DESIGN & NARRATION?

-A research exploring how design and narration, collectively, work as a means to expand the uncharted field of design pedagogy

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Photo from Arvidsjaur, fall of 2011.

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ABSTRACT

This text process a design pedagogical research executed in Arvidsjaur during the fall of 2011. The formulation of questions that this study circles around regards how combining design and narration can be used in the development of design pedagogy. Also scrutinized, how did the formulation of this research affect the outcome and what means, in addition their attendance, did the people who partook contribute with?

The purpose is to find a pedagogic angle that moves focus away from the finished product and onto other aspects of the design process. To clarify, by investigating how narration adapts as a tool during a design process this research seek to enlighten ways that we comprehend, and make use of, our surroundings while working towards a common - designed - goal. What comes about when gathering a group of people and asking them to represent Arvidsjaur by designing a cup?

The material used emanates from observations, narratives, images and finished artifacts – all deriving from a set of workshops held in the city of Arvidsjaur. To partake in the workshops was voluntary and the invite began with the question/statement: Design and narration? An ethnographically inspired method preceded the structure of the study and hence made it impossible to foreordain what would occur before arriving in Arvidsjaur. By placing the gathered material and observations along with a set of selecte theories, such as sociocultural learning and social constructionism, I wish to enlighten and point out qualities, along with weaknesses, that this study occupies.

Beyond a written contribution, and the work on the field, the research resulted in a number of designed cups. These cups were photographed, processed, and depicted in three different ways – as posters and as a series of photographs. These images were on display during an exhibition at Konstfack in December 2011. My contribution to the exhibition was meant as a continuation on questions regarding design and narration. What happens e.g. with an item when it is displayed in this matter? When moved from one context to another? It is thus a way to stress the importance of questioning and challenge the way we apprehend our surroundings and what we chose to enlighten or leave out – a comment on a stirring development. I did not wish to explain to the viewer what the cups narrate; they were made to reveal something on their own. How they ultimately are received becomes yet another way of pointing out that how we experience something is dependent on a variety of circumstances.

Key words: Design, Narration, Design pedagogy, Artifacts / Cups, Design process, Sociocultural learning
DESIGN & NARRATION?

En undersökning som utforskar hur design och berättande, kollektivt, fungerar som redskap i arbetet med att vidga fältet för designpedagogik.

Clara Ceder

Fotografi från Arvidsjaur, hösten 2011.

Nyckelord: Design, Narration, Berättande, Designpedagogik, Föremål, Muggar, Designprocessen, Sociokulturellt lärande
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INTRODUCTION

To begin with

In order to give you as a reader a chance to follow the first train of thoughts toward this project I want to briefly clarify the context in which these following thoughts began to grow. While scrutinizing the development of our Swedish school system, after browsing through Sven Eric Liedman’s book *Hets*, it became evident that we are approaching an organization that is becoming even more focused on results than during prior decades. This development made me question the path *we* have chosen and where *we* are heading with these reorganizations. Italicizing *we* in the former sentence is a way to emphasize that *we* in this case has to do with the current government and, although it is based on the foundation of democracy, the changes made are still important to review and question. While reflecting on the issue mentioned above I realized how institutionalized I, most likely, am myself after more than a decade within this systems and developments. How has this affected me and my own free spirited, unbiased, open-minded view on creativity, learning and results versus that of ‘the system’?

In addition, we are living in a society where very much is depending on global cooperation and very little seem to be heading down a sustainable path. Every new development or solution makes me wonder if we have designed ourselves into a corner? A corner that we soon won't be able to design our way out of. Inhabiting a large scale of interpretations, and disagreements, the concept of design is remodeled and changed on a daily basis; the concept *design* and the various meanings the word inhabits is thus widely debated. The history of design is not said to be very old although items have been designed for as long as we have used tools. An interest in how we communicate and what are considered valid forms of correspondence began to grow, what about communicating straight through an artifact? The reverberations from the reflections above all spread like an echo over this project and led up to the following consecution.

BACKGROUND

Design is anonymous in some ways and extremely public in others, so what offspring can the union between design and pedagogy bare? What can we narrate through design? Or what can design narrate to us? This is where the journey began and what follows next is a more close description of the background and previous research within the field.

This study has its foundation within the enormous field of design and is at the same time coexisting with the pedagogical area. As if this was not enough it also circles around
theories within the sociocultural and social constructionist field of knowledge. I have arranged a qualitative research where the starting point is a small town/community in the northern part of Sweden - Arvidsjaur. My own preconceived ideas about this town mainly emerge from the actual geographic location it inhabits and thus assuming it might reveal an interesting history of crafts along a certain cultural context.

A concept that has colored this project just as much as design has done is narration. As mentioned above, the fields of design covers a great deal of land and in order to narrow it down certain angles are peeled off. Esko Mäkelä’s dissertation in educational work, Slöjd som Berättelse, is based on the thesis of sloyd as narrative. Although our works diverge from each other his research will still be of help when clarifying certain terms and keywords that will occur in this text, narration in particular. His dissertation comes in handy since our areas of research inhabit similarities that are interesting to emphasize, such as narrating something through an artifact.

Mentioned in the introduction, the history of design can be seen as both reasonably young yet also as old as any artifact we have discovered. For some people the word design is immediately connected to the profession, to design, while others see a noun or a design. Some claim that design has to do with a specific type of artifacts whilst others see everything as being designed. This project does not engage in straightening out the different views on design or trying to find a correct description. It is the different views that make design interesting to investigate and discuss. This project rather works as a way to explore and get close to the design pedagogical field and seeking to develop this union by focusing on design and narration. To clarify, take the current Swedish school system along with the constant development of a design critique and enlightenment. Then add the various views on the concept of design, together with the history of it, and you will end up with all these strings going in different directions heading towards the research questions in this study.

