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# Bling &

## Other Breaches in Design

Despina Christoforidou



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### DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

Doctoral dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) at the Faculty of Engineering at Lund University to be publicly defended on 15 of June 2023 at 13.15 in the Main Auditorium, Ingvar Kamprad Design Centre, Sölvegatan 26, 223 62 Lund

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**Title and subtitle:** Bling & Other Breaches in Design

**Abstract:** The overall theme of this thesis is norm deviations, i.e. *breaches*, as an approach to illuminating blindspots in the design field in order to handle potential friction that arises constructively. The research presented consisted of two parts: the Bling? studies, which are part of the licentiate thesis, attached in Appendix 2, and the Breach! studies.

The Bling? studies present how planned provocations in the form of norm-violating experiments, i.e. *breaching experiments*, were used in a design-education context to illuminate blindspots and reflect on and question established truths. Design students' encounters with the Bling aesthetic resulted their dismissal of it due to the design field's underlying norms and values regarding good and bad taste and thus highlighted a blindspot in the relationship between good design and good taste. In the Breach! part of the studies breaching experiments were explored, and rather than these being staged artificially the focus was on identifying naturally occurring breaches in the design field. The aim was to understand how these are expressed, the motives that drive the people who perform the breaches, i.e. the *breachers*, and what these breaches reveal about the design field.

Within the framework of the Breach! studies, a comparative interview study was conducted wherein designers in Sweden and New Zealand shared their experiences and reflections on their practice, what drives them, what challenges they face, how they handle these challenges, and how they see the future of their profession. A qualitative content analysis of the designers' narratives employing breaches as an analytical filter showed, among other things, that to some extent the designers in New Zealand felt that they are isolated from the rest of the world in a professional sense as compared to their Swedish colleagues. At the same time, they feel less constrained by bureaucratic processes and more flexible to address challenges as 'in-betweeners' and 'bricoleurs'. Although Swedish design benefits from the widely known Scandinavian design brand, the responses of the designers in Sweden suggested that norms and values about what is right and wrong contribute to a more solid, less flexible discourse about what design is and could be, and there are tendencies towards a more *monolithic* context, contrasting with the more *polylythic* one in New Zealand.

An additional Breach! study was conducted with the intention of comparing three designers who, in different ways, breach the prevalent norms of their context. Each of these breachers represents a niche of the design field – design practice, design education, and design research – with regard to exploring different types of breaches and breachers. Regardless of how successful they are in their breaches, their attempts have the potential to push the boundaries regarding which questions are possible to ask in different fields and go beyond these, so that they can expand – especially in normative contexts, or when consensus is high on the agenda.

Breaches and breachers offer valuable opportunities not only for insights and introspection, e.g. in design-education contexts, but for managing friction and building norm awareness, which is a prerequisite for both norm criticism and norm creativity – both of which are central aspects of the design field. Furthermore, the contribution of this work is relevant to the design field in terms of concretising and conceptualising some of the abstract dimensions of design as a practice and discipline, i.e. designers as 'in-betweeners' (*mellanförskapare*) and design as 'in-betweenness' (*mellanförskap*). It highlights the importance of friction in design, and of both designers and the design field being able to handle it in a constructive way.

**Key words:** Bling, blindspots, breaching experiments vs. breaches, breaches and in-betweenness/*mellanförskap*, breachers as in-betweeners/*mellanförskapare*, design as in-betweenness/*mellanförskap*, designers as in-betweeners/*mellanförskapare*, monolithic and polylythic contexts, norm critique/norm creativity/norm awareness.

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Date 2023-05-08

# Bling &

Other Breaches in Design

Despina Christoforidou

PhD Thesis 2023

## Supervisors

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Anders Warell, Professor, Innovation Engineering, Lund University



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In memory of Viktor Hiort af Ornäs,  
supervisor and friend



## ABSTRACT

The overall theme of this thesis is norm deviations, i.e. *breaches*, as an approach to illuminating blindspots in the design field in order to handle potential friction that arises constructively. The research presented consisted of two parts: the Bling? studies, which are part of the licentiate thesis, attached in Appendix 2, and the Breach! studies.

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Breaches and breachers offer valuable opportunities not only for insights and introspection, e.g. in design education contexts, but for managing friction and building norm awareness, which is a prerequisite for both norm criticism and norm creativity – both of which are central aspects of the design field. Furthermore, the contribution of this work is relevant to the design field in terms of concretising and conceptualising some of the abstract dimensions of design as a practice and discipline, i.e. designers as in-betweeners/*mellanförskapare* and design as in-betweenness/*mellanförskap*. It highlights the importance of friction in design, and of both designers and the design field being able to handle it in a constructive way.

#### Keywords

Bling, blindspots, breaching experiments vs. breaches, breaches and in-betweenness/*mellanförskap*, breachers as in-betweeners/*mellanförskapare*, design as in-betweenness/*mellanförskap*, designers as in-betweeners/*mellanförskapare*, monolithic and polythitic contexts, norm critique/norm creativity/norm awareness.

#### SAMMANFATTNING (sv)

Det övergripande temat i denna avhandling är hur normbrott (*breaches*) kan användas för att belysa blinda fläckar inom designfältet, samt hantera och förvalta den potentiella friktionen som uppstår på ett konstruktivt sätt. Forskningsprojektet som presenteras här består av två delar: Bling?-studierna, som redovisas i licentiatavhandlingen, bifogad i sin helhet i Appendix 2 och Breach!-studierna.

I Bling?-studierna användes planerade provokationer i form av normbrytande experiment (*breaching experiments*) för att belysa blinda fläckar och reflektera över och ifrågasätta etablerade sanningar i ett designutbildningssammanhang. Designstudenternas möte med Bling-estetiken resulterade i ett avfärdande av denna mot bakgrund av underliggande normer och värderingar rörande vad som utgör god och dålig smak inom designfältet och belyste därigenom en blind fläck i relationen mellan vad som anses vara god design och vad som är god smak. I Breach!-studierna utforskades normbrytande experiment vidare genom att, i stället för att iscensätta dessa artificiellt, identifiera och undersöka naturligt förekommande normbrott inom designfältet. Syftet var att förstå hur dessa kommer till uttryck samt undersöka vilka egenskaper och motiv normbrytarna (*breachers*) har, dvs. de som utför normbrotten, och vad det säger om designfältet.

Inom ramen för Breach!-studierna utfördes en jämförande intervjustudie där yrkesverksamma designers i Sverige och på Nya Zeeland delade med sig av sina erfarenheter av, reflektioner kring och drivkrafter inom deras respektive praktiker, samt de utmaningar de står inför, hur de hanterar dessa och hur de ser på yrkets framtid. Kvalitativ innehållsanalys av intervjumaterialet, i vilken normbrott användes som analysfilter, visade bland annat att designers på Nya Zeeland i större utsträckning än sina svenska kollegor upplevde att de arbetar isolerat från resten av världen, samtidigt som de kände sig mindre begränsade av byråkratiska processer och mer flexibla att ta itu med utmaningar som "mellanförskapare" och "brikolörer". De svenska designerna uppgav att de drog nytta av att skandinavisk design är ett välkänt begrepp, närmast att jämföra med ett väletablerat varumärke, samtidigt som de anser att normer och värderingar om vad som är rätt och fel bidrar till en orörligare, mindre flexibel diskurs om vad design är och skulle kunna vara. Resultaten antyder att designkontexten i Sverige kan vara mer "monolitisk" än den på Nya Zeeland, som kan beskrivas som mer "polylitisk" än den svenska.

Ytterligare en Breach!-studie genomfördes där tre exempel av normbrytande designers jämfördes. Avsikten med studien var att utforska olika typer av normbrott och normbrytare, varför en designer från vart och ett av följande tre områden av designfältet valdes ut: designpraktik, designutbildning och designforskning. Oberoende av hur framgångsrika de studerade normbrotten kan anses vara visar de på en potential att tänja på gränserna för vilka frågor som är möjliga att ställa inom, eller kanske snarare bortom, olika typer av kontexter för att dessa ska kunna växa och utvecklas – särskilt i normstyrda sammanhang eller när konsensus står högt på agendan.

Studier av normbrott och normbrytare erbjuder inte bara värdefulla möjligheter till introspektion och insikter i till exempel designutbildningssammanhang, utan bidrar även till designers förmåga att hantera friktion genom att ge möjlighet att utveckla den normmedvetenhet som är en förutsättning för både normkritik och normkreativitet, vilka båda är av central betydelse för designfältet. Denna studies resultat är dessutom relevanta för design som praktik och disciplin genom att den konkretiserar och conceptualiserar några av dess abstrakta dimensioner, till exempel designers som "mellanförskapare" (*in-betweeners*) och design som "mellanförskap" (*in-betweenness*). I avhandlingen belyses nyttan av friktion inom design och vikten av att både designers och designfältet som helhet kan hantera denna på ett konstruktivt sätt.

#### Nyckelord

Bling, blinda fläckar, normbrytande experiment kontra normbrott (*breaching experiments* vs. *breaches*), normbrott (*breaches*) och "mellanförskap", normbrytare (*breachers*) som "mellanförskapare", design som "mellanförskap", designers som "mellanförskapare", monolitiska och polylitiska sammanhang, normkritik/normkreativitet/normmedvetenhet.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This PhD endeavour would not have been possible without the help and support of a number of people and organisations, and I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to them.

I have had the privilege of being part of a workplace where I could develop over the years. For that, I am deeply indebted to Lena Sperling, my first director and predecessor, who saw potential in me, hired me when the Division of Industrial Design was being created, and involved me in research projects. I will always remember our cooperation with fondness.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the Stichting IKEA Foundation for financial support to the Division of Industrial Design at Lund University, which was a prerequisite for me conducting my doctoral studies, and to the Swedish Foundation for International Cooperation in Research and Higher Education (STINT), who granted funding to INSPIRED, the Initiative for Sweden-New Zealand Postgraduate International Research and Education in Design, which made it possible to conduct site visits and interviews with design educators and designers in New Zealand.

Furthermore, I would like to acknowledge the two research schools I have been enrolled in: The very first network of design researchers and research students I encountered as a fresh PhD candidate, the Nordcode network (the Nordic Network for Research on Communicative Product Design), have been a continuous source of inspiration. Thank you for the open and supportive climate that has come to be synonymous with Nordcode. I would also like to express my gratitude to Designfakulteten (the Swedish Faculty for Design Research and Research Education) for funding and arranging great doctoral seminars and courses and for providing an extensive research network.

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my supervisors, who have guided me along the way during the various phases of my research studies. First and foremost, I would like to thank Viktor Hiort af Ornäs, who unfortunately passed away far too young, for helping me to structure the Bling? studies and bring them together into a licentiate thesis. You were always thorough, constructive, and insightful, with a great sense of humour, and I am grateful for your tricky questions and your firm yet kind and patient way of helping me forward. I miss you and have found it difficult to continue my work without you – I hope you would have approved of the outcome. I am also greatly thankful to Lisbeth Svengren Holm and Britt Östlund, for inspiring theoretical and methodological discussions and for invaluable support, especially during the planning and realisation of the empirical studies during the Bling? part of the thesis. For the supervision throughout the Bling & project, I would like to direct my sincere gratitude

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Lund, May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2023.  
Despina Christoforidou



## PUBLICATIONS

Publications appended in the PhD thesis:

## Breach! studies

## Paper E

Authors: Christoforidou, D., Erlingsdóttir, G. and Warell, A.  
 Year: 2021  
 Title: *Monolithic vs. Polyolithic Design Cultures? Designers' accounts of professional practices in Sweden and New Zealand*  
 Journal: Journal of Design Research, Volume 19 (1/2/3), pp. 7–30.  
 DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.1504/jdr.2021.121062>  
 Contribution: Christoforidou had the main responsibility for planning the study and the research questions along with analysing the material and writing the article. Christoforidou conducted the interviews in Sweden alone, and the interviews in New Zealand with Warell. Erlingsdóttir and Warell contributed to outlining the structure of the article, supplemented the introduction and theoretical framework, and reviewed earlier versions of the article.

## Paper F

Author: Christoforidou, D.  
 Year: Submitted January 2023.  
 Title: *From Breaches to Breachers: Three designers revealing blindspots in the design field*  
 Journal: FormAkademisk.  
 Contribution: Christoforidou had sole responsibility for planning, data collection, analysis, and writing.

## Bling? studies\*

## Paper A

Authors: Christoforidou, D. and Olander, E.  
 Year: 2008  
 Title: *Bling and How it's Message Captures Our Interest*  
 Conference: 6<sup>th</sup> Design and Emotion conference (D&E), Dare to Desire, 6–9 October 2008. Hong Kong: School of Design, the Hong Kong Polytechnic University.  
 Editors: P. M. A. Desmet, S. A. Tzetanova, P. P. M. Hekkert and L. Justice.  
 Contribution: Christoforidou and Olander had equal responsibility for planning, data collection, analysis, and writing.

## Paper B

Authors: Christoforidou, D. and Olander, E.  
 Year: 2009  
 Title: *To Bling or not to Bling? Cultural transformations of consumer products*  
 Conference: 3<sup>rd</sup> Nordic Design Research Conference (Nordres), Engaging Artifacts, 30 August–1 September 2009. Norway, Oslo: The Oslo School of Architecture and Design.  
 Contribution: Christoforidou and Olander had equal responsibility for planning, data collection, analysis, and writing.

## Paper C

Authors: Olander, E., Christoforidou, D. and Warell, A.  
 Year: 2012  
 Title: *The Love and Hate of Bling Products: An industrial design student case*  
 Conference: 8<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Design and Emotion (D&E), Out of Control. 11–14 September 2012. U.K., London: Central Saint Martins University of the Arts.  
 Editors: J. Brassat, P. P. M. Hekkert, G. D. S. Ludden, M. Malpass and J. McDonnell.  
 Contribution: Christoforidou and Olander had equal responsibility for the research planning and data collection. Warell had the main responsibility for the analysis, and Olander the main responsibility for the writing.

\* Also appended in the licentiate thesis.

## Paper D

Authors: Olander, E., Christoforidou, D., Warell, A. and Svengren Holm, L.  
Year: 2012  
Title: *Good Taste vs. Good Design: A tug of war in the light of Bling*  
Publication: The Design Journal, Volume 15 (2), pp. 185–202.  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2752/175630612X13258652805095>  
Contribution: Christoforidou and Olander had equal responsibility for the research planning, data collection, analysis, and writing of the article. Warell and Svengren Holm helped outline the study, contributed to the analysis and discussion chapters, and reviewed earlier versions of the article.

## Additional publications:

Authors: Zainal Abidin, S., Christoforidou, D. and Liem, A.  
Year: 2009  
Title: *Thinking and Re-thinking Verbal Protocol Analysis in Design Research*  
Proceedings: 17<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Engineering Design (ICED),  
24–27 August 2009, U.S.A., CA: Stanford University.  
Editors: M. Norell Bergendahl, M. Grimheden, L. Leifer, P. Skogstad and  
U. Lindemann.  
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.13140/2.1.2971.0404>

Authors: Christoforidou, D. and Motte, D.  
Year: 2009  
Title: *Responses to Product Features: An affective neuroscience perspective*  
Proceedings: 2<sup>nd</sup> International Conference on Research into Design (ICoRD),  
7–9 January 2009, India, Bangalore: National Science Seminar Complex,  
Indian Institute of Science.  
Editor: A. Chakrabarti.

- Authors: Christoforidou, D. and Olander ,E.  
 Year: 2010  
 Title: *From “Absolutely not!” to “Why not?”: Expanding designers’ horizons through Bling*  
 Conference: 25<sup>th</sup> Cumulus Conference, BORDERLINE-Pushing Design over the Limit, 26–29 May 2010. Belgium, Genk: Katholieke Hogeschool Limburg, Media & Design Academie.
- Authors: Warell, A., Christoforidou, D. and Lidgard, C.  
 Year: 2010  
 Title: *Informed Provocation: Industrial design research at Lund University*  
 Publication: DIID, Disegno Industriale Industrial Design: Vitamins for Design, Year VII, no. 42–43, pp. 110–115.
- Authors: Christoforidou, D., Olander, E., Warell, A. and Svengren Holm, L.  
 Year: 2011  
 Title: *Good Taste vs. Good Design: A tug of war in the light of Bling*  
 Proceedings: 9<sup>th</sup> International European Academy of Design Conference (EAD), The Endless End, 4–7 May 2011. Portugal, Porto: University of Porto, School of Fine Arts.  
 Editors: H. Alvelos and S. Barreto.
- Author: Christoforidou, D.  
 Year: 2014  
 Title: *The Social Construction of Subversive Taste Setters*  
 Research seminar: 13<sup>th</sup> NORDCODE Seminar and Workshop, Action and reaction – Behaviour and experience triggered by artefacts, 10–12 September 2014. Sweden, Gothenburg: Chalmers University of Technology.
- Authors: Christoforidou, D., Eckhardt, C-C., Hopf, A., Kolte, O. and Liljeqvist, P.  
 Year: 2021  
 Title: *Design as Knowledge-creating Process for Navigating Uncertainty and Friction towards Sustainability*  
 Conference: 1<sup>st</sup> Research Conference on Sustainable Development, Knowledge for Sustainable Development, 4 May 2021. Sweden, Lund: Lund University.

Authors: Amiri Rigi, S. and Christoforidou, D.  
Year: 2021  
Title: *(Un)weaving (Un)sustainability*  
Proceedings: 9<sup>th</sup> Nordic Design Research Society Conference (Nordes), Matters of Scale, 15–18 August 2021. Denmark, Kolding: Design School Kolding and the University of Southern Denmark (SDU).  
Editors: E. Brandt, T. Markussen, E. Berglund, G. Julier and P. Linde.



|                                                                                             |      |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| Abstract                                                                                    | v    |
| Sammanfattning (sv)                                                                         | vi   |
| Acknowledgements                                                                            | ix   |
| Publications                                                                                | xiii |
| <b>Breach!</b>                                                                              |      |
| 1 INTRODUCTION                                                                              | 1    |
| 1.1 Background                                                                              | 1    |
| 1.2 Norm criticism                                                                          | 3    |
| 1.3 Aim and research questions                                                              | 9    |
| 1.4 Thesis outline                                                                          | 12   |
| 2 FRAME OF REFERENCE                                                                        | 15   |
| 2.1 Personal points of departure                                                            | 15   |
| 2.2 Theoretical foundation                                                                  | 17   |
| 2.3 Methodological approach                                                                 | 26   |
| 3 THE STUDIES                                                                               | 33   |
| 3.1 Study VI: From the field of design practice                                             | 35   |
| 3.2 Study VII: From the fields of design practice,<br>design education, and design research | 35   |
| 4 THE APPENDED PAPERS                                                                       | 39   |
| 4.1 Paper E: Designers' accounts from Sweden and New Zealand                                | 40   |
| 4.2 Paper F: Three examples of breachers                                                    | 41   |
| 5 DISCUSSION                                                                                | 43   |
| 5.1 Key concepts and findings                                                               | 43   |
| 5.2 Knowledge contribution                                                                  | 53   |
| 5.3 Implications and future research                                                        | 59   |
| 6 FINAL REFLECTIONS                                                                         | 63   |
| 6.1 My process                                                                              | 64   |
| 6.2 My <i>mellanförskap</i>                                                                 | 66   |
| Postscript                                                                                  | 69   |
| References                                                                                  | 73   |
| APPENDIX 1                                                                                  | 83   |
| Paper E                                                                                     | 85   |
| Paper F                                                                                     | 111  |
| APPENDIX 2                                                                                  | 127  |
| Licentiate Thesis:                                                                          | 129* |
| <b>Bling?</b>                                                                               |      |
| <i>Abstract</i>                                                                             | v    |
| <i>Introductory chapters 1-7</i>                                                            | 1    |
| <i>Paper A</i>                                                                              | 53   |
| <i>Paper B</i>                                                                              | 63   |
| <i>Paper C</i>                                                                              | 69   |
| <i>Paper D</i>                                                                              | 83   |

\* N.B. The licentiate thesis *Bling? Roles and Contradictions in Design* (2013) is appended in its entirety, including papers A, B, C and D. After page 129 it follows the pagination of the original publication.



