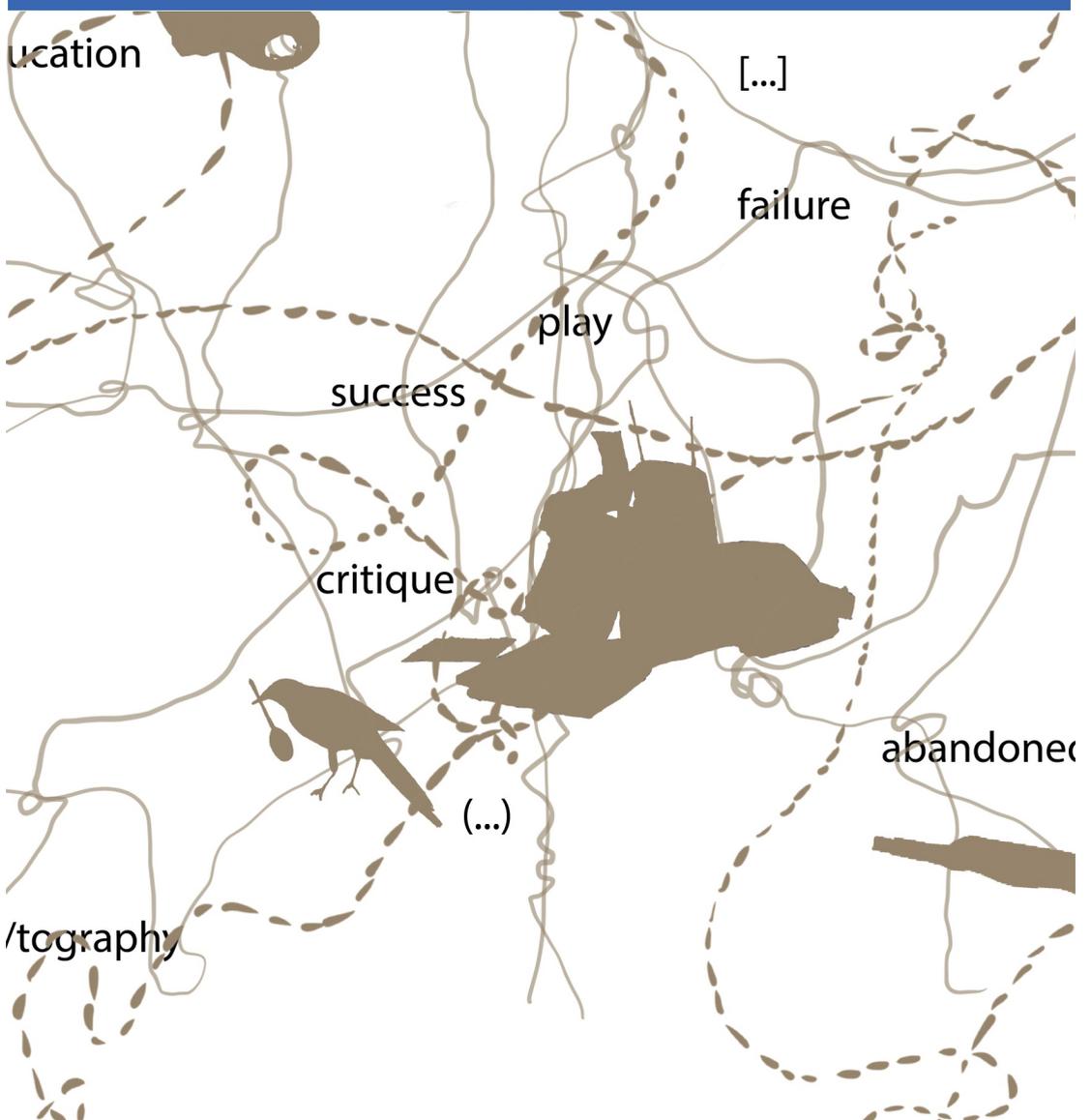


Vibeke Sjøvoll

Creating, uncreating and recreating: experimenting together with students, things and processes in design education





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**Creating, uncreating and
recreating: experimenting
together with students, things
and processes in design
education**

A PhD dissertation in
Culture Studies

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Preface

This thesis has taken a long time to write, several years. It has been an extensive process. My name is on the thesis, and I am responsible for it, but it is equally the result of a collective process: the students, supervisors, my peers and me. The thesis is article-based. All the articles have been published or will be shortly. The articles have been created over several years. Before they were published, or in the process of being so, they were texts sent back and forth between peers (there have been many of them) and me.

The articles are thus also the results of dialogues between unknown representatives of the professional community and me. There are decisive differences between the texts I first wrote and how they appear here, as concluded in the thesis. The work of peers on my texts has contributed to the process in so many ways: in many cases, they have introduced ways of seeing the field I work in that I was unable to see myself. At other times they have pointed out weaknesses in my argument, one-sidedness, shortcuts, and omissions, and asked me to strengthen it and make it clearer. They have introduced me to theories I did not know about before. They occasionally ask me to go further when they think I have encountered something meaningful and interesting. The articles have been created in collaboration with the field; the collaboration has led to the dissertation becoming more multifaceted and balanced than I would have managed without this process.

The dialogue with peers and the time that the processes took have taught me that researching something (like the topics in this thesis) is, in many ways, to investigate processes that have no end. There is always more to say, something else to say, other ways of saying it, other perspectives from which to see them, and other methods that can be learned and used. Perhaps most importantly, my peers' contributions have helped me familiarise myself with the central role of writing in this type of research: writing is something other than reporting a result on something; to write is to think, re-think, and re-write and in this process, to create research. My supervisors have played a central role in the dialogue with my peers. Together we have read the reviews, interpreted and discussed them. My understanding of these peer review processes has changed. The thesis has become different from what I imagined at the

start; this is because it is also the result of collective processes. It is from these processes – which I could not know about beforehand – that I have learned the most from.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I must thank my supervisor Lars Frers from USN who never (to my knowledge) gave up on me, who made me aware of everything from comma mistakes to big misunderstandings of the theories and philosophy I embarked on reading and who fed me with promising, new research articles from a wide range of different fields. With my deepest respect Lars, thank you for that and all the hours we have spent thinking together and makings sense of things. I am so very grateful. One of the deepest learning experiences for me was the co-writing of the article “Abandoned ideas and the energies of failure” with Lars Frers and with my husband and fellow PhD candidate Geir Grothen. I want to express my deepest gratitude for your patience, Geir, with love and gratitude for the journey we experienced together as PhD students and as life partners. You have supported me both as a reader and a discussion partner throughout this project, by being who you are, your poetic, honest and wild mind, you have reminded me to play and of what is important for me. Thank you, Svava Riesto from the University of Copenhagen, you read my work early on and helped me find direction after the midway seminar. Thank you, Hannah Kaihovirta-Rosvik from the University of Helsinki, you read my work towards (what I thought was) the end of it and provided me with support and belief in my project. Both of you pointed me in new directions and towards other researchers that I otherwise would not have known about. Thank you Kristine Jørgensen, from the University of Bergen, who was my cosupervisor at the beginning of my project and generously invited me into her world of research on play and game studies. I would also like to thank Biljana Frederiksen from USN, who became my other co-supervisor, for the knowledge she provided me in the landscape of arts-based research and profound support in the last phase and rewriting of the thesis. Thank you to my colleague Hanne Cecilie Geirbo for support in the last phase. Many thanks to the institute of product design at OsloMet and my colleagues who have given me the opportunity to explore my interests with the students. Many thanks to the students who – sometimes without knowing – have given me so much inspiration to continue my work. I am particularly grateful to the students who let me use their projects as cases to explore in this thesis and for generously sharing their thoughts, feelings and abandoned ideas with me. To my dear friend and colleague Gry Olsen Ulrichsen from NTNU, thank you for genuine support on so many levels throughout this

process. My children Signe and Viktor, thank you for your love and support, thank you for being anchors, for being home. Warm thoughts and gratitude to my sisters who believed in me throughout this project. To the library at OsloMet and Elise Valseth who helped me with checking all my references, thank you.

Abstract

The research that makes up this thesis takes place in the context of design education. However, the implications reach beyond the confines of design, education, and design education. The research, or the subject(s) of the research, and the processes that gave the research its form and content, can be seen as originating from two different sets of problems, distinctly different from each other but at the same time drifting in and out of a kind of intimate interconnection. On the one hand, the thesis is an exploration, through empirical studies of concrete situations in different educational settings, of problems, values, knowledge, hopes and aims that are at play in design education. On the other hand, it is an unfolding of processes that, in some senses, are also mine; the processes of making an academically relevant text out of material experimentations, knowledge, skills, and praxis that were located within, and working through, the body. The processes are different in that they are 'about' different things, from different spheres: education from the outside and me as a kind of inside. They are alike in that they thematise the intimate relationship(s) between the material world and the social world; education and values; body and mind; matter and meaning; and practice and research.

Sammendrag

Forskningen i denne avhandlingen har funnet sted i en designutdanningsammenheng. Men temaene som undersøkes kan også ha relevans for andre fagområder. Forskningen, eller gjenstanden(e) for forskningen, og prosessene som ga forskningen form og innhold, har vokst frem fra to ulike knipper av problemer, forskjellige fra hverandre, men likevel tett sammenkoblede: På den ene siden er avhandlingen en utforskning av – via empiriske studier av konkrete situasjoner i en utdanningsammenheng – problemer, verdier, kunnskap, håp og mål som er i spill i designutdanning. På den andre side er avhandlingen og en utforskning av ulike prosesser som i en viss forstand er knyttet til min egen utvikling som forsker: Disse prosessene har jeg undersøkt ved å tematisere utfordringene knyttet til det å lage akademisk relevante tekster på grunnlag av materielle eksperimenter med studenter og virksomhet knyttet til praktiske ferdigheter som er lokalisert i, og virker gjennom kroppen. Slike prosesser

kan sees på som forskjellig fra hverandre ved at de handler 'om' forskjellige ting fra ulike sfærer: Utdanningen som et slags utenfra eller utenfor, forskeren og forskerens prosesser som et slags indre eller innenfor. Men de kan også sees på som like hverandre ved at begge tematiserer de intime relasjonene mellom den materielle verden og den sosiale verden, mellom utdanning og verdier, kropp og sinn, materie og mening, og praksis og forskning.

List of papers

Article 1

Sjøvoll, V. (2022). The stool that became a tree: Reflecting on a collaborative student project in design education. *International Journal of Education Through Art*, 18(3), 377-393.

doi: 10.1386/eta_00107_1

Article 2

Sjøvoll, V. (2023). Experimenting with aesthetic-affective openness to vital materiality in design education – an exploration of three student projects: ‘the disassembly of a guitar’, ‘the forgotten table’ and the ‘sofa that became a dress’. *Jased: Journal for research in arts and sports education*. Submitted with minor revisions.

Article 3

Sjøvoll, V. (2022). ‘Please tell me about an idea you would love to realise’- an exploration of abandoned ideas in design education. *FormAkademisk*, 15 (1), 1-12.

doi: 10.7577/formakademisk.4513

Article 4

Sjøvoll, V., Grothen, G., Frers, L. (2020). Abandoned ideas and the energies of failure.

Emotion, Space and Society. Doi: 10.1016/j.emospa.2020.100709

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As an artist first, then as a teacher and now as a researcher, I have been attracted to what can be described as everyday aesthetics, the potentials of the ordinary: the poetics of everyday situations and everyday objects (the beauty in ordinary events, rubbish and waste, the things you only see out of the corner of your eye, the quiet people, the things that exist in a kind of limbo, so you are not sure where they belong). Working as an artist, I was always searching for, and attuned to finding, materials in the world around me: driftwood, rust, marks, scraps of paper, accidental combinations of objects. These materials – already marked by being in the world – were my inspiration. My ideas were intimately related to what the world has to offer.

1 Introduction

Figure 1. Plate.

Design takes place in a material culture, and it involves exploring ideas by externalising and materialising them (Cross, 2007, p. 9; Sawyer, 2018, p. 159). In the present study creating is explored as entwined with material culture as a primary source of thinking and inspiration. Materiality involves physical and sensory aspects of making and designing, as well as materially mediated relationships and their immaterial purposes and meanings (Laamanen, 2016).

The things that this research engages with are products and materials ranging from items coming from Ikea warehouses or recycling stations, things left on a street corner, washed ashore, or stowed away in an attic. The different things and materials – no matter where they come from, whether they are bought or found, considered old, not old enough or new, valuable or scrap, collected or discarded – tell different stories and behold and convey

effects, affects and interesting information and sensations. The transformations that things and materials undergo; from the factories via the warehouses to use and consumption, from being cherished to being thrown away and perhaps found and taken into use by others, says something important about our relations to things and our problematic ways of producing and consuming them. “We inhabit an overfull world” and our environments are “ready to burst, among more and more perishable products, junk food and bottlenecks”, writes Bourriaud (2016, p. vii). The pace of their changing status, from brand new and desired to “garbage, shit or toxic waste” has become so rapid that it has become more interesting to treat things as parts of fluid processes rather than seeing them as separate entities undergoing phases that can be clearly separated from one another (Moore, 2012, p. 781). Bennet, in her book *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010) investigates our ontological notions and ideas about the relationship between humans and “things”. Bennett articulates that a thing can “never really be thrown ‘away’ because it continues its activities even as a discarded or unwanted commodity” (2010, p. 31). With the influence of new-materialism theories, it has become more acceptable to approach materials and things in the world as alive or animated, having power or an agency of their own (Moore, 2012, p. 781). Including the “more than human” also proposes a decentralized understanding of human influence in the world (Ingold, 2020, p. 435; Østern & Knudsen, 2019, p. 193). Understanding human creativity and creation as processes that occur in a dialogue with other equally powerful and influential sources/things/material processes in the world may induce a change; a shift from understanding creation as solely “an ingenious human making” to more careful and humble perspectives - a rethinking of creating towards more modest activities that “emphasise continuity of the world’s processes”¹ (Roudavski, 2019, p. 31). Seeing materials as changing parts of fluid processes challenges our habitual way of seeing things and “how we name things, define them and assimilate them to the domain of the familiar” (Pétursdóttir, 2020, p. 88) and inspires us to begin to qualify them not merely by sorting them (archiving them), as we tend to do now. This could mean not to differentiate between so-called virgin

¹ In the book chapter *Notes on more-than-human architecture*, Roudavski (2019) is arguing for a call for “a rethinking of design as a gradual, ecological action” and he suggests a shift from “creating as an ingenious human making to more modest metaphors that emphasise continuity of the worlds processes” (p. 31)

materials and found materials or waste materials, or not to distinguish between new versus old, “valuable and valueless materials” and so on (DeSilvey, 2007, p. 886; Moore, 2012).

This thesis thematises the intimate relationship(s) between the material world and the social world; design education and values; body and mind; matter and meaning; and practice and research. I am writing about practices at the intersection of art, design and research “A practical aesthetics, (...) that attends to living art and thinks by way of it (...) reaches along the lines of its sensory participation into an ever-forming world” (Ingold, 2021, p. 146). Practical aesthetics is about relating to the materials and things in the world in terms that do not fix them but understand them as shifting forms in ongoing transient processes.

In this thesis the term 'things' is frequently used, and I draw on Bennet’s understanding of this term. Bennet explains what 'things' are by contrasting them with the term 'objects': “objects are the way things appear to a subject—that is, with a name, an identity, a gestalt or stereotypical template. . . Things, on the other hand, . . . [signal] the moment when the object becomes the Other, when the sardine can looks back” (W. J. T. Mitchell, cited in Bennett, 2010, p. 2). Hence an object is how something appears to us as form, dimensions, surfaces, weight or construction, whereas a thing is how something appears as part of our lives, belonging to time, place, and cultural practices. Putting things and objects on opposite ends of a spectrum, or closing them into separate categories, is not new. The relationship and the transitions between objects and things are essential in much art and design research, including in this research. Sometimes how to approach them is confusing; the things are smoothed over and become a series of objects, but that does not prevent them from re-appearing, re-entering somewhere else, later, this time as animated or vibrant.

The research primary sources are teaching experiments with students in design education. These experiments are inspired by how I used to work with materials as an artist working with sculpture. Being an artist and researcher who teaches design students has given me an opportunity to probe into the spaces and openings that reside in-between art, design, teaching and research. These spaces are full of meeting points, misunderstandings, similarities and differences. During the work on the thesis, my positions as an artist (experienced), teacher (influential) and PhD candidate (apprentice) overlapped and changed.

At times, I became an artist when I researched and wrote. At others, I was the teacher, an organiser of means and goals, just to become a novice, an apprentice (in my attempts to make sense, think and research), and then the students became my teachers. In the beginning of the process, I was not yet aware of a/r/tography as an approach connecting art and research (Irwin, 2013; Springgay et al., 2008). This research approach has since proved to be both inspiring and valuable for my research process, an approach on which I elaborate in chapter 3.

Since one of the thesis topics is how my students and I perceive, act and create, the thesis is about how we create our environment but also about how the environment² creates us. To be able to work with my questions and interests with students is a fortunate position to be in – abundant, open and ambiguous. However, this position is also challenging: the topics of the thesis are close to my heart. The topics relate to how I set about searching and making sense, and thus to my insecurities and ways of engaging with the world. Being open about insecurities and being adequately critical about my own teaching and research is demanding. Including students' projects from courses I have also arranged and taught as a teacher is challenging because, in these situations, it is not easy to distinguish what is my influence or wishful interpretations from how these arrangements were experienced by the students. I will try to delineate and reflect on these ambiguities throughout the research and the different parts of the thesis.

² How we create our environment is a large topic. In this context the environment is where my research took place. In some senses, the research has grown out of this environment, and I write more about this in chapter 4, "Seeing, writing and thinking with theory".

Below is one of three illustrations of the research process in the thesis. The illustrations gradually become more complex. The first show visual vignettes of things piling up, plastic bags drifting around, and a magpie with a spoon to visualise the non-human and unknown actors.

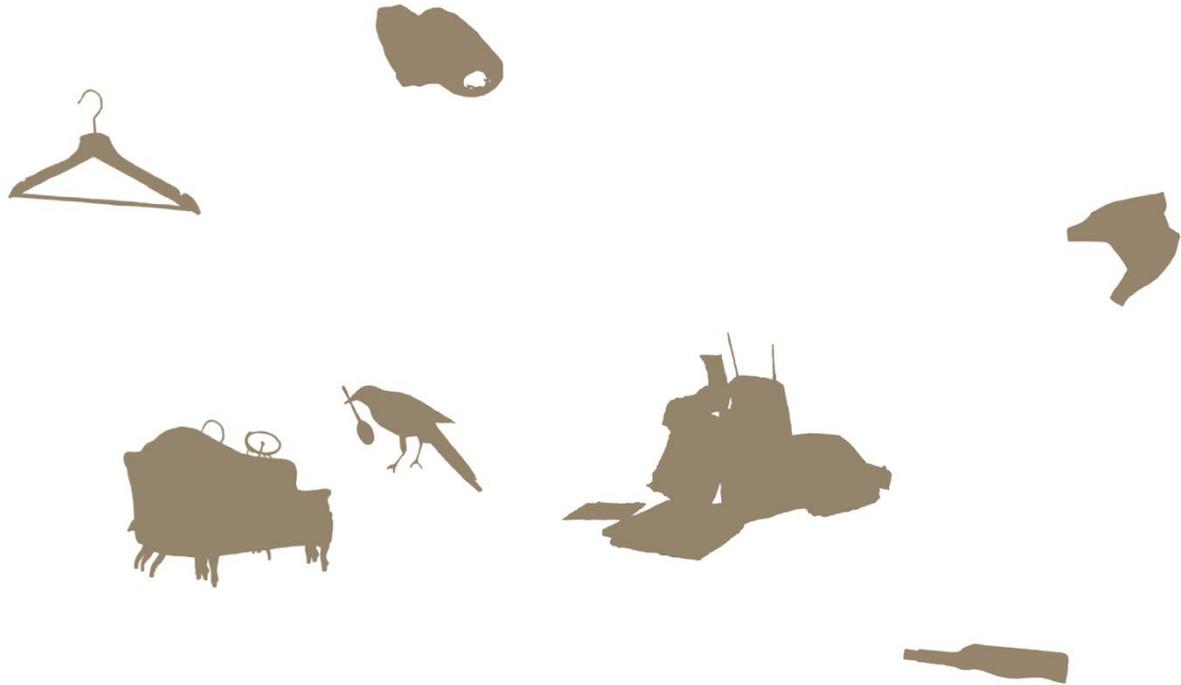


Figure 2. 1/3 illustrations of the research process.

In my research, I investigate ongoing processes: processes with materials that become things, and things that become materials – creating, uncreating and recreating. I work with students in their process of education to become product designers. Some of the most exciting moments in these processes - at least the ones I find most interesting – is when imagining joins and experiments with the concrete, but, at least as interesting are the moments when the students are on the brink of leaving and giving up their ideas and the reasons for them doing so. I have been particularly interested in looking closely at things that are ignored or abandoned and things and materials that are in-between stages; products in a physical sense but also ideas and qualities connected to them. The concepts of “aesthetic-affective openness

to material vitality³” that I have borrowed from Bennett (2010, p. x) and ‘abandoned ideas’ that I have developed through this research process have served as central analytical tools in my study. Thus, they become elementary parts of the methods developed and used in this work. I explain these concepts in more depth at a later stage. In the next section, I present the product design education at Oslo Metropolitan University, where most of the research took place. After that, I present some arguments leading to the research questions of this thesis.

1.1 A brief introduction to the Institute of Product Design

The research took place at the Institute of Product Design at Oslo Metropolitan University. I teach the bachelor’s degree (BA) and master’s degree (MA) programmes. The BA programme combines traditional product design training, like workshop training, technical material knowledge, creative thinking and experimental methods, and introduces different design research methods. The MA programme has an increased focus on design research and theory, but the students still have access to the same workshop facilities as the BA students. The semesters are mainly organised into six- or twelve-week courses with one main teacher as leader. The education is primarily practice based, and problem or project based learning is the main pedagogic method used in the institute. Project Based Learning (PBL) is an instructional methodology that encourages students to learn by applying knowledge and skills through an engaging experience. PBL presents opportunities for deeper learning in context and learning by doing. The research I report on in this thesis is with students from the first-year BA in a course called “Form and Aesthetics” and first-year MA students in a course called “Design and Culture”. The first two teaching experiments I explored in two articles were not planned beforehand or defined as part of this PhD project. They were teaching experiments and projects I did as an artist teaching design students. Consequently the interviews and investigations into the student reports were done after the courses were finished. Hence, the development of this thesis is, to some degree, a non-smooth transition from a curious artist/teacher position to a more developed a/r/tography. The role of becoming a researcher

³ “Aesthetic-affective openness to vital materiality” was a concept which was helpful for me in engaging with the strange ability of everyday items to exceed their status “as objects and manifest traces of independence or aliveness” (Bennett, 2010, p. xvi).

developed intertwined with more established roles of being an artist and a teacher. I address this transition more extensively in the method chapter.

Design education is itself designed. It operates as a functionally orchestrated curriculum and is oriented to student satisfaction and assuring students that their design degree can translate into a professional practice (Coombs et al., 2019, p. 4). The description of the bachelor's degree programme in product design, where I conducted most of my fieldwork, states that "The programme will prepare students for work on material-related, process-related and aesthetic issues from a global, cultural, user-oriented and market-oriented perspective" (OsloMet, n.d.-a, Introduction). Such descriptions serve at least two purposes: on the one hand they are descriptions of the programmes, on the other they are designed to make the education attractive in the market of education. The descriptions are constantly changed and re-phrased in response to changing societal concerns. Terms like creativity, criticality, responsibility and sustainability are frequently used, as reflected in the description of the master programme, which states: "Sustainable value creation means finding sustainable solutions that take the fullest account of economic, cultural and ecological concerns in their development, implementation and realisation" (OsloMet, n.d.-b, Introduction) and the programme for the bachelor degree states regarding creativity and imagination that, "If you are inventive, creative and imaginative - then product design is for you" (OsloMet, n.d.-a my translation). These formulations consolidate the belief that "design will present solutions to help change the future for the better" (Coombs et al., 2019, p. 2). This conventional assumption has been challenged by design researchers who draw attention to the way "design both creates and limits possible futures" and that "design needs to be considered as part of the problem" (Fry (1999) p. 2). In the book *Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds* (2018) the author asserts that "the majority of design treatises still maintain a fundamental orientation that is technocratic and market centred, and do not come close to questioning design's capitalistic nature" (Escobar, 2018, p. 26). Capitalism, as a morally empty and highly flexible system (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2007; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), forms a background for the critical perspectives developed in my research. However, this research does not engage in a focused critique and investigation into capitalism but responds to how it ruptures and affects the environment I

describe. One of the main concerns of this thesis is the gap between what the programme descriptions claim for design education, and what the students and teachers eventually do. Education is sometimes understood in an image of production, efficiency and distribution of capital (Robinson, 2006). As I mentioned before, phrases and terms like demand in the market, trends, cultural understanding, sustainability, responsibility, and creativity are used to inform about and label the education. In the descriptions, these phrases and terms seem to melt seamlessly together. The possibility that they might be connected to mutually exclusive values and goals needs to be communicated and given more attention. These possible paradoxes pushed my research in the direction of scholars writing about the neoliberal influence on education, like Giroux (2010), Ingold (2021) and Kalin, who write that paradoxes are sometimes ignored and that our “values, ethics, relationships to culture, fears, and responsibilities” seem to be taken care of so we do not have to (Kalin, 2018, p. 1).

1.2 Research questions

Creativity is one of the most celebrated values in society today (Bilton, 2014). Ingold writes that creativity has become “thoroughly absorbed into the fast-talking, shallow-thinking patter of legions of advertisers, market consultants and business analysts” (Ingold, 2021, p. 19), and is commonly identified with innovation. He writes that in our commodity-obsessed age, in the all-consuming logic of commodity capitalism where the idea of newness prevails, the meaning of creativity has been reduced and aligned with simple principles of productivity that feed capitalist and neo-liberal ideals (2021, p. 5). Returning to myself as an artist for a moment, rather than speaking about creativity, I would prefer to speak about different kinds of awareness, sensuous knowledge and “aesthetic-affective openness” (Bennett, 2010, p x). In line with Ingold, I would instead use the term 'to create' in the sense that to create is

“(…) actively to participate from the inside in the world’s ceaseless creations of itself – and, since we belong to the world, of ourselves as well. It is once again to reunite the creator and created in one act. And at a time of present crisis, with the world on a knife-edge, this step has never been more needed” (Ingold, 2021, p. 28).

I share the concern that “narrow concepts of creativity are being funnelled into the accessible, reproducible, controllable, and instrumentalized” (Kalin, 2018, p. 11) for purposes that are mainly economic. In turn, this narrowing might exclude other kinds of creating and

engagements that are more experimental, tentative, and difficult to turn into sellable products and services. In a rigid system where goals are predefined, the fear of failure itself discourages imagination and kills creativity (Robinson, 2006). Suppose I, as a teacher in design education, also embraced such an effective market approach towards creativity. In that case, the consequences could be that there would be no space for different ways of working, aesthetics and things that do not immediately fit into the prevailing ideology or trends, doing and making that make space for our ambivalences. We would miss out on many things we do not yet know and knowledge that comes from more experimental processes. This concern needs to be studied, to be researched from the inside of the institutions. This leads me to the following overarching research question:

1. What do students' thoughts, actions, work processes and products tell us about ambivalences in relation to implicit and explicit design education goals?

Design education students are squeezed between the timely quest to engage in the world with a social and political civic-minded agenda and a regime of educational expectations that privileges job readiness and individual security (economy) above any other educational values (Aronowitz, cited in Giroux, 2010). According to OsloMet "the goals of the programme description reflect the labour market's needs (...) but also aim to encourage development in and add new expertise to the labour market" (OsloMet, n.d.-a). Students are encouraged to change the system and raise awareness about its shortcomings and excesses. However, they are also expected to surrender to it by making themselves attractive to an industry that thrives on upholding traditional notions of economic growth.

In this research, I have probed into the students' design processes, investigated how they approach their work and reflected on what they do. However, I have also tried to get insight into what they chose not to do and the ideas they abandoned. I have come to believe that what the students decide not to do might be equally as important and informative for this research as what they eventually deliver as presentable work. I have tried to include and be attentive to the ideas and sentiments left behind and abandoned by the students. The abandoned ideas can say something about how the educational system prioritises values, favours, degrades, and controls in ways that the students are socialised into through

education. The second research question follows up on the first with a more specific focus on the method and analytical concept of exploring abandoned ideas⁴ :

2. How can we explore and know more about which ideas (working methods, processes, thoughts, products, opportunities) are allowed to live on and which are perceived as impossible, naïve, stupid, and too unrealistic in design education?

To probe into the microcosmos of education as this research does – small events in the classroom and the workshops – is also to explore the workings of larger things and structures. Investigating what is not being done can be a way to understand individual and personal processes that are intertwined with larger environments. It is not feasible to examine the choices and feelings of what to include and what to exclude in creating or in research on a solely individual level. According to Deleuze:

This prejudice is social (for society, and the language that transmits its order-words [mots d'ordre], 'set up' [donnent] ready-made problems, as if they were drawn out for 'the city's administrative filing cabinets,' and force us to solve them, leaving us only a thin margin of freedom) (Deleuze, 1988, p. 15)

In the quotation, Deleuze addresses how different forms of order deny us the freedom to explore our questions and tasks and force us to stay within established frameworks. Insights like this have inspired my research. Exploring the students' design processes can bring to the fore some of the regulations to which the students are subjected. This generates a sense of understanding of how the educational system and teachers like myself affect the students' sense of freedom and their possibilities to experiment with ideas. These perspectives and ways of research have brought back memories of things that I have abandoned in the past. I have also adjusted to the different pressures and regulations; as an art student, artist, teacher, and now as a PhD-student. I hope such explorations can support the development of new, better tactics to recognise and resist some of the things imposed on us. This fits into the scope of this research, which is about how we create our environment and how the environment creates us.

⁴ I write about the concept of care for abandoned ideas in more dept in chapter 4 "Seeing, writing, thinking with theory" and in article's 3 and 4 in the thesis.

As mentioned at the beginning, the investigations in this thesis are limited to experimentations exploring artistic and practical aesthetic work in a specific context. The research does not claim to represent some general idea of the reality or state of the art in design education. Instead, the experiments dive into practice-led and artistic research, exploring what can happen if.... Such a way of working and researching “is best described as ‘an enthusiasm of practice’” (Haseman, 2006, p. 100): something which is exciting and driven by curiosity and might sometimes be unruly and messy. The experimentation has not been without ethical challenges. As an insider, I am humbly aware that this position affects my understanding of the unfolding processes. I have used Ingold’s, Bennett’s and Winnicott’s theories, previous design research, and texts from material cultural studies to look more closely at the playful, vital materiality and aesthetic-affective encounters between students, things, materials and processes.

As a teacher, I introduced and experimented with the already existing – the abundance of things – as material for design students. I tried to give space for artistic processes that offer rich understandings of materials, how they circulate and their performativity. As mentioned before, in the research on and with the students’ processes, I engage with “aesthetic-affective openness to material vitality”, a concept that I borrowed from Bennett (2010, p. x). Further, my research engages with spaces for “formless experiences”, play, “creative impulses”, and experimentation (Winnicott, 2005, p. 64). The intent in doing this is to offer a more expansive conception of what materials can offer by focusing on flows and shifts, on the inherent and potent capacity of change within all material things (new or old). My concern and focus in the experiments with the students were on specific engagement processes and the relationship between material practices and aesthetic products (Irwin, 2013, p. 204). The qualities, movements and challenges enacted in the processes are the focus of the research rather than the outcome of the student projects.

1.3 The structure of the thesis

The overall goal of the summary report (kappen in Norwegian) is to tie the articles together. The thesis consists of four articles. Articles 1 and 2 explore teaching experiments and assignments that I have had with first year BA students and with first year MA students. In

article 3, I reflect on design education practices through the perspective of caring about abandoned ideas and the role that risk plays in students' management or processing of ideas. Article 4 is co-written with my supervisor Lars Frers and colleague Geir Grothen (PhD candidate at the time of the article's writing). In this article, three authors, together and individually, explore the hidden geographies of abandoned ideas and failures both as a cultural phenomenon and as bodily experiences.

Chapter 1 in this summary report introduced the reader to the general topics, researcher positions, methodological inputs and clarified selected terms. I briefly introduced the design education setting where the research took place. In chapter 2, I write about previous research and primary approaches that have informed the research process at different stages, and I explain how they have influenced the course of the research. Chapter 3 describes the research process, the research positions and the methods used in the thesis. Chapter 4 describes the complexity of the environment from which this research has grown, with its different possibilities and limitations. It continues the work begun in chapter 2 by introducing the most important theoretical concepts that have helped me think about and analyse the processes in the research. In chapter 5 I follow up on and explicate the main findings in the four articles and explain how these relate to the overarching research questions and aims of the thesis. Chapter 5 also revisits some of the discussions and findings related to the articles that have no room for elaboration in the article format.

In the concluding chapter 6 I expand on some implications of this research and the thesis, including its shortcomings and the ethical implications that became relevant in the process. It displays the importance of how we arrange our working processes and lays bare some of the structural conditions in which we (students, teachers, and researchers) work. It also singles out important aspects of a practical aesthetics that attends to living art and thinks by way of it (Ingold, 2021, p. 146), knowledges that tend not to be counted and be ignored; how we perceive and act, how we create, how we shape our environments, and how the environments shape us. The findings thus demonstrate certain aspects of the intimate relationship(s) between the material world and the social world, education and values, body and mind, matter and meaning and practice and research.

2 Approaches

As stated in the preface, this research has developed over several years through ongoing dialogues and negotiations with peers in the field. I was already acquainted with some of the research literature and the texts I discuss in this chapter at the beginning of my research. However, essential parts I have learnt about in the review processes have inspired and changed the perspectives I use in ways I could only have achieved with their input. The review processes of the articles and the feedback and comments I received from the academic committee that read my thesis on my first submission in 2021 represent important steps in the process.

