... At my place in Vilnius... At about 8.15... All morning you were trying on your vest you had bought in Zara. You were squirming and trying to get comfortably into your new garment. I remember a smile on your face widening, your green eyes running through my half-naked body. I saw that a lashing sound that the clothing made upon touching it provided a sprinkle of potency. I do love THROUGH A GARMENT.

You: I love THROUGH YOU.

Me: Then I looked around – they were lying everywhere – on the armchair, on the table, on the books, on the carpet yet to be bought. They were wrinkled, saturated with various stories, or in other words, they were speaking in the silent language, or, in other words, they ranted and raved – we were wildly ripped off your bodies! Looking at you with a smile drawn on your face I wanted to make love again. I was excited by the feeling, by that crazy feeling the way you feel in your new garment we had found the day before at half past four or half past five... (I look through the window at the sleeping Sunday city.)

Remember when I offered you a cup of coffee pointing with my finger to the ash-coloured hair on your body?

You said to me: Yes, and then I'll have to go." You bent down and kissed my shin. My white skin was glowing with orange shade from the night curtains covering the window. At that moment I realized that our morning would have been different if it had not been for the vest we bought the day before in Zara at half past four or half past five...

Me: I decided that we are going to drink tea (I smile and look at you.) Want an apple? What a lazy morning...!

And you asked: What does this smile mean?

And I said: Apples have intimate places. A stem, a pit, a round shape, a shadow full of mystery... How sexy, isn't it? It's part of our morning medication which unites You and Me, the morning, the vest, the apples, the room full of lust which hasn't escaped to the fresh air yet...and...?

You lost control: I want You – you shouted out and I felt your lips

on my neck. And...? You said you were sorry you lost control and interrupted me. After all we knew each other only for two weeks. When I first saw you... I wanted to run away from you because I knew that you were the one, you were mine...

Then I said: And I think I know what lust smells like.

I bent my neck backwards and I laughed looking at two neon dolphins attached to the ceiling swimming after each other.

You: What does it smell like? (In surprise.)

Then I leaned towards you, took a zipper of your vest in my hands and slowly moving it forward and backward I shouted out – Apples. It smells like Apples...!

And you hugged me and said: You are my Woman, your are my Love, my Death, my Mystique... I Love You.

We joined our hands like two magnets, and when I closed my eyes I was thinking about clothes that speak... I was thanking to the brown vest bought in Zara half past five or maybe half past six... And when we were kissing, suddenly the old-fashioned Minsk fridge started buzzing as if confirming that it heard everything and gave its approval...

Me: Do you remember? We were laughing and we were as happy as we are now, here, everywhere, forever.

Oh my L, I love THROUGH A GARMENT.

You: Oh my L, I love THROUGH YOU.

5.) *FASHION DESIGNER*

I bought a bag by Alexander McQueen for LTL 250 at a 80 percent discount which made me go deep in thought. He didn't take his own life, people did it, i. e. their thoughts, talks, pressure, rumours, although these are so innocent-sounding words.

Fashion designers are primarily artists and this means that they are very sensitive and subtle persons. They need to be protected, respected, defended, and accepted unique as they are. But this is only possible in a country not plagued by starvation. Design is possible in a rich country. If people are hungry, they will never think about design. One of my students Balqis has spent five years in Africa. Once she was beaten by a black guy who took away her potatoes she bought in a store. "What design? What fashion?" she said. "When people are starving their primary concerns are a shelter, food, water, and only then do they think about clothing..." she continued in a sad voice.

Fashion designers are by no means mechanical dolls whose sketches may be thrown around or accompanied by yells: "Go and paint it, it's your job". Sometimes an innocent phrase that slipped from someone's mouth may throw you to a remote corner of the world and leave a deep scar or make you give up who you really are. When working in the light industry, various nonsense was shoved into my face, for example: "You see, the designer's career only lasts five years. After that they run out of ideas and are sacked". I kept thinking to myself: "Wow. The kind of thoughts some people have. The longer I work, the more ideas I seem to have", but I would remain silent because I didn't want to heat up something I don't believe. Over time a calm smile would settle in my face – I simply let myself be myself (I followed my heart), and I let others be themselves. If you

have a grey life and it's your point of reference, then it doesn't mean that my life should also be like that. During my travels I've met a lot of colourful people with unique life stories and to me this was a great motivation to continue what I've started.

Fashion designers are seekers. Just an hour ago I was standing in a post office planning to send a parcel to my mom. I met this student called Rasana who briefly told me her life story while we were waiting. She studied the Chinese language for two years and lived in China, later she moved to Malaysia, and then to Singapore (Student living costs are very high in Singapore). Finally she returned to Malaysia to finish her studies but she will take further study in America.

Fashion design is a highly intellectual field and a fashion designer is primarily an intellectual, an open-minded person, who can have an interesting conversation not only with a country's president but also with a cleaning lady. It is a person with a leader's role who always stands beside the main figure but at the same time integrates into the team, and finally who rules the humankind with their design. Simple, humble, not seeking attention, working silently and understanding their power to make a change and impact. Recently I've personally experienced that some fashion designers are digital nomads who rather quickly adapt to a new country and are also open-minded people who see fashion design not only as garments but also as a tool of communication, self-expression, lifestyle and philosophy.

Classmate: You know what? My mom is working at a kiosk near your house so now so we'll be able to go home together.

Me: Ok.

Classmate: My mom was a designer, I have some very nice sketches at home. Some day I could bring them and show them to you. She draws very beautifully.

Me: Really?

It was a short conversation I haven't forgotten till this day. When my classmate told me that her mom had once been a fashion designer and was now working as a saleswoman (selling beer, cigarettes and candies) at a kiosk, I got scared before I even enrolled in design studies. I was asking myself how could this be, and when I asked my classmate about this, she said to me that her mother was simply not lucky. Since my early days I had to stick to my route, and like a small ship I was buffeted from all sides by a mighty sea. I have always been threatened from all sides (you'll not get accepted, you don't have it, what are you going to do, dream on, etc.) until I finally got in front of a mirror with a Master's diploma in my hand and a few years of industrial experience and with my eyebrows frowned into a question mark asking the image in front of me: "Who are you?". Since my childhood I've wanted to become a fashion designer, and here I'm one now, and forever, but why so much doubt? Something's not right. Why aren't you feeling happy having a pile of diplomas and experience and successful/profitable jobs and projects?

Me: Hey you, the one in the mirror, tell me what is it that you still need?

Image: Something more.

Me: What's "more"? You have so much already.

Image: I want to make it bigger.

Me: What's that?

Image: I don't want it all come down only to clothing. It's too narrow for me. I find it stupid.

Me: What? Too narrow? Stupid? Are you saying that after five years of preparation for studies and six years of studies, working as a fashion designer while still pursuing your Bachelor degree and now holding a Master's diploma and having several years of experience you are going to stop and you think in doubt that your mother was right and that you should have studied medicine because now you'd be a respectable doctor and you'd be able to help people?

Image: Yes.

Me: What? Wake up! Hello!

Image: Yes. (Eyes cast down, streams of tears running down her face.) I want more – for your own sake, for the sake of your mother and the world. I want more. Jellyfish in the sea not only swim around and sting but they can also glow in various colours. I want more!!!

For a few years, work and projects have span me up again like a powerful life carousel but the more time passed the more silly everything looked to me. I was surrounded by people who had nothing to do with design but were selling it. I was surrounded by the environment which did not resemble the environment I could be myself one bit. More interesting projects did not seem to help as well. For instance, I met a Lithuanian couple who had lived in New York for eight years and had underwear business. I created a swimsuit collection Lace Me Up for them. The collection was excellent and the working relationship was great, they even became my friends but every time I looked in the

mirror I heard words coming deep from the bottom of me: “I want more.” I realized one thing that my soul was longing for something that money cannot buy. My mind and soul longed for a new environment, challenges, quests, searches, answers and colours. I found no comfort in the thoughts of my relatives: “You have good projects so stick to them, buy an apartment, besides, it’s time to bear children”. I wanted freedom, freedom from myself, freedom from my profession, freedom to be myself, freedom for the sake of freedom. I realized that I will not take the “apartment, car and someone’s life” I was offered to buy to the great journey, so what’s the point? I wanted to accomplish/create something that would give me peace of mind. I had to leave everything only to find answers and be able to create myself anew. I did as I said. And my mum’s wish to see me enrolling in medicine studies and becoming a greatly respected doctor that had always haunted me went away. Why? No matter how tangible the doctor’s profession would be, it serves people who are largely unconscious, who are sick because they are naïve, they eat much sugar and, if we think more broadly, it serves weak-willed slaves to their cravings or victims of advertising. A doctor is powerless, besides, he himself becomes a part of a powerful pendulum. Looking at most of doctors you see patients in them as well. In that sense, the designer’s profession that boils down to clothes is more tangible because we get dressed every day and sometimes even several times a day.

So, my dear parents, if your children want to study fashion design, let them do it, support them, invest in them and believe in them and being aware that everything comes at the right time!

6 questions

Fashion design is shrouded in superstition and legends. At the heart of it is belief in your strength. The phrase “Only the elect are destined to achieve success” is very stupid. You have to hear yourself, and this is today’s greatest challenge which is especially difficult in the nowadays world. If you are tortured by doubts, you probably still need to study, to give some deep thought to your professional path and try to answer the questions that haunt you. Searching for answers means taking action.