PURPOSE / RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study moves focus away from the pulse of larger cities and proceeds from a small town in the northern parts of Sweden. A lot of projects are, due to various reasons, executed and emanate from larger cities and it therefore felt profitable to start off in a different direction. This research can be traced to the development of the term design and what it involves -

everything for some and very little for others. Design can tell us as much about history as anything else we know and we can read and gain knowledge from it but we can also question and challenge what we find. Design pedagogy is a ground that is reasonably unexplored although needed now more than ever. It can e.g. work as a way to raise questions, interact with, or/and examine the field of design. Can we for instance communicate something straight through an artifact? A pedagogic angle that moves focus away from the finished product and onto other aspects of the design process is hence the vision. In other words, aiming to investigate how narration adapts as a tool in this process whilst also seeking to enlighten ways that we comprehend and make use of our surroundings while reaching a common, designed, goal.

Moreover, what comes about when gathering a group of people, unknown to me, in ways familiar for each other, and asking them to represent Arvidsjaur by designing a cup? What happens in this social experiment and what is learnt? Focus will lie on the interaction between the participants while working on their artifacts, and by interaction I do not merely refer to the conversations between them. Also important to mention, and illuminated in the introduction, the path our Swedish School system is heading down and the rapid developments within global industries is not in any way what this research is set out to change or solve. It is nonetheless a research that stresses the importance of questioning and challenging the way we apprehend our surroundings and what we chose to enlighten or leave out – a comment on a stirring development.

Narrowing the research down to revolve around a specific set of questions is very challenging and not all questions need answers. Nevertheless, set out to be examined in this design pedagogical study is the following questions:

• How can narration work as a tool in a design pedagogical research?

• When faced with the task to design a cup that narrates Arvidsjaur - what aspects of the process are in focus?

• How do the participants in this research make use of each other’s and their own resources? And finally, in what ways do the surroundings affect the participants work?

**EMPIRICS**

The main material of this study was gathered during a three week stay in Arvidsjaur, in the fall of 2011. Five workshops with two different group constellations were arranged. The participants were given the choice of partaking three times à 2 hours or during one four hour
session. It was free for the public to attend and a total of eight people turned up at the first two hour workshop. Occasion number two occupied six people and the last one held four people whilst the longer workshop was left vacant. The age level had a range between 27 to, approximately, 70 years. The fifth workshop was held at a high school together with two joint art classes and the ages varied between 15-17 years, teachers not included. The work that took place before executing the workshops, along with the exhibition that succeed them, is part of the gathered empirics as well. Consequently, this is a qualitative study and the materials worked with here emanates from the three weeks spent in Arvidsjaur. Large parts of this design pedagogical research derive from the workshops, meetings, and tours that that took place, e.g. from observations, sound recordings, field notes and images.

ASSORTMENT / SELECTION

Arvidsjaur was elected school community of the year, an award that is handed out to the community that has done best according to a set list of criterions. For me this list of criterions elucidates a view on what seems to matter in schools today. Nevertheless, this is not a study that is focusing on the effects of this development, it is merely a comment and an invitation to pay attention to what is happening in schools today. However, I did choose to leave the metropolitan area of Stockholm and travel to this city in the north of Sweden. Arvidsjaur with its surrounding environment inhabits an interesting history and was hence one of the reasons for choosing this place as the starting point for this research. The whole district inhabits around 7000 people whereas approximately 4600 live in the core of Arvidsjaur. An interesting Sami culture that goes back hundreds of years, along with trades, agriculture, and forestry, are all part of Arvidsjaur’s history and present. The post-industrial Arvidsjaur is nowadays also known for being a place where international car industries travel to test-drive their prototypes. The participants’ own connection to Arvidsjaur was the entrance to the workshops. Their connection to the city became the starting point and enabled a personal way to interpret the task of narrating though a cup, without having to be too personal. How the geographical location influenced, or/and was of importance, will therefore be inspected further on in this study.

The main focus will move in an orbit around what happened during the actual workshops; the work of the participants and how they worked with the task of narrating

2. To see the whole list, check out: http://www.lararforbundet.se/web/ws.nsf/documents/0035E3C2?OpenDocument
3. www.scb.se
something about Arvidsjaur through an item. This item, ending up a cup, was not destined in the beginning. It started off as an item that was free of choice, leaving the decision to the designer. Although, seeing how boundaries not always are suppressing it might, instead of working as an obstacle, turn out to challenge the participants and enable them to focus on the narrative part of the design instead of on what item to choose. The cup itself was chosen because of the general place it has in most peoples’ lives. Drinking is essential for surviving and when giving it further thought most people probably, and hopefully, come across a drinking vessel in their everyday life. A selection of the artifacts from the workshops will be analyzed within the context that they were created. Also, what happens when the cups are moved out of the workshops and conquering the public sphere with the claim to represent Arvidsjaur? I ended up arranging a total of five workshops in Arvidsjaur and emphasis will lie on three of these along with an exhibition that was arranged to display the cups.

The choice of exploring how narration and design work together is part of the assortments in this research. Narration and design is present as a challenge for the participants during the workshops - in how they make use of the concepts and what they choose to enlighten. Also, narration and design play parts when analyzing the gathered materials from Arvidsjaur.

**METHOD**

**Qualitative research**

Without looking at the relationship between qualitative and quantitative studies as pairs of opposition this research is still labeled a qualitative one. To clarify, interest lies in the interaction between the participant and the role of narration, not how many or how often something occurred

**Ethnographical studies**

According to Birgitta Kullberg, PhD in pedagogies and didactics, an ethnographical study can be referred to as a field study. Such a study is, succinctly put, based on spending a long period of time in the environment, situations, and context, of the specific field of research. This study is inspired and has borrowed several approaches from ethnographical studies. A connection is therefore made between the gathered empirics and some of the ground pillars of this science. Kullberg provides her readers with the essentials of this form of research tool in

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her book, *Etnografi i Klassrummet*. She writes about three phases that you can apply; *the pre fieldwork phase, the fieldwork phase and the post fieldwork phase*. Accordingly, being inspired by the methods used within the field of ethnographical studies, the structure of the process chapter of this research is divided into the phases mentioned above.