In my work as a teacher and researcher in design education, I draw on my knowledge of artistic practice and experiences as a visual artist. Whether something is more art or more design is not very significant in the processes I explore. In the thesis, I propose to problematise the notion of distinct and principled boundaries between what is referred to as design and what is referred to as art. I draw on research that proposes ways of thinking and doing that challenge established disciplinary traditions and frameworks. Kinds of research that welcomes and embraces artistic modes of inquiry. The literature that I have used in working with my research thus questions the ways we engage, perceive or practise with and within the world. The way we ‘take in’ our surroundings, what we include in our perceptions – and what we tend to ignore – forms the basis for what we later create as designers, artists, or researchers. This way of understanding creating is also something Ingold is concerned with; the art of inquiry from the perspective of the craftsperson “*that thinks through making*” (Ingold, 2013, p. 6, original emphasis). To think through making is a conduct where “thinking goes along with, and continually answers to the fluxes and flow of the materials with which we work” (p. 6). This reminds us that we are making and designing enmeshed in environments that influence us in turn; we are ‘shaped’ by our environments.

I organise this chapter in a way that provides a frame to support the reading of the thesis as a whole. I first present an approach that became part of my thesis in the last stages of the research. Reading this research literature made me understand my work in retrospect in a context that, in many ways, has always been there in the background but which then became

explicit. This first part is entitled 'Critical practices' and is followed by sections on art and design education, art-based research and a/r/tography, performative research and new materialism.

2.1 Critical practices

The design approach called critical design or speculative design is expanding the traditional framework for design. Critical and speculative design approaches are practices and theories characterised by an ethic of social inquiry and non-commercialism. Critical design and speculative design are associated with the work and teaching of Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby at The Royal College of Art in London in the years 2005 through 2015 (Dunne & Raby, 2013; Haylock, 2019). Critical design questions practices that are defined as “affirmative design – commercial design practices that reinforce the status quo”, by seeing design as primarily the production of more and more commodities (Coombs et al., 2019, p. 2). Critical and speculative design developed as a practice that “interrogates its own conditions of production and display, i.e., institutional critique” (Haylock, 2019, p. 19), in some ways similar to critical works of art. Critical design seeks to rethink what design can be and what questions design can and should raise. The idea is to use design as a way of engaging in a critical dialogue about the assumed nature of the designed world that we inhabit. In the book *Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction and Social Dreaming* (2013) Dunne & Raby state that “Critical design is critical thought translated into materiality. It is about thinking through design rather than through words and using the language and structure of design to engage people” (Dunne & Raby, 2013, p. 35). This approach in design emphasizes the making of “what if- scenarios”, not limited to be being “realistic” or connected to “what is”, or solving known problems, but by aiming to be open for all kinds of future scenarios that expand the scope of design. In the book *Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds* (2018) – also mentioned in the introduction – Escobar writes that “such critical design can go a long way, in their view, against design that reinforces the status quo” (2018, p. 17). Escobar is hopeful about the thought that we are entering the age of “speculative everything”; he thinks that this can fuel ways of “social dreaming” that might lead to ‘the multiverse of worlds that the world could be’” (Dunne & Raby in Escobar, 2018, p.

17). In the book chapter “What is critical design?” in the book *Undesign, Critical Practices at the Intersection of Art and Design* (2019), Haylock is at one point asking whether it is necessary to engage with a design that must call itself critical, since to be critical should be an integral part of what design is. However, the introduction of critical design as a concept supports the development of discussions and design theory, much in the same manner as the term “undesign” from the aforementioned book does. “So long as a gap persists between, on the one hand, the aspirations that we hold for design and, on the other, its present reality, critical design will remain, as a term and as a concept, vital and historically necessary” (Haylock, 2019, p. 13). An ambition of the book mentioned above is to draw attention to practices that fall beyond affirmative design and design futuring such as speculative and critical design, practices that might just as well find their place in the art world. Writing about practices operating at the intersection of art and design helped to conceptualise “undesign” as an approach that transcended the aesthetic and the productive to dismantle some of the prevailing assumptions around design (Coombs et al., 2019, p. 4). By proposing the concept of undesign, the authors articulate a critical approach to design and how it influences the world; how in everything from urban environments to our bodies and even nature, “there is little that remains untouched by design” (Coombs et al., 2019, p. 2). For my research, the concept of undesign highlights some critical concerns for design education and practitioners that I share, like for example the limits of design. The view that new design solutions alone can solve new challenges might be too optimistic, undesign suggests pausing the conventional assumption that “all solutions require the application of more design” (Coombs et al., 2019, p. 7). So much is at stake for designers and design educators in terms of developing ways of thinking, including how design itself is largely to blame. Design is itself causing problems in our society today that design is trying to solve. In the book chapter “Notes on more-than-human architecture”, Roudavski (2019) argues for a call for exploring design as a gradual and ecological action (p. 24) and he suggests a “shift from the notion of creativity as the process of addition to its interpretation as the process of re-structuring” (p. 31). Undesign as a concept suggests more modest, engaged and imperfect processes for creating.

Sometimes it is possible to achieve a better result by untying or undoing something. Undesign allows for this possibility, while also pointing to that which cannot be designed, the limits of design, the un-designable (Coombs et al., 2019, p. 3).

The combination of the insight that design might harm the environment and the quotation above, pointing to that which cannot be designed, is provocative but can also open new perspectives for design practice. What appears to lie behind this critique is a deepfelt love and enthusiasm for design as an activity and a profound concern for its development. The concern comes from the notion that design is about empathy and appreciation for people, nature, and the world we shape through design. Design helped to make us human, and the first design was to make tools, writes Friedman (2000). The urge to design in a basic understanding is to consider a situation and then “imagine a better situation, and to act to create that situation – goes back to our prehuman ancestors” (Friedman, 2000, p. 6). Connecting or perhaps re-connecting design to its ethical foundations combined with design as a speculative (imaginative) practice is very inspiring. The following paragraph elaborates on some such perspectives that have influenced my research.

In the book *Critical Fabulations: Reworking the Methods and Margins of Design* (2018) the author Rosner⁵ proposes design as project that is “both activist and investigative, personal and culturally situated, responsive and responsible” (Rosner, 2018, p. 11). She proposes an understanding that “design is in the fabric, the engineering, and the thought process” (p. 11). In doing so, she draws on, among others, Schöns’s famous book, *The Reflective Practitioner* (1983), where an epistemology of practice is implicit in the artistic processes where intuition, uncertainty and uniqueness are included. This connects with my teaching and research through experimenting with artistic, open-ended ways of practising for the students. Rosner also includes Haraway’s book *Staying with the trouble* (2016) in her arguments. Haraway writes about seeking methods to live with and between contradictions and breakdowns (Haraway, 2016). This means inhabiting differences in the present and not only looking to the future. At this point Rosner’s work offers something different from some of the ideas introduced by speculative design, and it is also at this point that it connects to some of the topics that I explore in my research. I am also concerned with what we sometimes ignore in our immediate surroundings, in our material and sensuous realities. Forgetting to see and

⁵ Rosner is in her book “connecting worlds of high-tech computing with traditions of textile production by pointing to the embodied heritage they comprise”. She uses legacies of craftwork like traditional female and often ignored skills connected to quilt-making to explore this position.

notice what is already in our surroundings, in the discarded or abandoned things and materials, might lead to missing opportunities for rich experiences and stories ‘found in the present’ and values to include ‘in the future’.

The works I have introduced above about speculative and critical design, designs for the pluriverse, undesign, and critical fabulations, are about developing new concepts and theories about what design practice can and should be in current times. These new concepts differ from those used in an affirmative design, understood as traditional market-driven design. In my work, I have attempted to expand the opportunities for design with artistic experimental approaches in design education. These experiments cannot be compared to the elaborate critical works introduced here, but reading this literature has given my research new inspirations and spaces to unfold, also retrospectively.

2.2 Critique, care and creativity in art and design education

The things I write about in my thesis happen against the backdrop of the neoliberal market thinking that influences education. Critical research in design education problematises the effect of market thinking on design and visual arts, the determinism of instrumental reason, the role of economic factors as an influential evaluation criterion, and the (lack of) problematisation of ethics in design (Findeli, 2001). When design broadens its field of action “it needs to be conversant with what philosophers, critical thinkers and theorists (...) are developing” (Marenko & Brassett, 2015, p. 15).

In the ten years I have worked with design education, I have experienced contradicting expectations on how I should teach. Universities have increasingly modelled their teaching on an ideal of education as production (Anundsen & Illeris, 2019, p. 119). Neo-liberal views of universities as competitors in the education and research market have led to an “exhaustive practice of measurement on every level” (p. 119). In order to control the efficiency, quality and output of each course, lecturers like myself have been required to describe in detail what the students should learn in the form of learning outcomes. These learning outcomes also form exam grading (p. 119). In many ways, this development has been helpful for the communication of course content to the students. However, this goal-oriented logic often

feels limiting and inappropriate because, in my courses, I want to “let the practice lead” (Østern & Knudsen, 2019, p. 193); I want to experience what happens in the relationships and encounters between the students, the teacher(s) and the materials – to let events unfold according to their local logic. It is impossible to think of such events as something it is possible, or even desirable, to know of before they unfold.

To let the practice lead is in this context an aesthetic and material mode of engagement that is intended to bridge the gap between physical and conceptual explorations. Such teaching can be associated with “critical making” that merge design and art practice. This approach is described by Ratto (2011) as requiring personal investment, a “caring for” attitude rather than a “matter of fact” attitude (p. 259). The fostering of personal investment and the notion of care is not typical education today; “[w]e are educated by large to ‘compete and consume’ rather than to ‘care and conserve’” (Sterling, 2001, as cited in Lutnæs, 2017, p. 171). In my teaching I would like to provide the students with an arena to question, rethink and resist the tendency to “compete and consume” and turn toward more caring and conserving attitudes. Illeris proposes that education should be used as a “symbolic place” where teachers and students can experiment together” (2017, p. 14). Like Illeris, I also try to approach teaching as transformative and not to see it as “a means of training students to reproduce existing knowledge and practices” (Illeris, 2012, p. 83). She sees education as a journey for both teachers and students towards new, and in many ways unknown, ways of thinking and living (p. 83). Introducing this kind of open approach and attitude inspired by artistic practices in design education has sometimes been challenging. Such approaches are often perceived as outside a dominating goal-oriented logic; they can be perceived as getting lost, wasting time, or just not relevant. My aim has been to find ways to inspire the students to create and embody alternative knowledges and values. However, the curriculum is not innocent, writes Orr & Sheevre (2017): “it reflects the values of those who produce it and the wider context within which it is produced” (Orr & Shreeve, 2017, p. 42). When I did this research, my role was not innocent either; my biases and goals might not have been transparent to me. Exploring students’ abandoned ideas soon became a tangible and critical investigation into the values that are being celebrated and those that are being ignored in design education. Structures and values “privilege and disadvantage students in different ways” (Orr & Shreeve,

2017, p. 42). Grappling with these issues led me to critically reflect on my own role as a teacher, what and whose ideas, practices and approaches are given value and my crucial part in the processes to which the students are exposed to.

According to Orr and Shreeve, “[t]here are competing tensions between a need for clarity driven by concerns regarding accountability and transparency” (2017, p. 15) and the conflicting need in art and design education to allow for open-endedness. Creativity is in the context of this project understood as representing an open-mindedness, exploration, and celebration of difference. However, creativity has become a word used to denote a wide range of actions, from marketing and sports to artistic innovation. Griggs claims that: “Creativity has become a buzzword (...) in increasing demand across many spheres” (Bailin, 1994, cited in Griggs, 2009). In order to have a more nuanced and more fitting vocabulary with respect to creating and making, I turn to artistic practice that shows us how increased awareness of a knowledge that comes to us through our senses and bodies can contribute to making us more tolerant of explorations into spaces where “solutions” are left waiting or missing. As Ingold describes it, to differentiate, divide, distinguish and decide is “a wisdom that draws out form from within the flux of materials” (Ingold, 2021, p. 59).

Design has been widely acknowledged as an increasingly interdisciplinary and complex field in recent years; even “a carefully worded definition (...) hardly ever does justice to the complex nature of actual design processes” (Halstrøm & Galle, 2015, p. 3.2). According to one such definition, design professionals “take solving complex social issues as their domain” (Kimbell, 2011, p. 286). The issue of design as a process of co-evolution and the complex connections between problem, audience and solution is widely discussed in literature (Halstrøm & Galle, 2015). Currently, the practice of design is shifting to collaborative networks for sharing knowledge, and the existence of the open-source movement (e.g. makerspaces, DIY) is leading to questions about the “boundaries between users and producers” (Marenko & Brassett, 2015, p. 9). The overview of the master’s programme in design offered by the university at which I teach, emphasises that “Sustainable value creation means finding sustainable solutions that take the fullest account of economic, cultural and ecological concerns in their development, implementation and realization” (OsloMet, n.d.-b). See:

<https://student.oslomet.no>. It is expected that the students will “challenge established perspectives and norms in the field” (OsloMet, n.d.-b). However, in line with recent research on design education, I too worry for design students I observe accepting supposed facts as truths with little time for investigation, discussion of opposing information, or healthy resistance (Kalin, 2018; Lutnæs, 2017; Thiessen, 2017, p. 146). In my teaching practice and in my research, I have, with varying success, tried to address this concern and to inspire more critical practices, as in the article, “The stool that became a tree – reflecting on a collaborative student project in design education” (2022)⁶. Introducing artistic approaches to my students has been my way of contributing means for opening up and including more and different ways of engaging with the world in their practice. I have tried to do this through tangible, physical and concrete practices with the students. I have also engaged with students’ abandoned ideas to counter their tendency - without reflection - to accept conventional notions of what is, and what is not, valuable in design education today. Together these actions and inquiries aim to explore the predominant research questions in this thesis, which is about what students’ thoughts, actions, work processes and products can tell us about ambivalences concerning implicit and explicit design education goals.

2.3 Arts-based research and a/r/tography

In arts-based research I found ideas and ways of thinking about research that included and drew on artistic modes of production. Through the acknowledgement of non-verbal and embodied modes of knowledge, arts-based research invents new trails of thinking for qualitative methods. This includes more alternatives for cognition, experience, transformation, learning, knowledge production, understanding and research dissemination (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Springgay & Truman, 2018; Waterhouse et al., 2019, p. 8). Arts-based research as a concept was first described by Eisner, a painter and researcher in qualitative research in education from Stanford University in the United States (Barone & Eisner, 2012). Following his research several variations of artistic research, practice-led, and performative

⁶ The student project I write about in this article initially set out to explore critical modes of creativity and making different from commercial design. The research question was: Which possibilities are there for cultivating critical, creative, artistic and ethical thinking in collaboration with a major corporation in a student project?

research developed (Boulton et al., 2017; Bresler, 2006; Eisner, 1991; Irwin & Chalmers, 2007; Springgay et al., 2005; Østern & Knudsen, 2019). One of these research approaches is a/r/tography, a combination of the words ‘artist’, ‘researcher’, and ‘teacher’ and the ending ‘graphy’ that relates to the process of writing or recording. Writing is understood as something that can be with art, in art or about art (Springgay et al., 2008). A/r/tography was developed by Irwin (2013). It does not describe ‘one’ method but rather an approach that takes its starting point from the special qualities that are associated with multisensory and embodied experiences. It does not lay out prescribed plans or methods, but “pursues an ongoing inquiry committed to continuously asking questions” and foregrounds that “knowledge is always in a state of becoming” (Springgay et al., 2008, p. 2).

Reading about a/r/tography was an epiphany in my attempts to understand my own role and position in more nuanced ways. It helped me to consider and reflect on the different roles of being an artist, a teacher and a researcher. More importantly, however, it made me aware that the different roles are not fixed, they are entangled and are sometimes even floating between different roles and functions. At the risk of addressing aspects that could equally be placed in the final parts of this summary report, I want at this point to follow this thread a little further, to provide a critical framing of what is to follow. Working with students in a practice-led way can evolve into collaborations that disrupt the predefined roles of the involved participants. In some situations, the identity of being the teacher weakened and fell apart; I became a learner, a student. In these moments, I lost track of the differences between the students and me; it was as if we were alike, moving along the same plane. However, it is crucial not to overestimate these moments: they were brief, transient, and they were, perhaps first and foremost, ongoing results of my own, almost bodily interpretations of the events. It is not unlikely that the students never experienced them as I did, as momentous deviations from the structuring hierarchical orders within which educational institutions operate. To forget who is in charge is, in many instances, a privilege for those in charge, those with power. However, these moments harboured a difference; their unfolding created rifts and cracks and disturbed the predefined, even if they were perceived differently only by me and not by the students. Even such small events can make ripples.

The openings offered by arts-based research and a/r/tography offered, made me use other ways of exploring the topics in the thesis, and also gave me courage, hope and energy for the process. I started to include and give more attention to my way of acting and reasoning as an artist in the research process. I explore this in more detail in the method chapter. A/r/tography is described as “a research methodology, a creative practice, and a performative pedagogy that lives in the rhizomatic practices of the in-between” (Irwin, 2013, p. 198). As a researcher, I am in the middle of things, a part of different things; I am the creator of situations meant to be relevant for my research, but I am also affected and changed by them. To be introduced to these ways of thinking and doing changed and complicated my position. The change in my understanding of my positioning and the changing roles made the research process more complex and perhaps messier, but, ideally, also richer and more multifaceted.

Irwin articulates that a/r/tography is not a description of ‘one’ way of doing things, and I would add that what is considered artistic practice can be very diverse. As an art student I was influenced by various forms of site-specific art⁷ and socially engaged art that was developed in relation to and together with environments, places and people. In consequence, my a/r/t-ography is influenced by this relational way of thinking and working as an artist. Relational aesthetics is a concept first written about by Bourriaud. *Relational aesthetics* (Bourriaud, 2002) concerns how artists have progressively expanded their activities to increasingly pluralistic environments (Bishop, 2006). The artist’s activities have been expanded into areas of teaching but also into socially engaged art that focuses on participation and development of places and politics (Sachs Olsen, 2019). Bourriaud defined this approach as “a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space” (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 113). In my artistic practice, relational aesthetics connects to how I perceive and include what already exists, like found things, materials or places, into the artistic processes. In the book *Postproduction* (2005) Bourriaud

⁷ Site-specific art is a term that describes art created to exist in a certain place. The work of art was created in the site and could only exist in that environment, it could not be moved or changed.

states that: “It is no longer a matter of starting with a ‘blank slate’ or creating meaning on the bases of virgin material but of finding means of insertion into the innumerable flows of production” (Bourriaud, 2005, p. 17). The relation between already existing things in the world and production of new things is an important theme in the thesis. I would suggest that Bourriaud’s concept of “using society as a catalogue of forms” (2005, p. 5) should be expanded to include the things and ideas that transcend any notion of an existing catalogue; the waste, the abandoned, the inelegant, the ugly, the forgotten, the ridiculed, the cursed, things made by those that are not allowed to matter, the invisible, the dirty and the suppressed. Such a concept should grow out of the soil rather than be a result of the activities of the superior “scrupulously ‘classificatory’ eye” (Foucault, cited in Howes & Lalonde, 1991, p. 132). This expanded concept of aesthetics could grow out of the mingling with songs and fragrances, sounds and smells, the mundane, the small things, like doing the dishes, living in the ordinary mess, the things that we try to ignore, avoid, hide, forget, or the things that do not fit in. Reading *Postproduction* (2005) inspired me to continue my search into material culture, and theoretical perspectives that relate to the material in inclusive ways, such as new materialisms, which I explore more in more detail in the following section.⁸



One of the aims in my teaching and research is to make space for an expanded notion of the process of making, thinking, and learning, by adapting to what is already in our environments. Such an approach is less concerned with beginnings and ends and more concerned with the changing world that we are already enmeshed in. To introduce such thinking in design

⁸ As a graphic element in the text of the summary section, I use small visual vignettes. These are meant to signal a pause and that there is a change in the perspective or argument in the following part without adding a new subchapter. The visual vignettes are made by me drawing outlines of things, layering them and experimenting with new shapes that emerge from this process.

education can – as I have mentioned before – be challenging since the result of the process is not easy to predict or explain beforehand; it is an open-ended process. In order to endorse the value of such processes I turn to Ingold and his notion of dwelling. Ingold argues for the importance of what he calls the ontology of dwelling “the world is not a matter of construction but of engagement, not of building but of dwelling [...], not of making a view of the world but of taking up a view *in it*” (Ingold, 1996, p. 117). This notion of dwelling conveys a caring, attentive regard, a ‘being with’ environments, materials and cultures that are already there. To create something from and with something that has already existed as a thing in the world requires the students and teachers to dwell and take in the forms, expressions, materials that are already there in the creating process. I write about how such an approach might materialise in the article 2: “Experimenting with aesthetic-affective openness to vital materiality in design education – an exploration of three student projects: ‘the disassembly of a guitar’, ‘the forgotten table’ and the ‘sofa that became a dress’”.

Could design education contribute to more caring and conserving attitudes and practices that think of creating as a continuity of the world's processes and not only an individual achievement? Could including more dwelling into the students’ processes bring them, without nostalgia and sentimentality (Atkinson, 2007), towards sympathising with and caring for the things (products, materials, places etc.) that already exist in the world? It could be argued that it is possible to care for what is and, at the same time, to fight for change. To do so would involve contesting some of the conditions within which we are working in design education

The perspectives and methods I found in studying a/r/tography, postproduction and relational aesthetics allowed an opening for spaces where it was possible for me to create something that resembles a methodological and theoretical framework, where my skills as an artist became relevant. The perspective helped me understand how these skills were relevant. It was not that I thought that what I had learned as an artist had no value, but I did not know what their value was ‘here’. Sometimes I even thought my skills as an artist might get in the way of – what I was going to do here: research. Rather than trying to make distinctions between the different sensitivities into positions like artist/researcher/teacher,

“a/r/tography draws attention to the in-between, where meanings reside in the simultaneous use of language, images, materials, situations, space and time” (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, as cited in Boulton et al., 2017, p. 200). The reading of art-based research literature led to the feeling that the sensitivities, the skills, the knowledge that are connected to being an artist finally became relevant, useful – indispensable even – for my teaching and my research.

By opening up for the research literature that thematised non-fixity of materiality, material culture, performativity and making practices, I found that my research began to form a kind of meshwork⁹, where ideas and values are like lines floating and entangling into knotted lines continuously changing, connecting, disconnecting and re-connecting to one another in unforeseeable ways.

2.4 Performative research and new materialism

In the research that I write about in my thesis the students worked with practical observational engagements and experienced the properties of the materials through what ‘happened’ when they worked with them. Artistic approaches can be described “as lenses to understand the world” (Østern & Knudsen, 2019, p. 193) and are connected to performativity as “a way to understand the world in its ceaseless becoming” (p. 196). According to Haseman¹⁰, performance as research and research through practice are about not knowing beforehand what knowledge the event can lead to (Haseman, 2006, p. 100;). Education can itself be acknowledged as a performative act (Østern & Knudsen, 2019). This would mean that as a teacher, artist or researcher, I must relinquish control and “engage in the act of being in motion, being in relation, being sensitive, being open, being in revolt or being in-between” (p. 193). With such a perspective, creating will not only be an individual achievement but a process that is a continuation of something already happening and affecting us. Therefore, this approach is relevant to my research as well.

⁹ Ingold has developed the concept of meshwork to discover and explore entangled environments and situations. Ingold describes meshwork as environments where ideas and values are like lines floating through space. I elaborate on the notion of meshwork in the chapter 4, “Seeing, thinking and writing with theory”.

¹⁰ Haseman’s paper ‘A manifesto for performative research’ (2006) is recognised as influential in proposing a non-traditional research methodology for the arts.

Research into material culture often starts from the “premise that the world is simultaneously material and social” (Haraway, 1988; Woodward, 2019, p. 1). Research into everyday experiences with materials and things, and research that acknowledge the vitality of materials has been developed by a range of researchers, and they have done so from different starting points (Barad, 2007; Bennett, 2010; Gibson, 2015; Ingold, 2011; Latour, 2007; Saito, 2008). Without claiming that I have read all these authors in depth, scholars such as Latour, Ingold, Bennett, and Haraway are frequently referred to in the literature that I have read. The work of such researchers has brought forth “important epistemological and methodological questions about how we might go about researching the non-verbal, the tacit, and the material properties of things” (Olsen et al., 2021; Woodward, 2016, p. 360). Much research and “ways of writing that foreground the material world” are using interdisciplinary approaches (Woodward, 2019, p. 9). Some of these methods have been developed in disciplines such as design and art-based research, which “lend themselves to developing open-ended or unexpected insights. These methods draw upon the playful capacity of things to invite people to interact, respond and join in” (Sachs Olsen, 2019; Woodward, 2019, p. 54). These insights have helped me to articulate and give space to some of the qualities and processes that are integral to aesthetic practices that I research in this work.

In the interview *How Like a Leaf* (1999) Haraway and Goodeve are talking about “Worldly practises”. As I interpret “Worldly practises” it is a way of exploring the world through the relationship between things, bodies and meanings in our environments. The point of the “Worldly practises” has been to enable us to describe the world in new ways. Descriptions of things in the world need constant renewal: “to redescribe something so that it becomes thicker than it first seems (...) a meaningfulness that is both fleshy and linguistic” (Haraway, 1999, p. 106). This makes up for the creation of new epistemological starting points. It seems that we need this kind of new grounding – one that avoids the often automatic use of sedimented abstractions – to make it possible to make use of “objects as frozen stories” (p. 106). The attempt to redescribe, to make things thicker or to see them again, is related to what I attempt to do with engaging students in tangible and playful explorations in material-making practices.

Such perspectives differ from seeing the world as passive matter lying dormant, waiting to be examined. This research on materialities describes how practice as learning also relates to the idea of Bennet's (2010) "vibrant matter": that materials, things and places have agency – that they affect how we act. Matter also has agency in learning; the materiality of places, environments and things work as "constitutive and independent factors in students' learning processes" (Mäkelä & Löytönen, 2017, p. 242).

In my work, my aim is to demonstrate and write about ways to explore, transform, re-imagine, and see things again in different ways and perceive how this can produce new meanings and possibilities¹¹. In a sense, the attempt to do so is a way of "refusing to accept what is presented to us as given" (the categorisations but also the materialisations of them) and exploring how things could always be different (Sachs Olsen, 2016, p. 37). This is an activity that is trying to be productive and critical at the same time. It is an attempt to make visible the things that we are in the habit of ignoring, to foreground what might have been lost in an object, "not in order to make the other meanings disappear, but rather to make it impossible for the bottom line to be one single statement" (Haraway, 1999, p. 105). Much of the research that I write about below also draws on Haraway's work. This is research that takes as a starting point:

that we are an ecological multiplicity of phenomena entangled with-, rather than acting on, on top of, or somehow ontologically separately, allows for new, creative and innovate ways of living and participating in a world that is already eroding our (perhaps outmoded) sense of what is to be human, in ever faster paces (Bayley, 2018, p. 8).

Similar arguments are made in *Ma: Materiality and Teaching and Learning* (Sameshima et al., 2019) and *Performative Approaches in Arts Education* (Østern & Knudsen, 2019). New materialism and material culture in teaching and learning in these books are explored with the help of a variety of methods: performative, visual and arts-based practices. The reading of them led to other texts that explore things, materials and their properties in ways that consider new and more 'messy' views of the relationship between things and humans as well as promising new perspectives on the ontological status of things. I became interested in research that investigated the unstable and changing materiality of things, especially

¹¹ See article 1 and 2

researchers writing about drift matter, unruly materials, abandonment, and decay¹² (DeSilvey, 2007; Olsen et al., 2021; Pétursdóttir, 2020).

Pétursdóttir writes about drift matter: seaborne debris such as “Wood, plastic, seaweed and more, that travels with waters and washes on shores. Things from afar, vagabonds, braking on land and gathering in wavelike ridges in coves and inlets” (Pétursdóttir, 2020, p. 87). Reading about drift reminded me of the artist Halvard Kjærvik’s work¹³. In 2001 I co-curated the Lofoten International Art Festival (at that time called Kunstfestivalen i Lofoten) together with artist and researcher Gry O. Ulrichsen (Kunstfestivalen i Lofoten, 2001). Kjærvik participated in the exhibition with his collection of plastic bottles and other items he had gathered from the shores in Nykvåg in Vesterålen (Northern Norway). He said: “In Nykvåg, I am in a way at the edge of the world by the Norwegian sea. From there I have contact with the world via waste that drifts ashore. It is almost like sitting on another planet and picking up radio signals from the world” (Guttu, 2001, my translation). The objects in the collection are mostly ordinary everyday things like ketchup bottles, mosquito spray, lighters and vodka bottles, shoes, and clothes from different countries. In addition, the collection consisted of lifebuoys, residues of emergency flares, and the type of emergency rations that are attached to lifeboats. Kjærvik said that he was mindful about which things he picked up and the story they offered. For example, a Russian spray can with bullet holes after someone has shot it and the aggression materialised in the object. Another example was a Spanish fish container, which had been torn on one side and had since been stitched together – someone had spent time and carefully mended the box – to regain its use. Kjærvik said that he wanted to endorse and value these actions that are visible in the things (Guttu, 2001 my translation).

Reading about drift matter triggered memories. I grew up by the sea and I remember well the strange, foreign, often broken and worn things that I could find among seaweed and pieces of wood by the shore. The combination of the sea and the things was, and still is, wonderfully

¹² I write more about DeSilvey (2007) and her concept of unruly materials in the chapter 4 ‘Seeing, writing, thinking with theory’.

¹³ Many artists are working with and explore ordinary everyday things, the unstable and changing materiality of them, their value and uses. I write more about how artist sometimes work with collections of things in later chapters.

evocative. Such combinations or entangling resonates with Ingold's writing about "Weathering" in the book *The Life of Lines* (Ingold, 2015): the things (materials) and the water, movements and time that it drifts around and the special kind of aesthetics and concepts that these shifting constellations create. The strong effect these everyday objects transmit perhaps connects to what Bennett calls "thing power", which is the encounters "between ontologically diverse actants, some human, some not, though all thoroughly material" (Bennett, 2010, p. xiv). Pétursdóttir explores how it might be possible to make use of the assemblages of drift matters "in terms of problematizing our conceptions of heritage and waste, wanteds and unwanted, or between salvation and loss, but also by resisting such classifications, this material can be said to afford certain thing- lessons" (2020, p. 88). Large parts of this drift matter – the products, packaging, plastic, containers, and single-use cups – are at some point designed. This insight connects to what proponents of "undesign" propose when they urge us to reconsider the assumption that all problems require the application of more design (Coombs et al., 2019, p. 7). Like many others, Pétursdóttir also refers to Haraway: "It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with;(…) It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories" (Haraway, 2016, p. 6). I sympathise with the quest to keep things alive and let them work on us. I believe that it is valuable to engage with their vitality in dialogues and let them be heard and that this links to the approaches to making and researching that I explore in this thesis¹⁴.

In projects explored in this thesis, the students experiment with affordances¹⁵ and various perspectives on things and materials that we are surrounded with by relating them to what they could become, always starting from what they already were. In the article "As Found: A New Design Paradigm" (Braae & Riesto, 2011), the authors emphasise and urge us to notice what is already there in our environments – the traces, the stories, materials and values – and to bring this with us in our processes. Cultivating such awareness depends on leaving a

¹⁴ See especially article 2: Experimenting with aesthetic-affective openness to vital materiality in design education – an exploration of three student projects: 'the disassembly of a guitar', 'the forgotten table' and the 'sofa that became a dress'.

¹⁵ I write more about Gibson (2015) affordance theory in chapter 3 and 4.

concept of design that is about adding something new and considering if design and creativity, as Roudavski (2019) articulates, can be understood as a more modest process of re-structuring (p. 31). Such a concept of designing means not to start with an idea already construed but to look for meaningful connections to the surroundings. As Braae & Riesto (2011) assert, “[a]ny design product influences and hence alters the surroundings in which it is situated. And vice versa: the situation that designers attempt to improve also has an impact on the design idea and the process of realization” (p. 8).

The “performative process is characterised by contingencies and interruptions (...) the spontaneous appearance and emergence of the unexpected and the new, should come into focus” (Frers, 2004, my translation). The perspective Frers writes about promotes educational philosophies and aesthetic processes that offer a diverse understanding of ‘what is’: as something unfinished and prone to change; temporal qualities, and experiences of making and unmaking. In performative inquiry, one begins with an open-ended question or a curiosity, a quote, an issue, an idea, or an event that is explored. Through such a process, new questions or curiosities inevitably emerge that offer further opportunities for explorations (Fels, 2012, p. 54). Performativity is relevant both for the general understanding of what I study in this thesis but also how I go about studying it. This research (especially the teaching experiments with the students) is often performative and playful¹⁶ in its creation and involves room for imagination as well as material affordances in the encounters with materialities of things and places.

2.5 Chapter summary

This chapter has introduced approaches and research that I have found and been introduced to by peers, supervisors and self-study during the research process. In the first section, I introduce critical practices, speculative design, and undesign. Critical design seeks to rethink what design can be and what questions design can and should raise. These critical

¹⁶ I write about play and playfulness in relation to art and design processes in the chapter “Seeing, thinking, writing with theory” and in article 1.

perspectives have given my research inspiration, context and essential reference points. The following section considers art and design education. There I present and discuss various problems, and opportunities to resist the current push from an increasingly instrumental and neoliberal market thinking in art and design education. In this literature, different ways of engaging with education are proposed, as spaces where there is room for experimenting and collaborating through artistic and open approaches, which is intrinsic to my a/r/tography position. Next, I introduce arts-based research methodology and its development into various practices with a/r/tography being a particularly relevant example. Reading this research helped me reflect on the different positions and mindsets at play when practising as an artist, researcher and teacher. Further, I reflect on relational art practices and practice-led research that make way into a section about performative research and new materialism. In the last part, I write about how I move and find myself being moved by new materialism and performative perspectives in teaching and research – moving and being moved towards giving attention to the relational processes with materials and the nonhuman in developing knowledge.

In the next chapter, I outline and discuss the methods I have used in my research and how I came to understand my position as an a/r/tographer.

3 Methods and positions

The description of the research process and the methods used in this thesis is also an account of a learning process. The ways these processes developed were influenced on the one hand by my background, my skills and my shortcomings, and on the other by the events that took place, by the problems that arose, things I learned from others and unexpected breakthroughs.

The research that makes up this thesis includes experiences I had before I knew I would become a PhD student. These experiences originate from working as a teacher for design students for over ten years and from practising as a visual artist for many years before that. Some of the events and stories that became part of my research process were not ‘planned’ as research beforehand but became part of the research as the research-process unfolded.