One day my student approached me after a lecture and asked me if I could help her. I asked her what had happened. She shared her story with me. She said that since her childhood everyone had ignored her and had not noticed her, and that most people hated her. She kept approaching people and asking them what was wrong with her, she tried to change herself listening to their advices and making her own effort but the situation remained the same – nobody liked her. She was beautiful, stylishly dressed, nice, polite and naïve. I told her briefly that in my opinion, it was those whom she approached that needed to change. You don’t need hundreds of friends in your life, you should be grateful for having at least one true friend. There are six questions. Sit down quietly and devote a few minutes to yourself (after you switched off your phone, logged out from Facebook, turned off the music, the refrigerator, the iron, etc.) with a blank sheet of paper in front of you. If something’s not clear, you can approach me again and we’ll be able to talk again.

After around two months, i. e. yesterday, after I returned from an academic meeting, I found a letter and a CD on my table. When I opened the postcard with best regards, I read her letter

of thanks which said:

“Dear Agne, thank you for the “growth model”. After I responded to your questions my life has become clearer and I know what I want to do and what I want to pursue. I realized what the most important thing is in my life and how I am going to achieve it. Everything is just wonderful, and I have cleared up my confusion and doubts (smiley face). I hope you don't mind I've written a letter to you because I dropped by several times and I could not find you. This CD is for you, it contains piano music and beautiful songs. Best regards (smiley face).”

Six questions that I once found while searching on the internet being totally confused and trying to find God's mobile number (I really needed to talk to him). At that moment I was already packing 12 encyclopedias I had at home and intending to go to live in a cellar and to read these books until the day I die. I came to realize one thing – he who searches, finds. Here they are, all six questions that have inspired me and put everything to place and did not let me stop.

1. Who do I want to be now and in future?
2. How can you achieve it?
3. What prevents me from achieving it?
4. What challenges are waiting for me today and tomorrow?
5. How will I know that I have already achieved it and how will I reward myself?
6. What is the cost of opportunities?

Everything is possible

“Impossible is nothing” is the slogan of Adidas. I think that there is too much negativity in this slogan and I would like to change it to “Everything is possible”. I think that you have to have a strong position in your life and this is associated with the word NO but in everyday life you should avoid saying no and instead say yes. Positive thinking is the essence of humankind.

After pouring out my thoughts into my diary, I turned on my computer, went on the internet and saw that there were only few days left before the deadline for the competition held by the Adidas Academy. I took action. I dedicatedly and intensely sketched and created and when I woke up three days later with my profile at Adidas and an attached collection I thought to myself: “You are so silly. It’s an international competition and there is going to be an enormous number of participants. Did you come to believe you can do it? Did you come to believe that you can create for the Y-3 brand? Did you come to believe that you can work at an international company? Yes, yes, I did (you, the weird voice inside, why won’t you go away somewhere for a walk one day, somewhere far away) a month later after I got through a phone interview I was invited to visit Adidas company in Germany.

Aaah!

One Thursday in deep autumn I took a flight to visit the Adidas company (in Hercogenaurach) because I was among eight lucky winners who got through to the Adidas Academy finals. A lovely female guide wearing high heels presented the hometown of Adidas. She gave a charming wave towards the horizon

and said: “Here, further away you can see blue containers. Our designers are working there. This glass building accommodates conference rooms, here’s a café, etc.” After returning to the five-star hotel I could not believe what was happening. A light shock got me into panic, I could not fall asleep, and when I turned on the TV it showed my name and words welcoming me to the Adidas company.

In total there were over three hundred participants and only 8 of them got through: New York (a Korean woman), a Brazilian woman married to a German, a black woman from Paris (originally from Greece), a Finish woman, a German woman, a Singaporean woman, a British woman and me, Lithuanian. It felt so good. Out of all the interviews I had throughout my career as a designer, this one was the most interesting and difficult. Everything took two days with German precision and probably with one-minute error. Independent tasks, group tasks, interviews, self-assessment and tens of questions. I can firmly say that it is those people whom I met at Adidas that make the world go around. It’s strange but I don’t remember everything because of stress.

“What about my Milan?” I thought to myself looking at two Indians at the airport. At that moment a mobile phone of one of them made a cackling sound like a hen. It made me want to laugh. Everything was over. My body wanted a warm bed and a ginger tea.

Two weeks later while walking down the street I was looking at a flashing green little man in a bus station who soon turned red, then yellow and then again green and so on and so forth. Ready, go, stop, ready, go, stop... *Finally, I received a long-awaited, lucky call which changed my life.* It was the right call from Adidas. I didn’t get a contract but I was called an individualist who has to learn to work in a team. As soon as I thanked

them and said goodbye I remembered my tickets to Milan and I thought to myself if I am such a sworn individualist I must take my own path and go on the search for the “Freedom of being”. I was happy to not have to work in the blue container. This sent warmth into my heart, put a smile on my face; all my doubts cleared up. I took out my suitcase from the wardrobe and started getting ready for my journey to Italy.

Now I’m Empty, I’m Nothing. It has been a long time since I was a student. My role as a fashion designer still exists but I switched it to a sabbatical (I’ve heard that designers at Diesel each year are sent on a sabbatical to foreign country where they not only holiday but also select material for the coming season – visit flea markets, buy books, take pictures, make sketches, etc. Finally, when they come back, they put everything into a pile and start brainstorming and this results in new creations and trends), and I felt that my position as a fashion design lecturer needs time, strength and maturity. I dressed up in an “I’m empty, I’m nothing” garment, I installed an “Everything is possible” antivirus program in my brain, packed my stuff, said goodbye and went to Milan to chase my dreams: to study language, culture, to meet new people, to take pictures, to draw and to spend all my savings on creation.

6.) *I'M EMPTY, I'M NOTHING*

I worked hard, I ran and ran until one morning I realized that I was empty, I was nothing.

It felt very strange. My head felt like it was about to burst out with all the thoughts I wanted to scribble down on a blank sheet of paper... The year 2008 was not easy for me. It was a year when I started to actually get to know something but I could not tell what exactly it was at that time. It was a year after my studies, the year after very painful love, the year spent with a new person, a year during which I started to grasp myself and my goals, it was the year that served as a start to 2009 – my year and I say “my” because my soul felt it. A celebration was set in my soul; joyful, cheerful, colourful, full of flight, new searches, acquaintances and passion for life. After saying goodbye to my inner timid little ant, I was preparing to travel somewhere, to step out to the wide world. I wondered where I had been all that time. Everything seemed like a dream. What have I been thinking recently? Where have I been? Why were my eyes and my look full of sadness? Why did my voice shout when I wanted to speak softly? Why have my emotions gone up and down like a stormy sea and why have I felt like a little ship? Why have my thoughts been controlled by pain and why have I knocked at the door that no one could open? I woke up. Now I could feel again that I was myself and my roads were becoming open to me again. No matter how hard it had been for me and how restless my soul had been, one day it burst out in a passionate dance. Yes, I was flying again, only this time dancing. I felt so good and I know for sure that it was a good sign. And I will repeat I, I, I because I am alive, I am, I love, I feel, I want, I fly, I write, I dream, I desire, I seek, I smell, I

kiss... I am a butterfly who will travel around the world, I am a prophet, I am different, I'm me, I'm a human, I'm a woman, I'm an avatar, I'm a lecturer, I'm an expert, I'm a seeker, I'm an achiever, I'm a baker of clouds and dreams, I'm a "make it happen" person, I'm a creator... Because I have power inside me, I have flight inside me, and love lives inside me, passion lives inside me, dance lives inside me, wind lives inside me, ideas live inside me, the whole lives inside me. And I promise to you that from this day I will be happy. My road starts from the warm, sunny, fragrant, bright, loudly silent, tasty and dreamy morning which smells like Milan!

Milan

Two days back or "I want to forget but I can still feel."

The last night. I cannot fall asleep. Although it's always cold, at this moment my legs are burning with heat. Merely burning. How is it going to be? What is waiting ahead? Why do I always have to make things up and only then do I think? An alarm goes off. 2.55 a.m. I wake up. I won't eat, only a banana. Outside. A frozen car. It's -17 outside. Airport. Plane. Kiss. Vilnius – Riga – Milan. Rain. It's wet. A girl named Monika (she's charming, cheerful and good). Chinatown and a horrible abandoned apartment. Pasta with onions (I feel sick). I'm tired. Six people. Leaking windows. It's cold. Ahead of me is fear, sleepless nights and cold. Morning. Darkness. I wake up, brush my teeth and head to the school as if to a spring of pure water. I keep repeating to myself that everything will be alright. I just know it. 440 euros and a two-bed room with a Russian girl is yours. *Sì, sì*, I'm taking it provided it's not cold in there and I

won't need to sleep on the floor. After writing a tearful letter to my mom, I'm rushing across the whole city to the Chinatown. Metro – bus – my legs. I got lost. I don't remember either the street or the building. Factory, factory – I hear the words in my head... The apartment is in the factory yard. Gosh, how many Chinese people. No, I won't cry, I'll soon find that place. The corner between Bertini/A. Alvardi. I found. I unlock the door. I open my suitcase. Soon everything will be over. I'm a princess. Princesses never cry, they can fasten the suitcase, they can bear a lot, they say goodbye politely and always say thanks no matter what life throws at you. Besides, they kind of love it when they lose kilos because of nerves and running around. Because then G-star jeans smile at them through the showcase. Warmth. Shower. Clean clothes. Appetizer. 12-hour sleep. School. Lessons. Feeling good. Just feeling good. I'm breathing. My city. Me. Doggie. Poop. Ah, one more, now there's two of them. Keeping my head up I nearly run into a third one.