In a similar way, Christer Stensmo, associate professor in educational studies, argue that when a case study concerns a pedagogical situation it is bound to certain delimitations: time, place, and content. It is within these frames that you perform your study. Being just that, a case study with social relations in the center, a pedagogical situation, the gathered material is regarded in relation to these delimitations. Stensmo also states that ethnography is a strategy, within cultural science, where the researcher through participatory observations set out to establish certain traits within cultures and ethnic groups. In order to describe and understand the target group they observe their everyday life during a long period of time. As a comment, this research differs from a more anthropological angle of ethnographical studies in the way that I myself set up the arrangements for the study; I brought in the materials and invited people to voluntarily partake.

**Transformation Design**

RED, an inter-disciplinary team within the Design Council, has proceeded from design in their work with finding and developing solutions to improve situations within the public service sphere of the United Kingdom. Their work with developing the discipline of *Transformation Design* is accounted for in their RED-paper. In short, they argue that all transformation projects are signified and proceeds from six characteristics, although this is not the case in this study. Only some of their thoughts behind *transformation design* are visible in the way the workshops were arranged. Since not all guide lines within this discipline are followed this study is merely inspired by some of the fundamental conditions behind RED’s way of working and their way of structuring a design process as a whole was not adapted. However, some of the basic ideas on how to work with design were picked up: “*One of transformation design’s great strengths is in its ability to mediate diverse points of view and

5. Ibid. p. 13
7. Referring to quote in Swedish from ibid, p 69. Own translation and interpretation.
9. Ibid p.20
facilitate collaboration. [...] the design process creates a neutral space in which a range of people, whose expertise may have a bearing on the problem in hand, can work together.”

This quote illustrates the way transformation design inspired the methods used in this design pedagogical research; by elucidating the importance of valuing your own contribution in any project and making use of others knowledge to reach a common goal.

Concisely, *Narration* is a word that plays an important role throughout this study and the act of narrating (narration) is placed both within the methods used and within the theoretical frame. *Design and narration* This question/statement was first used as a way to attract the attention of the participants and it was also the entrance during the actual workshops, hence the reason for placing it along with the methods used. Following is a more elaborate description of the word and how it applies to the theoretical conditions as well.

**THEORIES / INTERPRETIVE FRAMEWORK**

**Narration**

First to go, as mentioned above, a word that is recurrent in this study but has been left fairly unexplained is, hitherto, *narration*. When looking it up in a dictionary the word narration is provided with a variety of definitions, most explanations are thus connected to the act of communicating. As the lexical explanations of the word implies, the word *narration* inhabits several meanings. There are numerous ways to use narration within a scientific field; it is merely a matter of clarifying how it is employed. In Esko Mäkelä dissertation, on narration and sloyd, he accounts for some areas where studies with a narrative approach can be found. He emphasizes the importance that lies in how to use narrative; is it a study where narrative is the tool for analysis or the goal of the analysis? This study can be placed together with both. By asking the participants to narrate about Arvidsjaur through a cup, an artifact, narration has been used as means to accomplish a goal. On the other hand, by looking closer at the finished items you can explore the way the participants narrated through their cups.

This research proceeds from an inquiry concerning how to work with narration and design. Narration is present throughout this study in abundance. Yes, as a method to attract

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11. See attachment nr 1- Poster.


13. Ibid., p. 73
participant but also when interpreting the gathered empirics - by placing it together with sociocultural learning and social constructionism. "The narrative story of a design object offers a series of events, a journey through time, not dissimilar to narrative in literary text." This quote strengthens the way I have made use of narration in this research. By arranging workshops where the main task has been to design a cup that narrates something about Arvidsjaur I have anticipated that it is possible to do so. By assuming this I agree with the claim that objects can narrate something on their own. This is a notion that some critics emphasize limitations with due to the disregard of language that may occur. This is hence where social constructionism and sociocultural learning enter the arena.

Sociocultural Learning / Social Constructionism

So, in order not to upset the critics, as a help in investigating the questions for this research the analysis will be made within the realms of sociocultural learning and the ideas behind social constructionism. As a way of considering how we learn, and change experiences, a sociocultural perspective will be applied onto this research. Accordingly, language enables us to communicate and interact with each other. Roger Säljö, professor in pedagogical psychology, investigates the relationship between language and artifacts and claims that physical artifacts are in fact loaded with distinctions generated by language. Developing discourses about the surrounding world is one of the most substantial ways that humans gather experience and reconstruct their substantiveness. It felt like one thing to read about how we learn and interact through language and artifacts and another to explore it on the field. Having done precisely this by arranging a number of workshops in Arvidsjaur the exploration continues by feeding it with some more theoretical nourishment.

“Social constructionism cautions us to be ever suspicious of our assumptions about how the world appears to be.” Having initially expressed a concern regarding the way society is developing and the path we are heading down it does not seem more than right that this study is scrutinized as well. By putting on a pair of social constructionist glasses I hope to discover, question, and put in place some of the events that I myself created when carrying out this research. The views on social constructionism are many and the opinions differ within this social science theory as well. A term that is recurrent, but still carries different meanings

15. Referring back to Ibid, p. 54
for different areas within social constructionism, is discourse. “A discourse refers to a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events.”18 This view on how we understand our surroundings will be used as a tool to analyze the events that took place during three weeks in Arvidsjaur. The discursive context in which we come across an artifact influence how we perceive them and the following view on objects will be present when looking closer at the results from the workshops: “A discourse about an object is said to manifest itself in texts […] In fact anything that can be ‘read’ for meaning can be thought of as being a manifestation of one or more discourses and can be referred to as ‘text’ ”19

Local area studies

Inger Sanderoth, et.al, writes about local area studies with a school environment as starting point. In Plats – Identitet - Lärande they contribute with valid points concerning the relationship, and meaning, that a location carries for how we learn. Through close interaction with our surroundings one can develop a deeper understanding of oneself.20 Some of these ideas regarding the relationship between identity, location, and learning will be supportive for this research, proceeding from Arvidsjaur.