**Breach!**



# Breach!

Norms and Blindspots in Design



## 1 INTRODUCTION

*Despina: Any plans for the weekend?*

*Cheryl: Actually, I have a workshop with students in Culinary Arts that I am very excited about.*

*Despina: Sounds interesting, what is it about?*

*Cheryl: Mayonnaise.*

*Despina: Mayonnaise?*

*Cheryl: Yes, we are going to spend an afternoon sabotaging mayonnaise.*

*Despina: What? How come?*

*Cheryl: When you go through all imaginable ways to sabotage mayonnaise, then you really know your mayo.*

As the above dialogue with Cheryl Akner-Koler, professor at Konstfack University of Arts, Crafts and Design in Stockholm illustrates, it can be beneficial to approach some subjects through antithesis and negation, instead of head-on and directly. Another example from my own experience that supports this is Umberto Eco and Alastair McEwen's (2005) work on beauty, in parallel to Eco's (2007) book on ugliness. My understanding of beauty deepened when I read the book on ugliness. Approaching beauty via ugliness, and vice versa, enabled a more nuanced and elevated perception of both concepts.

The unifying theme of this thesis is a similar approach; the ethnographic method of *breaching experiments* developed by Harold Garfinkel (1984). Breaching experiments involve "the conscious exhibition of 'unexpected' behavior, an observation of the types of social reactions such behavioral violations engender, and an analysis of the social structure that makes these social reactions possible" (Rafalovich, 2006: 156).

### 1.1 Background

Over the past couple of decades, I have worked within design education on an administrative and strategic level, as an educator and research student. During this time, I have had the privilege and opportunity to develop long-term experience of the design field, and participate in countless conversations with colleagues, peers, and students. For example, in one of the courses I am responsible for, I moderate weekly discussions with invited professionals from the design field and other adjacent practices who share their experiences with the design students. Along with the insights I accumulated over the years I eventually started to recognise several recurring themes and potential blindspots, both personal and collective, and started to think about how we can address them.

One such theme relates to the different roles designers take on in their professional practice (Christoforidou, 2013: 7–9): user-centred problem solvers (Rittel & Webber, 1973; Buchanan, 1992; Eason, 1995), taste and form experts (Bourdieu, 1984; Julier, 2008; Pye, 2007; 2008), and conveyors of (symbolic) meaning and communication (Krippendorf, 1989; Vihma, 1995; Monö, 1997; Warell, 2001; Wikström, 2002; Karjalainen, 2004). However, relatively little had been said about the tensions designers experience between these roles and their personal preferences and values. Therefore, I set out to explore the potential challenges designers face when working on the value-laden expressions of products. As norms and values are inherently underlying and difficult to access, studying them requires an approach which makes it possible for them to surface. In this respect, breaching experiments, i.e. staging provocations to study the reactions they generate in the social context (Garfinkel, 1984; Rafalovich, 2006), are relevant as a means of illuminating blindspots in a given context (Garfinkel, 1984; Rafalovich, 2006), e.g. the design field, thereby making it possible to address them.

Inspired by this approach, I planned a study in which design students would participate in a breaching experiment exemplified by the aesthetics of the concept of Bling; this resulted in a content-rich and, from an analytical point of view, interesting friction between two different worlds. This occurred because the design students dismissed the Bling aesthetic as ugly and vulgar, arguing that it clashed with their own tastes, which are in turn influenced by values relating to what constitutes good design (Christoforidou, 2013).

Figure 1 summarises the process of working with breaching experiments, which proved to be a valuable approach in an educational context (Rafalovich, 2006; Stanley et al., 2020). These were applied in order to understand the mechanisms behind the friction, create opportunities for introspection and reflection, set the stage for discussions to engage the students, and ultimately expand the space of the creative process and move it forwards (Christoforidou et al., 2012).

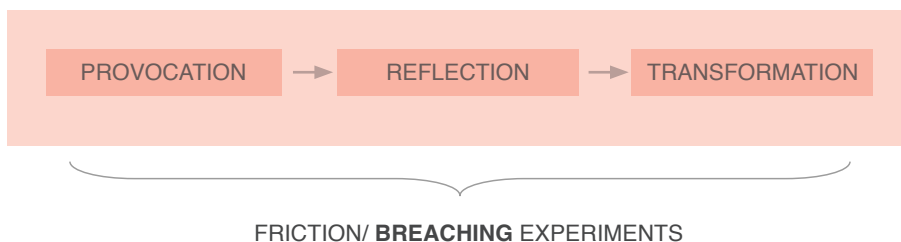
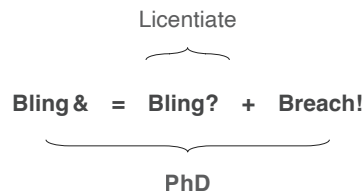


Figure 1. Reflecting on a perceived provocation caused by an intended breaching experiment helps to transform understanding of the underlying reasons behind the provocation, facilitating the viewing of an issue from multiple perspectives (Christoforidou, 2013).

Working with Bling and breaching experiments, and studying the contradictions that occurred and friction that arose because of them, enabled the contours of the studied context to become clearer, in turn making it easier to go beyond normative thinking and question established truths. Therefore, after finalising the Bling? studies I sought a new breaching experiment in order to create friction between two different worlds that would help to illuminate underlying norms and values and make these explicit thanks to the collision itself – a search that would turn out to be long, winding, and worthwhile.

Initially, I searched for subcultures as a frame for exploring breaching experiments, which led to pilot studies on *raggare*<sup>1</sup> and *chavs*<sup>2</sup>. While these are comparable to Bling in the sense that they are characterised by specific tastes that are mediated through value-laden products, they did not offer new insights in relation to design and designers' own professional roles. Consequently, when considering the direction of the research after the Bling? studies, the focus of the resulting Breach! studies became a deepened exploration of breaching experiments in relation to the design field, how these are enacted and why, and what they reveal about the design context (Fig. 2).

Figure 2. The two parts of the thesis.



## 1.2 Norm criticism

Working in the design field, one is often expected to think ‘outside the box’ (Buchanan, 1992; Kelley, 2001; von Stamm, 2008; Brown & Katz, 2009; Cross, 2011). At the same time, influences and inspirations are generally drawn from more or less the same sources (e.g. Instagram, star designers<sup>3</sup>, brands, subcultures). Consequently, there is a risk of ending up thinking and acting in ways similar to others and being unaware of falling into normative thinking. The question is, how normative can design afford to be?

Approaches that expand the horizons of normative mindsets and provide insights into which driving forces and strategies, hopes, fears, dreams, norms, and values are at play in various contexts are relevant to professional design practice. Moreover, applying breaching experiments expands the horizons of design discourse by tearing down existing ‘norm walls’.

The remainder of this chapter provides an overview of breaching experiments and other norm-critical approaches to design; this is followed by an outline of the research questions the Breach! study aimed to address and the thesis as a whole.

<sup>1</sup> A subculture in northern and central Europe concerned with American cars and music of the 1950s, comparable to greasers.

<sup>2</sup> A British derogatory slang term used to describe an anti-social lower-class youth dressed in sportswear and lavish jewellery.

<sup>3</sup> Star designers' names are brands in themselves, and their design aesthetic can often be personal and led by their own tastes, and not necessarily by their employers. Retrieved 17 January, 2023, from: <https://luxurysoociety.com/en/articles/2016/02/luxury-fashion-is-the-star-designer-era-at-an-end>

### 1.2.1 Breaching experiments

The term ‘breach’ has different meanings depending on whether it is used as a noun or verb. As a noun it can mean “a hole that is made in a wall, or in another structure being used for protection during an attack”, and as a verb “an act of breaking a rule, law, custom, or practice”, “to break a law, promise, agreement, or relationship”, or “a failure to obey a law, or to do what was promised or agreed” (Cambridge University Press, n.d.: ‘Breach’).

‘Breach’ is also used to describe the surface activities of certain aquatic mammal species. Humpback whales are often observed to use their powerful fins and flukes to launch themselves out of the water; when most or all of body of the whale has left the water, the whale has breached. This requires substantial amounts of energy (Fig. 3). While several whale species breach, humpback whales seem to breach most frequently. Scientists suspect that humpback whales breach and slap their fins and flukes on the surface as a way of communicating, on the basis that sound travels further and more rapidly underwater than it does through air. It is believed that these breaches create sounds that are used to communicate messages to other whales, and big splashes are used to send messages long distances (Kavanagh et al., 2017).



Figure 3. A humpback whale breaching, Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary. Adapted from photograph by Whit Welles, August 20, 2007<sup>4</sup>.

In the 1950s the sociologist Harold Garfinkel developed breaching experiments as part of an overall research strategy he called ‘ethnomethodology’. Along with his students, he enacted breaches to disrupt established truths and expose the prevailing norms and values that influence people in their everyday lives. Breaching experiments are a way of studying everyday, small-

<sup>4</sup>Source, Wikimedia Commons. Retrieved 21 February, 2023, from: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Humpback\\_stellwagen\\_edit.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Humpback_stellwagen_edit.jpg)

scale social behaviour, in contrast to larger social structures, systems, and processes of social phenomena, such as trends, and the impact of technology on society (Garfinkel, 1984).

Garfinkel felt that social scientists were not paying enough attention to small-scale social interactions and how people structured and navigated through their lives. The approach of breaching-experiments was one way of compensating for this lack of attention to what he believed was a rich body of poorly understood experiences of social exchange (Ibid.).

As breaching experiments are considered to help to reduce the gap between what students learn during their studies and their everyday lives, they are still popular assignments in social-science education programmes. Rafalovich (2006) and Stanley et al. (2020), for example, have implemented breaching experiments successfully in sociology courses. Here, students trained their ability to recognise the circumstances that result in a breach and identify which social norms are being breached and how, e.g. by disrupting the expected behaviour in a queue (Rafalovich, 2006), or by standing still and doing nothing in a busy place during rush hour (Stanley et al., 2020).

In the context of design education, ‘thinking outside the box’ is a popular, almost stereotypical expression (Buchanan, 1992; Kelley, 2001; von Stamm, 2008; Brown & Katz, 2009; Cross, 2011). Although there are numerous references to creativity in design (see e.g. Csíkszentmihályi, 1996; Schön, 2003; Cross, 2007; Lawson & Dorst, 2009, to mention a few classics in the field), it is by no means obvious how creativity can be achieved in concrete terms. In this sense, breaching experiments are concrete, hands-on, and easily implemented for educational purposes.

### 1.2.1 Critical design

In the field of design, there are frameworks and approaches that, similar to the breaching experiments used in the realm of ethnomethodology, take a critical viewpoint. Critical design’ is a term coined by Anthony Dunne in *Hertzian Tales* (1999) and has its roots in radical design, which started in Italy in the 1960s as a reaction to the ideals of modernism. Radical design was driven by a motivation to question the role of design and its impact on society, and to radically reform design in a more critical direction (Didero, 2017). While breaching experiments and critical design both aim to uncover norms that we are often not aware of and that govern human behaviour and how we relate to each other by provoking reactions against them, the former have a focus on human interactions in a social setting (Garfinkel, 1984) while the latter challenges preconceived ideas regarding what products are and how they are used (Dunne & Raby, 2013; Malpass, 2013). By utilising exploratory and experimental design methods, critical design aims to broaden perspectives through critical reflection and alternative approaches to how we relate to products and each other (Dunne 1999; Dunne & Raby, 2013).

Design and critical design are both solution-oriented; however, the critical-design process is often oriented towards non-traditional design concepts which are often not intended to actually be mass-produced. Instead, the intention is for the results of critical design to be starting points for increased awareness of how our choices and actions influence our future (Dunne & Raby, 2013; Malpass, 2013).

### 1.2.3 Norm-critical design

A development of critical design is the norm-critical design approach, which has the goal of promoting inclusion and equality by questioning power structures and norms that affect perceptions of what is considered to be 'normal', referring individuals to various limiting templates (De los Reyes, 2001; Bonnevier, 2007; Hjerm & Peterson, 2007; Ahmed, 2010; Browne & Nash, 2010; Zavalía & Vinthagen, 2014; Wikberg-Nilsson & Jahnke, 2018).

Beliefs regarding what is creative, innovative, and normal are influenced by the prevailing norms of a given context (Benhabib, 1986; Kumashiro, 2002; Bromseth & Darj, 2010). One of the challenges of studying norms is that they are inherently obscure, making them difficult to approach and question. Over the past two decades, design educators have become increasingly aware of the fact that norm-critical perspectives foster norm creativity. Literature, exercises, and tools have been developed in relation to this, and are widely used in design education programmes worldwide (see e.g. Kumashiro, 2002; Jahnke, 2006; Alves et al., 2016; Ehrnberger, 2017; Wikberg-Nilsson & Jahnke, 2018).

Between October 2017 and February 2018, ArkDes, the Swedish Centre for Architecture and Design in Stockholm, hosted the 'Norm Form' exhibition – “an exhibition about design that goes against the grain”. Karin Åberg Waern, head of exhibitions and education at ArkDes, described it as follows: “Norm Form is an exhibition about design that challenges what is considered normal. There is a strong movement among designers at the moment to work in a way that challenges norms, and the exhibition reflects this movement”<sup>5</sup>.

The catalogue from the 'Norm Form' exhibition included several critical-design projects; the *Crafts Skirt*, for example, was designed by Marcus Jahnke in 2005 and produced by Blåkläder AB; it was inspired by the kilt, and constitutes an attempt to create comfortable work clothing for manual-labour jobs in hot environments for all people. Similarly, the *Safety Top* was designed for the fire services by Maja Gunn, Camilla Andersson, Emma Börjesson, Karin Ehrnberger, and Anna Isaksson in 2015 to be a protective garment for all, irrespective of sexual identity<sup>6</sup>.

Figure 4a and 4b show two more norm-critical design projects from the 'Norm Form' exhibition: the *Dolphin Drill* and the *Mega Hurricane Mixer* by Karin Ehrnberger (2006; 2017; Ehrnberger et al., 2012).

<sup>5</sup>From the press release of the 'Norm Form' exhibition, ArkDes Stockholm, 8 August, 2017. Retrieved 27 January, 2022 from: <https://pressroom.arkdes.se/posts/pressreleases/norm-form-an-exhibition-about-design-that-goes-against-the-grain>

<sup>6</sup>Catalogue from the 'Norm Form' exhibition, ArkDes Stockholm, 6 October 2017 – 11 February 2018. Retrieved 27 January, 2022 from: <https://arkdes.se/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/arkdes-eng-katalog-171011.pdf>

Figure 4a. and 4b. (next page)  
The *Dolphia Drill* and the *Mega Hurricane Mixer*.  
Photographs by Karin Ehrnberger  
(2017: 61)<sup>7</sup>.



<sup>7</sup>Printed with permission from Karin Ehrnberger.



Here, two common household appliances – a drill and a hand blender – were reimagined by analysing stereotypical product language. Changing the product language of each highlighted how gender values are connected to designs and artefacts, meaning that the designs of the artefacts we are surrounded by are not fixed and can be renegotiated and resituated in terms of time, place, and context (Ehrnberger et al., 2012).

Although norm-critical approaches are important from an inclusion perspective, they can involve a tendency towards exaggeration. The increased awareness that they result in can, when not balanced, foster a non-permissive atmosphere involving e.g. political correctness, where people are overly anxious to appear ignorant. If everyone is norm-critical, there is a risk that this becomes the new norm and the new blindspot (Kristofersson, 2016).

### 1.3 Aim and research questions

One of the conclusions drawn from the Bling? studies was that the design students' introduction to the culture and aesthetics of Bling within the frame of a breaching experiment generated a clash, which illuminated a blindspot regarding their personal preferences in relation to the underlying norms and values on good and bad taste within the design field (Christoforidou, 2013).

The following sections detail the research objectives that formed the continuation of the research presented in the licentiate thesis, and which guided the research presented in this thesis.

#### 1.3.1 *Breaching experiments vs. breaches*

Both Garfinkel's (1984) breaching experiment and the Bling? workshop (Christoforidou, 2013) involved deliberately staged provocations, undertaken in order to elicit reactions. Breaching experiments contribute important insights, but are artificially induced, planned, and orchestrated by academics with the aim of studying the influence they have on social interactions. Such academics do not necessarily have a relationship with the provocation that the breaching experiment represents, and when the experiment is over they go back to their own environment, where the studied friction is not necessarily present.

Exploring naturally occurring breaches in the design field in terms of how, why, and by whom they are performed, along with their consequences, can be relevant in order to increase the visibility of and raise awareness regarding the norms and values present. The challenges, contributions, and future relevance of designers can thereby be understood and addressed better.

Throughout this study, a differentiation is made between consciously undertaken breaching experiments and breaches identified in real-life situations.

### 1.3.2 Norm awareness as a prerequisite of norm criticism and norm creativity

As the norm-critical design examples in section 1.2.3 illustrate, there are designers who work with norm criticism, and in so doing utilise experiences from their personal and professional lives and integrate these into their work; this leads them to question existing notions and values relating to how things should be, and create prototypes for how things could, or ought, to be (Simon, 2019). The scenarios that designers propose, and any norm criticism attached to these, generally concern the contexts of other people rather than their own, i.e. the design field. It is not particularly difficult for designers to be critical or norm-critical of the conditions that govern others' contexts, but much more challenging to place themselves in the middle of it all, take responsibility for their own gaze, and recognise the precedence of interpretation that accompanies their own position. On this basis, failing to address one's own privileges can lead to consequences that go against the norm-critical ambition.

Several design methods have been developed to encourage and support norm-creative solutions in design processes. One such example is the card deck *Nova*, which provides hands-on methods and encourages critical reflection and discussion of norms that we are often not aware of (Alves et al., 2016). Norm-critical approaches are also used to increase normative creativity, i.e. to go beyond normative thinking (Vinthagen & Zavalía, 2014). Figure 5 is an adaptation of Vinthagen and Zavalía's model of the development from norms to norm creativity through norm criticism. Because norms are underlying and therefore often things that we are not conscious of, a step has been added to highlight these so that they do not become blindspots: norm awareness.



Figure 5. *Norm awareness*: a prerequisite for norm criticism and norm creativity. Adapted from Vinthagen and Zavalía (2014).

Norm-critical approaches are of crucial importance in the development of more inclusive societies and organisations, providing these do not cross the border towards overly rigid environments governed by norms that are strictly adhered to out of fear. Such conditions are unsuitable for fostering inclusive and creative processes. Thinking 'outside the box' requires on the one hand that there is room for friction to arise and an ability to handle this in a constructive way, and on the other hand a feeling of safety to experiment and fail.