The reading, writing, and reflecting methodically about my practice changed the way I look upon my past actions as a teacher and artist. In particular a/r/tography as a form of inquiry offered ways to describe both past and ongoing experiences in the research process. A/r/tography represents “the coming together of the arts and graphy (writing)” (Irwin, 2008, p. 2). Finding ways to write and describe experiences and events with words has been a large part of my learning process. Reading and writing have moved the research process into a productive unknown that also includes past experiences.

Like a/r/tography, autoethnography is a personal, reflexive, responsive form of living inquiry. In autoethnography, the researcher is a complete member of the social world under study (Anderson, 2010, p. 379). In my case, this also includes my participating in and practising the activities that are being studied (teaching art and design processes), where the “group membership precedes the decision to conduct research” (p. 397). When doing autoethnography, the researcher seeks to describe and systematically analyse personal experiences to understand them in new ways and as cultural experiences. This means that “as a method, autoethnography is both process and product” (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 273). One distinguishing quality of both a/r/tography and autoethnographic research is how they emphasise the researcher’s role in the creation of the research and the creation of knowledge. “A/r/tographers understand that who they are is embedded in what they know and do”, and theory and practice come together in lived inquiry (Irwin, 2008, p. 2). Autoethnography reflect how “researchers are themselves involved in the social world” and the research they undertake (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019, p. 16). Later in this chapter I engage in more detail with how these research approaches become part of the methods in this thesis.

Writing about my a/r/tographic practice has changed the way I understand it in relation to my background and history, the system I work within (education), and the process of becoming a researcher. The critical reflection that emerged from my reading and writing unleashed new understandings and affected how I imagined the future and understood the past. The description of this process(es) is incommensurable with claiming a fixed and detailed research design specified at the start (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019, p. 3). The data collection was

relatively unstructured at the beginning of my project, and questions, themes and choice of methods took form and matured as the work went on.

The thesis should be read as situated and partial, as snapshots or scenes, sections, views or passages – rooted in more-or-less formalised modes of inquiry and narrated by the researcher through her engagements with specific series of situations. Research through practice pursues an ongoing inquiry committed to continuously asking questions, doing interventions and gathering information before asking further questions (Haseman, 2006; Irwin, 2008). This way of inquiry aims to relate to the situations by sense-making and not knowing beforehand to what paths or knowledge the event can lead (Brinkmann, 2014; Haseman, 2006, p. 100; Stake, 2010; Østern & Knudsen, 2019). The significance of this for the wider impact or potential resonance of this work is discussed in the concluding chapter.

3.1 Qualitative methods, autoethnography and a/r/tography

In order to frame and analyse the events, I created an overarching research question that I repeat here as a reminder: What do students' thoughts, actions, work processes and products tell us about ambivalences in relation to both implicit and explicit goals for design education? To make sense of the data and the articles in this thesis, I use this research question to enter into a dialogue with the data material and the context I am studying. I am inspired by abductive forms of analyses by Brinkmann (2014) and Ingold (2011) that do not see the world as a collection of static things but as moving lines and associations. According to the abductive model, we do research in situations of uncertainty for purposes of living and when we need an understanding or explanation of something that happens (Brinkman p.722).

The materials that make up the data in this thesis respond to this abductive model by originating from several sources and from the use of different methods. I have done different kinds of interviews with students and investigated documents such as student reports. I have also collected written stories about students' abandoned ideas. In the following parts, I first present an overview of the methods and the data connected to the articles in this thesis. After that, I describe how I went about interviewing students; then, I continue with the investigations into the students' written reports. The next part considers how collecting

abandoned ideas became part of the methods and an analytical concept. At the same time as I do this, I return time and again to my perspectives as an artist and to the concept of performativity and how this characterises me as a teacher, researcher and a/r/tographer. Finally, I describe how writing and learning to write became essential for the direction of this research, and I conclude these actions and experiences up in relation to a/r/t-ographing and autoethnography. Throughout the chapter I also consider some of the ethical challenges associated to the methods I have used, especially regarding the teacher-student relationship.

3.1.1 Overview of the methods and the data in the thesis

Article	Research questions	Data material	Methods
1 The stool that became a tree – reflecting on a collaborative student project in design education	Which possibilities are there for cultivating critical, creative, artistic and ethical thinking in collaboration with a major corporation in a student project?	Five semi structured interviews 30 to 60 minutes about a six-week course for 1BA students. Five students working processes (photo, text, drawings, models, renderings) and products	Practice led research Interviews Autoethnographic writing
2 Experimenting with aesthetic-affective openness to vital materiality in design education, an exploration of three student projects: 'the disassembly of a guitar', 'the forgotten table' and 'the sofa that became a dress'	Which possibilities and challenges are there in cultivating an aesthetic-affective openness to material vitality in a teaching experiment with discarded things in design education?	Three 1BA students' working processes (photo, text, drawings, models, renderings) and products. Teaching experiment with discarded things with 1BA students.	Practice led research a/r/tography Autoethnographic writing
3 Please tell me about an idea you would love to realise` – an exploration of abandoned ideas in design education	What design ideas do design students choose not to realise and why?	One Interview 40 minutes with 1MA student. Three interviews where 1MA students interviewed one other student with rough interview guide. Thirteen written accounts of students abandoned design ideas	Autoethnographic writing Interviews Collecting written accounts of students abandoned ideas
4 Abandoned ideas and the energies of failure	In this article, three authors, together and individually, explore the hidden geographies of abandoned ideas and failures both as a cultural phenomenon and as bodily experiences.	One Interview 40 minutes with first-MA student. Three interviews where first-MA students interviewed one other student with rough interview guide. Thirteen written accounts of students' abandoned design ideas	Autoethnographic writing Collecting written accounts of students abandoned design ideas Conversations with students co-writing with two other authors

A table such as the one above is a reductive presentation of the complex process of research. However, it may provide an overview that can help navigate the different parts of the thesis¹⁷. What is missing in this representation is the way that methods, concepts and actions are interrelated; they are ongoing processes moving lines and associations (Ingold, 2011). It becomes clear that an interview or an event continues to work throughout the stages of the research process - they (interviews, observations, reactions, memories) join in and spill over into new events and stages. A/r/tographers are concerned with renderings, concepts and relational forms of inquiry. A/r/tographers can use any method commonly used by qualitative researchers, such as interviews, observations, and reflective notetaking. However, it is crucial to understand that concepts direct inquiry, whereas methods are strategies for gathering information (Irwin, 2008, p. 3). My artistic practice and concept of materials and everyday aesthetics give direction and inspiration to how I teach the students to explore materials and everyday aesthetics in their working processes. This is but one example of how concepts direct inquiry, and entangle the roles of the artist, the teacher and the researcher.

By acknowledging non-verbal and embodied modes of knowledge, arts-based research opens new paths for qualitative methods. Several variations of artistic research, practice-led and performative research, have emerged in recent years (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Springgay & Truman, 2018; Waterhouse et al., 2019, p. 8). The work with this thesis has taught me that researching something (like the topics in this thesis), in many ways involves processes that do not end. There is always more to say, something else to say, other ways of saying it, other perspectives in the light of which to see them, and other methods of getting to know them.

3.2 Interviews

Interviews are used as part of the methods in all the articles in this thesis. In the first article, I ask the students about a six-week course called “Form and Aesthetics” from their first year of study. I contacted via email the classes that had participated in my course one and two years earlier (who by this point were 2nd and 3rd year BA students). I informed the students that I was working on an article about ‘the Ikea project’ (this is how it was known colloquially

1 ¹⁷ In chapter 1,4 and 5 I include three illustrations of the research process in the thesis.

among students and teachers). I wrote that I would like to interview them about their experiences with the project. I also wrote that the interviews would be audio-recorded but that only I would have access to them and use them when writing the article. The students could remain anonymous if they wished in the published manuscript. Five students responded to the email; I made arrangements to meet them in my office.

The interviews were about a course where I facilitated a practical assignment involving the transformation of an already existing product from Ikea. The details of this study are described and discussed in the article “The Stool that became a tree: Reflecting on a collaborative student project in design education (2022)”. The students had carefully documented their work in their reports, including sketches, photographs, text and renderings. I had the pdf files on my computer screen during the interviews. Using photographs and visual material in interviews is a method that resembles “photo-elicitation” (Jenkins et al., 2008). The primary purpose of this method is to record how subjects respond to the images, attributing their social and personal meanings and values. In these interviews it involved the students looking at their student reports with images from the project with the Ikea product. Thus, the images could trigger memories in ways “as more or less direct representations of aspects of the real world” (Frers & Meier, 2007, p. 175). Photo-elicitation is done by using the photographs in the interview situation, and the idea is that what is elicited may differ from or supplement those obtained through verbal inquiry alone (Harper, 2002; Jenkins et al., 2008). It felt natural to use visual material when interviewing the students since the nature of their work entails visual and material processes. The photographs provided access to and triggered detailed memories of the different stages in the working process that might otherwise have been forgotten. Using photographs has the “ability to stimulate latent memory” and to stimulate and release emotional statements about the informants’ life” (Collier, (1957) in Harper, 2002, p. 14). Having the visual documentation available also triggered my memories as teacher and enabled me to ask about details, choices and reflections. Another aspect is that “usually research (data collection) and analysis are described separately” (Frers & Meier, 2007, p. 175). The reflective potential of this interviewing method, a kind of “radical flexibility” (Jenkins et al., 2008, p. 5), opens for emerging understandings as the conversation goes on, and the informant, as such, can become a “recourse for analysis” (p. 4). The analysis

through such reflexive engagement with the visual material and the student can make it more of a joint product of the participant and the analyst (p. 5).

I asked the students to speak freely from memory about the project, about how they experienced it in the beginning, during the process and at the end (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 46). I responded to their answers and asked them to elaborate on things they said about inspiration, challenges, materials, mistakes, competition and more. The students and I already knew each other (from the project that was the focus of the interview) which could have inspired a trusting atmosphere for sharing personal and complex information. However, it could have resulted in quite the opposite, primarily because of the uneven power relationship between us as student and teacher. Also, we were still part of the same environment they as students in their (2nd and 3rd year BA) and I as teacher. It is fair to assume that the students who agreed to be interviewed had retained an interest in the project and were willing to talk about it, which could mean that negative experiences and feelings of exclusion or meaninglessness that some students might have had with the project are missing in my 'data'. This is a possible shortcoming that I am aware of, and have taken into account. Another point with likely methodological implications is the course's status as a success: My work was associated with a course based on an idea popular among the students, colleagues, and leaders. In the first article, I provide a critical overview of the project, the collaboration with Ikea and the possibilities of critical, creative and playful framing in education.

Doing the interviews and writing about the student project made me think of my interest in found materials, and I realised that the project with the students had several similarities to my way of working as an artist. The more completely and "effectively we can understand and account and its context – (...) how it was produced, by whom, for whom, and why – the better able we will be to anticipate how it may suffer from biases of one kind or another as a source of information" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019, p. 104). Mixing the roles of a teacher and researcher (and artist) is complex, especially when using interviews as a method. During the interview, I sometimes felt that the students were assessing what I wanted from them in the search for an appropriate answer (even if I was not their teacher in their present courses and the project under discussion was from a previous year). This reaction is not unexpected since

being a student often involves understanding what the teachers are asking for or wanting. As the quote by Hammersley and Atkinson above illustrates, the context of the accounts, the “by whom” and “for whom”, affects how the interviews developed and how they should be presented in the analyses.

One way that I take these reservations into account is by being aware of the specific circumstances for the interviews, the relation between the interviewer and those interviewed, and the small sample they represent in the context of qualitative studies. The data must be evaluated according to its particular logic (Levitt et al., 2018, p. 28). However, Hammersley & Atkinson state: “The problem of reactivity is merely one aspect of a more general issue: (...) the context generally, of what people say and do” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019, p. 106). The authors claim that there is no such thing as “pure” data. The goal “must be to discover the best manner of interpreting whatever data we have” and to check our inferences (p. 106). The difficulties I experienced while analysing the interviews made me reflect on the problem of reactivity and inferences. The experience of students possibly tailoring their answers to me inspired me to find other methods of collecting information in the context of education, such as the idea of collecting abandoned ideas that I describe later in this chapter.

3.3 Investigating documents and artefacts

In this section, I present my methods when researching another student assignment with first-year BA product design students. In this teaching experiment, I introduced things discarded or set aside by their owner (a table, a guitar, a sofa) as materials for the students’ design projects. This teaching experiment is explored in article 2, “Experimenting with aesthetic-affective openness to vital materiality in design education – an exploration of three student projects: ‘the disassembly of a guitar’, ‘the forgotten table’ and the ‘sofa that became a dress’”. The guiding question in the article was: Which possibilities and challenges are there in cultivating an aesthetic-affective openness to material vitality in a teaching experiment with discarded things in design education? This question relates to the overarching research question in the thesis, the question about ambivalence (possibilities and challenges) in students’ work processes and products concerning implicit and explicit goals in design

education. In this article, I examine processes of engagement and making by introducing redundant and discarded things in a design education setting. The teaching experiment with the students was a practical aesthetic and sensory involvement inspired by artistic approaches. The students worked with practical observational engagements and experienced the properties of things and materials through what happened when working with them.

To research and write this article, I conducted investigations into students' project reports where they documented their working processes. The reports were pdf files consisting of written text, visualisations of processes, drawings, renderings or photographs of different tests, models, and results. The reports were made in response to the assignment, the specific situation, and the teacher (me). These reports constitute a large part of the exam which determines the students' grades. One difference from doing the interviews (where I could not know which students would reply to my email) is that I could select which students' working processes and projects I wanted to write about. I chose projects that were different from each other in various ways, a kind of sampling, "choosing those whose testimony seems most likely to develop and test emerging analytic ideas" (Glaser & Strauss (1967) in Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019, p. 112). The three projects I chose were meaningful to me because the processes and thinking involved inventive, playful and sometimes surprising actions and registrations. They were also interesting because some changed considerably during the project. They were thought provoking because reading them revealed that I was less open than I thought to what might come out of the students' assignments and had certain expectations as to the results¹⁸.

3.3.1 Material methods

The research in this thesis engages with the material world, the things that the world has to offer, and thematises the intimate relationship(s) between the material world and the social world; education and values; body and mind; matter and meaning; and practice and research.

¹⁸ After I had chosen the projects to include in the article, I contacted the students and showed them what I had written. I asked permission to use images from their reports and if they thought I had represented the projects in a fair way, which they all agreed to and some even expressed positive feedback that I had retained an interest in their work.

I investigate the students embodied, material, experimental, and open-ended design processes. Such processes are not only interesting for me as a teacher but also as an artist and researcher. When I wrote about them it was not my method as a researcher when doing interviews or observations that I documented, but the exploration of the methods or practices that characterised the students' design processes. In this way the "research methods become a practise of being *inside* a research event" (Springgay, 2021, p. 204, original emphasis) by attending and thinking 'with' the students' design processes. The students use methods that explore sensory, material and embodied ways of knowing and experience in their projects (Woodward, 2019a, p. 54). Material methods originate in disciplines like design (Research by design) or arts-based research. These methods are ways of working for artists and designers that draw upon the playful capacity of things to invite people to interact, respond and join in (Woodward, 2019).

The students' design projects discussed in the article started with three different discarded items or ready-mades¹⁹: a guitar, a wooden table and a corner sofa²⁰. The students' design processes demonstrated interesting examples of the stories that discarded things evoked when the students encountered them. Things that have use marks, stories and wear and tear from previous use make it possible to make use of "objects as frozen stories" as Haraway writes (Haraway, 1999, p. 106). This might make ground for other epistemological starting points, as I explored in chapter 2, "Approaches": "not creating meaning on the bases of virgin material" but rather re-imagining things that already exist into the flow of production (Bourriaud, 2005, p. 17). Such an approach foregrounds the material world of things that actors create, use, circulate, collect, and value.

¹⁹ The term ready-made was first used by French artist Marcel Duchamp (born 1887) to describe the works of art he made from manufactured objects. It has since often been applied more generally to artworks by other artists made in this way.

²⁰ I had told the students to bring one or more discarded things or items set aside by their owner to use as material in the course. This resulted in a range of different items such as a bookshelf, a commode, sofa, musical instruments, a Hoover, a fan and more that the students randomly were assigned to work with.

3.3.2 Material affordances in the students' design processes

Artefacts and materials have not always been given much attention in ethnographic work. However, for my research they constitute an essential part and source for much of my work. I am interested in all that has to do with material and things, aesthetics, biographies, cultural contexts, time, flow of materials, affordances, practices - the making and creation of things, and the life and destinies of things, and what they can tell us. Things are more than “just the outcome of making. Once made, they have a social life” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019, p. 137). Things are given significance or value, they are exchanged, circulated and evaluated aesthetically and in other ways. There are “multiple cultural codes and conventions that inform such values: size, shape, colour, material, surface” (p. 137). The previous life of the things and the material affordances were at play in the students' design projects. The different ways students thought, and sensed and negotiated the different possibilities that the things afforded offered opportunities to explore the intimate relationship(s) between the material world and the social world. The things the students worked with (table, sofa, guitar) afforded the design students a multitude of possibilities. Gibson (2015) describes affordances as the actionable properties of the object; such actionable properties can be perceived and constituted as relationships, or they can remain ignored (p. 121). “Affordances are properties taken with reference to the observer” (p. 135) which means that affordances are relationships that rely on the actor to shape them with their own initiative. “Affordance cuts across the dichotomy of subjective-objective and helps us to understand its inadequacy. (...) An affordance points both ways, the environment and the observer” (p. 121). The concept of affordance is vital in the context of the method of this study because I write about and work with practical and material processes. Actionable properties of things and materials provide possibilities for a nuanced understanding of the events that unfold within the students' design processes²¹.

Writing about the three design projects the students did with the guitar, the table and the corner sofa was challenging. Memories from observing the students' work at the time and the dialogues I had with them mixed in with my reading of the reports and the analytical work. In

²¹ I return to the discussion about affordances in chapter 5.

the two projects, the students appeared to be discarding a line of inquiry. The working processes were discontinued or broke up from some of their first ideas and objectives. It seemed difficult for the students to follow through their initial ideas, and I question if this was because they did not take the risk of failure that I write about in article 3 “Please tell me about an idea you would love to realise – and exploration of abandoned ideas in design education” (2022). However, one of the projects was very ambitious from the start and followed through with a result that was both surprising and original.

The data material in article 2 represents fragments of the events in the teaching experiment; I write about only three of the forty student projects in the course. The research in this article does not ‘represent design education’ or the overall experiences of the students in the course in a general way. This research is not about ‘true representations’ of students’ design processes; instead, the students’ design processes inspired and stimulated thinking and writing about such processes. The samples I inquire about are treated as “materials to think with, to facilitate the production of new ideas” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019, p. 167). Because I am so familiar with the data material I discuss, I need ways “to unsettle” and to avoid reproducing what I (think I) “already know and thus sameness” (Mazzei & Jackson, 2022). This also rhymes well with what Brinkmann (2014) writes about inquiry as a never-ending process; it is the process of trying to understand the situation by sense-making. “There is (...) no hard and fast line between life, research, theory, and methods” (p. 722).

A/r/tography is an approach where the lines between life, research, theory and methods are entangled through living inquiry: “Methodology constitutes the connection between ontology and epistemology and shows concretely (...) how the connection is expressed” (My translation Karlsson et al., 2021, p. 33). In the next section I explore how this connection is expressed in an a/r/tography approach by including examples from what I think of as material performativity and performative, artistic or practical aesthetics explorations with materials, and events in everyday setting.

3.4 Performativity and methodological implications

The significance of performativity in the context of my methods is that things and materials influence me and are partners in what I do, how I think, and what it is possible to do and think. My work as an artist was intimately connected to processes, movements and materials and situations in everyday mundane situations. The artistic work connected the things in the world, the things at hand, with different modes of learning, doing, experimenting, testing. My doings as an artist may be regarded as an unending series of methodological experiments aimed at creating connections between things in the world and the ways we experience them, think of them, treat them and process them. Below I have included some vignettes as examples. The “Newspaper flower” and “Spaghetti sun” are from many years ago and the “Assembled things, Hovseter” are recent, from within the same time period in which I have been working with this thesis. All three are based on observations and interactions with temporary, arbitrary and everyday events that I stumbled across. They are events that I acted upon in ways that were determined by the time and circumstances in which they took place. If they had happened now, I would probably have acted differently, done other things.



My neighbour was an elderly gentleman who seemed very private and perhaps even shy. He lived on his own, but he had one friend who visited him often. One day I was in a foul mood and as I opened the door very abruptly to go out, my neighbour did too, at the exact same time, and was confronted by my raging face. He got a bit frightened I think; I felt ashamed of that and that he saw me in that state. One autumn he gave us apples from the garden of his summer cottage; we could take as many as we wanted. It was an exceptionally rich autumn for apples; they were large and crisp, juicy and very tasty apples and we had apples for a long time.

The photo to the left shows how the newspaper landed on my neighbour's doormat after delivery one morning. It made me think, what if the newspaper took an entirely different form: a flower perhaps. I took my own newspaper and quickly shaped it into a flower, laid it secretly on the neighbour's doormat later in the day and photographed it (photo on the right).

Figure 3. Photographs, newspaper flower on my neighbour's doormat.



One day when I entered the kitchen, the red floor was covered with spaghetti that was spread around. The thin spaghetti were like lines in a drawing. It must have taken quite some time to break and spread the spaghetti in this way and I think that my daughter (1.5 years old) must have enjoyed doing it. Perhaps she was fascinated by the contrast between the white spaghetti and the red floor and the way the spaghetti breaks into different lengths. I found the camera and took a series of photographs. I then began to organise the spaghetti on the floor into the shape of a sun.

Figure 4. Photographs, spaghetti sun.

The examples illustrate what I have come to understand as performativity in materials, and how this potential performativity repeatedly produces something that is simultaneously mundane and singular, ordinary and beyond repetitions. This production has effects and ‘comes to me’ via the constantly shifting relational and social settings they are part of. The performativity of materials unfolds in playful dialogues and interactions between things that are moving, that are stationary, human action, or complex patterns of minuscule ordinary events. The spaghetti on the floor were the result of a child’s actions: her curiosity, her efforts to get to know her surroundings. The interlude between her play and my cleaning up the mess gave space for performativity and play with otherwise often ignored events: “The sociality of materiality is here made explicit: objects can be seen as ‘crystallizations’ of human activities, inviting us to use them in certain ways, even if this use does not correspond to their intended function” (Sachs Olsen, 2016, p. 37). A simple ordinary event on the surface of it, but still, complex and singular, impossible to write about using ordinary research language, maybe impossible to write ‘about’ at all. To think and act along these lines has effects on the

methods I use and explore. The only possible way to do the situation justice lies in creating a new situation, the situation of writing: the floor, the child, the dry fragility of raw spaghetti, the mother; redness, whiteness, the child close to the floor, the ground, mother hovering above, spotting patterns, hunter and mother, motherhunter, huntermother. The sun burning outside the kitchen window. It is Tuesday, any day. Series of shifting constellations producing series of different results, the sound of spaghetti hitting the floor, the joy of moving through the mess, touching it, making things with it, the potential of organising patterns, images, ruined food. In the afternoon, gone, as if it never happened, the floor, immaculate; cleansed

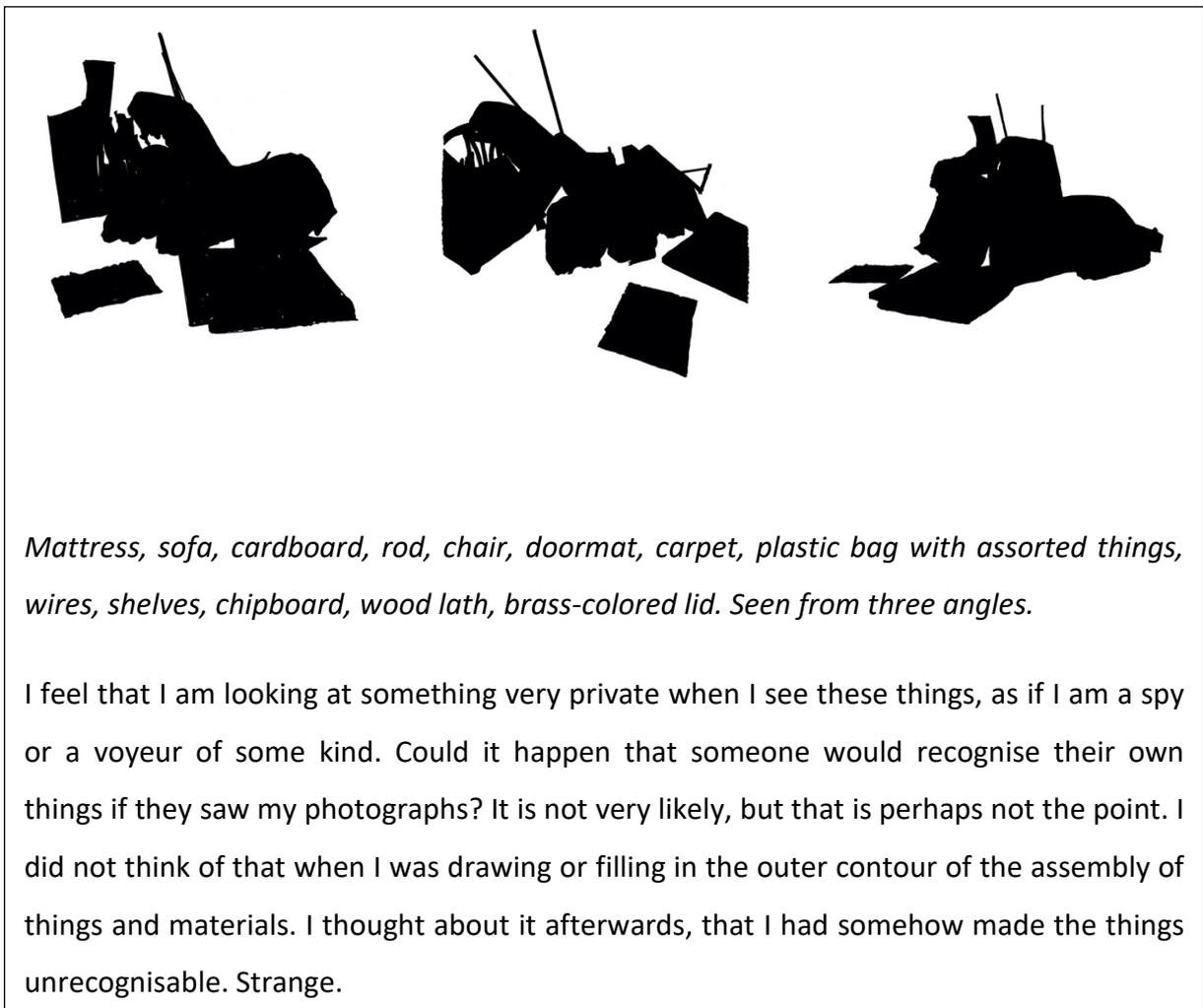


of spaghetti, spots, crumbs, dust. Red.

Figure 5. Photo and drawing. Assembled things with three, Hovseter (2021)

I have been thinking about aspects of materiality during the process of this research, and also on my daily, local walks. Hovseter is a square in a densely populated residential area in Oslo that I cross when going back and forth to the subway. When walking this route, I have observed how things exist, gather, are assembled, and grouped in strange ways, for short periods, outside the tall houses. They come, and they go: piles of stuff, all kinds of mattresses,

carpets, lamps, sofas, planks, shining decorations, document folders, sacks with clutter. They are not only inanimate things but also tableaux, like a scene from a story, vital. Bennet writes about “thing-power”: “When the materiality of the glove, the rat, the pollen, the bottle cap, and the stick started to shimmer and spark, it was in part because of the contingent tableau that they formed with each other, with the street, with the weather that morning, with me” (Bennett, 2010, p. 5). These things assemble – they are arbitrary combinations of stuff stored in temporary places before they are transported elsewhere. It is not the currents of the sea that are moving these things around, like drift matter, that Pétursdóttir writes about;



however, there is a resemblance. The things drift in and out – and they come from all over the world – like the ketchup bottles that Kjærviik picked up from the shore in Nykvåg in northern Norway that I wrote about earlier.

Figure 6. Assembled things from different angles – drawings, Hovseter

These vignettes connect to how I make sense of, explore and engage with the world: how I see, sense, think and a way to make sense of and interact with the world. The examples are snapshots, examples of my gaze. They are about what I notice and care about and how I experience the life of things around me and are thus essential to my role as an a/r/tographer and my autoethnographic position. Things, environments and materials are perceived as performative agents. Things are considered agents that contribute to the students' projects, and therefore they also contribute to the research process and the results of my research.

3.4.1 Thinking with materials, bodies, senses

The exploration of the students' processes transforming already existing material objects offered a way for me to *re-search* into materiality. The students' ideas, problems, associations, and imaginations in meeting with the objects they worked with gave me an opportunity to re-engage in something that was half forgotten, something that I once cared for and struggled with – the relationship between us and the things in the world. Seeing materiality as performative, as an approach, is a way of destabilising our habitual ways of treating things; is a method for disturbing what we take for granted, to mess with the relationship between what we tend to treat as the real and the imagined: "Seeing materiality as performance is an attempt to subvert this distinction between the 'real' and the imaginary by refusing to accept what is presented to us as given"(Sachs Olsen, 2016, p. 37).

The kinds of knowledge that come from working with materials are sensuous, embodied ways of exploring and testing (Christensen-Scheel, 2013; Pallasmaa, 2012). These kinds of knowledge are the results of processes that do not immediately translate into words or the written language of systematic thinking. In the thesis I aim to show how the practice, the hands and the body are integral parts of exploration and creation. In this, I draw on a tradition of practice-led research that emphasises the centrality of the body, the hands, and senses, but also our presence in the world. "I would say that the performative seeks to grasp the

raising of this art-specific reflection or consciousness, which allows sensuous and social material in general to be evaluated as part of integrative structures” (Christensen-Scheel, 2013, p. 114).

3.5 Methodological implications of studying abandoned ideas

In article 3 in this thesis, “‘Please tell me about an idea you would love to realise’ – an exploration of abandoned ideas in design education” (2022), I reflect on design education practices through the perspective of caring about abandoned ideas and the role that risk plays in students’ management or processing of ideas.

After having focused on students’ design processes in my work with the interviews and by exploring students’ design processes, it struck me that the conversations and topics often brushed past what was ‘not done’; abandoned ideas that are given up before they even are articulated or part of any design process. Exploring abandoned ideas as a method is counterintuitive (Tracy, 2010, p. 840) by studying events that did not unfold, secrets, ideas and sentiments that were not intended to be shared. What design students choose not to do and the reasons why, are as much about their education as what they eventually do. Inspired by Tracy (1995), I aim to “make visible what is hidden or inappropriately ignored” (p. 210) and, by doing so, generate a sense of understanding of the regulations that students are subjected to and how the educational system and teachers like myself affect the students’ sense of freedom and reduce their possibilities to experiment with ideas.

Exploring abandoned ideas became an opening into researching which values are being celebrated and which are ignored in education: a critical approach, a way to connect with something that we might fail to perceive if we are only concerned with what we see as results. The critical potential in this approach is reflected in one of the sub-research questions in the thesis: How can we explore and know more about which ideas (working methods, processes, thoughts, products, opportunities) are allowed to live on and which are destined to remain impossible, naïve, stupid, too idealistic, in design education? Exploring abandoned ideas set things in motion, students' individual experiences, and feelings of loss and

abandonment – these events also made me more aware of my own abandoned ideas from the past and those I was still abandoning.

3.5.1 The (re-)assembling of abandoned ideas as method

How I set about collecting abandoned ideas is something I write about in article 3 in this thesis. Below I include some parts of the article in order to make a comprehensive presentation for this reflexive account of the processes that I write about in this chapter.

“In autumn 2017, I taught a course on design and culture to first-year master’s students in design” (Sjøvoll, 2022, p. 4). I introduced them briefly to my PhD research. “I explained that I wanted to know more about the decision-making processes and the factors that influenced students to disregard or choose certain directions in their work. I said that my intention was to become aware of and reflect upon the things that influence us in our lives as students and teachers in design. After they signed the participation form, I handed them a sheet with two requests:

Please tell me about an idea you would love to realise but you don’t or can’t ... and why. Please make a short description of why you abandoned this idea” (2022, pp. 4-5).

The initial meeting with the students and the response I sensed from them, made me feel that I had embarked upon a riskier undertaking than the interviews I had conducted with students about their already finished projects. There was something more at stake here, both for the students and for me. To talk about this, how we sometimes abandon our own ideas, seemed to trigger a plethora of reactions: recognition, a sigh, a laugh, emotions. Something emotional was activated and “[e]motions are neither opposed to, nor complementary to rational behaviour, but integral to it” (Blix & Wettergren, 2015, p. 689). The question about the students abandoned ideas triggered reflections on things from the past: memories; dreams; disappointments; and half-forgotten things that nevertheless seemed to reside close to the surface, just under the skin. The question had a performative effect to it; it sparked a kind of energy that I was confronted with during the rest of the course. The energies that were generated in these brief encounters produced something and continue to produce something. In a way I think the question about the abandoned pointed both backwards and forwards: back to things you had abandoned and forward, towards either picking some of them up again or being more attentive and critical towards what and why you abandon a

dream or a plan. The analyses of the abandoned ideas and the discussions of this research are further explored in articles 3 and 4 in this thesis.

3.5.2 Participatory methods

In addition to collecting the written stories about students' abandoned ideas, interviewing was used as a method to approach the same topic. The way the interviews were initiated has some resemblance to an approach called "student-as-researcher-and-participant design" (Mitchell et al., 2020), which is a way to teach qualitative research by engaging classmates to interview each other throughout a semester (p. 1). This approach was motivated by participatory methods that aim for co-constructing knowledge (Leavy, 2017, p. 12; Ulrichsen, 2022, p.41) through a minor attempt to expand the interviewing situation and let others (the students) take an active role, an attempt to be less "alone with my PhD project" (p. 41). When I met with the class the day after I collected the abandoned ideas, I asked if any students would volunteer to do interviews with a fellow student. The instructions given were:

Find a fellow student to interview, record with video or only sound if you prefer. The interview may take the form of conversations where you, as an interviewer, can also reflect on the questions. You have a rough interview guide, but you don't have to answer all the questions; select the ones you want to discuss. Record between 5-15 minutes and give the recordings to me in two weeks' time. All questions are related to you in the context of a student in design. However, your answers can include whatever else influences you in your practice.

