

NÅR NOGEN LER, ER DER NOGET PÅ SPIL – EN UNDERSØGELSE AF DESIGNPROCESSEN SOM SOCIAL KONSTRUKTION

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I began this PhD project on the basis of something I was curious about. I was curious about the fact that there are so many controversies in the design profession about what design is, about what it is capable of, about what it should be capable of. In my view, the design profession is a broad category that can embrace many different object fields, and my impression is that there are processes, thinking, views, methods and tools that are fundamental to all design work that cut across these object fields. I also have the impression that many of these object fields form part of designers' tacit knowledge and that there is no common language in the profession with which this knowledge can be conceptualised. My curiosity thus became the point of departure for the thesis of this dissertation:

The thesis of this dissertation is that – in spite of the controversies that apparently reign throughout the Danish design profession about the design concept, about what design is, what it must be and is capable of – there are similarities in designers' methodical approaches to designing that help to make the design profession a socially-constituted system. These similarities in designers' methodical approaches are not a *conscious* aspect, but rather an *internalised* aspect of the collective world of the design environment.

I have therefore carried out empirical studies that deal with the collective world of the design environment. I chose to draw on the sociology of knowledge as a point of departure for this dissertation, in that: knowledge is relative and is constructed in a sociocultural context at a given point in time. At a more detailed level, I apply existing cognitive design concept theory in order to provide an account of one of the reigning approaches in the area, and also to be able to position myself in relation to this. I

subsequently present my approach to the design process as a social phenomenon, beginning with anthropological and sociological theories. As, during its course, the project came to deal with the role of humour in the design process, I also present the various approaches to humour that I use in my analyses. Furthermore, I introduce the reader to the deliberations I had concerning my role as a researcher of the design practice. The reason for this was engendered by the research design. I am part of the research object I am studying and therefore move within the borderland between being in the position of subject and that of object in the study. Between being an observer of the project and – as part of the intellectual habitus I am studying – also its object. I provide an account of my doubt about whether I have performed practitioner research or not in the crossover between theory and practice and finally conclude that this has not been the case.

The main body of the dissertation comprises two parts: one that deals with the design process with the point of departure in existing cognitive design research, and one that deals with the design process as a social phenomenon.

My presentation of the design process is divided into several sections which include the design process as a structural phenomenon, the design process as design thinking and idea generation in the design process. In the part that deals with the design process viewed as a social phenomenon, I describe practice as interaction which in part creates situational meanings and in part reveals norms that are internalised and which thus appear as truths in the design profession. In this connection, I argue that social hierarchies are of significance for the way in which design processes proceed, who is regarded as creative and who is not. I also provide an account of the fact that designers take on various roles during the *idea generation stages* – and of how humour plays an important role in this – which means that the social hierarchies of the normal world become partly inoperative in this connection.

My conclusion is that there is a spirit of community at the practical, methodical level which is instrumental in making it possible to describe the design profession in this sense as a socially-constituted system. This manifests itself in several ways, but I chose a focus for my analyses that is connected with the concept of humour in various ways.

The contributions made by the dissertation have proved to comprise three parts.

The dissertation indirectly contributes to a discussion of the design concept as it presents descriptions of how designers work.



My methodical deliberations also resulted in a contribution to reflections over practitioner research in relation to more traditional research. And finally, the primary contribution of the dissertation is that it supplements existing theoretical knowledge of the design process with new theoretical knowledge of the design process as a social phenomenon with its own, specific patterns that are tacit, but determined by intellectual habitus. The dissertation thus contributes with an expansion of the existing theoretical interpretations of the design process, with emphasis on and a qualification of social interaction and the significance of normativity for the course of the process and its results. The contribution partly comprises concrete analyses in which humour plays a central role, and partly an analytical apparatus that has proved to be fruitful in understanding the design process.

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