I'm smiling. Ouch! I've stepped in sh... I rush to my flat.

My room, my bed, my stuff, music, an Adidas sneaker in my hands which I worn when I stepped in sh... and a book *A Year in the Merde* lying on the bed... Hmmm... I told you this would soon happen. Most often I look into the sky and very rarely I look to the ground. Milan. Streets full of dog mess. It's so funny. I'm washing this shoe and the African girl named Deborah looks at me shaking her head and says: "I'm sorry". I start panicking because I cannot wash it off because it got into the grooves. I go to the kitchen, take someone's Chinese stick and my shoe soon becomes as clean as whistle. This magic stick later disappears somewhere without a trace. ... I'm drinking Japanese tea. It's tasty. It's not mine. There are no Japanese in our house. I took just a little bit of it. I found it. In London, someone also finds flats and houses and settles in there

as if they were their own. Tea. Green. Even now I can feel my tongue covered in a strange Oriental taste. It feels good. It is meditation in a way. Six euros and one kilo of peeled shrimp. Cheap. Tasty. I'm going to eat them.... I keep thinking about the sneaker I just cleaned which sort of reminds me of Adidas Academy and make me think what if.... Nothing special.

The Leonardo da Vinci language school. I adore the Italian language, culture and emotions and the most handsome men in the world!

Butterfly

Streets full of people, diversity of nations and me standing against some wall, immersed in the observer's role and trying to find a solution between internal freedom, a sense of fashion relevant at this moment and an upcoming trip home. I can firmly say that this place has an imborn sense of fashion. I see a man walking at a fast pace in the latest Gucci euro (hand-me-down) suit with two buttons I have only seen in advertisements. Stylish and luxurious shoes, a watch, a suitcase... I see also an Italian woman of mature age walking down a narrow street, size 34, a silk dress, slingbacks with a platform, many paper shopping bags in her hands and a small dog. Still overwhelmed by this view, I see a very stylish tramp passing by in a light coat pushing an old chequered Burberry bag that cannot be mistaken for any other brand. I want to shout out to him: "Mister, you don't have money so where does your sense of style come from?" Suddenly a couple from the Far East noticed my exotic white skin and I had to pose for a photo with them. Only three minutes pass in such a fashion, and what about the

next coming months in Milan?

Speaking about a sense of fashion, you first start searching for it, then start seeing it, then feeling it and only then do you have to start desiring it.

I continued keeping a lookout for fashion!

SEARCHING:

Saturday. A flea market Fiera di Sinigaglia. Dishes, South Americans, Africans... Music, rhythm, the smell of weed, incense sticks, new and second-hand clothes, books, comic strips, discs...

FLEA MARKET:

I give myself a command – run away from masses, make something your own. What's important here are forms, layering and proportions. Abundance and excess.

A mix dominates fashion: cheap/expensive/second-hand/
found/created/stolen/old/new/.

Oversized sleeves, undersized trousers, blousons a la air-bags, multi-national designs and the entirety coming down to functionality. Coats with large hoods, uniform-inspired pipe-shaped shortened jackets, mismatched lengths, patterns, textures and fabrics. I'm a butterfly. For the past couple of weeks I have had butterflies in my stomach. Kisses of the young Mexican guy are driving me crazy!

SEEING:

I enter an ice-cream boutique and I get overwhelmed by the wide array of colours and flavours. The famous Milan ice-

cream. This delicious palette of colours from yogurt and coffee to cocoa and wine may become a source of inspiration in autumn which brings gloomy mood. And my guess proves to be right!

COLOURFUL (TASTY) MOVEMENT:

Move fast, move colourfully. It's the abundance of the streets and the people walking by full of vibration, conformity, cleverness, flexibility and energy. A crossing between two opposites – light/heavy, fine/large, even/patterned dominates fashion. In the long run it disappears. On the outside, clothing becomes massive, spacious, voluminous and has large forms; here only form, colour and pattern prevail. It is combined with tight hand-me-down clothes. The inside has an air of secret. I shout out: "The inside of the clothing becomes more beautiful than the outside!!! Let's not try to name the exact colours of this movement, let's try to feel them internally. The colourful palette of ice-creams may serve as a reference.

"I want to make love to you," I hear an offer from a chaser Italian and the butterfly, having flapped her wings, fly away from him with a smile thinking to herself: "Well, you can't have it all!"

FEELING:

It's +35 °C outside. It's hot. I decide to cool myself... I go to a chocolate boutique and buy chocolate candies seasoned with red pepper and a cup of cold Italian coffee... Taste dictates life...

POWER OF SEDUCTION:

It's a silent language. Since ancient times the power of seduc-

tion has been attributed to women. The body does the talking.

What prevails here is a single colour, a look, a woman's curves, elegant walk, a secret, secret passion for something and cold beauty. Colour plays crucial role in clothing. Black, dark blue, dark grey, dark green, dark brown and dark cherry simply enchant and overwhelm you this season. Dresses, skirts and blouses. Everything is skin tight. Length – mini or medium. Well-defined silhouette and no unnecessary details.

Evening, night... Transgender party. I and my friend, an Italian architect. You still don't know who your other half is? Man or Woman? People are smiling and winking at me ... Women! Hey, Vali, let's leave this place. I know that he is a man. My partner is a man! My man! My M! But where is he???

DESIRING:

Here, life begins at night. Streets are full of people and everyone out on the street are trying to flaunt their new perfumes, clothes, a new boyfriend or girlfriend or a new life philosophy. The Milan street catwalk is like a mating bout full of seduction and passion.

MATING BOUT:

Grrr... People mate all year round. It is often a case in nature that the male is given all the beauty, while the female is colourless and invisible. I am a woman who becomes visible – charm surrounded with flowers and a drop of aggression. This time power, sex and money are in my hands. Femininity is the opposite of masculinity. A feminine woman has correct posture, elegance, attractive manners and inner charm. An important factor which has always and will always prevail is a touch, also

a look (to the side, to the ground and then to him). Housewives become husbands' partners and lovers. Here, a range of passionate autumn colours play a particularly important role. Just like flowers, a symbol of spring and summer. Silhouettes vary from long dresses to fine suits. At this point, underwear, a secret women's gun, becomes of central importance. You are beautiful! I love you! Go out into the rain to honour the singer Michael Jackson's journey out of this world with your wet kisses. He ceased to be, and now, Milan is thundering with rain; a storm came. People dressed in plastic bags are running on the streets; restaurants play his songs for the remaining ones, for the intoxicated, for those who sank into deep thought, for those who pay homage... Your red lips and high heels... Who are you? I just want to kiss you... Let me be your servant, my queen...!

I search, I see, I feel and I desire!

You must visit Milan!

Actually these thoughts were taken from my first article I wrote for a Lithuanian fashion magazine which employed me to work as a stylist for one project. The editor, after reading my article, said to me: "If you were "somebody", well, you know a famous person or a renowned designer, we would definitely publish this article... but I can see that you can write. Why don't you write about..." she tried to throw a topic/task or something upon me that I didn't believe in. I quickly left the famous magazine because I felt that it was not for me.

I am still "somebody".

Who am I?

I am not "somebody", I am a BUTTERFLY.

Bicycles

The thought is material. A few years back, following the celebration of the fourth anniversary of my mountain bike, I suddenly started to ignore it, and the store shop-windows tempted me to buy a newer, better and nicer one. My bike was very good but one day it was stolen after it got named “the clunker” and was brought to Milan. Sigh... And then I started feeling regrets and I don't have a bike until now. It was a good lesson, a lesson showing the power of our thoughts. Inspired by my granddad, I started seeing bikes all around me – old, new, rusted, stolen, abandoned, forgotten and all those that have unique stories. In my photo-folder, various photos with bikes and their life stories started to pile up. In markets, on the roadsides, by the river, in the park, against the wall, painted with graffiti, running in the city, fallen, dreaming and thinking, with people and without people, and in all ways – at night, at day, in silence, and everywhere my eyes could see. At the same time, my camera would sometimes capture pigeons. While watching pigeons, a phrase was born in my head: “People pigeons”. You can find pigeons everywhere in the world, and everywhere they are the same, even in Asia – gathering in flocks, rhythmically bobbing their heads forward and backward, forward and backward, and eating. That's all I could see. I got scared.

During the experimental design lecture I gave my students a task on the topic: “Milan - the city of bicycles”. Each student had to choose a photo portraying a bicycle, and assuming the role of Sherlock Holmes for a little while they had to find a concept and a legend for their collection. My students were fascinated with the task and the next lecture I got to hear most interesting ideas. Reda who had selected a white bike, was analysing its rust stains until she finally reached the origami art of

paper folding. Alina noticed that each bicycle had a shadow and after she copied them onto the paper she found most interesting silhouettes. Daiva selected a red photo portraying a Campari bicycle of the design week and after exploring in detail the nuances of the company she created a commercial collection of dresses. Reda and Alina participated in ArtViko fashion competition in Lithuania. I gave them a chocolate euro as a present and wished them not only creative but also financial success. The young designers competed with the students from all higher education institutions of arts. By the way, the collections were taken from the experimental design task "Milan - the city of bicycles". Reda won the Grand Prix and Alina took the first place! I felt a breakthrough in me. I answered many questions even without asking myself these questions. I bought a bottle of rose-coloured champagne with the remaining money because I felt I needed to! It feels wonderful when your students win.