Despite the creativity that characterises the design profession, there are dimensions of the design field as a whole that tend to be conservative and normative. For example, the influence of the Bauhaus is still central to prevailing ideas of good design principles, 90 years after the school's closure (Vihma, 2003; Margolin, 2015; Nelson & Cabra, 2004; Christoforidou, 2013; Brunnström, 2019; Christoforidou et al., 2021).

Foucault (2017) used the term 'discourse', i.e. written and spoken communication and debate, to describe the relationship between how knowledge is structured and how power is produced and reproduced; in other words, discourses determine what and how we think. Since the world of ideas is dependent on the norms and thought horizons that discourses outline, they affect people's ability to 'think outside the box'. In parallel, they determine what is inside the box as well as what it looks like, who has access to it, and who does not. Therefore, there is reason to take a closer look at the norms that influence designers' contexts.

The overall aim of the Breach! studies was to shed light on the norms that exist between designers by identifying and analysing different types of breach in the design field. This was undertaken in order to increase awareness of prevalent norms and how they affect design practice. Breaching experiments were part of both the theoretical framework and methodological approach of the research presented in this thesis. More specifically, the intention was to identify and analyse naturally occurring breaches in different contexts within the design field in order to approach the underlying norms that surround and influence designers' professional practice, rather than staging them. We are often unaware of norms and they are therefore difficult to access, and so employing breaches makes it possible for norms to surface and blindspots to become more visible and thus be reflected on and questioned. With these objectives in mind, the following research questions were addressed in this study:

*How can breaches contribute to making underlying norms that are prevalent in the design field, and which surround and influence designers' professional practice, visible?*

*Which blindspots relating to the underlying norms of the design field can be uncovered?*

*What can we learn from breaches in general, and in relation to the design field in particular?*

#### 1.4 Thesis outline

This thesis has a compilation format, i.e. it consists of the introductory chapters<sup>8</sup> and appended papers. Two sets of studies were conducted within the frame of the PhD project: Bling? and Breach! The Bling? studies constitute the first part of the thesis, and are included in the licentiate thesis (Christoforidou, 2013), which was also written in a compilation format. As the Breach! studies were a continuation of and built on the Bling? studies, the licentiate thesis has been included in its entirety and can be found in Appendix 2 (see Table A).

The Breach! part of the thesis includes a summary of the introductory chapters and appended studies and papers, as well as how they build on each other. Reflections on the PhD project as a whole, from Bling? to Breach!, are also presented. The Breach! studies and papers are presented chronologically, which reflects the gradual increase in responsibility and independence of my work as a researcher. Following the overview and presentation of the research questions, Chapter 2 presents my personal points of departure, along with the theoretical framework and methodological approach that guided the research. Chapter 3 describes how the studies were designed and conducted, and how the empirical material was analysed. In Chapter 4, a summary of the primary findings of the appended papers is provided. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the outcomes and contributions of the thesis, along with the implications of these for the design field. Chapter 6 contains suggestions for future research and final reflections.

| PhD thesis: <b>Bling &amp;</b> |                                        |                                   |                                     |                   |                     |                                      |                                            |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Studies                        | Licentiate thesis                      |                                   |                                     |                   |                     | <b>Breach! Studies</b>               |                                            |
|                                | Pre-Studies                            |                                   | <b>Bling? Studies</b>               |                   |                     |                                      |                                            |
|                                | Affective neuroscience<br>(I)          | Eco-design<br>(II)                | Bling?<br>research seminar<br>(III) | BBC study<br>(IV) | Trend course<br>(V) | Sweden<br>and<br>New Zealand<br>(VI) | Three<br>examples of<br>breachers<br>(VII) |
| Papers                         | Christoforidou<br>and Motte,<br>(2009) | Unpublished<br>paper <sup>9</sup> | A, B, C, D                          | A, B              | C, D                | E                                    | F                                          |

Table A. The PhD project as a whole.

Table A shows how the parts of the thesis are connected. It is possible to read the thesis in chronological order, starting with the licentiate thesis (Christoforidou, 2013), where the pre-studies

<sup>8</sup> The Swedish terms for the introductory chapters are 'ramberättelse' and 'kappa'.

<sup>9</sup> Christoforidou, D. *Design through a Neo-Green Filter: A Hollywood ending?*

are briefly described and the Bling? studies are elaborated on. The sections referring to the Bling? studies (III–V and Papers A–D) are referenced accordingly and colour-coded in coral in the tables, which was the theme colour of the licentiate thesis. To facilitate a differentiation between these, the Breach! studies (VI–VII and Papers E–F) are colour-coded in grey in the tables and figures.



## 2 FRAME OF REFERENCE

The Bling? and Breach! parts of the PhD project shared the same frame of reference, meaning that both were exploratory in character. Moreover, the approach to both was influenced by interpretative research, qualitative methodology, and the hermeneutic circle. The research process has involved shifting between the theoretical and the empirical parts of the project, and reframing and adjusting the initial research questions as part of an iterative process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Gadamer, 1989).

The theoretical approaches of social constructivism and symbolic interactionism and a dramaturgical perspective have been used to understand the research outcomes. A fundamental tenet of social constructivism is that reality is socially constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). According to scholars of symbolic interactionism, people act based on their own and others' situations and experiences, depending on the meaning they ascribe to these. The continuous process of interpretation of these is shaped during social interactions with others (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1985). The dramaturgical perspective was developed by Erving Goffman (1990[1959]), and uses the scene as a metaphor that describes human interaction, i.e. people take on roles to create specific impressions when they interact with others. The above-mentioned perspectives all have social interaction at their core, and were selected because they facilitate exploration of breaches in the design field as specific social situations. Looking at these as social situations created between designers can improve understanding regarding the underlying norms prevalent in the design field that influence designers' practice. The frameworks of social constructivism, symbolic interactionism and the dramaturgical perspective are described further in the introductory chapters of the licentiate thesis (Christoforidou, 2013).

The perspectives and models used during the Breach! studies are outlined below, following a description of my personal points of departure.

### 2.1 Personal points of departure

The theoretical and methodological foundations on which my work rests, were influenced by my educational background. Since I was trained as a sociologist, communicator, and art historian, the foundation of my frame of reference originates from these research traditions. As my PhD project and I, as a design researcher, developed, I immersed myself in relevant design references.

#### 2.1.1 *Reflexivity*

Reflexivity is a concept that involves recognising that one is part of a social field, and having a willingness to investigate and account for how one's relationships, experiences, and positions

within this field affect one's overall understanding and interpretations (Broady, 1989; Ehn & Klein, 2007; Palaganas et al., 2017).

The concept of reflexivity is well established in the humanities and social sciences and qualitative research, e.g. sociology, anthropology, and philosophy (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Lynch, 2000; Pels, 2000; Chadwick, 2003; Ehn & Klein, 2007). A reflexive approach and constant questioning of what we know and how we know it are prerequisites for conducting qualitative research in a transparent way. In order to raise awareness of how the researcher's own understanding and experiences influence the research process, they are required to turn their gaze inwards, towards their own self and conditions (Harding, 1986; Finlay & Gough, 2003). It should be noted that reflexivity is not about accounting for as much information as possible regarding researchers and legitimising positions, but rather about problematising what is visible and putting this in a historical and cultural context (Andersson, 2003; Palaganas et al., 2017). Questions that I have asked myself continuously during my thesis work include: who am I in relation to the context, and what does this mean for my encounters with and descriptions and interpretations of other people's life stories?

The Bling? studies were conducted locally, in the sense that they were based on workshops, interviews, and participatory observations with design students, colleagues, and peers at the at Lund University School of Industrial Design (LUSID) where I work as a design educator (Christoforidou, 2013).

In order to broaden the context of the research project, the Breach! studies were conducted both nationally and internationally, and nuanced in several ways. For example, interviews with professional designers were conducted in Sweden and New Zealand, and this variety of contexts enabled a comparison between the two countries, and a multi-layered perspective to be used in relation to proximity and distance regarding the research context (Study VI, Paper E, Christoforidou et al., 2021). Furthermore, the research material was diversified through several types of data being used; for example, in addition to the interviews and participatory observations, archived and recorded material constituted the basis for the comparative Study VII (Paper F). Although I was not involved in producing this material, the analysis and interpretation were conducted by me.

### 2.1.2 *Dialectical process*

One way for researchers to set themselves free from preconceived notions and ingrained thought patterns is to maintain a critical, reflective, and flexible mindset by adopting a *dialectical approach*.

A dialectic is a way of posing one argument against another that is often conflicting, in order to achieve new insights (Adler, 2000; Herrick, 2021), and originates in classical Greek philosophy. Although its conception is attributed to Zeno, it was Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle

who popularised it as a method of obtaining truth through a process of asking questions (Atwill, 2009; Jameson, 2009).

The fact that I have always been inclined to think in terms of ‘on the one hand/on the other hand’, which underlies the dialectical approach, can be explained, among other things, by dimensions such as my being both Greek and Swedish, being part of a family where both traditional and progressive values are represented, having gone from being a natural scientist to a student of the humanities, and having professionally been an educator and research student at the same time. Something that I have become increasingly aware of during this PhD project is that these and other dimensions have shaped me on both conscious and subconscious levels, and that I understand the world through antitheses rather than theses, i.e. considering what things do not appear to be in order to, step by step, approach what they appear to be.

During my PhD project I have met designers who have shared their professional and personal experiences of challenges, driving forces, hopes, and prospects. The purpose of communicating the experiences of others in this thesis is to show how I as a researcher have strived to increase my awareness of the personal experiences and preconceptions that I have brought into the research process, and to be transparent about these through a reflexive approach. In addition, I have approached the empirical material dialectically – paying attention to deviations, antitheses, norm deviations, and breaches, and contrasting these with the thesis and the normative, aiming to nuance and problematise understanding and interpretation of the outcome.

For additional reflections on methodology and trustworthiness in qualitative research, see Christoforidou (2013: 37–39).

## 2.2 Theoretical foundation

Norms and breaches have been central parts of this PhD project from the very beginning. In the Breach! part, breaches were explored as means of shedding light on potential blindspots prevalent in the design field. Since norms and the values that influence them cannot be approached directly, breaches are useful in provoking reactions that can raise awareness and understanding of the dynamics involved so they do not remain obscured. As norms, breaches, and blindspots are intertwined, the upcoming sections provide an overview of the approaches that address them, both in society in general and the design field.

### 2.2.1 Norms

Norms are implicit rules that a group of individuals share, and that govern the interactions within the own social group or with others in society. According to Durkheim (2014), one of the founders of modern sociology, norms are the essence of social order; they can be likened

to social facts on which the foundations of society rest. On the one hand, social control is exercised through norms by influencing people's thoughts, behaviour, and expectations; on the other, they provide a sense of security and affirmation when following them, and create a sense of the opposite when not followed (Durkheim, 2014).

The process of matching one's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours to the prevailing group norms is called 'conformity'. The term describes social interactions between individuals, how these work, and how they are affected by each other. Leaving aside the norms of a specific context, conformity also depends on the behavioural patterns that people follow or power and influence that authorities have over people, both of which create social peer pressure (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004).

Social peer pressure is a classic example of what is called 'normative conformity', which is based on the desire to be socially accepted and liked by others (Sherif, 1935; Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). A similar type of conformity is 'informational conformity', which is rooted in the desire to behave in a correct manner. Informational conformity occurs when one changes one's opinion or behaviour to conform to that of people who one believes to have more accurate information or field-specific expertise (Sherif, 1935; McLeod, 2016).

Kelman (1958) identifies three types of conformity: compliance, identification, and internalisation. Compliance is justified by the need for approval and fear of the opposite – rejection. It involves conforming publicly, and potentially keeping one's private beliefs intact. Identification is more profound than compliance, and involves conforming to a well-liked and respected role model such as a celebrity. The deepest, longest-term influence on people is internalisation, which means accepting and complying with common beliefs and behaviours both publicly and privately (Kelman, 1958).

#### Norms in the design field

According to Berger and Luckmann (1967), common ideas, values, processes, and notions are habitualised and then institutionalised until they constitute the basis of people's reality, which thereby is socially constructed. They argue that "all human activity is subject to habitualisation. Any action that is repeated frequently becomes cast into a pattern" (1967: 53). In other words, habitualised actions and processes are institutionalised in society as definite constructs.

The norms that exist in society are mirrored in various fields, and in the case of design influence how it is taught, practiced, produced, reproduced, and consumed. Design is a relatively young field, the advances and refinement of which are closely linked to industrialism and mass production (Vihma, 2003; Margolin, 2015). Important milestones for industrial design in Europe are the employment of Peter Behrens, a German architect, graphic and industrial designer, as artistic director by AEG in Germany in 1907, who was the first designer to have a leading position at an industrial design company with responsibility

and influence over all design activities (Johansson & Svengren Holm, 2008) Also important for the development of industrial design as a profession in Europe, was the founding of the Bauhaus school, which was the first design education institution with a focus on the modern business world and which had a new approach to design pedagogy, in 1919 (Ibid., 2008).

In Europe, and Scandinavia in particular, the German Bauhaus movement took on a central role in design. It was inspired by the abstract art movement of the early twentieth century and functionalism, both of which embraced a ‘form follows function’ aesthetic. Scandinavian design, which had a golden era in the 1950s, is still an established design tradition characterised by functionality, clean lines, simple shapes (Brunnström, 2019), and authentic, natural materials (Nelson & Cabra, 2004). The functionalist notions of what constitutes good design live on in the present, and although this view has been criticised it still plays a major role in industrial design (Johansson & Svengren Holm, 2008).

In recent years, an increasing number of scholars have argued that design is intertwined with the Eurocentric modern/colonial paradigm, and for decolonial perspectives to be applied to design (see e.g. Mignolo, 2012; Vazquez, 2017; Torretta, 2022). Vazquez (2017) argues that both design as a field and Eurocentric modernity, which has placed Europe at the centre of the world, not only shape our lives and how we relate to the world but what design is and how to be a designer. How close to or far from the prevalent norms in design, i.e. being European, white, male, etc., one is affords different degrees of power, privilege, and access (Gonzales, 2020). Design history is full of “big-name” designers (Torretta, 2022: 273), promoting European and American designers who are white and male, and canonising notions of good taste and design (Kaufman-Buhler et al., 2019).

As is discussed in the introduction to this thesis, some design movements have tried to break with normative conventions, e.g. radical design (Didero, 2017), critical design (Dunne & Raby, 2013; Malpass, 2013), and norm-critical design (Jahnke, 2006; Alves et al., 2016; Ehrnberger, 2017; Wikberg-Nilsson & Jahnke, 2018). An internationally renowned design collective that went against the trends of its time was the Memphis Group, founded in Milan by the Italian designer Ettore Sottsass and active between 1981 and 1988. The collective designed postmodern furniture, fabrics, glass, metal, and other objects using geometrical, colourful patterns. The group wanted to break with the tastes of the time and the modernist tradition, and create debate about the future of design. Their works can be seen as works of art rather than products as several were obtained by exhibitions, museums, and art collectors (Rewald et. al., 1993).

### 2.2.2 *Friction*

In the nineteenth century, Hegel and Marx developed the dialectic process to explain paradoxical and contradictory phenomena relating to consciousness and history. While

Hegel was interested in individual rationality and contradictions within the consciousness of individuals, i.e. psychological dialectics, Marx was more focused on collective irrationality and the contradictions between individuals, i.e. societal dialectics (Føllesdal et al., 2001). Hegel formulated the dialectic scheme of thesis–antithesis–synthesis:

- The thesis is the accepted position and is upheld as long as there is consensus; when opposition to the consensus is too much it is toppled, and counterforces begin to form.
- The antithesis is the opposite of the thesis.
- The synthesis contains elements of both the thesis and the antithesis, without being equal to either of them; the new is incorporated into the old as part of a transformation.

Both Marx and Hegel used the concept of ‘contradiction’ to concretise the schema and explain the process of dialectics and paradoxical or contradictory phenomena of consciousness and history. Consequently, in order to embrace dialectics, one must agree with the underlying assumption that change does not occur through continuous harmonic growth, that conflict, tension, and contradiction are instead required for this, and that it is through this process that society is driven forward (Føllesdal et al., 2001).

#### The Law of Jante

Expressions are used every day in languages all over the world that capture the friction that can arise between existing norms in given contexts, and the scale of tolerance of and intolerance towards deviating from what is expected. In the Scandinavian countries this type of conformity is often referred to as ‘Jantelagen’, the Law of Jante, which is an informal yet strongly rooted set of social norms that deems any type of behaviour that is non-conforming or that makes the person to stand out or be remarkable in relation to one’s surroundings in any way to be inappropriate and unworthy. Instilled from childhood and thereby imprinted in the collective consciousness, the Law of Jante captures some aspects of the Scandinavian mentality (Gopal, 2000; Cappelen & Dahlberg, 2018).

The Law of Jante was set out for the first time in the Norwegian satirical novel *A Fugitive Crosses his Tracks*, written by Aksel Sandemose in 1933. It describes the author’s upbringing in the small fictional Danish town of Jante, modelled after his native town of Nykøbing Mors, a typical small town where no one is anonymous (Sandemose, 1936). The small-town mindset portrayed in the book was intended to criticise societal rules and norms that Sandemose felt held people back, and evolved into an idiomatic term to describe a commonly accepted code of conduct: the Law of Jante. The term implies a negative attitude towards individuality, and criticism of people who want to break out of their social groups and strive for an improved position and success. A more positive interpretation is, however, also possible, in

that it emphasises virtues such as modesty and equality and values the collective above the individual, in so doing encouraging harmony and social stability. The Law of Jante is also argued to have contributed to the well-developed welfare state of the Scandinavian societies (Smith et al., 2003; Turausky, 2011; Gentile, 2014).

Although the expression ‘the Law of Jante’ is mainly connected to Scandinavia, the mindset of not trying to be better than or different to or considering oneself to be more valuable than other people is a widespread cultural phenomenon. The equivalent expression in Anglo-Saxon societies is ‘tall-poppy syndrome’ (Fig. 6); in Asian cultures, ‘the nail that stands out gets hammered down’ (Cappelen & Dahlberg, 2018)<sup>10</sup>.

Figure 6. *Tarquinius Superbus* by Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, 1867, depicting the king cutting off the heads of the tallest poppies. Private collection, painting; oil on panel<sup>9</sup>.



<sup>10</sup> Source, Wikimedia Commons. Retrieved 21 February, 2023 from: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lawrence\\_Alma-Tadema\\_11.jpeg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lawrence_Alma-Tadema_11.jpeg)

In summary, individual conduct that conforms to prevailing societal rules, i.e. conformity, is considered to be normal behaviour. Moreover, normal behaviour and conformity are often contrasted with abnormality and non-conformity, which usually have negative connotations. Being considered to be abnormal may have social ramifications, e.g. being excluded or stigmatised (Bartlett, 2011).

### Deviance

Norms help to reinforce social control, and their absence can lead to a sense of insecurity regarding how to navigate social life, and ultimately even chaos (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Durkheim, 2014). A weakening or dissolution of the prevalent norms and values of a collective can give rise to a social state of what Durkheim called “anomie”, i.e. lawlessness. During states of anomie the levels of chaos and insecurity rise, as do rates of suicide (Durkheim, 2006).