1. Please tell me about something you misunderstood or a mistake you made. How did you feel about making mistakes? How did fellow students and teachers react?
2. Please tell me any advice or insight that has been important to you

Three students volunteered and, once more, the students demonstrated willingness to help and assist me in my research. Asking the students to interview each other was an attempt to stimulate conversations among them about the topic I suggested. However, at the same time, the instruction tried to give room for the conversation to develop on its own terms. In this way, I could step back from the situation for a while and remove my teacher/researcher gaze hovering over the students participating. The students seemed quite confident with the task and only asked simple questions to clarify details. I had prepared a consent form that the students were asked to sign (the student interviewing and the student being interviewed). In

one of the interviews, an exciting conversation about failure took place. The students' discussion reflected the tendency to celebrate failure as a step towards success. Listening to this, I realised that it might be the understanding of what constitutes success that represents the most interesting problem in this context: error, or the act of failing, is an infinite quantity; one can imagine that it is possible to fail in endless ways. Success, or ending up with the 'solution' - we may suppose - is linked to a limited number of answers related to established criteria. I elaborate on this in the concluding chapter of the thesis. Inviting the students to take an active part in the research and methods for gathering information represents a small part of the research in this thesis. However, it indicates possible future research directions for such participatory approaches, which would be interesting to do with a more developed conceptual apparatus.

As with the other methods I have used, likewise in this situation it is important to keep in mind the circumstances under which the students provided me with the data material. Although it was not part of a graded assignment, and I, as a researcher (PhD student), asked if they would care to participate voluntarily, the event was still within the context of a teacher-student relationship. It is fair to assume that the students were somewhat reserved on elaborating on frustrations in encounters with teachers, courses and that they tried to formulate their answers within the established language of the educational setting. Their answers might have been motivated by wanting to help me in my research, as in them trying to give me what they might think I wanted to hear or needed from them. To avoid some of the specific ethical and representational traps connected to my insider position in an "at-home" ethnography (Alvesson, 2009), I have had focused discussions with colleagues to critically reflect on this method and its implications. These discussions have proved enriching – both complicating and reassuring – in that they have helped me to detect relations between the particular (in the data) and the larger political and social world in which they and the researcher are embedded. Article 4 that is co-written with my PhD supervisor Professor Lars Frers and my fellow PhD student (at the time) Geir Grothen, is a result of such discussions. I was not alone in my "PhD project" (Ulrichsen, 2022, p. 41) anymore, nor alone with my abandoned ideas or failures. Please see article 4 for more in-depth descriptions of the co-writing experience.

As a method, abandoned ideas focus on phenomena and effects that often remain hidden and unmentioned. This makes this method resemble “post-oppositional” and relational methods that try to pave the way for inquiry and knowledge construction “in the understanding of the materiality of lived experiences” (Bhattacharya, 2018, p. 273). The opening to write about this topic was offered to my co- authors and me through our participation in a session called “Reclaiming Failure in geography: academic honesty in a neoliberal world” at the annual Royal Geographical Society conference in Wales (2018). This led to an invitation to a special issue of *Emotion, Space and Society*. This special issue was based around the topic of academic failure (Davies et al., 2021). This gave my co-authors, Geir Grothen and Lars Frers, and me a chance to reflect on and share experiences and feelings from our careers and lives. I rooted my part of this article in my engagement with abandoned ideas. The writing showed some very interesting similarities between the three of us: we all shared experiences of being vulnerable, insecure, and ashamed, but we also found mutual ground in our attempts to think; write; and use our own voices, experiences, and backgrounds. The setting gave us an opportunity to explore a new topic and to experiment with different ways of writing in an academic setting. We wrote vignettes that some called poetic – which we saw as an indication of them being different – and we thematised things that usually go unmentioned or unnoticed. The experience was liberating, hopeful and very educating for me as a novice in the academic world, and it would be encouraging if it could have a similar effect on others that read it. In my part I reflect on some of the students’ responses to the questions and conversations about abandoned ideas. Some of the apparently mundane and everyday experiences of being a student, like seemingly harmless corrections from teachers or the hidden – soft, obvious, unnoticeable – expectations, affect them in ways that it is easy to pass over. Bhattacharya writes that to become a researcher, “one would need to be able to play with multiple contradictory ideas, hold on and let go of assertions and understandings that once seemed stable if viewed through varied lenses, and reflect on one’s liminality while moving in between varied worldviews” (Bhattacharya, 2018, p. 273). Writing this article has made me more aware and critical of the structures that sometimes make me ignore and abandon essential aspects of my experiences in order to fit in and gain acceptance and recognition within already existing frameworks.

3.6 Writing

Writing is at the heart of ethnography and closely related to the process of analysis. I have come to learn that it is a craft skill at which I am a novice. I was trained as a visual artist in the beginning of the 1990's and theory studies and writing were not a large part of the education at that time (at least, not for me). Method does not only refer to the process of research but "also to the process of making sense of that research in and through a writing that does not come afterward as a 'writing up' of what has previously been discovered, but is actually continuous with it, and, in large part, produces it" (Gibbs, 2015, s. 222).

I spent a long time on struggling to find a voice or a way of writing. I felt a kind of numbing humility in my admiration for the elegance of well written texts, and the elegance and smoothness of words, especially those written by other scholars. After some failed attempts, in which both exams and article submissions were dismissed on what I felt was a very fundamental level, I became more adept at describing with words what I was doing, what the students were doing, describing environments, forms, feelings and so on. When I finally achieved some shape in my own writing, I felt pleased. However, this newly acquired skill then led me into a new trap, making me a bit naïve and not self-critical enough, and I was again forced to learn something different about writing. After improving my powers of description of things: relations and situations with words, I needed to learn more: how to write about how I write, what I include and what I tend not to write about, or what might be blind spots in my writing and my analyses. I had to learn to write about the possible other ways in which what I described could be interpreted. "A description—whether in philosophy or in literature—is an invitation to a response, an invitation to answer the question: "This is what I see. Can you see it too?" (Moi, 2017).

As my research developed, I acquired more knowledge about research methods and my researcher positions; I understood my role to a greater extent as an a/r/tographer and my research in a context of creation and performativity. I describe this development and my movements with it within an autoethnographic framework. The writing is thus a part of the methods and the narrative inquiry and storytelling is part of the analyses. The act of writing is also a vital part of a/r/tographic research and the autoethnographic method.

3.7 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I outline the methods I have used in my research and how I came to understand my position as an a/r/tographer. I also deal with some ethical challenges associated with these methods, especially regarding the teacher-student relationship. The research in this thesis is situated in practice-led experiences and driven by personal curiosity, engagement and ideals. Elements of autoethnography are integral parts of how I worked as an a/r/tographer; ongoing autoethnographic reflections characterise almost all parts of the thesis. I describe how different qualitative methods were used, such as various forms of interviews and investigations into documents and written accounts. I also explain how I have explored and interpreted visual documentation alone and in conversation with students and colleagues.

Furthermore, the chapter describes the overall epistemological position related to a/r/tography and material and performative worldviews. These worldviews and concepts branch out and entangle with the different methods and events that have taken place. This branching out and entangling demonstrate the intimate relationship between theory and practice, the abstract and the concrete, as Hammersley & Atkinson (2019) thematise when they assert that “research acts shape the phenomena under investigation” (p. 198).

Finally, this chapter thematises how the writing in the thesis is performed within a contextualised personal narrative that highlights my background as an artist and the process of training to be a researcher as a PhD student. Moreover, the writing is explained as a pedagogical narrative related to my work as a teacher and an investigation into how artistic processes may enrich design students' thinking and engagement with assignments. Also discussed are the limitations, shortcomings, risks and ethical issues connected to the choice of methods. I write more about ethical issues in the concluding chapter 6.

In the next chapter, I first describe the environment where my research took place at the Institute of Product Design at Oslo Metropolitan University. After that, I present the theory and concepts I have engaged with in the different articles and overall in the thesis.

4 Seeing, writing, thinking with theory

This chapter presents and further explores the theory I have read and used in my thesis. However, first I will describe the environment where my research took place. Such a description is vital for understanding the logic of some of the choices I made, since I see the environment as a collection of different possibilities and limitations. It is important to remember that the environment in this research is very complex; it is composed of a vast array of different settings, educational, institutional, theoretical and so forth, each with its rules, traditions, possibilities and limitations. After introducing the environment understood this way, I will visit the most important theoretical concepts that have helped me think about and analyse the processes in my research.

As I mentioned in the introduction; the research in this thesis takes place in product design education at a Norwegian University. In this environment, many different processes, on different levels, take place simultaneously: studies, research, teaching, implicit and explicit expectations, hopes and dreams, traditions, history, and social and material relations. The most visible part of this environment is its physical structure, which includes buildings with classrooms, offices, canteens, auditoriums, meeting rooms, a library, and workshops. The physical environment has humans in it: students, teachers, leaders, administrators, cleaning staff, technicians, and librarians. The people that populate this environment are artists, industrial designers, pedagogues, technicians, and design researchers, often in changing roles, like mine as an artist, teacher, and researcher. The students, who are the largest group here, have different backgrounds, ages and skills. The physical and social environment is full of sound – buzzing sounds of conversations, small talk, laughter, and greetings. Discussions blend in with noise from coffee machines, lifts, saws and 3D printers. I am a part of this environment too, as I move around, smelling burnt wood from the laser cutter, reading documents, texts, strategic plans and goals, drinking coffee. Different schools, backgrounds, languages and values come together in this environment.

The research in this thesis took place in this environment; in some senses, it has grown out of this environment. However, it is at the same time research that tries to make sense of its

meaning by thinking about it, experimenting with it, and even trying to understand it. Ingold²² has developed the concept of the meshwork to discover and explore entangled environments and situations. Ingold describes meshwork as environments where ideas and values are like lines floating through space. The meshwork is moving and changing it is not a static situation.

The lines are bound together in the knot, but they are not bound *by* it. On the contrary, they trail beyond it, only to become caught up with other lines in other knots. Together they make up what I have called a meshwork, and the threads from which it is traces are lines of wayfaring (Ingold, 2007, p. 100).

I recognise the complexities of the environment I am researching in Ingold's descriptions. In my research I am investigating ongoing processes; processes with materials that become things and things that become materials – creating, uncreating and recreating. I am teaching, learning and researching in a constant stream of events. The events are movements in-between. Ingold articulates that there is a difference between “between and in-between”, which is also a helpful distinction for my thinking and writing. Researching processes of creation that are non-linear and probing needs a language that can follow emerging movements.

‘Between’ articulates a divided world that is already carved at the joints. It is a bridge, a hinge, a connection, an attraction of opposites, a link in a chain, a double-headed arrow that points at once to this and that. ‘In-between’, by contrast, is a movement of generation and dissolution in a world of becoming where things are not yet given – such that they might then be joined up – but on the way to being given (Ingold, 2015, p. 147).

To work, think and write with the concept of movement as a primary premise works for my project because it refers to a broad, dynamic, relational, and imaginative reality that also characterises the environment that I am writing within and about. The environment of design education offers the intertwining of different people, roles, expectations, and dreams. Multiple connections, relations and events on different levels can be explored and included. It is possible to trace lines and knots that take form ‘In-between’ organisation and structures and the practice on the ground. Among or in-between language – effects and affects. In-between what is being done and what is not being done. Meshwork resembles Deleuze and

²²I especially engage with Ingold's perspectives from the latest book "Imagining for real" (2021) and "The life of lines" (2015).

Guattari's concept of rhizome²³. Deleuze writes that "things advance and grow out from the middle" and "that's where you have to get to work" (Deleuze in Bourriaud, 2005, p. 17). I must start with the situation I am in, in the middle of the things I am enmeshed in, with things I have at hand, from inside my environment. The topics that are explored in this thesis are intertwined and partly co-created with the methods that were developed and used during the processes that gave the thesis its form and content. The path of the research was not laid out beforehand, and it did not follow a linear movement, so much as a searching/probing one.

It is important for me to remember that this research did not start as a theoretical study; it started with practical experiments and artistic approaches in the context of education. It has been a complicated process to write the thesis; now and then, I have lost my way, written myself into dead ends or out on the plains. However, I found some support in what Donna Haraway²⁴ says about writing: "We work with what we got – constantly trying, to write this story, not some story in general. You have to be attached to somethings, not everything"(2019). I must choose among many different things on different levels that are going on simultaneously. Therefore, it is not possible to write about everything from all perspectives.

Sometimes theoretical concepts are seemingly so fitting to a situation that it is tempting to pluck them without paying attention to the "highly nuanced and complex notions" they represent in order to "quickly fix things" (Vagle and Hofsess, 2016, p. 338). I admit to choosing complex concepts and notions in this chapter, and I will attempt to proceed humbly and be careful with my assumptions. Theory is a word that I have grappled with; at times, it seems like a cloud in the sky: fluffy, light, perfect and out of reach. What is theory and what is not? In the article with the appropriate title "The meaning of 'theory'"²⁵ the author confirms

²³ The rhizome "is a concept that 'maps' a process of networked, relational and transversal thought, and a way of being without 'tracing' the construction of that map as a fixed entity" Parr, A. (Ed.). (2010). *The Deleuze dictionary: Revised edition*. Edinburgh University Press.

²⁴ Haraway says this in her film *Story Telling for Earthly Survival* (2019).

²⁵ Abend writes that theory has "multiple meanings" in sociology, and he identifies seven senses of the word. It is not for me in this thesis to engage further with the discussions on the meaning and use of theory in sociology. However, I find one of the descriptions he proposes to be valuable: A theory is, "an overall perspective from

that it is difficult to know what theory is and that theory has "multiple meanings" (Abend, 2008, p. 177). In research, it is expected that the researcher uses theory and concepts when thinking about the world. The quality of the concepts we choose lies in what they offer and provide when we put them to work. When I make use of the concept of meshwork²⁶ as a thinking tool or mental image, it is an experiment, and as Massumi puts it: "The question is not: is it true? But: does it work? What new thoughts does it make it possible to think?" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, foreword by Massumi, s. T).

4.1 A Meshwork

The research in this thesis is complex; it explores problems, values, knowledge, hopes and aims in design education through empirical studies of concrete situations in an educational environment. However, the research is also an unfolding of processes of material experimentations, knowledge, skills, and praxis and senses located within and working through our bodies. The research takes place in the context of design education. Nonetheless, the implications reach beyond design, education, and design education. The processes that gave the study its forms and directions originated from different sets of problems, but simultaneously, in a kind of intimate interconnection. The processes are 'about' education from the outside, and me as a kind of inside, different things from different spheres: They are alike in that they thematise the intimate relationship(s) between the material and social worlds: education and values; body and mind; matter and meaning; and practice and research.

which one sees and interprets the world". This means that the way I understand theory in my research is not about the world, social or material, in "itself", "but about how to look at, grasp, and represent it", that is "for example, the nature of the location from which we look at the world" (p. 179).

²⁶ For this research the differences and similarities between the concept of meshwork and rhizome are not significant and therefore I have chosen to use meshwork as a theoretical lens or thinking tool.

4.2 Introducing other perspectives on making and creation in design education

In my teaching I introduce and experiment with the already existing – the abundance of things – as material for design students. I try to give space for processes that are inspired by artistic approaches and that offer rich experiences and perspectives on the things and materials surrounding us in our everyday life. Another part of the study is concerned with what students chose not to do (the abandoned ideas and the ignored) and the sense of failure inflicted on them when they – often in obscure ways – abandon their projects. The research is twofold. It is an investigation into what it is possible to do and what is perceived as impossible to do. These ambivalences and tensions are reflected in the overarching research questions in the thesis. The explorations also map out some issues concerning how we understand what creation is, or what it is to engage in processes of making and unmaking. What is it to be a creative practitioner?

Ingold writes within the anthropological realm of phenomenology. He explores how humans feel their way in the world– how when we create, we are also being created in spaces and places we encounter. Wisdom, he writes, is an ecology of relations, “unfolding from the inside in a continual movement of interstitial differentiation, (...) not cognitive but ecological” (Ingold, 2021, p. 60). To differentiate, divide, distinguish and decide is “a wisdom that draws out form from within the flux of materials” (Ingold, 2021, p. 59).

As I express in my first research question, one of the concerns in my research is how we manage and cultivate creativity in design education. I am especially concerned that the concept of creativity has become “narrowed down” (Kalin, 2018) in ways that often exclude that which is not results-oriented or otherwise primarily driven by economic motives. It is possible to identify such use in design education too, Ingold affirms:

“The educational environments in which we work are increasingly dogmatic and oppressive and worse still, dogma and oppressions are being delivered in the name of freedom and creativity” (Campbell, 2018, para. 12).

Creativity is often conflated with innovation and newness rooted in economic concerns and shunted away from notions of art (Kalin, 2018, p. 8). I sometimes do not recognise how I

engage, think and create in my practice in definitions of creativity. Ingold's description of creating as a matter of engagement – not of creating a view of the world – “but of taking up a view *in it*” (Ingold, 1996, p. 117, original emphasis), is closer to how I want to work. Similar perspectives are further developed in the book chapter “Notes on the more-than-human architecture” by Roudavski (2019), where he proposes “a rethinking of design as a gradual, ecological action” (p. 24) and suggests a “shift from the notion of creativity as the process of addition to its interpretation as the process of re-structuring” (p. 31). A shift from “creating as an ingenious human making to more modest metaphors that emphasize the continuity of the world’s processes” (p. 31) – more “modest, engaged and imperfect” processes. In my view, modest and imperfect processes could be achieved by allowing more openness and processes without prescribed outcomes; allowing processes that are risky and could involve imperfection or failure. Such ways of relating to aesthetic practices are articulated and developed in arts-based and practice-led research. Haseman (2006), articulates that practice-led researchers “do not commence a research project with a sense of ‘a problem’” (p.100). Such ways of working and researching “is best described as ‘an enthusiasm of practice’ — something which is exciting, something which may be unruly “(Haseman, 2006, p. 100). Similarly, I introduced the students to a design approach that was not first and foremost outcome-oriented or problem-solving, but rather an approach “seeking to engage with new modes of interrogating the existent”²⁷ (Marenko, 2019, p. 48).

Ingold explains that the problem with how creativity is sometimes understood is that it almost always assumes that first there is an idea or intention, followed by a process of creation, realising this idea as the end product. He proposes another way of working that addresses a plurality of senses, a way that starts with an open mind and attitude, not with an already finished result in our minds. My efforts have been to give space to and cultivate such open perspectives on making and creation in design education. It may be timely to ask: Is it imaginable that design education – which is so much about the production of things for imagined future needs – could benefit from a more comprehensive understanding of the here

²⁷ Marenko works at the intersection of design and philosophy, examining the tensions between design as a way of speculating on, and instigating, the future and thought concerned with materiality, affect, the virtual and the nonhuman.

and now, the things and environments we encounter? The importance of “being mindful of all those who have or may have an interest in valuing what has already been created” (Sless (2012) cited in Roudavski, 2019, p. 25) is increasingly recognised.

Being mindful of what has already been created in design processes would involve letting processes initiate dialogues through practice and thinking with and in continuation of existing things. Such an approach requires special attention or perception that does not rely only on conventional representations or conceptualisations of the environment. The ecological theory of perception by Gibson provides insights that are interesting in this regard. Gibson's ecological approach to the study of visual perception holds that humans perceive directly without mediation in cognitive processes; what we perceive are affordances. Affordances are what things or environments offer in terms of movements or actions. The affordance theory gives us ways of understanding our material world in terms of what the world invites us to do rather than contenting ourselves with what we can "observe" (Gibson, 2015). In article 1 in this thesis, I discuss how play with affordances offers ways of exploring the material processes that I examine, such as physical transformations of familiar products. Affordance offers a way to expand the notion of observing to go beyond what we recognise and know about a thing or place.

Ingold argues that the kind of ecological perception that Gibson writes about allows for difference in perception without putting human beings “over and above the world in which they and other organisms live” (Ingold, 2021, p. 2). This kind of decentring is also a topic in posthuman theories and new materialisms. These theories offer openings to think differently about the long tradition in western culture to think of human beings as having a position above other life forms, nature, places, things and materials. The concept of non-human agencies holds that not only humans have agency but also things, materials, nature, and that the combining whole – the earth – has assertive powers and effects.

The implication of non-human agency is challenging to grasp and understand for me. However, if I think of this via practical aesthetics and imaginative processes in the setting I lay out at the beginning of this chapter, it gains meaning. Relating the theoretical concept to

practice opens possibilities to explore it. My practice and research take place in material and social settings, with materials, something I can see and feel.

Encountering the reality of paint, stone, wood, metal, sound, bodies, including one's own body; encountering resistance, in order to explore possibilities, meet limits and limitations, and out of this create forms, establish forms and find forms that make existing-in-dialogue possible, that is what I see in the 'doing' of art (Biesta, 2018, p. 17).

The quotation above is from the book *Art, Artist and Pedagogy, Philosophy and the Arts in Education* (2018). It describes quite accurately how working with art, viewed in this way, is an ongoing activity and exploration. Art is an attempt at working out something about the world and what it means "to be – here – now" (p.17). Encountering "resistance, in order to explore possibilities, meet limits and limitations" is the description of "the doing" in art. There is a long tradition of using found materials in fine art, from Duchamp's ready-made to Kabakov's collections or Wentworth's photographs. (I return to these examples in later sections.) When thinking about it in this way, a line forms in the meshwork, this line entangles and forms knots with the ideas of non-human agency, art practice and things, and the line make it is possible to ask: What is new, what is ignored, and what is allowed to count?

It is possible that some of the ideas and thinking in new materialisms are already part not only of the practice of making, doing art, and design but also in other human activities. Fredriksen & Sørnum (2021) claims that in craft work "we know what happens in making processes depends on delicate nuances in encounters between materials, tools and the body. Such meetings are intense, physical, invisible from the outside and difficult to describe in words (my translation p. 157/158). The "more-than-human is not a new condition", Ingold writes; "For those who actually draw a living from the land or oceans, it is simply a statement of common sense" (Ingold, 2020, p. 435).

(...) it amounts to a recognition that for every one of us, the world of experience radiates from the centre where we stand to embrace others of every possible complexion, and to an acknowledgement of the debt we owe to these others for our existence as human beings. Decentering humanity would write off this debt (p.435).

Bennett²⁸ explains that a language to acknowledge non-human agencies as operative on the scene would probably be sprinkled with process-oriented verbs, for example, to induce, animate, sing, or partake. These verbs describe how we are acting with or interfering with something that is already going on, and that we are affected by what is already happening: it is acting with us as we are acting with it. Sometimes we can notice this; when we sense wind or rain, we get wet, cold or energetic. I am 'wetted', I am 'winded'. These are not proper words in the languages we use now; if we use them, we will be corrected. Perhaps non-human agencies are difficult to describe or to reason with, in theory, but easier to grasp in practice, with experience and imagination. The written language, reflecting and describing experiences, is part of my research. To read, write, and reflect in a methodical way about my practice has become entangled with the concepts and theories I have investigated²⁹. The methods and the theories I engage with become bundles of lines in a meshwork, thus they feed each other. "Theory and method are entwined, and the informed researcher must develop a way of accounting for this symbiosis" (Ruddock, 2001, p.17).

4.2.1 Defamiliarisations

As described in article 2, it is arduous to disassemble a sofa, a table, or a guitar; the students had to be careful to keep all the bits and pieces for later use. The unmaking and making processes become entwined. A space for negotiations between the agency of the subjects and the agency of the things and their parts and materials can unfold and offer surprising ways of working. Such processes are time consuming and give opportunities for profound engagements. A rich and multifaceted collection of registrations, associations and speculations came from this, connected both to material qualities, culture(s) and the personal.

²⁸ Bennett's works investigate our ontological notions and ideas about the relationship between humans and "things". Her concept of "thing-power" have helped my thinking about situated meaning making experiences and the complex material entanglements (of human and nonhumans).

²⁹ Finding a way to write and describe experiences and events with words has been a large part of my learning process.

The aim was to explore what would happen if we (the students and I) looked at the surplus of things that have become redundant or unwanted as something potentially active and giving to us. What if we started thinking that these things could teach us something? With this question, I tried to turn around the idea that education is about teaching about the world and that I should teach students about the world. Instead, it should be a shared attempt to be taught by the things in the world. The questions are 'in line' with what Ingold says about education, that it is not about teaching students in art, crafts or design. It is the practice, the doing, "the experiential entanglements that come from working with stuff" (Ingold, 2020, p. 438), that educates.

If we let our surroundings and all that we encounter influence us and guide us, this can offer sympathetic and modest approaches to creating and engaging in the world. It expands the notion of creativity into something that should not solely be understood as "an agency directed from within a human creator and out into the world" (Roudavski, 2019, p. 31) but rather as something that creates and maintains dialogues. In my explorations of the student projects, I attempt to articulate some possible effects by intentionally starting with something that already exists in other forms than supposedly pure, raw materials like planks or industrial materials. This way of relating to materials is inspired by my working with sculpture as an artist.

Materials have different names and stages of life: objects, things, commodities, items, artefacts, assets, treasures, waste, ingredients, raw and more. What is considered 'pure' materials are unmixed like water or salt; what is considered 'raw' materials could be steel or lumber. Industrial materials could be plastic or ceramics used to manufacture goods. Different stories and cultural dimensions connect to materials such as found, bought, discarded, forgotten, ignored or collected materials. The teaching experiment provided opportunities for exploring material vitality and aesthetic-affective openness in design education. I have borrowed the terms material vitality and aesthetic-affective openness from Bennett (2010). Her concept of "thing-power" was helpful in engaging with the strange ability of everyday items to exceed their status "as objects and to manifest traces of independence or aliveness" (Bennett, 2010, p. xvi). Her concept was a way into understanding things as

“temporary, shifting forms in ongoing undetermined processes” (p. xvi). What does it mean that things, materials and our surroundings manifest aliveness, that they are animated? It could mean that we are affected by them, perhaps in obscure ways, also because of their embeddedness in culture. Bennett’s way of thinking relocates or complicates my position towards my surroundings.

Considering material vitality helped me to understand the experiments I did together with design students in more nuanced ways. Descriptions of things and materials as temporary, shifting forms of ongoing processes fit what I aim to explore with design students. Namely, to experiment with what they could become, but always including what they already are in that moment. The cultural significance of material changes and transformations is also a topic for the geographer DeSilvey. She explores what she calls unruly materials or matter out of place. She questions the way unruly materialities are organised through strategies of collection and curation and the way that these “materialities work back on our ordering principles to suggest other ways of knowing and doing” (DeSilvey, 2007, p. 881). DeSilvey writes about the ways in which many artists have worked with ambiguous materials like Ilya Kabakov’s (born 1933) in the installation piece *The Man Who Never Threw Anything Away* (1988-1995). In this artwork a man meticulously collects and catalogues ordinary objects from candy wrappers, pieces of string and old shoes. For this installation “Kabakov invents and documents the spectre of a man not able, or not willing, to distinguish between valuable and valueless materials” (DeSilvey, 2007, p. 886). Artists like Ilja Kabakov focus on the poetics and politics of rubbish or waste and configurations of objects, people and practices. In the article “Turn your trash into... Rubbish, art and politics, Richard Wentworth's geographical imagination” Hawkins writes: “What emerges is a rubbish aesthetics that privileges material fluidity and circulation over fixity” (Hawkins, 2010, p. 805). Richard Wentworth (born 1947) is an artist who works with material excess and creativity in everyday surroundings. “Seeing the world as Wentworth” does, according to Sachs Olsen, is to document how people place things and transcend their original function by utilising them as quick fixes to solve immediate practical and everyday problems, like using a rubber boot as a doorstopper (Sachs Olsen, 2019, pp. 49-50). Wentworth’s photographic series *Making Do and Getting by* (Wentworth & Obrist, 2015) is an example of how “objects are never neutral” but “take on multiple meanings as they

become part of various social practices in which we use a myriad of means to create new roles, to redefine existing ones, and to deny the existence of others” (Sachs Olsen, 2019, p. 52).

Yngve Holen (born 1982) is another artist whose work expresses a sensibility for the growing intertwining between human bodies and things (the goods). In his work the things define us as much as we define them (Kunstneres Hus, n.d.). Holen’s works reflect how the boundaries between things and us constantly move, expand and stretch. In his work, everyday objects such as kettles and water coolers are subjected to clinical dissection and split in two. This enables us to study the inside of familiar things; headlights take on anthropomorphic qualities, and kettles become futuristic portals into new realities (Kunstneres Hus, n.d.). This rather violent molestation of ordinary object points towards something that is also important to my research: the well known phenomenon in art called defamiliarisation (making things strange again). Defamiliarisation as a term was introduced by the Russian formalist Shklovsky, who believed that “over time our perceptions of familiar, everyday situations become obsolete, and that art can address this automatization by forcing us to slow down our perception, to linger and notice” (Gurevitch, 1998 in Mannay, 2010, p. 96). When Holen presents us with familiar everyday things, he succeeds in accentuating both the recognisable and the strange at the same time, and thereby forcing our perceptions into play with our expectations, which creates new forms of curiosity about what already is. Sachs Olsen argues that “art has the potential to call into question established classifications that are based on the apparent naturalness of dominant values and definitions” (Sachs Olsen, 2019, p. 7). This potential to question different kinds of “naturalness” is valuable and inspirational in the context of my teaching and defamiliarisation as a concept helps me to describe some of the aims in my a/r/tographing.

To slow down our perception, to linger and notice, corresponds with Ingold’s concept of dwelling; dwelling stands in contrast to the ideas of efficiency and production of knowledge which in many situations are dominant in design education. One way of achieving these states, or modes, is described by Ingold in an inspiring way when he urges us to try to “participate from the inside in the world’s ceaseless creations of itself” (Ingold, 2021, p. 28).

However, my experience is that introducing and cultivating such thinking can also lead to uncertainty and conflicting interests among students. In the research, I have experienced that it can be challenging to engage the students in open and artistic approaches and cultivate different sensitivities to creating. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, my research and teaching experiments led to confrontations with topics and implications that I had not known beforehand, such as feelings of failure, abandonment and vulnerability, in both students and myself as an artist/teacher/researcher. In the next paragraph I elaborate how I engaged with this in the thesis.

4.3 Abandoned ideas and failure in education and research

To be a teacher also involves incarnating social processes. According to Giroux citing Freire, “educational institutions are hybridized spaces where everyday experiences are linked with the social gravity and material forces of institutional power” (Giroux, 2010, p. 719). To process something with the speed required by our educational systems also involves the imminent danger of collateral damage, of creating sharp-edged, destructive energies (Sjøvoll et al., 2020, p. 3).

In my research I have encountered some vulnerabilities related to both internal and external expectations and implicit demands for certain ways of measuring value and results in education. Experience of this sometimes leads students to abandon or postpone ideas, to leave their hopes and dreams of exploring in other ways.

The daily brutality of the education world is little discussed; students are trained to deal with hurt and shame and to let go of things they love and believe in without allowing it to show. Through the work with abandoned ideas and failure I was introduced to a book that became important for the way the research in this thesis developed: *The Queer Art of Failure* by Halberstam (2011). The book engages with the measures for success and failure in complex and interesting ways and proposes “other modes of political engagement than those conjured by the liberal imagination” (Halberstam, 2011, p. 10). This has an important relevance for my exploration of students’ abandoned ideas. Halberstam puts forwards failure and undoing as a possible productive space (or method) for critiquing and finding other, more creative ways of

being in the world. The inclusion of confusion and getting lost in the dissemination of research was recognisable to me. Halberstam suggests that including such detours and experiences can lead to new and different types of knowledge in comparison with more traditional ways. Further development of this suggests a notion of a theory that works on many levels at the same time, an inclusive and attentive low theory in contrast to a more abstract high theory: a knowledge that seeks not to explain but to involve and that reveals the detours and twists and turns through knowing and confusion (Halberstam, 2011, p. 15). I relate this to forms of knowledge that come through the senses, the body and the material world; knowledge that comes from play and experimentation. "Foucault calls them 'naive knowledges, hierarchically inferior knowledges, knowledges that are below the required level of erudition or scientificity' this is what we mean by knowledge from below" (Halberstam, 2011, p. 11). The naivety that Foucault suggests connects these knowledges to homeless forms of knowledge, knowledge that does not belong in research; they are a kind of surplus emanating from the ground, from below. This connects them to forms of knowledge that are circumstantial, accidental, not planned, but events and things we stumble over during our attempts to do proper things in the right manner or when we are out on what Halberstam calls 'Benja-minian' strolls³⁰:

Again, we might consider the utility of getting lost over finding our way, and so we should conjure a Benja-minian stroll or a situationist *derivé*, an ambulatory journey through the unplanned, the unexpected, the improvised, and the surprising (Halberstam, 2011, p. 15).

This quotation makes me smile; I think the lucid attitude, the leeway and detachment and sensuousness it proposes is valuable. Indeed, it works well as a transition (or a line that forms in the meshwork) towards the next topic that has proved important for my work as a teacher and my explorations of students' working processes in this thesis. Play and playfulness was to some extent the first concept I connected with at the start of my research and in my observations write about the making and unmaking processes in which I was interested. In the next paragraph I explicate how this has affected my research process.

³⁰ Halberstam is referring to Walter Benjamin and his use of the concept of the urban explorer or a flaneur in the *Arcades Project*. Benja-minian strolls can be described as making social and aesthetic observations during long walks through a city.

4.4 Play

At the initial stage of the work on my thesis and the article “The stool that became a tree: Reflecting on a collaborative student project in design education” (2022), I was interested in exploring play and playfulness as an approach in design education. The definitions of play and playfulness are many, but one of the central qualities and premises for play that I would like to stress is that the playful mindset is “defined by doing things for the sake of doing them, not for an external goal” (Stenros, 2015, p. 216). Many other writers have also written about this aspect of play (Caillois, 2001; Huizinga, 1971; Suits, 2014; Sutton-Smith, 2009). Play is not a fixed position; playfulness does not occur on demand, it happens. Winnicott’s perspective on play is connected to a tradition that makes no clear divisions between play and work. Play in his view is not limited to something children do or merely recreational activities for grown-ups. Play is also liberating and productive and has an integral role in processes of personal development and learning and for creativity. For Gadamer, play was an important concept that relates to understanding and engagement:

It is in the concept of play (Spiel) that we find the key (for genuine human engagement in which true dialogue and understanding can be achieved) in Gadamer’s philosophy, to understanding how we must ‘approach’ the other for dialogue to be a fruitful and transformative event, in which interlocutors truly communicate with each other and develop a higher shared grasp at the subject matter at hand (Vilhauer, 2013, p. 75).