I repeated this topic a few years later with my students in Malaysia. A concept offered by Mei etched in my memory. She noticed that although a bicycle associates with freedom most of the pictures I gave them portrayed locked bicycles. She will try to solve this rebus in her projected collection. One thing that struck me as weird was the fact that most of the bikes I took photos of were locked. Why did I keep seeing only the bikes that were locked?

Love hate

My mood swings from euphoric to somewhat comically tragic. I breath. I take a deep breath and clear out all my bad thoughts.

Everything is and will be alright. I'm calm, the sun is shining, the whole world is making love. It smells good. My thoughts smell like chocolate and my stomach is rumbling like a green large frog. I feel good. I am flying. Thoughts. I'm kissing the clouds and I'm licking honey. I'm diving into my subconscious like a fish and I'm waiting for a genial idea. I'm calm. The world is big, varied and colourful. I let the world inside me, I relax and eat trefoils. Indians are making love, Brazilians are making love, the Portuguese are making love, Italians are making love...

I love Milan. It fascinates me, it scares me, it lures me and here I always feel high. Each day – from homesickness to enormous passion to stay here and to discover new things over and over again. Beppe, my friend, an artist, designer, painter, and an owner of sky-blue eyes; I had him yesterday. The flea market near the Porta Genova station, many punks with dogs, old stuff, knick-knackery, clothes, laugh, emotions, street musicians, silent jazz, disgusting smell of weed and silently calm sleep; I got them yesterday. My friend Vali, an architect, a person who does not know if his other half is man or woman; elegant, polished and an unbelievably nice person; I had him the day before yesterday. A closed fashion library and a large plant market in the Naviglio Grande; I have it today. Three friends – deep green basil for two euros and a vase of yellow narcissuses for three euros and a bouquet of cranberries which later will produce berries (four euros); I got them today. Discussions about fashion; I will have them tomorrow. A great wish to stay; I have it today. Start to hold on. Zona Tortona. The design week. When I was walking here a month ago I did not imagine that something could happen here. I made a Zona Tortona passport and wandered through the streets. There are so many things around, so many strange and interesting people, workshops, furniture, accessories, presentations, introductions, names, advertisements

and so on and so forth. This made my head dizzy... I was on a lookout, I took pictures, I was staring at things, I was happy, I was watching, I was thinking...Ah... It feels so good in here... Each day I am high on life. I feel happy in Milan.

What's next?

My savings ran out, my computer files were full of pictures, my diary was full of records, my head was full of ideas and thoughts. For several months I had to work as a waitress in the evening; it is common practice in Milan. Everyone gets to work as a waiter or waitress, even those who boast themselves in working at D&G, for example. I met many interesting people, artists, designers; I acquired life experience as well as other sort of experience; I've discovered a lot; I've left something; but finally I decided that it was time to go home and I went back to Vilnius with my 300 books and a vast collection of fashion catalogues. I wanted to go up but you pulled me down. Life is not a battlefield. Let people be themselves. And if someone believes in crazy stuff, let them be what they are and let them believe in their truths. We create miracles ourselves! A ring with a butterfly which I had chosen without knowing its meaning "Libera come farfala" (Free as a butterfly) set me free. No matter how fragile my wings are, I dared to go up and fly away. The locks of the locked bicycles have opened. I'm complete, I'm already a BUTTERFLY!

Avatar

Cologne. I sat down in a noisy café by the street near the lucky Alegro hotel. It feels like here no one is in a rush either to

wake up or to work just like in Italy. Cologne in the morning is like a baby who just woke up. So silently soft and smells like milk. I was sitting on the bench and I remembered a music exercise described in Paulo Coelho's book. I closed my eyes, I turned my face to the sun and started enjoying the sounds around me – you could hear the sound of water, boats and ships coming from the Rhine, the echo of train sounds was coming from the train station; the sound of people passing through on bicycles... How sweet... Others were making the rhythmic sounds of the morning sport and someone stopped to fasten his shoe, and at that moment the keys thrown down to the ground sounded like a refrain. Birds were chirping in the background, a hugging lovers' couple was chatting, and my silent breathing sort of tried to merge everything into one. A bird was frisking nearby picking the floating feathers. You have an interesting mission, I thought to myself. I felt an urge to start dancing. I was enjoying myself, I was enjoying myself so softly and lightly... Then I got up to leave, I walked past a girl who was wearing beer cap earrings. Suddenly I saw lots of children drawing the Rhine and boats. I still found it strange. I headed towards the chocolate factory for a cup of coffee. My watch showed one hour ahead of the actual time of Cologne, so I had to turn around and go back near the hotel. I received an SMS. The professor wrote me a message asking to meet up in an hour. And yet it's so interestingly weird in a strange way. I answered one more question to myself – I want to travel, to acquire more experience, to spend my time in a meaningful and interesting way, to write books. To write.

Comfort zone

Yesterday night I was hanging around in the academy together with the professor like two ghosts.

The topic of the night was finding your comfort zone. Everything is quite simple – you have to create/find an environment where you could feel damn good. What is my comfort zone? You know what? It's the freedom to be myself.

The 3D Avatar workshop was very interesting. Students had to create an object, dress it up and make it move. I was a guest lecturer and talked about fashion, or to be exact, about clothing as an avatar by means of which we can create ourselves. During the discussion I presented my avatar concept. I said to the students: "I was thinking what my avatar could look like in a 3D world. I have been closely examining my photos from my childhood, adolescence and the recent travels and I saw that there is room for wings in each of them. If I were to create myself as an avatar, as a fashion world representative I would do without clothes. I could do with a naked athletic body and wings which could help me touch Mars. I have everything. The only thing I want is to fly."

After I left Milan and returned to Vilnius, I started working as a lecturer at the Vilnius College of Design. I dived into creative projects and into the life with students. The following year passed very quickly and was full of most interesting projects. I organized workshops 1st Experiment Fashion which saw student participation from three colleges; the event Be Creative in Blue where everything was coloured in blue from students and lecturers to collections and drinks to music... We decorated jeans in the Paris café and drew smiles on people's faces; we

sold creative ideas in the design marketplace; the photographic studio was buzzing with cameras and photo shots; the works of my students were in line to claim the Grand Prix. It felt like my life was so wonderfully unpredictable!

The creative “Owooooo!” broke out well into the middle of the year with the question: “My sweet butterfly, maybe you can do more?”

Yes, I Can.

Soon I got a position at a college of one of the largest design institute chains in Asia (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia)! I continued my exploration of fashion, life and design.

Before the long haul flight I had a strange dream.

8

8 or the idea of endless freedom of acting. I had a strange dream: I was standing in the dark as if on a stage, illuminated by light and could not see anything around me. I heard a voice (calm, magnificent, awe-inspiring).

The voice: What number represents a human?

Me: 8.

The voice: Why?

Me: Because if you rotate it 90 degrees you get an infinity symbol, and this means that human self-expression is limitless. (I

uttered like a class achiever.)

The voice: That's correct.

A silent pause. (I feel like I'm participating in a quiz show; I feel light anxiety and thrill.)

The voice: And what could you say about the word "how" which is mostly repeated in your head in such a form: "How do I achieve it?", "How do I do it?"

Me: There is no such word. You simply need to act.

The voice: That's correct.

I heard many palms giving me a clap and woke up. I carried this dream with me all day long until I remembered someone's words: "Be realistic, demand the impossible!" After this dream the trip to Asia no longer scared me.

P. S. I think it was God. I believe that he visits all of us.

7.) ASIA

On my birthday, I got an Ayurvedic massage gift voucher. An elderly masseuse in an Indian dress greeted me with a charming smile, lit up a candle and asked me to take off my clothes. Within a few moments I was lying on the massage table waiting for relaxing massage. Suddenly she asked me what I was doing for a living and then her thoughts again drifted somewhere far away.

“Your arms and legs are very cold,” she said to me at the end of massage. “You could devote the energy that you use to heat them, say, to creation.” Then she told me that blood circulation may be activated with massage; moreover, nutrition, sport and positive lifestyle that would make you feel worthwhile is also important. She smiled at me again. I was looking at her with my eyes wide open; a light sleep-inducing aroma was coming from my body. I was trying to read into her words when a phone rang suddenly and I was carried away by reality like a mouse by the cat. For several years I was coming back and drifting away from the things she said to me.

Energy. Everything is energy. Even a human made of hundreds of thousands particles moving at a fast speed is energy.

Applications, endless telephone job interviews, questions, answers, and finally, one month later I am holding a 2-year contract in my hands for the position as a fashion design lecturer in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

I had little knowledge about Asia. The standard information (a beautiful and exotic country, monkeys climbing trees, heat, many colours and very good people who smile all the time) was

perhaps all I had. For the past couple of days I kept playing a Youtube video “Malaysia – truly Asia” on my computer. I adjusted my rose-tinted glasses, boarded the plane together with my L who had “fallen into my life as if from the sky” and went on a journey to a place 10,000 km away from home.

I’m about to describe Asia sticking to my notes from my three Moleskine notebooks-calendars. Moleskine came into my life out of the blue but mostly it caught my attention due to its concept. The brief birth story of Moleskine tells us that it is a legendary notebook used by artists and thinkers over the past two centuries: among them Vincent van Gogh, Pablo Picasso, Ernest Hemingway and Bruce Chatwin. This notebook contained sketches, notes, stories and ideas that would one day become famous pages in the list of the most popular and most loved books of the world. Moleskine is described as a repository of ideas and feelings or the energy passed down from generation to generation. In today’s world, this notebook is synonymous with culture, trips of imagination and personal self-expression in the virtual and real world. It is a partner of a creative profession. Asia: challenges of two years, experiences, the metamorphosis of the butterfly into the happy duckling who in her way turned into a sky bird.