The sociologist Robert K. Merton studied deviance with the aim of understanding the reasons behind criminality. According to his ‘strain theory’ (1957), deviation can occur when there is an imbalance between the cultural goals that are, according to the prevailing societal norms, legitimate and desirable – such as a successful career or monetary wealth – and the available institutionalised means to achieve them. Such unequal societal structures can, according to strain theory, lead to the consequence that people are pressured into committing crimes. Merton proposed five types of deviant behaviour in relation to the acceptance or rejection of existing cultural goals and institutional means available (Fig. 7).

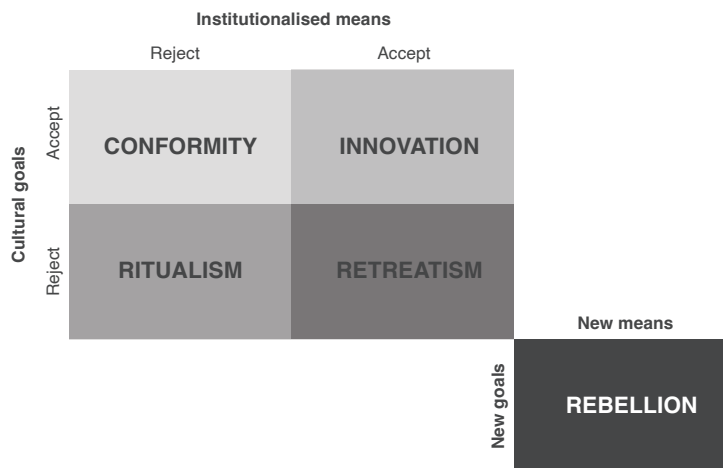


Figure 7. The typology of deviance (Merton, 1957).

According to Merton's typology of deviance, *conformity* means accepting both the cultural goals and means of attaining them. *Innovation* involves the acceptance of cultural goals but the rejection of the traditional and/or legitimate means of attaining them; instead, the goals are reached through illegitimate means, for example criminal or deviant ways of obtaining wealth. *Ritualism* involves losing faith in cultural goals but keeping one's actions within the accepted frame of means of achieving these goals by routine. Individuals who are inclined to *retreatism* have given up on both society's goals and the legitimate means of obtaining them, and live outside conventional norms, e.g. hermits. *Rebellion* is a case outside the above parameters, where individuals, as in the case of retreatism, reject both the cultural goals and the traditional means of achieving them. The difference is that they try to replace these goals with new ones.

Although Merton's strain theory has received criticism, for example on the basis of the weak empirical evidence and the focus on criminality in relation to the lower classes, rather than considering e.g. corporate eco-crime, his typology offers a useful illustration of the friction caused by commonly shared norms and values, when the means to achieve them are structurally unattainable by some groups in society (Giddens & Sutton, 2021).

#### Power and discourse

In aiming to understand power structures and contribute to social change, Michel Foucault focused on social deviations and themes such as mental illness, disciplining institutions, and sexuality (Foucault, 1990; 1991; 2006). Foucault (2006) questioned the notion that those with mental illness are today seen as crazy, whereas in the past they were merely different and could even possess a form of wisdom, gain respect, and move freely in society. In contrast, modern medicine treats mental illness with heavy psychotropic drugs and diagnoses. Terms such as 'insane' and 'mentally ill' are social constructs that emerged in the seventeenth century, and with these the view of normality changed; people began to distinguish between reason and unreasonableness, and terms such as 'crazy' and 'abnormal' were introduced, causing people with mental illnesses to undergo 'correction' efforts in order to fit socially determined norms. Prior to that, insanity did not exist as either a concept nor a state of mind (Foucault, 2006).

Foucault (1991) also criticised the state's approach to discipline, arguing that the modern prison system is less humane than the public executions of the Middle Ages. He argued that in the past a convict could gain sympathy and even admiration, and that the executioner was an unsympathetic figure. Although the mediaeval system was more brutal it was also more honest, and it encouraged questioning of state power. Today, however, power seems to be milder because it is hidden; the new disciplinary institutions, such as prisons, asylums, schools, workhouses, and factories, and the new 'humane' practices of discipline and surveillance, reconfigured punishment with the aim of producing obedient citizens who complied with

social norms and internalised dominant beliefs and values. The ambition was to make deviance visible, and thus correctable, in a way that was previously impossible (Foucault, 1991).

Also gender was considered by Foucault (1990) to be a historical construct and questioned the view that society had become more sexually tolerant and liberated than in the past. Rather, he argued that there was an obsession with defining and intellectualising sexuality, and thereby controlling it. In referring to homosexuality as a ‘deviant act’, the terminology and focus shifted towards deviant types, e.g. perverts and homosexuals, who needed intensive medical intervention and correction. By singling out homosexuality, heterosexuality was simultaneously established as the norm (Foucault, 1990).

Foucault (2001; 2002; 2006) believed that such categorisations were claims to define the truth, while at the same time being employed to exercise power. Thus, it is not the truth that gives power, but power that formulates the truth and influences the discourse. The more power, the greater the opportunity to influence the discourse and thus the perspectives, attitudes, and issues within an area, and so also the regulatory framework we construct for what we consider to constitute the truth (Foucault, 2001; 2002; 2006).

The enduring contribution of Foucault (1980; 2002; 2017) is our relationship to history; he urges us to question our view of society and be aware that development is not necessarily synonymous with improvement. In doing so, he does not advocate a nostalgic approach, but rather that we use lessons from the past to address contemporary challenges. Only through a deepened understanding of the origin and structure of our present social order will we be able to grasp and seize future possibilities for social change (Foucault, 1980; 2002; 2017).

### 2.2.3 *Blindspots*

Researchers have used blindspots as a metaphor for underlying assumptions in the contexts they study. For example, Tengelin uses the term to describe healthcare professionals’ underlying “assumptions, which are taken for granted, are carried within people and expressed as talk, thoughts and action. I have termed them ‘blindspots’” (2019: 1).

In this context, the term refers to practices and behaviours that occur during social interactions that risk being neglected because we are unaware of them, but originates in the fields of medicine and biology. More literally, blind spots are the result of a region of the eye lacking receptors, making it impossible for those parts to perceive light. Through the visual information received by the other eye, the brain compensates for the blind spot. Regardless of where the eye is looking, the blind spot moves with it (Wandell, 1995).

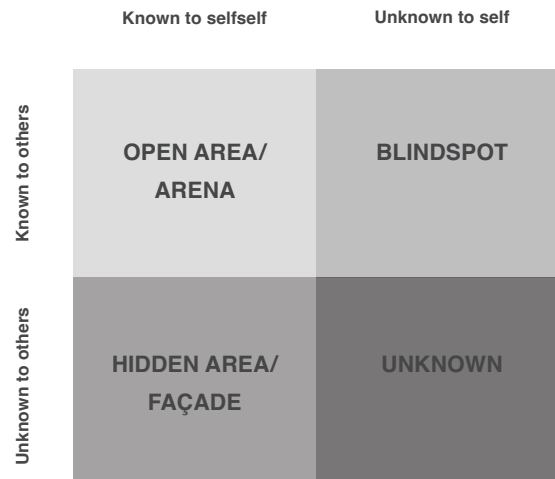
In a similar process to how visual blind spots occur, cultural blindspots<sup>11</sup> are at play when social interactions end in conflict or misunderstanding (Bjørn & Ngwenyama, 2009). What exactly is overlooked due to blindspots depends on the cultural attitudes and practices that we are unaware of in relation to prevailing norms and values (Clausen & Zølner, 2010;

<sup>11</sup>The term ‘blind spot’ refers to a visual phenomenon in medical and biological literature and is usually written as two words. A ‘blindspot’ in the cultural sense can be written as either as one or two words. In order to avoid confusion between visual and cultural blindspots, ‘cultural blindspots’ are henceforth referred to as ‘blindspots’.

Christoforidou et al., 2021). To avoid blindspots hindering communication, they need to be revealed (Matthiesen et al., 2014; Christoforidou et al., 2021).

The Johari Window (Fig. 8) is a psychological communication model that describes how variations in openness influence social interaction. The model was developed by the psychologists Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham (1955), who studied group dynamics at the University of California, and is a portmanteau of their first names. The Johari Window is useful for understanding conscious and unconscious biases, increasing individuals' self-awareness and understanding of others, improving communication and collaboration skills, and achieving a common understanding and improved cooperation between group members and different groups.

Figure 8. The Johari Window (Luft & Ingham, 1955).



The Johari Window helps people to identify and understand what they know about themselves in relation to what other people know about them by dividing information across four areas:

- The open area/arena: anything one knows about oneself and is willing to share with others.
- The blindspot area: anything one does not know about oneself that others are aware of.
- The hidden area/façade: anything one knows about oneself but is unwilling to share with others.
- The unknown area: any aspect unknown to oneself and others.

Consequently, blindspots are a helpful concept when seeking to unravel critical issues. In addition, by introducing the exploratory approach of breaches, underlying blindspots that risk remaining unnoticed can be identified and compensated for.

### 2.3 Methodological approach

In the following, the research layout is provided, along with the methodological considerations that arose during the studies. The methods that were used in the first part of the PhD project and the Bling? studies are described in the appended introductory chapters of the licentiate thesis, (Christoforidou, 2013).

Although the point of departure for the methodological approach used in the second part of the PhD project (the Breach! studies) was the same as for the first part, as were some of the methods, these were elaborated on and supplemented with new approaches. Table B presents the methods used in the Breach! studies and how they are connected to the appended papers.

| <b>Breach!<br/>Studies</b>     | <b>Sweden and New Zealand<br/>(VI)</b>                                                                     | <b>Three examples of breachers<br/>(VII)</b>                        |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Context</b>                 | Breaches and blindspots in design practice                                                                 | Breachers, blindspots, and <i>mellanförskap</i> in the design field |
| <b>Empirical material</b>      | Designer accounts                                                                                          | Documentary, recorded symposium, and online discussion forum        |
| <b>Methodological approach</b> | Qualitative content analysis and comparison of on-site, in-depth interviews and participatory observations | Qualitative content analysis and comparative study                  |
| <b>Reported in Papers</b>      | E                                                                                                          | F                                                                   |

Table B. Schematic overview of the methodological approach implemented in the Breach! studies.

### *2.3.1 Qualitative methodology and content analysis*

In general, qualitative methodology concerns human experiences and how these can be explained within the framework of the social structures in relation to which they occur (Flick, 2018; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). A qualitative procedure enables contextual processes to be explored and the experiences, expectations, and aspirations of participants to be taken into account (Mishler, 1986; Patton, 2015). More specifically, qualitative methodology is applied when exploring ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions (Yin, 2016). Similar to the Bling? studies, the planning and overall conducting of the Breach! studies was guided by a qualitative research approach.

When considering methods for the interview-based Study VI, the decision was made to use face-to-face, in-depth interviews, which have the merit of focusing on the interviewees’ personal beliefs and experiences (Guest et al., 2012). However, as the researchers decide the topic of the interview, there is a risk of influencing the conversation and interviewees so that they provide answers that they think are expected of them (Silverman, 2007). One way of reducing this risk is to keep the focus primarily on the interviewees’ accounts, encouraging them to speak freely while sharing their experiences. Moreover, aiming to understand abstract dimensions – in this case underlying norms and values – is best approached via the interviewees’ own accounts, rather than direct questions (Galletta, 2013; Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018).

Qualitative content analysis in the form of focused coding was used to analyse these accounts (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2015). This involved reading and re-reading the transcripts – in this case the interviews, posts, and recordings – in order to become familiar with the empirical material and identify patterns, while making margin notes similar to bookmarking. The margin notes were subsequently translated into condensed meaning units, i.e. codes, which were grouped into categories of similar content. Key themes were generated using these categories and relevant quotations compiled (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004; Flick, 2018).

Condensing extensive transcripts into relevant quotations can be challenging. One approach to reducing the material down to relevant categories proposed by Alvesson and Kärreman (2007; 2011) is to treat it as a mystery to be solved while looking for similarities and differences.

### *2.3.2 The three-dimensional critical discourse analysis framework and structure of the practical arguments*

Previous work that explored how designers reflect on their professional practice and contributions suggests that studying norms and values can be challenging due to their underlying and implicit nature (Christoforidou, 2012; Christoforidou et al., 2013). Consequently, the methods used in contexts such as this research project should enable a critical point of view

and understanding of the construction of social identities and power dynamics within various discourses, i.e. the spoken or written statements and rules that dictate what is appropriate and inappropriate to say or write in a given social context (Boréus, 2017).

Discourse analysis is applied in the social sciences in order to understand society and the relationship between language and action. There are several traditions in the field: post-structural discourse theory, discursive psychology, and critical discourse analysis (CDA). Although they share key concepts, e.g. a critical perspective and focus on language in the construction of discourses, they vary in terms of how far the discourses span (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). The focus of the post-structural discourse approach is the power dynamics of the development of discourses over time (Foucault, 2002; 2017). Discursive psychology examines how and why particular senders communicate (Edwards & Potter, 2005). The common perspective in CDA is that social identities and relationships are, at least in part, shaped by how we use language.

Fairclough (1992) defines discourse as language, a form of social practice among other social practices, and a way of speaking or writing from a certain perspective, such as an inclusive or exclusive one. He makes a distinction between discursive practice, which is limited to language or linguistic practices, and other social practices, and considers only the spoken or written word to constitute discourse. Laclau and Mouffe (2001), on the other hand, argue that all practices are discursive (see also Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002), and that all actions constitute discourse. Foucault argues that discourses determine the encompassed modes of thought (2002; 2017); therefore, this study embraces the latter perspective.

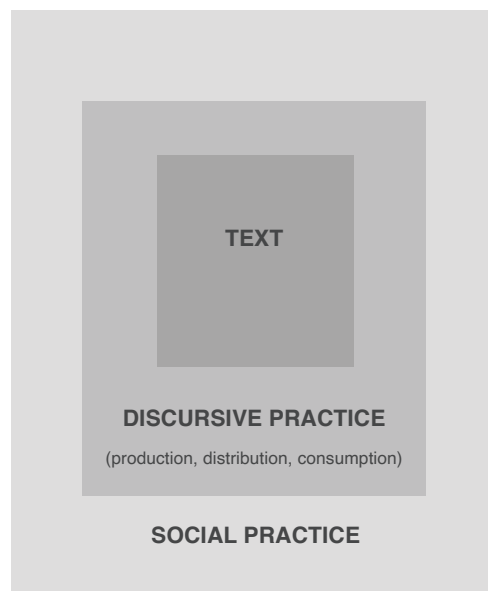
Discourses are not elevated above the influence of other social practices and processes; rather, they shape and are shaped by the world around us (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). As discourses contribute to the constitution of the world, they have ideological effects; they construct and reconstruct the power relations between different groups in society. The critical element of CDA is the revealing of these ideological effects in order to enact social change and more equal power relations. Fairclough (1992) argues that discourses constitute:

- Social identities or groups.
- Social relationships between these identities or groups.
- A greater context within which these identities, groups, and relations move (i.e. knowledge and meaning systems).

In order to study these levels, Fairclough (2013) developed a three-dimensional model where a distinction is made between the dimensions of text, discursive practice, and social practice during the analytical process (Fig. 9). The first, inner-most layer is the textual analysis of linguistics, whereas the second relates to the discourse that shapes, and is shaped by, the social

context. The third, outer-most layer is formed by microsocial practices that are produced by people and manifested through texts, either spoken or written, which are distributed and interpreted in social contexts (Fairclough, 2013). Unlike traditional linguistics, which focuses on the content of a text rather than the milieu in which it is embedded (Fairclough, 2013), CDA explores the development of discursive practice. This analysis sheds light on how language forms social reality, rather than merely reflecting it (Phillips & Hardy, 2002).

Figure 9. Fairclough's (2013) three-dimensional CDA framework.



In addition to the text itself, the context in which it emerges and the roles of the producer and consumer of the text are also relevant. Therefore, Fairclough (2003) uses the analytical dimensions of genre and style: the former refers to specific ways to act in certain contexts, and the latter to roles or identity markers in these specific contexts, i.e. interpersonal communication.

The advantage of the CDA approach lies mainly in its focus not being restricted to textuality. Texts do not exist in isolation; therefore, the social practices in which a text is embedded represent a significant context that is also accounted for. From this structural point of view, language is regarded as a form of social practice in which discourses are both shaped and constrained by social orders. The discursive practice, in turn, influences the social structures

that constrain it (Fairclough, 1992), and so social practices and structures are manifested through discourse. Fairclough (2013) also argues that discursive practices are dynamic by nature and create and recreate orders within social contexts. Varying rights of individuals, such as to produce and distribute a particular text, reveal power structures (Bacchi, 2000). Having access to and being able to influence a discourse shows a degree of power; consequently, social action is determined by the social structure in which it is embedded (Parker, 1992; Wodak & Meyer, 2001).

In summary, a central aspect of CDA is the study of how texts are produced, distributed, and consumed within a certain discourse (Phillips et al., 2008). Analysing this process offers a way to understand power dynamics, but also to maintain a self-reflective stance throughout the analysis.

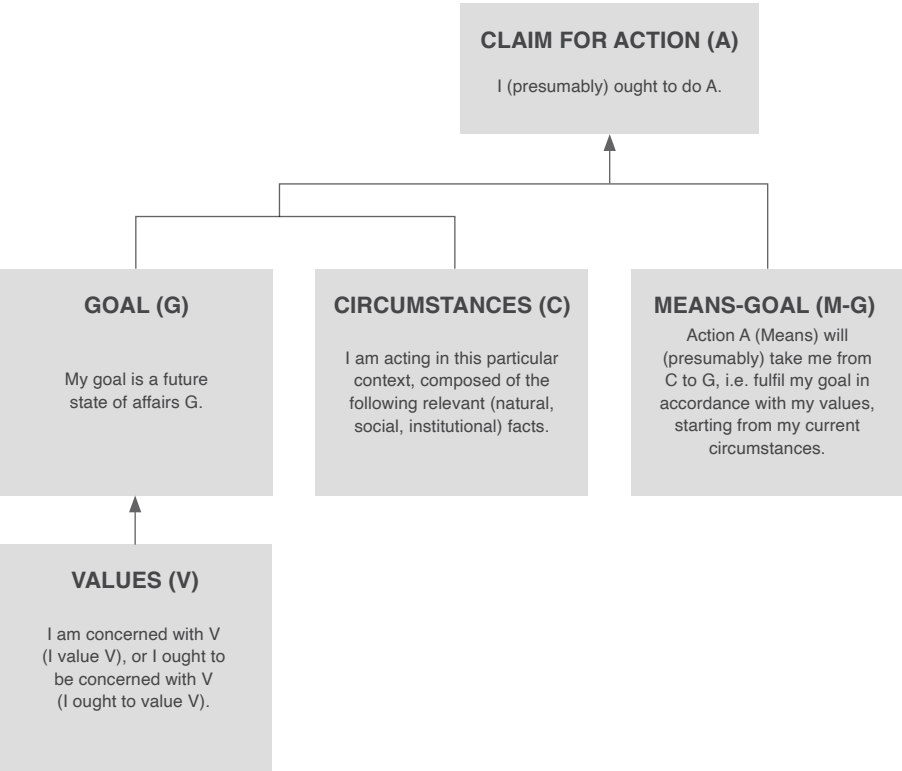
#### The structure of the practical arguments

One focal area of CDA is the structure of practical arguments, namely those that an actor uses to motivate or justify a specific action (Fairclough, 2013; Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012: 29). These are defined as practical reasoning leading to the question of ‘what should I do?’, in contrast to theoretical reasoning, i.e. ‘what is true?’ (Ibid.: 35). In order to analyse the structure of practical arguments, Fairclough and Fairclough developed a model consisting of the following building blocks: claim for action (A), goal (G), circumstances (C), means-goal (M-G), and values (V; Fig. 10).