An approach to the field of design and pedagogy

Susanne Vihma provides one view on design, and the history of it, in her introduction to the book: Design Historia- en Introduktion. She questions whether a design history is motivated at all and answers the question by referring to how professional designers can make use of a time perspective when faced with fundamental questions regarding their work.21 However, are we now provided with a reason to why we ought to have a design history? This reason might be sufficient for some, though surely there must be several other reasons for having a design history as well? What I am grasping for here is something that Vihma stresses in her book just a few pages later. Namely, that her layout and presentation of design and design history is just one of many ways of closing up on the topic. This clarification is meant to enlighten the fact that how we make use of a discipline such as design is never objective; it is always dependent of the situation and the person applying it. This postmodern view on design inevitably applies to the design process as well.

18. Ibid. p.67
19. Ibid. p.66
Views on the design process

According to RED, the interdisciplinary group mentioned in the method, a design process can appear in various shapes and forms. RED, first and foremost, emphasizes a user-centered approach to design which differs from what they refer to as a customer-centered one. These two perspectives differ in focus in the sense that one focus on meeting the requests of the customer whilst the other focuses on other parts of the process and not merely on the result. They elaborate the perks with a user-centered perspective by enumerating three important skills, all containing factors that are present in this research as well. A user-centered design approach, at its most basic, involves three core skills: firstly they bring up looking, and the importance of observations as a way to gather inspiration and gain knowledge. Secondly they mention the strength that lies in illuminating ideas and problems as a way to achieve quicker solutions and feedback from others. Thirdly they accentuate the finesse with prototyping and argue that: “This culture of trying things out quickly, getting feedback in-situ and then iterating the idea is a fast and low-cost way of moving a project forward.” To interpose, though the participants in Arvidsjaur were not supposed to solve a problem for the public sphere, RED’s perspective on a design process is still present.

A person, who enlightens how a design process can progress, or rather stagnate, is Thomas Thwaites. I first came across the work of Thwaites when reading about him in Christina Zetterlund’s text “Vad kan vi göra?” Zetterlund provides her readers with a description of a project of his which basically revolves around him setting out to recreate a toaster from scratch. The difficulties Thwaites is faced with in his Toaster Project makes it clear how far the development and globalization has gone and it raises tons of design related questions. Thwaites’ is just one human dynamo, in a long line of people, who acknowledges this development. By proving an alternative view on how far certain design processes has gone he strengthens the importance that comes along with a functioning design pedagogy - one where questions can be raised.

FORMER RESEARCH

Sloyd and Narration

Mentioned earlier in this text is the work of Esko Mäkelä. His dissertation is based around sloyd as a subject in school: “The chief aim of this thesis is to explore aesthetic aspects of the Swedish school subject of sloyd. “26 His target group is constituted by a number of students and revolves around their work. My work disregards questions regarding aesthetics and what is considered good versus bad. Aesthetics was never, purposely, used as a measure in this study. However, Mäkelä’s work circle around questions regarding narration is similar to my own and is therefore used as a way to straighten out certain issues.

Radical pedagogies

A group that provided this research with inspiration on how to challenge certain notions within the world of pedagogy is Radikal Pedagogik, or Radical Pedagogies if you want.27 This group, consisting of Johanna Gustavsson and Johanna Nyberg, works with a pedagogical collaboration and have composed the book Do the Right Thing. In this book they declare how they, amongst other things, seek to conquer and question the world of art. They argue that art is not supposed to merely reflect the world we live in but also be part of it. They work to equalize art with a process a meeting and an action.28 They write about their hopes to capture and take over the white rooms of art: stretching the limits of what is expected and who is welcomed there.29 Their work, with arranging workshops and daring boundaries within the grounds of pedagogies and art, has inspired this study in the arranging of workshops and exhibitions.

r a k e t a

Another group who confront notions, within a realm of design, is r a k e t a - a group of people from various instances and backgrounds who together work with interdisciplinary projects in various forms and shapes.30 Their work to erase boundaries and experiment with cooperation between different fields such as art, design, architecture inspired this research.

27. My own translation.
29. Ibid.
30. r a k e t a : http://www.raketa.nu/about.html
r a k e t a has carried out a project named How can I tell you so you will understand?31 This project evolves around the importance of asking questions. The actual name of the project worked as an entrance to my research through the way it exemplifies the ambiguity that lies in a narration. There are several aspects that affect how something is perceived and the questions r a k e t a ask inspired this study to work with narration and to emphasize the importance of questioning. There are so many ways of expressing oneself and receiving information; ways that goes beyond spoken words and body languages.

The appearance of social constructionism and a sociocultural perspective

To carry out a research and apply it to a sociocultural or/and social constructionist perspective is not something new. For example, Mikaela Saint Just Ribeiro presents her study Orminge i mitt Hjärta from a social constructionist viewpoint. She does this by looking closer at the interaction between the participants and placing them within different discourses and power relations.32 When using such a perspective I find it important to emphasize your own role in the process. To clarify, depending on how you present your work, and your way of perceiving what has happened in a certain interaction or/and situation, is also colored by cultural luggage and discursive contexts and hence also becomes of importance for the research.

PROCESS AND ANALYSIS

The following passage consist of abstractions from the three weeks in Arvidsjaur that this research circuit around - occasions that are identified as vital and elucidates what this research set out to examine.

The Pre-fieldwork phase

To refer back to Kullberg, the gathered empirics in this research are made visible by a division into phases. As previously mentioned an ethnographical study can be divided into the pre-fieldwork phase, the fieldwork phase and the post-fieldwork phase.33 Kullberg writes about the pre-fieldwork phase and the importance of discovering and contacting, what she refers to as, the gate keepers of a research field. Accordingly, a week before setting off to Arvidsjaur I began contacting people that could be of help, seeking to find volunteers interested in

32. Read the whole research at: http://konstfack.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2:461394
partaking. Schools, non-profit organizations, the municipal office of Arvidsjaur, and those in charge of the cultural activities within the community were contacted. The names of several people, private as well as within organizations, had within days been gathered. By contacting a non-profit organization the first essential step was conquered, namely finding a location for the workshops. Contacting people through emails and phone calls were the first attempt of announcing and making the project public. The pre-fieldwork phase was also incorporated by the formulation of a text suitable for a poster along with the actual making of it. The text had to be long enough to describe the project and short enough to attract people’s attention.\footnote{34} The purpose of the poster was to both invite people to partake and get those who chose not to attend to nonetheless reflect around the question.