You can.

My first Moleskine was a sketch notebook which I mainly used for drawing and writing down my thoughts and strangest observations. For example: “And yet palms grow in cemeteries”, “This place is a home to cats without tails”, “Today in the butterfly park I kissed their wet wings”, “A crow is sitting on a coconut”. It gave birth to the drawings from which ideas were later born; here I began coming to life, in a slightly different way from the idea of flight, gasping surprise in Singapore uttering “Wow”, the name of my first house Sucasa in Kuala

Lumpur, chaos of nationalities and strange thoughts to luxurious events, the rudiment beast and the concept of the happy duckling. The second Moleskine – a calendar/notes. Time is my ally. I grasped my freedom of being. The third Moleskine – a calendar/notes. It is breaking free from my own self, it is self-realization through the fashion design lecturer, the writer, the observer of this world and a simple happy person that we all are.

Wake up.

I, just like you, want to love someone, hold someone close, hug someone and smile. I, just like you, was born one day, and one day I will pass away.

Singapore

In a Salvador Dali's exhibition, I was staring at the moustached painter without any thoughts in my head, only thinking to myself with my eyes wide open: "I want to be him." In the Valentino's exhibition I wanted to scream like in a concert – it was the first time I saw what high fashion is like up close...!

Singapore is a city-state in Southeast Asia, one of the four Asian Tigers or Dragons, among which are Hong Kong, South Korea and Taiwan. My first stop was 5-day training in the Raffles Design Institute in Singapore. I felt like Alice in Wonderland. "I like your hair!" shouted some girl to me looking at my locks. We returned home on a bike with a carriage. We ate shrimps at a restaurant near skyscrapers. It felt so good to enjoy all these tastes and smells. When I entered the clothing store I expe-

rienced culture shock as well as other types of shocks. I felt like I had been living in lie for 27 years. I had never seen more beautiful clothes anywhere. Here, everyone is stylish, polished, everyone is studying, working and moving forward at an impossible speed. The most delicious food in the world, the tallest skyscrapers, cleanliness, nice people, most beautiful clothing stores and my high heels resonating with every step. The only word that accompanied me everywhere I looked around was “Wow!” I even stopped to take photos because here I wanted to take photos of everything. I felt like I was on another planet. As if I returned home after some time away. It’s so clean here. What beautiful people, tidiness and precision from the old elegant lady walking down the street to every single lamp properly screwed in to adorn the city which is probably not only energy-saving but also has a perfect design.

Later trips, challenges, work, work, work to Singapore from insane happiness – music, a long road, the sun, relaxation – through stress because my L still didn’t have a visa and a job; threats from a frontier-guard, our long and painful analyses of our path we had chosen ourselves to Singapore in Christmas, silver-sprayed advertising faces, Vietnamese restaurant on the roof with a viewpoint overseeing the city in the night, craziest photos before me, inside me and through me – waiting final shows in the most luxurious hotel and conversation with important people to wish/reluctance to seek/stay/improve myself, but where? In Kuala Lumpur, Hon Kong, Singapore or in some other exotic city? So many people, so many opinions and styles. Here the whether, the food, the showbiz world, cultures and values are different; here life has a different speed... from the church to Muslims washing their feet near their temple, from remembering to give a child a pat on the head to alertness and realization not to do this here. My inside is shaking, shaking.

One-week courses passed very quickly. Besotted with the most perfect city-state (here they don't even sell chewing gum!) five days later we took a flight to Kuala Lumpur.

Salam Malaysia 1

“Salam Malaysia satu,” the news anchor greeted viewers, each day reminding them of country's unity. Advertising mostly features three figures – a Malay, a Chinese and an Indian character, all of them smiling, looking friendly and happy. In the evening, TV channels broadcast prayers; the city rings five times a day. The unified Malaysia is a project uniting different nations.

The diversity of nationalities results in chaos I could not get used to. We went to the Secret Recipe café and ordered a piece of pie and a cup of coffee. Soon our raised heads put us to sleep in a strange silence: sitting at the table were two gay lovers whispering sweet words to each other; four teenagers sat down next to us who looked like Chinese but were fluently speaking in Russian; then an African guy came up whom we soon named a tribal leader with an escort of two simply dressed guys accompanying him who sat down surrounding him on both sides. They were sitting with their legs crossed scratching their fingers, and when the snacks were served, the leader king started eating them with a fork, whereas his guards were using their hands. Suddenly two darlings passed reminding us of the lyrics of the song by Anthony and the Johnsons “One day I'll grow up, I'll be a beautiful woman/But for today I am a child, for today I am a boy...” It looked strange and unusual, especially in the Muslim country where everyone seemed to stick to rules. Local children asked tourists for money; mysterious

Arab women wearing black niqabs slightly scared us and many other people from various walks of life were moving around us from travelling backpackers, Australians and Russians to locals boasting about their food and offering various services. We were walking in silence without uttering a word with smiles on our faces and kept thinking to ourselves: “Can you believe it?”.

Here everything is different. Adaptation took place already on the first weekend when my L’s bag was stolen by a thief on a scooter. Passport, driving license, bank cards, cash... We saw the scooter running away from us with our savings. All we had was each other, scared and confused. But what mattered was that we were together. We filled out a report at the police and continued our journey towards the realization of our dreams. My L said to me smiling from ear to ear: “I’m not going to give in and I’m beginning to really like KL. Let’s move on!” Unpredictable life started putting smiles on our faces. These were only things, damn it, the most important thing is that we’re ok.

After we signed a one year contract we settled in a suite at the Sucasa skyscraper. It felt good to wake up in the morning, drink my morning tea, admire mountains rising to the sky, look at skyscrapers towering, cars travelling along a highway, train lines reddening and birds soaring through the sky. It was a silent painting which gave meaning to my life. In everyday life we were constantly mistaken for tourists although we did not wear shorts and slippers. It happens even now when you see smiles around you and people screaming “Welcome to Malaysia!” although you have been living here for nearly two years. I also have to admit that with my glowing white skin and hair which also recently got white, I’m a star here. My way to work zigzags along luxurious hotels, the subway, the long crossings and shopping malls. Every day I hear air kissing sounds and various pickup attempts. I always smile at them and in my

mind I send them peace because it's much easier to live this way.

I love Malaysia

For already half a year I was in culture shock which manifested itself in shortness of breath, allergies, tears, lose stomach (Asia), etc. The hardest thing for me was to discover myself in this cultural chaos since multiculti means that you live not only with Malay Muslims but also with people from island tribes, the Chinese, Indians, travellers and various weirdos. I still cannot get used to my mood swings I experience here. But time went by very quickly, my eyes were bombarded with images I wanted to take photos of. And to continue the topic "I have it today, I had it yesterday" here is a few more scenes from my diary:

Yesterday we attended a skyscraper presentation at the Hilton hotel. Funny life advertisements (advertising rooms with models sitting in them and advertising some products, e. g. bags, golf supplies, computers, etc), Malay people making English sounds, a singer singing "You are a super woman" while looking me straight into the eyes and tuning it up emphatically singing "Super Woman" after I uttered "Thank you". Delicious treats and the colours of fresh fish sushi, the most impressive deserts, the most creative Asian chiefs and the most helpful people; I had them yesterday. Me as the tallest person in a crowd; I had it yesterday... my head gets dizzy, I feel good... Batu Calves: A cocky liar taxi driver, a unimaginably huge temple, the most aggressive monkeys in the world, hundreds of small steps and a shot of the day I called "The Woman"; I had this today. I especially liked her bulging breasts who looked like two ripe

apples. How it is nice and divine to be a part of the Earth. I love Malaysia!

Friday thoughts

The entire internet is packed to brim with information. It is so tiring. People are selling, trading, spreading rumours, discussing, presenting things that are yet to be made. The savage world. And here you are, with your undiscovered self or, in other words, still on your way to discover yourself. So what? The world keeps revolving, running, rolling at an impossible speed. You are so small against the world. Every day you are ransacking your brain to find ways to become part of it. The world becomes a home or a study to your creation or the greatest source of inspiration. What diversity! How much of everything. Such horrible consumption gets you deep in thought and You, with your still undiscovered self, start rearranging or introducing order to your life which is still not perfectly fixed. You are an idealist, you aim for perfection, at night you fight vampires and snakes, you climb high mountains or run from white sharks, and you see grins all around you. So what? Then you get back into yourself and you see that perfection or a human knows no bounds. You massage you neck and keep writing things that come out of the box called the head. "Think outside the box" – you hear the slogan of the school in your head but hush... easy. What about those who don't have the box? If I had wings I would fly around. I'm tired. Cars are screaming outside the window... Simply screaming and keep polluting my beloved earth which is really going to face doomsday. You need to draw. Egyptians used to draw because they were afraid of death. You have to express yourself.