Practical arguments are based on values that engage the actor, whose values are directly linked to their goals, which in turn relate to their reasoning. They are also linked to the circumstances that provide the argumentation context. Why is the argumentation needed, and in what context does it take place? Values, circumstances and goals together lead to the conclusion of a pragmatic argument, which is what should be done, i.e. the claim for action (Ibid., 2012).

To summarise and relate this to the issues at hand: CDA and the model of practical arguments were applied to three examples of breachers in Study VII and Paper F; each breach was compared to the others, taking into account the respective contexts, circumstances, and driving forces of the breachers (Wodak & Meyer, 2001; Fairclough, 2013).

Figure 10. The structure of practical arguments (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012).





### 3 THE STUDIES

The second and final part of the PhD project picked up where the licentiate thesis left off – with the conclusion that Bling is a breach in relation to the underlying values of design students regarding what constitutes good design, which in essence is about common notions of good taste (Christoforidou, 2013). Although the concept of Bling guided the first half of the PhD project, it was not the initial focus, which was to explore the material expressions of environmentally friendly products and the emotional responses they evoke. The emotional aspects of design were investigated by studying how emotions are generated in the brain on a physiological level (Table C, Study I) and whether people's values regarding the environment are reflected in their purchasing decisions (Study II).

The pre-studies (I and II) resulted in something of a standstill, among other things due to the interviewees' efforts to appear to be ecologically aware and conscious consumers by giving stereotypical, politically correct answers. Moving the PhD project forward became possible by a shift in direction, towards working experimentally by exploring environmentally friendly products via another, quite different trend: Bling. This grew in popularity at the same time as ecological, organic, and green alternatives were on trend. During a design research workshop at which Bling was introduced as a research focus, it was strongly rejected by most of the design researchers and postgraduate students in the audience (Study III). Suddenly, the comments were anything but polished or politically correct, and so I began to seek new ways of making sense of the puzzle; the new objective of my research was to understand the underlying reasons behind the turmoil stirred up by Bling. The first step was to understand the nature of Bling (Study IV); this was followed by a workshop with design students where the theme was explored gradually (Study V). Additional information about the pre-studies (I and II) and Bling! studies (III–V) can be found in Appendix 2, where the licentiate thesis is available in its entirety.

The continuation of the PhD project revolved around exploring breaches in the design field as part of a knowledge-enhancing effort about design as education, profession, and practice, and in order to uncover blindspots. Thus, for the second and last part of the PhD project, two additional studies were conducted (Studies VI and VII). Having arrived at the conclusion that Bling constituted a breach among design students during the research for the licentiate thesis, Study VI provided an opportunity to explore breaches among design professionals in Sweden and New Zealand by comparing and contrasting accounts of the interviewed designers. In the last study (Study VII), the focus was on the people behind the breaches, namely the breachers. Three examples of breachers – a professional designer, a design educator, and a design researcher, each representing a niche in the design field – were analysed and compared in order to portray and nuance their characteristics.

The aims, methods, and outcomes of each study are summarised in Table C. The studies presented in the licentiate thesis are colour-coded in coral, which is the theme colour of the licentiate thesis. The pre-studies are a lighter shade of coral and the Bling? studies are darker, while the Breach! studies are grey. The methodological considerations and design of Studies VI and VII are elaborated on in the upcoming sections, whereas their outcomes are presented in Chapters 4 (the Appended Papers) and 5 (Discussion).

| PhD thesis: <b>Bling &amp;</b> |                                     |                                 |                                  |                                               |                                             |                                                                                    |                                                                     |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Studies                        | Licentiate thesis                   |                                 |                                  |                                               |                                             | Breach! Studies                                                                    |                                                                     |
|                                | Pre-Studies                         |                                 | Bling? Studies                   |                                               |                                             |                                                                                    |                                                                     |
|                                | Affective neuroscience<br>(I)       | Eco-design<br>(II)              | Bling? research seminar<br>(III) | BBC study<br>(IV)                             | Trend course<br>(V)                         | Sweden and New Zealand<br>(VI)                                                     | Three examples of breachers<br>(VII)                                |
| Theme/<br>context              | Physiological mechanism of emotions | Eco-glam                        | Design meets Bling               | Understanding Bling                           | Breaches and blindspots in design education | Breaches and blindspots in design practice                                         | Breachers, blindspots, and <i>mellanförskap</i> in the design field |
| Empirical material             | Literature review                   | Pilot study                     | Research seminar                 | Internet portal search                        | Student workshop                            | Designer accounts                                                                  | Documentary recorded symposium, and online discussion forum         |
| Approach                       | Database search                     | Shop-along interviews           | Participatory observation        | Quantitative and qualitative content analyses | Assignments and participatory observations  | Qualitative content analysis of in-depth interviews and participatory observations | Qualitative content analysis                                        |
| Reported in papers             | Christoforidou and Motte, (2009)    | Unpublished paper <sup>12</sup> | A, B, C, D                       | A, B                                          | C, D                                        | E                                                                                  | F                                                                   |

Table C. The PhD project as a whole.

<sup>12</sup> Christoforidou, D., *Design through a Neo-Green Filter: A Hollywood ending?*

### 3.1 Study VI: From the field of design practice

The aim of this study was twofold: to explore breaches as an approach to blindspots through designers' accounts of their professional practice, and to delve into the underlying norms and values that surround and influence designers' professional practices. For this reason, designers in New Zealand and Sweden were interviewed, and they were encouraged to discuss topics of importance to their practice during the interviews (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018).

Why compare Sweden to New Zealand? To begin with, an opportunity to visit New Zealand in the framework of an exchange programme between the design schools of Massey University College of Creative Arts in New Zealand and Lund University School of Industrial Design (LUSID) in Sweden presented itself. Therefore, a series of interviews was conducted with design professionals and design educators who were part of the two design schools in question. Moreover, the specific conditions for design and designers in New Zealand are interesting to compare and contrast to those of Sweden for a number of reasons. For example, both countries are relatively small (although Sweden is approximately twice as big in terms of both population and size); both are secular cultures; and both share and represent opposite examples of centre/periphery dimensions, e.g. by being outskirts, or extreme outskirts, while also being parts of Scandinavia and the European Community in Sweden's case, and Oceania and the Commonwealth in New Zealand's case.

And so, between November 2014 and May 2015, several in-depth interviews with designers were conducted during on-site visits to their workplaces in both countries. The interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewees, and were transcribed by a professional consultant who translated the Swedish interview transcripts into English. These transcripts amounted to over 400 pages; as a result the qualitative content analysis of the empirical material was challenging, particularly with regard to e.g. the identification of themes and coding into categories (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004; Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007; 2011; Geertz, 2017; Flick, 2018; Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018).

Several rounds of reading through the transcripts of the interviews led to the identification of both similarities and differences. The topics mentioned by the designers in both counties were generally conditions that they felt were favourable for the practice of the design profession, the challenges they face, what they underlined in relation to their expertise and contribution to the design profession, and how they see the future of the design profession (Paper E, Christoforidou et al., 2021).

### 3.2 Study VII: From the fields of design practice, design education, and design research

In Study VII, the focus shifted from the breaches to the people breaking the norms, i.e. the breachers. Contexts, motivations, and goals were compared in order to deepen the

understanding of the dimensions underlying norm breaches, what they reveal about the context from which they originate, and – from a broader perspective – how to use breaches to highlight various blindspots relating to underlying norms and values. The three contexts that were studied – design practice, design education, and design research – were each represented by a breacher, and compared to each other. As the examples were selected on the basis that they involved attempts to understand underlying causal relationships and individual and shared social meanings and reflect on and question assumptions, the approach started with a combination of an interpretative and critical stance (Paper F).

The context of design practice was represented by a Swedish designer, Anders ‘Lagombra’<sup>13</sup> Jakobsen, also known as ‘Radikalsløjderen’<sup>14</sup>, who has a reputation for controversy due to his lifestyle and aesthetic. His name was mentioned on a couple of occasions during the interviews with designers in Sweden as an example of a controversial designer. The empirical material consisted of an hour-long documentary broadcast in 2017 by the Swedish public television service (Sveriges Television, 2021), which contains scenes from Jakobsen’s life and work shot in his apartment in Stockholm and his cabin in the deep forests outside the town of Hede, in the northern part of Sweden. In addition, art and design experts were also interviewed, and provided information about his works and position in the art and design world (Ibid.; Fougner & Degerman, 2017).

Design education was represented by the second example, Dr Johnson Witehira, who is from New Zealand and of Tamahaki and Ngāi Tū-te-auru descent. Witehira is an artist, designer, and academic whose main mission is to bring Māori culture into all aspects of New Zealand life. During November 2015 Witehira and practitioners and academics in the field of design gathered in Wellington for ‘Helix’, a two-day symposium on New Zealand’s design identity (DesignCo, 2015a). The suggestion to keep an eye on the Helix symposium came from the design educators at the School of Design at Massey University in Wellington, during a visit in May 2015 in connection to the research that formed Study VI (Paper E; Christoforidou et al., 2021). The presentations given by the speakers at the Helix Symposium were recorded and made accessible online (DesignCo, 2015b). In his fifteen-minute presentation, Witehira stated his intention to “say some things against the grain” (Ibid: 3:59); instead of the planned presentation with the title ‘Invisible Culture: mono-cultural graphic design in a bicultural New Zealand’, he shared examples of teaching design students to work with concepts and myths from Māori culture (Ibid: 1:31).

The field of design research was represented by ‘Ashok Kumar’ and his posts, especially the final one from 2017, published on an online discussion forum for academic design research (‘the Forum’). Unlike Jakobsen and Witehira, who I came across via interviews with designers in Sweden and New Zealand, I stumbled upon ‘Kumar’ in connection to a controversy on the Forum, which I am a member of, albeit only as what Fairclough (2013) would call a consumer

<sup>13</sup> Meaning moderately good, good enough.

<sup>14</sup> Meaning radical sloyder/craftsman.

of the discourse rather than a producer of it. A group of researchers criticised the power relations of the Forum and left it to create the ‘Decolonising Design’ platform (Decolonising Design, 2016). ‘Kumar’s’ post was part of the discussion that arose in the aftermath, where he defended the dissenting voices and announced his decision to terminate his membership and leave the Forum. While the documentary about Jakobsen and the Helix symposium are, or were, widely available to the public, the exchange of design research on the Forum was only intended for members who subscribed to the posts. Consequently, both the Forum and ‘Kumar’ have been pseudonymised in order to safeguard the identities of the Forum members in general, and ‘Kumar’ in particular (Paper F).

In order to compare the breaches of Jakobsen, Witehira, and ‘Kumar’ to one another, the empirical material from each case had to be configured in similar formats. Therefore, the documentary was translated into English and, along with Witehira’s presentation, transcribed by a professional agency. The transcripts were analysed and compared through qualitative content analysis (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004; Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007; 2011; Geertz, 2017; Flick, 2018; Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018) to explore the ‘portraits’ of the breachers that emerged (Paper F).

Chapter 4 provides an overview of the outcomes of Studies VI and VII, and a summary of the appended Papers E and F.



#### 4 THE APPENDED PAPERS

Papers E and F, which are described in this chapter, are presented in an order that represents both their chronology and relation to the other studies in Table D. The table reflects the research progression of the PhD project, and how the appended articles contributed to the outcome of the project as a whole. As mentioned above, the coral-coloured fields constitute the Bling? studies and the grey-coloured ones the Breach! studies. Papers E and F can be found in Appendix 1, and the licentiate thesis, including Papers A, B, C and D, in Appendix 2.

Table D. An overview of the Bling? and Breach! studies in relation to the appended papers.

| PhD thesis: <b>Bling &amp;</b>                                                       |                                                                    |                                        |                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <div>STUDIES</div> <div>PAPERS</div>                                                 | Licentiate thesis                                                  |                                        |                                                      | Breach! Studies                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                    |
|                                                                                      | Bling? Studies                                                     |                                        |                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                    |
|                                                                                      | Bling? seminar<br>2008<br>(III)                                    | BBC study<br>2008<br>(IV)              | Trend course<br>2009<br>(V)                          | Sweden and New Zealand<br>2015<br>(VI)                                                                                                                                | Three examples of breachers<br>2021<br>(VII)                       |
| Key concepts                                                                         | Norms and values, breaches, blindspots                             |                                        |                                                      | Norms and values, breaches, blindspots, monolithic and polyolithic contexts, breachers, in-betweenness/ <i>mellanförskap</i> , in-betweeners/ <i>mellanförskapare</i> |                                                                    |
| A<br>2008<br>Conference                                                              |                                                                    | Aim:<br>Describe<br>Role:<br>Co-author |                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                    |
| B<br>2009<br>Conference                                                              | Aim: Analyse,understand<br>Role: Co-author                         |                                        |                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                    |
| C<br>2012a<br>Conference                                                             |                                                                    |                                        | Aim: Analyse, understand, explore<br>Role: Co-author |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                    |
| D<br>2012b<br>Journal                                                                |                                                                    |                                        | Aim: Analyse, understand, explore<br>Role: Co-author |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                    |
| Introductory chapters of the licentiate compilation thesis<br>2013<br>Public defence | Aim: Analyse, understand, explore, synthesise<br>Role: Sole author |                                        |                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                    |
| E<br>2021<br>Journal                                                                 |                                                                    |                                        |                                                      | Aim: Analyse, understand, explore<br>Role: Main author                                                                                                                |                                                                    |
| F<br>Submitted<br>Journal                                                            |                                                                    |                                        |                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                       | Aim: Analyse, understand, explore, synthesise<br>Role: Sole author |
| Introductory chapters of the PhD compilation thesis<br>2023<br>Public defence        | Aim: Analyse, understand, explore, synthesise<br>Role: Sole author |                                        |                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                    |

#### 4.1 Paper E: Designers' accounts from Sweden and New Zealand

Christoforidou, D., Erlingsdóttir, G. and Warell, A. (2021). Monolithic vs. Polylythic Design Cultures? Designers' accounts of professional practices in Sweden and New Zealand. *Journal of Design Research* Vol. 19 (1/2/3), pp. 7–30.

This comparative study explored breaches in order to unveil blindspots within the social constructs surrounding design practice in Sweden and New Zealand. Although in-depth interviews with designers in both countries revealed both similarities and differences, the underlying norms and values identified suggest that design professionals in the two countries share a similar value base. The interviewed designers in both countries described the niche they occupy in terms of what could be called 'in-betweenness', or what Bhabha (2004) describes as being both insiders and outsiders, or neither. In their accounts, the designers also expressed subtle differences in relation to their professional roles; while the designers in New Zealand identified as bricoleurs, the designers in Sweden compared themselves to engineers (Fig. 11). Moreover, Sweden appears to be a somewhat more monolithic context compared to New Zealand, which in contrast seems to be more polylythic (Fig. 12).

This approach enabled a deeper understanding of potential blindspots in the design field and surrounding social construct. Implementing breaches as a lens can be valuable in questioning established truths and ultimately instigating change.



Figure 11. Schematic representation of the position of designers between engineers and bricoleurs, and the dynamics of the context (Christoforidou et al., 2021).

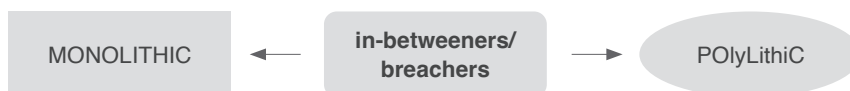


Figure 12. Schematic representation of the position of breaches between monolithic and polylythic contexts, and the dynamics of this (Christoforidou et al., 2021).

#### 4.2 Paper F: Three examples of breachers

Christoforidou, D. (submitted). From Breaches to Breachers: Three designers revealing blindspots in the design field. *FormAkademisk*.

This article presented three examples of breaches in the field of design: one from design practice, one from design education, and one from design research. The focus was on the people who perform the described breaching acts, including what these breachers have in common and what sets them apart from one another.

Comparing the breachers with each other enabled a deepened and nuanced understanding of different types of breach and what these reveal about underlying motivations, conditions, norms, and values in each context. Both breaches and breachers push the boundaries regarding which questions are possible to ask in various fields and go beyond these – especially in normative contexts or when consensus is high on the agenda.

In a broader sense, it can be argued that breaches and breachers offer valuable opportunities for not only insights but for friction in terms of building norm awareness. This in turn is the foundation of both norm criticism and norm creativity, which are central aspects of the design field.



## 5 DISCUSSION

In this chapter the key concepts addressed in the thesis are described, and the findings are discussed in relation to the research questions posed at the outset and how they can be beneficial for the design field.

Table E shows how the studies and papers are connected to the resulting key concepts. The latter along with the conclusions and knowledge contribution of the PhD project are presented and further discussed in the upcoming sections.

Table E. Schematic overview of the conducted studies in relation to the appended papers.

| STUDIES            | Bling?                               |                                                |                                                        | Breach!                                                                            |                                                                           |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                    | Bling? seminar 2008 (III)            | BBC study 2008 (IV)                            | Trend course 2009 (V)                                  | Sweden and New Zealand 2015 (VI)                                                   | Three examples of breachers 2021 (VII)                                    |
| Context            | Design meets Bling                   | Understanding Bling                            | Breaches and blindspots in design education            | Breaches and blindspots in design education                                        | Breachers and blindspots in the design field                              |
| Empirical material | Research seminar                     | Internet portal search                         | Student workshop                                       | Designer accounts                                                                  | Documentary, recorded symposium, and online discussion forum              |
| Approach           | Participatory observation            | Content analyses, quantitative and qualitative | Assignments, participatory observation                 | Comparative qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews, participatory observation | Comparative qualitative content analysis                                  |
| Reported in papers | A, B, C, D                           | A, B                                           | C, D                                                   | E                                                                                  | F                                                                         |
| Key concepts       | Breaching experiments and blindspots | Breaching experiments and blindspots           | Breaching experiments and blindspots, Bling vs. design | Breaches and blindspots, Monolithic and polythetic contexts                        | Breaches, breachers, and blindspots, In-betweenness/ <i>mellanförskap</i> |

### 5.1 Key concepts and findings

In the Bling? studies breaches were implemented intentionally, whereas in the Breach! studies, they were explored in the contexts in which they occurred. The following section recaps which breaches have been dealt with in the framework of both studies.

### 5.1.1 *Blindspots*

A central part of the research presented in this thesis has been developing an approach to illuminate blindspots in the design field. But why is it important to illuminate blindspots?

In all professional contexts, openness rather than blindspots is key; the more open, the better the conditions for professional practice (Luft & Ingham, 1955). This is true for design as well, where designers are expected to deliver design proposals that are ‘outside the box’ (Buchanan, 1992; Kelley, 2001; von Stamm, 2008; Brown & Katz, 2009; Cross, 2011).

Moreover, a central dimension of design is a well-developed ability to deal with ambiguity (Micheli et al., 2019; Auernhammer & Roth, 2021). In a sense, ambiguity involves entering the ‘hidden’ and ‘unknown’ areas of the Johari Window (Fig. 8, p. 25). However, for this to happen, the window cannot be entirely ‘closed’; curiosity, tolerance, and willingness to explore are required.