This description offers a good explanation of why play is, or at least should be, an important part of education and research.

Play is in this thesis understood as a dimension that feeds and expresses itself in art, in design, in nature and in people’s lives. It is especially Winnicott’s ideas on play that have remained with me during the work on this thesis. In his book *Playing and reality*, Winnicott writes: “It is creative apperception more than anything else that makes the individual feel like life is worth living” (Winnicott, 2005, p. 65). To relate to external realities ruled by compliance forms a world “only as something to be fitted in with or demanding adaptation”, that creates “a sense of futility for the individual” that can result in “the idea that nothing matters, and that life is not worth living” (p. 65). For Winnicott, to be able to recognise something of yourself in what we do is what gives direction and meaning to our lives. This makes up for a potential space

where the known (external) and the unknown (internal) can play, merge, and thus offer a leeway between imagination and reality. Making space for play is important for my position as an a/r/tographer. As a teacher, I try to facilitate situations for play to occur; as a researcher, my aim is to remain flexible and open to new thoughts and ideas; and as an artist, I often start my processes with a kind of active awareness without specific goals or ends in mind, allowing one event to lead to another, creating spaces for playful curiosity. To succeed (success in this regard is always provisional) in making these potential spaces, delicate negotiation is required, balancing care, failure and trust. Most importantly, for creative play to occur, it needs a space that can “afford opportunity for formless experience, and for creative impulses, motor and sensory, which are the stuff of playing” (Winnicott, 2005, p. 64). “The stuff of playing” is connected to something that can be irrational, intuitive, searching, questionable and often disturbing. Play can also be – as every child knows – vicious, deep, dangerous, subversive and critical (Flanagan, 2009; Jørgensen, 2014; Stenros, 2015). Flanagan’s concepts of critical play and unplaying speak to the critical potentials that play can instigate. A space for play also makes the chance of failure less threatening and stiffening. Sometimes play is about tracing and balancing borders or lines, stepping on lines or outside/inside/between lines, finding paths and making new routes. Play, in my view, might be essential to critique and subvert some of the linear and non-sustainable educational ways of thinking and doing in design education. It is Flanagan’s concept of critical play, together with Winnicott’s concept of the potential space and creative apperception, that I have drawn on in this thesis. I have used their insights in article 1. In the later articles, my terminology has turned more towards the performative, new materialism and artistic processes. Nevertheless, the concepts of play continue to have crucial roles, offering important distinctions, qualities and implications as to how we might think about education and creating. Vilhauer (2013) enables us to understand how we must ‘approach’ the other for a dialogue to be a fruitful and transformative event.

4.5 Possibilities and closures

In this chapter I have presented the theory and concepts that I have engaged with in the different articles and, overall, in the thesis. The relevance of the concepts emerges when they

are put to work. The concept of meshwork provides opportunities to trace and explain how different planes can cross and affect each other and offers further directions the thinking and research might take: different planes, whether structural, individual, imaginative or human, and non-human entities; different roles: how the roles of artist, researcher, and teacher, student move towards each other, drift apart, cross paths or entangle in knots for a while. In this presentation of interlacing lines, my intent is to follow the events and the processes in the research. Meshwork as a concept does not explain how or why different planes may or may not entangle. The actual meshwork needs to engage with other concepts and events to become alive.

Central to the notion of creating that I propose is the premise that imagination is not understood as an activity solely from the inside of the mind but rather as an activity that responds to, and is shaped by, dialogue and in relation with things, materials and environments (Ingold, 2021). Since all things constantly change, questioning and finding different approaches can offer new and more relevant understanding of what it means to execute a profession: to be an artist, designer, teacher or researcher. Here my reference is not to specific methods or theories, but to attitudes, frames of mind, sensitivities and openness combined with transparency, in addition to willingness to participate in dialogues that include a wider range of stakeholders.

The a/r/tographing approach draws on a practice-led and performative research derived from interaction between the known and the unknown other that shapes a plurivocal potential and celebrates multiple construed realities (Haseman, 2006, p. 103-104). In my work as a teacher and researcher, I engage with students, processes, meanings, and values in an educational context, but also with non-human entities like things and materials (Springgay, 2021). The educational situation and the environment where the research takes place play a significant role in the research events in this thesis.

No theoretical or methodological approaches, no matter how critical of power they may otherwise be, may be able to dissolve the significant differences between teacher and student, the researcher and what is being researched. A naive attitude towards the uneven distribution of power can be destructive to the credibility of any project. As I determined in

the “Approaches” chapter, it is critical to remember that I, as a teacher and researcher, have a privileged position with a certain power. Power, according to Gerrard et al., “pervades the creation of particular subjects, and the creation of these subjects has powerful effects” (Gerrard et al., 2017, p. 385). My research creates both opportunities and closures; it closes around how well I can trace different lines that emerge, how well I can account for how my wishful interpretations and hopes might suppress other experiences and interpretations or make them disappear. The inclusion of the non-human is a fragile and speculative endeavour and the immersion, tension, friction, anxiety, strain, and quivering unease of doing research differently needs attention (Springgay, 2021, p. 204). I have laid out how the environment that my research is enmeshed in might be described as multiple ongoing relations, events and changes. In doing so, I have tried to pay careful attention to the complex socially construed ways reality is framed. Such attention is not about looking closer or harder; instead it is an attempt to look differently, towards a complex middle where different forces entangle. My research questions explore what might or might not count as ‘knowledge’ in design education and design research. Critical approaches are valuable because they question established practices or lines of thought about things and values that we often take for granted. The best questions are those that are probing, tentative attempts to give place and attention to things that do not easily allow themselves to be categorised, and that question things and events that do not easily lend themselves to the written language at all.

4.6 Chapter summary

I begin this chapter by describing the environment where my research took place to make visible the various effects that this environment has had on the research process. I start with the situation I am in, in the middle of the things I am enmeshed in, with things I have at hand. The second section reflects on one of the main concerns in this thesis, which is how to cultivate other perspectives and different sensitivities to making and creating in design education. Doing this also involves exploring how, and whether it is possible, to consider design more as an ecological process or a continuation of processes already active in the world, and a shift away from simply thinking of creativity as always adding something new to a variety of different engagements. The third section focuses on experiential entanglements,

material vitality and how things and materials can be considered as active partners in creating and making if we let it happen. The following section discusses feelings of failure and vulnerability in the processes of the students' design and my research. Further, it discusses failure and undoing as a possible productive space for critiquing and finding new ways of working. The fifth section elaborates on how the concept of play and a playful mindset has influenced the research process—mainly focusing on Flanagan's concept of critical play, together with Winnicott's concept of the potential space and creative apperception. The last section revisits some of the concepts engaged with in my research and reflects critically on problematic issues, regarding hierarchical structures between teacher and student, and between researcher and what is being researched. In the following chapter, I will lay out how, in different ways, the articles explore and engage with the concepts addressed in the research, and discuss how they inform and relate to the overarching research questions in the thesis.

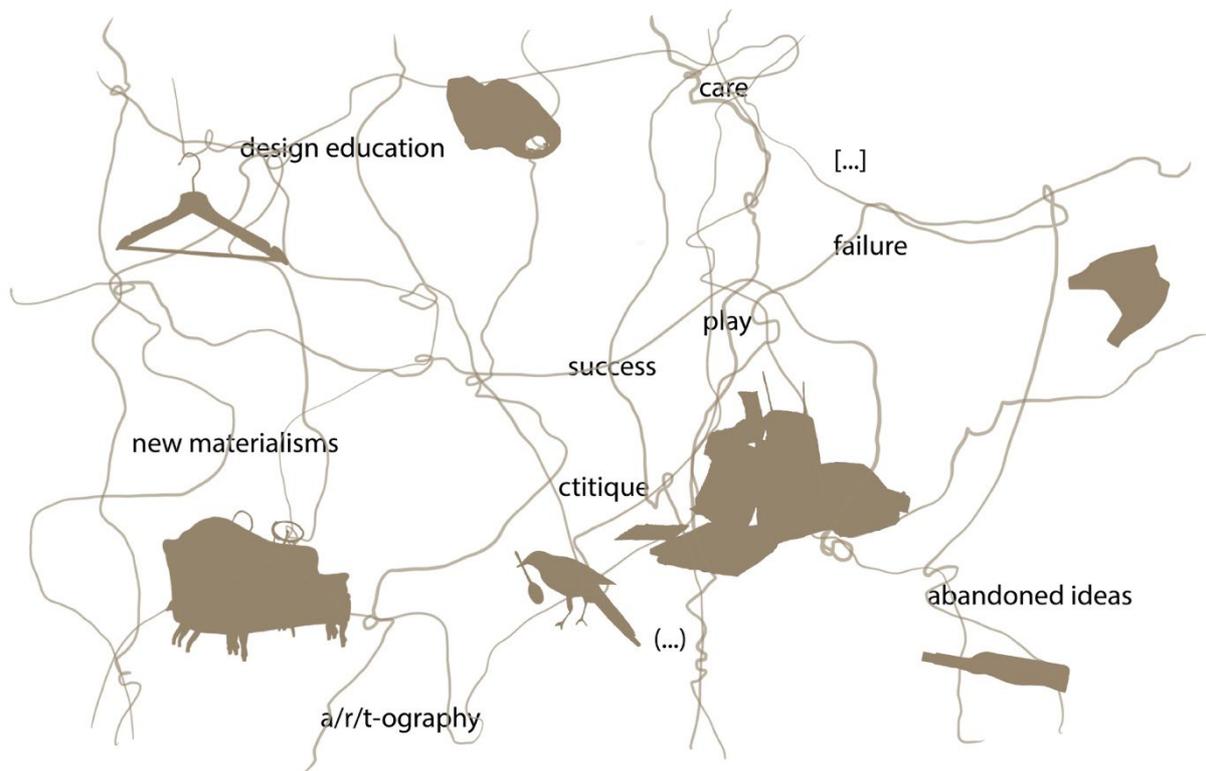
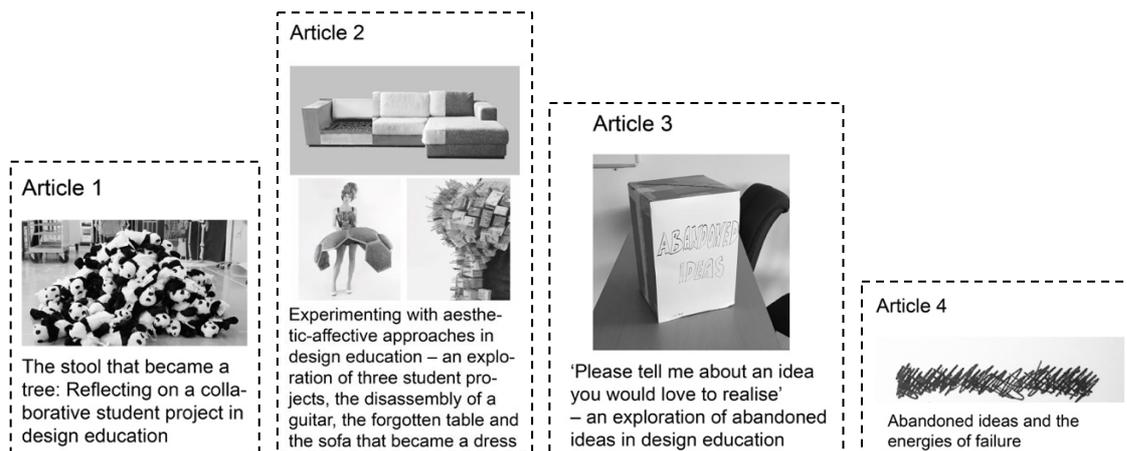


Figure 7. 2/3 illustrations of the research process. Lines that entangle and connect different aspects of the research process.

5 Emerging discussion in revisiting the articles

In this chapter I revisit some of the discussions and findings from the articles, where the article format allows no room for elaboration.

5.1 Revisiting the 4 articles



In the first section I introduce and explicate the main findings in the 4 articles and explain how these relate to the overarching research questions and aims of the thesis. The original publications provide a more detailed account of the research findings.

5.1.1 The stool that became a tree: reflecting on a collaborative student project in design education

Article 1 relates mainly to the first research question in this thesis, which addresses ambivalences in the goals of design education. The program descriptions of design education at Oslo Metropolitan University articulate goals of learning to become creative while also being market-oriented. These goals, which to date can be said to have been fairly uncontroversial, can be perceived to be at odds with program formulations that thematise the need to think ecologically, in a nature-friendly and sustainable way. The article explores a student project which experimented with creative and critical potential in artistic and playful approaches to design.

The research approach in this article combined methods such as practice-led research with students, and photo-elicitation interviews and autoethnographic writing. An example in the article is a three-day workshop with plush pandas that demonstrates that the playful workshop assignment can be understood as an example of critical play. Critical play is a concept introduced by Flanagan (2009) which articulates the acts and effects of rewriting, reskinning and unplaying. The examples from the students' work are discussed considering these different dimensions of critical play and how they materialise in the students' work.

Play and students' creative apperceptions are further discussed as a mix of subjective and objective experiences and creative impulses, drawing on some of Winnicott's work. The article also thematises how play and playfulness are not a constant, as tangible qualities that can be controlled, but rather are states that come and go. Play may or may not occur, and might need to be carefully negotiated.

The key question the article explores is: What are the possibilities for cultivating critical, creative, artistic and ethical thinking in collaboration with a major corporation? The primary student assignment, which forms the main part of the empirical material, involved the transformation of an existing Ikea product into new forms, ideas, expressions and functions. The framework for this assignment was that the students were not allowed to use any other material than the constituents of their product (apart from nails, screws, or glue for assembly). This combination of constraints and open-endedness to what the students were allowed to do with the product elicited many different approaches, each of them linked to the students' subjectivities. The array of differences and variations emerged from the same premises – a single product – and offered a range of material sensibilities. The students explored and pushed the materials' limits, properties and conventions, like modifying something static into something flexible or making a stool into a tree. The reversal of the process (the attempt to return the stool into something that resembled a tree) reminded me of the destruction (of nature) that lurks behind the mass production of new products. The processes and results of the project connects with the practice of critical design, a design which asks questions, provokes and "interrogates its own conditions of production and display, i.e., institutional critique" (Haylock, 2019, p. 19). The critical dimensions are

connected both to the materials – their inherent limitations and possibilities – and to the embodied subjective working processes of design. However, one of the most interesting findings from this project is - perhaps not surprisingly - that being exhibited under the auspices of a large and well known company probably weakened the project's critical potential or made it less visible. This shows that projects like this may result in celebrating the order of things they aim to critically reflect upon. This may reflect some of the ambivalences in the goals of design education that I mention at the start of this section. If I undertake a similar project in the future, I will aim to have more focus on the critical dimensions of creativity and play that were indeed at the core of this project.

5.1.2 Experimenting with aesthetic-affective openness to vital materiality in design education – an exploration of three student projects: ‘the disassembly of a guitar’, ‘the forgotten table’ and ‘the sofa that became a dress’ (Article 2)

Article 2 explores the possibilities for cultivating and giving space to artistic, open-ended processes in design education. The article proposes perspectives to designing that explore creating as ongoing dialogues with the vitality of things and materials. The article also discusses issues of uncertainty and vulnerabilities that emerged in the student processes.

The methods in the article draw on practice-led research in education. The article also includes an investigation of the students' project reports where they documented their working processes. These reports consist of written text, visualisations of processes, drawings, renderings or photographs of different tests, models, and results. The teaching experiment I explored with the students was a practical aesthetic and sensory involvement inspired by artistic approaches. The students worked with practical observational engagements and experienced the properties of things and materials through interacting with them. As a design approach, this was not first and foremost an outcome-oriented or a problem-solving approach but rather an approach “seeking to engage with new modes of interrogating the existent” (Marenko, 2019, p. 48).

Simply put, the teaching experiment described in the article was about what would happen if we looked at things that have become redundant or unwanted as something potentially active and valuable to us. This was explored by introducing redundant and discarded things as material in a design education setting. The guiding question was: What are the possibilities and challenges in cultivating an aesthetic-affective openness to material vitality in a teaching experiment in design education using discarded things? The approach was inspired by my engaging with materials as an artist working with sculptures. The article discusses such approaches in relation to emerging theories on material vitality and affective-aesthetic openness (Bennett, 2010). These concepts expand and unsettle the perception of how things and materials can affect us. The hope is that such explorations can motivate a change in the way we approach making and creating processes in art and design.

The assignment presented in article 2 was framed similarly to the Ikea assignment presented in article 1. The students had one item (table, sofa, or guitar) to work with; this was their only material resource in the project. One significant difference this time was that the item the students worked with had a previous life; it had been used and later discarded or put aside. This offered opportunities to speculate about the item's previous use and wonder why it had been discarded. Such speculations relate to cultural dimensions of things and materials that can activate other aspects and sensitivities in the students' design processes.

The student projects showed complex and sensitive engagements that complicated and enriched the design processes by allowing space for the uncertain and ambiguous. A range of sensibilities was present in the attentive and affective care the students demonstrated for the things they worked with. The discarded and unwanted things became something active and meaningful in these students' projects, and the students' engagements with them showed the things' potential to guide and teach them. In this way, the teaching experiment facilitated possibilities for cultivating new and different approaches to creating in design education.

However, the research in this article also revealed some problematic or precarious aspects of openness. Entering open-ended processes is not without risks. For design students trained to deliver results in an educational system that expects and evaluates results, the risks inherent in the open-ended can be stifling. The lack of expectations of a traditional outcome can cause

discomfort and profound insecurity. Students are still novices and cannot be expected to navigate risks and mistakes in the same way as professional artists or designers. (Risk and failure in design education are topics in article 3). Recognising this led me to reconsider my thoughts on the relationship between openness and structure. It made me realise that pursuing projects like this depends on different kinds of support. Such support could perhaps also be achieved if the project, from the start, was more collaborative. So instead, in a later project I could perhaps explore the potential that assemblies of several things and cooperation among several students can offer: an accidental combination of several items for groups of students working together. That would stimulate dialogues, sharing and swapping parts and materials from the things they had. I imagine that such an approach could help to create even more playful energy, more leeway and less rigidity. Such a more 'crowded space' could be helpful in the difficult transition from a state of habitual compliance with expectations and conformity with the outside world towards a freer, more unruly unfolding of making and creating that may challenge and develop established educational structures.

5.1.3 'Please tell me about an idea you would love to realise' – an exploration of abandoned ideas in design education (Article 3)

Article 3 reflects research question number one (about what students' thoughts, actions, work processes and products tell us about ambivalences in relation to both implicit and explicit goals for design education), but it is first and foremost an article that thematises research question number two in the thesis, that is: How can we explore and know more about which ideas (working methods, processes, thoughts, products, opportunities) are allowed to live on and which ones are perceived in design education as impossible, naïve, stupid, and too unrealistic?

The article is about a case study within a master's class in design education and investigates how things, widely understood, work in a particular situation (Stake, 2010, p. 10). The study involves multiple sources of information (e.g., written replies, interviews, and audio-visual material). The investigation explores what is not being done, abandoned ideas, events that did not unfold and information that was not intended to be shared. In this way the approach in this article is counterintuitive (Tracy, 2010, p. 840). The aim was to conduct a critical

exploration that could bring to the fore some of the (hidden) regulations to which students are subjected, thus exposing how the educational system and teachers like myself affect the students' sense of freedom and their ability to experiment with their ideas.

The analyses problematise the notion of risk taking in the students' design processes. Whereas professional artists and designers often develop ways to be able to "use" mistakes and failures in productive ways (Greene et al., 2018, p. 140), students who are still novices might not be able to handle risk in the same way. Risk taking is often described and almost naturalised or sanitised in descriptions of design processes, but this analysis exposes the dangers and fearful sides that cannot be smoothed over. Emotions and affects are strong dimensions of failure, but they are "rarely discussed or worked with productively" (Whittle et al., 2020, p. 1). The constant, obligatory stream of everyday educational events can, slowly and undramatically, lay open the students to the danger of losing contact with, or even renouncing, their initial hopes, desires and plans. The students, it seems, try to adapt to their role by navigating the culture of the educational situation, and by doing this, they are faced with the risk of being bereaved of their initial hopes and motivations. They abandon the unarticulated, the unfinished, the unclear, the vague and the fumbling (Sjøvoll et al., 2020). This is problematic since openness for ambiguity (uncertainty, multiple meanings) is emphasised as a valued part of the creative curricula that we present to them (Orr & Shreeve, 2017, p. 13). The article exposes some of the students' vulnerability and dependence on understanding and operating within given frameworks in education, and the effects this can have.

The article attempts to open the way for gentler and more inclusive practices regarding the kinds of ideas and dreams that are considered valuable in design education.

It is very difficult to resist processes such as the abandoning of ideas if we cannot understand where they come from or what or who is enacting them. To care about abandoned ideas is the other concept that is explored in the analyses. To care about the ideas that we abandon can have transforming effects in our daily activities, as teachers, students and everywhere else; to care for the things we tend to forget can serve as a catalyst for exposing other neglected experiences and practices too.

The article presents a single study with a small selection of students; repeating it in a similar context with other students would have given opportunities to explore variations in the students' experiences, like the effects of working alone vs. working in groups. Further research could explore and recognise the 'who' and the 'what' behind the tendencies to abandon our ideas and hopes. The work with this article has made me more aware of my role in strengthening the students' ownership of their aspirations and thereby making a constructive contribution to the ongoing negotiations about what good design education should be.

5.1.4 Abandoned ideas and the energies of failure (Article 4)

Article 4 is written in collaboration with my fellow PhD candidate (at the time of the article's writing) Geir Grothen and my PhD supervisor Professor Lars Frers. It was the first article to be published and thematises the devastating feeling of failure that I experienced when struggling to become a researcher. The opening to write about this topic was offered to me and my co-authors through our participation in a session called "Reclaiming Failure in geography: academic honesty in a neoliberal world" at the annual Royal Geographical Society conference in Wales (2018). This led to an invitation to a special issue of *Emotion, Space and Society*. This special issue was based around the topic of academic failure (Davies et al., 2021). This gave us a chance to reflect on and share experiences and feelings from our careers and lives. The writing showed some very interesting similarities between the three of us: we all shared experiences of being vulnerable, insecure, and shameful, but we also found mutual ground in our attempts to think; write; and use our own voices, experiences, and backgrounds. The setting gave us an opportunity to explore a new topic and to experiment with different ways of writing in an academic setting. We wrote vignettes that some called poetic – which we saw as an indication of them being different – and we thematised issues that usually go unmentioned or unnoticed. The experience was liberating, hopeful and very educating for me as a novice in the academic world, and I hope that it can have a similar effect on others that read it. In my part I reflect on some of the students' responses to the questions and conversations about abandoned ideas. Some of the apparently mundane and everyday experiences of being a student, like seemingly harmless corrections from teachers or the

hidden – soft, obvious, unnoticeable – expectations, affect them in ways that it is easy to fail to notice. In the article I relate this to my own experiences of being a student, an artist and a teacher/researcher. The writing of this article made me more aware and critical of the structures that guide and influence us and that sometimes make us ignore and abandon important aspects of our work. We do what we must to fit in and gain acceptance and recognition within already existing frameworks. Working with these topics inspired me to try out more inclusive, experimental ways of writing and practising research.

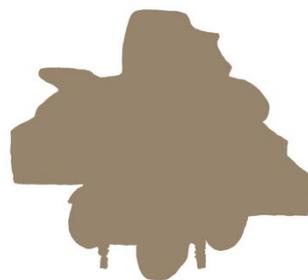
To collect abandoned ideas was at first a small and perhaps strange idea. It was aimed at telling stories through things that did not happen, by listening to silent voices. I think it is, as Scott says in her “Researching underwater: a submerged story”; “nothing” is also productive. Negative social phenomena, “no-things, no-bodies, [and] non-events” lead to “somethings, somebodies and somewhere that are made instead” (Scott, 2019, p. 79; Sjøvoll et al., 2020, p. 3). Exploring abandoned ideas set different things in motion, not only materials and things but also individual experiences, feelings of loss and abandonment. It made my research take an unexpected turn and I became a different researcher because of it: something else took place, something else was made, that I had not realised before.

“To research often means to confront oneself” (emerald & Carpenter, 2015, pp. 746-747; Sjøvoll et al., 2020, p. 2), and such confrontations often create tension. This became an implicit part of my autoethnographic approach. I asked the students to write down and share stories with me about design ideas and projects that they had wanted to realise, but which they had decided not to follow up. I also asked them to say why they had abandoned ideas or were not trying them out. This was an attempt to gain insight into how the students adapt to what they perceive as expectations and whether they feel they have the opportunity to experiment and think freely about how they want to work with design. The students’ mix of rationality, compliance and sense of loss evoked my memories of abandoning, and of being abandoned. The evidence of the drama and turmoil that teachers’ comments and other ordinary actions can produce, has reminded me of how fragile motivation is, and how delicate and vulnerable the feelings of self-worth are, not only in students, but also in colleagues, and in people in general. The method of paying attention to the abandoned, focusing for a time

on the discarded, disclosed some often unnoticed sides of the learning environment I was in. It also gave space for resistance: noticing, remembering and caring for the fearful sides of the students and myself, the shame we are subjected to, the loneliness we sometimes suffer. Paying attention to, caring for abandoned ideas is a way of “counting what others don’t” (Mountz et al., 2015, p. 1250; Sjøvoll et al., 2020a, p. 4) and a way of giving space to that which does not fit, is neglected and often opposed within the present educational climate.

5.1.5 Summarising the 4 articles

In the 4 articles presented I have used different concepts and theories to explore and analyse the events with the students. I have also used descriptions of the design education programme at Oslo Metropolitan University to explore potential gaps between what it claims to do, what I as the teacher claim to do, and how this is practised and followed up with the students. Some discussion regarding the different concepts I have explored like play, affordance, aesthetic-affective openness to material vitality and arts-based methods have emerged and in the next chapter I discuss these further to trace connections and differences thematised in the articles.



5.2 Emerging discussions

The format of the 'kappe' allows both for clarifying some of the findings presented in the articles and, moreover, for discussing them in a wider context, first and foremost in relation to the theoretical concepts I have introduced and experimented with in my attempts to make sense of 'the events on the ground', the events that took place within the projects with the students. The next part follows a similar structure as the sections above, following up on discussions that emerged in articles 1 to 4. I make this visible by putting the images of the relevant articles at the beginning of the sub-sections. I first return to the concepts of play and creativity, critical play, and material affordances. Thereafter I write about new materialism and arts-based research (a/r/tography) and discussions that emerged in article 2. The last part follows up on discussions that emerged in articles 3 and 4, concerning complicating and unravelling the relationship between success and failure.

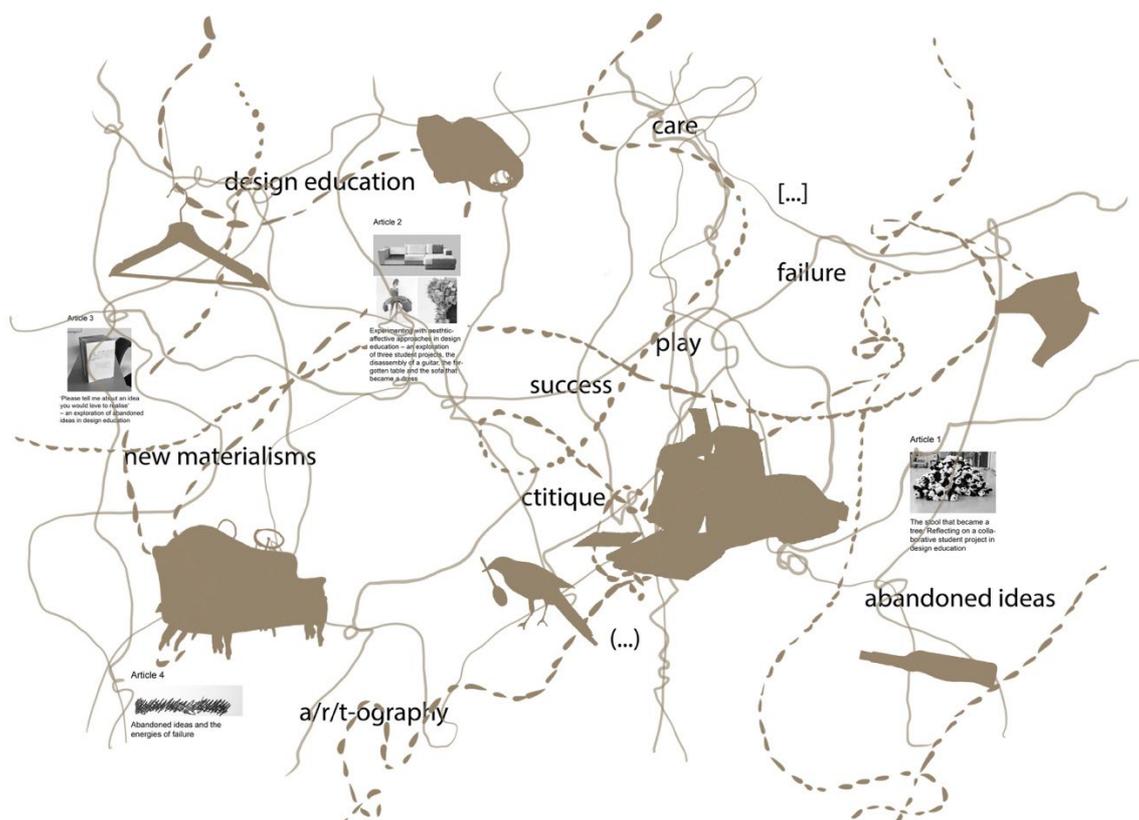


Figure 8. 3/3 illustrations of the research process. Visual vignettes of things piling up, plastic bags drifting or moving around, and a magpie with a spoon to visualise the non-human and unknown actors. Entangling lines and movements in-between concepts, environments, things, and the 4 articles.

Article 1

The stool that became a tree: Reflecting on a collaborative student project in design education

5.2.1 Play and playfulness as aesthetic exploration and freedom

In article 1 I explore, analyse and try to make sense of events in a design-educational setting with the help of the concepts of play, critical play and playing with material affordances. As I have already argued in the theory section in relation to Winnicott (2005) and others, the choice of these theoretical concepts is not random, they are the results of experiments with other concepts besides, such as for example more phenomenological approaches. Experimenting with concepts and theory consists in putting them to work, thinking and feeling in their extension, testing them out in relation to events, contexts, situations, or a material. I understand that I could have chosen differently and that other choices would have produced other results, or at least that other aspects of the situations I examine would have received more attention.

As article 1 demonstrates, play becomes relevant as it relates to a wide range of activities, and it introduces another dimension relating to the investigations into the students' projects. Considering that this is a project that concerns design education, some may wonder why I did not choose the term 'creativity' instead. The reasons may lie precisely there: 'creativity' is the obvious choice; it is a term that is in general use in education, the students know it, the teachers know it, and it is a central term in the course descriptions and learning outcomes, but it is used in many other contexts and situations.

The term 'sticky' from Orr & Shreeve (2017, p. 9) might be fitting; creativity has become a 'sticky' concept. This means that the term can be said to be weighed down by everything it connotes, by everything it is used for; the weight of all the connotations, and all kinds of use, make it difficult to use when attempting to look at something from another perspective. In

this context, the tendency of the concept of creativity to be linked to various forms of results and success (Bilton, 2014, p. 153) has also been decisive for me choosing 'play'; instead, my project attempts to investigate the students' working processes, not the results.

Play is another type of concept. It is also used in many contexts, in connection with children, in sports, in expressions such as playful behaviour and so on. The term play connotes a number of different things, but one thing it does not connote – not in the same way as creativity, at least – is specific outcomes, and it is precisely that difference that makes this concept so relevant in reflecting on the meaning of article 1 for this thesis as a whole. Play is a more open concept, a more undefined one. However, while being more open, it is also connected to something universal. Huizinga (1971) sees play as the element from which culture is derived: people play, play is social, play seems to be important for individual development. Incidentally, it can look as if animals play too, or at least we play with animals. In some ways, play can be said to be a broader concept than creativity.

Play is a general phenomenon, while the term creativity is perhaps best known as relating to the notion of individual talent (Bilton, 2014, p. 158). It is only in recent decades that creativity has increasingly been used in 'ordinary' production life and as a term for different types of behaviour and ideals in private life, whereas play is a more curious concept, and in my opinion more irrational, disturbing and open.

Play is considered an element for aesthetic exploration and freedom and as "a spur to creativity" (Sommer, 2014; Sutton-Smith, 2009, p. 7). For example, Dada artists were experts at appropriating spaces, objects, and the language of sociocultural production. This included playing with materials and language (Flanagan, 2009, p. 128). Looking at things from a strange or unusual angle, from a slightly removed space, yet connected to everyday life, is an idea that unites play, creativity, art, humour and science (Stenros, 2015, p. 89).

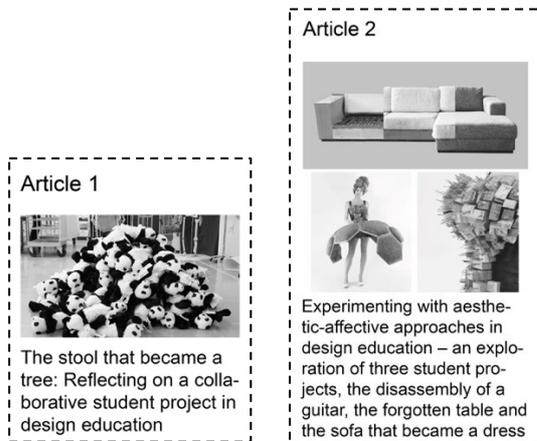
Of course, many academic definitions treat play as part of creativity, for example Csikszentmihalyi (1975) with his theory on flow that is a state when a person performs acts because they are intrinsically rewarding in a merging of action and awareness. Play is combined with the concept of creativity also by Winnicott who sees play as a creative

apperception and a premise for creative living. As argued in the theory section, for Winnicott play offers a transitional space between subjective inner drive and external realities that allows for creative apperception, development and feeling one's own life (Winnicott, 2012, p. 67). In this perspective play is not only about imagination or an activity in a separate space but rather a space of exploration in-between inner life and external realities.