For years somebody hammered something into your head and now you would like to just vacuum everything. The ideas that shoot into my head sometimes make me think that this head is not mine. You tell the wrong thoughts that you don't believe in them and you simply carry on living. It's hard to hold yourself together, you have to be strong. You belong to the fashion world. So what? It's a trendy choice to drink at Starbucks, to eat various healthy/unhealthy/high-calorie-content foods without which you cannot be trendy, you must be thin, healthy and have a perfect skin. I don't believe in it. Then you are bombarded by the pharmaceutical industry; artificially created wellness clubs; they even start charging spiritual courses. You open your big eyes and see that the world is only about buying and selling. How dreary. How empty. How terrible. Then you realize one thing: you need to be strong, in other words, your mind realizes that you are capable of everything. They can laugh if they wish; they can spread rumours if they wish; they can eat non-stop, they can watch; they can discuss... Meanwhile you are you. You are your life. You are living now. You are creating, smelling, loving, waiting, putting together pieces, crying. It's better now. I feel better. Sometimes you howl like a dog to the person you love: "Why is it so haaaaard?" And he says to you with the softest smile in the world that you should replace the word "hard" with the word "easy". Then you keep howling: "Why is it so easyyyy?" You are giggling together and a cup of coffee spills out in the room because you get deep into thought and repeat one more time: "Why is it so easyyyy?" and realize that it is hard because everything is too easy. It's ironic. Everything is so ironic. Ah, the narrowness of me. Ah, this skin colour. You feel like you are in a vicious cycle.

What's next?

Monday and time to work.

The happy duckling

What is the happy duckling?

The concept of the happy duckling came to me very unexpectedly. One day, a crystal happy duckling was sitting on the palm of the person I love who brought out a beast in me and dozens of questions came to my mind:

“Are you giving me a happy duckling as a gift for one-year anniversary of our friendship? Tension set in: So this is how much you love me? The happy duckling? I’m so unhappy! My boyfriend went out of his mind. Hello! Hello! I told you “Chanel” ... He does not love me. He does not hear me. It’s a fact.”

For a moment I was short of breath. In her head the fashion design lecturer packed all her stuff and ran far far away... I felt sorry for him looking at him smiling and I was on the verge of crying when he said:

“This is for you. The happy duckling. On the surface of water, the happy duckling looks very beautiful and fluffy but underwater it keeps working with his little orange legs. It is you. Never forget the happy duckling when one day you wake up to find yourself transformed into the happy swan. And of course your Chanel,” he said pulling out a beautiful white box with a golden ribbon.

This sent me shivers down my body. In silence, I smiled at him with excitement and in my mind I came back from far away (the plane from NY landed successfully), I unpacked my stuff and felt slightly embarrassed. I planted a light peck on his cheek and blushed for a moment. I leaned down under the

table pretending that my leg was hurting.

Holding the happy duckling on my palm, I was thinking a lot.

I presented his concept to my students saying that on the surface we may and must look beautiful (neatly dressed, pleasant and able to listen – true professionals) but at the same time we should not forget to “work with our orange legs” (to improve ourselves, to create, to draw, to think, to grow, to aim for best results and to contribute to the welfare of the earth). This is something we must know ourselves. At the end I said to them: “Looking at your works, one shouldn’t feel the smell of sweat. We have to admit that nobody is interested in how many nights you’ve stayed up to do the job; they are interested only in the result. Let’s create and spread beauty.”

Together with the Mirrors 2011 graduating students we went to buy fabrics and accessories for our collections to Hong Kong. Already at that time I had a thought of giving a little happy duckling to each of my student as a gift, as a cosy and warm symbol full of meaning encouraging them to move on and not to stop. All week we were diving in the Sham Sui Po fabric market absorbed in creative search. I found it! Miniature glass bottles, small plastic ducklings and golden tapes. Once I came back home I arranged the small gifts into sets and a few months later I gave them to the young designers. I want to believe that this concept will help them during difficult times. Because life is full of challenges. Let’s move on!

At the end I want to add that I shared the concept of the happy duckling with more people. I gave several ducklings to some adults, some of them being in their late adulthood years.

One person for whom I have great respect told me: “But are you sure that I’m already the happy swan? I wouldn’t be so sure

about that.”

These words made me think.

I wonder what it would feel like in the morning when I wake up to find myself transformed into the happy swan. What it would mean to my life? Will I be different than I'm now? Will I be the same? How it would feel? But what if it never happens?

But maybe you have already woken up and found yourself transformed into the happy swan?

If such morning has not come yet, don't forget that you are not alone. Give me a smile.

I keep working with my orange legs. Even now my cousin likes to call me a worker bee. I like to be busy, sometimes I find it difficult to sit down and do nothing. For two years I have been working as a lecturer and a person responsible for creative projects at the Raffles Design College in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. This institution is owned by Raffles Education Corp operating a network of over forty colleges in Asia. I am happy having the opportunity to work as a fashion design lecturer, to be on professional internship and to improve myself working with the Raffles Design Institute in Singapore. My professional growth is supplemented by numerous fashion events, seminars, creative projects, professional trips, exhibitions, among them a three-day seminar-workshop Asia Fashion Summit 2011 in Singapore, a Japanese designer Shing Tokihiro's workshop and Grand Prix projects won in cooperation with students (Parkson, Passport to Europe, young designers' competitions during the Malaysia fashion week 2011, Puma, Motorsport 2012 (Kuala Lumpur), uniform project Elzecom 2012 (Cambodia),

fabric purchase trip with graduating students to Hong Kong, 2011, T-wish workshop (Penang Island, Malaysia) which I created, presented and implemented. I am happy having had a chance to meet/get to know the famous fashion wolves of Malaysia (Bill Keith, William Liew, Terenzi Soo, Khoon Hooi, Theresa Thian, Jimmy Choo) and the young designers (Jonathan Liang, Silas Liew).

The Fortune Court

If you looked at me through magic binoculars from the outer space, you would see me at a café in a cheap shopping mall called Sungei Wang Starbucks near the street at the heart of Kuala Lumpur, still trying to tame this large city. The street is full of red Chinese lanterns; cars are running fast after work; advertising signs are flashing in the night; a ventilator is blowing cool air into my face; an Arab family sitting down next to me. Nearby a smiling guy is walking around carrying a sign “Free Hugs”, and a few steps away his friends are standing laughing at him ready to take pictures of the events of the coming minutes. I have been sitting here for about an hour and let my thoughts drift away. I must admit I honestly am too lazy to go to the Fortune Court. The Fortune Court is the name of our second home in Kuala Lumpur. It is very cozy, small and modern. It is located in the heart of the city near the thunderous Palanga (this is how I call the Chankat street because it looks very similar); streets are full of restaurants and various entertainments. Our window overlooks the courtyard of restaurants so it is only some drink that we order in the famous street. Puppy-sized rats, fat cockroaches which can fly and a familiar smell of rubbish, especially on weekends. Our

pocket-sized apartment we go up every time we want to hide. We have a gym on the roof and a sky-blue swimming pool we rarely swim in. It's too hot during the day, and in the evening you don't always have time, besides, my skin is sensitive to chlorine. The morning view – construction and builders every day wolf-whistling at me and shouting “Oh la la!” The morning view – a hangover street full of trash. The morning view – trains going along the sky; towering skyscrapers and people of different nationalities – on a rush, deep in their thoughts, eating, flopping (the main footwear in the hot climate is slippers) and sleepy tourists trying to rush through the city in order to see as much as possible.

We moved to our new apartment in July last year. We found it on the internet.

It started raining cats and dogs!

White hair

Me: Mom, mom, mom! I want to have white hair! – I was mewling day after day.

Mom: I'm so tired of this girl! (She pulled me by the hand.) Here, look there is a hairdresser's parlour out there. We are going to visit it to get your hair white, - my mom said in a strict voice losing her patience after a couple of weeks during which I tormented her. I was walking with firm determination but we passed through the hairdresser's salon without coming by. This topic was finished. I realized that I had to abandon my wish for a while.

I was dreaming about white hair!

Fashion design lecturer: If you dyed your hair white, you'd look like an angel! (Reminded me of my old dream.)

Me: Yes, – I thought to myself. If you switch the letter n and g in the word angel you will get my name from the first four letters. Maybe I am an angel, – I thought to myself and postponed hair dyeing to the future.

And finally after two decades and a few years of intense search for myself, I decided that it was time for white hair.

I had never felt more confident. I bravely sat down in the stylist's chair. I said to him with confidence what I wanted and in a couple of hours I was overjoyed with an excellent result. All shaking with excitement I was in a hurry to meet with my L. People whom I encountered on my way greeted me, some of them gave me compliments and one man looked at me with great fascination in his eyes (I'm in Asia and here white hair is a rarity).

My hands were shaking and my fingers were typing a message: "I'm your Sun, I'm your Angel, I'm your Infinity!"

When he saw me he also started shaking.

He: "You're my star," he said kissing me, hugging me, starring at me happily.

Unrealized wishes suck your energy. Something I long carried in my heart came true.

White hair is only a detail. Sometimes I feel disappointed when most people see only this change.

Let it be!!

What about you? Do I look like an angel to you?

Colourless man

I recall a children's book portraying a world without colours and Mr. Painter who coloured this world. It was a small pocket-sized book which I could browse for long hours on end and let its pages take me across the vast skies of a child's imagination. When I was little, the concept of an invisible man deeply etched in me as the movie "Invisible Man" was popular at that time. Finally, during my study years, I started to perceive myself as an observer, a sort of mix of colourless invisible man whose God was lurking in details. The colourless invisible man is not necessarily someone who lacks colours. Actually it is a very colourful personality hiding himself/herself underneath grey clothing. Once this person for whom I have great respect said to me: "Whatever you touch becomes beautiful." These words is the mantra of my being and till this day I hold on to them, but today I think that whatever I touch takes on a colour and yet it is the same beauty only that the words are different. And it does not matter whether it is a young student, a colleague, or a friend that you have missed so much... I add colours, but sometimes they can be black and white!