Breaches and breachers can bring about the necessary friction to transform blindspots and hidden and unknown areas into less opaque ones, break boundaries, and provide insights regarding e.g. a context’s underlying norms and values.

### 5.1.2 *From breaching experiments to breaches*

Studies III–V explored design students’ strong reactions to Bling, which were based on their preconceived notions about what constitutes good design and fear of embarrassment in front of their peers with regard to deviating from prevailing norms. As a result, the students distanced themselves from the concept of and reacted vehemently due to what Bourdieu (1984) defined as symbolic violence, i.e. a fear of appearing to not possess symbolic capital appropriate to the context and social field to which one wishes to belong (Christoforidou, 2013). Similar to Garfinkel’s breaching experiments (1984) the use of Bling was a planned breach, deliberately staged to explore the reactions it gave rise to.

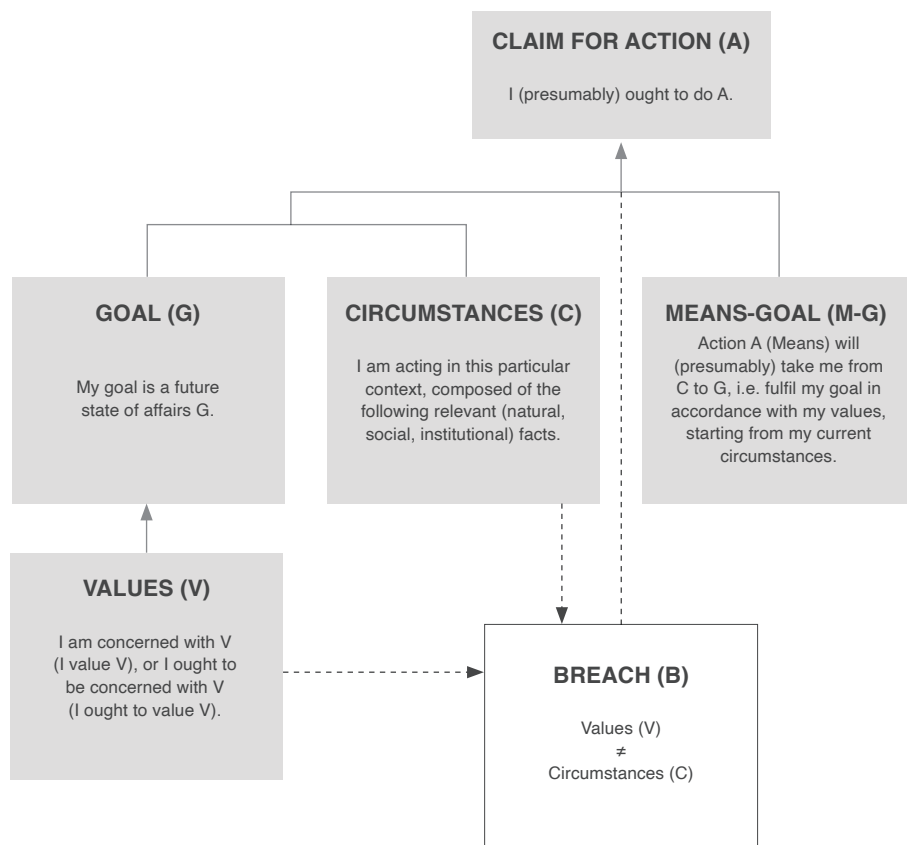
Study VI focused on designers’ accounts of their professional practice in Sweden and New Zealand. The interviewed designers shared their thoughts on their challenges and hopes regarding the future of their practice. The interviews were analysed using a qualitative content-analysis process, in which focused coding and margin notes, i.e. ‘memos’, were used to identify themes and group similar content (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004; Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007; 2011; Flick, 2018; Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). In this study, breaches were not implemented per se; rather, the designers’ accounts were analysed by utilising breaches as a lens and analytical dimension to draw attention to deviations in relation to the contexts in which they originated and by comparing the designers’ statements from the two countries. The detection of these deviations, i.e. breaches, laid a pattern, eventually leading to the conclusion that Sweden is experienced as a more monolithic context and New Zealand as a more polythitic one by the interviewed designers. The designers in Sweden stated that they

tend to rely on governmental channels and professional organisations to implement changes, while the designers in New Zealand stated that they are more inclined to act as bricoleurs and take matters into their own hands (Christoforidou et al., 2021).

The second Breach! study (Study VII) dealt with three examples of breaches in relation to their contexts and the realms of design practice, design education, and design research. Aided by the structure of practical arguments (Fig. 10, p. 31), the comparison of the three examples of breachers provided an opportunity to conceptualise some of the building blocks of the motives behind a breach. These examples illustrate that a claim for action (A) can become a breach when there is a discord between persons' values (V) in relation to the circumstances (C) they find themselves in (Fig. 13).

Figure 13. Development of Fairclough and Fairclough's (2012) structure of practical arguments (Fig. 10).

A claim for action A becomes a breach (B) due to friction between values (V) and circumstances (C).



More specifically, Jakobsen's breach (Fig. 14) is involuntary and continuously ongoing, rather than a specific reaction at a given time. Although he would like to be less isolated and more accepted (C), he left the art and design scene in the city and lives in the woods (M-G) in order to work in peace and be himself (G). Examples of values (V) he expresses in the documentary include his relation to authority; he feels reluctant to 'play the game' and even repulsed by the idea, does not tolerate authority, and has a well-developed intuitive feeling for when someone is trying to exercise power over him. The conclusion he draws regarding what he should do about this (A) is that when it happens, he opposes it and does things that cause trouble for him, which is why it is better for him to stay away.

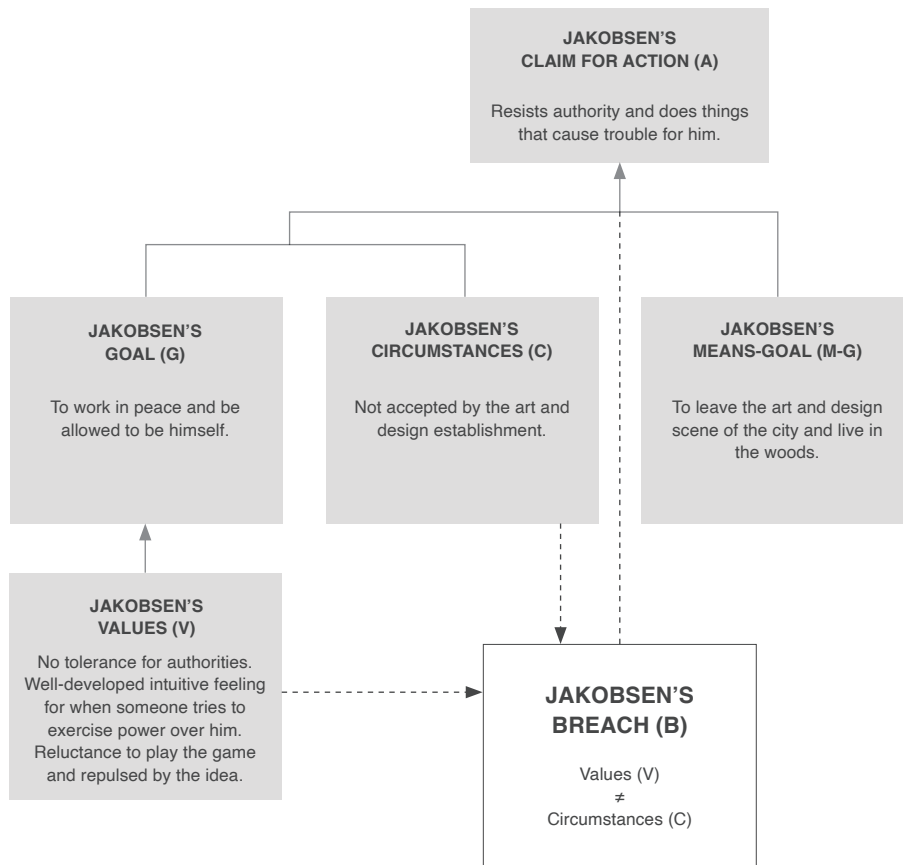
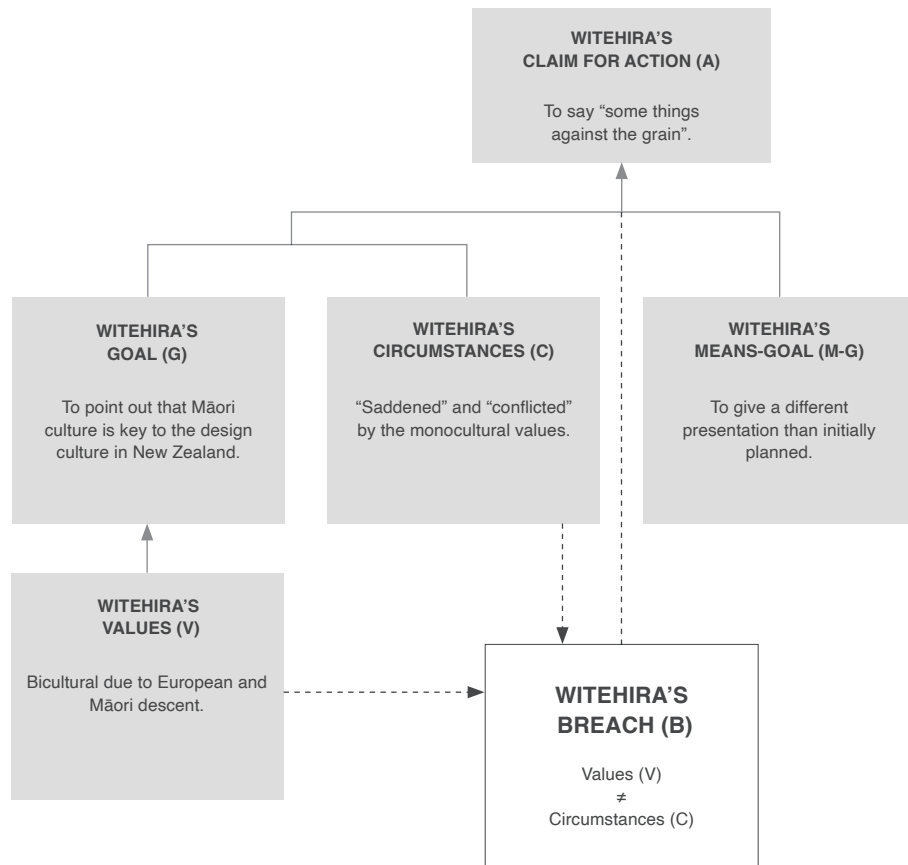


Figure 14. The developed structure of practical arguments (see Fig. 13) applied to Jakobsen's claim for action (A), which becomes a breach (B) due to the friction between his values (V) and circumstances (C).

Figure 15 presents Witehira's breach (B) in relation to his values (V) and circumstances (C). Witehira is of European and Māori descent; his bicultural values (V) were in contrast to the circumstances (C) of the Helix symposium, where he felt "saddened" and "conflicted" by the continuous absence of Māori culture in discussions regarding New Zealand's culture, leading to a spontaneous breach (B). Because of this, he announced that (A) he was going to give a different presentation than initially planned. He aimed to achieve his goal (G), which was to point out what in his opinion is obvious – that Māori culture is key to the character of design culture in New Zealand – by saying "some things against the grain" (M-G).

Figure 15. The developed structure of practical arguments (see Fig. 13) applied to Witehira's claim for action (A), which becomes a breach (B) due to the friction between his values (V) and circumstances (C).



‘Kumar’s’ post on a digital forum for design researchers (‘the Forum’) differs from other posts in terms of both content and tone. Instead of being a comment or contribution on topics related to design research, “Kumar’s’ post is a proclamation of his intent to terminate his membership of the Forum while at the same time explaining the motivation behind this decision. Applying the developed structure of practical arguments (Fig. 13, p. 45) to ‘Kumar’s’ post suggests that his claim for action (A) is to “say goodbye from this list”, i.e. the Forum. In doing so, his goal (G) is to “reclaim a space for hearing” by posting a brief account of the reasons behind

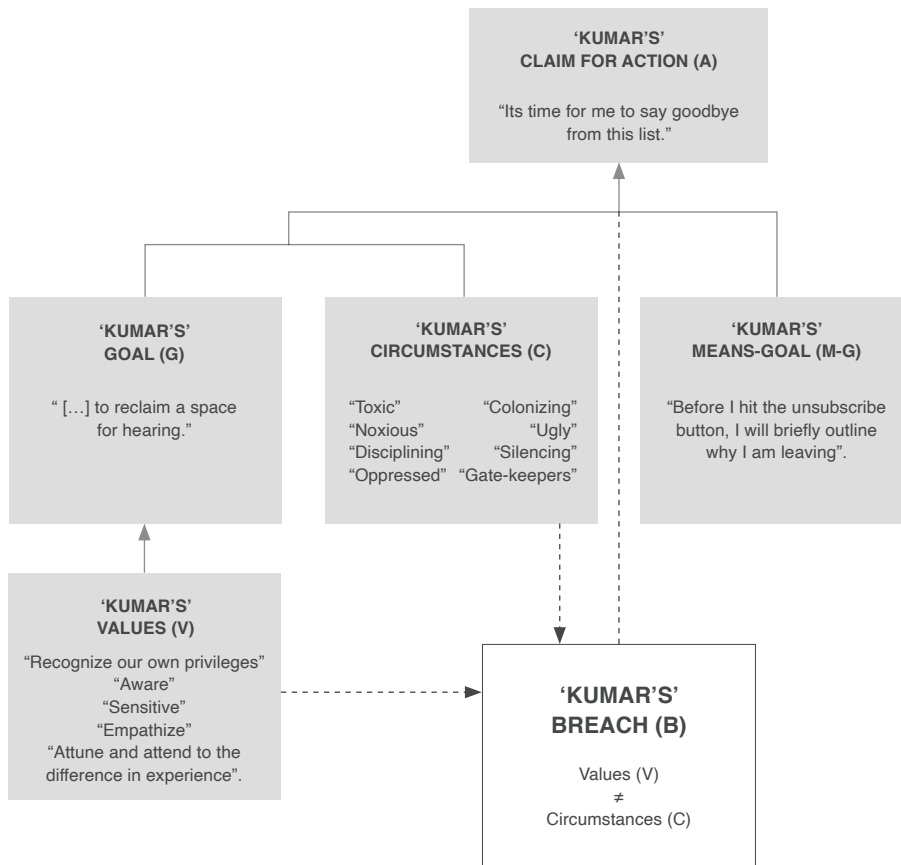


Figure 16. The developed structure of practical arguments (see Fig. 13) applied to ‘Kumar’s’ claim for action (A), which becomes a breach (B) due to the friction between his values (V) and circumstances (C).

his decision to terminate his membership of the Forum: “Before I hit the unsubscribe button, I will briefly outline why I am leaving” (M-G). ‘Kumar’s’ breach (B) is the result of a long-term discord between his values (V) – a willingness to “recognize our own privileges”, be “aware”, “sensitive”, “empathize”, and “attune and attend to the difference in experience” – and the circumstances (C) prevailing at the Forum that he describes as “toxic”, “noxious”, “disciplining”, “colonizing”, and “silencing”. ‘Kumar’s’ post appears to be carefully thought-through; it was an intentional and planned breach (Fig. 16).

Analysing the breaches using the model of practical arguments (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012, Figs. 13–16) helped to shift the focus away from breaches as an act and towards the persons enacting them, i.e. breachers.

### 5.1.3 From breaches to breachers

The three breachers represented the fields of design practice, design education, and design research; their breaching acts, as described in Study VII, were compared in search of commonalities and differences in order to better understand the circumstances that lead to breaches. During this study, breaches were not deliberately staged to provoke a reaction; rather, each example was identified as a breach since it deviated from the conditions of the context in which it arose.

Jakobsen, who represents design practice, was referred to by the interviewed designers in Sweden as an example of a controversial designer. The documentary on Jakobsen’s work (Fougner & Degerman, 2017) presented a portrait of an *unintentional* breacher, a person who lives and acts beyond the norms of what is socially acceptable. Although this has created some buzz around his person and work, a downside of this is a degree of social exclusion (Paper F). Jakobsen admits to being profoundly uninterested in social occasions and not knowing what he could do differently to fit in, and states that he finds peace in e.g. secluded woodlands where he is not bothered or bothering others. Both Jakobsen himself and some of the interviewed art and design experts featured in the documentary often mention the ADHD diagnosis that he received as an adult. This diagnosis seems to function as a universal explanation for the peculiarities of Jakobsen’s personality and work and the exclusion he experiences, and Jakobsen himself seems to be agree with this explanation. Paradoxically, it is as if Jakobsen is an ADHD designer and not a professional among an array of professionals with various challenges. The effects of Jakobsen’s diagnosis seem to be intertwined with his form language; his work is described in the same terms as his personality, i.e. not fitting into the context. Jakobsen’s challenges in finding a way to fit in and have a sense of belonging in Stockholm’s art and design scene are to some extent signs of a monolithic culture, which the statements of the designers interviewed in Sweden also point to (Christoforidou et al., 2021).

Witehira, who represents design education, is an artist, designer, educator, and researcher who discussed the unique character of design in New Zealand with other professionals from the design field at the Helix symposium (DesignCo, 2015a; 2015b). According to both the available biographical information and his presentation he is very interested in Māori culture, and this is reflected in his work. As he is of European and Māori descent he is influenced by both cultures, and seems to have felt strongly that the speakers before him at the Helix symposium had failed to make what in his opinion was an obvious connection and acknowledge the importance of Māori culture in the identity of New Zealand. Feeling “saddened” and “conflicted” by this, he *spontaneously* decided to “say some things against the grain” (DesignCo, 2015b: 3:59), i.e. to *intentionally* perform a breach. His presentation was not the one he had prepared specifically for that symposium, and instead he showed examples of design students’ projects that had been inspired by Māori mythology and traditions. Witehira’s double cultural identity and multiple professional roles as designer, artist, and academic afford him characteristics that relate to what Bourdieu (1977; 1984) refers to as “habitus”, making him an *in-between*er. As such, he is able to identify and create a space between the cultures he belongs to and perform his spontaneous breach successfully, in the sense that some speakers after him acknowledge and refer to Māori culture being central for the identity of New Zealand.

There is less information available about ‘Kumar’ – of the six entries he published on the Forum, only the last two were of a personal character. He describes himself as a “silent” member of the Forum, and professionally as a young scholar and design academic. These credentials are seemingly sufficient to be accepted as a Forum member and be treated as an equal. Since according to ‘Kumar’s’ experience this is not the case, he provides comments on gender, class, race, and nationality, describing himself as a brown, Indian, upper-caste, privileged male with a PhD from a Western university. He contrasts this with a profile of the opposite: white, male, seemingly senior professor (Paper F). Although ‘Kumar’ speaks up in favour of the dissenting voices and defends them, he does not seem to fully identify with them. Along with his descriptions of himself, his position can be understood to have an element of in-betweenness: a privileged Indian scholar who is not white nor senior enough to be included among the established design researchers at the Forum, or what Bhabha (2004) describes as both an insider and outsider, or neither, at the same time. Possibly ‘Kumar’s’ in-between position and the tension between his values and circumstances (Fig. 16, p. 48) contributed to his feelings of frustration regarding the situation, and his eventual decision to terminate his membership of the Forum. Contrary to Witehira, ‘Kumar’s’ breach is not spontaneous, but rather *planned*.