The non-design experience needed to partake had been clarified. Regardless, the opinion that some people were less suited to attend the workshops, due to their loss of aesthetics and artistic know-how, was still present. It was an opinion that people had regarding themselves but also about others. When gathering names during the search for participants some people were regarded to misfit the purpose of the workshops, regardless of the clarification that everyone was of interest. From a social constructionist viewpoint this enlighten how: “The positions available within discourses bring with them a ‘structure of rights’; they provide the possibilities and the limitations on what we may or may not do and claim for ourselves within a particular discourse.”\footnote{35} Regardless of what was written and said, about who was allowed to attend the workshops, people made their own estimations connected to their ideas about the context. The discourses in which the gatekeepers received the research differed from my own and from their point of view some people were more suitable than others. In other words, although it was clearly stated that everyone was of interest there was a power that lied in the knowledge and connection that the gatekeepers had to Arvidsjaur.\footnote{36}

On arrival the posters were placed in various public places such as the library, outside the supermarkets, and on the local notice boards. The function of the poster was to invite people to partake and also to regard the question/heading: design and narration? The text on the poster explained the purpose of the workshops and the total disregard of prior knowledge within the field of the design that was required. It was supposed to attract a public interest although it, at the same time, turned out to contain exclusionary elements. Such an element

\footnote{34} See attachment nr 1 for the actual poster. 
was, not surprising but still an aspect, the time of the workshops. People were unable to attend because it collided with other activities and undertakings. In addition to this, a general disinterest in the research due to an opinion of not having anything of interest to narrate about Arvidsjaur excluded a few.

To summarize, regardless of the actual text, the posters intimidated and had people experience themselves as unqualified to attend. This came to the surface when talking to people about the project and inviting them personally. Also, emails arrived from people who had ideas on how to narrate Arvidsjaur through an artifact but who refused to attend themselves. They did so by referring to their limitations within the 'artistic field' – their words not mine. So, to conclude, regardless of the actual message of the poster it did not merely serve its purpose but the layout also, unintentionally, scared people off.

**The fieldwork phase – on arrival**

The fieldwork phase, overlapping the pre-fieldwork phase and contacting the gatekeepers regards what happened on arrival, some events are already accounted for above. Even though the learning environment in which the study was preformed was created, as a result of the arranged workshops, it did not proceed from an already existing group of people. The situation was new for everyone who attended though their connection to Arvidsjaur united them. Following is a brief description of the work that occurred before the workshops along with a closer look on the actual work that took place during, all placed under their own intermediate heading.

Access to a studio was organized on arrival and time to schedule the workshops was arranged - due to the commitment of the non-profit association mentioned earlier who lent out the place for free. Having passed the first, allegedly most difficult quest, the search for participants continued. Meetings with the people that had been contacted allowed access to names and number to other organizations and people of interest. Further efforts were made through the posters (see appendix) and by attending the local website and finally by spreading the word the old fashioned way - letting rumors of the project go free.

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37. Referring back to Kullberg, Ibid., p. 13
The weaving group

One suggestion that came up during the search for participants was to meet with a weaving group that gathered twice a week in the basement of the district health care center. I was invited to attend a meeting to inform them about the project. A tour presenting their work was given and I got time to present my project. Later on, while ingesting coffee and cake, stories flourished on how Arvidsjaur used to be and how it is nowadays. Interesting here is that when narration was brought up they revealed how they used their handicrafts as a means of expressing, or rather carry on, a cultural heritage. Remarkable here is that although the ladies, only ladies partook in the activities, confessed to working with narrating through their tapestries they still regarded themselves to be unfit to attend the workshop - with the exception of two women. Image number four, above, is a great example of ways that the ladies used narration in their works. On closer inspection the weave unveil small images that together constitute a short telling.

Furthermore, during the meeting one person immediately expressed ideas on how to narrate Arvidsjaur through a cup. She referred to materials that she associated with the nature surrounding the town and how these could be used in the making of a cup. The reason for mentioning this person is that she remained a no-show during the workshops and was very firm in her decision not to attend. Approximately one day after leaving Arvidsjaur she called and reported that she had finished her contribution and wondered how she should deliver it. She explained her reasons for not attending and had instead designed a cup on her own initiative. This exception reveals how the research also inspired a person to interpret narrating and design by herself and hence single-handedly make a contribution. As a comment, when Säljö briefly describes one of the definitions behind a sociocultural perspective he refers to the description of cultural psychology - seeing that it regards how people adopt and are
formed by participating in cultural activities and using the tools that the set out culture provide.  

The first three workshops

The invitation allowed the volunteers the choice of partaking in the workshops during three shorter times: Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday 19-21.00 or alternatively Sunday 13-17 for a longer session. The choice was theirs and the first workshop was arranged in the following way. After welcoming the people who showed up, eight to be precise, I introduced the project and began by getting their approval to use the gathered material. Their roles and rights as participants were clarified and they got the opportunity to determine if their contribution could be used in this study or not. When this was settled they were given the opportunity to introduce themselves and then they were sent out on a short exercise. The assignment was for them to go out and with the help of a few cards containing simple demands and challenges walk around to get a new perspective on Arvidsjaur. This first task was inspired by the interdisciplinary group raketa, who, during a seminar at Konstfack during the fall of 2011, handed out cards containing short invitations or challenges. The purpose was to follow the instructions on the cards and finally send an explanation or map back to raketa in order to show where and what you had experienced. When gathered after forty minutes each group (they had paired up) gave a brief review on their tour focusing on what they had experienced and how they had taken on the challenges on the cards. A variety of experiences were presented. E.g. one group discovered that a sculpture they found had been designed by Astri Taube. A summarily presentation of the set-up during the remaining two workshops follows while focusing on interesting occurrences that took place.