In my work, both as a teacher and a researcher, the playing takes place within an educational context. Both the students and I are acting within situations that point towards different forms of change, and in this context this makes it necessary for me to look at play in the light of different perspectives, perhaps especially those that focus on the potential of play to initiate change.

Flanagan's (2009) concept of critical play is again of relevance when discussing play as a form of social activism, particularly in the context of contemporary design education. Flanagan draws on how artists and poets have used play and games to raise awareness and push for social change. Putting the term 'critical' in front of 'play' changes it and gives it a sense of direction and purpose. Play is no longer something that just happens or that may take any form or direction, it can both be liberating and disturb the state of things. The concept of critical play was useful in the analyses of the students' projects in article 1. My initial idea was, together with students, to interfere with and disrupt the prevailing notions of design as an element of an industrial production process. The students were given products to work with as material instead of materials to work with to make products. It was also a way to introduce to the students that anything can be material for creating new things, hoping this would induce them to look beyond the standard material in the workshops, in short to see the world as material, even if to them this might sound somewhat pompous. It was a playful and perhaps even a critically playful initiative on a small scale. The first time I did this, I certainly did not know how this would be received by the students, or what it would lead to. In the analysis, the term critical play made it possible for me to notice and point out events of unplaying, re-dressing or re-skinning and rewriting in the students' projects. Despite these traces of critical playfulness, the conclusion of the article was that the experiment failed to be critical in the way that I had hoped.

The potentials in critical play that have wider relevance for my thesis as a whole have emerged through my analysis, mostly related to material transformation of plush toys into strange new shapes, clothes and mutated animal shapes. The messiness of the whole event illustrated sensuous and imaginative engagements with the plush animals and the materials they consist of. A play with material affordances as well as cultural signifiers took place in these processes. Reflecting on this teaching experiment now, it seems that the framing of it using plush pandas (toys), and the constraints (rules for the workshop), steered the results in a certain play direction. However, whether the students had a playful mindset is not evident. They pushed limits and possibilities with the materials, but they did not push the rules or framework for the workshop. They might have been participating in playing of sorts without feeling playful or having a playful mindset (Stenros,2015, p. 69). This illustrates how problematic it is to use play as a method or request. Asking someone to be playful, especially if the roles between them are characterised by various forms of asymmetry, can fail, and the desired playfulness, which should ideally be experienced as something internal, can become something external, an imitation of what they think is the correct answer, or the right attitude. This illustrates the complex ideas surrounding play in design education and its complexity and irrational aspects that make it challenging to utilise.



5.2.2 Playing with affordances

Gibson claims that the fundamental function of perception is to pick up information about possible ways of acting in the environment. In other words, we look for affordances (Linderoth, 2011, p. 4). This makes affordances a concept that is relevant for design; how we experience the environment, what it makes us think, feel and do are central knowledge for designers (Cross, 2007; Curedale, 2013). For this thesis as a whole, it is fascinating to observe how the different things the students worked with afforded various engagements—whether they had a new product like a stool or plush toys from Ikea (article 1) or a discarded item like a sofa, table or guitar (article 2). The variation in how the students picked up or negotiated affordances and possibilities with the different materials was evident and varied in the project where the students were given the same product as a starting point. I show one example of this in the image below, where all the different things in the image are made from the same stool.



Figure 9. Photographs from one of the student projects in article 1. The stool in the centre is the material for all the different designs in the image. For more information see catalogues from the different years here: <https://vibekesjovoll.no/catalogues>

The ecological theory of perception and the concept of affordances has been helpful to me in the way that it introduces a concept of perception that is “unlike values and meanings” (Gibson, 2015, p. 121); they are properties taken with reference to the observer (a form of life), not only humans. They are “neither a subjective property nor an objective property” (p. 121). It is a theory that describes how the environment changes and affects how animals (human or non-human) act. Affordances are – as Gibson explains it – relational; affordances are relative to a form of life and they can invite action (Withagen & Costall, 2022, p. 506), just

as some trees invite me to climb in them and others invite different kinds of engagement. However, as Withagen & Costall points out, “we should not want the concept of affordances to capture all of the many dimensions of our experiencing the environment” (p. 506). Equal emphasis can be put upon expressive qualities and the aesthetic and cultural aspects; these dimensions are not mutually exclusive. Objects can be functional for sitting on, elegant, or poignant with memories, but equally can afford the opportunity to play hide and seek or other uses.

Gibson has received critique for refusing to accept that man-made affordances pose their own special theoretical questions. Costall addresses this critique in the book chapter “Canonical affordances and creative agency” (Costall, 2014). Costall argues that a distinction should be made between affordances in general and canonical affordances that relate to human artefacts (p. 45). In material culture meanings of things are often attributed to how they are represented either individually or culturally (p. 53). However, use meanings of things are regarded as primary (like shapes, colors, size) but the affordances of things are facts of the environments. In the thesis as a whole, I have adopted Costall’s distinctions, such as the canonical affordances of things and artefacts that relate to how they are experienced in a cultural context. As the research in articles 1 and 2 shows, material affordances relate to what possibilities a particular material or a certain amount of that material can offer in environments or situations, and that they vary. Hence, affordances can also be a resource for creative human agency (p. 47). For my research, affordance allows a nuanced analysis of things, materials and environments in the students’ design processes. However, the concept of affordance does not cover the whole spectre of experiences or perceptions, as Costall points out. The use of the concept of affordances cannot, on its own, unriddle what design students choose to do or choose not to do with materials, objects, or things.



5.2.3 Decentralised listening and being with new materialism and arts-based research

A/r/tography draws inspiration from poststructuralism, hermeneutics and phenomenology, but also perspectives from posthumanism (e.g. new materialisms), post-qualitative research and feminist theory (Irwin, 2008; Irwin et al., 2017; Springgay, 2021). In article 2, I refer to theorists of new materialisms to provide a basis for exploring the teaching experiment. However, new materialisms perspectives on arts-based research in education are also central for the thesis in its entirety. Therefore, in this section, I alternate between reflecting on the research in article 2 and the discussions that emerge concerning the thesis as a whole.

To describe material vitality and the non-human with words is difficult, as Lemke (2015) expresses: “linguistic or textual description is insufficient for an adequate understanding of the complex and dynamic interplay of meaning and matter” (p. 4). Sameshima et al. (2019) articulate that, “new materialism does not posit a blended style of thought or a single theoretical position, but rather encompasses an assemblage of different approaches and disciplinary perspectives” (p. 60). A new materialist approach might envision the process of writing and textual descriptions as having their origins in human interpretations that render materiality as static. This may mean that other ways of interacting with the world, such as artistic or multimodal, may be at least as well suited to the kinds of explorations thematised by Bennet and others. New materialist approaches “are referring to aspects of existence that in principle exceed our ability to capture them in a single set of representations because they are materially constituted through our inquiry processes”; things and materials are

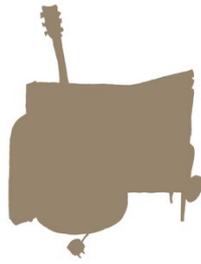
understood as moving between multiple modes of engagements (Rosiek, 2017, p. 640). The students have described and related to the things and materials they have worked with in different ways, stretching from technical qualities like hardness or strength of the material to aesthetic expressions like making the stiff wood look soft and flexible. In the projects with discarded and previously used things, use marks and the original design seemed to make the student pay attention to and write about the stories that the things carried with them – sometimes, they also expressed a hesitance towards deconstructing the item. Breaking up or disassembling it to make something new affected how they wrote about the design processes in the student reports. The concept of material vitality or vibrant matter expounded by Bennett (2010) proposes that materials and humans as actants³¹ simultaneously constructs what is understood, perceived and acknowledged (Sameshima et al., 2019, p. 45). However, such descriptions are not far from Ingold’s approach to which I have referred in several parts of this thesis, both in the extended abstract and in the articles. When Ingold proposes creating as to participate from the inside in the world’s ceaseless creations of itself, and – since we belong to the world – of ourselves as well (2021, p. 28), then he makes connections similar to those made in new materialisms. Bennett and others propose to decentralise or at least question humans’ role in the world and to challenge some of the “most basic assumptions that have underpinned the modern world” that put ourselves as humans and as creators at the centre (Coole & Frost, 2010, p. 4). This thinking is characterised by a strong ethical impulse, and it is precisely the ethical impulse in this that has had the greatest significance for my research. Such ethical considerations emerge in the students’ hesitance to break or disassemble a thing to make something new. Sensing the materials’ aliveness, knowing the agent in materials can “contribute to developing respect, humility, care and responsibility” (Frederiksen & Sørnum, 2021, p 168) in what students and, in turn designers do. Barad writes about this profoundly and essentially, and despite my not previously using her research directly, many of the researchers I have used do so, and here I include an excellent quotation:

³¹ Bennett (2010) provides a definition of an actant drawing on Bruno Latour (2004) as “a source of action that can be either human or nonhuman; it is that which has efficacy, can *do* [original emphasis] things, has sufficient coherence to make a difference, produce effects, alter the course of events” (p. viii).

Listening for the response of the other and an obligation to be responsive to the other, who is not entirely separate from what we call the self. This way of thinking ontology, epistemology, and ethics together makes for a world that is always already an ethical matter (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012, p. 69).

It became evident to me that careful and sensitive considerations were present in some of the students' projects that I return to soon. This concerns my position as a researcher too; the idea that through working with art and through inquiry, I am being changed, that I become entangled with events and materials that I do not necessarily understand poses a risk and puts me in a vulnerable position. Rosiek writes that to practise art involves the "cultivation of receptivity to a phenomenon or experience" (2017, p. 640). However, material provides resistance, it resists the students' or my efforts to impose form, (a kind of negotiation is needed), it does not merely take shape. Many materials are more stable than they seem to be.

In the student design processes with the table, sofa and the guitar that I write about in article 2, it was hard and time-consuming work to disassemble the things and reuse the materials. The material resists, then starts to change its physicality, the materiality pushes back or breaks. That is not all that is happening, however; in the middle, says Bennett, swarms of events are taking place. She asserts that an action is always an acting amidst, it is an additive to a multilayered ongoing process. This process involves actual entities, objects, things as well as virtual forces (Harvard GSD, 2021, Bennet pharaprased by me). The resistance of materials requires the development of particular habits in response to their texture and nature, and thus the materials also change the artist/student. Allowing this to take place, not withdrawing, not stopping, not cutting the connections which the processes open, requires a kind of existential courage, the courage to relinquish control (Rosiek, 2019. P. 644-645). In the students' projects that I have explored in this thesis many examples of such courage to let go of control have occurred in the early phases of the processes. For example, the project with the disassembly of the guitar, focused on in article 2, besides a curious openness in the approach, showed both the courage to interfere with the guitar, and ethical considerations.



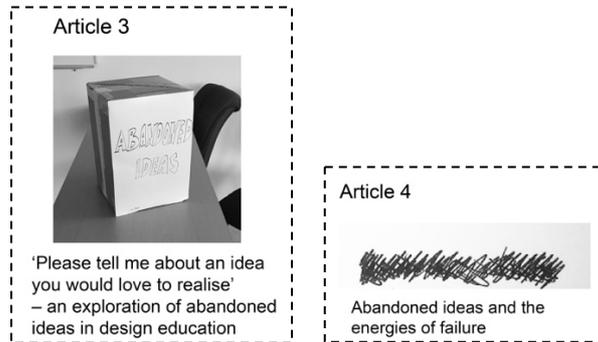
In the previous sections, I have presented theory and concepts that thematise the relationship between people and the world around them, often in a fundamental way. Such theory development also takes place within the field of design.

For decades the umbrella term 'human-centred design' has maintained the humanistic perspective in design. This is a design that seeks to focus on users, to make things better for humans, also often referred to as consumers. However, following Roudavski, who and what can be counted as users is open to question, besides what might constitute legitimate, desirable or sustainable 'use' (2019, p. 27). To use something or to be a user of things can have some outdated and exploitative connotations in the context of ecological relationships (p. 27). Following such lines of thought, as I have mentioned before, can give incentive to change how creating and creativity is understood; if we try to approach our environment and our materials in a manner of a dialogue and think about designing as re-structuring rather than merely adding something new this might create a change in the ontological status of design (p. 31).

In article 2 in this thesis, I explore Bennett's (2010) concept of aesthetic-affective openness to material vitality. The use of this concept in my research makes some of my thoughts about working with materials as an artist explicit in new ways, as I describe in the introduction: "my ideas were intimately connected to what the world has to offer". What the things, environments, materials and events offer relates to affects, to aesthetics but also to this other dimension of aliveness or animation (vitality) which I understand also as situated, cultural and relational qualities. In the students' projects I can distinguish some dimensions and sensitivities that include memories, storytelling, speculating and many of the senses in addition to sight, such as smell, touch, and listening. The discarded and unwanted things and materials evolved into something active and giving in the students' projects, and the students'

engagements with them showed their potential to teach us. Working with things that have already had a life and are not raw material, as the students and I did in the teaching experiment, seemed to offer rich, gentle, careful and affective-aesthetic design processes. Such sensibilities were present in the attentive and affective care the students showed for the things they worked with – at least if compared to more linear or more effective and traditional ways of working with material in our design education.

This perspective suggests educational philosophies and aesthetic processes that offer a wider understanding of ‘what is’ and what ‘becomes’ as something unfinished and prone to change; temporal qualities, and experiences of creating and uncreating. Performativity is relevant both for the general understanding of what I study in this thesis but also how I go about studying it. Perspectives and theories about performativity, new materialisms and situated perspective have become increasingly important for me during my research process. I want to continue exploring such engagements with the students and in my research. I believe it can enhance our understanding of things and artefacts as continuously invented and performed through social and cultural practices.



5.2.4 Success according to established ways of thinking might be failure as measured by emerging ones

One of the most interesting problems I have encountered in working on the thesis (mostly when doing the explorations in article 3 and 4) that goes beyond the individual articles, is the relationship between success and failure. Often these are treated as two conditions at opposite ends of a scale. My research with the students has shown me that it is more complex. The relationship between success and failure is a relationship characterised by dissonance, complications and disturbances. However, these dissonances and disturbances are only thematised to a very modest extent; when my students discussed failure in article 3, they saw it as a step toward success. The students reflected on and seemed to appreciate that making mistakes and failing is an essential element of the iterative, creative and innovative processes (Choi et al., 2019, p. 74; Sawyer, 2018).

However, beyond this point, there emerges an interesting and necessary discussion about what and who decides what 'success' is. It may be the understanding of what constitutes success that represents the most interesting problem in this context: error, or the act of failing, is an infinite quantity; one can imagine that it is possible to fail in endless ways. Success, or ending up with the 'solution' - we may suppose - is linked to a limited number of answers related to established criteria. Nevertheless, it is possible to think that many of the problems of our time are connected to an unmatched series of what we have perceived as successes. An excellent example of this may be the use of plastic for more and more products; this seemingly perfect material, lightweight, flexible, durable and inexpensive, possible to use for almost everything, has created a myriad of almost insurmountable

problems, from ending up as particles in our bloodstreams to piling up along beaches, suffocating birds and fish, and being critically indestructible.

It may be that our understanding of success is what needs to be contemplated. The criteria for success might be too simple; we are acquiring more and more knowledge that makes it problematic to think about the relationship between failure and success by using established criteria. Things and designs that are perfectly functional and attractive as measured by established ways of thinking may be disastrous failings by emerging ones. By all accounts, measuring things against our own short individual lives is not sufficient. To include life other than the human entails a long-term commitment to the world that the anthropocentric is unable to fulfill.

To rethink success should involve a shift and a movement towards decentralising humans' role in deciding what success is—a rethinking of success for whom, what and at what time. Success in the future might be very different and something as yet unknown. In my research, such thinking is made evident through perspectives from Ingold, new materialism and post-humanism that assert that we inhabit a world of more than humans. Such perspectives propose a decentralising of humans' role in the world and to see others, human or non-human, the materials in our surroundings, as alive and vibrant, as partners, not as materials that we can refine into something for us to consume, possess, or trade. This would mean thinking of creation as a kind of dialogue, a listening-in to, with care and sensitivity, and joining with and attending to the formative processes already going on, as Roudavski (2019) concludes.

Thinking along these lines also challenges the roles of teacher and researcher: what constitutes knowledge should perhaps also be less human centred. From such a perspective, knowledge is always in a state of becoming; to teach and research cannot be anything but a joint, ongoing activity, not something that an individual does towards and in relation to something placed outside Ingold writes that. this would require inquiry into new ways of attending to the world around us. For my practice and research that would include inquiring into the relation between art, life, the role of teaching and the craft of writing.

The writing of this thesis has made me aware, and more critical of the structures that guide and influence me and that sometimes have made me ignore and abandon important aspects of my work, as I write with my co-authors in article 4. For a long time, as long as I can remember, I have already been taking care to do the things I have to do in ways that suit the contexts in which they have to function. That is probably how I have sought acceptance and recognition. However, I am also well aware that without others, all the humans involved on different levels, all the things and materials, the places and the events, this research could not have happened. It is regrettable that I had not realised even earlier that I should have been less concerned with becoming an individual researcher and let ‘the others’ play an even more important role than I have allowed them in this work. It would have been preferable to have done more of the kind of work I did together with others writing article 4, attending to what researchers – or those trying to become researchers – experience they must leave behind, change, abandon or postpone. In this article, my supervisor, and my colleague and at the time fellow PhD student and I, thematise how difficult and painful it is to find out and navigate what fits in, what belongs to the academic genre and what falls outside or is condemned to the peripheries, an outside.

5.3 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have revisited some emerging discussions from the articles, the format of which lacks room for elaboration. By returning to the articles and seeing them together, I draw some lines between them and connect them to the main research questions and the thesis in its entirety. Play and playfulness as aesthetic explorations, and freedom and the relationships between concepts of creativity and play became explicit. I argue for the concept of playing with affordances in relation to creative agency and how this concept has informed my inquiries into the students’ working processes. Then there follows a discussion on perspectives of new materialism and material vitality and how these theories question and change some fundamental ideas about our relationships to, and our place in, the world. An argument is presented about how multi-modal artistic practice can align and expand research with these theories. Finally, I make an argument for complicating and unravelling the

relationship between success and failure. In the following concluding chapter, I summarise findings, implications, limitations, shortcomings and further research.

6 Conclusion and new beginnings

In the introduction, I discuss how creativity has become aligned with simple principles of productivity, according to Ingold (2021, p. 5), and how this affects design education. The research investigates the ambivalences and sometimes conflicting goals and expectations in design education. One central concern in the research on which this thesis is built, is the gap between what we claim to do and what we actually do in design education. I have discussed (especially in chapter 5) the two overarching research questions about what students' thoughts, actions, and work processes can teach us about ambivalences in implicit and explicit goals in design education, and how we can know more about the ideas and opportunities that are allowed to live on, and those that are perceived as impossible or too unrealistic in design education.

The thesis proposes a shift from simply thinking of creativity as an activity that always adds something new to seeing creativity as various engagements, to consider design more as an ecological process or a continuation of processes already active in the world.

I draw on researchers that thematise the conflict between “the need for making an imagined future – both our own and our students’ – ‘safe’” and, on the other hand, the “pedagogical re-imaginings” that are needed in our troubling times (Bayley, 2018, p. 23). Bayley is referring to Haraway when she argues:

Staying with the trouble does not require such a relationship to times called the future. In fact, staying with the trouble requires learning to be truly present (Haraway, 2016, p. 1). Rather than stay safe, how might we come to better stay with the trouble of creating relevant and sustainable pedagogies in light of the pressures brought on by the standardisation movement (...) or manage the apparent impact that digital and ecological rapid-fire changes are having not only on daily life, but on our very ways of thinking and practicing ‘being-human’ (Bayley, 2018, p. 23).

This thesis is concerned with how materials and things sometimes are neglected and ignored, and how they can trigger other design processes, by the stories they might convey or the constraints and affordances they embody. The research is intertwined between the material, the embodied, and the emotional aspects in the unfolding educational settings that also are the empirical settings of this research.

The tentative spaces for play; the imaginative; the in-between; the formless; the vague; the concepts that I draw upon in my thesis also connect to other things and concepts that I have read and been inspired by, like drift matter; unruly materials; the abandoned or ignored; and waste. What unifies these concepts is that they accentuate the need to deal with things in the world in new ways, first and foremost by including them in our making and thinking and being in the world, and in our research. Halberstam claims, “We may, ultimately, want more undisciplined knowledge, more questions and fewer answers. Disciplines qualify and disqualify; legitimate and delegitimate; reward and punish; and most importantly, they statically reproduce themselves and inhibit dissent” (Halberstam, 2011, p. 10). The concepts I have mentioned here do not provide us with sets of prepared methods or answers, but they provide us with new questions and other spaces to explore and can thus inspire us in our tentative experimentations with developing, or thinking about, other possible theoretical frameworks.

6.1 Implications for design education

Most of the empirical material in the thesis is from experiments with students in design education. Working as an a/r/t/ographer, artists’ works, texts and theories about art, together with my own artistic approaches, have played an important role in my research. The thesis is thus also an exploration and a discussion of how artistic approaches and thinking can contribute to the teaching experiments I have staged in a design education setting.

I have introduced working methods that might belong more to the sphere of art than the field of design. Design is traditionally meant to perform and respond to people's needs or problems. This is not the case with art (Sawyer, 2018, p. 142). Design assignments, or briefs, often aim to solve an already defined problem and search for a specific goal or result. However, this does not apply to all design assignments; open assignments are also common in design education, but to a lesser extent than in art education. Recent approaches associated with critical design and undesign, discussed in previous chapters, are examples of that. My way of working with artistic approaches in design education is not intended to replace other practices; they are not proposed as ‘best practice’. To work in this way is to try

out other ways; it is an exploration of possibilities and challenges that may arise when working this way in design education and research.

6.1.1 Introducing care and criticism via artistic experimentation

One area that is important in summarising and saying something conclusive about what came out of my research concerns the concepts of care and criticality, or the activities of showing care and being critical. These two terms can ostensibly be seen as belonging to separate registers or in opposition to each other. Carrying out criticism can often be associated with an unsentimental willingness to see through, even in contexts where it can hurt, whereas being caring, on the contrary, can be seen as prioritising feelings and well-being at the expense of rational, efficient results. My work in this thesis, however, shows that care can also have a critical potential and that being critical may involve looking at the world in different and caring ways. In the thesis, this makes itself felt because I use the terms in connection with creating and in relation to the concept of creativity, a core term in the design education of today. I do not intend them to replace other concepts, but use them in the discussion to nuance, discuss and complicate the most commonly used notions in design, and to avoid slipping into abstraction or irresistible smoothness. Introducing care and criticism via artistic experimentation is my way of framing my research and my attempt to contribute to the ongoing discussions about the direction design education should take, especially in relation to current societal and environmental trends.

6.1.2 Researching with materiality - marks, dents, and chips

As I establish at the beginning of the introduction, design takes place in a material culture (Cross, 2007, p. 9; Sawyer, 2018, p. 159). In this thesis, creating has been explored as entwined with material culture. This entwinement has been a primary source of thinking and inspiration, but it also involves the physical and sensory aspects of making and designing, materially mediated relationships and their immaterial purposes and meanings (Laamanen, 2016). Materiality is a term that transcends the distinctions between disciplines. This makes exploring and debating materiality, along with its effects and opportunities, a fitting arena for escaping the limitations of thinking along disciplinary lines.

In one of the students' processes that I have explored in this thesis, (article 2, p.9), there was a mark on a guitar, engraved by a previous owner who had probably made use of the mark to learn how to play the instrument. The mark triggered the student's imagination. He started to make stories out of his speculations. The mark on the guitar is an example of something everyday, mundane, but it was also an opening into something – the mark was a crack in an otherwise smooth surface –hence it afforded several possibilities. The scratch opened up a space, it activated subjective, affective, relational aesthetic and cultural associations for the student. It was a discovery that triggered invention; the mark unleashed imagination and action. The observation of the mark was an ordinary observation on one level, but also an opening for something more unexpected. I cannot say what the student thought or felt. I can only comment on my perception of what the student wrote and revealed about his reactions to the mark. This might be an example of an aesthetic-affective openness to the guitar with the mark. The image of the plate with the chip in the introduction of the thesis conveys something similar about the life of things: they are marked and scarred. At the risk of being sentimental, I believe such registrations and the awareness of such qualities are valuable and worth considering. Bennett (2010) writes about thing power:

Glove, pollen, rat, cap, stick. As I encountered these items, they shimmied back and forth between debris and thing—between, on the one hand, stuff to ignore, except insofar as it betokened human activity (the workman's efforts, the litterer's toss, the rat-poisoner's success), and, on the other hand, stuff that commanded attention in its own right, as existents in excess of their association with human meanings, habits, or projects. In the second moment, stuff exhibited its thing-power: it issued a call, even if I did not quite understand what it was saying (p. 4).

Stuff exhibited its thing power and issued a call even if I did not quite understand what it was saying, observed Bennett. Her sentence could function as a good description of my feelings towards several aspects of my own research. Facilitating such encounters, and the experiences they can bring with them, is desirable. They point towards some of the possibilities that are hidden within what already is, and what we already do.

Both the students' projects and my research were characterised by attempts to contemplate the abandoned things in attics and garages and to be sensitive towards the history conveyed by the marks, the wear and tear. We taught each other to appreciate that things can be

openings into “how things draw us into relations of care, and challenge conventional ethical frameworks with unintended afterlives” (Olsen et al., 2021, p. 4). On one level, this contemplation and sensitivity is about a more careful attention; on another, about our handling things and materials that the world has to offer in more thorough ways. Such new and more inclusive perspectives are needed in the world today, and perhaps especially so in education. Education is also about making space for a future that we want, a future that it is possible to live in for the ones that come after us.

Our material world, the world of commerce, is characterised by smoothness without friction, and by mirroring surfaces, “entire sections of our existences spiral into abstraction as a result of economic globalization” (Bourriaud, 2005, p. 32). The qualities of things we encounter are gifts, messages that we can listen to, or sense – or pretend not to hear, and disregard. Dents, chips and marks are affordances, gifts from what we tend to ignore in education and research.

Such perspectives offer processes that take place in “potential spaces for the imagination (...) the idea of gaps, those spaces between where there was room for the play of speculation” (Winnicott, as cited in Phillips, 2007, p. 2). These spaces – spaces of the in-between – are not spaces that invite us to specific sets of knowledge, or certain types of professionalism, such as being an artist or having certain knowledge of design; they invite us to an infinite range of actions. What is offered by these spaces of the in between offer is vivid, unique, and infinitely varied.

6.1.3 Ethical Implications, vulnerability, and asymmetry in teaching

The fact that I have done research in my own workplace, in my own practice, means that I have had to deal with holding several roles at the same time, primarily the roles of teacher and researcher, but also as PhD-student and, on a different level, as artist. Rather than relegating such reflections to a methods section, I choose to discuss them here, to highlight their importance, and to explore their significance beyond this thesis. Sometimes these roles have been easy to keep apart; at other times, they have blended. This has meant that I have had to reflect on and negotiate between them. As a teacher, I am also a practitioner with

experience in the subject. As a researcher, I am also a PhD student. I assess and criticise my students, but I am also evaluated and criticised by reviewers, peers and supervisors. In the educational setting, the students and I expose ourselves with our ideas, vulnerabilities, and enthusiasm (they more than me), and at the same time, we are enrolled in education systems that reward specific successes and accomplishments, rewards which I am appointed to administer.

I like to think of myself as a participant when I teach and research (a notion that has been challenged in many ways during this process and is the subject of further discussion later). In gathering information from and with the students, in the encounters and events that unfolded, I was reminded of questions, memories and the discomforts of being a student. Thematising my own role reminds me that I was the originator of inventing, facilitating and organising the situations with the students I used as starting points for the production of data I depended on in my research.

The discomfort I felt when thinking of myself as a student was perhaps linked to memories and experiences of being a student. I have made many mistakes, and some of the failed projects live on inside me and make themselves known via sudden feelings of defeat and shame. My experiences as a student, a novice, have contributed to my confusing the students' fumbling with my own. However, my remembering has also made it possible for me to recognise feelings of being unable to articulate clearly what to do. I also recognise their eagerness to do something great, something never done before. I felt solidarity with the students, but I am also aware of my role in the educational institution system, a system that has fixed criteria for what constitutes a successful teaching plan. As a teacher, I am evaluated in relation to these criteria. I know that the fumbling that the students experience is necessary, but the system is result-oriented and measures what is completed and documentable. In common with so many of my colleagues (for we do talk about this), I must tend to my duties oscillating between ideals and realities, processes and results, between solidarity with the students and rather brutal assessment of their results.

I remembered the feelings of discomfort that I myself had as a student, as a young artist, but it was as if I had started to forget them, or no longer cared to investigate what they might

mean. The memories came back to me through the projects with the students, perhaps especially so because I encouraged them to work openly and experimentally. Their vulnerable uncertainty helped me to become aware of my power and responsibilities as a teacher and, at the same time, opened up new spaces in my research. A/r/tography and autoethnography are approaches where I can use my experiences from being a student (both before and now) to unravel issues of vulnerability and asymmetry in the relationship between teacher and student, and between researcher and what is being researched. I have tried to relate to the students' vulnerability - which came to light in what they said, and in their voices when they said it - in as respectful a way as possible. I have tried to distinguish between what they said and did and my interpretations of what they said and did. It is a difficult task, and sometimes the interpreter's interpretations spill over into what is rendered as 'pure' representations. Conducting research on events in the world is also a kind of endless sorting work; sometimes the eagerness to interpret and understand can interfere with what happened and what is eventually presented. Reflecting on my role in the situations I was researching contributed to less naivety about what data can be said to be.

Before the interviews, I informed the participating students about my research: the observations and the production of data. Where necessary, I allowed them to read the articles as they developed, which gave them the chance to react if they did not recognise themselves in what I wrote. I have also – in the cases where I have used photographs with students – anonymised their faces. Sometimes I have used pseudonyms instead of the students' real names. On some occasions (article 2) the students asked me to include their real names. Due to the nature of their work, the students' voices, or the students' expressions, emerge most clearly in what they made with the things and materials I document in the thesis. In the following I turn to reflecting on effects that my research might have had on the students.

Does my research empower participants to see the world in another way? Such a question is vital to Tracy (Tracy, 2010, p. 845) and I think this question has several dimensions, including ethical ones that should be of importance for all researchers. As a teacher I have experienced the tensions that sometimes arise between being the one that is supposed to have the right

knowledge, even the right answers, and being the one that I am, a human that does not know what the right knowledge is, or which answers are the right ones, even a person that neither wants nor believes in right answers. As a teacher, as the teacher I am, I want the situations I create to be part of collaborative learning processes. However, the desire for learning to take place as a collaboration between the students and me can be a goal that it is difficult to realise, perhaps primarily because of the differences between the parties: I am a teacher, a permanent employee, I can return to the habitual after launching playful perspectives on design. For the students it is not so: they have yet to find employment, their future may seem uncertain, perhaps their greatest concern is to learn skills and produce work that qualify them for an already existing labour market. The asymmetry complicates the hopes and wishes for collaboration on equal terms.

The students are instructed and obliged to do assignments that I, as the leader of the course, give them. The students' projects in the courses outlined in my research start with the demanding task of deconstructing objects they are given to work with. While working on this thesis I have reflected to what extent this task was strange and unfamiliar for some of the students. I have come to realise that they probably would never have engaged in doing this without the very specific assignment to do so. The students did it dutifully because the teacher asked them to; as students, they are obliged to obey. Their obedience exposed the nature of my authority, granted to me, forced upon them. I could not be sure that the students experienced what I hoped from the teaching. Presumably, one can never be sure that there is a match between what we think we are teaching and what the students learn. This uncertainty is not lessened by the fact that the relationship between students and teachers is part of a world characterised by hierarchical orders; the students may believe that they are served by ensuring that what they learn corresponds to the formulations in the learning outcomes sections in the course descriptions.

My research has shown that it can be challenging for students to engage with open-ended artistic approaches; such ways of working are in many ways more risky than more instrumental assignments. In the articles, I problematise the uncertainties and emotions that can follow risk taking and open practice-led ways of working in different ways. Some of these

issues are connected to the way education is structured and in the assessment practices that are used. Other insecurities and vulnerabilities are connected to expectations and traditions in the conception of design, since it can be difficult to operate against established expectations. Other challenges may be connected to the insecurity and the courage needed to spend time, effort and money on processes that might not lead to a finished result, as is the case in many artistic processes. I have written about how design students cannot be expected to navigate such insecurities and risks as they are novices and not professionals. Therefore, I have come to realise that I have been introducing artistic approaches and open-ended processes from a privileged position. It is I who have caused these situations that sometimes triggered their different forms of uneasiness. First as somebody who has experience with such processes and secondly as a teacher with the privileges and comfort that follow from having a regular income. This has made me reconsider how I should do this in the future. The students need a framework to support them in the artistic and open-ended processes within the educational structure. They also need teachers like me to be conscious of the profound insecurity that some students may feel when they are expected to, or even forced to, participate in different teaching experiments in order to pass their exams.

Asking the students about their abandoned ideas that I write about in two of the articles did however seem to open a space for and increase the awareness of such issues of asymmetry and made more explicit both the adaptations made by the students, and the hidden expectations from teachers. The question about abandoned ideas was a topic that was somewhat hidden yet at the same time very close to the surface. To ask the students questions about what they had left behind, not done, or abandoned, perhaps made them reflect on the 'hows' and 'whys' and the possible loss of ideas, dreams and hopes they had not previously considered. A colleague of mine who read the article "Abandoned ideas and the energies of failure" said that she was moved to tears when she read it. She recognised the sentiment that mistakes and failures should not be hidden, and especially the part about scars: "We cannot transform the scars into muscles or beauty spots, they need to remain scars, they are quite right as scars" (Sjøvoll et al., 2020, p. 6).

Writing this dissertation has been a task that has required the use of everything I have, everything I can do, everything I have experienced; many of these skills are new, certainly, but not least needed were the skills and ways of thinking and working I used as an active artist, which for a while I thought would be illegitimate in the realm of research. My thinking and writing would not become anything at all without the students, my supervisors, my peers, the things, and the materials, together playing, doing, failing, creating and not giving up.