In summary, the following variations can be derived from the comparison of the three breachers and their breaches:

- Jakobsen's *involuntary* breach – an *unintentional* breacher
- Witehira's *spontaneous* breach – an *intentional* breacher
- 'Kumar's' *planned* breach – an *intentional* breacher

What these variations have in common is that all require courage on the part of the breachers – to stand up and go against the grain of their surroundings, while at the same time being vulnerable as in-betweeners.

#### 5.1.4 From breachers to in-betweeners

In addition to what set Jakobsen, Witehira, and 'Kumar' apart as breachers, there are also commonalities: in different ways, they all act as in-betweeners, as insiders and outsiders or neither (Bhabha, 2004), and as Ma (Akama, 2015), or nepantla (Scott & Tuana, 2017; Paper F).

Jakobsen works in the niches between sloyd and design, lives between Stockholm and the woodlands outside of Hede, and experiences feelings of both inclusion as a designer and exclusion as a person. Foucault's (2006) thoughts on social control, power, and discourse are relevant in this context. An ADHD diagnosis automatically positions Jakobsen outside the discourse of what is considered to be 'normal' and perhaps excludes him from society.

Witehira has professional experience of art, design, design education, and design research, including a PhD. In addition, he has been influenced by two cultures as he is of European and Māori descent. This is something that he is aware of and mentioned in his presentation at the Helix symposium (DesignCo, 2015b).

Although 'Kumar' seemingly has academic credentials, like many of the members of the Forum, and acknowledges his own privileges, e.g. having a PhD and an academic position as a design researcher and faculty member at a university, he sides with dissenting voices and critiques the established Forum members and their unequal treatment of less privileged peers.

How successful are the three in-betweeners in relation to their breaching acts? Jakobsen is an in-betweener as a designer as he works between sloyd and design. As a person, he is a breacher and outsider, albeit unintentionally; he did not choose it, and he admits to not knowing what to do to change this situation. Witehira had prepared to share another presentation at the Helix symposium but was so provoked by the total lack of reference to Māori culture in the previous speakers' presentations, which in his opinion was obviously central to the topic discussed, that he decided to change his presentation at the last minute and "say some things against the grain" (DesignCo, 2015b: 3:59). What did he manage to achieve with his spontaneous breach? In the recording it seems that some members of the audience agreed with him during his presentation, and several of the subsequent presentations included references to Māori culture. 'Kumar' was not successful in his efforts to encourage a discussion regarding privilege and

power dynamics at the Forum, and so he felt forced to discontinue his membership. In that sense, it could be argued that his breach was a failure. He did, however, break his silence to raise a topic he felt strongly about, and thereby instigated a discussion thread where other dissenting voices joined in.

Of the three in-betweeners Witchira seems to have been most successful as a breacher, although his breach was spontaneous and not planned. It seems that in-betweenness is a prerequisite for breaches but that, for these to succeed, the breachers who perform them must possess agency, and the right habitus and symbolic capital for the social field they occupy. However, the more the breachers risk losing in relation to their habitus (Bourdieu, 1977; 1984), the more difficult it may be to decide to go through with the breach (Christoforidou, 2013).

#### 5.1.5 From in-betweenness to *mellanförskap*

The Swedish terms for in-betweenness and in-betweener are *mellanförskap* (e.g., Arbouz, 2012) and *mellanförskapare*<sup>15</sup>, respectively. In an etymological sense, in-betweenness suggests a more static position or a place as compared to *mellanförskap*, without providing information about a direction. Although in-betweenness and *mellanförskap* are synonymous due to the inclusion of *skapa*, meaning ‘create’, the latter implies a more dynamic position, a potential movement, and expansion of spaces and fields, as illustrated in Figure 17.

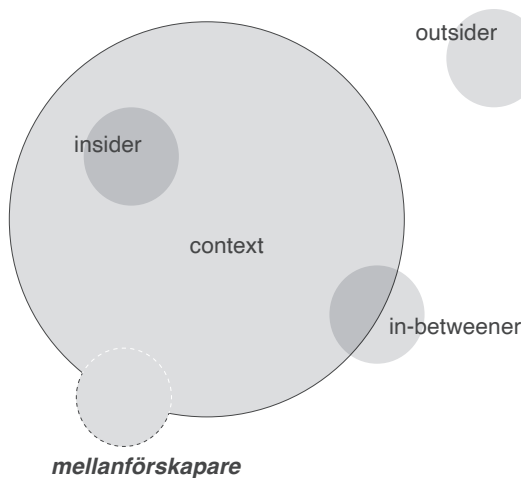
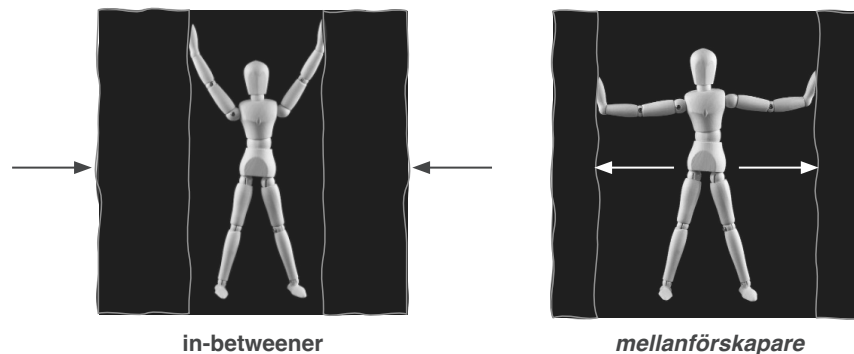


Figure 17. The relative roles and positions of in-betweeners compared to *mellanförskapare* in relation to insiders and outsiders of a context.

<sup>15</sup> I have constructed the term *mellanförskapare* to indicate the person experiencing *mellanförskap*.

Figure 18 illustrates a person between ‘a rock and a hard place’. My interpretation of in-betweenness and in-betweeners is that the terms do not indicate the direction of tension, i.e. whether it is stable and static without any movement of the ‘walls’ or if the ‘walls’ are about to give way. The reason I prefer *mellanförskap* and *mellanförskapare* is that with these terms there is an in-built indication of potential that the (norm) ‘walls’ can be moved outwards, increasing the space between them and allowing for more openness.

Figure 18. In-betweener vs. *mellanförskapare*.  
Adapted from photographs by  
L. F., March 3, August 20, 2011<sup>16</sup>.



Considering the degree of acceptance of the three breachers in their respective contexts as regards their breaches, Jakobsen and ‘Kumar’ can be seen as in-betweeners while Witehira is a *mellanförskapare*.

## 5.2 Knowledge contribution

Being inspired by Garfinkel (1984) and working with his breaching experiments approach throughout the research presented in thesis has led to a deepened understanding of the nuances of breaches and how these can be a powerful lens for bringing forth underlying norms and values and illuminating blindspots. Shifting the focus away from breaching acts and towards the performers of breaches has resulted in insights in relation to not only breaches but the importance of design as *mellanförskap* and designers as *mellanförskapare*. Moreover, this research project has facilitated reflection on why it is important to illuminate blindspots.

<sup>16</sup>Source, Pexels. Retrieved 1 May, 2023 from:  
<https://www.pexels.com/photo/omino-di-legno-15622550/> and <https://www.pexels.com/photo/omino-di-legno-15622546/>

### 5.2.1 *Benefits of illuminating blindspots*

What blindspots in the design field have been illuminated by the researched presented in this thesis?

The research presented in the licentiate thesis explored Bling, and the trend course (Study V) and Papers C and D highlighted, among other things, the notions of good and bad taste in relation to the norms and values of the design field and design students (Christoforidou, 2013; Olander, Christoforidou & Warell, 2012; Christoforidou et al., 2012).

In Studies VI and VII, breaches also proved to be useful for exploring blindspots (Christoforidou et al., 2021). To summarise, the following blindspots in the design field have been illuminated:

- Indications of a monolithic design context in Sweden compared to a more polythitic one in New Zealand in the accounts shared by design professionals in both countries. In the former there is a general expectation that changes are to be implemented by others, e.g. the state and branch organisations, while in the latter it seems more common to find in-between spaces and act as a bricoleur and *mellanförskapare*.
- Three examples of breachers in the fields of:
  - Design practice, in terms of the experiences of Jakobsen, a breacher, and *mellanförskapare* and the exclusion he is subjected to as a designer, seemingly because of an ADHD diagnosis rather than the quality of his design work. Jakobsen happens to have a diagnosis, and he as a person is treated as being defined by his condition.
  - Design education in the context of a symposium where designers gathered to discuss the unique character of design in New Zealand, and where Māori culture was not discussed until the matter was raised by the breacher and *mellanförskapare* Witehira.
  - Design research, where an inability or unwillingness by established voices to reflect on their privilege and treat less privileged peers as equals was addressed by the breacher and *mellanförskapare* 'Kumar'. His breach questioned the unidirectional exchange of knowledge on the digital design research forum, where senior researchers produced the discourse and younger, less-established researchers were expected to simply consume this. This brings a focus on the missed opportunities to embrace ongoing breaches in order to achieve an inclusive platform, instead of the experienced discriminatory and colonial mindset.

### 5.2.2 *Benefits for design practice: Design as in-betweenness/mellanförskap and designers as in-betweeners/mellanförskapare*

In addition to the merit of a deepened understanding of and sensitivity towards breaches, the experience of conducting this research into breachers has resulted in insights regarding how designers and design students view their roles as practitioners, and how design as *mellanförskap* can be communicated to related contexts to increase the understanding of the value design as practice and the outcome of design as process.

One of the starting points of the Bling? studies was the idea that designers move between three different professional roles (Christoforidou, 2013: 7–9):

- User-centred problem solvers (Rittel & Webber, 1973; Buchanan, 1992; Eason, 1995)
- Taste and form experts (Bourdieu, 1984; Julier, 2008; Pye, 2007; 2008)
- Conveyors of (symbolic) meaning and communication (Krippendorf, 1989; Vihma, 1995; Monö, 1997; Warell, 2001; Wikström, 2002; Karjalainen, 2004)

In the course of the work on the Breach! studies, another role that designers assume in their professional practice emerged: in-betweeners/*mellanförskapare*. Being a *mellanförskapare* is not an easy position to occupy; it can be lonely, especially if one exists in a context without other *mellanförskapare*. This difficulty is confirmed by e.g. the case studies of Johansson and Svengren Holm (2008), wherein professionals, such as technicians and engineers, who cooperated with designers within organisations expressed uncertainty regarding the contribution and role of designers. However, if designers understand and conceptualise the outcomes of their professional practice via the role of in-betweeners/*mellanförskapare*, it is perhaps easier to communicate this role clearly while maintaining the necessary level of abstraction, both in their own minds and to peers and clients.

### 5.2.3 *Benefits for design education*

I often meet design students during the first couple of years of their education who express concern and uncertainty regarding their future professional practice, partly because they feel that it is abstract and difficult to grasp. Communicating and understanding this space as in-betweenness/*mellanförskap* offers a degree of direction and purpose, and having an opportunity to articulate their future professional practice without defining the content in detail encourages a creative and critically reflective mindset.

In addition to creativity and critical reflection, another crucial quality for designers is tolerance for ambiguity and failure (Micheli et al., 2019; Auernhammer & Roth, 2021). In my experience as a design educator I have found that, for students, dealing with ambiguity, risking

failure, and being vulnerable require a sense of security, both in terms of the environment and to access as a feeling. Through breaching experiments and breaches, students get in touch with vulnerability, learn how to deal with ambiguity and friction constructively, and build up their skills as future professional in-betweeners/*mellanförskapare* and breachers. Cultivating a sensitivity towards the underlying norms and values of different contexts is an essential skill for a designer (Auernhammer & Roth, 2021). Enabling norm awareness, norm-critical, and norm creative approaches through breaches, breachers and in-betweeners/*mellanförskapare* support explorations of blindspots that otherwise remain obscured and lead to predictable, normative outcomes (Fig. 5, p. 10).

As the Bling? studies exemplify, breaches can also be fruitfully applied to illuminate blindspots in the design field (Christoforidou, 2013), rather than only being useful for highlighting the ones that we deal with when working norm critically as practising designers. Working with breaches provides the opportunity to become aware of the boundaries of the discourses of design education (Fig. 9, p. 29) and explore which norms underpin this and which are perpetuated when they are passed on to design students and then move out to design practice. Breaches can even enable horizons to be expanded beyond the norm ‘walls’ (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Foucault, 2001; 2002; 2006; Fairclough, 2003; Durkheim, 2014).

#### 5.2.4 *Benefits for design research*

In a way, this research project would have remained a pilot study were it not for the breach that Bling caused (see Tables A and C). The interviews I conducted in pursuit of the initial idea, i.e. to study how sustainable products communicated their environmentally friendly content, resulted in stereotypical, predictable empirical material (Christoforidou, 2013); however, the discussions that followed my saying that ‘perhaps eco needed some Bling’ during a presentation of the progress of my project at a design research seminar were neither stereotypical nor predictable, but rather led to a gold-mine of information, and so the Bling? studies were born. A breach, albeit an unintentional one, worked as a catalyst for my research project, and shows that they can in general be utilised intentionally to stir up a research project that is in danger of arriving at a dead end.

Similar to Garfinkel’s breaching experiments, the approach of the Breach! studies described in this thesis began with artificial breaches before moving on to naturally occurring ones. Witnessing and applying variations of breaches throughout the studies – Bling, comparing Sweden and New Zealand, and the three examples of breachers – led to the identification of similarities and differences.

These can be further understood by adopting terminology from the field of medicine and laboratory experiments. In doing so, a categorisation of the breaching dimensions involved is enabled:

- In vivo
- In vitro
- In situ

‘In vivo’ means ‘in life’ in Latin, and refers to something within its natural context, for example living cells and tissues in organisms. In contrast, ‘in vitro’ means ‘in the glass’, i.e. outside a living organism and the natural context (Lorian, 1988). ‘In situ’ indicates something in its natural context but not necessarily natural conditions, and is an intermediate classification between in vivo and in vitro (Byers, 2011).

In this research project three types of breach were identified, and can be applied to this framework. An in-vivo breach occurs when a breach among designers is unintentionally instigated, for example by the contrast between environmentally friendly and Bling products in the context of a design-research seminar (Christoforidou, 2013). Breaches can also be applied intentionally, i.e. in vitro, such as when design students were subjected to Bling (Papers C and D; Olander, Christoforidou & Warell, 2012; Christoforidou et al., 2012). During the second part of the PhD project, breaches were observed in the contexts in which they originated, i.e. in situ (Papers E and F; Christoforidou et al., 2021).

The in vivo, in vitro, in situ typology offers several benefits, e.g., a useful framework to outline well designed in vitro breaching experiments. Moreover, it enables a deeper understanding of what is happening and why, in the event of experiencing in vivo breaches, witnessing in situ breaches, or engaging with breachers.

In addition to breaches, the concept of in-betweenness/*mellanförskap* has proved valuable with regard to arriving at relevant insights regarding design research. Over the past couple of decades of working with design administratively and strategically, as an educator and research student, I have participated in innumerable discussions regarding design as a discipline and its position vis-à-vis other professions and areas, and considering whether design is an artistic or scientific field. Often, the conclusion is that design is multifaceted, and therefore easily ‘falls between the chairs’. Based on my experience from the ongoing dialogue with peers within the design field and my research, I can conclude that design is both, and neither at the same time. It is a discipline in its own right between art and science; design is *mellanförskap*, and designers *mellanförskapare* (Fig. 19).

Figure 19. Design as *mellanförskap*.



### 5.2.5 Contribution to the design field in general: Design, friction, and ambiguity

The theoretical foundation, methodological approach, contribution, and central themes of this thesis are visualised in Figure 20. At the centre of the image is a slightly modified version of Fairclough's (2003) three-dimensional CDA model (Fig. 9, p. 29), which has been borrowed from the realm of linguistics. The textual level is replaced by that of design, i.e. the discursive practice, which contains norms and values that influence the design sphere, and there is also the social practice, i.e. context, which surrounds everything. All social contexts are in one way or another subject to friction, e.g. norm criticism, non-conformity, deviation, and breaches. How friction-prone the context is, i.e. whether it is 'frictophobic' or 'frictophilic'<sup>17</sup>, has different effects on the blindspots present, as well as the propensity for change – the further to the left, the larger and darker the blindspots are, and the further to the right, the less monolithic and more open-minded and polythitic the social structures are. This relationship is not binary; rather, it is a fluid scale between highly intolerant and highly tolerant contexts.

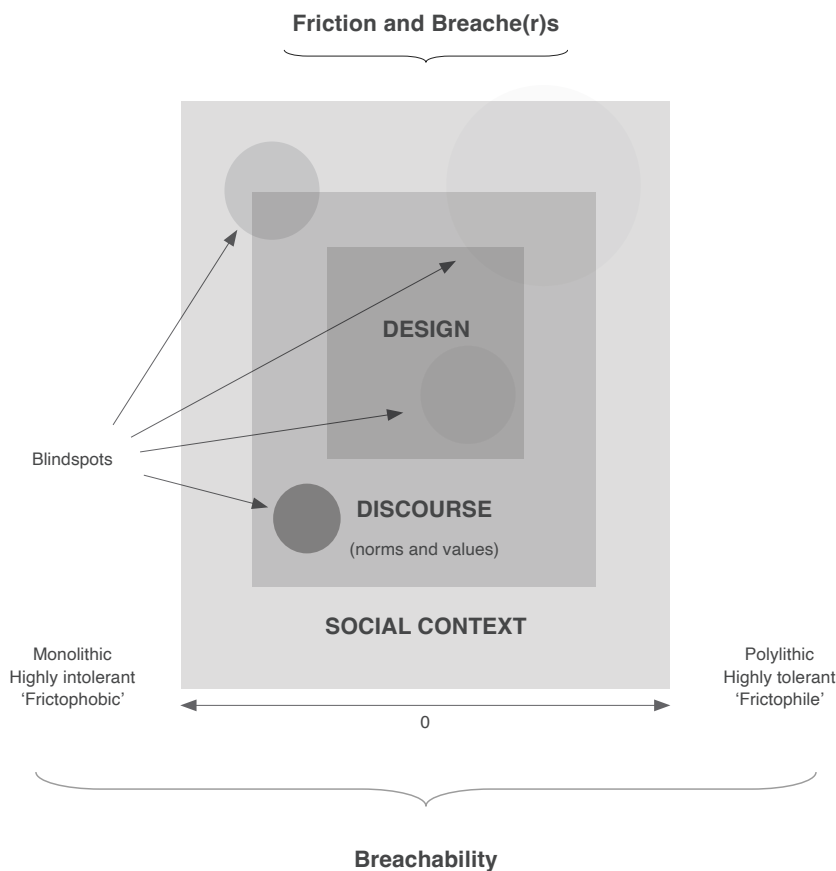


Figure 20. Scale of breachability.

<sup>17</sup>'Phobia' and 'philia' are Greek terms. A 'phobia' is a fear of something and 'philia' the opposite, i.e. 'friend of'. It is one of four Greek words for love, along with 'storge' (affection), 'agape' (unconditional love), and 'eros' (romantic love).