Workshop number two, on this night we were six people in place and the evening began with instructions and discussions about their assignment. Henceforth, they all began working with their artifacts, everyone had by this time gotten started with their cups and by the end of the evening some had finished as well. While working with their cups several discussions occurred where the participants explained how their cups narrated something


39. I will refer to the three workshops that were held on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday as the shorter workshops, simply because they were shorter per occasion.

40. Inspired by raketa: http://www.raketa.nu/

Name of the project: How can I tell you so you will understand? http://www.raketa.nu/projects/liaf/index.html
about Arvidsjaur but how they had disregarded the function of the cup. In their design process they allowed themselves to focus on narration through the shape and material used and to disregard the function of the cup almost all together.

One person chose to narrate Arvidsjaur through his cup by proceeding from a memory he had from when he was a little boy. The memory involved how he and his father had used their hands as drinking vessels during expeditions in the woods. He used this memory as starting point for his design and used two hands held together to get the shape of his cup. With the help of the hands of a fellow participant he used casting bandages to get the right shape and when it stiffened he decorated it with a pattern that he found suited his purpose. When going through the sound recordings from the workshops it becomes evident that while the participants worked with the cups stories with memories, such as the example above, flourished. These conversations and discussions lead up to new ideas for the participants on what they wanted to narrate.

At workshop number three the number of attendees had, due to previous engagements and illness, decreased to four people and we had a visitor from the press. As a last attempt to attract people’s attention I accepted an invite to attend the local newspaper. They wanted to write about the project and we welcomed them to the workshop and seized the opportunity to attract participants by featuring the project in the paper. On this evening a few people in the group had, as a request from my side, brought along artifacts from home that they found narrated something about Arvidsjaur. Time was set aside and they were given the opportunity to present their items. One person brought along a book containing images from her former employment within the military. This person chose to knit a cup - to keep the fingers of the soldiers warm while drinking out on the field. The knitted cup had the familiar shape of a scoop-shaped drinking vessel that is commonly used in the outdoors. She strongly connected Arvidsjaur to her workplace and therefore chose to narrate this through her cup.

The main focus has been to look at ways that the partakers made use of their own abilities and resources. This was, as previously mentioned, inspired by some of the ideas in RED’s manifesto on transformation design. One participant, referred to as A, partook in all three workshops and the exhibition. A displayed a concern regarding her own lack of knowledge within the field of design and compared herself with the others in the group. A brought along a small piece of leather, coming from a shoe, which had been found in a garden plot in Arvidsjaur. She had received it from a person who thought she could make use of it
during the workshops. Bringing along the piece of leather and applying it onto her cup became one of her ways of narrating through design. She found that the small piece of leather had its own connection to Arvidsjaur and hence narrated something about Arvidsjaur when she placed it onto her cup. A was not alone in bringing along materials for the workshops, several people brought along items that could be used and one person in particular made it a habit to bring different findings to every occasion. A was consequently the only person who made use of people from outside the group. Having settled for a small piece of wood as the foundation of her cup she brought it home and had a person she knew drill a hole in it. This event enlightens how the idea of taking advantage of your own resources moved a design process forward - she found ways of realizing her design with the help of her surroundings. The remaining single workshop had seven people answering the invite in advance.

The one that got away

Christer Stensmo states that the mission of the ethnographical researcher is to produce a narrative that withholds a lucid logic and chronology combining it all to a meaningful entity. On the night before the last workshop six cancellations were received so only one person was now expected. The only persons who turned up were those from the workshops earlier that week and the night ended with a study visit to a participant’s house for a quick look at work she had done. At first this night felt like a failed mission yet with time passing another perspective appears. The ethnographically inspired method made it impossible to know exactly what to look for before arriving to Arvidsjaur and the turn of events now enables a closer look at three workshops and thus allowing this narrative to become a meaningful entity regardless of the unaccomplished workshop.

In a school environment

The effort put in contacting different schools in Arvidsjaur resulted in an invite to a high school and an opportunity to arrange a workshop together with students from their arts department. The setup here differs in several ways from the other workshops arranged and it will therefore be reviewed with other glasses.

Even though the teachers were responsible for other departments as well the time given was with the art students. Two classes were combined and the students were informed

about the upcoming challenge a week before the actual event. In beforehand, as with the other group, they were informed about the rules and rights regarding their anonymity and participation. The group now consisted of twenty three students and two teachers. The time given was three and a half hour. The difference with this structure, in contrast with the workshops held before, is that this workshop was not voluntary. The students were, in theory, supposed to attend and hence not given the same freedom to choose if they wanted to partake or not. Also, several of the students in these classes were from places other than Arvidsjaur which consequently generated an alternative connection to the town. Due to the shortage of time the walking tour assignment was canceled which excluded an opportunity to inspire new ways of experiencing Arvidsjaur. The way this task opened up for discussions during the first workshop is the reason for regarding this as a missed opportunity in the process. The students did not know about this task and were therefore unaware of what they missed, or for that matter, escaped.

The workshop was held in a classroom and the environment was already familiar for the students, they had e. g. knowledge on where to find certain materials and so on. Due to the presence of the teachers the process took new expressions. The teachers suggested alternative ways of making the cups such as sketching it on a paper. This technique can on the one hand be seen as an alternative way of designing their cup and on the other it can be regarded as a familiar way of solving the task. Some student chose to begin their work by proceeding from the materials that had been placed on a table whilst a few sat down with papers and pencils and drew or wrote words that they associated with Arvidsjaur.