Grey umbrella

A couple of days ago I participated in a few days seminar on improvising and I realized that it is the basis of life. Recently, I've been struggling to hold on to this feeling. It is interesting to observe yourself and others, and to connect things that seemingly do not fit together – to discover, to get to know, to accept, to let in or set free. “Swish” to the right, “Swash” to the left, “Bang” – you hit, “Bong” – you hit back. You need to be as flexible as a reed and if you encounter soft breeze you have to lie down on it, if you encounter strong wind you should not fight against it and bend to full and if a blow is about to hit you, do not try to take it and let it go past by “Swash” or “Swish”.

When I come to college I am greeted by a school's security guard, an Indian guy with a nice smile named Bala. He is very nice, slim and tall man in his late years with a red spot on his forehead. Every morning the same one and it has been like this for two years in a row. I will try to describe the moment when I see him. In Malaysia, I always take an umbrella with me wherever I go because my skin is very white and I don't want to get sunburns. At first I was very unlucky with umbrellas. They would break one after another, or I would lose them. Once I happened to go to the Muji store after I arrived at Singapore and bought top-quality grey umbrella of which I am proud till this day. Thus the morning topic I used to have with Bala, whether staying mute or vocal or exchanging a few words, would sometimes ignite annoyance in me. Everything would go like this: the morning of my first day - he is pointing to the umbrella and laughing saying to me that it is not raining. Then I explain to him that the sun is shining. The next day he is pointing with his finger up to the sky (implying that

it's cloudy, it's not raining and the sun is not shining), then he points to my umbrella and laughs again. I explain to him that this is for radiation. The following day he is again pointing at my umbrella saying "a new umbrella". I nod and smile at him. The other day he waves to me from a distance, looks at me in surprise with frown expression and points with his finger to the sky (it's cloudy, the sun is not shining) and asks me where my umbrella is. I smile at him and tell him that I have lost it. The next day – a new umbrella (he is overjoyed). After a couple of days he laughs and points to my umbrella saying that it is broken. And it has been like this for two years in a row, five times a week. Every morning the man pulls new facial expressions as soon as he sees me and my umbrella and keep asking me and getting sad or happy hearing me say it's broken, I've fixed it, I've lost it, I bought a new one, "yes, it is made of fabric because it is meant to protect against the sun" etc. Finally, after so many umbrella mornings, I started greeting him with an increasingly wide smile slightly waving to him with my umbrella.

He was the nicest person and I'm happy that it is with him that my school mornings start. If someone notices my umbrella stories and they enrich someone's life, it's all the better for me. I smile. I live. After all it is such a charming detail! It's the colour of the day!

Cats without tails

Malaysia. When I first saw cats without tails I thought to myself "People are so cruel..." The second time I saw them I felt bizarre and this sent cold down my spine so before I saw them the third time I decided to ask people about it. One evening

I was going home from work with my colleague Lucy and she said to me that it was genes, simply genes. She also told me that Chinese people do not like cats because their hair is harmful to children and causes respiratory system diseases. I kept hearing the phrase “cats without tails” in my head and sometimes whenever I saw such a cat my mind would create a story about a cat who wanted to have a tail. I often felt like a cat without a tail on a hunt for my tail. I realized that everything takes its time. I decided not to rush. I kept hearing the proverbs “think twice, cut once”, “haste makes waste” in my head. I don’t want to rush and run and do everything without thinking any more. I want to think everything over systematically, to prepare myself and, of course, to keep a small window open for breathing and for the openness to new ideas. You cannot plan everything hundred percent but it is always worthwhile to correct, to reconsider and to make conclusions. Only this makes you move forward. Moreover, you don’t need to make excuses. Once you make a mistake it is better to admit it and to correct it, and you have to make many mistakes because it this way you make most of your life lessons. And you learn only through yourself. Got confused? Not sure what to do? Feeling upset and it seems like something is building up inside of you? You don’t know what you want – run away, drive away or maybe remain where you are and howl, and your head feels like it is about to explode... Make sure it does not show on the outside and try to get up with a smile and the least thing you can do is to drink a glass of water. Drink slowly, enjoy yourself. Maybe a cup of tea? Take action, read books, keep bad thoughts away from you. You have to work with yourself and do it regularly.

And finally, if there is nothing you want to do, there is an Italian saying “dolce fare niente” – “the sweetness of doing nothing”. It is very important to find your comfort zone, but first of all to learn how to avoid inner conflicts and unite those two con-

flicting forces. Direct their power toward self-improvement. It is also important not to forget a person closest to you. It is not only you but also him who also has to deal with tough times. Besides, without him, you would not be what you are now. Be grateful because perhaps it was he who made you into what you are now and made you bloom. Love him without demands and let him love you. At least once a day remind yourself of who you are, what you aim for, where are you heading and do not forget to express your gratitude and to spend some time in silence with yourself.

ENJOY YOURSELF.

At the end I want to talk about Cundra, a cat, who had the most beautiful tail. Here is my letter to her from Milan:

“Dear Cundra,

I am coming to visit you this month. Please don't be mad at me for being late... Even though you had a name, all this time I still wanted to call you the “C a t”. When my mom told me that you were ill I thought to myself that it would soon go away and you'd get better. When my mom told me that you had stopped eating, I thought to myself that in Milan there are many of those who don't eat... Maybe you wanted to be a “model”, a cat model who wanted to demonstrate Chanel... When my mom told me you were gone... I... I said to her firmly that you had always been independent and decided everything by yourself... And it was you who had chosen the date to leave us... 15 years!

Do you remember when you were little? I bought you at a marketplace, I took you home and I have loved you since then... And the five kittens you later give birth to? Four white and one grey... And your night pranks that wouldn't let me sleep...!

And your bizarre rutting every two weeks? Always full of passion, erotica and “something more” ...

What fascinated me most was the queen of independence that you were. You knew what was your “freedom of being” because to you it was inborn. I could be silent and cry without saying a word to anyone, and it would be then that you would scratch on my room door letting me know that you wanted in. Once you were inside, you would sleep in my room for the whole week and then you would go off and wander your own paths. You knew that you were there for me and it was all that mattered. My little white furry bundle of joy. I love you. I wish you, Cundra-cat, have a good flight!”

8.) *SKY BIRD (INTERPRETATION)**

I am a SKY BIRD and it is my idea of free flight or a freedom of action equivalent to my wish TO TOUCH MARS.

Have you ever been tormented by the questions “Why am I so different?”, “Why can’t I fit in?”, “Everyone is doing it this way and I want to do it the other way. Will I succeed?”, “What’s wrong with me?”, “I’d better stay silent”, etc. You know what? Questions you ask yourself show that you are growing. If the environment that surrounds you does not change naturally, that’s what you are here for, so unique and special. You are here to change it. Calm down, you are not alone who feels different.

Is it bad? No. Is it good? Again, no. What matters most is being yourself. Now life tells you that better, more abundant and more interesting things are ahead! Make a move, look around and make at least a small change.

It is important to know who you are and where you want to go. A person living with doubt will remain so. What’s important is discipline and interests. You can change your environment by developing yourself, e. g. a wish to learn a new language may be a door leading to your path. New people, new acquaintances, travelling and positive thinking expand the boundaries we created ourselves. Take a look in the mirror more often. You are unique and it’s a good start. Try to think from a wider perspective. Those who “speak” usually live the lives of others rather than themselves. I realized that each statement I made is accompanied by actual experiences I have had and this makes me a strong person. I already know it because I’ve experienced it.

Take a blank sheet of paper and draw, write, hear yourself,

make a change, take action and discover. Do not forget the sound “hush!”.

“Most gulls don’t bother to learn more than the simplest facts of flight – how to get from shore to food and back again. For most gulls, it is not flying that matters, but eating. For this gull, though, it was not eating that mattered, but flight. More than anything else, Jonathan Livingston Seagull loved to fly.”

How are you feeling? Have you recognised Jonathan Livingston within yourself? Does your flight get you only to shore or are you lured by far horizons? Do you love your flight the way it is, unique and created by yourself, or do you find the flights you take following misleading advices imposed by others more tempting?

It feels good when you are “exactly the way you are” and you are not alone. Cheer up and smile!

“Can you teach me to fly like that? Jonathan Seagull trembled to conquer another unknown.

“Of course, if you wish to learn.”

“I wish. When can we start?”

“We could start now, if you’d like.”

“I want to learn to fly like that,” Jonathan said, and a strange light glowed in his eyes. “Tell me what to do.”

I’ve known this story about the extraordinary bird since my childhood. The yesterday day reminded me of it and I decided to read this story all over again. It is a bird who followed his heart, who fell, got up and tried again approaching his limit of capabilities which does not exist in this world. Many times he

acknowledged the fact that he was only a seagull and that he had to get rid of foolish thoughts, to return home to his flock and be happy with what was meant to him. But the passion for flying kept taking him to his real path. Dark thoughts would go away and dissipate like predawn mist. What an inspiring and wonderful story! He became an outcast and later a legend.

“Why, Jon, why?” his mother asked. “Why is it so hard to be like the rest of the flock, Jon? Why can’t you leave low flying to the pelicans, the albatross? Why don’t you eat? Jon, you’re bone and feathers!”

“I don’t mind being bone and feathers, Mum. I just want to know what I can do in the air and what I can’t, that’s all. I just want to know.”