An improved understanding of the dynamics and motivations of breache(r)s constitutes an opportunity to deal with friction in a constructive way. To summarise the contribution of this research project to the design field, I would like to refer to Audre Lorde's often-quoted words, which represent a metaphor for structures and systems of oppression:

*The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. (1984: 112)*

Lorde urges us to take our unique differences, make them our own, and turn them into strengths. Hopefully, the approach of breaches can be a valuable tool in this pursuit, and ultimately create a space for *mellanförskap* and allow for wider horizons.

### 5.3 Implications and future research

One of the recurring themes of the discussions with the designers interviewed in Sweden and New Zealand was the challenges designers face in trying to verbalise their contributions as professionals on the basis that the design practice and process are perceived as being abstract. The concepts of breaches, blindspots, and in-betweenness/*mellanförskap* can be helpful in this context and are therefore worthy of further exploration, e.g. as a theme for a course or a project for Industrial Design Master's students, who are generally a culturally diverse group.

#### 5.3.1 The 'new' Bling?

Because I have been conducting my research studies part-time and in parallel to my role as a design educator, it is a decade since I finished the Bling? studies. Over the years there has been a shift in the trends that influence the design field, and I wonder whether such a workshop today would provoke current design students in the same way. For this reason it would be relevant to undertake a similar workshop and, if the same reactions were not achieved, try to identify what the modern equivalent of Bling is in dialogue with students. Even if design students today would not find it controversial to work with Bling as a theme, there are always new breaches that conflict with prevalent norms. Identifying some of these would be valuable so as to work through the provocation towards transformation and reflection, with an eye on potential blindspots and position on the breachability scale (Figs. 1, 20).

#### 5.3.2 Strategies for successful breaches and breachers

Study VII focused on identifying the characteristics of the various breaches and breachers. The comparisons of the breachers showed that Jakobsen is an *unintentional* breacher and his breach an *involuntary* one, Witehira an *intentional* breacher and his a *spontaneous* one, and 'Kumar' an *intentional* breacher who enacted a *planned* breach.

Another aspect that would be valuable to explore is the degree of success and failure of different breach(e)s. Is a breach by definition supposed to be a failure of some sort? How successful can a breacher be and still be a breacher? Understanding which conditions are involved in the respective poles of the breachability scale (Fig. 20, p. 58), e.g. power dynamics and timing, would facilitate a better understanding of how and what we can learn from breach(e)s and result in a greater degree of tolerance.

### 5.3.3 Design as in-betweenness/*mellanförskap* and rebellion

A dimension I aim to explore in my future research is design as *mellanförskap*, i.e. between the arts and the sciences (Fig. 19, p. 57), and how the epistemological discourses of the two areas influence the content and communication of design and design research. In my experience, design students sometimes find it challenging to achieve a satisfactory balance between the two, and often feel that their creativity is limited.

In addition, Merton's typology of deviance (Fig. 7, p. 22) will be revisited to further explore design as a discipline as compared to similar ones, such as innovation, in relation to the means and goals of processes.

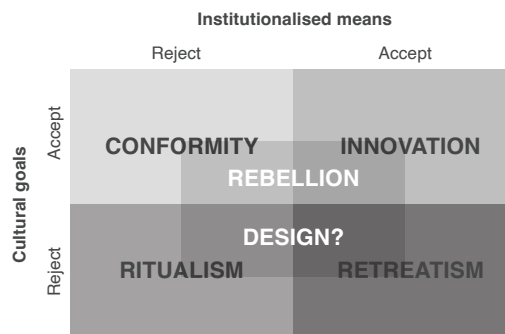


Figure 21. Interpretation of Merton's (1957) typology of deviance (cf. Fig. 7), in relation to design.

What would it mean for design as a discipline if it could be understood as rebellion, while at the same time holding a central position of *mellanförskap*, rather than a deviant one (Fig. 21), in relation to practice, academia, society, and industry?

### 5.3.4 Swedish design students' reflections on their future professional practice

Over the past few decades I have been working at Lund University School of Industrial Design (LUSID) in Sweden. As part of one of the courses I teach, I organise and moderate a series of guest lectures with designers from various niches so that the first-year students can orient themselves in relation to the various specialisations in the design field.

By the end of the course the students create manifestos in which they reflect on who they want to be as designers, how they want to work and why, what their sources of inspiration are, and who their heroes and anti-heroes are. The manifestos often relay reflections and concerns about how the next generation of Swedish designers envision their future as design professionals. Analysing the manifestos would be valuable in developing the idea of design as *mellanförskap* further. In addition, they provide a rich source of information when planning and developing the structure and content of future design education curricula so that these best meet the future needs of both society and future generations of designers, along with an opportunity to reflect on what norms and values we reproduce is offered.

### 5.3.5 The Decolonising Design Platform<sup>18</sup>

As described in Paper F and the case of ‘Kumar’, the question of whether the Forum was a colonial space or not was raised due to a discussion that, according to ‘Kumar’, “turned ugly” concerning a group of “dissenting voices”, who chose to leave the Forum and create a more inclusive and decolonised platform.

It would be relevant to look more closely at whether this platform is in fact what it claims to be, or if it is yet another colonial space that excludes in-between voices:

- What platforms are there for in-between voices, both in general and in the design field specifically?
- If there are any, are they in fact inclusive?
- If so, how is this achieved and sustained?

I have come across several visions of what design is and where it is heading during this research project. Attempts to formulate the relevance of design for a more sustainable future are being dealt with at the same time as an overall discussion regarding the global scene of design in a postmodern and post-industrial era is being conducted. It is widely acknowledged that design is deeply rooted in both modernism and industrialism; they even constitute the pillars for the emergence of design as a field during the twentieth century.

However, if we are to discuss the future of design in a meaningful way, we should also consider post-colonial aspects. In order to do so, it would be relevant to look into the dark side of design history, i.e. the colonial past. Thereby we would be able to understand, accept, and move on to formulating a relevant and sustainable vision for the future of design from an informed position – without unconscious blindspots and biases that increase the risk of repeating old mistakes. Therefore, I intend to continue to explore blindspots by utilising breaches.

<sup>18</sup> Link accessed 18 March, 2017: <https://www.decolonisingdesign.com/>



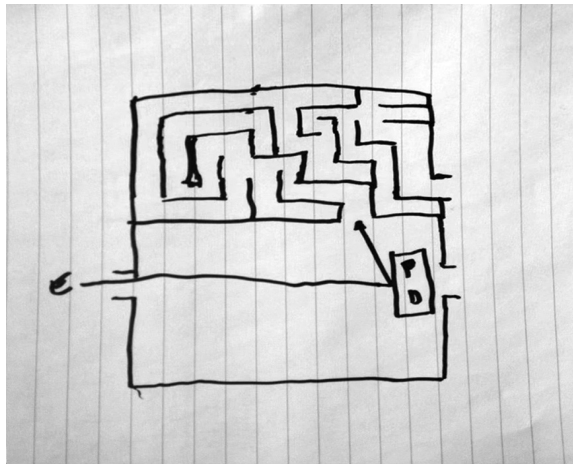
## 6 FINAL REFLECTIONS

As Micheli et al. (2019) and Auernhammer and Roth (2021) argue, design practice requires an ability to handle friction and ambiguity (Fig. 20, p. 58). This is especially important in normative contexts, not to mention in times of cancel culture.

Not everyone thrives with ambiguity and friction – far from it. Ambiguity and friction are needed to provide the space and conditions for design to take place. *Mellanförskap* is an important design dimension in that respect, and so is the role of designers as *mellanförskapare*. Provided they are given opportunities to enact breaches and detect blindspots, the conditions for design to happen can thereby be improved.

The illustration shown in Figure 22 was drawn by a design engineering student (marked ‘E’ in the drawing) during a supervision session, and illustrates how the design process is experienced in an educational setting: the design educators (‘P’ and ‘D’ in the drawing) block the initial impulse to pursue a shortcut, and instead encourage the student to enter a labyrinth that they must be subjected to, and as part of this relinquish control and preconceived notions of the outcome.

Figure 22. Sketch of a labyrinth drawn by an design engineering student (E) to illustrate the design process in a design project supervised by Per Liljeqvist (P) and Despina Christoforidou (D). Photograph by Per Liljeqvist, 2017.



Through my experiences working as a design educator, I can confirm that it requires courage to be vulnerable, but that this is required within the creative process; it is essential to dare to relinquish control and embrace ambiguity, to trust that the process will carry you through and that you can accomplish your goals while maintaining your integrity.

## 6.1 My process

Throughout the process of working on this thesis, I have shifted perspective between the parts and the whole in order to understand the phases and outcomes of the project. As the project unfolded and new insights matured along the way, I became increasingly aware of details I had been unable to discern at first. The purpose of presenting the somewhat random twists and turns of the PhD project is to emphasise the importance of being able to find a balance between the strict, rigorous parts of the research process and relinquishing control and making room for friction and ambiguity, which are all-important ingredients of a design process (Micheli et al., 2019; Auernhammer & Roth, 2021), thereby practicing what we preach to the design students at Lund University School of Industrial Design (LUSID).

In general, the same criteria regarding trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) were taken into consideration for the Breach! studies as for the Bling? ones (Christoforidou, 2013: 37):

- Credibility: confidence in the ‘truth’ of the findings
- Transferability: showing that the findings have applicability in other contexts
- Dependability: showing that the findings are consistent and that they could be repeated
- Confirmability: degree of neutrality

In my research, there is a continuity in the questions that drive me as a researcher. My thoughts are often occupied by ‘why?’ and ‘what if?’ before I move on to ‘what?’ and ‘how?’ Furthermore, as described in the personal points of departure, I usually set out with a dialectical approach, i.e. I analyse and understand the world by comparing and contrasting theses and antitheses. For example, ugliness reveals complementary dimensions regarding the norms that surround the notion of beauty in a society.

As the research progressed, I found it increasingly reassuring to rely on the design process in order to move forward with the various phases of the research project. A design research project has a lot in common with any design project, especially connecting the dots and synthesising an erratic process into something comprehensible.

It is often said that a picture says more than a thousand words and this is valid when working with design research processes, which often involve images and metaphors. In the Bling? studies there was a focus on products’ symbolic meanings in relation to the prevalent norms of their contexts, while the Breach! studies were more oriented towards the norms of designers and the design field. In order to integrate a symbolic dimension into the Breach! studies, I developed symbolic representations of the key concepts in a similar way to how Latour (1986) uses the term ‘token’ to symbolise ideas or models being translated in a model (see also Erlingsdóttir, 1999).

Table F summarises the overall themes and key concepts of the thesis, and shows how these can be understood and communicated through symbolic representations inspired by mathematics. These symbols have helped shape the key concepts and moved the creation of knowledge forward. Most importantly, they have deepened my understanding of the outcomes of the research presented in this thesis, and helped to conceptualise the process and outcomes of not only the studies but the design practice in general.

The symbolic representations of the key concepts (Table F) will be used to support the theoretical aspects of future work, and further developed practically and artistically. In recent years, I have taken up silver- and goldsmithing and, in addition to providing a balance

Table F. Symbolic representation of key concepts.

| KEY CONCEPTS |                                        | SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATION |              |
|--------------|----------------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------|
| EXISTING     | Equality                               | $=$                     | MATHEMATICAL |
|              | Approximately equal                    | $\approx$               |              |
|              | Inequality                             | $\neq$                  |              |
|              | Identity                               | $\equiv$                |              |
|              | Isomorphic to/congruent to             | $\cong$                 |              |
|              | Divergence (deviance)                  | $\nabla$                |              |
|              | Friction                               | $\mu$                   |              |
|              | An element of                          | $\in$                   |              |
|              | Not an element of                      | $\notin$                |              |
|              | Norm                                   | $\  \times \ $          |              |
|              | Empty set                              | $\emptyset$ or $\{ \}$  |              |
| NEW          | Norm $\approx$ norm walls              | $\  \times \ $          | CONCEPTUAL   |
|              | Breach! $\approx$ torn down norm walls | $= \times =$            |              |
|              | Empty set $\approx$ blindspot          | $\emptyset$ or $\{ \}$  |              |
|              | Norm blindspot                         | $\  \emptyset \ $       |              |
|              | Revealed norm blindspot                | $= \emptyset =$         |              |
|              | In-betweenness/mellanförskap           | $\} \{$                 |              |
|              | In-betweenner/mellanförskapare         | $\} = \emptyset = \{$   |              |

with my academic work, this has given me the opportunity to practice what I preach – that is, to let go of control, embrace ambiguity, and risk failure in the same way as the design students during their design processes. One idea is to design and forge a doctoral ring that summarises my thesis, to close the circle that began with Bling, literally and metaphorically.

## 6.2 My *mellanförskap*

I am often asked whether I intend to focus on research or teaching in the future. Every time, my immediate response is that I of course intend to pursue both. I have always believed that in an ideal world it should be fully possible for the two activities to enrich one another. Moreover, teaching makes me a better researcher, and vice versa. It was not until recently that I realised that this conviction may be linked to the idea of *mellanförskap*.

The same applies to how I cooperate with others due to my *mellanförskap*. While I appreciate working independently, at the same time I am very much someone who enjoys working with others. In the teams I have worked within so far I have often had the role of the ‘spider in the web’ or the ‘glue between’ the group members. Again, being a *mellanförskapare* enables me to contribute to finding a common ground and expanding the space of possibilities in-between, and beyond us when the conditions allow for it.

Being a *mellanförskapare*, neither an insider nor an outsider, or both at the same time, can be both burdensome and positive. If one does not manage to find a balance it can be all-consuming, which is why I have come to appreciate the importance of finding contexts where one is accepted and does not have to prove oneself and is able to recharge. It requires another *mellanförskapare* to truly understand the pros and cons that come with the position, and an inclusive environment in which to thrive, contribute, and carve out a space for additional creation, action, reflection.

Being a *mellanförskapare* can be either a curse or a blessing, but as time has gone by it has increasingly become the latter. The confusion and frustration involved has been gradually replaced by a realisation that I have developed the skills to recognise patterns and structures in different contexts, a confidence in these, and a sensitivity regarding the underlying norms and values that hold the structures together; what belongs inside the structure, what ends up outside, and the reasons why. I have also come to realise that the concept of *mellanförskap* has probably been significant in how I am perceived professionally on a subconscious level, both in my context and by myself. For example, I believe I have had a reluctance to belong to or pursue clearly defined contexts and roles, possibly out of fear of losing the flexible, dynamic, and critically reflective stance enabled by my *mellanförskap*, which in turn has had an impact on my professional choices. In a sense, I have had a tendency to choose the scenic routes rather than the motorways.

To conclude, I cannot resist the temptation of a cliché: like many PhD candidates before me, I set out on this endeavour in pursuit of answers, and by the end I had also discovered pieces of myself. However whimsical it may sound – and I thought so initially – there is something to this idea. It has been an academic project, grounded in and guided by formalised traditions and regulations, but at the same time there is a specific person behind the specific researcher who reflexively made every decision, interpretation, and change of direction – a person driven by a specific set of norms and values. Putting together the pieces of this reflexive jigsaw puzzle has led me to better understand my own predispositions, motivations, and shortcomings, along with the origins of these. I hope that this will prove useful to others as well.

I am Δέσποινα, breacher and *mellanförskapare*.  
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## POSTSCRIPT

At the end of my postgraduate studies, I often think about my first day of school. As a child I did not go to nursery school, so I was particularly excited to start primary school. When I was approaching the age of six – the age at which children start primary school in Greece – my parents decided to leave Sweden and move back home to Greece. They were hesitant about the decision; we enjoyed our life in Sweden, and in Greece the military junta, which was one of the causes of the move from Greece in the first place, was still in power. My education and that of my brother was important to them, however; they wanted to be part of it and make sure that they could support us, which they did not feel they could when it was being delivered in Swedish.

There was a lot of excitement in connection to the start of school, and I was looking forward to wearing a school uniform – a blue dress with a white collar. The preparations were meticulous: a new school bag, a pencil case, and notebooks, but unfortunately the school uniforms were out of stock at the local bookshop. My aunt was supposed to bring one from the big city of Thessaloniki, but this was to be the weekend after school started. In the absence of a school uniform I had to wear my best dress instead: a dress that my grandmother had crocheted in pink silky yarn, with quite a high Bling factor. I did not want to wear it because it was not comfortable to play in and got caught on things easily, but my grandmother convinced me of the importance of being well dressed on this important occasion.

At the school our class gathered in a large classroom; the children were dressed in the blue and white colours of the Greek flag. The colours that shone brightest were our teacher's fiery red hair, styled in a tight French twist, and my pink dress. I sat down next to my cousin and, wide-eyed, absorbed the sights of the room, when suddenly I heard the teacher call my name:

- Christoforidou, stand up!

I stood up but would rather not have, because I was shy. I thought the teacher was about to introduce me, the new pupil from out of town, to the rest of class. Instead, she turned to the daughter of one of her colleagues:

- Maria, would you please stand up too?

Both Maria and I looked down at our desks, and our teacher addressed the whole class:

- Can you tell me what the difference is between these two girls?

It was quiet in the classroom, and some children began to squirm nervously. After a brief pause that felt like an eternity, the teacher continued:

- Well, I can tell you: Maria looks like a proper school girl, while Christoforidou looks like a tourist!

Back home, I tore off my pink crocheted dress, and have had a hard time with fancy dresses ever since. Considering my flop on the first day of school, it was fortunate that my curiosity and desire to learn were not damaged. Instead, half a century later, I am still in education.

This was the first time I remember being a breacher, albeit on an involuntary and unconscious level. I violated the norms of my context – a context permeated by the written and unwritten rules of an undemocratic regime – and the appropriate code of conduct. Everything that threatened order was nipped in the bud. It was not just the pink crocheted dress that violated the prevailing norms, however; I needed to be put in place because my family had just moved from a socially democratic country to Greece, which was then ruled by a far-right military junta and to which my parents were suspected of not being loyal. Our repatriation attempt lasted four months for my father and ten months – from the start to end of the school year – for me, my younger brother, and my mother. After that we re-joined my father in Sweden.

When I think back on the pink crocheted dress today, having worked on my PhD thesis, in relation to breaches and breachers, I see a nuance to that past experience: besides being a garment that I felt exposed and vulnerable in, I also see how it acted as a piece of armour, a crocheted piece of chainmail of pink yarn that protected me from experiencing the incident on a deeper, more personal level. I was very young and in a completely new situation, so I did not fully comprehend what was happening. As I recall, I certainly felt at the time that it was embarrassing, but there was also a matter-of-fact realisation that some things are not allowed – pink dresses at school being one of those things, which incidentally was not my choice to begin with. It was abundantly clear that the social framework was not flexible, and that it was wise to avoid standing out in any way.

The incident with the pink dress, along with several similar events, caused my family to reflect on where we belonged, where we were insiders and where outsiders. These things are not binary, and change over time. I guess we are all insiders, outsiders, and in-betweeners/ *mellanförskapare* in some sense, whether at school or work, when playing sports, when among friends and family, or over time. Understanding some of the mechanisms behind this makes it easier to cope with and decide what to do about it.

I was fortunate to have a solid sense of belonging and security as a result of my family; this means that I can always rely on my core, regardless of where I am, and I have them to thank for that.

Figure 23. I never played with Barbie dolls. My first Barbie was a gift from my friend Camilla when I finalised my licentiate thesis. Her pink crocheted ball gown is also a Bling toilet-paper holder – glamour, function, and a breach, all at once. In the absence of a photo of my pink dress it is represented by my Barbie, as is the trajectory from vulnerability to pink armour. Photo credit: Claus-Christian Eckhardt





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