One student loudly expressed a concern about narrating something about Arvidsjaur through the artifact. His qualms had to do with the fact that he merely went to school in Arvidsjaur and lived a couple of miles away. This turn of event was followed by a discussion between the students on how to make use of the situation. This discussion enabled the student to view the circumstances as something that in fact could be expressed through his cup instead of working as an obstacle. The workshop ended with a presentation where all students presented their work. The results had a wide range; a few students worked with the size of the cups whilst other focused more on the materials and some with the actual imagery on the cups. Three examples are displayed below.
The exhibition

The workshops were succeeded by an exhibition arranged at the local library, during the final week in Arvidsjaur. The contributions consisted of cups deriving from the four workshops. The cups were all placed together in a glass monitor in the middle of the entrance to the library. The location of the exhibition was picked due to the access it allowed for the general public. As a means to involve the spectators a suggestion box was placed along the monitor. A text explaining the conditions of the workshops was placed next to the box as well as a plea to the visitors to make their own written contribution on how they would have interpreted the task. The box was however left empty with the exception of a few X-rated suggestions. Nevertheless, the box worked as an intermediary tool and, although without success, as an interaction allowing visitors the possibility to partake.

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATIONS

THE POST-FIELDWORKPHASE

The post-fieldwork phase is actually constituted by the results from a research and is thus what this text is all about. The questions that are examined in this degree project, and are exposed in this written part, regards how the participants in the workshops made use of their
own knowledge’s and each other’s resources. Also, how did narration work and what aspects of a design process were in focus during the making of a cup?

Making use of own resources

To change the possible usages of design in the same way as RED desire to do with their discipline transformation design was never the sole purpose of this project, although some of their views are present in the way this project was structured. “Because transformation design is about applying design skills in non-traditional territories, it results in non-traditional design outputs.”42 In this research the non-traditional territories are constituted by the lack of experience the partakers had in these kinds of workshops. When asking them to design a cup that narrated something about Arvidsjaur they were forced to reason around the word/term design and also on what they wanted to narrate. During the workshops it became evident that the function of their cups was less important than what it displayed. For example, none of the cups were safe to use as a drinking vessel which reveals how the use of narration resulted in non-traditional cups.

One of transformation design’s great strengths is in its ability to mediate diverse points of view and facilitate collaboration. […] the design process creates a neutral space in which a range of people, whose expertise may have a bearing on the problem in hand, can work together.43

Accordingly, how did the participants make use their own and each other’s knowledge when solving the problem of narrating through a cup? Further on in RED’s paper, on how to work with transformation design, they write about the importance of making the designers, and non-designers, aware of the benefits of working together. By emphasizing that the partakers should regard their own resources in the process I was able to escape the role of know-all and keep the interaction flowing; making the participants ask each other when coming across problems or when having the need to air an idea. Emphasizing, this was not equivalent with leaving me out of their work but rather realizing that we were all each other’s assets. Several of the attending people expressed how the workshops became a place for them to work with materials that were new to them. Due to the fact that some materials were brought in from the participants themselves naturally lead up to that person explaining the possible usage of it,

suggesting to the others how to best make use of it. An example of this was when a person brought along a certain type of paper that was excellent for papier mâché.

The example above is one of many in this research where sociocultural learning is of interest. Säljö explain that one of the key stones in how we attain sociocultural resources is through communication and that it is carried on through communication as well. Interaction and communication are both important building blocks in the process he writes about. In this research a design pedagogical situation is explored and in order to make use of the gathered information a sociocultural perspective is important to enlighten - as with the example above, how an interface between an individual and a group has been present and lead up to new knowledge and learning.

The usage of design and narration enabled a view on how the participants grasped their challenge but also on what happened in the process. So, another non-traditional territory is found in the use of narration as a means to design a cup. The purpose with the making of a cup was to narrate something about Arvidsjaur. This was preceded by several discussions about what to narrate, something personal or something universal? Along this discussion questions arose on whether the narrating elements should be presented in the actual shape of the cup, through the material used, or in the size of the cup.

The formulation of the project

The first incident that changed the formulation of the project took place during the first assignment the participants faced. The purpose was for them to go out alone and create a new way of looking at their hometown with the help of the information cards. The first thing that happened when this assignment had been explained was that the group changed the conditions and divided themselves into pairs. So, instead of working alone to get new perspectives they created a learning situation and seized the opportunity to getting to know each other. The results from their walking tours were presented when they returned and the dynamics in the group as a whole changed.

The teachers responsible for the art classes made use of the workshops by using the occasion as a first entrance to further work with design. The question design and narration? became a way for them to continue working with design and provide a new perspective on the discipline. The collaboration enabled a situation where a design pedagogic situation successfully succeeded further work within the field. They made use of the workshop as an entrance to their own continued work. Consequently, one of the questions in focus concerns

what visible ways people made use of their resources during the workshops and this example reveals exactly that.

The contribution made by the woman from the weaving group, who did not attend the workshops, is one the one hand an exception from the others. Nevertheless, according to Säljö one of the starting points when having a sociocultural perspective on learning regards how individuals, and groups, adopt and make use of physical and cognitive resources. The example above, formally known as the exception, reveals how one *individual* have done precisely this. Group implementations have been in focus prior in this text yet here is an example of how an individual have made use of her resources. She has on her own preformed the task and interpreted the assignment to design a cup that narrated something about Arvidsjaur. Her contribution consisted of a white crocheted cup decorated with orange and purple flowers that had been stitched on and a handle with orange streaks. The fact that she preformed the task on her own makes it hard to regard whether or not she learnt something from it. She nevertheless made use of her own knowledge and provides this research with strength that the use of narration and design was successful enough to lead up to a person spending her spare time making a contribution.

**Narration**

Narration plays the lead role in the structure of the workshops and in the challenge the participants faced yet it also becomes a way of exemplifying that how we perceive something is dependent on the context. An event that reveals this occurred during the final workshop, the one held without new participants. A woman came by to look at the finished cups to find inspiration for her souvenir shop. She explained that she did not think the cups narrated anything about Arvidsjaur, except for maybe through the materials used. What occurred here is firstly that the woman, regardless of the fact that she was informed about the foundation of the work, established that the cups did not narrate what she wanted. Secondly, she came in with a pre-set notion on what she wanted to find and when this ceased to live up to her expectations she appeared disappointed. Thirdly, she did discover that the materials used had a connection to Arvidsjaur, the whole idea for some of the participants, but since it did not fit her own intentions it was disregarded.