So much meaning. I relate to this conversation as it reminds me of myself. I have had many such conversations with my mum who kept asking what was wrong with me (Why do you have to go so far away, why can’t you be satisfied with a peaceful and simple life?) and I kept answering to her that it came from inside and I just wanted to know what I could do and what I couldn’t, that’s all. I have become a teacher to myself by exposing myself through my fears and day after day I am trying to touch this perfect speed of life, sometimes becoming the worst, and sometimes the best.

“ – You will begin to touch heaven, Jonathan, in the moment that you touch perfect speed. And that isn’t flying a thousand miles an hour, or a million, or flying at the speed of light. Because any number is a limit, and perfection doesn’t have limits. Perfect speed, my son, is being there.”

I agree with the fact that perfection doesn’t have limits and I agree that the perfect speed is being here and now.

This is my flight: “Why, that’s true! I am a perfect, unlimited seagull!”

I had to choose the path of an outcast, at least at this stage of my life, and only yesterday did I feel I was a teacher... “a teacher who can express her love by revealing truths to another seagull who is maybe looking for a slightest chance to find his own path.”

Did you know?

“The gull sees farthest who flies highest.” Smile! “Don’t be harsh on them, Fletcher Seagull. In casting you out, the other gulls have only hurt themselves, and one day they will know this, and one day they will see what you see. Forgive them, and help them to understand.”

Did I make it somewhat clearer to you?

“Each of us is in truth an idea of the Great Gull, an infinite idea of freedom,” Jonathan would say in the evenings on the beach, “and precision flying is a step toward expressing our real nature. Everything that limits us we have to put aside.”

“We’re free to go where we wish and to be what we are,” Jonathan answered, and he lifted from the sand and turned east, toward the home grounds of the Flock.”

Hey, friend, I believe in you because you wrote a letter to me and asked me. I believe in you because you are looking for answers. I believe in you because your inquiry has moved my world. You have power because you’ve inspired me to act. Thank you!

I believe that your doubts disappeared.

I wanted to finish my response by the sea, looking at the flying seagulls and to establish the idea of unlimited flight – the idea of creation, self-expression, inspiration, encouraging, being a role model and loving...! But this morning I decided not to go to the sea. The fashion design lecturer decided to write, write and improve her writing skills because it's like a spring of water to her thirsty body, it is stronger than a wish to see the sea, to buy a nice piece of clothing and even stronger than the responsibility of lecturing.

It is a flight for the sake of flight and it has nothing to do with “food”. I've become a bird, a SKY BIRD.

* *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* by Richard Bach

Vision

A fashion design lecture. Fashion students wearing stylish ear-phones are watching the virtual fashion projections. The fashion design lecturer is walking around the deck in her white yacht watching the flying seagulls and becomes fully convinced of the idea of infinite freedom of action: “Yes, the most important thing is flight.” Feeling fresh wind on her face, she turns off the fashion show being played by the cutting edge technology and feeling slightly annoyed energetically starts a virtual lecture disturbing the existence of a few sleeping students: “Hello, today you are going to have the shortest fashion design lecture.

Theory. The sound “hush” came to my head which we utter

when we want to invite silence, calmness or to hear ourselves. This word is magical and it works if it is uttered out loud, especially when you slightly frown your eyebrows, when you stare intently, when you shout out or you put your finger to your lips. But “hush” should be more often uttered to yourself personally, especially when your mind is making up various stories, e. g. “Sigh... I will never be...”, “If I were you, I would...”, “I’m done. I worked so much and put so much effort and nobody cares...” These are thoughts about diet, healthy/unhealthy lifestyle, family, career and everything that surrounds our lives. Let your mind drift. You have to say “hush” out loud to yourself and then you need to focus on what’s important. You need to say “hush” also to those who create your life, e. g. “You have to do this and that and only then will you succeed”, “Now pull yourself together”, “You will never have it, you will never find it, you will not do it, you are taking risk”, “No, no, are you kidding me? Dream on, unless you were rich.” You have to respond to these phrases by uttering “hush” and then put your efforts into creating your life by yourself and it doesn’t matter if you are not moving forward fast. You must do something you can get a kick out of. This is the only way to be fit, beautiful, happy, etc.

So HUSH and this is all the theory for today!

Practical part. The modern world is too fast so a little less conversation and a little more action! When I look at people while I walk sometimes I see hundreds of books in place of them. Different sizes, covers and contents. Sometimes I want to approach them and ask them: “Do you know that you are a book? And if your death would be a metamorphosis into a book, could you tell me how thick and what size would it be? And would your cover would be colourful or monochrome? What about the contents? Whom the acknowledgment would

be dedicated? How many pages have you lived or what page have you stuck on? Is this search and life on the run is taking you towards culmination?

And if you were to write a book, what would it be about?

Everything starts with PHILOSOPHY which contains ideas floating in the air, various creative concepts, a personal vision and mission, experience, experiments and action.

Now your fashion design lecturer is going for a swim.

If you have any questions or want to share your thoughts, please contact me at:

Agne_Vei@yahoo.com

Good luck with your work and see you soon!

We'll keep in touch!

THE END

My dear friend,

I've started eating chicken wings again!

I'm allergic to chicken and this has been diagnosed by an allergist whom I visited when I was still a teenager. Since that day I had to cut down on chicken, or to be precise, I had to stop eating it altogether so that my body could cleanse itself. Since my childhood I've loved chicken wings which I would eat in strange bouts. Each time a chicken wing craving hit, my mum would say to me: "This kid is sure going to fly somewhere again!" It's strange but it was true and this continues till this day.

At the end I will repeat myself: let's be kids, let's PLAY (ACT) and think nothing!

(Yes, I still cannot get the adult life I had longed so much. I usually shrug my shoulders and go back to playing).

LOVE,

Agne Vei

PHOTOS



1



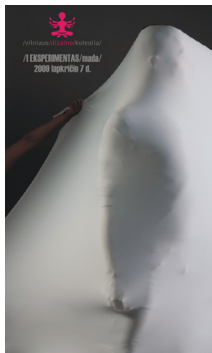
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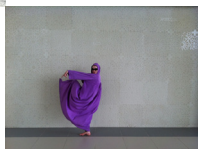
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15



16

1 Collection Fast and Furious 2004 (photo by magazine Lilit)

2 Collection Life is a Traffic Jam 2005 (photo by Delfi)

3 Collection Soccus 2007 (photo by Pix Studija)

4 Collection Lace Me 2010 (photo by Okto)

5 Creative workshop 1st Experiment Fashion 2009, Vilnius Design college (photo by J. Kimsaite)

6 Creative project Be Creative in Blue 2010, Vilnius Design college (photo by M. Azusilis)

7 Creative project Pimp My Jeans 2009 (photo by J. Kimsaite)

8

Collection Per Form 2010, Vilnius Design College (photo by J. Kimsaite, student Reda Budvilaitiene, lec. Agne Vei, Art Viko competition Grand Prix)

Collection Injected 2010, Vilnius Design College (photo by M. Azusilis, student Alina Vaitkeviciute, lec. Agne Vei, Art Viko competition 1st place winner)

9 Adidas Academy Blue Container, 2009 m.

10 Creative workshop T-wish 2011, Raffles Design College, Kuala Lumpur and chinese secondary school, Penang (personal archive)

11 Fabrication Field Trip, Hong Kong, 2011 (personal archive)

12 Agne Vei and fashion designer Bill Keith, 2012 (photo by Stylo fashion week)

13 (from left to right)

Collection Untouchable Agony 2011, Raffles Design College (photo by Gavin, student Brad Paik Seung-Ho, lec. Agne Vei, graduation Mirrors).

Collection Fight or Flight 2011, Raffles Design College (photo by Raffles, student Alyssa Lee, lec. Agne Vei, graduation Senses).

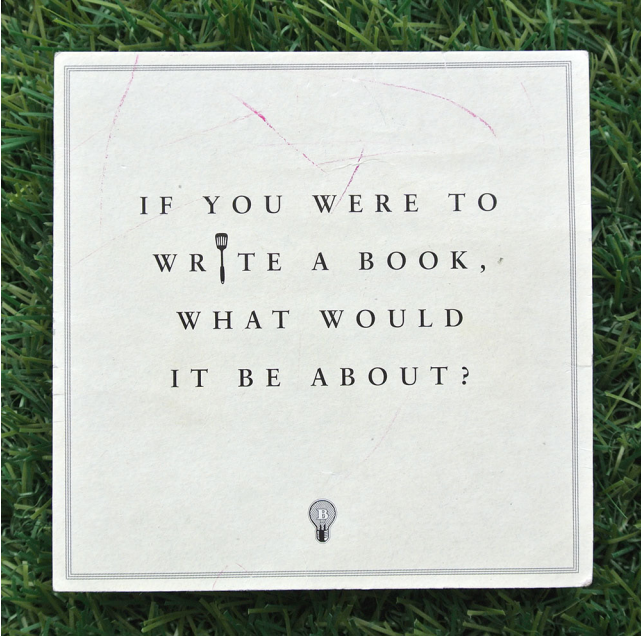
Collection Manimal 2012, Raffles Design College (photo by Gavin, student Gynn Ling, lec. Agne Vei, graduation Hijau).

14 Creative workshop, 2011, Raffles Design College (personal archive)

15 Shingo Tokihiro creative workshop, 2011 (personal archive)

16 Agne Vei and Twin Towers, 2012 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (photo by Marius Kas)

You are a book, indeed. Challenge yourself to ask:



IF YOU WERE TO
WRTE A BOOK,
WHAT WOULD
IT BE ABOUT?