6.2 New beginnings

My PhD project has taken many years; I have experienced failure and rejection for my articles and for my PhD project as a whole. As I have said before, I have learned a lot from this process. The more I have read and oriented myself within the areas I write about, the more I have become interested in what is already going on and how others work in the intersection between materiality, design and art. I have wished that I had started my project somewhere else, that I had done things differently from the start. I wish that I had known then all the things that I know now, but that is impossible. When I now look back on my projects with the students, I think of them as outdated and my attempts with the teaching experiments appear small and even narrow-minded. I could pursue this line of thought, but it is probably more interesting to write about what I would like to do in the future.

First, I would like to talk with students about the conflicts that they are confronted with as design students. I would also like to engage with them about ambivalences that confront them when the expectations of them at one and the same time imply the need to feed a market, make money, find a job *and* make the world a better place, do no harm and be free and creative. Secondly, I would like to introduce artistic approaches and open-ended ways of working combined with being critical and caring in both creativity and play in their design processes. Thirdly I would endeavour to argue for the value of such processes in the system that I work within and try to identify ways of doing courses without constricting and simplifying measurement procedures that do not take into account the value of open-ended approaches to both teaching and designing.



In the future, which has in some ways already has started, my goal, in collaboration with students and colleagues, is to provide for making processes that offer room for the affective and the situated; for ways of making and doing that allow space for the unpredictable, and thus, varied connections between our lives and experiences and the things we do. However, as I have mentioned before, this is not meant to replace already existing skillsets and structures in education and research but is rather about taking care and cultivating complex engagements that can enrich, expand, and change what already exists, and thus facilitate more ways of conducting design education.

7 References

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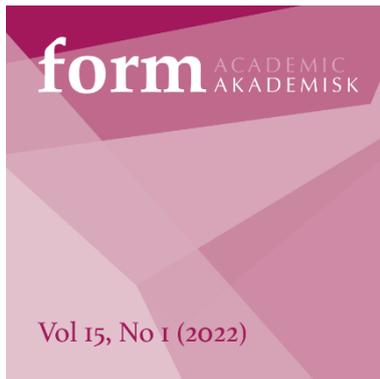
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‘Please tell me about an idea you would love to realise’

– an exploration of abandoned ideas in design education

ABSTRACT

Choosing to pursue one design idea usually requires leaving several others behind. As a design teacher, I have experienced this at close range making me curious about what design students choose not to do and why. In this study, I look at my students’ design ideation from the perspective of care and look at the reasons for them abandoning their design ideas. Through this perspective, I will probe the role that the notion of risk plays in students’ management or processing of ideas. The findings are based on an empirical study using students’ reflections on abandoned ideas as data. Such explorations can bring some of the regulations that students are subjected to into the foreground, thus exposing how the educational system and teachers like myself affect the students’ sense of freedom, hampering their ability to experiment with their ideas. Creating awareness about students’ abandoned ideas in new and attentive ways can play an active role in strengthening the students’ contact with and ownership of their hopes and motivations. This can make a difference in the ongoing negotiations, re-negotiations and struggles about what good design education ought to be.

Keywords:

Abandoned ideas, risk, failure, care, design education.

INTRODUCTION

The research in this article takes place at the Institute of Product Design at Oslo Metropolitan University where I have worked as a teacher in design for several years. The article aims to create awareness of some of the regulations students are subjected to by looking closer at design ideas that students abandon and their reasons for doing so. Students arrive at the university with a “rucksack full of hope” (Whittle et al., 2018). What design students choose *not* to do and the reasons why, are ongoing and changing results of invisible culminating effects of what may be considered the mundane activities associated with being a design student.

Openness to ambiguity is held as a valued part of the creative curricula that comprise design education (Orr & Shreeve, 2017; Sawyer, 2018). We (as teachers) state that we want to train empathic,

critical, engaged designers able to include complex social issues as their domain (Kimbell, 2015, p. 286). This study shows that achieving this goal is a complicated, demanding activity. Signature pedagogies associated with art and design should be based on a student-centred approach and be predominantly dialogic in nature; students’ experiences should be central, and learning should be recognised as a partnership (Shreeve, 2010, p. 1).

The study is counterintuitive (Tracy, 2010, p. 840) by studying events that did not unfold, of secrets, ideas and sentiments that were not intended to be shared. In this study, I became more attentive to what I do in my role as a teacher. Learning about the drama and turmoil caused by teachers’ comments and other ordinary actions reminded me of how fragile motivation is and how delicate and vulnerable one’s self-worth may be, not only among students but also among my colleagues and people in general. Investigating the ideas that students abandon revealed the often-unnoticed aspects of the design learning environment. An intensified focus on care, attentiveness and time might be indispensable if we want to cultivate a learning environment that encourages students to experiment with ideas with a brave and open-minded attitude. It is imperative if we want to enable “not only practise, but critical practise to develop” (Orr & Shreeve, 2017, p. 152) and move the discipline forward (p. 151).

Design is now widely acknowledged as an interdisciplinary and complex field (Halstrøm & Galle, 2014, p. 56). Sustainability issues and sustainable value creation add to the complexity of design education, and students are expected to include cultural and ecological concerns in their development, implementation and realisation (OsloMet, 2018). However, this development is taking place simultaneously as the demands for market thinking, instrumental reason and economic factors are being emphasised in design education (Findeli, 2001, p. 6; Kalin, 2018). In recent years the design approach called critical design or speculative design has expanded the traditional framework for design. This practice and theory are characterised by an ethic of social inquiry and non-commercialism. Critical design and speculative design practises are associated with the work and teaching of Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby at The Royal College of Art in London the years 2005 to 2015 (Dunne & Raby, 2013). Critical design questions “commercial design practices that reinforce the status quo” (Coombs et al., 2019, p. 2). The critical and speculative design seeks to rethink what design can be and what questions it should raise. The idea is to use design to engage in a critical dialogue about the assumed nature of the designed world we inhabit (Haylock, 2019, p. 19). In line with other researchers in design education, the article explores whether students are given the opportunity to develop critical skills to analyse the political, cultural and social context they are becoming part of (Lutnæs, 2017, p. 174; Thiessen, 2017, p. 146).

Choosing to pursue one design idea usually requires leaving several others behind. As a design teacher, I have experienced this at close range, and it has made me wonder what design students choose not to do and why. Inspired by Tracy (1995), I aim to “make visible what is hidden or inappropriately ignored” (p. 210) and, by doing so, generate a sense of understanding of the regulations that students are subjected to and how the educational system and teachers like myself affect the students’ sense of freedom and reduce their possibilities to experiment with ideas. In the article, I reflect on design education practices through the perspective of caring about abandoned ideas and the role that risk plays in students’ management or processing of ideas.

The first part of this article introduces how I engage with the concept of risk in design education and the development of the conceptual approach to care about abandoned ideas. Then I go on to describe the empirical material and give an overview of the project. The analyses are constructed with the help of short vignettes in a narrative structure around emerging themes such as failure, risk, self-preservation, motivation and vagueness. The last part of the paper presents a discussion and conclusion about the possibilities of combining the concepts of abandoned ideas, care and resistance in discussing design education.

THE RISK OF FAILURE

Making mistakes is a risk in creative processes. Professional artists and designers know this and expect dead ends and mistakes in the processes (Greene et al., 2018, p. 140). They try to use the mistakes as guidance and reflect on them to identify new creative paths. However, students are not professionals

yet and are often not comfortable with failure. Students tend to avoid risk (p. 140). Without the ability to tolerate risk, there is a danger that students are “just going about things in a highly prescribed way” (p. 140).

Design is an idea-based practice. The process of developing ideas has many names: ideation, idea generation, going wide, spark of ideas, brainstorming and so on. The process is often considered to be social and co-creative in nature, and a lot of effort is put into facilitating an atmosphere that encourages curiosity, courageousness and concentration (Brown, 2008). Playfulness is considered to foster creativity, and in order to be playful we need to feel safe. A common cause of conservative, timid ideas is fear of our peers or embarrassment (Brown, 2008). Playfulness is associated with a willingness to take risks, and the aim of most design education practices is to “create an environment where the student dares to experiment with one’s ideas and with a brave and open-minded attitude” (Mäkelä & Löytönen, 2017, p. 247). In design education, “[taking] creative risk is required and [is a] transferable competency” (Steers, 2009, p. 128). Risk is a “sticky concept” (Orr & Shreeve, 2017, p. 144), partly because “measuring value in creative work is problematic” (Bilton, 2014, p. 157). From the student’s perspective, “voicing one’s creative ideas to others is inherently risky, [as it involves] exposing oneself to the possibility of failure and rejection” (Choi et al., 2019, p. 84).

Risk exists in many forms, such as: misunderstanding/misinterpreting, pursuing an idea that has already been used or is outdated, spending time and energy on something that amounts to nothing, being disliked or embarrassed because other people do not understand the processes, ideas or aims and not passing exams. Risk is an inherent part of engaging with the unknown and new concepts where the result is not predetermined or certain. In material making processes artists and designers work with risk in manual production with hand tools. In the book *The Nature and Art of Workmanship* (1995) David Pye introduces the terms “workmanship of risk” and “workmanship of certainty” that describe the characteristics of processes or operations along a spectrum running from free to regulated. The workmanship of risk is defined as “workmanship using any kind of technique or apparatus, in which the quality of the result is not predetermined, but depends on the judgment, dexterity, and care which the maker exercises as he works” (Pye, 1995, p. 20). However, in this article, I am asking the students about ideas that may not even reach the threshold of failure in the outside world; untested and unacknowledged, ideas that they have abandoned.

The creative process in itself is generally considered to be a process that is nonlinear, experimental and iterative (Sawyer, 2018). Drawing on the design thinking related theory of iterative prototyping and testing with users, designers must learn to expect failure and to incorporate failure productively into the design process (Cross, 2011; Greene et al., 2018, p. 128). Quotes like “failure is the key to success” and “fail better” have become common in creative industries. This modifies risk into a transient phase: “Like risk-taking the idea of failure can be appealing” but only “valued if it is entwined with some form of recognisable success” (Orr & Shreeve, 2017, p. 48). However, it is fair to assume that ideas, especially those we are excited about, are connected to ourselves, our values and motives. According to Orr and Shreeve (2017s), “[i]n art and design, it is rarely the case that the student’s work is judged without reference to its creator. What this means is that the studio becomes a place or means to create (or deny) human value” (p. 45). In other words, risk is not only connected to the judgement, success or failure of certain ideas, but also closely intertwined with our perceived self-worth, capabilities and value.

Care for the abandoned

Ideas are abandoned for many different reasons, including time pressure, the demands of teaching systems, the perceived amount of work, rejection by teachers or a lack of concreteness. There is some discomfort associated with examining and confronting our abandoned ideas, including feelings of failure, uncertainty and embarrassment. Additionally, the projects and/or ideas that are abandoned implicitly convey something about our personal sense of freedom and our feelings of shame or fear, the latter often amplified by academic rules and evaluation systems. I think that to explore students’ stories about abandoned ideas can move us and create awareness about some of the (hidden) regulations that students are subjected to, and how they affect the students’ sense of freedom. Examining this further

can enable us to resist, perhaps even take the offensive in relation to the forces that compel us to do things in certain ways. Resistance can only take place if we have a sense of what is happening to us, knowledge of what or who is causing this to happen to us. Critically approaching the small events that occur in the encounters between humans (the students) and the institutions and structures (the university, the market) is a good starting point for doing this.

Our failures or mistakes are rarely given much attention when we present our work to others: “failure is often absent from our discussions of field work and sanitized academic outputs” (Harrowell et al., 2018, p. 2). This reflects “a reluctance to acknowledge doubt and failure in a novel idea” (Bilton, 2014, p. 157). All too often, the descriptions of our processes are smoothed over by “hiding the confusion, self-doubt, and many mistakes that are made along the way” (Harrowell et al., 2018, p. 2). The continuous push for design students to produce new results, solutions and novel ideas leads to a surplus of ideas and initiatives. Not all ideas can or should be realised. However, exploring the various descriptions and reasons as well as feelings and opinions concerning students’ abandoned ideas is intended to enable critical resistance by both students and teachers and reclaim space and time for failure, fumbling and searching as fundamental parts of creative, critical practices.

METHOD

This is a case study within a master’s class in design education on how things work in particular situations (Stake, 2010, p. 27). The study involves multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audio-visual material). It is a situated, or at-home, ethnographic study as I conducted research at my workplace, in an environment that is familiar and “natural” to be in (Alvesson, 2003, 2009).

The reflections in this article are based on an empirical material collected in an educational situation in the form of students’ reflections about abandoned ideas. The questions given to the students were an attempt to gain more knowledge about the relationship between students’ design ideas and the educational context and to explore how the structural and social factors in students’ education influence the students’ sense of agency (i.e. freedom) and capability and inclination to take risks. The guiding research question is as follows: what design ideas do design students choose *not* to realise and why?

In the analysis, I look for the role of risk-taking in students’ processing of ideas. To build on and further develop existing research on this topic, I will attempt to critically reflect on how caring about abandoned ideas can contribute to reclaiming, expanding and supporting students’ agency, ability to resist, sense of freedom and independence and ownership of their creative processes.

My position as a teacher and researcher is influenced by my knowledge of artistic practice and experiences as a visual artist. Whether something is more art or more design is not very significant in the processes I explore, rather I try to introduce practices at “the intersection of art and design” (Coombs et al., 2019, p. 4). I am inspired by a critical and speculative design approach that asks questions and “interrogates its own conditions of production and display, i.e., institutional critique” (Haylock, 2019, p. 19), similar to critical works of art. Being an artist and researcher who teaches design students has given me an opening to probe into the spaces and opportunities in-between art, design and research. In this article, I make use of Orr and Shreeve’s understanding of the art and design curriculum as “a complex web of activities” that is inherently “sticky [...] messy and uncertain” (Orr & Shreeve, 2017, p. 7). These activities and spaces are full of meeting points, misunderstandings, similarities and differences.

Overview of the study

In autumn 2017, I taught a course on design and culture to first-year master’s students in design. I aimed to thematise the reciprocal relationship between culture and design. By the end of my first class with the students, I asked if it was acceptable to introduce them briefly to my PhD research, even though it

Please tell me about an idea you would love to realise but don’t or can’t ... and why.
Please make a short description of why you abandoned this idea.

was not part of the course content and would not impact their grades or evaluation of their outcomes. When I told them about my idea to collect abandoned ideas, one student immediately asked why I was interested in this. I explained that I wanted to know more about the decision-making processes and the factors that influenced students to disregard or choose certain directions in their work. I said that my intention was to become aware of and reflect upon the things that influence us in our lives as students and teachers in design. After they signed the participation form, I handed them a sheet with two requests:



FIGURE 1. Author, Cardboard box for abandoned ideas and classroom, photograph, 2018.

Thirteen students participated, and they spent 10-30 minutes writing their answers. Beforehand, I had made a cardboard box where they could put their responses. This allowed them to remain anonymous if they wanted. If they preferred, they could provide me a memory stick with images, drawings or audio recordings. One student provided a memory stick containing a design project and a written answer.

The following day when I met with the class, I asked if anybody would volunteer to do interviews with a fellow student. Three students volunteered. The instructions given were:

Interview guide:

Find a fellow student to interview, record with video or only sound if you prefer. The interview may take the form of conversations where you, as an interviewer, can also reflect on the questions. You have a rough interview guide, but you don't have to answer all the questions; select the ones you want to discuss. Record between 5-15 minutes and give the recordings to me in two weeks' time. All questions are related to you in the context of a student in design. However, your answers can include whatever else influences you in your practice.

- Please tell me about something you misunderstood or a mistake you made. How did you feel about making mistakes? How do fellow students and teachers react?
- Please tell me any advice or insight that has been important to you

Below is a list of the different materials and the order in which they were produced:

1. Students' stories collected in a box in the classroom (main data source).

2. One thirty-minute long interview/conversation with a student who was especially interested in the topic.
3. Three interviews (two audio recorded and one video recorded, approximately 10 minutes each) in which the students interviewed each other with a set of prepared questions about their feelings concerning mistakes and reactions from fellow students and teachers.

Ethnographic approaches inspired me to construct the analysis around the short stories collected from the students in the abandoned ideas box in the classroom. In ethnographic writing, the data is treated as “materials to think with, to facilitate the production of new ideas” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019b, p. 167) and to further develop ideas derived from previous theory (p. 167). The reflexive process from the research and analyses when I wrote this article persisted over a long period. The use of the perspective of care for abandoned ideas set things in motion; the students’ individual experiences and feelings of loss and abandonment made me more aware of my own abandoned ideas and the ideas I continued to abandon. Researcher reflexivity “implies a recognition that research acts shape the phenomena under investigation” (p. 198). The qualitative data I have collected is from educational situations with relatively few participants. The material was produced in an educational context; the context is vital for the development of the analysis. Further, this is a qualitative inquiry; it must be evaluated according to its particular logic (Levitt et al., 2018, p. 28). The writing of the article is a preliminary result of reading the students’ answers many times and repeated listening to the interviews. Some themes that emerged were failure, risk, self-preservation, motivation, time pressure, vagueness. In the analyses, I discuss them in relation to the notion of risk in creative processes and the perspective of care for abandoned ideas.

DISCUSSION

My initial browsing through the data material revealed two tendencies. First, abandonment of ideas was explained by or blamed on external factors, such as guidance from teachers, the demands of the school system, time pressure and lack of support or interest from others. Second, the decisions were explained by internal factors, such as a lack of skills and knowledge, personality traits and abilities. It cannot be expected from students in the process of learning and becoming designers that they can evaluate the potential or value of their idea as professionals do. Closer investigations into the material made it apparent that straightforward organizing or listing the reasons and explanations for abandoning ideas was not adequate. There was a striking overlap between external and internal factors and the students’ negotiations of these in the educational context. (I am referring to the different students using capital letters (A, B, etc.) to clarify the analyses).

The quotes below come from one of the audio-recorded interviews where I asked one student to do a loosely guided interview/conversation about making mistakes with a fellow student. I begin this section with passages from their conversation because they illustrate how students try to rationalize failure and mistakes:

I have been listening to a lot of podcasts on business... entrepreneurs, and they are about all these famous businessmen who have successful businesses like Ben & Jerry’s. They are speaking to this guy and saying, ‘oh, you have to fail, it’s the best thing for an entrepreneur, is to fail’ and then it is like, ‘ah, man, sure it applies in other areas that we need to make those mistakes’. (Student A)

Maybe the mistakes are an exploration, what is a mistake? Something is happening that you didn’t want to happen, it might happen that it actually is perfect for another solution, another day for another thing or something. (Student B)

Time is really the issue here with the smaller projects; you don’t really have time to follow up mistakes, you can’t explore those mistakes, you have to do fast backtracking. (Student A)

Both the students reflect on making mistakes as a valued part of the design process; they seem to appreciate that making mistakes and failing is an essential element of the iterative, creative and innovative processes (Choi et al., 2019, p. 74). The students’ discussion reflects the tendency to celebrate failure as a step towards success. The relationship between failure and success is interesting. In many accounts, the relationship is described as a kind of function; failure is a necessary event in achieving success. However, the relationship may not be that straightforward: the criteria for success might be too simple; we are gaining more and more knowledge, which makes it problematic to think about the relationship between failure and success by using established criteria. Things and designs that are perfectly functional and attractive according to established ways of thinking may be disastrous failings according to emerging ones.

In the next part of the discussion, I refer to the written responses that the students submitted to the box of abandoned ideas. Failure is also a powerful emotional concept. “Even when we know we can rationalize it, how it feels at the time cannot be underestimated” (Whittle et al., 2018). In the next, I will present quotes and stories from students’ written replies submitted to the box for abandoned ideas. These stories shed light on the emotional feeling of failure and risk in different ways, including the hurtful sides of the risk-taking, such as the feeling of doing something wrong, not fitting in, and failure on a fatal/damaging/hurtful level and the silencing, stifling and suppressing effects that failure can produce. Student C wrote:

I dream about visualizing music by means of creative processes that I’ve learned as a product design student. I feel like my starting point is “wrong” because the idea emerges from passion, instead of solving a problem for someone. (Student C)

I wonder where the feeling of *doing something wrong* comes from. Why did this student feel that their interests were wrong and that he or she should be doing something else? The student’s personal motivation does not match the notion of what is expected of designers and what is appreciated. In a sense, the answer illustrates a risk that the student does not take: the risk of pursuing a task that is not intended to solve a problem for someone. The demand for clarity and accountability hinders this student from engaging in open, explorative creative processes. Teaching manuals imply that students are expected to challenge established perspectives and norms in the field (OsloMet, 2018). However, doing so involves, at least to some extent, challenging the established culture of the educational system – the very system on which they depend to achieve a professional career in the future. Challenging what you are dependent upon is risky, and the space to do so is somewhat limited, fluctuating and difficult to trust.

Several of the students’ reactions followed a kind of a pattern when they tried to explain or outline their ways of managing the risks involved in the processes of making new things and ideas. When they grow insecure about their ideas, or meet resistance, they first deny that they will give up on their ideas, tell themselves that they will put them aside, wait until the circumstances change, or the ideas have matured. Sometimes, however, as I write in the article “Abandoned ideas and the energies of failure” (Sjøvoll et al., 2020) this insistence on the value of the idea is abruptly replaced by the student declaring that the idea was nevertheless stupid, unworkable. The student rejects, abandons the idea, not infrequently accompanied by feelings reminiscent of shame. The events within these rejections take place at a furious pace; the imaginations of how the “outside” will judge their ideas manifest themselves in bursts rushing through the bodies; the power “snaps into place”, as Kathleen Stewart expresses it in her book *Ordinary Affects* (2007, p. 15).

In ideation processes, especially in the early stage, it is necessary to have an open mind, which requires accepting uncertainty and enduring it both by the student and the teachers (Laamanen, 2016, p. 4). In the responses I had from the students they often avoid saying “yes” or “no” to their ideas initially. They try to adopt to more flexible ways of relating to them, for example by waiting – the circumstances might change, something may happen to their ideas, they might be made into something useful later, or function in settings they do not know of yet. The flexibility, however, does not last. It is as if the uncertainty in not deciding is unbearable to them, and the unbearable makes them gravitate

towards ending the ambivalence by rejecting, abandoning, sometimes even cursing the idea – by declaring that their idea was stupid all along. Witnessing these processes revealed the vulnerabilities involved in creative activities – the risk involved in pursuing ideas, the uncertainty of pursuing “wrong” ideas and the danger of being stupid in doing so.

To be a student is to be exposed to the institution, teachers, curricula, aims, goals and the “proper” ways of doing things. Some of the answers from the students indicated that what the teachers say and do can have devastating effects on the student’s motivation:

When the teachers said that I should direct my focus on another group of users, I did not feel that this fitted my original ideas in this project and I lost the motivation to continue with it. I concluded that it was better to postpone the idea for a future project. (Student D)

This student also concludes by postponing the idea. This implies that the student thinks the idea is good enough, but not for now. There are signs of refusal and defiance here, too, but they are more passive; the student is obeying the teachers but not quite, only postponing the project. Minute signs of disobedience followed by loss of motivation are also mentioned in the next student’s story:

When I have presented my idea to a few teachers often the question has been: ‘But what are you going to make then?’ This is not very motivating when my idea was to first observe the field and then find the problems to work with. I do not know if I have abandoned the idea but I may need a different approach. Perhaps it is better to work with smaller themes within the overall theme (Student E).

The loss of energy is apparent in these examples. Motivation is a fragile and unstable concept and pedagogical moments like this can affect us for the rest of our lives even if we are not consciously aware of it (Van Manen, 2015, p. 15). When the students are disturbed, interrupted or corrected, they report that they lose energy and abandon or downscale their ideas or projects, cutting off edges and removing what does not fit. In an educational setting, it is often uncertain what is being evaluated. Is it the ideas, the motives behind them, the results, or the subject that created them? The ambiguity of this is somewhat intimidating.

Lack of time is a recurring theme. In education, the demand for visible and understandable results is strong, and if students do not want to risk failure, they have to deliver within the time frames presented to them, as the story below illustrates:

I have not rejected the idea, but I have not had time to proceed with it. This is an overall issue when I come up with ideas. As the school requires a specific process and approach, it becomes difficult to use an already existing idea or plan for a product, because I have to justify all choices and use the methods and tools presented in the course. (Student F)

Similarly, another student said:

Rather an ongoing problem. I think too big. I often have big ideas with intricate and complex parts. I am one person, I have my limits, and several ideas cannot be prawn (sic) or justified in one single medium. (Student G)

An open and playful learning environment should “allow for adequate time to develop, revise, and iterate creative ideas” (Choi et al., 2019, p. 87). To some extent these examples show how limiting the demand for instant and instrumental justification can be in education; this makes it difficult to search and experiment openly. Once more we are faced with the tension between “accountability and transparency” and the need to allow for “open-endedness, playfulness and ambiguity” in art and design (Orr & Shreeve, 2017, p. 13). This context features a conflict between the ideals of play and exploration, which welcome the accidental, unforeseen and new, and the stultifying effects of time pressure and the

demands for results and immediate clarity on both students and teachers. In the next student’s story, the reason for abandoning an idea is vaguer and perhaps more many-sided than those presented above:

I have an idea that I have long dreamt of developing. This dream is to create a furniture collection inspired by my grandfather’s drawings and furniture when he lived. What is stopping me is what others say about this and that it is a huge project that is difficult to accomplish. (Student H)

What happens if we continue to get everything set for a culture in design education that only rewards the justification for imagined outcomes and ignores and belittles what touches and motivates us? If the vivid dream of this student is subject to comparison, or forced into square containers, if the edges are cut off to make the idea more “feasible”, the shape becomes more like something we already know, such as triangles, circles or squares. If we are forced to abandon what moves us, we will be in danger of constraining the complexity of thinking, feeling and making into manageable procedures and losing ownership of our questions. The singularity of making will fade away and it will be thought of as a kind of post-industrial manufacturing, detached from the all-too-human fumbling, feeling and hoping. In my experience, making involves a plethora of approaches and experiments. It is fuelled by imagination; it is an improvised (or planned, or both) dialogue conveyed through gestures, materials, objects, ideas and coincidences. Designers (teachers and students) are pushed to create the illusion of linearity and clarity despite the often frustrating, foggy character of the design process. Appreciating that which we do not know, “to accept the unknown” (Orr & Shreeve, 2017, p. 148), may be a prerequisite for searching or finding something valuable. Undue demands for instant justifications and solutions are an obstacle for students’ ability to live with, flourish in, nurture, and enjoy their own creative processes.

CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER DIRECTIONS

Risk and failure

In this analysis, I have explored different notions of risk identified in the data and how they affected the students’ managing or processing of ideas. The emerging themes were tensions and concerns regarding failure and uncertainty, demand for clarity, strategies for self-preservation, motivation, time pressure, vagueness and openness. A shift in the quality of thinking and acting means tolerating a certain amount of risk and willingness to let go of fear. I believe that the risks associated with creative processes are connected to more than enduring a phase; they are an unavoidable part of creativity, making and living (Scharmer & Senge, 2016, p. 174). The risk of failure is imminent throughout our lives; before ideas have shape, they are vague fragments that we are forced to adapt into something useful, productive, a result. Even long after an idea has been realized as a product or service, there are the severe risks of having done something wrong, inadequate, dangerous, insignificant, meaningless or immoral. It never ends. We are always in the middle of risk; it surrounds the process, permeates it, defines it, and embodies it. To perceive risk as merely part of a phase, and thereby a *temporary state*, is to miss the point. I suggest that a simplistic, one-dimensional understanding, and use of the concepts of risk and failure should be replaced with more nuanced and careful understandings and approaches that take the specific creation and ambiguities of design processes into consideration (Choi et al., 2019; Orr & Shreeve, 2017, p. 13). The care with which work is done, be it in the material-making processes or in how teachers and students make space for imagining new, never-before-seen work (that I worry often become abandoned ideas), could make students, teachers and researchers reconsider and practise a more extended process of making. These are nonlinear processes in which ideas and imaginations emerge from the process of working with materials (Sawyer, 2018, p. 142).

Care and respect

Creating awareness about why students abandon and give up ideas is a way to show respect and understanding for the students’ motives and underlying reasons for their creative ideation. To do this would mean including what students tend to give up while gently also showing them other aspects that should be counted in deciding further development. Such care and respect can be a way to give space

to that which does not fit and is neglected and often alien to the present educational climate. Curricula reflect, reproduce and produce the values and aims of those who influence and create them and not necessarily the values and aims for emerging knowledge (Orr & Shreeve, 2017, p. 42).

Limitations

This study's research question and methodology have several limitations that suggest opportunities for further research. It is crucial to keep the circumstances in which the students provided me with the data in mind: Even though it was not part of a graded assignment and participation was voluntary, the research project was nevertheless conducted within a context of a teacher-student relationship. Thus, it is fair to assume that the students did not fully elaborate on their frustrations with the teachers or the course and that there is some probability that they were inclined to formulate their answers within the established language of the educational setting. To avoid some ethical and methodological problems associated with the insider position and at-home ethnography, I have had frequent discussions with colleagues about the research data and listened to their thoughts about risk-taking in design education. However, this is a single study, and the validity of the research would be strengthened if I could repeat it with other participants in similar contexts. Doing several studies with different students would offer opportunities to explore possible variations in the students' experiences depending on the context and if they worked (alone or together with others) in the ideation phase of their design.

Further research

It is both important and necessary to recognize the “who” or the “what” behind our tendencies to abandon our ideas and other notions, sentiments and hopes. However, beyond being useful as an analytical concept in research, to care about the abandoned can have transforming effects if we dare to make use of it in our daily activities as teachers. To include care for abandoned ideas in learning and working processes can serve as a catalyst for exposing other neglected experiences and practices, revealing the attempts to control us and taking control ourselves. By caring for the abandoned in new and attentive ways, we can play an active role in strengthening the students' contact with, and ownership of their hopes and motivations, and thereby make a significant difference in the ongoing negotiations, re-negotiations and struggles about what good design education ought to be.

This article attempts to initiate such work primarily by thinking about design education's relationship to failure with the help of a set of problems and questions, experimenting with them in a given situation: a small selection of students in design education. The article indicates possible directions for investigating the topic more thoroughly, using a larger sample and a more developed conceptual apparatus.

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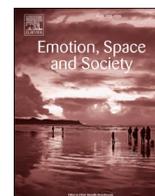
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Article 4

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Abandoned ideas and the energies of failure

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ABSTRACT

Our academic life is ripe with failures and things abandoned, with hurt and feelings of defeat and despair. Already as students, we learn how to hide and tuck away such experiences and the impact they have on us. As a result of this the surfaces of our texts, our presentations, the things we make, have come to resemble certain industrial products, cleansed of any traces of dirt, human toil, crookedness and suffering. However, that which we hide tends to live on, even when we succeed to forget its existence – as bodily tensions and shame, roaming around in our interiors, eating their way into our practises. In this article, three authors, together and by themselves, explore the hidden geographies of abandoned ideas and failures both as a cultural phenomenon and as bodily experiences. Our hope in doing this is to open up for more gentle and affirmative practices, practises that release the energies of the hidden; the hurtful, the minor, the modest, the bent, tentative and crooked. To be able to resist, to counteract we have to begin with what we are forced to forget, hide and suppress.

1. Introduction

In extension of recent theorisations of failure, we will try to thematise what Horton described as “the increased acknowledgement of *failure as unspoken*: a typically unsaid, although everyday experience within the contemporary academy” (Horton, 2020, p. 2). We will try to do this by reflecting over the hiding away of failure, that is, writing *about* it within contexts we are used to, but also by “acting our failures out”, by experimenting with *writing* them out into the world. We will do this by avoiding censoring ourselves in ways we are used to, but try to censor ourselves differently. We will not eradicate the traces of pain in our sentences, the shame and uncertainty from our paragraphs and by toning down the urge to process, understand and qualify in ways that leave the tentative, the shivering, the failing without voice, unspoken.

For the most part, we are able to hide or camouflage our shortcomings, defeats and misfortunes. We are expected to do so, as adults, and even more so as scholars. Our skill in this is most evident in our texts, where we demonstrate our ability to handle and process subjects, questions and answers in legitimate and acceptable ways. The bulk of academic research, in journals and books, reveals few traces of how they came in to being. They are purified of things and thoughts not deemed worthy, purged of failures and their ghosts. In this article, we want to move our attention backwards, through our bodies, to the things and thoughts that we have left behind, that are carved into our corporalities,

hidden in their depths, inscribed on our backs and sometimes get visible through rifts and openings in our skin; a sudden rush of blood that creates nervous flecks on our throats. Since this is a text, we must fold our arguments through text, through the screen, back inward and then outward again, to try to face and take hold of what is made invisible, of what is abandoned. We write about this in some sort of ‘general’ sense first, to prepare the ground for more in-depth explorations of how failures and abandoned ideas permeate our research and our academic careers. Then we present three vignettes, in which the individual authors have tried to evoke the sense of experiences of failures and abandonments that they have encountered. Towards the end we will try to make some sense of what we have wanted to do, try to map it, and thus make it easier to grapple with, possibly less harmful, maybe more productive, hopefully creating a sense of both resistance and care.

“Writing is not a transparent medium, nor something that comes somehow after the event, a simple ‘outcome’ of research that always takes place elsewhere, in the archive, in the field or the focus group, on the Web, but is a mode of inquiry in its own right.” (Gibbs, 2015, p. 222). To be recognised as an academic you have to do the kind of writing that Gibbs warns against. That is, you can deviate within certain limits, in the foreword, in excursions, in the margins. However, the general provision is to conform your language to different sets of standard languages; you have to make it fit an introduction, a discussion, to serve as a proper vehicle for presenting outcomes, conclusions; only then will your

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contribution be accepted as a contribution proper. This means the writing must be stopped from roaming around, be stripped for its protuberances, bumps. You must domesticate your writing, silence the howls, speak up when you whisper; reformulate your brown sentences, your faltering and moving sentences, your filthy and confused sentences, your too careful sentences, your shameful and insecure sentences, into straight white sentences. It is not enough to use the right words; the words must be arranged in specific ways also, have the proper flow. Avoid staccato rhythms or rhythms at all, too much melody, or the total lack of it; discard sentences that move too slow, like turtles do, or too fast, like jazzy slang. The strict control of language should not surprise anyone, “Use the minor language to send the major language racing” urge Deleuze and Guattari in *A thousand plateaus* (1987, p. 105). No one knows what’s going to happen if we loosen the control over language, the words and the arrangements of them, the proper command of them, allow the small words to mess with the big ones, open up for closing or even start discussing the gaps between “what happened on the ground and what finds its way into the page” (Katz, 1994 in Harrowell et al., 2018, p. 2).