Narration worked as a tool in the participants work with design. They were not asked to merely design a cup; they were asked to design a cup that narrated something about Arvidsjaur. This formulation was the source to several discussions on what to narrate and also how to realize it. Narration was thus present as a method for making the cups but also ultimately in the cups on their own. Narration was also present in the first task the participants
faced i.e. taking a walking tour with information cards. They all received the same information cards but came back with different experiences from the walk. For example, one card contained the demand: Go to the nearest water - stand there for a while - create a memory.\textsuperscript{45} One group had walked to a lake and told the others about a new year’s eve that they had spent at that exact lake. Another pair had interpreted the card in a different matter and walked straight to a pool of water and reminisced. The walking tour not only worked as a way for the participants to get to know each other but they also got to create new ways of looking at their town. According to Ingrid Sanderoth et.al, writer behind the book \textit{Plats, Identitet och Lärande}, creating confidence to a place and develop a sense of belonging to it correlates with learning.\textsuperscript{46} The participants got to both gain new perspectives on their hometown and also confide in the places they visited, the arranging of a walking tour hence worked as a first step towards narrating something about Arvidsjaur,

Narration was also present in what the participants chose to narrate through - the material, shape, a detail, etc. This research set out to examine how narration can be used as pedagogical tool and the results from the workshops reveals how this entrance worked and how it challenged the partakers to regard what was important when designing their cups. Narration enabled and made use of the location as well as being a tool in the development of design pedagogy.

\textbf{FINAL DISCUSSION}

It is a challenge to round up a work, especially one that wishes to accentuate how everything is dependent on the context in which it is perceived. As an attempt, this research enlighten how a design process can be just as important as the finished result yet it at the same time investigates how an artifact can narrate something on its own, or be narrated through. The entrance of the workshops, design a cup that narrates something about Arvidsjaur, became a foundation for other forms of narration as well. While working on their artifacts the participants shared stories and memories that were connected to their own personal history. The fact that they shared stories with each other, sad and happy ones, raised questions on how narration can be used in other forums as well. This research seeks to contribute to the design pedagogical area and the connection between narration and design not only investigates how

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45. raketa: http://www.raketa.nu/about.html

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artifacts narrate something standing on their own. It also reveals how it leads up to people sharing experiences and memories during the process. Participants returned to the workshops even though they had finished their cups merely to see how the other ones were doing and a few began working on new contributions. If I did not know better I would say that the workshops became a meeting point and curiosity took the best of them.

Along with the structure of this project followed, as mentioned above, other interesting forms of narration as well. Another example of this came through the contact with the non-profit organization that helped with a location. It was at their premises that I came in contact with a person who turned out to have substantial knowledge about the history of Arvidsjaur. His research, from studying old scripts and documents, enabled an acquaintance with Arvidsjaur that otherwise would have been difficult to attain during three weeks. Although he refused to design a cup he still had his own way of representing Arvidsjaur; his way of narrating is connected to the history of the town. History writing can never be objective and is thus dependent of the person and context in which it is presented, and written. Even though the history he presented is a subjective representation of the town, based on texts written in a context different from his own, it is still a fabulous remake about how Arvidsjaur came to be.

Tucked into the whole research is an opinion regarding how an artifact can tell us as much about history as anything else we know. What is presented, and even more importantly not presented, when looking back in time can be as present in artifacts as in writing. A comment within this study is to emphasize the importance of questioning our surrounding, so what about the cups then? Was the thought of results not what lead the participants forward? And do the cups really narrate something about Arvidsjaur or are they just a representation of a few peoples interpretation on how to narrate something through an artifact? None of the cups, with one exception, was safe to use as a drinking vessel and they were all part of an exhibition instead of ending up in a person’s cupboard. What does this bring to the discussion? How should these cups be viewed?

If the formulation of the project had been different a different result would have appeared. The actual question regarding narration made most of them rule out the function of the cup and focus on what to narrate instead; they did not combine the two. For people who consider function the most important element of design these cups shall be a disappointment - but for a person who considers the process important it is a success.

To elaborate and bring the discussion regarding perception and context further the cups were photographed, processed, and depicted in three different ways. The process of photographing the cups, and creating new ways of communicate them, also contribute to the research. What happens if they are presented on a poster or as a series of photographs? This is
in fact how the cups were displayed during an exhibition at Konstfack 2011. The purpose of displaying the cups in this matter was intended as a comment towards exhibition halls and how differently an artifact can be received depending on the display – not that one approach is more correct than the other, it is merely a note to pay attention and maybe ask a question or two.
SOURCE REFERENCES

Printed sources


Internet sources


r a k e t a: http://www.raketa.nu/


Thomas Twaites: http://www.thetoasterproject.org/ (2011)
Images

All images inserted in this text -front page and nr 1-13- belong to Clara Ceder. All photos are taken during three weeks in Arvidsjaur 2011.
Design och berättande?

Kan man berätta något genom design? Jag är en student från Konstfack som håller på att avsluta mina studier i bildpedagogik. Jag kommer att vara stationerad i Arvidsjaure i tre veckor (v. 41-43) för att arrangera ett antal workshops där vi tillsammans kommer att undersöka begreppet design. Vad kan man berätta genom design? Hur ser historien ut och kan vi tillsammans designa något som berättar om Arvidsjaure? Jag tror att Arvidsjaure med omnejd har en intressant hantverkstradition som kan komma väl till pass under dessa workshops, jag är spänd på att se om ni delar min uppfattning eller motsätter er den.

Kom och var med!

Kontakta mig på clara.ceder@student.konstfack.se om du vill veta mer! Tider, plats, utställning, syfte etc.

*Poster 1.*