Texts are perfect grounds for the ambitious, they offer both time and space for hiding, omitting, showing off, avoiding, processing, cleansing. It takes time to write texts, and time offers us possibilities to accommodate, forget, play down the things that bother and disturbs us. However, our lives as academics also include events and geographies where there is no or almost no space or time between what we are trying to do, or are supposed to be doing and the visible, audible, sensible results of our attempts. In these situations, we are left on our own, exposed. There is no time to accommodate, to disperse, thin out in time. “Ideologies happen. Power snaps into place. Structures grow entrenched. Identities take place.” (Stewart, 2007, p. 15).

To achieve success through thematising failure is ripe with paradoxes, dilemmas. If you are no longer affected by that which you write; it is because you have transcended it, maybe even betrayed it. Fear of betrayal should be kept alive as we reflect critically over states, conditions and results that we are (un)able to pursue ourselves. Others have thematised similar paradoxes, like the feminist writers in *Critiquing thinness and wanting to be thin*; they write about the paradox of how we critically reflect over another kind of failure, the failing body: “how is it possible to critique ideologies and practises of slimmish while wanting (and trying) to be slim?” (Thorsby and Gimil, 2013, p. 106).

In this article, we present three stories where we write about and reflect over situations and events from our ongoing research projects and professional lives. All three writers have different backgrounds. The collaboration revealed that we shared a common fate of sometimes trying to cope with almost unbearable feelings of failure, of being matter out of place (DeSilvey, 2006), of “failure in terms of ... not belonging” (Horton, 2020, p.3, p.3).

Vibeke’s story is about caring for the things that are not permitted, that do not fit. Her story is the longest because it is not about her alone. Her approach is to dig into the abandoned, the waste and abundance of ideas, sentiments and dreams that are left behind, chopped off, lines that are straightened out, the mess that is smoothed over. Her story starts as an exploration of students’ abandoned ideas; she finds the students more rational than she is. To abandon the things they dream of, their hopes and ideas, is part of being a student. Students are at the forefront; they are at the same time the miner’s canaries and a sort of avant-garde; the first to faint, but also the ones destined to take over the world. To research often means to confront oneself (emerald and Carpenter, 2015, p. 746–747), and this confrontation creates tension. In this case, the student’s mix of rationality, compliance and sense of loss evokes Vibeke’s memories of abandoning, of being abandoned. The doubling of attention bares the devastating mechanisms of education and reason. Still, it also gives space for resistance, noticing, remembering and caring for the fearful sides of us, the shame we are subjected to, the loneliness we sometimes suffer.

Geir’s story is about the feeling of time and time again presenting

ideas and approaches that do not quite fit, ideas and approaches which are perhaps regarded as interesting, even fascinating, but somehow flawed or at least too quirky to count as proper research. He is currently working on a project that probes into the relationship between audiences and museums. His story is rooted in a presentation of his research at a conference. The story is about affects that are cutting through the corporal space of someone being told that his habit of paying attention to questionable things has – yet again – been noticed. However it is also a story about a researcher being both haunted and blessed by a past as a writer of non-academic texts, by bent sensibilities ripened in different environments, who now fears that he is liable to counteract against that which haunts (or blesses) him to achieve recognisable success in the professional academic life he has surrendered to.

Lars’ narrative is about positioning oneself in the academic world somewhat ill-equipped, outfitted with a naïve will for honesty and openness but failing in his resistance and thus succumbing to the codes that permeate the academic sphere. His adaptation is not complete, but the question of how far one can and should purify academic or scientific accounts of personal faults and failures always remains open. The question also gets more urgent over time, as he moves up the ranks, now inhabiting a position in the centre of a peripheral institution, thus becoming the voice and the embodiment of the codes and norms that constantly create failures which often cannot and should not simply be transformed into another lesson learned.

Our three stories trace different spaces and areas in the geography of failure, but they are all stories where we remember events and emotions we tend to want to forget. To remember that which we are encouraged to forget is to “undo the main effects that this system has upon its minority subjects: wilfully instilled amnesia, symbolic misery, lack of self-representation” (Braidotti, 1996, p. 312). The abandoned, that which we did not do, was too scared to do, to think, are encouraged to forget, may have tremendous energy, but we have to re-direct our attention to get hold of it. “We tend to author our identities with reference to positive phenomena – who we are, what we have done, what we know – but turning over the mirror, we find an inverse, parallel collection of experiences not had, which can be equally significant and meaningful” (Scott, 2019, p. 81). The “turning over the mirror” has indeed affected all three of us. One thing is the exploration of the bent, the hidden, the abandoned, the not done; another is to make these explorations visible to each other and possible readers of this text. Both created new hopes, new feelings of solidarity, but maybe most of all a promising feeling of wonder; the cracks, rifts, hopes and wounds we showed each other have opened for glimpses of possible, colourful, vibrant geographies, full of hidden mysteries, movements, energies and hope. But do not mistake this text as a proposal for a lowering of the criteria for research. It is not a retreat into obscurity, it is a proposal for openness, for transgressing the barriers between the messy realities of life and the ordered and enclosed formulas of academic thinking and writing. It is an attempt to fuse moisture and dryness, impulses and analysis, lived life and our attempts at communicating it, analysing it. It is a shot at including life instead of treating it and the events within it, as mere raw materials for “extracting constants” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 106).

2. Three stories

2.1. Vibeke’s Story: Abandoned ideas in design education

‘No frayed lines in design sketches.’ Frayed. No shivering lines. No shivering. We don’t allow shivering people here, trembling limbs. No old, crooked people. Not too young, either. No loitering. No jumping, no shivering, stay in line. The line is there. Go there. I shiver all the time; all my lines are frayed. I am a frayed line. My mother shivers. Life is shivering, is a frayed line. No shivering, no loitering. No life here.

A student of mine told me that she, in her first year as a product

design student, was told that her way of drawing was frayed, vague and tentative. The teachers said that lines and strokes should be confident, conclusive, fast, clean, without residues of any kind. She never forgot this. The hardest part is getting the hands to obey. Lines and strokes in drawings are, like voices, ways of walking, fingerprints, individual, singular, unique. To tidy them, to straighten out the bends, crooks, twists and shivering in them is also to abandon something within ourselves, to cut away the subtler energies that seek out and retract; probing, feeling. We are constantly forced to abandon or modify our ways. Our bodies tell stories of years of abandoning; tense and superficial breath, subdued movements, high-pitched nervous voices. To be a teacher also involves being an incarnation of social processes. Few make much fuzz about the everyday brutality of the educational world; we are trained to handle hurt, shame, and abandoning things we love and believe in without letting it show. That is maybe the reason for the discomfort I felt when I listened to and read the student's stories. *-Please tell me about an idea you would love to do, but you don't or can't... and why. Please make a short description of why you abandoned this idea.* This was the task I gave to my students. Their stories led me into a trail of uneasiness; I began remembering my own abandoned ideas, recalled the shame and embarrassment from back then. The regrets came back to me; me showing things to the wrong people, sharing ideas with people without sufficient ability and time to care about them, discarding my ideas and imaginations all too fast, and the shame, most of all me exposing my shame to them, my reddening face, dejected eyes, the apologetic submission. The anger of giving up too much of *my own* to fit in, of letting others thrive on processing my ideas for me and others like me. It is not over; it goes on.

To care for that which is abandoned, or to prod through what is disposed of or ignored can be a “proactive and provocative” (Harrowell et al., 2018, p. 1) way to approach an investigation in the educational system and the forces that cut through it. Exploring abandoned ideas and the energies of failure has a resemblance to Susie Scott's “sociology of nothing”. Her research is exploring negative phenomena – things that people do not do, have, say, know or feel – and how this affects our lives. Negative spaces are formative, and as Scott says, they are “shaping biographical selfhood” (Scott, 2019, p. 2). Abandoned ideas are *not* nothing, but they *not quite* something either, conceptually they connect to the *not yet* or the *vague* or the *messy*.

Space, time and society mark us all. One of my students replied, when I asked them about abandoned ideas: “I don't abandon them. I just wait until it is feasible to execute, or it has matured. Either that or the idea is stupid or silly.” Answers sometimes stage whole worlds: ‘I don't abandon them’ is an uncompromising beginning that insists on keeping ideas. However, this initial refusal is modified, qualified in the next moment; ‘I don't abandon’ fades into a more pragmatic, tactical approach. The student does not clearly say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to ideas but adopts a reasonable position—waiting—the circumstances may change or the idea may mature.

Transcending black and white and evoking an indecisive and swirl-grey may seem like a mature thing to do. But this ‘mature’ position does not last either; at the end of the answer, there is a return to black and white, to a merciless logic: ideas are either executable or silly, stupid, abandonable. The student's answer uncovers the logic of a world squeezed into three short sentences. The last sentence of the student reminds us about the inherent dangers in our ways of processing ideas: ‘Silly’ and ‘stupid’ are infectious categorisations, as they tend to spread from ideas to the person that produced the ideas. With reference to Ehrenreich (2009) Halberstam writes: success happens to good people and failure is a “consequence of a bad attitude rather than structural conditions” (Halberstam, 2011, p. 3). Condemning ideas often involves creating or denying individuals human value (Orr and Shreeve, 2017, p. 45) and “the logic that work can be unequivocally classified into ‘passes’ and ‘fails’ generally goes unquestioned” (Horton, 2020, p. 4). To process something with the required speed also involves the imminent danger of collateral damage, of creating sharp-edged, destructive energies.

Other students also said that they did not abandon their ideas, that they instead postponed them or archived them for later. To do so seems like a sensible and reasonable thing to do. Students (i.e. novices) are being rejected on a regular basis; they are not characterized as ‘idiots’ (Philo, 2016), but they are corrected, adjusted or normalised. They are therefore in acute need of creating a language and an attitude that makes it possible to survive the frequent discarding of ideas without themselves feeling discarded as well; they need to relate themselves to the infrastructures of failure in academia (Turner, 2020). Postponing and archiving may be attempts of glossing over reality and make inevitable defeat endurable. This language—‘postponing’, ‘archiving’ and other jargon—is something we learn and are encouraged to use to process ideas and become efficient. But it is at the same time the language we use when we try to rescue ourselves from rejection, pain, hurt.

The energies of failure can thus, darkly, be described as a feeling of hurt, suffering and loss, but they can also be starting points for something new. Winnicott uses the concept of potential space in his book *Playing and Reality*: “It is creative apperception more than anything else that makes the individual feel like life is worth living”. If we are left to relate to external realities ruled by compliance; if the world we live and work in succeeds in reducing the range of possible actions to that which can “be fitted in with or demanding adaptation”, it will create “a sense of futility for the individual” (Winnicott, 2012, p. 65). However, the feeling of disintegration, of futility, (or failure) can also be openings for creative acts and new connections with the external world, says Winnicott (Rose, 2016, p.386, see also the idea of kindness as offered by Dorling, 2020). But this requires a holding environment like the one's mothers create and maintain when they hold their child. This is a potential space where it is safe to reach out, to fail and to reach out again: “The holding environment, whether it is relational or aesthetic, is a space that can tolerate the oscillation between illusion and disillusion, disintegration and integration” (Ibid. p.395).

We are all in danger of being dominated by that what is explained to us as external realities. Instead of breaking with these realities, we adjust to them by developing a language that lets us believe that it is up to us to decide which ideas to keep, which to abandon. To be sensitive, to pay attention to sentiments and ideas we tend to ignore, to pick them up, be curious about them, care for them, is perhaps a form of resistance to this state – but it can also form starting points for new kinds of practises, practises that open up for wider notions of what can be considered relevant for the production of ideas; practises that include the vague, the frayed, the messy, the “indistinct” ephemeral ... (Law, 2004, p.2). This means to set a higher value on the sorts of activities that have traditionally been considered as women's work, a messy sort of everyday aesthetics (DeSilvey et al., 2013; Saito, 2008). The “processual complexity of everyday materiality's relations and spaces” (Massy and Thift in Horton, 2008, p. 365) resembles a home rather than a modern production line; it is a space full of traces of life, inhabited bodies, not merely brains and eyes. John Cage said in an interview: “Recently I have become interested in the repetition of similar sounds that before I used to try to ignore, now I want to share them with you” (Miller, 15. October 2012). Cage shows us that being interested in the ignored, the abandoned is intriguing and inventive. In the text *As Found – a new design paradigm* the writers are pointing in the same direction and ask, “How can we refine our sensibility towards what is already there?” (Braae and Riesto, 2011, p. 8).

To be corrected in how to draw or sketch may seem harmless on its own, but it is only one of countless habitual corrections and instructions that continuously are inflicted on us. According to Henry A. Giroux citing Freire, educational institutions are hybridised spaces where everyday experiences are linked with the social gravity and material forces of institutional power (Giroux, 2010, p. 719, and also Turner, 2020 in this special issue). This means that what we do, our habitual corrections of ourselves and others, are not transparent to us. We are trapped, entangled in obscure webs, unable to distinguish between that which is forced upon us and that which is ours by right. “More

concretely, this incorporation takes place through the *displacements and body movements* organised by these social structures turned in to spatial structures and thereby *naturalized*.” (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 126).

Drawing is valuable as an example because it is an activity intimately connected to the body. It can be whimsical or precise; it is an explorative extension of the eye, the senses and the imagination. Transferred implication; your hand, your body, your eyes and your imagination are not fast enough, not confident and not clean enough. You are too frayed, vague and tentative. The language that is used is uncannily familiar to us (naturalized); to use fast (effective), confident (not searching) lines somehow illustrates how an ideal of clarity (not mess) and smoothness (elegance) are considered more important than searching, tentative and open qualities in drawing (education) and in research. As we journey towards professionalism, we are transformed. Education, the exam, converts us into standardised professionals. It is a kind of spellcraft. We (educators) are teaching methods and procedures to follow; we are in possession of predefined knowledge and answers that we make students reproduce. Small, undramatic things repeated over and over again. The end goal is to eradicate the difference between teacher and student, make sure that we all end up sharing the same ideals, the tight, precise line, a joint understanding of what to abandon, what to keep. Living uncreatively is to be caught up in the creativity of someone else, or of a machine (Winnicott, 2012, p. 65). For us to oppose this, or to disturb it, we can start noticing and valuing the modest, tentative, the vague, fumbling and sketchy lines that allow for process-like play. To care for the tentative is to celebrate the value of probing, searching and searching again (re-searching). How such practises can manifest themselves is still to be discovered, how they do must be (re)discovered over and over again, it is not something that can be regulated by manuals, fixed procedures or rules. However, what we can imagine is that noticing and including the modest, the probing, and not shying away from the ambiguity and pain will facilitate for broader and more (self) caring and opening processes of acting out creatively.

In the beginning of my project, I thought that I was doing research on something apart from myself. However, as the study proceeded, it quickly gravitated towards my own memories, when my younger self was led towards using the ideas of someone else instead of my own. This made me angry but also determined to be more attentive and caring towards my own ideas and more cautious when interacting with students. In fact, this research has made me recognize how my capacity to play has been curbed or even impaired. I am failing, and in dealing with this failure I might have to, as Winnicott's infant; “relive, fantasize, dream the integration of past, present, and future” (Winnicott, 2012, p. 10). To care for the abandoned is to “count what others don't” (Mountz, 2015, p. 1250). To care for one's failures is also to count what others don't. To count what others don't is to explore the hidden, the marginalised, the fragile, life.

2.2. Geir's Story: Not entirely unpleasant

I changed my hairstyle so many times now

I don't know what I look like

Talking Heads, *Life during wartime*.

Poetic, she said. The chair of the session, a session about the life inside and outside the museums, described my contribution, a presentation of ongoing fieldwork in a museum of contemporary art, as poetic. A feeling of defencelessness, *poetic*; an appraisal with ambiguous meaning here. I smiled, thanked her and returned to my seat in the seminar room. I did not yet realise that the feeling of irritation, directed against her, them, the situation, soon would shift, transform. First to seething accusations directed inwards, then, slowly, practically without me noticing it, into a sense of loss, before the feeling of it all, as soon as I was able to distract myself with other things, would dissolve into senseless obscurity in the body. There is no wonder that failures, or the

sense of them, often appear or re-appear in shapes that resemble popular imaginations of how ghosts operate. Ghosts are often unwanted; they appear, disappear, re-appear, haunt on, do not abide by the rules of death proper. Some of them are said to be several hundred years old. They move around by coming back (Wylie, 2007, p. 172).

She was probably right. There has often been something wrong in my texts and presentations; traces of the idiosyncratic and washed out remains of eager amateurism, a quirky tone. Not always entirely unpleasant. Earlier, the excesses were apparent for all; my voice, lines and words have often been left shivering under the weight of elements that I wasn't capable of handling. I have matured, broken myself in; what is left is a white noise rising from an obscure mix of saddened compliance and complicit ambitions the professional life demands of us all — a hint of the deviant. As a research novice, I was, as we all once were, thrown into a language that was already perfected. In *Kafka, towards a minor literature*, Deleuze and Guattari (1994) write about major and minor languages. The major language is the official language of something, the proper language of producing legitimate statements about different things in the world. The minor languages are illegitimate variations over the legitimate languages, deviations from them. Sometimes they subvert the major, at other times bend the major to become even more dominating. Our voices often roam between the major and the minor, life makes us stray, we attempt to dodge that which is imposed on us, but genre forces us to choose, instructs us to eradicate traces of the deviant.

“Write like a dog digging a hole,” write Deleuze and Guattari (1994, p. 42); to do this, you have to “find your underdeveloped point, your dialect, your dessert.” (my translation) The professional language has always seemed more developed than me. The dog and the dessert; the alluring promises about finding and using one's dialect seemed impossible or as another strange fashionable notion for sugar-coating the major, transforming it into fake minor, a more subtle major. However, it may be that the dog is not so far away, it is just that I cannot stand the dog, my dog, the sight and smell of this dog is unbearable to me.

We grow old already as children; we learn how to suppress, transcend, and endure. Confusion, disappointment and grief transformed into small acts of violence; outwards, inwards; branch, stick, sword, cutting off the hair of a favourite doll. I seldom break down; my body is capable of absorbing almost all of what is happening to me; it disperses off the effects into the flesh, bones and the organs. The complete, instant and automatic dispersion secures my capacity to operate, to function, protects me from falling, dissolving, becoming visible beyond my direction. I level myself by using the energies of failure as ballast.

We are told that experience is the high road to learning. However, there is always too much going on; to make an experience out of events, we have to reduce the complexity of them, carve out the relevant, and toss away the rest. We move between closed sites, “each with its own laws: first of all the family, then school (‘you're not at home, you know’), then the barracks (‘you're not at school, you know’), then the factory, hospital from time to time, maybe prison, the model site of confinement.” (Deleuze, 1992, p. 3). To be an experienced researcher is to possess the ability to make sense of things by using the rules of the site. I am always lagging or coming in too early; still mingling with crows in the trees outside, soaring over half-forgotten memories or gone altogether. It is as I am unable to make proper experiences out of anything, cannot surrender to experience, will not surrender to the licenced art of experiencing.

I started to read:

“Once, the museums were perhaps slow places, places for something else. Slowness is hardly enough in the age of the experience economy: we do not longer suddenly realise, with astonishment, or fear, that we have experienced something, we know where to obtain experiences.” (A picture from a “selfie-friendly exhibition”, Yayoi Kusama)

And I finished by reading:

“The sounds of the museum are the sound of the world that is passing through the museum. There is maybe no inside, no outside; everything is connections, relationships. Even the exclusion, especially the exclusion.”

I finished, kept standing still, waiting.

“Your presentation was very poetic.”

When I think of it now, I think that her comment was a reality check. I was on a slippery slope, on the verge of ignoring that ideas are both irrelevant and wild outside their proper domains. The heart is one thing for the poet, another for the physician. I was heading towards amateurism, began to resemble Vibeke’s student whose way of drawing “was frayed, vague, tentative”. Vague, tentative lines may be poetic, but they must be cleaned and tightened up if they are to become functional. “The hardest part is getting the hands to obey. Lines and strokes in drawings are, like voices, ways of walking, fingerprints, individual, singular, unique.”, writes Vibeke. To reverse our tendencies towards the frayed and tentative, we need to surrender to comprehensive interventions, like education, series of repeated measures, thousands upon thousands of adjustments. Seen as isolated, single actions, they may seem small, insignificant even, but put together, the effect of them is devastating, makes us abandon. Later on, we remember what we abandoned with an embarrassed smile; I was another back then.

“The proper voice is no voice at all.” (Charmaz and Mitchell, 1996, p. 286) I know this, I have often tried to sound like someone other than me, be a kind of a ventriloquist’s dummy. I have tried to educate myself into a point where I thought I could see everything without being anyone particular, like an omniscient ghost, or God (Haraway, 1988, p. 581). The “I” in science should not be more than a pronoun hidden in the shadows or preferably left out altogether. The “I” should be random, accidental; it should not matter who the “I” is. The “I” can be anyone. Is meant to be anyone. With the same or the equal qualifications, anyone identical. I was on the verge of thinking of myself as a researcher, a hopeful and energetic feeling of blending in, of finally being able to leave the failed “I” of the past behind, entering the world of the abandoned “I”, the one and true ghost of science proper.

“... the subject does not constitute an ontological unity but is a composite of a multitude of moveable ideas”, writes Spindler (Spindler, 2013, p. 131, my translation). Much of what I do seems beyond my control, it is more like what I do is doing me. I often end up on the fringes of where I am supposed to be, or just outside it, as if I have misunderstood the directions the contexts keep offering to me. I do not recognise my own trespassing before someone tells me about it, which is too late. It is like I, without thinking – like a slowly acquired habit? - have begun to move secretly along the less guarded, duskier parts of the world, like movers of contraband or shy people. However, my peers notice how lost I am without much delay; you been to another place they say with friendly interest. I am snapped into the proper place; I evacuate my ground, try to find my way into the pages.

I have always tended to swallow my defeats, a kind of obedience I guess — I have become an interior of waste, abandoned ideas, lost inclinations. A dense, dark geography, caves, tunnels; a banal geography, therefore a secret geography. It is a bodily affair; I don’t tell anyone, no bodies allowed here, no shivering, no loitering, no bodies allowed here. Choking on my swallowing, I am constantly haunted by the ghosts of my failures, by what I have abandoned. They keep on returning, I am not able to spot them, but I can feel them, watching me, watching over me. Why don’t you confess to us, they whisper.

2.3. Lars’ Story: Purification

Science is about truth! Saying what is true, what needs to be said. To change things, to fix things. Probably even to fix people? At least to fix society. This is the impulse that propelled me into university. But, the university is also academia. So the failing begins (anew, of course,

school was different but the same). The codes are obstacles. Sometimes they are walls, plain and simple – I know about walls, I stood on one, on the night of the ninth of November. You know where you are with walls. But sometimes the codes are like whiplashes, coming from behind, wrapping around my ankles, making me stumble. Or the lashes are just plain hurting, cutting into my back, into my cheeks. These are worse; they can make me keep to the given route, submit to trotting along, not edging out, not sitting down, not looking sideward. The worst codes, though, are those that feel smooth, those that I can master easily, that make me slick and strong.

The codes arrange the field, they belong to the sphere of the strategic, as de Certeau puts it. But they are not everything. They form space, but they don’t rule time. There is the realm of tactics, there can be openings, paths can be found and, trodden often enough, and by many, they might even solidify. (de Certeau, 1984, p. 35–39).

And what would be more solid than the truth, I wonder? She needs to be my ally; I always tended to imagine allies. Like Wonder Woman crossing her braces, shielding me from the bullets fired from the trenches. To have and to keep such allies, one needs to take some risks, I think in my brighter moments. How could I even consider contributing my share to changing the world for the better if I am not honest – since honesty is one of the fundamental aspects of truth? Should it not disarm scepticism, or, even better because playing on the right register, should it not create validity? So, when I submit my first paper to a journal, I take a risk, I am open, I describe the context in which I worked on it originally – a graduate student’s term paper, written in a spirit of both engagement and discontentment with the field of conversation analysis anno 1999. But a couple of years later, I am armed with what I perceived as ‘high theory’ (Katz, 2017), I feel equipped for challenging how science and openness and boundaries work. Because I had learned that much about the codes. I was trying to bring my friends in (Latour, 1987, p. 33) to stave off potential criticism. I was ready for success, for starting a career of publishing in top journals, after sending it to the journal.

The editor didn’t even bother to send it out for review—a student’s paper. A lesson learned. Honesty is not honoured; I got it. So, I submit again, but keep my mouth shut this time. Paper accepted, but more than that, I never again got a paper accepted with so little need for revision and in such a highly ranked journal. Another lesson learned? I guess so. And many times over. The sore didn’t disappear, though. It still is there, some kind of energy working away in all of us. It doesn’t feel productive—most of the time. But sometimes, I can muster up some anger. This isn’t right. This isn’t how it should be. This needs to be changed. I listen to the track *Discontentment is Our Engine* by Plan B; punk rock from Berlin in 1989. But, I also remember the advice that I received during civil service – received from a very kind superior after I went through a hurtful experience and, telling him about this experience, I concluded that I probably should toughen up. But he provided an unexpected response: he said I shouldn’t. So, I try to transform the energies, try to be open again, in other areas, now using more sophisticated language. Maybe I cannot be honest and blunt and at the same time here in academia. I need to clothe the crude and uncomfortable part of being honest in elegant words, in elaborate arguments, in addition to supporting them by big names. It feels as if I need to hide my blue-eyed but somewhat brutish past as a small-town kid from an uneducated background. A kid who was confounding superhero stories with literature to the bemusement of the schoolteacher he admired.

I need to purify my words; I need to purify my research (Latour, 1993, p. 46), to cut away the bumps, to cover up my failures and smoothen the story. Honesty doesn’t work for everyone. But I can try to smuggle something through the cracks, try to give readers access to the complexities of real taste. Is this resistance through adaptation? Or just a little lie that I use to calm the anger and the sadness and the questions below a cover of connoisseurship?

A few years ago, my position shifted. In the periphery, I became a professor, a representative of the centre. A strategist, someone who can channel energies. I now teach others how to become an academic.

Eventually, someone that I appreciate quotes me, telling me I taught them an important lesson: to focus on ‘publishing the smallest publishable unit’. And I stopped dead in my tracks. I really said that. Who did I think I am? I am failing myself.

3. Geographies of failure (conclusion)

Where do we meet failure? Where is it placed? What distances are established between us, others and our failures? In this article, we argue that the geographies of failure are shifting and mobile. How we treat failure depends on where we are, and experiences of failure can create very different trajectories in the personal and academic landscapes. Abandoned ideas, which may never even reach the threshold of failure in the outside world, remain hidden away. Some of them shift into a spectral mode of existence, where they can rest and be invisible most of the time. Until they rise to haunt us in our dreams, in the liminal areas between being awake falling asleep (Rose, 2006), in a late-night confession to a friend or colleague – or in an encounter which triggers the ideas’ relevance and summons the potentialities that we supposedly left behind.

There are many energies in failure, in shame and hurt. They consume us from within if we try to contain them within our bodies, if we are content to make them a matter for our interior. The question is then how much these energies can be channelled without purifying them too much, without making them too smooth and thus letting go of what they can offer? We need these energies of failure to transgress. They need to be kept intact – even though this scares us – their painfulness and ugliness ignores both time and space. We need to create spaces of production that allow for the messy to develop, a time-space where the energies of failure can clutter up, seep through cracks, gather in puddles, be cared for and collected to maintain, create or change. Even if we try to turn our failures into resistance, we also need to care for them, not disregard them as mere occasions for learning, transformation or resistance. They are not transcendent or merely fluid energies; this metaphor is too limited, too soft at times. They can also etch themselves deeply into our subjectivities, our corporal being, into the academic landscape that we inhabit. We cannot wish them away or eradicate them in one revolutionary stroke. We cannot transform the scars into muscles or beauty spots; they need to remain scars; they are quite right as scars.

Is there any potential for resistance in writing successfully about failure? Maybe there isn’t any – our stories might just end up being yet another contribution to the twisted and lucrative world of academic publishing. We don’t know yet. However, we do hope that mentioning that which we rarely speak of, our failures and vulnerability can ease the feeling of loneliness in others. None of us knows anyone that has not felt the shame in failing, in having to abandon something that they believed in.

And we do believe that mentioning the sometimes destructive, toxic even, atmospheres in science, publishing and education can help create or maintain the impulse towards resistance in many of us, or support us in giving our attempts to resist a direction, as set forth in a more militant manner by Clare (2019).

To mention something can be to care for it. One of the worst things that can happen to us and our ideas is not to be mentioned, to be ignored, not noticed. This we have experienced, all of us if we dare to remember; the loneliness in not being noticed, mentioned. It is like being denied being; like dying, unbearable.

We conclude in a stance of wanting to continue to open up for, to care for, and include the messy, the vague, the hurtful and other events and emotions we tend to abandon or dismiss. To continue to do so even if it means us losing our way, making a detour, leaving the known, entering the wild and the messy or embracing risky inspirations from people that dare to open up for “different aesthetic standards for ordering or disordering space” (Halberstam, 2011, p. 10). A starting point for such a move may be to insist on the value of including the excess, of valuing frayed or crooked lines, the old, mended, the disorderly, the ignored and

abandoned; our own voices, tentative, failing, trying, hoping.

To acknowledge the abandoned, the failure, to keep mentioning it, can provide us with gentler emotional geographies, but perhaps also more imaginative geographies, geographies that offer us the space we need to continue to think, feel, make and care. To do so is in our opinion to open up for generating different practices, practices that are highly needed in our current climate of conformity, constant evaluation and streamlined efficiency.

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Vedlegg 1

Vurdering fra NSD Personvernombudet for forskning

Vibeke Sjøvoll
Kunnskapsveien 55
2007 KJELLER

Vår dato: 16.11.2017

Vår ref: 56418 / 3 / OASR

Deres dato:

Deres ref:

Vurdering fra NSD Personvernombudet for forskning § 31

Personvernombudet for forskning viser til meldeskjema mottatt 05.10.2017 for prosjektet:

56418	<i>Undersøkelse av studenters refleksjoner og arbeidsmåter i emnet MAPD4200 Product aesthetics and culture på Høgskolen i Oslo og Akershus.</i>
<i>Behandlingsansvarlig</i>	<i>Høgskolen i Oslo og Akershus, ved institusjonens øverste leder</i>
<i>Daglig ansvarlig</i>	<i>Vibeke Sjøvoll</i>

Vurdering

Etter gjennomgang av opplysningene i meldeskjemaet og øvrig dokumentasjon finner vi at prosjektet er meldepliktig og at personopplysningene som blir samlet inn i dette prosjektet er regulert av personopplysningsloven § 31. På den neste siden er vår vurdering av prosjektopplegget slik det er meldt til oss. Du kan nå gå i gang med å behandle personopplysninger.

Vilkår for vår anbefaling

Vår anbefaling forutsetter at du gjennomfører prosjektet i tråd med:

- opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet og øvrig dokumentasjon
- vår prosjektvurdering, se side 2
- eventuell korrespondanse med oss

Vi forutsetter at du ikke innhenter sensitive personopplysninger.

Meld fra hvis du gjør vesentlige endringer i prosjektet

Dersom prosjektet endrer seg, kan det være nødvendig å sende inn endringsmelding. På våre nettsider finner du svar på hvilke [endringer](#) du må melde, samt endringskjema.

Opplysninger om prosjektet blir lagt ut på våre nettsider og i Meldingsarkivet

Vi har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet på nettsidene våre. Alle våre institusjoner har også tilgang til egne prosjekter i [Meldingsarkivet](#).

Vi tar kontakt om status for behandling av personopplysninger ved prosjektslutt

Dokumentet er elektronisk produsert og godkjent ved NSDs rutiner for elektronisk godkjenning.

Ved prosjektslutt 21.12.2019 vil vi ta kontakt for å avklare status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Se våre nettsider eller ta kontakt dersom du har spørsmål. Vi ønsker lykke til med prosjektet!

Marianne Høgetveit Myhren

Øivind Armando Reinertsen

Kontaktperson: Øivind Armando Reinertsen tlf: 55 58 29 94 / Oivind.Reinertsen@nsd.no

Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering



Prosjektvurdering - Kommentar

Prosjektnr: 56418

Utvalget informeres skriftlig og muntlig om prosjektet og samtykker til deltakelse. Informasjonsskrivet er godt utformet. Vi ber imidlertid om at følgende tilføyes:

- Oppgi dato for prosjektslutt og hva som da vil skje med datamaterialet. Vi anbefaler at du skriver at datamaterialet vil bli anonymisert ved prosjektslutt, heller enn slettet, slik at du kan ta vare på anonymisert datamateriale.
- Oppgi behandlingsansvarlig institusjon.

Personvernombudet legger til grunn at forsker etterfølger Høgskolen i Oslo og Akershus sine interne rutiner for datasikkerhet. Dersom personopplysninger skal lagres på privat pc /mobile enheter, bør opplysningene krypteres tilstrekkelig.

Det oppgis at personopplysninger skal publiseres. Personvernombudet legger til grunn at det foreligger eksplisitt samtykke fra den enkelte til dette. Vi anbefaler at deltakerne gis anledning til å lese igjennom egne opplysninger og godkjenne disse før publisering.

Forventet prosjektslutt er 21.12.2019. Ifølge telefonsamtale 15.11.2017 med oppklaring av prosjektmeldingen, skal innsamlede opplysninger da anonymiseres. Anonymisering innebærer å bearbeide datamaterialet slik at ingen enkeltpersoner kan gjenkjennes. Det gjøres ved å:

- slette direkte personopplysninger (som navn/koblingsnøkkel)
- slette/omskrive indirekte personopplysninger (identifiserende sammenstilling av bakgrunnsopplysninger som f.eks. bosted/arbeidssted, alder og kjønn)
- slette digitale lyd-/bilde- og videoopptak.

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and processes in design education**
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Vibeke Sjøvoll
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